



BETTER TOGETHER

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Better Together Strategic Direction

Three decades post-merger, Guilford County Schools is on the verge of a new chapter – one full of opportunity and promise for the future of our children and grandchildren. However, we recognize that the context in which each school operates has changed. Technological advances, globalization, mental health challenges and a pandemic have all contributed to these rapid changes.



To continue as a thriving school district and community in the 21st century requires us to reimagine what education can and should be.

So we did.

1 OUR JOURNEY

In 1991, our community overwhelmingly supported a referendum to bring together three school districts to create Guilford County Schools, a unified district committed to supporting all children in our community.

2 LEADING FORWARD

Following her announcement as superintendent, Dr. Whitney Oakley launched Better Together, a series of community conversations with various stakeholder groups.

3 OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTION

With Dr. Oakley at the helm, Guilford County Schools has hosted community conversations and engaged participants across our community to inform Better Together, our new strategic direction with a singular focus to make Guilford County Schools the best place to learn, work and grow.

4 OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTION

JOIN US in building a stronger and better tomorrow.



A group of five diverse students are shown from the chest up, holding up handmade signs. The signs have space-themed illustrations and text: 'STUCK IN ORBIT', 'ROCKET SCIENTIST', 'REED W. TAGE', and 'TAKES GIANT LEAPS'. The student on the far right is wearing a maroon shirt with 'VIRGINIA TECH' printed on it. The background is dark with some yellow star cutouts.

1

OUR JOURNEY

A UNIFIED DISTRICT

In 1991, our community overwhelmingly supported a referendum to bring together three school districts to create Guilford County Schools, a unified district committed to supporting ALL children in our community. Since then, GCS has been home to nationally recognized students, educators, and leaders.



“It’s about the only equitable way that public education can give all kids a fair chance.”

William B. Reynolds, City Electrical Inspector
Greensboro News & Record, 1991

Better Together Strategic Direction



42k
miles a day

Nearly 68K
students and
10K employees



121
languages/
dialects
spoken

126 Schools
And 300+
buildings



11.4
Million meals
served per year

337
National board
Certified teachers



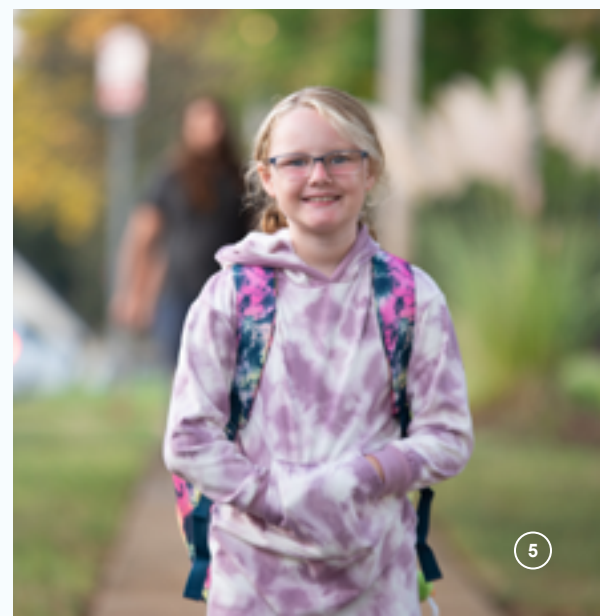
700+
community partners



LARGEST
district in North Carolina



5,572
volunteers



Covid disruptions and impact on learning

We have also faced significant challenges as a district over the last three decades. Namely, the COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the most disruptive singular forces in education.

While the challenges we face are not solely the effect of a global health crisis, pandemic-related disruptions exposed historical, systemic gaps in our nation's education systems.



“The pandemic erased two decades of progress in math and reading.”

The New York Times, September 2022

“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.”



Melvin “Skip” Alston, Chairman of the Guilford County Board of Commissioners Deena Hayes-Greene, Chairperson of the Guilford County Board of Education Dr. Whitney Oakley, Superintendent of Guilford County Schools



Working together

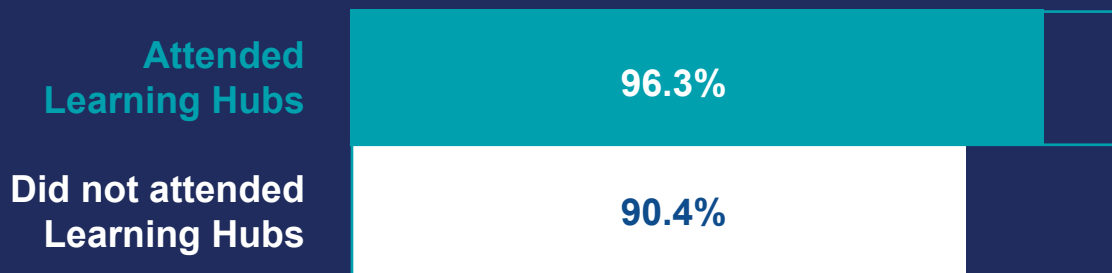
- During the spring of 2020, when pandemic-related job losses were at their peak, GCS served approximately **34,000 meals** daily.
- **124 Smart Buses** were deployed to apartment complexes, mobile home parks and other areas of the community that lacked broadband access so students could learn online.
- GCS distributed more than **79,000 devices** to students and staff and provided more than 2,411 MiFi hotspots to students.
- **15,000+ students** have participated in district-wide 5th-quarter enrichment programs.
- **5,251 students** were tutored for a total of 66,910 hours in more than 109K sessions.
- **5,901 students** attended Learning Hubs at one of GCS's 15 comprehensive high schools.

Recovering together

National research suggests it will take several years for students to recover from learning loss experienced during the pandemic. However, due to early action by our school leaders and the commitment of our community, we are beginning to see academic progress.



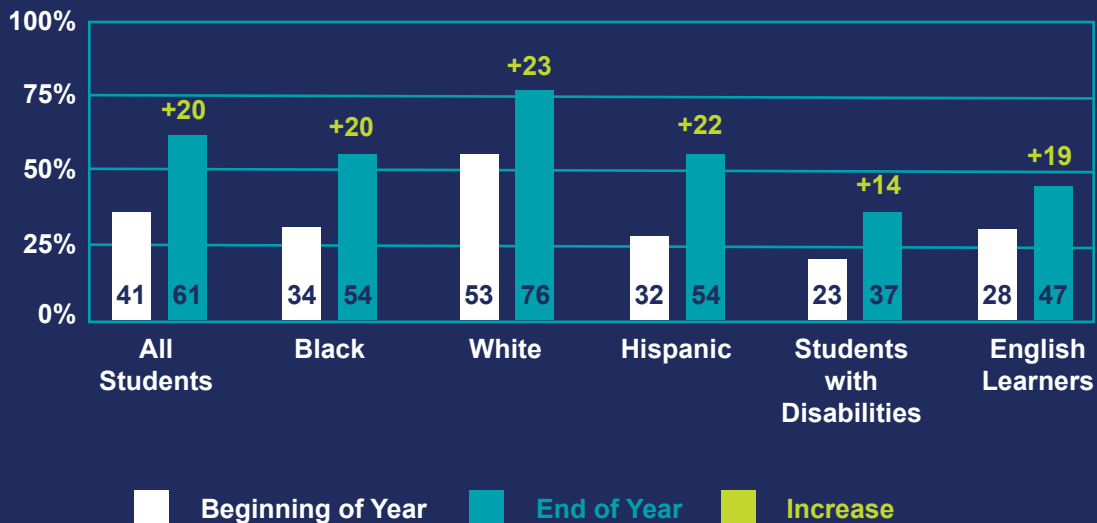
Impact of Learning Hubs on 4-year Cohort Graduation Rates



Recovering together continued

K-3 Combined Literacy Proficiency 2021-22

% of students with DIBELS composite at or above benchmark

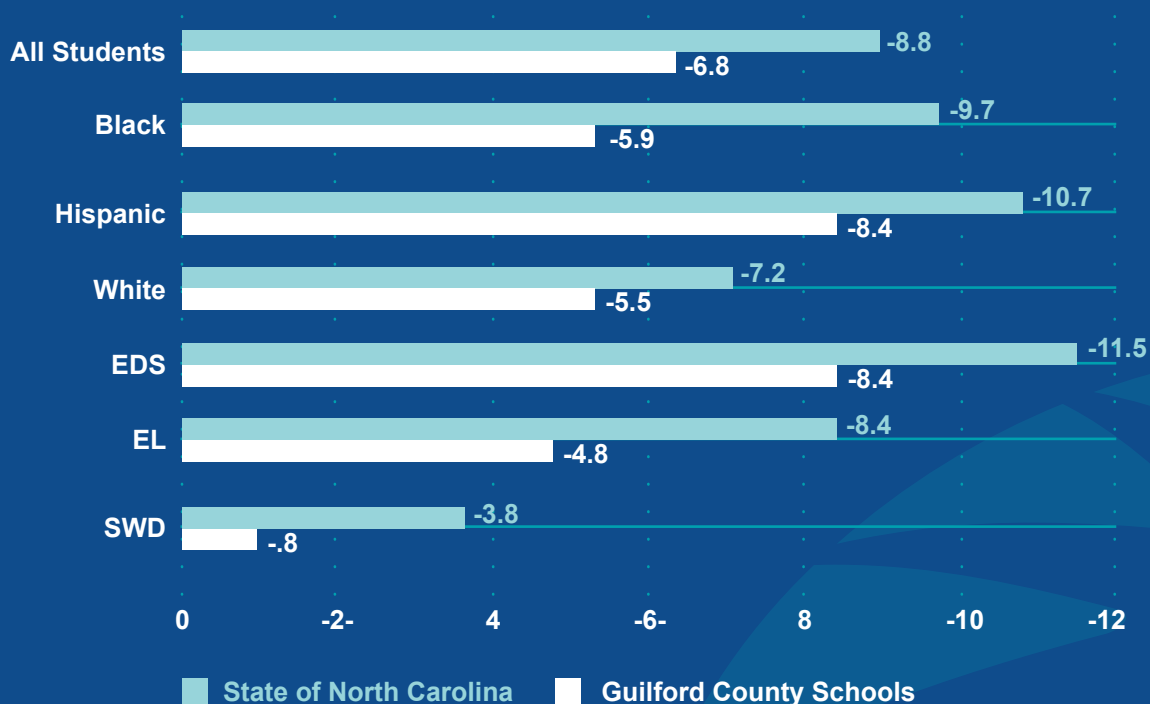


Learning gains

- GCS saw increases in proficiency compared to 2020-21 on **83%** of end-of-course/end-of-grade tests.
- All student groups (racial groups, students with disabilities, English learners, economically disadvantaged students) saw **increases in testing proficiency compared to 2020-21**.
- **102** schools increased their Performance Composites compared to 2020-21.
- Black and Hispanic students had **the highest graduation rate in GCS's history in 2021 - 2022**.

Math Recovery Faster Than the State

EOG Math Grades Three-Eight Percentage Point Change
from 2018-19 to 2021-22 Percent Proficient



Voter approved bonds

Looking forward to the numerous possibilities to support our public schools, Guilford County voters have taken an important step to launch our school district into the 21st century by approving a historic \$2 billion investment in our facilities.



The voter-approved bond program will build, rebuild and fully renovate schools across the county. The program will also invest millions of dollars in school safety and technology upgrades. The school bonds represent a strong, unified commitment to support our public schools.



This is not the time to slow down. We must look toward the horizon recognizing the 2020s will be one of the most important decades for our students, our community, and Guilford County.



2

LEADING FORWARD

LEADING FORWARD

Following her announcement as superintendent, Dr. Whitney Oakley launched Better Together, a series of community conversations with various stakeholder groups, including parents, students, teachers, staff, operational staff, bus drivers, faith-based leaders, business and nonprofit representatives, families with multilingual learners and exceptional students, and superintendent advisory councils, among others.

Guiding Questions for Better Together Community Conversations



What is compelling about where we have been and what we have accomplished over the last five years?



What else would you have liked to see prioritized based on your lived experience in our community?



What do we need to prioritize in order for our graduates to be successful? What do we need to focus on?

What is compelling about where we have been and what we have accomplished over the last five years?

- **Increased support for students** following the COVID-19 pandemic school closures (high-dosage tutoring, learning hubs, fifth quarter, etc.).
- **Work being done to close gaps** between white students and black and brown students.
- Expansion of **school safety measures and mental health supports**.
- **Historical bond to address critical infrastructure needs**, including building and fully renovating schools in priority order, as well as safety and technology upgrades.
- **The wide range** of educational and co-curricular programs available to students.
- Advocacy for competitive pay scales that **attract and keep the best and the brightest**.
- Enhancements in **school transportation**.



What else would you have liked to see prioritized based on your lived experience in our community?

1 COMMUNITY

- Strengthen **communication and relationships between schools, families & students.**
- Increase intentionality to **involve parents.**
- Offer clear ways for community partners, parents and others to support the district & schools.
- Offer more opportunities for the GCS community to learn about the budgeting process.

2 LEADERSHIP & STAFF

- **Increase community forums** between senior district leaders and staff, especially classified staff.
- **Calibrate on code of conduct** and its implementation.
- Address staff **schedules and impacts on childcare.**
- Include more time for school administrators to **focus on instruction and strategy.**
- **Increase consistent practices** with clear, meaningful data.
- **Integrate impactful and relevant professional development** into the calendar for all levels of staff.
- **Build a strong professional culture** where teachers and staff feel supported, respected and appreciated.

3 STUDENT DEVELOPMENT

- Raise awareness of **on-demand workforce development career paths** and other programs available to students.
- Improve access to **higher education and knowledge-based jobs.**
- **Provide meaningful integration of technology** into academics.
- Address student schedules – **athletics and after-school jobs.**
- Provide additional safety **strategies and mental health supports** for students and staff.

WHAT DO OUR GRADUATES NEED TO BE SUCCESSFUL?

- Strong written and verbal communication skills
- Critical and analytical thinking skills
- Early and frequent exposure to professional opportunities
- Civic engagement
- Team building and collaboration skills
- Personal vision for their lives and careers
- A focus on addressing the gap in expectations for students between transition points (K, 6th, and 9th grade)





3

OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTION

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2023-2026

GCS has hosted 200+ community conversations and engaged more than 8,000 stakeholders during phase 1 and phase 2 to inform Better Together, our new strategic direction with a singular focus to make GCS the best place to learn, work and grow.

200+

Town Halls
and Meetings

8000+

Participants
engaged

350+

Online
responses

FOCUS AREAS

Our new strategic direction is anchored in four focus areas:



Accelerate learning

- Strengthen core curriculum and increase access to high-quality instruction across the district
- Grow instructional leaders with a strong equity lens committed to increasing student achievement across racial groups
- Expand learning recovery efforts (high-dosage tutoring and learning hubs)
- Improve support at key academic transition points, including kindergarten, sixth, and ninth grade



Recruit, retain, and reward top talent

- Advocate for competitive living wages for all staff
- Foster working environments where all staff feel respected, seen and appreciated
- Provide all staff with meaningful professional opportunities to learn and grow



Strengthen health, wellness & safety in schools

- Grow mental health supports for students and staff
- Expand school safety strategies, including deploying school bond dollars
- Support student wellbeing and physical health



Prepare students for the world

- Build 21st-century schools that prepare students to compete in a global economy
- Invest in programs that provide students with the tools to perform 21st-century jobs
- Strengthen alignment between GCS programs, college readiness, and workforce development needs
- Expose students early to a broad range of post-secondary opportunities and prepare our graduates to seek various pathways, including employment, enrollment, entrepreneurship, enlistments





SHARED COMMITMENTS

**As we work across all our focus areas,
we commit to:**

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

Operating efficiently to maximize resources for students



MISSION, VISION, AND CORE VALUES

We will continue to be driven by our mission, vision and values established by the Board of Education.

MISSION

Guilford County students will graduate as responsible citizens prepared to succeed in higher education or in the career of their choice.*

*This mission was adopted by the Guilford County Board of Education on December 12, 2000.

VISION

Transforming learning and life outcomes for all students.

CORE VALUES

Diversity | Empathy | Integrity | Innovation | Equity



GUILFORD COUNTY SCHOOLS BOARD OF EDUCATION

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Crissy Pratt - District 2

Bill Goebel - District 3

Linda Welborn - District 4

Deborah Napper - District 5

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Bettye T. Jenkins, Vice-Chair - District 7

Deena A. Hayes, Chair - District 8

Alan Sherouse - At Large



TRANSITION TEAM

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Jose Bernal
Joe Blosser
Angie Brown
Katrinka Brown
Rebecca Buffington
Kim Bullock Gatling
Ivan Canada
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Tara Trexler
Elaine Utin
Kristin Vaughn
Weaver Walden
Monica Walker
Mark Watkins
Brittany Wells
Kevin Wheat

The Better Together website was inspired by the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation's 2018 All for NC Framework for Grantmaking and Learning website.



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JOIN US

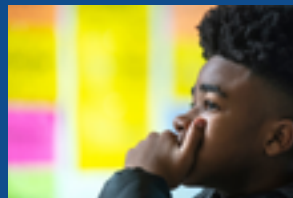
JOIN US in Building a Stronger and Better Tomorrow



**WORK
WITH US**



**CONTRIBUTE
YOUR TIME**



**HELP SUSTAIN
THE WORK**



**ADVOCATE
FOR GCS**

WORK WITH US

Districts across the country are facing staff shortages when students need them the most.

[Join our staff](#)



CONTRIBUTE YOUR TIME

Sign up to be a tutor, volunteer, or community partner at one of our schools.

[Become a tutor](#)

[Become a volunteer](#)

[Register as a community partner](#)

HELP SUSTAIN THE WORK

Using time-limited federal relief dollars, GCS has invested millions of dollars to make important safety upgrades, implement learning recovery programs and provide mental health supports to students and staff. Help us continue to strengthen our schools.

[Make a donation](#)



ADVOCATE FOR GCS

Help us advocate at the local, state and federal levels for adequate and equitable funding for schools – including better pay for teachers and staff.

[See our legislative priorities](#)





View online at www.gcsnc.com/bettertogether