

Hello, my name is Dr. Carrie Dow-Smith and I appreciate the opportunity to speak. The student assignment plan under consideration this evening includes the loss of over 250 magnet seats. I respectfully ask the board not to make decisions that change or reduce magnet seats until a comprehensive magnet plan is completed.

As a pediatrician serving a population of predominantly low income children in southeast Raleigh I see first-hand the poverty, violence, hunger, homelessness, fatigue and desperation often present in this inner city population.

Money for field trips, time spent volunteering in the classroom, effort working with their child on math homework—these are luxuries many of my patients can't afford. Providing medical care for these families is a joy and a challenge.

My children attend Hunter Elementary, a magnet located in an area that serves many of the same base families I serve in my practice. Despite our very old physical facility in a less than cookie cutter neighborhood, our school is a beautiful example of symbiosis.

Many Hunter parents happily spend more than their share of time and treasure assisting children less fortunate than their own, and this relationship is mutually beneficial. Our children and base children get the benefit of the magnet programs, but even more importantly they are learning and playing next to children of every color, background, and experience.

This dynamic program has been working since I completed 5th grade at Hunter in 1982. However, in the past three years there has been a decrease in the number of magnet seats and the beginning of erosion of this “magnetic” program as the base population increases as a proportion of the whole. If this continues, it may reach a tipping point where teachers will be unable to meet the academic and emotional needs of children, where parents who cherish their involvement will no longer be able to shoulder the load alone, and overwhelmed teachers and families who have voluntarily integrated may return en masse to their bases. Underutilized facilities in southeast Raleigh will be the result of this demagnetization.

I implore you to do more than make vague statements denying you are dismantling the magnet program. Please clarify your support for these magnet schools and your plan to continue this successful voluntary integration system. Make assignment decisions that recognize that there is a healthy ratio of magnet seats necessary to support a challenged base school. Thank you for your consideration.