

# Orange County Public Schools 2013 State of the Schools Address

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*This address was delivered by School Board Chair Bill Sublette and Superintendent Barbara Jenkins at Oak Ridge High School on May 23, 2013. The event was sponsored by the Central Florida Chapter of Associated Builders and Contractors, Inc.; CFE Federal Credit Union; Central Florida Hotel and Lodging Association; Herff Jones; Orlando Regional Realtors Association; and Valencia College. Chairman Sublette was introduced by Rich Maladecki, President and CEO of CFHLA.*

**Sublette:** Common core. Digital texts. Virtual classes. Career path diplomas. High-tech work training. Community schools. K-8 schools. School choice.

For years you've heard of the coming evolution of American public education. An evolution, which will take us from the model of the past -- a general education, neighborhood based system of schools -- to a performance based, digitally delivered, highly competitive system of choice. That future is here. That future is now.

**Jenkins:** Orange County Public Schools intends to be at the forefront of that change. We recognize that in order to be the top producer of successful students in the nation -- which is our vision -- then we must steer our own path forward and not let the winds of change alter our course. We understand the wisdom of Mahatma Gandhi when he said, "The future depends on what you do today."

**Sublette:** Last year, the focus of the annual State of the Schools address was school choice and the need for public schools to compete for students. Today we will give you a glimpse of the future - focusing on changes in curriculum, technology, and facilities - and will share with you our plans for engaging our entire community as we transition to the schools of the future.

**Jenkins:** After 16 years of Sunshine State Standards and FCAT, we are transitioning to Common Core State Standards. Take a look at this video, which helps explain the standards.

## **[Pause for Video]**

PARCC assessments will replace FCAT by 2015. This represents a monumental shift, and we are working hard to prepare our teachers through intensive professional development. Common Core instruction has already started in grades K-1, and by the end of next year more than 12,000 OCPS teachers will have been trained. In the spring of 2015, the first English and Math Common Core examinations will be given.

**Sublette:** If you were to step outside, cross the plaza, and walk upstairs, you would find yourself standing in the Junior Achievement Academy for Leadership & Entrepreneurship.

The first of its kind in the nation, this new magnet school will teach leadership and entrepreneurial skills that will help our students be successful in America's free enterprise system. And every one of the 100 freshmen enrolled in the JA Academy has been assigned an iPad for the year.

Why? Because digital literacy is essential to on-line access to education, jobs, health care and government services. In fact, more than 80% of Fortune 500 companies require applicants to apply on-line.

**Jenkins:** Within three years, OCPS is required to use 50% of its instructional materials funding on digital instructional materials. In only **two** years, most standardized tests, including Common Core tests, must be taken by computer. And the Florida Department of Education has set a goal of one computer for every child within only five years.

OCPS is determined to lead the way in the state in this initiative. We intend to exceed the 50% benchmark set by the State and have 75% of our curriculum resources spent on digital curriculum by 2016.

We are rolling out a pilot program in the seven schools listed on the screen behind me. The pilot program will help determine how best to convert to digital instructional materials. Each of the seven schools will have a 1:1 ratio of devices to students. We will test different devices, four leading operating systems, and various content providers. Most importantly, we will be measuring the impact of the various platforms on student learning, college and career readiness, and student performance.

**Sublette:** Twelve years ago our graduation rate stood at 49%. This year our graduation rate stands at 86% at our 19 traditional high schools.

While we are proud of our graduation rate's dramatic rise, if only one student fails to graduate we have failed that student. Many students who drop out, do so simply because they don't see the value of staying in school, because they've decided college isn't for them. And while we have increased our career and technical education completion rate by 12 percentage points over the past two years to 86%, many students fail to take advantage of our CTE offerings.

**Jenkins:** Last month the Florida Legislature passed a law allowing for a career-ready diploma. Beginning next year, students can choose a career path that will allow them to waive mandatory Algebra II, Chemistry and Physics courses and take more career and technical offerings. They can also earn workplace learning credits. If students choose the career path and earn industry certification, they will receive a "merit" diploma. Those going to college can also earn a "scholar" diploma, if they complete the current graduation requirements.

We intend to work with local workforce boards, business and industry, and post-secondary institutions to improve and develop our career path options for our students through partnerships and workforce education opportunities. We believe this diploma option will help boost our graduation rate even higher!

**Sublette:** A shining example of this type of program is the Laser Photonics Academy at Wekiva High School. The academy, a partnership among OCPS, Valencia College, Northrop Grumman and L3 Communications, trains and certifies students in laser photonics.

When the Academy opened, there were 1,200 high-wage openings in the field nationwide, and just 212 students in the country graduating with Associate degrees in laser photonics. Northrop Grumman was spending thousands of dollars traveling the country in search of qualified graduates in the field.

We recently graduated our second class from the program and our Laser Photonics Academy is now a national model. Its very first graduate, Seth Spicer, accepted a laser photonics position directly out of high school with L3 Communications, underscoring how relevant the academy is to producing homegrown employees for local industry.

Two other recent academy graduates are with us here today, Emily Maddox and Nick DiRocco. Emily and Nick earned their Associate degrees from Valencia 26 days before they graduated from high school. Both intend to pursue four-year engineering degrees. Nick even won a \$10,000 scholarship from Northrop Grumman. Emily and Nick, please stand and let us recognize you.

We are excited that this program will grow next year as the Academy branches out into robotics.

This is our model for the future of technical education!

**Jenkins:** The Broad Prize for Urban Education is awarded each year to a large school district that demonstrates the greatest overall student achievement improvement, while reducing achievement gaps for low income and minority students. It is the gold standard of excellence for urban districts in America.

Merely being nominated as a Broad finalist, signifies that a large urban district is among the elite districts in the nation. Recently, we were one of only two districts in the country to receive an in-depth diagnostic site visit from a Broad Foundation team. It found that we were on track in 19 of 24 measures of teaching and learning, leadership, and organizational structure, with only five areas of concern.

The Broad Prize is important to us not just for the prestige it brings, but because an important criteria for winning the award is narrowing the minority achievement gap. In Orange County, Hispanic student reading scores trail whites by 24 percentage points, and black student scores trail by 34 points. All children deserve a high quality education, and for that reason, I have established a Minority Achievement Office, for the sole purpose of narrowing our gaps.

**Sublette:** So much attention, justifiably so, is paid by the media and the public to our high need populations, whether students with disabilities, or those coming from high poverty households. However, if OCPS is to reach the heights we aspire to, our schools must be viewed as institutions where our most gifted students can thrive and gain admission to America's most elite institutions of higher learning.

This begins by identifying at an early age, those students who are gifted. To do this, the Superintendent has instituted universal gifted screening for *all* second graders at 65 Title I schools, not just those students identified by their teachers as possibly gifted. Eventually, as funds become available, we hope to expand universal screening for gifted to second graders at *all* 126 Orange County elementary schools.

**Jenkins:** For many of us, taking the PSAT was a rite of passage from high school into college. A way to gauge how we would perform on the SAT. A practice test if you will.

The PSAT can also be used as an accurate diagnostic test of potential, including the ability to succeed in college. A way of identifying those students who are capable but were never pushed or identified as gifted.

We now administer the PSAT to *every* 9<sup>th</sup> grader in Orange County Public Schools. We use those PSAT scores to push more students into high rigor honors, AP, and International Baccalaureate course work, so their future pathways are expanded.

**Sublette:** Last year the Board started its *Super Scholars* recognition program. The program recognizes students who gain admission into America's Top 20 Universities, Liberal Arts colleges, military academies or World Universities as ranked by US News and World Report.

We started *Super Scholars* to let parents of talented and gifted students know that their son or daughter can gain admittance into the world's elite universities, coming from an Orange County Public School, and to market the high rigor of an Orange County public education. This year 90 graduates gained admission to one of these elite schools. In fact, OCPS graduates are headed to 19 of the top 20 universities in America. Take a look at this video by super scholars from last year.

### **[Pause for Video]**

We want to thank WFTV/Channel 9 for partnering with us in our efforts to promote *Super Scholars*. WFTV is airing a 30-minute special on our OCPS *Super Scholars* June 26.

**Jenkins:** You've heard that our vision is to be the *top* producer of successful students in the nation. Along with our 86% graduation rate, we measure our success by not having any D or F schools.

Even with new, higher FCAT cut scores imposed midway through the year, I am proud to share with you that 77% of our 184 schools earned an A or B grade this year. However, because of those new cut scores, we had 15 D schools and one F school.

We are not happy with the number of D schools, and believe even one F school, is one too many. Even though we've improved from the 10 F schools we had 10 years ago, we will not be satisfied until all our schools are high performing.

**Sublette:** We recognize in our Mission Statement that we cannot achieve our vision of being the Top Producer of Successful Students in the Nation without the support and involvement of our families and our community. This year we have unveiled a number of major initiatives designed to enhance our community engagement.

First and foremost, is our Philanthropic Strategic Plan. We live in a community that has prospered, through making the dreams of children from all over the world come true. All too often, though, the dreams of our own children are shattered by poverty and adversity.

The conduit for the sustained community support needed to take OCPS to the mountaintop will be its Philanthropic Strategic Plan. You have on your chair an overview of the plan. The purpose of the Plan is to ensure that EVERY child in Orange County Public Schools, regardless of their circumstances, has the tools needed to realize their potential.

The eight initiatives we've chosen to pursue were culled from more than two dozen submitted. Each has the potential to have the widest possible impact on improving student success in OCPS. They are, first, expanding the Tangelo Park full day pre-kindergarten model. Second, ensuring a licensed nurse is available in every school. Third, providing literacy tutoring for at-risk students. Fourth, expanding the successful Read2Succeed and Middle School Morning Book Club program. Fifth, providing K-12 access to STEM programs. Sixth, bridging the digital divide for high poverty students. Seventh, expanding the proven City Year model, and, eighth, building a network of suspension centers so kids aren't on the street while serving an out of school suspension.

We know that if we can fund these eight initiatives we will improve student performance and provide a hopeful future for many of our students. Just listen to the difference tutoring has made in one young woman's life.

**[Pause for Video]**

With your help we will build a new partnership of philanthropists and companies interested in investing in public education – the Orange Educational Partnership – which will work to implement our community's vision for Orange County Public Schools.

**Jenkins:** One of our goals is sustained community engagement. It is for this reason that we have launched our Customer Service initiative.

Our customer service initiative seeks to improve upon the experience the public and parents have when interacting with Orange County Public Schools. In our latest climate survey, 87% of parents were happy with the quality of instruction their children received. Only 6% were unhappy.

We believe we can always improve. In fact, the board has asked me to pursue the Governor's Sterling Sustained Excellence Award. The Governor's Sterling Award recognizes performance excellence by examining an institution's customer service and value. We are busy preparing to

apply for the Sterling Award this fall, and we hope to become *only the third public school district* in the 21-year history of the award to win it!

In another effort towards our goal of sustained community engagement, we have begun encouraging churches, synagogues, mosques, and all faith-based organizations to adopt schools, so that we can harness the power of volunteerism and servant leadership to benefit our students. Since we began, we have doubled the number of partnerships, which help impact student achievement in numerous of ways.

**Sublette:** Two wonderful models of community engagement made their debuts this year - City Year and the Evans Community School.

City Year is an AmeriCorp program, founded in 1988, and made possible in Orange County by the donors on the screen behind me. It partners with public schools to provide full-time targeted intervention for students at risk of dropping out. Its team of young AmeriCorps leaders, support students by focusing on attendance, behavior, and course performance through in-class tutoring, mentoring, and after school programs that keep kids in school and on track to graduate.

For over a year, City Year mentors have been working with the students at Oak Ridge High School. This year they expanded to include Evans High School and Walker, Memorial and Meadowbrook middle schools.

You may have noticed our City Year corp members here today. They are the young men and women in the distinctive red jackets, which they wear each and every day. Stand up and wave guys. City Year mentors, are you ready to make a difference? **[Response...]** Yes, they're young and enthusiastic! That's what makes City Year so special, they recruit recent college graduates and current college students to act as near peer mentors from similar backgrounds that our students can relate to.

We've already seen tremendous results. In fact, 84% of the students served have increased or maintained a high attendance rate.

Don't take it from me, however, listen to the difference City Year has made in one young man's life.

**[Pause for Video].**

Solomon is with us today. Solomon stand up and let us recognize you and your determination. You will be successful, I can assure you...

**Jenkins:** The first of its kind in Florida Evans Community School is much more than a place for students to attend class. It has become known as the jewel of the Pine Hills community. Evans provides after school activities, health care services, counseling, tutoring, mentoring, character development, adult education, and community engagement programs and services to help students, parents and local citizens turn their dreams into reality.

Open six days a week throughout the year, the Evans Community School opens early and closes late, so students and community members have more opportunities to participate in their children's education, and to improve the well-being and future of their families.

With the help of our partners on the screen behind me, we hope to grow, and eventually, expand the community school model to other high-need schools and communities.

**Sublette:** It is no accident that we are delivering our annual State of the Schools presentation here at Oak Ridge High School today. We chose this venue to show you what a rebuilt, state of the art, frugal, yet functional school looks like. We also wanted to talk today about the future of our building program, some exciting opportunities we have, and some challenges we face.

**Jenkins:** Recently the Board agreed to potentially build five new K-8 schools, or kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade schools.

A growing body of research shows the K-8 model is correlated to higher student achievement, higher attendance, and lower student discipline levels. We already have three K-8 schools in Orange County: Blankner, Windy Ridge and Arbor Ridge, and have seen high academic achievement at all three schools.

I cannot emphasize enough the fact that the two scenarios for adding K-8 schools are limited to being a geographic solution or a small schools solution. We do not intend to convert schools designed and built as elementary schools to K-8's because it is neither economical, nor practical.

Also, our research has shown that the optimal size of a K-8 is 900 to 1,200 students. Anything larger, and we need to build a traditional middle school. Anything smaller, and we cannot justify the operating costs.

**Sublette:** The first K-8 to be built, one already in design and scheduled for completion in 2016, is in the Wedgefield community in southeast Orange County. It is a geographic solution intended to meet the need for a population relief school in that area.

The next K-8 will be in the Parramore area. Mrs. Gordon and I are particularly excited about this school. For more than 40 years, OCPS operated under a desegregation order. One effect of the order was that the children of Parramore were bused to nine different elementary schools as shown on the screen behind us. We call these island zones, because they created virtual "islands" of minority students separated by miles from their neighborhoods.

In 2010 the federal court oversight ended. Now we can bring these children home. We intend to build them a new, state of the art K-8 school within walking distance of their neighborhoods. We also have a community partner that has expressed interest in donating \$2.5 million to build a joint use facility so we can offer academic, athletic, and cultural after school programs. This school could potentially become another community school, like Evans.

The other three K-8's proposed, are small school solutions designed to address three inner city schools which will be left with populations under 300 students, one under 200 students. Those

proposed K-8's are on the screen behind us and are: a consolidation of old Audubon Park and Fern Creek Elementary Schools at the old Audubon Park site; a consolidation of Pine Castle and Pershing Elementary Schools at the Pershing site; and a consolidation of Lake Como and Kaley Elementary Schools at the Lake Como site.

**Jenkins:** On December 14<sup>th</sup> a national tragedy occurred. Twenty young children, and six adults were senselessly murdered at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, by a mentally ill young man. The tragedy shook our nation as no other tragedy has since 9/11.

We want to thank our local law enforcement partners and Orange County for helping OCPS reassure our parents and community that their children were safe. We would also like to thank Mayor Jacobs, and the County Commission, for funding additional deputies at our schools. Mayor Jacobs could not be here this morning, but we are joined by her Chief of Staff, Graciela Noriega Jacoby, as her representative. Graciela, can you please stand and allow us to recognize you.

We have recently completed a technical review of our school security. The review team consisted of representatives from Orange County Emergency Operations, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, the Orange County Sheriff's Office, the Orlando Police Department, and the Winter Park Police Department. The team conducted site visits at schools and completed an internal assessment of our Safety and Security Services department.

Because it was a confidential security assessment, I cannot share many details of their findings and recommendations with you. However, I can share with you that one consistent theme of the review, was the need to harden our schools from outside threats through perimeter security and enhancements to points of entry, electronic surveillance, and communications.

**Sublette:** Unfortunately, the money is simply not there for all the security enhancements we need, for the completion of our K-8 initiative, or for the rollout of digital curriculum to the entire county. This is because collections from the ½ cent sales tax the voters approved in 2002, expires in 2015. Without that funding, we lack the money to complete these important initiatives.

We also lack the funding to renovate 30 of our schools on the original sales tax list. These are schools that were in dire need of a renovation as far back as 2002 when the list was first compiled. Take a look behind me to see if your child's, or grandchild's school is amongst those that have been waiting for a renovation that may never happen.

There are many valid reasons why the list was not completed. Foremost among them, were the unanticipated cost of Florida's class size amendment, the dramatically increased cost of building materials during the boom years, and the dramatic decline in sales tax collections due to the Great Recession. Regardless of the reason, these schools are in desperate need of repair and reconstruction.

**Jenkins:** Unlike many surrounding counties, Orange County never stopped growing during the Great Recession. In fact, we've averaged 2,000 new students per year since the recession. Think about it. We've added the equivalent of more than two new elementary schools, or one entire

middle school, per year. Yet impact fees stopped flowing, as housing starts ground to a halt, and sales tax collections plummeted, thereby leaving us with limited revenue to meet the needs of our growing public school population, even as students flocked back to public schools as a result of the recession.

The screen behind me is where heavy growth is happening. The dark green patches represent areas where we project the largest student growth as a result of new development. Now let me show you those elementary schools projected to be more than 25% above their capacity in the next ten years. Now the middle schools. And now the high schools.

Allow me to put this in real world perspective. Ocoee Elementary today is 207% over capacity, Audubon Park Elementary 68% over capacity, Clarcona 136% and Pineloch 111% over capacity. Nor is the problem limited to elementary schools. Avalon Middle School is 66% over capacity and Cypress Creek High School 55%. All these schools have large numbers of portables on their playgrounds and playing fields.

Now let me show you where we have planned relief schools that we know are needed to relieve the severe crowding many of our schools are experiencing. Those in red are elementary schools, those in green middle schools, and those in blue high schools.

Many of those schools will never get built once the sales tax expires in two years. The real tragedy is that several schools have moved from low-performing to high-performing in close proximity to moving into their new facilities. While hard to quantify, the quality of the facility does correlate to the quality of the learning in the school.

**Sublette:** For all these reasons, the need to ensure the safety of our children, the need for us to produce digitally literate students for our workforce, the need for more K-8 schools, the need for us to finish our school renovation program, and the need to relieve school crowding, we will soon begin a conversation with the voters about extending the current ½ cent sales tax beyond 2014.

Allow me to close by saying this. All of us in this room are committed to helping make Orange County a truly great place to live, work, and raise our families. All of us in this room love our community. As community leaders, we all frequently talk about the need to take Orange County Public Schools to the next level. To take it from where we are now, a very good Florida school district, and to transform it into one of America's great public school systems. This is where it begins!

**Jenkins: Our future begins now.** God bless you and God bless our children.