

Parents of students in the Wake County schools need to know about a promising new policy. The school board has agreed that children living in integrated Raleigh neighborhoods will not be bused to ensure racial balance elsewhere.

## A better option for integration

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RALEIGH

**T**his last round of school redistricting in Wake County was volatile. Many parents simply had had enough of their young children being bused for long distances for either racial balance or to alleviate overcrowding. Parents expressed anguish, and even some anger, at open hearing last month.

I, a parent who has participated in this process, want it known that the Wake Board of Education did listen to organized parent groups who offered them reasonable alternatives. The final plan adopted on March 23 was substantially altered from the earlier proposal, and clearly took into account parental input.

I believe something else was hidden in the changes made to the original proposal. The Board of Education — prompted by community input from our neighborhood and a solution from the Raleigh City Council — made a small but perhaps significant step in a new and promising direction. For the first time, parents seem to have a new alternative: children in integrated neighborhoods will not be bused to ensure racial balance elsewhere.

Board member Jean Schillawski stated gently (quoted in The News & Observer, March 24), "I think there are some neighborhoods that are already addressing racial balance. It's not logical to expect them to be part of this reassignment." The Raleigh City Council agrees, and unanimously passed Resolution 850 which requested (among other things) that the "Wake County Board of Education take into consideration the development and preservation of integrated, inner-city neighborhoods in reassignments of students."

of the county.

Parents who care about sparing their children the trauma of redistricting during elementary school, who value neighborhood schools, who dislike children spending much time on buses, and want assignment to a magnet school can — if they choose carefully — have it all. Simply buy a home in an integrated neighborhood assigned to a nearby magnet school. The social policy: encourage home ownership in integrated neighborhoods, and use the schools as magnets.

How did this preliminary commitment to supporting residential integration come about? Good old-fashioned community organization and a reasoned, thoughtful response from our elected officials. This is the political system working, really working, just like our children read about in civics class.

Let me explain exactly what happened. I live in Longview Gardens, a middle-class urban integrated neighborhood east of downtown. The 37 children from our community were slated for redistricting from their local magnet school, Hunter Elementary, to a school about an hour's bus ride distant. This was unacceptable to us.

### POINT OF VIEW

Most of us have moved here recently, or remain here, due to several factors: a conscious desire to raise our children in an integrated neighborhood, the proximity to our inside-the-Beltline workplaces (e.g. Wake Medical Center, state government, downtown business offices, N.C. State University and Shaw University) and the belief that our children would go to three terrific magnet schools (Hunter, Carnage and Enloe) without having to apply and then pray to get in. The magnet schools have worked, as should be their intent, by pulling in families to residentially integrated neighborhoods.

Remember, if you will, why we began — and I believe, still need — busing for racial balance: because African-Americans and white Americans have often lived in separate neighborhoods and communities, perhaps even separate worlds. And these worlds were not, are not, and cannot be, separate but equal. As we move toward the 21st century, we don't think anyone really wants to go back to having children attending racially homogenous schools, even if they are close to their homes. Today's education must prepare students to thrive in a diverse

school integration serves the educational needs of all children.

But busing young children to distant schools, simply because that has become habit, is unacceptable. The ultimate long-term goal is to end the racially isolated worlds in which children — and their parents — live. Isn't one facet of that goal to have neighborhood schools which are naturally desegregated, because the neighborhoods themselves are integrated?

The Board of Education appears to be moving in the direction of giving Wake County parents a new choice: If you want your child to attend a neighborhood magnet school, live in an integrated neighborhood.

Try ours: it's lovely and diverse, with modest and affordable split-level homes, rambling ranches on lakefront property, even mansions. Longview Gardens was outside the city limits when developed by the Pee family as the first suburban development near Raleigh, and so we have yards of an acre, lakes, wide tree-lined streets and beautiful homes. Or ask your real estate agent to find you another "node" (that is, school system talk for neighborhood) within the integrated and assigned to a nearby magnet school. Unlike many cities, urban Raleigh remained remarkably livable, with lovely neighborhoods hidden throughout.

Now, if you are a suburban parent, you may be worried about living inside the Beltline. And it is true, we do live closer to the city than neighborhoods with dangerous streets than our friends who live in Cary. But as the events in the suburban development of Woodcroft so painfully illustrate, you can escape from poverty and the criminal activities of foster care, wherever you live. But if you choose to live in a (de facto) segregated neighborhood, then you are choosing to have your child experiencing redistricting as it needs to racially balance schools change, you take your chances in the magnet lottery.

The deliberations of the Board of Education during the last month indicate that you may indeed have another option. Choose a residentially integrated community near a magnet school, inside the Beltline. Move in and breathe a sigh of relief. The children on your street will know one another because they interact daily at school. If you get within the Beltline, better yet, you will be able to get to your child's classroom, read a book and be back at work within an hour. A congratulations, you are now part of