AdvancED

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January 21, 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 December 8-10, 2013. 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.

The Monitoring Review Team recognized many areas in which the school system has made significant progress toward completing the Required Actions, including the effort and hard work of the Board, Superintendent Thurmond, system staff and personnel at all levels, and stakeholders to accomplish all the work necessary to establish the foundation upon which real progress can be achieved throughout the school system for all students. Many programs, policies and processes have been put into place to stabilize the school system and begin to restore confidence and trust among stakeholder groups. However, sustaining the progress made to date and keeping the implementation of initiatives moving forward will require the long-term commitment of the Board, Superintendent, system staff and the community of DeKalb County.

Based on the findings in the Monitoring Review Team report and subsequent review and action by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, the accreditation status of the DeKalb County School District has been moved from "Accredited Probation" to "Accredited Warned."
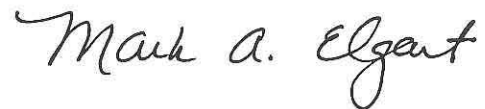
As identified in the report, the school system is responsible for completing Required Actions 1, 3 and 6 as well as for addressing the new Required Actions outlined in the report, which are designed to ensure that the school system continues to sustain its progress and establish increased stability through a focused commitment to continuous improvement. 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 May 31, 2014.
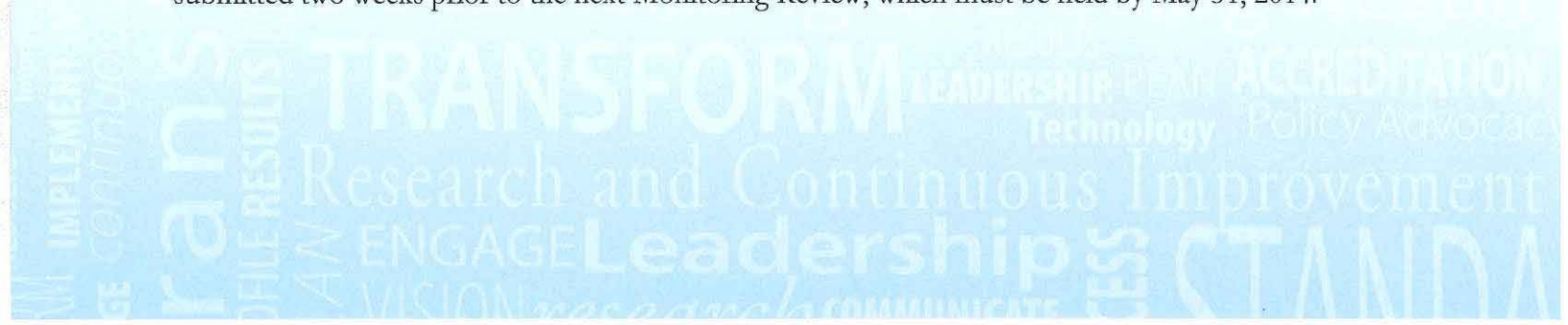
Please note that it is the responsibility of school system officials to share the contents of the report with the system's governing body and the community.

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

AdvancED™

Monitoring Review Report

DeKalb County School District
1701 Mountain Industrial Blvd
Stone Mountain, GA 30083

Dates of Review:

December 8-10, 2013

Monitoring Review Report

Introduction

This report summarizes the findings of the Monitoring Team Review held on December 8-10, 2013 to the DeKalb County School District. The purpose of the review was to assess the school system's progress toward addressing Required Actions resulting from the Special Review conducted in October 2012 and Directives resulting from the Monitoring Team Review conducted in May 2013.

Activities of the Monitoring Team

In preparation for the Monitoring Review, the Monitoring 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 40 stakeholders selected by the school system, including all board members and representatives of the Central Office staff, principals, teachers and community members
- Artifact review
- Team deliberations and report preparation

The Monitoring Team used the findings from these activities to assess the progress the institution has made toward addressing the Required Actions made by the original review team.

Findings

The Monitoring Team's findings are organized by each of the Required Actions identified by the Special Review Team. For each Required Action, the Monitoring Team provides a progress status rating, summary of findings, and directives to guide 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: Please indicate the progress the institution has made toward addressing this required action.

	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 Monitoring Review revealed strong evidence that the school system is continuing the transition from a culture centered on the Board's behavior to a culture focused on the needs of students with day-to-day operations being led by the Superintendent. The Board has taken steps to develop policies and engage in professional development to strengthen the effectiveness of present and future governance for the school system. Further, the Board's engagement in a process dedicated to improving professionalism and collegiality is both evident and commendable. Stakeholders indicated that board members exhibit mutual respect even when differences exist among them on key issues. It appears that efforts to improve their decorum have increased the capacity of board members to carry out their roles and responsibilities within the confines of the law, ethical standards and heightened scrutiny by the community of stakeholders. From all indications, the image of the school system is changing as a result of the new policies that have been developed and shared with all stakeholders. According to both internal and external stakeholders, public trust appears to be on the rise. One individual indicated that the Board is more functional than it has been in years.

Interviews revealed that staff and the community are gaining more confidence in the leadership of the Board and school system. Both internal and external stakeholders acknowledged changes in attitudes and service on the part of the governing body and school system staff. Numerous stakeholders indicated that the deep-seated fear factor so pervasive in the school system previously has disappeared and has been replaced with support and a sense of trust. Central office staff believe they have a voice, and that gives them hope. The professional working relationship between the Board and Superintendent has given system staff a high level of confidence in performing their work. Several staff members expressed satisfaction with having their ideas, thoughts and creative initiatives valued, and they reported receiving encouragement and support from school system leaders. External stakeholders believe they also have a voice, as parents and the community feel that the Board and school system now value their participation. To promote input and feedback, a clear protocol describes the process for stakeholders to communicate with the Board. Stakeholders often described the work of the Board and Superintendent as transparent. Because of the transparency of the Board's actions, stakeholders feel more at ease addressing issues, without fear of intimidation or embarrassment.

Nevertheless, according to a number of individuals who were interviewed, there is apprehension about the sustainability of preliminary shifts in the ethos. Uncertainties still exist among some stakeholders about the Board's and school system's inclination to nurture the current level of respect and functionality that has been displayed during the relatively brief period since March 2013. Some interview participants shared that the presence of the accrediting agency was an important aspect in the climate change within the school system. Two specific areas appear to cause concern. As indicated during interviews, one area of concern is the pending election of board members. Related to these concerns regarding the stability of the Board's professional and ethical demeanor, some stakeholders are apprehensive about the sustainability of practices, processes, procedures and policies that have been developed and implemented. In addition, there is concern regarding the impending impact of the Superintendent's expected departure in 2015. These issues are the basis for some stakeholders to have lingering reservations about accepting the sustainability of current changes. On the other hand, some stakeholders believe that so much change has occurred to improve the school system it would be difficult to "go backward" or regress. However, some level of concern about the stability of the school system appears to be warranted given the transformation of the Board through training and policy development being in its early stages and the lack of sufficient time to fully implement the work that has begun.

The Board is considering having a board retreat, but at the time of the Monitoring Review, written plans had not been developed with a place, date, time, objectives and agenda. Yet, the possibility is being discussed among both board members and school system staff. One individual described it as "a retreat in the making." In relation to the retreat, a review of evidence showed that Policy BAB – School Board Governance indicates that the Board shall have an annual retreat: *The Board and the Superintendent shall hold an annual retreat devoted to updating the existing strategic plan (or the development of new strategies, as needed) and to review the upcoming year's key budget issues.*

The 2013 May Monitoring Review Report indicated that the school system needed to devise and implement a written, comprehensive plan for unifying the DeKalb County Board of Education, a policy and training plan to address concerns over the sustainability of progress made by the school system since March 2013, and a plan to ensure that the policies and training of future boards will maintain a core focus on serving the needs of children in the school system. The Board and school system have made numerous accomplishments from May to December 2013. The Institution Progress Report dated November 22, 2013 includes descriptions of progress such as the Board having engaged in the development of norms and policies to improve its functioning, actions and interaction. Interviews at all levels indicated that the Board has engaged in policy development, training and aligning the budget with educational programs. However, the Institution Progress Report did not include a written, comprehensive plan to unify the board, a policy and training plan to address concerns over the sustainability of progress, and training for future boards focused on serving all children.

A written plan would serve as a blueprint for the Board and the school system to review and manage objectives, strategies, progress, evaluation and communication of results. Plans serve as roadmaps to success. They should be written, readily accessible and flexible enough to permit adjustments. For example, a plan including data from the Governance Center of McKenna Long & Aldridge (MLA) board training could conceivably provide essential information for creating a comprehensive plan. Developing clearly written plans with goals, action steps, timelines, resources, persons responsible, evaluative measures and communication of results would effectively guide continuous improvement efforts to address many of the governance violations of *AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems*.

Long-Term Plans to Sustain the Results/Impact of the Required Action:
The school system summarized its long-term plans to sustain the results/impact of Required Action 1 as follows:

Board Policy BAB – School Board Governance has given the current and future boards of education parameters in which to work. The details of this policy identify key concepts and provide procedures for school board operations. Adherence to continued professional learning and commitment to ethical behavior by the current Board will carry-over to future boards.

While the aspirational idea that proper board governance and behavior will simply "carry-over" to future boards is admirable, the system cannot leave the sustainability of this progress to chance. Therefore, the school system must continue its efforts to fully address the expectations of this Required Action and corresponding Directives.

REQUIRED ACTION 2:

Ensure that all actions and decisions of the DeKalb County Board of Education are reflective of the collective Board and consistent with approved policies and procedures and all applicable laws, regulations and standards, rather than individual board members acting independently and undermining the authority of the Superintendent to lead and manage day-to-day operations.

Directives:
1. Implement a systemic process to evaluate the Board's decisions and actions to ensure they are in accord with board policies and procedures and their defined roles and responsibilities.
2. Implement and complete training initiatives and continue to reflect transparency and adhere to policies, procedures, applicable laws, regulations and standards.
3. Develop a systemic structure for board training and evaluation to ensure that in-depth training and evaluation are institutionalized and built into continuous improvements efforts.

Progress Status: Please indicate the progress the institution has made toward addressing this required action.

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:

A review of board agendas, minutes, board policies and the school system's website as well as interviews with various stakeholder groups indicated that the Board and Superintendent have made substantial efforts to ensure that the actions and decisions of the Board are reflective of the collective board and consistent with approved policies and procedures and all applicable laws, regulations and standards. In February 2013, the former board, upon the recommendation of the then newly appointed Superintendent, contracted with the Governance Center of McKenna Long & Aldridge (MLA). The purpose for contracting with this firm was "to assist the Board and superintendent in becoming better equipped to address governance issues and in utilizing best practices when developing organizational improvement processes that support student success." The current Board, which was seated in March 2013, and the Superintendent have taken intentional steps to address Required Action 2 and ensure compliance with *AdvancED Standards for Quality*, Standard 2: *Governance and Leadership*, Indicators 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3. At its April 2013 Business Meeting, the Board unanimously affirmed Board Policy BH: Code of Ethics and Policy BHA: Conflict of Interest.

The MLA Governance Center collaborated with the Superintendent to identify areas of concern voiced by stakeholders during the spring of 2013. These areas of concern included a sense of mistrust, fear, lack of systems and controls, and a high turnover rate among leadership. The Superintendent opened communication channels and listened to school system and community concerns. The Board adopted Policy GAGD – Staff Nepotism on May 6, 2013 to address concerns about nepotism and favoritism in hiring and promotion practices. The Board adopted transparent procedures for hiring and awarding promotions to eliminate the perception of mistrust and favoritism among internal and external stakeholders. In addition to system-wide awareness of the new policy and participation in training to implement the rule and specified procedures, all system employees must disclose annually whether they are relatives of any other current employee. Failure to disclose this information may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

The Board also adopted a set of Board Norms on May 6, 2013. These norms establish guidelines that board members are expected to follow when interacting with each other, staff, parents and other stakeholders. The norms are consistent with the MLA recommendation that the Board adopt a Code of Civility. According to feedback from various stakeholder groups, the Board is complying with various aspects of the norms, which categorically and simply describe "principles" in five areas: board interaction, system administrator interaction,

community engagement, communications and time management.

As an aspect of its training, the Board participated in the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA) Annual Conference in June 2013. During the conference, board members participated in state-mandated training on topics such as becoming a board member, board member roles and responsibilities, and board member ethics. In an effort to provide a blueprint for current training, the Board approved in its September 25, 2013 Business Meeting the 2013-2014 board training schedule. However, evidence did not include a systemic process to systematically provide board training each school year to promote effective governance.

Meritoriously, on June 14, 2013, the school system received information from the Public Education Leadership Project (PELP) at Harvard University that the school system had been selected to attend its summer program for a cohort of 10 large, urban school systems. The DeKalb Chamber of Commerce remitted half of the tuition payment for the system to show its support for this initiative. As a result, nine representatives including the Superintendent, three board members, three system staff, a principal and a parent attended the symposium. An outgrowth of the school system's participation in the PELP program was the development of the Bridge Initiative. The Institution Progress Report described this initiative as "a board-approved, research-based program designed to meet the needs of the diverse group of parents and students within the district." A review of the September 9, 2013 board meeting agenda showed that the Superintendent presented the Bridge Initiative to the Board as an information item.

During a called board meeting, MLA presented the DeKalb County School District Governance Review. Information from this review formed the basis for the development of Policy BAB – School Board Governance. On October 22, 2013, the Superintendent was a guest speaker at the School Board Governance Symposium sponsored by the University of Georgia, an event that some board members also attended. The Board also participated in a GSBA Governance Team-Self Assessment in October 2013.

Long-Term Plans to Sustain the Results/Impact of the Required Action:
The school system summarized its long-term plans to sustain the results/impact of Required Action 2 in the following three actions:

1. The full implementation of Governance Policy BAB will assist in sustaining the results of Required Action 2, because the policy provides for effective governance that all board members must follow.
2. Adherence to Board Norms and continued governance training by GSBA, MLA and universities such as UGA and Harvard will create a culture where continuous improvement is accepted practice that will carry-over to board members elected in the future.
3. Finally, when internal and external stakeholders realize that board members maintain fidelity by focusing on student achievement and are transparent in all aspects of board governance, a sense of trust will become pervasive throughout the district.

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: Please indicate the progress the institution has made toward addressing this required action.

	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:
Evidence verified extensive efforts to develop policies and procedures that ensure the segregation of duties between the governing board and the administration. The elimination of board working committees was a significant action that will help to remove opportunities for board members to become involved in administrative functions performed by staff. More specifically, the Board at its February 18, 2013 meeting adopted a revised version of Policy BBC – Board Committees stating that there "shall be no more standing committees of the Board."

On May 6, 2013 the Board adopted a revised version of Policy BDC to dissolve provisions for the Board Policy –Committees thereby resolving a conflict between Policies BBC and BDC. Additionally, on May 6, 2013, the Board adopted a revision of Policy BC – Procedures for Board Meetings that includes a statement requiring adherence to Policy BBC when discussing procedures for establishing an ad hoc committee. An annual in-depth policy review will be an essential component of ongoing efforts to maintain and manage effective policies and their content.

The November 11, 2013 board minutes showed the adoption of Policy BAB – School Board Governance. A review of Policy BAB showed that the recently adopted policy includes provisions in direct conflict with the roles and responsibilities of board members. For example, the policy states the following:

Board Responsibilities
Board members shall:
- Monitor and assess the staff's performance and execution of strategic plans and objectives and ask appropriate questions of Senior Staff to address accountability with established goals.
- Be a partner with Senior Staff on strategic issues by advising and consulting.
- Oversee legal compliance programs and procedures.

Board Contact with Operations and Management
- Board members have access to Senior Staff through in-person, telephonic, electronic and written communication. This interface between the Board and Senior Staff is important for the Board to effectively oversee execution of policies and strategic goals by staff. The Superintendent shall be informed of Board Members requests for information or meetings.

The content of another policy – Policy BDC – Policy Adoption appears contradictory or at best unclear. For example, the policy states the following:

Any Board action that appears to be in conflict with Board policy shall remain valid and effective. The conflicting policy will be deemed suspended to the extent and for such time as may be required by the action taken by the Board. However, such actions shall not otherwise constitute an amendment of these policies. The Superintendent annually shall review the policy manual of the Board and report recommended changes to the Board.

The language contained in Policy BDC allows this Board to take any action it deems appropriate regardless of the policies that it may violate. This policy language is an open invitation to the Board and its members to disregard policy whenever it is expedient or convenient. Only through rigorous and consistent application of board policies can the school system hope to regain the public trust.

Summarily, evidence substantiates that the school system has taken the necessary and appropriate actions to establish and implement policies and procedures that ensure segregation of duties between the governing board and the administration. Actions related to board policies have included the elimination of board working committees, which result in board members assuming administrative functions that should be the responsibility of appropriate staff. Policies include provisions to create ad hoc committees that dissolve upon the completion of specific duties related to their formation. Nevertheless, adhering to a systemic process for the systematic in-depth review of policies would facilitate eliminating the apparent incongruences within and among policies.

Long-Term Plans to Sustain the Results/Impact of the Required Action:
The school system summarized its long-term plans to sustain the results/impact of Required Action 3 in the following three actions:
1. The adoption of Policy BAB: Board Governance provides specific procedures for present and future Board of Education members to use in order to guide the district.
2. The Board's professional learning plan outlines a schedule of courses/workshops to enhance the knowledge base of individual board members and improve long-term operations.
3. Ongoing review and revision of policies in accordance with federal, state, and local laws and ordinances ensures compliance with the law and helps to resolve any potential conflicts between Board of Education policies such as BBC and BDC as noted by AdvancED in the May 2013 Monitoring Review Report.

Directives:
1. *Eliminate the provisions noted that are in direct conflict with the roles and responsibilities of board members.*
2. *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.*

REQUIRED ACTION 4:

Implement and adhere to fiscally responsible policies and practices that ensure the DeKalb County Board of Education will adopt and ensure proper implementation of budgets within the financial means of the school system and that support the delivery of an educational program that meets the needs of the students.

Directive:

1. Inform the community as to how the FY2014 budget has been developed to better meet the needs of the students of the DeKalb County School District.

Progress Status: Please indicate the progress the institution has made toward addressing this required action.

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 DeKalb County School District has taken significant steps to restore public confidence in the school system's stewardship of the monies entrusted to its care. The development and implementation of a more transparent budgetary process is vital to restoring the trust of all stakeholders in the financial management of the school system. The actions taken by the school system to complete Required Action 4 have begun the process of fundamentally changing the public's perception about the Board's and system staff's stewardship of resources. Of course, the actions taken to date are only the beginning of a very long journey to restore the public's trust and confidence that the resources of the system are being used in the most efficient manner to deliver a high quality educational experience for all students.

The Monitoring Team reviewed all of the evidence presented as part of the Institution Progress Report, including but not limited to recordings of meetings/hearings, 2014 Budget Executive Summary, published legal notices and various other financial reports. Interviews with board members, the Superintendent, the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and other system staff, as well as school-based administrative personnel revealed that the governing body and leadership conducted a budgetary process that was transparent and focused on improving the delivery of an educational program that meets the needs of students. During the May 2013 Monitoring Review, the school system defined a set of budgetary analysis criteria for developing the 2014 Budget. The criteria used by the system in evaluating the intended return on investment for approval of an expenditure is the impact that the expenditure is expected to have on classroom instruction and student achievement. The evidence provided and information obtained through interviews confirmed that the established criteria remained at the forefront of all discussions related to the development of the 2014 budget.

The school system has created balanced budgets in the past and subsequently failed to implement the budget with fidelity. The Superintendent and CFO have begun to implement policies and procedures designed to ensure board and leadership oversight of the financial operation of the system in a manner that allows for monitoring and accountability. The school system also has begun to create an operational environment dedicated to using its resources to improve and support the academic success of DeKalb County students.

An example of the shift in philosophy is evidenced by goals stated in May 2013, identified in the budget, and implemented in the school system's current operations. Clear examples of the philosophical shift that have significant fiscal implications include the following directives: reduce legal fees to provide more dollars for instruction, conduct a personnel audit of system staff, eliminate furlough days, analyze all programs to ensure a positive return on investment, and positively impact academic achievement to provide a framework for

budgetary discussions and development. In numerous interviews, board members, system leadership and other stakeholders identified the system's determination to implement these changes with fidelity. The initial implementation is clearly evidenced by the initiation and maintenance of the FY2013 midyear spending freeze; the adoption of the FY2014 Balanced Budget with specific cuts to items such as legal expenditures (-$6,000,000), central office vacancies (-$5,346,000), and central office budget cuts (-$7,200,000); the resolution of the Heery-Mitchell litigation; and the addition of specific educational enhancements such as restoration of one furlough day (+$3,000,000), textbooks (+$4,000,000), rebind-replenish textbooks (+$1,300,000), student diagnostic needs assessment (+$1,100,000), student wrap around services (+$350,000), career pathways initiative (+$1,000,000), central office decentralization (+$150,000), interpreters (+$500,000), band uniforms and instrument repair (+$300,000), bus mechanics (+$250,000), meritorious attendance program (+1,000,000), and principal supplement (+$100,000).

The school system continues to show progress in creating a unified approach to the fiscal operation of the system with the stated goal of positively impacting student achievement and outcomes. However, the shift in culture cannot have its maximum impact until it is aligned with a fully developed strategic plan. Aligning the shift in fiscally responsible culture with the strategic plan will further ensure the actions of the Board and staff positively impact the goal of improving student achievement and outcomes.

The actions taken so far are all necessary foundations to restore the public's trust in the system's use and allocation of resources. The next imperative is to continue to put in place the processes, procedures, reporting and monitoring necessary for the implementation of the balanced budget. To improve on the processes and procedures, the Finance Division has initiated a conversion to the recommended State Chart-of-Accounts and revision of standard accounting operating procedures is ongoing, along with efforts to improve internal controls. The improvement of reporting and monitoring will be instrumental for the effective financial governance of the system. The Finance Division continues to improve the financial information available to the Board and staff by implementing the use of new reports and procedures. Monthly board reports now are being provided on a Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) basis and include a variance report. In addition, the system's division heads are conducting quarterly reviews of the expended/encumbered amounts compared to the budget. The system also has purchased and begun installing new school-based accounting software.

The progress outlined above as well as evidence supplied by the school system support the conclusion that the system has completed the foundational work needed to establish fiscally responsible policies and practices to ensure the adoption and implementation of budgets within the financial means of the school system. Throughout the school system, from board members to stakeholders, the importance of sound fiscal policies designed to meet the needs and educational opportunities of all of the approximately 99,000 students in the DeKalb County School District is being recognized and embraced. The Board has changed its focus from advocating for financial opportunities in electoral regions to advocating for the financial needs of all students in the system. The tone of the Board's inquiries is decidedly more professional and less accusatory. This will have an extremely positive effect on the ability of system leadership to restore the public trust in the financial operation of the school system.

However, this is only the beginning of the process. The lack of institutional integrity in its financial operations has plagued this system for nearly a decade. The damage to the system's effective operation and reputation requires a sustained, aligned and diligent effort from everyone committed to the success of the school system. The key challenge is to identify the means by which the system can sustain and build upon the progress made during the past year. The school system identified the processes and procedures that it believes are necessary to continue the progress made in response to Required Action 4 and has committed to the following: a transparent budget development process that adheres to all required annual advertising and hearing requirements, implementation of the specific educational enhancements adopted in the FY 2014 Budget, quarterly budget

review meetings with Division Heads, the submission of monthly variance reports in addition to the GAAP Financial Reports to the Board, and conversion to the State Chart-of-Accounts by July 1, 2014.

As critical as the procedural improvements are to the success of the school system, the Board must continue to conduct itself in a manner that exemplifies a commitment to the proper oversight and governance of the system in order to restore public trust while also remaining focused on allocating resources to best meet the educational needs of all the students in the DeKalb County School District.

REQUIRED ACTION 5:
Establish and enforce a policy that board members honor the chain of command when communicating with stakeholders.

Directive:

1. Expand the content of Policy BBI – Board-Staff Relations to include more descriptive details that clarify the protocol for the chain of command in the school system.

Progress Status: Please indicate the progress the institution has made toward addressing this required action.

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 school system continues to make progress in establishing and adhering to the chain of command for communications throughout the system. Interviews with board members, system staff, and school-level personnel validated that board members are honoring the chain of command when communicating with stakeholders and staff alike. Evidence supports a finding that the Board continues to be committed to establishing a norm of behaviors whereby each board member honors and adheres to the chain of command. Multiple interviewees cited instances wherein board members referred inquiries and requests from stakeholders through the proper chain of command. Board members commented about the integrity of the chain of command and revealed a continued commitment to a change in behavior from previous boards.

However, this is only the beginning of the process. In order for these changes in the chain of command protocol to become standard behavior for all future board members and community stakeholders, several conditions must be met, including policy alignment with these expectations. In addition, board members must participate in continuous training, and transparent communication must occur throughout the school system about the importance of adherence to a chain of command. Finally, everyone within the system must continuously demand board member, staff and stakeholder compliance with policies and norms of behavior.

By adopting Board Policy BAB – School Board Governance on November 11, 2013, the Board attempted to better define its role and responsibilities, including but not limited to board members' contact with the staff and other stakeholders. The new policies adopted address concerns raised in the previous Monitoring Review, and begin to provide a framework for defining appropriate board member behavior. However, the adoption of this policy and subsequent training for current and future board members cannot be done in isolation. Continuing efforts must recognize the issues that the school system is working to overcome regarding micromanagement, unequal access to information between board members, cronyism between board members and Senior Staff, and other issues caused by board members' failure to follow a proper chain of command.

Therefore, there are concerns raised with the adoption of policy BAB. Said policy appears to create potential conflicts of interpretation with policy BBI. Policy BBI reads in relevant part:

B. Board Communication to Staff

All Board member communications, questions, policies or directives of staff interest and concern will be communicated to staff members through the Superintendent. Board members should not contact staff to discuss school or District business. The Superintendent will develop appropriate methods to keep staff fully informed of the Board's problems, concerns and actions.

Policy provisions contained within the recently adopted policy BAB read in relevant parts as follows:

Board Responsibilities
Board members shall:

- *Monitor and assess the staff's performance and execution of strategic plans and objectives and ask appropriate questions of Senior Staff to address accountability with established goals.*
- *Be a partner with Senior Staff on strategic issues by advising and consulting.*
- *Oversee legal compliance programs and procedures.*

Board Contact with Operations and Management

- *Board members have access to Senior Staff through in-person, telephonic, electronic and written communication. This interface between the Board and Senior Staff is important for the Board to effectively oversee execution of policies and strategic goals by staff. The Superintendent shall be informed of Board Members requests for information or meetings.*

The policy provisions highlighted above from Policy BAB and adopted in November 2013 create avenues for abuse and micromanagement of the school system. The policies already provide for the Senior Staff to be accessible before, during and after board meetings. This ensures that all board members have equal access to information and staff members. Previous boards routinely suffered from the appearance of a disparity in access to information provided by staff. Because the new policy allows individual board members to have private access to Senior Staff without adequate safeguards, concerns of micromanagement and cronyism between members of the Senior Staff and certain board members would almost certainly arise again. A school system with a history of board member interference in the day-to-day operations of the administration must take extreme care when creating policies to avoid allowing an individual board member to have contact with staff members at any level. The establishment of a new board culture free of micromanagement and cronyism will take time to create and establish as a cultural norm. Based on the observations of the Monitoring Team, the system is too early in the process of reform to allow the type of unfettered access to Senior Staff that is sanctioned in the new Policy BAB.

Although an overwhelming majority of board members, staff and stakeholders recognized that board members' adherence to the chain of command has greatly improved and had a positive impact on the climate and operation of the school system, this progress can be easily lost. As with the continuous improvement of any school system, it is imperative that the system continues to review and refine all policies systematically. This review coupled with effective training is needed to ensure consistent interpretation and understanding of the policies, thereby resulting in consistent application and proper enforcement of the policies.

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.

Directives:

1. Develop protocols for sharing available data with the Superintendent, Board, senior leadership, and stakeholders.

2. Develop protocols to use data from a variety of assessments to inform instructional and operational decisions.

3. Address the comprehensive nature of assessment, from the classroom to the system level, in formative and summative concepts.

Progress Status: Please indicate the progress the institution has made toward addressing this required action.

	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:

Interviews with board members, the Superintendent, senior leadership, Regional Superintendents, system staff, principals, parents and community members, as well as documentation review consistently substantiated the identification and beginning stages of implementation of the 6-Step Data Protocol as the means to analyze and interpret data to inform and guide instructional and operational decision making across the school system. The 6-Step Data Protocol identifies the following priorities: (1) Capturing Data and Situation Assessment; (2) Data Analysis; (3) Establish Plan/Set Goals/Identify Evidence (this process utilizes the SMART Goal format); (4) Develop Action Plan/Determine Required Resources (this step includes identification of Professional Learning needs to support the initiative as well as the identification of the research that supports the efficacy of the action step(s); (5) Monitor Progress/Reflect/Adjust (this includes a reflection on the budgetary impact of the action in addition to establishing monitoring processes, metrics to measure and evaluate success, and the flexibility to adjust action steps based upon the progress made) and (6) Communicate the Plan. To support the systemic and systematic implementation of the 6-Step Data Protocol, the school system has developed and distributed corresponding templates to support use at the Classroom/Teacher, Building/School, and Region/Cluster/System levels. In addition, the system has developed corresponding protocols aligned with the 6-Step Data Protocol that correlate with the Response to Intervention (RtI) protocols and the Culturally and Linguistically Responsive protocols for use at the school level.

The system presented for the review of the Team, a draft Communication Protocol designed to provide "specific and clear expectations for communicating with stakeholders at all levels." The comprehensive protocols are in effect for all levels of the organization including the classroom, school, Cluster/Region, system, and Superintendent. The Communication Protocol provides specific guidance for each level of the organization as it identifies the "Suggested Audience" and" Possible Methods/Examples" for communication relevant to stakeholder groups at all levels. Interviews with system and building level personnel substantiated their awareness of the Communication Protocol with the expectation that it is to be implemented to provide "all appropriate stakeholders with the most relevant data in a timely and effective manner to drive instructional and operational decisions."

The school system has developed and begun to implement comprehensive training dedicated to the Universal Screener (US)-RtI Official Roll-Out. The training is scheduled for delivery between August 2013 and May 2014. School system staff made a presentation during the Administrator's Academy on November 19-20, 2013 to inform leaders of the 6-Step Data Protocol and Communication Protocol. A crosswalk that identifies the reporting capacity of the Instruction Data Management System (IDMS) and the State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) was conducted, and the results were distributed to personnel across the system in an effort to support teachers and administrators in "obtaining student data from the most advantageous location." This crosswalk document further identifies for the user when it is advantageous to use each of the management systems. For example, one would use IDMS to access student achievement data beginning in 2005-06 as well as curriculum, assessment and reports related to the school system. SLDS would be more appropriate to glean information related to data for students in other Georgia school systems and access the State's Online Evaluation System.

The school system has strategically identified training that staff are systematically delivering related to the 6-Step Data Protocol, its uses, RtI correlations, and assessment tools to school-based teams. Interviews with the Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Professional Learning and Federal Programs, and the Director of Research, Assessment and Evaluation along with a review of the Universal Screener (US)-RtI Official Roll-Out Training schedule provided evidence that the training model being used. Notably, the training model is reflective of best practice in that it is planned and organized to engage teachers at all grade levels with the intent to positively impact the learning and achievement of all students. In addition, the system has taken steps to identify support and monitoring mechanisms system-wide to ensure the implementation of assessment practices with fidelity. Throughout the duration of the training and work sessions (August 2013-May 2014), the system will have reached teachers across all grade levels. In addition, the system provided focused work sessions for the Senior Cabinet and the Superintendent related to developing support and monitoring systems to ensure the faithful implementation of the 6-Step Data Protocol and comprehensive assessment system.

Although the school system has provided substantial evidence via documentation and substantiating interviews across multiple categories of internal stakeholders related to ensuring the implementation of a robust diagnostic assessment program, insufficient time has elapsed to measure the effectiveness of these efforts in terms of student learning and achievement and organizational effectiveness. At this point in time, the school system is well positioned to succeed. However, much work lies ahead. The system must maintain its current energy level and laser focus as it engages in the critical work of monitoring and evaluating the quality and effectiveness of the implementation of the comprehensive assessment 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.*

REQUIRED ACTION 7:

Establish a formal change management process for new system initiatives (vision, mission, strategic plan, curriculum, benchmark assessment, etc.) to address development, implementation, timeline, monitoring, communication and evaluation effectiveness. This process should be in accordance with state regulations and guidelines.

Directives:

1. Complete the development of the formal change management process for new system initiatives (vision, mission, strategic plan, curriculum, benchmark assessment, etc.) to address development, implementation, timeline, monitoring, communication and evaluation effectiveness. This process should be in accordance with state regulations and guidelines.

2. Provide professional learning opportunities for stakeholders related to the formal change management process.

Progress Status: Please indicate the progress the institution has made toward addressing this required action.

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:

Evidence verified that the school system has established the framework for a formal change management process for system initiatives based on a continuous improvement model. The Institution Progress Report, interviews and a presentation to the team revealed that during the design process, staff made the connection and manifested the interrelatedness among departments, Strategic Plan components, Required Actions and AdvancED Standards and Indicators. The system has developed a formal change management process for system initiatives along with a process for implementing these initiatives and appropriate professional learning related to change management.

Professional learning for all principals and selected assistant principals and central office administrators occurred on November 19-20, 2013. During the professional learning sessions, system leaders created a strong linkage between the change management process and Strategic Plan, a current initiative in progress, to demonstrate relevance and ensure "a more cohesive and focused approach to implementation" and efforts to create a systemic approach to managing initiatives. To further facilitate implementation, participants in professional learning sessions received a charge to provide training for all employees at the system and school levels. Evidence also indicated that "the Change Management for Continuous Improvement process will be presented to the Board of Education and Superintendent as a component of the District's Strategic Plan on December 2, 2013." However, this presentation was not readily apparent from a review of the agenda for the Board of Education meeting on December 2, 2013. If this presentation has not been made before the Board of Education, the system needs to ensure proper inclusion of this initiative with the development of the Strategic Plan and continued stakeholder engagement.

Long-Term Plans to Sustain the Results/Impact of the Required Action:

The information below was presented by the school system to refine, implement, support and sustain Required Action 7:

- In order for the new change management process to be effective, it must be a component of the District's Strategic Plan.

- The success and sustainability of the change management process is dependent upon setting clear expectations for its consistent use when establishing new school, regional, and district changes (or initiatives).
- A comprehensive communications plan for the implementation of the Strategic Plan is essential to stakeholder commitment, use, and sustainability. This plan ensures that all personnel in the organization are aware of the process, why it was developed, and its short- and long-term benefits to achieving and sustaining the District's Strategic Goal Areas and Priorities.
- The communications plan will be supported with ongoing, job-embedded professional development opportunities for school, regional, and district staff to understand, utilize, and recognize the organizational efficiency that can be attained by using the Change Management for Continuous Improvement process when implementing new changes (or initiatives).

REQUIRED ACTION 8:

Conduct an internal audit on the available technology across all schools in order to identify areas of need with the intent to allocate appropriately throughout the school system. Support this action by researching appropriate training for teachers and staff to ensure technology's effective use in daily instruction.

Directives:
1. Develop a comprehensive management structure that includes ongoing and regularly scheduled technology audits and inventories and an analysis of the data to inform and proactively meet the current and future technology infrastructure needs of the system.
2. Develop a process to determine the equitable allocation of technology throughout the system.

Progress Status: Please indicate the progress the institution has made toward addressing this required action.

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:
A review of board agendas, minutes, board policies, and the system website, as well as interviews with various stakeholders groups, indicated that the Board, Superintendent, and system staff have completed a technology audit. In addition, the school system developed a process to determine the equitable allocation of technology throughout the system. The Board and Superintendent formed a committee "to develop a process for conducting an internal audit, addressing equity in technology allocation, as well as developing a research-driven technology training plan for teachers that ensured implementation into the daily classroom instruction." The committee also was tasked with developing "a comprehensive management structure that utilizes data analysis to inform and proactively meet the current and future technology infrastructure needs of the district."

The school system completed the technology audit in April 2013. The goal of the audit was to inventory technology and related resources. The audit addressed hardware devices, their age and student-to-device ratios. The audit also contained a list of technology projects scheduled for completion during the 2013-2014 school year, the system's technology plan, and the system's instructional software list. The Information Technology and the Curriculum and Instruction departments worked collaboratively with local schools to identify widely used software. The school system posted the technology inventory, technology plan and

executive summary on the system's website. The ultimate goal is to define the elements of the 21st Century Learning Environment Framework and ensure that all schools and sites have access to all components of the 21st Century Learning Environment Framework. Additionally, the Resource Alignment and Allocation Chart for the 21st Century Learning Environment Framework has been posted on the system's website.

Technology projects that have gone through the comprehensive process for evaluating technology include: wireless access for all classrooms, comprehensive desktop refresh/virtual desktop, and 21st Century Learning Environment. Wireless access for all classrooms was achieved in November 2013, and the comprehensive desktop refresh/virtual desktop was approved on July 1, 2013. The 21st Century Learning Environment was scheduled for board approval in December 2013. A research-based technology-training plan also has been approved to guide appropriate training for teachers and staff.

Long-Term Plans to Sustain the Results/Impact of the Required Action:

The school system summarized its long-term plans to sustain the results/impact of Required Action 8 in the following five actions:

1. The District will continue to conduct an annual technology audit that informs the needs of the district. This needs assessment will continue to guide the District's Technology Plan mandated by the state of Georgia BOE and approved by the DeKalb Board of Education. It is imperative that the Board uses this data to inform equitable allocation of technology throughout the district.
2. The Technology Training Plan identifies instructional goals for all staff and provides assessment opportunities to measure mastery for the next three years. In addition to data from the technology plan, various benchmarks such as ongoing technology audits and needs assessments will be used to measure progress and make data-driven decisions.
3. Stakeholder Engagement will be a critical component of sustainability. The District will continue to solicit for continuous feedback via focus groups, surveys and training. Engaging our stakeholders will empower them to serve as ambassadors for the milestones in this Required Action.
4. Adhere to the fidelity of the system's perpetual technology audit and streamline efforts to combat the obsolescence of hardware such as the virtual desktop.
5. Develop a systemic process for training teachers and other staff to reflect their documented training needs and ensure the effective use of technology in daily instruction through consistent monitoring to verify that instructional staff implement in their classrooms lessons learned in professional development activities.

REQUIRED ACTION 9:

Communicate to stakeholders the differences between programs and financial resources available to schools.

Directive:

1. Refine the communications plan to ensure that it is a viable tool to communicate to stakeholders the difference between programs and financial resources available to schools.

Progress Status: Please indicate the progress the institution has made toward addressing this required action.

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 identified and completed a comprehensive, three-phase, multi-tiered process to address the requirements of Required Action 9 to communicate to stakeholders the differences between programs and financial resources available to schools. Review of information provided by the school system in its Institution Progress Report, evidence presented by the system and stakeholder interviews revealed and confirmed that the system has continued its work to develop viable action steps to address the requirements. The timeframe from February-May 2013 (Phase I), prior to the May 15-17, 2013 Monitoring Review, was devoted to organizational tasks. The school system formed a committee and included representation from Curriculum and Instruction (C&I), School Leadership and Operational Support (SLO) (including but not limited to Title I), Instructional Technology (IT), and Finance. This committee met for the purpose of defining programs, determining the data collection process it would use, and identifying data collection categories and funding sources. The committee also identified the need to distinguish between programs purchased with system funds and those purchased by the school. The school system used a subcommittee structure to establish criteria for the programs to be included in the data collection process along with the corresponding timelines and expected outcomes. To collect relevant data, the committee developed a plan to survey all schools and system departments. Principals and system departments reported instructional programs currently in use and funding sources utilized to purchase them. The committee compiled and analyzed the information provided.

Between May-July 2013 (Phase II), the committee met weekly and continued to collect and analyze data. The committee concluded the results were problematic because information regarding types of programs was voluminous, collected by a variety of sources, incomplete in some instances and self-reported in others, and had not been housed in a centralized database. The committee further realized that a common framework did not exist for defining what is meant by "program." As a result, the committee redefined the meaning of the term "programs" as "technology-based instructional software programs (ISPs)."

The committee entered into Phase III of its work in October and continued into December 2013. During this time, the committee focused in earnest on the specific action steps it would take to address Required Action 9. Using the new definition of "programs," the committee revised the format of the data collection spreadsheet to include the following: program name, funding source, program goal/target subject area, subscription period, help/contact information link, region and school name. The committee finalized a comprehensive Communications Plan with a goal to "create a viable communications tool to use to communicate to stakeholders the difference between instructional software programs (ISP) and associated financial resources available to schools." The Communications Plan format includes information related to the data survey; summary of findings; and the objective to "Increase the communication to stakeholders who inquire about the available ISPs across the system and at individual schools and their associated

funding sources," the timeframe for the implementation of the Communications Plan (April 2013-ongoing); and target audiences. The Communications Plan uses a table format to identify and communicate with its stakeholders and includes tasks of the committee, timeframe, persons responsible, and status of completion.

An approval process has been developed related to instructional software purchases connected to existing and new building or system initiatives. Significantly, the school system has integrated the District's Change Management Process (associated with Required Action 7) into the approval process. The flowchart related to the process identifies steps to be followed from the selection of the ISP through notifying stakeholders of the purchase and implementation. In recognition of the importance of being able to quantify and demonstrate return on investment (ROI) related to the ISPs, the school system has developed an Instructional Software Program (ISP) Criteria Form for schools to use in the selection process. The form requires information related to a) alignment with Strategic Plan Goals, b) Evaluation Process and Specific Measures used, c) Funding Source and ISP Costs, and d) Technical Specifications and Information.

The committee also developed a heuristic to communicate with all constituencies via the system and school websites. A review of this model revealed that the web tool is easy to navigate and user friendly. It succinctly provides comprehensive information related to the ISPs used in each school, the ISPs available by region, and identifies the ISPs provided by the system. In addition, the committee developed a comprehensive list of ten Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), which also are posted on the website. The questions focus on the following areas: how to find out what ISPs are in "my child's school," "what programs are provided by the school system," and "how to view all ISPs available in regions." Stakeholders also are able to find information related to "which ISPs are available for access at home," "how to become part of the decision-making process," and "how to find out the impact the programs are having on student achievement."

Interviews with system administrators and evidence provided confirmed that during the week of November 18, 2013, the committee conducted a demonstration of the interactive webpage tool to all school principals, assistant principals, and district/system heads and staff. The committee also presented an update of its work at the December 2, 2013 board meeting. When the link goes live, this tool will provide the system the opportunity to clearly communicate to stakeholders which ISPs are in place school by school, region by region, as well as the funding sources utilized to purchase the ISPs. In addition, the system is using memos, newsflashes and social media to communicate this information to stakeholders.

The school system has finalized its Communications Plan and Implementation Plan. The program data collection, analysis, evaluation structures and communication strategies related to ISP selection, analysis and evaluation are systemic and systematic and indicative of a commitment to provide focused coordination and support for schools. However, it is critical to note that the school system is in the beginning stages of implementation. The school system's challenge now is to implement the process with fidelity ensuring that it provides consistent, coordinated direction and support for all schools. The school system delineated in the Institutional Progress Report and articulated during interviews a Long-Term Plan to Sustain the Results/Impact of Required Action 9. The school system indicated that it would review and update the process annually and continue to integrate the steps of the change process when making ISP changes. The comprehensive actions taken by the system to ensure consistent reporting of existing programs across the system and with external stakeholders have resulted in the school system's compliance with the expectations of Required Action 9. Moving forward the system must ensure that it builds into the ISP Process a systematic review and evaluation of the effectiveness of the ISPs at the school and system levels in order to ensure that the ISPs implemented in schools positively impact student learning and achievement and provide equitable learning opportunities for all students.

REQUIRED ACTION 10:

Enroll all students (K-12) in Parent Portal and communicate with parents this action to work more closely with them. Establish policy for timely Parent Portal updates by teachers. Also provide students with tools to monitor their success.

Directives:

1. Identify and implement system-wide strategies to promote the use of the Parent Portal to increase the number of parents, teachers and students using the resource.
2. Develop regional plans to provide access to computers in schools and other community facilities such as libraries.
3. Provide supportive service for English Language Learners and families to permit them to access the Parent Portal.
4. Evaluate the user-friendly status of the Parent Portal, which should require minimal steps to sign in and readily access student information.

Progress Status: Please indicate the progress the institution has made toward addressing this required action.

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:

Evidence confirmed that the school system developed a systematic approach to address 1) enrolling all students (K-12) in the Parent Portal, 2) communicating this information to parents to more actively involve them in the process, 3) establishing policy for timely Parent Portal updates by teachers, and 4) providing students with tools to monitor their success. To implement strategies to expand the effective use of the Parent Portal, system-level staff worked collaboratively with other committees focusing on Required Actions as well as with the Division of Information Technology. Evidence confirmed that detailed plans outlined tasks that staff performed and established timelines for essential activities.

Working expediently to prepare for the launch of the Parental Portal, the school system conducted pilots as a means of determining the effectiveness of the changes. Piloting the Parental Portal in three schools proved to be a strategically savvy means for enhancing the efficiency of the portal. Principals, teachers, students and parents are reportedly satisfied with the operation of the Parental Portal. Evidence indicated that the system has enrolled all K-12 students in the Parent Portal. One report indicated that parent accounts were at an all-time high of 71,306. Interviews revealed that parents are developing a greater comfort level in using the portal to access information about their children's progress. The system has developed a Parent Portal Registration and eSIS Parent Assistant Handbook to facilitate the dissemination of information about the system. The handbook is available in multiple languages to support the diverse populations served by the school system.

Overall, communication is more widespread as the portal conveys important information to schools, students, parents and the system. Stakeholders indicated that the school system partnered with the DeKalb County Public Library System, and as a result, the county library system participated in the registration process for the system.

A review of documentation revealed that the school system revised Board Policies IH – Student Achievement and IHA – Grading Systems as agreed upon by the subcommittee. After receiving input from Senior Staff, Board Policy IHA was presented and adopted by the Board on October 7, 2013. The policy included wording related to teachers providing student progress information "in a timely manner through the electronic grading portal." System- and school-level administrators, support personnel and teachers received the revised policy for implementation. More specifically, Board Policy IHA – Grading Systems states the following:

> *… The DeKalb County School District believes that the most important assessment of student learning shall be conducted by the teachers as they observe and evaluate students in the context of ongoing classroom instruction. Teachers shall evaluate student progress, report grades that represent the student's academic achievement, and communicate official academic progress to students and parents in a timely manner through the electronic grading portal.*

> *The Superintendent or his/her designee shall have the responsibility for developing and implementing a uniform procedure for evaluating and communicating student progress.*

The Parent Portal serves as a tool that permits parents to monitor their children's performance and students to monitor their individual progress. Parents and students have real time feedback and increased interaction, all of which leads to improved student achievement. Students have the ability to check their academic success using a minimal number of steps. The Student Information System automatically creates an account for a student within 24 hours after enrollment in a school. The portal successfully engages families in meaningful ways by keeping them informed about their children's academic performance and attendance. The portal also strengthens communication between the home and school. One parent indicated that the Parent Portal removed the unknowns about her child's homework assignments and overall progress.

Staff generate various summary reports such as login account activation status per school and Student Changed Password Activity by school and grade. The portal has other meaningful capabilities. If problems or challenges exist, parents have a telephone number to call for assistance. During the past year the school system has been engaged in monitoring and evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of the Parent Portal. After conducting its review, the system has decided to migrate to a new parent portal platform called Infinite Campus in August of 2014.

REQUIRED ACTION 11:
Re-establish the system's strategic planning team for the purpose of effectively implementing the DeKalb County School System Strategic Plan to guide the direction of the system.

Directive:
Complete the RFP process, retain a strategic planning facilitator and begin the strategic planning process to define and set the future direction for the DeKalb County School District.

Progress Status: Please indicate the progress the institution has made toward addressing this required action.

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 school system continues to make significant progress in the strategic planning process. In response to the directive to "Complete the RFP process, retain a strategic planning facilitator and begin the strategic planning process to define and set the future direction for the DeKalb County School District," the Board voted to adopt the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA) and Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI) processes to devise an updated strategic plan. The process is divided into four phases and framed around a continuous improvement model that centers on the following questions: Who are we?, Where are we now?, Where do we want to go?, How will we know when we get there?, and How do we plan to get there? The school system is currently completing Phase I of the implementation. In addition, interviews, the presentation by system leadership and a review of evidence clearly indicated that the school system is implementing a Theory of Change to Bridge the Gap Between Under-Performance and Excellence through Growth and Achievement. The Bridge Plan was identified as the means to provide a strategic roadmap for staff, parents and community members.

Interviews with board members, system leaders, principals and community members and a review of the Strategic Improvement Planning Report presented by the Superintendent on December 2, 2013 to the Board indicated the process thus far has included a comprehensive community engagement component. The school system valued the input stakeholders provided during the 2011 strategic planning process. Staff studied and synthesized feedback provided by 300 stakeholders during the Community Forum held in September 2011 and the results of an online survey administered in September 2011 to which 1,227 stakeholders responded. Additionally, staff reviewed the input of 24 participants of "mostly parents" during the October 2011 Hispanic Focus Group and Listening Sessions conducted from 2011-13 with internal and external stakeholders. In addition, the school system conducted focus group sessions during October 2013 in each of the attendance regions. The groups were representative of a cross section of internal and external stakeholders that included teachers, non-instructional staff, students, parents, business leaders and other community members.

A Planning Team of 54 members that included representatives of a cross section of stakeholders (school board members, central office staff, school staff, parents, students, business and other community members) was assembled in September 2013 and charged with the task of responding to the strategic planning process guiding questions: "Who are we?, Where are we now?, and "Where do we want to go?". These questions provided the focus for the discussions during meetings. In addition, the Planning Team conducted a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of the school system; reviewed current school system beliefs, mission, and vision; and identified five strategic goal areas and priorities that included Student Success with Equity and Access, Stakeholder Engagement, Staff Efficacy and Excellence, Internal and External Communication, and Organizational Effectiveness and Efficiency.

Following the work of the Planning Team, five Action Teams, comprised of 12-15 members each, were assembled in October 2013. Their task was to review the five strategic goals and priorities, identify performance objectives, and draft measures and targets to answer the question, "How will we know when we get there?" The Action Teams worked to ensure alignment with *AdvancED Standards for Quality School Systems*, Required Actions related to the AdvancED Monitoring process, The "Bridge Initiative," recommendations related to A Vision for Public Education in Georgia, Race-to-the-Top Guidelines, Title I Guidelines, the Atlanta Regional Commission Strategic Plan for Economic Development, the Georgia Road to College Initiative, and the DeKalb County Government's Strategic Plan. In November 2013, the work of the Action Teams was presented to the Planning Committee for feedback and recommendations for additions or revisions. The draft was presented to the Board during the December 2, 2013 meeting. During this meeting, the Board offered feedback and voted to adopt the report representative of the work thus far.

The school system will now embark on Phase II of the strategic planning process. The focus of work during this phase will be to facilitate the development of Regional Improvement Plans, Division Plans and School Improvement Plans aligned with the school system's strategic plan and address specific areas of need within the individual division and school contexts. The school system has developed a comprehensive timeframe for this process including three work sessions beginning in January 2014. The goal for completion of this work is June 2014. Phase III of the process will require the school system to ensure alignment with the system, regional and school plans as well as ensure that the appropriate resources to support the accomplishment of the plan's objectives are reflected in system and school processes. Phase IV of the plan is focused on execution, monitoring and reporting. The system has outlined strategic planning mid-year and summary updates. These updates will be provided to the Board in March and June of 2014. The school system has been highly transparent during the strategic planning process. The school system is utilizing the Georgia School Board Association's eBoard Strategic Planning Software to report, execute and monitor the completed plan. This electronic platform will enable the system to provide real time information to all constituent groups. Interviews and a review of evidence indicated that the school system plans to work with consultants from McKenna Long and Aldridge LLP to develop and implement an accountability structure to ensure a faithful implementation of the strategic plan.

The school system has accomplished significant work related to the strategic planning process since the May 15-17, 2013 Monitoring Review. It has successfully completed the RFP process as well as reviewed, analyzed and synthesized input from representative groups of internal and external stakeholders gathered via focus group meetings and surveys. Including input gleaned from the 2011 strategic planning process was an important step in regaining trust within the school system as well as from its external stakeholders, along with ensuring that valuable feedback was not lost. This feedback was used to inform the identification of the strategic goals and direction approved by the Board on December 2, 2013. The Action Teams have furthered the work of the strategic planning process by identifying performance objectives and drafting measures and targets to answer the question, "How will we know when we get there?" The school system is well positioned to begin the next phase of its strategic planning process and the development of the corresponding division, region and school improvement plans. As a result, the system has completed Required Action 11.

It is critical to note that although the school system has completed the requirements outlined in Required Action 11, it is at the threshold of the real work of strategic planning. Ensuring that the division, region and school improvement plans align with the school system's strategic planning goals is paramount to the success of the next phase of planning. The school system will begin to implement these plans during the 2014-15 school year. The real work begins during this time. The school system must ensure that it remains committed to 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 system's progress on the plan's implementation.

Next Steps

The progress made by the DeKalb County School District since May 2013 is commendable. Many programs, policies and processes have been put into place to stabilize the school system and begin to restore confidence and trust among stakeholder groups. However, sustaining the progress made to date and keeping the implementation of initiatives moving forward will require the long-term commitment of the Board, Superintendent, system staff and the community of DeKalb County. To ensure that the school system continues to sustain its progress and establish increased stability through a focused commitment to continuous improvement, the Monitoring Review Team has outlined the following additional Required Actions.

The school system is responsible for completing Required Actions 1, 3 and 6 as well as for addressing the Required Actions below.

The school system will be expected to submit an Institution Progress Report. The institution will use the report to document the additional actions it has taken to address the remaining Required Actions and Directives of the previous Special Review and Monitoring Review Teams, new Required Actions and Directives as outlined in this section, and 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 May 31, 2014. During that review, the Monitoring Review Team will seek to verify the information and evidence contained in the report and to determine the system's completion of the Required Actions and adherence to the AdvancED Standards and Policies.

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.

REQUIRED ACTION 13:

Develop and implement plans, policies and processes to monitor, evaluate and sustain the school systems' 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.

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 district.
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.

Conclusion

The Monitoring Review Team recognizes many areas in which the school system is making significant progress toward completing the Required Actions. The directives provided in this report are designed to help the school system meet all of the Required Actions established by the Special Review Team and ensure the establishment of monitoring and evaluation processes and procedures to ensure the sustainability of all realized improvement efforts now and in the future. DeKalb County School District may discuss these directives with AdvancED to gain assistance and support in using them to meet the Required Actions and sustain progress to date.

After an extensive review of evidence in the form of documents, audiovisuals and interviews, the Monitoring Team determined that the DeKalb County School District has made substantial progress in creating a framework for addressing the Required Actions by developing comprehensive and systemic processes to guide its operation. At this point, the school system must commit to a timeframe to implement and complete the Required Actions. Additionally, the system needs sufficient time to develop measures to ensure the systemic incorporation of improvement efforts into the school system's operation regardless of the board members, superintendent and staff who fill various positions. The school system has used the accreditation process to skillfully develop the foundational elements of a more effective management process designed to guide the school system as a fully-functional educational enterprise.

Well-qualified board members, superintendent, staff and other stakeholders have emerged to accept the challenge of restoring the school system to a course of operational efficiency. Through shared leadership, respect, accountability and numerous other best practices, Superintendent Thurmond has empowered the talents and skills of staff members to create a highly functional staff improve existing structures and create new structures when warranted in order to move the system forward in a positive and productive manner. The initiation of a culture change has permitted the focus to remain on implementation of significant initiatives that focus on the education of students system-wide. Having a clear chain of command for the Board and staff has elevated the level of effectiveness, engagement, commitment and understanding of the various roles and responsibilities of the stakeholder groups including board members, staff, students, and business and community representatives.

Despite the extensive scope and breadth of the policies, procedures and systems developed in response to the Required Actions, the quality work is in the formative stage and needs to move progressively through to full implementation and evaluation. Another critical component of the process is ensuring that the framework becomes institutionalized within the system's operations. This school system faces several critical factors that will impact the stability of its operation. In particular, two issues have significant implications for the school system: 1) the pending election of the Board and 2) the long-term commitment of the Superintendent. In 2014, elections will take place for seven board members as the Board will be downsized from its current state of nine to seven members. Notably, the Governance Center of McKenna Long & Aldridge (MLA) indicated that "In our experience, it typically takes 18-24 months [for the implementation of governance systems] to take hold and become institutionalized." It is imperative that policies and procedures continue to be adopted and implemented with an understanding for the need to create a foundation of effective board governance that is easily translated and demanded from board to board. As to the superintendent, the system needs to begin to address the need for succession planning throughout the system including the position of superintendent.

The Monitoring Team recognizes the effort and hard work of the Board, Superintendent Thurmond, system staff and personnel at all levels, and stakeholders to accomplish all the work necessary to establish the foundation upon which real progress can be achieved throughout the school system for all students. The challenges facing the system did not materialize overnight. The difficult task of restoring the school system to the level of one of the premiere school systems in the state will take time and a sustained effort by everyone in the system. Now that, the Board and system leadership are once again focused on student achievement, the system can pursue in earnest its goal of providing every DeKalb County School District student a 21st century education in preparation and pursuit of their chosen career or college pathway.

In recognition of the progress made by the school system and based upon the recommendation of the Monitoring Team, the AdvancED Accreditation Commission has approved the recommendation to change the accreditation status of the DeKalb County School District from "Accredited Probation" to "Accredited Warned". Given the extent and nature of the challenges and distractions faced by the system since being placed on Probation in 2012 and the resulting delay in addressing the Required Actions, the system has made remarkable progress. However, as the system has identified, the work is ongoing and the larger issues of implementation and sustainability of changes need to be addressed to ensure continuous improvement of the system. With the continued support, monitoring and assistance of the larger community of stakeholders, the system will not only achieve its desired status of "Accredited," but will more importantly provide a real educational pathway to the future for the students of the DeKalb County School District.

About AdvancED®

Background

Dedicated to advancing excellence in education worldwide, AdvancED provides accreditation, research, and professional services to 32,000 institutions in over 70 countries. AdvancED provides accreditation under the seals of the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), the 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 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 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 once every five years. The team evaluates the institution's adherence to the AdvancED quality standards and accreditation policies, assesses the efficacy of the institution's improvement process and methods for quality assurance, and provides commendations and 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 during an institution's accreditation, a special external review may be conducted in response to complaints or information about the institution and/or its system (district, board, or corporation) to investigate adherence to the AdvancED standards and accreditation policies and procedures. 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.

A Process of Continuous Improvement

The AdvancED accreditation process engages the institution 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.