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

After reflecting on the close of one school year and the beginning of another, my thoughts turned to this year's graduating class -- the class of 2010 -- but also the graduating class of 2022, this year's kindergarteners.

The vision of our school system -- is for *every* child to graduate on time, prepared for the future. Graduation is the completion of one phase of a life of learning. In a constantly changing and complex world, we must ensure that the diploma our students proudly hold up on graduation day mean something. The diploma must be the symbol of the skills and knowledge needed to either enter the job market ready to thrive, or moving on to a college or university setting.

Our vision means that every child leaves us ready to contribute their gifts to our world community.

What we've learned as a school system is this: if you focus on a graduation rate as a "high school problem," then you're missing the vital role that our middle and even elementary schools play in keeping our student on the path to graduation.

I've spoken to high school drop-outs -- some of them in fairly grim circumstances -- to better understand the point in their lives where they lost contact and disengaged from learning. For some of them it was at a very early age, for others it was in their middle school years. I learned from these conversations that we must establish strong relationships between us as adults and our students; show them the relevance of what they must learn in order to achieve their goals and challenge them academically so they stay engaged in learning. Do you know what? All of these critically important things need to happen whether you are in kindergarten or in AP Geometry.

Education Week Magazine recognized our graduation rate of 75.5 percent as the seventh highest in the nation among large school districts. We are both proud and encouraged by that and will continue to challenge ourselves to improve. And if you are wondering if those graduates are prepared for the future, the Class of 2009 earned a record-breaking 66 million dollars in scholarships. I know there thousands of parents in Wake County very happy about that fact.

On the flip side of that coin however is if nearly four out of five of our students are graduating from high school within four years that means that we have a great deal of work ahead to meet our school board's goal of a 100 percent graduation rate by 2014. That's why we are focusing on using student performance data to align how we teach the curriculum and bring our resources to bear as we work to improve what we do in every classroom across the county.

Your support at home is also critical.

For every student there are two behaviors that are absolutely vital to them graduating on time, prepared for the future: first is attending school and second is learning the standard course of study. While these sound so simple, if children aren't going to school regularly, they won't learn. And when they come to class, we as educators must teach the curriculum in exciting and engaging ways.

Throughout the year, we will be sharing information with parents to help them extend what their children are learning in the classroom at home. Efforts like these create a true partnership as we help each child find their future.

Every day, I am proud of the work our students and teachers are doing to make learning and teaching the focus of everything we do in our schools. We'll continue to do better to secure a bright future for the Class of 2010, the Class of 2022, and all the classes in between.

Thanks, and I'll talk to you again soon.