CMS Leaders Will Work Toward A Better Plan For Building Academic Skills After Setbacks

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Published September 28, 2021 at 5:46 AM EDT

Crafting a more effective plan for student success is the top item on Tuesday's Charlotte-Mecklenburg school board agenda.

Superintendent Earnest Winston and his staff will report on goals and strategies for reading and language arts, where students saw major setbacks during the pandemic. The report attached to the agenda shows the district is now dramatically off track for the six-year goals it hoped to meet in 2024.

The plan was launched under then-Superintendent Clayton Wilcox in 2018. It calls for 52.5% of all CMS third-graders to have 2021 reading scores that put them on track for college and career success, moving toward 80% in three more years. In reality, just over 29% of last year's third-graders hit that mark.

For Black and Hispanic students, the 2021 goals for third-grade reading were 40.8% and 38.2% respectively, with the aim of steadily progressing to above 75% by 2024. The actual college-career ready percentages for those groups were 17.8% and 13.8%.

Even before the results came in for a year disrupted by the pandemic, CMS came under fire from county commissioners and some community leaders for shortchanging Black and Hispanic students and the low-performing schools that serve thousands of them.

Commissioners failed in their effort to withhold $56 million from the district until CMS leaders produced a better academic plan. But CMS officials said they were already working to improve the six-year strategic plan.

Tuesday night’s discussion is part of the quest to do that — and to improve the school board’s focus on student performance.

We can’t afford to flounder right now," board Chair Elyse Dashew said Monday. "We can’t afford to be fuzzy right now."
After staff presents the update on reading results, which is part of the ongoing monitoring process, consultant A.J. Crabill from the Council of the Great City Schools will guide the board in asking questions that keep the spotlight on results.

Dashew said that's things like, "What’s working and what isn’t working? If something’s working, what do we need to replicate? If something isn’t working, what are we going to do about it? What are we going to do differently? How much is that going to cost?"

Dashew says the goal is to have the strategic plan updated — with adjustments for the pandemic as needed — by December.