

## K-12 Education

### Wake Parents, Students Condemn Diversity Policy

#### Apex, Cary mayors also criticize school board's reassignment plan during public hearing



By David N. Bass

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Parents and students from Apex High School protest Wake County's new batch of reassignments during a public hearing Monday.

APEX — Parents, students, and elected officials used a Wake County School Board public hearing this week at Apex High School to criticize the district's reassignment policy that often shuffles students from school to school in the name of diversity.

"As a taxpayer and a parent, I see reassignment as costly and disruptive," said Marian Hussey, a Cary resident with children enrolled in public schools. "Spending money, our money, without a proven cost-benefit is the definition of wasteful. ... Public servants should serve the people, not rule them. The board has spoken, but the taxpayers are speaking back."

Apex Mayor Keith Weatherly, an opponent of the school district's diversity busing policy, called on the board to eliminate annual reassignments that he said harm families. "The board of education must not continue to ignore parents and their well-intentioned actions on behalf of

their children," he said, drawing applause from the crowd of about 200.

Several dozen parents and students sounded off to school board members on a new batch of reassignments announced in mid-December. The school board's plan would shift 25,486 students to different schools during the next three years. The board is slated to take a final vote on reassignments Feb. 3, following four more public hearings in January.

The Apex High School hearing Monday underscored the tense relationship between the school board and many Wake County families. During the meeting, parents leveled much of their rhetorical ammunition at Policy 6200, which governs reassignment and attempts to create socioeconomic diversity by mixing high- and low-income students in schools.

"I believe the intention of [Policy 6200] is fantastic, but unfortunately the impact that the policy is causing is painful and disruptive to many parents," said Cary Mayor Harold Weinbrecht. "I've actually seen many parents reach a tipping point because of this policy. I talk to many of these parents, and they all value diversity. That's not the issue. But they believe there are better ways to implement economic diversity."

Some of the strongest criticism came from parents with students at Apex High School who were reassigned under the new plan to Athens Drive High School, located inside the Interstate 440 Beltline. Mark Darby, a resident of Churchill Downs in Cary, asked the school board to keep his 16-year-old daughter at Apex High rather than transfer her.

"The only thing that we can see that this move is going to accomplish is to cost more money at a time when we need to be worried about saving every single dollar that we can," he said.

Darby's daughter, Becky, told school board members that students should not be moved around to prove a statistic. "I am not a number that can be moved from one school to another to fill a vacancy that shouldn't be there to begin with," she said. "I shouldn't be there because it's cheaper than doing the right thing."

Don Frantz, a Cary Town Council member, said his six children have been shuffled among eight schools. He also stressed the importance of parents taking an active interest in their child's education.

"Parental involvement is the No. 1 indicator of how students performed in the classroom," he said. "I fail to see how moving children and families further away from schools promotes parental involvement."

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