

## Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, N.C.

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### District Profile\*:

Rank among U.S. school districts (by size):	19
Number of schools:	176
Number of students:	133,664
Number of teachers:	8,965
Per pupil expenditures**:	\$8,081

Superintendent: Peter Gorman was appointed superintendent of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) in 2006. Gorman began teaching in Orlando, Fla., and has worked as a teacher, principal and administrator in Orange and Seminole counties. Prior to his appointment as superintendent he served as superintendent of schools in Tustin, Calif.

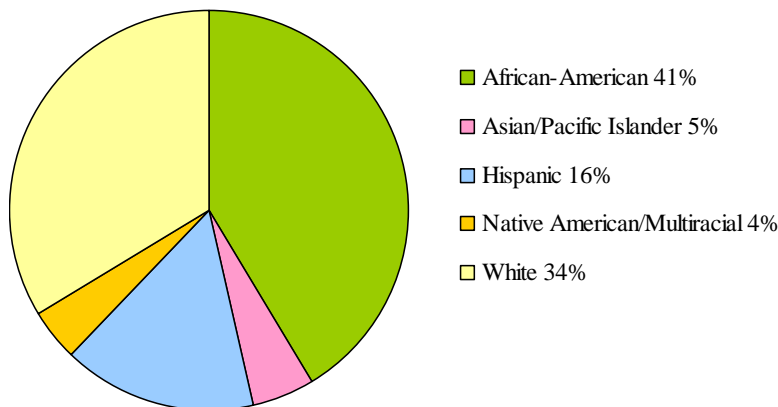
Governance: The nine-member board of education is comprised of three at-large members and six district representatives who serve staggered four-year terms.

Teachers Unions: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Association of Educators

### Student Characteristics

Percent of students eligible for free and reduced-price school lunch:	51%
Percent of students designated as English language learners:	12%

### Student Demographics:



\*2009/10 data, unless noted otherwise

\*\*Total expenditures per pupil in 2006-07. Source: Common Core of Data

## Student Achievement

- In 2009, Charlotte-Mecklenburg's African-American and Hispanic students *achieved higher average proficiency rates* than their counterparts in North Carolina in reading and math at all school levels (elementary, middle, high school).
- In recent years, Charlotte-Mecklenburg *narrowed achievement gaps between its African-American and white students in reading and math at all school levels*. In addition, Charlotte-Mecklenburg *narrowed achievement gaps between its Hispanic and white students in math at all school levels, and in middle and high school reading*. For example, between 2007 and 2009, the gap between Hispanic and white students in high school math narrowed by 9 percentage points.
- In 2009, a greater percentage of Charlotte-Mecklenburg's *African-American and Hispanic students performed at the highest achievement level* on state reading and math assessments in all school levels than did their counterparts statewide.
- Between 2006 and 2009, *SAT exam scores and participation rates increased* for African-American and Hispanic high school seniors in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. For example, during this period, SAT exam scores for African-American seniors increased by 21 points while participation rates rose by 5 percentage points.

## **High-Impact Factors Behind Improved Student Achievement**

- **CMS supports effective instruction.**

Over the past four years, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools has implemented a variety of initiatives designed to improve the quality of instruction. The highest-profile effort, viewed as a bold and effective tool for improving teaching and learning conditions at some of the district's most struggling schools, has been "strategic staffing." Principals who have been successful at raising achievement in their schools are recruited to low-performing schools, offered additional pay incentives, and given additional resources to strengthen student performance.

Principals who are recruited as part of the strategic staffing program are allowed to bring with them up to seven strong staff members—five teachers, one curriculum facilitator and one assistant principal— and can transfer the same number of people out of their new schools. The district has implemented leadership training programs, such as New Leaders for New Schools, in an effort to replace those transferred principals with other strong administrators. Schools that have been "strategically staffed" have seen improvements in school climate as well as significant increases in test scores. In their new schools, the principals are given additional funds and staff to bring about achievement growth in the areas where students are the weakest, usually concentrating on the critical areas of language arts and math.

In addition, the district's "professional development master teacher" program is designed to support novice and struggling experienced teachers by identifying a district-wide cadre of experienced teachers who have strong records of effective instructional practices in a particular grade level or content area. These teachers provide professional development training to colleagues by modeling effective techniques, and providing coaching and mentoring.

In a state whose former Gov. Jim Hunt was integral in creating the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, CMS is also highly supportive of this certification process—setting high targets for participation and offering courses to help teachers obtain their credential. In CMS, 13 percent of the district's teachers are National Board certified, compared to 11 percent for North Carolina teachers in general. The district provides study groups, seminars and other support activities to help teachers through the process. District funds are also used to pay National Board certified teachers who work part time coaching other colleagues working toward the credential.

- **The superintendent skillfully leads the district, serving as a critical link between the district and its schools, and between the district and the community.**

Since being appointed in 2006, Superintendent Peter C. Gorman has been viewed by district personnel, parents and community leaders as a forward-thinking instructional leader who has effectively brought to CMS strategies to improve schools such as performance-based pay for staff, decentralization of decisions about instructional strategies and how to use staff. and post-secondary readiness even before some of these practices became national trends.

Considered a problem-solver, Gorman spearheaded solutions to faltering student achievement, including the "strategic staffing" initiative and creating an "achievement zone," a grouping of low-performing schools that receive extra funds, staff and professional development opportunities. To increase parent involvement in the schools, he worked with his wife to establish a "Parent University," which has provided parenting information and training on topics such as how to support their children's academic progress and health and wellness to

thousands of families. Employees say Gorman has created a performance-based culture where staff are focused on continuous improvement. In 2008, employees gave Gorman a satisfaction rating of 85 percent.

Gorman is also viewed by CMS staff, parents and community members as an excellent communicator who is accessible and responsive. A teacher who, like others, sends e-mails directly to the superintendent, reports that “Gorman will totally write back.”

Members of the business community say that the superintendent has significantly improved the relationship between business leaders and the district. They recognize the value of Gorman’s approach to producing students who are ready for the workforce, and business leaders have stepped up to provide financial support for school improvement initiatives because of his leadership.

“He created an environment that invites reform that wasn’t here before,” says one business leader.

- **CMS’s strategic plan serves as a guide for the district and its schools.**

The district’s vision is to provide “all students the best education available anywhere, preparing every child to lead a rich and productive life.” The district’s mission is “to maximize academic achievement by every student in every school.” This vision and mission were developed in 2006 and serve as a foundation and compass for all actions by the school board and the district. The 2006-10 plan outlined seven goals—each with specific benchmarks, strategies and timelines. Achieving the district’s goals is not left to chance. The district’s strategic plan is also clear about who is responsible for carrying out each of the strategies.

Since the beginning, CMS’s strategic planning process had extensive involvement by district staff, parents and members of the community. Annual surveys have been conducted with stakeholder groups to gather feedback and assess progress. District and school progress toward meeting the strategic plan goals is measured annually and the results are widely disseminated and discussed. Community conversations about the district frequently include discussions about how the district is achieving its objectives. As one community member says, “You’d have to live under a rock not to have been exposed to the strategic plan.”

- **CMS holds all schools accountable and helps struggling schools improve.**

In 2007, a group of 11 chronically low-performing schools were organized into what is called the “achievement zone.” Other schools in the district that are not meeting accountability targets are referred to as “FOCUS” (Finding Opportunities; Creating Unparalleled Success). These 65 low-performing schools also receive additional supplies and materials to improve achievement. Teachers who work in these schools are eligible for extra incentives, such as a signing bonus, financial aid if they are working on a master’s degree, or stipends for advanced degrees. Achievement Zone schools and FOCUS schools receive extensive technical assistance from the central office on how to raise achievement levels and intervene with struggling students.

Achievement zone and FOCUS schools receive training in Datawise, an online student data system that is intended to sharpen educators’ skills in analyzing and using student data to improve instruction and performance. In addition, with the help of content coaches, teachers provide extra support in core content areas of math and literacy, and proven instructional programs are brought in to help schools reach their goals. Area superintendents make frequent visits to these schools to provide support.

The district also partners with agencies that can address students’ health and other social service needs. School climate and student behavior is improved through “Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports,” a nationwide

program that encourages positive, responsible behavior among children through modeling expectations, creating a system of incentives and rewards, and providing support for students with more complex issues.

- **CMS uses funds efficiently and seeks external resources to meet strategic goals.**

District officials strive to hold down costs during times of budget cutbacks, while still remaining committed to strategic plan goals. “You should never embrace instruction more than when you’re going through budget woes,” Gorman says.

The district, however, has also been highly successful at seeking and receiving outside funding to support school improvement initiatives. CMS received a \$1.4 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to train teachers and other personnel on how to use student data to improve instruction. It also received a \$4 million grant from the Charlotte-based C.D. Spangler Foundation to increase the number of Teach For America corps members in the district’s schools. Contributions from the local business community also support New Leaders for New Schools in CMS to recruit and train principal talent, as well as the district’s Parent University. One business partner says that Gorman “opened a door” for community support that wasn’t there before.

“He gives concrete ideas on how to be involved,” she says.

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools Foundation, a non-profit organization, has received more than 400 donations and given almost \$1.2 million to school or district initiatives that promote improved student achievement. The foundation receives donations from individuals, as well as from corporate and family foundations.

Also, through its office of strategic partnerships, the district coordinates volunteer and partner efforts. During the 2008-09 school year, more than 33,000 volunteers worked in schools and helped stage fundraisers and special events, donating an estimated 150,000 hours to the district each year.