

Dear Weldon City School District Students, Parents, Staff, Friends and Community Members:

Many will say that the vision of the Weldon City School District to become a model district for the state cannot be accomplished by a small rural district in Northeastern North Carolina. I beg to differ. As I have said many times, this district is truly a diamond in the rough. Since I was given the chance to lead this school district, I have been impressed with the commitment of the teachers and staff, administrators and school board members who truly believe in the students of this community. This commitment provides the opportunity to build on our strength and the current foundations as we work to polish that diamond and transform our district into the model district we envision it can be.

There are many notable examples of those who have been told they weren't good enough or their dreams were too grand. An article in a recent edition of *Newsweek* describes the now familiar story of a high school sophomore in Wilmington, North Carolina, who tried out for the varsity basketball team, but had to settle for the junior varsity instead.

"In 1978, Michael Jordan was just another kid in the gym, along with 50 or so of his classmates, trying out for the Emsley A. Laney High School varsity basketball team. There were 15 roster spots. Jordan—then a 15-year-old sophomore who was only 5'-10" and could not yet dunk a basketball—did not get one. His close friend, 6'-7" sophomore Leroy Smith, did. The team was in need of his length. 'It was embarrassing not making the team,' Jordan later said. He went home, locked himself in his room and cried."

But the fact that he didn't make the varsity basketball team motivated him to do better and try harder. And so it is with Weldon City School District. We will rise above our current status and demonstrate that we have the ability and strength of character to be a district that is not only remarkable because of its test scores, but also because we produce caring, competent, and responsible lifelong learners who are successful in their life's work.

This will not be an easy task or a quick fix, but I promise it will be immensely satisfying. There is little else that compares to seeing students acquire the knowledge and abilities that will continue to serve them throughout their lives.

So, how will we become the object of "Charger Pride" again? Our first task is to improve academic outcomes. Although higher than average test scores alone do not demonstrate college and career readiness, it cannot be denied that they are a prerequisite of the "model district" we want to be. There are three inter-related elements that increase these outcomes—teacher knowledge and skill, student engagement, and academically challenging content. These three elements will be our points of leverage during the first few years of our plan.

There are many challenges to accomplishing this aggressive plan, but one of them is not the ability of our students to set goals and believe in their ability with our help to reach those goals. The surveys that we have conducted as part of preparing this plan have shown beyond a shadow of a doubt that our students believe that they can achieve their goals. It is up to us to own those dreams as well and help to make them happen. Some of our challenges are political, some are social, and some are economic. While this is not a strategic improvement plan for the entire region, it is impossible to propose improving outcomes for the students of the district and not mention some of the issues that our students and faculty must deal with on a daily basis—in particular, those who appear to have a negative impact on the district.

We are not statistically unusual. Most rural districts in the United States are about our size and perform at about the same level on high stakes standardized tests. However, regardless of the national data we cannot continue at our current level of performance. If we don't focus on improving education, Weldon City Schools will continue to be at or below average. I know that is not acceptable to me, our staff, our students, or our community.

I am unable to accomplish this alone. I need your help. I ask that you work with me and the Board of Education to create the model district that we all envision—that is not only the source of “Charger Pride” for the community, but also the origin of success for all of our students in the future. Please join with me in the difficult work ahead.

Thank you for all you do in support of our Charger Family.