

Good evening. As we gather here on a cold winter evening, with flurries in the forecast later in the week, I decided to talk about the weather. The weather is often on the minds of teachers, principals and most certainly our kids at this time of year. I have to confess, I have never lost that excitement of watching the weather report and seeing if it might snow. I have to go to work anyway, and I **STILL GET EXCITED** about a snowfall and a snow day. But you know how weather forecasts can be. Especially in Middle Tennessee. Now I **CAN** think of one weatherman who was 100% accurate with what probably was the most hard to believe weather prognostication ever.

There is no greater meteorologist in the world's history than Noah. Noah knew how to predict rain before satellites and for that reason I'd like to suggest that we subscribe to the "Noah Principle". The Noah Principle is simply this: **NO MORE PRIZES FOR PREDICTING RAIN, ONLY PRIZES FOR BUILDING ARKS!** Though I cannot claim to be an Old Testament scholar, the Noah Principle is very much alive as school districts across the country like ours try to get better. Some districts spend a great deal of time predicting, measuring, than guessing their way to improvement. Or just looking back and wishing for programs and ideas from the past. No

child left behind has required us to predict student success through high stakes tests, value added assessments, and regular benchmark assessments. We know more about how any individual student performs and can predict how they will perform more than ever before. Sometimes that's about as far as most districts go. NO PRIZES FOR PREDICTING RAIN, ONLY PRIZES FOR BUILDING ARKS. I am pleased to report tonight that Clarksville-Montgomery County Schools is building arks, not just predicting rain. We are actually trying to change the way instruction is delivered, changing the way teachers do their jobs and truly are playing out the belief that ALL MEANS ALL when it comes to injecting more challenging curriculum, what we call "rigor". But the ark is very much unfinished and to stop the construction process because we are tired or because we have arrived or because there has been a change in leadership or whatever reason would, of course, have dire consequences. So tonight, I am here to share not only the "weather prediction" in the form of data, but also talk about the great building process that has taken place over the last year and those ARKS yet to be constructed that must be built to save the lives of our most valuable resource: our children.

After only half a year of working in this district with quality administrators, staff, parents and community, I recognize the opportunity I was given as a

school leader. Not just Opportunity, but also Responsibility. Tonight I want to share with you how both apply to this district. And I want to honor everyone here by inviting you to join me in this opportunity and responsibility to move students forward.

I especially want to honor some people here tonight who lead the effort in creating opportunities for success in our district. If you would please stand.

I want to recognize our Board of Education. I also acknowledge and appreciate the attendance of our County Commissioners and other elected officials if they would please stand. Thank you.

Our responsibility is to see all of our 28,000 students be successful. Our opportunity is with every single one of them.

This is what opportunity and responsibility look like in the Clarksville – Montgomery County School System through the scope of our system's strategic goals. (Slide 1: 2006-07 work plan) I want you to see our data, but more importantly how much of the ark is built and how much more we have to build.

In Goal 1 – Improving Student Achievement (slide), there is reason for applause as our schools hone in on strategies that are working. (Report card data explanations – Slide: TCAP writing performance; Slide: Report Card School by School Achievement Snapshot; Slide: School by School Report Card Value Added Snapshot; Slide: System/percentage Report Card Achievement; Slide: Midstate systems’ value added performance; Slide 8: Graduation rate targets.) The programs that made this happen are many. The commitment and hard work by administrators, teachers and classified staff has brought us to a milestone. We are closing the achievement gap. And when it comes to student achievement, there is always more to do, but we are moving in the right direction.

The “ARKS” or Programs That Are Getting Us There

- 1) 90 Minute Literacy Block – now you will see this fully implemented in every elementary classroom in the district. It means more time for student practice, more time for assessing students, more time for quality teaching, more time for differentiating instruction, all things that we know work.

- 2) Secondary Literacy efforts – Read 180 and Language X have proven it is not too late to put in place quality programs to help students read better in secondary schools.
- 3) Data Chats – Though we are not through with a full implementation of this, schools that are using data chats work collaboratively and are doing a better job of meeting the needs of students.
- 4) Virtual High School – A way for students to complete a rigorous course of study, allowing them the opportunity to finish high school graduation requirements where they might otherwise fail. Students will graduate ON TIME thanks to this program.
- 5) Academic Coaches once thought of as a radical idea are now seen as “can’t be withouts” necessary to helping teachers teach more effectively.
- 6) After School Programs – something I can point to as making it possible for students to improve and be successful. (funding not available from sources as before)
- 7) Pre-K – nationally recognized as setting the stage for academic success for all children, but especially for those at risk

Where the “ARK” Remains Under Construction in Student

Achievement

The world of career and technical education has evolved. When you look at the best programs in the country, vocational education has changed greatly from the programs of the 80s. You won't find what used to be considered a convenient place for the unmotivated, the “non-academics”, the ones who won't go to college. After years of being considered second rate to academia, career and technical education now finds itself at center stage in the high school reform arena. According to the US Department of Education, enrollment has shot up in the past decade by 57%, from 9.6 million to 15.1 million. That increase is no doubt due in part to the growth of career academies – small schools within schools focused on career paths or themes. Designed to make high school more relevant to students, there are about 2,500 career academies in the USA today. Today, career technical education programs serve a variety of students, often our best and brightest. Ten years ago – even five years ago, college bound and high achieving students wouldn't consider taking technical or career education courses. But today in the best high schools, career and technical education programs essentially blur the line between college prep and career prep, dismantling, and rightfully so, the old high school tracking system that is absolutely wrong for

today's 21st century schools. So this ark is not even close to being built yet, but we are beginning the work NOW and hope to see major changes in the years to come. Principals are beginning the work of designing and formulating, at different levels of implementation, career academies. We will be reviewing very closely our old vocational programs and courses. It will take the form of new courses of rigor and relevance along with the creation of solid, meaningful career academies.

We also must focus on how we can improve mathematics in our high schools, which have not made the growth we need to see, and find ways to engage more students so that our graduation rate will rise significantly. This will mean a deeper implementation of the programs we already have seen as successful including freshman academies, some of which still must be improved and evolved.

In Goal 2 – Building Leadership Capacity – (slide), we are growing leaders in this district. With an untold number of Learning Communities and leadership development courses, there is a maturity of professionalism that is unheard of for a school district. As our system focused on strengthening employee voice, work groups became advocates for student success. What

our data shows us is that staff understands the role they play in improving student achievement (slide). That may sound overly simple, but that understanding is what makes goals become real. The bow of our ark has been built and our opportunity is vast. Where the ark really needs more work is making sure our top leaders (principals and Senior leadership) have access to the best in leadership development and training.

In Goal 3 – (slide) Improving effectiveness and efficiency we recognize that the unsung heroes of our district are the ones who make sure things happen when and where they should. They are the transportation employees, the business office, the maintenance staff, our technology department, our food service professionals. They have built goals for themselves and they are ensuring that our students have what they need. As we hold safety of children as a critical responsibility, our goal is to prevent accidents and breakdowns. (slide, slide) And we know that in order for our children to learn, they need to be at school when the bell rings.

(slide) We are pleased that we have completed once again an audit which resulted in our continued certification as an ISO-9000 school district.

In Goal 4 – (slide) Engaging the Public in support of student achievement

Much work has been done in this area over the past five months. People wonder why they are asked to fill out a survey, why it is important to attend a focus group or an engagement session. I can tell you why. It is the responsibility of our stakeholders. Our parents. Our taxpayers. Our staff. Our citizens. Recently, we added county commissioners as a group that we listened to back in the fall with our first Linkage Summit. Many of the ideas gleaned from that meeting will be incorporated in the budget process coming up. I'm excited about the close working relationship between the County Mayor's staff and our staff as we focus on the needs of our community and work together in a shared vision of excellence for our schools.

The School Board's most recent public engagement sessions reinforced areas where we need to increase focus. Our stakeholders recognize that our strengths include: Benchmark Assessments; Innovative curricular programs such as AVID, Bridges, the 90-minute Reading Block, and PreK as well as technology and communication tools like K12 Planet and ConnectEd.

Focus groups also identified opportunities for growth and improvement. They include a concern about high stakes tests; teacher morale, workload and stress; and the need for additional funding for technology and textbooks.

Funding in general was a concern as were transportation issues and hiring and keeping quality teachers. They also listed the community's need to address growth and the impact of that growth in terms of required rezoning. Additionally there is the need to address the dropout rate as well as a challenge to identify more advanced and gifted program opportunities throughout all grade levels.

We value this input and know it is an important part of the design process. Just as it's smart to get good advice before building a ship, we are soliciting input before we build our schools. Project teams are busy at work as our building program on four schools is underway.

FOUR Schools!! I believe that is unprecedented in this system. Thanks to the hard work of our operations division, we now have for the first time a 20 year facilities plan that can be updated annually based on new information.

WHERE DOES THE ARK NEED MORE WORK?

Engaging parents in the middle and high schools. The Minority Issues Committee recently came up with a brilliant vision. Wouldn't it be powerful

if every parent of every sixth and ninth grade student in our district engaged with our administrators and teachers during the first month of school?

Last month, we were honored as the second district in the State of Tennessee to be granted district level accreditation under SACS-CAIS. The highlights of that report showing the arks that have been built and those not yet complete in their construction can be found on our website. I encourage to review that.

So, this is where we've been and now let's look ahead.

Improve graduation rates

Build a school community of cultural sensitivity

Hire and keep quality teachers

Offer programs that keep students interested, engaged and prepared for life

Improve graduation rates

Here is how we can make that happen: We continue the programs we have put in place like AVID, Bridges, Virtual High School, after school programs.

But we also continue building relationships with students by shrinking their communities. If they don't get lost in a crowd, we won't lose them.

Freshman Academies which we started this year will continue and we will begin to expand those to upper grades. We will connect with every child and we will see our graduation rates improve when that happens.

Rigorous high school academies that create smaller learning communities and possibly a Middle College on the campus of APSU will give students more options. Rigorous and new career and technical courses that attract all students will give new meaning to vocational education.

Build a school community of cultural sensitivity

We recognize a need to develop better understandings of our diversity. We may not all be alike, but we can find common ground. We must start in a place of respect. We are all responsible in making this happen and our opportunity is certainly great.

Training of employees in understanding how to work with diverse students in ways that promote better results and fewer discipline problems will take place.

Hire and keep quality teachers

We know who makes the ultimate difference in a child's education. His teacher. This system is committed to not only an intense recruitment effort, but an intense QUALITY recruitment effort. We will not be satisfied with mediocrity. We must have excellence. Our children deserve nothing less.

WE NEED TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF APPLICANTS FOR TEACHING POSITIONS SIGNIFICANTLY AND REACH OUT TO MINORITY CANDIDATES SO THAT OUR DISTRICT MORE CLOSELY MIRRORS THE STUDENTS WE TEACH. While we do this we need to invent and create more rigorous selection processes to insure that the teachers we hire are the very best we can find. That means finding ways to hire earlier and reduce the bureaucracy that accompanies hiring teachers. We also must find ways to better support all teachers, but especially find ways to mentor our new teachers so we can keep them in our classrooms.

Offer programs that keep students interested, engaged and prepared for life

What can we do to incite children to learn? We make it meaningful.

Whether it is a vocational program that has real life application or a different way to attend high school, our students need challenge. Our younger students are demanding rigor and we need to meet that demand. They are raising the bar for us. We had better well keep up.

This is a lot to digest in one sitting, and we know the ark wasn't built in a day. But it is incumbent on each of us to act. Get your hammers and let's design and build the rest of this arc together. Thank you for coming tonight.