

**ORANGE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA**

**SCHOOL MERGER STUDY COMMISSION REPORT**

**ORANGE COUNTY, CHAPEL HILL - CARRBORO**

**SCHOOL SYSTEMS**

**Executive Summary  
&  
Committee Reports**

SCHOOL MERGER STUDY COMMISSION REPORT

On February 4, 1985 the Board of County Commissioners had before it an agenda item concerning the appointment of a study commission to consider the impacts of merger of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro and the Orange County school systems. During the following months there was an effort to get the two school boards to vote to have the Department of Public Instruction do the study. This effort failed because only one of the two school boards involved voted to concur.

The matter was continued until after the adoption of the annual budget so no one was appointed to the study commission until July, 1985. During the next two months a commission of thirty members was established and Richard E. Hildebrandt was named chairman by the Board of County Commissioners.

The first meeting of the newly appointed School Merger Study Commission was held in September, 1985 at which time the group elected its other officers and appointed a steering committee. Terrence Greenlund was named vice-chairman and Jim Murfree was named secretary. Other members of the steering committee were: Elizabeth Wells, William Richardson, Betty Francisco and Peter Topping.

Following the mandate from the County Commissioners, the Steering Committee recommended to the study commission that the group be divided into four study committees as follows:

Community Growth & Facility Needs: Robert Rose, Chair  
Curriculum/Program: Elizabeth Wells, Chair  
Funding/Finance: Watts Hill, Jr., Chair  
Organization/Staffing & Governance: Peter Topping, Chair

During the course of the year the real work of the study commission was done within the four committees. The full commission came together to hear from persons who had information the entire group needed to hear and from which all would benefit. During the month of February, 1986 two public hearings were held, one of Chapel Hill and the other in Hillsborough.

By action of the study commission the reports and supporting documentation are part of this final report. Attached to the four committee reports is the study commission's findings and recommendations for the consideration of the Board of County Commissioners.

The members of the School Merger Study Commission present this final report with their thanks to the County Commissioners for the opportunity to serve the County and with the request that the study commission be dismissed.

Acknowledgements

The work of the School Merger Study Commission could not have been done without the dedication of time and talent from those who have been given the responsibility for carrying out the request of the Orange County Commissioners. The study commission was composed of the following citizens of Orange County, representing many vocational and geographical areas:

Arthur L. P. Brown  
Betty Francisco  
Watts Hill, Jr.  
Norman Lowenthal  
William Richardson  
Robert M. Rose  
James R. Summers  
A. Joy Frelinger  
Wayne T. Kuncel  
Dan Lunsford

DeWitt S. Brown  
Terrence Greenlund  
Jeanette Jones  
Ralph C. McBroom  
Edwin Riley  
Anthony V. Seaber  
John T. Walker  
Peter A. Topping  
Ronald Wiegerink  
Sue Baker

Jeanette G. Eddy  
R. E. Hildebrandt  
Katherine Knight  
J. M. Murfree  
Richard Roberts  
Sandra H. Siegal  
Elizabeth C. Wells  
Mary Cay Corr  
Robert Bateman  
Gerry House

In addition to the faithful members of the study commission a special word of thanks goes to the following persons who made presentations to the group over a period of many months:

Darrell Spencer, State Department of Public Instruction  
Howard Maniloff, State Department of Public Instruction  
Ira Trollinger, Orange County Schools  
Michael Radz, Chapel Hill-Carrboro Schools  
Gary Koser, Chapel Hill-Carrboro Schools  
Don Liner, Institute of Government  
Wayne Watts, Orange County Schools  
Anne Barnes, North Carolina House  
Joe Hackney, North Carolina House  
Wanda Hunt, North Carolina Senate  
Russell Walker, North Carolina Senate  
Mebane Pritchett, North Carolina Board of Education  
Gene Causby, North Carolina School Board Association  
John Pyecha, Research Triangle Institute  
Marvin Collins, Orange County Planning Department  
Roger Waldon, Chapel Hill Planning Department  
Roy Williford, Carrboro Planning Department  
Gerry Cohen, Legislative Director, NC General Assembly

Each of the above has played a role in bringing the study commission to the conclusions it has reached. Some of them not only met with the full commission but also met with one or more of the four committees which did the portions of the study assigned to them. We thank them all for their time and talent.

## COMMISSION FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### THE COMMUNITY

#### A. Community Characteristics

Orange County, North Carolina, is a combination of rural and urban life styles. The urban southern section of the county is the site of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the rural northern section is the location of the county seat, Hillsborough. Remaining areas are farming communities for the most part, with the exception of the small town of Efland.

The two school systems in Orange County have served two different populations. The Chapel Hill-Carrboro (city) system serves a population with one of the highest concentrations of parents with graduate degrees to be found in the country. It is estimated that 92% are high school graduates and 69% hold college degrees. The city school system seeks to serve this population. At the same time, it seeks to offer programs to meet the needs of its students who are not college bound.

The Orange County (county) system serves a different population, one which is closer to the normal distribution of high school graduates, college graduates and professionals to be found in North Carolina. There are two diverse communities to be served - those whose needs are for a college preparatory program and those who will go directly from school into the workplace and, therefore, will want the schools to offer a broad range of vocational choices.

Neither system has the resources to meet fully all the needs of all its students. Each system had to establish priorities and make choices. The city system, for example, might benefit from a broadened vocational program, but in the absence of sufficient demand to warrant diverting resources from other programs where the demand is high, is unable to do so. The county system, on the other hand, might benefit from broadened advanced college preparatory course offerings, but has been unable to divert resources from vocational education courses which are in high demand.

Each system has developed its educational program to best meet the needs of its constituency. The differences in the system are explained by and appropriate to each constituency.

#### B. Trends

The population of Orange County has grown 27.69% in the 6 years from 1980 to 1986. During that time, the enrollment in the city system has grown 4% to 5,360 in the Fall of 1986. The county system has grown 7% to 5,108.

Enrollment projections for Fall, 1989, only three years away, are 5,999 for the city system and 6,873 for the county. This is an increase of 23% in three years. More significant is the fact that the county growth rate is 35% and the city rate 12%. Appendix E-4

The implication is that changes will be made in the county system to accommodate the new population which the completion of I-40 and continued growth in the Research Triangle will bring to Orange County. It is anticipated that the demands on the county school system will be for more emphasis on the college preparatory program.

- FINDING 1: The two school systems traditionally have served two divergent community populations.
- FINDING 2: Both communities are facing phenomenal growth which is changing the nature of the two communities and reducing their differences.
- FINDING 3: The school systems have roughly equal enrollments, teacher pupil ratios, and racial compositions.
- FINDING 4: The Chapel Hill-Carrboro and Orange County School Systems offer curricular and instructional services that compare favorably with that of other school districts in the state.
- FINDING 5: Per pupil expenditure by the Chapel Hill-Carrboro School System is higher than that of the Orange County School System. The total county school district current expenditures totalled \$14,550,000 or \$2,860 per pupil, while the Chapel Hill-Carrboro expenditures totalled \$18,172,000 or \$3,382 per pupil.
- FINDING 6: Both school systems are experiencing student population growth which will accelerate in the future.
- FINDING 7: Both school systems are serving students in schools which are considered to be overcrowded by State Department of Public Instruction and local school board standards. New elementary and high school facilities will be needed in both districts by 1990.

#### CONCLUSIONS

1. School improvements should be directed toward providing the same range of educational opportunities in both school systems so that the individual needs and expectations of all the students can be addressed.
2. The county has the capacity to finance whatever new school construction is needed and to finance equal funding of the two school systems' instructional programs.
3. Merger will likely increase school costs in the short run and might produce economies in the long run.
4. The method of organizing and selecting a merged Board of Education will be crucial for merger to succeed.

ADVANTAGES OF MERGER

1. Would provide all children in Orange County with the full range of educational opportunities required to meet their educational needs.
2. Would create opportunities for economies in facilities and transportation.
3. Would equalize per pupil funding countywide.
4. Would contribute to a countywide sense of community.

RECOMMENDATION

We believe that a single school system will prove to be desirable in the future. The commission believes that now is not the time for merger. To facilitate the possibility of merger, we recommend that the following actions be taken by the Orange County Commissioners now:

1. Equalize the per pupil funding countywide.
2. Fund construction of new schools based on a cooperative facilities plan developed by the two school systems.
3. Encourage the school districts to investigate areas where economies may be affected by joint operations such as transportation, food service and maintenance.
4. Encourage the school districts to pursue areas of educational cooperation such as special services.

SCHOOL MERGER STUDY COMMISSION

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

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1. Arthur Brown	
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7. John Thomas Walker, Vice-Chair	
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1. Mary Cay Corr, Vice-Chair	
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FUNDING/FINANCE	104 - 156
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