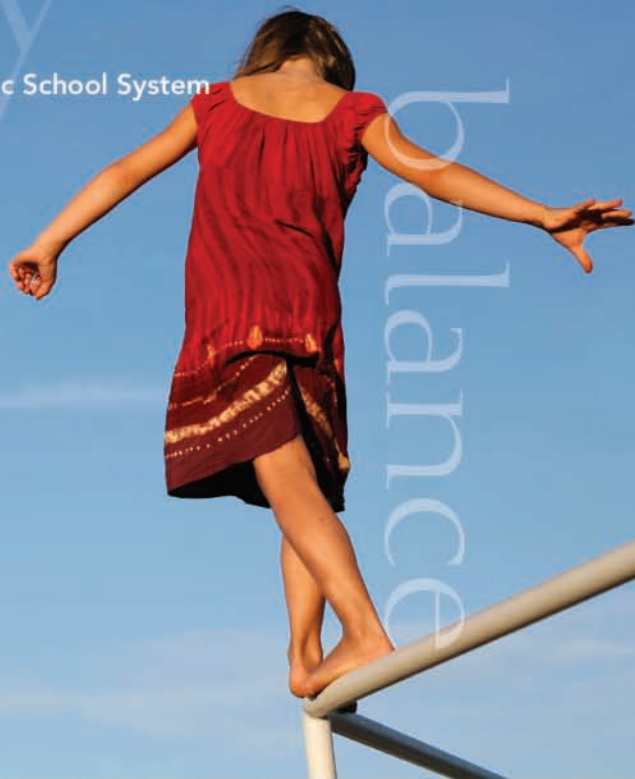


# Striking a Balance:

In Support of Diversity in the Wake County Public School System



## Foreword



It's a promise Wake County leaders made to their public school children: every child will attend a high-quality school. Leaders in Wake County have delivered on that promise for over 30 years! They have made decisions that resulted in academic excellence in the

Wake County Public School System. The school system also earned a far-reaching reputation for delivering high levels of teaching and learning in its classrooms.



Largely as a result of this well-deserved reputation, explosive enrollment growth has required the constant building and renovating of schools. Most have welcomed this growth and prosperity as our quality of life has made Wake County one of the best places in our country to live, work and raise a family. What a wonderful place to be! As with anything, there are challenges. Wake Education Partnership believes one of the greatest challenges is ensuring we remain true to the fundamental principles that made our school system great.

We believe one of those is maintaining socio-economic balance in schools.



This document presents our belief

that maintaining socio-economic balance is fundamental to maintaining high standards and quality in our schools. We hope it will help citizens understand some of the history of our school system. While this issue provides a wealth of research

information, we have chosen to present a paper that is concise and easy to read. The

interested person can easily locate additional research to support the position set forth

here: socio-economic balance is absolutely critical to maintaining healthy schools.



We insist that every child in our county receive a public school education that is

second to none! It's really very simple: We are a great community. Great communities care

about all their children. You could say it's our passion!



Ann T. Denlinger, Ed.D.  
President  
Wake Education Partnership

## Introduction

For more than 30 years, students attending the Wake County Public School System have benefited from a demonstrated commitment by community leaders to schools that reflect the county's diversity. First by race, and more recently by family income, the Wake school system has actively sought to create and maintain the kind of enrollment balance that decades of research have proven to be critical for successful schools and successful students.<sup>1</sup> That effort – though not without costs to students and families – remains the linchpin both of a system of strong schools and of a thriving local economy that draws thousands of newcomers every year.

Yet few issues generate more controversy and angst for parents than the yearly adjustments the school system must make to accommodate new students and keep enrollments in reasonable balance. Shifts in school assignments are rarely popular. Rapid growth forces the need for frequent changes as schools grow crowded and new ones are opened. Time and again, parents have objected to the school system's assignment practices as a heavy-handed instrument of social engineering or as just being too disruptive in their children's and families' lives.

That kind of perennial resistance means sometimes fragile support for Wake's assignment policy and the rationale that underlies it. Parents have very legitimate concerns about shifts in school assignments affecting their own children. But such resistance doesn't change the facts. Too often, schools skewed by high levels of poverty doom their students to low achievement and limited opportunities.

Wake leaders have been courageous in their commitment to the kind of schools where those outcomes aren't accepted as a given or an unavoidable circumstance of the neighborhood where a child might live. They have defended the school system's frequently unpopular assignment approach as a necessary condition of effective schools. If anything, school leaders have renewed that commitment by taking careful and well-considered steps to ensure that all schools have balanced enrollments. However tenuous, public support is essential for enabling the school system to continue balancing the enrollments of individual schools. The future of Wake's schools – and the county's quality of life – depends on it.

The alternatives to Wake's approach are sobering. North Carolina offers too many examples of school systems that have largely resegregated by race and income in recent years as they lost the political will to take the sometimes unpopular steps necessary to maintain well-balanced schools.<sup>2</sup> Court decisions since the late 1990s have only encouraged the retreat of school and community leaders, by creating confusion and a chilling effect on the use of race in assignment decisions. Most recently, last year's decision by the U.S. Supreme Court rejecting race as a factor in school assignments in Seattle and Louisville has seemed to settle the issue altogether. Most school systems simply have backed away from the politically risky steps needed to achieve enrollment diversity and have settled instead for the more politically expedient alternatives of neighborhood schools or plans that allow parents to exercise choices that often result in schools segregated by race and income.

As a result, Wake remains an exception rather than the rule. More than 30 years ago, the county's political leaders bucked public opposition to a merger between the Raleigh City and Wake County school systems. They achieved a step thought key to the school system's – and county's – long term health and prosperity by creating a unified system that provided the foundation for solid schools throughout Wake County.<sup>3</sup> More recently, school board members accommodated rulings



by the federal courts by altering the basis for school assignment. The board changed its basis for assignment from race to indicators of poverty and performance. The new approach, adopted in 2000, rests squarely on what extensive education research shows: schools burdened by high concentrations of poor students and low achievement often face insurmountable challenges.<sup>4</sup> Conversely, students in schools with a critical mass of children from middle class families tend to benefit from better teachers, stronger parental support and the influence of classmates more likely to be engaged academically.<sup>5</sup> But even eliminating race from the equation in Wake hasn't settled the debate.

## Growth vs. Diversity

Rapid growth in recent years has complicated the district's assignment goals in ways not foreseen when school leaders in the late 1970s set guidelines for racial balance, nor in the early 1980s when they converted under-enrolled Raleigh schools into magnets as a palatable strategy to achieve voluntary desegregation. One of the school system's greatest challenges now lies in maintaining balanced enrollments as the county's demographics have shifted with growth – especially in the county's largely affluent suburbs.

Yet even during two decades of steady growth in the county, particularly during the 1990s, the school system's efforts to maintain racial balance in enrollments were generally supported by the public and were never seriously challenged. Anti-busing candidates ran in nearly every school board race from 1993 on, but none were elected. Voters in the county consistently backed major school bond proposals except one in which opposition stemmed from objections to its high cost rather than district policies. In short, school leaders were under little local pressure to drop the use of race in making school assignments when a series of court decisions elsewhere created unavoidable external pressure to put the district's assignment objectives on a differ-



ent footing. And even when school board members in 2000 voted to use indicators of poverty and achievement in lieu of race to make school assignments, they were largely maintaining long-established attendance patterns. Because of a high correlation in Wake between race and poverty, the application of the new criteria didn't result in any major shifts.<sup>6</sup> Yet school leaders believed the new income-based approach to be more precisely focused on what years of education research showed: schools are most effective in helping all students succeed when they're not faced with high concentrations of students living in poverty.

The school system's efforts to provide enrollment balance now are threatened, indirectly, by a 2007 court ruling that limits the school board's legal authority to assign students to schools that operate according to a non-traditional, year-round calendar.

## What is poverty?

*In public education, poverty is defined on both an individual and school level.*

*Individual poverty refers to whether an individual student is eligible for free or reduced-price lunch subsidized by the National Student Lunch Program. Families are eligible for a no-cost lunch at 130 percent of the poverty level, or an annual income of \$26,845. Families are eligible for a reduced-price lunch at 185 percent of the poverty level, or an annual income of \$38,203.<sup>1</sup> (The poverty level is identified as an annual income of \$20,650 for a family of four.)*

*School poverty is typically seen as the percentage of students at a school who*

*are eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunch. Education researchers tend to define schools impacted by poverty as those where enrollments of students receiving subsidized lunches exceeds 40 to 50 percent. Over the last five years, WCPSS has seen a steady rise in the number of students receiving free and reduced-price lunch at elementary, middle, and high schools. The decline in percentages from elementary to high school is more a reflection of the reluctance by older students to be seen as needy than a reflection of real differences in family income. In other words, poverty in high schools tends to be understated.<sup>2</sup>*

*Nationally, 1.3 million more children were living at the federal poverty line in 2006 than in 2000 – a 17 percent increase.<sup>3</sup> In Wake schools, the numbers of students eligible for free and reduced lunch have been increasing also, from 22.5 percent in the 2001-02 school year to 29.1 percent during the 2006-07 school year.<sup>4</sup> This year, as of the 20th day of school, 28 percent of students (37,531) were eligible to receive free and reduced-price lunch.<sup>5</sup> While the absolute number of Wake students receiving free and reduced-price lunch did increase, the overall percentage of all students receiving subsidized lunch fell slightly.*

# diversity

Before last year, most students attending year-round schools in the district did so by choice as magnet students. Facing continued rapid enrollment growth however, the district moved to significantly expand the number of space-saving year-round schools – by converting existing schools and opening new ones – and by assigning neighborhoods to those year-round schools. Previously, only a small number of low-income neighborhoods had been assigned to the district’s year-round, largely suburban, magnet schools as a means to better balance enrollments that attracted few children from low-income families.

In reaction to last year’s move to expand the number of year-round schools and assign students to them, as with conventional schools, an organization of parents opposed to such mandatory year-round assignments successfully challenged the plan in court, resulting in a ruling that now requires the district to secure the consent of the parent as a condition of year-round assignment. Such “consent” is not required when a student’s school assignment is changed from one conventional-calendar school to another for any number of reasons, including crowding or socioeconomic imbalance. Parents and students have the right, however, to request a transfer back to their original

school, or failing that, they can appeal the assignment to the school board. The same options remain open to parents under the district’s assignments to year-round schools. The court ruling gives parents the right to refuse reassignment by requiring their consent; the school system’s long-standing assignment procedures – set out in state law – give school boards the final say in determining school assignments that are in the best interests of all students. The Wake board is appealing the ruling.

The school board has a legal and moral obligation to ensure that all students are afforded the opportunity for a sound basic education, regardless of family circumstances, poverty or where they live in the county. Whether a student lives in a mansion or in public housing, each is guaranteed under the state constitution the opportunity for an education that will lead to success in post-secondary education, in a career and as a contributing citizen. For a generation, Wake school leaders have held that school assignments are crucial to delivering on that goal of equity.



## WCPSS 2003-2008 Free and Reduced Lunch Data<sup>6</sup>

School Year	F&R Students District-Wide	% Elem.	% Middle	% High
2003-2004	26,492 (24.3%)	29.1	25.1	15.2
2004-2005	30,312 (26.3%)	31.0	27.5	17.4
2005-2006	33,002 (27.1%)	31.4	28.0	18.8
2006-2007	36,175 (28.2%)	32.2	29.2	20.3
2007-2008	37,531 (28.0%)	31.8	28.8	20.9

<sup>1</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, National School Lunch Program, Income Eligibility Guidelines, 2007-2008, at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/governance/notices/iegs/iegs.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Viadero, *South’s Schools Pass Milestone on Poverty*, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Debra Viadero, *South’s Schools Pass Milestone on Poverty*, Education Week, November 7, 2007, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Wake County Public School System, Demographics, School Facts, at <http://www.wcpss.net/demographics/quickfacts/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Wake County Public School System, Demographics, School Facts, at <http://www.wcpss.net/demographics/quickfacts/index.html>

## Diversity Does Matter

The evidence is compelling. A large body of research, gathered over 40 years, provides irrefutable evidence of an inescapable correlation between poverty and school performance. The single most important predictor of academic achievement is family income, followed by the socioeconomic composition of the school that a student attends. Those findings, first documented by researcher James S. Coleman in 1966, have been reaffirmed in numerous studies since then, according to Richard Kahlenberg in a 2007 report on socioeconomic school integration published by The Century Foundation.<sup>7</sup> They include:

- *The school's makeup is a critical factor in student outcomes. "All students – rich, poor, white, black, Latino and Asian – perform significantly better in schools with strong middle-class populations than they do in high poverty schools," Kahlenberg wrote in the paper, released after the U.S. Supreme Court's school ruling last summer. "Virtually everything that educators talk about as desirable in a school – high standards and expectations, good teachers, active parents, a safe and orderly environment, a stable student and teacher population – are more likely to be found in economically mixed schools than in high-poverty schools."<sup>8</sup>*
- *On the critical issue of teacher quality alone, a 2004 report by the U.S. Department of Education found that high-poverty schools, where at least 75 percent of students were from low-income families, had three times as many uncertified or out-of-field teachers in English and science than in schools with lower concentrations of poverty.<sup>9</sup>*

- *Most recently, an international assessment of science, math and reading skills and knowledge by 15-year-old students in 57 countries reached a similar conclusion about the impact of socioeconomic factors on achievement. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), administered every three years by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, found on a global scale that low-income students perform better in schools with higher socioeconomic levels.<sup>10</sup> "Regardless of their own socioeconomic background," the PISA report states, "students attending schools in which the average socioeconomic background is high tend to perform better than when they are enrolled in a school with a below-average socioeconomic [population]." The report goes on to note the influences of peers, and also teachers: "Talented and motivated teachers are more likely to be attracted to schools with higher socioeconomic status and less likely to transfer to another school or to leave the profession."<sup>11</sup>*
- *Data from the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress, known as the Nation's Report Card, points to the same kind of benefit when looking only at schools in the United States. Among fourth graders taking the math assessment, students from low-income families in more affluent schools scored significantly higher than low-income students in schools with high levels of poverty. The 20-point difference between the two groups of students represents nearly two years of learning.<sup>12</sup>*
- *Research also provides ample evidence that while students from low-income families clearly benefit from the various advantages of "middle class" schools, students from more affluent families who attend schools reflecting diverse income levels are not adversely affected. "Integration is not a zero-sum game," Kahlenberg said in his 2007 paper, "in which gains for low-income students are offset by declines in middle-class achievement....The majority is what sets the tone in a school, and...research finds that middle-class children are less affected by school influences (for good or ill) than low-income children."<sup>13</sup>*



## School Districts that Include Family Income as a Factor When Assigning Students<sup>1</sup>

Baltimore County School District, MD  
Berkeley Unified School District, CA  
Boulder Valley School District, CO  
Brandywine School District, DE  
Cambridge Public School District, MA  
Charles County School District, MD  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, NC  
Christina School District, DE  
Clark County (Las Vegas), NV  
Coweta County, GA  
Duval County (Jacksonville) Public School District, FL  
Eugene Public School District, OR  
Fresno Unified School District, FL  
Greenville County Public School District, SC  
Guilford County Public School District, NC  
Hamilton County Public School District (Chattanooga), TN  
Manatee County School District, FL  
Manchester School District, CT  
McKinney Independent School District, TX  
Miami-Dade County School District, FL  
Minneapolis Public Schools, MN  
Montgomery County Public Schools, MD  
Moorpark United School District, CA  
New York City Public Schools: Community School Districts 13, 14, 15, 20 and 21, NY  
Omaha Public Schools, NE  
Palm Beach County School District, FL  
Portland Public School District, OR  
Proviso Township High Schools, IL  
Rochester City School District, NY  
Rock Hill Public School District of York County, SC  
School District of La Crosse, WI  
San Francisco Unified School District, CA  
San Jose Unified School District, CA  
Seminole County Public Schools, FL  
South Orange-Maplewood Public School District, NJ  
Springdale Public School District, AR  
St. Lucie County Public School District, FL  
Wake County Public School System, NC  
Williamsburg-James County School District, VA

<sup>1</sup> Richard Kahlenberg, *Rescuing Brown v. Board of Education: Profiles of Twelve School Districts Pursuing Socioeconomic School Integration*, The Century Foundation, 2007, p. 3-4.



## Wake's Evidence

Student performance in Wake schools, specifically, is consistent with what research has found generally. On nearly all measures, students in Wake's schools perform as well or better than students in comparable urban districts in North Carolina, most of which reflect greater numbers of high-poverty schools. Data from North Carolina's most recent ABCs school accountability report only underscores that connection. Of the 211 schools statewide in 2006-07 where 20 percent or less of students received free or reduced-price lunch, the average passing rate on state exams was 79 percent. Passing rates decline steadily as poverty increases. The average passing rate for the 383 schools statewide last year where more than 80 percent of students received federally subsidized lunches was 58 percent. This is more than 20 points lower than the average for schools with the lowest percentage of poor students. The same pattern was true for schools in Wake County. As a group, schools with the least poverty (0-20 percent receiving subsidized lunches) had the highest average passing rate (83.7), while schools with most poverty (61-100 percent) had the lowest average passing rate (less than 70 percent.)<sup>14</sup>

Schools with high levels of poverty also were less likely under the ABCs program to meet goals for student progress – irrespective of absolute passing rates – meaning they failed to earn the bonus pay for teachers and other educators provided under the accountability system. Among the 211 schools in the state with the lowest poverty (0-20 percent), 86 percent made “expected progress,” earning educators in those schools bonus pay of \$750; 45 percent of those schools also achieved “high growth,” giving educators an additional \$750 bonus for total incentive pay of \$1,500. At the other end of the spectrum, however, in the 383 schools statewide with the greatest concentration of poverty (81-100 percent), 53 percent of the



schools reached “expected growth,” and 15 percent of them achieved “high growth.”<sup>15</sup> The ABCs bonus pay is intended as an extra incentive for teachers to help their schools achieve strong gains by students, regardless of where students started the year. But in practice, teachers in high-poverty schools are less likely to earn bonus pay, resulting in a disincentive for teachers to work in such schools. That hard reality can’t be ignored, and it’s an argument that supports Wake’s efforts to maintain schools that aren’t burdened by lopsided levels of poverty.

A host of other performance indicators yield persuasive evidence that all students – regardless of income or ability – are well served by the district’s assignment approach. Compared to other urban districts, greater percentages of Wake’s eighth-grade state math and reading tests received passing scores than in comparable North Carolina districts, weighing the performance of all students as well as that of minority and low-income students. While a significant achievement gap remains between white students and black or Hispanic students, and between students who aren’t economically disadvantaged and those who are, the eighth-grade results suggest that Wake schools are effective in reaching all students. Graduation rates for Wake students also tend to exceed those for the state as a whole. The four-year graduation rate for all Wake students in the class of 2007 was 79.3 percent, compared to 69.5 percent statewide. For white students, Wake’s rate was 88.2 percent, compared to 75 percent statewide; for black students, Wake’s rate was 65.3 percent, compared to 61.4 percent statewide and for Hispanic students, Wake’s rate was 55.3 percent, compared to 53.7 percent.<sup>16</sup>

## WCPSS 2006-2007 Testing Data<sup>1</sup>

Assessment	% at Level III or IV
<b>Grades 3-5</b>	
<i>Reading Composite</i>	
All	89.64
F/R	77.88
non F/R	95.23
<i>Math Composite</i>	
All	77.17
F/R	55.51
non F/R	87.47
<b>Grades 6-8</b>	
<i>Reading Composite</i>	
All	89.76
F/R	76.36
non F/R	95.43
<i>Math Composite</i>	
All	73.24
F/R	46.74
non F/R	84.44
<b>Grades 9-12</b>	
<i>EOC Composite</i>	
All	75.9
F/R	50.9
non F/R	81.5

<sup>1</sup> N.C. Department of Public Instruction, Reports of Disaggregated State, School System (LEA) and School Performance Data, 2006-2007 at <http://disag.ncpublicschools.org/2007/>



## A Cost-Effective Strategy

School districts that have sought to compensate for the effects of high concentrations of poverty have found limited success. And while there are examples of schools nationwide that have beat the odds with strong student achievement despite high poverty, such success is rarely achieved on a system-wide scale. Too often, beating the odds depends on such unique circumstances as individual and/or highly motivated school leaders. Districts have sought to meet the needs of students in high-poverty schools by providing additional resources. But such efforts have shown less success, often at greater costs, than assignment approaches aimed at achieving enrollments that reflect a balance of income levels. Research does show that a number of measures can improve student achievement in high-poverty schools. Among them: increasing the rigor of courses students take, more time spent on homework and improving teacher quality. But none of those steps has been demonstrated to be more effective in boosting student achievement, on average, than the effects of lower concentrations of poverty in a school or lower individual poverty of students.<sup>17</sup> Even allowing for successful compensatory measures resulting in equal achievement, taxpayers face higher costs.

The most recent financial data available from the N.C. Department of Public Instruction show that Wake spends less, per student and from all funding sources combined, than other comparable urban districts in the state, including Durham, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Guilford and Winston-Salem/Forsyth – none of which follows an assignment policy that pursues socioeconomic balance in school enrollments as deliberately as Wake. Several of the districts, including Charlotte-Mecklenburg, provide additional local funding to schools impacted by high levels of poverty. For the 2004-05 fiscal year, Wake ranked 67th of 115 districts statewide in total funding. In terms of funds generated strictly from local tax revenues, Wake received less, per student, than three of the urban systems mentioned above. Per-student local funding was lower only in Winston-Salem/Forsyth by \$48 compared to Wake.<sup>18</sup>

State data shows also that despite Wake's extensive magnet system and other busing for socioeconomic balance the same urban districts spend more per student on bus transportation. Again, only Winston-Salem/Forsyth comes close to Wake's \$522 per-student cost, while Durham and Charlotte-Mecklenburg spend upwards of \$100 per student more than Wake.<sup>19</sup>



## Where Next?

The Wake school system's efforts for more than 30 years to ensure good schools for all children have hinged on a fragile bargain between school leaders, parents and the community. Students may not attend the school in their neighborhood or even the school closest to their home, but in exchange, the school where they are assigned will be equally as good. Often, that arrangement is needed because the school closest to home is too crowded. And sometimes, assignment shifts are required to achieve the kind of enrollment balance that results in better schools and better educated children. It's not always easy on students or families, but more than a generation of Wake students have benefited from that bargain, as has the county they call home. We recognize that it does require sacrifice by many, but the alternative would be too many schools where only the children of those with the least resources and the least influence would have few other options but to attend.

# future

*This document was written and edited by Todd Silberman and Julie Crain.*

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> *The Socioeconomic Composition of the Public Schools: A Crucial Consideration in Student Assignment Policy*, UNC Center for Civil Rights, School of Law, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, January 7, 2005, pp. 1-2, and Richard Kahlenberg, *Rescuing Brown v. Board of Education: Profiles of Twelve School Districts Pursuing Socioeconomic School Integration*, The Century Foundation, 2007, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Making Choices: Diversity, Student Assignment and Quality in Wake's Public Schools*, Wake Education Partnership, April 2003, pp. 12-15.

<sup>3</sup> Todd Silberman, *Wake County Schools: A Question of Balance*, in *Divided We Fall: Coming Together through Public School Choice* (The Century Foundation Press, 2002) pp. 143-145.

<sup>4</sup> Kahlenberg, *Rescuing Brown v. Board of Education*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Brief for Walt Sherlin as Amicus Curiae supporting respondents in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District and Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education*, at 7.

<sup>7</sup> Kahlenberg, *Rescuing Brown v. Board of Education*, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *The Socioeconomic Composition of the Public Schools*, pp. 4-5, citing U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education*, 2004.

<sup>10</sup> *Programme for International Student Assessment 2006: Science Competencies for Tomorrow's World*, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Dec. 2007, Vol. 1, pp. 193-196.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 194-195

<sup>12</sup> Kahlenberg, *Rescuing Brown v. Board of Education*, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Kahlenberg, pp. 7-8.

<sup>14</sup> N.C. Department of Public Instruction, *ABCs of Public Education*, 2007, custom search page at <http://abcs.ncpublicschools.org/abcs/abcAdvSearch.jsp?pYear=2>

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> N.C. Department of Public Instruction, *Reports of Disaggregated State, School System (LEA) and School Performance Data, 2006-07* at <http://disag.ncpublicschools.org/2007/>

<sup>17</sup> *The Socioeconomic Composition of the Public Schools*, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> N.C. Department of Public Instruction, *North Carolina Public Schools Statistical Profile*, 2006, pp. 48-50.

<sup>19</sup> North Carolina Public Schools Statistical Profile, 2006, pp. 65-67.

## Wake County Public School System Board of Education Policy 6200: STUDENT ASSIGNMENT <sup>1</sup>

The Board of Education's goals for the student assignment process include:

- *Creating stable school environments (families, classmates, and peers)*
- *Protecting the ability to offer quality programs in every school*
- *Collaborating with the community (all parties/stakeholders)*
- *Creating and maintaining a diverse student body*
- *Alleviating overcrowding*
- *Filling seats efficiently*
- *Achieving academic success for all children*
- *Providing a logical progression between elementary, middle, and high school*
- *Creating good teaching conditions (the social, emotional, and physical environment)*
- *Retaining good teachers*
- *Ensuring consistency across the System over time*
- *Building a sense of community and connection (i.e. neighborhoods, parent involvement)*
- *Fairness*

Maintaining diverse student populations in each Wake County school is critical to ensuring academic success for all students. This is supported by research. The school system will also consider other factors that impact communities, families and costs. Each student enrolled in the Wake County Public School System shall be assigned to the school of his or her grade level serving the attendance area in which that student's parents or court-appointed custodian is domiciled and the student resides. Exceptions will be made as necessary to limit enrollment of a school due to overcrowding or for special programmatic reasons such as the need for special education services or alternative school programs. Each student will have the option of applying for admission to one of the magnet educational programs offered in designated schools or to a school which operates on a different calendar than the assigned school.



All of the following factors, not in priority order, will be used in the development of the annual student assignment plan. While absolute balance of each factor across all schools is not achievable, comparability between neighboring schools in regard to each factor is the desired outcome of the student assignment process.

**A. Populations of Students With Higher Needs**

The student assignment plan will create balance across schools in the distribution of students who:

1. are eligible to receive free or reduced price lunches in the child nutrition program,
2. perform below grade level on End-of-Grade tests,
3. are identified as being Limited English Proficient (LEP),
4. require services from Special Education programs.<sup>1</sup>

Whenever any of the following targets are exceeded, the Board directs the Superintendent to review the reasons for exceeding the target, study trends across several years, and recommend ways in which the student assignment plan could help achieve the targets:

1. Less than 25% of students at any school, averaged across a two-year period, will score below grade level on the Reading End-of-Grade test.
2. Less than 40% of students at any school will qualify for free or reduced price lunches.

**B. Facility Utilization**

The student assignment plan will seek optimal utilization of each school’s long-range capacity and, whenever possible, reduce utilization of mobile or modular classrooms that cause a school to operate at more than the approved long-range capacity.<sup>2</sup>

**C. Alignment With The Magnet Schools Program**

The student assignment plan will include a review of the extent to which the systemwide objectives of the Magnet Program are being achieved.

**D. Grade Structure**

The student assignment plan will adhere to K-5, 6-8, 9-12 grade organization whenever possible with consideration for moving groups of students together across levels.

**E. Stability Of Assignment**

Nodes will remain assigned to the schools at each level (Elementary, Middle, High) for at least three years before being considered for reassignment, whenever possible.

**F. Distance**

Proximity of nodes to assigned schools will be considered, and no student should travel more than the maximum time established by Board Policy 7125.

**Footnote:**

- 1 Board policy regarding special education services is specified in Board Policy 6222.
- 2 Long-range capacity is defined as the capacity of the permanent building(s) plus the capacity of the optimal number of mobile or modular classrooms for the campus.

Legal Reference: G.S.115C-366; -367  
 Cross Reference: Policies 6202, 6203, and 7125  
 Adopted: May 4, 1981  
 Revised: January 17, 1983  
 Revised: May 16, 1983  
 Revised: November 18, 1991  
 Revised: April 21, 1997  
 Revised: January 10, 2000  
 Revised: March 18, 2003  
 Revised: December 4, 2007

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<sup>1</sup> Wake County Public School System, WCPSS: Board Policy - Student Assignment (6200), at <http://www.wcpss.net/policy-files/series/policies/6200-bp.html>



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#### Todd Silberman

Todd Silberman, Project Director in Research and Communications at the North Carolina New Schools Project, has more than 20 years of experience with newspapers in North Carolina and California. As a reporter for *The News & Observer* in Raleigh, he wrote extensively about K-12 education for 15 years, reporting first on Wake County schools, and later covering statewide education issues. He previously wrote about Wake's diversity efforts in *Divided We Fail: Coming Together through Public School Choice*, published by The Century Foundation. His reporting for the *N&O* helped bring attention to North Carolina's lagging high school graduation rate, inequities in the distribution of qualified teachers and flaws in the state's accountability system. Before joining *The News & Observer*, he was an investigative and projects reporter for the *Fayetteville Observer-Times*. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in history from the University of California at Santa Cruz.

#### Julie Crain

Julie Crain, Vice President of Programs at Wake Education Partnership, is responsible for managing and implementing the Partnership's Program of Work as well as coordinating research strategies. Julie is a National Board Certified teacher. She taught English in Wake County Schools for 12 years at Fuquay-Varina High School, and served as chair of the School Improvement and Leadership Teams. Julie graduated from UNC-Chapel Hill, where she earned a bachelor's degree in English education as a N.C. Teaching Fellow and a master's degree in English education. She is a past Kenan Fellow (2001-2003). Presently, Julie also works with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards as an assessor trainer. She is currently pursuing her PhD in Educational Research and Policy Evaluation at NC State University.

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Wake Education Partnership is an independent local education fund that mobilizes resources, leverages relationships and convenes the community to ensure that Wake County prepares our students for lifelong learning in a competitive global economy. Since 1983, the Partnership has worked together with the business and civic community to build public responsibility for world-class public schools in Wake County. Programs for 2007-08 focus on retaining effective teachers, developing effective education leaders, and ensuring healthy schools for all students. For more information, please visit [www.WakeEdPartnership.org](http://www.WakeEdPartnership.org).