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February 13, 2015

Mr. Michael Thurmond
1701 Mountain Industrial Blvd.
Stone Mountain, GA 30083

Dear Mr. Thurmond:

Enclosed, please find the AdvancED Monitoring Review Team's report from the review conducted December 8-10, 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 initial report from the Special Review Team October, 2012.

Based on the findings in the Monitoring Review Team report and subsequent review and action by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, DeKalb County Schools will be moved to the accreditation status of **Accredited on Advisement**.

As identified in the report, DeKalb County School District is required to continue to work to complete Required Actions 3, 12 and 13. The Monitoring Review Team has designed the directives in this report to help the system persist in maintaining its focus on completion of the Required Actions.

Additionally, DeKalb County School District must continue to meet all AdvancED Accreditation Standards and policies. Please note that it is the responsibility of DeKalb County School District officials to share the contents of the report with the system's governing body and the community.
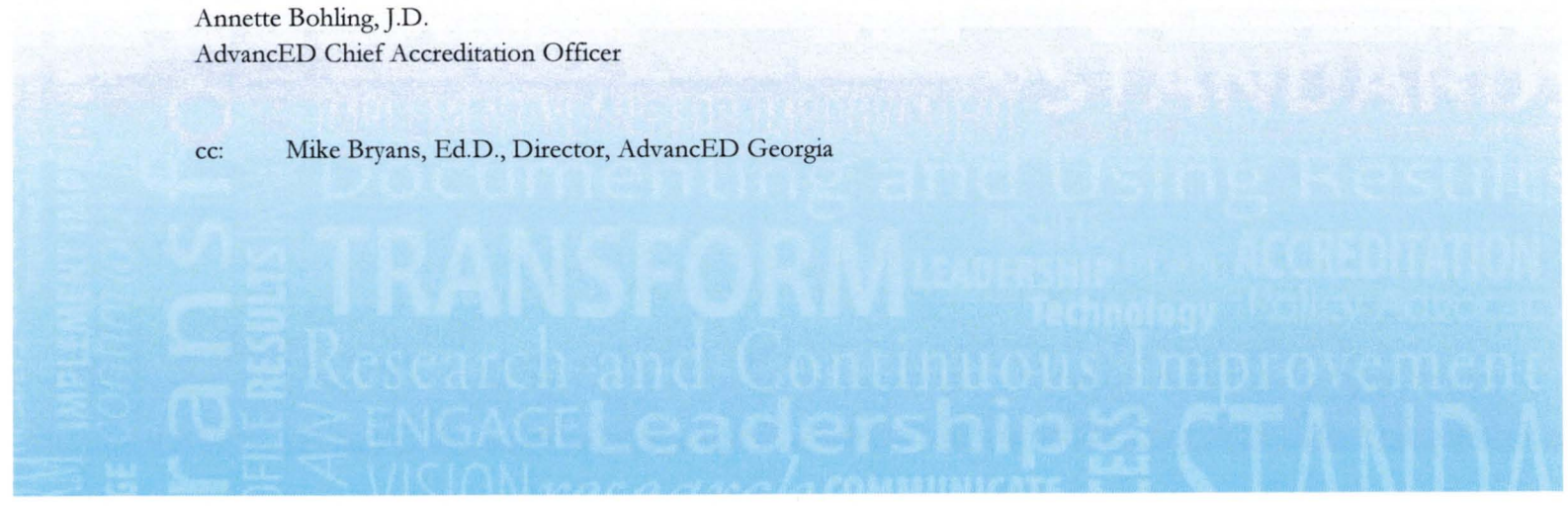
Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns regarding the Monitoring Review Team report. The AdvancED Georgia office is available to support your efforts.

Sincerely,

Annette Bohling

Annette Bohling, J.D.
AdvancED Chief Accreditation Officer

cc: Mike Bryans, Ed.D., Director, AdvancED Georgia

AdvancED®

Monitoring Review Report

DeKalb County School District
Stone Mountain, GA

Dates of Review:

December 8-10, 2014

Monitoring Review Report

Introduction

This report summarizes the findings of the Monitoring Review held on December 8-10, 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, December 2013 and May 2014.

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 Warned. A Monitoring Review was conducted May 11-13, 2014 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 May 11-13, 2014 Monitoring Review the accreditation status for DeKalb County School District remained Accredited Warned. This report identifies the results of the December 8-10, 2014 Monitoring Review which was conducted to verify continued progress to complete the outstanding Required Actions and Directives as well as continued improvement supporting organizational effectiveness and student achievement.

Based on the findings of the Monitoring Review Team and subsequent review and action by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, DeKalb County Schools will be moved to the accreditation status of **Accredited on Advisement**.

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:
- Meeting with the superintendent
- Interviews with 28 stakeholders selected by the school system and representing board members, school system office staff, regional superintendents, principals, parents, and community members
- Artifact review of the evidence provided by the system in support of the Institution Progress Report submitted November 21, 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.
4. Systematically monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the DeKalb County Board of Education members' implementation of the *DeKalb Board of Education Handbook.*

Progress Status:

x	**Completed** - All necessary and appropriate actions have been taken and evaluated. The institution has documented evidence that supports fulfillment of the required action.
	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 system has made substantial progress as related to the implementation of a comprehensive plan for unifying the DeKalb County Board of Education as evidenced by the information gathered during interviews with the superintendent, board members, staff, administrators and community representatives, along with a review of the *DeKalb Board of Education Handbook,* board agendas and minutes, revised policies and board meeting videos. The *DeKalb Board of Education Handbook,* which was approved on November 3, 2014, is a comprehensive document that reflects federal and state laws and statutes. The major components of the handbook include:

- Board mission;
- Governance;
- Separation of the Roles of the Board and the Superintendent;
- Policies and Protocol;
- Board Norms and Code of Conduct;
- Board and Superintendent Evaluations;
- Communication among and between Board Members, Stakeholders, and the Superintendent; and
- A Professional Learning for Board Members.

The plan includes provisions to ensure that the Board is "unified as one Board working together to provide guidance for strategic planning, board self-evaluation and assurance of board training."

Minutes and videos of board meetings show board member actions that are consistent with the requirements of the *DeKalb Board of Education Handbook* and Policy BH—Board Code of Ethics, with no exceptions being observed. An extensive training calendar has been adopted, and it includes training for both new and veteran board members. The combination of the actions identified in the handbook and Policy BH must continue to guide the board members in the decisions they make, the way they interact among themselves and with others, and the manner in which they conduct themselves as board members. Based on this evidence, Required Action 1 has been completed. However, continuing adherence to the requirements of the handbook, policy and laws must be regularly monitored and appropriate action must be taken when they are violated to ensure the sustainability of a unified Board. This is especially critical as the Board navigates the transition to a seven member board and the identification of a new superintendent.

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 November 3, 2014 adoption of the comprehensive *Board of Education Handbook* and revised policies (BAB—School Board Governance, BBI—Board-Staff Relations, BDC—Board Policy Adoption, and BDF—Review of Administrative Rules) are positive steps related to the completion of Required Action 3. However, based upon a closer review of these documents, there remain concerns regarding the language contained in revised Policy BAB. Revised Policy BAB includes two troublesome statements. The last sentence in the second bulleted paragraph on page 3 of the policy reads "…Board members may ask for additional information from, or meet with, Senior Staff at any time. Any such requests or meetings shall be coordinated through the Superintendent." Page 4 of Policy BAB reads "Senior Staff attend Board meetings and meet informally with Board members before and after the meetings."

Policy language authorizing board members to meet with Senior Staff invites them to interfere in day-to-day operations, even when such meetings are coordinated by the Superintendent. The same reservation exists for language that authorizes board members to seek information from Senior Staff. While current board members may fully understand that this is neither the intention nor the purpose of this policy statement, future board members may not. Policy BAB must be revised to eliminate all references to board members meeting with, and requesting information from Senior Staff in order for the school system to be in compliance with Required Action 3. As federal and state laws and statutes change in the future, it will be incumbent upon the Board to review its policies to ensure that they remain in compliance with these laws and statutes.

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 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:
Policy BAB – School Board Governance

Evidence revealed that the school system has revised parts of Policy BAB – School Board Governance adopted on November 3, 2014. An intensive examination of the document disclosed that the policy continues to contain some of the same problematic language as it did initially. The wording of sections of the policy authorizes behavior that is in direct conflict with the roles and responsibilities of board members and school system staff. From every indication, the Board has adopted the revised document without eliminating wording that describes and advocates behavior which is a root cause of the governance issues that board members have faced. The policy supports a culture which the current Board has worked consistently and successfully to eliminate. While a culture shift has begun, written authorization continues to exist in board policy condoning a working relationship between the Board and staff that permits circumventing the superintendent.

The Monitoring Review Team found the following examples of problematic language that still exists in Policy BAB:

Board Meetings and Annual Retreat   Policy BAB   (Page 3)

- The Chair is responsible for conducting meetings and informal consultations in a manner that encourages informed, meaningful and probing deliberations. Presentations at Board meetings should be concise and focused, and should include adequate time for discussion and decision-making. <u>Board members may ask for additional information from, "or meet with, Senior Staff at any time. Any such requests or meetings shall be coordinated through the Superintendent.</u>

Stakeholder Communications   Policy BAB (Page 3)

- Stakeholders <u>may communicate with the Board by sending written correspondence to DeKalb County School System</u>, Administrative & Instructional Complex, c/o Board Secretary, 1701 Mountain Industrial Boulevard, Stone Mountain, Georgia 30083, <u>or by emailing the Board at the following email address:</u> <u>youtellus@fc.dekalb.k12.ga.us</u>.

Board Contact with Operations and Management   Policy BAB (Pages 3 and 4)

- <u>Senior Staff</u> attend Board meetings and <u>meet informally with Board before and after the meetings.</u>
- Board members provide substantive value through their policy setting and strategic involvement without usurping the Superintendent's and staff's traditional management function. In exercising its oversight duty, the <u>Board should assure proper demarcation between its role and the role of staff. Board members should not direct staff on operational matters. They should refer such inquiries or concerns to the Superintendent as appropriate.</u>
- Ongoing communication between the Board and the Superintendent is important for the Board to effectively oversee execution of policies and strategic goals. <u>Board Members' communication with staff for requests of information or for meetings shall be directed through the Superintendent.</u>
- Visits to schools are beneficial and educational for Board members when appropriately conducted. <u>Board members should visit and observe schools (and other sites, if helpful) to gain insights and familiarity with the actual operations of the District without disrupting them.</u> This section of the policy appears to be in conflict with Policy BBI.

The Monitoring Review Team recognizes the process used by the system to update policies and develop the *DeKalb School Board Member Handbook 2014-2015*, including the review of policies and procedures of other effective school boards, and the selection of an appropriate prototype to guide its work. However, the system has not completed this component of the Required Action. The system must continue to review all board policies to ensure the elimination of policy provisions that conflict with board member roles and responsibilities.

Self-Assessment Evaluation Process

In relation to developing and implementing a process for self-evaluation, interviews with board members indicated that board members collectively evaluate the operation of the Board. According to information shared, a discussion serves as the main tool for soliciting input. Interviews and artifacts did not confirm that a process for self-evaluation has been developed and implemented.

Board Policy BAB stipulates the following:

Board Self-Evaluation   Policy BAB (Page 5)

- The Chair coordinates an annual evaluation process by the Board members of the Board's performance and procedures. This self-evaluation leads to a full Board discussion of the results.
- The Chair informally consults with each of the Board members as part of the evaluation.

The *DeKalb School Board Member Handbook 2014-2015* states that twice each year the Board will have discussions about means to improve its own performance. The handbook also states that the Board will review the contents of the handbook annually as a part of the board self-evaluation.

The *DeKalb School Board Member Handbook 2014-2015* specifies the following:

Board Self-Evaluation

The Board will conduct an annual self-evaluation at its spring retreat or at a time between its spring retreat and its final annual evaluation of superintendent performance. The evaluation will consist of a review of the

principles and protocols incorporated in this handbook and a review of Board actions over the previous year for consistency with the principles and protocols. The outcome of the self-evaluation should be a reaffirmation of the principles and protocols or amendment of them.   See Policies: BC – Board Meetings and BAB – School Governance.

Evidence did not confirm the completion of this component of the Required Action. The system must implement Policy BAB – Board Self-Evaluation in a formal systematic process.

Annual Professional Learning Plan

In relation to an explicit plan for board training, the Board has a state-approved professional learning plan that it submits annually. Evidence included a 2013-2014 Local Board Governance Annual Training Report submitted by the superintendent showing annual training requirements and statutory requirements for school board members. Credit hours earned ranged from 12-18 with six members completing 12 hours and two members completing 18 hours. Another document entitled Local Board Training Plan for Individual Board Member Training and Whole Board Training Resulting from An Assessment Identifying Areas of Board Governance Improvement outlined the approved plan for board member professional learning. This document specifies the general timeframe for each area of training and expected number of hours of training for board members based on their longevity of service. The draft of the DeKalb BOE Fiscal Year Agenda and Planning/Training Calendar reveals a composite document of board-related activities, including the steps and timeline for the evaluation of the superintendent. The on-going professional development of the governing board is a crucial step in ensuring the progress that has been made on all of the Required Actions can be maintained.

Plan for Collecting Feedback from Stakeholders

In relation to the plan for surveys to acquire stakeholder input, evidence documented that the school system has completed numerous surveys to solicit and receive stakeholder feedback about various issues that would reveal the climate of the system. Interviewees indicated that various stakeholder groups are satisfied with the school system in relation to communication and trust. One interviewee shared her appreciation for consistently receiving immediate responses when contacting school system personnel.

Though numerous examples exist of survey data being collected and analyzed, a systemic plan for collecting, analyzing and using survey data from various stakeholder groups – board members, staff, students, parents and business/community representatives – was not evident. Although the school system has indicated that it has completed this Required Action, activity appears to be in a developmental stage in relation to designing a plan to ensure that a process exists for feedback that is subsequently evaluated and considered in decision-making processes. A systematic, inclusive process of soliciting, reviewing, acknowledging and considering feedback from stakeholders is imperative as the system continues its efforts to build a trusting, positive climate for the school 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. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. Develop and implement a plan for the migration to the new parent portal platform, include details and a timeline for implementation, training and communication.

5. 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:

Interviews with the superintendent, board members, system and school administrators, a review of multiple artifacts including financial and budget reports, Board Policy BAB, the recently adopted *DeKalb Board of Education Handbook,* and the DeKalb County School District Strategic Implementation Plan 2014-19, indicate the system had made significant progress in meeting the directives identified in Required Action 13.

The school system ended Fiscal Year 2014 with a budget surplus of $31 million. The implementation of systematic procedures such as School Books Software, monthly Finance Reports and monthly Budget Status Reports presented to Unit Managers has increased the system's capacity to effectively monitor and evaluate its ability to allocate sufficient resources in support of its strategic goals, maximize student learning and achievement, ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students, and optimize organizational effectiveness.

Interviews with school system administrators and review of the DeKalb School District Improvement Plan, reveals the school system has embedded the Change Management Process within Goal Area V of the Plan. Examples include an Accountability Initiative and Organizational Effectiveness Initiative. Interviews with members of the IT and Curriculum staff, Regional Superintendents and school administrators substantiated the positive impact of the implementation of the Change Management Process related to the implementation of the Instructional Software Program (ISP). The process provides a systematic decision making framework related to the purchase of new ISPs and an evaluation process to determine the renewal of existing ISPs, as well as the Instructional Technology Work Flow Process related to Change Requests. Significantly, the system recently reorganized the makeup of the RA 9 Committee to address the expectations of the directives related to Required Actions 13 and 14. An outcome of the work of this committee was the IT Department's creation of an innovative "online store" where schools and departments go to select software from the current list of 88 ISPs identified in response to the requested update for ISPs for the 2014-15 school year. In addition, these processes have served as a reference point for the creation of the Instruction Materials (IM) Adoption process. A review of artifacts reveals the development of a draft plan, *The Instructional Review Process for 2014-15,* in support of Strategic Goal Area 1: Student Success with Equity and Access. The plan embeds the Six Step Data Protocol to guide and inform decision-making related to the review, evaluation and piloting of instructional resources to support equal access to the curriculum for all learners.

A review of artifacts, including The Infinite Campus Flyer, record of Portal Logins, screenshots of support documents such as the *Campus Portal for Parent Navigation*, and records of training provided for schools, indicate a successful launching of the Infinite Campus Portal. In addition, interviews with school system and school administrators as well as parents confirmed a variety of support systems, such as the Campus Portal Telephone Hotline, were provided to support the successful implementation of the Portal. The hotline provided technical support for parents and students who were setting up accounts in the system.

Although the school system continues to make progress to finalize its strategic plan, it currently remains in the development stage. The system conducted two face-to-face meetings with stakeholders on May 21, 2014 at 9:00 a.m. and May 22, 2014 at 6:30 p.m. and administered an Online Survey May 22-June 13, 2014 as part of a strategic plan to gather data related to stakeholder perspective on the strategic plan goal areas and performance objectives. Attendance at the two face-to-face meetings totaled 32 people and there were 61 survey respondents. Of the 61 online survey respondents, 72% identified themselves as "Parent with child[ren]) in school". A review of the qualitative results presented in the District Strategic Plan Engagement Report indicated that although the respondents were generally hopeful that goals identified in the Strategic Plan will be brought to fruition, the system continues to have trust issues with the community. The report further indicated the importance of the system ensuring it systematically implements transparent communication processes and engages stakeholders in active roles in the ongoing implementation of the strategic plan to ensure there is mutual accountability to achieve the goals and performance objectives identified in the District Strategic Plan.

Interviews with the superintendent, regional superintendents and principals and document review substantiated that an alignment between the District Strategic Plan and the 137 School Improvement Plans was finalized in July 2014. In an effort to provide transparency and accountability to the community, the School Improvement Plans are currently posted on e-Board, and the system personnel indicated there are plans to publicize the District Strategic Plan which will include the School Improvement Plans on e-Board.

The school system revealed in the November 21, 2014 Institution Progress Report that the former Chair of the Strategic Planning process accepted a promotion in another school system. Interviews with school system and school administrators, community members and parents revealed some concern that the strategic planning process has stalled since this occurred. Others recognized the school system is in a transition period. The school system has identified two new co-chairs to lead the process forward. The Georgia Institute for School Improvement is providing them guidance and technical support to ensure fidelity to the original strategic planning process. There was further recognition the leadership transition delayed the identification of the Performance Targets which were presented to and approved by the Board of Education on December 8, 2014. The Division of Curriculum and Instruction has develop a department plan dated December 2, 2014 in which it has identified performance objectives and initiatives to the achievement of Performance Objectives 1: "Improve Students' Mastery of Learning Standards, Performance Objective" 2: "Provide Equitable Access to Academically Rigorous Courses, and Performance Objective 3: "Increase Graduation Rate of All Students". The Six-Step data protocol is embedded in this process, and several initiatives are identified in the Plan. However, the majority of these initiatives are in the planning stage and not yet implemented. In addition, the school system has yet to determine the monitoring and evaluation systems it will use to evaluate effectiveness in meeting the Performance Targets as well as keeping departments accountable to meeting their goals.

Evidence did not confirm the school system currently is implementing the District Strategic Plan, nor did it confirm the school system has identified a systemic and systematic process of accountability based on the plan designed to monitor, evaluate and communicate the system's progress to meet the Performance Targets. Based on evidence, this component of the Required Action has not been completed.

Directive:

Implement the strategic plan with fidelity, identify and maintain a systemic process of accountability based on the plan. Sustain the governance and management structures to monitor, evaluate and communicate the school system's progress to meet the Performance Targets.

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.
5. Monitor and systematically evaluate the continued implementation of the system's current technology plan and those developed in the future to ensure actions focused on the effective and equitable distribution of technology to support learning and organizational effectiveness are sustainable.

Progress Status:

X	**Completed** – All necessary and appropriate actions have been taken and evaluated. The institution has documented evidence that supports completion of the Required Action.
	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 system has developed and systematically implemented a comprehensive technology program. Descriptors such as, "dynamic, exciting, cutting edge, awesome, extremely satisfied and phenomenal," were used by stakeholders when communicating their views of the system's technology program. Interviews further revealed other school systems have contacted DeKalb's Technology Department staff to gain insights from their processes.

Interviews with school and system administrators, a review of numerous artifacts, including the technology update, grant award letters, technology course evaluation results, summaries of technology committee meetings and the description of the Learning Management System Review process, revealed that the system has greatly enhanced its technology initiative. In addition to the development of a comprehensive technology plan, the system has acquired and provided numerous technological tools for use by classroom teachers and students.

During the 2013-2014 school year, the system completed the following projects:
- Strengthened the Technology Infrastructure by
  - providing wireless access for all buildings
  - increasing the broadband width
  - refreshing the desktops
  - installing ActivBoards in all classrooms
- Strengthened Communications Tools through
  - creating websites for all schools
  - providing a system app to assist parents in obtaining information regarding their children's school

progress
- o providing Outlook 365 for internal email systemically
- Enhanced Community and School Support by
  - o employing a records retention system
  - o offering Office 365 Student Advantage to students
  - o helping parents to gain Internet access through Internet Essentials from Comcast
  - o scheduling a Technology Fair with more than 230 students participating systemwide; 49 students participating in the State Technology Fair with 10 receiving awards
- Improved Customer Service by
  - o resolving technical issues systematically and in quickly, using a ticket system (94,000 tickets resolved)
  - o increasing the customer service rating to 4.5 on a 5.0 scale

A review of documents and interviews with system and school staff revealed that the system has engaged in the development of a 21st Century Learning Environment, focusing on the development of higher order thinking skills, communication and collaboration skills, and technology skills. This learning environment supports student achievement by providing equitable access to technology as a teaching and learning tool, which enhances learning experiences for all students.

To further support the implementation of the 21st Century Learning Environment the system is systematically implementing its Technology Training Plan through the Technology Academy, which provides virtual and face-to-face delivery options for training staff in the use of various instructional software and technological tools. During interviews, staff members expressed a high level of satisfaction related to the 22 course offerings scheduled for teachers during the summer of 2014. The focus areas for instructional technology training during the 2014 – 2015 school year include Infinite Campus (the new student information system), ActivClassroom (interactive white boards), instructional websites and mobile devices.

The system implemented Infinite Campus on July 21, 2014, the new student information system and gradebook. This system, accessible to parents, promotes and supports parental engagement in their children's education through direct access to grades, assignments and teachers. The portal allows parents and students to:

- view attendance, schedules, grades and assignment details online;
- receive direct notices and messages from the system, school and teachers; and
- access the Infinite Campus app from their mobile iOS or Android devices.

A review of artifacts, videos of board meetings and interviews with staff revealed that the system was the recipient of the competitive Connections for Classrooms Grant in the amount of $8.4 million. System staff indicated that these funds would be used to continue to improve the infrastructure to ensure that schools have the maximum achievable bandwidth (100 Mbps per school). The ultimate goal is to systemically and systematically provide equitable access to technology for all students.

Members of the 2015-2018 System Technology Planning Committee indicated that the new technology plan includes a process to actively engage representatives of all stakeholder groups in the decision-making process regarding technology. The process utilizes surveys, email messages and forums to gather data regarding the status, successes and challenges of the system's technology infrastructure. The Technology Plan Advisory Committee is charged with reviewing the status of the current technology plan and providing feedback for the development of the new plan. Continued collaboration between the Technology Plan Advisory Committee and the Technology Planning Committee will ensure that appropriate input and feedback are provided throughout the planning process.

In summary, the school system has committed to the systemic and systematic implementation of the Technology

Training Plan through the Technology Academy. Representatives of all stakeholder groups are slated to become active participants in the decisions impacting the system's technology infrastructure and instructional technology training plan. System staff indicated that the Comprehensive Management Structure will continue to be employed to effectively manage the system's technology infrastructure. Evidence confirms the system has completed the Required Action.

Conclusion

The Monitoring Review Team recognizes the concerted effort and focused work of the Board, Superintendent Thurmond, system staff and personnel at all levels to stabilize the system and create a culture of trust and transparency. The school system continues to take significant steps to establish and implement board norms based on best practices in order to sustain a system that is properly governed and strategically focused. At this juncture, as the Board transitions to seven members, finalizes a process to select a superintendent to succeed Superintendent Thurmond, and reaches a decision whether to move forward as a charter system or IE2 to meet the directive of the State of Georgia, it is more important than ever that it builds on this progress in order to institutionalize the processes and procedures necessary to build and sustain the capacity to provide the resources necessary to meet teaching and learning needs of all in the system.

The system's successful implementation of its Technology Plan demonstrates its capacity to innovate and collaborate across departments and effectively utilize the Change Management Process to inform decision-making. As a result, the technology infrastructure is in place to support equal access to technology necessary to support the instructional and operational needs across the system. In addition, the Informational Technology Division successfully launched the Infinite Campus Portal between July 2014 and September 2014. The system has eliminated the $13 million deficit and ended Fiscal Year 2014 with a budget surplus of $31 million and has implemented systematic budgeting and accounting processes to ensure it maintains the capacity to operate in a financially responsible and transparent manner.

The recently revised Policy BAB along with the recently developed *DeKalb School Board Member Handbook* which were approved November 3, 2014 are significant steps to provide a framework to ensure an effective governance structure based on research of best practice. However, a close examination of these documents reveals they continue to contain language that describes behavior that is at the root cause of the severe governance issues of the past the system has worked diligently to overcome. The elimination of this language is critical if the system is to continue to build upon the system's cultural shift to one of transparency and trust.

The system continues to make progress in the development of its strategic plan. The Performance Objectives related to the five goal areas of the DeKalb County Strategic Plan were adopted by the Board on December 8, 2014. However, the system has yet to identify and implement strategic steps to monitor, evaluate and communicate the system's progress to meet the Performance Targets.

The system is at the crossroads of taking critical steps to ensure the continuation of its forward progress to stabilize, and, more importantly, sustain an organizational culture of trust and transparency in the midst of two major transitions--the search for a new superintendent and the transition to a seven member board. In order to successfully meet these challenges, it is imperative that the system address the remaining policy issues and demonstrate its capacity to successfully implement the DeKalb County Strategic Plan which up to this point remains in the development phase. In doing so, this will provide the Board the optimum opportunity to leverage the progress that has been made to select a new superintendent who can provide the leadership necessary to successfully address the organizational challenges of the school system in order to ensure the learning needs of all students are met.

In order to ensure that the school system remains committed to a path of continuous progress, DeKalb County School District is required to assess and report its progress on the three remaining Required Actions (3, 12 and 13) in an Institution Progress Report due by December 15, 2015. AdvancED will review the report to determine if the Required Actions have been met.

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 (school system, 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.