Color and Character
Chapter 4: "Building an Integrated School"

"Building an Integrated School" examines the way that West Charlotte's students, teachers and parents worked together to create one of the nation's most successfully integrated high schools, a place where students from a wide variety of backgrounds felt at home.

UNC Press has made this chapter available for free, because it seems especially useful to the challenges involved in building successfully integrated schools in the present day.

As you read, look for examples of actions, events and cultural circumstances that the author sees as contributing to West Charlotte's success. They might include:

• Generous spirit: caring, willing to give.

• Confidence, honesty and respect: willing to speak, willing to listen, willing to change.

• Significance of African American history.

• Deliberate efforts to bring students together, and to make sure all are treated fairly.

• Connections between the school's diversity and broader community priorities.

• Direct community/district support.

• Events that bring people together with a purpose.

• Sense of success – things to be proud of.

• Humor.

• Factors that make it possible for students to experiment, to be/find themselves.

• Differences/tensions and how they are handled.

Discussion Questions

• What should a "successfully" integrated school look like? Does West Charlotte fit your definition?

• Which key aspects of the West Charlotte efforts seem relevant for schools today? Which seem less relevant, and why? Which do you see in the present-day schools you're familiar with? Which seem to be missing, and why?

• What actions have been taken to bring different groups of students together at schools you have been involved with? How successful have they been?

• What tensions between different groups of students/parents have you experienced?

• From your experience, how does a community's overall racial climate affect what happens in its schools?

• What do you see as the greatest challenges to creating successfully integrated institutions?

• Is the constant work required to create successfully integrated schools worth the effort?