

Past CMS Attempts at Equity

Several years ago, CMS began to confront the challenges of high-poverty schools, school board members put a great deal of time and effort into considering what programs and measures might help ensure that children at high-poverty schools had the same educational opportunities as children at low-poverty schools. They came up with a number of policies. These included:

Focus School Designation

Schools with especially high levels of poverty, and/or issues such as Limited English Proficient, high student turnover, inexperienced staff or low test scores were designated as Focus Schools. This designation was equivalent to prior designations of Equity, Equity Plus, and Equity Plus II.

The Focus School designation earned the school:

- extra staffing
- An expectation that schools would have teachers whose credentials and experience would be comparable to those at NC Schools of Excellence and Schools of Distinction
- extra space to accommodate smaller class sizes
- 1/3 more funding for supplies, as they had far less access to the private funds (PTA, etc.) available to other schools.
- "Red Tag" service on maintenance issues, as most of them did not have the active parent lobbies of other schools.

Differential Staffing

A class size ladder was established prior to 2005-06 that recommended the following class sizes:

Schools with 20-40% FRL:	1 to 22, K-3
Schools with 40-60% FRL:	1 to 19, K-3
Schools above 60% FRL:	1 to 16, K-3

This ladder was created before the dramatic increase in schools with 80% and more FRL children and does not provided differential staffing for schools with extreme poverty.

The 2005-06 differential staffing had three tiers, base, Non-FOCUS with Higher FRL percentage, and FOCUS. The 2006-07 Weighted Student Staffing Model does not provide guarantees of pupil-teacher ratios at FRL increments.

Equity Template

A template was identified for elementary, middle and high schools. These included measures that the board felt were essential to providing the same quality of opportunity at all schools. They included:

- A full-time Talent Development teacher in all FOCUS schools
- Staffing to promote parental involvement
- Communities in Schools services in all schools that needed them

- Efforts to ensure that all schools offered the same extracurricular activities such as chess club, debate teams, Odyssey of the Mind, etc.

Measures to be implemented with Family Choice Plan:

- A language teacher in all schools with a significant number of LEP students.
- Professional Development Schools

Professional Development Schools were supposed to be developed in conjunction with several of our neediest schools, particularly high schools. This was to assure that (1) staff itself would be strong and (2) teachers would be trained to be successful in schools such as in our urban core.

Implementation and Backsliding

Because of funding issues, not all these programs were implemented (for example, the promised of at least one TD teachers at each FOCUS school was never fulfilled). Some were implemented but have not been fully maintained or were implemented in name only, including positions which were created but not filled. Many extracurricular activities that exist largely on paper, such as Odyssey of the Mind teams that lacked the coaching and other support to be competitive with those at other schools and National Academic Leagues which were scheduled to compete but were never formed.

Monitoring Equity

Balanced Scorecard

The Balanced Scorecard also kept up with equity issues including provision of extra curricular opportunities for schools. Unfortunately, many of the equity areas in the balanced scorecard, such as providing minimal extra curricular activities, have gone backwards rather than forwards. For some reason, the Equity Booklet was apparently not published in its complete form last year, although it is required to be presented to the School Board and the Equity Committee.

Other measures have not been monitored in clear enough fashion. This includes positions that have been created but not filled, as well as a monitoring of actual class sizes at targeted schools. It's important to know if classes are in fact as small as they should be. It's also important to have an overall picture of where positions are unfilled, to ensure that high-poverty schools are not bearing the brunt of this problem, such as the lack of qualified science and math teachers.

Closing the Gap

Although State legislation calls on each community to form a team on Closing the Gap to be formed in each community, it never was formed (at least to involve the community) in Charlotte-Mecklenburg.

Results

These efforts brought significant progress at many of these schools, although the recent math scores make clear that not nearly enough has been accomplished. It is important to note that the full program was never implemented.