



# Office of Superintendent

Dr. Gregory A. Firm

30 January 2012

In January our second Community Forum – *Connecting the Dots* generated several questions. Anson County School staff were assigned questions within their areas of responsibility. Their responses are in italics.

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What program or policy is keeping us from being successful and why are we holding on to it?

*There is no one program or policy that is preventing us from being successful. Rather, it is a collective mindset that community, parents, staff, and students must have to be successful. Many of the practices of yesterday cannot and will not produce the type of learner we are expected and required to produce today. This means we must think and do differently to be successful.*

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Would we be willing to ask our staff and parents what program or policy is keeping us from being successful and why are we holding on to it?

*Our staff as well as community have the means to answer this question through our Give Us Your Feedback link on the Anson County Schools' website. We would welcome any and all responses to this question.*

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Can we or should we increase the number of slots at Ombudsman and make the entrance process quicker?

*We are working with Ombudsman to make the process for entering the program more effective and efficient. Presently we contract for 100 student slots. Increasing the slots means increasing the costs. Currently the grant funding the program is based on 100 students.*

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Would Anson County consider a year-round schedule?

*ACS regularly reviews schedule / school calendar options with the best intentions of making final decisions based on best educational practices, budget allowance, and the different types of educational programs we offer. All stakeholder input is considered when annual calendar recommendations are submitted to the Board of Education. Each year final decisions are made with significant consideration as to which option is best for the district.*

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To what extent are teachers expected to collect and maintain data that will reflect the performance and growth of each child in the room? How are interventions documented?

*Interventions should be documented through planning meetings as a result of formative assessments. Also the data is for formative assessments (CFA's and Benchmarks) are maintained in the Thinkgate software system*

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In what instance is it acceptable for major differences in class size? (Ex: 29 vs. 19) What about student teacher ratio?

*Student class sizes vary from grade level or grade level spans based on the recommended teacher – student ratios defined by NCDPI and the State Board of Education class size guidelines/policies. Additionally, class sizes vary based on the actual number of students enrolled on each grade*

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*level at a particular school or the number of students signed up to take a specific course at the secondary level.*

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*I enjoyed this meeting being excited about taking part in ways of continuing to help all children learn, and focus without pressure but becoming successful in life as the teachers, principals, state, and parents come together and form plans and (routines)<sup>2</sup> that's best for now the children learn and succeed in life.*

*Thank you.*

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What are examples of "restrictions" for uses of funds? Specific categories? Decreased class size? More support staff? Are those site-based decisions?

*Funds are restricted based on exact guidelines that accompany each allotment. For example, we have funds that can only be used for teaching positions and if these funds are not used for this purpose unused dollars must be returned to the state. Another example would be funds designated for professional development provided by specific grants or federal programs. If the funds are not used for professional development the district is required to revert the funds back to the funding source. Some decisions are site-based such as using teacher assistant funds to provide teachers in the K-3 classroom or to provide teacher assistants. Either way these funds are required to be used to support instruction.*

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Have you or anyone on your cabinet received a bonus within the past 24 months? If so, how can that be justified given the performance of the school system? Why would it be a bad thing for the government to take over the school system?

*No!*

*We do not have bonuses for central office or any staff for that matter.*

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What efforts are being made to create more diversity in the schools especially LES? There is a deficiency of people of color in the professional arena there.

*The focus is always recruiting high quality classified and professional staff to work for ACS. Employment laws only allow agencies to request certain types of information on employment applications; therefore, during the screening process we have no way of knowing an individuals ethnicity. Once staff is selected, efforts are made to distribute staff to provide diversity at all schools. LES has increased this year in the number of staff bringing diversity to the workplace.*

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I feel it necessary that teacher workshops not take place on student time. Substitute training is too far behind.

*We are working on both these issues.*

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How much emphasis will be placed on EVAAS? Will this be the determining factor? Will parents have access to EVAAS information?

*Michael McLeod's response was excellent although and I would add that the predictions become more accurate as the student's year in school progresses. That is, if there is 5 year's worth of data, the prediction is more accurate than if there is 3 year's worth of data.*

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What is being done for AIG students in elementary schools?

*AIG students in the elementary school are grouped together in a classroom with a teacher who works well with high-level students. Teachers are to "compact" the curriculum and enrich or accelerate students who have already successfully completed material. There should be differentiation in the classroom so that students can be challenged and worked with at a rigorous and challenging level.*

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At what age are students identified as AIG? How will I know if my AIG student is receiving services?

*Students are officially identified at the beginning of 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Students in grades K – 3 may be identified earlier if they have been individually tested by a licensed psychologist and the scores meet the county's qualifications. Parents must pay for psychological testing. Students in K-3 that are recognized by teachers as having exceptional abilities may be grouped together and nurtured for possible identification at a later time.*

*You should be able to tell if your child is doing rigorous and challenging work. Ask your child if everyone in the classroom is doing the same thing or if they are doing different. Work should be different not more.*

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It is my understanding that our administration and teachers will be replaced if we don't improve and the state will take over. How can the state find persons for these positions and how successful has the state been with this?

*If you are referring to my presentation to the school board, I was asked to discuss the role of District and School Transformation in Anson County Schools. Because Anson County Schools is a low-performing district, DST has been assigned to support the school system. Our role is to **support and coach leadership (district and building) and teachers** to improve and grow their skills in helping increase student achievement. Ultimately if this support does not sufficiently increase student achievement, the district could be taken over by the state. In the state's only take over (Halifax County), to date the DST support has not shown the necessary growth, but it has caused us to change the model we use for support. We are using this changed model in Anson.*

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Dr. Finn, I truly enjoyed the presentation. It provided both clarity and was informative. I am curious to know the "proverbial gap" you mentioned needed more time to bridge. Now, by more time are you referring to the school year?

*Current research is indicating a longer school day not school year is resulting in deeper more enduring learning.*

*My comments about the "learning gap" are directly related to the absence of formal learning activities over the summer recess. Learning activities do not have to be formal or structured in a manner that resembles school. We have several community as well as school programs that are offered during this time but transportation as for the most part prevented many children from participating. We must do more to ensure the opportunity and access to learning is truly for all learners.*

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How does a program replace direct teacher instruction? Seems to be a lot of programs that take away from class time.

*Technology based supplemental instructional programming are not designed or expected to replace or take time away from formal, teacher led instructional activities. They are supplemental. Staff are expected to take the results from these programs and use them to inform both planning and instruction to ensure each learner is successful.*

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Is there documentation to prove the L2 is working?

*Absolutely!*

*Where staff and schools have implemented the program as intended they have seen significant growth or maintenance of learning. Where staff and schools are not seeing growth as we see in other schools it is more a matter of implementation, monitoring, and adjusting where and when necessary. The Anson County Schools have been nationally recognized for the success of L2.*

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How many students are still below grade level after TeachTown, HeadSprout, and Fast ForWord?

*Still too many!*

*Technology based supplemental instructional programs are not intended to be substitutes for sound, effective instruction. Where staff and schools are not seeing growth as we see in other schools it is more a matter of implementation, monitoring, and adjusting where and when necessary.*

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Why is there confusion about where we want to go? All students being successful is the goal, right? Why are some not taking steps to get there?

*Though argumentative, the confusion of the purpose and aim of education has never been resolved. American education has for the most part accepted that each learner is of value and is not only ethically or morally but legally entitled to an education. What has not been universally accepted is the "whatever it takes" to educate each learner to high standards.*

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Annual Planning Table – Will parents receive a copy of the annual planning table for their children? I think this information is important to make sure my child is progressing according to plan.

*Yes.*

*Currently, each parent in grades PreK through 8<sup>th</sup> and in selected subject areas have available Family Guides that articulate what each learning must know and be able to do in that grade level or subject matter. With respect to the Annual Planning Table for each school, the principal may at any time-share their plan. I would suggest attending a PTA or PTO meeting at your school to learning more about the work in that school to improve.*

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