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## Hopefuls vie for CMS board

**Seventeen people seek the seat vacated when Vilma Leake became a county commissioner.**

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Applicants for District 2 CMS seat shake hands with school board members after giving their 3 minute speech on why the applicants should be picked to replace Vilma Leake. ROBERT LAHSER - rlahser@charlotteobserver.com

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The applicants' comments will air on CMS-TV Cable 3 at noon and 5 p.m. today through Sunday, and can be viewed online at [www.cmstelevision.com](http://www.cmstelevision.com).

With an hour of formal remarks wrapped up, six days of behind-the-scenes lobbying for a Charlotte-Mecklenburg school board seat begins.

Seventeen people told the board Wednesday night why they ought to fill the District 2 seat vacated when Vilma Leake became a county commissioner in December (one applicant dropped out and one didn't live in the district). Leake sat in the audience, but said she won't endorse anyone because she represents them all as a commissioner. District 2 covers west and southwest Charlotte.

The board – including James Ross, who was appointed to the District 3 seat in December – will vote Tuesday on who should fill the seat until the 2009 election.

"It's a lot more fun over here," Ross said, smiling. He also competed in a field of 17 for the seat left empty when George Dunlap replaced the late Valerie Woodard as a county commissioner.

The two vacancies, coupled with a hard-fought battle over the chairmanship, create a rare chance to reshape the board's philosophy and style. Board members say they'll follow up with applicants and talk among themselves to winnow the field.

Some applicants started their lobbying quickly. Kimberly Mitchell-Walker, a CMS secretary and parent who is the

sister of Charlotte City Council member James Mitchell, had supporters holding up signs and handing out brochures Wednesday night. She touted her combination of experience with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and political campaigning. If appointed, she would have to resign her CMS job.

Jenifer Daniels and Donna Jenkins Dawson both submitted thick packets of biographical information and endorsement letters. Daniels, a 30-year-old Charlotte newcomer with a 2-year-old child, described herself as “old enough to be knowledgeable about our past yet young enough to be excited about our future.” Dawson, a mother of four who has run for school board, cited her extensive involvement in community groups that promote education.

Three applicants – Terry Brown, Richard McElrath and Lyn Sweet – noted that they'd bring three decades of experience as educators to the post. Many others have extensive volunteer involvement with schools, mentoring programs and other community groups.

“It's uplifting to me just to see this many people turn out,” said Kathy Ridge, executive director of Mecklenburg Citizens for Public Education, a nonprofit coalition of business leaders and education advocates. “There was no anger or rancor. It was all very thoughtful.”

Several board members voiced similar sentiments, saying they were impressed with many speakers. They say they'll start comparing “short lists” today to figure out who might get the five votes needed for the appointment.

“This is going to be fun,” member Ken Gjertsen said afterward. “It could be almost anyone.”

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