

**FIFTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CMS EQUITY COMMITTEE TO THE  
CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG BOARD OF EDUCATION AND SUPERINTENDENT  
PETER GORMAN**

**APRIL 2007**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The Equity Committee of CMS understands that truths which should be self-evident often become anything but evident if people fail to pay sufficient attention to those truths. For example, it should be an evident truth that every child can make a positive difference in our community and should have an equal educational opportunity to realize his or her full potential and make that impact. For another year, however, the Equity Committee reports that CMS does not appear to be effectively allocating resources equitably and that for this reason – and others – too many students in too many schools continue not to get enough of what they need to reach their academic – and personal – potential.

The biggest change in CMS since the Equity Committee’s February 2006 Report (the “02/06 Report”) is the start of new Superintendent Peter Gorman’s administration. With that start and the ongoing calls – and some actual initiatives – for educational reform in our community, the Equity Committee more than ever sees its role as helping the Board and the Superintendent – and hopefully our larger community – be aware of the substantial equity hurdles that CMS still must overcome. Mostly, we remain optimistic as a committee that equity is being pursued and can be achieved. We have serious concerns, however, that even as Dr. Gorman’s first budget to implement the *CMS Strategic Plan 2010: Educating Students to Compete Locally, Nationally, and Internationally* heads to the County Commission for debate, too many equity issues – and too many children – will be left behind. We urge you – and our community – not to seek to reform CMS too much on the backs of the most vulnerable of our students. All students – not just the ones in certain zip codes or new “learning communities” – need to have their opportunity to compete “locally, nationally, and internationally.”

The Equity Committee starts this report by re-affirming the scope under which we scrutinize equity in our schools. Two key considerations, with several layers of meaning and intent, guide our work:

1. **Resource Allocation and Equity.** Equity does not mean equal. What is necessary for one school may not be necessary for another school. Resources need to be allocated according to the varying needs of students and the schools that serve them. To address equity issues from a common understanding, we have developed and continue to follow this “resource-centric” definition: **Equity is the condition in which each student is able to realize his/her full potential for academic achievement, individual performance, and personal success. Equity requires an ongoing process to allocate resources to each school so that each student has access to rigorous academic challenges and an environment that promotes high expectations. An equal allocation of baseline resources is the first step toward equity, but equity requires much more. Equity requires a differentiation of resources among all schools to enable every school to meet the unique needs of each student.**

2. **The Quality of the Student Experience.** This consideration includes: (a) the tangible and measurable aspects of educational standards set forth in our curriculum; (b) the physical setting and attributes of a school's environment and amenities; (c) the completeness with which the coursework and social approach expose students to the real world for the purposes of greater understanding and competitiveness upon successful matriculation; and (d) the intangibles of a quality experience brought by the diversity of our employees and students that become the core of preparing a child and adolescent for social awareness in the rapidly changing world of tomorrow.

As CMS and our community hopefully strive toward the goals in the *CMS Strategic Plan 2010*, the Equity Committee believes we must do more to keep equity issues front and center as we consider, debate, and implement educational reforms. As detailed below, we hope to mobilize ourselves in new ways in 2007 so that it is not just another year of the same issues for us and for CMS. First, we have more "action items" in place that will be described below to help us stay on top of equity issues and challenges in ways that go beyond rhetoric. Second, we hope to link these action items to more frequent communication with this Board and CMS's administration so that answers and the ripple effects of action and accountability will promote equity and help it occur more quickly within CMS.

## II. WHAT WE HAVE DONE SINCE OUR LAST REPORT

Since the 02/06 Report, the Equity Committee has undertaken a variety of tasks. We take this opportunity to express our thanks to the whole CMS administration for their particular cooperation in working with us since that report. We thank our staff liaison, CMS Diversity Specialist Jose Hernandez-Paris and his assistant, Mary Wilmore, for exceptional efforts. We also want to thank prior Superintendent Frances Haithcock, Superintendent Gorman, their staffs, and particularly Assistant Superintendent Anthony Bucci for their assistance, discussions, and dedicated attendance at our monthly meetings. The feedback and dialog about equity issues have been fruitful. We also thank our School Board liaison, the Rev. Tom Tate, for his cooperation, candor, good humor, and leadership in our work.

These past fourteen months or so, among other tasks, we have: met eighteen different times; provided information to the School Buildings Solutions Committee about equity issues; reviewed and analyzed data, including "scatter plot" graphs about varying levels of student achievement within CMS; reviewed "teacher allotments" based on weighted student staffing; reviewed budget changes in light of the 2005-2006 county appropriation for education; sent representatives to various community meetings; held two joint meetings with the Board; conducted school tours to review equity issues;<sup>1</sup> held meetings with representatives of the Citizens' Task Force; lost and gained a variety of Committee members; received and analyzed materials about CMS's prioritization of capital needs; received and analyzed information about Dr. Gorman's initial strategic plan; received and analyzed data about CMS's testing results and various achievement gaps; reviewed with disappointment the quickly withdrawn *January 2007 Report on Adequate Resources and Facilities (Equity)*; and conducted among ourselves an increasingly harder series

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<sup>1</sup> Specifically, since our last report, the Equity Committee has toured and reported on the following schools: Alexander Graham Middle; Eastway Middle; Bishop Spaugh Middle; Mint Hill Middle; J.T. Williams Middle; Garinger High (including New Technology High); and West Charlotte High. Summaries of our reports from these schools are included in the Appendix to this report.

of discussions about equity within CMS. Along with these activities, we also, at the Board's request, analyzed and reported to the Board in September 2006 about our reactions to the Citizens' Task Force's twenty-one recommendations for reform within CMS and how those recommendations could impact equity.

Amidst all of this activity, however, we also acknowledge that we have failed in some of our commitments from the 02/06 Report. Despite the two joint meetings with the Board and the regular attendance at many of our meetings by CMS staff, we believe we have not engaged in enough interactive communication with you about equity issues. We also have not undertaken tours or prepared reports on CMS's alternative schools or reviewed CMS's Talent Development or Exceptional Children programs in enough detail to be able to report back meaningfully to you on equity efforts in these areas. As indicated below, the Equity Committee hopes to do better on these tasks and to do more in 2007.

### **III. TOO MANY ONGOING EQUITY DISPARITIES WITHIN CMS**

In the 02/06 Report, we shared with you the results of our analysis of 2002-2005 testing data and a breakdown of that data across racial, socioeconomic, and geographical lines in our six School Districts. As we reported then, "The results sobered us. If the ultimate measure of equity is consistently high student achievement throughout Mecklenburg County, CMS has a very long way to go."

This year, we again got testing data from CMS through 2005-2006, and we have broken all of the 2002-2006 data down for more racial and socioeconomic groups.<sup>2</sup> We also have analyzed the data this year, not across School District boundaries, but across the six new "learning communities" adopted by CMS as a means to improve "freedom and flexibility with accountability" under the *CMS Strategic Plan 2010*. The results across these different geographic lines still sober us and indicate that CMS faces many challenges in providing equitable educational opportunities – and consistently high student achievement across all population groups – in each "learning community."

Similar to what we did last year, we have taken EOC and EOG proficiency scores from CMS and assigned each school a "grade" of A, B, C, D, or F depending on the percentage of students the school had at the end of the 2006 academic year testing on grade level. Slightly different from last year, we have applied the following "grading" standard:

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<sup>2</sup> Specifically, we received from CMS's Assessment and Accountability Department, reviewed, and analyzed the following: an "EOC Performance and Population Trends 2003-2006" data report for high schools; an "EOG Performance and Population Trends 2003-2006" data report for middle schools; and an "EOG Performance and Population Trends 2003-2006" data report for elementary schools. Copies of this data are included in the Appendix to this report.

Grade of “A”	90% plus of students on grade level
Grade of “B”	80% plus of students on grade level
Grade of “C”	70% plus of students on grade level
Grade of “D”	60% plus of students on grade level
Grade of “F”	Less than 60% of students on grade level

Just like in the 02/06 Report, we acknowledge the limits of using EOC and EOG test scores as the sole measure of how much learning goes on in a school. Just like in the 02/06 Report, though, using the scores and a rough grading system has some value, and the scores demonstrate that too many low performing students are clustered – to their apparent academic detriment by the aggregation of poverty – in too many low performing schools. Also just like in the 02/06 Report, we find the testing results both striking and disturbing.

**Disparities in Achievement by Geography:** For example, of CMS’s seventeen high schools, only four got a grade above D (*i.e.*, more than 70% of students on grade level), and none of those high schools with a passing grade are in the North, Northeast, or West learning communities. On our grading scale, all four of the high schools in the West learning community earned Fs. Will the administration in that learning community merely be given the same resources as the other five learning communities or will additional resources be provided at that level – as well as in each individual high school – to address particular needs? If additional resources are provided, will there be criteria to demonstrate if the resources enhance student achievement? If the criteria are not met, will there be accountability in dropping unsuccessful programs?

Among CMS’s thirty middle schools, four earned As under our grading scale. Three of those are in the South learning community, and none of them are in the Central, East, Northeast, or West learning communities. More disturbing, the Northeast learning community’s four middle schools all performed at the F level, which bodes ill for the Northeast learning community’s two high schools in future years, one currently at the D level and the other at F. In the West learning community (with all four of its high schools currently at the F level), the five middle schools feeding into those high schools were, in short, two Cs, one D, and two Fs, which at least offers hope for some degree of improvement.

Among CMS’s eighty-nine elementary schools for which testing data was available, a few signs exist for cautious optimism, but only a few. Fourteen elementary schools performed at the A level, but none of those schools are in the Northeast or West learning communities. Even more telling, a total of thirty elementary schools performed at the A or B level (*i.e.*, at least 80% of students on grade level), but only two of these schools are in the West learning community and only one is in the Northeast learning community. At the other end of the achievement scale, twenty-eight elementary schools performed at the D or F level. One of them is in the North learning community (which bodes well for the North’s middle and high schools because it should mean that most of the elementary school students matriculating up through these schools at least will arrive on grade level in future years). None of the D or F elementary schools are in the South learning community (which bodes particularly well for the South’s middle and high schools as it should mean that even more of the elementary school students matriculating up through these schools at least will arrive on grade level in future years).

As in the 02/06 report, one could draw a host of conclusions from this admittedly superficial analysis. The Equity Committee draws at least these three. First, a state of equity has not yet been achieved in CMS. We acknowledge student success depends on more than just the resources CMS provides a school. Such success may depend on a multitude of factors, such as family support, community interaction, and individual aptitude, discipline, and initiative. Across the board, however, such gaps in achievement suggest to us that equity has not been achieved and appropriate, sufficient resources are not being provided in too many places. Second, absent some very specific attention to equity and achievement in the Northeast and West learning communities, too many students in those areas will find it harder and harder to compete locally, nationally, or internationally with students from the South and North learning communities in particular and the Central and East learning communities as well (much less students from other parts of the country and the world). Third, the data suggests to us that without changes in allocating resources, these problems only will persist as too many of today's D or F elementary and middle schools send students throughout much of the CMS system and D or F high schools send citizens into our community as a whole.

**Disparities in Achievement by Socio-Economic Status and Race:** Equity issues still abound – and get even more pronounced – when geographical lines are removed and socio-economic and racial groups are compared. At CMS's seventeen high schools, students who qualified for reduced-price lunch (RPL) or free lunch (FL) performed at or above grade-level in percentages significantly less than more affluent schoolmates. Specifically, based on the data provided us, CMS's "paid lunch" high school population was on grade level 75.3% of the time as compared to 57.4% for the RPL students (a 17.9% gap) and 47.3% for the FL population (a 28% gap). Only four (4) high schools had at least 60% of their RPL populations on grade level (a D or above in our grading system), and only two (2) were at that level with their FL populations. In fact, among FL populations, only five (5) of the seventeen (17) CMS high schools had at least half (50%) of these students on grade level. Of these five (5) high schools that did the best with low-income student populations, only two (2) (Independence High and Vance High) had greater than a 17% FL population in their student bodies, and neither Independence nor Vance had greater than a 50% free-and-reduced lunch population (FRL) in their student bodies. At the five (5) CMS high schools with greater than 60% FRL populations, not a single one had a FL population with 50% on grade level. From this kind of data, the Equity Committee again concludes (despite the multitude of factors that could affect student achievement) that (i) an aggregation of poverty in CMS's high schools (indeed, throughout CMS) contributes significantly to inequitable situations, and (ii) at least as of now, the Board of Education has not addressed this problem in a substantial enough way to do anything about it.

The numbers scarcely improve when analyzed by race. For the second year in a row, the number of CMS high schools in which African-American students were on grade level in percentages equal to or above the percentages of all students was **zero (0)**. For the second year in a row, the number of high schools in which the percentage of African-American students on grade level was at least within five (5) percentage points of the percentage of all students on grade level was **five (5)**. For the second year in a row, though, of these five (5) high schools, four (4) of them were among CMS's five (5) lowest performing, which suggests only an "equity of mediocrity" – *i.e.*, the only times African-American high school students perform close to the rest of a high school's population (on a school-wide basis) is too often when the whole high school's numbers are simply too low.

The picture is a little brighter for Hispanic students in CMS's high schools, but not as good as last year. At two (2) high schools, Hispanic students are on grade level in percentages equal or greater to the schools' populations as a whole (compared to three (3) last year). At three (3) more high schools, Hispanic students are on grade level at percentages within five (5) percentage points of the school's population as a whole (compared to six (6) last year). These five (5) schools range from some of CMS's strongest performing high schools (in terms of EOC percentages) to some of its weakest.

As a comparison, at 4.3% of the high school student population, Asian students made up a much smaller group of CMS high schools students than African-Americans (43%), whites (37.4%) and Hispanics (12.3%). Academically, Asian high school students are on grade level in percentages equal or greater to the schools' populations as a whole at fifteen (15) of seventeen (17) high schools. At one (1) more high school, Asian students are on grade level at percentages within five (5) percentage points of the school's population as a whole.

Among CMS's thirty (30) middle schools, marginally (but only marginally) better news exists. Based on the data provided us, CMS's "paid lunch" middle school population was on grade level 87.7% of the time as compared to 72.8% for the RPL students (a 14.9% gap) and 59.4% for the FL population (a 28.3% gap). Along racial breakdowns, African-American students are on grade level at or above the percentages of student populations as a whole at zero (0) middle schools (down from two (2) last year). African-American students are on grade level in percentages within five (5) percentage points of school populations as a whole at ten (10) middle schools, down from fourteen (14) last year. Most alarmingly, these ten (10) middle schools all had less than 60% of all students performing at grade level (*i.e.*, grades of F on our scale). African-Americans were on grade level at least 80% of the time in only four (4) middle schools, all of which earned a grade of A (at least 90% of total population at grade level) and had percentages of African-American students in their populations of no greater than 13.4% (and FRL populations of no greater than 10.2%).

Hispanic students in middle schools were on grade level at or above the percentages of student populations as a whole at seven (7) schools (up from six (6)). They are on grade level in percentages within five (5) percentage points of school populations as a whole at eight (8) schools (up from seven (7)). These fifteen (15) schools are dispersed throughout CMS in terms of both geography and performance.

Also as a comparison, in their smaller percentage group, Asian middle school students are on grade level in percentages equal or greater to the schools' populations as a whole at twenty-seven (27) of thirty (30) middle schools. At one (1) more middle school, Asian students are on grade level at a percentage within five (5) percentage points of the school's population as a whole.

Among CMS's eighty-nine (89) elementary schools for which we had data, the news gets better still, at least in terms of equity and student performance. The "FRL achievement gap" appears smaller in elementary schools. RPL students were on grade level at or above the percentages of student populations as a whole at fifty-two (52) elementary schools and on grade level in percentages within five (5) percentage points at ten (10) more. FL students were on grade level at or above the percentages of student populations as a whole at three (3) elementary schools and on grade level in percentages within five (5) percentage points at thirty-two (32) more. Both (i)

the sixty-two (62) elementary schools where RPL students are performing roughly as well as the student populations as a whole and (ii) the thirty-five (35) elementary schools where FL students are performing roughly as well as the student populations as a whole are dispersed throughout CMS in terms of both geography and performance.

Along racial breakdowns in the elementary schools, African-American students are on grade level at or above the percentages of student populations as a whole at eight (8) elementary schools (down from nine (9) a year ago). African-American students are on grade level in percentages within five (5) percentage points of school populations as a whole at thirty-two (32) elementary schools (down from forty-nine (49) a year ago). These forty (40) schools appear to range across CMS geographically, but it is worth noting that, on our grading scale, they are one (1) A, zero (0) Bs, eleven (11) Cs, seventeen (17) Ds, and eleven (11) Fs. Again, along racial lines, the trend for African-American students is at best toward an “equity of mediocrity.”

Hispanic students in elementary schools are on grade level at or above the percentages of student populations as a whole at thirty-seven (37) schools (up from thirty-five (35)). They are on grade level in percentages within five (5) percentage points of school populations as a whole at another fourteen (14) elementary schools (down from twenty-five (25)). These fifty-one (51) schools also are pretty well dispersed throughout CMS geographically. In terms of performance they include seven (7) As, seven (7) Bs, sixteen (16) Cs, seventeen (17) Ds, and four (4) Fs.

As a comparison in elementary schools, Asian students, in their smaller overall percentage, are on grade level in percentages equal or greater to the schools’ populations as a whole at seventy (70) of eighty-nine (89) elementary schools for which we had data. At five (5) more elementary schools, Asian students are on grade level at percentages within five (5) percentage points of the school’s population as a whole. These seventy-five (75) schools are dispersed throughout CMS in terms of both geography and performance.

The Equity Committee draws these conclusions from this, again, admittedly superficial analysis. First, CMS appears to be doing a better job providing equity (*i.e.*, allocating various resources to attempt to meet students’ needs and enabling them to achieve) along both socioeconomic and racial lines in elementary schools (although a lot of factors could contribute to these testing results as well). The achievement gaps (both between socioeconomic groups and racial groups) grow larger in middle school and high school. Second, the data indicates that for whatever reason, children in certain categories (at least of class and race) are not performing as well as children in other categories. In particular, the number of schools in which African-American students performed close to other students *decreased*, and *too many* of the schools where the performance was close were among CMS’s *lowest performing*. Although many factors also could contribute to this trend, the Equity Committee sees the trend as evidence that equity may not be being achieved as rapidly as we would hope. Apparently at a cost of approximately \$8,000,000 in this upcoming academic year’s budget, CMS will be decentralizing and moving administrators into the various learning communities in the near future. It is not immediately clear to the Equity Committee how this decentralization will enhance equity or improve student performance, but we strongly recommend that resources and programs be allocated to the learning communities in an equitable – not equal – fashion so that more of the needs of all students in each learning community potentially can be met.

#### IV. SPECIFIC EQUITY CHALLENGES FOR 2007

The Equity Committee views 2007 as a year of opportunities and challenges for equity. Several issues will highlight tensions in attempting to achieve equity and the balance that must be struck between many competing needs and the ultimately limited funding and other resources our community has to address those needs. We specifically note the following as particular opportunities, challenges, and general observations.

**Teachers/Faculty:** As the *CMS Strategic Plan 2010* details, CMS – along with all public education in North Carolina – will have to work hard (and think outside the box) to find, recruit, and keep quality teachers and effective principals in an environment in which demand outstrips supply. This issue is exacerbated in CMS’s FOCUS schools. We generally view positively steps toward higher salaries, bonuses, educational supplements, and other incentives to attract top educators, both into CMS generally and to particular schools. Attracting and keeping talented teachers, however, requires more than money. It requires a positive teaching environment, trust, discipline, and support. We view very positively the role of mentors in developing and retaining teachers and administrators, particularly those less experienced as well as those working in CMS’s most challenging environments (even more so those in both categories). Relying solely on mentoring by other teachers or informal relationships within schools is not sufficient. CMS needs effective mentoring strategies system-wide, particularly at FOCUS schools, and we oppose strategies that eliminate mentoring programs for new teachers and diminish support for teachers system-wide.

We also want CMS to provide sufficient teachers to keep class sizes low for FOCUS schools and all schools that need smaller class sizes to effectively teach their student populations. A key part of having sufficient teachers strikes us as casting a wide net to find teachers – and other professionals who want to be teachers – in as many places and in as many situations as possible. We urge the Board to consider seriously all of the State of North Carolina’s and CMS’s policies geared toward recruiting teachers. If those policies need to be changed to attract as many quality educators as possible and making those educators be as diverse as the students they teach and the community they serve, we urge you to consider revamping those policies.

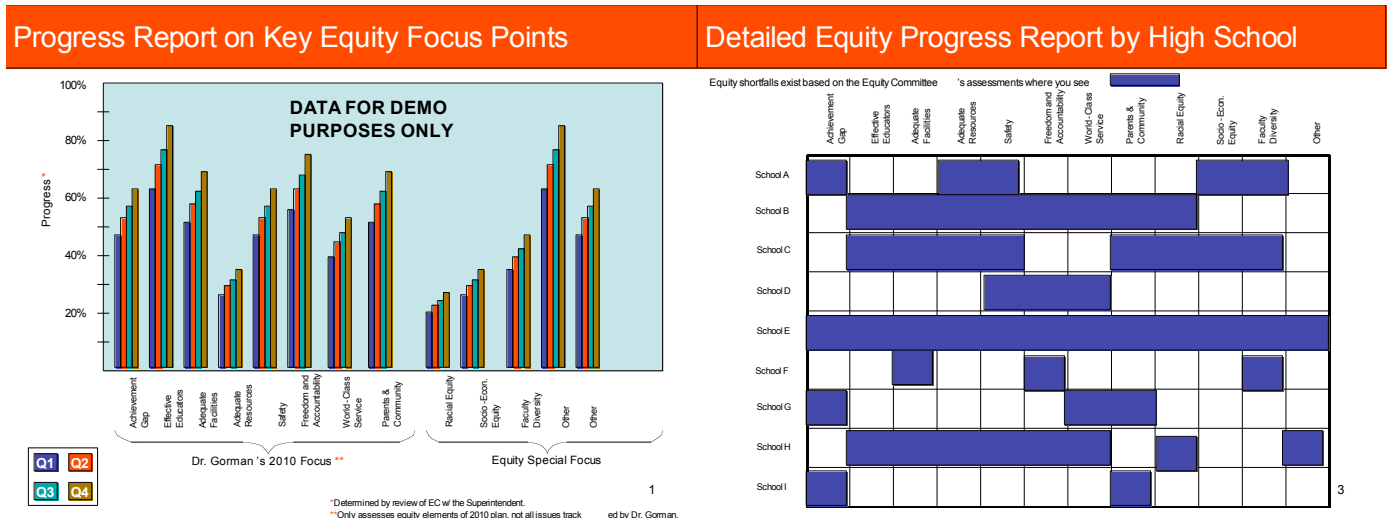
**Buildings and Bonds:** 2007 looms as an important year for decisions about Charlotte-Mecklenburg’s educational “bricks and mortar.” As detailed in previous reports from the Equity Committee, we believe that there are more legitimate needs both for (i) building new schools in rapidly growing areas and (ii) refurbishing more dilapidated schools in many areas than a single bond referendum can address. We generally view the process of prioritization of capital needs projects as a good idea, but we observe that the weighting of the various criteria significantly will affect the ranking of projects. Clearly, the latest priority ranking from CMS includes needed renovations at schools toured by our Committee in recent years (such as Alexander Graham Middle, Davidson IB Middle, East Mecklenburg High, West Charlotte High, and South Mecklenburg High). We also repeat here what we have said in the past, namely that quality, safe, and uncrowded facilities are needed in all areas of the county by all students. Denying such facilities in rapidly growing areas is just as legitimate a threat to equity as failing to refurbish older schools in other areas. Realizing that resources are finite and needs likely only will continue to grow, we urge you to continue to fine-tune and make transparent the prioritization process in ways that take into account an understanding of equity.

**How Best To Communicate About Equity in Our Schools:** We are pleased to have heard about recent moves toward creating a “dashboard indicator”-type report card for all schools. We have long advocated for such a report card, and we remain keenly interested in working with CMS to come up with a similar kind of report that would focus on equity issues. Specifically, by the end of 2007, we would like to see a standard set of metrics on a school-by-school report that would quantify, illustrate, and communicate progress toward (or away from) equity. It should include:

- A high-level scorecard or dashboard of equity at CMS that reflects key issues pulled from CMS’s equity policies, the *CMS Strategic Plan 2010*, and issues suggested by the Equity Committee (*see sample below*); and
- A more detailed break-down for each high school, middle school, and elementary school for various equity categories. Assessments can be ascertained from CMS data, school visits, self-assessments, and other means to be determined (*see sample below*).

Sample Dashboard

Sample Report on High Schools



The Equity Committee offers itself to work with CMS’s administration in 2007 to develop an effective series of measurements and a “dashboard”-type report card that can track those measurements about equity going forward. Such a means of reporting – and communicating – about equity at each school within CMS should be an effective means to promote equity and enhance accountability to make sure that our community’s resources are being used effectively in the areas they are needed most.

As potentially excited as we may be about such a dashboard report in the future, we were disappointed this past year by the lack of an annual report on *Achieving the CMS Vision: Equity and Student Success*. We found the report apparently intended as its replacement, the *Report on Adequate Resources and Facilities (Equity)* to be inadequate and unfortunately riddled with flaws. Typically, the Equity Committee’s annual reports have included some analysis and

critique of the *Achieving the Vision* report. Because even the *Report on Adequate Resources* was withdrawn, we are unable to provide such comments here. We would observe, however, that a report of some sort along these lines – including accurate and verifiable information – to track progress at FOCUS schools is an important tool and a necessary step (when done well) for monitoring equity and communicating both progress and a lack of progress to our community. We urge that such a report be produced and that it become a real priority. We remain willing and open to work with the administration to improve the usefulness and accuracy of such an annual document.

**Questions and Discussions About Student Assignment:** As discussed below in Section V, the Equity Committee hopes in 2007 to continue having a series of hard conversations about what is required to address inequitable situations – and ongoing achievement gaps – in too many schools within CMS. One of the hardest discussions the Equity Committee intends to have will be about the heated and difficult topic of student assignment. Too many schools try to serve exceptionally high populations of FRL students. Other schools have extremely low FRL populations. As noted repeatedly above, the Equity Committee views both: (i) the aggregation of poverty in a school to be a significant challenge to achieving equity in that school; and (ii) increases in the number of schools with high aggregations of poverty within CMS to be a significant challenge for achieving equity within the system. In the midst of other reform discussions, we also plan to discuss among ourselves whether CMS needs to reconsider how our Community’s most precious resource – its students – are allocated and assigned to schools. If the earliest of those conversations are any indication, we may reach no consensus or not have any view on the topic worth reporting. At a minimum, however, it is a difficult topic about which we intend to have difficult discussions. If those discussions generate any light (as opposed to heat), we will share the results with you.

**CMS’s Vision for the Future:** The *CMS Strategic Plan 2010* includes many objectives and strategies that we applaud. “High academic achievement” is an equitable goal, and steps to accelerate high school reform initiatives, create Eight-PLUS programs, expand opportunities for talented and gifted students, and address the needs of ESL students and students of poverty all are directly in step with equity. We wonder where the resources will come from to make these steps a reality. Providing effective educators, adequate resources, and quality, safe schools all are bedrocks of equity. “Freedom and flexibility with accountability” may help provide equity, but it may only stratify the system. We will follow with interest the specifics of how to reorganize and decentralize CMS in this regard. As a general matter, we certainly believe that “world-class service” only will enhance CMS’s larger relationship with our community and hopefully attract more families into CMS and enable families already within CMS to have their needs and expectations met. Given the ultimately finite nature of our State and Mecklenburg County budgets, we also applaud the ongoing development of strong parent and community connections, including strengthening school leadership teams, expanding partnerships with the faith community, and finding successful programs for connecting with and empowering parents. CMS cannot meet the needs of all students on its own. As noted above, we strongly endorse the idea of publishing school performance report cards, particularly if those report cards include specific materials about equity. Accordingly, at first blush, and even upon closer reading, much in the *CMS Strategic Plan 2010* addresses fundamental equity issues.

**Questions and Concerns:** Even with all that potentially is positive in the *CMS Strategic Plan 2010*, we have ongoing concerns about equity. Although as noted above, our Committee generally believes that at least some progress toward equity is being made and that equity can be achieved, we see in the flurry of educational reforms being discussed some signs that equity is not as high a priority as it should be. We are concerned about the elimination of positions and programs to help classroom teachers. We are concerned about the effects of weighted student staffing on the number of teachers at each school and the resulting class size that can be offered, particularly at FOCUS schools and schools trending toward that status. A building plan that skews too much in one direction or the other does not inspire the desired (and needed) confidence about equitable facilities. Issues about the accuracy and clarity of reporting data on equity also inspires little confidence.

For all of these reasons, and doubtless others, 2007 – and 2008 before we likely report to you again – will be an important time in setting the tone and direction for equity within CMS for the foreseeable future. As indicated below, the Equity Committee wants to help make sure that equity issues are considered prominently and effectively in deciding what educational reforms to pursue.

## **V. EQUITY COMMITTEE PLEDGES FOR 2007-2008**

We make to you and our community the following pledges for the coming year. We pledge to encourage improved communications with the School Board and staff and to focus our efforts in specific areas that we believe are critical. We will spend more time examining CMS’s TD and EC programs, as well as CMS’s programs for attempting to reach and teach students who have had behavior or discipline problems in conventional classrooms. We will work on making our reports easier to read and will try to improve the efficacy of our meetings and conversations with the School Board as well as CMS’s administration and staff.

The Equity Committee pledges to continue our school tours. We plan to make our tour reports more standardized so our conclusions will be easier to understand and act upon. As noted above, alongside a “dashboard”-type report card, our goal is to develop a different tool for data collection. We want this tool to produce an easier to understand tour report that is more user-friendly, and we envision this format looking more like what has been discussed above. We also will attempt to write our annual reports so that they will relate to CMS’s scorecard approach to tracking data and progress. Additionally, once we bring specific school issues to the attention of staff, we will request follow up regarding issues we have observed.

We pledge to heighten the level of content and depth of conversations between our committee members as well as with staff and the Board. We will make concerted efforts to have more focused, in-depth conversations, including, and especially, the very difficult and uncomfortable conversations that need to be undertaken about equity, race, socio-economic strata, divisions in our community, and the role of public education. Our committee represents this community, and we feel that both the community and this Equity Committee need to have ongoing difficult conversations that reflect what is being debated in the community. Some of these conversations may revolve around the value of diversity, our progress toward achieving equity, how we are spending our money to achieve equity, and whether this money is actually, having an effect on student achievement and, if not, where our money would be better spent.

The Equity Committee also has begun to dig deeper into data for a better understanding of student achievement. For example, we ask, “When we group schools according to similar student demographics, why it is that students at some of these schools have significantly better achievement scores than at other comparable schools?” We hope to continue to dig deeper into the data to try better to understand student achievement and what inputs are making a difference in performance. We also would like to understand which inputs may be missing that could be holding achievement levels back. We want to examine whether we spend our limited resources wisely on inputs that make the most difference in promoting student achievement. We also want to encourage accountability regarding the determination of which inputs – based on actual data – are having positive effects on student achievement and move toward spending decisions being made that are based on such empirical data.

Finally, it is important for the Equity Committee – and CMS – to communicate to our larger community. We pledge to point out our disappointments regarding achieving equity, but we also hope to make the public aware of our successes in addressing inequities through initiatives like FOCUS schools, added resources and rigor for Achievement Zone schools, and the experiments in education going on at the High School Challenge schools, among others. Ultimately, we look forward to attempting to work with you and serve our community and its children for another year.

**THE CMS EQUITY COMMITTEE**

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