

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## FairCompare Analysis & Audit of Educational Effectiveness for the Guilford County, North Carolina, Schools by

This FairCompare Analysis & Audit for the Guilford County Schools was commissioned by Action Greensboro and its Commitment to Excellence Committee on behalf of the Board of Education of the Guilford County Schools and the Superintendent as a means of improving the quality of teaching and learning in the school district.

This FairCompare Analysis and educational effectiveness audit compares the Guilford County Schools to similar student population demographics nationwide. A FairCompare Analysis & Audit examines the degree to which the student and staff populations in a school district meet levels of effectiveness. Each school district population is examined against populations nationwide with similar demographics, some of which are currently achieving educational effectiveness and which have firmly established the conditions of effectiveness. The SchoolMatch approach compares student populations rather than school systems in order to provide more fair, accurate, and comprehensive cohort comparisons.

Within the Guilford County Schools cohort group exist similar populations which have achieved effectiveness in one or more of the areas analyzed by a FairCompare Analysis & Audit (approximately 15-20% of the entire population). Also within the cohort group are student populations which perform at or below the average (mean) for the entire group, in a given category (approximately 15-20% of the population). In order to form the basis for comparison with these demographically similar populations, SchoolMatch calculates the average (mean) performance level for the cohort group in every category analyzed in the audit process. This demographically matched **set** of populations (the cohort group) can be described in terms of the average (**mean**) in each performance area. Once the averages in each measurable category are calculated, the cohort group is then **mean-matched**. Once the mean for each category is determined, the effectiveness level (one standard deviation above the mean) can be calculated. Among student populations in the more than 15,800 public school systems in the United States, the school systems listed here share similar **primary** demographic characteristics in the categories of education level of school system residents, per capita income, and poverty level of the community. The districts listed below may not be identical to Guilford County Schools in all primary or secondary demographic categories. They represent the closest overall matches nationwide to the Guilford County student population.

| <u>NAME</u>                     | <u>CITY</u>    | <u>STATE</u>   |
|---------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1. San Juan Unified Schools     | Carmichael     | California     |
| 2. Jefferson County Schools     | Golden         | Colorado       |
| 3. Seminole County Schools      | Sanford        | Florida        |
| 4. DeKalb County Schools        | Decatur        | Georgia        |
| 5. Anne Arundel County Schools  | Annapolis      | Maryland       |
| 6. Anoka-Hennepin Schools       | Coon Rapids    | Minnesota      |
| 7. Greenville County Schools    | Greenville     | South Carolina |
| 8. Shelby County Schools        | Memphis        | Tennessee      |
| 9. Chesterfield County Schools  | Chesterfield   | Virginia       |
| 10. Virginia Beach City Schools | Virginia Beach | Virginia       |

We believe that discussions between leaders of the school systems listed and leaders in the Guilford County Schools relative to effective school practices may provide information about how demographically similar school systems manage their resources in pursuit of effectiveness.

For purposes of "End of Course" (EOC) and "End of Grade" (EOG) performance comparisons, the following demographically similar school systems within the State of North Carolina were identified:

1. Buncombe County Schools
2. Charlotte-Mecklenburg County Schools
3. Durham Public Schools
4. Forsythe County Schools
5. Wake County Schools

### **Lower Grade/Upper Grade Analysis**

Assuming the district's student population has similar characteristics (e.g., poverty level, parent education level) at all grade levels, students should perform at equivalent or higher levels on the achievement tests given in different grades. This kind of consistent achievement at different grade levels may be thought of as "value added" achievement. When this does not occur, a more rigorous academic program should be provided at upper grade levels. The most appropriate way to gauge value added achievement in a school district is to follow each group of students as they progress from grade to grade throughout their entire twelve years of schooling. The SchoolMatch team encourages the leadership in the Guilford County Schools to establish procedures to collect data and monitor progress in this way. In the absence of twelve years' worth of data on one academic class, the SchoolMatch Audit team considered achievement data at each grade level for one year as a kind of "prism view" of performance across the grade levels in the Guilford County Schools.

### **Advanced Placement Program**

Having an Advanced Placement program in the high school creates a stronger academic press for the students and higher expectations for student achievement. The ability of the district to be successful in this effort is related to its willingness to train its teaching staff and to establish a more rigorous curriculum. The means and effectiveness levels for enrollment, percent taking exams, and percent earning eligibility college credit are established for populations of high school Juniors and Seniors nationwide enrolled in AP classes.

#### **Enrollment**

The 2002-03 enrollment of Juniors and Seniors in Advanced Placement courses achieved effectiveness.

#### **Percent Taking AP Exams**

The percent of juniors and seniors who take one or more AP exam achieved the effectiveness level in 2002-03. Juniors and seniors taking the AP exams represent 36.67% of the total student population in grades 9-12.

Of the juniors and seniors enrolled in AP courses, 74.23% took one or more culminating exams at the end of the year.

|                      |
|----------------------|
| <b>COMMENDATIONS</b> |
|----------------------|

It is important to note that the number of commendations recorded by the Site Visit Team is the highest number recorded in any FairCompare Analysis and Audit. A number of visionary and effective innovations taking place in the Guilford County Schools District account for such an assessment. The Guilford County School District is commended for the following goals, programs, and practices:

- Focus on student achievement: The evidence indicates a re-focusing of school system priorities on student achievement. The Site Visit Team noted several instances of recently instituted programs and school philosophies designed to highlight the importance of the learning process as the primary mission of Guilford County Schools. Examples include the innovative Middle College concept, the widespread use of Literacy First in elementary schools, student and teacher recognition programs, and strong perceptions on the part of parent, teacher and administrator stakeholder groups of high expectations for student learning exist throughout the school system

- Reaching effectiveness: The Guilford County Schools has a considerable percentage of schools scoring at the effectiveness level on the North Carolina statewide tests. Special note is made of the large number of elementary schools performing at the effectiveness level in Grade 4 mathematics. In addition, the students in several elementary, middle and high schools performed at or above the effectiveness level in at four of six tests in elementary and middle schools and seven of ten tests in the high schools. Nationally, in most student populations, 15-20 percent of schools are judged to be effective. In Guilford County Schools, 26.7 percent of elementary schools, 27.8 percent of middle schools and 14.3 percent of high schools met this rigorous level of achievement. The Guilford County Schools are to be commended for their attention to increasing the level of achievement on measures such as the EOG and EOC tests.
- Scholarship incentives: In school systems throughout the nation, Site Visit Team consultants have observed creative college scholarship incentive programs. Nowhere have these valuable initiatives been more diverse and extensive as those in Guilford County. Scholarships received totaled more than \$35 million in 2002.
- Multiple instructional options: A review of the data and tours of the schools presented a picture of a school system highly committed to a wide range of academic programs and school location choices for students and their parents as evidenced by magnet school programs, Early College programs and high schools of choice.
- Relationship with the business community: The Site Visit Team commends Guilford County Schools for outstanding improvement in the relationship, support and understanding between the schools and business community. It is evident the administration of the school district has secured a strong commitment on the part of the business community in Guilford County to support the school system. Site Visit Team members attended an unprecedented joint meeting of the Greensboro, High Point and Winston-Salem Chambers of Commerce, targeting regional economic development collaboration. It was clear the majority of participants believed that strengthening the K-12 school system is an important strategy for regional economic growth. Specific recommendations from the Milken Institute program presenter included informing parents and students on the knowledge-based economy, linking teacher pay to performance and introducing entrepreneurship programs among school offerings.
- Human resource practices: Classroom observations and interviews evidenced strong human resource practices including effective building level leadership new to their roles, a focus on retaining and recruiting quality educators and support staff, the delivery of staff development through multiple approaches such as instructional improvement officers, facilitators and coaches and unique and well-conceived award programs for effective teachers.
- Closing the achievement gap: The Site Visit Team commends school officials for a commitment to close the achievement gap between students of various racial and ethnic groups. Data indicate that progress is being made to close the achievement gap among the broad diversity of students of various racial, ethnic and socio-economic groups. Administrators, principals and teachers demonstrated a clear commitment to providing learning opportunities and encouraging academic achievement for all students.
- Student promotion: The Site Visit Team commends school officials for demonstrating an easily observable commitment to reducing retention rates without social promotion through focused learning activities and student services in the elementary and middle schools.
- Increasing instructional time: Most school systems in the United States continue to operate a 180 day school year that is far less than many of the industrialized nations with high scores on the TIMSS and other international measures of student achievement. Steps in the direction of extending the school year in some Guilford County schools through the elementary school magnet global education schools are commendable. Additionally, a decision to move towards uniform "start-stop" times resulted in adding 40 minutes to the instructional day for 65-70 percent of the elementary schools.
- Students with special needs: The Site Visit Team commends school officials for providing well-designed programs, including the use of technology, for students with special needs.

- Emphasis on the primary years: The Site Visit Team commends school officials for efforts to develop a strong primary program. The lowering of class sizes in grades K-2 and a strong emphasis on reading at the kindergarten through second grade levels are serving to establish a strong foundation for student success in subsequent grades.
- International Baccalaureate: The Site Visit Team commends school officials for initiating International Baccalaureate (IB) programs at the elementary school level and expanding the secondary school level to provide an additional academically challenging instructional process.
- Use of communication technology: The Site Visit Team noted the effective use of closed circuit, cable and broadcast television in many schools. Use of such technology can also serve to minimize interruptions to the instructional day. Efforts to inform students, staff, the public and parents of programs and events in the school system are commendable and should be enhanced and extended.
- Enriched curriculum: The Site Visit Team noted significant efforts to enrich the core curriculum by providing foreign language opportunities for elementary school students particularly in Spanish and Japanese. In addition, commitment to the arts is evidenced by art and music programs in Guilford schools, and opportunities at higher grade levels through magnet programs in the arts. The Guilford County Schools are to be commended for providing these opportunities for students to become exposed to and proficient in the arts.
- Advanced Placement program: There is strong and consistent evidence of the commitment of school leaders to increase access to AP programs and courses for all students. As a result, the school system is to be commended for attaining effectiveness levels in the enrollment of juniors and seniors in AP courses and also the numbers students taking Advanced Placement tests. It is important to point out that a significant benefit of the AP program is to prepare students for successful performance on college entrance examinations. For example, student performance on the SAT is at the effectiveness level, placing Guilford County among the top 15-20% of like student groups in the country.
- Food service program: The emphasis on nutritional content and services through the Food Service Department is exemplary. For example, the school system has implemented a Summer Feeding Program. During the summer, school children may come to designated schools every day for a free lunch. During the first year of the program, over 8,000 meals were served each day in 15 schools. Additionally, no soda is dispensed in the elementary and middle schools, and the soda machines in the high schools are not operational until after 3:30 p.m. Emphasis in the food service program is on quality, nutritional offerings to enhance students' ability to learn through a protein-rich menu.
- Support staff commitment to students: The Site Visit Team wishes to commend the school support staff for their strong commitment to student well-being and success. Examples of such strength range from bus drivers who take up a pool to provide school supplies for needy students, to food service staff who single out at-risk students for mentoring, to cafeteria cashiers who personally affirm each student every day. These participants in the educational process, although not the most visible contributors to student learning, nevertheless make invaluable contributions by their professionalism, caring and attention to student needs. All are important members of each school's team.
- Implementation of ISO 2000 quality management standards. The ISO 2000 quality management standards being implemented in Guilford County provide a **single** set of quality management standards that experts worldwide recognize and respect. Thousands of companies in over 100 countries have already adopted these standards and many more are in the process of doing so. Few school systems have implemented such rigorous work processes and procedures standards. The Site Visit Team commends school officials for efforts undertaken in this important area.
- The Great Fleet Award from School Bus Fleet Magazine. The massive student transportation system in Guilford County was recently awarded the prestigious "Great Fleet Award from the national *School Bus Fleet Magazine*. The Site Visit Team recognizes the many complexities involved in operating a safe transportation system for Guilford County students, and commends the school system upon receipt of this award.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

From an analysis of the data, observations of schools, and interviews with Guilford County School District officials, the SchoolMatch Audit team makes the following recommendations:

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Facilities utilization plan: It is recommended the district update and revise its comprehensive multi-year facilities utilization plan which focuses on enrollment projections, security, building capacities, space needs and maintenance/building repair schedules. Special attention should be directed toward:
  1. Eliminating the 550 portable classrooms which the district has been put in place due to space limitations. As a result of increased enrollment, these portables have been added and appear to be becoming permanent buildings. The Site Visit Team recommends eliminating these portable classroom since many are in poor repair, they tend to lack overhangs for inclement weather, present safety and security risks and isolate students and teachers from others on the site. This should be made possible in part through \$300,000,000 school facility bonds recently approved in Guilford County.
  2. Establishing uniformity and equity in the maintenance, landscaping and overall cleanliness of the buildings. It appears a good deal of time is expended on the part of building and department personnel checking on the status of facility progress requests and the project itself while in process. The Site Visit Team recommends an on-line access system to provide monthly status updates for administrators and managers in the District.
  3. Improving school security programs to promote school safety, with special attention to the specific configurations of each campus
  4. Developing standards for building utilization ratios to assure that building are neither under or over utilized.
- Technology infrastructure: The Site Visit Team notes an apparent lack of understanding of the District's commitment to improve its technology infrastructure in support of the instructional program. In order to assure that all stakeholder groups will support and understand the District's vision for technology improvement, it is recommended district officials collaboratively prepare a multi-year technology plan which includes:
  1. Projected investment, timelines for completion, hardware/software specifications and replacement plans in each school building and administrative unit. The plan should be updated and disseminated annually.
  2. Specifications for promoting and accepting technology gifts for the district and its students.
  3. Dissemination activities that include parents, community, business leaders, teachers, support staff and administrators.
  4. Consider the implementation of programs such as "ET Goes Home" (Educational Technology Goes Home) personal computer loan programs, and school district-supported staff computer purchasing programs, particularly in low-income communities within the Guilford County School District.
- Dropout rates: The calculated cumulative 4-year dropout rate of 11.84% is higher than the effectiveness level of 10.4% and the mean of 11.6%. Continuing efforts to reduce the dropout rate through increased analysis and intervention should be pursued in order to surpass the mean and approach the effectiveness level.
- Home/school collaboration: Teachers in the elementary schools identified parental involvement in helping to prepare their children for learning in the early years as the single most important contribution to complement the district's efforts to improve student achievement. The Site Visit Team encourages school officials to explore opportunities to increase home/school collaboration in support of the Guilford Schools instructional program.
- Evaluating overall assessment programs: It is recommended the district leadership review the number of assessments and intervals of testing of students in the system with consideration given to reducing the frequency of tests. This should be facilitated since the District is the first in the State to initiate the innovative McGraw-Hill Early Progress Pro software that will assist teachers in the assessment of individual student progress. Furthermore, the

Site Visit Team recommends the addition of nationally-normed tests that will provide valuable comparisons to student performance nationwide and a district-wide kindergarten screening instrument.

- Review and consider initiating a peer assistance and review program in cooperation with the Guilford County Association of Educators. School districts from Poway, California, to Columbus and Toledo, Ohio, have initiated successful peer assistance and review programs to eliminate a major source of confrontation between teacher organizations and school district leadership. The Site Visit Team has discussed the Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) with teacher association leadership and the superintendent of schools, and suggests both programs for interns and intervention be explored to help improve student performance and increase teacher job satisfaction.
- Site-based management: There appears to be inconsistent evidence regarding the implementation of site based teams in the district. The Site Visit Team recommends school officials review the requirements of appropriate North Carolina statutes and the degree to which there is compliance.
- Increase opportunities for school readiness: Although there is no consistently administered kindergarten screening instrument, almost every elementary school principal and early childhood educator interviewed indicated that far too many students arrive in kindergarten with significant gaps in learning and preparation. The result is that elementary school staff must depend on often inadequate staffing levels of resource personnel to address speech and other developmental needs of these young children and to help prepare them for basic learning at the kindergarten level. Educators also reported that while pre-K enrollment forms are distributed to every household in the surrounding community of each elementary school, many parents do not follow up to register their children for an assessment.

The Site Visit Team recommends:

- 1) Identifying, selecting and consistently administering a kindergarten screening instrument
  - 2) Establishing personal outreach efforts to invite pre-K parents to events where their children can be assessed and enrolled on the spot.
  - 3) Linking with service organizations such as area Rotary Clubs to provide books for the homes of every child. Rotary International's President has recently initiated a Literacy and Education mission and Rotary Clubs are very active in the Guilford County area.
  - 4) Initiating parent education programs which stress the importance of reading to children and the role of nutrition in child development
  - 5) Ensuring that the above efforts are conducted in Spanish for the youngest and most rapidly growing demographic group of students and their families.
- Magnet school visibility: Improve the mechanisms whereby parents and students can learn about and become familiar with the various magnet school options available for choice. For example, tours of each magnet school for prospective parents might be helpful in expanding enrollment interest.
  - Enhancing school district identity: Additional efforts should be made to bring together taxpayers, parents, teachers, staff and students into a more cohesive "Guilford County School Family." Specifically:
    1. The Site Visit Team was impressed with statements of knowledgeable teachers that the Guilford County School District is the " Most Awesome Boat Afloat" compared to private schools and "Provide Something for Everyone."
    2. Continued efforts should be made to recognize and reward teachers, staff and students for outstanding work. Attention needs to be devoted to the recognition and support of the critical role all staff play in the total educational experience for young people. Those who transport and feed students and those who maintain the learning environment are an integral part of an educational program.
    3. Re-doubled initiatives should be taken to involve stakeholders in the identification of problems and solutions.
    4. Greater attention should be given to be entire two-way communication cycle in the system. It is recommended the district leadership consider a communications audit. Such assessments are available from university communications faculty and graduate students approved by the Organizational Communication Division of the International Communications Association (ICA).

5. In the decade that has passed since the consolidation of the district, confusion still exists among some residents regarding the identity of the organization. Research indicates brand identity can be powerful in creating a team atmosphere. It is recommended school system leadership follow the lead of other successful organizations and seek suggestions and support from individuals including community business leaders, art teachers and art students in the establishment of a new logo to unify the image and identify the school system brand on school signage and printed materials. In the process schools, entrances and parking facilities should be clearly identified.
- Teacher Attendance: In reviewing individual schools within the District, it is noted that discretionary teacher absences are uneven, ranging from an exemplary 1.10 days per year to 10.11 days per year. Efforts should be undertaken to determine the reasons for such varied teacher attendance patterns. Teacher attendance may be improved by publicizing absence rates, designing school district policy to recognize and reward teacher attendance, and implementing practices across the district adopted form buildings where teacher attendance is effective.
  - Explore improving school transportation practices: While commending the transportation officials in the Guilford County Public Schools for mounting an award winning system, the Site Visit Team also notes a need to consider more uniform transportation management practices including:
    - 1) Improving supervision of students entering and exiting the bus;
    - 2) Assuring uniform procedures for following up on discipline problems that have occurred on the bus;
    - 3) Reviewing the length of time students should be expected to spend in transit; and
    - 4) Strengthening communications at all levels in transportation services.
  - Pacing curricular opportunities to economic development: The Guilford area economic climate has recently suffered job losses as a result of changes in industries such as textiles and furniture. The school system is poised to be a partner with area businesses in improving the economic climate. By marshalling its resources in collaborations with area businesses, the school system can help provide employers and potential employers with associates for the future and students with skills to compete in a newly evolving marketplace. High schools in Guilford County already offer technical certification for systems ranging from Microsoft to Cisco to Red Hat. It is recommended that school officials engage in a high-priority project to thoroughly explore with business leaders creation of a small high school focused on systems technology and biotechnology. School leaders have discussed such a magnet school in recent months; the Site Visit Team heartily endorses the continuation and extension of these discussions.
  - Academic Levels: The Site Visit Team observed efforts on the part of school leaders to create ethnic balance in elementary school programs in the school system. This effort, however, needs to be redoubled in the elementary school Advanced Gifted III Program. Requirements that all students take eighth grade algebra are a step in the direction of improving academic rigor in the middle school years. In the high schools, however, the four-tier tracking system lends itself to inordinate enrollment of primarily non-white student populations in lower level courses. The Site Visit Team recommends that the district engage in an assessment of selection criteria and redouble recruitment efforts to engage non-white students in the Advanced Learners program. In addition, the lowest level courses should be eliminated in favor of more rigorous courses in an effort to help close the achievement gap.

**DISTRICT RESULTS**

| <b>Guilford County Schools</b>  |                       |                            |                                |
|---|-----------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Superintendent Terry B. Grier, Ed.D.</b>   |                       |                            |                                |
| <b>Grades PK-12</b>   |                       |                            |                                |
| <b>Categories of Effectiveness</b>  | <b>Mean (Average)</b> | <b>Effectiveness Level</b> | <b>Current District Status</b> |
| Advanced Placement:   |                       |                            |                                |
| • Percent of juniors and seniors enrolled in AP courses                               | 10%                   | 12%                        | <b>41.2%</b>                   |
| • Percent of juniors and seniors taking AP examinations                               | 3.2%                  | 3.7%                       | <b>36.67%</b>                  |
| • Percent of tested eligible for college credit (score of 3,4 or 5) on AP examination | 60%                   | 70%                        | 52.16%**                       |
| American College Test (ACT)   | 19.0                  | 21.0                       | 19.6                           |
| Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)  | 960                   | 996                        | <b>995</b>                     |
| Dropout Rate, Grades 9-12 cumulative  | 11.6%                 | 10.4%                      | 11.84%                         |

|                                  |        |        |       |
|----------------------------------|--------|--------|-------|
| Senior Class Grade Point Average | 2.6    | 2.4    | 2.96  |
| Student Attendance Rate          | 92%    | 95%    | 94.7% |
| Teacher Absence Index (TAI)      | 7 days | 5 days | 6.57  |

This SchoolMatch FairCompare Analysis and Audit was conducted by Ms. Donna Maria Alvarado, Dr. William L. Bainbridge, Ms. Cameron Harris, Dr. Roger J. Lulow, Dr. Roderick J. McDavis, Ms. Carol A. Scott and Dr. Steven M. Sundre from July 8, 2003 through October 30, 2003.