

# Journal 14

September 11, 2009

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

Last week, I talked about the two vital behaviors that are the keys to a child graduating on time, prepared for the future. Our students must demonstrate those behaviors that include learning the Standard Course of Study and attending school. Today I'd like to take a little bit of time to explain what learning the Standard Course of Study means in the Wake County Public School System, especially in a time of constrained resources.

Our school system's budget is now set, after a very challenging period for students and employees alike. Declines in per-pupil funding and an increase in student enrollment mean that we must literally do more with less. And then the question becomes, what must our priorities be? And we must answer that question in light of our board's goal: that all students graduate on time by 2014, and all student groups achieve high academic growth. To fulfill that goal and be true to our vision, we have been working very hard on aligning all aspects of our school system.

By aligning, I mean providing an atmosphere of clarity, consistency, and commitment toward learning and teaching. One of the most important findings of the 2007 Curriculum Management Audit was that we definitely had the commitment, but the clarity and consistency could be stronger. Expectations of what we wanted our students to learn were not always made clear, and resources that guided instruction were not always provided equally across all of our schools. These types of resources and clearer expectations are particularly valuable to our newer teachers.

As I mentioned last week, the North Carolina Standard Course of Study is a rigorous, uniform set of academic standards for everything from arts education to high school science. For example, second graders are expected to be able to use multiple strategies to solve story problems in addition and subtraction. Third graders are expected to know how many cups are in a gallon, and a Level 3 foreign language student in high school must demonstrate evidence of self-correction in communication with others. Grade level by grade level, course by course, a student's education is cumulative and directed by these standardized expectations.

Achieving these expectations means ensuring that we are consistently teaching this curriculum to all of our students, providing remediation to children who are behind and acceleration to children who are advanced. The standard course of study defines what will be taught. Our teachers determine how it will be taught. That is where alignment comes in.

Some parents -- and teachers -- express concern that by following these standards we are removing creativity and autonomy from the classroom, but that's not the case. In order to meet all of our students' individual needs, we need our teachers' full creativity to identify ways to bring the standard course of study alive to their students. That is the "how it is taught." But in a time of reduced resources, we also need to ensure that our teachers' creativity comes into play while focusing on a core curriculum that will prepare all students for the future.

Consistency and creativity. A core curriculum that responds to individual student needs whether

soaring or struggling. It's a balancing act to be sure, but in our current financial environment it's all the more important that we are aligned in support of our kids. Instructional time and financial resources are both precious. Our ability to align our efforts in the classroom and in Central Services will ensure that we meet our responsibility of helping every student realize his or her potential.

By the way, in case you were wondering about how many cups in a gallon? You don't have to google it, the answer is 16.

Thanks, and I will talk to you again soon.