

## Superintendent column

Written by Superintendent Bernadeia Johnson Minneapolis Public Schools  
Monday, 27 September 2010 14:30

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I so enjoyed visiting classrooms on the first day of school and seeing the anticipation on children's faces. Principals were enthusiastically greeting students and families. In the midst of all this excitement, teachers were focused on teaching on the very first day of school.

That enthusiasm and focus will serve us well as we set course for a new year. Our 2010 Report on Academic Progress underlines the importance of good teaching and the urgency with which we must approach our work.

Overall, proficiency in our district is at 51 percent in reading and 45 percent in math – 20 points below the State average. As a group, our white students significantly outperform the State; however, students of color make up almost 70 percent of our enrollment and are 36 points below the State in reading and 35 points below in math. While our annual gains in achievement are comparable to the State they are not enough.

One of the most disturbing trends laid out in our report is that at the current rate of achievement, it will take us almost 60 years to catch up to the State. I find this deeply troubling. Incremental progress is like paying only the minimum balance on your credit card. If all you pay is the minimum, you will be paying it off for the rest of your life.

Our students don't have a lifetime to catch up. They deserve to be learning all they can right now.

Our report sets new five-year goals using a model similar to other urban school districts. Our new goals seek to reduce our gap to the State by half – bringing us up to 66 percent proficient in reading and 65 percent in math by 2015. That means that as a district we must double our gains in math and triple them in reading every year. For students of color, we must quadruple annual progress.

We will continue to aim for 100 percent proficiency for each and every student. But, the danger in setting an unrealistically high district-wide goal is it is too easy for people to throw up their hands and say, "It's not being done anywhere. It's impossible." Well, this is possible. We can point to school districts like ours who are making this kind of progress. This is a 'no excuses'

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goal that empowers us to say, “Yes, it can be done, and we will do it here.”

As I visit schools, I am reminding staff of how their work supports good teaching. I tell bus drivers that getting students to school on time supports good teaching because in most elementary schools, reading is the first class of the day. One of the most important things families can do to support good teaching is to make sure that students are in school every day, on time, ready to learn. They support good teaching by setting aside quiet time for their child – with the TV off – to do homework and read every night. Parents support good teaching by setting a clear expectation that going to school and learning is their child’s job. I hope that education is among the values that families hold most dear. Together we can support our students to value their culture, their language and what a good education can give them.

Our community can also support good teaching by volunteering in our schools, working with organizations that mentor students or donating valuable resources that our teachers will put to good use in the classroom.

Thank you for partnering with us this year to support good teaching. We look forward to a wonderful year of learning in Minneapolis Public Schools.