

## **Open Letter to Wake County Board of Education and Superintendent Anthony Tata**

The North Carolina NAACP supports Great Schools in Wake Coalition (GSIW) in calling for a delay in the implementation of the new Wake County student assignment plan. The January 3, 2012 work session of the school board made it clear that there remains a long list of unanswered questions regarding the new assignment plan. We believe it is in the best interest of all children of Wake County to delay implementation of the plan until the questions are answered in order to ensure that Wake County adopts the best student assignment plan possible.

NAACP leaders met with Superintendent Tata and his staff last July. During that meeting we posed many questions to the Superintendent and to date have not had a response from him or his team regarding their answers. GSIW posed additional questions that are also still unanswered. Questions and concerns we posed last summer include:

1. The percentage goals of low-performing, poor and minority students in each school have not been clarified. Any effort to avoid high-poverty, racially-identifiable or low-performing schools requires this data.
2. The numbers of seats available for families who choose to send their students to magnet and so-called "achievement choice" schools is not clear.
3. No plans have been announced to address the issue of access to "achievement choice" schools for families without the necessary resources to wade through the online process to make informed choices for their children's school assignment. Without the necessary assistance, these families will not have equal opportunities to benefit from any student assignment plan.
4. There is still no urban school district operating a so-called "choice" plan that has maintained greater success than the pioneering socioeconomic diversity plan that made Wake County a national model for student achievement. While there was room to improve the socioeconomic diversity plan, especially in adhering to its goals of no high-poverty schools, the strengths of that plan should not simply be pushed aside.
5. There is still no data to show how the current recommended plan would decrease or increase the number of high-poverty, racially-identifiable or low performance schools in Wake County.
6. There is still no analysis that shows that the partial plans presented thus far are empirically better than the socio-economic diversity assignment plan.
7. The high-poverty schools that came to be under the old plan were not a result of the plan itself but rather a result of unprecedented growth in numbers of students in Wake County and flagging determination to meet the standards of the plan. No plan is stronger than our will to measure up to its goals.
8. Considering that the leadership of the previous board, which adopted this plan, was committed to a pure so-called "neighborhood schools" approach, we need to make sure that any plan Wake County adopts will balance the factors of diversity, stability and student performance. Even Michael Alves, who advised the Superintendent and his team, indicated that these factors need to be embraced to ensure the success of the plan.

We continue to support a research-based approach to student assignment. Research continues to show that socio-economic diversity and adequate resources foster student achievement and that high-poverty, racially-identifiable schools present strong obstacles to student achievement. There is hardly any argument among scholars as to whether or not diversity and resources are two critical elements for student achievement in public schools. Across the country, re-segregated schools undermine all efforts to lift student achievement for all children. Any plan we adopt must be clear in avoiding re-segregation, whether accidental, incidental or intentional. We are not questioning anyone's intent but insisting that we pursue a research-based commitment the best schools for all children.

We encourage the school board to proceed in implementing a new student assignment plan only once they have the data and a clear program to ensure they are making the very best decision. We believe thoughtful people who put all our children first and who want high-quality, constitutional, well-funded, diverse education for every child -- as opposed to those driven by ideological agendas and partisan politics -- can always find common ground.

Our commitments are grounded in the best interests of all our children, the strongest scholarly research, the lessons of history, and a clear understanding of the state and federal constitutions. From the outset, the NAACP has noted eight fundamental principles that should guide a sincere commitment to strong public schools:

1. Stop the trend toward re-segregation and promote school and classroom diversity.
2. Provide equity in funding for all schools.
3. Provide high-quality teachers and smaller classes.
4. Provide strong leadership and high-quality teams.
5. Provide first-rate facilities.
6. Focus on math, science, reading and history.
7. Support parental and community involvement.
8. Address unjust and disproportionate suspensions, reduce dropout rate and increase graduation rates among African-American, Latino/Hispanic and low-income students.

All educational decisions must be guided by sound educational research, which continually proves that diversity and resources are key components to student achievement; by the standards of constitutional law, which guarantee every child equal access to a sound, basic education; and by our history, which reminds us we must go forward and not backwards.

In the spirit of truth and justice,

Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, II, NC NAACP President  
Dr. Timothy Tyson, NC NAACP Education Chair