

# **To a Culture of No Excuses**

**A Look at the Success of High School Graduates in the  
University of North Carolina System**

***Executive Summary***

**Public Education Research Institute  
Wayland H. Cato, Jr. School of Education  
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# To a Culture of No Excuses

## *Executive Summary*

Of the 2006 North Carolina (NC) high school graduates, approximately 36% indicated they would like to attend one of the 15 schools within the University of North Carolina (UNC) system. Of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) seniors, 42% had stated they planned to attend and graduate from one of these schools.<sup>1</sup> Yet the percentage of NC high school graduates and CMS graduates who actually did enroll in a UNC school is somewhat lower, and the percentage of that class expected to graduate from our public universities and colleges in five years or fewer is in stark contrast to the percentage who indicated they wanted to go to one of these schools and graduate.

Why is there such a difference in the number of NC students who actually graduate from a UNC school and the number who indicated as high school seniors that they wished to pursue a degree from one of the 15 public 4-year schools? Did they even apply? Were they accepted? Did they enroll? Were they prepared for the rigors of college? Were they successful in persisting even to year 2?

### **Report Purpose**

To begin answering these questions, the Public Education Research Institute of Queens University of Charlotte (PERI) studied the postsecondary experience of NC students entering the UNC system, with special emphasis on CMS and its individual high schools. The study was designed to answer four questions:

- How many of our CMS students actually pursue postsecondary education through our UNC system and are they successful in obtaining a degree?
- Are these CMS students prepared for the rigors of the universities?
- Do students from the various CMS high schools pursue an education at one of the UNC system schools in equal proportions, and do they perform equally well in the university system?
- How do CMS students perform when compared to UNC system students who graduated from all NC public schools as well as compared to UNC system students from other NC urban districts – that is, from Durham, Forsyth, Guilford, and Wake Counties?

### **Report Design**

There are many options for students when they graduate from high school. They may enter the workforce directly, enter the military, attend a trade school or a community college, or enroll in a university or college. Even enrolling in a college or university presents several options -- in or out of state private or public school.

Based upon surveys conducted each year by the NC Department of Public Instruction, the largest percentage of NC high school students graduating in 2006 indicated they intended to

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<sup>1</sup> North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. *North Carolina Public Schools Statistical Profile: 2007*. Retrieved April 3, 2009 at <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/fbs/resources/data/statisticalprofile/2007profile.pdf>

enroll in a 4-year NC public institution<sup>2</sup>: Because many of the jobs being created in NC – such as those in the biotechnology and knowledge-based industries – require at least a 4-year degree from a college or university, and because the largest percentage of our seniors indicates they intend to attend a public 4 year college in the state, this report examines students within the UNC system institutions. PERI analyzed the data by school district and by the individual high schools within CMS.

The report is divided into two parts.

- *Part I* examines whether CMS students apply to, are accepted by, and enroll in one of the UNC system schools. The study looks at CMS students compared to others across the state, and it also looks at results within the individual CMS high schools.
- *Part II* examines how well CMS students performed once enrolled in a UNC school and how many persisted through graduation. Again UNC freshmen from CMS schools are compared to freshmen from all NC public schools and to freshmen from the four other NC urban districts. Success rates of students from each CMS high school are also compared to see if they perform equally as well as the others in the UNC system.

## Report Data Sources

All data used in this report were generated by the UNC Office of General Administration. Annually, this office distributes reports on high school graduates entering one of the UNC system universities and colleges.<sup>3</sup> The reports include information about the freshmen entering the universities as well as a variety of data concerning the students' performance and graduation rates within the various UNC schools. (Information for the freshmen class of 2006-07 school year is the most current data available. The most current data available for graduation rates are for the class that entered as first-time freshmen in 2002-03.)

The data are broken down by the 115 public school districts (as well as charter schools and special schools) and by the individual high schools within those districts. Performance data are given for 15 of the universities within the system. The University of North Carolina School of the Arts data are not included in the reports produced by the Office of General Administration.

The following are the schools in the UNC system for which the data are available:

Appalachian State University	NC Central University	UNC Greensboro
East Carolina University	NC State University	UNC Pembroke
Elizabeth City State University	UNC Asheville	UNC Wilmington
Fayetteville State University	UNC Chapel Hill	Western Carolina University
NC A&T	UNC Charlotte	Winston-Salem State University

<sup>2</sup> North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. *North Carolina Public Schools Statistical Profile: 2007*. Retrieved April 3, 2009 at <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/fbs/resources/data/statisticalprofile/2007profile.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> This report produced by the Office of General Administration is available online at [http://www.northcarolina.edu/content.php/assessment/reports/student\\_info/far.htm](http://www.northcarolina.edu/content.php/assessment/reports/student_info/far.htm)

## Data Summary Charts

### 2006 High School Seniors by Districts Who Applied, Were Accepted, and Enrolled in a UNC School

	# Graduating from High School	# Students Who Applied to 1 or More UNC Schools (% of the high school graduates who applied)	# Students Who Were Accepted to 1 or More UNC Schools (% of those who applied who were accepted)	# Freshmen Enrolled in UNC System (% of those accepted who enrolled)	% of High School Graduates Enrolled in UNC System
<i>All NC Public High School</i>	73,527	34,076 46.3%	28,585 83.9%	22,740 79.6%	30.9%
<i>CMS</i>	6,075	3,576 58.9%	2,878 80.5%	2,146 74.6%	35.3%
<i>Durham</i>	1,785	1,050 58.8%	850 81.0%	633 74.5%	35.5%
<i>Forsyth</i>	2,579	1,519 58.9%	1,289 84.9%	1,000 77.6%	38.8%
<i>Guilford</i>	4,048	2,347 58.0%	2,004 85.4%	1,618 80.7%	40.0%
<i>Wake</i>	6,799	4,470 65.7%	3,805 85.1%	2,968 78.0%	43.7%

### 2006 CMS High School Seniors by Schools Who Applied, Were Accepted, and Enrolled in a UNC School

	# Graduating from High School	# Students Who Applied to 1 or More UNC Schools (% of the high school graduates who applied)	# Students Who Were Accepted to 1 or More UNC Schools (% of those who applied who were accepted)	# Freshmen Enrolled in UNC System (% of those accepted who enrolled)	% of High School Graduates Enrolled in UNC System
<i>Berry</i>	238	140 58.8%	107 76.4%	91 85.0%	38.2%
<i>Butler</i>	460	249 54.1%	209 83.9%	138 66.0%	30.0%
<i>East Mecklenburg</i>	394	237 60.2%	195 82.3%	147 75.4%	37.3%
<i>Garinger</i>	240	103 42.9%	80 77.7%	67 83.8%	27.9%
<i>Harding</i>	278	218 78.4%	162 74.3%	118 72.8%	42.4%
<i>Hopewell</i>	461	264 57.3%	209 79.2%	148 70.8%	32.1%
<i>Independence</i>	456	235 51.5%	180 76.6%	150 83.3%	32.9%
<i>Myers Park</i>	534	377 70.6%	315 83.6%	212 67.3%	39.7%
<i>North Mecklenburg</i>	538	382 71.0%	314 82.2%	244 77.7%	45.4%
<i>NW School of the Arts</i>	118	51 43.2%	40 78.4%	32 80.0%	27.1%
<i>Olympic</i>	282	121 42.9%	95 78.5%	83 87.4%	29.4%
<i>Providence</i>	520	415 79.8%	358 86.3%	255 71.2%	49.0%
<i>South Mecklenburg</i>	504	332 65.9%	270 81.3%	217 80.4%	43.1%
<i>Waddell</i>	164	55 33.5%	38 69.1%	32 84.2%	19.5%
<i>West Charlotte</i>	238	114 47.9%	81 71.1%	54 66.7%	22.7%
<i>West Mecklenburg</i>	215	79 36.7%	62 78.5%	40 64.5%	18.6%
<i>Vance</i>	373	202 54.2%	162 80.2%	118 72.8%	31.6%

## Overall UNC System Freshmen Performance Data: 2006-07

	Pre-UNC System						UNC System Freshmen Performance							
	# High School Graduates	# Freshmen in UNC System	% Going to UNC System	Avg. Verbal SAT	Avg. Math SAT	Avg. Freshmen GPA	% Returned for 2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	% Returned for 2 <sup>nd</sup> Year and GPA ≥2.0	% Recommended for Remedial Math	% Recommended for Calculus or Higher	% Recommended for Adv. Placement English	% Enrolled in 1 or More Remedial Class	% Graduating Within 5 Years*	
All UNC Students		29,651		530	550	2.8	81.3%	70.7%	9.0%	22.5%	13.0%	4.5%	54.8%	
All NC Public Schools	73,527	22,740	30.9%	524	547	2.8	81.3%	70.1%	8.7%	21.9%	11.4%	4.8%	54.1%	
<b>CMS</b>	<b>6,075</b>	<b>2,146</b>	<b>35.3%</b>	<b>529</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>83.9%</b>	<b>73.5%</b>	<b>10.8%</b>	<b>21.8%</b>	<b>14.4%</b>	<b>5.6%</b>	<b>56.2%</b>	
Durham	1,785	633	35.5%	500	517	2.7	84.3%	68.5%	16.0%	16.3%	10.6%	7.9%	51.0%	
Forsyth	2,579	1,000	38.8%	528	547	2.7	78.0%	66.3%	8.1%	24.2%	11.3%	5.2%	53.2%	
Guilford	4,048	1,618	40.0%	523	539	2.7	77.8%	66.2%	9.2%	18.7%	11.6%	5.5%	53.1%	
Wake	6,799	2,968	43.7%	551	577	2.9	86.9%	77.5%	7.5%	29.0%	15.9%	3.8%	63.9%	
	Berry	238	91	38.2%	462	471	2.3	79.2%	53.9%	11.0%	16.5%	3.3%	7.7%	**
	Butler	460	138	30.0%	547	564	3.0	81.9%	74.7%	6.6%	25.4%	18.2%	2.9%	45.3%
	East Mecklenburg	394	147	37.3%	539	549	2.9	86.4%	75.6%	5.5%	22.5%	15.7%	2.8%	67.8%
	Garinger	240	67	27.9%	469	450	2.4	73.2%	62.7%	20.9%	10.5%	7.5%	20.9%	34.6%
	Harding	278	118	42.4%	506	526	2.7	91.6%	73.8%	14.5%	17.8%	12.8%	6.0%	44.7%
	Hopewell	461	148	32.1%	522	535	2.7	75.1%	62.2%	13.6%	23.7%	16.9%	9.5%	**
	Independence	456	150	32.9%	507	511	2.6	76.1%	64.7%	16.1%	17.4%	9.4%	9.4%	53.3%
	Myers Park	534	212	39.7%	584	611	3.0	90.6%	84.0%	3.4%	31.2%	23.6%	1.0%	68.8%
	North Mecklenburg	538	244	45.4%	544	560	3.0	89.4%	83.7%	13.2%	23.0%	15.6%	5.0%	53.3%
	NW School of the Arts	118	32	27.1%	552	524	2.9	81.3%	68.8%	25.1%	0.0%	18.8%	3.2%	30.0%
	Olympic	282	83	29.4%	481	502	2.5	78.4%	67.5%	14.5%	10.9%	8.5%	8.5%	50.8%
	Providence	520	255	49.0%	573	587	3.1	87.5%	82.0%	4.8%	29.5%	20.1%	0.4%	69.2%
	South Mecklenburg	504	217	43.1%	544	577	2.9	86.7%	76.5%	10.2%	24.9%	14.8%	3.3%	59.4%
	Waddell	164	32	19.5%	437	440	2.5	62.6%	56.3%	12.6%	18.8%	0.0%	21.9%	**
	West Charlotte	238	54	22.7%	423	452	2.5	72.3%	61.2%	18.6%	9.3%	3.8%	7.5%	44.1%
	West Mecklenburg	215	40	18.6%	468	481	2.5	80.1%	57.6%	10.1%	17.6%	7.6%	5.1%	49.0%
	Vance	373	118	31.6%	493	508	2.7	86.5%	73.8%	13.6%	16.2%	6.8%	11.1%	57.3%

\* Graduation data based upon students who entered the university system as freshmen in fall 2002. \*\*Berry, Hopewell, and Waddell High Schools were too new for UNC System 2002-03 Freshmen

Note: Ardrey Kell and Mallard Creek High Schools were too new to have UNC System Freshmen during the 2006-07 school year.

Source: [http://www.northcarolina.edu/content.php/assessment/reports/student\\_info/far.htm](http://www.northcarolina.edu/content.php/assessment/reports/student_info/far.htm)

Public Education Research Institute at Queens University of Charlotte

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## Conclusions and Implications

- **A lower percentage of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) high school seniors, when compared to other NC urban districts, indicated intention of enrolling in one of NC's public 4-year institutions.**

**It appears, as a whole, the expectation for students in Wake County to pursue a 4-year degree is higher than it is for CMS students.**

In fact, the percentage of CMS students indicating they intended to pursue a degree at *any* 4-year institution was lower than that of all urban districts except Guilford County. Of the urban districts, Wake County had the highest percentage of seniors indicating their intention to attend a 4-year institution of higher education.

*Implication:* Without even considering a 4-year degree, CMS students put themselves at a disadvantage in obtaining a job in our new knowledge-based economy.

- **A higher percentage of Wake County students actually enrolled in one of the UNC schools than did students from CMS, Durham, Guilford, and Forsyth Counties.**

Out of those who applied, the percentage of those accepted is approximately equal among these urban districts (between 80% and 85%). The percentage of those accepted who enrolled was quite high for all districts (between 70% and 80%). However, because a larger percentage of students from Wake County applied for admissions, the number of all their high school graduates who enrolled was considerably higher than that of the other urban districts.

*Implication:* Opportunities are there for CMS students; they need to be encouraged to apply. For all students to have equal opportunities at higher paying jobs, the expectations for attending and graduating from a 4 year institution must be raised within the urban districts. All students must be aware of the difference a degree can make in their lives and be taught to "reach for the stars." The adults must provide the support needed. No excuses accepted!

- **In addition to the differences among the urban districts, there were wide variations among CMS high schools in the percentage of students enrolling in one of the UNC schools. It appears this variation was more related to the lack of students in some of our high schools applying to the schools rather than in their failure to be accepted or their just not enrolling once accepted. The CMS high school where the students attended appears to be a factor in whether they apply to one of the 15 UNC schools.**

*Implication:* While student assignment may have created some schools where there are not strong expectations from families and peers for attending college, without adults in the students' lives giving proper support and not accepting any excuses from students, students in those high schools will not be afforded the opportunity to be effective and productive citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Schools must ensure that feeling does not still exist in any of our schools. Student assignment may not be able to change, but expectations can. All students in our public schools need to know what it

takes to be successful after high school and they must know adults in the schools will help them be successful – no excuses from students or adults.

- **Once enrolled, many CMS students entering the UNC system appear not to be as prepared for the rigors of college level work as they should be. CMS students tend to lag behind their peers from some of the other NC urban districts in many indicators of college readiness. There are also wide variations among CMS high schools in how prepared their graduates are when they enter a UNC school.**

These indicators include SAT scores, remediation, advanced classes, freshmen grade point averages, and persistence to graduation. While the percentages of students being recommended for remedial math classes and actually enrolling in remedial classes have decreased over the past years, too many students still need remediation before they can begin college level courses. In addition, too few are recommended for calculus or higher math and too few enroll in Honor Programs.

*Implications:*

- When students take remedial classes, it raises the risk that the student will not graduate from the university.
- Remediation programs are expensive for the taxpayers. Money could be spent on expansion of programs and increasing financial support for students.
- Because a student is not ready for calculus as a freshman may limit a student's degree choices and ultimately his or her vocation options.

- **Even though the gap may be closing somewhat, CMS students continue to lag behind Wake County students in performance in the UNC system.**

*Implications:*

By not being equally prepared to enter the various schools, students from some CMS high schools have a much higher risk of not graduating.

- **Too few students graduate in five years or fewer.**

*Implications:*

- Students who do not graduate with a degree will be at a disadvantage for higher paying jobs in the 21st century. As of 2003, the median yearly income of college graduates was 62% higher than that high school graduates. While some college increases the median earnings by 15%, financially it pays to get that college degree.<sup>4</sup>
- Not graduating in four or five years is costly to taxpayers. North Carolinian tax dollars contribute about \$12,897 per year for each in-state undergraduate.<sup>5</sup> This means over \$51,588 of taxpayers' money is spent for four years of college. If it takes a student longer than 4 years, it is costly to the taxpayers.

	Median Yearly Income
Less than high school	\$21,600
High school degree	\$30,800
Some college, no degree	\$35,700
Bachelor's degree	\$49,900
Master's degree	\$59,500
Doctoral degree	\$79,400
Professional degree	\$95,700

<sup>4</sup> UNC-CH Office of Sponsored Research. *Graduate Education and the Public Good*. Cited in *The Fountain*. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Spring 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Retrieved from [http://www.ecu.edu/cs-admin/financial\\_serv/customcf/Fees\\_Main\\_Campus\\_Spring\\_2009.pdf](http://www.ecu.edu/cs-admin/financial_serv/customcf/Fees_Main_Campus_Spring_2009.pdf) on April 6, 2009

If the student does obtain a degree, this amount paid by the taxpayers will be paid back to the state with additional tax dollars the individual pays throughout his or her lifetime. Yet if a student does not complete his or her degree, the lifetime earnings are reduced significantly and the tax dollars this individual generates are much less. Thus there is little to no return on investment for the taxpayers. Keep in mind based upon the \$12,897 a year, the 4,252 of the 2006 UNC system freshmen who do not even return for year 2 cost the taxpayers of North Carolina \$54.8 million; the 346 of the 2006 freshmen from Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools not returning for year 2 cost the state approximately \$4.5 million for that one year or less of university education.

- Not obtaining a college degree is costly to students and parents. If a student drops out prior to completing a bachelor's degree, the student or parents are often saddled with paying back large amounts of loans. In addition, the student's life-time earning power is negatively impacted. And, without a degree, many are simply not prepared for many 21st century jobs.

## Recommendations

- **Why so few students in some of our high schools apply to one of our public 4-year institutions needs to be examined. A plan must be designed and implemented to address these issues in order to increase the percentage of students in those schools who do apply.**
  - Do the students at those schools believe they cannot be accepted?
  - Do they believe they cannot afford to apply or to attend?
  - Do they know how to apply? Do they know how to navigate the complexity of applying?
  - Have the students taken the appropriate subjects to fulfill requirements for the UNC system?
  - Have the students taken the SAT and scored appropriately?
  - Do they have the adult support they need?
- **High expectations for all students and a *no excuses* culture must be created in all the high schools. Students must understand what a college education can mean for them and know what possibilities are there for them. Students applying to colleges must be the norm, not the exception.**
  - Ensure strong AVID programs are in these high schools as well as the feeder middle schools. Organizational skills are often lacking in college freshmen. AVID helps build those skills as well as to expose students to college possibilities.
  - Support a strong Communities in Schools (CIS) program in these schools; ensure an effective counseling program is in place (both school counselors and CIS counselors) to work with all students but particularly those needing extra support.
  - Make visits to college campuses available.
  - Begin continual conversations about colleges in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade; in various ways expose students to different potential colleges; develop a 4-year plan for each student.

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Current tuition costs for East Carolina University retrieved from <http://www.ask.com/bar?q=Tuition+costs+%22East+Carolina+University%22&page=1&qsrc=2106&ab=2&u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ecu.edu%2Fcs-bus%2FTuitionComparison.cfm> on April 6, 2009



- Examine techniques used by schools such as KIPP Academies and other schools designed for high poverty schools – techniques whereby the students are expected to attend college and almost all do.
- **The data must be monitored annually: (1) to examine how CMS performs compared to the universities at large and to the other urban districts and (2) to examine to see if gaps in the percentage of seniors applying to UNC schools are being closed among CMS high schools.**
- **High expectations for all students to graduate and to enter postsecondary education and a *no excuses* culture must be created in all the high schools.**

While a 4-year college education may not be the appropriate choice for all high school graduates, students must understand what a college degree can mean for them and know what possibilities are there for them. They must be provided the opportunity to prepare for enrolling in a 4-year institution if that is their choice. They must be prepared to be successful in that college or university if they do enroll.

  - Develop and implement a plan to ensure all students understand the value of a college degree prior to entering high school and to know what it takes to get there.
  - Offer all support necessary to ensure students are prepared for the rigors of college-level work, including quality instruction in each classroom.
- **Ensure these data from the UNC Office of General Administration are available annually for each individual high school within the District. Have each school analyze the data and include it as part of the individual high school's School Improvement Plan and as part of the Data Wise Process.**
  - Ensure a culture of no excuses among the adults in the schools; have all educators within each school collaboratively develop plans for improving the performance of its graduates at the postsecondary level.
  - Ensure there is vertical planning between the high school and its feeder middle schools in order to better prepare the graduates for college rigor.
- **At the District level, analyze the same indicators year to year in order to determine the trends for CMS students and to see if gaps between CMS and other urban districts continue to shrink.**

In particular, examine variations among the CMS high schools and examine graduation rates to see if the decrease in the percentage noted in the 2006-07 year was an aberration or a beginning of a new downward trend.
- **Include postsecondary readiness as part of CMS's accountability plan.**

While the data from the UNC Office of General Administration does have a lag time between 18 and 24 months, it does still offer indications of whether CMS has been successful in preparing its students for the rigors of a college experience.
- **Through a P-16 collaborative effort that includes CMS and the various colleges and universities in the area ascertain where high school expectations and skills learned do not align with university expectations.**