

**TALKING POINTS – DR. NANCY J. MCGINLEY
SUMMER LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE
JULY 29, 2008**

Introduction:

Charleston Achieving Excellence is a plan to visibly accelerate District progress, and I am going to talk about that plan today, but before I do, I want to take some time to welcome everyone here.

I can't stress how excited I am to stand before all of you, such bright minds, innovative thinkers and hard workers. You are the heart and soul of our district, at the school and central office levels. Your work touches the lives of over 100,000 people, from students to families, extended community networks and the entire economy of the Lowcountry.

People know that I love to use quotes, from Teddy Roosevelt to Pat Conroy. There's one that I often repeat about leadership, and it's simply that "Leadership is who you are when nobody else is watching."

I have a feeling that everyone in this room is the type of leader who works hard, thinks and acts with children in mind, and stays on task whether in front of others or working alone. You were hired, or have stayed part of the district, because you share a tireless commitment to ensuring excellence for every child, every family, and every customer that we serve.

In order for this leadership to extend outward, we must reflect, empower others, and gather to share ideas. This is why we've come together for these Institutes over the last five years, and why we're here today. Of course, this Institute will be the best of all, as will this year.

Now it is my pleasure to introduce our new leaders.

Leadership is paramount to our success, and that is why this year's Summer Leadership Institute is so important. We need to not only be "on the same page" – we each need to be able to explain and articulate why we are doing the things we ask ourselves and others to do in this district.

In 2007/2008, Charleston County School District stopped “planning for excellence” in the future and declared and adopted two irrefutable constructs to change the culture and achievement results in our school district. We said:

#1. The Victory is in the Classroom and

#2. we declared . . . Excellence is Our Standard.

With these constructs in mind, we introduced and now hold staff accountable for clear, logical, and research-based practices and outcomes. We know that the “quality of the teacher” is the primary driver of achievement. To that end, we made improved classroom support the primary goal for principals and assistant principals.

To reinforce our support for teachers, we established the **Teacher Roundtable**, with teacher representatives from every school meeting directly with me once a month. We created **Teacher of the Month** awards that are aired in the local media and published on our website to honor great instructors. We started monthly **Breakfast with the Superintendent** events to recognize employee contributions and expertise. We now send weekly **Desk Letters** from the Superintendent to keep all staff in the information loop. We cite classroom accomplishments on our website. In January 2007 we launched an unprecedented **Voluntary Teacher Transfer Initiative** to move experienced teachers into high poverty schools. These are just a few examples.

Additionally, we know we need to recognize and reward great teachers for great results. Recognizing teachers of excellence has been a practice in District 4 and one that we will replicate across the District in the future. Dr. Washington started this teacher award program and I thank her for making victory in the classroom a priority.

All of these initiatives that I mentioned, are designed to support quality instruction in every classroom.

Our Second Construct is “Excellence is Our Standard”:

Making Excellence our district standard was both symbolic and profound. We expect all of our children to be educated in classrooms of excellence and this past year many contributors spent countless hours building consensus around the essentials of instructional effectiveness at the elementary, middle, and high school level. These essential elements of good schooling are in the **Action Designs** we will adopt and follow as a district for at least the next three years.

You will be learning more about the contents of the **Action Designs** during this Leadership Institute. More broadly, we embrace excellence in everything we do, especially customer service, which is more important than ever. Last year we introduced the “60 Second Rule” – an expectation that within 60 seconds a visitor to

any district school or office would be greeted, acknowledged, and assisted. Drayton Hall Elementary School responded so powerfully that they won the National Red Carpet Award.

“Excellence as our Standard” extended to our **Operations, Maintenance, Finance, and Food Service Divisions.**

- In Facilities Services, Mark Cobb and his team did a great job. They cut down on work request response times; increased their number of inspections; reduced costs; and the Security Office cut the number of police alarm calls by *80%*. How many of you appreciate the work of this group?
- In Food Services, Walter Campbell and his team served 14,112 breakfast meals and an average of 23,314 lunches per *day*; completed the installation of the “meals plus” software in all schools, redeveloped menus for the 2008-2009 school year to eliminate highly processed and high sugar content items, and established collaborations with Dr. Ann Kulze, the Charleston Medical Society, and the “Lean Team.”
- Bill Lewis and our Capital Programs Division have really transformed our county, giving us world-class schools that everyone—students, parents, surrounding and extended communities—can be proud of. We built new schools, replacing aged buildings with modern-day centers of excellence. Buildings are now LEED Certified, matching the kinds of ED specs that 21st Century students deserve. Let me show you a few examples of excellence in our Capital Programs.
- Michael Bobby, Terri Shannon, Allen Milburn and the Finance Team really shined this year, passing a balanced, forward-thinking budget that will modernize our classrooms, support our teachers and enhance instructional effectiveness despite a “Perfect Storm” of financial conditions described by most observers as the “worst in the history of the school district.”

(Will Mark Cobb, Mike Johnson, Eric Cook, Walter Campbell, Bill Lewis, Mike Bobby, Terri Shannon, Allen Milburn, please stand and be recognized.)

At all levels our employees are making Excellence their standard. **Administrative Assistants** stepped up to the plate and created their own professional development conference. On June 25th, 200 administrative support staff attended a full day professional conference where they led sessions to improve their own performance and support Charleston Achieving Excellence. There was one clear message that day – we’re all on the same team. We have a wealth of in-house expertise and if we leverage our talent we can bring all of our clerical and support staff to a high performing level.

On the academic front – our core business – schools performed and students excelled. Examples of excellence that were recognized include the fact that earned scholarships are up from last year.

Earned Scholarships are up compared to last year. A total of \$42 million was earned by students, an increase of over \$6,000,000 from last year. HSAP scores went up for the third straight year, as did SAT scores, even with more seniors taking the test than last year. At the early and middle grades, PACT averages went up. Classroom management strategies and school-wide progressive discipline plans led to fewer expulsions, suspensions and office referrals this year. And the great thing is, people are really taking notice – after six straight years of declines, our enrollment is increasing this year by over 450 students.

Individual Schools Earned Top Honors, constantly raising the bar. Just a few examples:

- Academic Magnet High School was ranked the 7th best high school according to *Newsweek* magazine, up from 11th last year. U.S. News and World Report awarded the school “Gold Medal” status as its 27th best school in the country.
- School of the Arts and Wando were awarded “Silver Medal” status, ranked among the nation’s best. They are in the top 3% of schools nationwide.
- Jennie Moore Elementary won a prestigious 2007 *No Child Left Behind* Blue Ribbon Award, also placing the school among the best in the nation.
- Pinckney Elementary was the ONLY Elementary school in the entire Tri-county area to earn both an Excellent Absolute and Improvement rating.
- Buist Elementary, a school known year after year for its excellence, extended the reach of its International Baccalaureate program in becoming the first IB Authorized “Primary Years Program” in Charleston.
- Sanders-Clyde Elementary, a Blue Ribbon Award nominee last year, won \$25,000 from the U.S. Department of Education for its honorable mention as a “Distinguished Title I School for Overall Achievement.” Sanders-Clyde was the only Lowcountry school to receive the award, which is part of the National Title I Distinguished Schools Recognition Program under No Child Left Behind.

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26 schools were recognized for closing the achievement gap. The district led the state in the number of Palmetto Gold & Silver Awards earned.

Gold Award Winners

Garrett

Wando

Jennie Moore

Mt. Pleasant Academy
Sanders-Clyde
Stiles Point
Sullivans Island
James B. Edwards
Buist Academy
Belle Hall
School of the Arts
Academic Magnet
Charlestowne Academy
Pinckney
Charleston Development Academy Charter

Silver Award Winners

Lincoln
Military Magnet
Goodwin
Hunley Park
Lambs
Murray-LaSaine
Pepperhill
St. Andrew's School of Math & Science
Mt. Zion
East Cooper Montessori Charter

39 schools made Adequate Yearly Progress this year under the state's NCLB guidelines:

St. James-Santee ES
Lincoln HS
Belle Hall ES
James B. Edwards ES
James Island MS
Jennie Moore ES
Mt. Pleasant Academy
Pinckney ES
Sullivan's Island ES
Whitesides ES
Harbor View ES
James Island ES
James Island MS
Stiles Point
Clark Academy

Corcoran ES
Hunley Park ES
Lambs ES
Pepperhill ES
Academic Magnet HS
Garrett Academy
School of the Arts
Angel Oak ES
Mt. Zion ES
Ashley River ES
Drayton Hall ES
Oakland ES
St. Andrews ES
Springfield ES
Stono Park ES

Buist Academy
Sanders-Clyde ES
Blaney ES
Ellington ES
Minnie Hughes ES

Baptist Hill HS
Charleston Development Academy
East Cooper Montessori
Orange Grove ES

In January 2008, eleven schools took the challenge to form **Neighborhood Planning Teams** and move to become “partial magnet” schools under our access and choice initiatives: Those schools are:

- Laing MS
- Mt. Zion ES
- Haut Gap MS
- Chicora ES
- Hursey ES
- Charleston Progressive
- Fraser ES
- James Simons ES
- Memminger ES
- Mitchell ES
- Jane Edwards

Two schools – West Ashley Middle School and St. Andrews Middle School moved ahead on their own to offer choice to parents and families through innovative programs.

The Education and Economic Development Act:

EEDA ushered in IGPs and career academies as a district wide expectation.

All Middle and High School Guidance departments were restructured to insure that all students received career counseling.

All rising freshman and sophomores completed Individual Graduation Plans as the result of conferences held with the student, counselors and parents.

All high schools now have a student to counselor ratio of 300 to 1. Still too high, but moving in the right direction. (***)maybe quick story about your involvement in graduation—fact that EVERY graduate in your example had a plan?)

- In 2008 **Wando High School** graduated 400 seniors who had completed “career majors” taking at least four courses in their major.
- **Baptist Hill**, with a 70% and climbing 4-year graduation rate, established a partnership with Trident Technical College to create programs in construction and welding

- **West Ashley** established a partnership with Garrett High School that sent 14 students to Garrett to complete courses in Metal Fabrication, Drafting and Welding.
- **Stall High School** students attended Trident Technical College to earn dual credit in Welding. This year they will expand their partnership to include a “Head under Hoods” Program for students interested in auto technology.
- **Burke High School** students attended the Palmer Campus of Trident Technical College earning dual credits in a variety of subjects.
- **James Island Charter High School** established an Industrial Technology Program at the school where students were taught construction techniques.

All of these partnerships with colleges and universities reinforce our view as a district that we must prepare every child to succeed in college and the 21st century workforce.

On the district level, as a large school district we cannot succeed without **partnerships**. In 2007-2008 we:

- Revitalized the **Parent Advisory Council** –This year, we met parents at the grassroots level – holding meetings in churches, schools, and community centers. We held community forums at the beginning of the school year and throughout the year, especially around important topics like the budget. –We brought a representative council of parents in regularly to share parent-related ideas, materials and strategies with them, and to get their point of view on these things **before** they were finalized.
- This year, we strengthened our relationships with our legislative delegation. We need positive and meaningful partnerships with political and legislative stakeholders at the state and local level, and our Director Public Affairs and Volunteer Services helped to promote these. Senator Glenn McConnell said it is “the best relationship we have had in years.”
- To provide both support and materials to our parents we established a Parent Information Resource Center (P.I.R.C.) at Burke High School. District 20 principals will learn more about P.I.R.C. this week. Office of Categorical Programs made this possible.
- **Sound Media and Communications** – All along the way, parents and community members knew what we were doing. We called parents on Parentlink before they heard about issues from the media. We created user-friendly videos that explained major initiatives. We launched a new TV show, and aired student performances, teacher recognitions, and high-achieving

school videos on our web site. We reached people near and far through new online, television, print, and phone-based mechanisms that raised our level of engagement to new heights. . .

In short – CCSD did much to be proud of in 2007-2008. So where do we go in the year ahead?

The Year Ahead

CAE Year II – 2008/2009

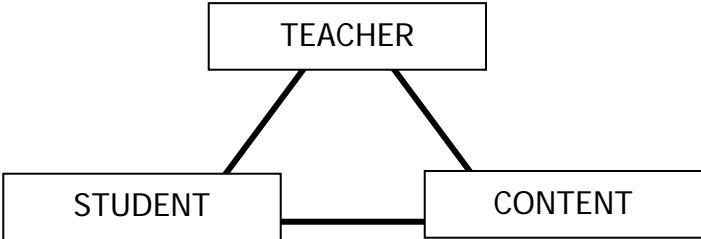
“In every conversation and at every turn, the message is not that we’re going to be a great District, but that we are a great District.” –John Emerson, CCSD General Counsel

DISTRICT GOALS

Despite these accomplishments, the 21st Century economy demands that we do even better. We must take the foundation built by the Charleston Plan for Excellence to a new level, to a three-year vision of Charleston Achieving Excellence (“CAE”) built on simple but far-reaching goals and values that every single staff, student, parent, business and community member can relate to and benefit from. Let’s review the CAE’s goals. We will:

1. **Elevate the achievement of all students.** District-wide, we are going to raise the academic proficiency of our students. Our absolute and overall numbers will continue to improve.
2. **Close the achievement gap.** In the early, middle and high school grades, we are going to decrease the achievement gaps— defined by a range of test scores and other measures— that exist between African-American, Hispanic and Caucasian students.
3. **Increase the graduation rate.** Graduation rates overall and by subgroup will rise steadily each year, and after year three, will exceed state and national averages. We will instill a college-bound culture in every school, built on high expectations for every child and a steady connection between classroom learning and future success.

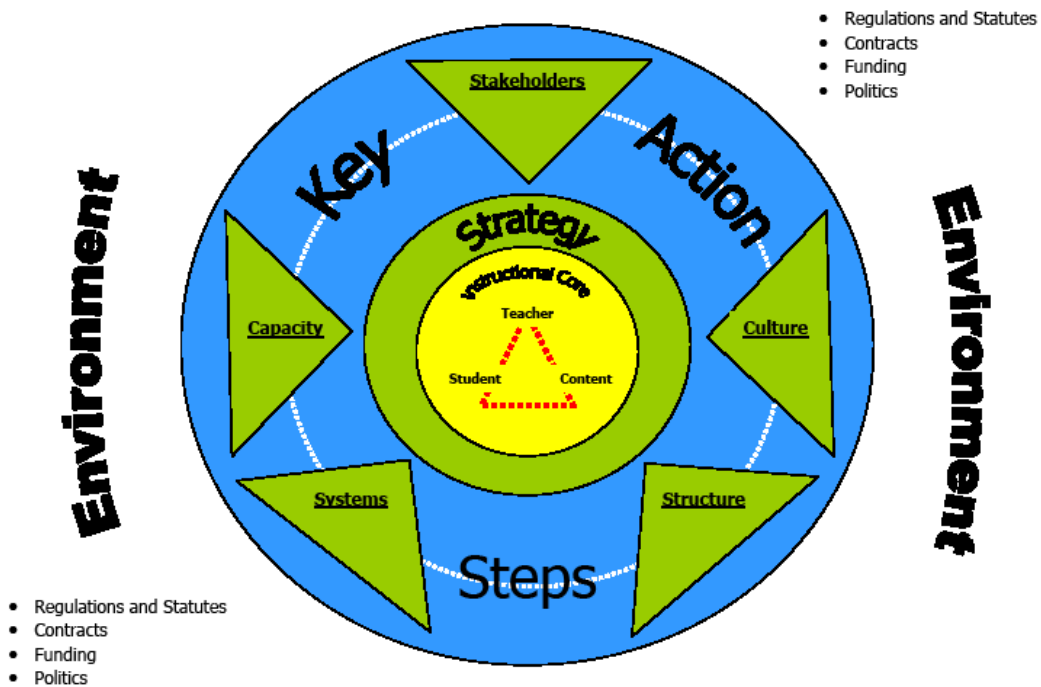
To reach these goals we must impact and strengthen the "Instructional Core".



CHARLESTON ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE DISTRICT STRATEGIC OVERVIEW 2008-2011

This plan builds upon and refines the “managed instructional program” that was introduced four years ago under the Charleston Plan for Excellence.

For the last four years we have been part of the Public Education Leadership Project at Harvard University. CAE is based upon practices that have been proven effective across the nation. To reach these goals, we must impact the instructional core.



CORE VALUES

Goals cannot be achieved without a solid foundation of **values** that support them. That is why Charleston Achieving Excellence is built on three core values— **Results, Access, and Partnerships**. Let me explain each of these in further detail, and provide examples of district-level strategies and systems that will be in place to support and measure them.

RESULTS: Rigor and Relevance

As a district, we will focus on results— again, now clearly defined as elevating performance overall, closing the achievement gap between groups, and raising graduation rates— by increasing the **rigor** of instruction and challenging all students to achieve at high levels. We must also make the learning process **relevant** to today's students and families. In a high-tech world that emphasizes knowledge, problem-solving and critical thinking, course offerings and instruction must connect with the goal of preparing for success in college and the 21st Century workforce.

Educators know from experience what scholarly research has now proven, which is that instructional effectiveness is at the heart of all school-based learning. Effectiveness, at its core, relies on three things working mutually: the quality of the teacher, the rigor of the content being taught, and the level of active student learning of the content. This is why rigor and relevance are so important to our theory of action, which directly ties instructional effectiveness to the achievement of our three core goals.

In support of Results, the CAE plan:

- Holds staff accountable for following effective school practices that are outlined in our Elementary, Middle, and High School **Action Designs**. Elementary, Middle, and High School **Action Designs** are blueprints that provide the “essentials” for success at each school level.
- Introduces a quantitative, performance-based evaluation system for school administrators that directly links annual salary increases to the achievement of individual, group and district goals.
- Launches new strategies for the recruitment, retention, and equitable distribution of high-quality principals and teachers.

Results will be measured by:

- Tracking the academic growth of every child, disaggregated by race and family income level.
- Measuring graduation rates and postsecondary attainment overall and by subgroup.

- Implementing district-wide behavioral intervention plans and support systems, and measuring suspension, expulsion and referral rates by race and gender.
- Tracking enrollment figures annually.
- Conducting frequent classroom visits that will measure instructional effectiveness, improve teaching, and empower and involve teachers.

ACCESS: Equity and Choice

Without access, a vision of every child learning to high standards and achieving their dreams cannot be realized. The second core value of the CAE is access through equity and choice. All students will be provided with opportunities to receive effective instruction, enrichment, and advanced courses. By creating a portfolio of school options, families will be given what they all want—the choice—to select the best possible educational setting for their children. At the high school level, we will continue to support and expand 21st Century career pathways that make learning exciting, relevant, and motivational.

In support of access, the CAE plan will:

- Deliberately expand the range of school choices offered to parents and students, including Montessori and single-gender programs, neighborhood and countywide magnets, and charter schools.
- Create a district-wide college-bound culture that provides tips, materials, resources, and information on college and the 21st Century workforce beginning in the early grades, connecting all student learning in the classroom with positive future outcomes.
- Provide equally clean, safe, and orderly school environments that promote student growth, learning, and citizenship and serve as assets to their communities.
- Create online and grassroots teacher-to-teacher networks that will replicate “best practices” and raise the quality of instruction district-wide.
- Modernize classrooms and computer labs through a classroom modernization project that will enhance technology in schools.
- Offer more students Advanced Placement course offerings; encourage more students to take the PSAT and college exams; and ensure that all students and parents understand the financial aid process.
- Expand early childhood programs to ensure that every eligible child has access to preschool education opportunities.
- Create a “Success for All” taskforce specifically charged with developing comprehensive district-wide strategies to close the achievement gap.

PARTNERSHIPS: Respect and Relationships

Public education is built on partnerships, especially in Charleston County, which is why CAE will strengthen CCSD's connections with volunteers, parents, communities of faith, public agencies, the business community, elected officials, and institutions of higher learning. Each of these partnerships will be built on a foundation of respect, and maximize the value of relationships between people— student to teacher, staff to parent, and so on. The culture of the CAE, and the district at-large, will be one that respects all people, values and promotes diversity, and encourages collaboration and feedback from all stakeholders.

As part of the CAE plan, CCSD will promote partnerships by:

- Expanding existing collaborations that support child health and nutrition, literacy, arts and music, and other district-community priorities.
- Embracing the diversity of community, staff, student, and stakeholder members and groups.
- Promoting and building public/private partnerships that support the goals of the CAE.
- Including business, community and faith-based leaders in the development of initiatives, strategies, and course offerings.
- Recognizing and rewarding the accomplishments, contributions and success of partners and volunteers.
- Respectfully and actively listening during meetings, conferences and community forums.
- Creating and promoting transparent, timely and relevant communications strategies for outreach to all publics.

MEASURABLE THREE YEAR GOALS

1. Elevate the achievement of all students.

By the close of the 2011 school year:

- 90% of students will be at the Basic (and above) level on the state elementary-middle school assessment (currently the PACT).
- In high school, 90% of students will pass both subjects of the HSAP on the first attempt.
- Over 50% of students will score Proficient (and above) on the state's elementary-middle school assessment (currently the PACT).

2. Close the achievement gap.

By the close of the 2011 school year:

- 100% of all four-year-olds from high-poverty homes will be enrolled in full-day, literacy-rich Child Development programs.
- There will be at least a one-third reduction in the gaps that exist between White and Black students in all subjects on the state's elementary and middle school assessment (currently the PACT).
- There will be at least a one-third reduction in the gap between White and Black students on the HSAP, defined by the percentage of students passing both subjects on the first attempt.

3. **Increase the graduation rate.**

By the close of the 2011 school year:

- The graduation rate, overall, will be at least 80%.
- The gap between White and Black students will be reduced by at least one-third.

Theory of Action:

If we improve instructional effectiveness by increasing the rigor and relevance of the content, the skill and knowledge teachers bring to the teaching of the content, and the level of students' active learning of the content, then we will increase achievement for all students and close the achievement gap.

Two new structures that you will here more about at the SLI include the Action Designs and the Performance Management System that links annual raises to individual growth and District goals.

Stay tuned for these and other initiatives that we'll add to the Charleston Achieving Excellence plan. As we move forward, let's refine and talk about how we can improve these structures and systems. The point of our **Theory of Action** process is to prove our theory—after all, if we do, we will have succeeded—but as many of you know, theories aren't typically proven the first time around. It's a *continuous* process of improvement that will require all of us to reflect on "what works" and work together to refine strategies and develop new ones as we move forward. I look forward to seeing this kind of analysis and collaboration throughout the year, and in years to come. (PAUSE)

I started this speech with a quote from John Emerson: "In every conversation and at every turn, the message is not that we're *going* to be a great district, but that we *are* a great district."

John has it right. We're great because so many of our schools have already figured it out, and are achieving excellence right now...Because as a district, we recognize *where* we are and where we need to go—we are self-analyzing, “looking in the mirror, and not out the window”—to improve what we do, raise the bar of achievement, and ensure excellence for every child...We're great because, most of all, every single person in this room *believes* that every child can learn to the highest standards, that it's our mission to get them there, and that things like race, income, neighborhood and background will *never* limit our children.

That is what *Charleston Achieving Excellence* is all about. That is what *you* are all about, the leaders and field workers who will take the plan and get it done.

I told you I like quotes, and there is another one I'd like to close with. This one was spoken by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who has inspired all of us and countless of our students. He said: “All labor that **uplifts humanity** has **dignity and importance**, and should be undertaken with painstaking **excellence**.”

Our work uplifts humanity, has dignity and importance. **And we will carry it out with excellence.** Thank you for all that you do.