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## CMS board seat attracts 22 candidates

District 3 appointment jumpstarts changes in Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools leadership.

By Ann Doss Helms

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Posted: Wednesday, Dec. 03, 2008



2/18/2002-Mug of Valerie C. Woodard, who filed with the Mecklenburg County Board of Elections Monday, Feb. 18, 2002. WENDY YANG/STAFF

### More Information

- [The applicants](#)

*Applicants for the District 3 school board seat will address the board at a special meeting at 6 p.m. Thursday at the Education Center, 701 E. Martin Luther King Blvd. It is open to the public and will air on CMS-TV Cable 3 at noon and 5 p.m. Friday, Saturday and Sunday.*

**Dianne Alexander:** 59, a speech pathologist who volunteers at Irwin Avenue Elementary. Says her work with struggling students and homeless people would add valuable perspective.

**Turin Auguste:** 74, a retired Boston Public Schools educator who runs a leadership consulting business. Says his experience and expertise prepare him to oversee the district's finances, personnel and curriculum.

**Linda Butler:** 57, a postal clerk who has grandchildren in CMS and volunteers in schools. Says her community and volunteer work lets her understand the concerns of youth.

**Dwayne Collins:** 41, a clothing-shop owner, associate minister and political activist who chairs Charlotte-Mecklenburg's Black Political Caucus. He has children at Independence High and has served on two CMS advisory boards; says he wants to reduce the number of low-performing schools.

**Colvin Morgan Edwards:** 70, a retired real estate broker and former assistant secretary of the N.C. Department of Transportation; served on a volunteer panel advising CMS on building and renovating schools. Says his management career and time in the Navy Reserve prepare him for board leadership.

**Michael Evans:** 56, Winthrop University finance professor, past president of Leadership Charlotte and member of several other civic boards. Says his children graduated from CMS schools well prepared for college, and serving on the board would help him ensure all students get a high-quality education.

**Andrew Maurice Holt:** 37, works for CorVel Healthcare Corp. Says he wants to improve test scores, curriculum, school safety and parent involvement.

**Michael Hudson:** 41, lawyer and administrator in charge of Central Piedmont Community College's Cato campus. Says providing an equitable education for his now-preschool children and all others is a key issue.

**Lucille Joe:** 44, a social work supervisor with Mecklenburg Department of Social Services and former educational coordinator for the Columbia Housing Authority. Says she wants to represent "the families and voices that are not being heard."

**Vivian Mitchell:** 45, a CMS secretary and parent. Says she wants to see "the student's achievement gap closed tight."

**Kojo Nantambu:** 56, a paid parent advocate and longtime volunteer for CMS. Says public education is eroding in Charlotte and nationwide and wants to push for "equity, balance and fairness."

**Hans Plotseneder:** 64, a CMS teacher and parent and 2007 school board candidate. Says his frontline experience in high schools would help the district improve academics and reduce dropouts.

**Aaron Pomis:** 34, science teacher at KIPP Charlotte charter school and a former program director of Teach For America in Charlotte. Says his experience in urban school districts would let him promote high achievement for all.

**Lucille Puckett:** 40, a home health care coordinator, CMS parent and 2005 school board candidate. Says her knowledge of fragile youth and families will be a plus.

**William Dalen Rice:** Age not listed, unemployed engineer and former Americorps volunteer. Says he has done "the physical and manual labor to improve society" and has process-engineering experience to analyze data.

**James Ross:** 73, retired management consultant and CMS volunteer and substitute teacher. Has served on several nonprofit and government boards; says he's "down to earth and (gets) things done."

**Larry Shannon:** 59, Citigroup operation specialist. Says the board needs "a new direction."

**Elizabeth Troutman:** 24, child advocate with Council for Children's Rights and volunteer with a CMS after-school program. Says she did extensive research on local and statewide education at Princeton University.

**Teresa Tudor:** 34, computer support specialist and CMS parent. Says she has "excellent interpersonal skills" that will fit well with the current board.

**Joyce Davis Waddell:** 64, retired CMS educator and real estate broker. Says her business and education experience will enhance the board.

**William Woodard:** 59, Lucent Technologies retiree and CMS volunteer. Says he wants to strengthen reading curriculum and dropout prevention.

**Willus Woodard:** 38, group home manager, former CMS behavior management technician and CMS parent. Says he wants to bring change.

Twenty-two people have applied for the District 3 seat on the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school board, kicking off a year of change in education leadership.

Two of the three members with more than a decade's experience, George Dunlap and Vilma Leake, have resigned to become county commissioners. The third, Molly Griffin, says she won't run in 2009, when all six district seats are up for election.

That means a significant shift in leadership for a school district with a \$1 billion-plus budget, 134,000 students and 19,000 employees. CMS is seeing the gulf widen between struggling urban schools and suburban high-flyers, where the county's clashes over race, class and philosophy often play out on the governing board.

"There's no more important time, and arguably no more important task, than those folks lining up to run our public schools," said John Lassiter, who spent 11 years on the school board before winning a seat on the Charlotte City Council in 2003.

The shift starts Thursday, when the District 3 applicants will have three minutes each to tell the remaining seven board members why they should succeed Dunlap, a 13-year board veteran who resigned to take the commissioners' seat left open by the death of Valerie Woodard.

Woodard's husband and son are among the applicants for the school board post. The district includes portions of east Charlotte, University City and central Charlotte.

On Tuesday, the board will appoint Dunlap's replacement and open applications for Leake's District 2 seat, in west and southwest Charlotte. After 11 years on the school board, Leake was elected to represent the same district as a commissioner. She took that seat Monday.

Dunlap and Leake were the board's only two African American members, in a school district where 66 percent of students are nonwhite. Tension over representation of minorities heightened last month, when Republicans Larry Gauvreau, Kaye McGarry and Ken Gjertsen backed an unsuccessful motion to leave those seats open until the 2009 election.

Dwayne Collins, chairman of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Black Political Caucus, is the highest-profile applicant for Dunlap's seat. Collins, a Democratic party activist, competed with Dunlap for the commissioner's appointment this year and lost to Dunlap in the 2005 school board election.

In 1999, Collins was one of two black CMS parents who sued Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, seeking to preserve court-ordered desegregation. Fighting for the opposite side was Gauvreau, who was among a group of white parents suing to end race-based assignment. Gauvreau cited Collins' that lawsuit in a recent e-mail calling his application "a new low."

Other applicants include an array of CMS parents and employees, civic leaders, education activists and retirees. State law would require school employees to resign to serve on the school board.

By the time the board chooses Leake's replacement in January, candidates are likely to be jockeying for the November vote to fill the district seats. The lack of longtime incumbents in at least three seats means opportunities are open for newcomers.

Griffin, the board's vice chair, said recently she's ready for a break: "I think 12 years is enough."

Gauvreau, who opposes the board's majority and Superintendent Peter Gorman on a wide range of issues, would be the board's senior member if he won a third four-year term. But he said he won't decide until summer whether to run.

"If the liberals continue to dominate and reject (along with the superintendent) meaningful education reform measures, I may surrender," he said in an e-mail this week.

Tom Tate and Ken Gjertsen, district representatives elected in 2005, say they plan to run again. The three at-large members won't be up for election until 2011.

The last time the school board saw such a loss of experience was in 2003, when Lassiter and Arthur Griffin, a 16-year veteran and former chair, opted not to run and then-chairman Wilhelmenia Rembert, with five years' experience, was defeated. A period of turmoil followed, in which school bonds were defeated, suburbanites called for splitting up CMS and business leaders formed a task force to advise the school board.

But both Griffin and Lassiter say this year's turnover could turn out to be a plus.

"There are a number of quality, qualified individuals who could step up to the plate," said Griffin, now an executive with a textbook publishing company.

The ideal response, Lassiter said, would be a strong turnout of "centrist-minded" candidates who will focus on education rather than "personal agendas and philosophy."

Mecklenburg Citizens for Public Education, a coalition of business leaders and education advocates, launched training for potential board candidates last month. About 30 people turned out to learn more about running.

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