

Orange County Public Schools 2019 State of the Schools Address

This address was delivered by School Board Chair Teresa Jacobs and Superintendent Barbara Jenkins at the DoubleTree by Hilton at the Entrance to Universal Orlando on Sept. 13, 2019.

The event was presented by Addition Financial in partnership with the Central Florida Hotel and Lodging Association. Featured sponsors included: Advent Health, CORE Construction; EMCOR Services, Orlando Health, Premier Elevator Co., Inc., Spectrum Enterprise, University of Central Florida, Wells Fargo, Wharton-Smith, Inc., and Williams Company. Community sponsors included: BMS CAT, Boy Scouts of Central Florida, Duke Energy, Gilbane Building Company, Greater Orlando Builders Association, Heart of Florida United Way, Ripley's Believe It or Not!, Orlando Premium Outlets, University of Phoenix, and Valencia College Foundation.

Chair Jacobs was introduced by Rich Maladecki, President and CEO of CFHLA.

Jacobs:

Thank you, Rich, and thank you to the Central Florida Hotel & Lodging Association for your continued support of Orange County Public Schools.

Welcome everyone. I'm excited to be with you this morning at my first State of the Schools address. It warms my heart to see so many parents, community members and supporters here today.

Like you, I believe in the power of public education and my hope is we can energize more people to become involved. Not just by supporting our students. But by advocating for the funding we need to continue the amazing transformation that has taken place at OCPS in just the last 20 years. A transformation we're excited to share with you today, but before we get started, let me introduce a committed advocate for our children. She is a former Superintendent of the year for the State of Florida – as well as a finalist for the national title. And earlier this year, she was named the most powerful person in education by *Orlando* magazine.

While I'm excited about the great things happening at OCPS, Dr. Jenkins has earned the right to be more than just excited, she's earned the right to be proud. She has served as Superintendent for 7 years and prior to that she served as Deputy Superintendent. But for those who don't know, Dr. Jenkins first entered Orange

County Public Schools, not as a teacher – as you might expect – although her entire teaching career was here at OCPS, but she first entered OCPS as a first-grade student at Eccleston Elementary School.

Jenkins:

Good morning. I'm equally delighted to share some of our great accomplishments. But before I do that, let me say this – none of what we've accomplished would be possible without our dedicated staff of more than 25,000 employees who show up every day with a single goal – to better the lives of our students.

More than 14,000 of these team members are teachers who are on the front lines each day molding future generations.

To put into perspective how large that responsibility is, today OCPS is the eighth largest school district in the nation, serving nearly 212,000 students in 199 schools. And this year we're expecting to add 3,700 **MORE** students (which could potentially move us up to the 7th largest public-school district in the nation)! Bragging rights? Not so fast.

With growth comes challenges, the most obvious being the challenge of keeping up with the demand for new schools.

Jacobs:

Not only is our district one of the largest in the nation, it is also rich in diversity. Today, our students come from 165 countries and speak 157 languages and dialects. Our students range from academically gifted to those with severe disabilities. While some students come from affluent households, 69% of them qualify for free and reduced lunch, and more than 9,700 were homeless last year.

But don't jump to conclusions about any of our students, because we certainly don't. We have children from homeless families who are brilliant, just as we have children from affluent families with significant learning disabilities.

And to make sure that we didn't underestimate the potential of any of our students, in 2013, Dr. Jenkins directed Title 1 schools to begin testing all second graders to see if they qualify for Gifted programs. In 2017 she expanded that initiative to all schools.

Jenkins:

Universal screening prevents overlooking students that lack an advocate such as a teacher or parent and ensures that every student is evaluated.

In our work to lead students to success, here are some notable accomplishments we want to share with you this year:

- Last year, 102 students from 18 high schools earned their Associate degree from Valencia College along with their high school diploma through our dual-enrollment program. That's a 46% increase from the previous year.
- 110 of our graduates were accepted into U.S. service academies or the nation's top colleges and universities as ranked by *U.S. News and World Report*. We honor these "Super Scholars" at a special recognition event each spring.
- 19 seniors from nine high schools also were chosen as winners in the 2019 National Merit Scholarship Program. 16 others were semi-finalists and also won scholarship awards.
- But what we're most proud of is the increase in graduation rates. In 2000, our graduation rate was under 50%. We are extremely proud to report that for the 2017-18 school year, our overall graduation rate, which includes charters and alternative schools was 88.9% -- up 4.2 percentage points.
 - Among our 20 traditional high schools, those schools we have direct control over, we reached a record-high graduation rate of 96.1% -- 2.3 percentage points higher than the previous year.

Jacobs:

By any standard, such a dramatic rise in graduation is remarkable. But beyond the statistics, think about all those young people who didn't graduate in 2000. They're about 37 years old now and most have school-age children. Many of their children may be part of the 69% of our students on free and reduced lunches. How many challenges are their children facing because their parents weren't able to graduate in 2000?

Yet today, regardless of the challenges our students face, they have a much greater chance of having a brighter future not only because of the increase in graduation rates but because of the expanded pathways to success offered by our Career and Technical Education programs.

Jenkins:

Thanks to our record graduation rate and a focus on preparing students for college and career, Orange County Public Schools regained its "A" rating from the Florida Department of Education – one of only 24 districts out of the state's 67; and one of only three "A" districts among the state's seven large urban districts.

While a single-letter grade doesn't tell the whole story of our schools, we are pleased with the recognition, contributed to by all of our schools to earn the district's overall

letter grade. On our website you'll find comprehensive school report cards with more detailed looks at individual schools' performance.

Jacobs:

Before we move on, I want to take a moment to recognize the prior board members, Chairman Bill Sublette and members Nancy Robinson, Christine Moore; Joie Cadle and Daryl Flynn, as well as Dr. Gordon, Pam Gould and Linda Kobert whose leadership helped make that "A rating" a reality.

Another initiative that helped make that possible was the School Transformation Office established by Dr. Jenkins in 2013 to provide comprehensive support to "low performing" schools.

Since its inception it has served 30 Title I schools.

This past school year, the School Transformation Office served 5 "D" or "F" rated schools. Every one of them rose **TO** a letter grade of "C" or higher. By the end of the school year, there were no "F" rated schools in OCPS.

One example of success was Lake Weston Elementary which improved three letter grades from an "F" to a "B" in a single year.

It pleases me to see some of our excellent administrators and best teachers, many of whom volunteer to work in our most fragile schools, giving their all to ensure that every child succeeds.

Jacobs:

While our core business is educating young people, our highest priority is keeping them safe. We want to share what we can about our efforts to ensure the safety of our students and employees, but we also want to take this opportunity to urge you to share your concerns, whether they're site-specific concerns or concerns about potential threats. You can share those concerns with law enforcement and school administrators by using a new app called Fortify-Florida. You can learn about it on the front page of our district website or in the OCPS mobile app.

Jenkins:

For security reasons, we don't talk publicly about many of the safety measures we have in place, but we have made significant strides since the Sandy Hook Shootings in 2012 to harden our facilities and make them more secure and we've received excellent evaluations by third-party safety experts who've studied our plans.

Jacobs:

Just last month, OCPS held a two-day, full-scale active assailant exercise hosted by our Safety and Emergency Management team. The event included our District Police, law

enforcement officers from partner agencies, Orange County Sheriff's Office, Orange County Fire Rescue, district staff and school administrators.

Jenkins:

We've also met all the requirements set forth by the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act of 2018, including having a school resource officer at each school. And we've partnered with the Sandy Hook Promise Foundation to implement a program that positively engages students in identifying threats of violence while proactively supporting students who may be in crisis.

Jacobs:

Shout out to Sheriff Mina, District Chief Holmes and any other first responders so we can recognize your commitment and support.

Jacobs:

Just as we are highly focused on creating the safest physical environment, we are also working hard to create a safe emotional environment for all students, especially those facing a mental crisis or experiencing trauma.

Did you know that more than half of all young people have reported exposure to violence or abuse? And by the age of 16, more than 1/3 will have experienced a potentially traumatic event.

Because of this, OCPS is focusing on mental, social, emotional and behavioral health. We are also creating 24 Trauma Informed Schools focused on meeting the needs of the "whole student" by training teachers to identify students adversely affected by trauma and to respond in a more appropriate and effective way.

Jenkins:

We have also implemented additional direct counseling services for our students to assist with mental, social and emotional issues. All middle and high schools have a fulltime SAFE Coordinator and our 20 traditional high schools now also have a full-time social worker, working directly with students. And every elementary school has been allocated a full-time certified school counselor position.

Also, as part of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Mental health assistance program, all OCPS employees throughout the district are receiving training to assist with identifying students that may need mental health counseling.

As proud as we are of the work of our teachers and counselors, we know that parents play a crucial role in the lives of their children. And we also know parenting isn't easy. To help, we offer several parent support and engagement programs such as the Parent Academy. A newer effort involves our Parent Engagement Liaisons (PEL) which are in 67 elementary schools and 19 middle and high schools. Through workshops this

program fosters partnerships between the schools and families to support student achievement.

[Video]

Jenkins:

Would all the PEL coordinators in the audience please stand to be recognized for your hard work?

Jacobs:

While OCPS has accomplished a great deal since 2000, we've had our share of challenges, most of them -- funding related.

My comments, though, are not a reflection on our local delegation, most of whom are extremely supportive of public education and strong advocates for us in Tallahassee.

As one of the consistently fastest growing counties in the state, keeping pace with growth has not been easy. One of the primary sources of revenues districts rely on for capital projects like building new schools or renovating older ones is a local property tax. Prior to 2008, the millage rate for that tax was set at 2 mills. However, during the 2008 and 2009 legislative sessions, school districts were forced to reduce the rate to 1.5. That ½ mill reduction equates to a loss of \$½ billion for school construction and renovation in Orange County, alone.

Districts with declining enrollment like Miami-Dade, Broward, Pinellas, or even Duval, may not have seen a serious impact. But OCPS has added nearly three times more students over the last nine years than any other urban district in the State. So a decline in capital funding is a serious problem.

Jenkins:

In an effort to keep up with growth, OCPS has worked with the Orange County Board of County Commissioner to utilize every tool in the toolbox, and together, we've even created some new tools.

In 2004, when Chair Jacobs was a County Commissioner for the highest growth district, she proposed a charter amendment that was overwhelmingly approved by the voters. That charter amendment requires greater coordination between the county, cities and OCPS and also requires developers in areas where schools are overcrowded to pay a mitigation fee in addition to impact fees.

For today's students and parents concerned about portable classrooms, who may be asking -- can't we do better. Yes, we could, with more resources, like the ½ mill in local property taxes we lost access to. However, in spite of that loss, and in spite of an increase in enrollment of 22,000, we've still reduced portables by 50%.

Jacobs:

We're not where we want to be -- yet, but we are clearly heading in the right direction. That's why I want to share with you a concern about efforts to undermine our progress. For instance, this past legislative session, a bill was passed that threatens to further reduce the amount of local revenues we receive to keep up with growth. We're working with Orange County on a solution. But for us to continue our progress reducing portables, we need more money -- not less.

But the single greatest challenge we face is insufficient funding to pay our teachers and classified employees a wage which honors the value they provide to our students.

For years, Florida has been ranked among the lowest states in the nation for public education funding. Last year, the National Education Association ranked Florida 43rd.

For the last four years, the state has required OCPS and other districts to reduce the Required Local Effort millage rate. Those are property taxes that fund salaries and operations.

While we have still seen an increase in that revenue source, reducing the millage rate has cost the state \$4.3 billion over the last 4 years.

For OCPS, the estimated loss during those 4 years was about \$344 million... and for this year alone, the loss was approximately \$134 million. That's equivalent to an 11% across-the-board increase in salaries.

Jenkins:

While we have faced funding challenges at a state level. At a local level, we've been incredibly fortunate to have the support of the voters. In 2002 they approved a referendum for a ½ penny sales tax. The primary purpose of that tax was to renovate older schools, making them safer, healthier and providing all students the same high-quality learning environment. That sales tax was reapproved in 2014 and has allowed us to renovate or replace 124 schools.

In 2010, 2014 and 2018, the voters approved a special millage that supplements our operating budget. Without that additional revenue, we wouldn't have been able to offer any significant raises since 2010. Instead, we would have been forced to cut hundreds of teaching positions and valuable programs like arts, music and extracurricular activities.

And... we might not have been able to share with you this story of one of our own from Jones High.

[Video]

Jenkins:

I actually witnessed their performance at Carnegie Hall. Andrea Green is with us this morning. Would you please stand to be recognized?

Jacobs:

While I believe it's indisputable that more funding is needed for public education in Florida, that in no way relieves us of our responsibility to use every dollar we receive as efficiently and effectively as possible.

One way to measure efficiency is the "administrative cost per student." According to the most recent report issued by the Florida Department of Education, OCPS has the lowest administrative cost per student among the seven large urban school districts, and the sixth lowest of the 67 counties in the state.

And this coming year, working together with Dr. Jenkins, our Board will take a new approach to develop next year's budget, but more about that later.

Jenkins:

Earlier I mentioned the ½ penny sales tax which helped us renovate our older schools, but part of our promise to the citizens was to also bring our schools up to the same educational standard. We call it educational equity.

That's why we are proud to announce that more than 147,000 devices were distributed last month through our digital learning initiative. All middle and high school students have their own device, and this year we expanded into more of our elementary schools. Thanks to the support of our voters and the half-penny sales tax, we're on track to be fully 1-to-1 by 2021.

Jacobs:

With 5 new board members and a strategic plan that was developed 10 years ago, the Board decided to take a fresh look at that plan ...

... starting with changes to our Vision and Mission statements, to more accurately reflect who we are and where we are going. Our revised vision statement is *"To ensure every student has a promising and successful future."*

Jenkins:

We believe that each of our students can attain a level of success and OCPS can alter the path of a student's life for the better, regardless of the economic or social issues they might face.

But don't take my word for it, let's hear from one of our students, Kayla Martinez.

[Video]

Jenkins:

That was an example of the impact we can have on the life of every student... which brings us to our revised mission statement: *With the support of families and the community, we create exciting and successful pathways to lead our students to success.*

Jacobs:

We also know that to achieve our goals, our budget must be closely aligned with our strategic plan. To accomplish that, we will be using a new approach for developing next year's budget. That will require more time and involvement from the board but will also create more transparency for our 25,000 dedicated employees and the public.

Jenkins:

Now that you've had a look at what we've been working on, we want to hear from you. In the coming weeks, we will ask stakeholders for feedback about our revised strategic plan and whether there's anything missing that should be included.

Jacobs:

We'll also be looking for feedback on school start times...But first some background.

Science has shown that high school students' brains require more sleep and are wired to stay awake later, even if you force them to go to bed early. However, with our present rate of funding, moving high school start times back by, say an hour, would require significant changes to either elementary or middle school schedules, or both.

About 10 years ago, the school district swapped middle school and high school start times. The push back from parents was so overwhelming, that the next year, newly elected school board members reversed the decision.

While most board members see the value in starting high school later, we also recognize the impact these decisions have on all of our families and students.

That's why we're conducting a new community survey.

But I think it is important to note that we only face this dilemma because of insufficient transportation funding.

The state provides OCPS about \$31 million for transportation. The actual cost is closer to \$67 million, over twice that amount. If this were a fully funded mandate, OCPS

would have an additional \$36 million for transportation services and we could adjust high school start times without impacting elementary or middle school start times.

Jenkins:

Community support is so important to our core business. Last year, more than 58,000 ADDitions volunteers logged 1.7 million volunteer hours; and more than 2,800 business Partners in Education helped support our schools.

Jacobs:

Likewise, our faith-based initiative works with organizations to benefit our students. What began with only 40 partners in 2012 has increased to 203 institutions of faith today. That's a 400% increase.

Jenkins:

There's something else that we're excited to share with you. This year, Orange County Public Schools **turns 150 years old!** *(Pause for possible applause.)*

Our school district was founded four years after the end of the Civil War, on Dec. 11, 1869, with the appointment of three board members and our first superintendent – William A. Lovell. For anyone from the Apopka area, you may recognize that Lovell Elementary bears his name.

We couldn't let this milestone go unrecognized, so today we are kicking off a yearlong effort to celebrate our past, educate our community and reconnect with our alumni.

If you've driven by any of our schools this year, you might have noticed a commemorative 150th anniversary flag flying in front. It was my pleasure to raise one of the flags at Howard Middle School. Built in 1926 as Orlando High School, famous graduates such as Astronaut John Young, actor Buddy Ebsen, and Nobel Prize winner Marshall Nirenberg walked its halls.

Jacobs:

That is the kind of historical information we hope our community will find interesting, and we plan to share it on a new website launching today – 150.ocps.net. This site will be our repository of all kinds of content that we will generate over the course of the year. You'll be able to read about our history and even share your story or old photos with us.

Jenkins:

By a show of hands, who in the room are alumni of Orange County Public Schools? We hope every one of you will help us celebrate by posting a message on social media such as "I'm a proud graduate helping OCPS Celebrate 150 years! #OCPS150." That hashtag - OCPS150 is important to make sure we see your messages.

Jacobs:

Even if you're not alumni, you can still show your support with a message like "Congratulations to Orange County Public Schools for 150 years of leading students to success. #OCPS150."

On December 11, "Go Orange" with us and help us celebrate. Hopefully you will see some famous landmarks around town displaying their OCPS pride.

Jenkins:

We will culminate our 150th celebration with the induction of five more people into the OCPS Hall of Fame – three alumni, an educator and a community champion.

In fact, I am happy to announce this morning who our first inductee will be – and he's here – please join me in congratulating the well-known and esteemed 1968 Jones High graduate, former chief judge of the 9th circuit court -- Belvin Perry.

Save the date - March 28, for our Hall of Fame event at the Rosen Shingle Creek Resort.

Jenkins:

Before we close, I am excited to share the story of another of our exceptional teachers... Dr. Jeffery Redding the director of choral activities at West Orange High School was named the 2019 Music Educator of the Year by the Recording Academy and GRAMMY Museum.

[Video]

Jacobs:

We've shared a lot with you this morning and we hope that you walk away proud of the work your school district is doing;

... inspired by the efforts underway every day to change the lives of our children for the better;

... and with a renewed optimism in the future, knowing that dedicated teachers are helping all of our students succeed, some of whom are overcoming incredible odds;

... and a sense of urgency, because, if we are going to continue the momentum, we have gained over the last 20 years, we must recognize and appreciate the profound role our teachers play in the lives of our students, and the futures of our community and our nation.

I've talked a lot this morning about the funding challenges local school districts face, but don't worry I'm not going to ask anyone in this room to pull out their checkbook.

But everyone can do something to support Orange County Public Schools. Whether it's your time, talent, resources or your advocacy, we need your help to ensure and safeguard the next 150 years of leading students to success.

As chair of the Orange County School Board, I look forward to what we will accomplish together, and I hope we can continue to count on your support. Our future depends on it.