

Mecklenburg ACTS

Summary of presentation to the
CMS Equity Committee
June 1, 2007

Evaluation of the CMS “Report on Adequate Resources and Facilities (Equity)” January, 2007

Introduction

Thank you for allowing us to share our thoughts with you.

We had two major concerns with the Equity Report prepared by CMS. First, the report failed to present a clear, accurate picture of what was going on in CMS regarding equity. Second, this lack of clarity suggested that CMS's commitment to equity may well be waning. Specifically, no one in the central office seemed to be either knowledgeable enough about the subject, or focused enough on the issue, to ensure that the report was clear, accurate and complete. [details of the report's shortcomings >>](#)

Previous equity reports have been far from crystal clear. But we found this one especially concerning because it seemed to fit into a larger pattern of what we're calling slippage and shrinkage regarding equity.

Slippage

- The CMS report replaced the word “equity” with “adequate.” This substitution invoked a baseline standard, rather than an effort to give each child what he/she needs to achieve at the highest possible levels.

- The 2006-07 implementation of a Weighted Student Staffing formula cut teaching staff and thus raised class size at many majority poverty schools. Although this effect was pointed out to CMS officials, no change was made in the formula for 2007-08. [full report >>](#) The League of Women Voters of Charlotte-Mecklenburg has recommended that CMS abandon weighted student staffing and instead adjust the Template format used to fund equity in previous years. [LWV report >>](#)

- The percentage of Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) students in CMS's new Learning Communities ranges from 27 – 63%. Despite greater student needs in the high poverty areas, each area is assigned the same number of staff (with the exception of the Central area, because of its large number of schools).

Shrinkage

- Increasing numbers of majority poverty schools, combined with inadequate funding, have resulted in an ever-increasing FRL threshold for FOCUS designation. At

the inception of the Equity Plus/Equity Plus II/FOCUS programs, schools with FRL as low as 45% qualified for additional services. During 2005-06 FOCUS elementary schools were 70%+ FRL (with one exception). Middle school FOCUS schools were 62%+ FRL. Many schools in need fell below that threshold.

- While the extra staff and attention Achievement Zone schools are scheduled to receive is welcome, these are far from the only schools that need additional help. We are concerned that the focus on a handful of Achievement Zone schools will distract community attention away from the many other schools that need similar levels of assistance.

- Although the number of CMS students living in poverty has increased, the number of school social workers has remained the same. As a result, social workers serve a shrinking percentage of the students who need them.

- The mentor program for new teachers was abruptly abandoned this spring in order to place the mentors into classrooms. Since teacher retention is a critical need in majority poverty schools, the loss of mentors will likely have a negative impact on teacher retention in these schools.

Improving the Equity Report

We believe that an annual Equity Report is a crucial document for monitoring the effectiveness of CMS's efforts to create equity throughout the school system. To be effective, the document needs to include detailed and specific data that deals directly with the reality at individual schools. This data would include:

- Specific data on every school, not just FOCUS schools.
- Student achievement measures that include growth indicators for every school.
- Arranging lists of school-by-school data by FRL percentage, rather than alphabetically, so that more effective comparisons can be made.
- Measures of teacher stability, along with teacher experience, at every school.
- Number of students consistently participating in co-curricular activities at every school.
- Teacher-pupil ratio and actual class sizes, not simply teacher allocations, at every school.
- Dollars spent per student at every school, including school activity funds.