

On Achievement and Civil Rights

Jim Martin April 5, 2011 to the Wake County School Board

I know that the majority of us are concerned with high student achievement in a just and equitable school system. That said, I was deeply troubled last week when I read your filing with the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights.

We rightly should scrutinize your data and claims. For example, it was news to me, that, based on your data, because my children live more than 15 miles from their school, they apparently are suffering lower achievement. Or are we to conclude that bus rides enhance the achievement of magnet students, but hurt the achievement of base students? No! The length of a bus ride has little to nothing to do with student achievement. You have implied flawed conclusions based on a careless selection of data.

At a much deeper level, I am concerned with your effort to prove that there was no "discriminatory intent" or "no racial animus," and that instead all actions were based on an effort to focus on "student achievement."

Your focusing on "**intent**" demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of systemic bias. One need not **intend** to be discriminatory to actually contribute to discrimination. The facts are, that with Walnut Creek Elementary School, you will be opening a racially identifiable, low-income, high-needs school. We cannot know your intent behind this action, but we do know you are creating a high-risk educational setting, that all substantive research and experience suggests will at a minimum, set both students and teachers up for undue challenges, but sadly more likely, for failure.

Irrespective of your **intent**, the creation of a racially identifiable, low-income school, along with your disproportionate reassignment of low-income children, **does** contribute to systemic racism and classism.

In contrast to your effort to demonstrate no prejudicial intent, your filing attempts to make the case that changes to student assignments were based on the need to address matters of **student achievement**. Why then, with such great concern for student achievement was almost all language to this effect removed from policy 6200? In the previous policy, with all its flaws, there were reasonable targets to balance the responsibility of all schools to work with high needs students performing below grade level. Not only was that language removed, nothing was put in its place.

While the abolition of "the diversity policy" has gotten much press, by analogy you equally abolished the "student achievement policy." I recommend revision and reinstatement.