

State Superintendent June S. Atkinson
 Summer Leadership Conference Presentation
 June 25, 2007
 Grove Park Inn, Asheville, NC

“Teaching Fido How to Whistle”

Good afternoon. Thank you Roger, the Western RESA, and all of the sponsors for coordinating the leadership conference. Over the past year, I have visited schools across NC, talked to teachers, principals, central office staff, parents, business people, and students about public education.

This school year, I have joined the SBE and others in congratulating the 2007 Teacher of the Year, James Bell, from Edenton Chowan; the Principal of the Year, Craig Hill, from Kinston High School; and the Superintendent of the Year, Dr. Shirley Prince, Scotland County. (Please stand if you are in the audience). These three people will represent educators on the SBE this coming year.

It was an honor for me to see our 2006 Teacher of the Year, Diana Beasley, being congratulated in the White House Rose Garden by the President and First Lady, George W. and Laura Bush. What a historical moment it was for me to attend the dedication of the Rev. Dr. Billy Graham Library and see and hear three presidents, Presidents Bush, Sr., Jimmy Carter, and Bill Clinton.

With each visit and conversation, I’ve heard about the challenges we face in public education and suggestions about what we must do to improve our system.

A 7th grader had the most memorable quote. After a press conference about the facility needs of our public schools, I asked a 7th grader, Cameron Courtney, if he were looking forward to his summer vacation from school. “Not really, he replied. I go to a school where “learning” is almost fun.”

With a majority of students who drop out of school because they say they are bored and don’t see the relevancy of what we are teaching, we do face a huge challenge of having all students attesting that school is a place where learning is almost fun.

As we prepare Generation M for this 21st century, certain challenges rise to the top. Listen to what members of my Superintendents’ Advisory Committee see as major challenges – **PLAY VIDEO – VOICES FROM SUPERINTENDENTS**

These superintendents raise the issues of accountability, teacher recruitment and retention, and facilities. Larry Price, 2006 Superintendent of the Year, talked about his role as an advisor of the SBE and how members deliberate to address 21st century challenges through policy.

As we address our challenges, we must listen to students. Listen to what middle school students say are the issues for them – this video is titled “Having our Say.” **PLAY VOICES OF STUDENTS VIDEO**

This video was produced by the Friday Institute and emphasizes once again the message you have just heard from Lt. Gov. Perdue. Our students expect and want technology to be used to engage them in learning. They are challenging educators to use technology and change instruction to become more relevant and meaningful.

What are your responses about the student's requests for engaging technology, project-based learning? What are your responses for making the changes these students are requesting? Can we figure it out?

In listening to the voices of educators, business people, citizens, and students, five major challenges shine bright:

1. Graduation rate
2. Teacher and administrator recruitment and retention
3. Technology
4. Instructional change
5. Accountability

DPI and the SBE have undertaken some important initiatives to address these challenges and issues. They include:

- SBE 21st Century Strategic Plan
- ABCs Blue Ribbon Commission
- Charter Schools Committee
- Professional Teacher Standards
- Leadership Standards
- Professional Development
- North Carolina VHS
- Future Ready Core Requirements (2009-2010)
- Graduation Project
- NCLB Change Requests
- NC WISE
- Chart of Accounts

I want to recognize the DPI staff members who are here today. They work hard to provide you services and leadership.

In 2006, a new mission that the SBE adopted affirms the importance of improving our graduation rate.

“All students will graduate from high school globally competitive for work, further education and life in the 21st century.”

Along with this mission, five strategic goals were adopted:

1. Globally competitive students
2. 21st century professionals
3. Leadership for innovation
4. Healthy, responsible students
5. 21st century systems

Current statistics show us that we have a long way to go to fulfill the mission of graduating all students.

The most recent data, 2005, show that

- 68.1% of the students who started the 9th grade in 2002-03 graduated 4 years later (2005-06)
- The community college remediation rate was 24.9% in math, 17.6% in English, and 7.5% in reading.
- Our public university remediation rate was 7.4% in math and 2.5 % for English.

On the other hand, 64% of our graduating class continued their education as a postsecondary institution. Then again, the graduation rate for our public universities within six years ranges from a low of 37% to a high of 84%. Over 50% of the students who enter our universities do not graduate within six years.

Graduation Rate

In the 21st century, we need a new approach to the challenges we face in

- Accountability
- Recruitment and retention
- Instructional redesign of schools
- Many students need different delivery systems for making sure that they are college and work ready. We must also connect with the students' interests. Our elective programs – Arts, CTE, traditionally have connected to student interests and have proven to be effective.
- Expansion of connectivity
 - * IT connectivity
 - * Not only IT connectivity, but new structures for using the power of the world outside of the walls of our schools.

Accountability

Let's start with a new approach to accountability. Our accountability system is 12 years old. It is time we examine our ABCs accountability system extensively and we are in the middle of doing just that. The SBE and I have appointed a Blue Ribbon Accountability Commission to study and make recommendations to the SBE. The Commission is headed by Sam Houston, former superintendent. Teachers, parents, business people, superintendents, representatives of higher education, and principals are on this commission.

What would happen, as an example, if we had a high school accountability model that mirrored the SBE's mission?

What would happen if we had four components to the high school model? What would be the results if we started with the end in mind and used the SBE's mission to align the accountability system? What if the accountability system included these components?

- Graduation rate 3-5 years
- Percent of students receiving state or national credentials
- Percent of students meeting minimum admission requirements for the NC University System or accepted at an accredited four-year university or proprietary school
- Percent of students eligible to enter NC community colleges without remediation

And what would be the role of end-of-course tests? Perhaps they could be local instrument tools to determine progress toward the mission and components.

Perhaps it would allow us to see further into the future for our students and not just focus on end-of-course test scores.

Perhaps it would take us into the world of formative assessments, available and used “at will” by teachers who could “nip low achievement in the bud,” to paraphrase Barney Fife.

Stay tuned for the Commission’s recommendations – we need your input.

Recruitment and Retention

We need new approaches to teacher and administrator recruitment and retention. We have to face the hard facts that the 55-year old principal and teacher and the 21-year old potential teacher and principal will not stay in the same classroom or school building for 30 years.

Stefanie Sanford and Steven Seleznow from the Gates Foundation, make a cogent argument in a recent article they wrote about the new generation of teachers.

What is important to them are

- transparency
- pragmatism
- mobility
- accountability

The lesson to be learned is “how to help teachers become more effective in a shorter period of time.” Research tells us teachers become the most effective after three years with other things being equal. How can we prepare and support teachers to become more effective sooner?

From my perspective, all roads lead to a system of professional development and with technology being a major vehicle for delivery and consistency.

We have to listen to the voices of teachers when they talk about working conditions and need for mentor support. We must, through a systems approach, help them to change instruction to prepare students for worlds we cannot imagine.

Connectivity

We need expanded and new approaches to connectivity - connectivity as it relates to using technology to bring the world, its people to every classroom and connectivity as it relates to students in NC taking courses or having online instruction from any place in the world. Our NC Virtual High School and Learn and Earn online are big steps forward in this direction.

For decades, we have talked about seat time vs. mastery of competencies. What was missing then was technology. Now we have access to technology – technology that will allow us 21st century learning to personalize and customize learning for each student. We must collaborate with people in our state, across district lines, and even with other states and countries.

Our preparation for administrators must include how to lead a school where instruction originates from many parts of NC, US, or over the world.

College and Work Ready

We need a new approach or expansion of redesign and reform efforts leading to our students being college ready and work ready. Ninth grade transition programs are proving to be successful. Reading coaches are helping with important foundation skills. New and expanded approaches must start with preschool and go through high school graduation.

We must feel uncomfortable and drawn to action when we see what is happening in the job market.

- 20 years ago, we couldn't conceive of U.S. engineering or accounting work being done in India, China, or Ireland.
- 20 years ago, I couldn't believe that I would talk to someone in India to schedule repair for my GE refrigerator.
- 20 years ago, the word avatar, did not exist. Yet today, these little robotic creatures on websites are ready to help you buy more as they walk you through an Internet-based catalogue.

Who would have thought that when you place an order at the Wendy's drive thru window, the person responding may be located in Connecticut, India, and Alabama. Wendy's has such a pilot. Change and new structures, are not waiting on us.

Diane Ravitch said it well – "Schools must do far more than teach children how to learn and how to look up things; they must teach them what they know has the most value... And how to use that knowledge, how to organize what they know, how to understand the relationship between past and present, how to tell the difference between accurate information and propaganda, and how to turn information into understanding."

Diane Ravitch, Former Assistant Secretary of Education

As you prepare for the 2007-2008 school year, we must keep one big idea in mind as we prepare all students for work, further education, and life in the 21st century.

That big idea can be summarized by telling you about a cartoon I saw in Hickory City. Two little boys were talking to each other. One little boy said, "I thought you said you taught your dog Fido how to whistle. I don't hear his whistling." The other little boy replied, "I said I taught him how to whistle. That does not mean that he learned."

Some of us may believe that a dog Fido will never learn to whistle – just listen. **PLAY FIDO'S WHISTLE!**

May you be optimistic and action oriented next year to make sure that all of our 1.4 million children learn what is necessary for them to be successful in the 21st century.

The dogs and the children are praying and counting on you as leaders to make it happen.