

Journal 15

September 18, 2009

Hello, I'm Del Burns, superintendent of the Wake County Public School System, and I'd like to talk for just a few moments about the importance of school attendance for all our students – from the senior class of 2010 to day's kindergartners in the Class of 2022.

I have been sharing information for the last couple of weeks about the two vital behaviors that our students must demonstrate in order to graduate on time, prepared for the future. Last week I focused on the vital behavior of learning the Standard Course of Study. Today it's time to take a closer look at school attendance.

The relationship between school attendance and performance is very clear, as we showed in an earlier journal: the more days of school a child misses, the lower that child's performance will be. There are a few reasons for that, but the most important is that education is cumulative. By that I mean that every lesson during the school year builds on lessons from the days before, just as concepts introduced in one grade build on the foundations established in previous grades.

The issue isn't so much keeping up with one's classmates, as it is keeping up with the concepts and information that our kids are being introduced to every day. Students who fall into the trap of repeatedly missing class have a lot to overcome when they return. At times they may feel like they're drinking from a firehose -- when maintaining regular school attendance would have helped them feel in control of their schoolwork. Without that sense of control, students may simply give up.

Whether we're talking about older students being tempted to skip school, or younger students who may not receive the encouragement that we would hope, the message needs to be clear from teachers, parents, and our community alike: our kids need to stay in school. They need to keep working at it.

Kids don't come to our schools performing at the same level. Some may actually need more time than others to graduate, as you can see comparing our four-year and five-year graduation rates. We'll certainly provide them with the time they need, but to help them reach their goal -- and ours -- for on-time graduation, they must adopt this vital behavior early. It means our educators must address individual students' needs. Our schools must be engaging places where children come to love learning.

And if there is a child in your life, or in your faith community, or in your business volunteer activities, who seems lost -- get involved. Encourage them to keep at it, because the rewards for a lifetime will be theirs.

Thanks, and I will talk to you again soon.