

GASTON COUNTY SCHOOLS

Report to the Community



Looking Back < **MOVING FORWARD** >

2015



“We keep moving forward, opening new doors and doing new things because we’re curious and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths.” – Walt Disney



Gaston County Schools

REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

From the Superintendent ■ W. Jeffrey Booker

In our fast-paced lives, we are constantly looking forward to what is happening next and rarely take time to reflect on the past. Our past connects us to our future, and based on the words of English poet William Wordsworth, if we never stop to look back, we may miss the opportunities that lie ahead.

Wordsworth said: “Life is divided into three terms – that which was, which is, and which will be. Let us learn from the past to profit by the present, and from the present, to live better in the future.”

This publication, “Gaston County Schools: Report to the Community,” provides an overview of the achievements in our schools from the past year and gives us a glimpse of what’s in store for 2015. Through this annual report, we are able to reflect on our accomplishments and envision our success.

When I became Superintendent of Schools on January 1, 2014, I pledged to do everything possible to ensure that our children learn, grow and flourish. The progress we have made over the past year to offer more classroom resources, increase the use of instructional technology, enhance communication, and provide a safe learning environment makes me extremely proud.

However, we must continue our diligent efforts to move Gaston County Schools forward. Working together with a renewed commitment from parents, school employees and community, we will be able to give our children more opportunities during the 2015-2016 school year.



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About this Publication

“Gaston County Schools: Report to the Community” is produced by the Gaston County Schools Communications Department. The publication is designed to provide information about Gaston County’s public school system and highlight our success over the past year.

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Board of Education **VISION, MISSION and GOALS**

In May 2014, the Board of Education approved the strategic plan for Gaston County Schools. Students, teachers, parents, school administrators, community leaders and others participated in the process to develop the strategic plan, which outlines our guiding principles for the next five years.



> **VISION**

The vision of Gaston County Schools is to inspire success and a lifetime of learning.

> **MISSION STATEMENT**

Through outstanding employees and community partners, Gaston County Schools provides innovative educational opportunities for all students in a safe and nurturing learning environment.

> **WE BELIEVE IN**

Diversity ■ Innovation ■ Collaboration ■ Excellence ■ Safety

> **OUR GOALS**

Every student will graduate prepared for post-secondary opportunities.

Every member of our diverse student population has the opportunity for individualized instruction.

Every employee is capable and committed to the education of the whole child.

Every school has up-to-date technology to support teaching and learning.

Every student has the opportunity to learn in a safe school environment.

Gaston County **BOARD OF EDUCATION**

The nine members of the Gaston County Board of Education are dedicated to educating all children. They are responsible for establishing policies and guidelines for school operations.



Kenneth R. Lutz, Jr., Chairman
Crowders Mountain Township



Jeff Ramsey, Vice Chairman
At-Large Member



Dot Cherry
At-Large Member



Kevin Collier
Riverbend Township



Lee Dedmon
Gastonia Township



Dot Guthrie
Gastonia Township



Chris Howell
South Point Township



Catherine Roberts
Dallas Township



Mark Upchurch
Cherryville Township

Looking After



It is obvious that at the heart of every decision made by the Board of Education are the 32,000 children in our schools.

At A Glance

GASTON COUNTY SCHOOLS

Gaston County Schools is fully accredited by AdvancED and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools as a quality school system. Each school also is fully accredited.

- > Gaston County Schools is the **9th** largest public school district in North Carolina.
- > We have **31,979** students in pre-kindergarten through high school.
- > With more than **3,700** employees, we are one of the county's largest employers.
- > Our **56** neighborhood schools are a great source of community pride.



FACTS and FIGURES

For more information about Gaston County Schools, visit our website, www.gaston.k12.nc.us, click the 'About Us' menu tab, and then click 'Facts and Figures.'

SCHOOLS

Elementary/Primary Schools: 30
Intermediate Schools: 2
Middle Schools: 11
High Schools: 11
Special Needs School: 1
Alternative School: 1
Total Schools: 56

STUDENT ENROLLMENT

Grades K-5: 14,339
Grades 6-8: 7,198
Grades 9-12: 9,884
Total (K-12): 31,421
Pre-Kindergarten: 558
Total (Pre-Kindergarten - Grade 12): 31,979

STUDENT ETHNICITY

African American: 21.0%
American Indian: 0.2%
Asian: 1.5%
Caucasian: 62.4%
Hispanic: 10.9%
Multiracial: 3.9%
Pacific Islander/Hawaiian: 0.1%

Student ACHIEVEMENT

Gaston County Schools provides a comprehensive educational program with opportunities for students at all grade levels. Our challenging curriculum includes courses in all academic subjects, the fine arts, JROTC and Career and Technical Education. Additionally, numerous extracurricular activities are available to students.

ACADEMIC GROWTH

Gaston County students are making academic progress on the READY state testing and accountability program. For the 2013-2014 year, Gaston County had 78 percent of schools (39 of 50 schools) to meet or exceed academic growth – an increase from 63 percent the previous year.

83.5

is the high school graduation rate – and it's our highest rate ever. Since the state first reported the high school graduation rate in 2006, Gaston's rate has increased 15.4 points.

DROPOUT RATE

Gaston County Schools' dropout rate remains low, which means more students are staying in school. Our dropout rate for 2013-2014 is 1.84, which is lower than the state rate of 2.28. Over the past eight years, Gaston's dropout rate has decreased significantly from 6.29 to 1.84.

SAT SCORES

Gaston County Schools' average score on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) is 1423. Seven high schools saw an increase in their SAT score and Highland School of Technology ranks above the state and national averages.

Ready for Work



More than 600 students in the Career and Technical Education program earned silver, gold or platinum certification.



Photo Credit: John Clark, The Gaston Gazette

GOING TO JUILLIARD

Forestview High School student Taylor Hampton was accepted to attend the Juilliard School in New York City, which is considered the nation's most prominent school for music, dance and theater. An accomplished percussionist, she would like to someday teach music at the collegiate level and perform with a symphony.

ACADEMIC SCHOLARS

Gaston County Schools had students who were named Park Scholars at N.C. State University and Levine Scholars at UNC-Charlotte. They earned full-tuition scholarships that include academic, study abroad and extracurricular opportunities.

12 outstanding high school students were selected to attend the prestigious Governor's School of North Carolina.

Honoring the **CLASS OF 2014**



2,121

That's the number of graduates in 2014.

Ashbrook: 342	Highland: 133
Bessemer City: 128	Hunter Huss: 201
Cherryville: 158	North Gaston: 239
East Gaston: 327	South Point: 306
Forestview: 249	Warlick: 13
Gaston Early College: 13	Webb Street: 12

\$40 million

That's the amount of scholarship money awarded to seniors in the Class of 2014.

Academic:	More than \$31.5 million
Athletic:	More than \$7.1 million
Military:	More than \$877,000
Fine Arts:	More than \$530,000

MAKING US PROUD

There is no question that our graduates are learning, achieving and excelling like never before. The Class of 2014 included some of the most outstanding students in North Carolina. Our seniors earned honors and recognition in many areas, including academics, athletics, fine arts and extracurricular programs.

MONEY FOR COLLEGE

"Show us the money!" That's what students in the Class of 2014 were able to say about college scholarships. Our graduates earned more than 1,200 academic scholarships and more than 100 athletic scholarships from the most prestigious colleges and universities in the country.

Moving On >

Approximately 86 percent of the seniors in the Class of 2014 planned to attend college after graduation.

Congratulating our **CHAMPIONSHIP ATHLETES**

Athletics is a source of pride for our schools and the community. Our teams consistently capture county, regional and state championships. All athletic programs in Gaston County Schools emphasize academic success, student attendance and good sportsmanship.

WINNING WAYS

Gaston County Schools experienced another banner year for athletics in 2014. Our student-athletes captured state championships in the following sports:

- Golf
- Swimming and Diving
- Track and Field
- Wrestling

We also had a student named to the Shrine Bowl football team and a student who earned a state award for excellence in wrestling.

4,093

Students participate in middle school and high school athletics.

SCHOLAR ATHLETES

Two high school teams – Highland girls' soccer and South Point boys' cross country – earned the State Scholar-Athlete Team Award from the N.C. High School Athletic Association. The award recognizes the students for having the highest combined team grade point average in the state for a particular sport. Our high schools also had many Scholar Athletes, a distinction that honors individual students for excelling in athletics and academics.

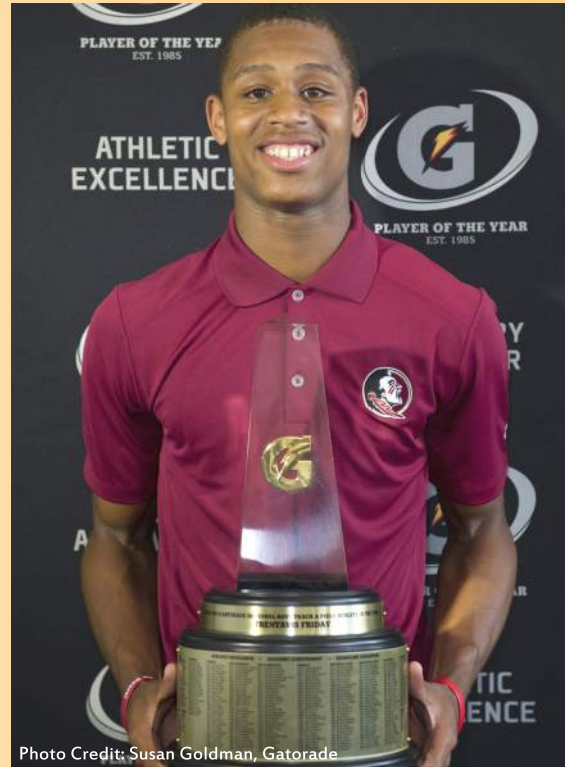


Photo Credit: Susan Goldman, Gatorade

NATIONAL ATTENTION

Cherryville High School's Trent Friday earned significant recognition for superior performance in track and field. He won eight state high school championships, set state and national records, was named the Gatorade National Track and Field Athlete of the Year for 2014, and received a scholarship to attend Florida State University.

IN TRAINING

Our II middle schools offer team sports in football, golf, softball, track, soccer, basketball, baseball, volleyball, wrestling and cheerleading for students in grades 7-8. Students involved in our competitive middle school program gain the knowledge and skills needed to become standout athletes in high school.

Good Sports >

Gaston County Schools had four high schools recognized by the state athletic association for outstanding sportsmanship.

Gaston County Schools YEAR IN REVIEW: 2014

LET'S TALK

The "Community Talks with the Superintendent" meetings took place at seven schools across Gaston County. The meetings gave citizens an opportunity to offer input about the future of our schools.



POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE

Gaston County Schools presented diplomas to more than 2,100 seniors in the Class of 2014.

TALKING EDUCATION

Gaston County Schools hosted the N.C. School Boards Association annual district meeting. Officials from school systems in the Charlotte region gathered to discuss education policy and other topics.

ALL CONNECTED

The school system achieved its goal of having wireless Internet access available on all 56 school campuses.



MESSAGE OF HOPE

Country singer Jimmy Wayne, a 1992 Bessemer City High School graduate, visited several schools to share his music and inspirational life story.

JANUARY FEBRUARY MARCH APRIL MAY JUNE JULY AUGUST SEPTEMBER OCTOBER NOVEMBER DECEMBER

WELCOME, MR. BOOKER

On January 1, W. Jeffrey Booker took the helm as Superintendent of Schools.



BUZZ WORDS

Students participated in the Gaston County Spelling Bee.

BOOKS GALORE

The Literacy Builds Health campaign provided 40,000 books to Gaston County Schools to enhance classroom libraries.

SCHOOL BELLS RING

The buses rolled and the school bells rang on Monday, August 25 to mark the first day of school for 2014-2015. Enrollment was up slightly with more than 31,500 students in grades K-12.

BEST IN REGION

Cherryville High School's Rosalind White was named the Southwest Region School Social Worker of the Year.

OUR SHINING STARS

The annual Star Teacher-Student Awards program gave the top high school students in the senior class an opportunity to honor the teachers who had the most significant influence on their lives.



A BRAND NEW CAR

Stevie Anderson, a custodian at Gardner Park Elementary, was chosen the Kia Outstanding Educator and won a new Kia Soul from Kia of Gastonia. The exciting recognition program honors school employees who are "unsung heroes."

Back in Time

5 Years Ago

2009 ■ South Point High School won the 3-AA football championship

10 Years Ago

2004 ■ Highland School of Technology was named a national model school

15 Years Ago

1999 ■ GCS was home to the State School Librarian of the Year

20 Years Ago

1994 ■ Brookside Elementary opened with 767 students

25 Years Ago

1989 ■ Spanish taught to GCS kindergarten, first grade students for the first time

Recognizing our **OUTSTANDING EMPLOYEES**

Gaston County Schools strives to employ the best qualified personnel in all work categories to ensure optimal learning opportunities for students. Our employees care about children and work diligently every day to make our schools among the best in the state.



EPITOME OF EXCELLENCE

The 2014-2015 Evening of Excellence award winners were Central Office Administrator of the Year Resa Hoyle, Principal of the Year Rebekah Duncan of Sadler Elementary, Teacher of the Year Karla Endemann of Chapel Grove Elementary, and Assistant Principal of the Year Gina Stiwalt of New Hope Elementary. The award recipients are pictured with Superintendent of Schools W. Jeffrey Booker and Board of Education chairman Kenneth Lutz.

In 2014, Gaston County Schools had teachers who were

- Appointed to the Governor's Teacher Network
- Selected for the Cato Excellence in Teaching Award
- Chosen for the Honeywell Educators @ Space Academy Program
- Named STAR Discovery Technology Educators
- Presented the N.C. Virtual Public School Teaching Award

1,904 Teachers are employed by Gaston County Schools.

192 Teachers began their career in education this year with Gaston County Schools.

99 Percent of our teachers are "highly qualified" in the subject area they teach.

40 Percent of all employees have an advanced degree and/or professional certification.

Giving Back >

Gaston County Schools employees contributed more than \$98,000 to the United Way's annual fundraising campaign.

NUTRITION and TRANSPORTATION

6

Elementary schools received a federal grant to serve more fresh vegetables and fruits and promote healthy food choices.

21

Schools are involved in a U.S. Department of Agriculture program that provides free breakfast and lunch meals for all students, thus ensuring that no child goes hungry.

60

Percent of students in Gaston County Schools receive free or reduced-price meals.



DELICIOUS and NUTRITIOUS

Many Gaston County school children look forward to eating in the cafeteria. That's why we strive to serve meals that are delicious and nutritious. Every day, 9,000 breakfast meals and 22,000 lunches are served, which equals more than 1.6 million breakfasts and 3.9 million lunches served annually.

TRANSPORTING OUR CHILDREN

Gaston County Schools operates one of the safest school bus fleets in North Carolina. Our Transportation Department has earned national recognition for its commitment to excellence and school bus safety.

Every day, our buses travel busy highways, city streets and country roads, transporting our most precious resource to and from school. The district also provides activity buses that are used for field trips and athletic events.

All buses are inspected and serviced regularly, and drivers complete a training program through the N.C. Division of Motor Vehicles. That's why our school buses are among the safest vehicles on the road.

16,000

Students transported daily

12,000

Miles traveled daily

2,300

Gallons of fuel used daily

206

School buses

47

Activity buses

Watchful Eye



All school buses are equipped with high-tech cameras and a GPS tracking system to ensure safety.

SAFETY and TECHNOLOGY

#2 of 10

Of the ten largest school districts in the state, Gaston County Schools has the second lowest school crime rate.

5 years

Gaston County's school crime rate has been significantly lower than the state rate for the past five years.

4.723

Gaston County's school crime rate for 2013-2014

6.790

North Carolina's school crime rate for 2013-2014

SAFETY: A TOP PRIORITY

Parents want their children to learn in an environment that is safe and secure. That's why we have invested in our comprehensive safe schools program.

In 2014, Gaston County Schools took numerous steps to further improve safety. The district installed new visitor check-in systems at all schools, updated surveillance camera equipment, fire alarms and Intercom systems, and piloted technology that provides more security at entrance doors.

Additionally, the school district works closely with local law enforcement agencies to ensure safe and orderly schools. Now, we have a police resource officer assigned to every school thanks to a state grant that makes it possible for us to place officers in elementary schools.

Efforts to enhance security are on-going because safety ranks as a top priority for Gaston County Schools.



ALL CONNECTED

In July, Gaston County Schools completed the installation of Wi-Fi at elementary schools. All schools now have wireless Internet access. With Wi-Fi available, the district implemented the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) program.

We live in a technology-driven world. That's why our classrooms have modern computing devices.

23,600

Devices including desktop and laptop computers, Chromebooks and tablets in Gaston County Schools

5,300

New computing devices added for the 2014-2015 school year

2,100

SMART Boards in our classrooms

1:1.33

Computer-to-student ratio

Techie Move



All schools were given two mobile carts of Chromebook computers for classroom use. Each cart holds 30 devices.

COMMUNICATION and FINANCE

Effective communication is key to our success. That's why we have focused on ways to enhance how we connect with our community.

NEW WEBSITE

In August, Gaston County Schools redesigned the district website and all school websites. The design is more modern and user-friendly and makes it possible to feature news, announcements, pictures and videos prominently.

MOBILE APP

To complement the new website, the school system launched a mobile app. The app makes it convenient to receive school information on a smartphone or mobile device.



COMMUNITY TALKS

The 'Community Talks with the Superintendent' meetings held in February and March gave Mr. Booker an opportunity to meet with and hear from students, parents, employees, civic leaders and other citizens about the future of our schools. More than 1,200 people attended the meetings held at seven schools across the county and submitted 1,600 comments and suggestions.

Our community expects us to be good stewards of funds for public school education. That's why we make every dollar count in Gaston County Schools.

What does it take to fund our schools?

Our 2014-2015 operating budget is \$231 million. Eighty percent of the budget pays salaries and benefits for more than 3,700 employees and 20 percent pays for services and materials/supplies.

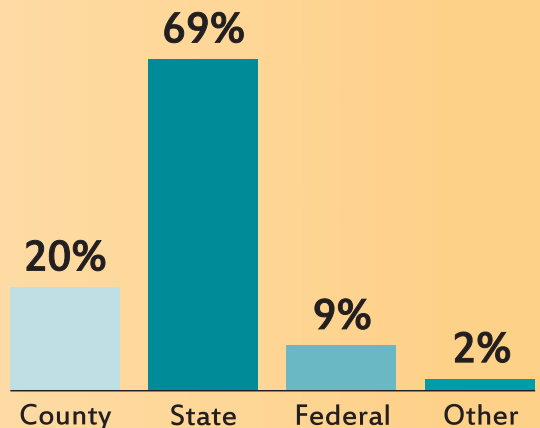
What is spent each day to educate children?

For about \$40 a day per child, our students receive quality instruction, specialized services, transportation, nutritious meals, access to technology and much more.

What happens to money from the N.C. lottery?

Gaston County uses its \$2.1 million from the lottery to pay for school construction bonds.

Sources for School Funds



For Energy >

Gaston County Schools' monthly utilities bill for electricity, water, sewer and natural gas averages \$600,000.

Every picture tells a story
OUR SCHOOLS: IN VIEW



SPIRIT OF GIVING

Our schools sponsored collection drives and fundraising efforts to help families in need during the holiday season.



SCIENCE FAIR SUPPORT

FMC Lithium contributed \$40,000 to the Gaston Science and Engineering Fair.



NATIONAL YEARBOOK HONOR

The Gaston Early College High School won the 2014 Jostens National Yearbook of Excellence Award. Only 19 schools in North Carolina received the recognition.



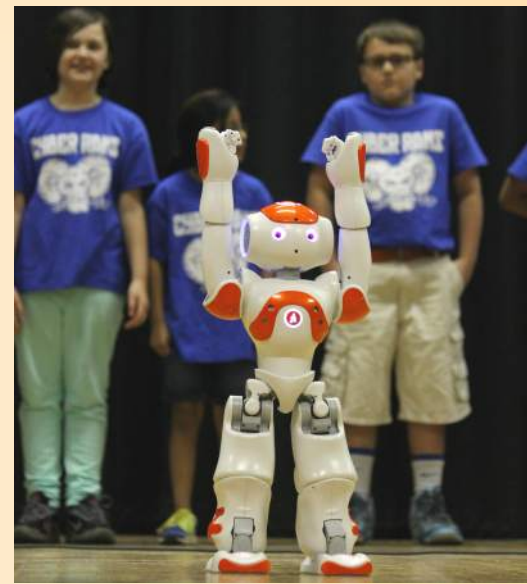
OUTSTANDING BANDS

Our high school marching bands earned numerous awards at various regional competitions for excellence in music.



BACK-TO-SCHOOL SPIRIT

Ten schools received recognition for showing the most spirit at the Back-To-School Convocation in August. The award-winning schools were Ashbrook, Catawba Heights, Chapel Grove, Hunter Huss, Mount Holly, Pleasant Ridge, Stanley, Tryon, Warlick and Woodhill.



INTEREST IN ROBOTICS

Robotics is a popular program in Gaston County Schools. Seven schools advanced to the regional robotics competition.



ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN AWARD

Stuart W. Cramer High School was named an outstanding example of school architecture and design by American School & University magazine.

Points of Pride



We had six schools to earn the Energy Star Certificate of Achievement for contributing to energy conservation.

We had a student to receive the N.C. English Teachers Association's Poet Laureate Award.

We had a high school moot court team to capture the Western Regional Championship.

We had a student to win the region's Congressional Art Award and have artwork on display at the U.S. Capitol.

We had students chosen to participate in national choral festivals held in New York and San Diego.



Gaston County Schools

WHAT'S AHEAD

We are looking forward to the 2015-2016 school year with enthusiasm and optimism. Here's a glimpse of what's ahead for our schools.

NEW SCHOOL OPTIONS

The Board of Education is moving forward with plans for new schools in Gaston County. The new school options include a new elementary school in west Gastonia, a new middle school in Stanley, a new elementary school magnet program, and a new Career and Technical Education high school. The new school options are a first step toward addressing school facility needs and future growth.

FOCUS ON ACADEMICS

In today's competitive global society, it is imperative for students to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful after graduation. We are committed to further strengthening our academic program and increasing student achievement.

TEACHER PAY

The Board of Education has identified more pay for teachers as the most significant funding priority for Gaston County Schools. While the budget remains tight, we are working on ways to improve the local supplement pay for teachers and other certified personnel.

100%

students giving 100 percent, we will have more regional, state and national winners in 2015-2016.

Last year, our students earned top recognition in music, theater arts, poetry, science and engineering, graphic design, technology, visual art, cheerleading, JROTC, robotics and many other academic, athletic and extracurricular areas. With our

MORE RESOURCES

Providing more resources for schools is important for student success. We plan to continue our efforts to enhance reading instruction for children in grades K-3 and upgrade instructional technology so students will have computing devices to aid in learning.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Community involvement makes a difference in our schools. We want to strengthen the partnerships we already have with businesses and community organizations and seek new partners to support our students and teachers and become involved in our schools.

Forward Together



We are on the threshold of great success. Working together, we will move Gaston County Schools forward.



“A great accomplishment shouldn’t be the end of the road, just the starting point for the next leap forward.” — Harvey Mackay



Photo Credit: John Clark, The Gaston Gazette

Looking Back < **MOVING FORWARD** >
2015



GASTON COUNTY SCHOOLS

Moving Forward > For All Children