"WE ARE WHAT WE REPEATEDLY DO. EXCELLENCE, THEN, IS NOT AN ACT, BUT A HABIT."

– Aristotle

"OPTIMISM IS THE FAITH THAT LEADS TO ACHIEVEMENT. NOTHING CAN BE DONE WITHOUT HOPE AND CONFIDENCE."

– Helen Keller

"INTELLIGENCE PLUS CHARACTER – THAT IS THE GOAL OF TRUE EDUCATION."

– Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
MISSION
GUILFORD COUNTY STUDENTS WILL GRADUATE AS RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS PREPARED TO SUCCEED IN HIGHER EDUCATION, OR IN THE CAREER OF THEIR CHOICE.*

VISION: ACHIEVING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

In an era marked by rapid and global change, we face the challenge of preparing students for an unknown and uncertain future – one where knowledge doubles every two years and where today’s kindergartners may pursue careers that have yet to be imagined.

More importantly, as guardians of the democratic society we inherited, we hold the future of our community, our state and our nation in trust for the next generation. Together, our teachers, support staff, administrators, school board, students, parents and community members must build on the sacrifices of those who went before us. It is our turn now to secure a better future for the children and young people we serve.

That duty calls us to acknowledge the fundamental truth that links freedom with responsibility and education with opportunity. Like the opposite sides of a door, when one swings open the other recedes, yet each is pivotal to the success of the other.

In a world where citizenship can extend beyond traditional geographic boundaries of nation and state, and where technology exponentially increases our ability to achieve great good or great harm, it is not enough for our students to be smart. As the leaders of tomorrow, they must be ethically grounded, also. This reality forms the vision for this strategic plan, which is to nurture students who will excel academically while developing strong moral character.

We recognize that helping our students take advantage of all the world has to offer requires us to provide the best academic opportunities possible. To thrive in a future characterized by change, learning must become their chief endeavor and our community’s top priority. So, not surprisingly, the pursuit of academic excellence for all students is a hallmark of this plan.

We also believe that strength of character, combined with the keen analytical skills of a finely tuned mind, can overcome any obstacles and create a limitless future. With Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., we believe “Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education.” As a result, character development of our students is a critical component of this plan.

Educational excellence – the successful coupling of academic achievement and character development – will come only when each of us puts self-interest aside and starts focusing on the common good. United, we can ensure that every child has what he or she needs to succeed, academically and in life.

Working together, we can show our young people that we achieve excellence decision-by-decision, action-by-action, day-by-day, moment-by-moment. As Aristotle noted more than 2,000 years ago, “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”

(Cross-reference Clear Baseline & Equitable Standards, Goal VIII.F)

VI.D Increase Minority Women Business Enterprise (MWBE) participation in construction and the procurement of goods and services. (Measures and baselines will be established for the procurement of goods and services.)

MAJOR STRATEGIES

• In order for GCS to become a high-performing and results-oriented organization, all schools, divisions, departments and areas of responsibility must be involved. Improvement plans, monitored against key performance indicators, will be developed and executed.

• To ensure that all functions are in support of the strategic plan, GCS will review current practices, processes and initiatives to make sure all resources are utilized to their fullest.

• As a district that values diversity, GCS will continue to expand opportunities for Minority Women Business Enterprise participation.

• GCS will adopt educational specifications, design guidelines and the Guilford Green Guide to improve operations while developing a strategic energy master plan to reduce consumption.

Area VII – Transformational Technology

VII.A Ninety-two percent of students will score at a Level III or higher on the eighth-grade computer skills assessment. (77.3 percent as of the 2007-08 school year) (Cross-reference Improving Academic Achievement, Goal I.F.)

VII.B Increase the percentage of classrooms that meet the 21st century technology standards. (Measure and baseline will be established) (Cross-reference Clear Baseline & Equitable Standards, Goal VIII.B.)

VII.C Increase the percentage of teachers who use technology in the teaching and learning process as measured by an annual survey. (Measure and baseline will be established.)

VII.D Increase the percentage of central office “paper workflow” processes converted to a digital format. (Measures and baselines will be established.)

MAJOR STRATEGIES

• In keeping with 21st century learning, we must provide 21st century learning atmospheres.

Therefore, GCS will establish school-based standards for technology.

• Utilizing the latest technology, GCS will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of communication while increasing the amount of paperless work flow.

• In order for students and staff to achieve excellence, GCS must focus on instructional technology.

In addition to ensuring the infusion of technology throughout the K-12 curriculum, GCS will develop a technology prototype school.

Area VIII – Clear Baseline & Equitable Standards

VIII.A All schools will be equipped with the GCS baseline standard of instructional materials and supplies; targeted schools will be equipped with the GCS equity standard for the same. (Measures and baselines will be established.)

VIII.B All schools will be equipped with the GCS baseline standard of technology; targeted schools will be equipped with the GCS equity standard for the same. (Measures and baselines will be established.) (Cross-reference Transformational Technology, Goal VII.B)

VIII.C All schools will be equipped with the GCS baseline standard for media materials and supplies; targeted schools will be equipped with the GCS equity standard for the same. (Measures and baselines will be established.)

VIII.D Schools will be staffed with teachers who have comparable experience, degrees, certifications, etc., when vacancies occur as measured by the district-wide, three-year average for teachers in the same grade level. (Measures and baselines will be established.)

VIII.E All schools will meet the GCS baseline standard for co-curricular activities. (Measures and baselines will be established.)

VIII.F Increase the percentage of schools that meet the baseline standard for facilities. (Measures and baselines will be established.) (Cross-reference Optimal Operations, Goal VI.C.)

MAJOR STRATEGIES

• GCS will identify baseline standards for instructional supplies and materials, technology, media materials and supplies, human resources, staffing, facilities and co-curricular activities. Once those are determined, GCS will develop strategies for all schools to reach the established standards.
Preparing students for leadership roles in a global society requires excellence in all aspects of school and district operations. High academic achievement, while important, isn’t enough. At GCS, we want our students to excel as disciplined, responsible, honest, compassionate and caring individuals as well. And, we want them to leave our school district with an unquenchable thirst for learning and the confidence that they may tackle any challenge successfully.

Our young people all have the capacity to be great; it is our expectation that they will excel. With the support and involvement of parents and community members, a high-performing organization and the equitable distribution of resources, our students will develop into the kind of scholars and citizens in which we can take pride. If we work together, educational excellence for every child in every school is an attainable goal.

Outlined in this document are the eight areas of improvement. Each area encompasses many goals and strategies with specific launch dates. Through the implementation of these strategies, our students will achieve educational excellence.

Area I – Improving Academic Achievement

I.A Ninety percent of students will graduate from high school in four years as measured by the North Carolina cohort graduation rate. (79.5 percent as of the 2007-08 school year.)

I.B Eighty-one percent of students will perform at Level III or higher proficiency on EOC reading tests as measured by the North Carolina ABC accountability model. (55 percent as of the 2007-08 school year.)

I.C Eighty-eight percent of students will perform at Level III or higher proficiency on EOC mathematics tests as measured by the North Carolina ABC accountability model. (71.4 percent as of the 2007-08 school year.)

I.D Seventy-four percent of students in grade 5 and 77 percent of students in grade 8 will perform at Level III or higher proficiency on EOG science tests as measured by the North Carolina ABC accountability model. (42.5 percent in grade 5 and 51.2 percent in grade 8 as of the 2007-08 school year.)

I.E Eighty-nine percent of students will perform at Level III or higher proficiency on EOG reading tests as measured by the North Carolina ABC accountability model. (65.5 percent as of the 2007-08 school year.)

I.F Ninety-two percent of students will score at a Level III or higher on the eighth-grade computer skills assessment. (77.3 percent as of the 2007-08 school year.)

I.G The percentage of students in grades 3-8 scoring at a Level IV will increase by 8 percentage points on EOG reading tests, 13 percentage points on EOG mathematics tests and 7 percentage points on the EOC composite, while students scoring at the top half of the Level IV range will increase by 3 percentage points on the composite score for EOG reading, 4 percentage points on the composite score for EOG mathematics and 4 percentage points on the EOC composite. (17 percent on EOG reading, 27 percent on EOG math, 23 percent on EOC composite for Level IV students as of the 2007-08 school year; 3 percent on EOG reading, 6 percent on EOG mathematics, and 3 percent on EOC composite for top Level IV students as of 2007-08 school year.)

I.H Five schools will be designated by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction as either Honor Schools of Excellence or Schools of Excellence; 20 schools will be designated as Schools of Distinction, and no schools will be designated as low-performing. (One School of Excellence, 14 Schools of Distinction and nine Low Performing Schools as of the 2007-08 school year.)

I.I The scale score gap on EOG mathematics tests will be reduced by 30 percent and by 15 percent on EOG reading tests. The achievement gap will be reduced by 20 percent on EOC exam composites.

I.J The percentage of College Tech Prep/College Prep completers will increase by 3 percentage points. (49.6 percent of our graduates were College Tech Prep/College Prep completers as of the 2007-08 school year.)

I.K The percentage of students taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses will increase by 6 percentage points, and the overall passing rate will increase by 6 percentage points. (70 percent take AP courses and 44 percent pass AP exams as of the 2007-08 school year.)

I.L The percentage of students taking the SAT will increase by 6 percentage points, and the overall district total mean score will increase by 29 percentage points. (65 percent of students take the SAT and the GCS total mean score is 1471 as of the 2007-08 school year.)

- GCS schools have individual goals that address the unique needs of their students and staff members. These goals are outlined in each school’s improvement plan. In some cases, where student achievement has already surpassed the district average or goal, these school-based goals will be higher than the district goals. The district achievement goals outlined above are based on an average of all district schools or the appropriate subset.

MAJOR STRATEGIES

- By reorganizing schools and district resources into geographic regions, GCS will provide quality, timely and cost-effective support to schools and communities.
- GCS will join community groups in establishing a county-wide literacy initiative.
- GCS will ensure that all students will perform on grade level in math.
- As technological advances change our world, our approach to education will change, too. GCS will integrate technology in the teaching and learning process and also provide ample opportunities for our students to master 21st century skills and knowledge.
- We will educate the whole child – enrichment opportunities and increased focus on the physical and mental health of all children will support the growth of our future leaders.
- Through expanded opportunities for students to earn graduation credits and the addition of more alternative schools and school options, GCS will increase graduation rates.
- We must challenge all students to achieve higher levels of academic rigor. We will review our Advanced Learner program and restructure it to meet student needs while using acceleration and enrichment opportunities to promote higher achievement and performance for all students.

Area II – Supportive Family & Community Involvement

II.A Increase awareness among parents regarding ways they can support their children’s learning at home, school and in the community as measured by an annual survey (e.g., online, phone, print, public opinion polls). (Measures and baselines will be established.)

II.B Improve employee perception of GCS students, parents and families as measured by an annual survey. (Measures and baselines will be established.)

II.C Improve the perception of GCS among parents as measured by an annual survey. (Measure and baseline will be established.)

II.D Improve the perception of GCS among community members as measured by an annual survey. (Measure and baseline will be established.)

II.E Increase awareness of GCS successes and challenges and opportunities for involvement as measured by a survey. (Measures and baselines will be established.)

II.F Increase the number of business and community partnerships. (Measures and baselines will be established.)

II.G Increase the number of volunteers and volunteer hours. (342,800 volunteer hours as of 2007-2008; baseline for the number of individual volunteers will be established.)

II.H Increase financial donations and in-kind contributions of goods and services. ($1.7 million combined in 2007-2008.)

- Partnerships are mutually beneficial, non-commercial arrangements between schools and local businesses and community groups or organizations. As part of this strategic plan, GCS will seek partnerships that focus on character development, the arts, parent training and information, or core academic areas such as reading, mathematics, science and technology.

MAJOR STRATEGIES

- When parents are partners in their children’s educations, children will succeed. GCS will establish a parent university to provide the training, information and support that parents need to help their students grow.

- GCS will make decision-making processes and information more transparent to employees and the public.

- GCS recognizes that schools and district facilities belong to the public. As such, we encourage parents and citizens to become involved in school and district activities, initiatives and decision-making processes. In addition, GCS actively seeks volunteers and business partners to focus on improving student character development, the arts and academic performance.
Area III – Strategic Human Resource Management

III.A. Reduce the number of teacher resignations from the start of school to December by 50 percent.

III.B. Increase the retention rate of high-performing teachers and principals in hard-to-staff schools by 5 percent.

III.C. One hundred percent of teaching positions will be filled on the first day of school for students.

III.D. Increase the diversity of teacher experience and minority teacher representation district-wide as natural vacancies occur.

MAJOR STRATEGIES

• The key to GCS' success is its people, and through an employee selection and appointment process, GCS will grow current and future leaders.

• An equitable personnel allotment system will help distribute our resources in a fair manner. As such, GCS will collaborate with principals and other district leaders to develop the course selection, registration, schedules, projections, forms and weighted funding allotment system for the assignment of personnel to schools.

Area IV – Respectful & Responsive Service*

IVA. Improve the percentage of community members, parents, students and employees who indicate information, responses to inquiries and services are provided in a timely and efficient manner as measured by an annual survey. (Measures and baselines will be established.)

IVB. Increase the percentage of employees who consider GCS a “preferred place” (culture/climate) to work as measured by an annual survey. (Measure and baseline will be established.)

* GCS wants all employees to be responsive and respectful at all times while providing outstanding service to co-workers, students, parents and community members.

MAJOR STRATEGIES

• Each and every person who interacts with GCS should be treated with dignity, respect and courtesy at all times. As such, GCS will increase awareness among employees regarding the need for improving service while strengthening internal communications and improving employee morale.

Area V – Safe Schools & Character Development

V.A. Increase the percentage of students who report that they feel safe at school as measured by an annual survey. (Measure and baseline will be established.)

V.B. Increase the percentage of parents who indicate that their child’s school is safe and orderly as measured by an annual survey. (Measure and baseline will be established.)

V.C. Increase the percentage of community members who rate our schools as a safe place for students. (Measure and baseline will be established.)

V.D. Decrease the number of overall out-of-school suspensions related to non-compliance (rule No. 6) and discourteous acts (rule No. 8) in the Student Code of Conduct by 15 percent as measured by the annual suspension report. (57 percent of out-of-school suspensions were for rule No. 6 and No. 8 violations as of the 2007-08 school year.)

VE. Decrease the number of State Reportable Incidents of inappropriate behavior per 1,000 students by 10 percent. (638 verified reportable incidents as of 2007-2008.)

MAJOR STRATEGIES

• GCS will educate the whole child and support students’ character development by expanding character education district-wide. In addition, GCS will adopt the recommendations of the School Climate Task Force and expand Positive Behavior Support (PBS).

• In order to ensure the district-level hearing process is applied consistently, GCS will review current student discipline policies and procedures.

• All students deserve the chance to achieve educational excellence. As such, GCS will expand instructional alternatives for students including SCALE and Twilight school.

Area VI – Optimal Operations

VI.A. Meet and/or exceed key performance indicators for all business operations, divisions and departments. (Measures and baselines will be established.)

VI.B. Complete more than 1 million square feet in construction through new schools, additions, renovations and/or upgrades.

VI.C. Ensure schools reach baseline standards for facilities. (Measures and baselines will be established.)

If we commit to excellence, our children and young people, all with the capacity to be great, will respond in kind. If we expect excellence, they will deliver it. If excellence is the only acceptable option, they will embrace it, for children live what they know. The only question is whether we, as students, parents, teachers, support staff, administrators, school board leaders and community members, will make excellence a habit in GCS.

We already have a school district that, in many ways, is highly regarded nationally for creating innovative programs and making gains in student achievement, thanks to the hard work and dedication of our Board of Education, GCS employees and countless others in our community who are passionate about education. Now, we have the opportunity to build on that strong foundation and take our school district to the next level.

We have the vision and we have the ability. This plan focuses on eight key areas: improving academic achievement; supportive parent and community involvement; strategic resource management; respectful and responsive service; safe schools and character development; optimal operations; transformational technology; and, clear baseline and equitable standards.

By focusing on these key areas and aligning our resources accordingly, we have the opportunity to do what no other school district nationwide has truly mastered: achieving educational excellence for every child in every school.

This is an ambitious plan, one that will require us to refocus our current resources more strategically. Times are tough, which means we will have to squeeze every penny out of every dollar and every minute out of every hour. While the current economic conditions clearly will make this effort more challenging, our children deserve no less than our very best. When we make a commitment to excellence for all children, I am confident we can achieve it.

Sincerely,

Maurice “Mo” Green
Superintendent of Guilford County Schools
January, 2009