

Mecklenburg ACTS Statement on School Funding

Mecklenburg County Commission Budget Hearing

18 May 2006

Delivered by Pamela Grundy

I am here representing a new group: "Mecklenburg Area Coming Together for Schools," or Mecklenburg ACTS.

Mecklenburg ACTS was created by a grassroots group of parents and citizens to build community commitment to equity and excellence in all our schools. Our motto is: Actions Speak Louder than Words. You will be hearing more from us soon.

Tonight, I am here to speak to the question of action on equity, as related to the proposed CMS budget.

Although we feel confident that most Mecklenburg residents believe in excellent educational opportunities for all children, as a community we have yet to muster the will to live up to our ideals.

Excellent work by dedicated individuals such as the members of the Equity Committee has highlighted both problems and solutions. But too often, we as a community have found excuses not to give the schools what they need.

We don't like the behavior of some school board members – even though that behavior has had little effect on school board policy or day-to-day school operations. We listen to those who claim that CMS spends money unwisely – even though study after study shows that CMS administration operates quite efficiently, and critics rarely point to specific, systemic examples of waste. And I can't help but say here that those who cite public opinion rather than demonstrated waste as a reason to cut the CMS budget have failed as community leaders. Leaders lead based on facts. They don't follow based on opinion.

Issues such as school board conduct and public skepticism need to be dealt with. But they should not be used to deprive children who already face great obstacles of equal educational opportunities – equally strong and experienced teachers, equally rich enrichment programs, equally fine facilities. Nor should they be used to avoid giving our new superintendent the tools he needs to do his job.

To this end, we support funding the proposed CMS budget in full. We particularly support the measures designed to attract and retain teachers, especially at low-performing schools, the measures to provide adequate numbers of ESL teachers to schools that need them, and the measures to provide additional staff to schools with moderate levels of free and reduced lunch students.

Ideals mean little if we do not make our best efforts to live up to them. Actions speak louder than words. On behalf of Mecklenburg ACTS, I thank you.