

## REMARKS – DR. NANCY J. MCGINLEY STATE OF THE SCHOOLS ADDRESS, APRIL 23, 2009

### WELCOME

Thank you. “I believe that children are our future... Teach them well, and let them lead the way.” Can we get a round of applause for all of these students who are leading the way, and their terrific parents? The performances have been amazing, and I want to especially thank Ross for being the best emcee ever...

Good morning, Charleston! It is an absolute thrill to look out and see this collection of leaders, partners, and supporters. I cannot tell you how much I appreciate your presence here today, and the privilege to stand before you. I am so pleased to see Mayors Riley and Summey... Mac Burdette representing Mayor Hallman..and Mayors Alston, Heyward, and Baldwin, thank you for being here. Thank you too to Board Chair Toya Green, fellow Board Members, and other distinguished guests. I want to publicly thank Jack Mitchell and AT&T for sponsoring our breakfast... And thank you to the Marriott for hosting us and waiving the rental fee for the room this morning. So, if you are asking yourself, how can the school district afford to provide this wonderful meal in this beautiful room at a time that we face unprecedented budget shortfalls from the state—the answer is that we are fortunate that AT&T and the Marriott believe that advancements in public education—and the students that they benefit—are worth celebrating!

This event is important because it is the one day out of the year that we get an opportunity to shine a spotlight on all of our students and schools. Today’s event, timed perfectly with Volunteer Appreciation Week, is about you — the dedicated partners, teachers, principals, and volunteers of this district... Every one of you could stand up here and tell your own “state of the schools” story about public education. I recognize that it is my good fortune to be able to do so. As superintendent, I have the greatest job in the world because I get to wake up every day and do whatever I can to help children. And I am blessed to do so in a county with so many child advocates.

You are people who lead by example... who put the needs of our children before those of your own, before business profits or personal time. You are people who know that a strong Charleston county cannot exist without a strong public education system. Our work is not just about changing test scores—it is about producing lifelong learners, good neighbors, and passionate and compassionate citizens.

And ladies and gentleman... I am proud to stand before you this morning and say that I have studied the state of our schools, and despite tremendous challenges, it is stronger than it has ever been! GO PUBLIC!

Let’s talk about what I mean by this. Today, my remarks will celebrate where we are, and then preview where we are going for 2009-2010.

So where are we now? Our strategic goals are simple. Our values are clear. Our progress is directly tied to each and every one of you. Over the next few moments, I will talk about some of your contributions and our district's accomplishments.

I will also note here that each one of our 81 principals was asked to invite a school-level partner to be with us today. If you are one of these partners, please stand and be recognized.

And because I believe so strongly in transparency, I'm also going to talk about the challenges that we've faced, and those that still lie ahead. It's no surprise that like other districts our size; we have areas in need of improvement.

I believe, despite our financial and academic challenges, that through partnerships, an emphasis on results, and a plan built on achieving Victory in the Classroom, we can realize our vision of every child graduating from high school prepared for a lifetime of success. All means All - Children with special needs, English-language-learners, and children from homes challenged by poverty. By investing in them, we can change the world!

Tell me ...do you think we can make this happen?

## RESULTS

That's what I thought! We need you. Not only for the precious children we serve, but for our area's economy, we must have a bright-shining system of strong public schools, not just a few scattered beacons of light.

This is why I'm so happy to begin by talking about what matters more than anything else: Results. Last year, I introduced our new plan: Charleston Achieving Excellence. The plan is built on three simple Goals: 1) elevating the achievement of all students, 2) closing the achievement gap between groups, and 3) raising the graduation rate. Three core values form the bedrock of our work, and they are results, access, and partnerships.

So where are we on the results piece? There are four major highlights that I want to share with you.

**#1 Starting the year strong.** Let's begin with the first week of school in 2008. We had great success on two key fronts.

One had to do with students. For the last five years, we averaged 3,775 absences the first day of school. In my first year, the Mayors and I had to go on TV, pleading with parents to send their children to school. This year, my second as Superintendent, we were more proactive, and most importantly, we did not work alone. Inside the district, we did a better job reaching out to parents all summer long. We even convinced Darius Rucker from Hootie and the Blowfish to record a phone call to 44,000 homes urging parents to send their children to school.

But the real key was partnering with the cities of Charleston and North Charleston. Mayor Riley connected us with thousands of parents at the First Day Festival. And Mayor Keith Summey, Police Chief Jon Zumalt, Pastor Augustus Robinson, and Pastor Edwin “The Chef” Wright brought the “It’s Cool to be in School” initiative to the doors of North Charleston families, encouraging students to attend school the first day...knocking on doors, giving out backpacks, and taking away excuses. Will each of you please stand and be recognized?

Jim Frye and the Hands of Christ ministry donated free uniforms and supplies to thousands of low-income families across our county, with a dignity and generosity that was awe-inspiring.

Jim and others know that before we can teach them or reach them, we need to get them there. And taken together, these efforts resulted in an extra 1,000 students showing up the first day this year. We cut our absences by over one third.

When we opened our doors in 2008, we also had a full teacher corps ready and waiting for our students. Last year at the State of the Schools I said how proud I was to have cut the number of teacher vacancies down to 26 in 2007, from 100 vacancies just two years prior. In 2008, thanks to the efforts of our Teacher Employment office and proactive outreach from principals, we started the school with 3.5 teacher vacancies out of 3,500 teachers—a vacancy rate of one-tenth of one percent.

I don’t know if any of our partners from the Teacher Supply Closet are here this morning, but I also want to credit them for supporting our teachers before and during the school year.

We are also now in the top 20 districts nationwide in terms of our number of Nationally Board Certified teachers, the highest credential a teacher can earn.

So, we started the year strong with two key ingredients of the Victory in the Classroom—students and teachers.

**Success point #2 under “results” is about high schools.**

Several of ours grabbed national headlines...U.S. News and World Report ranked Academic Magnet, Wando and School of the Arts among the nation’s best high schools. Wando earned a bronze rating—one of the few schools nationwide without admissions criteria to do so—and School of the Arts earned silver. Academic Magnet was named a “gold” school, placing it in the top 100 schools nationwide out of 21,000 studied. No other school in our state made the top 100. Academic Magnet was also named the 7th best school in the country by Newsweek magazine. Would Lucy Beckham from Wando, Jim Reinhart from School of the Arts, Judy Peterson from Academic Magnet, and the partners from these schools please stand and be recognized?

Principal Beckham, please remain standing. This principal deserves a second round of applause for being named South Carolina's Secondary Principal of the Year for 2009! You have made us proud, and put Wando on the national map.

Garrett Academy of Technology also earned national acclaim with a Title I award given for its academic excellence, proving that when a school has a caring faculty, a 21st Century, career-focused curriculum, and involved parents, children can succeed no matter their background. Principal Parsons and Garrett's partners, are you with us this morning? Thank you for the great work you're doing!

Speaking of results, Burke High school's graduation rate went up by a staggering 22 points, moving the school—for the first time ever—off of the “unsatisfactory” list... This is a credit to principal Charles Benton's vision and hard work, and so many community partners who have invested in the school, including the City of Charleston and the College of Charleston. Thanks to everyone involved with Burke's success, including Mayor Riley, Fran Welch and Paula Eggleston and mentors and tutors from the Center of Partnerships.

Other high schools made tremendous strides, posting double-digit gains in graduation rate and earning “Excellent” growth ratings, including West Ashley High School... Military Magnet High School... and St. Johns High School.

Last year I told you that we made increasing the graduation rate one of our three core goals. This year, the rate jumped eleven percent, from 62% to 73%...

Looking at other important indicators, we had record scores on Advanced Placement, A-C-T, and S-A-T exams, even with record numbers of participation in each.

In 2008, our students earned a record \$42,000,000 in scholarships—over \$6,000,000 more than the record number I shared with you at this time last year.

Great job to everyone involved with our high school community!

I have two other major highlights to share with you on the topic of Results.

#3 Let's look at how our elementary and middle schools are doing.

Each year for over a decade, the state has given an annual assessment in grades 3-8 called the “Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test,” or the “PACT” Test.

Our results for 2008 were more than encouraging. I am proud to report that this year, we had the highest percentages of students scoring Proficient or Advanced in the ten-year history of PACT.

As an added measure, our students outscored their state peers in every subject and at every grade level, without exception. The green cells indicate where CCSD outscored the state.

Will our elementary and middle school principals, and all of our partners involved with these schools, please stand and be recognized.

**#4 Finally, I want to close our discussion of Results with some strong district-wide ratings and trends.**

- This year, our absolute rating moved up from Below Average to Average.
- And I am very excited to report to you that the Growth Rating—which used to be called the “Improvement Rating”—jumped two levels from “Average” to “Excellent,” - which is the highest growth rating that a district can earn in the state of South Carolina. CCSD has never had a Good or Excellent growth rating until 2008!

We also earned more “Palmetto Gold and Silver Awards,” given to schools either for absolute achievement or closing the achievement gap, than any district in the state of South Carolina.

To close on the subject of results, we know that people vote with their feet-- enrollment trends tell you what people think about your schools. We began the year by urging people to “GO PUBLIC!” explaining why we’re a great choice. And I’m thrilled to report that this year our attendance went up for the first time in five years.

I can’t talk about results and not mention how the budget situation impacted our district this year. \$16 million in cuts have forced the hardest of decisions upon us...No Superintendent or Board ever wants to consolidate schools or furlough employees...These were the most difficult decisions I’ve had to make in my 30 years as an educator... I am just thankful for the grace and dignity that I saw in our communities during the Redesign process. People stood up for their schools, and the vast majority stayed focused on what matters the most—the education of all children. As long as we focus on the students—as we are doing today—we will emerge stronger and better as a district.

Speaking of which...what is our plan for schools where we are not seeing success? Let me be clear that despite huge gains and record progress this year, we have academic challenges that demand our attention.

We are committed to lowering the number of At-Risk report cards in our district---now at 24 out of 89—and to addressing the issues plaguing our chronically under-performing schools.

This year, to help these schools, we will have a laser-like focus on literacy, with strategic programs and interventions that include...

- Expansion of early childhood programs...

- Creation of a 6th-grade reading academy in North Charleston...
- Extension of the school year through our “Quick start” summer reading intervention...
- The use of “Literacy Interns” in first grade classrooms...
- And the implementation of extended-day programs—“2.5” and “8.5”—that match high-performing teachers with high-need students...Dr. Gepford and the Associate Superintendents Vashti Washington, Terri Nichols, Lou Martin, and Patricia Yandle, I thank you for your leadership in our schools.

Our plans recognize that while we are clearly making progress on multiple fronts, we must double our efforts to close a growing achievement gap between students according to race and income.

### ACCESS...

I believe that we will not close achievement gaps and ensure excellence across the board without access... This means every child in our system should have access to the same resources...The same high-quality teachers...High-tech, world-class facilities...High expectations and standards ... and sports, arts, and music activities.

### LIFELONG SPORTS/TENNIS

Let us talk about the importance of lifelong sports. I think it’s a shame that games like tennis, which encourage lifelong, healthy activity and open up positive social networks, are limited to certain segments of the population. I applaud the work that’s being done in our community to involve low-income rural and inner-city youth in structured tennis activities—something I have been discussing with our local tennis partners and national U.S.T.A. leaders for some time.

We have a major event on the horizon that will amplify this theme and also celebrate and connect our teachers--the May 2nd “Superintendent’s Cup” tennis tournament! Thus far, 310 teachers have registered to play and help us kick off the beginning of Teacher Appreciation Week!

None of this would be happening without the leadership of Brian and Phil Burke and other tennis professionals from throughout the region... Would all of you, including the 12 principals who started new elementary tennis programs this year, please stand and be recognized?

### ARTS AND MUSIC

Access also means broadening students’ horizons. Arts and music programs are essential to preparing creative thinkers who will thrive in today’s economy. This is why we started up the Arts Roundtable, which hosted the first-ever “Arts Summit” last month, filling our Board room to capacity with enthusiastic supporters of arts and public education. The

Roundtable will be an ongoing collaboration, and I'm very optimistic about the benefits it will bring to our students.

Along these lines, we're also pleased to have a partnership with Jonathan Green, who is working closely with us on the opening of a brand-new, arts-infused Sanders-Clyde Elementary on East Bay Street. Mr. Green generously donated a painting that students will turn into a mural for the new school.

## STUDENT COUNCILS

Public education is the cornerstone of our democracy, and "access" means all students having the opportunity to participate in student council so that they can learn about leadership and government first-hand. At last year's State of the Schools, I announced that we would form student councils in every school. I am proud to say that we've done this, and we are honored to have student representatives with us from every one of our high schools and learning communities. Students—if you are a leader of your student council, would you please rise and be applauded? These are our future leaders!

## SCHOOL CHOICE

Let's talk about school choice, because access means choices for parents, and this is something we took major strides to expand this year. We asked schools to apply for Neighborhood Planning Team grants to develop new "partial magnet" themes around neighborhood schools—empowering these schools to redefine themselves, attract new parents, and improve student achievement.

Five schools were approved as new partial magnets. Memminger Elementary is now a "Global Studies" school; Chicora Elementary has a "Communications" Theme; Laing Middle is a Math and Technology school; Haut Gap has a new "Advanced Placement Academy;" and Mitchell Elementary has new Montessori and Math and Science programs. Nearly 200 applications have been received at these schools. I'd like to thank Dr. Brenda Nelson for her leadership on school choice, and ask her, the five principals and their lead partners to please stand and be recognized for working so hard to make these schools—and our district—open, exciting, and appealing to parents.

At this point, I also want to thank Mayor Summey for working with me to support new options for North Charleston—including Zucker Middle School for Science.

Anita Zucker—you are a friend to students and families in North Charleston and all across the county.... Your husband, Jerry Zucker, was one of the first CEOs—and by far the biggest—to sign up for and participate in our highly successful "Principal for a Day" program when I brought it here in 2004. His annual participation helped generate business support for public education. Anita, your leadership around Trident United Way's "Day of Caring" was exemplary. Your generous donations never cease to amaze me. We also thank you for your leadership on the Education and Economic Development Act (EEDA) advisory group...I know that nothing you do is motivated by recognition,

but would you please stand and be recognized and thanked for your family's relentless efforts to bring about education and opportunity for all?

## TECHNOLOGY

Access means better technology for teachers and students. This is why we launched the Classroom Modernization project, a \$30 million capital improvements project to level the technological playing field for our students, and give teachers cutting edge tools, like Smartboards and classroom computers.

Through this project, we're moving closer to where students will have access to the same technology no matter where they are in our county.

As another huge step in this direction, Charleston businesswoman and philanthropist Linda Ketner donated \$250,000 to the "One Laptop per Child" initiative that will put brand-new laptops into the hands of our students and others across the state...How do you spell generosity? Linda, on behalf of the students at North Charleston Elementary school, we offer our sincere thanks! (SLIDE: CAN YOU SPELL G-E-N-E-R-O-S-I-T-Y?)

## LOOKING AHEAD—

Now, let us look ahead: what can you expect from your school district in 2009-2010?

Most you know that I have championed the phrase "The Victory is in the Classroom!" for a reason. Teachers are the single most important predictors of student success.

According to some researchers, the impact they have on students is 20 times greater than the next-closest factor.

This is why Teacher Quality is so important, representing one of our four core strategies. It also marks our biggest change in direction.

We love our teachers. As a matter of fact, before I go any further, I want every teacher in this room to stand and be applauded. You are the best.

Our students need highly skilled teachers with core content knowledge, but also people who know how to bring subjects to life and engage learners.

## TOP PROGRAM

I want to highlight a new program and direction that supports this idea. It starts with the question, How do we define teacher quality?

We're taking major steps in answering this objectively. We now have a fabulous new tool that allows us to look at the growth of students by classroom, comparing their

improvement to similar groups nationally. It's an apples-to-apples comparison, based strictly on growth within one year. It's called the "Virtual Comparison Group" or "VCG." Right now, we've got strong data in grades 2-5, and next year we'll expand the system beyond these grades.

I'm happy to announce today that thanks to the contributions of Tom Hood from First Federal, the Charleston Education Network and others, we will be launching a "TOP" program—which stands for "Teacher Outstanding Performance"—to reward elementary teachers who have had at least 80% of their students meet VCG goals in English and/or Math.

The goal of this TOP project is simple—evaluate teacher performance on student growth, and reward teachers who move their classrooms forward. It's an evolution of ours that is consistent with the President's national agenda to reward teachers for measurable gains in student performance.

On May 22nd, we will host a ceremony to recognize a total of 89 teachers who made the "TOP" list. They will receive cash rewards—not for their years of service, certification, or popularity, but for their results in moving students forward.

Today, I am delighted that we have with us the 16 elementary teachers who earned the highest VCG marks in BOTH English and Math this year. Will these "TOP" teachers and their principals, along with Jon Luther and everyone involved with this project, please stand and be recognized? 13 out of 16 of these TOP teachers work in Title I schools.

As you can see, we are changing our culture so that teachers are celebrated, rewarded, and developed based on results in the classroom. "TOP" is a huge step in that direction.

## WORLD-CLASS FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS

Another huge step is ensuring world-class facilities and programs. What a tremendous facelift this county has had over the last few years, thanks to the Board's vision, strong community partnerships, and Bill Lewis's hard work. Next year, we're going to open nine new state-of-the-art schools...And we're exploring new grade configurations and school designs that offer terrific advantages to learners, while also maximizing efficiency.

## PARTNERSHIPS

I want to turn now to a fourth priority of ours—strategic, collaborative partnering. This means smart Project Management that empowers and involves multiple stakeholders...Community Learning Centers that offer students extended learning times and enrichment activities... Strategic volunteerism that addresses student needs and uses skilled tutors to improve literacy ...And Career Academies for workforce development and student engagement at the high school level.

As I said in the beginning, today's event is really about all of you.

Barbara Kelley Duncan and the Charleston Youth Development Center is a great collaboration that touches on the themes of partnership and world-class facilities. We thank you for everything you did to help open a brand-new Liberty Hill school this year!

Father Dewey... We created the "Behind the Scenes Hero" award this year, inspired by this terrific man who is there for us in times of need. Thank you, Father Dewey, for shining a light on us in the darkest of hours.

Our friends from the League of Women Voters, thank you for your help with the Academic Magnet vote and your steady guidance and advocacy for public education year-round...

Members of the Ministerial Alliance, and every faith-based leader in this room—I know that you are tirelessly working in your communities to help change the lives of students. Please stand and let us recognize you for leadership, commitment, and inspiration.

Children can't learn if they are unhealthy... This is why we've created significant partnerships to encourage the health of our students. All of our child health and nutrition partners—from Scotty Buff and colleagues at MUSC to Louie's Kids and anyone working to promote child health and nutrition, please know how much we appreciate your efforts.

To be sure, the children we serve represent opportunity and challenge. The sad truth is that many of them live under marginal circumstances, faced with high rates of poverty, teenage pregnancy, and crime.

Like me, you see these circumstances as a call to action. You believe in all children and want to change their lives.

Public education is the difference between letting children remain stuck in the chains of inequality, or flourish in the bright lights of the 21st Century American Dream. This dream can't happen unless we believe and invest in every one of them.

It can't happen unless we buy into public education as a common good, and work together to fix a broken funding system that expects more out of less. After all, our work is about our students.

I want to close by sharing something that one of my principals wrote me last week. She described dropping off one of her students after they both had the opportunity to attend the Family Circle Tennis Tournament. The student's mom was on an old bike at the end of a dirt road, with no shoes on. The principal writes, "she was happy to see us and thanked me over and over again...I kept my truck in the same position as my student, and her mom proceeded down the dark, dirt road...I know that the mom didn't want me to

see the condition of the house, and that's why she met me at the 'foot' of the road. I cried and cried, and prayed...that my student could grow to be successful and move out of poverty. Sometimes I feel defeated, but last night, I realized that while progress is slow and daunting, other things, like what we did yesterday are equally important... WE MUST CONTINUE TO BE RELENTLESS IN OUR PURSUIT TO PROVIDE HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMS TO HELP THE STUDENTS LIKE DESTINY FROM THE DARK, DIRT ROAD..."

That principal was Lerah Lee from St. James Santee. Our principals get it—and *you* get it. To Lerah and everyone in this room, thank you for doing the incredible work for our children, our future, and our country's peace.