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Three New York City firefighters raise an American flag at Ground Zero, site of the World Trade Center, on Sept. 11, 2001.

RICKY FLORES The Journal News/USA TODAY Network via Reuters Connect

On Sept. 11, 2001, a series of terror attacks in New York, Washington D.C., and Pennsylvania carved scars across our nation that continue to heal. To mark the anniversary, we pause to reflect on the tragedy of that day and the triumphs that rose from the ashes.

Inside: Read the story of a firefighter and the man he couldn't save, learn about the ways 9/11 changed our world, and see unforgettable images of loss and heroism.
Special section in Edition: Expanded coverage of the 25th anniversary, with more in-depth stories and striking visuals, can be found by visiting charlotteobserver.com/edition.
Online: View a photo story of enduring images of Sept. 11 and its aftermath, and search a Legacy database of victims. charlotteobserver.com.

At CMS, minority students see gains in standardized tests

BY REBECCA NOEL AND CAITLIN MCGLADE
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More Black students are passing standardized tests across North Carolina's biggest school districts, and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is at the forefront of that change.

Still, sizable achievement gaps persist among Black and Hispanic students in CMS.

From 2023 though the last school year, the gap between Black and white student proficiency rates narrowed the greatest in Charlotte compared to the four other biggest districts.

That put Charlotte's performance among Black students well above the others, including Wake County. But Wake County posted one of the highest proficiency rates in the state among all students.

A chasm of 37.8 percentage points still exists between the proficiency of white and Hispanic students in the district. However, the gap narrowed by nearly 4 percentage points during the 2025-26 school year.

"CMS is in the middle of a real academic recovery, but I do believe that recovery and equity are two different things," CMS board member Liz Monterrey Duvall told The Charlotte Observer Tuesday. "You can progress, but if you're not progressing at the same rate as other populations, then you are not closing the gap."

Monterrey Duvall has made it a priority of hers to not only see proficiency improve overall but to minimize discrepancies in achievement between student groups.

The key lies not in giving different support based on demographics, she said, but on finding out what support students need in different subjects and making sure resources are allocated equitably across the county.

"It's really about looking at what solutions are subject-specific and not demographic-specific," she said. "Black and Hispanic students are not minority students in CMS ... We're talking about the core of the district, not just margins."

Monterrey Duvall said progress toward closing gaps still is not "where it needs to be."

WHAT ARE SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT GAPS?
The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction released its yearly school performance grades last week,

SEE TESTS, 4A

Wake Forest helped legalize human composting nationwide

BY CHASE JORDAN
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For Wake Forest University Law School professor Tanya Marsh, it feels a little ironic that a company that turns human remains into compost is working to open a facility in North Carolina.

After all, the state played a major role in getting human composting up and running legally around the country, thanks to Wake Forest University helping the inventor. Human composting uses natural processes to turn a person's remains into soil over a period of more than a month.

"The ironic thing is, the legal work started in North Carolina. But to my



TANYA MARSH Wake Forest School of Law

Tanya Marsh, a law school professor at Wake Forest University, helped lay the legal foundation for human composting in the U.S.

knowledge, nobody's even introduced legislation to try and make it legal in North Carolina yet," said Marsh, a senior associate dean and professor of funeral and cemetery law at Wake Forest University School of Law.

That's what a company called Earth Funeral is trying to do.

The San Francisco- and New York-based business is working toward that

SEE COMPOSTING , 6A



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