

[TO GO ON CMS EQUITY COMMITTEE LETTERHEAD]

December 13, 2004

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education
701 East 2nd Street
Charlotte, NC 28202

Re: Budget Areas for 2005-2006 in Which Specific Spending Can Enhance Equity

Dear School Board Members:

As you and CMS staff begin to wrestle with budget issues for next year, your Equity Committee wants to remind you of areas in which we believe additional funds can help our school system achieve equity. For over two years now, your Equity Committee has grappled with equity issues in our school system. Early next year, we will provide you with our third annual report to help you in your analysis of how CMS is doing in providing equity.

To foreshadow that report, your Equity Committee does not believe that CMS is equitable as a system. The quality of educational *opportunities* students receive within CMS is still determined too much by the make-up of a school's student population, and the quality of educational *opportunities* differs too much from school to school throughout the system. CMS's testing system glaringly demonstrates that students in *EquityPlusII* schools do not achieve as well as their peers at non-*EquityPlusII* schools. For example, in 2003-2004, third-grade students in *EquityPlusII* schools for the full academic year read at or above grade level at a 70.9 % rate and performed math at or above grade level at a 79.8% rate. In 2003-2004, third-graders in non-*EquityPlusII* schools for the full academic year read at above grade level at an 88.2% rate and performed math at or above grade level at a 92.3% rate. Those differences are reduced (in terms of percentages) as students progress through the eighth grade, particularly in reading, but substantial differences remain, and those differences are too pronounced for us to be satisfied that equity has been achieved.

A host of reasons may exist to explain the discrepancies in test scores between populations, but to have equitable opportunities to achieve, all CMS students must have sufficient resources to meet their particular needs. Our review persuades us that too many students are simply getting the short end of the educational stick in terms of facilities, teachers, instructional materials, and other resources. The reality in CMS remains that equitable resources do not exist throughout the system to allow all students at each different school to achieve each student's full academic potential.

We have not, however, given up on achieving equity, and we hope that you and the larger Charlotte-Mecklenburg community have not given up either. We hope that your next budget will make specific provisions in various areas to promote equity, and with this letter (and accompanying presentation at your December 14 meeting), we want to identify some of those

specific provisions. We hope that the discussions you will have with the current County Commission will both (i) demonstrate the financial accountability we believe essential for attaining equity in the long term and (ii) achieve the immediate result of having more funding to achieve equity in at least the areas we identify below.

As you begin to contemplate CMS's next budget, we want to remind you of some of what we have been telling you the past two years. In fact, if you have not recently reviewed our February 2003 and February 2004 Reports, we encourage you to do so as quickly as possible and at least before you begin your budget plans and deliberations. We want to avoid redundancy, but much of what we have recommended about how to spend scarce education resources to achieve the most equity possible remains just as timely now as it was 22 and 10 months ago.

In our initial February 2003 report, we suggested spending money in the following areas:

- **Baseline Instructional Supplies;**
- **Teacher Compensation;**
- **Teacher Development Dollars;**
- **Parental Involvement;**
- **Full Utilization of Existing Resources;**
- **Talent Development Programs; and**
- **Programs for At-Risk Children That Do Not Fall Into a Neat Category.**

Our February 2004 report echoed some increasingly familiar themes about how to spend money most effectively and efficiently to achieve equity. That report recommended spending money on:

- **Leadership Training/Development for School Administrators;**
- **Attracting and Retaining Quality Faculty;**
- **Bricks and Mortar Spending;**
- **Instructional Supplies;**
- **The Need for More "International" Outreach;**
- **Parental Leadership Development; and**
- **The Need to Develop Community Trust.**

Our work and study over the past ten months suggests to us that most of the recommendations we made in these areas remain good ones. Specifically, in the past ten months, we have visited additional schools; heard reports from various CMS staff; talked with students,

parents, and teachers; and analyzed in considerable detail various achievement scores as well as data compiled by CMS in resources like *Achieving the CMS Vision: Equity and Student Success*. We will tell you more about our work in next year's report, but this work and study over the past ten months indicates that funding in the following areas should assist significantly in achieving equity within CMS.

CMS should increase spending in the area of **Instructional Supplies** because too many gaps continue to exist with too many schools not having the supplies they need to educate all children.

- For example, at Bain Elementary, the school's ratio of eight students per computer is inadequate for the school's needs. To perform needed activities with students, Bain also needs a laser color printer and an upgrade in the quality of its existing computers. *Achieving the Vision* mandates a 5:1 ratio for students to computers at elementary schools. Why not at Bain?
- Also at Bain Elementary, kindergarten students do not have sufficient instructional art supplies. In many instances, a committed and active PTA can help bridge these types of gaps, but such gaps should not exist in the first place at Bain or elsewhere.
- For example, instructional supply problems abound at overcrowded Hopewell High. As with other schools, basic instructional supplies like textbooks are allocated based on student counts at the 20th day of the school year. As student numbers increase during the year, they outpace the number of textbooks. A large number of "floating" teachers without assigned classrooms also means that faculty has inadequate access to computers for preparing to teach. The 28 mobile units in use at Hopewell also are not provided the same needed instructional supplies as other classrooms. As a further example of the breakdown in effective communication about needs in instructional supplies, Hopewell gets about ten times the number of globes that it needs for classroom instruction, but it lacks the supplies it needs to take advantage even of the too few jewelry-making kits that it does have. In prioritizing spending for supplies, we urge you to find the most money for textbooks and computer upgrades, but we urge CMS to spend that money wisely and provide the supplies the schools actually need.

More money should be spent on specific areas to improve **Student Achievement** on an equitable basis.

- Data reviewed by members of our Committee indicates that Bright Beginnings works in enabling at-risk children to read earlier and do better in all aspects of education. Find more money and more locations for Bright Beginnings to enroll more children in the program.
- As efforts continue to bring all children up to grade level, find more money for CMS's Talent Development programs. Use some of those funds: (i) to improve testing for identifying students in the program; (ii) to improve curriculum

provided in the program; (iii) to hire more Talent Development teachers in order to have an adequate number of teachers to teach all children who can benefit; and (iv) to improve the overall leadership of the program itself. For your Equity Committee, equity means enabling all children to achieve at their highest levels. All children include those who qualify for and can benefit from what should be the advanced, challenging opportunities of a strong TD program system-wide.

- Find money to address, diagnose, and solve the pronounced “dip” in CMS achievement across the board in sixth grade and ninth grade. The “dip” affects everybody, but it is even more pronounced at *EquityPlusII* schools where the student populations can least afford losing any ground.
- Find money to broaden and expand the *EquityPlusII* template. To be clear, your Equity Committee does not think that designating a school as *EquityPlusII* and providing the additional resources that designation results in “equity.” In too many instances, the resources currently provided are simply not enough, but in a lot of schools (particularly those that do not also get Title I funding), the *EquityPlusII* resources help a lot. We see *EquityPlusII* resources making a tremendous difference in schools like First Ward Elementary and Olympic High, but *EquityPlusII* needs to encompass more and enable schools like Cochrane Middle to do even more with their student populations. We also urge you to find money so that you can provide more resources to schools “trending” toward *EquityPlusII* status. We also urge you to find money that would enable you to “phase” schools out of *EquityPlusII* status so that they do not immediately lose many of the resources that have enabled them to improve student achievement.

CMS has an ever-increasing number of new students and a whole lot of old buildings. Physical conditions impact student achievement in a host of ways, including the decision-making process of parents sending children to schools; having safe, sanitary facilities in which to teach; and having satisfactory facilities for the teaching the needs to go on. We suggest finding more money for **Bricks and Mortar** and building more classrooms.

- Find money immediately to improve the facilities at Cochrane Middle. We are appalled – as our entire community should be – that students are educated in a facility that ever has raw sewage leaking in its halls and flooding in the band and other classrooms in its basement. While those problems grab your attention, also find more money for Cochrane to bring its lab facilities up to a satisfactory level for the magnet science curriculum Cochrane is supposed to teach.
- Moreover, Cochrane is only one example of the seven schools this Board identified in 2002 as having “critical needs” in terms of physical facilities. It is long since time that those issues were addressed so that students at these schools have equitable opportunities to learn. We urge you either to get the schools in at least adequate repair or stop using them. Another glaring example among this list of seven schools is Garinger High, and its long overdue need for an adequate science wing.

- One of the buildings currently used at Bain Elementary is an older building, the majority of which is condemned and off limits for students. Find the money to fix the building.
- Many of the bathroom facilities at Bain Elementary are outdated and need urgent upgrades.
- At Montclair Elementary, children regularly are taught in the hallways because that is the only space available for the “breakout” small groups that are a key reason that school is able successfully to educate so many ESL students. Find money to figure how to match up a school’s physical facilities with the student populations they are supposed to teach.
- Hopewell High uses 28 mobile units to enable a school for a substantially smaller student population to attempt to educate a student body of over 2,200. With those additional students and that mobile space, however, have come no additional resources for security to enhance the safety of the students, faculty, and equipment in these mobile units.

If we had a “silver bullet” in this next area, we would give it to you – or at least melt it down and let the money be used as a teacher bonus – but we implore you to find as much money as you can for any programs that CMS’s own teachers tell you are effective in improving the **Retention of Quality Teachers**.

- As a start, we strongly recommend paying higher local supplements for all teachers, but particularly those in EquityPlusII schools or schools trending toward EquityPlusII status. We also urge you to avoid overloading EquityPlusII schools with CMS’s most inexperienced teachers. Youthful energy and new ideas have to be balanced with experience for teachers – and schools – to be effective.
- Just as importantly, figure out ways to spend money that improve the working environment for teachers by improving the **discipline** of the students whom they are charged to teach. Continue to experiment with Positive Behavior Intervention Systems. Investigate the Titan Care Unit at Hopewell High and find money to fund it. Twenty-nine instances of teachers and staff being assaulted by students is twenty-nine too many.
- Find more money for training of teachers before you put them in the classrooms as well as ongoing training for teachers already in the classroom. In terms of preparation, we especially urge you to provide more funding for diversity-based programs that help educate teachers about the realities of the student populations they are called upon to teach. Diversity is CMS’s blessing and bane. Used wisely to demonstrate and bridge differences, diversity is a profound asset. Plunging inexperienced teachers into student populations with which they have little or no familiarity is a recipe for disaster, increased mistrust, and a growing divide. The later happens too frequently within CMS.

- Spend more money on the types of “support” positions at the schools that will help teachers in their day-to-day work in the classrooms. For example, Bain Elementary does not have a full-time nurse available. This reality creates problems in a school of over 800 students as teachers wind up having to deal with a myriad of student health issues. Find the money for a full-time nurse and eliminate tasks for teachers that they must perform in addition to teaching.
- At crowded schools like Hopewell High, be sure to find the money to recruit and put an actual teacher in every classroom. We find it problematic in the extreme that it can be nearly Christmas and some classrooms do not have full-time teachers, but it works against retaining the teachers you do have at Hopewell as more burdens flow to the teachers already there and overall morale is threatened.

As we described above, an important part of improving equity within CMS is improving an **Appreciation for Diversity** at a variety of levels.

- Find more money to employ bilingual teachers and support staff.
- Find more money or figure out other incentives to attract persons of color into CMS classrooms in schools and keep them there as examples and role models for students.

We continue to believe that schools are strong when they are supported by parents and the surrounding community. We encourage increased funding for **Parent and Community Involvement**, particularly in *EquityPlusII* schools.

- Provide full funding for as many parent advocate slots as possible in *EquityPlusII* schools and schools trending toward *EquityPlusII* status. Please also provide adequate funding to train persons in these jobs and effectively follow the examples of good work being done in these positions at various schools. It is a waste of funding to pay a person to be a parent advocate, but then to have no one (including parents and faculty at the school) realize the school had a parent advocate!
- At Cochrane Middle, for example, we observed the positive difference that trained and effective parent advocates and related support to staff can make at a school. To be clear, not all schools need this resource, and providing parent advocate positions at every school need not be necessary to achieve “equity.” Beware a “cookie cutter” sameness as a disguise and hindrance to real equity. Cochrane Middle contrasts sharply with another school we visited, South Charlotte Middle, with an active and energized parent support base, but still with other needs to be able to educate its students equitably.
- Montclair Elementary takes extremely good advantage of having parent advocates and social worker positions that assist the families of its students. Particularly at Montclair, the presence of a substantial Spanish-speaking population makes it essential to have these types of positions in order for teachers

and parents to come together and communicate in the best interests of all of the students.

Finally, we recognize the common denominator of strong school leadership – particularly principals and assistant principals – at all strong, equity-achieving schools that we have seen. Accordingly, we urge you to find additional funds for the **Development of School Leadership**.

- Increase funding for the training and personal development of principals. Develop and expand peer coaching and other mechanisms for developing the talents of principals and others within CMS to lead our schools. Be wary of putting inexperienced principals in *EquityPlusII* schools, and spend money to study the best ways to match principals' skill sets and experiences with the student populations at the schools they are asked to lead.
- Increase the amount of discretionary funds available to principals in their schools, but link the availability of such discretionary funds to improvements in student achievement. Your Equity Committee does not think that “carrots” should be linked merely to hitting certain achievement levels. Rather, the “carrots” should be rewards for improvements at whatever level as long as the increase is tangible and shows an increase in student achievement.
- Develop a process for recognition of school principals that have taken creative approaches to address student achievement issues by maximizing current resources. For example, the principal and faculty at Montclair Elementary have creatively used inventive scheduling and existing *EquityPlusII* and Title I funds to provide tutoring to students during school hours instead of after-school. This approach has eliminated some transportation costs and more effectively engages students during regular school hours.

Your Equity Committee appreciates your consideration of these points as you undertake the budgeting process. In many ways, we do not envy you your task. You lead a school system that increasingly does not look like the Mecklenburg County population base from which you must seek much of the equity funding we recommend. For example, students in CMS are 43% African-American, 39.5% Caucasian, 10.5% Hispanic/Latino, and 4.2% Asian. Mecklenburg County's population, however, is 58% Caucasian, 28% African-American, 9% Hispanic/Latino, and 5% Asian. You must persuade taxpayers, County Commissioners, and parents that the spending needed for equity is worth the investment in our community's children. We suggest in the strongest terms possible that the best means of such persuasion lies in linking that investment to increased achievement for all students and the advantages of a better-educated citizenry in every part of Mecklenburg County.

In 2005, we understand you will undertake work on both (i) teacher recruitment and retention issues and (ii) student assignment. We look forward to providing you with further comments about how these issues affect equity. If you want to hear more from us, ask. If you want to hear less from us, perhaps then we will be fulfilling our function as effectively as we would like. We also continue to look forward to working with you, both in the delivery of our

third report early next year and beyond, in trying to enhance and achieve equity for all CMS students.

Best wishes this Holiday Season.

Very truly yours,

Julian H. Wright, Jr.
CMS Equity Committee Chair

cc: Dr. James L. Pughsley
CMS Equity Committee Members

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