

My Academic Focus

I am humbled to be selected as the next superintendent of the Wake County Public School System. I intend to focus the system's impressive resources on the academic achievement of our students and on closing the achievement gap in student performance. I will ensure our teachers and principals have the resources they need to deliver this improvement. One of my goals will be to energize all aspects of Wake County's very large, complex organization to operate at maximum capacity and minimum cost so that we can push as many resources as possible to where they belong -- the classroom.

Because my background may seem to some as non-traditional for a school superintendent, I thought it would be helpful to describe my personal academic journey, how my 28-year military career and 19 months as Chief Operating Officer of DC Public Schools will contribute to my academic focus, what specific actions I will take to ensure academic rigor throughout the district, and the support that I will receive from institutions such as the Broad Center.

Academic Background

My personal academic journey began in Norfolk and Virginia Beach Public Schools as a student and as a son to two public school teachers. My father was a high school football coach, teacher, and guidance counselor in Norfolk Public Schools while my mother was a guidance counselor and teacher in Virginia Beach Public Schools. She later served two terms on the Virginia Beach school board. My father was elected a state representative in 1983 and today is the Chairman of the House Education Committee in the Virginia General Assembly. With a sister who is a public school teacher and coach in Virginia, education is, in fact, the family business.

After high school graduation, I attended the United States Military Academy at West Point where I earned a Bachelor of Science. During my military career I earned a Master of Arts from The Catholic University of America and a Master of Military Arts and Science from The School of Advanced Military Studies. I also attended Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government as a National Security Fellow where I studied in the Government, Business and Law Schools. During my transition from the military to a career in public education, I graduated from the Broad Superintendent's Academy, a rigorous ten-month program of study. Accordingly, research, study, and writing have been part of my life's journey. In addition to the theses and monographs I published for graduate programs, I have published columns for the Washington Post and other national online forums as well as two fiction novels with a third due for release in January 2011. Likewise, I have appeared frequently on CBS, NB C, and Fox News as a subject matter expert to discuss United States foreign policy. All of these activities require academic discipline and rigor to execute well.

My professional academic journey began as the Chief Operating Officer of Washington, DC Public Schools, where I serve as a member of the management team and actively participate in our relentless efforts to achieve academic reform in one of the nation's toughest districts. For example, we developed a Teaching and Learning Framework that focuses on modeling what excellent instruction looks like and what we expect from our teachers. Simultaneously, we developed a teacher assessment system, IMPACT, which combines student test scores and unannounced, subjective evaluations to determine and reward teacher effectiveness. As the leader of Wake County Public School System, I will energetically reap best practices not only from DC Public Schools, but also from across the country to enhance what is already an innovative school system. Likewise, I will listen to experts within and outside of the system and make the best program and instructional decisions for our students and their academic excellence. My personal and professional academic experiences provide me solid instincts for how to approach academic leadership and reform.

Relevant Military Experience

My military experience and life-long service to the nation is also relevant to how I will lead Wake County Public School System. Americans consistently rank the military as one of their most respected institutions. The military takes America's treasure, the mostly 17-19 year old enlistees from primarily public schools, and educates and trains them in all facets of life, to include discipline, technical skills, and academic achievement. As a leader of these young men and women, I had the privilege of instituting active education programs in all of my combat units ranging from 150 personnel up to 18,000. Of the hundreds of soldiers I re-enlisted, I awarded nearly all of them the time and resources to pursue undergraduate or advanced degrees. The military taught me the importance of lifelong education and consistently reinforced this through its systemic approach to professional development and education. Every installation at which I served had an education department with which I worked to ensure that all of my soldiers could seek associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees.

As with public education, the military has common tasks, conditions and standards that guide the soldiers' learning paths and the leaders' methods. This is similar to the common core standards that we are seeing introduced in all states nationally. Throughout my career I developed and approved hundreds of training, education and professional development plans and oversaw their implementation. As a deputy commanding general at Fort Drum and in Afghanistan, I participated in the management of our unit's instructional academies. One example is the Noncommissioned Officers Academy, which locally developed curriculum for basic, primary, and advanced level soldiers to meet Army-wide core standards.

My military experience provides me a strong academic foundation.

My Approach to Wake County Public School System

Coupling my service to the nation with my last 19 months as a member of the Washington, DC Public Schools management team, I know my strengths as an education leader. One of those strengths is to be wise enough to retain and hire the most talented team, particularly in the areas where I have comparatively less experience. Regarding human capital, my first step will be to ask Donna Hargens to remain as the Chief Academic Officer to provide continuity in that most critical domain. Meanwhile I will prioritize assessing the entire academic administrative chain from principals to chief academic officer to determine who has the energy and drive to make Wake County Public School System a high performing, world-class organization. Based upon that assessment and my instincts as a leader, I will move quickly to obtain the best talent within the teaching and learning parts of the organizational structure.

Likewise, as a Broad Superintendents Academy graduate, The Broad Center will provide me three audits of any aspects of the organization that I desire, all at no cost to Wake County. I will first review the recent curriculum audits of Wake County Public Schools and then determine what type of academic audit, if any, will be helpful. At a minimum I will want to assess my central office academic organizational structure and effectiveness. Specifically, I will want to review the previous audit and its implementation and assess Wake County's:

- Academic standards, to ensure that they are not only aligned to North Carolina's standards, but are at a world class level
- Curriculum, to ensure that it is powerful and aligned to high standards
- Hiring practices for principals and teachers, to ensure we are attracting and retaining world class talent
- Performance assessment practices for principals and teachers, to ensure that the practices include support and accountability
- Professional development programs for principals and teachers, to ensure that the programs are focused on the best performance of children

Having the right people and architecture will give us the energy and foundation for transformation. I intend to ask for a second audit to assess our data and accountability

systems. Knowing where we are academically will provide the starting point for the reform road map we collectively develop.

Additionally, The Broad Center will provide me a senior advisor for my first year, again at no cost to Wake County, and I will ensure that I choose an advisor with a strong academic background to advise me in this most critical area. Ultimately, I'm confident in my abilities now to focus on taking our academic performance to the next level, but also understand the value of a mentor.

I believe I have the experience, heart, resources, and vision to help Wake County Public School System accelerate its drive to become a world-class education system. I will bring a primary focus to supporting schools and teachers so that they may achieve academic success for our children in the same way I delivered unrelenting support to our troops on the front lines as they served our nation.

Thank you,

Anthony J. Tata