

Understand Your Schools:

- Assigning Students to Their Closest Schools
- The Role of Magnet Schools in Wake County

Joyner Elementary PTA

April 8, 2010

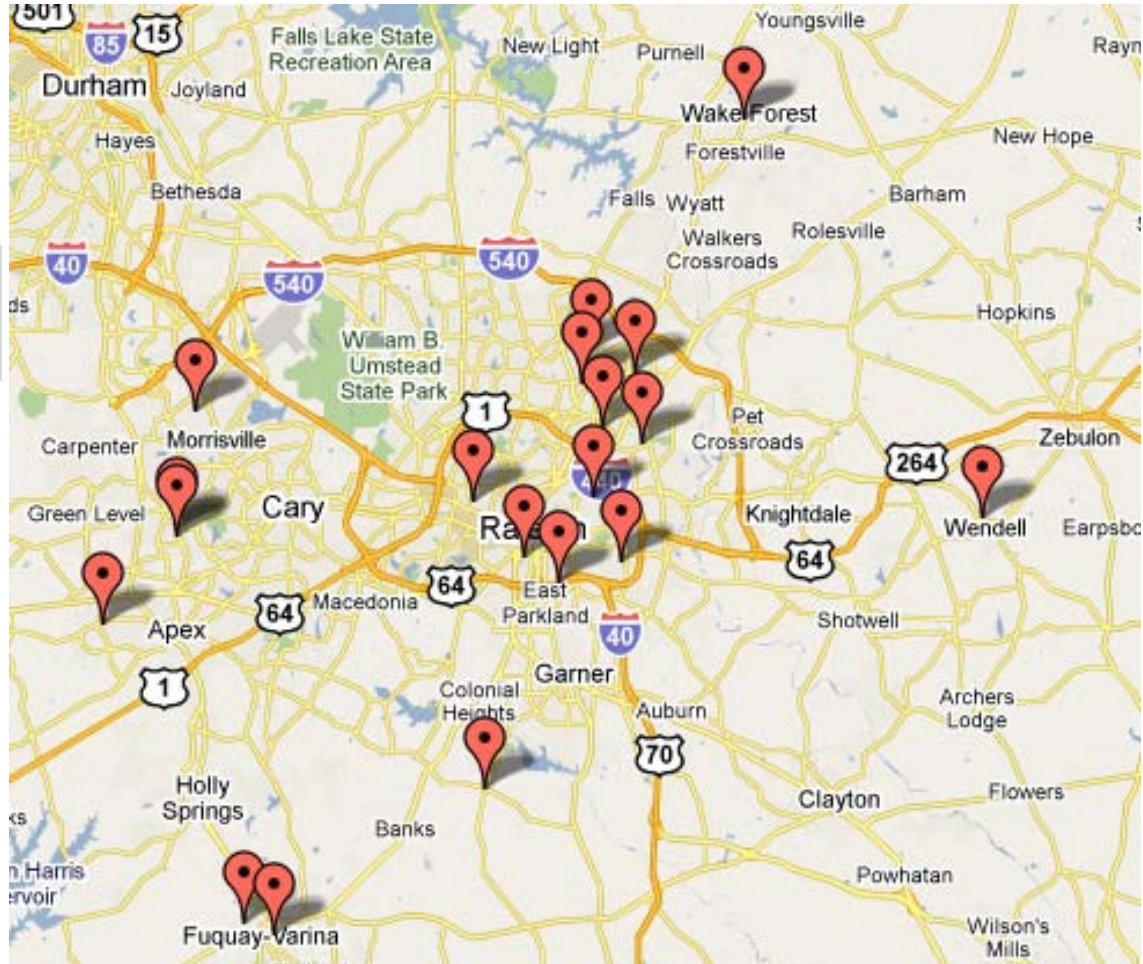
Dr. Ann Denlinger, President
Tim Simmons, VP Communications

The Wake County school board passed a resolution establishing community-based assignments. The resulting assignment plan puts an emphasis on allowing families to attend schools as close to home as possible.

What effect might this approach have on individual schools?

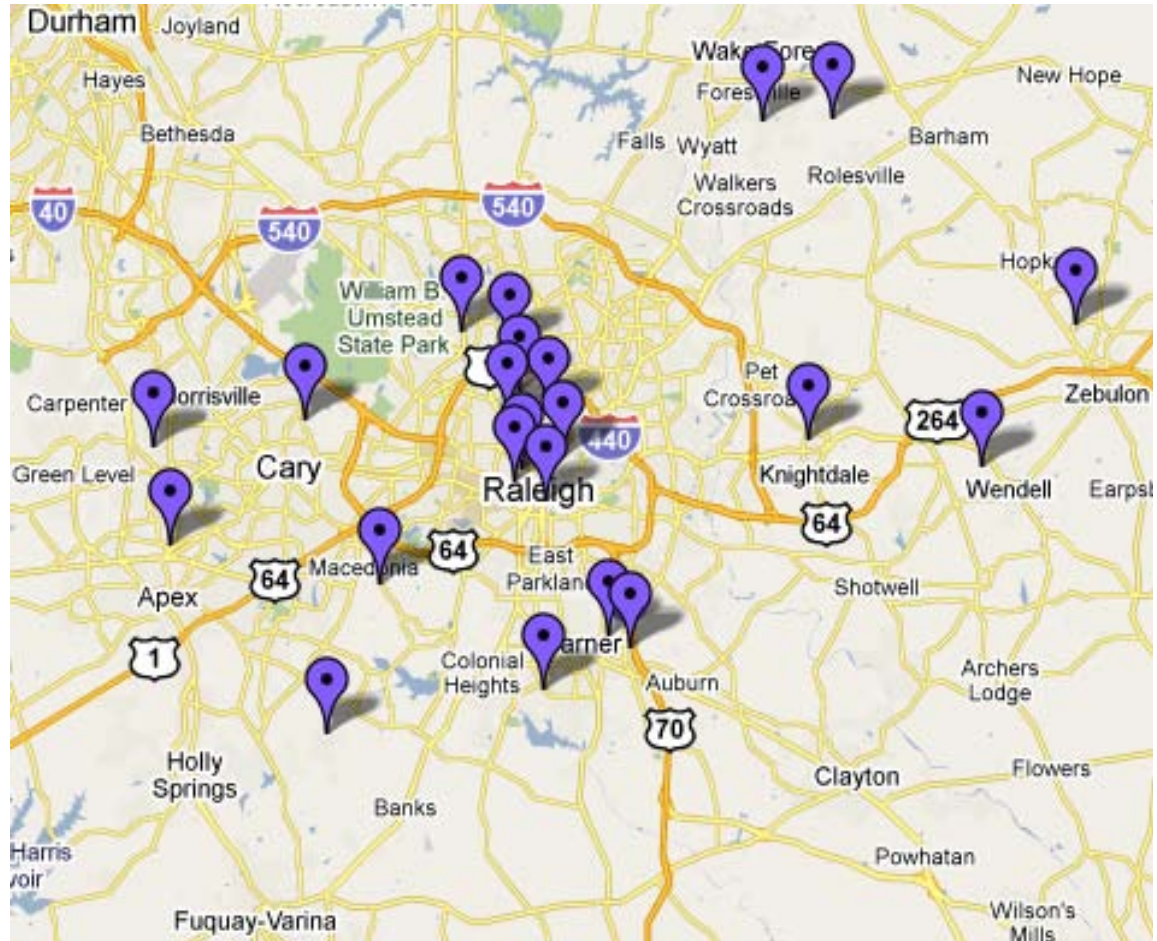
If all students are assigned to neighborhood schools...

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



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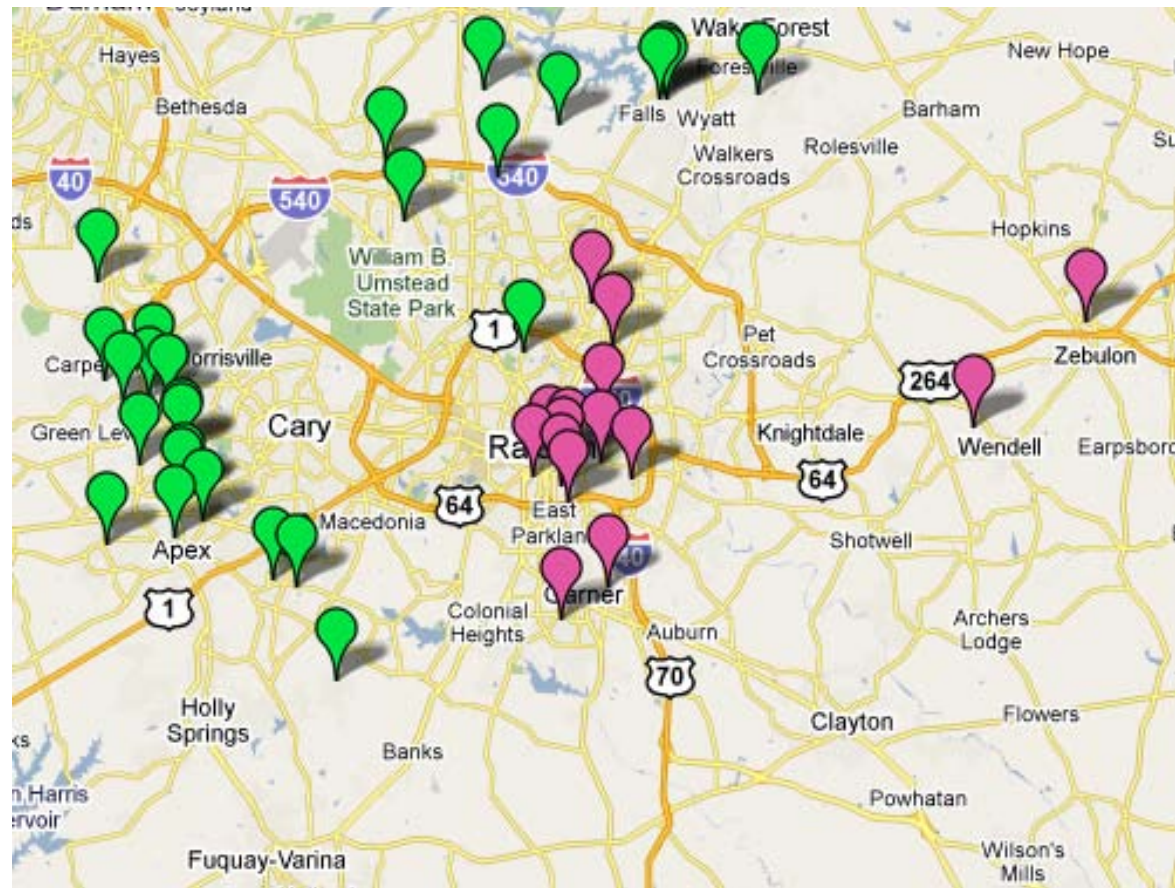
More than 20 buildings would be at less than 50% capacity.



If all students are assigned to neighborhood 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*)





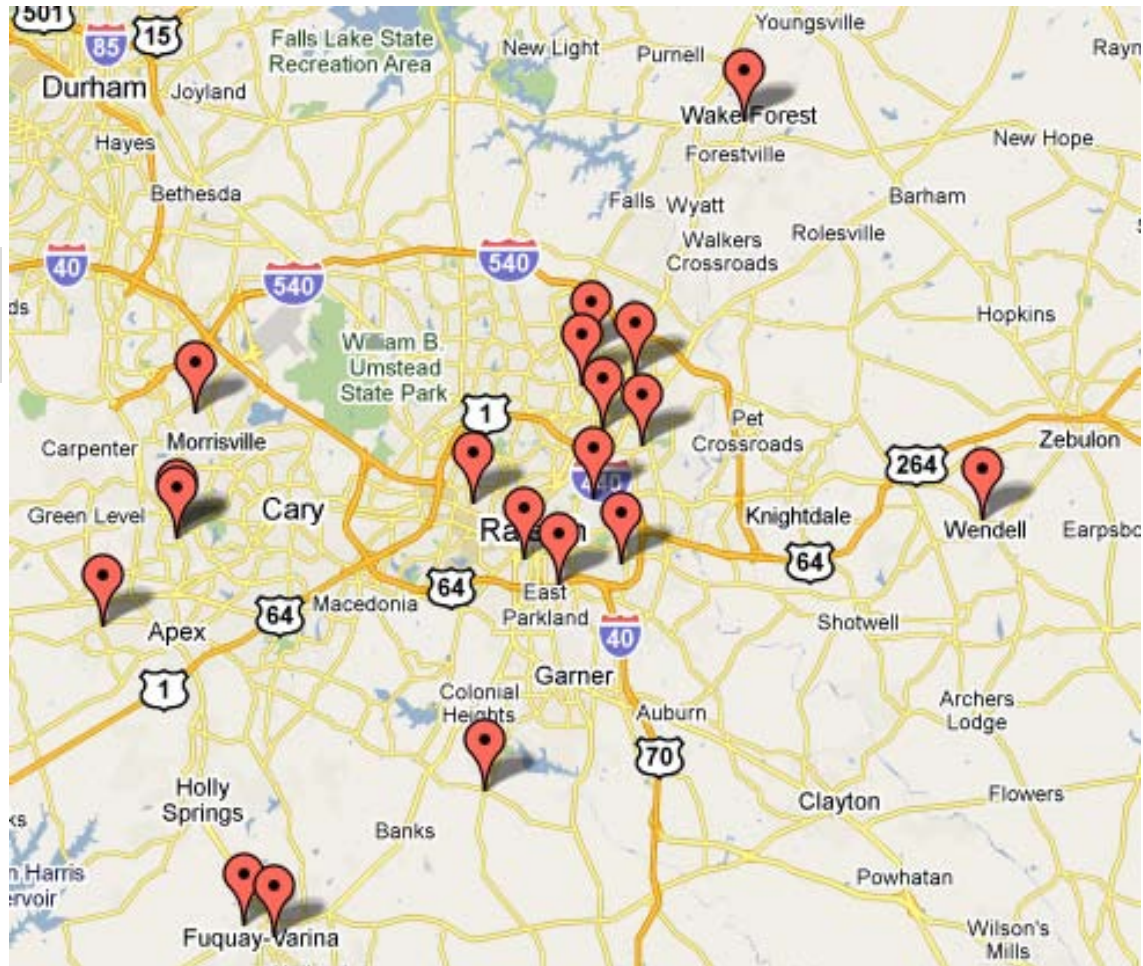
Understanding the Details: Neighborhood Schools

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

But many downtown schools would exceed capacity.

If all students are assigned to neighborhood schools...

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



Understanding the Details: Neighborhood Schools (*cont'd*)



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: Suburban Growth

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.

Cedar Fork Elementary
Davis Drive Elementary
Davis Drive Middle



>150% capacity

Wake Forest Elementary > 267% capacity

Understanding the Details: Suburban Growth (*cont'd*)

Anticipating growth is problematic.

- Lake Myra Elementary – planned and approved development fell apart. It now operates well under capacity
- Panther Creek High – over capacity within two years of opening

Understanding the Details: Magnet Schools

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: Magnet Schools (*cont'd*)

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 offered some hope that enrollment could be held stable.

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.

Understanding the Details: Magnet Schools (cont'd)



Current WCPSS Magnet Schools

Yellow = Elementary Blue = Middle Green = High

Promoting Excellent Public Schools For All

Understanding the Details: Magnet Schools (*cont'd*)

Creating a Diverse Student Body

In 1982, a diverse student body meant racial integration. Today it means socio-economic balance.

Sometimes the magnet works well.

School	Current F/R	Neighborhood F/R*
Douglas Elementary	38.3%	56.3%
Carnage Middle	37.9%	83.17%
Enloe High	28.2%	58.02%
Southeast Raleigh High	38.6%	62.1%

Understanding the Details: Magnet Schools (*cont'd*)

Other times, it doesn't work well.

School	Current F/R	Neighborhood F/R*
Brentwood Elementary	77.9%	80.06%
Smith Elementary	66.7%	62.56%
East Garner Middle	50.9%	59.21%

Understanding the Details: Magnet Schools (*cont'd*)

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

Excluding alternative schools, the system currently has four schools where the percentage of low-income students meets or exceeds 66%.

Understanding the Details: Magnet Schools (*cont'd*)

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

What is lost in that approach is the opportunity to create an assignment plan that provides both stability and balance.

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 spends less than the state average and less than the national average per student.

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

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.

Magnet schools do not automatically create success. They provide opportunities for success.

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. The district allocated additional resources to high-poverty and high-minority schools. Even so, poor and minority students are taught by higher percentages of nontenured teachers. More experienced, better paid teachers moved away from schools with high percentages of poor and/or minority students. (Houck, 2010)

Why It Matters: Teacher Quality *cont'd*

“The consistency of the patterns across many measures of qualifications for both teachers and principals leaves no doubt that students in high-poverty schools are served by school personnel with lower qualifications than those in the lower poverty schools.”

“The differences largely reflect predictable outcomes of the labor market for teachers and principals,” states a 2007 study authored in part by Helen Ladd of the Sanford Institute of Public Policy at Duke University.

Such blunt statements echoed in many studies are rarely a surprise to any principal or superintendent who has had to recruit educators for a job in high-poverty schools.



Choice and Equity

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

By placing magnet programs where they can best fill seats and encourage socio-economic balance, schools are by default too far away from families in the outer reaches of the county to be of much value.

Understanding the Details: Choice and Equity



Current WCPSS Magnet Schools

Yellow = Elementary Blue = Middle Green = High

Promoting Excellent Public Schools For All

Choice and Equity

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*)

Magnet school rules developed through the years further restricted who can reasonably expect to get a seat in the programs.

Those rules were recently changed by the Board of Education.

Selection criteria no longer considers socioeconomic status, but instead considers crowding at the student's base school.

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.



Choice and Equity (*cont'd*)

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

A magnet program that complements those goals would be a key part of that plan.

The Partnership will explore the framework for such a plan, possible changes to the magnet schools and what the broader plan would require of the community in future topic reviews.

Community-Based School Assignments – Resolution

On March 23, 2010 the WCPSS Board of Education passed a resolution to establish a board directive for community-based school assignment.

In the next 9-15 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.

On April 6, in order to compete for future magnet school grants, it approved a resolution “expressing board commitment to efforts of voluntary desegregation.”

The ways in which these two resolutions are allowed to complement one another will determine the role of magnets and the future look of the school system.



For More Information

Understand Your Schools – Topic Reviews

<http://www.wakeedpartnership.org/news/Understand%20Your%20Schools.html>

In Context – Newsletter

<http://www.wakeedpartnership.org/In%20Context%20archives.html>

Wake Education Partnership

<http://www.wakeedpartnership.org>