

# Trust invests big in future of local kids

BY LAYLA GARMS  
THE CHRONICLE

The Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust has great expectations of today's youth.

The Winston-Salem-based Trust — created in 1947 by the will of R.J. Reynolds heir Katherine Biting Reynolds to improve the health and quality of life of the state's financially needy — will invest \$30 million over the next decade in a program designed to help Forsyth County youngsters excel.

"We're making a huge investment and a huge commitment, conception through kindergarten," said Karen McNeil-Miller, president of KBR. "The research just continues to be overwhelming that if children can get off in the developmental years and in the first school years to success, it changes the trajectory for their school years and their lives."

The Great Expectations initiative kicked off recently with the awarding of a \$202,000 grant to pre-k and kindergarten teachers at Equity Plus and Title One-designated schools.

In addition to covering membership dues to the North Carolina Association of the Education of Young Children for teachers and principals, the money includes a \$200 per classroom stipend to cover the out of pocket expenses that many teachers incur in trying to provide

materials and supplies for their students, and \$1,000 per classroom to invest in developmentally appropriate materials as the teachers see fit.

The Trust deliberately made the grants to the individual teachers, so each teacher can fill the needs that he or she feels are most pressing, McNeil-Miller said.

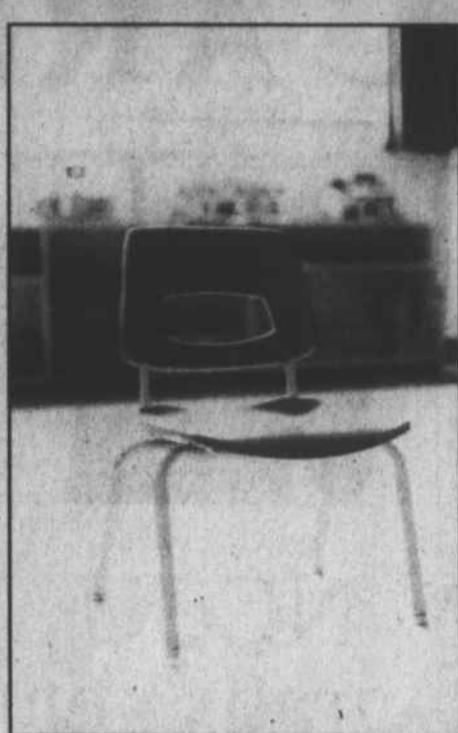
"We want the teachers to have complete control over those funds," she stated. "We just want to give them money because we know this money will be well spent."

The school system is just one of the agencies that Great Expectations is partnering with. Others include the Family Nursing Program and Reach Out and Read, which targets low income mothers of babies and infants, and early childhood development centers.

The Nurse Family Partnership, a community healthcare program for low income, first-time mothers, was awarded a \$2.5 million five-year grant from the Trust last year, before the inception of Great Expectations. The Partnership, which now falls under the Great Expectations umbrella, sends out nurses to make monthly in-home visits with mothers and their babies until the infant's second birthday. The Reach Out and Read program, which has been awarded a \$49,500 Trust grant, develops babies and toddlers' vocabularies by providing a series of books for their mothers to read to them during the crucial early years of their mental development.

Funds from the initiative are helping these partners to enhance programs that foster intellectual growth and development before children reach kindergarten, according to Crocker, who as director of the Trust's Poor & Needy Division, oversees Great Expectations.

"There is much research around the benefits of investing in early childhood education," said Crocker. "...Great Expectations just sets the stage for the expectations of these children that we're going to invest in, that they will continue to succeed and be well in life."



Trust leaders believe strongly that Great Expectations has the potential to make a tangible impact on the quality of life and future of countless children, said McNeil-Miller, who has led the Trust for the past eight years. McNeil-Miller added that she is especially excited that Great Expectations is proactive, rather than reactive.

"We would rather not do remedial efforts," she remarked. "We'd rather support (children) and help them flourish and sprout when they're younger."

Northwest Child Development Centers rounds out the current Great Expectations grantees. The agency's Mudpies Coliseum location received nearly \$42,000 from the Trust to cover the cost of staff, materials and tuition for nine preschoolers who would otherwise not be able to attend the facility, which is ranked highly by the state for its education and other standards. Mudpies also received a \$350,000 grant from the Trust

last year to aid in the procurement of the land for its forthcoming Mudpies Downtown East Facility. Northwest Child Development Centers CEO Dr. Tony Burton III praised the Trust for recognizing the importance of early childhood education.

"Most of the kids who drop out (of high school) had not as successful early starts to their education. The studies that are out there show that by third grade, you can tell whether a child is going to be successful in school," Burton explained. "I think the Trust recognized that (the problem) starts a whole lot earlier than kindergarten. We've got to do something to get these kids better prepared for kindergarten."

Burton said the program has a high probability of living up to its own name, because it focuses on fixing the issue at its core, essentially stopping the problem before it starts.

"If we can equal the playing ground for children, we can have more successful children across the board in our community, which makes our whole community more successful," he said. "...It's only (supporting) nine kids, but that's nine more kids that we have a chance to make more successful."

Crocker said Great Expectations leaders hope to work with other area agencies in the future in order to further its mission of ensuring that every child in the community gets a strong start to his or her education.

"We know that this works. We know that investments in early childhood education is a primary way to stem poverty and all that goes along with that," said the Kings Mountain native. "We will hopefully be adding other supporters that might have this same interest in this concept of making sure that early childhood education is a focus of this community."

For more information about the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust or the Great Expectations program, visit [www.kbr.org](http://www.kbr.org).

## Superintendent

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service, was on hand to talk about the search process. After the School Board reviews applications, Board members will interview candidates in February and March and hire a new superintendent by March 26, said Schafer, who said that the School Board will decide who to hire without any help or direction from the Association.

"We don't have a role in deciding who the board hires," said Schafer. "We don't screen candidates. We don't recommend them to the board. What we do is get them good candidates and good information about who those candidates are."

Many forum speakers, including a couple at Carver, have asked the School Board to hold another forum once the finalists for the job have been selected in order to let the public question the applicants. Although such a forum was held more than 18 years ago before Martin was hired, Schafer shot down those suggestions.

State law, she said, mandates that candidates' names be kept private unless the applicant consents to having his or her name made public. She said usually the most qualified candidates — such as those currently employed by another school system — are typically turned-off by having their names made public since it reveals to their current employers that they are job searching.

Diversity and equality were major issues for the racially-diverse group at last week's forum. Many voiced their disapproval of the School System school



Walter Marshall



Betty Quick

choice plan, which ended cross-town busing more than 15 years ago and resulted in a mass exodus of white students from inner-city schools. Critics say that the resegregation has further widened the achievement gap between white and minority students, and inner-city schools lack the kind of financial resources that have been shown to enhance a child's educational experience.

"I think overall, the issue of equity, transparency and zip code justice have not been met as much as they should've been," said County Commissioner Walter Marshall, a former member of the School Board.

Speaking on behalf of the Minister's Conference of Winston-Salem and Vicinity, newly-elected president Willard Bass said as long as some children are falling through the cracks, the school system is failing at its primary mission.

"We've always believed in one consistent vision for education: that every child must be provided high quality, well funded, constitutional, diverse education," said Bass, a minister at Green Street Church.

Speakers representing the business community, like Womble Carlyle Sanridge & Rice partner

Betty Quick, urged the School Board to hire a superintendent that will work with local businesses to produce a highly qualified, educated and diverse workforce.

"The business world has now embraced diversity; they understand it's important," said Quick. "We seek talented and well educated, diverse employees because we know we are better able to respond to the needs of clients who are diverse when we have a variety of view points and backgrounds when analyzing the problems we face every single day."

Dave Beveridge, a teacher, said the next superintendent should address increasing classroom sizes and work to build stronger bridges between his or her administration and educators.

"In the last couple years, I've come to believe the six words you don't want to hear as a teacher are: 'This is coming from Central Office,'" said Beveridge.

Alfred Harvey, a teacher at Atkins Academic & Technology School, asked his students what they wanted in a superintendent. He told the School Board that their responses included someone with high educational expectations, integrity and skills to engage the community.

Several parents also

spoke, including Lindsay Upson, who told the Board that her son faced such a hostile environment at his elementary school that she had to have him transferred to a different school. She hopes that the next superintendent will be supportive of parents going through similar situations.

"The school system is


supposed to be a support system," said Upson, a mother of two. "For many African Americans who are single parents and raising kids on their own, this is their hope."

The School Board is also receiving public feedback through an online survey at [wsfcs.k12.nc.us/Page/6695](http://wsfcs.k12.nc.us/Page/6695)

9, which will be up until Jan. 3. Schafer said that the survey — which is available in paper form by calling 336-727-2696 — has already yielded more than 1,500 responses. School Board members say that they will use the input that they have received from residents to formulate their questions for applicants.



Board Members (from left) Jane Goins, Donny Lambeth, Vic Johnson and Elisabeth Montsinger.




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