Talking Points for Realtors  
February 2011

- Durham Public Schools is one of the most richly diverse school systems anywhere, with academically challenging and rigorous programs for its students.

- Durham is quite literally one of the most exciting cities in the southeast to be in right now, and the young professionals moving here with young children or planning families make it even more so.

- In fact, Forbes magazine named Durham’s Metropolitan Statistical Area one of the Top 20 Places to Educate Your Child two years ago.

- DPS has one of the widest arrays of instructional offerings of any school district in the state of North Carolina. There are 11 magnet schools from which families can choose to match their children’s interests and aptitudes. Each school’s theme guides the instructional program that offers unique enrichment opportunities and educational philosophies.

- DPS will open its newest choice school – Sandy Ridge Elementary – in August 2011. Sandy Ridge, serving the northern section of Durham, will have a Visual and Performing Arts focus including strong partnerships with Durham Arts Council, Carolina Theater, Durham Performing Arts Center (DPAC), Duke University, North Carolina Central University and other local arts organizations.

- Year-Round Schools are very popular in Durham. We have three elementary and two middle schools which operate on a year-round calendar.

- Durham is known across North Carolina as a leader in small high schools. Knowing that the large, traditional high school is not for everyone, DPS has been at the forefront in developing small, non-traditional high schools to meet the particular needs of students. Several of these schools have received substantial funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and are turning out graduates who are entering college with enough credit to qualify as sophomores or juniors.

- Small high schools include the City of Medicine Academy, what we call an Early College High School, a New Tech High School, a School of Engineering and a Career and Resource Center.

- The DPS Montessori program is one of only five among public school districts in the state of North Carolina. DPS is one of only three districts with two Montessori elementary offerings, and the state’s first Montessori school for the middle grades.

- Durham is an urban/suburban community. With that comes some of the same challenges you might face in a larger city, but we have tackled many of them head on. Chief among these is the dropout rate. The latest figures we have, from the 2008-09 school year, show that the number of Durham Public Schools students dropping out of school continues to remain below the state average as well as many other large urban districts.

- Much of this is due to the focus of programs we have to encourage students to stay in school, but it also is due to our efforts to meet students where they are academically and to challenge them to reach higher levels.
The 2009-10 school year was the sixth consecutive record year of the number of DPS high school students taking Advanced Placement courses. DPS pass rate (proficiency 3, 4, 5 scores) was above state and national average.

Reform efforts were begun around the turn of the century at the elementary level, and they have resulted in significant improvements in reading and math performance. About five years ago, we established middle and high school reform teams at each school. These teams were charged with devising plans to increase academic performance through innovation.

We are now seeing the fruits of these efforts as well. Three of our middle schools are among only 32 statewide to have been named Schools to Watch by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform.

Four high schools have been continuously ranked in the top 1,300 academically rigorous high schools by Newsweek magazine for the last several years.

Three magnet schools were cited for excellence in programs by the Magnet Schools of America over the last three years.

Durham Public Schools 2010 graduates are headed to more than 144 colleges in the United States, Canada, Egypt and Honduras, and have garnered $13.5 million in scholarships. The prestigious list of secondary institutions includes Yale, Duke University, Stanford University, Brown University, Baylor University, University of Cairo, Hampton University, Howard University, New York University, Virginia Technical Institute, Spelman College and Morehouse College.

Durham is a Mecca for the arts across the state and in the southeast. This is reflected in our schools, too. Our visual arts students routinely take first place in our state fair, and in addition to the usual band and orchestra and drama, we offer dance in many of our schools. Durham School of the Arts is a highly desirable magnet school, but frankly, we offer equally high quality arts programs in many of our schools.

Community support is nearly overwhelming. We have a business community that cares about its schools. An advisory group of some 40 business representatives works with the Superintendent to ensure that our programs are in line with the skills they need for future employees.

Our facilities are among the best in the state. Voters approved more than one-third of a billion dollars for new facilities within seven years’ time earlier this decade. A $540 million facilities plan over the next 10 years will ensure that we maintain and improve our state-of-the-art status. Our buildings are beautiful, and they reflect the great things going on inside.

Parental support is growing every day. A recent public opinion poll revealed that 76% of Durham residents with children in Durham Public Schools (DPS) have a positive or very positive image of DPS. Only 13.7% had a negative or very negative image, with 10.4% uncertain; giving DPS a 5.5 to 1 positive to negative ratio, up from 4.7 to 1 last year.

We encourage potential parents to talk with parents who have children in our schools. And check out the DPS Website at www.dpsnc.net for more information.