

Quality Matters 2006

A Wake Community Review of the Public's Schools

Executive Summary



Wake
Education
PARTNERSHIP

QUALITY MATTERS 2006

A Community Review of the Public's Schools

Introduction

Quality in the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) abounds. We have a thriving, successful system that can proudly point to quality teachers, quality leaders, and most importantly, quality students. In some respects Wake County leads the nation as a model of public education.

Despite these successes, significant challenges remain for our schools. Over the past year the issue of growth in Wake County and how that growth impacts WCPSS has taken center stage in our community's discussion about education, culminating in the passage of the bond referendum on November 7, 2006.

So what should we be talking about in 2007?

That's the question that *Quality Matters 2006* addresses.

Since 2001 Wake Education Partnership has convened a team of leaders in government, business, and education to review the health of the public schools. In *Quality Matters 2006*, we discuss the ever-present issue of growth, as well as issues equally as critical that require attention in the coming year:

How successful are our students?

What should we be doing to strengthen teaching quality?

How well are we as a community funding the needs of our schools?

Most of our attention in 2006 centered on constructing schools and adding seats for new students. We hope that the information and recommendations in *Quality Matters 2006* will refocus our community's attention in 2007 on what occurs inside the classroom—on how our students can learn better, on how our teachers can teach better, and on how those who lead our schools can be even more effective in building a school system where quality truly continues to matter.

The 2006 Quality Matters Advisory Committee

Summary Findings of the 2006 Quality Matters Advisory Committee

Please review the full report—available for download at www.WakeEdPartnership.org—for a more complete explanation of the issues and data related to these findings.

The Quality Matters Committee's Findings on Growth

1) Growth has been the focus of education discussions for the past year, particularly regarding providing adequate facilities for the increasing student population. Growth will continue to be an important challenge in the years to come. The committee applauds the voters of Wake County for their approval of the \$970 million bond package and urges the community to continue its support for our schools.

This support is essential not only in future decisions on growth but also in discussions on student learning and teaching quality—discussions that should rise to the forefront now that the referendum is behind us.

If quality matters to our community, we must provide learning environments that are safe, healthy, and supportive of instructional excellence.

2) WCPSS began its magnet program in the early 1980s in an effort to ensure full utilization of school facilities, particularly in schools located inside the Beltline that were seeing a declining enrollment.

The committee finds the \$12.6 million annual cost of the magnet program to be a good investment. The program has been successful in achieving its stated purposes of full utilization of under-utilized schools and, in recent years, as a strategy to support the Board of Education's healthy schools goal.

The committee also believes WCPSS should implement a more formal and regular evaluation of each of the magnet programs. While the committee finds the magnet program to be a good value and an appropriate solution to help achieve its stated goals, there does not appear to be a formal structure to assess whether to start a program at a new school or to continue a program at an existing school.

If quality matters, we must engage in periodic assessment of the magnet programs to ensure that the policies and programs we have in place are meeting our needs.

Actual and Projected Growth in Wake County and WCPSS (1980–2020)

Year	Population of Wake County	Percent Increase	Population of the Wake County Public School System	Percent Increase
1980	301,327*	--	55,069*	--
1990	423,380*	41%	64,243*	17%
2000	627,846*	48%	97,691*	52%
2005	749,989	20%**	120,504*	23%**
2010	873,725	17%**	160,763	33%**
2015	999,504	14%**	192,748	20%**
2020	1,120,309	12%**	221,887	15%**

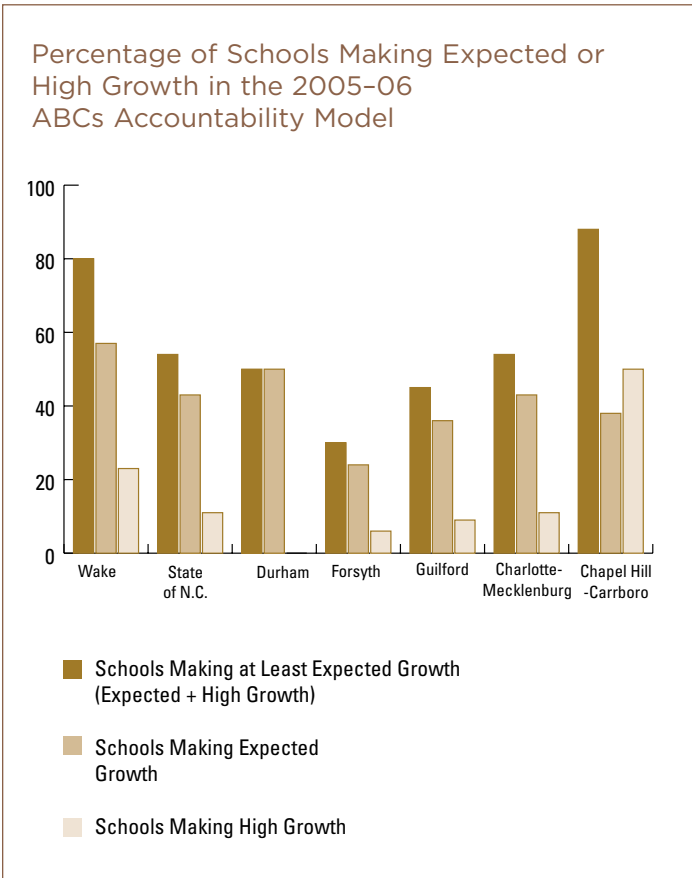
*Actual figures; other figures are population projections.

**Please note that these percentages reflect the projected increase over a five-year period, rather than a ten-year period.

The Quality Matters Committee's Findings on Student Success

1) The committee believes the WCPSS continues to lead the state and the country in a wide range of student learning indicators. We find the overall success of our students to be commendable.

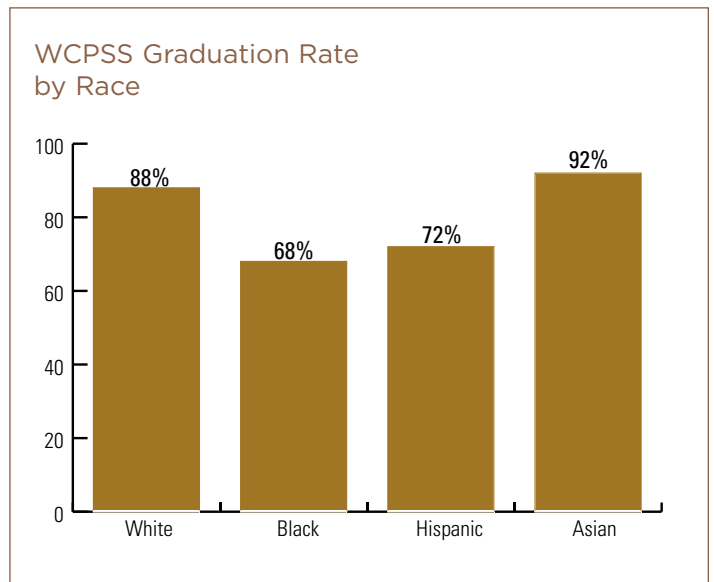
Because quality matters to our community, we must maintain this achievement and foster its continued growth.



2) There is much work still to do to ensure that all students are successful. The committee is unable to make a final determination about progress towards Goal 2008 due to changes in the assessments on which it is based. Available data we have reviewed give us reason to believe Goal 2008 needs reconsideration in light of the new state standards and slowed growth in recent years in performance on existing measures.

We are concerned by the apparent racial gaps that exist in indicators such as dropout and graduation rates. The committee hesitates to comment on the End-of-Course and End-of-Grade tests as so little disaggregated data is currently available for the 2005-06 school year. We have found, however, in past Quality Matters reports that existing gaps in state ABC tests were not acceptable for our community.

If quality matters for all students, we must ensure that every one is encouraged to achieve at high levels and provided with appropriate resources and opportunities.



See Appendix A in the Quality Matters full report to view school-level data on student achievement.

WCPSS Dropout Rates in Grades 9-12 by Race (2003-2005)

	Percentage of Total WCPSS Student Population 2002-03	Percentage of WCPSS Dropouts 2002-03	Percentage of Total WCPSS Student Population 2003-04	Percentage of WCPSS Dropouts 2003-04	Percentage of Total WCPSS Student Population 2004-05	Percentage of WCPSS Dropouts 2004-05
White	60.0%	47.4%	58.4%	37.9%	56.9%	33.3%
Black	29.1%	33.9%	29.8%	43.1%	30.1%	46%
Hispanic	6.4%	12.0%	7.2%	14.8%	8.2%	15.3%
Asian	4.2%	3.8%	4.3%	2.0%	5%	2.2%
American Indian	.3%	.1%	.3%	.4%	.3%	.4%

The Quality Matters Committee's Findings on Teaching Quality

1) The North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey provides important school and district level information on leadership, the inclusion of teachers in decisionmaking, facilities and resources, professional development, and how schools are structured to allow for appropriate instructional practices.

The committee strongly urges WCPSS to utilize the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey data in a more systemic way and to train School Improvement Teams to understand and apply this data at the school level. While some individual schools in Wake County are using the data, there appears to be no systemic effort to capitalize on this valuable source of data.

If quality matters to our school system and our community, we should utilize every piece of data that can provide meaningful and powerful information on our schools.

See Appendix A in the Quality Matters full report to view school-level data from the Teacher Working Conditions Survey and the most recent statistics on school-level teacher retention.

2) The committee recommends that WCPSS investigate structures it can put in place to allow its best teachers to remain in the classroom part-time while also (with added compensation) helping develop other teachers through additional roles, such as mentors, providers of professional development, and other peer coaching roles.

In recent years, WCPSS pursued a system that would employ the talents of teachers in new ways while still allowing them to devote part of their time to the important job of teaching students. The Teacher Enhancement and Leadership System

(TELS) created career paths for teachers that recognized advanced skills and additional roles and responsibilities and compensated teachers accordingly. The TELS model was not implemented due to its cost. The committee strongly urges the school system to find a model that will work for Wake County and to pursue its adoption aggressively. While WCPSS is a role model for districts around our state and nation in so many other ways, in this area Wake County has failed to lead.

If quality matters to our school system and our community, we should provide teachers with the opportunity to grow in their profession and utilize their talents to bring up the next generation of teachers, while still making a difference in the lives of our students.

The Quality Matters Committee's Findings on School Finance

1) The committee finds that WCPSS' per pupil expenditures have remained fairly constant despite large increases in student enrollment. It is our belief that this level of funding will only maintain student achievement and will not provide the resources necessary to increase student results given the growing numbers of special needs students.

Research has shown that some groups of students, including special education and low-income students, require additional instructional resources to be successful academically. In recent years, WCPSS has seen an increase in these students while the per pupil expenditure has remained constant.

If quality matters, we must provide the resources needed to ensure that all students are reached.

Percentage of WCPSS Students in Special Populations (2000-2006)

	Percentage of Special Education Students	Percentage of Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch	Percentage of Students Participating in the English as Second Language Program
2000-01	13.6%	21.6%	3.1%
2001-02	14.0%	21.5%	4.0%
2002-03	14.0%	22.0%	4.6%
2003-04	14.1%	24.3%	4.8%
2004-05	14.1%	26.4%	4.9%
2005-06	14.7%	27.4%	4.9%

2) We urge the Board of Education to seek additional funding for the instructional resources necessary to meet the needs of our increasingly diverse student population and increase the academic achievement of all students. Although the fiscal year 2007 operating budget contained a generous increase from Wake County, this amount covered growth and required increases and did not pay for any new or expanded educational programs to meet Goal 2008.

The committee understands why the Board of Education focused its fiscal year 2007 budget request on covering the increase in student population. Given the stalled growth in academic achievement in recent years, however, we believe that the school system needs to outline the initiatives necessary to reinvigorate the type of student success seen in the early years of Goal 2003 and 2008. The status quo is not acceptable to our community.

3) The committee also recommends that the school system continuously evaluate existing instructional programs to ensure that dollars are being appropriately allocated and to reallocate funds if they are not bringing about the desired results.

Because quality matters, we must always make sure that education dollars are being used in the most efficient and effective ways.

4) We also ask the Board of Education and the Board of Commissioners to pursue state action to reduce the state funding problems identified by the committee in the full Quality Matters report. Two significant examples are full sales tax reimbursement and full state funding of extra allocations for special needs populations. These two items alone could equate to tens of millions of local dollars being available for other educational purposes.

Since 2005 the State of North Carolina has denied school districts the right to receive full reimbursement of sales tax. All other state agencies, including the university system, have this ability. In the 2005–06 school year, WCPSS paid \$8 million in sales tax, but only \$3 million was reimbursed. This was essentially a \$5 million decrease in the school system’s budget, as dollars that should have been returned to it were not.

Per Pupil Expenditures (PPE) Adjusted for Inflation (1999–2005)

	Actual Total PPE	Total PPE Adjusted for Inflation	Change from Previous Year
1999–2000	\$6,225	\$6,913	--
2000–01	\$6,740	\$7,288	\$375
2001–02	\$6,846	\$7,229	- \$59
2002–03	\$6,810	\$7,078	- \$151
2003–04	\$6,989	\$7,150	\$72
2004–05	\$7,240	\$7,240	\$90

Per Pupil Expenditure (PPE) and Ranking Out of 115 Districts (2004–05)

	State		Federal		Local		Total	
	PPE	Ranking	PPE	Ranking	PPE	Ranking	PPE	Ranking
Wake	\$4,411	106	\$509	108	\$2,320	13	\$7,240	74
State of N.C.	\$4,727	--	\$789	--	\$1,812	--	\$7,328	--
Durham	\$4,797	73	\$777	70	\$2,841	5	\$8,415	29
Forsyth	\$4,620	93	\$615	95	\$2,276	16	\$7,512	64
Guilford	\$4,471	105	\$684	86	\$2,379	11	\$7,534	61
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	\$4,401	108	\$698	85	\$2,422	10	\$7,520	63
Chapel Hill-Carrboro City	\$4,619	94	\$460	112	\$4,092	2	\$9,170	12

In addition, the State of North Carolina provides additional resources for special education and academically gifted students, but caps the percentage of students in a school district who are eligible for the extra funds—regardless of the actual percentage of students in the district. WCPSS, like other districts, provides additional local dollars for the students above the cap. In the 2006–07 school year alone, it is estimated that WCPSS would have received \$26 million in additional state funding if the state lifted its caps.

Local Dollars Used to Supplement State Allocations

Student Population	Percentage of Students in Each Population at which the State Caps Funding	Percentage of WCPSS Students in Each Population	Additional State Dollars WCPSS Would Receive if the State Caps were Lifted and All Students were Funded (2006–07 estimate)
Special Education	12.5%	15%	\$10 million
Academically Gifted	4%	16%	\$16 million

If quality matters, we must ensure that the state fully funds extra resources for all identified special needs students. If fairness matters, the state must extend to school systems the same tax benefits it extends to other state agencies and education entities.

Conclusion

Our findings in *Quality Matters 2006* point to a school system poised for even greater success. That next level of success, however, will not come easily. The challenges immediately on the horizon require time, attention, and even money—all of which are in limited supply.

The timetable for meeting Goal 2008 remains in place, but it is unclear whether and how our schools will reach that goal. Certain groups of our students are not keeping up in the classroom, or worse, they are dropping out. Professional development and opportunities for new career pathways for our best teachers remain more of an idea than a reality.

Whether our community is willing to commit the money to improve rather than simply maintain the quality of classroom instruction in Wake County is not a shared resolve but an open question.

We understand that the solutions to these issues require new approaches, new ideas, and renewed effort.

If quality matters, we will welcome the opportunity to find those solutions.

If quality matters, we will not compromise for mediocrity but continue to pursue excellence in every aspect of education.

If quality matters, Wake County’s public schools and their students will set the standard by which all other public school systems are measured.

Quality does matter.

The 2006 Quality Matters Advisory Committee

The full report of *Quality Matters 2006*, which includes all data sources from this executive summary, is available for download at:
www.WakeEdPartnership.org.

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The executive summary and full report of *Quality Matters 2006*
are available for download at: www.WakeEdPartnership.org.