



# The Way Forward

Listening, learning and the case for change

---

Dr. Heath E. Morrison

November 26, 2012



Every Child. Every Day. For a Better Tomorrow.



# The Way Forward

- The Way Forward . . . . . 3
- The Entry Plan:
  - ‘Seek First to Understand’ . . . . . 4
  - What Did I Learn? . . . . . 5
- The Case for Change . . . . . 7
- Eight Key Goals . . . . . 9
- The Strategic Plan . . . . . 12
- Moving Forward . . . . . 12
- Delivering on the CMS Brand Promise . . . . . 14

---

# The Way Forward

**There were 8,130 graduates in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools class of 2012. Those graduates were offered more than \$96 million in college scholarships and many graduates left CMS with a bright future ahead of them.**

Jordan was one of them. He earned a year of college credits during high school and, as a National Honor Society member, won one of the scholarships given to top high school seniors across the country by the National Merit Scholarship Corp. He is now studying pharmacology at the University of North Carolina—an educational journey he plans to continue all the way to a doctoral degree.

Josh should have been one of those graduates in 2012. Instead, he was one of 987 dropouts that year. Josh was above grade level in reading and math all through elementary school. But as early as kindergarten, Josh missed many days of school. By ninth grade, his absences were causing him to fail some classes when he couldn't make up the days. A series of recovery plans and several attempts at catching up using online classes sputtered out and Josh lost his motivation, dropping out in the first semester of his senior year. He went to a CMS graduation ceremony as a spectator, not a participant.

The distance between Jordan and Josh is the difference between a good school district and a great one. A good school district, which Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is, can produce many high school graduates prepared for postsecondary work in colleges, careers or the military. A great school district—what Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools can and should be—graduates all students with a personalized post-secondary plan.

The challenge of public education today is twofold and complex: We must prepare all of our students for the future—but we don't know exactly what that future will be.

Many of our students come to us with home support to help them navigate public school from kindergarten through grade 12 in a seamless journey. Others do not—instead, they have the

added challenges of poverty, mobility, English as a second language or learning disabilities. These are challenges that can and must be overcome with planning and preparation.

Today's students are likely to change careers multiple times over their working lives and many of the jobs they will take may not yet exist. They will compete with jobseekers around the globe, not just here in the United States. Technology will shape the workplace and the workforce in unforeseen ways. Despite this uncertainty, it is imperative we give our children—all of them—the skills they need to succeed in that unknown workplace of tomorrow.

America has a rich history of creativity and innovation, as well as an abundance of resources and past success. Similarly, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is better positioned for success than many other districts. We have many pockets of success across the district.

As a district and as a community, we recognize that Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is not yet great. We are not yet graduating every student prepared for the future. We have much work to do.

How we will do that work, and why we must do it, is the focus of *The Way Forward*, a comprehensive overview of the new strategic direction for our district. We can educate every student, every day for a better tomorrow. We can meet the needs of all of our students who make up the culturally rich, diverse mosaic that is Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.



*Every Child. Every Day. For a Better Tomorrow.*

# The Entry Plan

---

When I began as superintendent of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in July 2012, I promised I would listen and learn before setting out a course for the district. In my entry plan, I outlined five goals for my first 100 days to guide the learning process:

- 1. Focus on student achievement.**
- 2. Build a collaborative relationship with the Board of Education.**
- 3. Increase organizational efficiency to ensure strong support for schools.**
- 4. Establish a respectful, positive culture centered on teaching and learning.**
- 5. Build public trust through open, honest communication.**

## ‘Seek first to understand’

Noted author Stephen R. Covey says, “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” I wanted to understand Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools fully—the internal operations, the relationships the district has with stakeholders—before establishing a plan. So I listened and I learned. I visited all of our schools, meeting with students, teachers, support staff and principals. I visited many departments of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools—including transportation, Child Nutrition, maintenance, human resources and academic departments.

To learn what employees and community members thought about the district, I held a series of 13 town hall meetings, inviting participants to tell me what the district does well and what it needs to improve. The meetings were structured with a large general discussion at the beginning, followed by smaller group discussions so everyone had a chance to be heard. I also met with hundreds of individuals and small groups of parents, critics, higher education officials, PTAs and other organizations which work with us in various ways.

I listened to dozens of our partners: state and local legislators, community organizations, public and quasi-public agencies that serve children, elected officials from all areas of government and philanthropic agencies and groups.



In addition, I wanted the insight of others with particular expertise. So I commissioned three audits by independent consultants. I asked AronsConsulting LLC to audit our human resources department. I asked Drive West Communications to audit our communications department. Finally, the Council of the Great City Schools reviewed the way Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is structured, how operations are managed and how decisions are made.

What I learned—and I learned a lot—about the five areas identified in my entry plan has helped our leadership shape eight key goals that will immediately focus our district’s school-improvement efforts.

In addition, we will also use that knowledge, as well as continuing feedback from our community- and employee-engagement efforts, to help us refocus our long-term strategic goals in the CMS *Strategic Plan 2014: Teaching Our Way to the Top*. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools has made significant progress in addressing challenges facing public schools.

We will build on that work to develop processes and systems to help the district succeed in raising student achievement, strengthen employee engagement and morale, and operate more efficiently. The existing strategic plan addresses many of those goals, so our work on the plan will focus primarily on how best to achieve them.

## What did I learn?

My first entry-plan goal was to gain a full understanding of how CMS addresses student academic achievement. I talked to parents, students, staff, administrators and the community about this, always asking the same two questions: What do we do well? What can we do better?

The answers were remarkably consistent across a wide range of stakeholders. Here is a summary, by goal, of what I heard:

### GOAL 1

CMS has narrowed achievement gaps significantly. This was part of the reason the district won the Broad Prize for Urban Education in 2011, a substantial honor. However, the gaps remain pervasive—even though they are smaller, they are still there.

CMS is not personalized enough. The needs of many students fall outside existing structures and supports, and we need to do a better job of matching needs with supports so all students can achieve. This personalization needs to include expanding our ability to help our highest achievers move ahead as well as helping average and struggling students.

The district has been recognized across the country for focusing on elements of effective teaching but CMS needs to do more to build capacity and to attract and retain top-quality talent.

While CMS offers a number of quality magnet programs, it needs to accelerate more options and choices for students and parents. New magnets, academy signature programs, alternative structures and a dedication to using technology tools in a blended learning environment will better meet the needs of a wider range of students.

### GOAL 2

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education is committed, individually and as a whole, to effective governance. The Board is willing to take on the tough challenges of raising student achievement and improving operations, both tasks made more challenging by budget cuts in previous years and the likelihood there will be more in the future. The Board is aware education is likely to face funding challenges for the foreseeable future.

The Board is also willing to expand its capacity for governance through professional development tailored to the changing landscape of public education.

### GOAL 3

CMS has been a national and regional leader in pursuing a performance-management system. The district began this work before many other districts and even the state of North Carolina. As a result, CMS is further along in a difficult development process. But we need better processes and systems to drive this work and ensure transparency and accountability.



We need to improve our cross-functionality as a district. Too much of the district's work has been done in silos, with little internal or external communication about decisions and the rationales for them. We must break down these silos so everyone understands the challenges and can work together on the best way to meet them.

We also need to provide better customer service. Parents and the community are often frustrated in their attempts to interact with the district, particularly at the central-office level. This is also true for employees, who often feel they are not being heard. We need to be more attentive and respectful of the public and our own employees, making courtesy and respect the rule, rather than the exception.



**GOAL 4**

Much of the knowledge we have gained for this goal has come from surveys and audits, as well as from community meetings we have held for employees and the public. On the survey and in the meetings, our employees display a high degree of commitment to their work and their individual work sites (schools, departments, etc.). However, there is a troubling disconnect between many of our employees and the district as a whole, with many employees disengaged with CMS on an organizational level. Employee morale needs strengthening and we need to build a stronger bond between CMS overall and the people who work for it. CMS has a compliance-driven culture which has hampered engagement and innovation.

Cultural proficiency is also a large area where CMS must focus. We are a culturally and ethnically rich, diverse district and we must do a better job of embracing the many countries and cultures of our students and our employees.

**GOAL 5**

Some schools in CMS are the source of great pride. Many of these schools draw fierce loyalty from students, families and employees. But this pride and sense of ownership does not extend to the district as a whole; successful schools are often perceived as exceptions to the CMS rule. This problem is not unique to our district; Gallup polls nationally show a declining trust in institutions, with many respondents giving lower marks to school districts than to the individual public schools their own children attend.

This is essentially a brand issue for CMS. Successful institutions recognize their brand isn't what they say it is—it is what people say about them. For CMS, that means our brand is what people say about our schools and the district as a whole.

We need to continuously engage our community in the work of making every school a school of choice and a source of pride. We need to earn a good brand for our district. Every school and every work site should be a source of pride, not just some of them. Every neighborhood school should be a school of choice, not a school of last resort. We must rebuild trust in CMS so our stakeholders are proud of our national reputation for innovation and excellence. Over time, as we improve our schools, we can build the trust and support at home that we receive nationally.



# The Case for Change

---

There is a very clear consensus among stakeholders Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools needs to change to better serve its 143,866 students. The residents of Mecklenburg County do not want a “good” school district; they want a great one. That desire is shared by the employees of CMS.

How to move from good to great will be the focus of an ongoing conversation with stakeholders we will have now and in the future. The change that is needed is not “one and done;” instead, it is a kind of evolutionary shift requiring constant attention. There is no place in our district for complacency or inflexibility. Instead, we must work together to identify how to improve our school district together.

Jim Collins, the author of *Good to Great*, says, “Confront the brutal facts.” Doing this, he says, involves three component actions: Create a climate where the truth is heard, get the data and embrace the Stockdale Paradox of maintaining faith without believing in false hope.

We have begun the process of confronting the brutal facts with three audits and a survey to measure employee engagement and morale.

An audit of our human resources department conducted by AronsConsulting found many areas where we can improve how we identify, hire, retain and support our employees. We have appointed a new chief of human resources to jump-start that improvement process.

An audit of our communications department also found areas where improvement is needed. We have appointed a chief communications officer and an assistant superintendent for community relations and family engagement. Together, these changes will help us strengthen our communications internally and externally, and will also help us bolster our partnerships with parents and the community.

An audit of our entire district found we can improve our effectiveness and efficiency by restructuring departmental alignment and reporting structures. We have begun the process of making changes at the executive level and in the reporting structures.

The local consensus on the need for change is supported by larger national and regional context in which CMS operates. The federal and state pressure to change will increase, not fade. We need to be a leader in these changes, not a follower, because it will allow us greater personalization of our schools—and it will serve our students well.

The urgency of school transformation is also supported by the changes in our workforce and workplaces. Our children will come of age in an era of unprecedented competition for jobs. They will compete against other jobseekers around the world, not only in Charlotte or North Carolina or the United States. Technology has made it possible for work to be done globally and our children will need to be literate, numerate, articulate and technologically adept if they are going to possess the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the future.

—  
The residents of Mecklenburg County do not want a “good” school district; they want a great one.  
—



What they can't be is average. The emerging workplaces of the future will be built on the talents of a global pool of applicants. According to *New York Times* columnist and author Thomas Friedman, "Just doing a job in an average way will not return an average lifestyle any longer. Average is officially over."

Our children will also not be able to successfully compete in global workplaces without some kind of postsecondary training. For many, that will be college and advanced degrees. For others, it will be career training or military preparation.

But no matter what our students choose, they will need a high school diploma that is meaningful in order to move on to postsecondary education. Having a high school diploma is no longer the guarantee of an average job and an average lifestyle, but not having one is virtually a guarantee of failure. We must graduate every student and we must make sure the diploma represents a meaningful attainment of knowledge. We can no longer teach our students by rote or by rule, because the workplace they are headed into is too fast-moving and too fluid. We must make sure that they have learned how to learn and we have fostered their creativity, ingenuity, innovation and entrepreneurial spirit because they will need those skills in our quickly globalizing world.

To prepare every child, every day, for a better tomorrow will require new kinds of schools. Education is not one-size-fits-all because of the diverse needs of our students—and our schools can't be one size either. Just as we have evolved

in public education from a one-room schoolhouse to academies and comprehensive high schools, we will need to continue the evolution of our schools. Some students may need extra time, or extra space. Others may need expanded capacity so they can learn faster. Still others may need career and technical education rather than college preparation. All of our students will need learning delivered with technology, because the world operates with smartphones, digital content and other high-tech tools.

Most importantly, we must clearly define what success is. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools measures and tests in many areas; however, we must engage our community in establishing a pathway of success for all students with agreed-upon targets that attest to college and career readiness. Once we have established a working concept of success, we can create an accountability system that provides autonomy for schools which meet these criteria while allotting additional attention to schools which need more support.

—  
To prepare every child, every day, for a better tomorrow will require new kinds of schools.  
—







## Eight key goals

To change our schools so they prepare our students for the future, we have identified eight key goals. All of these goals have the fierce urgency of now. However, meeting them will require time to build a shared vision and expectations for our schools. We need to work intentionally, effectively and carefully, balancing the urgency against the need for deliberation in order to succeed.

We also want to engage the community in this work. So we will convene 22 task forces made up of stakeholders, including parents, teachers, CMS administrators, members of the community and local leaders across a wide range of organizations and government. Each of these task forces will look at a particular component of a goal and how best to address it. For example, one of the task forces assigned to Goal 1, accelerating academic achievement for every child, will examine its key components of strengthening extended-learning opportunities and expanding early childhood education. Other task forces will convene to consider ways of improving instruction for specific groups of students, such as gifted students, African-American males, students with limited English skills and special education students.

The task forces and CMS administrators must also do this work in the context of creating the district's 2013-2014 budget. This involves not only knowing what our resources are but also determining priorities so we use our resources wisely and effectively.

Community and employee engagement is important to this work. The challenges of the present and the demands of the future will require the best thinking of all of us. No single person or organization has a comprehensive answer to all of the questions and challenges before us. Instead, we need to work together collaboratively to serve our students.

### GOAL 1

**Accelerate academic achievement for every child and close achievement gaps so all students graduate from CMS college- or career-ready.**

This is the core function of our public schools: to prepare our children for tomorrow. There are many ways that we can make our instruction more rigorous and our schools more robust. All of our work is ultimately in support of this goal.

In order to determine the degree to which we are meeting this goal, we must identify college-readiness measures. These can be used to help us reverse-engineer pathways of success for all students with a focus on literacy, numeracy and writing. We can begin by promoting increased participation in AP and IB courses and in SAT/ACT testing as well as providing support to strengthen student performance.

We must ensure our students stay on track by acquiring reading and math skills in the early grades, which in turn will allow them to pass algebra, English and science courses required for high school graduation. Expectations for students should be aligned to ensure successful progression through school.

We must also strengthen and expand early childhood programs to build an early foundation for success that addresses the achievement gap before it begins in order to prevent third-grade retention. We have to look at what the data tell us for specific groups, such

as English language learners, African-American males, children with special needs and children in poverty. It is also imperative we serve our highly able students, recognizing their giftedness and talents with the same intentionality we apply to every other student. Finally, we must build a personal plan of progress for every child that is aligned with success pathways and post-secondary goals.

—  
“Just doing a job in an average way will not return an average lifestyle any longer. Average is officially over.”

—  
*Thomas Friedman*



**GOAL 2**

**Ensure an effective teacher in every class is led by an effective principal in every school served by quality support staff, by supporting the professional development of all employees.**

Increasing academic rigor and student learning means bringing your A-game to work every day. We want our employees to be engaged and engaging, valued and held to the highest standards of teaching, learning and operations.

We can begin now by repositioning the Talent Effectiveness Project as a professional-growth system focused on employee effectiveness. High performance does not happen by accident and we need to supply a solid foundation of training and learning for all employees. We must define attractive career paths for all, including teachers who want to stay in the classroom. We will incorporate Peer Assistance Review (PAR), a peer coaching and evaluation program for teachers, administrators, and support staff. We will also incorporate district-level and school-based teacher-retention strategies focused on retaining our top talent.

**GOAL 3**

**Cultivate innovative partnerships with parents/caregivers and the community to provide a sustainable system of wraparound support for all children.**

Our district and our community have many assets that can help our students. We need to do a better job of matching needs with available assets. This will require building new and better processes in several areas. We can begin by inventorying needs at every school and asset-mapping the community to create unique matches and opportunities, strengthen existing partnerships and forge new ones.

We will work to expand parent involvement and engagement strategies by using what we learn from Parent University to refocus and improve it. We will also continue to reinforce higher education, faith-based, and business/civic partnerships as critical alliances needed to advance student achievement.

Additionally, in order to promote active readership, we will launch a community-wide literacy initiative. By modeling literacy as a component of citizenship, this initiative will raise children's awareness of literacy's crucial role in people's lives.

**GOAL 4**

**Continuously nurture a self-renewing culture of high engagement, customer service and cultural competency.**

CMS employees have indicated a high degree of site- and school-specific commitment; however, our employee-engagement survey also shows there are multiple ways in which we can make CMS more effective and attractive as a workplace. We want to ensure our schools are places where every student can learn. This is an ongoing process of continuous improvement essential to district success. In order to address these issues, we will begin by intentionally nurturing a culture of pride, trust and respect in schools and district-wide. Next, we will address specific areas identified in the employee-engagement survey as needing improvement, such as clearer, more timely communication of district actions and initiatives, and embedded processes for employee feedback.

We will also establish a strong culture of customer service within central office, in schools and with external stakeholders and customers. In order to promote a safe school environment for every child and adult, we will promote a comprehensive

anti-bullying campaign to dramatically reduce bullying and harassment. As part of this work, we will create a framework for discipline so schools handle issues of bullying and harassment consistently and fairly. Additionally, so we can provide welcoming learning environments for all students and staff, school leaders will receive cultural-competency training. To ensure that our classrooms meet the needs of all students, we will examine our practices to be sure they reflect and embrace the diversity of CMS.

**GOAL 5**

**Establish a comprehensive performance-management approach that ensures data-informed and evidence-based decision-making for students, schools and the district as a whole.**

An effective performance-management structure is the infrastructure that will support academic achievement and improvement in our schools. This is a district-wide imperative that will require changes now and in the future. In order to differentiate support for each school to meet unique needs, we must design a school-performance framework that allows greater autonomy for high-performing schools while also allowing CMS to be more deliberate in its interventions to assist underperforming schools. To further the work of developing multiple strategies to assist chronically underperforming schools, we will determine next steps for the Strategic Staffing Initiative, which has raised performance in some struggling schools by assigning high-performing teams of principals and teachers to them.

Additionally, we will partner with productivity and quality experts to establish key processes and systems to tighten the district’s daily operations.



We will continue to refine and establish Key Performance Indicators and scorecards for every department, including benchmarking against high-performing school districts in order to ensure continuous improvement. We will incorporate a system to ensure data integrity across every department.

**GOAL 6**

**Strengthen and expand our portfolio of educational choices for students to foster creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship.**

Americans have long been known for their ability to create and design important products, concepts and structures. We must nurture and unleash the creativity and entrepreneurial curiosity our children have, not stifle it with a rigid, inflexible delivery of instruction. Choice is essential for effective public schools. Every parent wants a great opportunity for their children to learn. It is our responsibility and our privilege to provide 159 schools of high quality and to ensure that every neighborhood school is a school of choice.

Every child is different, every child has unique learning needs and abilities and public education must be broad and deep in order to reach children where they are before moving them along the success continuum. We will make our neighborhood schools ones of choice by adding choice options such as strengthening existing magnets and initiating new ones, middle colleges, academies and Cooperative Innovative High Schools. We can begin by promoting new non-traditional educational options to support students with unique needs and circumstances, e.g., schools with on-site daycare and suspension-alternative schools. Current structures and operations can be modified and changed to create new types of alternative schools with blended learning opportunities and vocational options. Our range of choices must include options for the very brightest students as well as the ones who are average or struggling.

—  
To ensure that our classrooms meet the needs of all students, we will examine our practices to be sure they reflect and embrace the diversity of CMS.  
—

**GOAL 7**

**Increase technology integration to support inspired learning and teaching.**

Technology is no longer just an important tool; it drives the environment in which we live and work, and it must be incorporated effectively in our schools to prepare children for daily existence in the modern world. Emerging research on cognitive

and youth development shows the old models of one kind of classroom and one kind of instruction for everyone do not prepare students to succeed in higher education and high-skill careers. Our schools must offer personalized learning environments that reflect students' unique educational needs. We will begin by broadening the reach of our most effective teachers through technology. Also, we will expand access and use of technology to provide

—  
Our schools must offer personalized learning environments that reflect students' unique educational needs.  
—

one-to-one/blended learning opportunities and innovative learning environments for all children to support 21st-century learning. We will digitize our curriculum to widen access to methods and materials that reach diverse learners. We will also establish a website and electronic portfolio for every child to tell his or her unique story.

**GOAL 8**

**Communicate proactively and purposefully to strengthen public trust and establish CMS as the preferred K-12 choice.**

Without public support, our public education will never achieve what we want and need. Trust is earned over time and CMS is committed to re-engaging the community as well as our own employees in order to strengthen our schools. We will begin by improving internal and external communications quality and frequency around district-level initiatives. We will provide greater transparency in decision-making about management of resources such as capital, time and money. To do this, we will increase use of social media to drive timely awareness of key

messages and events and to strengthen the CMS brand. We will also advance the use of the CMS website and intranet as customer-focused, information-sharing tools.

**The strategic plan**

These eight goals identify many key areas for improvement that reflect the current strategic plan for CMS. The district has done substantial work in many areas that will serve as a foundation for the eight goals. Our intent is to revise the existing strategic plan rather than rewrite it. However, we want community input into this process and we will convene town hall meetings in 2013 to seek feedback on the strategic plan and how best to refine it. The work of the 22 task forces associated with the eight goals we have identified will also inform the reshaping of the strategic plan.



**Moving forward**

Public education is rooted in two of the strongest parts of our social fabric: The need to prepare our children for adulthood and the desire for equal opportunity. Whether we are parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles or some combination of those, all of us want to see our children prosper. As Americans, we want to have a democratic society where opportunity is equal for all.

Public education is also rooted in America's belief in itself—in every citizen's ability to participate and prosper. We have long been a world leader in intellectual capital, bringing innovation and

—  
Working  
together, we can  
build the schools  
we envision for  
our children,  
rather than the  
ones we  
remember.  
—

creativity to the global marketplace. Strengthening our schools will help us secure our position as the source of new ideas and fresh solutions. But our students must be properly prepared for a fluid, innovative world of work. The past several decades have seen the demand for workers with complex communication skills rise exponentially. The demand for workers who are experts in thinking and solving problems continue

to increase while demands for routine and non-routine manual labor declined significantly.

On a regional level, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools has the opportunity to provide intellectual capital throughout our economic area. Preparing students for post-secondary success in college, careers or the military will help provide the skilled, sophisticated workforce this region needs.

These shared goals can support us as we work together to strengthen our public schools. There will be disagreements, differences of opinion and complicating factors such as budget constraints, regulatory pressures and societal inequities that enter schools with children. These issues divide most communities, hampering efforts to improve the quality of education for all children.

Making our decision-making more transparent, as well as seeking a wide range of input into the process, will help us build the public trust we need to succeed. There are no easy solutions or fast fixes for the challenges facing public education and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Transforming our district and our schools will require much thoughtful work and open communication. It will not be a quick or easy journey but rather an unwavering commitment and campaign. We are creating many ways to include the community in the conversation and the work.

To succeed, we must work together and we invite all members of the community to take part in the transformation of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools from good to great. No work is more important and

more deserving of our time, our resources and our efforts. A common vision of great public schools that nurture our children and our democratic system can sustain us and guide our decisions.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is a rich, diverse mosaic of 143,866 children from many countries, many cultures and many backgrounds. Each child is important and individually unique and together they form a comprehensive, unified whole. Losing any piece of that mosaic diminishes its beauty, its quality and its meaning. That is why we must provide an excellent education to Jordan, Josh and all the other students who come to Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.

Working together, we can make the most of the many, many opportunities we have to help our children learn and grow. Working together, we can build the schools we envision for our children, the schools we aspire to have, rather than accept the timid recreation of the schools we remember.

Our district is already a national leader in education, known for progressive work and innovation. Many districts aspire to be great, but few have the assets and the opportunities Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools enjoys. As other districts get mired in conversations about why educating all children is not possible, Charlotte and Mecklenburg County can show that it can and will be done.

Our assets as a community and our shared vision of great public education, will help provide a personalized environment of academic excellence that prepares every child, every day for a better tomorrow.



## CMS Brand Promise:

To provide a personalized environment of academic excellence that prepares...

*Every Child. Every Day. For a Better Tomorrow.*

---

### **Eight strategic goals we must courageously pursue to deliver on our CMS brand promise**

- 
- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>GOAL 1</b> | Accelerate academic achievement for every child and close achievement gaps so every child graduates college- or career-ready.            |
| <b>GOAL 2</b> | Ensure an effective teacher in every class is led by an effective principal in every school served by quality support staff.             |
| <b>GOAL 3</b> | Cultivate innovative partnerships with parents, caregivers and the community to provide a sustainable system of support for every child. |
| <b>GOAL 4</b> | Nurture a culture of high engagement, customer service and cultural competency.  |
| <b>GOAL 5</b> | Maximize performance utilizing data-informed and evidence-based decision-making.   |
| <b>GOAL 6</b> | Strengthen and expand educational choices for students to drive learning, creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship.                   |
| <b>GOAL 7</b> | Increase technology access and integration to support inspired learning and teaching.  |
| <b>GOAL 8</b> | Communicate proactively and transparently to strengthen public trust and establish CMS as the premier K-12 district.                     |
- 

### **GOAL 1 Accelerate academic achievement for every child and close achievement gaps so every child graduates college- or career-ready.**

---

#### **Build the foundation**

- Reverse-engineer strategically designed pathway of success for every child
- Identify and define college-readiness and career-readiness measures
- Strengthen and expand early childhood education in our community—build early foundations for learning success to eliminate the achievement gap and ensure on-grade level reading by the end of third grade for every child
- Continue to highlight rigorous teaching and learning with high expectations for every child to be globally competitive
- Embed the tenets of Common Core state standards to ensure a strong core curriculum with focus on literacy, numeracy and writing in every class

### Personalize and accelerate achievement

- Build a personal plan of progress for every child aligned to success pathway and post-secondary goals
  - Design a case-management approach
  - Reassess student-services staffing model
- Monitor progress and provide real-time remediation to keep students on track for success using formative assessments and diagnostics
- Enhance extended learning opportunities for students who need additional support or challenge
- Promote increased Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, SAT and ACT participation, support and performance
- Increase programming support for critical-need student populations such as Limited English Proficiency and Exceptional Children
- Elevate our focus on academic success for African-American males
- Continue to focus on increasing the graduation rate, ensuring every child has a post-secondary plan

## **GOAL 2 Ensure an effective teacher in every class is led by an effective principal in every school served by quality support staff.**

---

### All employees

- Establish a transparent and robust professional growth system focused on effectiveness and continuous improvement
- Enable our staff to plan for, self manage and achieve their career objectives with vibrant career ladders and pathways
- Purposefully hire and build capacity for 21st-century learning especially for teachers, school leaders and school support staff
- Improve performance evaluation tools, processes and professional development for all employees
- Incorporate a peer coaching and evaluation program for teachers, administrators and support staff—Peer Assistance Review process (PAR)
- Implement succession planning, especially for all critical and hard-to-fill positions
- Enhance and transform our compensation model to reward and retain top talent
- Establish reliable sourcing strategies to develop talent pipelines for our unique staffing needs

### Schools

- Strengthen and refine our existing teaching framework and professional feedback system
- Build a pipeline of highly effective school leaders through continued focus on recruiting, hiring, evaluating and supporting principals, assistant principals and school leaders
- Build capacity of principals and other evaluators to effectively evaluate teachers through enhanced observation certification and utilizing inter-rater reliability methodology
- Strengthen the recruiting strategy for teachers; expand alternative programs such as Teach For America and TEACH Charlotte, and strengthen higher education partnerships

- Incorporate district-level and school-based teacher-retention strategies focused on retaining our top talent
- Determine next steps for Strategic Staffing—focus on driving academic performance beyond year three
- Emphasize school staffing models that attract strong talent while also meeting performance and retention goals
- Continue to explore school staffing models that build career pathways for teacher-leaders

**GOAL 3 Cultivate innovative partnerships with parents, caregivers and the community to provide a sustainable system of support for every child.**

---

Parental engagement and involvement

- Expand parental involvement and engagement strategies to meet the unique needs of all families in our communities
- Refocus Parent University to support parents and caregivers as teachers who guide the learning of their children and as learners who need to acquire skills to better assist their children
- Partner with parents and caregivers through targeted efforts to support literacy at home
- Increase parent/caregiver feedback tools to ensure parents are active partners in the learning process

Community engagement

- Inventory needs at every school and asset-map the community to create unique matches and opportunities; strengthen existing partnerships and launch new ones
- Continue to reinforce higher education, faith-based and business/civic partnerships as critical alliances needed to advance student achievement
- Establish CMS as a leader in literacy by launching a community-wide initiative around literacy promoting the need for all citizens to be active readers
- Rebuild our philanthropic foundation and position it to fund educational opportunities through foundation/business grants and individual donations

Other mechanisms for outreach

- Incorporate wellness clinics and wellness coordinators into our schools

**GOAL 4 Nurture a culture of high engagement, customer service and cultural competency.**

---

Employees

- Nurture a culture of pride, trust and respect in schools and district-wide
- Establish a strong, unified CMS team culture with shared leadership values and commitments
- Promote ongoing, district-wide efforts to continuously strengthen a culture of high engagement, e.g., engagement surveys, forums, etc.
- Launch a CMS Pride Campaign and expand employee recognition programs
- Establish a strong customer service culture within central office and schools, and with external stakeholders/customers
- Create a culture of cross-functional partnership and collaboration to eliminate silos



### Students

- Promote a comprehensive anti-bullying campaign—dramatically reduce bullying and harassment, and promote a safe school environment for every child
- Embed social and emotional learning standards within core curriculum to serve the whole child
- Implement consistent standards of discipline across schools

### Cultural competency

- Initiate plans to ensure cultural competency framework in all schools and every classroom
- Establish an office of diversity
- Engage culturally and linguistically diverse community members
- Build and sustain principal, teacher and support staff pool that reflects diverse student population

## **GOAL 5 Maximize performance utilizing data-informed and evidence-based decision-making.**

---

- Align all goals and targets to the strategic plan
  - Example: Align teacher goals → school leader goals → school improvement plan and/or progress reports → district scorecards → superintendent goals → strategic plan
- Establish a school performance-review framework and process
- Partner with productivity and quality experts to establish and refine key processes and systems
- Continue to establish and refine key performance indicators and scorecards for every department, including benchmarking against high-performing school districts
- Incorporate a system to ensure data integrity across every department
- Reinforce a data-informed and evidence-based culture by utilizing accurate and meaningful data displayed for action across every department and school
- Analyze the accountability systems that monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of programs based on student outcomes
- Provide central office and school-based staff with tools, processes and supports for continuous improvement
- Redefine freedom and flexibility with accountability as a method to advance school performance and maintain the progress of high-performing schools
- Redesign system/school progress reports based on new pathways to success
- Review all tests and assessments to ensure they add value to the teaching and learning process—focus on teaching and not testing our way to the top

## **GOAL 6 Strengthen and expand educational choices for students to foster learning, creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship.**

---

- Innovate programs to competitively position every school as a school of choice and help every school find its unique voice to satisfy the needs and interests of its students
- Assess and strengthen existing magnet schools and alternative education program performance and relevance

- Explore non-traditional educational programs to increase student engagement and enrollment, including new magnets, middle colleges, academies, K-8 schools, Cooperative Innovative High Schools, schools with on-site day care, suspension alternative schools and evening schools
- Strengthen, expand and align current Career and Technical Education offerings to ensure students are prepared for current and future job market
- Support Project L.I.F.T. and expand best practices across the district
- Develop a menu of strategies to address chronically underperforming schools

**GOAL 7 Increase technology access and integration to support inspired learning and teaching.**

---

- Expand access and use of technology to provide innovative learning environments and experiences for every child, support 21st century learning and ensure responsible digital citizenship
- Provide blended and personalized learning opportunities
- Broaden the reach of highly effective teachers through technology tools that actively engage learners
- Digitize our curriculum by widening access to methods and materials that reach diverse learners
- Ensure a broad array of virtual learning opportunities
- Establish a digital portfolio to enable every child to tell his or her unique story

**GOAL 8 Communicate proactively and transparently to strengthen public trust and establish CMS as the premier K-12 option.**

---

- Develop strategic communication plans that ensure employees, parents and community partners are informed about and engaged in important district initiatives—with emphasis on how decisions are made
- Expand the reach of positive CMS news by strengthening the CMS internet and intranet sites, re-envisioning CMS TV, and increasing the use of social media
- Promote positive CMS news coverage by strategically pursuing external communication partnerships and redesigning the format of CMS news stories
- Explore new forums to drive ongoing, authentic, two-way dialogue with key stakeholder groups
- Develop a process for timely stakeholder input into key CMS initiatives
- Drive greater transparency around resource management decision-making—people, time and money
- Develop school-based marketing strategies and plans, and proactively market our portfolio of schools and programs to competitively position CMS as the preferred K-12 option



Every Child. Every Day. For a Better Tomorrow.



*Every Child. Every Day. For a Better Tomorrow.*