

# Franklin County Schools



**F. Y. I.**

**March 12, 2004**

The Board of Education's "Mini-Retreat" last night was a successful and productive meeting. We talked about where we are now as a school system, our expectations and our next steps. I had a chance to give a report on my first ten weeks with Franklin County Schools and I'd like to share some of my comments with you.

---

It's been a busy ten weeks!

I think I've earned ten years of snow experience since my first day on the job.

*"Every student valued, every student challenged, every student successful."*

Franklin County Schools has great students, supportive parents, and talented and dedicated principals, teachers, and central office staff. The team is second to none. There is a will to make our school system the best that there is. My experience thus far indicates to me that parents and staff are willing to "hunker" down and get the job done. If this is the honeymoon, I hope and pray that it never ends.

---

- In the last two years, FCS increased the percentage of students reading on grade level by nine points ... from 70% to 79%. Math performance increased 8 points ... from 75% to 83%.
  - FCS has made considerable progress closing the achievement gap. Ten years ago 40% of African-Americans read at grade level while 70% of white students were on grade level. Last year, 71% of African Americans read at grade level, an increase of 31 percentage points and 86% of white students read at grade level an increase of 16 percentage points.
  - The numbers are even better for math. White students started at 67% and last year 90% were proficient. African-American students went from 36% to 76%.
  - This is phenomenal. The data tells me that we can go the distance. Franklin County Schools has a great deal to be proud of.
- 

A few weeks ago I visited Bunn High School and I met several students and two stand out. One student was "on line" working through an AP statistics class and Mr. Kelley told me that he would graduate at the top of his class. Another student explained to me that when he graduates he will be well on his way to owning and operating his own lawn care business. Both students are prepared to graduate and both students thrived in Franklin County Schools.

---

- I am visiting every school, talking to every faculty, department, director/executive director/assistant superintendent, and PTA/PTO and/or school improvement teams. I will complete this task by the end of March.
- I am in the process of meeting individually with each board member.
- I met with or have a meeting set with the following: Rotary, Obesity Task Force, Teach for America, Progress Energy, NCCU, NCSU, Office of Economic Development, Safe Space, Chamber of Commerce, Franklin County Association of Educators, Franklin County Alliance of Churches, and the Louisburg Interchurch Council.
- Two weeks ago I met with the Sheriff and the four police chiefs to discuss SROs, school safety, and effective and efficient communication during times of emergency.

---

### So where do we go from here?

We have three important goals facing us:

- 1) All students reading, doing math and writing at grade level, at least by third grade.
- 2) Closing the achievement gap between African-American and Latino students and their white counterparts.
- 3) Maintaining safe and orderly schools.

### How are we going to get there?

Listen to this quote:

*“Successful teachers invent work that students choose to engage in.”*

We are in the process of working with teachers, principals and central office staff to develop a comprehensive academic plan that ensures that all students achieve at their highest potential. What does that mean?

**Time on Task:** At our elementary schools we need to ensure that students have two hours of literacy instruction (reading instruction, writing, and spelling), one of hour mathematics, two hours of integrated science and social studies. At the middle and high schools we must examine how we use our ninety minute blocks and we must ensure long periods of uninterrupted instruction.

**Elementary Schools:** With Mrs. Street’s leadership, FCS completed and submitted a “Reading First” Grant Application for Louisburg Elementary, Franklinton Elementary and Laurel Mill Elementary Schools. This will be a first step in developing a comprehensive literacy plan for all elementary schools. Early literacy is key to any future success for our students. Literacy is the first hurdle. If a student does not successfully cross this hurdle, no other hurdles are possible.

**Middle Schools:** The issue is still literacy and academic rigor. Passing the EOG in reading is a relatively low bar and does not ensure success at the next grade. Consequently, we must ensure a high level of literacy at all levels. Historically, content area teachers are not trained to teach reading. But, they do! For example, a science teacher must teach her children to read science, understand science, and write science. This is not an easy task, but one that is critical to middle school success.

**High Schools:** Closing the achievement gap at elementary and middle schools is measured by the end-of-grade tests in reading and math. In high schools it is more difficult to measure. However, we

do know what strategies close the achievement gap at high school. More students must take more rigorous course work. More rigorous coursework is embodied in Advance Placement and honors courses and courses taken at local colleges. I have proposed that FCS administer the PSAT to all tenth graders and all eleventh graders who have not taken the PSAT.

**Dropouts:** FCS has a relatively small number of dropouts. Students who drop out of school are well known to faculty and staff. We have convened a dropout prevention task force made up of principals, counselors, teachers and central office staff. We are in the process of identifying strategies and methods for reducing dropouts. As we arrive at conclusions, identify strategies, and develop plans we will report to the board.

**Suspensions:** Since arriving in Franklin County, I have talked with dozens of parents and there seems to be nothing more important than safe and orderly schools. Students cannot learn and teachers cannot teach unless the classroom is safe and orderly. As you know, we are convening a grass roots effort to examine the problem and make recommendations to you. It is important to note that we will be looking at sanctions as well as preventive measures. The best way to solve the problem is not to have the problem in the first place.

**Annual Budget:** Under Doug Moore's leadership we began the budget development and approval process in January. Since that time we met with each principal and every department head. Next week we will present to you a first draft of the 2004/2005 budget.

**Long Range Facilities Plan:** As you know FCS has made good progress in promoting its Long Range Facility Plan. Recently there was a joint meeting with the BOCC and subsequent to that meeting a team from Franklin County met with the Local Government Council. The next step is for the smaller joint committee to meet and discuss next steps. Tommy Piper and Doug Moore will join Bernard Hall, Don Lancaster and me on the joint committee.

**Parent Involvement and Community Support:** There is nothing more important than improving parent involvement and community support. In 2004, we realize and understand that we cannot achieve our goals without consistent parental involvement from kindergarten through grade twelve. The community wants to be proud of their schools and the students who graduate from them. It is important that we engage the community in our goals – reading at grade level, closing the achievement gap, and ensuring safe and orderly schools.

**Communication:** Currently we are exploring methods and strategies for improving communication on all fronts: i.e. teachers, parents, students, Board of Education, principals, and administrators.

This list does not intend to address every concern and issue facing Franklin County Schools. I will be happy to comment these or other issues facing our school system and I will be happy to answer your questions.

**Thank you.**

~~~~~

The Board responded favorably to my remarks and followed with high praise of recent accomplishments and high expectations of even better things ahead. I want to thank each of you for your support and your candor during my first ten weeks. Please keep it up! Your input has been absolutely invaluable. I want to hear from you – even if it's not what I want to hear! Truly, our team is second to none. Together, we are going to do great things for Franklin County Schools.

--Bert