



THIS WEEK'S SPEAKER

June 8, 2021

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Earnest Winston, Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Superintendent

By Elly Clary

Without mentioning a high-dollar dispute about lagging academic achievement for students of color, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools superintendent emphasized a commitment to close the learning gap.

“Our schools need to do better in helping students achieve success,” Superintendent Earnest Winston told Charlotte Rotarians. “We are committed to closing the achievement gap. I will not stop until we have made progress.”

Mecklenburg County commissioners voted to withhold \$56 million – roughly 10 percent of the CMS request for \$551 million – until system leaders release a detailed plan for boosting academics among Black and Brown students. The dispute is playing out in closed-door mediation sessions. Presiding is [Mac McCarley](#), a Charlotte Rotarian and former Charlotte city attorney.

Answering a question about how CMS measures success, Winston said: “For every student we hand a diploma, it is important that diploma means something.” It must signify preparation for life and a career, he said, and to be a productive citizen.

Winston has been with CMS since 2004 when he signed on as an English teacher at Vance High School. He moved into administration and ascended steadily, ultimately being appointed superintendent in August 2019.

Introducing Winston, [Cheryl Banks](#) said he told her the most important thing about him is that he has two daughters enrolled in CMS.

In his Chicago blue-collar family, Winston said his mother and father taught him strong values: Always work hard, be kind, do your best whatever you decide to do, respect others and respect others' differences.

Nearly 125,000 CMS students and more than 19,000 staff dealt with restrictions necessary because of Covid-19 in the 2020-21 school year. Praising the 9,600 students who graduated this month, Winston said they collectively earned more than \$122 million in athletic and academic scholarships.

"With all that our senior class had to deal with, I think this is an extraordinary achievement," he said. "It demonstrates the perseverance of our students as well as our staff.

"Our teachers did what they always do," Winston said. "They met the challenge."

A milestone is what he called the last six weeks of the just-completed school year. "We had all our kids back in the classroom, except for those families who had chosen the full-remote option." A highlight was in-person graduation ceremonies.

He expects the system to operate "close to a sense of normalcy" in August when the 2021-22 school year begins. Meanwhile, more than 32,000 students are attending Camp CMS, a voluntary enrichment academic experience.

"This is a great opportunity to complete some unfinished learning," he said.

Winston challenged Rotarians to tutor or mentor a young person. "We need your time, your talent – we need everything you can bring so our students can have the academic experience that we all had."

*A recording of the program is available here: <https://vimeo.com/563391449>

Mr. Winston's introduction begins at approximately 15:45 minutes.