

## LOCAL

# Parents say they were last to know about early testing

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The third and final "wave" of statewide school reporting system conversions is nearing its close.

But catching the "wave" of conversion has not been an easy task for Cleveland County School administrators, educators, students and parents.

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction decided several years ago to switch all of the schools under its realm from their old Student Information Management System (SIMS) to a more technologically-advanced identification system called NC WISE.

Both systems help educators record and report information such as a student's grades, attendance, course information and other data. But NC WISE is on the Internet. According to DPI, it is "a Web-based tool that provides educators with direct and immediate access to a full spectrum of data on a student's entire career in the NC schools."

"The software (SIMS) that we've been using is over 20 years old. It's a DOS-based software program," said CCS's Director of Administrative Technology Mitchel Self. "So it needed to be updated. The new software is Windows-based."

He said that one of the big issues with NC WISE is that it is accessible on the internet. Kings Mountain Intermediate Principal Henry Gilmore said that in the end, NC WISE will be a helpful tool. "Right now we always have to call another school, request the information we need and it doesn't always arrive as quick as we would like it," he said. "But with this it will be more immediate."

After the statewide conversion is complete, schools will be able to go on-line and have instant access to a student's records. But Self said schools won't be the only ones who may have access. Within the next year, a parent assistant module coined "Parent Portal" will be up and running. It will allow parents to keep up with their child's records, including attendance and grades, on the

internet, he said.

Although NC WISE promises to be a handy resource, converting to the new state-mandated program has been a chore. "Any time you have a transition, it's going to be a transition, but I think in the end it will be a positive thing for our school," said KMMS Principal Stephen Fisher.

Self said that the most lengthy part of this whole process has been converting all of the courses offered at CCS to the new state code equivalents. They began tackling this step in August of 2006. "One thing that made it a little bit longer for us is that we used to be three different school systems before merger, so we had three different systems with three different ways to set up those courses," Self said. CCS decoded 8,000 courses for the conversion.

In another step, CCS also had to update a student's record for the new system, going back four years, especially for those in high school that may soon need their transcripts for post-graduation. "We have been planning for this over a year and a half now," said Director of Secondary Schools John Goforth.

According to Goforth and Self, CCS was informed last summer of its conversion week and "freeze date," the deadline for having all information into DPI for conversion - January 14. "We don't have any input on when we switch," he said. "They picked the week of the end of our semester."

But Goforth said although they knew of the deadline, they weren't sure it would stay that way. He said that so many other districts were given freeze dates and as they struggled to meet those deadlines, DPI changed the dates.

So they decided to wait it out and keep the academic calendar the same. But as September and October began to roll around and DPI still had not changed their dates, they realized that there might be a problem ahead. Goforth said that they recognized if they didn't cut the first semester short then they would be taking the risk of not

being able to print out report cards for students. "If we had problems, we didn't want to delay report cards," he said. "And we don't want to write it on a piece of scratch paper and send it home."

Therefore, CCS decided that all students grades K-8 would end their first semester before the Christmas break. Many tests and projects that were scheduled for January were bumped up to December. The counts for AR (Accelerated Reading) points also faced an early deadline, causing some student library helpers who earn their jobs based on AR points to be "fired." But they have since been rehired.

This early end to the semester caused some stir among the parents. Kathy Falls didn't know her child in the eighth grade would be having a test before Christmas until he told her his grade. She said that she didn't receive any letter informing her of the shortened semester or early test.

"Parents should have been notified when they (the schools) were notified," she said. "They say they want parents to be involved but we can't help our children if we don't know what's going on."

Sandra Stirewalt felt the same way. She has served on the school calendar planning committee for the past five years and was concerned about how quickly the school district could enforce an early semester. She said that she was told by a principal, the schools were informed about the early semester on December 1, but were instructed not to tell anyone. "I think this is a great school system but there is zero communication," she said. "I want to be told everything, especially, major changes like this."

"We felt like it was in the best interest of our students to give exams before Christmas," Fisher said. He added that students were not tested on areas that had not been covered. The first semester ended on January 4, instead of January 18. Fisher said that they didn't feel like it was very fair to let a student go

on Christmas break and then make them take a test right after they returned.

"We had to change our grading terms slightly. But the change has in no way affected what the students have done," Fisher said.

Goforth suggested that schools could use a different weight scale to measure grades this year. He said they could let the first semester count as 45 percent of a child's final grade and the last semester count as 55 percent. The final grade is the one that makes it into a student's official record, he said.

Letters explaining the early semester situation were sent out to parents on Monday.

As of Monday, Self said that they are on schedule for conversion. CCS will be sending all of its data to DPI on Friday for the transition. It will take DPI about a week to complete the conversion. CCS hopes to have all report cards for students grades K-8 printed and distributed on the normal date. But report cards from high schools, which were not able to take early EOC tests, will be distributed at least one week later than normal.

Semesters will resume regular lengths next year.

## Participants needed for observance of King Day

Participants are needed for the City of Kings Mountain's annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Observance, "Keeping the Dream Alive," on Monday, January 21, at 6:30 p.m.

The event will feature participants who will recite the "I Have a Dream" speech delivered by Reverend King on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963. Entries are limited to six individuals who will be competing for prizes.

The speech does not need to be memorized, simply following a copy of the speech is acceptable. If necessary, there will be auditions for the final six.

Additionally, local church choirs and lyrical dance groups will provide entertainment for this tribute. Rev. Prueella Sanders of Adams Chapel AME Zion Church will be the keynote speaker. The event will be held at the Joy Performance Center on Railroad Avenue in downtown Kings Mountain.

The event is free and open to the public. For more information, call city Special Events Director Ellis Noell at 704-730-2103.

### VARIETY WHOLESALERS, INC. ANNOUNCES THE OPENING OF A NEW ROSES' STORE IN KINGS MOUNTAIN, NC

January, 7, 2008 (Henderson, NC) – Variety Wholesalers Inc., today announced that the Company will open a new Roses' store in Kings Mountain, North Carolina. The store is scheduled to open the week of February 18th, 2008.

Roses' store will offer an extensive assortment in Electronics, Furniture, Housewares, Domestic, HBA, Food, Family Apparel, Shoes, Jewelry etc. All at EVERYDAY LOW PRICES!

The new Kings Mountain store will employ approximately 40 employees, of which most will be local residents of the Kings Mountain area. "We are excited about bringing Roses' into the Kings Mountain," a company spokesman commented.