

Orange County Public Schools 2018 State of the Schools Address

This address was delivered by School Board Chair Bill Sublette and Superintendent Barbara Jenkins at the Marriott Orlando Downtown on Sept. 13, 2018.

The event was presented by the Central Florida Hotel and Lodging Association. Featured sponsors included: CFE Federal Credit Union; CORE Construction; Downtown Orlando Development Board; Marriott Orlando Downtown; OUC; PlanGrid; Ripley's Believe It or Not; Spectrum Enterprise; Valencia College Foundation; Webster University; Wells Fargo; and Williams Company. Community sponsors included: Duke Energy; Nemours Children's Health System; Orlando Health; Premier Elevator; Rollins College; SGM Engineering; The Orlando Law Group; University of Central Florida; and Wharton Smith, Inc.

Chairman Sublette was introduced by Rich Maladecki, President and CEO of CFHLA.

SUBLETTE

Good morning, and welcome to this, my final State of the Schools address, a tradition I started eight years ago when first elected to this position. Today, the Superintendent and I will look back over the past eight years and discuss what has been accomplished and what remains to be accomplished. But first, a look at the future and the challenges and opportunities we face today.

Last February a gunman opened fire at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. He tragically shot and killed 14 students and three staff members, and wounded another 17. Since the Parkland tragedy the number one question our parents have is, "what are you doing to keep our children safe?" As parents of two OCPS students, Suzie and I have the same concerns.

JENKINS

Student safety has always been our number one concern. After the Sandy Hook shootings in 2012 we commissioned a comprehensive review of school safety and security by nationally renowned school security consultants. That review led to the creation of the Orange County Public Schools Police Department, which gives us the ability to more closely monitor school safety and security threats and to rapidly respond. It also provides for greater cooperation with our law enforcement

partners. We undertook a facilities-hardening construction program, reduced access to our campuses, improved perimeter security, and increased surveillance. We also increased monitoring social media for threats.

Even before the Parkland tragedy occurred, we had commissioned another safety and security review by the experts, because we are always seeking to be proactive when it comes to student safety. That most recent safety and security review led to the further hardening of our campuses, to random weapon screenings, and to a host of other, unspoken safety and security measures, unspoken because we keep confidential most of our security provisions. We have dramatically increased law enforcement presence on every campus, with more officers and deputies protecting our children and employees than ever before. And we have doubled our mental health counselors, hiring 18 additional counselors plus 15 additional psychologists and social workers this school year.

SUBLETTE

We want our community to know that your children and grandchildren are as safe as we can possibly make them while attending school. I believe that outside of our home, my children are safer in school than anywhere else they may be, whether that be the movie theater, the mall, or while on the road. Please know that all of our 25,000 employees constantly have the safety and security of our children at the forefront of their minds and that we are always looking for ways to improve.

I often say that “reputation matters” when it comes to American public education in the 21st century. When I was a kid the only choice available to my parents was between our neighborhood public school and a pricy private school education. That day is gone. Today’s parents can choose between that same neighborhood school, a voucher supported private school, a charter school, virtual education or even home schooling. We live in a competitive market for students today, yet our Board and our Superintendent believe that for most kids, the traditional neighborhood public school is still the best choice.

JENKINS

If we are to compete for students, our reputation must be stellar. We believe that the 1 mill renewal vote three weeks ago was a referendum on our reputation. And what a referendum it was! 84 percent voted to renew the 1 mill - irrefutable proof that the reputation of OCPS has never been better. Why is that? We believe it is because of our commitment to excellence in education, a commitment supported by 211,000 hard-working students, more than 14,000 teachers, principals and additional team members focused on student success, and over 400,000 parents invested in their children’s education.

SUBLETTE

Before we leave this subject, I would like you to look at the graph on the screen behind me. What it shows is that the amount of money that our district gets from the State for public education is \$1,400 less per student when adjusted for inflation than it was in 2007. Even when not accounting for inflation, our state funding per student this year is less than \$34 above what it was 11 years ago! \$34! Public education is being slowly strangled, some would say intentionally. What is especially frustrating is that in this booming economy and period of record state budgets, if our Legislature had simply kept the millage rate unchanged these past nine years, our per student funding would be about \$867 more per student today, making the local option 1 mill unnecessary. We need our entire community to let our legislators know that this is simply unacceptable; that we will not stand for them balancing the budget and their own political priorities on the backs of our children any longer!

JENKINS

We'd like to shift gears now and take a look back over the past eight years and what we have accomplished together. Please take a look at the screens behind us and at the Annual Report at your tables for a glimpse of what the hard work of our students, teachers and principals, and staff has produced. These are just a few of the innumerable awards and accolades we have earned through focused work and our commitment to excellence. It is difficult to choose what to highlight from the list on the screens, but among the more noteworthy achievements are...

SUBLETTE

In 2014, we were named winner of the Broad Prize for urban education as the top urban district in America. The Broad Prize was the largest education prize in the country and it went to the urban district that demonstrated the largest overall student achievement gains while simultaneously reducing achievement gaps among low income students and students of color.

JENKINS

In 2014 we became the third public school district to win the Governor's Sterling Award in the 25-year history of the award, and in 2017 we became the only recipient, public or private, to win the award an unprecedented three times, The Governor's Sterling Award to my right, is an organizational assessment based upon the Sterling/Malcolm Baldrige criteria, the international standard for organizational performance and excellence. Competing for the award appealed to us because the award recognizes exemplary customer service, operational efficiency and sustained excellence - attributes we value as stewards of taxpayer dollars and as the largest governmental entity in Central Florida.

SUBLETTE

In 2016 we earned AdvancED national accreditation as a school district; a process that involves rigorous on-site external reviews of schools and school systems to ensure that all learners realize their full potential. Only five percent of the school districts in America are AdvanceED accredited, and we now belong to that elite group of districts willing to be examined, measured and assessed.

JENKINS

Since 2011 we have been named an Advance Placement Honor Roll district three times, an honor afforded to only three-to-four percent of the more than 14,000 school districts in America. The AP Honor Roll names those districts which have increased access to high rigor AP courses while maintaining or improving AP exam scores. Last year we had the largest growth in students taking AP exams in the entire state and ranked eighth in the country. More than one-third of all OCPS graduates scored a Level 3 or higher on at least one AP exam, the score needed for college credit. That number is higher than the highest performing state in the country, Massachusetts, and 50 percent higher than the national average.

SUBLETTE

We have recognized 642 Super Scholars since 2012, students receiving acceptance letters to America's Top 20 colleges and universities as measured by US News and World Report, more than all private schools in Orange County combined.

JENKINS

We began an initiative to build popular kindergarten-8th grade school –better know as K8s – as a geographic or population solution in select areas of the county. Since beginning the initiative, we have opened or are in the process of constructing these five new K-8s.

SUBLETTE

For more than 46 years the children of Parramore were shipped to eight different elementary schools and three different middle schools. In 2017 we brought them home and gave them their own neighborhood pre-K-8th grade school, the OCPS Academic Center for Excellence. Their school, our second “community” school, not only provides those children with a high-quality education, but it also provides their community with access to quality health care, social services, after school programs, and a daily Boys and Girls Club program and gymnasium. And thanks to the generosity

of Harris Rosen, the center includes free pre-school for two-to-three year-olds, and guarantees every child who attends the school and graduates from Jones High School a full, four-year college scholarship.(Recognize Kat)

JENKINS

We implemented mandatory recess at all OCPS elementary schools, before state law was passed requiring it, ensuring every child gets unstructured free play and an opportunity to rest their minds and recharge during the school day.

SUBLETTE

We started a districtwide College Fair. Not every high school gets the same level of love from college and university recruiters, so every spring we now take our top high school juniors by bus to the Amway Center for our own OCPS College Fair. Over the past three years the College Fair has grown to 64 colleges and universities, giving many students their first exposure to the college opportunities and financial aid available to them.

JENKINS

Not all students follow the college path. With that in mind, we are proud to have increased the number of secondary and postsecondary students enrolled in career and technical education courses by 75 percent, over the past five years at our very own Orange Technical College. Currently more than 51,000 students are enrolled in CTE courses. We are especially proud that of the fact that 12,575 industry certifications were earned this year, signifying student readiness to enter the workforce. That's a 73 percent increase in industry certifications since 2013.

SUBLETTE

We drafted and implemented a Philanthropic Strategic Plan with the Foundation for Orange County Public Schools. This plan gave direction to our community's support of public education. The Philanthropic Strategic Plan has raised more than \$29 million dollars in cash and commitments over the past five-and-a-half years to support literacy programs, enhanced access to technology, expand school nursing programs, and improve our STEM offerings.

JENKINS

In addition to the two renewals of the 1 mill referendum, in 2014 our community reauthorized the half-cent sales tax for the construction and renovation of our schools by a 64 percent vote of the public. Since passage of the original sales tax in 2002, our

district has opened 50 new schools and has renovated or replaced an additional 118 schools. Last year we were the 9th largest, out of the more than 14,000, school districts in the nation. Yes, you heard me right, 9th largest. But we have grown by more than 4,000 students so far this year, so we expect to soon become the 8th largest district in America and to be 7th largest by the end of the decade. To meet that growth, over the next five years we plan to open 14 new schools - 10 elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools. This year alone we have approximately \$403 million in budgeted school projects under construction, and before the sales tax sunsets in December 2025, we plan to open an additional 16 new schools, including two new high schools, and to replace or renovate another 17 schools. None of this would be possible without the half-cent sales tax - so thank you, and give yourself a round of applause.

SUBLETTE

Since 2010, we have added 18 new magnet programs, including programs in Agriscience, Laser Photonics, STEM Education, Entertainment Production and Management, and a Future Educators program to name just a few. I have long been a champion of zoneless magnet schools, schools where the entire student body is there for the purpose of the magnet, not just a portion of the student body. A zoneless magnet also draws all of its students from the entire county, not from a limited geographic zone. Think of the Fame school of television and film. I have championed zoneless magnet schools because if you examine the various lists of America's top public schools they are dominated by zoneless magnet programs. I am proud to say that we now have three zoneless magnet schools, the performing arts magnet program at Howard Middle School, the foreign language magnet program at Hillcrest Elementary, and the gifted magnet program at Orlando Gifted Academy, what was once Ferncreek Elementary School. As these schools soar I am confident future Boards will expand our zoneless magnet school offerings to meet the needs and desires of our families and students.

JENKINS

We have added dedicated College and Career Counselors at all 20 of our High Schools.

SUBLETTE

We opened up our Board meetings to long overdue public comment on non-agenda items, increasing public participation in the governance of Orange County Public Schools.

JENKINS

We adopted a sexual orientation and gender identity “LGBTQ” anti-discrimination policy and began providing same sex partner employee benefits.

SUBLETTE

Let us close out this select list of just a few of our accomplishments these past eight years with the number that we are proudest of, and that is that our traditional high school graduation rate has risen from 49 percent in 2000 to 94 percent this year! At every school dedication and every graduation ceremony I tell students that one of the keys to life when they are young is not to open doors, but to simply keep doors open. I tell them that we live in a country with great freedoms, a country where any job, career, or profession is possible through hard work, persistence, and perhaps most importantly, through an education. I tell them that by getting their education they keep the door open to virtually any job, profession or career they may wish to pursue, whether they aspire to be a doctor, an astronaut, a teacher, a lawyer or even, as my daughter Alex once wanted to be, a ribbon twirling cowgirl... Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams,” and when our students get their high school diploma they keep the beauty of their dreams alive.

JENKINS

All this has been achieved because we are a team and we have a singular vision: to be the top producer of successful students in the nation. Our mission is to lead students to success with the support and involvement of our parents and the community -- and you have given us that support – so thank you.

SUBLETTE

Achieving our vision begins with good governance, and I have been blessed with a terrific Board to work with these past eight years. Four other Board members are stepping down with me: Joie Cadle, Daryl Flynn, Nancy Robinson and Christine Moore, and I would like to give them an opportunity to share with you what they are proudest of during their tenure on the Board.

[Introduce Joie, Daryl, Nancy, Christine speak - 2 minutes each...]

SUBLETTE

We have come far under this Board, and you can tell that we are proud of what we have accomplished together. Our work is not done, however, and I leave this Chairmanship with some unfinished business that I hope subsequent administrations will finish.

One is a mission of justice. In 1951, the Hungerford Trust turned over 300 acres of land to Orange County Public Schools for the education of African-American students. The Trust was established in 1899 by Edward and Anna Hungerford in honor of their son, Dr. Robert Hungerford, who had died from malaria while treating black children suffering from malaria in Louisiana. Their largesse resulted in the creation of the Robert Hungerford Normal and Industrial School. However, by 1950, the school was no longer financially feasible and the school and the Hungerford Trust land were conveyed to OCPS.

We no longer have need of the property, and since 2002 the Town of Eatonville and the Hungerford Trust have been attempting to have the property conveyed to the Town of Eatonville so that it may be sold to a private party and the land be put on the tax rolls where it can generate badly needed revenue for Eatonville.

In 2014, Eatonville's Mayor Mount educated me on the history of the Hungerford Trust. I went to the Superintendent and Board Counsel, Woody Rodriguez, and asked them to help me make this happen during my tenure. I asked them to provide the legal and procurement resources needed to sell such a large parcel of property, resources not possessed by the small Town of Eatonville. And for four years we have been at it, only to face repeated setbacks in the bidding process. This is important work, and just work, and I would ask the incoming administration to see this through, if only because it is the right thing to do for the people of Eatonville and for the sake of historical justice.

High school start times. [sigh] Where do I start? There is no debate that high school starts too early in Orange County and that the national trend is to align high school start times with science. Every reputable body from the Center for Disease Control to the American Academy of Pediatrics supports the proven science that teenage brains are simply wired to go to bed later and rise later.

When we surveyed the issue a strong majority of parents and students supported a later start time for our high schools. Their number one choice was to start after 8 a.m. We have a plan that would provide for a uniform school day of 6 hours 45 minutes at all of our schools, would free up 30 minutes per day for mandatory recess at the elementary school level, would start every high school at 8 a.m. This plan would cost roughly \$7.7 million for the one-time cost of buying new buses and an annual cost of \$5.1 million to run those buses and would require union approval. We are on sound financial footing and this is doable, it is supported by families and students, and it is a national movement.

My last two pieces of unfinished business are perhaps the most doable, and two that I campaigned on eight years ago and ruefully regret not having accomplished, but not for any lack of effort. One is the creation of a university sponsored laboratory school here in Orange County similar to the P.K. Yonge School operated by the University of

Florida, the Florida State University School, the Florida Atlantic University High School and A.D. Henderson Schools, and the USF network of lab schools.

University lab schools are created to provide instruction for K-12 students and university students studying to be teachers, to support university research efforts, and to test educational reforms. We have a nationally recognized UCF College of Education right here in our backyard and we have a teacher shortage, yet we are one of the only communities with a State University Education College without a laboratory school. Gaining a university-operated laboratory school would be a feather in our cap, would be of tremendous benefit to our county's students, would provide us with a pipeline of teachers, and would be of mutual benefit to UCF. With our building program as robust as it is, and with us opening up 11 new schools over the next five years alone and with more to follow, I have long proposed that we partner with UCF on one of our new school facilities as the site of a laboratory school. This would take the cost of building a new facility out of the equation, would still relieve overcrowding, and would simultaneously give us the type of lab school that UF, FSU, FAU, and USF and their communities already enjoy.

My last item of unfinished business is the creation of a polytechnic high school. Not just any polytechnic high school, but a technical high school with rigorous admission criteria so as to give the school a high prestige value. A school in which all of its students graduate with both a high school degree and an Associate of Science degree or an industry certification, and who are ready to enter the workforce in high wage, highly skilled occupations. A polytechnic school with a robust job placement office and with mandatory, school supplied internships. This can be done, and no proposal of mine gets a more popular response when talked about on the stump by me. The demand is there, the community will is there, and with our building program we can accomplish this while simultaneously relieving overcrowding. We are one of the only large urban districts without a polytechnic high school, and the time has long passed for us to have one.

[Bill ad libs...]

Thank you for coming to this, my final State of the Schools. I am proud to live in a community where for most families the neighborhood public school is still the first school of choice. A community which has chosen to support public education at the ballot box and through your hard-earned tax dollars. A community which cares about providing a quality education for all children regardless of the color of their skin, the wealth of their parents, or the country of their origin. Thank you for allowing me to hold this seat for eight years, and for the blessings you have bestowed upon our community's children. God bless you, and have a wonderful morning.