

PUBLIC HEARING

CMS urged to spend more on teachers

Turn focus on students, not administrative concerns, parents say

ANN DOSS HELMS

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Spend less money on administration and more on hiring teachers, a handful of citizens advised Superintendent Peter Gorman and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school board Tuesday.

"The discussion shouldn't be about which schools and which students are going to be lucky enough to get the limited resources provided," said CMS parent Pamela Grundy, speaking for a citizens group called Mecklenburg Area Coming Together for Schools.

The public hearing on Gorman's \$1.2 billion budget plan, which includes a request for \$346.5 million in county money, drew only 11 speakers. Most talked about hiring more teachers to shrink class sizes.

Gorman, already facing criticism from Grundy's group and some school board members for letting classes get too large in high-poverty schools, agreed last week to shift \$720,000 to hire 14 more teachers.

The state pays for most teachers, but CMS uses county money to hire more, with many sent to high-poverty schools where students need extra help.

Some speakers said Gorman is spending too much on such efforts as creating six regional administrative offices and a customer-service call center.

"The customers we should be serving are students," said CMS parent Carol Sawyer.

Several took Gorman to task for cutting \$914,000 in extra money for seven low-scoring high schools, saying those schools use the money to hire teachers for core academic subjects. That was one of the trims he proposed to pay for new projects.

Patricia Fronzaglia, a CMS parent from Huntersville, suggested cutting money spent on long bus rides to pay for more teachers.

School officials never reply or comment during public hearings. The board will vote on the budget April 10, and county commissioners will decide in June how much money to spend on education. Gorman's request for county money is up almost 10 percent over this year's spending.