

Recommended Alterations to the Proposed Amendments to CMS Policy ADA "Equitable Educational Opportunities"

Mecklenburg Area Coming Together for Schools (Mecklenburg ACTS)

The Policy Committee of the CMS Board of Education has proposed amending the board's Policy ADA, "Equitable Educational Opportunities," better known as the Equity Policy. Members of the Mecklenburg ACTS coalition believe that these proposed amendments weaken the policy, and should not be adopted as proposed.

Specifically, the proposed amendments weaken community oversight of equity in CMS schools, through weakening and possibly eliminating the Equity Committee. They also eliminate the concept of baseline standards – the process by which CMS determines whether students at all CMS schools have equal access to opportunity in areas such as technology, teacher quality and extracurricular activities.

We recommend addressing those weaknesses through a handful of key changes to the proposed amendments, as well as the restoration of some sections that the proposed amendments would delete from the existing Equity Policy.

The proposed amendments were given a first reading before the Board of Education on June 8, 2010. A public hearing on the amendments will be held at the BoE meeting on June 22, and the Board is scheduled to vote on them at the BoE meeting on July 27.

As CMS moves ahead with its project of "reinvention," policies regarding equity and equal access to opportunity will have significant effects on the reshaping of the school system. We urge groups and individuals to study the proposed amendments and voice opinions on them to the Board of Education, through phone calls, e-mails and statements at the public hearing.

A copy of the original policy, along with the Policy Committee's proposed amendments, follows these recommendations. A copy of a response made by the current Equity Committee to the proposed amendments is also included at the end of the document.

Mecklenburg ACTS is a grassroots coalition of parents and citizens working to build community commitment to equity and excellence in ALL schools. The group that worked on these recommended alterations included representatives from Charlotte East Community Partners, the Education Committee of the Black Political Caucus, the Education Committee of the League of Women Voters, the Southwest Area Neighborhood Coalition and the West Boulevard Neighborhood Coalition. This participation, however, should not be interpreted as an official endorsement of these recommendations by any of those groups.

Alterations Recommended by Mecklenburg ACTS

*Restored material marked in **green**. Additions and deletions marked in **blue**.*

Section 1 (No title): Add a sentence that specifies equal access to excellent educational opportunities

The Board of Education of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is committed to providing the best education available anywhere, preparing every child to lead a rich and productive life. This commitment will be realized when the academic achievement of every student breaks the predictive link between student demographics (race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and the like) and student achievement. **Breaking that link will require equal access to excellent educational opportunities for all of CMS's students in all its schools.**

Section 2 ("Equitable Allocation of Resources"): Restore the deleted language regarding baseline standards (with one small change). Remove the last line of the proposed new paragraph for clarity

Equitable Allocation of Resources

Maximizing the academic achievement of every child requires strategic and equitable allocation of resources so that every student has access to excellent educational opportunities, including effective teachers and principals and sufficient support services for their unique individual needs. ~~In addition, proactive attention must be given to students at risk of academic failure.~~

The provision of such opportunities for all students is expected to require providing additional resources **to** and implementing innovative strategies **at** schools serving students with additional educational needs, particularly students at risk of academic failure. Such resources and strategies may include, but are not limited to: differentiated staffing; smaller class sizes; increased instructional supplies and materials; expanded and renovated facilities; innovative family and community involvement initiatives; upgraded technology; comprehensive co-curricular activities; supplemental guidance and counseling; enhanced professional development; and preschool educational opportunities.

In determining whether all students are being provided with such opportunities, the Board of Education shall adopt baseline standards in the following areas: educational opportunities; student achievement; instructional materials and supplies; media equipment and resources; technology; facilities; faculty; teacher/student ratio; and family and community involvement.

Section 3 ("Measuring Success"): Add a phrase regarding baseline standards to the start of the section.

In addition to compiling school-by-school data on the baseline standards, the Superintendent shall develop a system of measurement based on the Board's Theory of Action and the goals of the current strategic plan (or its equivalent) to gauge the effectiveness of the allocation framework in improving student achievement. The measurement system must be based on achievement levels and growth, and, using the CMS accountability system, shall correlate resources (inputs) to academic results (outcomes). It shall include both quantitative (End of Grade, End of Course and other state assessment tools) and qualitative (school quality reviews or their equivalent) criteria. Results of the measurements will be considered in the Board self evaluation as well as evaluations for the Superintendent and certain employees.

Section 4: ("The Board's Role"): Restore the language regarding the creation and charge of the Equity Committee. Remove the final sentence.

The Board of Education is ultimately responsible for ensuring that resources are allocated and distributed in a ways that maximize the academic achievement of every child in every school. The Board will hold itself and the Superintendent accountable for achieving this goal. **The Board and Superintendent shall appoint a committee to help facilitate the annual analysis of the provision of equal access to excellent educational opportunities for all its students in all its schools.** ~~The Board may appoint an advisory group to provide community input and feedback.~~

Section 5: ("The Superintendent's Role"): Alter the language in the final sentence of the first paragraph. Add a line regarding baseline standards to the final paragraph.

The Superintendent shall establish and implement a systematic framework for distribution of resources throughout the district that ensures all students are taught by effective teachers and have equitable resources and facilities. ~~As provided in Policy GBKA,~~ The Superintendent shall exercise the right (provided in Policy GBKA) to transfer or reassign staff as necessary to ensure effective distribution of personnel (instructional, support, and administrative).

The Superintendent will propose for the approval of the Board appropriate timelines and methods for measuring progress in distributing resources to demonstrate that the predictive links between student demographics and student achievement have been broken.

The Superintendent will ensure that an annual report on equitable allocation and distribution of resources and their impact on student achievement and growth is completed and presented to the Board each year. **This will include school-by-school data on the baseline standards.** As areas of deficiency are identified, the report shall include clear recommendations for improvement.

Section 6: ("Policy Review"): No recommended alterations.

This policy will be reviewed by the Board every three years and revised as necessary.

Proposed Amendments to CMS Policy ADA "Equitable Educational Opportunities"

Proposed by Policy Committee, CMS Board of Education

Date of Adoption: 6/26/01: First Reading 6/8/10 Legal Reference: Previous CMS Policy #: none Related CMS Policies: AE, AEC, BA, BA-E1, BA-E2, GCKA, GCKA-R, IJ

Deleted material in blue (strikethrough); added material in red (underline)

The Board of Education of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is committed to providing ~~equal access to excellent educational opportunities for all its students in all its schools.~~ the best education available anywhere, preparing every child to lead a rich and productive life. This commitment will be realized when the academic achievement of every student breaks the predictive link between student demographics (race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and the like) and student achievement.

Equitable Allocation of Resources

~~The provision of such opportunities for all students is expected to require providing additional resources and implementing innovative strategies to schools serving students with additional educational needs, particularly students at risk of academic failure. Such resources and strategies may include, but are not limited to: differentiated staffing; smaller class sizes; increased instructional supplies and materials; expanded and renovated facilities; innovative family and community involvement initiatives; upgraded technology; comprehensive co-curricular activities; supplemental guidance and counseling; enhanced professional development; and preschool educational opportunities.~~

Maximizing the academic achievement of every child requires strategic and equitable allocation of resources so that every student has access to excellent educational opportunities, including effective teachers and principals and sufficient support services for their unique individual needs. In addition, proactive attention must be given to students at risk of academic failure.

~~In determining whether all students are being provided with such opportunities, the Board of Education shall adopt baseline standards in the following areas: educational opportunities; student achievement; instructional materials and supplies; media equipment and resources; technology; facilities; faculty; teacher/student ratio; and family and community involvement.~~

Measuring Success

The Superintendent shall develop a system of measurement based on the Board's Theory of Action and the goals of the current strategic plan (or its equivalent) to gauge the effectiveness of the allocation framework in improving student achievement. The measurement system must be based on achievement levels and growth, and, using the CMS accountability system, shall correlate resources (inputs) to academic results (outcomes). It shall include both quantitative (End of Grade, End of Course and other state assessment tools) and qualitative (school quality reviews or their equivalent) criteria. Results of the measurements will be considered in the Board self evaluation as well as evaluations for the Superintendent and certain employees.

The Board's Role

~~On an annual basis, aligned with the annual budget process, the Board of Education shall do the following: comprehensively review and revise the baseline standards in the areas listed above; assess whether all students are being provided equal access to excellent educational opportunities; direct the Superintendent to develop strategies for ensuring that those opportunities are being provided; determine the amounts of funding and resources needed to provide such opportunities; seek and direct the Superintendent to seek the funds and resources needed to provide such opportunities; and allocate, reallocate and direct the Superintendent to allocate and reallocate the funds and resources needed to provide those opportunities.~~

The Board of Education is ultimately responsible for ensuring that resources are allocated and distributed in a ways that maximize the academic achievement of every child in every school. The Board will hold itself and the Superintendent accountable for achieving this goal. The Board and Superintendent shall appoint a committee to help facilitate the annual analysis of the provision of equal access to excellent educational opportunities for all its students in all its schools. The Superintendent shall establish and implement regulations and strategies designed to accomplish the requirements of this policy. The Board may appoint an advisory group to provide community input and feedback.

The Superintendent's Role

The Superintendent shall establish and implement a systematic framework for distribution of resources throughout the district that ensures all students are taught by effective teachers and have equitable resources and facilities. As provided in Policy GBKA, the Superintendent retains the right to transfer or reassign staff as necessary to ensure effective distribution of personnel (instructional, support, and administrative).

~~On an annual basis, aligned with the annual budget process, the Superintendent shall present to the Board of Education the following: recommendations related to the baseline standards in the areas listed above; assessment of whether all students are being provided equal access to excellent educational opportunities; strategies for ensuring that all students are provided such opportunities; determination of the amounts of funding and resources needed to provide such opportunities; and recommended allocation and reallocation of the funds and resources needed to provide those opportunities.~~

The Superintendent will propose for the approval of the Board appropriate timelines and methods for measuring progress in distributing resources to demonstrate that the predictive links between student demographics and student achievement have been broken.

The Superintendent will ensure that an annual report on equitable allocation and distribution of resources and their impact on student achievement and growth is completed and presented to the Board each year. As areas of deficiency are identified, the report shall include clear recommendations for improvement.

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed by the Board every three years and revised as necessary.

EQUITY COMMITTEE RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDED POLICY ADA: EQUITABLE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Dear Members of the CMS Board of Education:

The Policy Committee of the CMS Board of Education has proposed a significant revision of the Board's Policy ADA: "Equitable Educational Opportunities." Among other things, the proposed policy would eliminate baseline standards for educational opportunities and weaken the mechanisms for monitoring and analyzing the opportunities available to students across the system.

Because the proposed policy would influence the school system for many years, it is important to examine the policy carefully. As members of the CMS Equity Committee, we submit this response to the recommendation of the Policy Committee.

Objectives of the Proposed Policy

The current policy defines its goal as "providing equal access to excellent educational opportunities for all its students in all its schools."

The proposed policy initially defines its goal as reaching a point where "the academic achievement of every student breaks the predictive link between student demographics (race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and the like) and student achievement." Later, it adds that the Board seeks to "maximize the academic achievement of every student in every school."

These proposed goals raise many questions and have many possible interpretations, now and in the future. How will the school system determine when the "predictive link" has been broken and/or "maximum academic achievement" has been reached? Do these statements mean that the Board seeks to reach a point at which each demographic group shows the same percentages of students at, above and below grade level? Or, do they mean that all children should reach the same achievement level? Or, do they mean something entirely different?

This range of interpretations leaves the policy vulnerable to continual change with changes in the make-up of the Board of Education. An effective policy requires greater clarity and consistency in application.

Shift from Opportunities to Outcomes

Under the current policy, the concept of "excellent educational opportunities" encompasses multiple facets of school life. Along with considering faculty quality and student achievement, the policy focuses attention on areas such as "media equipment and resources," "technology" and "comprehensive co-curricular activities." It requires the Board to set baseline standards in these and other areas and to monitor whether schools meet these standards.

The proposed policy would narrow this focus, concentrating on a "measurement system [that] must be based on achievement levels and growth," which would "correlate resources (inputs) to academic results (outcomes)."

Thus, the proposed policy would shift from an emphasis on assessing resources and opportunity to an emphasis on measuring student accomplishment. The proposed policy does not mention equal access to opportunity. Rather, it focuses on linking the distribution of resources to measurements of student achievement.

This change in focus raises questions about how the Board will determine which resources matter and which do not. What will be the fate of resources and opportunities that are not linked directly to improvements in test scores? For example, will low performing schools be expected to offer the same range of band, drama, art, electives and co-curricular activities as those offered at high-performing schools? Or will resources at low-performing schools be focused largely on measures seen to have more direct links to tested subjects? If the policy does not address non-tested areas such as electives and co-curricular activities, how will the availability of such opportunities be monitored?

Value of Independent, Community-Based Analysis

The current policy states that the Board and Superintendent *shall* appoint a committee “to help facilitate the annual analysis of the provision of equal access to excellent educational opportunities for all its students in all its schools”

The proposed policy states that the Board *may* (but need not) “appoint an advisory group to provide community input and feedback.”

This shift from *shall* to *may* raises the possibility that no such group will be appointed and that the likelihood of appointment will depend on the swings of Board of Education membership. Because of the size and complexity of our school system, monitoring and analyzing the allocation of resources and opportunities is an enormous and time-consuming job. These tasks present heightened challenges at high-poverty schools, where parents are less likely to have the time and resources to analyze the operations of their schools or to express their concerns in ways that reach the Board of Education or the Superintendent.

In recent years, the Equity Committee has addressed issues that include the bullying policy, access to Advanced Placement classes, challenges facing LEP families, mathematics curricula, and teacher experience and assignment. The Board and staff have provided the committee with the resources to analyze these issues in a manner that is not provided for in the discretionary committee structure.

Need for Community Discussion

The Board of Education confronts a range of difficult issues, from budgetary matters, to curricular issues, to personnel decisions. The school system finds itself at a time of transformation, including changes in administrative zones, expectations for personnel, and allocation of resources. The Equity Committee was created at a time of similar transformation for CMS. The continued existence of a citizen-based equity task force is as important now as it has been in the Equity Committee’s history. Indeed, the absence of such a committee during this current period of change poses significant risks that many students and their families across the system will be unable to make their concerns heard. The Board should carefully consider the proposed policy and provide for robust community discussion of its contents.

Thank you for taking the time to consider these thoughts. We welcome further discussion regarding these remarks as well as the policy itself.

Approved by the CMS Equity Committee: June 8, 2010 by vote of 6 to 1. Dissent follows.

DISSENT FROM EQUITY COMMITTEE RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDED POLICY ADA

Dear Board Members,

I would like to submit a dissenting opinion to the Equity Committee's "Response to the Proposed Changes to Policy ADA".

As a member of this committee for 2 ½ years, I have become increasingly concerned about the direction it has taken. In recent years the committee has ventured into analyzing and critiquing policy, at times using incomplete information or incorrectly interpreting data and often drawing conclusions based upon a particular political viewpoint. In addition, I believe that some on this committee have used their positions to promote divisiveness and distrust in the community. While I recognize that committee members are passionate about their beliefs, I am certain that this was not the board's original intent for this committee. However, by mandating a never-ending committee, with few parameters, the board unintentionally facilitated the abuses that I have observed.

I should note that committee chair Rob Harrington has done an admirable job of tempering some of the more strident opinions on the committee; however, Rob will not be chair forever.

For these reasons I support the proposed policy revisions.

In my opinion, both as an Equity Committee member and as a former CMS parent, CMS has made great strides over the past 8 years and is now a much stronger, more effective system than it was when we arrived here in 1994. My hope is that under the direction of this board we as a community can continue to move forward, despite current economic conditions.

Thank you.

Sharon Starks
Member, CMS Equity Committee