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

Next to our students' responsibility for their own learning, the primary reason our student performance is so strong in Wake County is due to our excellent teachers. However, the dedication, effort and creativity they put forward in our classrooms is only part of the story -- the rest is their sheer talent and their commitment to continuously improving what they do everyday. Just one example of their true professionalism is the fact that Wake County has the second highest number of nationally board-certified teachers in the nation.

Our teachers practice both the science and the art of education that makes the difference for 140,000 kids every day -- and it's for that reason we have made strong efforts over the years to retain and develop those teachers.

In brighter economic times, when we were growing by 4,000 students a year, we traveled across the country to recruit the best teachers in order to meet our growth challenges. As the budget crisis grew and our enrollment slowed, we needed to cut back those efforts. But as those in the business world know all too well, it's far more cost-efficient to retain employees than to recruit new ones. The second strategic directive we put in place when I became Superintendent begins with the word retain, in order to put the proper emphasis on this critical element of our core business, and then we talk about recruiting high quality employees.

Last week the State Board of Education released its analysis of the percentage of teachers throughout the state who voluntarily leave their positions, and the news was good for Wake County. We have the lowest turnover rate in the Triangle region at 11.12 percent, which is also better than the state average. When you exclude those teachers who left the classroom to become counselors, assistant principals, or to fill other positions within our school system, the percentage of teacher turnover falls to ten percent.

For years we have been surveying teachers who leave the classroom to determine what factors are affecting their decision and what, if anything, we could do as a system to help. Our exit data tells us that most of the teachers who do leave the Wake County Public School System do so due to family changes, such as the arrival of a child or a spouse's job relocating, or retirement.

The state conducts a state-wide Teacher Working Conditions Survey which provides us with additional data. Ninety-five percent of our teachers completed this survey last year, with an increasing number saying that conditions here were good and improving since the last survey in 2006. That is truly good news and shows me that our principals and central services teams are being responsive to supporting our classroom teachers.

As I said, this is good news. But it comes at a challenging time, as the state's funding crisis prevented us from maintaining all of our teaching positions. Our human resources department worked overtime with teachers and principals to protect as many jobs as possible. Everyone worked together as the employment landscape seemed to constantly change.

I am glad that we have been able to keep even more of our teachers in the Wake County family. I'm glad that we're able to provide them with more time collaborating with their peers. And I'm committed to providing them with professional development opportunities to help them become better at what they already do so well.

As you know, businesses constantly use production or sales data to assess their performance and as needed, adjust their strategies in order to meet their organizational goals. The time our teachers are investing in their professional collaboration each Wednesday, is exactly the same thing. By using student data, sharing best teaching practices and aligning what each teacher is doing while focused on our goals, we build personal capacity while ensuring professional satisfaction, and that means keeping the best teachers doing what they do best. After all, they are the front line connections between each child, what we do everyday, and the future of our community, both locally and globally.

Thanks, and I will talk to you again soon.