HUNTER'S HERITAGE

From the outside, you'd never guess what's so special about the 75-year-old elementary school. Its bricks are chipped and darkened, and its architecture is the simple, block style of an old-fashioned school, nothing like the sleek, open, modern look of the Wake County Public School System's new schools. But if you take care to notice, the columns at the entrance—a gift from the school's first principal—offer a hint of this school's grandeur and its ambitions for its students.

Students today do not choose to attend Lucille Hunter Elementary School for the building, which has survived the Great Depression, 45 years of segregation, a fire that ravaged nearly half the school and its entire 600-seat auditorium, and bouts of mold.

Students today come from all over North Carolina's Wake County to attend Hunter Elementary School near downtown Raleigh and some ride almost an hour on a school bus to get there. There is a waiting list for the magnet school, which offers a wide variety of electives as part of its gifted and talented curriculum. These electives include courses in literature, creative writing, computers, mathematics, science, and the arts, and they permit students in kindergarten through fifth grade to explore areas of interest that could enhance their knowledge of basic fields.

The elective courses, important facets of the current Hunter experience, are broad-ranging and as varied as its student population. On one day in the fall of 2002, groups of fourth and fifth graders are studying journalism, their assignments—to interview new teachers at Hunter and write a profile for each one for the school's newsletter. In another upper grade elective, students learn about videography and news casting, working toward producing a school television program. Downstairs, a lower grade elective studying coral reefs includes the dissection of a jellyfish.

But electives are just a part of what makes Hunter Elementary such a special place for its 604 students and 80 staff members. It is a simple, 35-classroom building with a cafeteria, gymnasium, and a media center with 15,000 books and a self-check-out system. After 75 years, Hunter remains one of the most vibrant elementary schools in Wake County.

"The most important draw was the academics and teaching methods at Hunter," said parent Kristine Scharf, whose older child, Matthew, entered kindergarten at the school in the fall 2002. "Attending the Open House at Hunter was a magnificent experience," she said. "Watching the students play instruments and sing Broadway musicals made me want my children to experience those same things. I love the idea of electives and having the students exposed to different teachers and classes in the elementary grades."

"I chose Hunter for its diversity and dynamic academics," echoed parent Herman Parker, whose daughter Hunter (aptly named) entered kindergarten in the fall 2002. Parker said the school's strong reputation in the community made an impression on him.

Hunter Elementary School's staff, students and even its building always succeed in making an impression. Step inside the historic school, and you are greeted by a massive tile wall, installed by teacher and parent volunteers with each tile created by a student or teacher at Hunter and fired in one of two kilns at the school. The project reflects Hunter at its best—a diverse group of individuals contributing their unique creation to a cooperative, unified project.

It is doubtful that even Lucille Hunter, the teacher for whom the school was named, could have foreseen the changes the entire educational system would undergo—specifically integration and the gifted and talented program—since the Hunter School opened in 1927. Even the history of the school site is impressive.

The school board that condemned the ten acres of land around East Davie Street on July 14, 1926 must have been familiar with the site's history. Between 1833 and 1840 it included a quarry that yielded stone for the North Carolina State Capitol.

And later, the gaping hole on the site became a "crime pit," where public executions were held while vendors hawked refreshments and souvenirs to numerous spectators. So, it stands as a significant achievement that where there once were public hangings, they built a public school with funds from a bond issue passed in 1926.

When construction of the Hunter School was completed, the following entry was recorded in the Raleigh Township School Committee minutes of May 12, 1927:

> ***On motion of Dr. Horton, seconded by Mrs. Upchurch, it was decided to name the new Negro grammar school building after Lucille Hunter, one of the former teachers.***

That's all it says. Nothing about who she was or what Mrs. Hunter had done to deserve the honor. But research for this history in the early 1990s turned up more information. And in 2001 and 2002, a group of former Hunter students and Hunter parents succeeded in learning more about Mrs. Lucille Hunter. She was more than a teacher: she was the first African-American teacher in North Carolina to have a school named for her at the request of former students and fellow teachers.

Lucille M. Hunter (1863-1926)

Wisht you could alus know ease an' cleah skies;
Wisht you could stay jes' a chile on my breas'-
Little brown baby wif spa'klin eyes!

From *Little Brown Baby*, by Paul Lawrence Dunbar

Lucille Hunter never taught in the school that bears her name. She died in the year before it opened its doors. From public records, her contemporaries, and information from her great niece, we know she was born Lucille M. Smith in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1863, to her parents, Louisa and Peter J. Smith, who were slaves. Sometime after the Civil War, the family migrated north to Boston, Massachusetts, where Mrs. Hunter attended public school and went on to attend Hampton Institute in Virginia. In 1888, she married Wiley B. Hunter, a Wake County teacher and later principal of the Method School. They lived at 316 Cabarrus Street in Raleigh. The Hunters had a son, W. Kendall, who died in a bicycle accident before he was 16.

Mrs. Hunter taught in Raleigh's segregated black schools for about 40 years. In 1899, when she was teaching third grade at the Washington School, she was listed in the Raleigh Public Schools Annual Report as a "colored" teacher with a monthly salary of $30. At that time, the school system had one salary schedule for black teachers and another for white teachers. At the time of her death, Mrs. Hunter was teaching at the Crosby-Garfield School in Raleigh.

Raleigh resident Pete Wilder, whose mother occasionally cooked lunch for Mrs. Hunter before a cafeteria was added to the Crosby-Garfield school. He described Mrs. Hunter as having "gray hair that lit up her entire face."

Before 2002, the school had no pictures of Mrs. Hunter to confirm Mr. Wilder's observation. The absence of an image of Mrs. Hunter at the school had always bothered many Hunter parents and students. While active in the PTA, Susan Graebe recalled several conversations with parents who longed to have a portrait of Mrs. Hunter. One of those parents, Susan Reinhard, who also served as Hunter PTA president, always felt a great appreciation for the significance of Hunter's history. She and Ms. Graebe co-chaired a 75th Anniversary Celebration for Hunter for the 2002-2003 school year and sought to obtain a portrait as part of that celebration. With the help of Jean Wilder and her friend Cornelia Boston, they found Dorothy C. Smith, Mrs. Hunter's great niece, and they learned more about the school's namesake.

"Obviously, Aunt Lucille was born into slavery," Ms. Smith wrote in a letter to Mrs. Reinhard, "but she and her siblings were achievers." Mrs. Hunter's family included doctors and teachers. As adults, Mrs. Hunter, her siblings, and many cousins left Boston

and relocated either to New York, where Ms. Smith currently lives, or returned to North Carolina.

The most precious information Ms. Smith sent was a copy of a photograph of Lucille Hunter. "There is a wonderful serenity about her countenance," Ms. Smith wrote. "According to Mr. Pete Wilder's recollections, her gray hair lit up her entire face. This is certainly evident in the picture."

Reinhard and Karen Brannan took the photograph and commissioned a charcoal portrait of Mrs. Hunter. Thai-born artist "Woody" Chaimongkol, known as "Woody Charcoal," produced the serene portrait, and Garner framer Warner Powell provided an appropriately ornate frame at cost. The vibrant portrait is now proudly displayed outside the school's media center—an image of the school's namesake finally shines at the school.

Dorothy Lane, who taught at Crosby-Garfield school at the same time as Mrs. Hunter, remembered her as a petite woman with a fine sense of humor and a love of poetry. "She used to love to tell stories and recite poetry, especially the poems of Paul Lawrence Dunbar," Mrs. Lane recalled.

Bertha Mae Edwards, in her autobiography, *The Little Place and the Little Girl*, remembers "Mrs. Hunter could recite Dunbar's poems with such fervor as to make one spellbound." From all accounts, Lucille Hunter's favorite recitation was Dunbar's "Little Brown Baby."

She had other attributes as well. Ms. Lane, who was also acquainted with her through the Presbyterian Church, where both were members, characterized her as thoughtful and caring: "In those days, everyone was poor. Mrs. Hunter was always distributing clothes to the needy through our church."

Lucille Hunter died suddenly at the age of 63. On December 23, 1926, the following obituary appeared in *The (Raleigh) News and Observer* under the caption, "WELL-KNOWN TEACHER DIES HERE":

> **Lucille M. Hunter, one of the best-known teachers of the state, died yesterday evening about six o'clock as the result of an attack of apoplexy. She met her classes at the Crosby-Garfield school on Friday as usual and was quite cheerful. She had taught in the schools of the State for over 40 years and her husband, Wiley B. Hunter, is a teacher in the county schools. She was well known as an elocutionist, being in demand for recitations in Negro dialect. Funeral arrangements will be announced later.**

Mrs. Hunter is buried at Mount Hope Cemetery, located south of downtown Raleigh.

Phase 1—Segregated Elementary School, 1927-1971

Julia A. Williams, Principal, 1927-1944

When the Lucille Hunter School opened in 1927, there were 20 classrooms, a 600-seat auditorium, a library, clinic, and cafeteria. And, in accordance with North Carolina segregation laws, the school had a black principal, black teachers—all of whom were women—and black students in grades 1-7.

Hunter's first principal, Julia A. Williams, remained in that position for 17 years. She is remembered by a former Hunter teacher and four students as having an abiding concern for the children. She was also a strict disciplinarian who believed in corporal punishment (with a strap) and required her faculty to administer it.

"If you did anything wrong, she would take you to the bathroom and give you a good strapping; then when you came home, you got another one from your parents," recalled former Hunter student Broaddus Cox. But Cox, who transferred to one of Hunter's third-grade classes the day after school opened, insisted that Mrs. Williams really cared about students. And Miss Lane, who taught at Hunter for 35 years, agreed: "Some people didn't like her because she was strict and yelled a lot, but if you did right, she wouldn't yell at you."

"Doing right" also meant a teacher had to stay on her feet and look sharp through the entire school day, including recess, Miss Lane said. She justified that command, pointing out: "If you were sitting, you didn't know what the children were doing, and Mrs. Williams did not want anything to happen to the children."

But despite her rigid supervision, Mrs. Williams did not require Hunter faculty to sign in every morning. "You knew you were supposed to be in by 8:30. What's going to happen to the children if the teachers aren't there?" asked Miss Lane.

Besides Miss Lane, teachers at Hunter during those early years included Mrs. C.B. Ligon, Rachel McCauley, Addie Gorham Stroud, Celia Jeffries Wortham, Lucile McCray Bryant, Nannie Perry Frazier, Daisy Birdsall Evans, Hattie Baker Mitchell, Mrs. Henri Jeffries Stredick, Alice Carrington Jones, Helen Davis, Josephine Otey, and Mary Elizabeth Phillips, for whom a Raleigh elementary school was later named.

They were remembered by four former students from Hunter's early years—John Thompson Moore, Jr., Christopher L. Hunt, MD, Broaddus Cox, and former Raleigh mayor Clarence Lightner. All four were interviewed in the early 1990s to tell their memories of Hunter.

Lightner, whose mother ran the school cafeteria, attended Hunter for two years. He recalled that the teachers took a personal interest in their students. Moore, a retired social

studies teacher, remembered Hunter faculty members were required to visit their students' homes, observe their environment, and discuss their health as well as behavior with parents. One teacher advised Moore's mother to have her son's adenoids removed. Yet he never missed a day of school and was awarded a perfect attendance certificate for all seven grades.

Some children had to be taught to wash and dress. Teacher Rachel McCauley kept her classroom closet filled with soap, washcloths, towels, handkerchiefs, and toothbrushes, which she dispensed regularly. And Miss Lane recalled scrubbing many a dirty neck.

But a more serious problem faced the children, as well as everyone else in the country. Two years after Hunter opened, the Great Depression descended and many parents lost their jobs and their homes. For their children, school was a place to be warm and cared for, especially since many came to school barefoot with patched clothes. Some in the upper grades had to drop out of school to support parents and younger siblings.

Despite the times, there were no free lunches in the Hunter cafeteria, and Moore remembered that for some children lunch was a five-cent bun and a soda at the corner grocery store. Both he and Lightner recalled that Mrs. Williams and several Hunter teachers brought in food and solicited contributions from the community to feed needy students.

As for supplies, the school distributed one pencil, one tablet, a crayon and a few sheets of notebook paper to each student, but an annual book-rental fee of $1.25 was charged. Those who could not afford to pay the lump sum were permitted to make several small payments. "Children from the upper class bought their books. The rest of us turned them back at the end of the year," Moore recalled.

Basic courses such as reading, writing, math, grammar, history, geography, and science were taught, but in addition, the teachers instilled pride in Hunter students' heritage. Lightner and Hunter remembered building replicas of African thatched-roof huts, discussing the hardships of slavery, and singing the Negro National Anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing." Social graces were emphasized as well. Boys were taught to tip their hats to girls "so that when they became men, they would be respected," Moore said.

At that time, the primary method of teaching was drill, drill, and drill again. That's how Hunter teacher Helen Davis' students learned the names of all 48 states and their capitals. Another teacher, Hatti Mitchell, supplemented the drill with a strap. But Miss Lane had a different approach. "She wielded a big stick just by being quiet," recalled Hunt, who was one of her students and later her physician. He is now retired from family practice.

"My crown and glory was to see my children be somebody," said Miss Lane, whose starting salary at Hunter was $54 a month. "I'd go in every morning and say 'think." If you want to be somebody, you can be somebody." And many became somebodies. They

learned trades, and some of her students eventually went into social work, teaching, politics, law, medicine and the church.

Although religion was not taught, it was emphasized at Hunter. Moore recalled how teacher Mary Phillips loved her daily morning devotions, reading each day from the New Testament. Her favorite, he recalled, was the Book of Proverbs.

On some holidays, religious pageants were presented in the auditorium. Moore remembered that in the nativity scenes, "a white doll with sky-blue eyes would symbolize the baby Jesus in the crib and his mother would be a black Madonna." And during assembly, Paul Powell, accompanied on the piano by teacher Celia Wortham, often sang "I want to be ready to walk in Jerusalem just like John," with all the students joining in the chorus.

In those days, there was no "social" promotion and students who did not make the grade repeated it. Hunt remembered some of his classmates were still at Hunter years after he had moved on to Washington High School. And former Hunter student Laura Brown, a retired school administrator, said she has never gotten over the humiliation of failing second grade. Decades later, she still believed teacher Addie Logan Stroud should not have kept her back.

Despite the rigid drills and emphasis on discipline at Hunter, many students managed to throw spitballs, horse around, and even fall in love. Moore wrote "I love Alice" on the sidewalk while classmate Christine Boykins thought of ways to get his attention.

In the upper grades, some older girls had their hair straightened by beauticians while the boys "conked" theirs. Conking, said Moore, was "putting grease on your hair and letting it be straightened out until it would shine like glass."

Since Hunter had no gymnasium, the students played outside, with boys on the west side of the building and girls on the east. They all played with marbles and horseshoes, and some girls played with dolls—white dolls with blonde hair and blue eyes.

Inside, there was special and sometimes professional entertainment. Lightner related vivid recollections of the blue velvet curtains in the huge auditorium parting to reveal clowns, magicians, ventriloquists, and other performers.

After school, additional entertainment was provided by the manager of a local movie theater who awarded free tickets to the best-behaved students. But while Moore and Lightner were frequent recipients of those tickets, Hunt said he never received any. He still does not understand why, recalling, "I thought I was pretty well-behaved."

When Julia Williams retired in 1944, Hunter had 738 students in grades 1 through 7 and a faculty of 19.

James W. Eaton, 1944-1953

James W. Eaton, whose wife, Minetta, taught briefly at Hunter, succeeded Mrs. Williams. Easton remained principal for nine years, with the exception of a one-year assignment at the Crosby-Garfield School. For that year, industrial arts teacher Arthur Williams was acting principal at Hunter.

Dr. Robert Bridges, former superintendent of the Wake County Schools and former provost of St. Augustine's College, described Eaton as a man who recognized and developed good teaching and administrative talent. "Eaton was a leader. He took people like me under his wing," Bridges said.

Ida Bower, who taught at Hunter for 21 years and in her retirement often returned to tell stories and play games with the children, remembered Eaton had a "loving concern for children and faculty, so much so that we called the school family." Eaton, in turn, had the respect of the faculty and the community.

During his tenure at Hunter, additions to the school curriculum included industrial arts and home economics. And, recalled Mrs. Eaton, the school got some new clocks and a water cooler.

But Eaton also is remembered by a former Hunter student for helping to raise funds to buy books and supplies the school could not obtain from the city of Raleigh. Andria Fields, who taught third grade at Hunter and currently teaches fifth grade at Olds Elementary, was a student at Hunter in the 1950s. She and Mrs. Brower said many of the school's books were old and worn, with missing pages—often hand-downs from white schools—and the shop classes never had sufficient equipment.

"Being black, we resented it, but we learned to accept it," said Mrs. Brower, pointing out, "if you go around carrying a chip on your shoulder, you become sick. The feeling was they are doing us wrong, but what can we do?"

There was indeed something they could do and did. They raised money on their own for new books, supplies, and equipment. The school help ticket-selling contests and the girl whose parents sold the most tickets became "Miss Lucille Hunter" who road down the street in a car float. Ms. Fields recalled: "One day, my Mom came to school with me, and at assembly they announced: 'Little Miss Lucille Hunter is none other than Andria Fields.' I was so proud."

The fact that everyone was black brought students and faculty closer together. In fact, recalled Ms. Fields, teacher and parents well worked together in those days. "Some kids didn't have food and teachers would send some home: 'You take this home and give it to your mother,' they would say. For our part, we would make sure the school was kept clean."

Many of Ms. Fields' classmates continued their education at Ligon High School and later learned trades or went into various professions or politics. A few, she notes, died prematurely, some of drug overdose.

William Wilson Hurdle, 1953-1974

When Eaton left to become principal of Washington Elementary and Junior High School in 1953, William Wilson Hurdle succeeded him at Hunter. By that time, Hunter had only six grades. Seventh graders had transferred to Washington Junior High.

Hurdle remained principal of Hunter for 21 years, during which time there were three significant changes, one of which altered Southern education forever. But the first change was the result of a devastating fire that ravaged Hunter and seriously damaged school morale.

On the night of January 22, 1965, two 14-year-old Hunter students broke into the school and vandalized several classrooms. One of them dropped a lighted match in the dark auditorium. The fire ignited the velvet drapes, gutted the entire 600-seat facility and destroyed more than half the school. The boys fled without tripping the alarm but were subsequently caught and sent to a reform school.

Although there was extensive physical damage to Hunter—insurance estimates were about $300,000—the blow to faculty morale, according to one former teacher, was even more significant.

At the time of the fire, Dr. Bridges was teaching sixth grade at Hunter, and almost 40 years later, he vividly recalled the traumatic shock of the aftermath. "We were awakened in the middle of the night and had to get all the records out of the school," he said. "The superintendent came by and accused some teachers of causing the fire by leaving combustible material in closets."

Some Hunter classes were temporarily housed at Ligon High School, but others, including Bridges' class, met in the Hunter School basement. But it was not those dark, dusty temporary quarters that depressed Bridges.

"That fire left a scar in the human fabric of the school. It altered our plan of operation," he said. "It was kind of like the school family or environment had been violated."

But when reminiscing, Hurdle would not dwell on the fire. Saying he did not believe it was deliberately set, he preferred to discuss the faculty at Hunter during his tenure. "I had teachers who understood children, were willing to accept them as they were and bring them to where they should be," he said. Those teachers included Alma Reid, Gladys Turner, Ida Brower, Pauline Goodline, and Dr. Bridges, he said.

Hurdle, like Mrs. Williams, was a firm disciplinarian who believed in corporal punishment, but he preferred the paddle to the strap. Most parents did not object to its use.

Emphasizing he did not approve of corporal punishment in the educational system in the 1990s, Bridges defended Hurdle's action, noting things "were different then."

"At that time, there was a bond between the home and the school that was solid and parents knew you cared about their children," Bridges said.

Hurdle was also firm with teachers. Gila Harris, a retired teacher who taught at Hunter in the late 1950s, had planned to take her child to the Ice Capades on the evening of a PTA meeting. It was the last night of the show. But Ms. Harris did not have much choice, and said, "Mr. Hurdle informed me that if I wanted to keep my job, I had better show up at the PTA meeting."

The fact that the teachers' lounge was across the hall from Mr. Hurdle's office may account for its being empty much of the day. "You dared not be caught even looking like you might be idle," said Ms. Harris.

One young substitute teacher protested to Mrs. Brower: "Nobody is going to tell me how to breathe." But years later, when she had a permanent assignment in another school, the contrite woman visited Mr. Hurdle and said, "I love you; I realize now you were setting the stage for a good teacher."

William Walker, a former social studies teacher at Ligon Middle School, was a student at Hunter in the '60s. Like Ms. Fields and Bridges, he stressed that Hunter teachers were like parents and the school an extended family. Walker recalled that many teachers donated lunches and clothing to needy students, "but they never put you down as a student or person."

Bridges was one of those generous teachers. He was hired by Hurdle for his first teaching job, on recommendation of Eaton. It changed his life.

"For me, it was the doorway to the profession," Bridges recalled later. "I walked in there (Hunter) and took over a fourth-grade class. St. Augustine's had prepared me, but I had no real feel for how I would do as a teacher." According to Hurdle, Bridges was an outstanding one, even if his style of teaching was somewhat less conventional.

Admittedly, Bridges' had a different approach to teaching: "I called my students mister and miss, which was not received too well by the faculty because I had a tendency to break the routine. I would take my class outside at odd times. Sometimes I would sit in the back of the classroom with the class instead of up front. Sometimes I took my class on the stage for the purpose of self-expression."

Walker was one of Bridges' students and recalled, "He (Bridges) was only about 24 or 25, but he was like a father. Some of the students would go over to his house and have a conversation just like we were part of the family. He told us we could come there any time if we had completed our homework."

The average class size ranged from 42 to 48 students, but Bridges recalled his classes were often larger after Christmas because he took on additional students, "the troublemakers nobody else wanted." But there were some students Bridges could not help, such as a boy who was eventually executed for murder.

Bridges pointed out that a child's achievements have much to do with self-image. "A black child looks in an environmental mirror, the profile of the black male in society. There is a tendency to set a low expectancy." Still, said Bridges, a lot of his students made it.

He credited Hurdle for helping to prepare him for his administrative career. "He was good for me in terms of giving me leeway and extra responsibility," he said. Bridges added that he probably became an administrator today because of the responsibility he received from Hurdle.

Hurdle continued the practice of home visitation, with faculty responsible for visiting their students' homes at least twice a year. Teachers were not supposed to let the parents know when they were coming, recalled Mrs. Brower. "There was no telling what you would find—sometimes a drunken father or mother; a scrupulously clean house with no father and eight illegitimate children; or parents who, on learning their child misbehaved, tell you to beat the devil out of him." But Mrs. Brower insisted that she never administered corporal punishment to any of her students, noting, "You can do more with a child by telling him you love him."

During Hurdle's tenure as principal, in addition to repairs after the fire, eight new classrooms were added to Hunter, and the cafeteria was enlarged. But in 1971, there were more significant changes: integration came to North Carolina schools, and Hunter became a sixth-grade center.

Phase II—Integration

Sixth Grade Center, 1971-1978

It was not terrifying; I had white teachers in college. My background was training to teach children, forgetting what race they were.

Hurdle was describing how he felt about the integration of Hunter—having white students and teacher in the building after being principal of an all-black school for 18 years. He said he just took it in stride.

But Bridges, who at that time was an administrator in the Raleigh public school system, recalled Hurdle's frustration: "Hurdle had strong beliefs regarding school operation in the administrative sense, and it really crushed him to give them up. A lot of his pride was abused. The insulting thing to him was the white faculty rejected so much of his administration. The white supervisors came with great authority. Everything changed, and he had no choice but to go along with what the majority of the white faculty was dictating."

Still, Hurdle smiled as he remembered how quickly his school's physical appearance improved after integration. "It (Hunter) was an old building, and there had been a lot of repair that needed to be done. At the end of every school year, the principals had to submit a list of repairs. I had presented those lists for five years in a row before integration came. We asked for water fountains, toilet seats, and other repairs to the restrooms. And every year we were told there was no money for them.

"Then, some of the parents came in before we held open house and saw the state of the broken toilet seats and broken bars between the stalls. When they questioned me, I told them, 'I am only the principal here. Your complaint should be taken downtown.' Then the superintendent called and bawled me out for not reporting the repairs. I told him to look back in his files. Well, that weekend you never saw so many carpenters at the school."

But when asked about changes at the achievement level, Hurdle insisted that before integration—in fact, all during his tenure as principal—Hunter had a reputation for high academics. He credited the home-school cooperation for helping to bring this about. Then, to illustrate that point, he told an anecdote: A teacher had sent a note home with a student, requesting that the boy's parents help him with his homework. The next day, the angry mother came to Hurdle's office and complained: "I thought the teacher was paid to teach." Hurdle had to explain the teacher meant the parent's help as a supplement and not as a substitute.

Hurdle, too, saw the school as family and emphasized he did not believe in a child's expulsion unless every other method was exhausted. "Whatever problem a family member has, we try to solve it. You don't kick a kid out of your home because of a squabble," he said. "You sit down and try to work it out."

But it was hard to keep the "family" intact after Hunter became a sixth-grade center. The students were only there for one year and then moved on to junior high school. That was the feeling of George A Coburn, who succeeded Hurdle as principal when he retired in 1973.

George A. Coburn, 1973-1976

Coburn found the school in good order but said he believed the now-defunct sixth-grade centers were merely a token approach to school integration. "One-grade schools were a way of achieving integration without incurring a lot of resistance," he said, noting that many students returned to mostly segregated schools when they completed the sixth grade.

He also pointed out that the new cycle of students each year did not give teachers and classmates sufficient time to really know one another, and many developed smug attitudes such as "I am a senior in the only grade here."

A saving factor, Coburn recalled, was the family with several children, each of whom followed the other to Hunter's sixth grade center: "The parents got involved and there was some continuity."

On the other hand, former Hunter teacher Marguerite Exum, who came to Hunter at the start of its sixth-grade center period, believed it had many positive aspects. She said, "It was good educational grouping, very well handled, an excellent opportunity for students of the same age to be involved with one another." She noted that sixth graders are at a difficult age, "not babies and not quite young adults."

During that phase of Hunter's history, peer counseling was introduced. "I can't think of another thing that touched a student more than going before his peers to be disciplined," recalled Mrs. Exum. The peer council gave offending students a list of goals to achieve before they could return to classroom activities. In addition to learning the meaning of obedience, self-discipline, and respect, offenders had to write a composition on how they might have handled the situation differently.

For Mrs. Exum, those were exciting years. Women began pushing harder for equal rights, and Mrs. Exum remembered the Hunter girl who felt it was her right to play on the school football team. "I made it very emphatic that she could not play football with the boys," she said. But after the girl's parents came to school to support her stand, and at Hurdle's

insistence signed a waiver absolving the school of responsibility, their daughter became the first girl to play on the Hunter football team.

Eugene Holshouser, 1976-1981

Hunter was still a sixth-grade center in 1976, when Eugene Holshouser became principal. Like Coburn, he was disappointed the sixth graders did not have sufficient opportunity to know one another, their teachers, or the school. "They stayed for only nine months," Holshouser said. "The thing they probably remembered most about Hunter was busing."

Phase III—Gifted and Talented Program

Merger, 1978

In 1978, another significant development affected Hunter: the merger of the Raleigh City and Wake County school systems. In the 1970s, the city schools were losing enrollment while the county schools were overcrowded. In 1978, Hunter was only two-thirds full, and there was talk of closing the school. With the merger came the idea of magnet schools, a strategy to attract students from the periphery of the county to the city's under-enrolled schools. Hunter became one of those magnet schools.

Seven years after becoming an integrated sixth-grade center, Hunter was again a K-6 elementary school. Only this time, there was a magnet component to attract students from other parts of the county. That component was a program for gifted and talented (G&T) children, the first of its kind to be implemented in the city-county schools that had just merged. Hunter also became the first Wake County school to have teachers certified to instruct G&T classes.

When the G&T program was first implemented in 1978, Holshouser was principal and he said it was a challenge to him to persuade West Raleigh parents that Hunter was the place for their children. But, he said, "when they were convinced, they became our biggest supporters." There were 150 children in the integrated G&T program, including 50 sixth-graders.

Unfortunately, that initial G&T program was responsible for another kind of segregation: ability grouping, as those children in the gifted classes were separated from those attending regular classes. Moreover, G&T class enrollment was limited to 25, while 29 was the maximum for other Hunter classes. These factors, said Holshouser, may caused some jealousy at that time on the part of the regular school population toward the G&T group, and challenged him to keep the two programs equal. In addition, the Hunter principal had to contend with transportation problems created by the logistics of busing children from all over the county to one location.

Holshouser described the Hunter faculty as close-knit. And not only was the atmosphere warm and friendly inside the school, but on cold winter days, the warm pipes under the building made the area a haven for street people who often had to be dislodged for the safety of the children.

Holshouser considered the implementation of Wake County's first gifted and talented program to be his administration's greatest achievement: "There had to be both a knowledge of giftedness and the ability to operate two schools in one."

Victoria Freitag, 1981-1984

The "two schools" were still in place in 1981 when Victoria Freitag followed Holshouser as principal at Hunter. Recalled Mrs. Freitag: "Downstairs they had the regular school and upstairs was the gifted and talented program." Then a third component was added—the extended day, where supervised care was provided for students from 7 am to 6 pm.

Mrs. Freitag believes the gifted and talented program with its special electives provides a favorable alternative for children whose parents are not satisfied with the regular elementary program. But, she observed, not all parents make the correct choice: "Sometimes they may have chosen based on their own desires for their children, and not because it was the best program for them." Moreover, she continued, "identifying children as academically gifted does not automatically mean they will be able to do the work the program entails."

Sometimes, Mrs. Freitag said, it took six months to a year for many children to adjust. "When they were in a regular school, they were big fish in a little pond. Then when they came into the magnet program, they were little fish."

Cornelius Swart, 1984-1985

When Cornelius Swart succeeded Mrs. Freitag as principal of Hunter in 1984, the ratio of black to white children was still higher than desired under integration, despite the superior program, outstanding teachers, and wide range of electives at Hunter.

Recalled Mr. Swart: "We did as much integrating as we could, but we recommended (to the Wake County Board of Education) that the entire base area be broadened to make Hunter a county-wide magnet school."

Sue King, 1985-1990

When Sue King was appointed principal in 1985, Hunter still had the two programs—regular and gifted and talented—with academically gifted students in classes separate from the base population. "The problem was we had a school within a school," recalled Mrs. King. In the non-G&T classes, 80 to 85 percent of the students were black.

Then the school board acted on Mr. Swart's and Mrs. King's recommendations. It assigned almost all of the base Hunter students to other schools and recruited a different group. However, those reassigned could reapply to Hunter, which at that time housed grades K-5.

"I had to go out and recruit students into the school—not just academically gifted children, but all kinds—so we could work toward not having identifiable classes in the program," said Mrs. King. She pointed out that currently Wake County's gifted and

talented programs are based on the premise that all children have gifts and talents. "What I did was to put children in those classes who could do well, even though they were not (identified as academically) gifted." Mrs. King provided the leadership to make certain every child felt special and there was a learning environment.

In addition to achieving closer racial balance in the classes, Mrs. King encouraged interaction among all the children—"When you have a school of choice, parents feel it is worthwhile to send their children on a 45-minute bus ride." And she instituted an open-door policy whereby parents could drop in any time to see their children.

Mrs. King also helped bring about some physical changes at Hunter. "The first summer I was there, we cleaned from top to bottom," she recalled. She also decorated the interior with plants, pictures and artwork. And during a $1.5 million renovation, new classrooms, a media center, circular driveway, and side parking lot were added, and the cafeteria and gymnasium reconditioned.

In 1987, Sue King received the Outstanding Principal Award from the Wake County PTA Council. Some reasons for her nomination follow:

> ***Mrs. King challenges both teacher and student to achieve their creative potential and draws upon all her resources to support their many diversified demands. In so doing, she has provided us with a school in which all (including parents) are eager to work. Perhaps the most valuable way Sue King has fostered community involvement in the PTA has been through providing ways in which to help one another.***
>
> Cleo Edwards, Kay Silver, Pamela Kinsey-Barker
> Hunter Elementary Nominating Committee

> ***As a parent, I have been amazed with her awareness of my children as individual students….One can see her concern for the individual child and her concern for the school as a whole…Her administrative style is reflected not only in the high morale of her teaching staff, but also in the confidence and enthusiasm of the PTA board….***
>
> Mary Louise Nesbitt, Hunter PTA President

In 1990, Mrs. King was appointed special assistant for leadership and staff development in the Wake County Public Schools and has since retired from the school system.

Cecilia Rawlins, 1990-1993

Cecilia Rawlins succeeded Mrs. King as principal in February 1990. "When I came (to Hunter), I felt we had an extremely strong academically-rounded program," she said. She promised that the school would continue to provide a diversified program to meet the needs of all the students, noting: "All children have gifts and talents."

The challenge Hunter faced, and continues to face, she said, is "that the needs of all children be met equitably." During her tenure, she introduced multi-aged classes in the basic curriculum and aimed to meet the needs of all children at all levels, both those identified as Academically Gifted (AG) and those not in the AG program. She is particularly proud of the strong arts program during her years at Hunter.

Hunter continued to have an "open-door" policy, where parents were encouraged to visit the school and classroom. In fact, Ms. Rawlins believes parents' positive involvement in the school is a key to a successful program, which she described as a three-legged stool: "One leg is the parents, one leg is the child, and one leg is the school." Ms. Rawlins left Hunter in 1993 to become principal at Wiley Elementary.

Lynn Williams, Ph.D., 1993-2000

During Lynn Williams' seven-year tenure at Hunter, she sought to imprint upon the school a balanced vision that reinforced teaching within a natural learning cycle. Using theories of multiple intelligences from educational theorists Howard Gardner and Bob Sternberg, Williams sought to blend creative and analytical learning and give it a practical purpose in the everyday teaching at Hunter. Such a manner of teaching gives each child "a moment to shine," she says.

Coming from a background as a specialist and classroom teacher as well as work in early education, Williams sought to bring the "different beams of light" that were shining at Hunter and steer those beams in the same direction--"true north", as she put it. Using her leadership skills and a joy for learning, Williams put systems in place that allowed teachers, students, and parents to have defined roles at the school and yet have the leeway to pursue those roles independently, while driving toward the same goal—making Hunter a vibrant place for learning for all children.

"You know that bumper sticker, 'It's Happening at Hunter'? It's really true," Williams said. The complexity of Hunter allows for varied learning experiences where children can shine in roles they find comfortable but also push their boundaries outside their comfort zones.

At Hunter, she says she was blessed with an exceptional staff that accepted each other and appreciated each other's strengths and unique qualities. Now a principal at a traditional school, Williams says what she misses most is the arts curriculum at Hunter.

"It doesn't matter what your EOG (End of Grade test) score is," she says, "the arts enrich all the kids' lives."

Highlights during her years at Hunter include an appearance on ABC's "Good Morning America," in which Bob Sternberg, a professor at Yale University, and the morning show's crew visited Hunter to discuss applications of intelligence theories and filmed the students in their classrooms, putting those theories into practice. Author visits by Seymour Simon, a science and technology writer, and Sheryl Harness, author of historically-based children's books, were examples of how to integrate these writers' works into rich learning experiences. "These special events had an integrated focus that Hunter teachers could make happen," she said. Dr. Williams also enjoyed the theatrical productions that showed off creative talents of students. In April 2000, Dr. Williams was appointed principal of Yates Mill Elementary, a new school in southern Wake County.

T.H. Mitchell, 2000-2001

T. H. Mitchell was appointed principal of Hunter in April 2000. She closed the school year and promised to spend the following year listening to Hunter's students and parents while continuing to raise the bar for academic excellence for all students. Program design remained the same, and she furthered the open-door policy for parents by initiating a student form, "Let Me Tell You About My Child." She believed that all students were "stars" and staff members were "star polishers," she said. A bike security guard was hired to patrol the campus. Improvements were made in landscaping, and additional parking spaces for visitors were added. The most significant development was the beginning of a $4 million renovation project that added a wing of classrooms, including a new art room, a kitchen and revamped office space to the 73-year-old facility.

Mrs. Mitchell said, "I believed in being a hands-on principal. I loved visiting classrooms and all the students knew my 'secret' signal. Getting to know the students was a top priority." Mitchell believed that teaching is a highly personal art, not a science and believed students learn best when they view the teacher as an "authentic, warm and curious person," and when "affection and empathy (are) the center of the educational process." She said she used that philosophy to lead Hunter as a flagship school for excellence in education for all students. Mrs. Mitchell left in June 2001 to work in the Magnets Program of the Wake County schools.

David Schwenker, 2001 to present

David Schwenker succeeded Mrs. Mitchell and remains principal today, having served as a teacher, assistant principal and principal at other Wake County schools before coming to Hunter. "My job is to support the staff and strengthen the school," he said. Schwenker has placed high priority on recruitment—both of high quality teachers and a wide variety of students to Hunter. In many ways, "recruitment is easy," he said, "because people can

feel the warmth of the school." In 2002, 150 new families came to Hunter. As principal, Schwenker conducts twice-weekly tours of the school to provide information to interested families and plans to add other creative ways of recruiting new families. One of his methods of recruiting includes returning to "house-to-house" recruitment, used in the early days of magnets, where Hunter parents host information sessions in their homes for others who wish to learn more about enrolling their children in Hunter.

Despite changes in principals over the years, Schwenker said the gifted and talented curriculum at Hunter has stayed the same, and that one of his greatest challenges is keeping the magnet program innovative and unique. "I want Hunter to remain the most innovative elementary school in Wake County," he said.

"Hunter is a flagship magnet," said Schwenker. He has established a team of teachers to form a Vision Group that will take Hunter into the future. One goal is to have each teacher trained in serving Academically Gifted students in the next several years.

Across all subjects, Hunter has an outstanding faculty, Schwenker says. He is particularly proud of the arts curriculum at Hunter. For the winter 2003 production of "Annie," both the performance band and orchestra provided music, a first for an elementary school in Wake County. More than 50 students sang and danced or worked backstage for a 90-minute production of the Broadway favorite, and more than 40 played their instruments in the band and orchestra.

The arts are strong and popular at Hunter, in large part because of its exceptional and talented music, drama, art, and dance faculty, Schwenker said. More than 50 students participate in the band program at Hunter, and more than 50 in the strings program. The two kilns allow the two visual arts teachers great opportunities to offer advanced classes to students at every level.

Schwenker hopes to have five classes across each of the grades eventually and has already brought smaller class size to the upper grades. He continues to be amazed by the excellent students at Hunter. "My goal is to continue to challenge all students and have them gain an appreciation for diversity," he said.

* * *

Lucille Hunter Elementary School has come a long way from its beginnings in 1927 to truly become a 21st century school complete with sophisticated technology—a state of the art media center, more than 300 computers, televisions in every classroom, air conditioning, and video cameras. Its classrooms are bright and filled with energy.

And the school's 75th year has been filled with events in celebration of its rich history and dynamic future. In addition to the unveiling of Mrs. Hunter's portrait, the school has

celebrated the 2002-2003 school year with picnics, parties, the completion of the tile wall, a special elective dedicated to Hunter's history, and other special events.

One enduring highlight will be the Outdoor Learning Courtyard, which will be commemorated on behalf of the 75th Celebration. The Courtyard, an enclosed outdoor space created when the new wing of classrooms was added during the 2001-02 renovation, will include an amphitheater, gardens, and other outside settings that allow for both one-on-one instruction and group activities. A plan has been completed by a team of designers from N.C. State University that specializes in educational outdoor spaces. With the Courtyard and other 75th Anniversary celebrations, the staff, students and parents of Hunter look toward the future.

Patrice Lewis, who has worked on the administrative staff of Hunter for 17 years, has served as a vital link of continuity through five principals and three major building renovations. Throughout it all, she has maintained her good humor and easy-going spirit. "I can't imagine working anywhere else but Hunter," she said in her office during a conversation interrupted by teachers wondering about their budget allocations and students looking for bags of ice and bandages for small injuries. "The most wonderful thing about working here is following the students and getting to know the younger siblings of older students. I love seeing graduates of Hunter once they've moved on, and I can always still see that innocence, that 'elementary school' look in their faces."

Fran Yohman, who taught at Hunter for more than 25 years, before retiring at the end of the 2001-02 school year, believes that Hunter has overcome its greatest challenge of the past—that of maintaining a balance in the classroom between high performing and low performing students. "The school has found solutions to those past problems of segregation (within the school). It's much better now than it used to be," she said. Maintaining that balance will continue to be a challenge for the future, she said.

Mr. Schwenker also agrees that important changes have unified the student body. Fifth-grade students have open seating at lunch—a significant privilege that means students can sit with any friends, not just those in their homeroom class. The arts, electives, and language arts and social studies classes are projects-oriented and heterogeneously grouped.

Ms. Yohman believes the main future challenge for Hunter will be to protect classroom teachers from burnout. "In the magnet program, teachers have four hours to teach what other have to do in six hours," she said. "We've got to protect our classroom teachers." At Hunter, teachers need to be flexible to succeed, and it is a place where creative teachers thrive, she said.

Ms. Lewis agrees—"Magnets have a lot going on," she said, "but if I worked anywhere else, it would seem like I was in a coma. Something's always happening here at Hunter."

In 75 years, Hunter Elementary School has undergone an incredible metamorphosis—from a traditional all-black elementary school to a racially mixed modern magnet marvel.

"Gone is the sea of ebony faces. They have been replaced by an assortment of every nationality," noted Andria Fields, the Hunter student of the 1950s and former Hunter teacher who now teaches at Olds Elementary. Admitting that there still may be some pockets of discrimination in the school system, Ms. Fields insists: "Those of us who are dedicated and truly professionals do not see kids as black or white. We see them as children."

In past history, Hunter's teachers stocked toothbrushes, scrubbed students' necks, and paid surprised visits to their homes? "Those first Hunter teachers were the original schoolmarms," said Ms. Fields.

In 2003, Hunter teachers are just as dedicated to their students. On a given afternoon, one might find art teacher Cindy Pryor or Carolyn Graf finishing projects in the school's kilns. Fourth-grade teacher Ryan Blohm leads an Ultimate Frisbee team on Thursday afternoons after school, and third-grade teacher Sharon Mogilski hosts a reading club. During breaks, drama instructor Heather Weaver prepares for an upcoming drama production that incorporates the music programs, headed by Joy Clayton, Matthew Pellas and Gina Ali.

Over the years, teachers like Miss Lane, Mrs. Brower, and Dr. Bridges formed an attachment to Hunter that has endured. That goes as well for teachers who serve Hunter today.

Throughout Dr. Bridges' administrative career, the former school superintendent kept watch over Hunter, he said, returning often to the school where he began his teaching career. "When you get to be superintendent," Bridges explained, "you need to know who you are. For me, Hunter has been an identity anchor."

While acknowledging radical differences between the old and new Hunter in terms of facility, teachers, and student body, Bridges insisted that there were also still similarities. For one thing, he noted, children at today's Hunter School still have the same eagerness to learn that he found there in 1961.

The biggest similarity, said Bridges, is the sense of spirit and excitement. "The excitement of children is very much what it was. And that's the essence of the school."

originally written 1992, Iris June Vinegar

updated 2002, Christine Kushner

Iris June Vinegar is a Raleigh writer and public relations specialist who has won numerous awards for her features, speeches, and handbooks, including A.S.S.K.-Adult Student Survival Kit, which she wrote while an adult student at N.C. State University. She also won a Thompson Theatre professional playwriting award. Coincidentally, she tutored students at the Lucille Hunter School in 1971 when it was a sixth-grade center.