

GCS Information Ambassador Newsletter



May 12, 2023

GCS Launches New Strategic Direction



Together, we can make Guilford County Schools the best place to learn, work and grow. That is the message Superintendent Dr. Whitney Oakley shared as she unveiled Better Together, the new strategic direction for Guilford County Schools (GCS). The plan serves as a blueprint, detailing four focus areas and strategies to guide the district for years to come.

More than 200 conversations with more than 8,000 people, including students, parents, business leaders and district employees, served as a guide for the strategic direction. Oakley said, "When I became superintendent, I knew it was important to bring our community together, to have honest conversations, understand the challenges and explore solutions together."

A 100-person transition team, co-chaired by Dr. Harold Martin, Sr., Deborah Hooper, Carlvena Foster and Elaine Utin, organized the feedback into four areas:

- Accelerate learning
- Recruit, retain and reward top talent
- Strengthen health, wellness, and safety in schools
- Prepare students for the world

Working together, GCS commits to work across all four areas by making investments that address historical inequities, prioritizing collaboration among stakeholders to address barriers to student success and achievement, maintaining open lines of communication and engagement and operating efficiently to maximize resources for students.

The pandemic has been the singular most disruptive force in education in modern history. During her presentation, Oakley praised the resiliency of Guilford County when it comes together to help students succeed. She credited the hard work of educators, community partners and lawmakers committed to investing in the advancement of our students.

Nationally recognized programs including: a high-dosage tutoring initiative in partnership

with local universities and learning hubs to assist students outside of school hours have begun to reverse learning loss and close achievement gaps. "Despite the trauma, pain and suffering that the pandemic brought, it also taught us we can overcome significant challenges when working together as one community," Dr. Oakley said. "This is a community we can rely on and a district we can believe in."

GCS pledges to continue this trend of fostering student success by expanding accelerated learning programs to improve support at key academic transitions including kindergarten, sixth and ninth grades.

The impacts of the pandemic are not just reflected in student performance. During meetings, stakeholders emphasized the need for mental health services in schools. Using federal funding, on-demand mental health services are available to all students and employees. "In the midst of a mental health crisis and gun epidemic in America, we must do more to improve the mental health and safety of our students and staff," Oakley shared.

Over the next five years, GCS will deploy more than \$15 million towards mental health and the hiring of additional staff. Full-time school-based clinicians may be trained in counseling, psychology, or social work, and will help improve the ratios of counselors, psychologists and social workers serving students.

The district is also partnering with local universities to recruit a diverse pool of graduate students to serve in assistantships and fellowships that build their skills and experience in providing school-based mental health services, creating a talent pool of qualified candidates to fill district positions.

Students perform better when they feel safe, seen and supported. For GCS, strengthening school safety infrastructure is a top priority. This school year alone, the district has deployed twelve safety strategies, including adding security screeners in high schools, upgrading cameras for our 400 active yellow buses, adding a new video monitoring system and upgrading servers to support more than 1,500 cameras across the district. Over the next year, GCS will purchase an additional 5,000 cameras for schools and install Evolv touchless security screeners in our 21 middle schools.

Through the construction of 21st century facilities and renovation of older buildings, money approved by voters in Guilford County is being strategically deployed to prepare students to compete in a global economy. "My vision for Guilford County Schools is for our schools to become accessible places for learning beyond the school day and the normal school year." Superintendent Oakley said, "I want our campuses to be places where we prepare our students to seek various pathways." During the event, Oakley recalled conversations with industry leaders to frame programming that provides students with the tools they need to perform in future jobs. Partnerships with local universities and companies like Toyota will expose students to a broad range of post-secondary opportunities.

GCS is committed to investing in the future of students and staff. With federal dollars sunsetting in the next few years, Dr. Oakley called on the community to become advocates for public education at the local, state and federal levels. "...without our people, we cannot and will not achieve our vision to transform learning and life outcomes for all students." Oakley highlighted her proposed budget, which calls for an increase in the teacher supplement and raises for frontline workers that will ensure all employees get a competitive, living wage. "I am deeply committed to growing and investing in developing our teachers and staff so we can better serve our students."

Superintendent Oakley made the appeal for the community to join the district in building a stronger and better tomorrow by supporting efforts in one of four ways; working with us, contributing time, helping sustain the work and advocating for GCS. Community members who want to know how to get engaged, support GCS or learn more about the strategic direction can visit the [Better Together website](#).

School Board Approves Annual Budget Request

The Guilford County Board of Education has finalized its budget request to the Guilford County Board of County Commissioners. The request, which was approved on Tuesday, calls for an increase in funding to address pay for the lowest-paid employees.

On April 18, Superintendent Dr. Whitney Oakley [presented a plan](#) to address dozens of vacancies across the district, including vacancies for custodial staff, school nutrition staff, plumbers, electricians and maintenance workers, to name a few. The school board ultimately approved a proposed \$77.6 million investment, which would make GCS a market leader in compensation for frontline workers.

"These are hard-working people who drive our school buses, make sure students have healthy meals at school, fix the air conditioner when it breaks and repair our roofs when a storm causes a leak," says Board Chairperson Deena Hayes-Greene.

Under the proposed budget, teachers would also include an increase in pay. The request includes a \$10 million increase in the local supplement, which teachers receive in addition to their state-funded salaries.

GCS currently ranks 11th for its supplement amount, behind Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Durham, Wake and Forsyth counties. Guilford is one of only four large districts in the state that did not receive additional state funding last year to increase supplements, despite having higher child poverty, food insecurity and a lower median family income than Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Durham, Wake and Forsyth counties.

In addition, the district anticipates an increase of \$1.25 million for benefit rate increases and another \$20.4 million for increases to charter school transfers, utilities and liability insurance.

If approved by the Board of County Commissioners, the district's 2023-24 local current expense fund would be \$349,538,498. Federal funding is estimated at \$186,836,743 and state funds are projected to be \$461,986,050 pending final approval from the North Carolina General Assembly. This puts the district's projected operating budget at \$998,361,291 for the 2023-24 school year.

The school board's request also includes \$10.2 million in capital outlay funds. The funding will support HVAC projects, technology equipment replacement, maintenance equipment replacement, roofing projects, activity bus replacement and systemwide finishes.

Including capital outlay funding, enterprise funds such as school nutrition (\$42,545,000) and ACES (\$6,246,733) and the special revenue fund, which includes grants (\$10,594,252), the district's proposed 2023-24 budget is \$1,067,947,276.

"In Guilford County, we have some of the best teachers and staff in the state serving our 68,000 students," says Oakley. "Without them, we cannot and will not achieve our vision to transform learning and life outcomes for all students. By investing in our people, we are investing in our students' futures."

The county will hold its public hearing for the budget on June 1 and must approve a final local budget by July 1. GCS anticipates adopting an interim budget resolution on June 22 to continue operations in the new fiscal year while awaiting the state's adoption and allocation of a final budget.

It's Time to Register for GCS Summer Programs!

Does your child want to learn about animal science, or drone technology, or modern music production? GCS has a camp for you. [Summer programming](#) is back, and [registration is now open](#).

GCS offers a wealth of summer camps, starting with academic programming for qualifying students. Those programs are free, and transportation and meals will be provided. Students may also choose to attend enrichment programs on a variety of topics and locations throughout the district, from LEGO robotics to community theatre. Transportation is not guaranteed, and some programs are fee-based.

All summer opportunities are Mondays-Thursdays. The first day for students will be Tuesday, June 20. There will be no programs during the week of July 3-7. The last day for students will be on Thursday, July 27. [For more information, click here.](#)

Student Reassignment Window Closes May 31

The Guilford County Schools (GCS) reassignment window for the 2023-2024 school year opens May 1 at 8 a.m. and closes May 31 at 5 p.m. During this time, families may submit a request to attend schools outside of their attendance zone at gcsnc.schoolmint.net. Approvals and denials will be processed and communicated electronically through SchoolMint.

Transfer requests are considered based on the reason for the request and space availability at the requested school. Parents are responsible for transportation to and from school for reassigned students. Transfer guidelines can be found [here](#).

Reassignment does not apply to Choice schools and programs. Choice program applications were accepted during the January-February application window for the following school year. More information on Choice schools can be found [here](#).

For more information, contact the Student Assignment office at 336-370-8303 or email StudentAssignment@gcsnc.com.

Employee Appreciation Month



In Guilford County Schools, we know it takes a **WINNING TEAM** to bring **LEARNING TO LIFE**



During the month of May, help us celebrate the teachers, administrators and support personnel who hit a home run for our students. Who do you see knocking it out of the park?

Tell us about your all-star on social media using the hashtag **#GCSAllStars** or by email at goodnews@gcsnc.com.

Better Together, GCS employees are batting 1,000!

It only takes a few minutes to make someone feel appreciated. May is Employee Appreciation Month in Guilford County Schools, and the district is asking for the community's help in ensuring that its nearly 10,000 employees, including teachers and frontline workers, know the value they hold and the importance of the roles they play.

"In Guilford County Schools, we know that public education is a team effort," says Superintendent Dr. Whitney Oakley. "That's why we recognize all employees in May because All-Stars are found not just in our classrooms but also on our buses, in our warehouses, in our cafeterias and across every department and division."

Parents, students, community members and fellow staff members are invited to share stories of employees who are knocking it out of the park for GCS students and staff. The process is simple: Email your story to goodnews@gcsnc.com or post on social media with the hashtag **#GCSAllStars**. Photos and videos are appreciated.

[Click here for a video](#) about the GCS All-Stars campaign.

