

## Larry Corry , 'Closing the Gap'

[Amy Kenna](#)  
Star Staff Writer

SHELBY — Some people know Larry Corry as a full-time employee of the KoSa plant in Spartanburg, S.C.

Others know him as trustee chairman of the Cleveland County Healthcare System.

Still others know Corry as a dedicated deacon at his church, Shoal Creek Baptist.

But in the schools of Cleveland County, Larry Corry has made, perhaps, his most significant mark.

There, his five-year-long effort to close the disparity between white and minority students' test scores have blossomed into a model program embraced by all of Cleveland County.

Five years ago, Corry spearheaded the "Closing the Achievement Gap Committee" in Cleveland County.

The idea was born after he chaired a local NAACP retreat.

"The number one issue that community leaders needed to address was education," said "Close the Gap" committee member Richard Hooker. "The area of education that needed the most attention was the disparity of achievement between minorities and their white counterparts."

The Close the Gap Committee now holds annual "education summits" during which educators and others gather to look at test scores and talk about strategies.

Corry still chairs the committee.

"He's always been a leader, very proactive, task-oriented," said John Goforth, assistant superintendent of Kings Mountain District Schools and a committee member. "He's focused on how you get from point A to point B."

The committee has gained statewide attention, even garnered praise from former N.C. Gov. Jim Hunt last month.

"The Cleveland County Close the Gap committee has become a statewide model," Hooker said. Corry's "leadership has just been so instrumental there. He's pretty much been at the helm since the beginning."

Corry, a former member of the Cleveland County Board of Education, is "thoughtful, analytical, visionary and seasoned," according to Hooker.

Corry's greatest vision has been that of encouraging churches to become active in education.

"He's tried to work with the faith community in after-school involvement, and that's hard to do," Goforth said. "He's tried hard to get people involved in their children's education."

Corry's efforts are voluntary.

Despite occasional setbacks, Cleveland County's achievement gap has narrowed progressively since the committee was formed.

Reading scores provide one example.

The reading gap between white females and black males, the highest and lowest performing groups, dropped in Cleveland County Schools from 41.6 percent in 1995-96 to 15.2 percent in 2002-03.

In Kings Mountain, the gap between white females and black males dropped from 29.4 percent to 11.6 percent.

In Shelby, the gap dropped from 49.8 percent to 19.5 percent.

Black males have made some of the biggest gains over a five-year period.

In Cleveland County Schools, black male third graders tested at 39.6 percent in 1997-98. By the eighth grade, in 2002-03, they scored 74 percent on end-of-grade tests

“You don’t make things better overnight. It takes time and dedication and energy,” Goforth said. “He’s worked pretty hard on this.”

That work reflects The Star’s values of life-long learning, community and voluntarism and earned Corry a 2003 Spirit of Freedom Award.