

## MSS. Collection #257

### Guilford County Schools Collection, 1932-1993 [bulk 1985-1993]. 3½ boxes (48 folders), ca. 250 items.

NOTE: The numbers cited in parentheses, e.g. 1:5, refer the researcher to the Series#:Folder# in which that name/topic will be found.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This collection consists primarily of materials relating to the countywide school system merger of 1993, in which three school boards consolidated into one. Extensive correspondence is accompanied by informational flyers, newspaper clippings, minutes, legislation, and legal briefs, providing the context for the Merger Guidebook and supporting reports. These materials reveal economic and demographic shifts in North Carolina and its schools in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The original Guilford County school board refused merger with the two urban districts, so the issue went to the state legislature, which called for a referendum. The debate for and against the merger captures the complexity of the issues facing public schools, such as racial and funding equity and efficiency of scale versus community control. Also included in the collection are three scrapbooks unrelated to the merger. One follows Edgeville Elementary School from the 1930s to the 1970s, while the others each capture a single school year in Greensboro's northwestern school district during World War II.

**Arrangement:** This collection is organized in four series and arranged within series by date or in original order. The series are: **Correspondence**, 1987-1993; **Guidebook**, 1960-1991; **Reports**, 1985-1993; and **Scrapbooks**, 1932-1973.

**Provenance:** This collection was donated by the office of the Superintendent of Guilford County Schools in August 2022 and assigned the accession number 2022.26.1. Note that all these materials predate the 1993 merger and therefore come from the files of the original Guilford County Board of Education.

**Processing:** This collection was organized and the finding aid was prepared by volunteer Ann Koppen in April 2023.

#### **HISTORICAL NOTE**

After the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* mandating integration, white responses – especially white flight out of urban districts – changed the demographics and relative funding of many public schools. In a prescient move, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school systems merged in 1960, claiming that the merger saved that county's schools, preventing a black city school system and a white county school system. Several other counties gradually followed suit for the same reasons: “to cut costs, equalize resources, bolster

achievement, and curb the suburban flight of white families and businesses” (Tabor). The discussion regarding a possible merger of the Greensboro City, High Point City, and Guilford County school systems began in 1978, intensifying in 1982 with the appointment of a committee by the Guilford County Board of Commissioners to research the impact on funding. At first most residents from all three systems opposed the idea. By 1985, the two urban school districts had grown to 50% black, while the rural school district was less than 20% black. After a major study by the Research Triangle Institute in 1985, commissioned by the Guilford County Board of Commissioners, Greensboro and High Point were on board and presented a merger plan to the Board of Commissioners. The Guilford County school board continued to resist, but state legislation providing for a referendum led to the approval of the merger in 1991. Despite the county school board’s persistent litigation, the three systems merged in 1993, creating the new Guilford County Schools. The merger was later considered “a national model for how to succeed” (Tabor). However, in 1998, the school board acknowledged that de facto segregation continued, as neighborhoods and communities remained identifiable by race and class.

**Historical Sources:** The sources for this historical note include newspaper clippings in the Correspondence series; a [“History of Education in Guilford County”](#) on the Guilford County Schools website; [“In Era of Smaller Schools, One County Finds Improvement from Consolidating.”](#) by Mary B.W. Tabor (*The New York Times*, June 12, 1996); and *The Guilford County Schools: A History*, by John E. Batchelor (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 1991).

## **SCOPE & CONTENT NOTE**

Most of this collection – the Correspondence, Guidebook, and Reports series – focuses on the Guilford County Board of Education merger. Only the Scrapbook series is unrelated to the merger.

The Correspondence series provides the narrative thread for the 1993 merger, in which three district boards of education – Greensboro City, High Point City, and Guilford County – combined into one countywide board. In addition to correspondence, it contains accompanying newspaper clippings, legal briefs, legislative bills, demographic and school data, informational flyers, and meeting minutes. Representing the time period of the original Guilford County school board, which actively resisted merger, these materials relate the drawn-out fight. The Guidebook series presents the final manual for facilitating the merger, as well as numerous resources that both prompted and informed it. The Reports series includes studies that promote and critique the merger, as well as subject-specific manuals for aiding the consolidation. Together, these materials provide a case study of the forces at play after school desegregation.

The Scrapbooks series predates the merger. Curated by the PTA, the Edgeville Elementary School scrapbook was started in 1960 to create a history of the school from its beginning in the 1930s. It contains photographs and a variety of printed materials relating to the student body and facilities, PTA activities, and PTA-sponsored events and performances. The Greensboro PTA Council scrapbooks from the 1940s are comprised almost exclusively of newspaper clippings about Parent-Teacher Council meetings, from local luncheons to the state convention. Issues include school funding, support of the war effort and democracy, and the consolidation of all state education commissions into one department of education. The schools represented are entirely white, since African American schools operated separately until 1954.

## **SERIES DESCRIPTIONS**

### **1. Correspondence. 16 folders (ca. 215 items). 1987-1993.**

Covering the years leading up to the merger of the three county school systems, these papers showcase the original Guilford County Board of Education's fight against the merger. Newspaper clippings, informational flyers, reports, minutes, demographic and school data, legislation, and legal briefs accompany the correspondence. The news articles provide helpful historical recaps. A few items of general correspondence, perhaps misfiled, include a set of letters regarding a safety issue at Pleasant Garden Elementary School (1:2) and another set petitioning for a new middle school in Guilford County (1:4).

Organized in chronological order, with subject titles that capture the focus of that folder's contents, the correspondence makes clear the county board's continued opposition to the merger, starting with its participation in the 1987 countywide citizens' Merger Task Force that considered and ultimately supported the Research Triangle Institute's (RTI) recommendation to merge the three school systems (1:2). With the two city boards clearly in favor of merging, the county board refused to cooperate fully in a joint report requested from the three school districts by the Guilford County Board of Commissioners. The county board then shared a critique of the final report with a counter proposal titled "Unity with Diversity," as well as a lengthy rebuttal of claims made in the RTI study (1:3). They further opposed House Bill 333, which offered alternative paths for countywide mergers, removing the authority from boards of education (1:3). In 1989, the county board joined with the county PTA in lobbying the Senate Education Committee to oppose Senate Bill 612, which mandated the merger subject to a countywide referendum (1:5). And in 1990, the two organizations urged constituents to support county and state political candidates who opposed the merger (1:6). Nevertheless, both the state Senate and House of Representatives drafted bills for reorganization (1:7-9), offering for referendum a choice of a total county merger or coterminous lines (aligning city school districts with city boundaries, thus reducing the size of the county district). A sub-story of Jamestown's attempts to redraw its boundaries in light of the legislation unfolds in this file. Also evident is opposition to the bill from other school districts in North Carolina. Despite a counter-resolution presented by the Guilford County Board of Education to offer county residents the option of no reorganization (1:7-9) and extensive lobbying and speeches before legislative committees (1:11) and the General Assembly (1:10), the legislation was ratified in May 1991. The Guilford County Board of Education then began litigation on multiple fronts, challenging the legislation's constitutionality (1:12) and its adherence to the Voting Rights Act (1:13), and requesting cancellation of the referendum and denial of preclearance – the advance approval for changes to voting regulations under the Voting Rights Act. In the meantime, after active lobbying for and against, well represented in this file (1:14), the choice to merge into one district won the referendum. Litigation by the Guilford County Board of Education continued through appeal into 1992 and 1993. The last document in this series is dated April 6, 1993, with no response to the county board's appeal filed on April 5. The merger of the three districts went into effect in 1993.

### **2. Guidebook. 18 folders (20 items). 1960-1991.**

This series consists of the contents of two binders holding the key documents guiding the Guilford County school system merger. The materials have been removed from the binders and

folded in the order they were presented in the binders. The first two folders contain the 1992 merger plan prepared by a study group of the Leadership Greensboro Program as a how-to manual for the newly combined school board, while the remaining folders are the resources used for the plan. The original 1987 plan (2:9), prompted by the RTI report and organized by subject (e.g. governance, curriculum, personnel), was prepared by representatives from the original three school districts, although Guilford County refused to participate in several sections. Other resources include state reports on the “crisis” in North Carolina education (2:4, 2:11, 2:13) and consolidation mergers in other counties (2:5-7, 2:10, 2:14). Papers for and against merger are also among the resources. The Guilford County Board of Education’s 1987 “Unity with Diversity” (2:15), their official argument against merger, also appears more than once in the Correspondence series.

### **3. Reports. 11 folders (11 items). 1985-1993.**

These reports range from historical studies of North Carolina school mergers to subject guides for the implementation of the Guilford County merger. The chronological organization allows for easy correlation to the Correspondence series. Most of these reports are referenced and sometimes included, at least in draft or summary, in the correspondence files. The first three present the case for district consolidation (3:1-3). “Heavy Meddle” (3:4) outlines the case against and was used by the Guilford County Board of Education in its challenge. The 1987 merger manual is a statewide study of school district mergers, presenting the history of North Carolina school mergers, the pros and cons of merging, and recommended procedures for effecting merger (3:5). The last five folders are subject reports put together in 1992 for the newly consolidated Guilford County Board of Education. Four of these (3:7-10) are status reports prepared by representatives of the original three school districts, and the final report is a facilities study by an independent educational planner. One of these reports is also in the Guidebook: the Research Triangle Institute’s Executive Summary (3:2) that launched the Guilford County merger. The four status reports are a direct result of the Merger Guidebook.

### **4. Scrapbooks. 3 folders (3 items). 1932-1973.**

The only series unrelated to the county merger, the three scrapbooks highlight the activities of one local elementary school and the Greensboro PTA Council decades before the merger. The scrapbook relating to Edgeville Elementary School (4:1) was begun in 1960 to document the school’s history and covers the years from 1932-1973. (In 1955, the school was renamed the William Sydney Porter Elementary School in honor of Greensboro’s most famous author, O. Henry.) A second volume referred to as the “later book” is not in this collection, and this scrapbook is missing the years between 1945 and 1949. Event programs and newspaper clippings cover student performances and ceremonies, as well as the initiatives and meetings of the PTA. Photographs show facilities, including the new school building built in 1936, students in class groupings and performances, teachers, and PTA members. Many photos, starting in the 1940s, record the May Court and Spring Carnival.

The two Parent-Teacher Council scrapbooks from the northwestern district of Greensboro (4:2-3) each cover one school year – 1941-1942 and 1942-1943 – and represent thirteen schools. Newspaper clippings predominate, covering Greensboro PTA Council luncheons, speakers, and executive board meetings, as well as state and national conventions and issues. Also included is

one program from a student performance for the PTA Council. Since World War II was in the background, the focus of these scrapbooks is more serious, including the goal to strengthen democracy through the schools and aiding the Red Cross and the Civilian Defense Volunteer Office. With resources and staff diminished, parents are urged to taken on more education at home. Involvement in the Parent-Teacher Council is heavily encouraged, and the duties of its members stressed, including attendance at the state Congress of Parents and Teachers and state Parent-Teacher Institute. Some newspaper clippings on national PTA events are also included.

### FOLDER LISTING

<u>Series</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>	
1	1	Correspondence	-- 1986 -- Heavy Meddle draft (merger critique)
	2	“	-- 1987 -- Merger Task Force
	3	“	-- 1987 -- Merger opposition
	4	“	-- 1988 -- Merger opposition
	5	“	-- 1989 -- Senate Bill 612
	6	“	-- 1990 -- Board of Education candidates
	7	“	-- 1991, January-March -- Bills -- House 573 and Senate 457
	8	“	-- 1991, April -- Bills -- House 573 and Senate 457
	9	“	-- 1991, May-December -- Bills -- House 573 and Senate 457
	10	“	-- 1991 -- Guilford Delegation to NC General Assembly
	11	“	-- 1991 -- Legislative Committee speeches
	12	“	-- 1991 -- Litigation
	13	“	-- 1991 -- Voting Rights Act
	14	“	-- 1991 -- Voting referendum
	15	“	-- 1992 -- Litigation
	16	“	-- 1993 -- Litigation
2	1	Guidebook	-- <a href="#">Merger Plan (1992)</a>
	2	“	-- <a href="#">Appendix (1992)</a>
	3	“	-- <a href="#">Resource List (1992)</a>
	4	“	-- Resource -- <a href="#">“Restructuring North Carolina’s Public Schools” (1991)</a>
	5	“	-- Resource -- <a href="#">“Cumberland County Schools Strategic Planning” (1990)</a>
	6	“	-- Resource -- <a href="#">Pitt County Schools consolidation guidelines (ca. 1985)</a>
	7	“	-- Resource -- <a href="#">Wake County School System merger history (1980)</a>
	8	“	-- Resource -- <a href="#">RTI “A School District Consolidation Study” Executive Summary (1985)</a>
	9	“	-- Resource -- <a href="#">Guilford County plan of school merger (1987)</a>
	10	“	-- Resource -- <a href="#">Wayne County merger plan (1991)</a>

<u>Series</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>	
2	11	Guidebook	<a href="#">-- Resource -- Public School Forum analysis of North Carolina's public schools (ca. 1985)</a>
	12	"	<a href="#">-- Resource -- "The Basic Education Program for North Carolina's Public Schools" (1986)</a>
	13	"	<a href="#">-- Resource -- Public School Forum report on school reform (1991)</a>
	14	"	<a href="#">-- Resource -- Charlotte/Mecklenburg school system merger (1960-1968)</a>
	15	"	<a href="#">-- Resource -- Guilford County Board of Education "Unity with Diversity" (1987)</a>
	16	"	<a href="#">-- Resource -- North Carolina merger "Issues and Directions" (1982)</a>
	17	"	<a href="#">-- Resource -- Guilford County "Merger Fact Sheet" (1990)</a>
	18	"	<a href="#">-- Resource -- North Carolina Senate bill on school accountability (1989)</a>
3	1	Reports	-- 1985 -- Research Triangle Institute (RTI) "A School District Consolidation Study"
	2	"	-- 1985 -- RTI "A School District Consolidation Study" Executive Summary
	3	"	-- 1986 -- Guilford County overview of RTI report
	4	"	-- 1986 -- "Heavy Meddle" -- NC School Boards Association critique of RTI report
	5	"	-- 1987 -- NC Department of Public Instruction's merger manual
	6	"	-- 1989 -- Public School Forum of NC's report on local school finance
	7	"	-- 1992 -- Status report for Guilford County Consolidated School Board -- Child nutrition
	8	"	-- 1992 -- Status report for Guilford County Consolidated School Board -- Curriculum and program
	9	"	-- 1992 -- Status report for Guilford County Consolidated School Board -- Maintenance and facilities
	10	"	-- 1992 -- Status report for Guilford County Consolidated School Board -- Student support
	11	"	-- 1993 -- "A Facilities Study for the Guilford County Consolidated School Board"
4	1	Scrapbooks	<a href="#">-- Edgeville School (renamed Porter School, 1932-1973)</a>
	2	"	<a href="#">-- Greensboro Parent-Teacher Council (1941-1942)</a>
	3	"	<a href="#">-- Greensboro Parent-Teacher Council (1942-1943)</a>