



Margaret Spellings
Report to the Board of Governors
Center for School Leadership Development
Friday, September 9

Good morning to you all. I'd like to recognize Representative John Fraley who is here with us for the second day. We appreciate your interest in the Board's work—especially the strategic plan—and we are grateful to have you here.

I also want to take a moment and recognize NC Central Provost Johnson Akinleye for stepping into the role of acting chancellor. Our thoughts and good wishes are with Chancellor Deb Saunders-White as she focuses on her health. I know she's grateful to have her institution in the hands of such a capable leader, and we extend our deepest thanks to and strong support for Provost Akinleye and his leadership team.

Heading into the Board meeting this week, I was thinking about the report issued almost ten years ago by the Commission on the Future of Higher Education, convened during my time as US Secretary of Education and launched in Charlotte, NC. That bipartisan group of experts from across the country, identified the key issues confronting American colleges and universities back in 2006. While we have made progress, I'm struck by just how many of those core issues—student outcomes and success, affordability, accessibility—remain front-and-center in our work today.

It's a real pleasure to be with you to tackle these issues and prove that public higher education can adapt to a new era and remain a driving force for the social and economic mobility of the people of our state and nation.

And as I said yesterday, your efforts to develop a strategic plan for the University will underpin everything we do in the years ahead, defining our aspirations and creating the policies and incentives that will get us there.

As became apparent during our committee meetings, the strategic planning process has begun with a lot of listening — to faculty, chancellors, students, legislators, Board members, researchers, and taxpayers from across the state who have ideas about how to improve. This will not be a top-down plan — it can't be, if it's going to be effective. And that's why we must be very deliberate and inclusive as we set goals and define success.

As you've heard me say, we have enormously talented people at our institutions and here at General Administration. I firmly believe they can move mountains if we give them the tools, the mandate, and the autonomy to do it.

Right now, we aren't paying for the results we say we want. One of the core themes that is emerging from our discussions so far is crucial need to align our policies and resources with performance — to reward our institutions not only for recruiting and enrolling students, but for getting them successfully on the path to graduation as quickly as possible to produce meaningful outcomes for them and our state. We heard some of this from Matthew Pellish yesterday, in his overview of approaches being tested across the country.

We know the immense value of higher education — when students of all kinds can access it affordably and complete a degree efficiently and effectively. We need to communicate that value more clearly.

In addition, we must be smarter in how we use the system as a platform, and more thoughtful in how we leverage the unique strengths of each institution to achieve our shared goals. These are detailed, challenging issues to sort through, but I know the nation's first and finest public university is up to the task. I thank you for your leadership.

Of course, the regular business of the University doesn't pause while we take on a new strategic plan. Last month, we convened an Elizabeth City State University working group to examine strategies for strengthening campus operations around recruitment and enrollment, academic programming, and finance. I want to thank Board members Steve Long and Harry Smith, along with Elizabeth City trustees Paul Norman and Jan King Robinson, for offering their time and expertise to support the working group. Chancellor Thomas Conway will chair this group, and we look forward to working with him.

Chancellor Conway is doing extraordinary work to put his institution on firm ground, and he and his team are asking the right questions and making the difficult decisions needed. The working group will provide help and expertise for ECSU and make sure we have the right policies in place to help the Chancellor execute our shared vision for ECSU.

While enrollment numbers for this year fell short, we have a game-changer in the form of affordable tuition and the public interest that will come with it. Elizabeth City offers a solid education at a tremendous value, and the ECSU working group will also, of course, focus on how to make the most of the NC Promise opportunity.

In keeping with our task force theme, we also have a group working on the broader implementation of NC Promise. I want to again applaud the bill's authors, Senators Berger and Apodaca, for their commitment to affordability and access for all of our state's students, but most especially our rural population. I also want to thank Chancellors Belcher, Cummings, and Conway. I believe this is an enormous opportunity for North Carolina, and a real boon for our students and these institutions. Having a clearly affordable option within reach of all North

Carolinians goes right to our core mission — our constitutional obligation — to keep tuition as free as practicable, and I'm thrilled we have the chance to promote the NC Promise plan.

We'll also be examining how to implement the guaranteed tuition provision across all of our institutions this year. There are details to be hashed out to make the plan work, we're committed to doing it in a way that benefits students, provides stability for institutions, and gives clarity to students and parents weighing their college options. Thank you to the chancellors and board members.

In addition, during the last session, the General Assembly adopted important legislation providing funding for lab schools. The University will be working with partners across the state to establish eight public laboratory schools serving children in grades K through eight. Our goal will be to expand student opportunities for educational success through high-quality and innovative instructional programming and research. We expect the schools will also provide exposure and training for teachers and principals to successfully address challenges existing in high-needs school settings.

Shifting gears, as you know, the U.S. District Court recently concluded that House Bill 2 likely violates Title IX and issued a preliminary injunction curtailing enforcement of HB2. As we have emphasized, the University is committed to maintaining a welcome and inclusive environment consistent with our non-discrimination policies, and we look forward to a resolution of these matters.

On the health care front, last month, we convened representatives of UNC-Chapel Hill, UNC Health Care, East Carolina, and Vidant Health to begin a series of discussions about the University's role in meeting the health needs of our citizens and the requirements of the University system to educate the workforce who will serve them.

There have been major changes in the health care landscape over the past few years, and I suspect we're going to see even more. Given all of that, we need a holistic approach and this seemed like the right time to get key people around the table to share ideas, raise concerns, and work together to maximize the University's impact across the state. My thanks to Peter Hans for helping to facilitate this project.

I'd like to take a moment to note that over 225,000 students returned to class at our institutions last month. I spent time with the Faculty Assembly this week, and you can absolutely feel the energy coming from that group as the semester gets underway. We spend a great deal of our time here at General Administration and the Board of Governors dealing with problems and contentious issues, responding to the challenges that emerge when you're overseeing a \$9 billion enterprise.

But as we start a new academic year, it's worth remembering the sheer scale of what goes right every day — the students, faculty, and staff who turn these closing weeks of summer into a

season of possibility. The best part of this job is learning a little more each day from these remarkable people.

Finally, it's my pleasure to introduce our five faculty fellows who will be spending the year at General Administration. As I've said many times before, I'm always conscious of the fact that we don't educate students here at GA; we don't make scientific breakthroughs; we don't cure the sick or produce great art.

Our job is to empower the people who do all of that, and our faculty fellows are here to help us do that better.

- Dr. Joseph Cazier from Appalachian State University
Dr. Cazier has been instrumental in the evolution of the University Innovation Council and provides expertise and direction in the area of tech transfer.
- Dr. Patrick Akos from UNC-Chapel Hill
Dr. Akos is engaged in a predictive analytics project surrounding student success.
- Dr. Gloria Campbell-Whatley from UNC-Charlotte
Dr. Campbell-Whatley is working with several pilot campuses on a survey of engagement and inclusion – with regard both to campus climate and to curriculum design.
- Dr. Frank Mullins from NC A&T
Dr. Mullins will soon begin work on a study of faculty retention and HR processes, as well as shadowing several administrators.
- Dr. Tim Petty from NC State
Dr. Petty is deeply engaged with the online learning task force and with academic planning.

I'm excited to learn from all of them, and I hope they come away with a deeper sense of how the system pulls together for the greater good of North Carolina.

As always, it's a pleasure to be with you. I thank you all for your time, your work, and your sincere commitment to this University and the citizens of this state.