



Overview of WCPSS Community Engagement Meetings in 2003

Summary

Wake County's constant and dramatic population growth requires the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) to continuously build new schools in order to provide safe, welcoming and effective educational environments for children in all parts of the county. The most visible effect of this growth is the need to regularly adjust school assignments, to fill new schools, and to reduce overcrowding at existing schools. The school system is making a concerted and continuing effort to open the student assignment process to greater parental scrutiny and input. In 2003, for the first time, the WCPSS Community Engagement Meetings were held as a component of the 2004-05 Growth Management Plan in order to increase the community's opportunity for input to the student reassignment plan. This input was accepted by WCPSS and was used, in conjunction with the goals of the school board and the school district, to develop the 2004-05 reassignment plan.

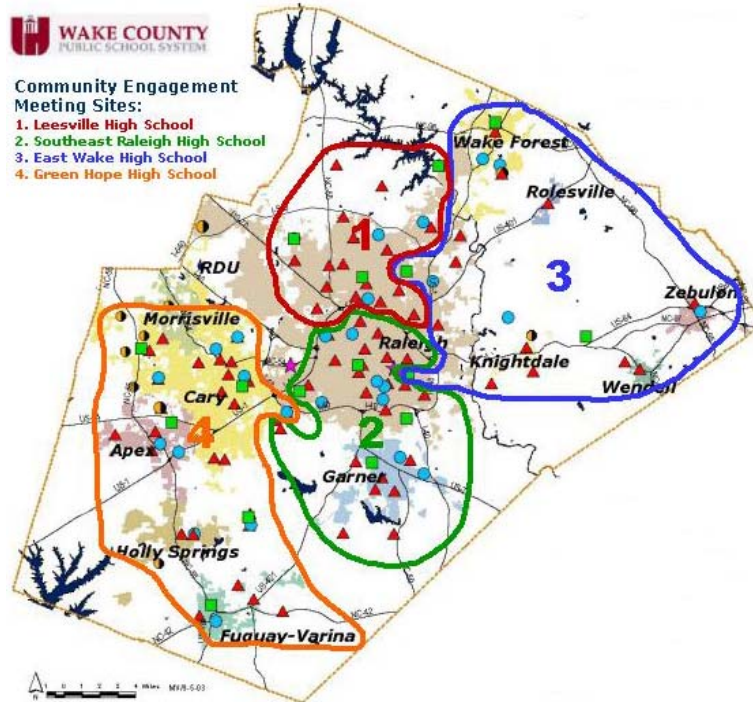


Figure 1. Parents played an important role in shaping the student assignment proposal for 2004-05 through a series of 11 **Community Engagement Meetings** held around the county in September, October and November of 2003. Four meetings were planned for each CEM topic, each meeting covering schools (marked 1-4 in the figure) in a different part of the county.

Motivation and Goals

WCPSS Student Enrollment (projected for 2005-2020)

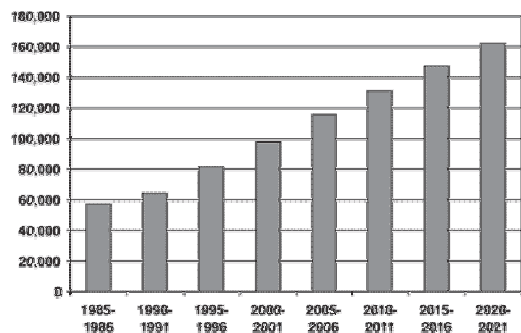


Table 1. The Wake County Planning Department projects the WCPSS student enrollment at 130,000 for 2010-2011 and 160,000 for 2020-2021.

The 2003 Community Engagement Meetings (CEM) were held as a component of the 2004-05 Growth Management Plan. Year 2003 marks the expansion of the role of the community in sharing with WCPSS staff the community needs and expectations.

The goal was to engage the Wake County community in the development of the 2004-05 WCPSS growth management plan, and thus have the community be more accepting of the plan. The objectives were to have the parents understand the processes, the goals, and the needs of the district in relation to the goals of the parents. It was also an objective to give the parents an opportunity to express their individual priorities regarding reassignment.

Meeting Structure and Materials

With seven (7) new schools opening in 2004/05, the challenges WCPSS Growth Management Plan (GMP) had to deal with were extensive. In addition to filling the new schools, the plan attempted a) to reduce the crowding at the existing schools and b) to maintain the socio-economic balance of each school that provides favorable and nurturing academic and other support for low-income and low-performing students throughout the county.

To accomplish the GMP goals, WCPSS held a series of community meetings beginning in September 2003 intended to explain the growth management process and obtain public input on the plan. Meetings were held in September, October and November of 2003 in different areas of the county.

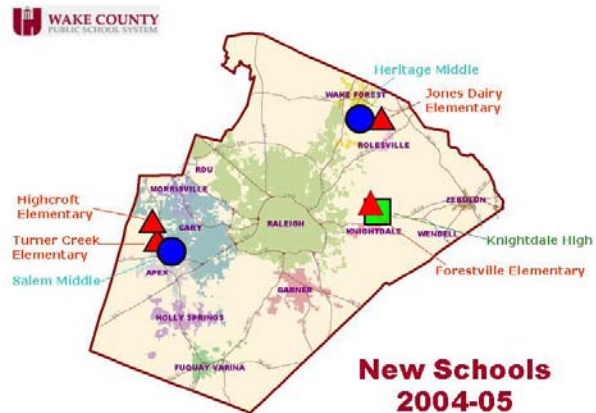


Figure 2. To keep up with the dramatic enrollment growth, seven new schools are to open in 2004-05, and another 15 by year 2007.

Each month the meeting **topic** was different. The topics covered:

1. WCPSS policies, practices and processes related to Growth Management (GM)
2. Growth management issues related to specific area of the county in which the meeting were being held
3. Discussion of how different schools in the area might be affected by the GM plan for the upcoming year and for the future

For each topic, four (4) meetings were planned in different parts of the county (see Figure 1). Together, they provided coverage for all affected schools/areas. At each meeting, and following each meeting, there were opportunities for the participants to a) submit questions, b) participate in a planning activity, c) complete an exit survey, and d) provide input in a variety of ways including focus groups, email, etc. The following subsections summarize each of the community engagement meetings held.

Meeting 1 – September, 2003 - Overview

Discuss and explain:

- Goals of Growth Management
- Board Policy 6200
- Roles of magnet and year round schools
- Academic results
- Stability efforts
- Opening of new schools
- Plan development process
- Terms used by Growth Management

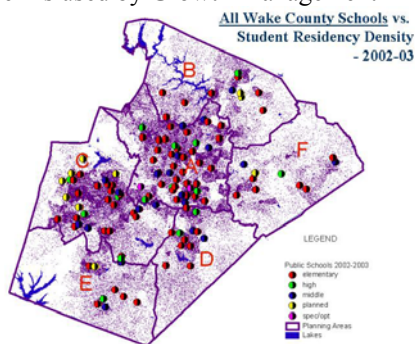


Figure 3. School locations conform with the student population density distribution.

WCPSS Mission:

The Wake County Public Schools will educate each student to be a responsible and productive citizen who can effectively manage future challenges.

Assignment Policy

Starting in 2000, a new student assignment policy was implemented. The policy is based on accepted national research. These socio-economic factors plus parental choices for magnet schools were key drivers in the reassignment process. The current policy is directed at maintaining the strength of individual schools, encouraging academic achievement, and providing opportunities to students at all income levels through more individual attention. Specifically, to achieve an effective and safe learning environment for every individual, the current student assignment policy states that each WCPSS school should have student population:

- a) Where not more than 40 percent receive free or reduced price lunch.
- b) Where not more than 25 percent are below grade level in academic performance, and
- c) That results in facility utilization between 85 and 115 percent of the school's capacity.

Meeting 2 – October, 2003 - Overview

Presentation

- Planning Areas and School Locations
- Opening of New Schools
- Growth History
- Enrollment Projections for Wake County
- Year-Round Enrollment
- F&R Data, Wake County’s Population Data
- Projected Growth by Planning Area

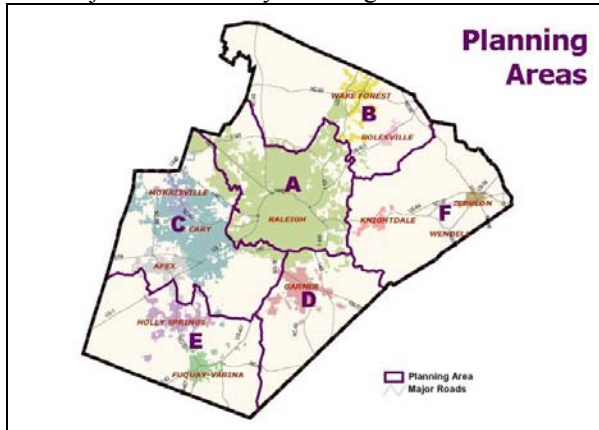


Figure 4. Location of 6 Planning Areas in Wake County

E/S Student Residency by Six Planning Areas, 1998-2002

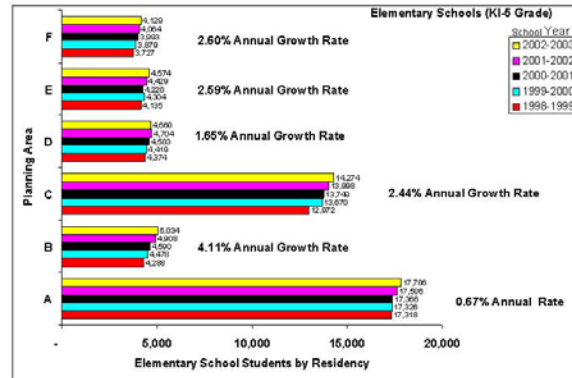


Figure 5. Illustrates Elementary Student Growth by Six Planning Areas

Meetings on these topics began with a review of the previous topics. One area of focus for this series was the location of the 6 planning areas of the county and how growth varies by area and by year. Participants were given an opportunity to identify key factors they wanted considered by staff when opening new schools and reassigning students to existing schools

Meeting 3 – November, 2003 - Overview

The purpose of the third round of meetings was to review crowding, facility underutilization, F&R level, and ESL concentrations for various schools, and in light of reassigning students to provide a quality educational opportunity for all students. The goals of the district were reviewed with the parents. The reassignment process was illustrated to the parents by actively involving them in an exercise based on the real data for the area under consideration.

Attending parents were given relevant school node information appropriate to the area (e.g., Figures 6 and 7), and were asked to make suggestions concerning student reassignment. Choosing priorities for student moves was not something many parents felt comfortable with, and many were frustrated by the activity. However, this activity did raise the level of understanding of how complex and involved the process is.

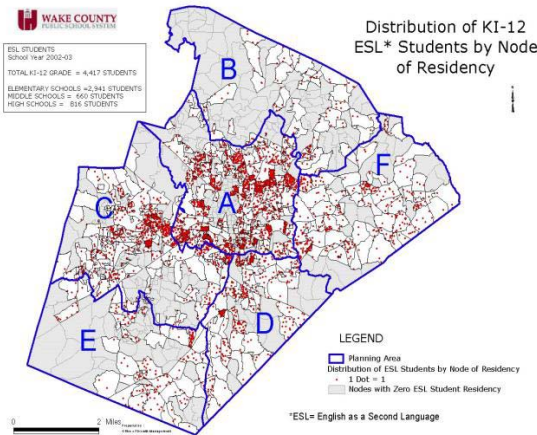


Figure 6. Distribution of ESL Students by Residency

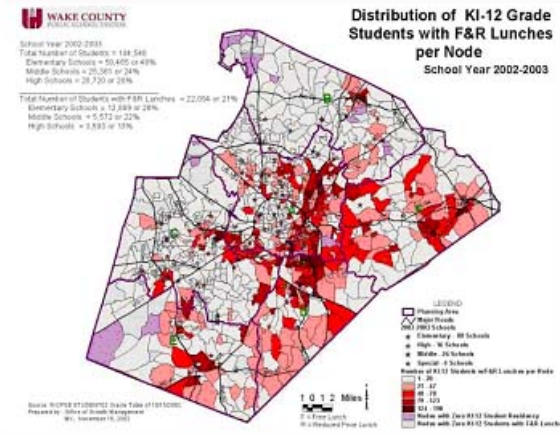


Figure 7. Distribution of F&R Students by Residency

Outcomes

In addition to discussions conducted during the meetings, community members were given several other avenues of input. For example, as part of CEM, parents were given an opportunity to fill out a survey regarding the reassignment policy. The following illustrate the survey. Percentages are the number of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the particular survey statement: “The most overcrowded schools nearest to a new school should be given the highest priority for reassignment to that school.” – 88%; “Travel time for students should be a factor when students are reassigned.” – 98%; “Travel distance...” – 95%; “A new school should open with F&R % similar to other schools in the area...” - 57%; “To reduce construction costs most schools should be multi-track year round” – 46%; “Stability for students is more important than reassigning students for feeder pattern adjustment” – 85%. In addition, the parents were asked to list a) importance of factors related to opening of a new school, and b) importance of factors related to the total assignment plan. Their top choices, in order of importance, are in the following table.

Highlights of Parents’ Input Regarding Importance of Factors Related to	
a) Opening of New Schools	b) Total Assignment Plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distance/travel time • Stability (at least 3 years) • Don’t split neighborhoods • Alleviate crowding in existing schools • Total grandfathering for family • Feeder pattern • Attend closest school to neighborhood • Diversity • F&R similar to other schools in the area • Stability within grade span 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distance/travel time • Keep communities together • Attend closest school • Stability/seniority for neighborhood • Grandfather all grades • Add grandfathering for grades 3, 4, 6, and family • Feeder patterns • Guarantee assignment K-12 when moving into a house • Keep siblings together • Assign resources, not students

Conclusion

In the past, input into WCPSS GMP was received from a variety of sources including advisory councils, PTA groups, community groups, administrators, etc. Year 2003 marked the next step in that process - expansion of the role of the community input before a final proposal was drafted. The guiding principles during the preparation of the 2003 plan were a) Providing every student with a safe, welcoming and academically **healthy environment**. Characteristics of Healthy Schools include high academic achievement by all students, strong parental support and commitment, strong community support and commitment, highly trained and effective staff, attractive and appropriate learning facility, a safe, orderly, and inviting learning climate, strong and effective leadership, and a diverse student body; b) Making the most **effective** use of our school campuses; c) Accommodation of **community priorities**, such as minimizing travel times and distances, assignment stability, keeping neighborhoods together and providing grandfathering for students in certain grades, and d) Compliance with the Board of Education **policies** designed to maximize student performance.

The 2003 Community Engagement Meetings gave both very broad and very specific input to the WCPSS staff. Many of the ideas submitted by the parents, school-based personnel, advisory groups and community leaders were used to draft the final WCPSS 2003 GMP proposal. The public version of the proposal, and the call for comments, was published in January 2004. The version presented to the board in February 2004 was amended to address the suggestions and the comments received during the comment period.

Next Steps

Community Relations Committee of the Wake County Board of Education believes that the *Community Engagement Meeting (CEM) model* was a positive first step and should be retained, and that it has helped increase community awareness and provided useful information about student assignment. The model should be further developed to better explain to the community the purpose and objectives of the meetings and to increase awareness and anticipation. Preparations are underway for another series of CEM in the fall.