

SPECIAL TO THE OBSERVER 1/28/07

From: LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG

Submitted by Lucille Howard, co-president

704-535-1662

How appropriate that your series on troubled schools started with the teachers.

As a community, we need to embrace the attitude of West Charlotte teacher Heather Balduzzi who asserted that "Our students are not failures. . .they deserve the best educators out there." Certainly that should be the expectation for all students. As long as kids are getting to school, there is a chance to help them reach their potential.

As a community, we need to place a higher value on the faculty than they have ever received and recognize that they do not have the sole responsibility for educating our children. Teachers are not flocking to the profession in the numbers that Mecklenburg needs even now, much less in the future.

While money certainly helps, it is not the only thing that will let our teachers know that this community values their skills. Teachers pointed out several factors at their recent Saturday workshop, including ways to recruit teachers to low-performing schools.

One of the Superintendent's goals in his 2010 plan as well as one of the board's policies is that teachers in the most challenged schools are comparable to teachers in our most successful schools. This is a key to achieving equity, an objective that has been part of the education positions held by the League of Women Voters of Charlotte-Mecklenburg.

After research about teacher working conditions, the League reached the following conclusions that would provide a positive impact on teacher recruitment and stability:

- (1) Provide outstanding principals. Perhaps the number one attraction for teachers is experienced, successful principals. They need to be assigned to the most challenged schools.
- (2) Provide a significantly smaller class size for high need schools. Previously, there were lower pupil teacher ratios for schools at 50-60% poverty, with additional space allotted to create smaller class size for Focus schools. Recent changes made in the policies which determine staffing levels have, instead, increased class size in some of these schools.
- (3) Allow flexibility for teachers. Give successful teachers latitude to innovate and challenge students in lower achieving schools.
- (4) Make sure that facilities offer similar educational opportunities for students and similar amenities for teachers, such as classroom telephones..
- (5) Continue an effective teacher mentoring program. The CMS mentoring program has saved many first-year teachers from leaving the profession. While we recognize that the recent crisis required that mentors be assigned to fill still-vacant teaching positions last month, it is important that the mentoring program be restored as soon as possible.
- (6) Put a priority on parent involvement and adequate staff to support school outreach to families to partner in the educational process.

If we want quality individuals to teach our children, we need to show the staff and new prospects that this community values teachers and will work with them to get the job done.

