

100 Day Report

July 1 – October 8, 2018

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Thank You

First, I want to thank the hundreds of people who shared their thoughts about Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) with me. As I said to all of our teachers just before the start of the school year, I believe that the American public school is a beautiful idea. It is a noble cause. It is a beautiful idea and a powerful force for good.

It is with this optimism that I have taken on the role of Superintendent of Schools, and I am very grateful for the opportunity the school board has given me to do this work for my home county. I wasn't born in Albemarle, but I've lived here just about as long as I've ever lived anywhere. My wife Sheri and I have lived here for more than half of our married life, and we've raised our children here.

I am invested in ACPS, and I am optimistic about our future. Meeting with and listening to nearly 400 of our stakeholders—including students, parents, teachers and support staff, and community members—affirmed my optimism about Albemarle County Public Schools. They shared their thoughts about bright spots in our work as well as areas for systemic improvement, and they offered me advice on how to be a good superintendent. I greatly appreciate all of the staff who helped facilitate my listening tour, and I heartily thank all who participated.

Background

Last fall, when the Albemarle County School Board was considering my appointment as superintendent beginning July 1, 2018, I submitted a 90-day entry plan outline. I stated, "If I am named Superintendent of Schools, I will take the opportunity to see and understand Albemarle County Public Schools—our children, families, and staff—through new eyes and ears. My goal will be to align the current state of ACPS with the board's vision for what we can and should be."

Early this spring, I met with Dr. Bernard Hairston—now our Assistant Superintendent for School Community Empowerment—and asked him to be in charge of managing my entry plan. Thank you, Dr. Hairston, for taking on this role and inspiring teamwork in the process. Dr. Hairston pulled together a team that planned a listening tour and survey development process. They also decided to document the progression of my first 100 days, including the listening tour, on a public-facing web page: [My First 100 Days as Superintendent](#).

Stakeholder Perspective

The entry plan has three phases: learn, clarify, and report and affirmation. As part of the learning phase, we hosted 16 listening sessions at locations around the county with various stakeholder groups, including students, teachers, administrative and support staff, and parents and community members. During each session, we followed a protocol developed by Dr. Hairston and his team. Facilitators lead discussions while notetakers kept track of what was shared. I closed each session by thanking the attendees and recapping themes and specific comments I heard during the session. Post-session, I circulated a written summary of feedback to attendees via email. Brief summaries of the sessions are archived on the First 100 Days website, on the [What I've Heard: A Summary of Listening Tour Feedback](#) page.

On the school board side of things, I attempt to call each board member about every two weeks, coinciding with the publication of the school board meeting agenda. Additionally, I am in the process of meeting with each board member for lunch during October and November to talk and get feedback on how things are going and how I'm doing.

Each week, I meet individually with the members of the Superintendent's Cabinet for a half hour on Monday, and we meet as a group on Friday. We have had three retreats since June. These are valuable listening opportunities, as are the monthly meetings of the Albemarle Education Association (AEA) Exchange Committee, which I attend.

We had so much positive feedback from staff about the format of the listening tour that I asked Jay Thomas and Michele Castner, our directors of secondary and elementary education, respectively, to reformat Teacher Advisory Committee meetings based on the listening tour format. They now hold meetings by feeder pattern, with new teacher representatives from each school in attendance at every meeting. Also, before Thanksgiving, I plan to invite our Student Cabinet—a group of third through twelfth graders representing every school—to provide input on our 2019-20 funding request, as they did last year.

Observation is an ongoing process. During the first five days of school, I walked through our 25 facilities with each principal for a brief check-in. All central office leadership staff were assigned schools to visit during the first three days of school, and we met as a team at the end of each day to debrief, share positive observations, and problem-solve as needed. Since the beginning of the school year, I have started each Monday morning by visiting one or two schools, depending on location and my schedule for the remainder of the day. I tour the school with the principal, visit with students and staff, and observe and take note of items I want to report out in my *Weekly Check-In* each Friday to all school division employees.

So far this year, I have visited Brownsville, Crozet, Red Hill, Scottsville, Stony Point, and Woodbrook elementary schools; Henley Middle School; Albemarle High School; and CATEC.

The Friday before each visit, I alert the principal, so we can have a productive walk together. This time provides an opportunity outside of the evaluation process to informally ask how things are going and if additional resources may be needed.

Framing: Horizon 2020 Strategic Objectives

As I sat down to frame up this brief to the school board, I went back to the strategic plan I helped develop in 2013. I remember spending a lot of time on that project, working with Melissa Morgan to conduct many community conversations about student learning and preparation for a 21st century that is now 18 years underway. As a result of our community's consensus, and a great deal of fine tuning from school staff, central office staff, and the school board, we arrived at one student-centered goal:

All Albemarle County Public Schools students will graduate having actively mastered the lifelong-learning skills they need to succeed as 21st century learners, workers and citizens.

Supporting this one goal are five objectives. In recent years, I feel like we have not emphasized their weight in our work as much as we should. If used as a focus and considered thoughtfully, they channel many, if not all, facets of a high-quality system. We most often focus on our strategic priorities as part of our project management process, but I'd like to use our objectives to frame what I heard in the "learn" phase of my entry plan.

During the 16 listening tour sessions, we took notes. Based on the themes that emerged, we developed a Superintendent Listening Tour Survey resulting in nearly 1,500 responses from students, parents, employees, and community members. We used this survey to affirm what was heard and recorded in listening sessions and to further prioritize ideas. Further, I am sharing the results from the survey along with all the comments posted with my cabinet so that they can mine the data to both celebrate and improve the work of their departments.

The more I reviewed stakeholder feedback and ideas, the more I kept coming back to our five strategic objectives as a way to organize my thoughts on how we are doing and what I think we can and should do next as a result. Further, at our last board meeting, we had a work session on the State of the Division. Dr. Patrick McLaughlin, our Chief of Strategic Planning, and his staff did an excellent job with the work session, and the data and conversations we had truly echo and triangulate with the qualitative data we collected and analyzed from the listening tour.

As it reads in our 2013-2020 Strategic Plan, *Horizon 2020*, "Our guiding objectives are our Commitments for how we intend to achieve our One Student-Centered Goal."

Objective 1: We will engage every student.

We are committed to engaging every student in meaningful, authentic and rigorous work through the use of instructional best practices and supportive technologies that will motivate students to be self-directed and inquisitive lifelong learners.

Stakeholder Feedback

With regard to bright spots shared during the listening tour, I heard that we have passionate and high-quality teachers; our schools provide an academic learning challenge; and we have welcoming school communities and positive school climate. In terms of student engagement, I heard that students have choice provided during their free time and in their course offerings at the secondary level.

When it comes to challenges, I heard that we need to truly focus on and increase student engagement. I also heard that we can and should do more to provide different choices in course selection and career readiness options for students. We should provide greater rigor, differentiation and challenge in our curriculum. Along these lines, we need to provide opportunities for students and parents to provide feedback to teachers on their work. Finally, we must continue to support and grow our social emotional emphasis and mental health support for students and school employees.

My Take

If our objective truly is to engage every student, our annual climate survey data tells us we are not doing so: About 70 percent of our third graders say they are curious about their school work, but only about 30 percent of our high school seniors say they are interested in their school work. While this is a national phenomenon documented annually in Gallup surveys, we must do better.

In alignment with our objective to engage every student:

1. We need to focus our energy on high-yield teaching and learning strategies in terms of student achievement and engagement. Our Teacher Performance Appraisal (TPA) needs a complete overhaul to make it simple, easy to understand and apply, and relevant to our teachers. Our Lifelong-Learner Competencies and our Framework for Quality Learning must be the basis for the TPA, and these philosophies also must be overhauled, as they are approaching 15 years old, having had some revisions over the years. They provide wonderful and admirable guidance, but they fall short of practical application for many teachers. Focusing our work on the “Four Cs”—critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity—as the frame for the Virginia Standards of

Learning should be the base of our curriculum. Teachers always will expand the curriculum in thoughtful ways; let's have a solid base for them to begin.

2. Daily, through Learning Walks, we need to measure high-yield practices used by our teachers and the corresponding rate of our students' engagement, so that principals continuously are focused on these elements and providing feedback to teachers. We have drifted in this area.
3. One objective within my four-year contract is to work with staff to operationalize a system through which students can provide feedback on their teachers' practices. They are our primary customers, and we do a disservice to both students and teachers when we do not provide adequate feedback opportunities. Great teachers get feedback from their students and other sources. We have many teachers who already do that, but all of our teachers need to do it if we are going to engage every student. Every teacher should have a dashboard report at least once per year.

Objective 2: We will implement balanced assessments.

We are committed to implementing a balanced assessment system that accurately reflects student demonstration and mastery of our Lifelong-Learner Competencies.

Stakeholder Feedback

I found it interesting that I was unable to strongly correlate any of the themes from the listening tour conversations to assessment of student work, because assessment (testing and grading) are at the center of so much of what we do in schools. Children are more tested than ever, and grades are the currency of secondary schools. Grades are used in so many ways, and grading is at the root of whether we will be successful with any of our other initiatives, including equity. The concept of a grade sounds cut and dried, but teachers' grading practices often lack validity and consistency. And it's not the fault of our teachers; the problem is the system.

My Take

The good news is that we are already studying grading practices. Independent of the listening tour, I have observed enough about grades throughout my years in ACPS to know that we, like most school systems, still use grades as part of a factory model, even though our teachers strive to help all students succeed and find individual satisfaction and motivation with their learning.

The grading system we use is broken. Teachers want their students to win, but the A, B, C, D, F system, which is based on point accumulations and averages, is set up so that any mistake or failure can start a student on the path to a losing streak. Students also can stay on winning

streaks with their grades and have no idea what they are actually learning. They only know that they are winning.

In other words, we do not have a balanced assessment system, and if we do not get grading and assessment right, all the other good work our teachers are doing to improve student learning will fail. The way teachers have coped with this broken system is to find every way they can to get around it through consistently inconsistent grading practices. Last year, we asked every teacher who assigns grades to complete a survey on grading practices, and none of the practices reported approach consistency. For example, 22 percent of our teachers reported that they almost always deduct points for late work, while 19 percent frequently do so, 36 percent sometimes do it, and 23 percent never do so.

In alignment with our objective to implement balanced assessments:

1. We must have a community conversation on grading. Dr. McLaughlin and his team currently are planning a series called, "Making the Grade." It's time. Students need to know what they know and can do. Our teachers want them to know as well. Our grading system does not accomplish this.
2. We must develop a set of consistent guidelines for grading that are developed through conversations with and professional learning for teachers; set in place through our electronic gradebook; and published with transparency for the community.
3. My goal, before I reach the end of my four-year contract, is for us to reach a point where we use standards-referenced grades on a much smaller scale than the 100-point scale we now use, I would prefer a five-point scale. I embrace the way we are growing culturally responsive teaching (CRT) through development, buy-in, professional learning, and credentialing, and I think we can change our grading system in the same way with patience, persistence and trust, and facts based on data. Many of our teachers now use standards-referenced grading; we can build on that.

And I will say it one more time: none of the initiatives we are working on will succeed if we continue to work with our unsystematic assessment system. It is broken.

Objective 3: We will improve opportunity and achievement.

We are committed to improving lifelong-learning opportunity and achievement for all students and enrollment groups.

Stakeholder Feedback

Related to this objective, I heard through the listening tour that our schools have collaborative, creative and innovative environments. We have resources for school staff, including technology,

instructional coaching, and professional development. I heard praise from our educators about our embracing Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices. We also have resources for students, like technology and access to field trips. Further, we are beginning to have conversations in earnest about equity, access, and closing achievement gaps. In this vein, we are providing professional development around CRT for educators, and it's growing!

Of course, our greatest challenge and opportunity for improvement in this arena is the elimination of achievement gaps. We should have equitable representation of student demographics in school programs. We should be providing equitable access to technology resources and improving monitoring of students' use of technology.

I also heard that we should improve our students access to after-school care and expand preschool education; we need to do better with recruiting and retaining a diverse teaching staff; we should implement policies consistently (e.g., dress code, cell phone use, attendance); and we should work toward eliminating "tracking" of students (the practice of placing students of the same age and ability together for instruction). By the way, gifted identification has become a form of tracking.

My Take

As a division, our average pass rates on the 2017-18 Standards of Learning (SOL) tests for reading, writing, math, science and history are on par with state averages. For "All Students," pass rates hover around 80 percent, and that's good work. If we graded our division based on our overall SOL pass rates and using our high school grading scale, an 80 would equate to a low B. To improve the learning performance of all of our students, regardless of the measure, we should focus on differentiating instruction for varying student needs.

A look at the performance of our Black and Latino students on the SOL assessments shows lower average pass rates ranging from 51 to 64 percent and all below the state averages of their Black and Latino peers. Again, if we were grading ourselves, these pass rates would yield a D or an F on our grading scale. To improve our results with these student groups, we need to focus on utilizing research-based instructional strategies.

Lower still is the performance of our students with disabilities, whose average pass rates on the SOL tests ranged from 41 to 52 percent and mostly below state averages for their demographic peers. These proficiency rates tell me that we must focus on coordinating and teaching curriculum objectives within and across grade levels to improve mastery, for these students in particular. Part of that is the obvious notion that to fully expose these students to the curriculum, they need to be in class and not suspended from school.

I don't think I'm oversimplifying what we should be doing as a division to improve our student's performance on the Virginia Standards of Learning—or any other measure for that matter. When I ask our principals whose schools are outperforming the division, and have closed

achievement gaps across most areas, how they have accomplished their results, I constantly hear that they are practicing the Professional Learning Community (PLC) model with fidelity. I want to support these principals and their colleagues to embrace this model, which is built for equity of outcome.

In alignment with our objective to improve opportunity and achievement, here are three actionable things for the PLCs in our schools to audit:

1. I expect students to learn the Virginia curriculum at the conceptual level, so that the knowledge and skills stick as students learn how to learn.
2. To give students quality learning experiences, we should use the FQL to frame conceptual understanding; use research-based instructional strategies; and differentiate instruction and assessment to meet students' needs.
3. To know whether our students are learning or not and so that schools can comparatively benchmark with each other, we should use common assessments across the division, once per mid-year at a minimum, to assess student learning at the conceptual level. We also should begin embarking on standards-referenced grading.

A few notes from my perspective regarding the Standards of Learning: We live and work in Virginia. Our students' performance on these assessments is a standardized measure of equity. I understand that we rank highly on the Niche rankings, and that is a wonderful accolade, but we must not embrace any sole measure as a success. Success is an aspiration, but as I once heard Robert Redford say, "One should not embrace success. Shadow box with it, but to embrace it is a mistake." Success is only about image.

As a school system, our students' rates of proficiency and growth on the SOL assessments should exceed Virginia averages as a whole and for all of our demographic groups.

To accomplish this goal, we must view the accreditation of our schools as a given. Given the way schools are now accredited, we will have to narrow the gaps in our outcomes for students, including attendance, SOL test scores, suspensions, and more, in order to stay accredited. I aspire that to be the case by the end of my four-year contract.

Our aspiration should be to strive for Virginia Index of Performance (VIP) Awards ([VIP Criteria](#)). VIP awards are presented to schools and school divisions based on criteria and guidelines adopted by the Board of Education. Winning schools and school divisions must meet or exceed all applicable state and federal accountability requirements. For the 2017-18 school year, all but one of our schools was fully accredited, and we had five VIP awards at Virginia Murray, Henley, Hollymead, Meriwether Lewis, and Western Albemarle. In 2008, nine of our schools won VIP awards of various levels.

When we were doing well with the SOL assessments, they were important to us, and then we drifted, and we say they are not. Let's get back on course. Let us not send a mixed message to our educators, often stating that the tests do not matter, when in fact, the tests suddenly matter when a school is in accreditation jeopardy. Let's provide such high-quality teaching, learning, and assessment and grading for each and every student that school accreditation is a done deal and we are hitting SOL proficiency rates in the 90's again.

When we have equity in ACPS, we will know it because we will have ended the predictive value of race, class, gender, and special capacities on student success by working together with families and communities to ensure each individual student's success. Despite what we most often see on the news or social media, conditions in our nation are mostly improving for people who have been marginalized throughout our nation's history, yet discrimination against diverse people of color still is deeply ingrained in American culture. Whether we call it racism or systemic bias, it results in inequitable opportunities for African American and Latino students in our school system.

Having said that, we can do better, and the way we as a society have always done better is through our schools. We have always made our nation, our state, and especially our own County of Albemarle better through our schools. I want our school system to be the exception to the rule of discrimination that hinders the greatness of our work.

Objective 4: We will create and expand partnerships.

We are committed to creating and expanding partnerships with parents, community and business leaders to fulfill their essential roles as actively engaged partners in supporting student achievement and lifelong-learning outcomes for student success.

Stakeholder Feedback

I did not hear much in the way of accolades for our work around partnerships, but I did hear throughout the listening tour that we need to increase parent, family and community involvement. Further, we need to continue to improve our communication with stakeholders around division initiatives while providing opportunities to inform our plans.

My Take

In alignment with our objective to create and expand partnerships:

1. For our students to graduate having actively mastered the lifelong-learning skills they need to succeed as 21st century learners, workers and citizens, we must facilitate and/or provide the meaningful work-based or community-based learning experience that is right for each student, and we must do this for each and every student prior to graduation. I

expect this to be standard operating procedure within four years, and I want it accomplished with equity.

2. For this to happen, we must have partners—more partners than we have now or have imagined thus far. To facilitate more than 1,000 experiences for our students annually, we will need an infrastructure that we have not yet established, one that will connect students with mentors, employers, nonprofits, schools, and other providers of experience, and we must cultivate a symbiotic relationship. I expect this to happen within two years.
3. We must simplify access to information about partnering with ACPS as well as the process of partnering with us, and we must annually recognize our partners and volunteers, and treat them like kings and queens. On a side note, we should also treat every senior citizen who lives in Albemarle County like royalty. They are investing in our schools with - typically - no children in them. We should, at least, have a partnerships web page accessible from our division-level homepage that lists all of our partners from small to large and includes an explanation on how to partner with us along with a simple application. While our division has talked about this in the past, we need to make it a priority and make it happen now.

Objective 5: We will optimize resources.

We are committed to optimizing fiscal, tangible and human resources to proactively support student achievement.

Stakeholder Feedback

During the listening tour, I heard that we have well-maintained school facilities and we employ outstanding teachers, support staff, and highly-responsive school administrators and central office staff—all sentiments affirmed by our listening tour survey. We also provide abundant resources for students in terms of technology and access to field trips. Further, we have a great program selection, particularly in music, art, maker work, and high school academies.

According to listening tour and survey participants, we need to improve instructional support for teachers; work on implementing programs consistently across schools; improve school security measures; and continue to maintain our small class sizes.

My Take

In alignment with our objective to optimize resources:

1. Our number one resource is our human resource—our teachers, support staff, and administrators. Facilities, technology, furniture, and the like are all in place to support

teaching and learning, and teaching and learning happens with people and relationships. In our budget development, we will continue to have infrastructure needs, and we should still, to the best of our ability, prioritize hiring, developing and retaining high quality personnel. Within four years, I want the diversity of our teaching workforce to greater represent the diversity of our system. For example, 65 percent of our current student population identifies as white. We currently employ a teaching force of 89 percent white teachers. So, to match our student demographics better, we would have a 65 percent white teaching force. The gap is 24% of our teachers. That is 312 teachers. We are a growing school system, so as we hire 150+ teachers each year, we need to set a target for diversity hires and work toward it. This is an oversimplification, but if we hired 25 minority teachers each year, it would take eight to ten years to a teacher force that more closely represents our student population. This is an uphill battle because we are facing a shortage of teacher applicants, especially minority applicants; however, we need to set a target and try. It is time.

2. When it comes to changes we make in pedagogy, technology, facilities, etc., we must make every effort, from the beginning, to be as inclusive as possible in the decision-making process. Students, parents, teachers, support staff, and administrators all should be invited to offer input as often as possible. Input is not a vote; however, we should seek as many perspectives as possible at the ground floor of a project.
3. The greatest resource we have that we do not control is time. Over the past several years, our school system has formed a habit of initiating new projects while leaving others incomplete or ineffectively implemented, which, in my opinion leads to wasted time. I am working with the Cabinet to identify all of the projects we have started or anticipate starting and prioritizing them over the next four years in terms of necessity. We must also continue to use and reinforce program evaluation as way to adjust or abandon programs that are ineffective, wasteful, or perhaps no longer relevant.

For something to be an innovation, it must be both new and improved. If something is just new and not research-based or tested, I'm probably not going to be interested in it for our students. We should try new things, but we know pretty much everything we need to know about how people learn through deep content knowledge, practice and feedback, and the use of tools that apply to their learning work and skills development (National Research Council, 1999). And, of course, the key to the door to open up a student's mind to truly inspiring learning, is a relationship with a caring and demanding teacher. Initiatives and innovations should meet one of these needs before ACPS seriously considers embracing it.

Action

Well, this process worked; I feel just about as overwhelmed with all the possibilities for ACPS as I would if I just showed up here in July and had not been an educator in ACPS for 15 years. I think the process worked thanks to the leadership of Dr. Hairston and all the staff who kept me in a listening mode. I think it also worked because I fought with myself to keep an open mind. As I have said before, it can be difficult to accept negative feedback about this school system because if there are things that are not going well, I own my share of the problems. But there is a heck of a lot of things going very well for our students, and yet, I have to always look for the cloud in the silver lining. Yes, this is complicated work, but that should never be an excuse for not tackling problems and making things better.

And we have made things better. From the time that I started working in ACPS in 2004, our drop out rate has dropped, our graduation rate has increased. We suspend far fewer students than we did and far fewer than the state averages. We haven't expelled a student in years. Our students, as whole, have excellent attendance, and our school climate reports are more positive than the reports across Virginia.

And yet, we have a marginalized population of students that is not accessing our full curriculum of opportunities and attaining success as well as they should, and it is not their problem. It is our problem, the system's problem.

Anecdotally, I have observed that diverse students of color and / or economically disadvantaged students who have high levels of success in ACPS, are helped by individual educators and mentors to get through a system that often presents unintended barriers against them. They travel a road, like the road from Jerusalem to Jericho from the biblical story of the Good Samaritan that Dr. Martin Luther King Junior described in the speech he made to striking sanitation workers in Memphis on the evening before he was murdered, April 3, 1968.

Probably all of us know of a parable such as this. It tells of a man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. Robbers attacked him, took his possessions and clothes, beat him, and left him half dead. A priest came down the road, saw the injured man, and passed by him on the other side. A Levite passing by did the same.

A Samaritan traveling the road saw the hurt man and had compassion on him. He poured oil and wine on his wounds, bound them up, then put the man on his donkey. The Samaritan took him to an inn and cared for him. The next morning, the Samaritan gave two denarii to the innkeeper for the man's care and promised to repay him on his way back for any other expenses.

In his speech, Dr. King referred to this story.

“On the one hand we are called to play the good Samaritan on life's roadside; but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it is not haphazard and superficial. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.”

I am proud of Albemarle County Public Schools for our students' successes, and yet when I listen to our stakeholders and analyze much of the data we collect, I see students who start out with us who are eager to learn and greatly encouraged to do so. As they make their way on the road through schools, many of our children become increasingly disinterested and often lost, whether they appear successful or not.

Ultimately, students succeed because we have good samaritans, teachers, administrators, and support staff, who find ways around the system - one we create and reinforce - to help them succeed. I love the good samaritan. I want the road to change. We will always need the good samaritan, but I want the system, the school system, to be a better road for students. I want them to struggle, but I want them to have a productive struggle that makes them stronger and not depleted but greatly engaged in their last years with us. I love the good samaritan. I want the Road to change. Finally, I want the barriers that are placed in the way of our diverse students of color removed. Barriers may be cultural, but look around the world and we see that cultures can and do change, sometimes slowly, but they do change. And they mostly change as a result of bringing the most marginalized among us to a seat at the table of prosperity and offering them their fair share. I love the good samaritan, and I want the road to change.

A couple of weeks ago, I met up with Jeannette Martin and Dr. Rick Turner, current and former President of the Albemarle & Charlottesville NAACP. We get coffee over at Millie Joe every couple of months. I consider Ms. Martin and Dr. Turner to be mentors. They challenge me. When I met with them couple of weeks ago, we got a coffee and sat outside. Traffic was bustling there on the corner of McIntire and Prescott. There was a breeze at 9:00 in the morning and the sun finally rising up over the Omni Hotel felt very good in the chill. Dr. Turner always cuts right to what he wants to say or ask. He asked me, “Are you a good superintendent?”

I said, “Yes, I think I am.”

He then asked me, “Do you trust the people who work with you to carry out your work for the things you believe?”

I said, “Yes, I do.”

He said, “I asked you if you are good superintendent because I want you to think about that. You cannot do anything in your role except believe in the right things and communicate your

beliefs to the people who work with you and expect them to carry out actions to make those beliefs happen. You cannot do it yourself, so you have to have trust.”

I’ve been the superintendent now for just a moment in time, and I’m the 20th superintendent in ACPS. I am just one small leg in the relay race of ACPS history. I have just been handed the baton, and I am running into the first turn of the track. I am certainly not the anchor leg, so my job is to serve in such a way that when I pass on the baton, I have improved the position of ACPS in serving our students and families so the next superintendent can do the same. I serve a county with about 100,000 residents. I serve 2,500 employees. I serve 14,000 students and their families. I am one small person in this organization.

I’ll say one last thing, in the 131 days I’ve been superintendent so far, I have trust. I trust the Board, I trust each individual on my cabinet. I trust my staff. I trust our principals and teachers and support staff, and I will keep on trusting each new person I meet who is in this work for kids. I trust that we all know what is right, let’s use our shared trust and the power behind it to both continue to do and begin to do what is right.