

Journal 29
December 23, 2009
Celebrating What's Right

Hello, I'm Del Burns, superintendent of the Wake County Public School System.

Our students are home for the holidays, with the last day of school thankfully being less eventful than we anticipated due to the weather forecasts. As we prepare for 2010, I've been reflecting on the past year, our students' progress, and our schools' successes. We certainly have room for improvement -- and we will work toward that until we have achieved our vision of every child graduating on time, prepared for the future. But this is a good time to pause and celebrate the things that make our students, and our schools, special.

In 2009, our students performed better on End-of-Grade and End-of-Course exams. The number of schools meeting the federal Adequate Yearly Progress standard increased, and 138 of our 156 schools made high or expected growth in the last school year.

We saw our students make a tremendous 20-point leap on the SATs, performing 76 points better than the national average and 99 points better than the state average. At the same time, our Career and Technical Education students achieved 86.6 percent proficiency and last summer's graduating class earned a record \$66 million in scholarships. In addition, we saw more of our students taking Advanced Placement exams, and their scores continued to rise.

This year our schools and staff have continued working with strategies that improve how students learn, and how we teach. And all that began with the independent curriculum management audit in 2007. In fact, we have had six schools undergo their own individual audits that will identify ways to improve their specific performance.

Teachers and staff have built assessment systems to help monitor students' progress throughout the year, not just at test time, and have collaborated in teams to use those systems to design appropriate interventions so we can bring additional help to students when they need it, not after the fact.

In 2009, we've better aligned strategic planning between our schools and Central Services, with a renewed focus on providing our schools with the support they need as resources continue to be stretched.

Our child nutrition services department was recognized as a District of Excellence for maintaining high standards as we work to meet the nutritional demands of children, and our facilities staff opened three new schools and renovated others this year that are providing safe, effective environments for learning and teaching.

We created new channels of communication with parents and the community to help them stay better informed about what we are doing -- including this weekly chat from me -- and for the 14th straight year, our Finance Department has earned the Government Finance Officers of America's Distinguished Budget Presentation Award recognizing our commitment to transparency and

fiscal accountability. And speaking of transparency, this year we were named the most transparent school system in the state.

These are just a few examples of the hundreds of ways we, as a community and a school system succeeded this year in working for children.

In looking back, 2009 was a very challenging, yet very rewarding year. It brought to light just how interconnected we all are as a system as we work to support our principals, teachers and students. One thing that continues to stand out to me however, is the caring and committed people at every level of our school system – the unsung heroes who go out of their way to help students and families every day. In this holiday season, I am grateful for everything each of our more than 18,000 employees have done to support our children.

When I visit schools, the students energize me. They challenge me to do better, and I do my best to respond -- because I see so much potential in their eyes, and I think that is true of everyone who works in the Wake County Public School System. Turning potential into reality is why we're here, and we look forward to resuming that important work in 2010.

Happy holidays, and I look forward to talking to you again soon.