

Journal 13

September 4, 2009

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

All of us -- whether working in our schools or supporting those who work in them -- have a shared vision: that every child educated in the Wake County Public School System will graduate on time, prepared for the future. The two parts of that vision are equally important. First, our students must succeed in our schools and build on what they learn year after year. Second, that success they achieve, represented by their diploma, must be meaningful -- so they can meet the challenges of the future.

We have strengthened the processes supporting learning and teaching across the county -- by providing a consistent curriculum, establishing a culture of professional collaboration, and ensuring the health of our schools. That said, we know that success happens one student at a time, and they must have the support of high quality teachers, involved families, and the broader community for that to happen.

There are two "vital behaviors" that our students must demonstrate in order to graduate on time, prepared for the future, and these are behaviors that all of us -- teachers, families and our community -- can work together to support.

A successful student must attend school and learn the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. These two behaviors sound like common sense -- and they are. But they don't always happen and supporting them can be a complex undertaking.

First, attendance. A child's OPPORTUNITY to learn is severely diminished if he or she isn't in the classroom. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the student to learn, but we cannot expect that to happen if he or she isn't in school. We looked at attendance data and found that students who miss more than ten days of school are much less likely to perform at grade level. It's important that our school staff keep our students engaged in learning while in the classroom, and it is equally important that our families set the expectation that when the school bell rings, children are at their desks, ready to learn.

The second vital behavior is learning the Standard Course of Study. This is North Carolina's definition of what our students must know by the time they graduate -- subject by subject, grade by grade, each year building on the last. It's a rigorous set of academic standards consistent across our state that is constantly evolving as our expectations increase. You can find a link to the website for the state's Standard Course of Study in the notes for this journal for more information.

Rather than "teaching to the test," our schools teach the Standard Course of Study, which -- if our students learn it -- will be reflected not only on EOGs and EOCs, but in ongoing assessments and feedback in the classroom.

Here is how it all comes together. It's important that our written curriculum, the curriculum that's

taught in our schools, and the curriculum that is tested in the classroom, all be aligned. It is a disservice to our students if we teach one thing, test for another and expect something else. That is a recipe for student frustration and ultimately failure. The curriculum management audit we have undertaken now holds us accountable for this alignment, from the board room, to my office, to the classroom.

But on the other hand, all of us -- educators, families and the community -- must also be aligned to support our students. You can help your child stay on track with their studies -- we have resources you can use at home to expand your child's learning outside the classroom. We've provided the link to this information for you to use; I think you will find it fun and easy.

Finally, we must help our students commit to those two vital behaviors, and it's our responsibility to help them do that. We are committed as a school system to doing what is necessary to make them a reality for all students, and I hope every parent will help make them a reality for their student. I know together we can.

Thanks, and I will talk to you again soon.