

Cox proposal: \$9 million for West Charlotte High

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Manager Harry Jones proposes for CMS and would be linked to the board accepting accountability goals.



Cox

The school board has asked for \$290 million, \$25 million more than last year.

Cox, who is retiring from the board later this year, is often a swing vote among commissioners. Republicans, who hold a 5-4 majority, have tended to hold the line on school budgets despite 7,000 new students over the last two years. Democrats are usually more supportive of increased school spending.

West Charlotte has a long and glorious history. It is the

last formerly all-black high school in the county and was Ground Zero when Charlotte-Mecklenburg campuses were desegregated in the 1970s.

"West Charlotte is an institution," said Laura Ellington, a former co-president of West Charlotte's PTSA. "It's not just a school."

But it is no longer the district's star campus, fueled in part by a 1999 federal court ruling that ended CMS's reliance on busing for desegregation. Middle-class families — black and white — took off for suburban schools. So did some of its best teachers. As a result, student achievement has lagged, something Cox believes the county should try to reverse.

"Something radical certainly needs to be done as far as the academics," Ellington said. "That was a significant issue when we were more

heavily involved with the school."

If money is appropriated to West Charlotte and test scores improve, Cox said he'd like to try those programs at other schools. West Charlotte would be a formidable challenge.

Last year, fewer than 32 percent of students scored on or above grade level in eight of nine end of course tests. A quarter of 10th-graders passed a comprehensive exam and student attendance was 89 percent, compared to 94 percent statewide.

Nearly 67 percent of West Charlotte's teachers were fully licensed by the state, 15 percent below the N.C. average, and turnover was 25 percent, 9 percent higher than N.C. as a whole.

"I think what we have to do with West Charlotte and other schools is take bold

action," he said. "You don't make bold action with incremental plans."

"This idea came from the realization that 60 percent of children in CMS are doing just fine, the business model works for them," Cox said. "But there's another 40 percent where the business model doesn't work for them. If you can figure out what works at West Charlotte, then you can export it to other schools."

Cox, who met with West Charlotte parents and supporters Wednesday at the Education Center, wants to move quickly. Commissioners are expected to vote on the 2004-05 budget June 15, and the school board's support is critical.

"That means the Dr. (James) Pughsley and the school board have to embrace it," he said. "Not a social embrace. A bear hug."

Ellington, whose husband graduated West Charlotte in the 1960s and son graduated in 2000, said money could help, but won't cure everything.

"It's more than a matter of resources," she said. "The school faces so many challenges. It almost seems to reflect what's going on in the country education-wise."

2, 4, 6, 8: Barber-Scotia football left at the gate



Fly on the Wall is an occasional column chock full of rumor, innuendo and a smattering of truth. If you're a veteran Post reader, no further schooling required. If you're new, congratulations, and where in the heck have you been?

That's Fly's legal disclaimer, brought to you by the good people at Dewey Cheatham and Howe, attorneys to bugs big and small.

• Barber-Scotia College suffered another blow last week when word leaked out that the Concord school dropped its fledgling football program. Without playing one single, solitary game.

One of Fly's Spies passed on the info after one of the now-former coaches vented to a few close friends. Fly was looking forward to football Saturdays in Concord, 'cause you know there'd be some serious BBQ around the way.

But Fly doesn't blame school officials for pulling the plug and leaving all those recruits without a place to play and coaches without jobs. With all the fires administrators face keeping the joint open and its accreditation intact, football should be the last thing on their minds.

• If you're looking for black people on WCNC, NBC 6, anchor Sonya Gantt is all you're going to get.

At a gathering of public relations folks in Charlotte, a suit at the station said NBC 6 is a suburban station and if you don't live in Ballantyne or some other posh Charlotte locale, then the station isn't covering it.

According to Mr. Suit, NBC 6 isn't interested in the urban market (that's the high falutin' buzzword for black and brown).

No wonder they're in third place in the ratings.

• Fly was inspired this week — mail actually addressed to yours truly. The contents was a note suggesting Mecklenburg commissioners are plotting to get rid of the Office of Minority Affairs, which has been around for a good many moons. Excuse Fly's callousness, but what has it done since the good old days when former director Ahmad Daniels and County Manager Harry Jones went at it over hyphenated

Americans?

• Speakin' o' Harry, who's betting there'll be fireworks over the county budget like last year's dust-up with Chairman Tom Cox? What theater — and totally unscripted, too.

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