



Effective Educators

Third in a series of six

‘Teach your way there’

Education, like life, has few absolutes. There are many ways to teach and many ways to learn. But as leaders in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools developed their first four-year plan for reform, they were united on one absolute: The only route to academic excellence is great teaching. As one consultant told the Board of Education, “If you’re going to get to greatness, you’re going to teach your way there. Nothing else will work.”

The district’s four-year plans (the first one through 2010, the second through 2014) include a specific focus on improving teaching. CMS is using a broad range of programs and plans to make district educators effective. But all are aligned along a single principle: The greatest school-based factor in student learning is the classroom teacher.

Although many of the district’s actions and programs are intended to strengthen teaching and leadership, three separate initiatives are expected to significantly improve how the district finds and keeps great teachers. The initiatives will also help improve the performance of all classroom teachers.

With the first initiative, called the Teacher Incentive Fund-Leadership for Educators’ Advanced Performance (TIF-LEAP), the district is reshaping training, evaluation and compensation strategies for teachers.

The Charlotte Teachers Institute, the second of the initiatives, will train CMS teachers in scholarly content using the Yale National Initiative as a model. It is a partnership between the district and two nearby institutions of higher learning, Davidson College and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Third, CMS has been invited to take part in a national two-year study designed to measure effective teaching, funded

by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, starting in the 2009-2010 school year.

Taken together, these initiatives will improve teaching in the district and help administrators recruit and retain outstanding teachers in the near future and in the long term. This white paper will examine each of the three initiatives for improving teaching in CMS in detail.

TIF-LEAP

In 2006, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools applied for, and received, a federal Teacher Incentive Fund grant to be paid over five years. The total amount of the grant was \$11.9 million, and it began in the 2007-2008 school year with \$2 million from the Department of Education and \$410,000 in funding from the district’s budget. (The grant terms require the district to provide between 70 percent and 75 percent in matching funds for the portion of the federal money budgeted for differentiated compensation; in 2007-2008, the district spent \$560,000 on compensation.)

CMS has set four specific goals for its TIF-LEAP initiative. The district wants to create a differentiated-compensation system for teachers and principals that rewards effective teachers, with effectiveness measures based on student-achievement gains and multiple classroom observations. Second, the district wants to support the recruitment and retention of teachers and principals in hard-to-staff schools and subjects. Third, CMS wants to build capacity to increase student achievement by aligning and improving systems that support the schools. The fourth goal is the creation of a performance-based compensation system that can be used and sustained district-wide.

It’s no small undertaking. District officials charged with putting TIF-LEAP in place recognize the challenge of going where no one else has yet succeeded.



“There’s no great example in the nation,” acknowledges Susan Norwood, who heads the CMS initiative. Norwood, a former teacher, also recognizes another important fact: financial incentives alone won’t get the job done.

“There’s no carrot big enough to make teachers work any harder than they already do,” she says. Instead, CMS is using a mix of financial incentives, training and specific measurements of teacher performance called Student Learning Objectives.

The Student Learning Objectives were created by a multidisciplinary panel of teachers, principals, administrators and accountability experts at CMS working in collaboration with the Community Training and Assistance Center, a national not-for-profit group which has partnered with CMS on the initiative. The objectives provide a framework for teachers to quantify what students in a particular class are learning and to measure how much they have learned in a set period of time.

The Student Learning Objectives became available for teachers’ use in the 2008-2009 school year, with 438 teachers participating. (For the grant’s first year, differentiated compensation was awarded strictly on the basis of results from yearly state tests.) More than half of the participants (238 teachers) successfully met the objectives, and slightly more than a quarter of the participating teachers completed two Student Learning Objectives. Each teacher was paid \$1,400 for success on a Student Learning Objective, with teachers who successfully completed two earning \$2,800.

Participation is increasing as TIF-LEAP begins its third year. Seven elementary schools, five middle schools and four high schools (including one, Garinger, that has been divided into

five smaller schools) are part of the initiative in the 2009-2010 year, and 1,005 teachers are participating.

CMS has also added a student-growth component to the program for the 2009-2010 school year, and additional refinements will continue to be made each year. CMS remains committed to building the TIF-LEAP initiative so it can be taken district-wide. Despite having to make more than \$80 million in budget reductions for the 2009-2010 year, the district has allocated \$1.4 million in matching funds. The federal government portion for the 2009-2010 year is \$3.2 million, and CMS has budgeted \$1.9 million for differentiated compensation.

“This is an important initiative, not just for us, but for public education in America,” says Dr. Peter C. Gorman, superintendent of CMS. “We want to get this right.”

Charlotte Teachers Institute

In May 2009, CMS announced an innovative educational partnership with two institutions of higher learning in the region: Davidson College and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. The collaboration, called the Charlotte Teachers Institute, offers seminars to public school teachers taught by faculty from Davidson and UNC Charlotte on subjects that teachers have chosen. It is the first such institute in the state of North Carolina.

“This partnership will help us develop and train great teachers by giving our teachers access to the expertise at two educational powerhouses here in Mecklenburg County,” says Dr. Gorman.

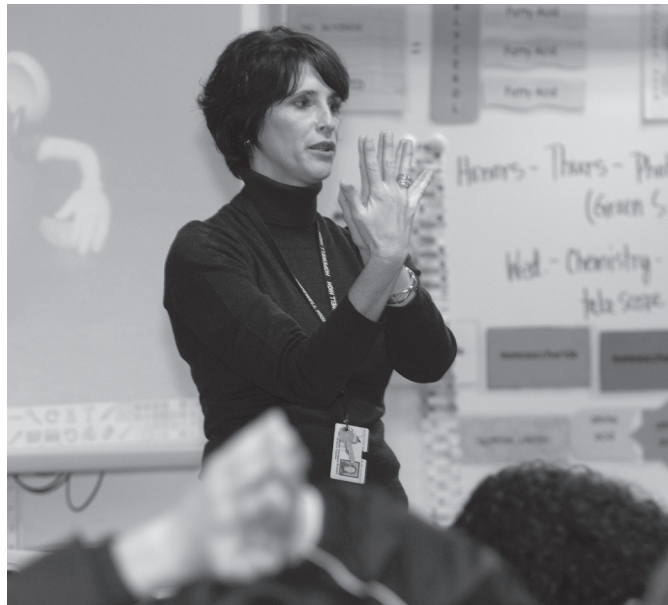
The Charlotte program is based on the Yale National Initiative, which began three decades ago when Yale University partnered with the New Haven Public School District to provide training for district teachers. Today, the Yale National Initiative includes a league of Teachers Institutes in districts across the country, including Houston, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. The Charlotte Teachers Institute has applied for league institute status.

For the past four years, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools has sent teachers to the Yale National Initiative’s summer program; eight teachers attended in the summer of 2009. The program has been nationally recognized for its effectiveness in strengthening classroom teaching by focusing on content and curriculum. CMS teachers have attended the Yale program and rate it highly.

“This experience has given me a unique command over my classroom. It builds my knowledge and helps me dig deeper into my subject,” said Jeff Joyce, who teaches social studies at the CMS Northwest School of the Arts and has attended the Yale program.

Each seminar at the Charlotte Teachers Institute is a semester long, allowing teachers to focus in depth on a specific topic. The classes are small, only 10 or 12 teachers each, and the seminar will meet between 12 and 15 times each semester at either Davidson or UNCC. The classes are collegial and collaborative, and teachers complete a unit of curriculum during the semester.

“This program will help CMS build a substantive educational partnership with two institutions of higher learning, Davidson and UNCC,” says Ann Clark, chief academic officer. “We will get access to a full range of educational thought and opportunity. Davidson is a small private college, and UNCC is part of the state university system. CMS will realize many lasting benefits in our classrooms from this partnership.”



Seminar participants attend weekly seminars and write a new curriculum unit for their students based on the subject matter studied. Each participant will receive a \$1,500 stipend and continuing education credits for successfully completing the program.

The program is structured so that each partner will contribute personnel and financial resources for the institute. Partners pay their own costs of the program, which include faculty compensation, teacher stipends, director and staff support and program costs. Despite a tight budget year, CMS was able to fund the program using federal Title II dollars, and the district will look for private and foundation support for the institute as it grows in subsequent years.

“This is an important program for us,” Dr. Gorman says. “It represents an enormous leap in the way we will train our teachers. It will help CMS improve our schools now, and in years ahead. The single most important school-based factor in a child’s learning is the classroom teacher, and this program is a

significant investment in our teachers. We believe it will help us achieve our top goal at CMS: raising academic achievement.”

Measuring Effective Teaching

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools was among the schools chosen to participate in a two-year research project funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to measure effective teaching.

The project began in the fall of 2009, led by top education researchers working with several school districts across the country, including CMS. It will seek to isolate and quantify

the characteristics of effective teaching, using research involving 3,700 teachers in multiple districts.

CMS will receive \$1.4 million from the Gates Foundation to fund its part of the project.

The project will collect and analyze five kinds of data in the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years. Researchers will analyze classroom observation, student feedback, student work, supplemental student assessments and how well teachers recognize and diagnose student misperception.

The first year of the study will focus on teacher recruitment and data collection. The second year will concentrate on validation of the most promising measures of effective teaching.

Teacher participation is voluntary, and teachers who participate will receive a \$1,500 stipend. The study will focus on five areas: math and English Language Arts in grades four through eight; algebra; biology, and English Language Arts in grade nine.

“This will take us beyond using only student assessment data to measure teaching performance,” said Clark. “It will help us build a multifaceted measuring tool that is rigorous, fair to teachers and effective. Good teaching is complex, and this research will recognize that.”

Data from individual teachers and students will be protected for privacy reasons. Aggregate data will be made available if districts request it. The project results – measures of effective teaching – will be made public when the study is complete.

Participating researchers and methods used in the study will come from Harvard, Stanford, the University of Virginia, the University of Michigan and Cambridge Education Associates. Schools will notify parents of students whose teachers participate in the study. Student participation is also voluntary.

“We are really excited to take part in this national research project,” said Dr. Gorman. “The potential to improve instruction – not just in CMS but across the nation – is so important. This research could be ground-breaking.”

Summary

The importance of teaching in raising student achievement is almost impossible to overstate. Academic excellence will require an almost surgical focus on the needs of individual students in every classroom – and the ability to reach every child is the hallmark of great teaching.

Some great teachers are born and others are made – and CMS hopes to find the first and develop the second. Using a range of strategies that are rooted in performance management – tracking effectiveness and basing compensation on it, as well as incorporating leading research into measurements of effectiveness – CMS has committed to putting educational leaders into every classroom who can motivate and inspire students to excel.



About Us

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is North Carolina's second-largest school district, with 137,000 students (pre-kindergarten to grade 12), 180 schools and 19,000 employees. The district has been recognized nationally for excellence and innovation. These white papers are an informational series designed to share the district's experience and expertise with others involved in public education. If you would like additional information about CMS, please call the office of public information at (980) 343-7450.

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Reach Further. **Global competitiveness starts here.**
