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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**PRIVATE SCHOOL SUPPORTERS
BASH ACCLAIMED WAKE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**False Statements Negatively Impact Teacher and Student Morale,
Damage County's Economic Prospects**

Raleigh, NC—August 18, 2010— The Great Schools in Wake Coalition (GSIW) and its more than 11,000 members take issue with claims made by private school supporters that our public schools are both “unpopular” and a “failure.” This false attack, repeated by a conservative pundit in a recent televised debate and endorsed by members of the School Board's narrow majority, appears part of an orchestrated plan to discredit and undermine the award-winning Wake County Public School System.

Such false claims fly in the face of the opinions of parents, students, teachers, and school administrators—many of whom were drawn to live, learn, work, and conduct business in Wake County on the strength of its public schools. While Board member John Tedesco claims to have “talked to thousands of people and [we] felt confident of the direction of where they wanted,” his anecdotal information contradicts the response of nearly 40,000 parents to a board majority-commissioned survey—94.5 percent of whom indicated their satisfaction with student assignment.

“The public schools are the crown jewel of our local economy. We should be advocating for them—not condemning them,” said Yevonne Brannon, GSIW Chair. “It is an insult to the intelligence of our educators and students when we suggest that one of the top school districts in the nation is a failure. If our schools are so bad, then why have they been held up as a national model of success?”

Recent test scores point to an across-the-board narrowing of the achievement gap—for all students in Wake County. End of grade reading and math scores for grades 3 through 8 reflect an increase in the percentage of students in all gender and ethnicity subgroups at or above level III in these subjects from 2008-09 to 2009-10. When comparing these results across all students, WCPSS outperformed Charlotte-Mecklenburg, 71.9 percent to 66.3 percent. Results for WCPSS Black and Hispanic students, however, were lower than those of their peers in Charlotte.

“In any road, you encounter bumps,” noted Tama Bouncer, President of the Wake North Carolina Association of Educators. “This is why educators continually fine-tune curricula and programs—we must always work to improve what we do. It’s clear that we need to enhance what we are doing to drive better results for our Black and Hispanic students,” Bouncer continued. “I want to remind everyone, however, that during Superintendent Bill McNeal’s tenure with WCPSS, we saw the gap in test scores between Black and White students shrink from 37 to 17 points, between Hispanic and White students it went from 28 to 11 points. Clearly, we have work to do, but we have a track record in excellence and best practices that we can leverage.”

Further evidence points to **growth** and **lack of funding** as the root causes of WCPSS achievement missteps.

Wake County receives less in funding than other districts in the state—it ranks among 82 among 115 school districts. And this year’s county budget for public education has stayed level, despite an additional 4,500 new students expected for this school year, which translates into a drop in per student spending. Adjusting for growth and inflation, county spending on education has been effectively cut in Wake County. When controlling for inflation, the **County would need to raise \$50 million per year** in order to match education spending from 10 years ago.

Of further note is the fact that Charlotte-Mecklenburg spends \$429 per pupil more in **local dollars** than Wake County. Funding WCPSS’ 144,000 students at the same level would require an additional **\$60 million per year** in local funding.

Instead of looking at the root cause of our student achievement concerns, including insufficient local funding, WCPSS detractors are instead proposing plans—such as the creation of high poverty schools—that will not be palatable to the community for a variety of reasons. Among them include the high costs of recruiting and retaining qualified teachers and principals in high poverty schools.

Despite attacks against our schools, our teachers, and our students, the facts about WCPSS are undeniable:

- National school performance organization GreatSchools ranked Wake County Public Schools (WCPSS) **#1 in public schools** for places with populations above 300,000.
- Twelve Wake County Public High Schools were just named to Newsweek’s list of America’s Best High Schools for 2010. Only six percent of all schools in the nation make this list.
- WCPSS ranks **second in the nation** in the number of National Board Certified Teachers (1,702).

- Fourteen WCPSS schools were awarded with national recognition in 2010 by Magnet Schools of America—representing over 10 percent of the total awards handed out.
- WCPSS has the **lowest per pupil expenditures of any school district in the nation** with 100,000 or more students. It is widely recognized as a very cost effective system.

“These unfounded attacks are reminiscent of the behavior of the schoolyard bully,” noted Brannon. “It seems like the Board majority and their supporters are trying to tear down our system, so they can take credit for any improvements we may see in the future. However, many improvements that we are beginning to see—like the recent change to the definition of long-term suspension—come out of the work led by WCPSS staff initiated well before this board majority took office. We would all be better served by repairing cracks and not taking a sledgehammer to our system.”

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About Great Schools in Wake Coalition:

A project of WakeUP Wake County, Great Schools in Wake Coalition (GSIW) is a community coalition of organizations, business leaders, parents and citizen advocates who are working to ensure educational excellence in the Wake County Public School System. GSIW’s mission is to provide accurate information to educate the public about policy initiatives that would impact the quality of education, foster well-informed discussions about critical education issues, and advocate for policies that improve public education in Wake County. For more information on the Coalition or to join, please visit: greatschoolsinswake.org.