

# Journal 31

January 15, 2010

## Helping Overage Students Catch Up

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

Later this month, we will be celebrating a different kind of graduation, as almost 30 eighth-grade students will transfer to high school on January 26. These are graduates of our Boosters program, offered at Mt. Vernon and River Oaks middle schools. You may not know, but Mt. Vernon and River Oaks are very special places where students who have struggled with circumstances, oftentimes beyond their control, can work in a safe and supportive climate to meet the challenges they are facing.

The Boosters program is an example of our school system -- and more importantly, these students -- taking on an increased workload in order to get themselves back on track to graduating on time, prepared for the future.

One of the significant risk factors in a student dropping out of school is if that student has ever been retained, or not promoted to the next grade. As those students enter middle school, the age gap between them and their peers becomes problematic. In some cases, students who struggled early are motivated to catch up and rejoin their class, and in others, students new to the Wake County Public School System were placed in a lower grade due to issues such as language proficiency. In both cases, motivated students need a structure that allows them to achieve much more than a year's academic progress in half that time.

That's what our Boosters program provides. It's for students who are making progress, who have the academic capability and the willpower to compress the Standard Course of Study into half of the time. It's a very intense experience. There is a 15 to 1 student/teacher ratio in the Boosters program and a dedicated guidance counselor.

This fall's Boosters students were overage eighth-graders, who on January 26 will enter high school as ninth-graders. This spring, students who began the year in seventh grade will start their eighth-grade curriculum, and upon successful completion will also make the transition to ninth grade.

100 percent of our students completing the Boosters program have been successfully placed in high school. Most will transition to their base high school, while some will go to Phillips High. In both cases, Student Assistance Program counselors will follow kids as they adjust to their new environment. So far, Boosters program alumni have passed 80 percent of the credits they've attempted. Some of them have joined athletic teams. All of them are making progress, and one student from the first fall cohort, in 2007, successfully completed graduation requirements in 2 1/2 years.

The Boosters program exemplifies the kind of creative, innovative approach to learning and teaching that is necessary to achieve our vision. It serves students who have found themselves

behind their peers and are determined to accelerate. Through our ongoing work in strengthening our curriculum and collaborating to improve instruction, we're committed to improving our systems so that every child, at every grade level, can receive the assistance they need. Congratulations to this semester's Boosters graduates, and I look forward to seeing our spring Boosters students as they leap ahead.

Thanks, and I'll talk to you again soon.