

*State of Our Schools speech
Nov. 5, 2009*

It all starts here

Thank you, Mrs. Griffin. On behalf of everyone in our district, thank you for your 12 years of service on the Board of Education. And thank you also to the other members who are leaving the Board at the end of the month: Larry Gauvreau, who represents District One. Kimberly Mitchell-Walker, who represents District Two. [*James Ross, District Three, if he loses.*] Ken Gjertsen, who represents District Six. All of us in CMS appreciate your work for our children and our community.

Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the fourth State of Our Schools event. In preparing for today's event, I found myself remembering something that my dad used to tell me about cars. He knew a lot about cars because he worked for the Ford Motor Company for 38 years. Dad explained to me why the windshield is so much bigger than the rearview mirror. He said it was important to know what was behind you – but it was even more important to have a good view of what lay ahead.

I think that's especially true for public education. We need to know where we've been and we need a wide, clear view of where we want to go. And as we all know --- objects in the rearview mirror are closer than they appear!

In looking at the state of CMS today, let's start with the rearview mirror. We've made significant progress in many areas since 2006. I'm going to talk briefly about our progress and how it has prepared us for what we see through the windshield – what we must do next.

Our 2010 plan set seven goals.

On **Goal 1, High Academic Achievement**, we have advanced in many areas.

- In 2009, 89.6 percent of schools made expected or high growth, a remarkable improvement over the 54 percent of schools of 2006 – and above the goal of 80 percent we set for ourselves by 2010.
- Student achievement increased in 24 of 25 areas tested where we had year-over-year data.

- On End-of-Grade tests in reading for grades three through eight, the percentage of students demonstrating proficiency grew to 59 percent in 2009. That's up from 55.2 percent in 2008.
- On End-of-Grade tests in math, the percentage of students demonstrating proficiency rose to 72 percent in 2009 from 64.3 percent in 2006.
- The district-wide composite score on End-of-Course tests (given in middle and high school) increased to 76.2 percent in 2009 from 66.2 percent in 2006.
- Student achievement increased in nine of 10 areas tested: Algebra I and II, biology, chemistry, English I, Geometry, Physics, Physical Science and U.S. History.
- The participation rate in CMS on Advanced Placement tests, used to determine students' readiness for college-level work, has grown. So has performance. The number of students scoring a three (passing) or higher has grown from 42 percent in 2006 to 49 percent in 2009.
- Similarly, the average score on the SAT test required by most colleges has increased. In 2007, the CMS average score trailed the state average by 10 points. In 2009, the CMS average was six points above the state average.
- On the VoCATS tests used to measure the learning of students in vocational education, the number of schools showing proficiency increased 24.2 percent in three years. In 2009, 79.9 percent of CMS schools showed proficiency on VoCATS tests.

For **Goal 2, Effective Educators**, we have increased the number of teachers with clear licensure and more than four years of experience, as well as the number of teachers with National Board certification and advanced degrees. We have had mixed results with this, and it has helped us shape our plans for 2014.

For **Goal 3, Adequate Resources and Facilities**, we wanted to have all schools meet CMS standards for technology and co-curricular offerings, bring school buildings to baseline standards and reduce the number of mobile classrooms.

- We met our goal of having a 5:1 ratio of students to computers in all schools in 2007. We are at the 83 percent mark for all schools meeting the CMS standard for co-curricular activities in 2009.
- We are on track to meet the 65 percent target we set for schools meeting our standards for quality learning environments. We were at 57 percent in 2009.
- Since 2006, we have secured authorization for \$766 million in facilities funding. We have made the most of that funding through innovative and astute management. Since 2006, the district has lowered the cost per square foot of new construction. We have saved more than \$22 million by taking advantage of prototype designs and changes in market conditions.
- Our construction of new schools lowered the number of mobile classrooms in use to the 2010 goal of 900 just before the start of the 2009 school year,

down from 1,192 in 2006. However, we anticipate this accomplishment will be short-lived as capital projects are further delayed by the economy.

- We have managed to keep the costs of school lunch unchanged for nine years while maintaining a balanced budget for Child Nutrition services.
- We have also achieved significant reductions in transportation costs. We have taken 100 buses out of use. We have reduced the daily miles driven by buses by 11,000 per day. That's almost two million miles each year. We have restructured our bus stops, eliminating 11,000 stops in a two-year period.

For **Goal 4, Safe and Orderly Schools**, we have seen improvement.

- In 2009, 79.5 percent of students – a half-percentage point away from the 2010 target of 80 percent – indicated that their schools were safe.
- The goal of having all schools undergo a safety audit was met in 2008 and 2009.
- Reportable violations by students increased to 10.4 incidents per 1,000 students, well short of the 2010 goal of 6.03 by 2010.
- The percentage of parents and community members who say that they believe schools are generally safe has increased since 2007, but not high enough to meet our targets.

For **Goal 5, Freedom and Flexibility with Accountability**, we made our targets – but there's a caveat. In 2009, 68.7 percent of schools made Adequate Yearly Progress – acceptable growth in achievement under federal standards. That's nearly double the 35.2 percent in 2006 and slightly ahead of the 2010 goal of 68 percent.

However, Adequate Yearly Progress is calculated by the state of North Carolina, not us. In 2009, the state decided to include the results of retesting in academic calculations.

We don't think it's valid to compare 2008 results without retesting to 2009 results with retesting. We are working with the Department of Public Instruction but thus far, these issues have not been resolved.

We launched a Freedom and Flexibility with Accountability initiative in the 2008-2009 school year to give selected principals increased autonomy. Forty-eight principals were given freedom and flexibility in the 2008-2009 school year, and 13 more were added in the 2009-2010 year. This program is showing promising results and we will continue to expand it.

For **Goal 6, World-Class Service**, we have improved the percentage of parents who said that CMS provides timely, accurate and responsive service. It has grown to 71 percent from 64 percent in 2008. The percentage of community

members who said that CMS provides timely, accurate and responsive service increased to 61 percent in 2009 from 39 percent in 2008. For employees, the percentage was 85 percent in 2008. For all three of these, our target was 80 percent.

For **Goal 7, Strong Parent and Community Connections**, we wanted to increase favorable perception of CMS in the community and increase our partnerships. The 2009 survey data indicated that 67 percent of parents in 2009 and 52 percent of the community viewed CMS more favorably than in earlier years. We exceeded the target for school responsiveness, with 86.8 percent of parents reporting satisfaction. For all three, we had set targets of 70 percent.

We surpassed the targets for being perceived as responsive, with 71 percent of parents and 61 percent of the community expressing satisfaction. The target was more than 50 percent.

The district also met its goals of increasing partnerships and volunteer hours. As of 2009, CMS has 247 partners, well above the target of 150, and 176,909 volunteer hours, well above the target of 109,956.

To summarize our progress since 2006: We have improved student achievement and streamlined many business operations during the past three years. We have decentralized to become more responsive and agile. We have tested innovative academic and leadership programs with very promising results.

That's the view of CMS in the rearview mirror.
Now let's look ahead. Let's look through the windshield.

Our mission as a public school district is to do a great job for every child. A referendum on how we're doing happens 137,000 times every day. That's a referendum on our performance by every single CMS family, and it happens every day. It can happen at the kitchen table, or in the car on the way home from school, or at supper. It starts when a parent says, "How was school today?"

There are 137,000 answers to that question every day in Mecklenburg County. In many ways, the job of CMS is mass customization. We want to make sure that all 137,000 students have a great day, every day.

Many of our students are having a great day every day. But I think that as a district, and as a community, we've got a math problem. We're struggling with a simple fraction: Two-thirds.

Two-thirds. Two out of three. That's how many of today's eighth-graders in CMS will graduate from high school if we don't improve our schools.

To solve this math problem is going to take all of us – CMS, parents, students, and everyone else in Mecklenburg County. CMS can't do it alone.

Nine thousand, seven hundred and nine students entered eighth grade in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in August. If we don't act – and act now – about 3,300 of those eighth-graders won't make it through the 12th grade. The majority of the dropouts are likely to be poor or minority students, and more than half will be male.

Let's be clear: We are a very good school district. We have been recognized across the nation as innovative and a leader.

Many of our schools, and many of our students, have earned national recognition for academic and extracurricular excellence. We have many reasons to be proud of many of our schools and our students. We get good marks on a lot of those kitchen-table referendums every day.

That's because our kids who are great are really great. And our kids who are good are really good.

Altogether, that's about two-thirds of our students – the ones who'll earn a diploma in four years and go on to college, or the military, or technical school.

But two-thirds isn't great. We are also part of the national crisis in public education. The dropout rate in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is the same as the dropout rate nationally: one in three American kids doesn't make it through high school.

The implications of that are substantial and unsettling.

For two hundred and thirty-three years, America has been the engine that drives global advancement. We have provided leaders in business, research, science, engineering, the arts and medicine. In nearly every area of human endeavor, American know-how and American can-do have shaped the world.

But if we want to stay a global leader, then we can't afford to educate only two-thirds of our kids. All of us must work together to solve this math problem – and the solution is going to give all of our kids a better, stronger education, not just help the ones who are dropping out.

Let's think about two-thirds for a moment.

Suppose that UPS and FedEx decided they'd only deliver two-thirds of the packages they get. Would we think they're doing a good job?

Or suppose hospitals said they'd only help two-thirds of their patients get well. Is that good enough?

What if Duke Energy decided to only provide two-thirds of the power Mecklenburg County needs? Would we agree that's good service?

Two-thirds doesn't cut it in those areas. It doesn't meet the American standard of excellence. And it doesn't cut it in education, either.

We have some serious work to do and it all starts here, with us. Here in Mecklenburg County, I believe that we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to dramatically reform our schools. We want better teaching. We want better leadership. We want to get more than two-thirds of our children through the 12th grade, because doing that will give *all* kids a better start in life.

We have a blueprint for this: It's the *Strategic Plan 2014: Teaching Our Way to the Top*. It's the CMS schedule of work for the next four years. These are the things we want to focus on so we lift this district from good to great.

I'm going to talk about this plan now. By the way, the 2014 plan, as well as our review of progress on the 2010 plan, will be given to you on your way out – we've put the plan and the review on USB drives that some of our students will distribute after I finish speaking.

Strategic Plan 2014: Teaching Our Way to the Top sets two big goals for CMS:

Improve teaching.

Manage performance.

Improving teaching and managing performance will take CMS to a new level. We can do a better job of educating our children. *All* of our children.

Great teaching and great leadership will take the high fliers even higher. It will take good students closer to great. And it will take the ones who need help over the academic hurdles to success. When we improve teaching and manage performance, every child gets a better education.

We propose to transform the district -- by creating a culture of effectiveness. We will set and meet high standards for our employees and high expectations for our students.

We propose to transform the way we measure our teachers, leaders, and ultimately all of our employees. We will link pay to performance and create standards that are rigorous and explicit to measure effectiveness.

We propose to transform our use of resources. We will better align our people, time and money with our priorities.

We propose to transform the way we use technology. We will incorporate it more effectively into our classrooms and our business operations.

We propose to transform district business operations. We will practice environmental stewardship to meet global standards of efficiency.

We propose this plan now because we believe that Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools stands today at an unprecedented convergence of national, state and local opportunities to transform our schools.

Do we have the will as a district and a community to make the transformational changes in *Strategic Plan 2014: Teaching Our Way to the Top*?

If we act now, we can make all of our schools better. We can help all of our students achieve more. We can dramatically improve the outlook for all nine thousand, seven hundred and nine students of the class of 2014, as well as the thousands of students who will come after them.

Now is the time for CMS to make these dramatic changes. Such transformational changes would not have been possible four years ago, or ten years ago.

The nation wasn't ready. North Carolina wasn't ready. CMS wasn't ready. But today, a lot of things have aligned and it's now possible to make the dramatic changes that public education needs.

It's possible because there is pressure for change on every side.

Nationally, there is a growing awareness of what has been called the silent epidemic of educational failure.

The federal government and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have set a race to the top for funding, challenging states to compete for four billion dollars in educational funding to improve our schools.

Secretary Duncan, a former school superintendent in Chicago, has said that his top priority is improving the quality of teaching by measuring and rewarding – or penalizing – teachers based on performance.

There is growing concern in the private sector as well.

Major companies and foundations are probing to quantify what constitutes great teaching and great leadership, and how we can make our schools better.

At the state and local level, there is pressure of a different kind. The economic downturn of 2008 has squeezed state and local funding.

That pressure is especially acute for us.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools took the largest hit in the state in our local funding for the 2009-2010 budget -- \$34 million, more than ten times the next biggest cut of \$3 million in Wake County.

These stringent budget cuts are forcing us to find new and better ways to use resources wisely. We have improved and streamlined many of our business operations – and we're going to do even more.

There is also strong impetus for reform here in Mecklenburg County. The Board of Education has set a high standard, directing CMS to provide “the best education available anywhere.”

CMS itself is ready for dramatic reform now. In the past four years, we have built a solid foundation. We have accomplished many of the goals in our Strategic Plan 2010 – and this progress has set the stage for our Strategic Plan 2014.

We are ready to work with our board, the veterans and the new members elected on Tuesday. We're ready to partner with them to make this Strategic Plan 2014 not just a plan, but a reality.

Strategic Plan 2014: Teaching Our Way to the Top continues the goal of increasing student achievement, while also sharpening the focus of the strategies and tactics to accomplish that. It significantly expands the scope of earlier reforms.

Managing performance means setting goals and then measuring to see if those goals have been met. We will manage the performance of our teachers, our principals and all of our employees.

We want to use performance to support training for teachers, to compensate and reward them, and to retain or dismiss them. We will establish fair and rigorous standards – standards that our teachers will agree are fair and rigorous – and link performance on those standards to compensation. This is something we want to do *with* our teachers, not *to* them, and we will consider their input as we design our performance standards.

It will take time to build these standards and we are committed to putting our time, our thought and our talent into this.

These standards will change the way teachers are chosen, trained, paid and retained. It is essential that this change occur in public schools.

Why? Because it's almost impossible to overstate the importance of great teaching.

Consider this: In 2006, the Brookings Institution published a study of the Los Angeles public schools. That study concluded that having a top-quartile teacher rather than a bottom-quartile teacher for four years in a row would be enough to close the test-score gap between African-American and white students.

Think about that. The achievement gap is the most difficult challenge in American education – and the means to solve it is within our reach.

And then think about something else: Think what a teacher powerful enough to move struggling kids could do for all the others in the classroom.

Think what a powerful teacher can do for average kids.

Think what a powerful teacher can do for high fliers.

It's the academic version of a rising tide lifting all boats. *When great teaching is happening in a classroom, every child in that classroom benefits.*

Strategic Plan 2014 emphasizes educators who are effective, rather than highly qualified. Based on our results and experiences, we have concluded that relying on credentials is no longer the best approach to determining the effectiveness of educators.

Eight years in, it's apparent that the No Child Left Behind Act is misguided in its reliance on credentials to measure good teaching. Our shift in direction is based on national and local research, as well as our own observation of teachers and teaching.

The best measure of effective teaching must include not only calculating the percentage of students who are proficient, but also measures of student growth.

The most effective instructors are those who can teach students to achieve more than one year's growth in one year's time.

The ability to move students this way is particularly critical in addressing the achievement gaps, where students may be two or more years behind in basic skills. That's why the researchers at Brookings concluded that top teachers can close the achievement gap over a four-year period.

Great teachers can get students to learn more than a year's content in a year's time - and that is the only effective way to catch up those students who are not on grade level. So the 2014 plan seeks to establish new benchmarks in measuring teacher performance, and linking pay to performance.

For our teachers, we will no longer measure effectiveness by credentials or years of experience. Instead, we will monitor year-over-year student academic progress in a variety of ways as the best indicator of effective teaching and leadership.

We also will look at how our compensation system is structured. Right now, teacher pay is based in part on graduate degrees and length of time in the profession.

In CMS, we allocate 26 percent of the money we spend on salaries to reward teachers with advanced degrees or experience. That's a big chunk of money, because salaries comprise most of our annual operating budget.

Is that the best way, the fairest way to compensate teachers? Does that compensation structure work to the benefit of children in the classroom? There's a lot of research out there that suggests that pay-for-experience is not the best compensation structure.

Preliminary research from one study has found that there is no significant difference between the effectiveness of a teacher with a graduate degree and one who does not have that degree.

That same research also suggests that the most improvement in teaching performance happens in a teacher's first three years. There's a big improvement between a new teacher's first year and the second and third years – but after that, the gains are minimal.

What this research tells us is this: If we want the best teacher in every classroom, we need to link pay to performance, not graduate degrees earned or years of experience.

We want the most effective teachers in our classrooms because great teaching will benefit every student in a classroom. High fliers fly higher. Good students get better. Average students get good. Struggling students succeed. Good teaching benefits every single student in a classroom.

This emphasis on effectiveness in the 2014 plan starts in the classroom but it doesn't end there. It is intended to usher in a profound, far-reaching cultural change for every one of our 176 schools, 19,000 employees and seven learning communities.

We want *every* employee to understand that his or her work affects the district's overall performance.

We will measure every employee's work, using measurement tools that can help employees improve. We will provide standards to meet and we will evaluate every employee's progress toward those standards. And we will link compensation to employee performance.

This change will begin with me and run the length and breadth of CMS to recognize the importance of individual excellence in institutional effectiveness. Truly great organizations are built on outstanding work by every participant. Public education has embraced the importance of measuring student progress in order to improve it. Now it is time to extend performance-measurement standards to everyone in education, not just students.

Improving teaching and managing performance are the twin pillars of this plan. We have set six areas of specific focus that will help us improve teaching and manage performance. Those areas of focus are:

- **One: Effective Teaching and Leadership.** How do we define effective teaching? How do we measure it? How do we get an effective teacher into every classroom? This area maps out how we will create and use measures of teaching and leadership.
- **Two: Performance Management.** We want to measure performance using standards that are effective and fair. This area maps out how we will build

those standards and how we will provide support as well as standards for all employees. We will use this to reward performance as well.

- **Three: Increasing the Graduation Rate.** Fifty years ago, a high school diploma was the foundation for a career. Today it is not – but it is a gateway requirement for college, the military, on-the-job training or technical school. It is the essential first step to a career and we need to get more of our students from kindergarten through grade 12 so that they are not clinging to the economic margins of society for the rest of their lives.
- **Four: Teaching and Learning Through Technology.** Technology is an integral part of our lives today. We must prepare students to succeed in this world by blending technology into our traditional educational practices. We must also use technology to ensure that our business practices are efficient and effective.
- **Five: Environmental Stewardship.** As one of the largest employers in Mecklenburg County, and as a publicly funded entity, we have a responsibility and an opportunity to lead in environmental stewardship. Practicing it will allow us to stretch our budget in new ways. CMS has a wide range of operations – transportation, food service, building maintenance. We have 20.6 million square feet of building space that occupies nearly five thousand acres in the county. All of these operations consume resources in some form, and all represent an opportunity to practice environmental stewardship.
- **Six: Parent and Community Connections.** We are committed to the improvement and reform required of us. But we need your support to succeed. We need the support of parents. We need the support of students. We need the support of the community, of business and organizations.

These six areas of focus will help us achieve our two big goals: Improving teaching and managing performance.

But we need your help to succeed. We can't do it alone.

Education is a national priority, but a state and local responsibility. If we are going to give our children the skills and the knowledge they need to succeed in life, education must be a priority and a responsibility for every one of us, not just those of us who work for CMS.

We need to reach broad agreement as a community that “ours” trumps “mine” in public education. We need to recognize that great teaching is essential, because every student benefits, not just some of them.

The gaps in achievement in our schools represent a permanent national recession. As a community and as a country, we cannot afford such loss.

Increasing the achievement of every student by putting a great teacher into every classroom is the key to long-term economic success here and across America. Working together, we can make sure that our students complete the journey from kindergarten through 12th grade.

All of us want more from our schools – and we must have more in order to prosper as a nation. Improving teaching and managing performance will lift all of our students higher. It's good for every single one of our 137,000 students.

Public education in the past has educated Nobel winners, internationally recognized innovators and entrepreneurs, as well as the unheralded solid citizens who keep America moving. Public education in the future must do no less.

We must prepare students for a fast-moving, competitive global workplace.

Public education is the future we all share. *Strategic Plan 2014: Teaching Our Way to the Top* is the next step toward that future for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.

It will require a great teacher in every classroom. It will require measuring the performance of everyone in CMS. Most important: It will require a collective will and a shared commitment to succeed.

I have been in this community for almost four years. I have seen the unlimited capacity and energy that are the greatest resources we have in Mecklenburg County. I know that this community has the capacity and the will to succeed in improving our schools.

CMS is committed to succeeding with this plan but we need your help.

Working together, we can improve teaching.

We can manage performance.

We can improve the education we provide to every child.

We can help every child build a strong future.

It all starts here, with all of us, today.

Thank you.