

**Dr. Peter Gorman's Speech for Chamber retreat at Pinehurst
9.28.06**

Good morning. It's great to be here and see all of you. I'm Pete Gorman, the superintendent of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, and I'm happy to be able to talk to you today about my vision for CMS.

Let me begin by saying Charlotte is indeed fortunate to have a Chamber and a business community that recognize the central role of schools in economic development. In business development terms, public schools are a community's most critical investment.

There are good societal reasons to invest in education, too. Public education is the best way we have to level the playing field, so that every child in America has the opportunity to succeed. We are a democracy, not a society that educates a fraction of the population so that a few can rule the many. Public education can – and must – put educational opportunity within reach of every student, and it is my vision for CMS that we do that as well as possible.

A lot of hopes, and dreams, and aspirations, and social goals get thrust on the public schools. And rightly so – we deal in the intangible futures of our children. But I believe that the best way to prepare our children for that future is to ground CMS in solid management techniques, sensible financial planning and proven educational methods. A billion-dollar-a-year business – and that's what we are -- is too big to use as a test tube for every educational theory that comes along. Mistakes cost too much! So I am committed to using proven educational methods in teaching our children.

But we also need parental and community input in the mix – a diverse group of stakeholders' voices helping us decide what schools can and should do. So I've spent the first two and a half months of my superintendency doing what I call "listening and learning." I've had a rigorous – seven days a week some weeks, morning to night some days -- schedule of public appearances at meetings with community leaders. I've been to churches, schools, civic groups, students, parents, teachers – I've pretty much talked to anybody and everybody who's involved with education. And in my view, let me say as an aside, everybody should be involved in education! And if I've missed anybody, I'm ready to listen to you, whoever you are.

Now we're coming up on the 100-day mark of my superintendency. I'm still listening and learning – I hope that never stops, to be honest – but I'm spending a lot of time now on the details of our reform plan. Broadly speaking, we are using three basic standards as we evaluate how best to improve student achievement: Is it educationally sound? Is it good for kids? Is it fiscally responsible?

It's still too early for me to give line-by-line specifics of the plan – that will come in November. But I'd like to share with you some of my thinking during this planning process, and how my executive staff and I are working with the Board of Education and other CMS staff as we formulate this plan.

Every plan needs a strategy, an overall 'how do we go about this' aspect. For us, that's Reform Governance.

Execute the Board's Vision, Mission, Core Beliefs and Theory of Action.

18 months work by the Board and staff.

Three new policies, one updated policy and one revised bylaw.

Serve as the foundation for District reform.

Increase accountability and transparency.

Revised policy Superintendent/Board Relations

Clearly spell out my duties as Superintendent and the Board's.

May not sound like such a big deal but in education, this is the downfall of many superintendents

Management oversight of the District's major systems
Curriculum, teaching and learning,
Constituent services and responsiveness
Construction
Finances
Food services
Human resources
Technology
Transportation
Accountability
Communication

In exercising its oversight responsibilities, the Board will not interfere with the Superintendent's management of the District except as permitted or required by law.

Review the performance of all major management systems on an annual and more frequent basis, using metrics developed by the Superintendent and approved by the Board.

Communicate the results of these systems to the community.

Review the integrity of all management systems at least every three years including overall effectiveness, structure, process, metrics, internal controls, etc.

Incorporate the results of management oversight reviews into the Superintendent's annual review. They are telling me what is important, they are measuring how well we achieved what is important and they are going to evaluate me based on how well we performed.

Bylaw Duties of the Board outlines major activities such as hiring the superintendent, establishing policies, drawing attendance areas, hearing appeals, consider the superintendent's recommendations management oversight of the ten areas.

New Policy Effective Teachers and School Administrators

Placing a principal with leadership and management skills in each school and an effective teacher in each class.

Securing and allocating adequate resources according to the needs of each child.

The Board holds itself, the Superintendent and other central office staff accountable for achieving this policy.

Recruitment and retention of staff particularly in schools and areas of highest need using strategies such as strong base pay, bonuses, salary differentiation, pay for performance and tuition assistance and non financial support such as positive working conditions and administrative support such as discipline.

Give principals authority in hiring and termination recommendations.

Professional development focusing on implementing Theory of Action, teacher induction with support, teachers have an opportunity to meet and collaborate, train emerging leaders, support beginning principals, all school administrators.

Positive working conditions including the physical environment, safe and conducive to teaching meeting a baseline standard, and a climate balancing accountability and empowerment.

Job assignments making sure strong and effective principal and teacher at each school. Superintendent develop regulations and strategies to measure and ensure reasonable balance of teachers who are new/experienced, advanced degrees and certifications, and a history of moving students to high levels of achievement.

Superintendent has the right to transfer or reassign including reconstitution of a school. Look at placing teams of teachers or administrators to impact a school.

Evaluation using accurate assessments based on student performance to determine the quality of teachers and administrators.

Accountability system will be adopted by the Board with clear expectations and rewards and sanctions. Those that deliver positive results provided more flexibility in their job duties.

Administrative Implementation of Management Oversight requires a report to the Board on the implementation of this policy within six months, including cost projections, and identifying methods to allocate and reallocate funds and resources to address the policy.

New Policy School Accountability System

District wide school accountability system that is rigorous, fair, difficult to manipulate, easy to understand and describe and designed to hold all schools and their staffs accountable for student achievement results and other operational performance goals. A performance classification system.

A report card on each school.

It should be concise and simple and easily understood by the general public.

Board establishes standards and schools and staffs rated on how well they achieve those standards with rewards or sanctions based on their ratings.

Key components include

School performance classification system

High -- scores on standardized tests, graduation rates, progress in closing the achievement gap, performance of the lowest performing group, local resource audits

Medium -- Drop out rates, scores on local benchmarks, teacher attendance, discipline referrals, suspensions, student attendance, parental involvement and satisfaction, teacher satisfaction and turnover, rigorous curriculum.

Low -- clean and well maintained facilities, grade 5 and 8 retention rates

Weighted as 70% on high category and 30% on medium and low

Rewards and sanctions based on the classification system including bonuses, pay for performance, salary differentiation, increased site level freedom and flexibility.

Communications plan to inform and educate employees, students, parents and the community.

Timeline operational for 2007-08 but piloted for 2006-07.

New policy, Data Dashboard

Aligned with management oversight.

Limited number of indicators of system performance that is a concise but comprehensive summary of district performance including baseline data, targets and results.

Communicates the Board's priorities to the community.

As we have worked on these policy revisions, there are some larger issues that underlie much of what we're doing, particularly at the school level. Several of these issues are pressing because – it's important to remember – we're open for business while we are trying to retool! School issues and school challenges don't take a vacation while the Superintendent and the staff figure out how to improve things, unfortunately.

One of those pressing areas is reform at the schools named in the High School Challenge – plus one. I'll explain.

In any process, there comes a point where policy must become action – where the rubber meets the road. For our reform initiative, where we are getting traction first is on the High School Challenge plan.

There are three high schools in the Challenge plan now – Garinger, West Charlotte and West Meck. I've added a fourth: E.E. Waddell. Waddell's composite score on the End-of-Course Test last year was below 50 percent.

What I proposed to do, and the Board approved 8:1, is reconstitute these schools, using \$4.9 million in county funds and other district funds. There are High School Challenge programs now in place showing some good results at those high schools. But these schools are still not successfully teaching more than half their kids. More stringent action is required: Reconstitution. This will now go to the Board of County Commissioners for their consideration. That evaluation is based on the End-of-Course Composite Scores. How many students are proficient?

Last year – 2005-2006 -- Garinger's score was 45.3 percent. That is not acceptable. Worse, it was only 1.3 percentage points above its 2003-2004 scores. That's not enough progress in two years.

At West Charlotte, the situation is even more challenging. West Charlotte's EOC test composite scores in 2005-2006 were 40.4 percent. Yes, West Charlotte's scores are up from 2003-2004, but again, not enough progress has been made.

Likewise at West Meck: The EOC scores last year were 47.9 percent, up from the year before but down from 2003-2004's 48 percent. Still below the 50 percent mark.

And at E.E. Waddell, the situation is precarious. This year's score was 49.2 percent, up almost 10 points from 2003-2004 but showing less than one percentage point improvement from its 2004-2005 score of 48.5 percent.

When less than half of a school's students can meet the state minimum for academic performance, we are not educating our students well, and we are not doing what is best for kids

We must begin reconstituting the staffs at these schools. The Board's Theory of Action says that managed performance and empowerment begins with standards, including high quality staffing. What will improve the scores at these schools is more effective teaching and more effective leadership. This puts into practice the Board goal of creating a performance-based culture. Under this proposal, we will hold teachers and principals accountable for meeting clearly stated standards.

We intend to retain staff members who perform at a high level and dismiss those who perform at low levels. This is a dramatic change, but it is one that is essential if we are to achieve dramatic reform. We cannot simply move our underperforming employees to other schools or administration jobs. All that does is put an existing problem in a new place.

We have also asked the Teacher Advisory Council to offer suggestions for viable incentives for school-based staff. This is the push in my push-pull strategy. First, we'll try to pull strong teachers into struggling schools with recruitment and retention strategies that reward them rather than pushing them against their will as a first alternative.

We'll use the appraisal instruments we have in place to assess the performance of teachers and principals. We will reward the top performers using bonuses and pay for performance.

This schedule allows us to identify our vacancies early – we'll know which teachers aren't meeting the standard -- and we can begin recruitment and hiring when top candidates are looking for jobs.

In addition, we will set goals for all four high schools: They must reach 55 percent on EOC composite scores by the end of this school year, and 60 percent – the state minimum required to move them out of Challenge status – by 2007-2008.

I have set this schedule because we cannot afford to wait. Here's why: Our kids are failing at these schools in appalling numbers. If Garinger's EOC composite score stays the same as last year, it means 865 kids this year won't have learned enough to pass the state minimum test. At West Charlotte, that number would be 1,096. At West Meck, it's 1,112 and at Waddell, it's 642. If we don't act now, more than 3,700 kids won't be able to pass state tests this year. More than 3,700 kids will have failed. Is that what we want? Is that the best we can do?

Those 3,700 kids are the reason we need to act now. Next year, it will be another three thousand or more. To delay is to deny our students the educational opportunity we have promised them.

We must do what is best for students – and that means holding teachers, principals and support staff accountable for student performance.

CMS has tried a lot of other things, but we're not seeing the results we need. Reconstitution is a strong remedy but I think it's the one that will help us reach and help us teach the thousands of kids who are in danger of failing in, and being failed by, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. We cannot stand by and watch that happen.

I need your support with this initiative. Make sure that the county commissioners know you support this. Write a letter to the editor.

A broad issue that is part of this strategy is, how do we best identify and train talent? We're working on a New Principals Program that will help us do this, and we're also partnering in the Crossroads Charlotte initiative with Bank of America to develop a training program for principals. In the last five years, we have hired or promoted 106 principals out of our 162. Is it reasonable to believe that we have the depth in our talent pool to find this many A-plus performers? I don't think so.

So what can we do? We have to provide leadership training and mentoring, and we need help from the business community. As the plan takes shape we will be coming to the Chamber for assistance. This program will require one-on-one assistance, pairing executives from private industry with principals.

As you can see, urgent reform takes a lot of pre-planning! But we never lose sight of this key fact: We are engaged in important work. Any community, whether it's a rural hamlet in the Midwest or a robust, bustling Southern city like Charlotte, has a future that's only as bright as its schools. Schools are the most important form of indirect economic investment, and the decisions we're making today in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools will affect this community far into the future. That's why I hope the public debate will continue to flourish, and that the level of participation and interest in what we're doing remains high.

And that brings me to the last topic I'd like to address today: the capital needs of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. These needs are real. Overcrowding is a serious issue at CMS, and it must be addressed before we reach a crisis point. I'll be honest with you: We are dangerously close to that right now. We have more than 20,000 kids in 1,020 temporary classrooms, portable or modular buildings. Two hundred and ninety eight of those portables are more than 40 years old. That's right, they are MY age! That doesn't sound temporary to me! We have children in elementary schools eating lunch at 10:30 because the cafeteria isn't big enough to feed all the students enrolled there in only two or three shifts. We have middle and high school students who have to carry 45 pounds of books and supplies in their backpacks all day long, because there are not enough lockers to go around.

This problem is not going to get better by itself. Even the most conservative population projections make clear that CMS is going to get bigger, not smaller, and it's going to happen quickly. We grew by 4,400 students since the start of last year. That means we have to build a high school, a middle school and two elementary schools just to keep pace, not to take care of the backlog of temporary buildings.

We need to build some schools and renovate some others. That will require a bond issue. We cannot afford to fail this time. So at CMS, we are re-evaluating our entire capital program. We want to be absolutely sure that everything we are doing and what we are proposing to do is necessary and justifiable, so that we can get this bond issue passed and give our kids what they need. We have to rebuild the public trust in our school district.

Some of the things we're looking at include:

Public Private Partnership (Capital Lease) -- review of alternative delivery of capital projects

- The two new elementary schools at Lancaster Highway and Hucks Road have been selected as pilot projects for the capital lease program.
- Requests for Qualifications being prepared to solicit interested developers.
- One or two developers will be selected based upon their submittals. CMS and County staff involved in the selection.
- A pre-development agreement will be negotiated and taken to the Board of Education and the Board of County Commissioners for approval.
- Lease costs will be compared to costs of a standard design/bid/build project funded by bonds or certificates of participation.
- If not economically viable as a public private partnership, construction project will be publicly bid and funded through a certificate of participation.
- If the private sector can build schools more efficiently and effectively than we can, then we want to partner with the private sector to build schools and we want developers to respond to the RFQ.

Program Management review of capital program services

- Bovis Lend Lease currently provides program management and staff augmentation for the capital services program.
- The details of the current contract and the current program will be presented to the Board at the November 14 meeting.
- If you have knowledge about this area, come to the meeting, listen to what is being said and share your thoughts and your expertise. We want to hear your opinions.
- At that time the Board will have the opportunity to discuss continuation of the current contract or other options for providing the service.

Standards Review Committees -- review of baseline standards and ed specs

- I will appoint two committees of 8 - 10 independent experts. One committee will review current baseline design standards and construction procedures. The other committee will review current space allocations (ed specs).
- County manager or his designee will be one appointment, as well as someone of his choosing to fill a second appointment on each committee.
- Each committee's charge will be specifically to identify opportunities for cost efficiencies that lower first costs of our construction projects without increasing our operational costs.
- SBSC set a 10% savings goal.
- Committees will report findings prior to January 1, 2007 so that the recommendations can be incorporated into the draft Ten Year Plan that we intend to present in special work session to the Board in January, 2007.
- We need volunteers for these committees. Let me know if you are interested. A word of caution: Please understand that this will take a commitment of time.

Planning Liaison Committee -- review of zoning regulations with the seven municipalities

We build schools to seven different sets of standards and specifications, based on which city or township has jurisdiction. This costs extra and needs to be consolidated.

- Committee has recommended review of local zoning ordinances and regulations that add time and/or costs to school projects.
- Planning commission staff and CMS staff meeting with local municipalities and cataloguing all zoning regulations that apply to schools.
- Matrix will be analyzed and presented at the next quarterly meeting for possible simplification and/or cost savings opportunities.
- Elected officials of the affected jurisdictions will take suggested modifications to the municipalities for action.
- We may need your help to address this concern with different municipalities.

Ten Year Plan (including capital budget) -- review of the facility needs and capital costs

- Staff held a full day's discussion of the next ten year plan at Building Services on September 21.
- Rubric for prioritization of the capital projects list presented to the Board at the November 14 meeting. We need to blend the needs for renovating older schools and building new schools. Both are important, but at this moment, I believe the need to build new schools to handle growth takes precedence over renovations. This is not an urban/suburban issue, it's a district-wide issue.
- Draft plan including a full prioritized list of capital projects will be sent to each Board member the week of November 27.
- Staff will be available for individual discussion and work sessions during the month of December.
- Draft plan will be presented to the public at meetings in each district for information and discussion in December.
- As residents and business executives in our community, you need to be aware of what is in the plan. You need to be knowledgeable about our plans and be able to both offer suggestions and share accurate information.
- Recommendations from the Standards Review Committee incorporated into the draft Ten Year Plan in January, 2007.
- Presentation of the draft plan (incorporating the ideas and comments from the public and the Board) in a special work session to be scheduled in January, 2007.
- Draft plan submitted as a report at the February 13, 2007 meeting.
- Public hearing same meeting.
- Draft plan submitted for approval at the March 12, 2007 meeting.
- Approved Ten Year Plan presented to Citizens Capital Budget Advisory Committee in late March, 2007.
- County manager makes his recommendation to Board of County Commissioners in May, 2007.
- We need your support. We are accountable, but not a taxing authority. I receive countless phone calls every week and the County Commission doesn't. This is not a "pass the buck" comment; this is reality. The people accountable for funding schools must support our needs, and you must demand that support.
- Board of County Commissioners places the bond referendum on the November 2007 ballot.
- At that point, if we at CMS have done what we've promised to do, please support the bond – and help us shoot down rumors and myths by clarifying the facts.

In the end, all the policies and strategies and bonds in the world can't make this a great school district. We have to do that – all of us. We must work together to formulate policies and plans, and we must all invest in education. The public schools cannot thrive without public support in all its many forms, and I hope Charlotte and Mecklenburg County will support us as we take these first steps toward improving academic achievement. It's really all about that – all about teaching our children to learn. I hope you will help us.

Thank you.