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<http://charlottechamber.com/news/2015/04/23/chamber-news/an-open-letter-from-the-charlotte-mecklenburg-schools-superintendent/1/>

To the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education:

As superintendent, I have the privilege and the responsibility of ensuring that more than 145,000 students receive the education they need and deserve. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is a diverse district with a wide range of educational offerings. We are committed to providing a personalized learning experience that addresses the needs and interests of each student. We strive to offer each student the best education possible so that every student graduates prepared for college or career.

Our annual operating budget is the expression, in words and numbers, of this commitment to providing the best education possible to every child. As a large, diverse district, we have many needs. It is my task as superintendent to identify the priorities that are most critical for our students each year. For the coming year, in addition to addressing the needs of our growing student population and facilities footprint, I believe that Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools must focus on three key areas: literacy, recruiting and retaining top-quality employees with competitive salaries and social and emotional supports for students.

The proposed operating budget for 2015-2016 that I bring to you, the Board of Education, strives to keep the promises we have made to our students of a personalized education. It also recognizes some troubling realities, particularly in the area of state funding.

Much of public education in North Carolina is funded by the state. But there are areas where state funding appears to be declining. For Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, the effects of diminished state funding are exacerbated by our continuing growth. At this time, we do not know if the state is going to fund growth as it has in the past – but we do anticipate that next year, we will have 2,400 more students than we had this year. We also know that, in order to keep increasing student achievement as we have in recent years, we must maintain our focus on literacy and on social/emotional supports for students.

For the 2015-2016 school year, we are seeking a total increase in county funding of \$39.9 million. This amount reflects \$3.4 million in reductions and redirections to help offset rising costs. The net request of \$39.9 million breaks down as follows:

* \$8 million or 20% is funding that is not retained by CMS. This funding passes through CMS and goes to charter schools that serve Mecklenburg students.



* \$4.5 million is for sustaining operations. This includes: \$1.9 million to cover rising day-to-day operating expenses such as utilities, fuel and maintaining security systems and \$2.6 million to address decreasing state funding for state-mandated programs such as driver education.

* \$16.2 million is to invest in our employees. We want to recruit and retain top-quality employees with competitive salaries. In the past seven years, most of our employees have had only two small raises. These funds will ensure all CMS employees receive a minimum two percent raise. In some cases, certified staff will receive an increase from the state that is greater than two percent, and \$5 million of this amount will allow us to cover the local impact of state-proposed increases. We want to ensure that the remaining employees receive an increase because we value the contribution made by every employee to educating our students. So \$9.8 million of this amount will be used to provide a two percent increase to employees not covered by the state proposed increases. North Carolina continues to trail most other states in teacher salaries; a National Education Association estimated ranking for the 2014-2015 year put our state 42nd in the nation. Our salaries must be competitive so that we can recruit and retain the best educators from across the country. Additionally, \$1.4 million is included to address the increasing costs for health and retirement benefits – costs that are determined by the state.

* \$5.8 million is for the costs of continued student enrollment growth. CMS expects to welcome more than 2,400 new students next year, bringing our enrollment to more than 148,000. This funding will cover the costs for additional staffing needs and additional space to accommodate new students and relieve overcrowding.

* \$8.8 million is for continuing and expanding literacy and student supports. This includes: \$4.2 million to maintain existing teacher assistant positions which are critical to our focus on literacy in the early grades; \$1.8 million for targeted professional development for teachers in our middle and high schools and summer reading camp for rising third-graders to expand the state-funded camp for rising fourth-graders; and \$2.8 million for phase two of social and emotional supports to help remove barriers to learning that many students face. Our budget proposal seeks to meet the needs of our students and our employees so that we can continue to provide the education our children need and deserve. Mecklenburg County's families have clearly indicated that education is a top priority. An investment in our schools not only will meet the current needs of our students, employees and families – it will help our community meet the needs of the future.

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Sincerely,

Ann Clark, Superintendent