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Your Investment In Our Students

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

In the last few weeks we've been looking at the four strategic directives that focus all of our efforts as we support our 140,000 students and 159 schools. The fourth and final strategic directive serves as the bedrock for our community's trust in what we do for children; expanding fiscal accountability.

As I've said, the Wake County Public School System is a people-powered enterprise -- it is people, and not things, that account for the vast majority of how we invest our financial resources. Regardless of where funds are spent however, we are mindful that those financial resources are, in fact, taxpayer dollars. So we have a shared responsibility to ensure that we do what's right for all of our students AND keep our citizens' faith by using wisely the resources they entrust with us.

Nearly 90 cents of every dollar spent is invested in our schools. We are constantly evaluating and re-evaluating programs and processes to make sure we are operating as lean as possible, while maintaining the systems and structures to support the classroom. This commitment of continuously improving what we do is shared throughout the organization and helps to ensure that we are being as efficient as possible as we support learning and teaching.

Our commitment also means transparency. Nearly seventy percent of taxpayers in Wake County do not have children in our school system. We must make sure that we present clear and accurate information to the broader community about our financial needs and budgeting process as well as where the community's investment in our schools is being made. Our website has a great deal of information about the financial state of the school system, including complete budget information and our comprehensive annual financial reports and audits.

An important element to maintaining fiscal accountability to the public is having our employees properly trained when dealing with school or departmental budgets. We require all of our budget managers and bookkeepers, in Central Services as well as schools, to undergo regular training to ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities and obligations under the law as well as under Board Policy. This is not a one and done type of training, either: we annually review and update our training to ensure that everyone with financial management responsibilities understands their role in maintaining the public trust.

So that's efficiency, transparency, and training. The fourth aspect of expanding our fiscal accountability to you is vigilance. We have a series of checks and balances to ensure we are operating with the highest level of fiscal integrity. Our Chief Business Officer has focused on implementing fraud detection and oversight systems that proactively search for irregularities in spending patterns and financial management. We have a strong, recently expanded Internal Audit Department, and the Wake County Board of Education is unique in maintaining an independent Audit Committee, made up of board members and other citizens, that selects outside auditors and oversees their work in reporting to the school board.

Auditors and fraud examiners have a phrase: the "tone at the top." It describes the need for organizational leaders to communicate their values to all levels of the organization; to set an expectation for behavior that is ethical, transparent and accountable. My leadership team and I strive to set that tone every day, because we know what you have placed in our trust: the children of Wake County, and the resources to support our children. We will continue to live up to that trust.

Thanks, and I will talk to you again soon.