



Strategic Plan 2014

Setting a high bar

There is a national crisis in American education: One in three students does not graduate from high school. The costs of this failure continue long after a student drops out – and those costs touch every aspect of American life. Thus, the dropout rate is a social issue as well as an education issue.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is part of this crisis. The dropout rate in CMS is the same as the national rate, one in three. But we believe it is possible to significantly improve the district's graduation rate by 2014. We have the resources and the expertise to improve our schools – and with support from the community, we believe we can get more of our students ready for college and careers.

In the past several years, our student achievement has increased district-wide, providing a strong foundation for reforms that will improve our graduation rate. Now it is time to make some dramatic changes in the way we teach our students, measure our progress and hold ourselves accountable.

As a district, we have committed to making these changes. These are ambitious targets – no district in America has yet been able to create a way to measure and deliver effective teaching on a broad scale. We know it can be done because it's happened with individual schools and even clusters of schools – but we want to make it happen in every school in CMS.

We can't do this alone. There are many reasons that students drop out of school, and the causes are often rooted in social or family conditions outside the school. This is a community issue and it will require community collaboration, as well as a great teacher in every classroom, to keep students in school.

Our blueprint for this work is *Strategic Plan 2014: Teaching Our Way to the Top*. In order to achieve our goals, it is essential that we align all of our resources with this plan.

This white paper will address the main goals of the strategic plan, why we chose them and how we can work together to help more of our students successfully complete high school.

The 2014 Plan

Strategic Plan 2014: Teaching Our Way to the Top sets two big goals for CMS: Improve teaching and 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 have set high expectations for our students and we measure their progress toward those standards. Now we must do the same for our employees. We must develop a system that rewards top performance and helps our teachers meet our expectations. These standards will change the way teachers are chosen, trained, paid and retained.

If we act now, we can make all of our schools better. We can help all of our students achieve more. The economic downturn that began in 2008 has squeezed state and local funding, especially for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. It is imperative that we 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.

Areas of Focus

To improve teaching and manage performance, *Strategic Plan 2014* identifies six areas of focus. These are the areas where we will put our resources – our time, our people and our money.

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. We want to be the first district in America to define, measure and develop great teaching in every classroom.

Measuring the performance of teachers and school leaders will require using a range of student assessments and other evaluation tools. 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. We also will look at how our compensation system is structured.

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.

The performance of school leadership – principals – is also essential for student success. There is no truly great school without a great principal leading it. School leadership has a direct effect on teachers, especially in recruiting and retaining great teachers. Teachers have repeatedly ranked school leadership as a top reason they choose to stay at or leave a school or the profession altogether.

CMS must also give teachers and principals the tools they need to work effectively. Therefore, this area of focus also includes some specific programs and models that CMS has identified as useful in making teaching and school leadership more effective.

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. We will use this to reward performance as well.

The 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 across the district. We want every employee to understand that his or her work affects the district's overall performance. Individual excellence is the foundation of institutional effectiveness – truly great organizations are built on outstanding work by every participant.



Performance management requires collaboration. Successfully employed by the business sector for years, performance management is intended to strengthen employee performance at all levels of the district by helping each individual understand how his or her effectiveness affects all of CMS.

Effectiveness must be measured in multiple ways, and it is essential that the process of performance management be both collaborative and fair. With performance management, CMS commits to an evolving process of measurement and excellence for every employee. This will require the creation of some new evaluation instruments, as well as increased reliance on some of the existing evaluation tools.

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.

The four-year graduation rate in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools was 66.1 percent for the 2008-2009 school year. The district needs to increase the rate of graduation for its students, and we have set a target of 90 percent of students graduating by 2014.

For many students, high school graduation is a seamless process that begins in kindergarten. For others, it is a path with obstacles. CMS can help students navigate around those obstacles and clear the diploma hurdle by monitoring student progress and providing academic intervention as needed.

CMS must also identify early those students who are struggling because of poverty, homelessness and other social factors so that therapeutic and effective intervention can occur. Robust intervention teams in schools can provide necessary assistance in each grade from kindergarten to 12th grade. This will require alignment of intervention strategies with instruction, and collaboration between teachers, principals and members of the intervention team. After-School Enrichment Programs should also be aligned with instruction, so that students realize an academic benefit from additional hours spent at school.

It must be emphasized, however, that many of the situations that cause students to struggle are social ones. The involvement of the community is needed to effectively address these problems. After-school and instructional strategies can help students learn more but do not, and cannot, address the root causes of poverty and homelessness. These are social issues that require a wide range of solutions.

Teaching and Learning Through Technology. Technology is an integral part of our lives today. We must prepare students to succeed by blending technology into our traditional educational practices. We must also use technology to ensure that our business practices are efficient and effective.

Skillful use of technology in a traditional classroom can expand its walls and engage students in new ways, providing rich content and opportunities to work collaboratively.

Mastery of technology is also critical to the effectiveness of teachers, principals and administrators. As the use of data becomes more embedded in the district's accountability measures, teachers, staff and principals will need the expertise required to access and analyze information about students and schools. All educators and staff will require expertise in analysis and use of data to drive accountability and improvement.



On the business side, functions such as payroll, student records, employee records, utility usage and the wide range of other district work must be managed well – and this requires adequate digital infrastructure to support district needs. This digital infrastructure is at the heart of the delivery of all technology services and will require growth and transformation as demands for those services rise.

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.

CMS has a wide range of operations – transportation, food service, building maintenance. We have 20.6 million square feet of building space occupying nearly 5,000 acres in the county.

All of these operations consume resources in some form, and all represent an opportunity to practice environmental stewardship.

Careful conservation of resources will enable CMS to stretch its budget in new ways by reducing costs across the spectrum of business operations while improving environmental performance.

District business operations include food service, transportation, building maintenance, landscaping, new construction and renovations as well as typical office operations. All of these can be streamlined and managed to reduce consumption and waste.

Effective environmental stewardship will also require educating parents, students and CMS staff. We want to engage all stakeholders, creating an awareness and sense of individual responsibility around environmental management and wise use of resources.

Parent and Community Connections. The gaps in achievement in our schools represent a permanent national recession. As a community and as a country, we cannot afford such loss. But successfully educating students requires more than good schools.

Parents and the community need to be involved with education and to communicate its value to students. We need to reach broad agreement as a community that “ours” trumps “mine” in public education.

Parents have a responsibility to participate in their children's education and they are a child's first and best teachers. There is no substitute for an involved parent. Research shows that increasing parental involvement also increases academic achievement for every kind of student and every kind of family. Full success in school depends on parental involvement as well as effective teaching and leadership.

CMS seeks to increase parental and community involvement in schools in a variety of ways. Parent University helps strengthen families and educate parents about what children need to succeed in school by providing free classes across the community.

We also use a wide variety of strategic partners and volunteers. Our partners are businesses, organizations, houses of worship, other governmental agencies and parents who want to help our schools. Partners donate services and other resources to schools, and many also provide volunteers.

Effective use of volunteers through management of the volunteer program will allow the district to leverage the benefits of community involvement by aligning that involvement with academic goals.

Areas of Focus

To achieve the goals of *Strategic Plan 2014: Teaching Our Way to the Top*, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools has created measures of success and strategies to achieve them for each of the six areas of focus.

Effective Teaching and Leadership

Measurement: One hundred percent of students will achieve more than a year's growth in a year's time. Teachers and leaders will narrow the achievement gap between the lowest-performing and highest-performing students.

Key strategies:

- Clearly define and measure teacher effectiveness.
- Develop a measure for a year's worth of growth for every subject and grade level.
- Base teacher recruitment and selection on effectiveness, not on qualifications.
- Provide access to training that is tailored to student and teacher learning needs.
- Recruit and retain top talent for school-level positions.
- Ensure that school leaders have the ability and resources to meet the needs of students and teachers.

Performance Management

Measurement: Ninety percent of all employees will meet or exceed expectations by 2014.

Key strategies:

- Manage employee performance using readily available, accurate and timely information. Create new measures and evaluations that specify expectations for every job in the district. Provide real-time data from local formative assessments.
- Revise compensation structure to reflect a focus on performance.
- Develop training programs for leaders and potential leaders to help improve performance.

Increasing the Graduation Rate

Measurement: Increase the number of students who graduate in four years from 66 percent to 90 percent by 2014.

Key strategies:

- Align intervention strategies and support services with daily instruction.
- Provide alternative settings or means for students to earn

- credits toward graduation.
- Improve accuracy of student records and registrations to better manage students' academic progress.
- Ensure that CMS schools are safe and orderly learning environments.
- Improve district attendance rate.

Teaching and Learning Through Technology

Measurement: CMS technology infrastructure will be capable of supporting 98 percent of all academic and business demands for service by the 2014-2015 school year.

Key strategy:

- Expand student and staff access to, and use of, technology-based educational services.

Environmental Stewardship

Measurement: Reduce all utility consumption by 20 percent, solid wastes by five percent and pollutants by 20 percent.

Key strategy:

- Engage all stakeholders in conservation of resources.

Parent and Community Connections

Measurement: Increase the number of family members who participate in Parent University courses to 30,000 by 2014. A district family survey will indicate that 85 percent of parents believe that family involvement is valued in their child's school. District partners will be surveyed annually and indicate a 75 percent or higher satisfaction rate on partnership effectiveness.

Key strategies:

- Expand academic support programs and opportunities offered through Parent University.
- Increase the capacity of schools to partner with families and strengthen communication between school and home.
- Expand to every school the effective use of volunteers as partners in the educational process.
- Effectively manage key volunteer and partnership programs.

About Us

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is North Carolina's second-largest school district, with 137,000 students (pre-kindergarten to grade 12), 176 schools and 19,000 employees. The district has been recognized nationally for excellence and innovation. This white paper is part of 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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In compliance with federal law, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools administers all education programs, employment activities and admissions without discrimination against any person on the basis of gender, race, color, religion, national origin, age or disability.

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REACH FURTHER. **Global competitiveness starts here.**