



Right: Hundreds of people gathered on the streets in front of Shaw University in Raleigh, N.C., to demonstrate against the new school board policies on diversity. Below: Protestor Chris Smith led marchers by chanting in his megaphone. Participants formed lines as they marched down Wilmington Street in Raleigh.

ALL PHOTOS BY TRACY RAETZ | Staff Photographer



Local rally challenges proposed changes to Raleigh school system

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equal opportunity, mothers also attended to show support for diversity in schools.

"As a mom whose children got an excellent education, I am marching so all students have access to the same education," said Pat Kinecheloe.

While the attendees expressed a general belief that diversity improves the educational experience, the school board members do not agree that diversity is the top priority. Chris Malone, Wake County school board member, said he does not believe the educational system during the past 10 years has produced satisfactory results. He expressed a positive attitude about the reassignment.

"People take it as an article of faith that if you put kids in different backgrounds together they are already going to have a better grades," Malone said. "It is a growth experience, but if diversity gets in the way of achievement then we have our priorities wrong."

According to Malone, the current school assignments hid underprivileged children in "healthy schools," masking the problems associated with student achievement.

Still, Vanessa Lucas, a rally participant, said she does not believe neighborhood schools are going to solve problems concerning education and expressed disappointment in the reassignment.

Wake County had a system people were proud of because of its progress in terms of racial and socio-economic diversity, Lucas said.

"We gather to say to those that want to drag us to the politics of yesterday, 'we won't go back,'" Barber said. "It increases parent involvement. It gives kids a stable environment and an opportunity to know fellow students and teachers. It provides consistency in that regard."

Although Malone acknowledges that a neighborhood school system will not directly increase the number of programs and resources available to students, neighborhood schooling will provide students with a foundation for student achievement through stability and parent involvement, he said.

"Student achievement is our number one priority," he said. "And that we find a way to succeed for every single kid, regardless of race."

While the marchers can agree on this objective, they do not believe that neighborhood schooling will achieve increased student achievement.

"I grew up in segregated schools, and it's unequal," said Ernie Stine. "They don't learn as much. They are behind and that's not fair."

Posters reading "Separate, but equal does not work," indicate that the marchers still believe in the verdict of *Brown v. Board*

of Education. Greg Flynn, a rally participant, said he fears the high poverty schools will continue to lack resources necessary for sufficient education and student achievement.

High poverty communities do not have PTA members able to fund large programs and projects, and these schools often educate students with English as a second language, he said.

"We need to allocate more resources (to high poverty schools) and (we're) not likely to do it," Flynn said.

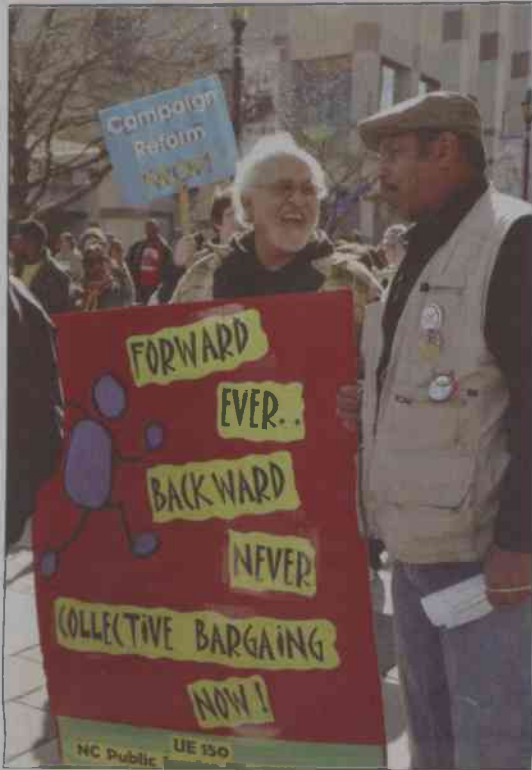
While many attended to evoke positive change in North Carolina and maintain past progress, Rodney Harrington saw the rally as an educational opportunity for his children.

"I brought my family," he said. "I want them to realize what our forefathers went through so that we can have what we have today."

Still, Todd Jealous, NAACP president and CEO, said he does not believe the fight is over.

"Do not believe the illusion that our forefathers finished the battle," Jealous said. "We are still fighting the old Jim Crow."

Jealous and Barber led the rally, which began on East South Street and ended in front of the North Carolina State Legislature building on Jones Street. The day of the rally marked the 102nd birthday of the NAACP.



Above: James Locklear marched with a sign reading "forward ever ... backward never," in representation of the N.C. Public Service Workers Union at the NAACP sponsored rally.

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VIDEO: See and hear scenes from the rally in Raleigh.

<http://bit.ly/TPOraleigh>
Melissa Kansky,
Multimedia Contributor



Above: Marchers and supporters of the NAACP-sponsored rally protested the changes made by the Wake County school board in regards to the diversity policy Saturday, Feb. 12 in Raleigh, N.C.