

Speech: High Poverty Schools

March 1, 2011

Board of Education Meeting

Chairperson Margiotta, Board Members, and Superintendent Tata:

For more than ten years, taxpayers in Raleigh have subsidized the construction of new schools in high growth areas, including western Wake County. Last month, this Board of Education majority caucus voted to expel students from Raleigh from those schools.

Also last month, this Board of Education created a racially identifiable, high poverty school in Walnut Creek. It created this high poverty school through deliberate choices in student assignment.

One year ago, this Board was presented with mounds of data that showed high poverty schools have an uphill battle to student achievement. You each received mounds of evidence that high poverty schools have trouble attracting high quality teachers and have trouble attracting high quality administrators. Yet you gave this uphill battle to the students of Walnut Creek.

The Students of Walnut Creek Elementary have the constitutional right to a sound and equitable education. That is a right in the North Carolina Constitution. You have a great responsibility to give that to them, to those children, who come to you innocent, as Judge Manning says. They deserve a sound education and you gave them a high poverty school.

You already gave us proof that High Poverty schools cost taxpayers money. You voted to give almost one million dollars of federal money—federal taxpayer dollars that come from President Obama—to Wilburn, Hodge Road, Creech Road and Barwell Road elementary schools. What will happen to those schools when that Obama money runs out? What will happen to those children when that money runs out?

In the meantime, there is no evidence that proximity helps achievement. What evidence will you show children at Walnut Creek or the children at the other four high poverty schools?

If this Board had left the diversity policy for student assignment in place AND had focused on student achievement—then we would truly be a school district in the center of the universe. We would be making the front page and garnering national publicity for all the right reasons. Working for educational fairness and for high student achievement are admirable goals—the very best goals.

We must work toward these goals—together.

Thank you.