



Chancellor's Address on the State of the DC Public Schools

REMARKS: *Going Further, Faster* September 30, 2014 H.D. Woodson Senior High School

Thank you Principal Slade and Aaron for that wonderful introduction. *Dedicated* and *ambitious* students like Aaron remind me that I have the best job in the city! Good evening, friends! I am thrilled to welcome you to this year's Chancellor's Address. I want to thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedules to be here, and extend a warm welcome to our friends joining us via webcast.

I am especially proud to deliver tonight's address from H.D. Woodson Senior High School. As Aaron mentioned, this year, the school kicked off a full-fledged STEM academy, with 120 tenth and eleventh grade students engaging in rigorous coursework in computer science, engineering design, integrated manufacturing, green engineering, and environmental science. They are developing critical thinking skills on topics from renewable energy to global issues, to robotics. In fact, just last year, a team of Woodson students tackled a project to make the nearby Marvin Gaye Park a safer community space. How did they do it? They devised a plan to harness energy from the sun through building solar panels that would generate power to light up the park at night. Their plan was so good that they were chosen out of 2,300 applications from schools ALL across the country to be one of the 15 finalists in Samsung's Solve for Tomorrow's STEM competition and they won \$35,000! And we're just getting started here at Woodson!!

You see, this is not some trendy thing to do. We are preparing our students for the future. Through these immersive experiences, students are applying what they're learning in the classroom to develop real world solutions. That what it's all about - preparing our students for success starting now, and continuing into college and INTO the workforce.

In last year's address I laid out a vision for DC Public Schools. We will become the best school system in the country, where everyone in this room would be proud to send their child to any school in this city. We're aiming for great schools, with a variety of engaging academic offerings, and nurturing cultures and climates. But most of all, we're 100% committed to ensuring the EVERY child attending a DCPS school is held to the same high standards, has the same rich experiences, and has equal access to the same level of learning resources- whether they live west of the park, east of the RIVER, or anywhere in the middle. I have great confidence that we are several steps closer to realizing this vision, and you will too, when you hear what's happening at DCPS.

Gone are the days when we were the lowest performing school district in the country. In fact, in an event just this past August that was broadcast all over the country, U.S. Secretary of the Education, Arne Duncan shared that when people ask him where to look for a model of where education is going well, DCPS is the first district that comes to his mind. Locally and nationally, Secretary Duncan has touted our recent successes as the fastest improving urban school district in the country.

Now, we all know that we are not yet where we want to be, with only half of our students reading and doing math proficiently, even though that's more than ever before. The most recent DC-CAS scores show that students made slight gains in math, and maintained growth from last year in reading. These results support what I said to you last year – we have made tremendous progress, and we still have a long way to go.

But I want to be clear, friends: We know what we need to do; and we have what it takes to get it done. This school year, we have set the bar even higher to build on students' success and accelerate their progress. We are moving more quickly this year to be on track to achieve our goals. To give a world-class education to every young person in this city, we must go faster and push farther, together. That's what's happening in DCPS this year.

On the first day of school, I visited several classrooms and saw what I can only describe as the best school opening in the 17 years I've been in this city. At my house, the excitement began even before school opened. Our third-grader's teacher, Ms. Smith, came to visit our home to discuss our expectations for Marcus. Not just my expectations, but our together. She also talked with him about his interests, and what was going to happen in their classroom this year. He was so psyched about the things she was describing, he was disappointed to learn that he couldn't go to Ms. Smith's classroom for another two weeks until school started.

This is the work of great partners like the Flamboyant Foundation. Through our unique partnership, families and teachers are empowered to build real relationships through home visits and by teachers helping parents support their students academically. In record numbers, our teachers stepped out of the comfort zones of their classrooms this summer and stepped into the homes of their students. The progress we have seen in classrooms using this model has been tremendous, and it confirmed that engaged families are essential to accelerating student learning.

And, my 8 year old wasn't the only one excited to get back to school.

This year, we opened with the highest enrollment on the first day of school in 5 years. Over 2,000 more students than last year entered our doors in August. And they are still coming! That's right, more families are choosing DCPS. And they are doing so because they see some of the amazing things that I saw during the first weeks of school and they want in!

- I saw first graders at J.O Wilson eagerly putting their early-writing skills in action by penning essays about their summer experiences. You heard that right, first graders writing pages upon pages of text on the first day of school! You heard that right. First graders writing pages upon pages on the first day of school.
- I saw students at Phelps Senior High driving an electric car through the halls that they built from scratch, demonstrating robots they designed to shoot hoops, and performing The Seven Stages of Man by Shakespeare – all on the first day of school!
- I saw seniors from the new Eastern Senior High School's donning crowns as they reviewed the new AP classes on their schedules and discussing the colleges they plan on attending once they graduate.
- I met some of our youngest scholars in Pre-K 3 at Raymond Education Campus as they confidently walked through the halls on their way to lunch with their new friends. They gave me fist bumps and high-fives when I asked if they love their new school.

Each of these moments, and so many more, capture the incredible learning environments and school pride that surrounds every student across this city.

From pre-K to Grade 12, let me tell you what I see when I walk into DCPS classrooms. I see engaged teachers, focused on helping all our students achieve at the highest levels. I see school leaders committed to doing whatever it takes to help our students succeed. I see support staff creating environments where students and their dreams are nurtured. And we're all seeing some new faces. Because we've expanded so many of our academic offerings, we have hired over 700 new teachers who join the outstanding cadre of DCPS educators working to ensure that our children have the best of the best.

You don't believe we have the best of the best? Let me tell you about Powell Elementary School. Principal Janece Docal started at Powell in 2009. At that time, the school's enrollment was in rapid decline and the community was unhappy with almost every aspect of the school. Principal Docal and her awesome team of educators stepped in and reached out to the community to transform the school. Let me tell you, that Powell team doesn't miss a beat, from student instruction to managing the school's modernization, and everything in between, they are on the front lines daily offering real solutions, teaming with each other and the community, advocating for students, and marshaling resources to continuously do more. That's the kind of quality we're working on at all our schools. Enrollment at Powell has tripled in four short years. And if we can do it in four years at Powell, we can do it across the city. Parents in the community now are proud to send their scholars to the school, and so are all the families on the long Powell waiting list.

This is just one example of the incredible talent at DCPS. I cannot overstate how fiercely our educators are working on behalf of our students. But the real action is in the classroom.....

If we're going to go further, faster, we have to do some things differently. So this year, there are some new things happening in DCPS classrooms.

- At Johnson Middle School, 6th and 7th grade students are preparing for college now by perfecting their note-taking skills, learning about colleges and what it takes to get there, and becoming stronger more organized scholars through the AVID program. At School Without Walls at Francis-Stevens, middle grade students are engaging in exciting enrichment activities like the school newspaper and math club, with new options every nine weeks. At Amidon-Bowen, students have more time for hands-on activities and more time for recess! How are they doing all of this? Through a longer school day. Twenty-five schools have answered the call to give the gift of more instructional time to their students by officially adopting an extended school day. By the end of the year these schools will have added 300 more hours to the school year. That's an additional month of learning time added to the calendar. The best part is students, teachers and parents have all expressed how much they enjoy this new time at school. That's what's happening in DCPS classrooms.
- Just a few years ago, Randle Highlands Elementary School had only five computers. Now, there are at least eight computers in every classroom, as the school fully integrates technology into traditional instruction thanks to the blended learning model. Students have a more personalized learning experience and access to top of the line educational technology. And teachers, like Alexander Brown, have important information that they can use in real time to better guide students' learning. Students are happy, students are engaged with the technology, and moving at their own pace. Teachers at Randle Highlands can be more effective. And the community has rallied around this new way of teaching. In fact, a Congresswoman from Washington State was so inspired after her visit that she drafted and introduced legislation to help more schools

around the country do what Randle Highlands is doing. And, Randle-Highlands is part of a blended learning feeder pattern, so the students will continue technology-based instruction as they progress through Kramer MS and Anacostia HS! To accelerate achievement across DCPS, we have doubled the number of schools with blended learning programs. That's what's happening in schools across DCPS!

- To go further, faster, we know we have to better help our middle grades students maximize their academic learning, and personal growth as they make the transition from elementary school to high school. Recognizing this, we've stepped up to support our middle school scholars this year like never before. We're providing students with extra support for their unique social and emotional needs by ensuring that middle grades schools have additional counselors, psychologists and support staff. We're ensuring equal access to a variety of subjects that enrich every part of a middle schooler's mind, including world language, music, art, and physical education. And we've infused almost \$20 million additional dollars to deliver to our families everywhere in this city the kind of middle grades education that all of our students deserve. That's what's happening in middle grades in DCPS this year.
- I know, I know. This all sounds very exciting but hey, let's be real. It takes a whole lot more to really get our young people jazzed about school. After all, school is more than just academics or technology—it's a second home. We want all students to feel like Aaron does about HD Woodson. We want them to LOVE their school. So, we've committed \$5 million to making schools more fun. From clubs and new extracurriculars, to the arts, more sports, and field trips, students will have more reasons than ever to love school and to love learning. We're adding competitive swimming to our athletics program. And, if there's any truth to the saying, "a well fed kid is a happy kid" then I'm pleased to announce that we have some pretty tasty new items for the cafeteria based on what students said they enjoy. We have some to sample at the Gallery Walk, so you can try it yourself! That's what's happening for DCPS students.
- Finally, if we're going to go further faster, we have to make better use of the incredible resources we have here in the nation's capital. A group of parents, teachers, and DCPS staff worked this summer to create five field trip opportunities aligned to our curriculum for every grade through the City As A Classroom Task Force. We also piloted DC Meets Washington this summer, a career program for our middle school students that exposes them to the high-wage, high-demand industries here in DC. For example, students visited the National African American History Museum construction site and learned about design and building principles from a local engineering firm. You could see how wide their eyes opened when they saw how the math and science they were learning at school can be applied to the world of hard hats and blueprints. They got an insider's view into new careers and they LOVED it. This is what's happening in DCPS schools and classrooms.

I could go on and on sharing the great things happening in DCPS schools and classrooms all over the city. But I want to get you to begin thinking about the next frontier. As many of you know, we have to think not only about what we're doing this year, but also plan for what will happen for years to come, if we are going to meet the goals of a Capital Commitment. You know that we've focused on building a great force of educators. You know that we've spent the last three years building a rigorous common core aligned curriculum. You know that we've been engaging students and families in innovative ways. So where are we headed next?

We have a lot more work to do on so many fronts, but perhaps the most important is ensuring equity for all of our students. As I mentioned earlier, we want to ensure that every student, everywhere in the city, has access to a world-class education. To do that, we are focusing on expanding equity in DCPS in three different ways.

First, we need to expand the equity of academic rigor. We already have a very strong common core aligned curriculum that more than 80% of our teachers are using. However, we see very different levels of implementation, which results in some teachers holding students to very high standards, while others are not. If we are going to ensure that ALL of our students are getting the very best, we have to deepen the curricular work and guarantee that every student is being pushed to their full potential through universal experiences and opportunities. You'll hear a lot more about that in the coming months.

Second, we need to expand equity for our young men and boys of color. Black and Latino males account for 43% percent of the students in our school district. Even though our proficiency rates have climbed, there is still a considerable gap in achievement between these students and their peers. The academic performance of our young men of color is simply not high enough and not rising fast enough.

That's why we've enlisted the help of Dr. Robert Simmons, a nationally recognized expert on urban education, to establish the Office of Innovation and Research with a laser like focus on addressing this men and boys of color issue. In the coming weeks, he will announce our strategy to improve, expand, and transform the educational experiences of our young men of color. Stay tuned.

Finally, we have to expand equity for our high school students. As many of you already know, we have revamped and improved academic and enrichment offerings at our elementary and middle grades schools. However, as our young people graduate from high school, they will face a new set of rules for success. Putting on a suit and heading to the interview with a basic resume and a firm handshake will yield no results, no call back, no job.

Even before graduating from high school, students will need a portfolio of work that showcases mastery of core subjects, experience with solving real world problems, deep involvement in extra-curricular activities, and a commitment to community service. You've heard the stories of the 17-year that has started her own nonprofit, or conducted research that has solved a medical mystery, or won three gold Olympic medals. Today, these stories are extraordinary exceptions. Tomorrow, these stories will be the norm for our students and for high school students across the globe.

Preparing our children for this future requires us to completely re-imagine high school. The old model is not going to cut it anymore. We have laid the groundwork necessary to reengineer the educational infrastructure of our high schools to meet the high expectations of the future workforce. From moving to a competency-based approach to graduating students ready for college to creating real-world opportunities that equip our students for careers, we have to do things differently in our high schools.

And we've already started. This school year, every high school features intensive career programming to ensure students graduate with the most basic requirements anyone, anywhere will need to secure and maintain a high-demand, high, wage job -- expertise, experience, resourcefulness, and resilience. Alongside this new initiative, six high schools launched career academies, made possible through a \$2.8 million commitment from Mayor Gray.

Did you know that there are approximately 30,000 new jobs in this city that are created every year, but

only 5% are filled by District residents? Our students deserve the opportunity to fill these jobs. The majority of these roles are within the fields of engineering, information technology, and hospitality. Our newly launched career academies, modeled from the National Academy Foundation, are focused on giving students experience and skills in these areas. In addition to intense career academics with university partners, these students are mentored by industry leaders, and they participate in internships with top companies.

Just this past summer, four McKinley Tech IT students interned with Microsoft. They developed a business plan for a new computer game. Microsoft was so impressed with their plan that through a partnership with 1776, a local IT Incubator they are giving these students in-kind software, work space, and mentorship to create their own start-up company.

A senior at Wilson High School this year who participated in the school's career program traveled to sunny California for a paid internship at 3D Robotics this summer. His project at 3D Robotics involved working on a drone that has the ability to follow you, and he worked on developing tracking software for the drone. Scary I know, but it's where we're going.

This is the work of our career programming. We're bringing our students out-of-the box, immersive experiences that are life changing - igniting a passion to pursue a previously unfamiliar career path. Along with industry certifications, students are guaranteed to graduate from high school with real skills. But, as I said, we have to do more to expand equity for our high school students.

To move further faster with our high schoolers, we are now offering Advanced Placement courses at all of our high schools. Every single one! Collectively, our high schools are offering 150 AP classes in a variety of subjects, including AP Chinese, AP Environmental Science, and AP Studio Art and Drawing. Demand for these courses is up. AP enrollment is at an all-time high. I couldn't be prouder that so many of our students are yearning to take their academics to the next level. But we still have more to do. So, we will spend the next few years redesigning, redefining, and recreating the high school experience for our young people, and we will make sure that you, our families and community members, are doing this work WITH us.

Our course is a difficult one, whose standards are rising every day. For the past three years, our student's learning has been guided by the Common Core State Standards. Starting from the earliest grades, these challenging standards are designed to prepare all students for success in college, career, and life. This spring, the DC-CAS will be replaced with the PARCC. This test will match what students are actually learning in school and give them a better opportunity to demonstrate critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills. But this test will also be a big change from the types of tests students are familiar with taking. No more paper-based bubble tests. Students will take the entire test on the computer and the questions will require written and interactive responses, many of them have more than one right answer. They'll have to draw a line on a bar graph or manipulate objects on the screen. We are prepared to help students do their best but, we know we have many challenges to overcome.

There are no easy answers. But I am reminded that all of us have to work together to end these disparities, and to build a system for our city that is worthy of every single one of the brilliant young minds that inhabit it. When we are successful, the results of our work will uplift all students.

Before we close, I'd be remiss if I didn't address the boundaries and feeders process that the Deputy Mayor for Education undertook this year on our behalf. I mention it because I think it's a great example

of what happens when we work together to solve the vexing educational problems we face. The Deputy Mayor for Education and the city-wide task force worked exhaustively to collect and listen to every single piece of feedback from all over the city from numerous meetings this past spring. They put aside parochial interests and developed a strategy to improve educational access all across the city. The recommendations were never going to be perfect, but I believe they are thoughtful recommendations and they will help us to move ahead. We are working every day to improve the quality of all of our schools, but these new policies afford us stability in our school population that will enable us to continue our making progress toward a world-class education for all students.

I want to close by sharing with you a little about my day today. I spent this morning at the Cooper-Hewitt Teen Design Fair, where 300 of our middle and high school students got to meet with some of the country's most celebrated designers. They met at small tables, a few students to each designer, kind of like speed dating, and after the expert shared what they do, our students had the chance to ask questions. Afterwards, a small group of students and I joined Mrs. Obama for lunch at the White House to celebrate the 2014 National Design Awards. This is our fourth year participating, but this year was the best for three reasons:

First, our kids rock. That's not news to most of us, but if I had a dollar for every designer who shared with me how thoughtful, ambitious, inquisitive, prepared, and on and on our students were, I'd be rich. They represented our city well (even better than the kids from NY!) Even though we aren't where we yet need to be, the young people in front of us are rising to the expectations we set. And let me tell you, these students today, just like their peers all over the city, are on the rise. We adults just need to work faster to provide more equitable access to rigorous experiences that prepare them for college and careers.

Second reason why today was the best? Narciso Rodriguez. Ladies you know who Narciso Rodriguez is, right? He is the hottest fashion designer around. In fact, Mrs. Obama was wearing a stunning purple dress he designed at lunch today. He was the one everyone wanted to touch. And his thrilling career, from nobody to everything, reminded me how important it is for us to expand equity for our young men of color. Narciso is the son of Cuban immigrants and he grew up in Newark, New Jersey, a city with similar challenges to ours. I was reminded that if we figure out how to equip our young men for success, how to affirm their place in the world, and support them as they dream of careers that others never imagined, we can grow a city full of young men who will lead in whatever fields they choose.

Third, in order to pull off the kind of real world experience that the Teen Design Fair offers for our students, we could not do it alone. If our high school students are going to be ready to lead the world, we have to work together to expand their options. Different people from all over the country and our city worked together to give our kids the most pre-eminent design opportunity today. From partners like the Cooper-Hewitt museum in New York, and Target, who sponsored the event, to our teachers and principals who got the students prepared for and to the event, to parents and families who support our students as they aim for careers that many of us have never heard of, we all worked together to give our students the very best.

Our mantra at DCPS is not "I can do this." It's not "You can do this." Our mantra is "We can do this." It's a collective, it's a community, it's a village. There is an African proverb that says, "If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together." Let's go together and go farther than we ever have before, for our children today, and for others to come. Thank you.