

# An Interview with Superintendent of Willingboro Schools, Dr. Ronald G. Taylor



As students, teachers, and faculty prepare to return to school, we caught up with Superintendent, Dr. Ronald G. Taylor, who shared with us his views on the current state of our schools, changes and improvements we can expect, and what he wishes parents knew.

**Dr. Taylor, how long have you been superintendent?**

Five years and seven months.

**What propelled you into this career?**

I am a lifelong educator. This is my 21st year in public education. I have climbed the ladder from a camp counselor as a high school student to Teacher, Assistant Principal, Principal, Regional Superintendent and now Superintendent. I have an Aunt, Uncle and Sister who have also been educators so it kind of runs in my family (smile).

**Overall, how would you say our schools are faring?**

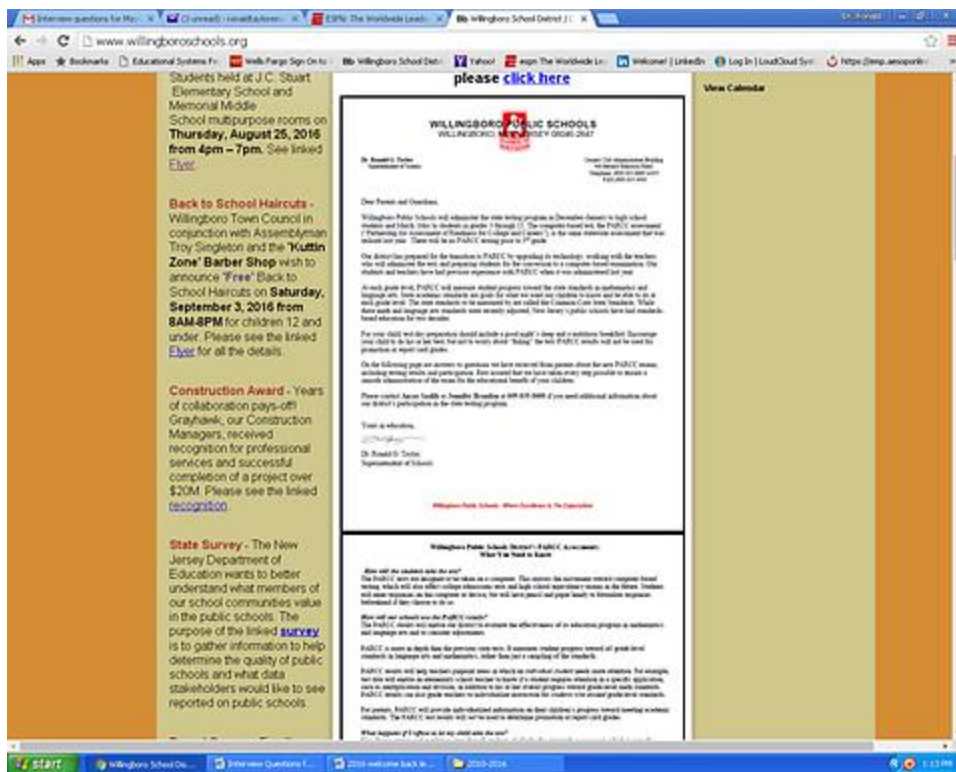
We are improving! We have seen great growth both operationally and academically, but we still have much work to do! Our NJQSAC scores (the State's evaluation of a District's efficiency and effectiveness) have gone up 60% in the last 5 years. Our graduation rate has gone up more than 20% in the last 4 years. We have completed the \$67M construction bond referendum both ahead of schedule and under budget. Our TOPS gifted and talented program expansion has been a huge success. We have made a large investment in technology, replacing nearly 1,000 computers in all of our schools, in addition to our mobile labs and new digital learning platforms. Most importantly we have stability in both our school and district

leadership and are increasing our investment in professional development for our wonderful teaching staff.

## Tell us about the new PARCC exams; why are they important, and how will it affect our school system overall?

Our website has a lot of information on the PARCC (See below). It's a computer based academic assessment mandated by our state and many others. Millions of students take it annually. It was adopted in 2014 as the New Jersey Department of Education's tool for evaluating how students, schools and Districts are performing academically. It is linked to the Common Core Curriculum that was also developed and adopted in the last few years. The PARCC assessment has been met with a bit of controversy across the country for many reasons that I'm sure most are familiar with.

However, we are focusing on using this assessment as a data point to measure our progress. We know that there is not a single assessment that can tell us all we need to know about our youngsters. We also know that we educate the 'whole child' and that some high stakes assessments have both racial and socio-economic biases; but we still must do all we can to ensure our students do their best to represent what they have learned on this and all high stakes assessments.



## What is the relationship between the Willingboro School Board and the Willingboro Education Association (WEA)?

It is a partnership. As in most collectively bargained partnerships, there is always negotiations and give and take. The WEA does all they can to protect their members and provide the best teaching environment they can, while trying to negotiate terms that are favorable. The Board is charged with ensuring we are educating our students to the best of our abilities, while also maintaining the fiduciary responsibility to the tax payers of our Town.

## What do you consider to be your greatest contribution to the district/township?

I would say my greatest contribution would be providing consistency in leadership, a level headed approach to decision making and implementing research based/data driven ideas and platforms to improve the teaching and learning that occurs daily. Prior to my arrival there was incredible turnover in leadership at every level in our District. Superintendents, Directors, Principals were all transitioning in and out so quickly that no ideas could take root

### **What has been your greatest accomplishment as superintendent?**

My greatest accomplishment is the positive relationship that I have developed and maintained with our Board of Education. This partnership is the key to all the work that we do. A superintendent cannot purchase programs, hire professionals, promote employees, adopt policies or establish partnerships without the approval of the Board of Education. Our Board has been extremely supportive of me during my tenure, while still holding me accountable for the goals we set together.

### **What has been your biggest challenge?**

Our biggest challenge is probably the negative perception that some have of our District. Re-branding of our District has been difficult. For some, no matter how much success you have they only focus on the negativity of past challenges.

### **What do you wish parents knew?**

I wish parents knew the success stories of our District. The number of students who have gone onto achieve fantastic things after graduating from Willingboro High School. This year's Valedictorian of Villanova University is a Willingboro High School Graduate! We have fantastic Teachers and Principals who are providing awesome opportunities for our students daily!

### **What changes or improvements can we look for in the coming school year?**

Some highlights about the coming school year include:

- The opening of the New Levitt School, which will house the 6th Grade Academy, TOPS Gifted and Talented Program and the Alternative Program for 6th through 12th Grade. (This also brings successful closure to our \$67M bond referendum project);
- The implementation of the I-Ready digital learning platform for our middle school students. (Last year I-Ready was successfully initiated in all of our Elementary Schools). This program allows for students to receive supplemental instruction at their own pace on any device connected to the internet! Teachers can then use this information to generate lesson plans for small group in-class instruction;
- New curriculum updates across grade levels and subject areas. Curricula is a fast paced target that is always advancing, we are preparing for significant updates to correspond with the New Jersey Department of Education's mandates;
- New Ed-Connect platform for educators. We have recently procured 'Ed Connect', a digital system that will offer 'digital real-time' dashboards for all educators in District; to provide critical information about students, classes, schools and the District as a whole so we can always utilize data to drive instruction and ultimately positively impact student achievement;
- We have centralized school registration at the Country Club Administration Building to offer increased customer service for our families; and,
- Lastly, we have re-organized our Technology Department to add personnel to support this ever growing important area of need.



**Willingboro Township Public Schools has a website. What is that address and what will parents find when they visit the site?**

The web address is, [www.willingboroschools.org](http://www.willingboroschools.org). On our website parents will find an enormous amount of information about our school district. On our main page there are links to each of our schools' pages. Parents will see information regarding our Board of Education and the District's Policies, we have a parent link for Genesis- our student information system as well as my Superintendent's Blog where I share highlights from our District's day to day operations.

**If you were asked to choose one book as required reading for Willingboro High School graduating classes, what would it be and why?**

The Auto-biography of Malcolm X ... I love this book because it shows just how dramatic a transformation a human being can make from the scourge of society to the leader of an international movement.

**What is your favorite quote?**

"If there is no struggle there is no progress," Frederick Douglass.