

World-Class Education Standards

It was early in 2008 when Wake Education Partnership gathered 150 business leaders, educators and elected officials to discuss what it would take to build a world-class school district in Wake County. The keynote address was titled “Think Globally, Learn Locally.”

The world was in a different place at that moment. People were wondering out loud if an African-American candidate named Barack Obama could actually win the U.S. presidency. There was little talk of global recessions and market meltdowns. Iraq dominated international headlines. Local chatter included talk of the next big school bond referendum.

Events of the next 14 months dramatically changed many peoples’ view of the world. But those same events reinforced the beliefs of those who gathered in Raleigh to talk about world-class schools. From local bond markets to international conflicts, it was clear that our ability to understand daily issues is vastly improved by global awareness.

And global awareness begins in our schools.

The phrase “21st century skills” has been used so often in the past decade it is sometimes meaningless. But in months of discussion following that first forum of early 2008, about 40 community leaders continued working on a detailed list of characteristics that would define a world-class school system in Wake County. You will find them in the report that follows.

In hours of conversation among the educators, business leaders and elected officials who gathered to talk about a world-class district, a picture emerged of a school system that is much different from the public schools Wake County has today.

They envisioned a district from which all students would graduate with a keen awareness of the world they are entering – regardless of whether they are enrolling in college or headed directly into the workforce. There would be no distinctions among basic skills, thinking skills, hard skills or soft skills. There would just be needed skills.

It isn’t possible to know what will happen throughout the world in the next few years. It isn’t even possible to predict events of the next few months. But with the right preparation, it is possible for students to understand, appreciate and remain globally competitive regardless of what the 21st century brings.

Suspending Disbelief

World-Class Public Schools for All

Key Findings

Basic Competencies:

Students should have the ability to: Use all forms of information, especially current media and technology; develop a greater cultural awareness of their country and others; have the ability to work with others of different backgrounds; and develop skills to analyze multiple sources of information that can be used to solve real problems.

Curriculum Standards:

A world-class standards curriculum would focus on fewer topics in greater depth. Flexible pathways to a diploma would acknowledge that a four-year college degree is not necessary for every high school graduate, but a more rigorous curriculum is needed for those going directly into the workforce. It would also recognize that some students are clearly going to exceed the district's curriculum standards no matter how high one sets the bar. Meeting the needs of those students is also imperative. Regardless of a student's path after high school, the curriculum should stress digital literacy, global perspectives and second language instruction every year.

Assessment and Testing:

Continuous classroom assessment would be more important than annual high-stakes exams in multiple topics. More responsibility would fall to teachers to assess students' strengths. Teachers, in turn, would be held accountable for sharing successful learning strategies with each other. Local tests would eventually be modified to include questions that allow the public to gauge how average student performance compares to international standards.

Time:

Schedules within the current school day would be redesigned to increase the amount of time that teachers and students spend in direct, engaged learning. Teachers would need more time for preparation, which will likely mean a new approach to school duties for all adults. The report anticipates a longer school year or even school day, but specifically does not call for changes in that area until the time now available is put to better academic use.

For a copy of the full report, go to www.wakeedpartnership.org

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