

Back to School Message – State Superintendent June Atkinson
August 2010

Welcome to the 2010-2011 school year. If you are a lifelong teacher at heart – the way I am – this is one of the most exciting times of the year.

Many of you have had the opportunity this summer to step back from ordinary routines of the classroom and school and to have a rest, the opportunity to recharge and rejuvenate. Every one of us is improved and better after a break.

And now, we stand at the start of a new school year, a fresh beginning filled with potential and promise. That's true for everyone. You are probably thinking about your new students and the strengths and needs that they will bring to your class every day. You have probably considered what you want to do differently this year and how you want to keep your classroom activities fresh and engaging for your students and for you!

And, for your students, they are probably wondering about you. What will my new teachers expect? Will the class be interesting? Will I make new friends? All the questions that we have when we are beginning a new school year.

In 2010, we are returning to school with hope and commitment and also facing a changing professional landscape.

The national and state economic situation is still challenging. The funds that we used to count on in the past are not there in the same way. Many of the children you teach have parents who are still looking for work. We all feel a pinch right now.

At the same time, the students we serve are excited about their future. They are connected through technology. They are setting higher goals for themselves and their education. They will face a more competitive and fluid economic world when they graduate.

Our responsibility is to meet our students where they are and to engage them to learn as much as they can learn. The goal for every student is to graduate from high school prepared for this challenging world. This year, for the first

time, we made it to 75 percent graduating, but that leaves us 25 percent more to go.

You have new tools in this changing landscape.

New curriculum standards have been adopted and will be completed in every subject and every grade by 2012-13.

A new teacher evaluation model is being implemented with a focus on the development of strong teachers.

NC FALCON is available now to help with formative assessment and other innovations. Our goal is to bring to every classroom the opportunity to “Go GPS” in learning, as I like to say. That means that just as a GPS device helps us adjust when we get off course on a road trip – we want to help you more easily adjust instruction to keep students on track all along the way.

Other new work on the horizon includes new student assessments in a few years and a new school accountability model.

We are working with your technology directors to create new opportunities to use technology effectively and efficiently through shared services and what is sometimes referred to as “cloud computing.”

So our landscape is changing in many ways.

As you begin the new year, I invite you to make sure you are connected to us so that you can stay up to date on all the news that will affect you in the coming months and years. Our website is a great way to stay up to date. You can visit the site at www.ncpublicschools.org .

And when you do go the website, look for the e-groups icon at the bottom left of the page. Click there and you’ll be able to sign up for email updates that pertain to you and your work.

Last year, North Carolina’s schools showed tremendous academic growth – and you made this happen despite fewer resources, larger classes and uncertainty. At the state level, we continue to advocate and seek additional resources for you and your schools. And to work to provide you with other

materials to make your work more effective. We know that these are important ways we contribute to your success.

As we do this, we know that we have some 100,000 plus educators standing along with us working with and for the young people of North Carolina.

Thank you for your work and for your care of our most important resource – the children who are the future of our state. I wish you a very successful school year.