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Vexed parent seeks answers, politely

Learning the lingo helps, mother says

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CARY - One unintended but predictable consequence of thousands of children being jostled from school to school is the toll it takes on their parents.

Some bemoan the situation and wring their hands. Others approach the situation as if it's a wild bull to be wrestled into submission, becoming expert at analyzing school system data.

Barb Walsh falls into the latter category. She's got reassignment on the brain.

She can rattle off the dates that the Wake reassignment plan was released and updated (Nov. 15, Dec. 16, Dec. 20). From memory, she can compare the ratio of low-income students and enrollment statistics documented in various reports.

She has sent e-mail to Chuck Dulaney, assistant superintendent for growth and planning, about her unhappiness at her family's assignment to Dillard Drive Middle School, which she says was portrayed years ago as temporary to her MacGregor Downs neighborhood.

In the past, she said, Dulaney didn't usually respond. Now he does.

Recently, Walsh has corresponded with Dulaney about her neighborhood's proposed reassignment from Apex High School to Athens Drive High School, five miles farther from her home. And she's doing it from what she calls a more "professional" vantage point.

"I don't understand this projection model," she might write.

And Dulaney will write back and explain it.

"He's not changing his mind or saying, 'Oh gosh, Barb, I see what you're saying,' but he is responding," she said.

Walsh attributes that partially to her newfound understanding of "school boardese," the language used in the reassignment plan. So Walsh, a freelance writer, has become proficient in terms like "growth management impact survey" and "socio-economic balancing."

Walsh's four kids attend two schools -- two at Adams Elementary in Cary and two at Lufkin Road Middle School in Apex.

Her oldest, Travis, is in eighth grade and sorely disappointed that he might not be able to attend Apex High School with his cousin who lives around the block.

"I don't really know why they reassign us," he said. "We're really close to Apex High School. It just confuses me why they'd do it."

It confuses his mother, too, and she's bent on getting answers.

She had never attended a Wake school board meeting before December, but now she's

determined to make her voice heard.

"I approach this the same way I approach everything else -- passionate but not irrational," she said.

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