



# KESTREL HEIGHTS PUBLIC CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

INVESTIGATORY REPORT  
OF STUDENT GRADUATION REQUIREMENT DEFICIENCIES

JANUARY 3, 2017

KESTREL HEIGHTS BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
4900 Prospectus Drive, Durham, North Carolina 27713



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In September of 2016, the Board of Directors (“The Board”) of Kestrel Heights, a public charter school located in Durham, North Carolina, currently providing K-12 education to 1,016 students, was informed of discrepancies in the transcripts of approximately 22 seniors in the graduating class of 2015-16. The discrepancies appeared to indicate that 22 of the 71 graduating seniors were missing at least one state-mandated core curriculum course required to graduate with a Future Ready Core designation on their transcript. The printed student transcripts disclosed that the student graduated with a Future Ready Core designation, but also disclosed that the student was missing one or more of the state mandated core curriculum courses, such as “English 4.”

Upon learning of the discrepancies, the Board ordered a subsequent review of the analysis conducted by staff for the 2015-16 graduating class. After receiving a verified report, the Board self-disclosed the discrepancies to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction’s (“DPI”) Office of Charter School (“OCS”) and scheduled an advisory meeting. At the meeting, the school disclosed the results of its initial investigation and a corrective action plan to the assembly of DPI staff, including representatives from Accountability, Instruction, OCS, and Legal. The staff of DPI was unable to provide any technical support or assistance during the meeting. The school was subsequently advised by the OCS to handle the matter in the best way it saw fit. The school undertook a second review of its corrective action plan by retaining the services of an outside education consulting firm. The outside education consulting

firm assisted the school with the development of student centered options to address the transcript deficiencies in a timely and efficient manner.

In the interim, the Charter School Advisory Board (“CSAB”) met with the Board of Directors and Executive Staff to discuss the dilemma. On December 5, 2016, the CSAB unanimously voted to require the school conduct an internal investigation spanning back to 2008 when the High School opened to determine the actual extent of the problem and provide a detailed investigatory report to it and the State Board of Education (“SBE”) on or before January 3, 2017. The CSAB further requested that OCS place the school on probationary status for “governance” concerns, and withdraw its previous recommendation of a 10-year charter renewal to the SBE. The SBE subsequently referred the matter to the Durham County District Attorney’s Office to determine whether criminal wrongdoing had occurred.

The results of the school’s internal investigation found that between 2008 and 2016, of the 399 total graduates, 160 have received a diploma without tangible evidences of meeting all requirements. With one limited exception, there was no discernable pattern to the majority of missing courses as the courses ranged from English 3 or 4 to Geometry or Algebra 2 to Physical Science and Physical Education. However, the internal investigation did reveal that approximately 54 of the graduated students are identified because they took American History I (Pre-Civil War), but not American History II (Post Civil War) due to an error in scheduling not detected by the high school principal or high school guidance counselor at the time.

The school has made or attempted to make contact with all the identified students. The school and students in most cases have agreed to cure the deficiency by several means:

1. Credit Attainment or Recovery Through Kestrel Heights Administered Proficiency Exam
2. Transfer of Credit based on Approved Course Taken Through an Accredited Institution
3. Proof that a required course was previously completed but not properly reflected on the transcript.

For those students unable to demonstrate mastery due to the lapse of time, the school is offering tutoring services or the opportunity for the student to take the course during its currently scheduled offering. As of January 3, 2017, no students have chosen not to obtain the Future Ready Core designation on their high school transcripts and those students the Board has approved amending their transcript to reflect a “Kestrel Heights” designation if they meet all other established criteria and have at least 22 credit hours.

The previous administration in the high school, along with the high school counselor were separated from the employment of the school on June 30, 2016 (principal) and September 2, 2016 (counselor), respectively. Effective July 1, 2016, the Board merged the administration of the middle and high schools to create a new Upper School, and the existing middle school principal was promoted to principal of the new Upper School. A corrective action plan has been implemented, which includes the use of a current and aligned program of study for grades 9-12, multiple meetings and review dates calendared throughout the academic year with each individual student and the student’s parent in grades 9-12, monthly reviews of academic progress by the high school leadership team for all juniors and seniors, and final review by the upper school principal/designee and the counselor to review senior credit hours within the first 20 days of school and the last 20 days of school prior to graduation.

## **IDENTIFICATION OF THE ISSUE**

The issue examined by this investigative report is how many students graduated from Kestrel Heights High School without having completed all of the necessary requirements to receive a Future Ready Core designation on their final high school transcript or otherwise failed to meet established criteria for graduation due to a missing or omitted core curriculum course between the 2007-08 and 2015-16 academic school years.

## **FINDINGS OF FACT**

On June 7, 2016, two Kestrel Heights staff members stopped the Executive Director while he was monitoring the High School. Separately these staff members expressed a concern that several students were on the list to walk across the stage during graduation, but they had not met the graduation requirements.

On June 7, 2016, the Executive Director sent an email to the High School Principal, [REDACTED], the High School Counselor, Ms. [REDACTED], the Exceptional Children's Director, [REDACTED], and the Academic Coach, [REDACTED] informing them that he had received a couple of complaints pertaining to the graduation ceremony and that a meeting would be held the following day to address all issues and concerns. Staff identified two students who may have not met graduation requirements or the requirements to participate in the graduation ceremony. (*See Appendix: Staff Indicating there was an issue about graduation*).

In response to that email the principal of the school sent the Executive Director an email indicating that the counselor has already met with these students and explained that they will not be participating in the graduation ceremony. This email also explained that it was a practice for the school to allow high school students who were one credit short of graduation to walk across the stage but those students would not receive an actual diploma. (*See Appendix: [REDACTED] met with June Graduation Issues-Email from [REDACTED]*).

That same day a formal calendar request was sent to the principal, counselor, EC Director, and the academic coach. The principal and counselor accepted the invitation, though the academic coach did not respond he did attend the meeting (*See Appendix: Meeting to Discuss June Graduation Issue-Calendar Invite*). The Director of Exceptional Children informed the Executive Director that she would not be able to attend, but to contact her if there were questions. Verbally she indicated that she had talked with the high school leadership and that there was not an issue as it pertains to following any IEPs and thus there was no EC issue (*See Appendix: EC Director Unable to Attend Graduation Concern Meeting*).

On June 8, 2016, a meeting was held in the high school conference room at 3:30 pm. At that time the counselor presented eight students who had not met the criteria for graduation, and who were not allowed to walk across the stage during graduation ceremonies. At no point during this meeting was there any discussion or indication that these students were being considered for graduation, only whether or not these students would be able to walk across the stage (*See Appendix: [REDACTED] Met with June Graduation Issues- Email from [REDACTED]*). The counselor did not provide any paperwork or documentation at this meeting; her presentation was oral. There were

no notes taken at this meeting. Based upon the oral recitation by the high school counselor all student issues and concerns related to missing courses were addressed and the students would be taking the missing courses during summer school or at another pre-approved time and location

The Executive Director recalls some of the reasons the students' graduation status were being questioned as follows:

- o One student had failed a class earlier in his academic career and was planning on completing credit recovery in the summer, but he failed art his last semester, thus having failed two courses and would no longer be able to walk.
- o Another student was an exceptional education student and he had not completed his Second Language requirement. There was a discussion if this was a reason for him not being able to walk since it was not a requirement for Future Ready Core.

According to the email from the principal (*See Appendix: [REDACTED] Met with June Graduation Issues- Email from [REDACTED]*) all of these students were informed that they would not be graduating. During that meeting, the Executive Director asked both the principal and counselor multiple times if there were any more issues pertaining to graduation. The counselor stated multiple times that she had reviewed all transcripts and these were the only eight that had questions or issues. The parents of the eight students were contacted by the high school leadership team informing them that they would not be participating in the graduation ceremony

The Executive Director spoke with at least two families as they expressed concerns over the decision to not allow their children to walk in the ceremony (*See Appendix: June Graduation*

*Issue- Students who were not allowed to graduate- Parental Complaint*). They were informed that their children were missing at least two required courses for graduation and that contradicted the school policy for permitting a student to walk across the stage during graduation, even though they would not be handed a diploma. Both sets of parents eventually understood and accepted the school policy and stated that their children would complete the necessary course requirements over the summer. It is important to clarify that the issues that were addressed on June 7-8 were addressed within a 24-hour period

It is also important to note that the issue of allowing students to walk in the graduation ceremony is not the same as the issue of allowing students to graduate without meeting school or state requirements (*See Appendix: Copy of Class of 2016 Names List- Email from Counselor*)

On June 22, 2016, the high school counselor sent the principal and the Executive Director an email with the retentions for high school. (*See Appendix: Documentation of Retention List- Sent by [REDACTED]*). The information provided disclosed that the seniors retained were engaged in summer credit recovery.

June 30, 2016, was the last day for the high school principal, as her contract was not renewed by the Board. June 30, 2016, was also the last day for the high school counselor, as she was an 11-month employee, she was not scheduled to return to work until August 1, 2016.

On July 1, 2016, the new Upper School Principal, [REDACTED], took charge after being promoted from the position of middle school principal to oversee both the high school and the middle school (now termed the Upper School); assistance would be provided by designated Assistant Principals at each school. While [REDACTED]'s official title is Upper School Principal, in

this document we will refer to her as the High School principal or simply principal as this document only focuses on the high school.

- When ██████ assumed the role as principal of the high school, the Executive Director met with her to discuss the organizational priorities (*See Appendix: Rigor, Responsibility, Relationships- Vision and Direction*).
- The Executive Director also provided specific guidance on expectations for the high school such as:
  - Creating a safe and stable school
  - Developing a robust curriculum by increasing Advanced Placement and Honors courses
  - Increase diverse offerings at the school both academically (electives) and extracurricular
  - Embracing a small membership school by stressing the advantage for the highest achieving students

During this transition meeting the Executive Director informed ██████ of the issue pertaining to the graduation ceremony that occurred in June, namely the two issues that the Executive Director discussed with the new high school principal were:

- Overall concern with the timing of the process; why was there a discussion about graduation days before the actual ceremony; and
- Whether the school should do away with the policy of allowing students to walk across the stage during graduation if they are one course short of graduation.

The Executive Director requested that the principal review these processes. No formal deadline was specifically provided, as at that time there was not an indication that there were larger issues.

On July 18, 2016, the new high school principal started generating the master schedule based on rising seniors in order to make sure they would have the opportunity to graduate on time. (See *Appendix: Scheduling of High School- Reviewing Transcripts- [REDACTED] Email*). The school was transitioning from a block schedule to a traditional schedule and there was a need to ensure seniors had the opportunity to complete all of the required courses to graduate on time. During this master scheduling exercise, the principal identified several rising seniors (Class of 2017) who had issues and concerns.

One of the questions with rising seniors was the articulation of Durham Tech Community College (DTCC) courses English 111 and English 112 as replacements for high school English III and IV, respectively. The principal researched the issue via online resources provided by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and DTCC, which clearly indicated the articulation for English III and IV. The principal contacted the high school counselor, who was out for the summer break as an 11-month employee, and scheduled a meeting upon her return to discuss the school's understanding of this course articulation. By the end of July 2016, the new high school principal had addressed all issues pertaining to the scheduling of required courses for the rising senior class of 2016-17.

Because there were so many issues and concerns pertaining to the master schedule for the class of 2016-17, [REDACTED] wondered if these same issues had presented themselves in the 2015-16 school year. In light of the discussion with the Executive Director upon being promoted,

████████ informed the Executive Director of her concern that the master schedule and course alignment issues may have affected the 2015-16 graduating class.

On August 1, 2016 the Executive Director requested a preliminary audit, using the tool the counselor had created, to check transcripts of the Class of 2016 transcripts. (*See Appendix: Initiation of Transcript Review- Email ██████████ & Transcript Evaluation Sheet- ██████████ 2015-16*). The Executive Director requested the following initial random audit:

- Pull 20 random transcripts
- The principal, counselor, and Executive Director would review each transcript using the tool that the counselor used to check transcripts
- Meet the following day to discuss the audit
- Brainstorm ideas and suggestions to prevent any identified issue from reoccurring

At the meeting on August 2 both the principal and Executive Director identified 6 transcripts of the 20 that appeared to have concerns relating to meeting the graduation requirements (*See Appendix: Meeting Notes from Initial Transcript Review- 20 Transcripts*). The counselor had not completed her own review but agreed that the 6 transcripts identified appeared to have some issues and concerns. During this meeting, the counselor was unable to provide the necessary information to resolve the missing credits. Also during the meeting, the counselor provided information that required further research by the principal, including:

- Course code alignment
- NCVPS
- Durham Tech articulation

- Missing 8th Grade Courses
- Missing Credit Recovery
- Homeschool Credits
- Courses taken with an approved vendor

A follow-up meeting was tentatively scheduled to allow the principal the time to investigate the new information provided by the counselor. The next meeting was tentatively scheduled for 3 weeks later because [REDACTED] was also focusing on preparing for the start of the new school year, which began in 2 weeks.

On August 2, 2016, the Executive Director verbally informed the Board President of the results of the preliminary audit and the plan to conduct additional research. On August 4, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] emailed the Executive Director, indicating she had some additional concerns about the preliminary transcript review (*See Appendix: Initiation of Comprehensive Transcript Review-Email [REDACTED]*). As a result of the email, the Executive Director met with [REDACTED] to discuss her concerns that day. [REDACTED] informed the Executive Director that based on her first interaction with the school's contact at Durham Technical College it was apparent that the counselor had misinterpreted the English 111 and 112 articulation agreement.

[REDACTED] continued to research the issues pertaining to the six transcripts that were identified, but her priority was focused on preparing for the onset of the school year and making sure current students were going to have the best educational experience possible. The teacher work week started on August 11, 2016, and continued through August 19, 2016 when students were scheduled to return to class. [REDACTED] priority during this time period was getting to

know her new staff, providing professional development, completing the master schedule, implementing new procedures at the school, and preparing for the onset of the new school year.

Between August 11, 2016 and September 2, 2016, the principal was focused on ensuring that both staff and students were off to a good start for the current school year and did not concentrate on the transcript review of the prior graduating class. At this time it was still unclear if the information shared by the counselor during the August 2, 2016, meeting was accurate.

██████████, continued to have conversations with the counselor requesting information pertaining to the six students identified in the random audit. The counselor worked August 1-25, 2016. Between August 26, 2016 and September 2, 2016, the counselor remained absent due to an alleged illness. On September 2, 2016, the counselor submitted her resignation via email without the standard 30-day notice as required by employment contract<sup>1</sup>. The sudden and unexpected loss of the counselor resulted in the principal having to make all schedule changes for the high school, further delaying ██████████ in her review of the scheduling and articulation issues for the 6 students with identified deficiencies in their 2015-16 transcripts.

On September 13, the Executive Director informed the Board of Directors of the results of the preliminary audit and the contact that had been made with Durham Technical College. The Executive Director informed the Board that there may be a larger issue than these six transcripts based on the preliminary results of ██████████ investigation. The Executive Director indicated that he would request that the principal complete a comprehensive audit of the 2015-16

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<sup>1</sup> A subsequent review of the counselor's email by the school's Director of Technology noted that a substantial portion of the high school counselor's prior emails appear to have been deleted (*See Appendix: ██████████ Email Assessment/ Director of Technology*)

class in light of the initial findings. The Board requested a second review to validate the findings of the audit. Dr. Valarie Evans, a Board Member and retired Educator and Administrator at DTCC, was asked to conduct the validation audit. Dr. Evans was approved as a new Board member in August of 2016, and the Board agreed her second review would be impartial and confirm the accuracy of [REDACTED] audit.

On September 14, the Executive Director sent an email to [REDACTED] requesting a complete audit of the class of 2016. He also required that [REDACTED] provide any requested support to Dr. Valarie Evans for her second impartial audit. (*See Appendix: Official Request to Complete Full Audit*).

The Board scheduled a Special Meeting on September 22, 2016, to review the results of the complete audit to be conducted by [REDACTED] and the audit review to be conducted by Dr. Evans. (*See Appendix: KHS Board Minutes Sept 2016*).

The comprehensive review of the Class of 2016 transcripts was completed by September 21, 2016, and identified 22 students who had not met Future Core Ready Graduation requirements although their transcripts indicated that they had graduated. The second review conducted by Dr. Evans of the initial audit of the Class of 2016 found no material or significant differences and confirmed 22 students impacted, with 25 total deficiencies noted.

On September 22, 2016, a special meeting was held to discuss the results from the comprehensive audit as were presented to the full Board and Board Attorney, Stephon J. Bowens. During the special meeting, the Board agreed to self-report the issue to the Office of Charter Schools. The Board the directed its attorney and the Executive Director to prepare

findings and a proposed resolution plan for delivery to the OCS. (*See Appendix: KHS Special Session Minutes Draft Sept 2016*).

Also during the September 22, 2016, special meeting the Board of Directors discussed immediately contacting students and starting the process of rectifying the situation.

- o There were questions raised about any potential OCS response. If OCS chose to mandate a different type of response or approach than recommended and approved by the Board, moving forward with contacting students and parents may unintentionally interfere with the intent to receive technical support and advice from OCS regarding next steps.
- o In light of the internal questions raised, the Board decided to delay contacting students and parents until guidance was provided from the Office of Charter Schools.

On October 3, 2016, a letter was sent to the OCS explaining the deficiency in the 22 identified student's transcripts for the 2015-16 graduating class, and the proposed resolution for these students. (*See Appendix: High School Graduation Concerns- Letter to OCS- Machado*).

Due to an unexpected illness and hospitalization by the Board's attorney, the initial meeting with the OCS had to be rescheduled. The OCS re-scheduled the initial meeting with the Board and Executive Staff of Kestrel Heights on November 11, 2016 to discuss the letter.

- o At that meeting, the OCS listened to the School's presentation of the issue and asked relevant questions related to matter from the perspective of the multiple disciplines in the meeting room and by telephone.

- o During the meeting the OCS advised the School to address the situation and keep the office informed of its progress.
- o However, the OCS declined to provide any specific recommendation for resolution of the issue or a timeline to complete the process.

On November 22, 2016, the Executive Committee of the Board met to discuss the implementation of the plan that was presented to the Office of Charter Schools. In addition to the Executive Board members, present at the meeting were the Board Attorney, Stephon J. Bowens, [REDACTED], [REDACTED], Executive Director of Kestrel Heights School, and Ms. [REDACTED] M.Ed., Upper School Principal for Kestrel Heights School. At the Executive Committee meeting, concerns were raised about the original process based on what was in the best interest of the students. Discussions centered upon:

- o While the original plan indicated a single path to resolution, the Board and Administration recognized the need to do what was best for students, and think through viable solutions for students, some of whom may be:
  - Currently enrolled, or attempting to enroll, in a college or university
  - Planning to enter, or had entered, the military
  - Entering the workforce in a capacity requiring a Future Ready Core Degree
- o Based on Executive Committee meeting it was clear there would not be a “one-size fits all” solution. Members of the Executive Committee expressed great concern about making a very challenging situation for former students more difficult with a “one-size

fits all” solution. While the solution met all educational and legal requirements, it did not consider the personal strain the former students would endure to resolve the issue.

- o To assist with navigating the complexity of this issue, [REDACTED] was retained to help the Board navigate the next steps in the process.

On November 29, 2016, the Executive Committee met to discuss next steps and finalize a revised plan taking the student concerns into account, and called a special meeting on December 1, 2016. (*See Appendix: KHS Executive Committee Meeting November 29*).

On December 1, 2016, an emergency meeting of the Board of Directors was properly noticed and held to approve the Executive Committee’s proposed final plan. During the emergency meeting the Executive Director and Upper School Principal provided input to the Board regarding an educationally ethical and administratively efficient manner to assist the students identified. (*See Appendix: KHS Dec 1 2016 Emergency Meeting*).

On December 2, 2016, school officials started the process of contacting students to inform them of the audit and that they had an issue pertaining to their transcripts.

## **HOW GRADUATION DATE & FUTURE READY CORE DESIGNATIONS APPEAR ON TRANSCRIPTS**

By interviewing available staff, the Board was able to determine how the deficient transcripts were generated. It should be noted that attempts to meet with or discuss this matter with the high school counselor were hampered by the referral of this matter by the State Board of Education to the Durham County District Attorney’s Office for consideration of criminal

sanctions. Because of the potential threat of criminal liability during the conduct of this internal investigation, communication with the high school counselor has been limited since her resignation. After conferring with the Executive Director and the Data Coordinator, [REDACTED], it was determined that between 2015 and 2016, the information relating to graduation was entered manually by the data coordinator under express direction of the counselor.

For the years prior to and including the 2014-15 school year, the school contracted with Acadia NorthStar for our student data coordination. New enrollments, withdrawals, grade changes, schedule changes and other data, including graduation data, was submitted to Acadia NorthStar. The data was then processed by Acadia's Powerschool Technician. If a task required in-house completion, the school would be notified by Acadia to complete these tasks including approving state required reporting.

The data coordinator worked with the school level staff at Kestrel Heights School to provide the tools and training to complete processes and tasks at the school level in Powerschool. This included checking daily attendance, verifying grades prior to storing, printing school level reports such as grades, transcripts and attendance letters, checking and adding demographic student information, medical information and alerts, sending parent and student portal information to families. The data coordinator's role in Powerschool, under the direction and request of school level administration, is to approve final reporting for the school and LEA levels, complete historic grade and transcript corrections, create and activate state course codes to create courses and ensure the attributes for course are accurate, clean up student demographic data, make grades historic, complete other federal and state reports at the district level. While

teachers enter their students' grades and attendance in their gradebooks, and school level administration provide discipline information, the LEA data coordinator may assist with entry of data such as required immunizations, school wide teacher and student data, implementing parent/student portal information, uploading schoolwide information such as student/staff pictures and emails. The LEA data coordinator also enrolls students and staff, ensures military affiliation is noted, and ensures course attributes are correct.

Powerschool provides many resource pages and available reports for school level administration for review and analysis. Examples of reports and pages available are: attendance summaries and count, discipline, grade distribution for teachers, transcripts, reports cards and progress reports, graduation requirements, yearly withdrawals, medical alerts, parent alerts, military affiliations, immunizations and medication logs. The data coordinator may be requested to run reports for the school level administration but does not complete the analysis of these reports.

In order to establish a check and balance process within Kestrel Heights School, several items were put into place.

Grades - For grade entry at all levels, teachers enter grades into their gradebooks and verify grades are accurate at the end of each quarter. The front office administrative assistants run the verification reports and have teachers sign off on their accuracy. When all grades are ready to store (made historic), the data coordinator is notified to complete the process. After grades are stored, the front office is notified and grades are printed.

Grade changes - After grades are made historic, any changes to grades will be made only after a historic grade change form is completed, signed by the teacher, guidance counselor and school level principal. Once complete, the form is given to the data coordinator and the grade is then changed. The form is kept on file.

Transcript updates/changes - High school transcripts are reviewed by the guidance counselor. If changes, updates, or corrections are needed, the guidance counselor makes note of the change on the transcript and gives it to data coordinator. The change is made and the request is stored on file. If a concern arises concerning the change, the guidance counselor would be notified for clarification.

Discipline Data - Discipline is entered by the school level administrative assistants, the end of year report is reviewed by principals and the ED, and approved by data coordinator under the direction of the ED.

Retentions - Retentions are requested from the school level counselors and principals. The students reported to the data manager by the school level administration are coded in Powerschool at the end of each school year.

Reports involving school level personnel - Reports are run through Powerschool at the school level. If a school level administrator is required to review the information, they are notified and given a deadline to respond with any changes needed. Changes are made, if requested, and the report is re-run and reviewed by the school level personnel. If data is cleared by the school level personnel, the final report is then approved by data coordinator at the school and LEA level.

Examples: The discipline report is reviewed by school level administrators and the Director prior to approving, the AIG report is reviewed by the EC Director prior to approving, the Dropout Data, Final Graduation Verification, Preliminary Graduation Data Verification are reviewed by the counselor prior to approving, the Retention/Promotion/Graduation data is reviewed by the school level principals and counselors prior to approving.

The counselor's role is imperative for the successful graduation of high school students. After grades are made historic for the F1 (final grade), they will appear on the student's transcript. The counselor reviews the transcripts for accuracy. If changes or updates are required, either a historic grade change form is submitted or, if the counselor discovers an inaccuracy from previous years such as credit missing for a historic passing grade or a CCP, NCVPS or CR course missing, the change is noted on the transcript and submitted to the data coordinator for correction in Powerschool. The historic grade form is reviewed and signed by the teacher, guidance counselor and principal prior to submitting to the data coordinator.

The counselor also has access to the Powerschool Graduation Requirements page which shows the progress of each student. The graduation requirements page has several tabs with different requirements including UNC, FRC, State. Kestrel Heights School has previously utilized the FRC (Future Ready Core) tab. While the graduation requirements page provides an excellent tool to track graduation progress, if there is a concern or question regarding credits met, the counselor would need to manually review the transcript to ensure all credit requirements have been met. This is more so in cases with students transferring in from out of state or who may have old course codes not recognized by the Powerschool program. However, it is always good

practice to review the actual transcript for accuracy. The high school counselor reviews the transcripts and graduations requirements page to ensure all credit requirements have been met.

The academics page is also updated for each high school student and is reviewed and updated by the counselor to ensure accuracy prior to graduation. Information entered on the academics page are: 9th grade entry date, counselor name, projected graduation year, bound for drop down menu, college Yes/No, FRC Plan, Diploma Issued and Diploma Granted dates.

Kestrel Heights School does not utilize the CTE Plan Data, UNC Plan Data, Endorsement Override or Post-Secondary Activities. The data coordinator has not used, nor is aware of any use of the diploma override field within her tenure as data coordinator. Because the diploma override field has not been used, the Plan Override Notes have not been utilized either. In order to assist with data entry, the data coordinator may be requested to assist with data entry under the direction and guidance of the guidance counselor.

While the following reports in Powerschool list the graduation students, the analysis and review must be completed by counselor and principal for accuracy and verification as the reports do not provide individual student graduation requirements. The data coordinator approves the reports under the direction of school level administration. *Reference:*

*[http://www.nc-sis.org/Documents/requirements/North\\_Carolina\\_Reports\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.nc-sis.org/Documents/requirements/North_Carolina_Reports_Guide.pdf)*

*Preliminary Graduation Data Verification* - This report is generated in mid-April and approved by June 30th. This report provides principals and/or counselors with instructions on querying, exporting data for, and evaluating data values for students that have been evaluated to be 2013 Summer School Graduates or 2013-2014 Early (Mid-Year) Graduates. This will ensure

these students appear in the Graduate Data Verification Report (GDVR) within PowerSchool. The annual data collection and review of high school graduate data, known in the past as the Graduate Data Verification System (GDVS), will be collected within PowerSchool beginning with the 2013-2014 school year. The new process will be known as Graduate Data Verification Report (GDVR). *Reference:*

[http://www.ncsis.org/Documents/email\\_bulletins/docs/GDVR\\_instructions\\_draft\\_052114.pdf](http://www.ncsis.org/Documents/email_bulletins/docs/GDVR_instructions_draft_052114.pdf)

*Graduation Data Verification* - This report is generated and approved in mid-August. The Graduate Data Verification Data Collection displays demographic information, Diploma Type, and post-graduate intentions of North Carolina high school graduates.

*Retention/Promotion/Graduation Data Collection*- This report is generated and approved in mid September/October. The data collection displays an individual student record on every student who completed the school's academic year at the reporting school.

The final step in "moving" the graduate student to the Graduated Students school in Powerschool is the End of Year (EOY) process. The end of year process is completed near or on June 30th at the LEA (district) level. The EOY is a process which moves students, if not marked retained, to the next school grade or, in the case of 12th grade students, to the graduated school. The data coordinator completes the required information, utilizing the retention lists and graduating students lists provided by school level administration.

From the End-of Year User Guide: "The End of Year process uses the next school indicator to determine which school each student will attend in the upcoming school year. Setting each student's Next School Indicator can be done individually on the Scheduling Setup

student screen, or by updating the Next School field using the Student Fields Value group function. This task can be performed by LEA or school level staff with the appropriate rights in PowerSchool. The school information at the LEA Level defines the lowest and highest grade levels for a particular school and further defines the default next school. When a student is at the highest grade level in a given school, the End of Year process will move the student record to the default next school unless a change is indicated in the student's Next Grade Level in the Schedule Setup Screen. The system evaluates the student's current grade level with the next grade level in the student Schedule Setup screen. Based on the results of that evaluation, the student will then be promoted to the next school, promoted within the same school, retained in the same grade, or graduated.”

“Graduating Students must have the exit code of W6 (W6 High school Graduate), the Next Grade set as 99 and the Next School set as 999999 / Graduate School to be promoted correctly during the EOY process.”

*Reference:* [http://www.nc-sis.org/Documents/end\\_of\\_year/PS\\_EOY\\_Guide\\_2016.pdf](http://www.nc-sis.org/Documents/end_of_year/PS_EOY_Guide_2016.pdf)

The screens referenced in PowerSchool are “progress” bars that indicate each student’s progress toward the completion of their specific course of study (*See Appendix: Future Core Ready Screenshot & Student Academic Screenshots-Entering Graduation Date*). For Kestrel Heights, this is the FRC or Future Core Ready. The function is utilized most efficiently by selecting the specific student, then selecting FRC and clicking “Run.” The resulting progress bars indicate how much of each specific area the student has completed and/or has remaining. As there can be different pathways (English 1, English 2, then English

through the CCP/DTCC program, etc.) the user must be aware of the student’s selected path to properly analyze and interpret the results.

Based on these facts, current Administration believes past guidance counselor and principals failed to utilize these tools adequately; the result being the deficiencies that have been uncovered.

## **TRANSCRIPT REVIEW RESULTS & NUMBER OF STUDENTS IDENTIFIED**

The Board commissioned the administrative staff of the school to conduct an individual review of all graduating high school classes since 2008. From academic year 2007-08 to 2015-16, there have been 399 students that have graduated from the high school. After review the Board has determined that 160 of the 399 students have been identified as having a course deficiency that would precluded them from receiving either the Future Ready Core designation or the equivalent designation from graduation requirements at the time. Chart A below depicts the number of students identified with a transcript deficiency:

**CHART A – STUDENTS WITH DEFICIENT TRANSCRIPTS**

<u>Year</u>	<u># Deficient</u>	<u>#Graduates</u>	<u>% Deficient</u>
<u>2007-08</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>58.3%</u>
<u>2008-09</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>38.9%</u>
<u>2009-10</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>36.0%</u>
<u>2010-11</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>42</u>	<u>35.7%</u>
<u>2011-12</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>25%</u>
<u>2012-13</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>61</u>	<u>14.8%</u>
<u>2013-14</u>	<u>15*</u>	<u>49</u>	<u>30.6%</u>
<u>2014-15</u>	<u>59**</u>	<u>69</u>	<u>83.1%</u>
<u>2015-16</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>71</u>	<u>30.9%</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>399</b>	<b>40.1%</b>

\* = 3 American History Deficiencies

\*\* = 44 American History Deficiencies

In 2013-14 and 2014-15, it appears that a significant portion of students took American History Part I (Pre-Civil War), but did not take American History Part II (Post-Civil War). For these students the error is not highlighted on the transcript itself but a thorough review revealed that while the students had met the then current requirement of three Social Studies credits, the specific US History course that was used to meet that requirement was not the correct course. Instead of taking the comprehensive US History course, these students completed American History I (Pre-Civil War) due to an error in scheduling not detected by the high school principal or high school guidance counselor. Starting in 2011-12 there were a few transitional years where the American History requirement was changed to a two class requirement. Nevertheless, Sophomores, Juniors and Seniors could graduate with the single American history class. The correct thing to do was to continue offering American History to those students grandfathered in, and to offer the new American History 1 and American History 2 to incoming freshmen, or to require them to take both American History 1 and American History 2. The principal at the time chose to count American History 1 as their singular required history class.

## **DISCLOSURE OF STUDENT/PARENT CONTACT**

All students identified have been sent letters regarding the deficiencies noted in the internal audit of transcripts. Students from the Class of 2016 have had the most extensive contact as they were the first group to receive letters. Additional direct contact has been made with some students from the class of 2015 and 2014 as they were the next group to receive letters. Summary information by students can be seen in the Appendix (*Appendix: Summary of Student/Parent Contact*).

Three letters have been drafted and are being sent to each identified student based on the student's chosen method of response. Letter one was sent to all students identified with deficiencies by certified mail. This letter informs the identified students that there is a potential issue with their transcript. Letter two will be sent to all students failing to respond within the initial time allotted. Letter three is considered a final letter after no direct communication has been made within the final time allotted (*See Appendix: Letter One, Letter Two, and Letter Three*).

## **PLAN OF RESOLUTION FOR IDENTIFIED STUDENTS**

All students with which the specific deficiencies have been discussed have opted to take the necessary steps to retain the Future Ready Core course of study designation. Specific information per student can be seen in the Appendix (*See Appendix: Plan of Resolution for Identified Students*).

## **COMMUNICATION WITH CLASS OF 2017**

Transcripts for the Class of 2017 were reviewed during July/August of 2016 in order to prepare the 2016-2017 master schedule. Meetings with students affected by the CCP/DTCC articulation were held to insure that specific courses were taken. Additional meetings with students and/or parents were held to modify/adjust external schedules (NCVPS, DTCC, etc.) to ensure specific course were taken.

Guidance counselor has completed a second thorough review of transcripts for Class of 2017. Counselor has met with students that still have deficiencies to resolve (ensure transcripts from prior schools received, ensure enrollment in proper S2 external courses, etc.). Additionally, the counselor will continue to meet with students that are at-risk for failing courses in which they are currently enrolled.

The Corrective Action Plan for Class of 2017 and Beyond as noted below has been implemented.

## **CORRECTIVE ACTION PLAN FOR CLASS OF 2017 AND BEYOND**

The following steps outline the plan that Kestrel Heights School has initiated for the 2016-17 school year to prevent any future incidents of graduates not meeting all KHS, state of North Carolina, and Future Ready Core requirements:

1. The following expectations will be in place for the guidance counselor specific to graduation requirements:
  - a. Use of a current and aligned program of study for all students grades 9-12.
  - b. Meet with students grades 9-11 no less than two times per year - fall to review progress and plans, spring to plan the following year's schedule.
  - c. Meet with seniors no less than three times per year - fall to review progress and plans, winter to check-in, spring to confirm progress and address any lingering concerns.
  - d. Parental involvement in all meetings (invite parents, parent signatures, etc.) will be encouraged and welcomed.
  - e. Parent meetings are REQUIRED at least once per year and with any student at-risk for not meeting graduation requirements (this can begin as early as 9th grade, if necessary).
2. The Upper School Leadership team will meet monthly to review academic progress of all juniors and seniors to ensure that they are on track to meet the graduation requirements

and offer alternatives to those students that are in jeopardy of not meeting those requirements.

3. The Upper School Principal or designee with the assistance of the counselor will review senior credit hours within the first 20 days of the new academic year, during Fall Break, and 20 days prior to graduation.
4. The board will receive a report from the ED regarding the overall progress of the action plan at least two times per year.

The following outlines the action plan for specific student situations:

Transfer Students:

1. Transcript reviewed upon admission to Kestrel Heights.
2. Plan of Study developed to address any remaining course of study. This will include but is not limited to:
  - a. verification of transcript received
  - b. credit recovery or retakes for courses not passed
  - c. schedule to reflect current needs of student in alignment with current master schedule
  - d. enrollment in external courses, if necessary (virtual, community college, etc.)

Credit Recovery: Students wishing to obtain credit through credit recovery must request and/or be advised of such by the school counselor.

1. Counselor completes the request form (student name, course, original grade)

2. Counselor submits the request form for approval to principal
3. Upon approval, principal provides form to designee for enrollment in credit recovery

PowerSchool Verification:

The use of resources in PowerSchool and the verification of information manually entered into PowerSchool will be overseen by the principal. Specifically, the principal will meet with the school counselor regularly to discuss student progress toward graduation. In these meetings, the resources within PowerSchool will be utilized allowing for both the verification of information within PowerSchool and the continued use and application of such tools.

## **CONCLUSION**

After careful review and analysis of the matter, the Board determined that the high school should have had better systems in place to ensure that each student was being properly advised as to the courses needed to successfully matriculate with a Future Ready Core designated transcript. During 2007-08 through 2015-16 academic years, the high school administration failed to properly vet student transcripts and align course curriculum. The primary responsibility for these activities fall within the job descriptions of the high school counselor and the high school principal. The high school counselor is responsible for making certain that each student's educational plan is in alignment with the state mandated requirements for graduation with a Future Ready Core designation. The high school principal is the senior administrator responsible for verifying that a student has completed the necessary courses and credits to receive a high school diploma and certifying that the transcript of the student is accurate before delivery to outside institutions. There was a systematic breakdown by the high school principals and counselor for the eight-year period in question and approximately 160 students were not provided the support they deserved, please note that the principals and counselor are no longer employed by Kestrel Heights.

While the Board finds that systematic errors were made throughout the eight-year period, it is unable to substantiate claims that the actions of the high school principals and counselor involved were willful, intentional, or done with malice. More to the point, the Board concludes that the actions of the high school principals and counselor lacked the requisite diligence and

thoroughness expected of educated, trained, and experienced professionals. The errors made could have been avoided by simply reviewing the course alignment between the school and Durham Technical Community College; verifying course completion in the Powerschool Program during the years it was available; or manually checking each student's transcript to ensure that the student has taken all the required core curriculum courses to receive a high school diploma. These are the fundamental responsibilities of a good and efficient high school seeking to meet the needs of the students and the community it serves.

The Board cannot undo what has been done. However, by issuing this investigative report, the board and school leadership have implemented stronger verification processes that should eliminate further accountability discrepancies. Kestrel as a whole has made significant strides academically, operationally and financially over the past three years under new leadership resulting in initially being recommended for a 10 year charter renewal in November of 2016. Kestrel's students have outpaced local and state high school students by most academic and end of course measures. A significant percentage of its students go on to college or university level study. As an organization we have grown and unified our governance and management practices. We aim to be the public school of choice in Durham County as Kestrel Heights School provides, and will continue to provide, an environment where academics are emphasized, where children are encouraged to excel and perform at their maximum potential and that promotes creativity and excellence in accordance with the Paideia Principles.

## **APPENDIX**

Hard Copy: See documents to follow.

Electronic Copy: See files of same name in shared [REDACTED] electronically submitted.