

Zoning

from page A1

gling to find room for all of their students. Kernersville and Southeast middle schools must rely on mobile classrooms to accommodate their populations.

Kernersville Middle has 1,063 students, almost 200 more than it had last year at this time. Southeast, which is also in Kernersville, has 882 students year, a figure that is unchanged from a year ago.

Greg Thornton, the assistant superintendent for middle schools, said the faculty and staff at Paisley are using the extra space to their advantage by reducing class sizes. He added that the school was able to get rid of its mobile units for the first time this year.

"In that particular zone, a lot of the youngsters chose Wiley and Jefferson. It's unfortunate. Paisley is a fine school," Thornton said.

Jefferson Middle, which is in the Robinhood Road area, is one of three new middle schools that opened this school year. Meadowlark Middle School, off Country Club Road, and Clemmons Middle School are the other new middle schools. Both Meadowlark and Clemmons have student popu-

lations well over 800. Clemmons has 685 students.

Thornton said only about five classrooms at Paisley are not being used.

Board member Marilyn Parker said she is pleased to see underpopulated schools taking advantage of their extra space. For instance, she said, some schools are using unused classrooms for tutoring labs.

"Capacity doesn't bother me as much as utilization of facilities," she said. "I think some schools that are down in numbers, but they are doing some really creative things with the extra space."

But County Commissioner Walter Marshall says he would like to see more students at the schools that are currently underutilized.

Marshall, a former School Board member, said that he and all those who sat on the board with him in 1995 knew that redistricting would mean that schools in inner-city communities would suffer.

"That's why we opposed that program; we knew that's what would take place," he said.

Marshall says he doesn't fault parents for sending their kids to schools that are closest to their

homes, but he favors restructuring zoning in order to foster population growth at inner-city schools. Marshall said the most desirable programs must also be put in place at the most undesirable schools in order to boost population.

And though overcrowding has become a big issue in county suburbs over the last two years, Marshall said the system should utilize all of its current facilities before it even talks about the possibility of new schools.

"How can you support a new middle school in Forsyth County when you have a school in the city underutilized, like Atkins?" Marshall asked. "There is no need for a new school; there is a need for a redistribution of students."

School Board member Vic Johnson said that capacity is at the top of his list of concerns.

"(Look at Cook, Elementary School), they only have 200 kids over there. We just spent \$2 million over there. You tell me what school can run a suitable program with 200 kids in it?" Johnson said.

Johnson is also in favor of the school system putting unique programs in place at underpopulated schools. That's one of the reasons he supports bringing the Edison



Photo by Jeri Young

Students prepare to head home from LEAP last spring. LEAP's move to Kennedy Middle School has not increased the rolls at other area middle schools.

Project to an inner-city school in Winston-Salem.

Johnson said the capacity issue is a no brainer. He says that since schools in the suburbs do not have enough room for the kids they serve, the students should, instead, be sent to Atkins, Paisley and other inner-city schools.

"We have schools that are over

capacity. Why not bring some of those kids out of those middle schools? ... If a school is over capacity you need to put the children in the schools that have room," he said. "That's simple. It doesn't take an Einstein to figure that out."

Both Thornton and Parker are holding out hope that as the redistricting plan goes on, the numbers

will begin to balance out at the system's schools.

At the time of the interview, Thornton said he had received no complaints from parents about a lack of students at their child's school.

"We are optimistic, next year, that we are going to see some increases back at Paisley," Thornton said.

BLR

from page A1

"Now think of the money you would use to tutor them and think of who's doing the tutoring. The same teachers that failed the students are the ones that are tutoring the kids. What would make you think they would know any more the next time around? Now if those kids don't pass after the tutoring, then you're going to have to remediate them back into the program.... That means there will be another year of instruction that you're going to have to spend, money you're going to have to spend to educate those kids. ... We spend anywhere from \$5,200 to \$6,200 a year, and it takes 80 hours of (additional) instruction (to remediate students who fail the end-of-course tests) at \$20 an hour - that's about \$1,600 per student - and then we have to spend (more money) the next year. Now who's wasting money?"

"Now wouldn't it be cheaper to get somebody that could address that problem the first time around? ... When you talk about 52 percent of the black kids not on grade level, you're talking about 7,000 kids. ... If you had a stock that was performing that poorly, there is no way you would keep it for four years. You would get rid of that stock. ...

"We've got all these people right here who come (to) these schools. ... They have these workshops and they talk about staff development. But after you have the staff development ... you (need to) have somebody to go in there (and) monitor the program to make sure that the people are doing what they're supposed to be doing in staff development. ... But when you go back in that classroom (now), they are basically doing the same things they've always done.

"Now the one thing I like about Edison they give you 40 hours of staff development before you go into that school because they're going to (tell) exactly how they want the students taught. And then they come and monitor the program. And then during the year they give you another 20 hours of staff development. In other words, it is research oriented. What we're doing, there's no research behind it. ...

"Edison started out in 1995 with 25 schools. They're up to 77 schools now. Last year (the first Edison school opened) in North Carolina, in Goldsboro, North Carolina. They advanced Goldsboro, a (predominantly) black population, 17 (percentage) points in one year (on state ABC tests). They went from 32 percent to 48 percent.

"The second year, they put computers in the homes. ...

"I'm not saying that we're going to be able to educate every child in the school system, but I believe that we're better than 50 percent.

"I taught for (more than 30 years). If I failed 52 percent of my class, my principal would have killed me, chewed me out. Think about that... 52 percent of

the black kids we're failing....

"The question I have of public schools, they're always talking about what they can do. My question is when? What is your time line? If you can do it, when ... will you show me how successful you can be? ...

"White kids do very well. About 11 percent of the white kids fail the end-of-course test. If white kids were failing at 50 percent, these white people would burn this place down. They wouldn't tolerate it one second. But I don't understand how black people can sit back, you can tell them that something is happening to their children and they don't seem that concerned about it."

Johnson said of the school system: "We ought not to have all these millions of programs and not be able to say exactly what are your best practices to teach this segment of kids over here.

"It's big business. That's why they fought the charter schools so. That's why they don't want vouchers... They don't want Edison because they feel if Edison comes in and does a better job than what they're doing, the people are going to take their children to Edison. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure this out. They don't want any experimentation in this community here.

"They didn't want charter schools in here. Before long the voucher is going to be here because... we as a race of people all over this nation are saying we are tired of the way our children are being educated. People have a lot of excuses but they don't have any solutions. That's the bottom line."

"Your teachers organizations (are) the ... number-one organization that is always anti-anything new in education," Johnson said.

"They should be (the) number one (supporter)," Floy Howie, chairman of the roundtable's education committee, said.

Johnson agreed. "They should be the proponent for it, but they're fighting it."

Howie asked how the school system should deal with the problem of young people moving away from the area after they are educated, to find better paying jobs.

Johnson said, "The sad thing about it is most professional black teachers' children have gone elsewhere because they knew there were better jobs. My daughter and my son are in corporate America. ... But they still are stakeholders in the education of the other kids because they are taxpayers. ... Education is the best investment a child can have."

Howie said the quality of local schools is one of the factors industries and businesses consider in deciding whether to locate in a community.

Johnson said, "That's the first thing they ask about: Where are the better schools?"

"I would want every school to be a quality school," Johnson said. "I don't care where it is, but we need to concentrate on some of the schools that we already know that are weak and strengthen those schools."

Some officials of the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County

School System have said they believe the increase in test scores in the ABCs accountability program at the Edison school in Goldsboro were due in part to an

assistance team that the state sent to the school. Some have also criticized Edison for hiring teachers with much less experience, on average, than the national aver-

age; and for having a much higher teacher turnover rate than the national average. Some have referred to magazine articles criticizing the company's financial

outlook. Some have said that Edison Project is too expensive and there is no factual proof that Edison schools out-perform other schools.

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