



9115 Westside Parkway
Alpharetta, GA 30009

advanc-ed.org
888.41 EDNOW (888.413.3669)
678.392.2285
770.346.9260 fax

July 2, 2014

Mr. Michael Thurmond, Superintendent of Schools
DeKalb County School District
1701 Mountain Industrial Boulevard
Stone Mountain, GA 30083

Dear Mr. Thurmond:

Enclosed, please find the AdvancED Monitoring Team's report from the review conducted May 11-13, 2014. This report summarizes the team's findings related to the DeKalb County School District's progress in meeting the Required Actions outlined in the report from the Special Review conducted in October 2012 and Directives resulting from the Monitoring Team Review conducted in May 2013 and December 2013.

The Monitoring Review Team recognized the progress of the school system to stabilize governance and operations as well as to begin to initiate actions to improve student performance. Under the leadership of the Superintendent and Board of Education the system is progressing in its effort to improve its organizational and instructional effectiveness. As noted in the report there are several critical potential challenges ahead including the transition to a new Board and the search for a new Superintendent. In the recent past, these challenges have been wrought with conflict and confusion. It is imperative that the Board of Education and district leadership ensure that the school system and community are prepared to address these known challenges in a professional and coherent manner.

As identified in the report, the school system is responsible for completing the remaining Required Actions. Additionally, the school system will be expected to submit an Institution Progress Report to document the additional actions it has taken to address all of the aforementioned Required Actions and Directives, as well as its ongoing compliance with AdvancED Standards and Policies. The Institution Progress Report must be submitted two weeks prior to the next Monitoring Review, which must be held by December 15, 2014.

Please note that it is the responsibility of school system officials to share the contents of the report with the system's governing body and the community.

Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns regarding the Monitoring Team report. The AdvancED Georgia office is available to support your efforts.

Sincerely,

Mark A. Elgart, Ed.D.
President and CEO

cc: Annette Bohling, AdvancED Chief Accreditation Officer
Mike Bryans, Director, AdvancED Georgia



Monitoring Review Report

**DeKalb County School District
Stone Mountain, GA**

Dates of Review:

May 11-13, 2014

Monitoring Review Report

Introduction

This report summarizes the findings of the Monitoring Review held on May 11-13, 2014 for the DeKalb County School District. The purpose of the Monitoring Review is to review the institution's progress toward addressing Required Actions from the Special Review held on October 17-19, 2012 and Directives resulting from the Monitoring Reviews conducted May 2013 and December 2013.

After a Special Review by AdvancED/SACS CASI in January 2011, the accreditation status of DeKalb County School District was categorized as Accredited on Advisement. The initial Special Review was followed by a Monitoring Review in October 2011, and the accreditation status remained Accredited on Advisement. In March 2012, the school system hosted a Quality Assurance Review and received Required Actions to support the system's continuous improvement. The system's status remained Accredited on Advisement. Due to the continuation of complaints related to violations of AdvancED Standards, AdvancED/SACS CASI conducted a Special Review from October 17-19, 2012 and designated the school system's accreditation status as Accredited-Probation with a charge to address 11 Required Actions by December 31, 2013. The next Monitoring Review occurred May 15-17, 2013, and the school system maintained its accreditation status of Accredited-Probation. In December 2013, AdvancED/SACS CASI conducted a Monitoring Review that recognized progress made by the system that resulted in a change in the accreditation status to Accredited-Warning. This report includes the results of the May 11-13, 2014 Monitoring Review, which was conducted with the express purpose of verifying continued progress on the outstanding Required Actions and Directives as well as continued improvement supporting organizational effectiveness and student achievement. Based on the information reviewed and gathered during the Monitoring Review the accreditation status for DeKalb County School District remains Accredited-Warning.

Activities of the Monitoring Team

In preparation for the Monitoring Review, the team reviewed the institution's progress report and related documentation. Once on-site, the team engaged in the following activities:

- Meetings with the superintendent
- Interviews with 27 stakeholders selected by the school system and representing board members, central office staff, principals and community members
- Artifact review of the evidence provided by the system as part of the Institution Progress Report submitted April 30, 2014
- Team deliberations and report preparation

The Monitoring Review Team used the findings from these activities and evidence reviewed to assess the progress the institution has made toward addressing the Required Actions and Directives identified by the previous review teams.

Findings

The Monitoring Review Team’s findings are organized by each of the outstanding Required Actions made by the October 17-19, 2012 Special Review Team. For each Required Action and Directive, the Monitoring Review Team provides a progress status rating and summary of findings. Directives within the report can continue to guide the school system’s next steps and support sustainability of progress.

Required Action 1: *Devise and implement a written, comprehensive plan for unifying the DeKalb County Board of Education so that the focus can become serving the needs of the children of the DeKalb County School District.*

Directives:

1. Devise and implement a written, comprehensive plan for unifying the DeKalb County Board of Education.
2. Devise a policy and training plan to address concerns over the sustainability of progress made by the school system since March 2013.
3. Devise and implement a plan to ensure that the policies and training of future boards will maintain a core focus on serving the needs of the children of the DeKalb County School District.

Progress Status:

	Completed - All necessary and appropriate actions have been taken and evaluated. The institution has
x	In Progress - The institution is currently engaged in actions and processes but has yet to fully implement steps necessary to address the required action.
	Has Not Addressed - The institution has not taken any action at this time.

Summary of Findings:

The Monitoring Review of the DeKalb County School District again revealed progress as evidenced by the information gathered during interviews with staff, administrators and community representatives. In reviewing several items of evidence for Required Action 1, it was noted that the Board developed a set of Norms and Standards accepting responsibility for their decisions and actions. This document further outlined the Board’s Interactions and Interpersonal Relationships; Interaction with District Administrators and Staff, Community & Stakeholders; and Interactions with the Media and Public Relations. While the Introduction to the document stated, “As a collective body of the DeKalb County Board of Education, we...,” there was no evidence of collective or individual agreement with the statement. Signatures of each board member could have offered greater accountability for the declaration of statements outlined, as well as serve as reminders to individual board members if the need should ever arise. While this effort to address interactions and interpersonal relationship is a major step for operating with respect and dignity as well as on behalf of the children in the DeKalb County School District, it does not constitute a comprehensive plan as outlined in the Directives for Required Action 1, but would be sufficient as one component in a comprehensive written plan.

The February 8, 2014 Board of Education minutes reflected the name change from “Guidelines for Internal & External Communication to and from Board of Education” to the name “Board Communication.” It was noted that the board members agreed that they would make communication among the Board a conscious and continuous process to ensure improved communication as a group as

well as improved communication with others such as the superintendent, system personnel and various stakeholders groups. Agreeing to improve communication is to be commended, and it would certainly be a significant step toward unifying the DeKalb County Board of Education. Yet, it reveals itself as another opportunity to make these efforts an essential part of a comprehensive plan as outlined in Required Action 1.

The adopted April 4, 2014 retreat agenda listed AdvancED’s Required Actions & Directives as a discussion item for the retreat. In the retreat minutes, handouts were given to facilitate the discussion of the Required Actions, but there was no indication that a written comprehensive plan was discussed or developed that would fulfill Required Action 1.

Overall, the school system is making great strides in creating steps that focus on serving the needs of the children in the DeKalb County School District. The action steps will be better served and recognized when they are coordinated in a comprehensive plan.

Required Action 3: *Establish and implement policies and procedures that ensure segregation of duties of the governing board and that of the administration including the elimination of Board working committees which result in board members assuming administrative functions that should be the responsibility of appropriate staff.*

Directive:

1. Evaluate Section B of the DeKalb County Schools Policy Manual to eliminate any conflicts with Policy BBC – Board Committees.

Progress Status:

	Completed - All necessary and appropriate actions have been taken and evaluated. The institution has documented evidence that supports fulfillment of the required action.
x	In Progress - The institution is currently engaged in actions and processes but has yet to fully implement steps necessary to address the required action.
	Has Not Addressed - The institution has not taken any action at this time.

Summary of Findings:

The school system has initiated a series of actions in response to the mandates of Required Action 3. Evidence indicated that the Board and superintendent participated in retreats held on February 8, 2014 with a focus on the Board Self Assessment Review including roles and responsibilities and April 4, 2014 with a focus on the accreditation-related Directives. During the April retreat, the Board decided to establish a policy review process covering a three-year cycle. However, the review process is in the preliminary discussion phase but has not been created. Reference was made to needed changes in policies to eliminate conflicting statements among policies as well as with the roles and responsibilities of the Board.

One Directive indicated the school system should, “Eliminate the provisions noted that are in direct conflict with the roles and responsibilities of board members.” However, Policy BAB still contains the same questionable language. For example, the policy states that “Board members shall be a partner with Senior Staff.” Being a partner with the *superintendent* who authorizes access to a senior staff member for specific purposes is different from being a partner with senior staff and having unlimited access to any

senior staff person on any strategic issue. Wording such as “Board members shall be a partner with Senior Staff” perpetuates authorization *in policy* to interfere with the day-to-day operation of the system and its schools. The intent of the actions presented in the policy may be legitimate; however, the wording is detrimental to the Board, superintendent and system staff. It is imperative that authors of policy clearly understand components of the board–superintendent relationship. Therefore, revising Policy BAB remains a task that must be completed in response to this Required Action.

Further, in the Institution Progress Report – April 30, 2014, the section entitled Next Steps for the Required Action includes the following: The Board will also incorporate a *board/senior management discussion* component to evaluate “what is working” and “what is not working.” The implications of this statement are unclear. This statement appears to promote one of the issues that was presented as a factor in board micromanagement. During the Special Review process, senior staff cited instances of board members interfering with their work without acting with approval from the superintendent. The key factor is that the Board hires and works with the superintendent. In turn, the superintendent recommends new hires to the Board for approval for employment. Authorization for board members to work directly with staff is in direct conflict with AdvancED Standard 2, *Governance and Leadership*, Indicator 2.3: The governing body ensures that the leadership at all levels has the autonomy to meet goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations effectively.

Another Directive mandated that the Board “Develop and adhere to an annual professional learning plan to promote and sustain the Board’s capacity to govern the school system and create the parameters for the process to become a systemic procedure.” Evidence did not include a professional learning plan or a process for annually developing a professional learning plan. The school system is currently engaged in actions and processes but has yet to fully devise and implement steps to address the Directives to 1) eliminate conflicting policy issues, 2) create a policy review and revision process, and 3) adhere to an annual professional learning plan.

During the interviews, the team observed that the current Board is respecting the segregation of duties between the Board and the administration. The evidence clearly supported the current Board’s adherence to a chain of command. There were multiple interviewees that confirmed the Board’s support of the proper chain of command and communication. The concern remains that without the proper policies and procedures being formalized and constantly reinforced through training and evaluation, the progress that has been made to date will not be sustained.

Required Action 6: *Ensure a robust diagnostic assessment program (universal screener, progress monitoring probes, and benchmarks included) that is a systematic and a regular component of the school system’s comprehensive assessment system, include a variety of formative assessment tasks and tools to monitor student progress, and provide school personnel access to the State Longitudinal Data System.*

Directive:

1. Ensure the continued operation of the protocol beyond the 2013-2014 school year. Efforts should include training for new employees in the use of the various protocols including the use of data to impact instructional decision making for groups of students as well as individual students.

Progress Status:

x	Completed - All necessary and appropriate actions have been taken and evaluated. The institution has
	In Progress - The institution is currently engaged in actions and processes but has yet to fully implement steps
	Has Not Addressed - The institution has not taken any action at this time.

Summary of Findings:

The school system has fully implemented the universal screener with success as indicated by both internal and external stakeholders. Data are used during discussions throughout the schools and the system. The emphasis on examining data is greatly influenced by the superintendent in his newly and very acceptable and appreciated Growth and Academic Achievement Model (GAM). Artifacts reveal that the superintendent holds strategy meetings to ensure that everyone understands the GAM. During the interviews, the Board, system staff and school level personnel all voiced their commitment and understanding of the importance of using data more effectively to address the academic needs of all the students in the system. In addition, the interviews revealed a real commitment to not only continued use of the universal screener but to empower the staff to more effectively use the data with more support tools and training. The system’s capability to assess all students; identify needed support; and implement, monitor and adjust the instructional supports constitutes a robust diagnostic assessment program, thus completing Required Action 6.

Required Action 12: *Develop systematic and systemic processes to ensure the continued implementation and sustainability of the continuous improvement efforts of the DeKalb County Board of Education in establishing and sustaining the Board as a highly effective governing body.*

Directives:

1. Eliminate the provisions in Policy BAB – School Board Governance that are in direct conflict with the roles and responsibilities of board members.
2. Develop and implement a Self-Assessment evaluation process to include Board Norms as well as to evaluate whether or not the Board’s decisions and actions are in accord with board policies and procedures and the Board’s defined roles and responsibilities.
3. Adopt and implement an annual professional learning plan to promote and sustain the Board’s capacity to govern the school system that includes full board training in accordance with state law.
4. Develop and implement a plan to collect feedback from stakeholders at specified intervals to determine the nature of the school system’s climate including the capacity to maintain trust between the system and its stakeholders. The Board and superintendent must assess stakeholder survey results, the board’s self-assessment and staff perceptions to determine how much progress is sustained over a period of time. Further, the Board and superintendent should analyze the results of crucial decisions (such as the cluster charter petition) to determine how lingering issues of mistrust and lack of transparency surrounding issues may be effectively addressed.

Progress Status:

	Completed - All necessary and appropriate actions have been taken and evaluated. The institution has
x	In Progress - The institution is currently engaged in actions and processes but has yet to fully implement steps necessary to address the required action.
	Has Not Addressed - The institution has not taken any action at this time.

Summary of Findings:

The school system continues to make strides in establishing processes and procedures necessary to ensure that the DeKalb County Board of Education establishes itself as a highly effective governing body. Previously in this report the need to address the remaining inconsistencies in Policy BAB were discussed. The majority of the technical work needed to create, review and modify the system's policies and procedures, thereby creating the framework upon which a successful Board can flourish, has been established. The Board has committed to establishing a process of review and updating of the policies over a three year period. This process of review must be fully developed and then become part of the standard operating procedure for the school system. All too often the commitment to a review process is abandoned during the actual implementation. If the system is truly committed to creating the environment and culture in which a highly effective Board can flourish and be sustained, everyone must remain committed to the processes and procedures that have been discussed and must still be fully implemented.

The team observed from the interviews and evidence presented that the Board is in the process of creating sustainable processes and procedures designed to result in an environment in which a highly effective Board becomes the expected norm. During the past several months the Board has conducted a series of training events and evaluation processes including, but not limited to, two different board retreats with guidance from several outside organizations, mandatory state board training, and continued development and implementation of the DeKalb annual Board Member Professional Learning Plan. The school system also has taken measures to develop and begin implementation of self-assessment evaluation processes. In order to gain invaluable feedback that can further the continuous improvement of the Board, the system needs to implement with fidelity the Professional Learning Plan.

As the school system continues to experience changes in the individuals seated on the Board, it is vital to its success that the Board adheres to the training requirements. Given the level of dysfunction that was previously present in the board culture, the system and subsequent boards must be diligent in requiring all members of the Board to actively participate in the established training guidelines. The Board must be prepared to enforce the new Board norms that have been exhibited in the past several months. Each member is responsible for the actions of the Board and must be diligent in demanding that all new members to the Board exhibit the same level of commitment to the educational success of all of DeKalb County's students. As the Board prepares for new members, it must not allow the progress that has been achieved to be lost to new personal agendas.

The development and implementation of plans designed to address the above-stated Directives 2-4 form the basis of a three-pronged approach to sustaining the progress made by the Board and system. The full development and adherence to these plans are fundamental for establishing the new board culture and regaining the public trust. These activities will direct the Board to maintain its focus on the proper governance of the system in order to support the school system's goal of achieving great academic results

for all DeKalb County students. The Board must continue to actively engage in self-assessment and use said results to guide the Board's training and culture building activities. The continued use of external third parties to provide both honest assessment and professional training are fundamental to the continued growth of the Board as it learns to embrace its role as a governing body. Finally, the Board must continue to collect and use feedback from the system's stakeholders to gauge the success of the Board and restore public trust in the Board and its ability to empower all the students of the system to succeed.

Review of the Spring 2014 board meetings provided further evidence of the change of board culture and norms that are being embraced in the DeKalb County School District. The Board meetings are once again focused on the needs and issues impacting the growth and academic success of the students of DeKalb County. The meetings are professional and collegial. Even when board members are not in agreement with each other or have difficult questions for the staff, there is a new atmosphere of respect. This is enabling the Board to govern more effectively and keep its focus on the important issues facing the school system.

As the school system begins the process of seeking formal recognition as a Georgia Charter District, it is vitally important that the work needed to establish and sustain a properly governed system is completed. During the April 1, 2014 board meeting, it was stated that one of the main areas of review by the Georgia Department of Education in assessing the school system's charter petition will be its governance. The completion of the Required Actions and Directives would provide valuable evidence to the Georgia Department of Education that the DeKalb County School District is capable of taking on the added responsibilities of governing a charter system.

Required Action 13:

Develop and implement plans, policies and processes to monitor, evaluate and sustain the school system's continuous improvement efforts.

Directives:

1. Establish a plan to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the fiscal policies, procedures and operations of the school system, including a review of all the accounting and financial management systems and resources currently in use.
2. Routinely evaluate the policies adopted to ensure the proper adherence to the chain of command and the ongoing training implemented for the Board and staff to guarantee the sustainability of the changing culture resulting from rigorous adherence to said chain of command.
3. Adhere to plans for the implementation of a systemic change management process for system initiatives (vision, mission, strategic plan, curriculum, benchmark assessment, etc.) to facilitate continuous improvement and sustain effectiveness.
4. Incorporate in the Instructional Software Purchase (ISP) Process a systemic and systematic review and evaluation of the effectiveness of the ISPs at the school and school system levels to determine the impact of ISPs implemented in schools on student learning and achievement and ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students.
5. Develop and implement a plan for the migration to the new parent portal platform, include details and a timeline for implementation, training and communication.
6. Develop and implement the strategic plan with fidelity, maintain a systemic and systematic process of accountability based on the plan, and sustain governance and management structures designed to monitor, evaluate and communicate the school system's progress on the plan's implementation.

Progress Status:

	Completed – All necessary and appropriate actions have been taken and evaluated. The institution has documented evidence that supports completion of the required action.
x	In Progress –The institution is currently engaged in actions and processes but has yet to fully implement steps necessary to address the required action.
	Have Not Addressed – The institution has not taken any action at this time.

Summary of Findings:

The Monitoring Review Team members reviewed the system’s Institution Progress Report, board agendas, board minutes, board policies, the Beanstalk Consulting contract, the Harvard Public Education Leadership Project (PELP) information, and the Preliminary FY 2015 budget. They also interviewed the superintendent, board members, administrators, and other stakeholders. The team members found that the school system has developed and implemented plans, policies and processes to monitor, evaluate, and sustain the school system’s continuous improvement efforts. The superintendent, administrators, and board members have made conscientious efforts to streamline all fiscal policies and procedures, governance policies, the change management process, and the purchase and use of technology so that they are aligned with the system’s strategic plan. Moreover, the actions taken are designed to ensure decisions made in these areas maximize student learning and achievement and ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students.

The State Department of Audits conducted an external financial audit for the Fiscal Year 2012 and that audit indicated that the school system had a deficit of \$14 million. This fact caused the school system to work out a Deficit Reduction Plan with the State Department of Education and submit mandatory monthly reports. As a result of sounder financial management, realistic budget forecasting and more rigid cost controls, the unaudited balance for Fiscal Year 2013 is a positive \$10.8 million. Preliminary indications are that Fiscal Year 2014 will end with a positive balance of approximately \$10 million, with an additional \$15 million coming in Quality Basic Education (QBE) earnings for Fiscal Year 2015.

This welcome news regarding the budget surplus and the increase in state earnings must be balanced against some financial obligations that must be met. The new fiscal year (FY 2015) will require that the school system make additional retirement contributions, additional state minimum salary adjustments and additional allocations to local charter schools. The school system also must consider cash flow requirements in addition to the expenditures outlined above. State QBE payments, after the deductions, will be paid in 12 increments from July 1, 2014 until June 30, 2015. Any enrollment increases must be covered with local funds until state growth funds are allocated in the spring of 2015.

The bulk of local ad valorem tax revenue comes in during the month of December 2014. Like many other school systems, DeKalb County will have to cover local expenditures with the existing fund balance and with a Tax Anticipation Note (loan). The cautionary note is that funds left over from FY 2014 and increased local ad valorem tax proceeds are not totally available for new spending and educational enhancements. A large portion of these funds must be used to cover new financial requirements and cash flow needs. Finally, the system is moving toward the full implementation of the State Chart of Accounts. This move will better facilitate regular financial management and reporting as well as state audits.

The Board of Education adopted two policies that clarify the distinctive roles of the board members, the superintendent, and the senior staff (Board Policy BAB: School Board Governance) and staff nepotism (Board Policy GAGB: Staff Nepotism). Policy BAB outlines the specific policy-making responsibilities of board members as well as the significance of their adherence to high standards for ethical conduct and values. However as previously stated, there remain a few opportunities to strengthen and clarify the language of Policy BAB. Policy GAGD clearly defines what a “relative” is and outlines specific requirements for disclosure and voting whenever relatives are involved. Adherence to Policy GAGD is beginning to have a positive impact on the system and its ability to hire and retain staff based on ability and talent and not relationships. The continued faithful implementation of this policy is a necessary step to restoring the public’s trust in the school system. Policies such as these set high standards for all policies and the board has committed itself to their regular review.

Comprehensive efforts have been made to measure all initiatives based upon their alignment with the school system’s strategic plan. They also will be measured for their compliance with best practices as outlined in the recommendations from McKenna, Long, and Aldridge; the Georgia School Boards Association and Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement. The system also has contracted with a company called Beanstalk Consulting to evaluate and analyze the operation of the Career and Technical Education, Gifted and Talented Education and the Exceptional Students Departments. They are seeking information on the effectiveness and the efficiency of the management of all of these areas.

The school system has developed a collaborative process whereby the Curriculum and Instruction Department, the Instructional Technology Department and the Fiscal Department evaluate all software purchases. They determine whether the items requested are consistent with the goals of the strategic plan, promote student learning and achievement, and ensure an equitable learning opportunity for all students. Once the software and other technology meet these requirements, they are recommended to the superintendent who makes the recommendation to the Board of Education.

The school system has substantially upgraded its Parent Portal by adopting a program called Infinite Campus. The Parent Portal information from the previous program has been imported into the new program, and the new portal has been widely advertised. Staff and stakeholders have been trained on this new program.

All indications are that the board members, superintendent, senior staff, and stakeholders are attempting to implement the strategic plan with fidelity. They are widely communicating the components of the strategic plan and accepting stakeholder input into its development. Accountability measures are built into all phases of the strategic plan. The current progress holds the promise of being sustainable over time and when transitions occur among board members, superintendent and senior staff.

While the school system has made tremendous progress in fiscal management, governance, systemic change management, technology, and the implementation of the strategic plan, the dominant factor will be sustainability as leadership changes occur in the coming year.

Required Action 14: *Continue to implement, evaluate and adapt the system’s technology plan to ensure an effective and equitable distribution of technology throughout the system and its long-term sustainability.*

Directives:

1. Adhere to the systemic process designed for conducting an annual technology audit to maintain a current perspective about the needs of the school system as a basis for developing the annual technology plan required by the Georgia Department of Education.

2. Create policies and procedures that facilitate the Board’s consideration of the data contained in the annual technology audit to inform the equitable allocation of technology throughout the school system.
3. Develop a structure to implement the Technology Training Plan as a systemic process within the school system with provisions for using data to determine progress and guide decision-making.
4. Create and implement a “stakeholder engagement” plan to collect feedback on the system’s Technology Plan, including monitoring and reporting on the annual feedback received describing variables such as the nature and number of participants, timeframe and description of the engagement.

Progress Status:

	Completed – All necessary and appropriate actions have been taken and evaluated. The institution has documented evidence that supports completion of the required action.
x	In Progress – The institution is currently engaged in actions and processes but has yet to fully implement steps necessary to address the required action.
	Have Not Addressed – The institution has not taken any action at this time.

Summary of Findings:

A review of board agendas, minutes, board policies and the system website, as well as interviews with various stakeholder groups indicate that the Board, superintendent, and system staff have conducted a technology audit and developed a process to determine the equitable allocation of technology throughout the system. The school system used the State Technology Inventory as a part of its Comprehensive Management Structure. The Board of Education has allocated \$9.3 Million from Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) IV funds to increase the capacity and efficiency of the local area network to effectively meet the needs of the system’s 21st Century Learning Environment. Not only do these measures help ensure equity for all schools and all students, but they also establish quantifiable parameters that each 21st Century Learning Environment must include.

Direct implications are made to the appropriate components of the strategic plan for all technology recommendations. These recommendations resulted from collaboration among Curriculum and Instruction, Instructional Technology and Fiscal staff members. A Technology Academy with mandatory courses, a communications plan, parental involvement and the capacity to access information through smart phones, Facebook, Twitter and other media have been established. A Technology Advisory Committee has also been formed. The Technology Audit process is providing data for the continuous analysis of the system’s technology infrastructure.

The school system must continue to adhere to the established Comprehensive Management Structure in order to effectively manage the system’s technology infrastructure, and continue technology training and implementation of best practices regarding selection and use.

Conclusion

The Monitoring Team continues to recognize the effort and hard work of the Board, Superintendent Thurmond, system staff and personnel at all levels, and stakeholders. The school system continues to establish proper norms, expectations and frameworks for the establishment of a system that is properly governed and operating in a highly effective manner to meet the growth and academic needs of all its students. It remains critically important that the processes and procedures become institutionalized within the system's operation.

The work to date has managed to stabilize the system and set it on a path of continuous improvement. However, the school system faces several critical challenges that can threaten the sustainability of the progress made. The continued work of the school system to address the governance issues and to establish the policies, procedures, norms and expectations for the Board is designed to provide the current and successor boards with the tools, resources and skills necessary to meet the types of challenges that must be confronted in the year ahead. In particular, the system must be ready to address the following issues: 1) the transition to the new Board; 2) the process of selecting a superintendent to succeed Superintendent Thurmond; and 3) determine its best pathway forward as a charter district or IE2 to meet the expectations of the state of Georgia.

As the school system prepares for the transition to a seven-member board, it is imperative that the new Board be trained on, and embraces the policies, procedures, norms and expectations that have been adopted and implemented by the current Board. The DeKalb County stakeholders must demand that the school system's progress in reestablishing an effective governance structure not be lost in this transition period. The selection and hiring of a superintendent is one of the most important responsibilities of any board of education and is a challenge to even the most highly functioning boards. During this process, it is imperative that the Board continue to model the norms and expectations that it has established. This will provide the Board with the best opportunity to select a superintendent who can continue to address the challenges facing the system and provide the leadership necessary to meet the growth and academic needs of all of its students. To be able to provide the state of Georgia with evidence of this level of effective governance, the system must continue to fully address the Required Actions and Directives, institutionalize the measures that have been taken to date and continue to exemplify the new board norms and expectations.

The school system continues to make material progress in confronting the challenges and issues that must be overcome to reestablish the DeKalb County School District as one of the premiere school systems in the state. As previously noted, the progress made so far must be sustained in order for the system to fully focus its talents and resources on student achievement and providing every student a 21st century education. In order to ensure that the school system remains committed to a path of continuous progress, AdvancED shall conduct another Monitoring Review by December 15, 2014. A Monitoring Review Team will review the institution to assess its progress on the remaining Required Actions. An Institutional Progress Report will be due from the DeKalb County School District at least two weeks prior to the review.

About AdvancED®

Background

Dedicated to advancing excellence in education worldwide, AdvancED provides accreditation, research, and professional services to 30,000 institutions in more than 70 countries. AdvancED provides accreditation under the seals of the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), Northwest Accreditation Commission (NWAC) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI).

The Accreditation Process

To earn and maintain accreditation, an institution must:

1. Meet the AdvancED Standards and accreditation policies.

Institutions demonstrate adherence to the AdvancED Standards/Indicators and accreditation policies, which describe the quality practices and conditions that research and best practice indicate are necessary for educational institutions to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness.

2. Engage in continuous improvement.

Institutions implement a process of continuous improvement focused on improving student performance and organizational effectiveness.

3. Demonstrate quality assurance through internal and external review.

Institutions engage in a planned process of ongoing internal review and self-assessment. In addition, institutions host an External Review team at least once every five years. The team evaluates the institution's adherence to the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and policies, assesses the efficacy of the institution's improvement process and methods for quality assurance, and identifies Powerful Practices and provides Required Actions to help the institution improve. The institution acts on the team's Required Actions and submits an Accreditation Progress Report at prescribed intervals following the External Review. Monitoring Reviews may be conducted during this time to ensure that the institution is making progress toward the Required Actions.

Special Reviews

At any point, a Special Review may be conducted in response to complaints or information about the institution and/or its system (district, board, or corporation) to determine adherence to the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and policies. The institution and/or its system must respond to the Required Actions of the Special Review Team. Monitoring Teams may be sent to the institution and/or its system at regular intervals to ensure that progress is being made toward the Special Review Team's Required Actions. Both Special Review Teams and Monitoring Teams are empowered to make accreditation recommendations based upon evidence obtained during said review.

A Process of Continuous Improvement

The AdvancED accreditation process engages institutions in a continuous process of self-evaluation and improvement. The overall aim is to help institutions be the best they can be on behalf of the students they serve.