

State of Our Schools
Oct. 16, 2008

Thank you, Coach. Good morning, everyone. This is our second annual State of Our Schools report. We began this report last year because public education is a matter of vital public interest. The state of our schools affects not only parents and students – it also touches business, the faith community and many others.

The fact is, all of us in the community have a stake in this! Preparing children for the world ahead goes much deeper than civic responsibility or political rhetoric. It's in our DNA: *Look out for the little ones*. Have you ever walked through Marshall Park, near the Education Center, in the spring when the goslings are hatched? They look like tiny bits of dryer lint on legs as they teeter around the park. In their first few months, they're always surrounded – guarded, really -- by mature geese

who protect them and teach them how to navigate the park. And, yes, how to stop traffic on McDowell Street.

Healthy human families work pretty much the same way, don't they? We guard and guide our children as we teach them how to survive – and thrive.

But our children's world extends well beyond McDowell Street, even well beyond Mecklenburg County. Our children will grow up and work in a global economy, a world linked by technology and driven by high-speed information that moves faster every day. We don't know exactly what that world will look like -- but we know this: It will be more complex, more diverse and more challenging than ever before.

All of the workplace will be more diverse, not just those companies that do business overseas. By 2020, according to the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, the number of white working-age people will decline by almost 20 percent. The minority portion of the workforce in the United States will double, hitting 37 percent by 2020. The Hispanic portion of the workforce is expected to triple from 6 percent to 17 percent.

Demographics aren't the only thing that's changing fast. The Rand Corporation, one of the nation's top think-tanks, said in 2007 that three things are reshaping the nation's economy: demographics, technological advances and globalization.

The U.S. is shifting from a production-based economy to an information-based economy. As a

result, tomorrow's workers will have to be highly skilled -- able to learn and relearn quickly because the global economy will require it. I read something recently about Webmasters that illustrated this point perfectly. Five or ten years ago, every business wanted to hire a Webmaster. Today, with the changes in technology that have simplified building a Web page, a lot of businesses don't need a specialist to build Web pages. Yesterday's Webmasters have had to learn new skills to stay in the game.

Workplaces in the future are likely to change even faster than that. So workers will need to be flexible, creative, able to solve problems and master complex communications, says Rand. And globalization means these changes are coming to parts of the workforce that haven't felt them previously. These changes will touch *everyone*, not just one class or group of workers.

CMS is readying our children for success in that global workplace. Many of our students are academically accomplished. They are culturally aware. And they are ready to lead. CMS offers our students a diverse environment that mirrors the world. Our public schools are the best training ground for a global workplace. At CMS, our students get strong academic training. They're also gaining cultural awareness and social responsibility. They're learning how to be global citizens and leaders.

Carlos Sanchez knows that. Mr. Sanchez is the director of corporate and external affairs for AT&T in North Carolina. He and his wife, Deanna, who's a substitute teacher in CMS, are the parents of Felipe and Daniel. The Sanchez family is with us today. Will you please stand up? Mr. and Mrs. Sanchez chose Collinswood

Language Academy and Smith Academy of International Languages because they want their sons to be ready to compete in a diverse, multilingual world. The Sanchezes chose CMS because they wanted the best education possible for their children. In fact, Mr. Sanchez believes that “CMS is a school system that’s full of jewels.”

[Sanchez quote on screen: “CMS is a school system that’s full of jewels.]

Mr. Sanchez is right. There are so many gleaming examples of academic opportunity in CMS, and so many students achieving at spectacular levels in language, science, math and the arts.

One of them is Kevin Lang, who’s with us today. He was one of just two dozen students in the

entire United States who qualified for the U.S. Physics Team. Kevin's science and math skills also qualified him to compete in the U.S. Mathematics Olympiad. Only 500 students each year are invited to take this two-day test requiring the use of calculus. Kevin's a senior at Myers Park this year, and he's been competing in math contests since he was a sixth-grader. Kevin is with us today, along with his family, his teacher and his assistant principal at Myers Park. All of you, please stand up. We're all proud of the way Kevin has turned potential into performance in physics and math! *[applause]*

Pang Yang is another CMS student whose achievements are extraordinary. Pang's family is from Vietnam and they came to the U.S. from a refugee camp in Thailand. Pang began learning English as a second language in CMS, and by fifth grade she was taking honors courses and

doing advanced work. At West Meck, where she is a senior this year, she is taking all Advanced Placement and honors courses – and she has a GPA of 4.7. She is in several clubs and on the West Meck tennis team – and she was chosen to receive the first Hood Hargett Breakfast Club \$1,000 scholarship award given this year. She wants to study medicine. Pang is with us today, along with her family and the principal at West Meck. All of you, please stand up. Your success has inspired all of us and we're very proud of all you have achieved! *[applause]*

CMS has high flyers at every level and in every school. Even as early as elementary school – like fourth-grader Casey Ladson. He attends Tuckaseegee Elementary where he's been in the Learning Immersion/Talent Development program since kindergarten. Casey's been on the honor roll every year, and he earned the top

CMS score in the national Wordmaster Program where more than 4,000 schools compete in all 50 states. Wordmaster encourages growth in vocabulary and verbal reasoning – and Casey says he wants to use those skills to attend the University of Southern California and study law. Casey is with us today, along with his family and his principal. All of you, please stand up. Your accomplishments make us all proud! *[applause]*

These students, and many others in CMS, illustrate why the best public education provides access to academic rigor. High achievement takes place in the context of high expectations. At CMS, we set the bar high for our students. That’s what appeals to Anu Murthy, the parent you saw in the video earlier. Ms. Murthy said, “There’s an extraordinary breadth of courses that children can take in CMS.” *[slide with quote about extraordinary breadth of courses]*. Ms.

Murthy and her family are with us today – please stand. Thank you for your support of CMS. *[applause]*

Our student achievement is the reason that CMS set a new record in scholarship money last year. The CMS graduates of 2008 earned nearly \$75 million in scholarships to the best colleges and universities in America – almost \$20 million more than the class of 2007. Our graduates can compete with students from across the country and around the world – and win.

Our student achievement is also the reason that CMS scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress have led the 11 cities in the urban areas tested. Our scores have also been consistently higher than the state and national averages on this test that is sometimes called the Nation's Report Card.

Our scores on the SAT, the test used by many colleges and universities to determine academic readiness for higher learning, have risen significantly over the past two years. This is an achievement worth celebrating. Two years ago, we trailed the state average by 17 points. Today, we're even – CMS rose 13 points in two years, and the state declined by four points. We're on par with the state scores and catching up to the national average quickly. We don't like to see the state scores decline, but there's another story in those numbers too: We're one of the two biggest districts in the state, so imagine what would have happened to the state average if our scores had declined!

We also encourage all students to take the test as part of our effort to get as many students into college as we can. More than two-thirds of our

eligible students take the test – 68 percent – compared to only 45 percent nationally and 63 percent in North Carolina. And our students who have scores in the top 10 percent consistently outscore the national and state averages for similar students.

Our district’s end-of-course composite score – the average of all the state tests that measure if middle and high school students have mastered specific subject areas – has also increased. In the 2006-2007 school year, 66.2 percent of our students demonstrated proficiency. In 2007-2008, it was 70.1 percent – a gain of almost four points.

There were 14 End-of-Course and End-of-Grade state tests given with year-to-year comparative data available. The number of students who were proficient increased in 12 of the tests,

stayed the same in one and declined slightly in one. This is a very positive trend – we improved in 12 out of 14! I’m very pleased with these results.

We have significantly improved our success in meeting the state’s ABC requirement for academic growth. In 2007-2008, more than three-fourths – 77.8 percent – of our schools met or exceeded the state’s growth standard. This number only includes math results; we are still waiting for the reading results from last year and so the percentages may change. In 2005-2006, it was barely more than half – 54 percent. That is significant improvement.

Those scores and percentages are an important measure of success. They show that CMS is fulfilling the broad mission of public education – giving access to every student – while also

meeting our district's particular mission of high achievement. If you want your child to be not just *ready* for college, but *competitive* for college, CMS is a great choice.

Let me talk for just a moment about the overall context in which these improvements have occurred. First, I'd like to recognize our Board of Education members who are here today. Our Board provided the framework for these improvements, and a springboard for CMS to do many innovative things, by creating its Theory of Action and passing reform governance policies. Thank you, members of the Board, for your leadership!

Another important context is operations. The organizational and operations side of our district must function efficiently in order for our principals, teachers and other administrators to

increase student achievement. We have made many large strides in streamlining and improving our operations. Some highlights of that for you are:

We opened our schools this year with only 16 teacher vacancies and no bus driver vacancies. Given that there is a recognized teacher shortage at the state and national levels, to have only 16 vacancies in a district with 174 schools and more than ten thousand teaching positions is remarkable. Any business would envy that!

We have successfully decentralized Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools into six geographic learning communities and an Achievement Zone. We are in the second year of operating this way, and it is helping us do a better job in every classroom because it has streamlined operations

and improved central-office services to our schools.

We have given 50 of our principals increased freedom and flexibility this year, so they can make decisions about how best to use resources and manage their schools. No one knows a school better than the principal – and this increased freedom and flexibility will allow our principals to move more effectively to improve performance.

We've put in place a Strategic Staffing Initiative to put new leadership into seven of our struggling schools. This initiative allowed the seven principals to bring in teams of teachers to strengthen the leadership team at these schools. The initiative also provides financial incentives for teachers and principals who succeed. We think this will improve performance at those

schools and we'll be using data from this initiative to help guide us in personnel decisions in the future.

We have been aggressive in seeking outside funding to fund these and other innovations. We've been awarded more than \$22 million, with funds coming from the U.S. Department of Education, the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Broad Foundation and the Spangler Foundation.

We're also catching up on some much-needed construction and renovations. After our successful \$516 million bond issue in November 2007, we have launched an aggressive schedule of capital improvements. Six new schools opened this year, on time and on budget. Six more will open next year. In all, CMS has secured \$766

million in bonds and certificates of participation since 2006. The 40 projects we said we'd start – new schools and renovations – have been started. We've kept our promise to the voters who supported us – and we're being careful with the money. Our construction costs per square foot have declined over the past three years, to \$132.14 per square foot, down from \$136.23. That's a lot lower than the state average rate of \$151.42 and the national average of \$157.05. We promised to build new schools quickly and to watch our costs – promises made, promises kept.

We've reduced our transportation costs this year by having about 3,000 fewer bus stops. Our buses are traveling 5,000 fewer miles a day this year than last year.

Academic achievement is the top goal at CMS, and we're working on it in many ways. But it's not the only advantage we give our students. We also offer cultural opportunities and character development – lessons that help prepare our students for a global workplace. Some of those opportunities spring from our size and our diversity. As parent Joe Burton said in the video you saw earlier, “Our children get to go to school with the world.” *[quote on slide: go to school with the world]* The Burton family is with us today. Please stand. We're glad you chose CMS as your school district! *[applause]*

CMS already reflects the global workplace. Our 137,000 students come from more than 150 countries and speak 120 different languages at home. We have a rich, diverse faculty – our teachers come from across the country and around the world, thanks to the teacher

exchange of the Visiting International Faculty program.

CMS also has Teach For America participants in our classrooms. These outstanding college graduates bring specialized knowledge, along with energy and enthusiasm, to our students. CMS has participated in Teach For America since 2004. Thanks to a generous gift from the Spangler family, CMS has been able to nearly double the number of teachers from this source, from 128 in 2007-2008 to 215 this year. That was truly a gift to this community – for the past four years, a Teach for America participant has won district’s award for “Most Outstanding First Year Teacher.” These are some of our best teachers, and we’re thrilled to be able to expand this program.

Our teachers are diverse and culturally aware, and they bring that to our classrooms. Our students learn from teachers like Oakhurst Elementary's Emma Juncadella-Welch [*JUNK uh DELLA*], who led a group of teachers from her school and others in CMS to her native Nicaragua during spring break last year. She and the other teachers visited three schools in rural Nicaragua – including two schools where the students live in houses made of tin and wood that lack indoor plumbing. The CMS visitors brought school supplies for more than 400 students with them, because the schools they visited didn't have many supplies. Those supplies had been collected by the students and staff at Oakhurst. Ms. Juncadella-Welch and her principal are with us today. Please stand. We are so proud of your work helping CMS students, and students in Nicaragua. Thank you.

[applause]

All of us want our children to develop awareness, sensitivity and good character. The benefits are long-term and far-reaching – but they are also immediate. Our public schools are shaping leaders who are not waiting until adulthood to use these skills. They’re using them *now* to sustain and enrich our community as well as others around the world.

For more than a decade, students at Idlewild Elementary have participated in the annual CROP Hunger Walk, which raises money to fight hunger. Last year, Idlewild students raised more than \$3,000 for the walk – the most of any elementary school in CMS. Overall, the Charlotte CROP walk raised more than \$260,000. One-fourth of that money stayed in Charlotte, where it was given to agencies such as Loaves and Fishes, Second Harvest Food Bank and the

Crisis Assistance Ministry. This year's walk took place over the weekend. They're still counting up the money, but Idlewild raised even more than last year and hopes to hit the \$4,000 mark. Jane Collins, the principal at Idlewild, is with us today. Please stand. Thank you for your school's tradition of community service. *[applause]*

Students at J.H. Gunn Elementary also have helped those in need. Third-graders in Mary Hughes' class learned about the founding of Hull House in 1889 and Jane Addams' work helping the poor in Chicago. Their new knowledge inspired them to make more than 150 gift bags for children living at the Salvation Army shelter here in town. Alisha Thomas, one of those third-graders, said, "We want them to know we care for them and we want them to feel like they are a part of us." The students raised money themselves, and also partnered with the J.H.

Gunn PTA and the Albemarle Road Wal-Mart to get the materials for the gift bags.

That kind of understanding and that sense of social responsibility are commendable in anyone – but in a group of children who are eight and nine years old, it's much more. It's outstanding. Mrs. Hughes and Alisha are here today, and so are Alisha's family and principal. Please stand. We are so proud of your contribution to our community. *[applause]*

Two South Meck High students, Hannah Heidenreich [*HIDE n RIKE*] and Anna Sturkey [*STIR kee*], organized Sabres Stand Against Indifference last year, a weeklong series of events to raise awareness of and funds for Darfur. Anna said the goal was to inspire students to take action and get involved in the world. She said, "We really do believe in the

power of high school students to fight injustice.” Anna also spent the summer with the Echo Foundation in Rwanda, and Sabres Stand Against Indifference has become a school club with about 80 members.

At Independence High, students raised more than \$5,000 to help the “invisible children” of Uganda. The students saw a documentary about the thousands of orphans who have fled involuntary military service with the warring factions in that country. So they decided to wear the same two shirts for 20 days -- shirts that students in the Academy of International Studies designed and sold to raise money to help children in Uganda. Kia Schmit, who organized the fundraiser with her classmate David Plath, said, “No child should have to go through that.”

Hannah, Kia, David and Anna, their families and their principals are with us today. All of you, please stand. We are so proud of your contribution to the global community and your concern for children who are suffering.

[applause]

These are the kinds of students that parents like Dr. Jordan Lipton want their children to be. Dr. Lipton said in the video that “The only way for my children to know what it’s going to be like... is to be exposed to children of various cultural backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds and beliefs.”

[quote on slide only way for my children to

know...] Dr. Lipton and many other parents

want their children to become informed, involved global citizens. They know that their children will live in an interdependent, fast-moving world that is linked by technology and fueled by information – and they chose CMS. Dr. Lipton

and his family are here this morning. Please stand. We are so glad that you chose CMS.

[applause]

Our schools are building global citizens ready to live and work in an interdependent world. CMS students learn how to get involved, how to turn caring into action to benefit others. Our students enjoy the privilege of a public education that offers all of this because so many people in our community value education and work to make CMS a great school district.

Is there more to be done? Yes, much more – and a lot of it is daunting. The state of our schools is far from perfect. This year, we’ve faced district budget challenges that reflect the larger economic challenges facing our community and our country. This year, and every year, we face challenges in being able to educate every child –

challenges that spring from poverty and other social issues that we don't own and can't control.

Too many of our kids come to school not ready to learn. It might be because they're hungry. Or maybe they have not had medical care, or immunizations. Or maybe they're frightened because the family is troubled or homeless. These social conditions come to school with too many of our students every single day – and although CMS works hard to overcome the barriers these conditions represent, we can't do it alone. We need more family and community support to help solve the underlying problems that are causing some students to struggle in school.

We still have an achievement gap linked to poverty and race. Many of our schools lack

racial or economic diversity, based on housing patterns in the community. Our current student-assignment plan follows those housing patterns. This results in less diversity in individual schools. We want to close the achievement gap, and we're working to close it – but the fact is this: No large district in America has yet closed the achievement gap.

So how will we do it? We are putting more of our resources – both financial and human resources -- into struggling schools, because we believe every child deserves a great teacher. We're giving teachers and principals substantial incentives to work in these schools and help them improve – but is that enough? Can we do more to close the achievement gap – can we do more as a district and as a community?

We know the achievement gap is linked to poverty and difficult family circumstances. We still have a dropout rate that is far too high, and that is linked to the same factors that we see in the achievement gaps.

All of these things are barriers to learning. All of them affect achievement. So I believe that as a community, we must ask ourselves: Are we doing everything we can for our children? Are we involved enough in our schools? Are there ways we can do more to help all children?

These are substantial challenges for CMS and for our community as a whole. They will require substantial commitments of time, energy and money from all of us. Many are linked to complex social issues with no easy, one-step answers.

Do we want our community to prosper? Do we want a unified school district that offers every child an equal opportunity? Or do we want schools that lack racial and economic diversity? Do we want schools of widely varying quality? Or do we want our children to have the opportunities we have had, and more?

As a community, we must rise to these substantial challenges.

In addition to the challenges that spring from poverty and other social issues we don't control, there are shortcomings that we must more adequately address.

Every school must have a great administrator to lead it. Every classroom must have an outstanding teacher. We want every class to be the right size, not overcrowded. We want every

classroom to have the resources it needs and every school to be modern and conducive to good teaching and learning. This must happen in every classroom, every school, whether the students live in poverty or wealth. We can and must do a better job with this. Every student deserves a great teacher and a great education.

We're not there yet. The gaps remain, and the social conditions that cause them remain. We have much distance to cover as a district to make every classroom right for learning.

I am concerned and all of you should be concerned as well, because these problems affect all of us, and affect the future.

I am concerned – but I am not discouraged. I am concerned but I am also confident. When I see the students who joined us this morning, it gives

me hope for our future. Our students inspire me every day. I share their enthusiasm, their energy and their commitment to making this a better world.

Our community inspires me, too. You come to our schools and volunteer. You mentor. You tutor. You donate supplies. Your foundations give money to help CMS. Your houses of worship partner with our schools in ever-growing numbers – we had 78 faith partners in 2005-2006 and we've got more than 200 today. You join the PTA. You build playgrounds for our schools. You support bond campaigns to help us build new schools. You are generous with your time and your money, your skills and your knowledge. You are helping CMS meet the challenges of educating every child well, of teaching our children to become global citizens.

Working together, this community and CMS are looking out for the little ones – our children.

Working together, we are guiding and shaping our children into global citizens. Working together, we can meet the challenges of poverty and indifference.

I'd like to ask everyone that I have recognized in this speech – students, teachers, families and principals -- to stand up one more time.

These are CMS students, families, teachers, principals and community members. They reflect the immense breadth and depth of public education. They represent the best of what we are as a community – our investment in education and our commitment to the future. They represent what is possible for us to achieve -- as a district and as a community.

When I look at them, and then consider all the challenges we still face, I am confident that we can meet those challenges.

I know we can do this because we are doing it now for many of our students. But we must keep working at our goal of preparing *all* of our students to compete locally, nationally and internationally.

As a district, as a community, as human beings with the instinct to guard and guide our children -- we must work to make *every* student in CMS a success story as amazing and inspiring as these students in front of you.

We can do this. We must do this. And, working together, we will.

Thank you.