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Strengthening The Team

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

Last week we talked about the second strategic directive guiding our school system: to retain, recruit and train high quality employees at every level. As I said, education is a people-intensive business. We need strong teachers in the classrooms to support our 140,000 students, and we need strong support and administrative employees to support those teachers. I want to briefly share where we are on the retention and recruiting fronts, and then spend some time talking about what we're doing in helping our employees not only keep their edge, but grow into leaders.

First, let's look at our retention and recruiting efforts. As we're still feeling the effects of the economic recession, retaining great employees is especially important. Slower growth and leaner budgets mean that we simply aren't recruiting new employees at the same rate we were just a couple of years ago. However we are still growing and all of our students need strong teachers. It's a challenge our school board and my staff will be facing in the coming months as we develop our budget for next year

The good news as we look at retaining employees can be found in the most recent statewide Teacher Working Conditions survey. Our teachers report improvements in: time for planning and collaboration, facilities and resources, leadership, and professional development. Improving teacher satisfaction in areas like these are important factors in keeping our high quality teachers in our classrooms. Like in any business, retaining employees is directly tied to employee satisfaction and I believe we are making good progress in this area.

Some more good news is that we have been able to grow our own when it comes to school leadership over the last few years. Even before I became superintendent, we saw an approaching gap in the number of principals we needed because of potential retirement as well as the opening of many new schools. Since 2006 I have brought 97 principal recommendations before our school board, and I am proud to say that all but six of them have been home-grown and are from right here in Wake County. We take succession planning seriously in our school system. We're offering significant training opportunities to our assistant principals, helping them develop their leadership capacities.

Growing up professionally in the Wake County System gives us the depth of knowledge and creates the culture of excellence we've come to expect for all of our employees. We call it the Wake Way. But it's not just about grooming the next generation of principals; we want to grow leaders throughout the organization. Our assistant principals, teachers, and other employees all take active personal leadership roles wherever they are in the Wake County Public School System.

We are all accountable for reaching our school board's academic goal. We all have the opportunity -- and the responsibility -- to lead by example, to do more with less, and to collaborate to find innovative solutions that -- ultimately -- will help all our children graduate on

time, prepared for the future.

When we speak of developing leadership capacity, our Office of Professional Development and the Triangle Leadership Academy are just a couple of the teams playing important roles in increasing our employees' productivity and leadership potential. Despite state funding cuts, they are doing a great job of helping our teachers maintain their certification, our administrators to facilitate cooperation and data-driven decision-making skills, and all of our employees to grow to become more effective in their respective roles.

Education is changing around the world, and we need to keep up with that change. We have to get out of our silos, collaborate in teams, and constantly assess and then reassess our efforts. You know that Professional Learning Teams have driven the process of continuous improvement in our schools, and they are increasingly more important in our other departments.

The key is accountability -- my accountability to you, and our employees' accountability to each other, to ensure that we're doing what we say we're doing: preparing our students to take their place as citizens, taking their own turns as leaders. Our second strategic directive ensures we retain, recruit and train the employees to make that happen.

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