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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TROUBLING SCHOOL REASSIGNMENT DECISIONS FORESHADOW FUTURE CHAOS FOR WAKE COUNTY FAMILIES

Raleigh, NC—September 28, 2011—Great Schools in Wake (GSIW) is deeply concerned over recent decisions by the Wake County Board of Education to use expensive and poorly analyzed reconfigurations of several school buildings as a means of repairing problems of its own making. These decisions, which include converting Hilburn Elementary into a K-8 school and creating two single-sex “academies” in downtown Raleigh, highlight the Board’s willingness to rush important decisions without obtaining adequate input from the community or studying the facts.

The conversion of Hilburn Elementary into a K-8 school was approved as a remedy for Board Member Deborah Prickett’s decision to convert Leesville Middle School from a year-round to traditional calendar, which caused overcrowding at Leesville. Many Leesville parents did not support calendar conversion, and now not all parents affected by the major change at Hilburn have been consulted. Two poorly advertised community meetings and a limited online survey were the only efforts made by the Board to engage the community. The decision to place kindergartners and eighth graders in the same building raises concern and will require the reconfiguring of facilities at a cost of over \$2 million. It also remains to be seen whether K-8 will be chosen by parents in sufficient numbers to fill the new school.

Perhaps even more troubling than the Hilburn action is the Board’s decision to create two single-sex academies, based on programs in Guilford County that are funded at \$14,000 per pupil—or twice what Wake County spends on its students. Planned for a total of 800 students, equivalent funding for operating both schools amounts to more than \$5.5 million annually.

The boys’ academy will be housed at Longview School, a decision that displaces all the special education students now attending Longview. This decision also triggers the forced reassignment of the special education students at River Oaks and Mt. Vernon schools. After multiple shufflings of students, Mary Phillips High School will re-open in August 2012 as the new comprehensive alternative school, serving at-risk students in

grades 6-12. Renovations at all of these facilities will cost taxpayers an additional \$3.6 million, in addition to ongoing operating costs. Although Longview had been recently renovated to accommodate special education students, and has a maximum capacity of 102 without room for modular classrooms, its capacity will somehow be increased to 400. The girls' academy will lease space at a cost of \$500,000 annually, in addition to an initial outlay of \$1.3 million to renovate a building that the school district will not even own.

“The K-8 and single-gender academy programs are yet another example of the School Board majority running roughshod over families,” said Yevonne Brannon, Chair, GSIW. “There was limited discussion among a small number of parents regarding Hilburn, and absolutely no public input into the idea of single-sex academies. There is no detailed cost analysis, no known demand by families, and no evidence of the benefits of either program. In fact, significant research indicates that single-sex education does more harm than good.”

According to an article published last week in the journal *Science*:

“In attempting to improve schools, it is critical to remember that not all reforms lead to meaningful gains for students. We argue that one change in particular—sex-segregated education—is deeply misguided, and often justified by weak, cherry-picked, or misconstrued scientific claims rather than by valid scientific evidence. There is no well-designed research showing that single-sex (SS) education improves students' academic performance, but there is evidence that sex segregation increases gender stereotyping and legitimizes institutional sexism.” (*Science* 23 September 2011: Vol. 333 no. 6050 pp. 1706-1707)

“Sadly, the Board majority appears to be creating an illusion of progress by haphazardly enacting expensive, new, and entirely untested programs,” observed Brannon. “This is a transparent effort to distract people from a record of failure. And it is exactly the kind of Board mismanagement that has put our high schools' accreditation at risk. While the Board is trying to sell the public on school choice, the reality is that they're creating unappealing and unproven programs that, in fact, are under enrolled in places like Washington D.C. In the end, many parents feel that the Board majority will end up forcing its poor choices on families, at a great cost to taxpayers.”

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About Great Schools in Wake Coalition:

A project of WakeUP Wake County, Great Schools in Wake Coalition (GSIW) is a community coalition of organizations, business leaders, parents and citizen advocates who are working to ensure educational excellence in the Wake County Public School System. GSIW's mission is to provide accurate information to educate the public about policy initiatives that would impact the quality of education, foster well-informed discussions about critical education issues, and advocate for policies that improve public education in Wake County. For more information on the Coalition or to join, please visit: greatschoolsinline.org.