

## **Journal 5**

**July 10, 2009**

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

This Tuesday was the first day of school for our elementary and middle schools on the year-round calendar. If you've been following the news about the state budget situation, you know that this has been the toughest time for North Carolina schools that I've ever experienced. State lawmakers still have not settled on a budget for the fiscal year that began more than a week ago, and the continuing resolution, which is set to expire in just a few days, cut state funding for our schools by 15 percent.

This week, 51 of our schools opened under these uncertain circumstances. I visited ten of them on opening day, and I'm very proud that our teachers and school staff rose to the challenge. Despite some increases in class sizes, some possible school reorganizations on the horizon, and the regret we all feel that some familiar faces were not there, this was one of the smoothest first days of school I have ever seen. Principals took stock of their limited resources and put them where they could do the most good. The teachers I spoke to weren't happy about the budget situation, but they were staying focused on their kids and determined to make the best of it. I saw new students being shown around the school, parents kissing their children goodbye, and each and every staff member pitching in to make these children feel at home.

Our transportation system appears to be running smoothly – and our area transportation managers were making the rounds, overseeing student arrivals, and working with principals to address any concerns that arose. As of the first day of school, our Growth and Planning Department's enrollment projections are on target – we have roughly the number of students that we expected, and we'll continue to monitor that in the coming days and weeks. This week has been a good example of all elements of our school system working together for children—and it's only the beginning

This past Wednesday was the first of our Early Dismissal days. Each Wednesday this year, time has been set aside for teachers and others to come together as teams to improve the process of learning for your child. Think of the power of teachers of varying backgrounds and experience levels working together to improve the way we help your child learn. This work as Professional Learning Teams, has been in place and highly successful in the private sector for decades, and we in Wake County have looked for ways to increase our use of this approach for years. This year we are planting the flag...we are carving out dedicated time...we are being focused and purposeful in how we help each child,...your child learn.

Right now, our school board is working on a policy that will set out the expectations of our employees involved with PLTs to guide us in making information available about the work that our school teams will be doing. We're doing that for two reasons: one, to hold ourselves accountable to you and our community, and two, to help you see the kind of work happening at your school during that time. Early dismissal Wednesdays are meant to be more than a simple planning period. It's collaboration time with a purpose, to review student performance and find ways to improve it. It's important for all of us to commit to it.

What has impressed me the most this week has been the attitude of our teachers, principals, school staff, and students. They have taken on this year's challenges with an intent to overcome them. We all take our responsibility for your children very seriously, and we are leading with a positive spirit. As our year-round students settle in, our modified- and traditional-calendar students arrive, and our state's budget is EVENTUALLY determined, we will continue to work to prepare your child for the future.

Thanks, and I will talk to you again soon.