



# Stability, Balance and the Role of Magnet Schools

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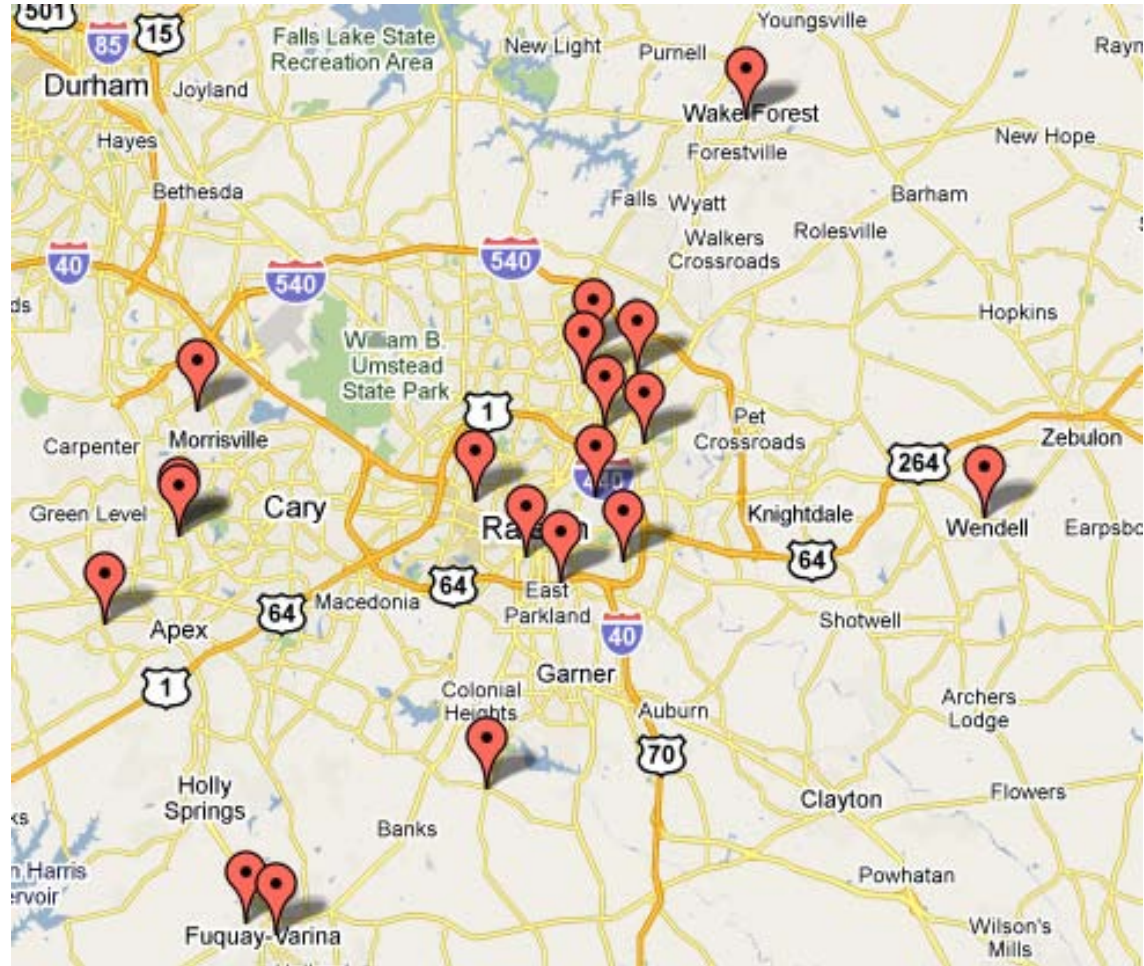
June 24, 2010

On March 23, the Wake County school board passed a resolution establishing community-based assignments. The goal is to develop a plan that assumes all students have a choice of attending schools close to where they live.

What does that mean? What are the challenges of that goal?

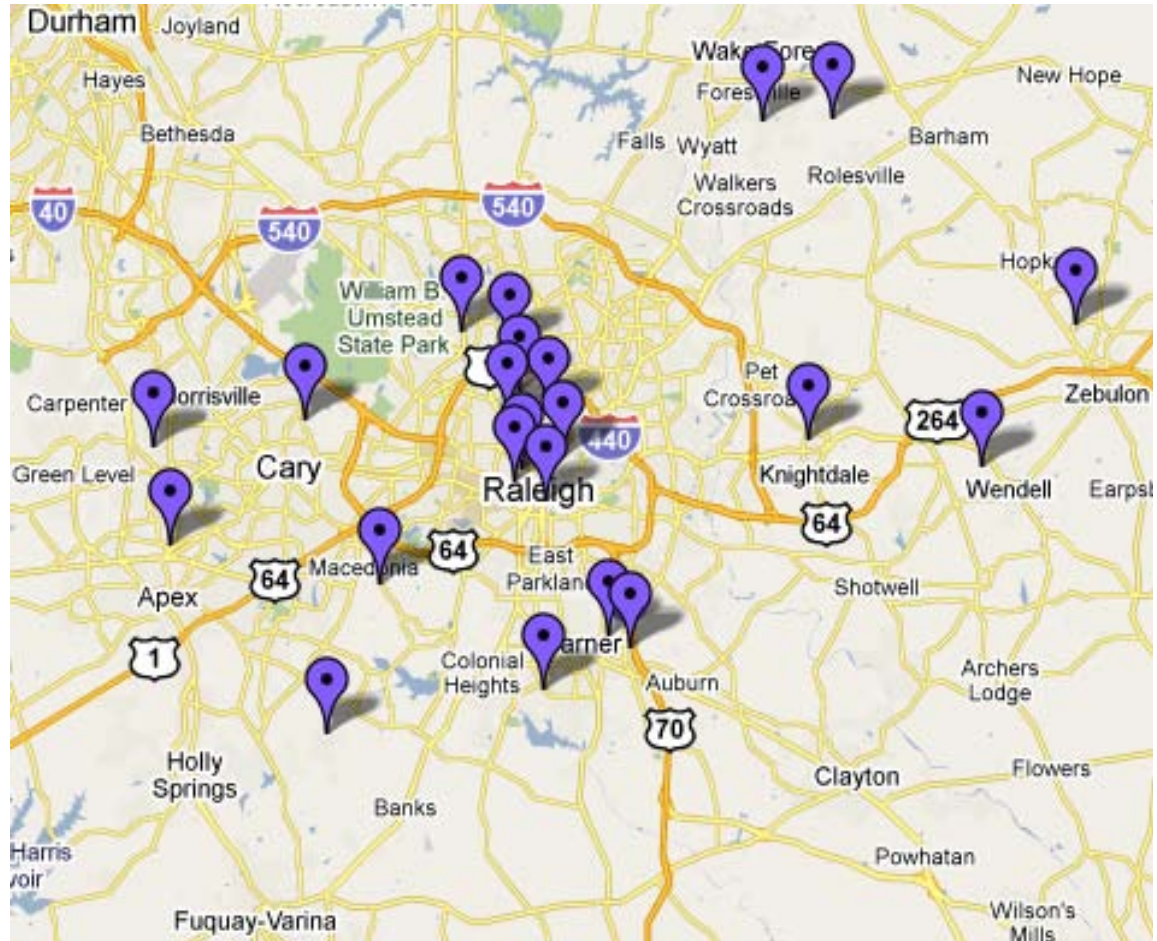
If all students were assigned to their closest schools...

19 buildings would be at or greater than 150% capacity.



If all students were assigned to their closest schools...

More than 20 buildings would be at less than 50% capacity.



If all students were assigned to their closest schools...

In at least 15 schools, two of every three students would qualify for free or reduced lunch. (*pink*)

At the other end of the range, 27 schools would have a student body where fewer than 10% of the students were poor. (*green*)



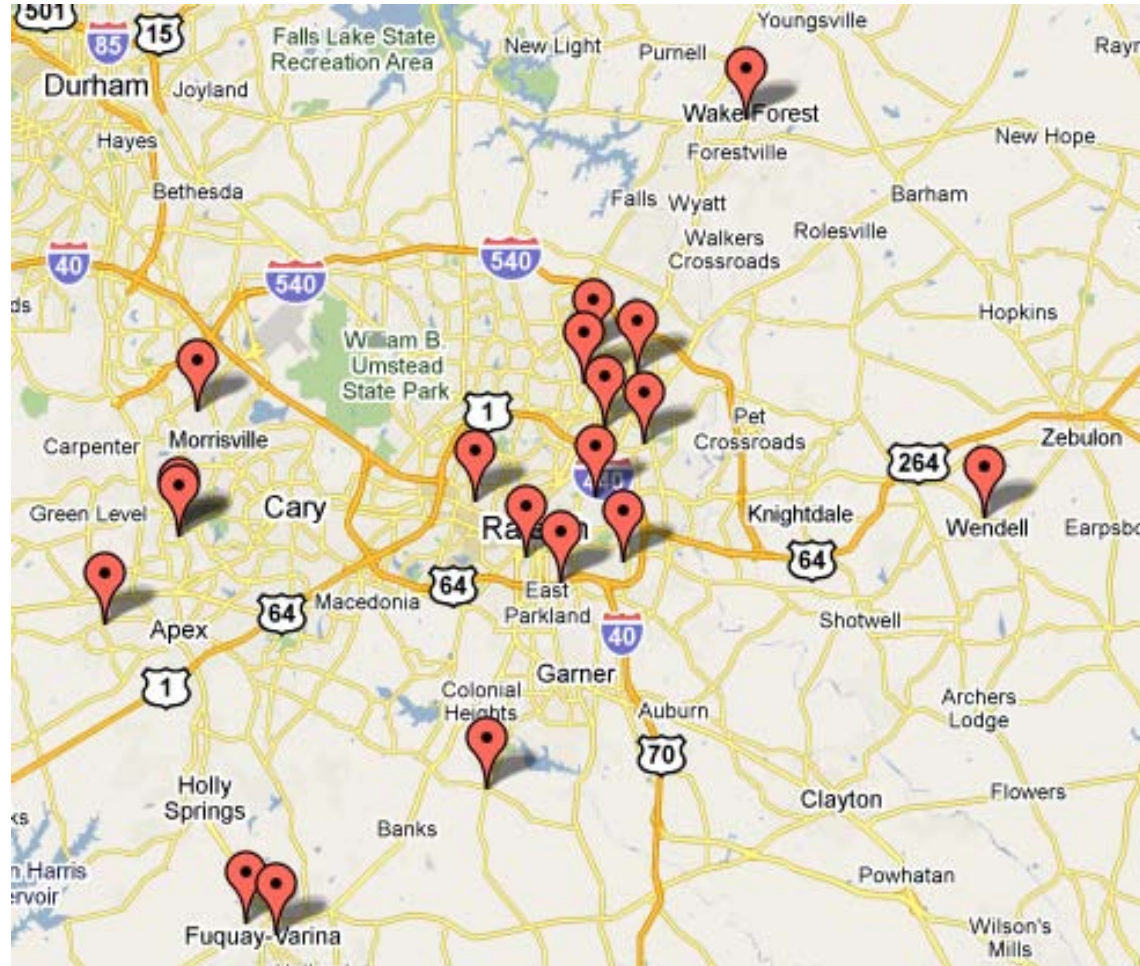
## Understanding the Details

It's logical to think that a neighborhood school assignment plan would leave many downtown schools half empty and suburban schools severely crowded.

That's not the case. In fact, several downtown schools also would exceed capacity.

If all students were assigned to their closest schools...

19 buildings would be at or greater than 150% capacity.



## Understanding the Details



*Schools marked in red exceed 66% F/R. Those with dotted red markers exceed 66% F/R and 150% capacity. Schools with yellow markers are less than 50% capacity and would likely receive students moved from overenrolled poor schools.*

## Understanding the Details

Issues of concentrated poverty are largely absent from closest school assignments outside the Beltline. But assigning students close to home creates many of the same capacity problems.

### Western Wake

Cedar Fork Elementary  
Davis Drive Elementary  
Davis Drive Middle



>150% capacity

Wake Forest Elementary > 267% capacity

# Magnet Schools

## Understanding the Details

Today's magnet school program has gone through numerous changes since it was introduced in 1982, but two basic goals have remained the same – to fill seats that would otherwise go empty while creating a more diverse student body.

The magnet program has remained an effective tool for achieving both goals even as the system has grown to 140,000 students.

## Understanding the Details

### Filling Empty Seats

Neighborhoods often go through cycles where children graduate and parents wait for years to sell their home to younger families. Magnet programs can help keep school enrollments stable during those cycles.

For example, Martin Middle, Joyner Elementary, and Wiley Elementary are located in older neighborhoods. While these neighborhoods aren't poor, many of the families have aged out of the school system. This changes the base student population.

## Understanding the Details



### Current WCPSS Magnet Schools

Yellow = Elementary    Blue = Middle    Green = High

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## Understanding the Details

The role of magnet schools in a community-based assignment plan will ultimately decide how many schools have high concentrations of poverty.

Magnet schools with different themes could be distributed equally among assignment zones, but the result would be a magnet program in name only.

## Why It Matters: Student Achievement

The achievement levels of poor students in Wake County *are* unacceptable.

Some might suggest the scores are predictable given that Wake County's per pupil expenditures are less than the state average in a state that spends less than the national average.

Regardless, there is no good reason for a system with Wake County's talents and resources to post such scores.

## Why It Matters: Student Achievement (*cont'd*)

But raising test scores was never a stated goal of the magnet program. The goal is to provide “equity in educational programs.”

In layman’s terms, that means making sure students in poorer parts of the county aren’t stuck in schools with lower standards and less qualified teachers.

Balance improves the odds of academic success, it does not guarantee it. Academic success is the result of good teaching.

## Why It Matters: Teacher Quality

- Education Trust (2004) – Large differences exist between the qualifications of teachers in the highest-poverty and highest-minority schools and teachers serving in schools with few minority and low-income students.
- 1999-2004 – The Metro Nashville Public Schools moved to a neighborhood- based student assignment policy. Even with additional resources for high-poverty and high-minority schools, more experienced, better paid teachers moved away from schools with high percentages of poor and/or minority students. (Houck, 2010)

## Choice and Equity

While magnet programs provide an inherent benefit for some middle-class families, that benefit is not available to all students.

That's because a magnet program designed to fill seats and encourage socio-economic balance is, by default, too far away from some suburban families to be considered a practical choice.

## Choice and Equity (cont'd)



### Current WCPSS Magnet Schools

Yellow = Elementary      Blue = Middle      Green = High

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## Choice and Equity (*cont'd*)

In effect, a trade off was built into the system. Those who live closer to poorer parts of the county have more choices. Those who live in more affluent suburban areas can attend schools that are consistently above average.

But this imbalance has been a point of friction for much of the past 20 years, largely because the county developed much faster than anyone ever envisioned.

## Choice and Equity (*cont'd*)

With careful planning, it is possible to offer choices to more parents without removing the pull of other magnet programs. But magnets by their nature are not about offering the same choices to everyone.

All families should have choices. All families cannot have the same choice. That would defeat the goals of a magnet program.

The missing component for families in the suburbs is a sense of stability, something magnet parents need not worry about.

# Stability and Balance



## School Assignment

The goal of any assignment plan in Wake should be one that helps create high student achievement by providing balance and stability.

In the next 6-12 months, input from the community, school system staff and other government planning and zoning officials will be used to develop a zone-based assignment model.

## Stability and Balance – Key Issues

### Points to Keep in Mind as a Plan is Developed

It is not possible to create a plan that relies solely on neighborhood schools.

It is difficult to attract and retain experienced teachers and principals in high-poverty schools.

Magnet schools must play a role.

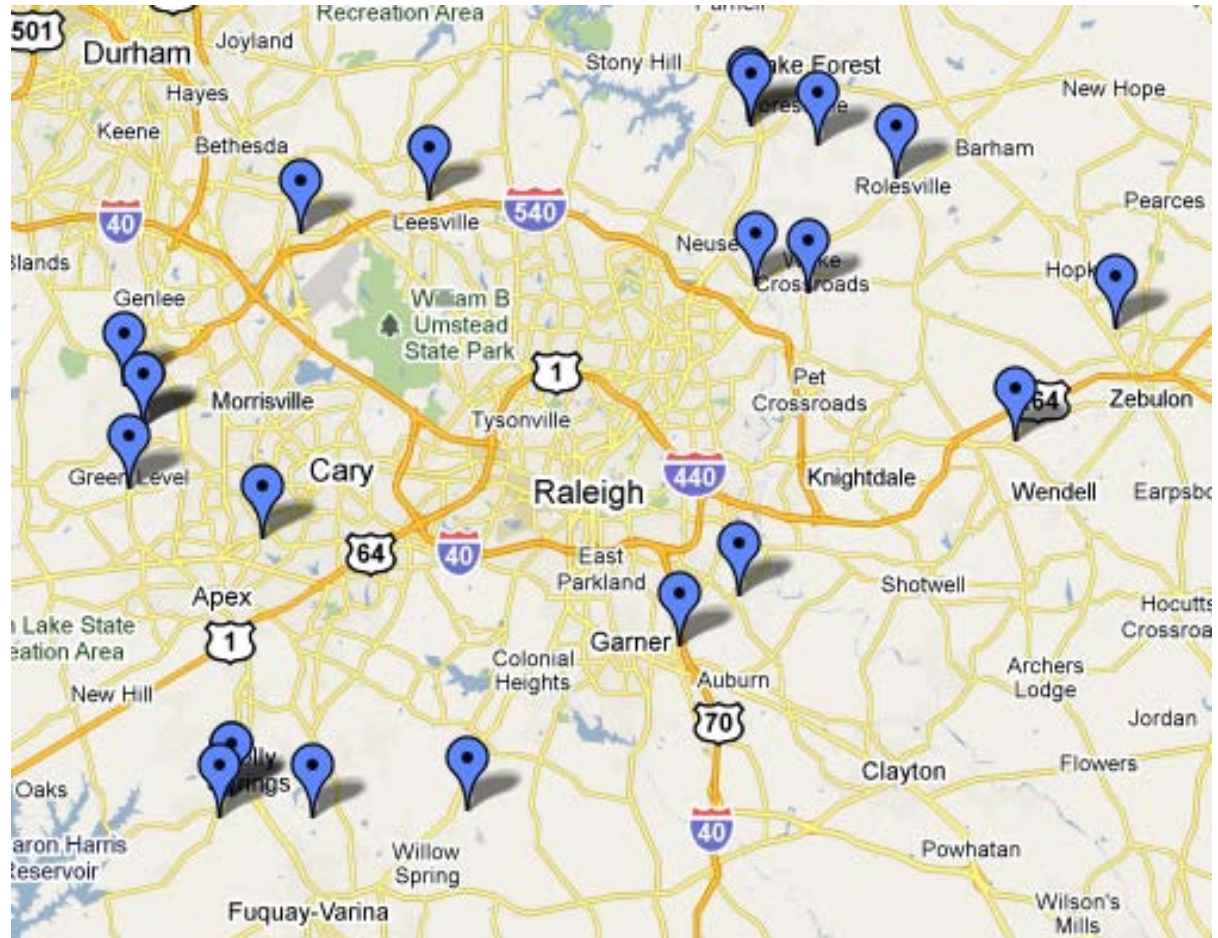
Choice is needed for those who live well beyond the 440-Beltline.

## Stability and Balance – Key Issues (*cont'd*)

Growth drives  
reassignments.

Between 2000-  
2009, Wake added  
more new students  
per year than the  
entire student  
enrollment of 48  
other NC school  
districts.

Wake opened 21  
new schools since  
2006.

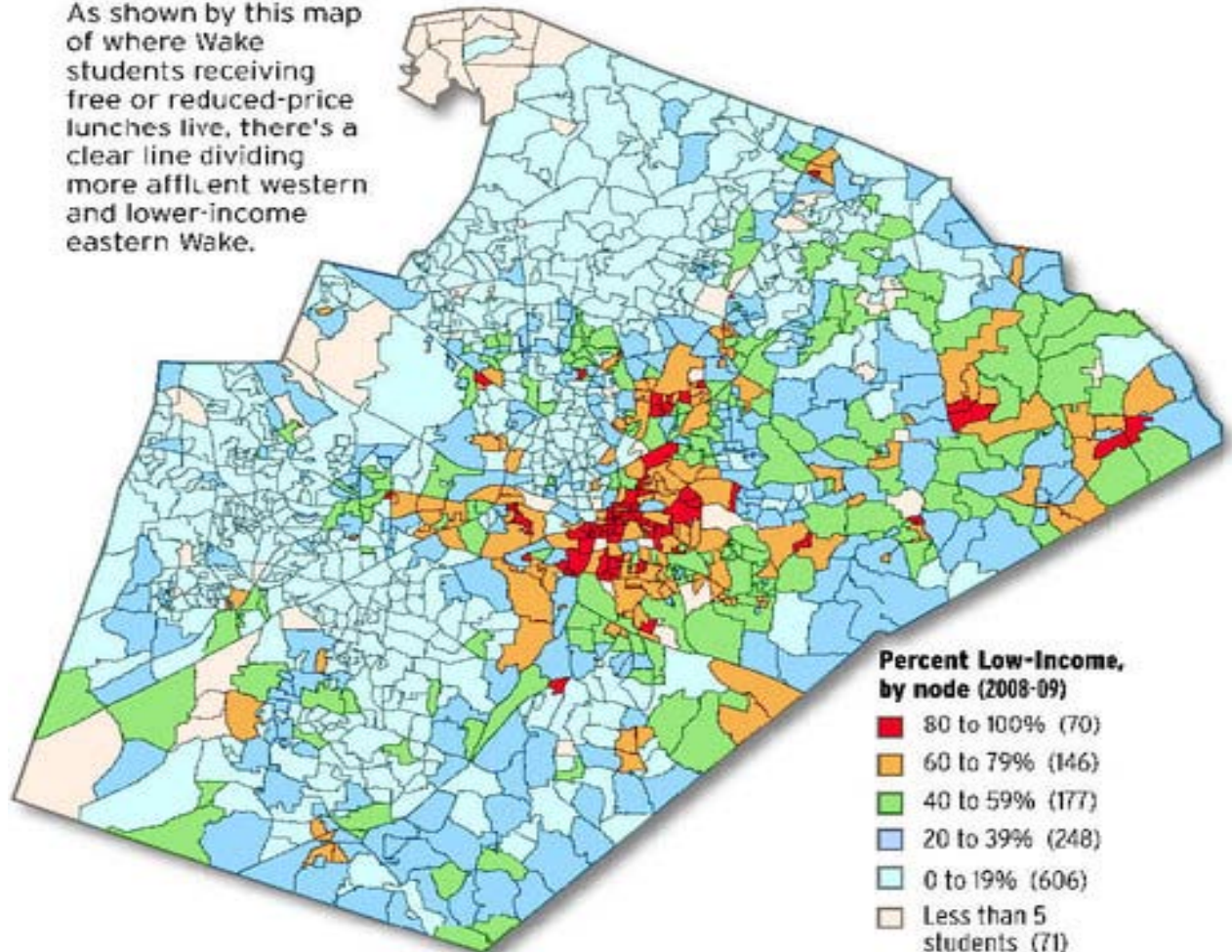


## Stability and Balance – Key Issues (*cont'd*)

The focal point of discussion about balance will be east Raleigh, north Garner, and a large section of eastern Wake County.

### WAKE'S DIVIDE: INCOME IS BIGGEST BARRIER

As shown by this map of where Wake students receiving free or reduced-price lunches live, there's a clear line dividing more affluent western and lower-income eastern Wake.



Stability and Balance – Key Issues (cont'd)

The one issue that will make or break almost any assignment plan is parental choice.



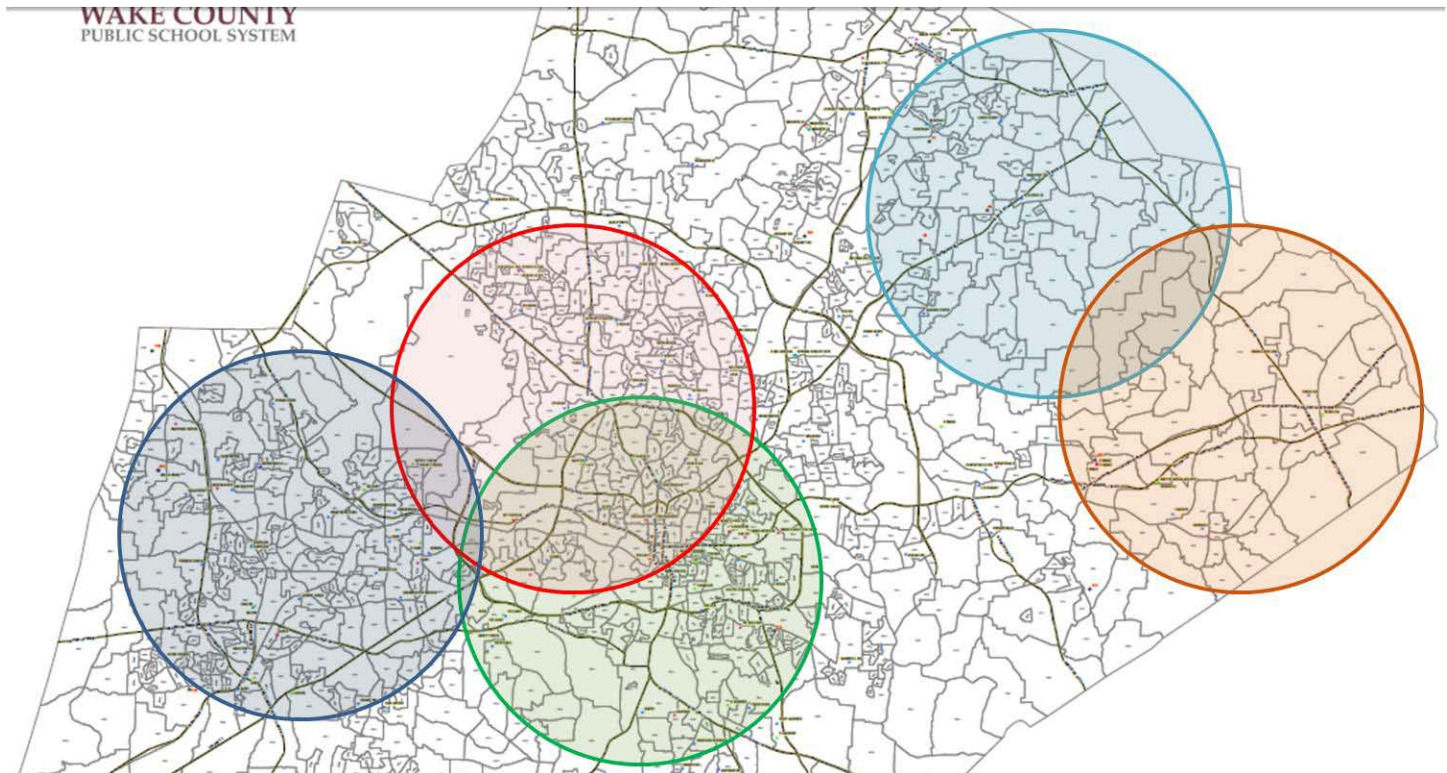
Current WCPSS Magnet Schools

## Alternatives

- 1) Changing the Current Model
- 2) Choice Plans
- 3) Clusters
- 4) Managing Growth

## 1) Changing the Current Model

Overlapping assignment areas would define choices and create a stable assignment area.

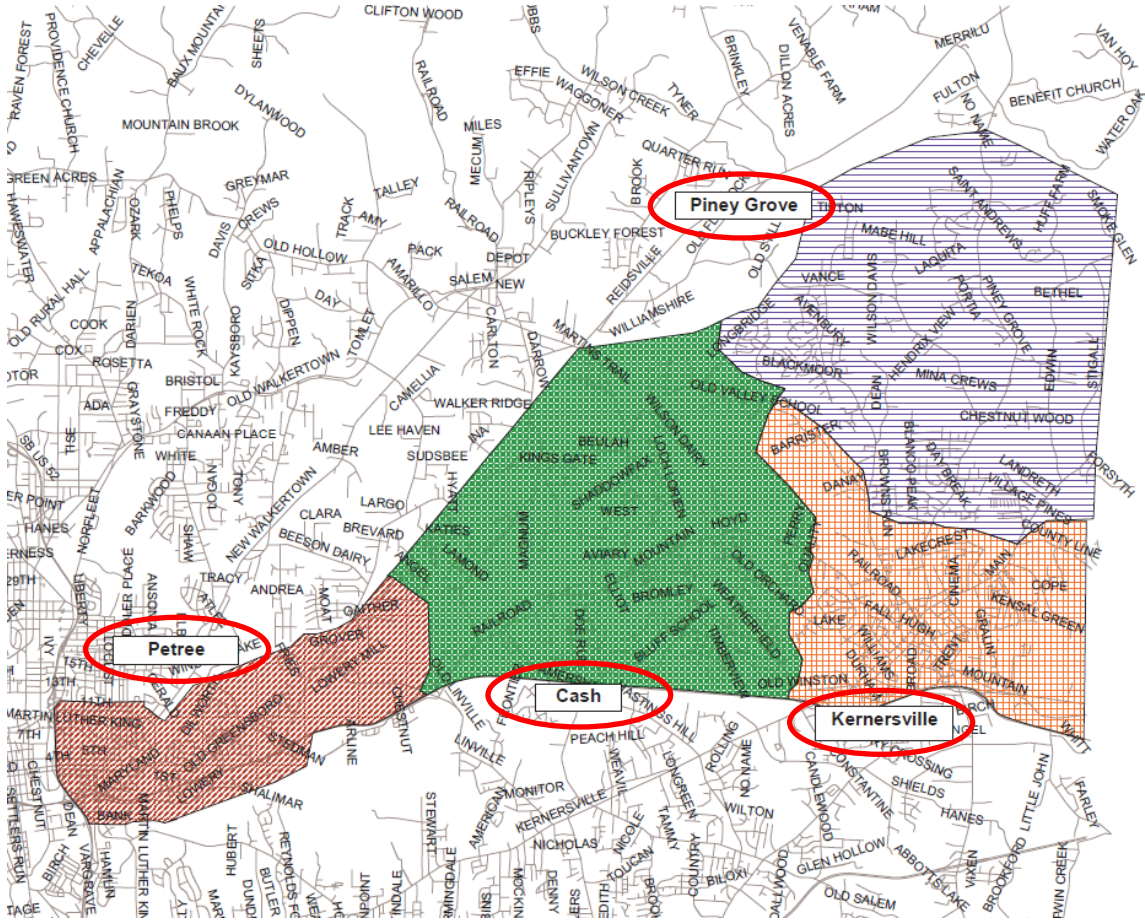


## 2) Choice Plans

Winston-Salem/ Forsyth  
County Schools

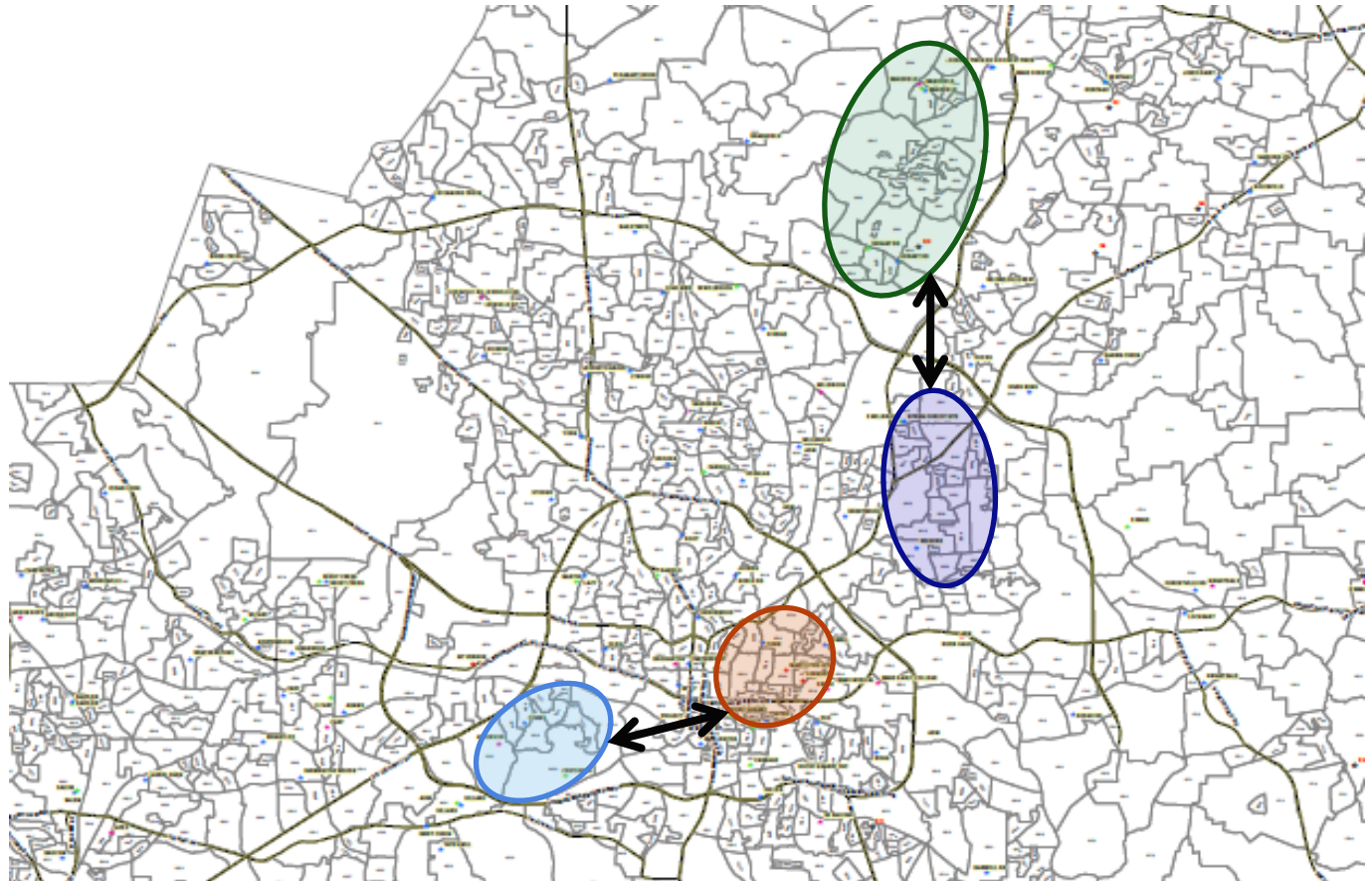
Elementary Schools:  
Zone 2

Most plans begin by  
breaking the district into  
regions or zones and  
then give parents  
choices within each  
zone.



### 3) Clusters

Schools in two areas are paired to create an overall balance.



## 4) Managing Growth

### 1990-2010

- At least one school opened every year

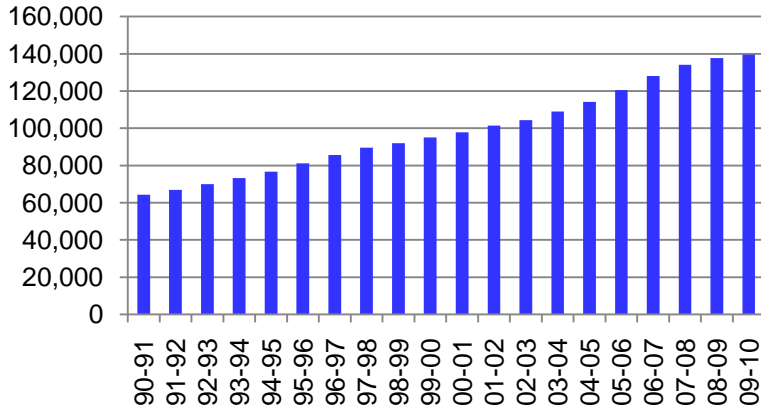
Year	Enrollment	# of Schools	# of Added Students
90-91	64,243	81	
91-92	66,915	83	2,672
92-93	70,052	90	3,137
93-94	73,192	91	3,140
94-95	76,731	97	3,539
95-96	81,203	100	4,472
96-97	85,539	104	4,336
97-98	89,548	108	4,009
98-99	92,038	111	2,490
99-00	95,018	112	2,980
00-01	97,853	117	2,835
01-02	101,397	118	3,544
02-03	104,373	121	2,976
03-04	108,970	122	4,597
04-05	114,068	133	5,098
05-06	120,504	137	6,436
06-07	128,072	145	7,568
07-08	134,002	153	5,930
08-09	137,706	156	3,704
09-10	139,599	159	1,893

### 2005-2010

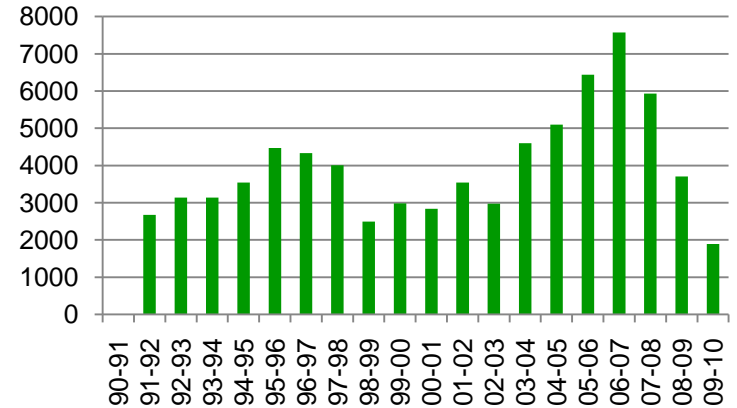
- 22 schools
- 19,095 students

## 4) Managing Growth

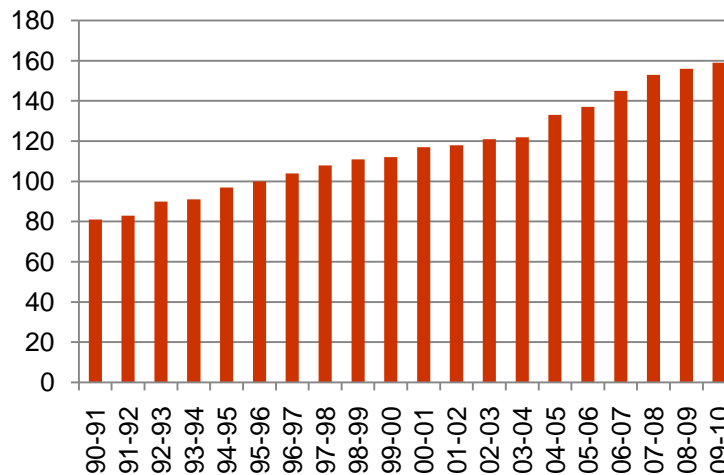
### Enrollment



### # of Added Students



### # of Schools



### 2005-2010

- 19,095 students
- 22 schools

### 1990-2010

- At least one school opened every year

## 4) Managing Growth (*cont'd*)

### **Mobile classrooms**

Pro: fastest (12-14 months), most straightforward

Con: 8-unit total cost \$830,000; single-unit cost \$88,000. Delays permanent solution

### **Cap enrollment**

Pro: extremely effective at short-term stability

Con: extremely disruptive for long-term planning

### **Fill new schools more slowly**

Pro: stability for incoming classes

Con: increases amount of unused space, limits choices at new school

## 4) Managing Growth (*cont'd*)

### Year-round magnet schools?

The district's Student Assignment Committee was asked in May to consider converting magnet school programs to a year-round calendar to increase available seats.

Pro: Some seats would be gained, thereby increasing choices.

Con: Parent surveys make it clear that a year-round calendar would be unwelcome. Magnets, in turn, would lose some of their pull. In addition, the practical gain is far less than the theoretical gain for several reasons.

#### 4) Managing Growth (*cont'd*)

##### Year-round magnet school challenges:

Some school buildings are too small to organize a four-track program.

Some magnet schools are barely filled using the traditional calendar.

YR magnets would leave no traditional calendar choices for some.

YR middle schools are less attractive to families with HS students.

Electives are more difficult to organize and staff in YR schools.

## Future Issues

To create a student assignment plan with stability and balance:

Financial costs must be obvious.

Computer simulations need to be run.

Community involvement and transparency are critical.



For More Information

Web Site

*www.wakeedpartnership.org*

Regular Publications

Understand Your Schools – Topic Reviews

*In Context* – Newsletter

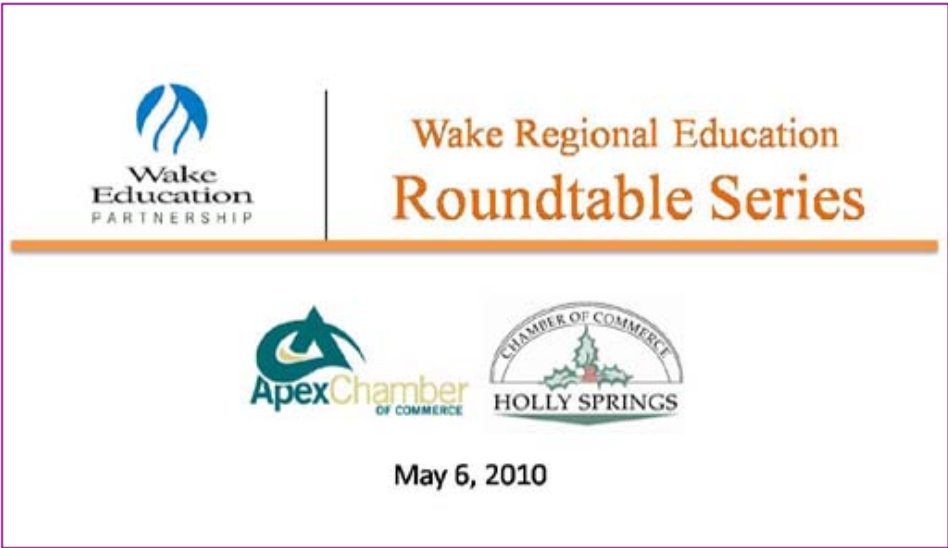


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*April topic review: "Creating stability and balance in Wake County"*



Wake Regional Education Roundtable Series

Apex Chamber of Commerce

Chamber of Commerce Holly Springs

May 6, 2010



SUSPENDING DISBELIEF

WORLD-CLASS PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOR ALL

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Learn more about the issues affecting your schools. A list of topics and times can be found [here](#).

## In Context

