

Good Afternoon... Distinguished guests, Dr. Emblidge, members of the Board, Dr. Cannaday, Dr. Wright, and others in attendance today.

I am honored to be a part of the State Board's meeting today. I have been asked to share with you information on the successes of Norfolk Public Schools... how we're achieving such remarkable results as well as the next leg of our journey towards excellence.

I am flattered to be in the position to follow up on what we heard earlier from the Governor. And, I am proud to know that the work we're doing with Norfolk's own "Journey towards Excellence" closely parallels Governor Kaine's focus, "From Competence to Excellence."

Our mission — to educate each student to be a successful, productive contributor to society by providing powerful teaching and learning opportunities — is based on the same philosophy espoused by the Governor.

We have made tremendous strides on our journey to reach world-class status. And... even though we've been named the top urban school system in the country by virtue of winning the 2005 Broad Prize... there is much work ahead.

As more and more people come to visit Norfolk Public Schools or begin researching our district, they always ask what we did to so dramatically improve student performance. Unfortunately, we have no single silver bullet. With that said, our success can be replicated.

Here are a few of the key components of our success, and then I'll briefly share what is embedded in each area:

- **Building a culture of high expectations**
- **Holding all staff accountable for achieving measurable goals**
- **Using data-driven decision making**
- **World Class by 2010**

Building a culture of high expectations

- ALL means ALL: Narrow, relentless focus on improving student achievement (all programs, all efforts must support quality teaching and learning).
- Three overarching objectives:
 1. Ensuring the continued growth of student achievement for all.
 2. Ensuring each school provides a safe, secure, and disciplined teaching and learning environment.
 3. Ensuring that parents, business, and community members are actively engaged in the educational process.
- From here, we identified 4 world-class targets:
 1. All students possess the habits of powerful literacy.
 2. All gaps are eliminated while increasing achievement for all.

3. All schools exceed local, state, national and international standards.
4. All students are prepared to access productive options and opportunities upon graduation.

- Key Partnerships

1. Panasonic Foundation — a partnership dedicated to the development of long-term relationships with public school districts to restructure their educational systems, by working not only with the superintendent, central office staff, and school board, but also with unions and associations, teachers, administrators, parents, and the community.

Panasonic currently works with districts in Atlanta, GA; Columbus, OH; Corpus Christi, TX; Highland, WA; Norristown, PA; Norwalk, CA, Racine, WI; and Santa Fe, NM.

When we began this partnership, we focused on approximately 5 achievable results or annual outcomes... what we believed to be our most pressing needs.

Through the course of our work, we have moved to the point of developing a multi-year strategic plan designed to ensure that we reach our goal of world class by 2010.

Now, we are moving from the year-by-year incremental focus to a more long-range, sustainable plan.

2. Greater Norfolk Corporation.
Another invaluable partnership whereby area business leaders and key stakeholders in the city are assisting NPS by providing principals and upper-level administrators

professional development opportunities at the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, NC. These key stakeholders are sharing business expertise with NPS on succession planning, team building, and establishing a high-performance culture.

3. Doug Reeves/Center for Performance Assessment

A partnership dedicated to improving student achievement and educational equity through a long-term relationship with school systems. The Center continues to assist us improve student achievement through practical and constructive approaches to standards, assessment, and accountability.

- Professional Learning Community — common readings such as *Literacy with an Attitude* and *Good to Great* are used as focus of continuing conversations throughout the district.

Other readings include: *How Full is Your Bucket*, *Follow This Path*, and *The Knowing-Doing Gap*.

- “No Excuses” mentality (result of reading QBQ: The Question Behind the Question) [WHICH LEADS TO...].

Holding all staff accountable for achieving measurable goals

- Comprehensive Accountability System (including examples of each level in your handout)
 1. Tier 1 (district level data), Tier 2 (school/dept. level data), Tier 3 (story behind the numbers)
 2. No more than 7 Tier 2 indicators each year (majority focused on improving student achievement, others split

between safe/secure environment and community engagement).

3. Set by individual schools/departments and reviewed by central administrators.
4. ALL schools, departments AND School Board have accountability plan.

- Leadership and Capacity Development support
 1. Content specialists spending 70% of time in schools
 2. Audits of content requirements (reading audit, looking for compliance with non-negotiables)

Instructional Non-Negotiables include:

- > Teachers and administrators shall focus on high quality instruction.
- > Schools shall be communities of learners which engage in collegial planning, sharing, collaboration, and professional development on a weekly basis.
- > Teachers and principals shall engage in data-driven decision making to ensure a laser-like focus on teaching and learning.
- > Teachers shall maximize the use and integration of technology.

3. Best Practices

- Intense review of data [WHICH LEADS TO...].

Utilizing data-driven decision making

- Designated Focus Schools for additional support
- Intense professional development on data analysis (training from Doug Reeves and Center for Performance Assessment)
- District-created quarterly assessments (Some schools assess even more frequently — monthly, every two weeks)
- Data teams in all schools that review results and modify instruction
- Reprogramming staffing and resources to support direct instruction

World Class by 2010

- Defined “world-class.” Developing these targets entailed approximately a year of in-depth bold, courageous conversations.

In the beginning... we said we would know world-class when we saw it. We soon realized that wasn't good enough...

“World Class” had to be more concretely defined, and we knew we had to be able to measure it.

For example...

1. Powerful literacy grew out of real areas of concern. We were reading Patrick Finn's *Literacy with an Attitude* and

we realized we had much work ahead to ensure that Norfolk's students possess the traits of powerful literacy.

2. We knew we faced challenges with regards to closing the achievement gap. And, though we've made remarkable gains... while increasing achievement for all... this continues to be a critical issue for us.
3. To reach world-class, we knew that all schools should exceed local, state, national, and international benchmarks. And... in Norfolk, these benchmarks are seen as the floor — not the ceiling. If we're going to reach world-class, we must strive for more than competency.
4. And, finally, as we began this journey, we knew that all students must be prepared to access productive options and opportunities upon graduation.

KEY LEVERAGE POINTS

- Climate of Trust
- Culture of No Excuses
- Comprehensive Accountability System
- Data Driven Decision Making
- Instructional Best Practices
- Focus on “All Means All”
- Parent and Community Engagement

- Personal and Organizational Will (this is perhaps the most difficult element!)

And, finally... world-class as a journey...

We have viewed our goal to reach world-class status as a journey... likened, if you will, to Climbing Mount Everest. Consider this: Mount Everest soars over 29,000 feet into the air and lies between Tibet and Nepal.

For years, many took on the challenge to reach the top of Mt. Everest. Some even died trying. In the end, Edmund Hillary of New Zealand and Nepalese Sherpa Tenzig Norgay became famous for being the first people to conquer this feat.

Hillary had this to say: “We didn’t know if it was humanly possible to reach the top of Mount Everest.” Many had tried before them and failed. But they did not give up... On May 29, 1953 he and Norgay reached their goal and set foot on the highest point on earth.

How many school systems across the country talk about being world-class? How many have really defined it? How many of those actually have accomplished their goal?

How many school systems talk about leaving no child behind?
How many actually deliver on that promise?

All too often, the path is littered with failures...

I am finishing my first full year as superintendent in NPS. And, each day... I know we are moving closer to our goal. Each day, I learn more about NPS’ journey, and I witness the tireless commitment of our staff.

And, like Hilary and Norgay, ours has not been an easy journey. The last five years have taught us new techniques... best practices. We have done the hard work of defining world class... we have faced our “brutal facts,” and have put into place measures to address our challenges.

Today, I am proud to tell you that **NPS will reach its goal of becoming a world-class school system by 2010.**

We are just as determined... just as committed... as Sir Edmund Hilary and his partner to reach our “Everest.”

Our children — your children — deserve no less.

Thank you.