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## Hundreds turn out for anti-racism rally in Raleigh

**RALEIGH** -- An anti-racism rally in Moore Square today brought together hundreds of students, veteran activists and other concerned folks, who heard ringing endorsements of civil rights and a stinging condemnation of the Wake County school board.

Organized by the YWCA of the Greater Triangle, the event featured songs, skits and slogans from about 170 students who came from nearby Moore Square Middle School, where they have been involved in a study project on the subject for weeks. A featured speaker, the Rev. David Forbes, talked about his childhood in segregated Raleigh and criticized the current school board for its efforts to change Wake County's diversity-based assignment policy.

"Shame on the board of education of Wake County!" Forbes, 69, a civil rights veteran who helped found the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Raleigh half a century ago, said to loud applause.

"How dare they try, through chicanery and fancy wording, to reverse what made Wake County the leading school system in the United States -- diversity?"

Members of the board's ruling majority have argued that the now-discarded diversity policy, enforced in part through busing, has not served low-income and minority students well. The board's new approach is based on a community-based model of student assignment, which has not yet been completed.

About 300 people gathered in the sunny square for the event. Students from the middle school sang a song composed for the occasion, recited and explained quotations on racism they had located, and put on a skit offering a race-reversed twist on the historic 1960 sit-ins in Greensboro.

Downtown resident Courtney Hodgson, 29, brought along son Caedmon, 20 months, in his stroller to take part. "We live in a diverse neighborhood and we just really try to build relationships and grow in community with our neighborhood," Hodgson said. "Being part of a 'stand up against racism' rally means we're in it for the long haul."

Long-time activist Marjorie Eckels, 88, came from her West Raleigh neighborhood partly because she's concerned about what's happening in Wake County schools. "I just foresee segregation again if they do what they say they are going to do," Eckels said

Christopher Johnson, 19, was in town from Fayetteville and decided to come to the event. Johnson's not sure how effective such public events are at changing human behavior, but thinks they are worth the effort.

"You've got certain people that want to listen and certain people that don't want to listen, but it's always good to talk to them," he said. "You never know what might happen."

Both Gov. Beverly Perdue and Raleigh Mayor Charles Meeker issued proclamations supporting the anti-racism event, which is observed nationwide in dozens of locations.

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