

Journal 18: Strategic Directions for Our Schools

October 9, 2009

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

Last week, I discussed the mission, vision and academic goal of our school system and why it is so important to us. For the next few weeks, I want to share some information with you about how we have fundamentally re-focused our efforts to have every child graduate on time, prepared for the future.

Our school system is a strong one. But I will be the first one to tell you that we have some work to do in eliminating the achievement gap and bringing our on-time graduation rate to 100 percent by 2014. Where we were as a system in 2006, when I assumed role of Superintendent, was a product of the hard work of prior school boards, administrators, and teachers. We were, and still are a nationally recognized school system, with a proud history of success and innovation. One thing that we knew that was happening, however, was that our performance was beginning to plateau. As standards and expectations continued to rise, this was not where we needed to be. What we needed was to redefine our CULTURE of success.

From a management perspective changing any organization's culture is very difficult. Changing the culture of a government agency was especially daunting. With increased regulations, expectations and pressures from explosive student growth, it was important for all 19,000 of our employees to be anchored by a few core values that would guide our work. These values would remind ourselves of our priorities as a school system and proactively address how we would react to new challenges as they arose. I set in place four strategic directives to help manage our work in both our schools and Central Services. These four strategic directives would also give our school board and community a framework for holding us accountable for our work.

These are the four strategic directives:

FOCUS ON LEARNING AND TEACHING

RETAIN, RECRUIT AND TRAIN high quality employees.

Develop and implement SYSTEMS AND organizational STRUCTURES to support schools, ensure accountability, and engage our community.

Expand FISCAL ACCOUNTABILITY.

Over the past three years, the activities of any school or department in the Wake County Public School System support at least one, and oftentimes more of these four strategic directives. Everyone employed by our school system, from teachers to support staff, have taken ownership of these four strategic directives. And we have organized all of our school and departmental work plans around them to ensure that we are working together towards our common goal.

Following these four strategic directives has brought clarity and focus to the complexities of

supporting 140,000 children every day. In the coming weeks I'm going to take some time with each of these strategic directives so you will know more about what we're doing -- and why we're doing it --and most importantly, how it is improving your child's education.

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