

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

District Profile*:

- Rank among U.S. school districts (by size)**: 18
- Number of schools: 178
- Number of students: 135,638
- Number of teachers: 8,565
- Per pupil expenditures***: \$8,739

Superintendent: Peter Gorman served as superintendent of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) from 2006 to June 2011. Gorman began teaching in Orlando, Fla., and has worked as a teacher, principal and administrator in Orange and Seminole counties.

Hugh Hattabaugh has served as interim superintendent of CMS since July 2011. Hattabaugh joined CMS in July 2007 as an area superintendent before becoming the chief operating officer in October 2008.

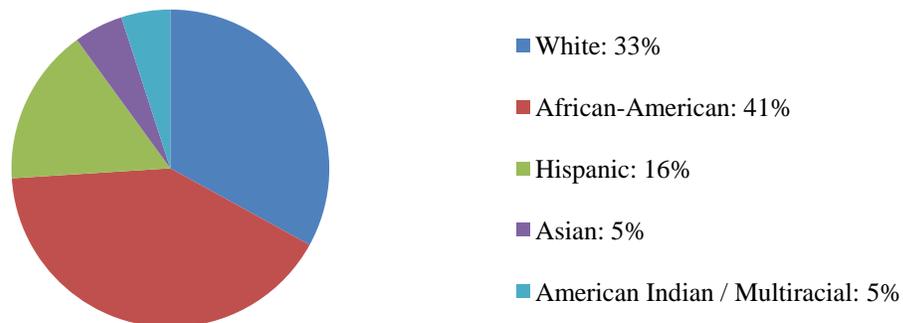
Governance: The nine-member board of education is comprised of three at-large members and six district representatives who serve staggered four-year terms.

Unions: North Carolina is a non-union state. Teachers associations that serve CMS include Charlotte-Mecklenburg Association of Educators and Classroom Teachers Association of North Carolina.

Student Characteristics:

- Percent of students eligible for free and reduced-price school lunch: 53%
- Percent of students designated as English language learners: 10%

Student Demographics:



*2010/11 data, unless noted otherwise

**2009/10 data

***2007/08 data

Student Achievement

- In recent years, Charlotte-Mecklenburg narrowed achievement gaps between African-American and white students in reading and math at all school levels. For example, from 2007 to 2010, achievement gaps between African-American and white students decreased by 11 percentage points in high school reading. In addition, Charlotte-Mecklenburg narrowed achievement gaps between Hispanic and white students in math at all school levels, and in reading at the middle and high school levels.
- In recent years, Charlotte-Mecklenburg also narrowed achievement gaps between its African-American students and the *state's* white students in reading and math at all school levels. For example, between 2007 and 2010, achievement gaps between Charlotte-Mecklenburg's African-American students and the state's white students decreased by 9 percentage points in middle school math. In addition, Charlotte-Mecklenburg narrowed achievement gaps between its Hispanic students and the state's white students in math at all school levels and in reading at the middle and high school levels.
- In 2010, 62 percent of Charlotte-Mecklenburg's African-American seniors participated in the SAT exam, the highest participation rate for African-American seniors among the 75 large urban American school districts eligible for The Broad Prize.
- In recent years, Charlotte-Mecklenburg was more successful than at least 70 percent of other North Carolina districts at increasing the percentage of low-income students who performed at the highest achievement level (level IV) in reading and math at the middle and high school levels. For example, between 2007 and 2010, the percentage of low-income students performing at the highest achievement level increased an average of 6 percentage points per year in high school math compared with an average 2 percentage point increase per year for other North Carolina districts.
- In recent years, the pace at which Charlotte-Mecklenburg narrowed achievement gaps between Hispanic and white students was among the *fastest third* of North Carolina districts in math at all school levels and in reading at the middle and high school levels. In addition, the pace at which Charlotte-Mecklenburg narrowed achievement gaps between African-American and white students was among the *fastest third* of North Carolina districts in reading and math at the elementary and high school levels.
- In 2010, the percent of Charlotte-Mecklenburg's African-American and Hispanic students performing at the highest achievement level (level IV) in reading and math at all school levels (elementary, middle and high school) on state assessments ranked in the top third in the state compared with African-American and Hispanic students in other North Carolina districts.
- In 2010, proficiency rates for Charlotte-Mecklenburg's African-American students in reading at all school levels and in math at the elementary and high school levels ranked in the top third in the state compared with African-American students in other North Carolina districts.

- In recent years, Charlotte-Mecklenburg was more successful than at least 70 percent of other North Carolina districts at increasing the percentage of African-American students who performed at the highest achievement level (level IV) in math at all school levels and in reading at the middle and high school levels. For example, between 2007 and 2010, the percentage of African-American students performing at the highest achievement level increased an average of 5 percentage points per year in high school math compared with an average 2 percentage point increase per year for other North Carolina districts.

Exemplary Practices Related to Student Achievement

The district has focused on strengthening and energizing personnel and leaders.

Former Superintendent Peter Gorman has been widely recognized for his efforts to invest in innovative strategies to strengthen the effectiveness of instructional leaders, teachers and staff.

His approach had several dimensions, all of which have had an overall positive yield. First, to strengthen the instructional leadership workforce, the district implemented strategies to ensure that administrators received the professional development they need to be effective in helping all of their staff reach high standards. He also implemented strategic staffing, a process that taps effective principals to be assigned to chronically underperforming schools and allows them to bring with them educators with exemplary records in achieving student learning gains—who then receive \$10,000 bonuses for undertaking the challenge—to catalyze the improvement effort.

Operating within what is a right-to-work state, Gorman also lifted the taboo surrounding some new, innovative approaches to personnel practices. For example, since 2008, teacher layoffs have not been based solely on seniority, but rather are determined in significant part on performance evaluations.

CMS has also turned to outside human capital pipelines in its quest for excellent personnel. The district has brought in about 150 Teach For America recruits each of the past several years. It also works with New Leaders for New Schools to help build a pool of effective principals, and has developed a program with Winthrop University, called Leaders for Tomorrow, to do the same for assistant principals and district leaders.

Principals have unusual leeway to make their mark on Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools. Not long ago, under managed instruction, all CMS teachers were expected to teach the same thing at the same time—in the same way. Now, they still are expected to teach to the standards and implement a few other practices required to comply with state and federal mandates. But as principals and teachers increasingly and consistently show that their schools and classrooms are successful—as proven by student learning gains—they are allowed to run them as they see fit. This has improved morale among teachers, who had chafed against what they saw as a cookie-cutter approach. It has energized principals as well, because organic, school-based innovation has become the norm rather than the exception. Out of 178 principals, 112 have earned this “freedom and flexibility with accountability.”

Finally, to improve the effectiveness of teachers, Gorman changed the criteria to be used for retention and compensation. Since 2008, with funding from the federal government’s Teacher Incentive Fund, the district also began to compensate teachers based on the performance of their students. The innovative pilot program, called Leadership for Educators’ Advanced Performance (LEAP), had two elements: Teachers received bonuses when their students showed exceptional growth on state assessments, and when their students achieve goals, set by the teachers, for “student learning objectives” achieved over a specified period of time. For example, one third-grade teacher aimed to increase the oral reading fluency of 17 struggling students from very low levels to the grade-level standard—110 words per minute—over three months. She succeeded, and was rewarded with a \$1,400 bonus. Because the pilot produced early promising student results, the district is now scaling the effort to nearly two dozen schools. In the future, the district

expects to be able to track the extent to which the opportunity to make a higher salary is connected to the quality of teachers who apply to teach in the district, teacher retention and student achievement.

The district has built a strong accountability system tied to specific strategic plan goals and bases decision-making on rigorous data.

CMS holds high expectations for performance, which are rooted in the district’s ambitious, specific strategic plan goals. The last two strategic plans, one spanning 2006 to 2010 and the other through 2014, were crafted through input from a variety of stakeholders and, above all, a careful look at data, with specific quantitative targets.

The 2014 plan, “Teaching Our Way to the Top,” calls for the graduation rate, now 74 percent, to increase to 90 percent. Utility consumption is to be reduced by 20 percent; 90 percent of students are to be achieving at grade level; and 100 percent of students should achieve a year’s growth in a year’s time. Specific initiatives are tied to those goals, and those initiatives are managed through project charters, which lay out action plans, necessary resources, performance benchmarks, timelines and allocations of responsibility. Data, too, provide the means through which the plan itself is evaluated at regular intervals.

This reflects the district’s intense approach to data-based decision-making, which is apparent at the school level as well. All educators in CMS are trained in DataWise, a structured system to improve instructional and organizational practices based on data, and every school and central office has a data team. Teachers, administrators and coaches can access a wide variety of learning data on the district’s online portal, which gives them the capacity to meaningfully track student performance—and adapt on the fly. Teachers can click and see exactly where each student stands on each performance objective, and they can assess their own performance objective by objective as well. Grade-level teams regularly swap students throughout the day so that the teacher most successful at teaching a specific objective can instruct students in other classrooms who have not yet mastered it.

The district creatively allocates resources, whether money or effective personnel, where they are needed most.

Charlotte’s school system educates poor and affluent children alike. For a long time, court-ordered racial desegregation policies ensured that CMS schools all had a mix of students. Those orders were removed after a 1997 lawsuit, and the district introduced a new school assignment and choice system in 2002. As a result, neighborhood-based enrollment became the norm—meaning that for the most part, affluent children attended school with other affluent children, and likewise for children from high poverty backgrounds—and the resource needs of different schools came to vary profoundly.

CMS responded by implementing a weighted funding formula, which ensures that high-poverty schools receive extra resources. Needier schools get more teachers (and thus smaller classes), more instructional coaches and other resources. The highest-need schools also receive extra professional development, increased monitoring and hiring bonuses for teachers. In all, they can receive as much as \$6,000 more per student from the district than the schools with the lowest

poverty rates. This additional allotment for students in high-need schools amounts to approximately \$48 million annually.

Gorman made sure that struggling schools receive not just money, but also the best educators possible. In 2008, he began an innovative program called the Strategic Staffing Initiative. The approach centers on the appointment at an underperforming school of a new principal who has proven results in improving student achievement. But a principal can't change a school's culture and outcomes alone. To attract principals to the task of turning around a challenged school and to improve the school's chances for success, the principals are allowed to bring a team of seven educators to include, an assistant principal, another academic leader and five teachers to bring to the school. As well, the principal may remove five teachers from the school. All of the new staff must have exemplary records in achieving student learning gains, and they receive bonuses for undertaking the challenge—for the teachers, \$10,000 in the first year at the new school and \$5,000 each of the next two years.

So far, 25 schools have undergone strategic staffing. At those schools, and all others in Charlotte, principals are expected to place their most effective teachers with the students who have the greatest needs. Allocating strong personnel this way, Gorman says, "is the most powerful thing we've done."

The sense of shared responsibility for all students extends beyond the educators. A buddy program ensures that participating PTAs at Charlotte's affluent and middle-class schools link with schools whose parents aren't as well-organized or well-resourced, to provide the same kind of funds, volunteer hours, and PTA events that they do for their own children's schools.

Parent University provides a wide variety of supports to help parents support their children's academic growth.

Children aren't the only ones CMS aims to teach. Since 2008, the school system has educated 39,000 parents through its Parent University. The Parent University catalog is filled with more than 50 topics each semester. Workshops are offered to parents multiple times, for free, at schools and shopping centers and churches, in English and, in most cases, Spanish too. Some courses cover general parenting concerns, such as discipline and bullying and understand your changing teenager. There are also classes on health and safety issues, such as asthma and teen driving and eating disorders. For their own benefit, parents can learn financial literacy and public speaking. And they can become effective partners in their children's learning by taking workshops on how to help their kids study for standardized tests, prepare for the science fair and oversee homework without a battle. Courses explain the importance of regularly attending school and reading at home, and a series of workshops demystifies each school transition—to kindergarten, to middle school and to high school.

The district has been successful in reaching out to external stakeholders in the business and religious community as partners in education, and that has paid off with Parent University. Faith-based groups host Parent University courses, and the program relies on external funding from outside sources, including businesses and foundations.

Maurice Chambers, the father of an eighth-grader, says that CMS makes it easy for parents to get involved in the education of their children: Parents can view sample tests on the district's website,

use its online portal to see how students are doing in class, and attend Parent University workshops. At a recent class on testing tips for end-of-grade exams, Chambers said, “They give you a lot of tools. The more you know, the better off your child will be.”