

Journal 7

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Hello, I'm Del Burns, superintendent of the Wake County Public School System, and after several weeks of sharing budget news with you, it is my PLEASURE to speak for a few minutes about our core business: learning and teaching.

This week, we presented preliminary results from the End-of-Grade and End-of-Course testing for the 2008-2009 school year. They showed that our school system is on the right track to helping more students perform to their potential, but we still have work to do to ensure that our resources are fully aligned to support them.

The state changed the way it calculates End-of-Grade testing results this year. Students who don't pass the End-of-Grade test are given the chance to take a retest. Beginning this year, the retests are being included in our annual results, which creates an artificial bump, but sets the standards that we will be measured against in the future at a higher level -- and we welcome that.

Comparing these new scores with last year's data is not an apples-to-apples comparison, so in order not to confuse the issue for the public, when we released our data, we first showed last year's scores and this year's scores side by side without the retest results added in.

We saw modest, but steady improvements overall in grades 3 through 8. We saw a 1.3 percentage point gain in student performance in math, and 1.9 percentage point increase in reading.

Across the board, our students improved. But what was most encouraging is that our students with limited English proficiency or receiving free or reduced-price lunch made greater gains. Using the same standards from last year to this year, these students made gains ranging from a three percentage point gain in math for our free and reduced lunch students -- to an almost five percentage point gain in reading for our limited English students. We are making progress toward our goal of every child graduating on time prepared for the future.

When the retesting is factored in as our new baseline, our gains are even larger in every category.

With the high school End-of-Course tests, we saw growth in all 10 subject areas with the exception of Algebra I. As we continue to analyze the data in the coming weeks, we will focus especially on this area.

For more detailed information about our test performance, I invite you to visit our website at the address here.

While I'm pleased with the "steady" part of these results, we need to stay focused to accelerate our students' academic growth. Between the changes that we are making to our academic programs as a result of the curriculum management audit I requested, and our schools' increased use of teachers working together in Professional Learning Teams, we are positioned to accomplish that.

In the coming weeks and months, we will share with you how the fundamental changes we have made by first, auditing our core business to improve our operational and the administrative support of our schools and second, bringing our school-based professionals together to build their skills and focus on each student, are changing the way your child learns.

Resources are scarce and still fairly uncertain, yet we need to focus our efforts to communicate and collaborate more than ever, to ensure that all of us are providing the services for your child that bring results. And preparing your child for the future is the result that counts the most.

Thanks, and I will talk to you again soon.