

COMMUNITY COMMITMENT TO SCHOOLS

Sponsored by Mecklenburg ACTS (Mecklenburg Area Coming Together for Schools)

Mecklenburg ACTS is a grassroots coalition of parents and citizens working to build community commitment to equity and excellence in all schools. E-mail: mecklenburgacts@earthlink.net

PRINCIPLES

Academics

We believe that it is academics—not politics, not board representation, not operational configurations—that should be the first and primary concern of our community and school leaders. CMS has been lauded nationwide for its efforts to close the achievement gaps by income and race. However, there are still unacceptable gaps at the elementary level, which become more pronounced at the middle school level and even more regressive in high school. Also, far too many of our high school students of all races and incomes fail statewide tests. Directly linked to high academic achievement are issues of equity, construction and community/corporate involvement.

Equity

We believe that equitable teacher staffing is one of the most critical factors in student success and that equity must encompass our community's changing demographics. CMS should be recognized for providing additional funding, staff and space at Focus schools and increasing the number of students who are successful in advanced courses. But recent reports affirm continuing disparities in distribution of school and classroom resources, extracurricular activities, facilities and attracting experienced, successful staff to schools with the greatest needs. Meanwhile, nearly half of all CMS students are on subsidized lunch. CMS also must be foresighted about emerging challenges and opportunities of an increasingly diverse school system with students from 130 countries speaking 94 different languages and student demographics that are 43.1% African-American, 37.6% white, 12% Hispanic, 4.2% Asian and 3.2% Native American/Multi-Racial.

Construction

We believe that new construction and renovations of current facilities are BOTH needed. Our facility issues can and must be a unifier and we must work for all children to attend school in the best possible conditions. The Charlotte metropolitan area is experiencing rapid growth, causing school districts throughout our area to face massive influxes of new students. No school must be left behind.

Community and Corporate Support

We believe that a concerted effort must be made to involve community and corporate support in our schools—particularly those most in need. We must examine the current involvement, or lack of involvement, of the wider community such as the corporate, faith and civic branches and harness those interests to produce concrete programs of support. Not since the days of integration has the Charlotte community witnessed such a burgeoning interest in CMS schools. But that interest in change must take place in our community as well as our schools.

In summary, we believe *now* is the time to be bold and focused on those issues that have a direct bearing on academics in CMS schools.

“Actions Speak Louder than Words”

www.MecklenburgACTS.org

ACTION PLAN

ACADEMICS

- Similar to this nation, CMS' high school math and science scores are a particular concern. CMS regularly records failure rates of 30%-50% on End-Of-Course tests at almost every high school. CMS must provide competitive pay and professional opportunities for math and science teachers sufficient to provide quality teachers in every classroom every day.
- Starting with the 2006-07 ninth grade class, graduates will be required to pass End-Of-Course tests in five key areas—English I, Algebra I, Biology, Civics & Economics and U.S. History-- to receive a high school degree. At that rate, up to half the seniors at some CMS schools will not graduate. Our leaders, administrators and community must make these challenging issues a community-wide focus.
- Challenging curricula must be taught at every school and magnet programs with challenging and compelling programs must be supported with emphasis on areas of change and need. Teachers and administrators at all schools must be allowed to creatively address the specific needs of individual schools, while adhering to system-wide expectations.

EQUITY

- Our community must demand and support whatever efforts are necessary to provide a reasonable balance of new and experienced, successful and highly credentialed teachers at all schools.
- Public and private funds can and should be used to create the same opportunities for teacher support, extra curricular activities and field trips at every school.
- Emphasis should be placed on ensuring that additional materials and equitable parent and teacher support system are present at every school.
- Programs should promote involvement of parents from varied cultures, effectively educate English language learners and promote opportunities for students of varied background to learn from each other.

CONSTRUCTION

- Adequate funding, including alternative funding sources, should be targeted to address new construction to relieve over crowding AND renovation of older facilities.

COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE INVOLVEMENT

- Concern is growing that corporate support often is not directed at those schools most in need of volunteer and funding assistance; that PTA budgets diverge widely, in part because of matching corporate donations; that corporations are providing school allowances for new employees to place their children in private schools; and that real estate agents are steering new residents into certain areas or away from public schools. These issues must be acknowledged and addressed at the corporate and community level.
- Faith-based, community and social service organizations must be involved in meaningful partnerships with schools rather than the sporadic, unstructured system we currently have. Simultaneously, the urgent need for mentors, tutors and support services must be identified and linked to community goals and commitments to meet these needs. Community agencies should be actively encouraged to share space and resources with schools to address student needs.
- Because social issues invariably “spill over” into schools, we must be cognizant of housing patterns that create economic isolation and development plans that result in severe overcrowding. The impact of planning and zoning on schools must be fully acknowledged and addressed.

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