

# Evening the Score

## Local Minority Students Tell Stories of Adjustment

By ROBERT ALBRIGHT AND KATHLEEN WIRTH  
Staff Writers

With her cleats scraping against the asphalt and a heavy equipment bag swinging by her side, Aquilla Faust lumbers toward the softball field at Guy B. Phillips Middle School.

Faust, an eighth-grader, said she was nervously preparing for her late afternoon softball game.

But also weighing on her mind is the homework that awaits her after the matchup.

Faust, who runs track and plays softball and tennis at Phillips, is among many area minority students struggling academically.

Despite excelling on the playing field, Faust has suffered her share of difficulties in the classroom.

After discovering that she might not be eligible to attend East Chapel Hill High School next year as a freshman if her grades continued to slip, Faust said she realized she needed a better balance between her studies and athletics.

"I'm excited about going to East, but I noticed I wasn't going to get in (with my grades)," she said. "I've had bad grades, but I'm pulling them up."

school, some minorities struggle even harder.

For ECHHS sophomore Don Jones, early frustration and apathy toward academics has made the road to success a long and winding one.

Jones said his dream of attending UNC-Charlotte would be impossible without Advancement Via Individual Determination, a support program within Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools that serves a large number of minority students.

"My (AVID) teacher told me at the end of last year to do some 'soul searching' over the summer," he said. "He told me, 'If you don't want to succeed, don't sign up for AVID.'"

Before joining the AVID program and focusing his efforts on school, Jones said seeing his mother struggle as a single parent affected his devotion to academics.

"If home-life isn't all that good, a lot of minorities just say 'Why even try?'" he said. "I know, because I've gone through that same thing."

Jones said he was determined to graduate from ECHHS and become the first member of his family with a college diploma. His mother attended Bay Ridge Christian College in Texas for two years before dropping out to raise a family - she never returned to complete her degree.

"As far as education goes, my family doesn't really have much," he said. "I always have to be on top of things concerning education. My mom wants me to be the first (college alumnus)."

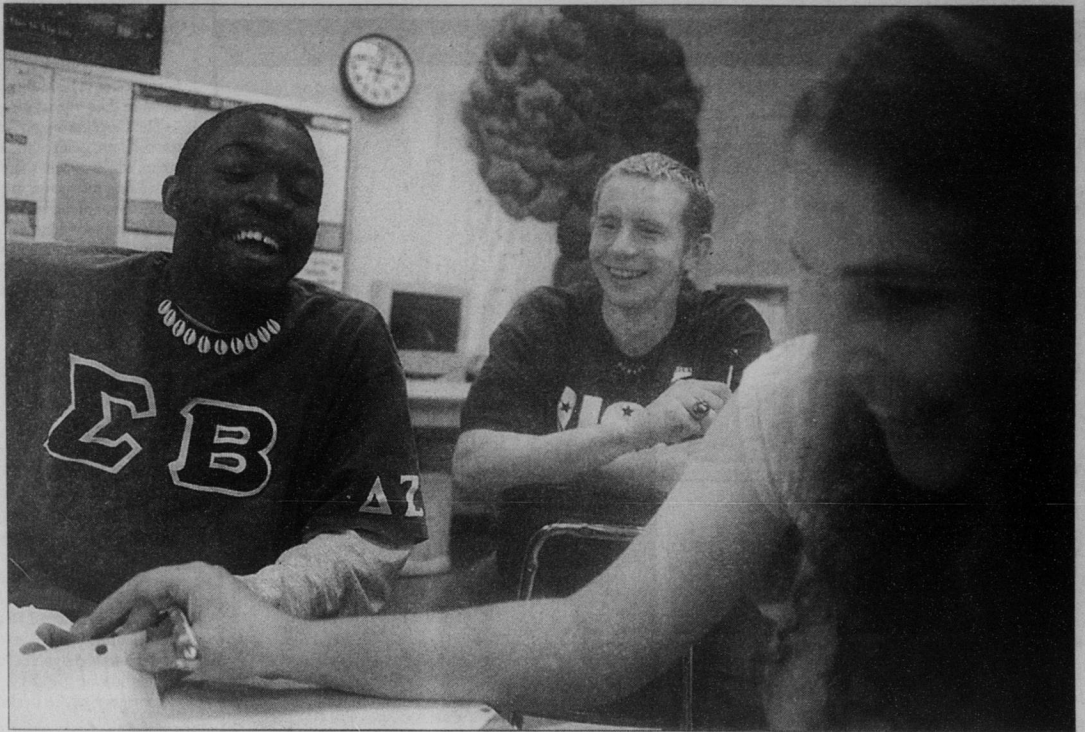
### Culture Shock

While Jones hurries to catch his ride home from school, across town a Chinese student quietly walks across the lawn of Chapel Hill High School.

After the final bell echoes through the halls of CHHS, sophomore Wei Li strolls along the sidewalk with his hands stuck deep inside his pockets - his mind racing with a mixture of anxiety and anticipation.

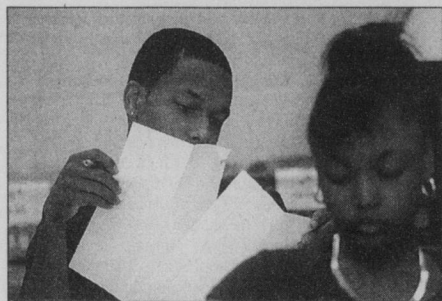
Since moving from China to Chapel Hill this past summer, Li said he had taken special measures to adjust to a new style of education.

"In China, I already had a good education," he said. "So when I came here, it was hard because I wanted to have school every day."



Quinten Flemming (left), Matt Sawatzky and Emily Ginsberg share a laugh during class at East Chapel Hill High School. Flemming plans to attend N.C. Agricultural & Technical University next fall.

DTH-GREG WOLF



Don Jones looks over a graded writing assignment in his English class.

DTH-GREG WOLF

Faust said she was confident her teachers would continue guiding her in the right direction, which she hoped would result in her advancement to ECHHS in the fall.

"I'm studying harder and asking for help (after school)," she said.

### Changing Paths

But once at ECHHS, a nationally ranked high

Li said he went to school six or seven times a week in his native country. Even though he had taken English classes in China, Li said there was no way to fully prepare for attending an English-speaking high school.

"The main thing I worry about is English," he said. "I had a good education in China, but I had trouble understanding English (when I arrived here)."

To combat his limited vocabulary, Li enrolled in English as a Second Language, a course offered at CHHS for students not fluent in English.

Li said his ESL teacher had done an excellent job preparing him for English 2, a class required of all sophomores regardless of their linguistic background.

"I didn't know much (English) when I got here, but my teachers have helped me a lot," he said.

In addition to taking two English classes, Li is also studying chemistry and honors pre-calculus. Out of his four classes, Li said his lowest grade



Aquilla Faust, known as "Speedy" to her teammates, cheers during a softball game between Phillips Middle School and Stanback Middle School.

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## Programs Push to Bridge Gap

By JENNY ROSSER  
Staff Writer

Area schools are giving students a chance to reach their potential by providing alternative programs for minorities and at-risk students that could improve their future opportunities.

In the Chapel Hill-Carrboro and Orange County schools, many programs designed to improve at-risk student's standing in the schools are comprised of a high percentage of minorities.

Ann Hart, assistant superintendent for curriculum for Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, said such programs were in place at each school.

"We try to meet the needs of all our students," she said. "We offer programs to students at all (grade) levels."

At the middle and high school levels, Advancement Via Individual Determination has been offered as an elective class for four years. The class is not necessarily directed toward minority students but does include a higher percentage than the school population, Hart said.

AVID is designed to prepare program participants for college by teaching reading and writing skills that will help them be successful in advanced courses.

"This class teaches students to be successful in note-taking, organization, writing and gives them an opportunity to interact with (role) models," Hart said.

She said students who showed a willingness to learn but were not necessarily making high grades were usually referred to AVID by parents or teachers. Unlike other programs which receive federal funding, Hart said AVID operated on local tax money and state funds.

Randy Bridges, superintendent of Orange County Schools, said that AVID was not operable within the Orange County School System due to a lack of funding, but that schools were looking into implementing the program in the future.

However, minorities in both school systems still have a large number of opportunities to interact with fellow students, teachers and role models.

William Evans, a guidance counselor at East Chapel Hill High School, said he found that the clubs and programs offered to minority students were very effective.

"I've personally seen students grow in maturity and skills," he said. "I think they really get a lot out of these programs."

LaTonia McCann, a teacher at Grey Culbreth Middle School, said AVID was designed to aid any students with average grades and motivation that had the potential to improve.

"These are students that could be doing better if they had skills," she said. "We try to get them on a college track."

In addition to AVID, Evans said clubs like Future Advancement of Minorities in Education, the International Club and Sigma Beta, an enrichment club targeting black males, have helped celebrate diversity and provide minorities with increased opportunities. "This (school) year FAME sponsored an African-American fashion show, participated in a Christmas parade and visited N.C. Agriculture & Technical



Wei Li, a sophomore at Chapel Hill High School, reviews his homework with ESL teacher Ron Aizen.

DTH-EMILY SCHNURE

University and Hampton University," he said. "They also have senior awards recognition."

Evans said the University was another resource utilized by the school system because UNC officials worked in conjunction with schools to offer tutoring and college opportunity programs. None of the clubs or classes for minority students are mandatory, but Evans said in the four years ECHHS had been open, all the programs had increased in number.

Another class offered to help minority students succeed in the public school system is English as a Second Language, a state-funded program. Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools have 13 ESL teachers, some of whom share schools.

An increase in the Hispanic population has prompted a larger number of ESL classes, materials and supplies, staff and modified curriculum guides. "We also started offering Spanish to the staff at lunchtime and after school," Hart said.

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### SCORES

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things that feed into performance of subgroups - education level of parents, socioeconomic levels, trends in performance for other minorities nationwide and peer groups, especially in the middle school years all affect the scores."

Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools Superintendent Neil Pedersen said a decrease in minority teachers was also part of the growing problem. The school system has a policy in place that dictates a correlation between the staff makeup and the district's demographics.

"On the surface, we're doing fairly well," he said. "We have a fairly good representation of African Americans in our teaching and administrative staff."

Osborne said students identified with teachers of similar backgrounds.

"Students often feel more comfortable, and in turn, do better if they have teachers more like them socioeconomically, in native language and ethnicity."

However, of the Chapel Hill-

Carrboro district's 7 percent of Hispanic teachers, none teach in a regular classroom, teaching mainly Spanish and other foreign languages.

This growing discrepancy is not limited to the system or to Hispanics. Statewide, there has been a steady decline in black teachers in the past 10 years, while the black student population has remained fairly steady.

As a result, many minorities have started looking elsewhere for their educational needs, often enrolling in charter schools. In North Carolina, 38 of the 75 operating charter schools serve a majority of nonwhite students.

Mary Anne Barden, an education consultant at the Office of Charter Schools, which determines whether to issue charters to prospective schools, said the number of minorities enrolled in charter schools was not surprising.

"If you have high needs in a population and charters are tailored to that need, then it follows there would be an increase," she said.

Fred Good, the founder of the School in the Community, a charter school that

had its charter revoked last year, filed a report in which he stated that the local school system failed to bridge the growing gap between economic classes.

"In fact, the (Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools) system with the highest SAT scores in North Carolina has made slow progress in closing the gap between the high scores of these students and the low scores of students from low income households, especially the higher grades," the report stated.

It was for this reason, Good stated, that he began the School in the Community. The school's minority student population was 54 percent, with 63 percent of the students coming from families living below the poverty line.

Chapel Hill-Carrboro Board of Education member Maryanne Rosenman said efforts from individual schools were a good start to solving the test score gap. "It takes a long time - it's not something you can come in and fix in a short time," she said.

"It will take more help and support for students falling into the gap over time."

### Local School System Enrollment by Race

