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Systems Responding to Challenging Times

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

Last week I shared a difficult economic forecast for our school system and the effect that it will have on our central services operations. While I'll have more information for our employees at a later date, it's important this week to return to our talk about the strategic directives which drive our school system. The fact of the matter is that we still have more than 140,000 students in our classrooms each day, with more to come next year. Regardless of the challenges we face, we must remain focused in order to support our students to the best of our ability so they can graduate on time, prepared for the future.

A couple of weeks ago, we talked a little bit about our third strategic directive, "to develop and implement systems and organizational structures to support schools, ensure accountability, and engage our community." Given what we know now about our future, we must be conscientious and purposeful as we build and improve the systems and structures that support our core business -- educating every child who comes to us. In a constantly changing, economically lean environment, sometimes the goals of supporting schools, being fiscally accountable, and engaging the community can come into conflict as we work to ensure the efficient use of our resources, both financial and human.

I've mentioned before the improvement planning processes that school and central services teams are currently working on to make sure our work is focused and aligned in order to make the most of what we have. Through a purposeful planning process we have been successful in making a complex organization leaner, more accessible and more focused on student learning.

Let me give you just three examples. Working with our schools we realized that during the first few weeks of school each year, when time was critical in getting every child off to a good start, some of our ESL teachers were losing almost two hours a day enrolling and testing students whose native language was not English. To eliminate this problem and let them do what they do best, we were able to repurpose resources to create our new Center for International Enrollment. Now families can come to just one place, and meet with professionals who can make their child's transition to school easy and successful.

In another area, we have increased our ability to reach out to our parents and the broader community through more online and interactive resources. In addition, the amount of information that is being shared directly with parents, community members and employees has increased and now comes in a variety of media. Education is a complex process. We are working to break down communication barriers so parents can fully understand the ways they can help their child succeed and what resources are available for their families. Sharing more information more quickly is just one way we are engaging our community as we improve our system.

Finally, even with a challenged economy, families continue to move to Wake County and we

continue to grow as a community. We know that more children will enter our schools. We know that we will need to build more schools, hire more teachers and be sure we have the systems and operational infrastructure in place to support them. We're working to implement business solutions that can scale as we continue to grow and our needs change. Being responsive, thoughtful and focused is at the heart of the third strategic directive: dynamic systems and structures to support our schools and ultimately, your child.

Thanks, and I look forward to talking to you again soon.