

**New Board Must Take Action to Stop the Largest Reassignment in Wake County's History:
600,000+ Addresses "Unassigned"
if the New Student Assignment Plan Goes Forward**

Implementation of the new "choice" student assignment plan is occurring at breakneck speed, despite the fact that an overwhelming majority of families are satisfied with their students' assignment. The current plan is far from complete; there remain some very serious concerns that have not been brought to the public's attention. A single hearing on October 13, 2011 was the only avenue for public comment, and the plan was quickly approved on October 18, 2011. In the view of Great Schools in Wake and its members, it is imperative that the Wake County Board of Education delay implementation of the plan to allow adequate fiscal and programmatic analysis that will ensure the plan is viable in the long term.

The impact of the plan is far reaching. Effectively, the new plan in its current state reassigns over 600,000 addresses. Families with students no longer have the security of a base school assignment, and property owners can no longer sell their homes with the certainty of having a known school associated with their residence. We strongly believe that you can have stability (once a child starts at a school, they stay at that school), proximity, and choice and avoid the current chaos with time and better planning.

A plan with so many open questions and unknown costs and consequences must be subject to greater scrutiny so it may be further refined and then implemented. Failure to do so will undermine further the public's trust and jeopardize future funding to operate our schools and build the new ones we need by 2014.

Please consider carefully the points below. Contact School Board members and ask your own questions. Attend School Board meetings and voice your views on how to move forward on these critical issues.

Top 10 Reasons Why "Choice" Student Assignment Plan Must be Delayed:

(1) This plan costs more money, lacks a detailed budget and funding, and buses more children.

No analysis has been calculated to measure the additional costs. Superintendent Tata has said that there will be increased costs; he just hasn't said how much more or where the funds will come from. There will be increased busing under this plan. With each family being forced to select a school, there is no economy of having a group of neighbors all attending the same school. For now, the plan promises every student transportation, but that will mean many more buses traveling through neighborhoods, and no corresponding improvement in educational equity for students in Wake County. Wake County will have to borrow (and eventually buy) more buses, pay more drivers, and purchase more gas. This plan will either force taxes up or require drastic classroom cuts. We need to keep our scarce dollars in the classroom, and not spend them on more busing.

(2) The plan does not guarantee proximity and destroys historic neighborhood attendance patterns.

No longer will neighbors have the choice to go to school with neighbors, and living within the walk zone of a school (1.5 miles) will be NO guarantee of access to that school if it is full. Citizens without children in the schools also have a lot at stake in this new assignment plan; they are likely not aware that every household address in Wake County (yes your house) has been reassigned, or "unassigned." No longer do you know, based on your address, where your child or the child of your subsequent purchaser will go to school. Even worse, in high growth neighborhoods, it is not only likely but also inevitable that neighbors will have different school choices because the most desirable schools are full; there will never be such a thing as neighborhood schools.

(3) The plan does not give real choice.

There is no choice where there is no capacity. Choice is a sham if there is no way to meaningfully exercise it. Popular schools will be oversubscribed and their enrollments will be capped. The purpose of the plan appears to be to redistribute students evenly across all of the county's schools, not to give real choice.

Families across the County are upset about "feeder patterns" because this plan has many unintended consequences. It was rushed through in October 2011 before the newly elected school board members were installed. If you lose the lottery as a kindergartener or want to make a change later on, you are stuck. Getting your fourth choice, when your child's best friend got their fifth choice won't make "getting to choose" as positive as it sounds now. 94 percent of parents are satisfied with their child's school. Under the proposed choice plan, fewer than 94 percent would get their first or second choices. Why would we move to a plan that virtually guarantees less satisfaction with school assignment?

(4) The plan actively limits choice at the points where it is most important.

Choice is more pedagogically important at middle and high school entry. Students have a better idea of their interests and preferences. Under this plan, rigid feeder patterns discourage choosing to change schools at 6th or 9th grade. A choice to leave one's feeder pattern is a choice to re-enter the uncertainty of a lottery.

(5) The plan does nothing to avoid high poverty schools.

At present, there are no seats allocated in high performing schools for students who are coming from low performing neighborhoods. There is no mechanism for placing the student whose parents do not make a choice, other than to assign that student to whatever school is left with an opening. Overall, the plan lacks controls necessary to prevent the creation of low-wealth or low-achievement schools which are costly to taxpayers, and create increased challenges for students and teachers.

In August 2011, Walnut Creek Elementary opened as a brand new, high poverty school. Walnut Creek is costing taxpayers more than a million dollars per year more than a diverse Wake County school. This is simply not financially sustainable; moreover, it creates great academic harm. Where will the funds come from if Wake County has an increasing number of high cost/high poverty schools? How will Wake County ask taxpayers to fund additional high poverty schools, while at the same time requesting money to build new schools?

(6) The plan threatens home values and does not accommodate our County’s ongoing growth.

All across the country prospective homebuyers make decisions based on the schools their children will attend if they live in a particular neighborhood. That security is no longer guaranteed, as the plan deals with growth by dividing neighborhoods, reassigning people to unpopular schools, and inevitably discouraging people from moving to Wake County—unless they can afford a private school education. Home values will plummet as new buyers will be stuck with whatever schools are leftover in a school system that is quickly running out of vacant seats.

The plan is based on "available seats," while not accounting for the fact that there is a projected seat deficit for elementary school seats starting in four years, middle school seats in about six years and high school seats in two years, with deficits currently in existence in certain geographic areas. The uncertainty of the current plan casts a looming shadow over the bond referendum required to accommodate future growth.

(7) The voters rejected the previous Board 5-0 this fall.

The fall election was a referendum on the policies and practices of the last two years. The current version of the plan reflects and embodies those failed policies. Citizens recognized that the plans afoot were costly and poorly conceived which is why those who supported this plan in the election were defeated. Our community wants this plan improved now to avoid making expensive fixes later. To do otherwise is simply defies best business practices.

(8) The plan shuts out newcomers.

The uncertainty created by this new plan discourages people from moving to Wake County, which makes this plan bad for our economy. Newcomers to the area, as well as kindergarten students or students transferring from private, charter, or home schools to public schools, are only given access to what everyone else didn’t choose. Realtors are already reporting that people who had intended to move to Wake County are either choosing a neighboring county or not coming at all. We will be forcing many families to choose homes based on their best “shot” at getting a seat in a preferred school.

(9) The plan undermines the health of magnet schools and does not improve the fairness of magnet access.

An academically advanced student who happens to live in a so-called low performing node is virtually locked out of the magnets. The choice plan does not improve access to magnet schools for students from so-called low performing nodes. Access is not equal across the county. At the same time, rigid feeder patterns may dramatically alter the demographics of many magnet schools.

(10) The public did not have opportunity for substantive and meaningful input in the development of the plan; substantive and meaningful community outreach is still nonexistent.

Only parents with access to computers/Internet would have had the opportunity to submit online comments, whose ultimate impact was unknown. Public meetings, though numerous, were one-way sales pitches, not an opportunity for citizens to give feedback. Without intense, ongoing community outreach, is it not reasonable to assume that every family will actually be able to make an informed choice. What happens to the thousands of children who will not have help choosing the best school for them? And how will our community be able to pay for the academic failures we

create?

Where Do We Go From Here?

What most citizens want and expect is to have a school that they and their neighbors are assigned to, a proximate calendar option that they have a chance of getting in to, fair and reasonable magnet choices and assignments that allow students to finish at any school they start at. At the same time, Wake County citizens want to continue their commitment to providing quality educational opportunities for all students. Wake County has an outstanding national reputation in part due to the quality of its school system and commitment to all students in all neighborhoods.

For those who believe we are too far down the road to slow the plan down, it is never too late to make a good decision—especially when the interests of generations of children are at stake. There is no compelling “emergency” forcing the hurried implementation of a new plan, and it is essential that we not create serious problems that we cannot afford to pay for.

Great Schools in Wake recommends that the following critical analyses be undertaken immediately so that an improved student assignment plan can be implemented in time for the 2013-2014 school year:

- **Complete, detailed cost analysis.** How much will expanded choice cost, and where will the funds come from?
- **Reevaluation of feeder patterns.** How do feeder patterns contribute to the health of all schools and provide realistic and desirable options for families?
- **Assessment of current nodes.** Are nodes optimized to allow families to exercise their best choice options and to accurately measure proximity to their schools?
- **Magnet assessment.** Where are magnets seats most needed and what kinds of programs will be most attractive to families?
- **Academic success analysis.** How can we balance school environments to increase academic success for all children?

Conclusion

The assignment plan, currently being pushed through at breakneck speed, fails to address critical issues that undermine the health and well being of the entire Wake County community. While some families have been lulled into a false sense of security because of the assignment “grandfathering” available to students currently enrolled in the system, many more families remain deeply concerned about the impact of the plan, both in the near term and further down the road. The prospect of tweaking an incomplete and problematic plan after implementation is tantamount to launching that airplane and building it once off the ground. We don’t want our children on that plane.

That families are content with current assignments affords us the luxury to slow down the rapid pace of implementation and to get solid answers to key questions. A new way of assigning students is a laudable goal and should be undertaken in a thorough, deliberate and cost-effective manner.