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July 3, 2013

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

Dear Mr. Thurmond:

Enclosed is a copy of the report of the Monitoring Review Team that conducted the review of the DeKalb County School District on May 15-17, 2013. The findings and observations indicate that the school system has made progress since the change in Board membership in March of this year.

As the report indicates, the newly configured Board has made progress in designing a framework to guide execution of its roles and responsibilities within the context of professional and collegial decorum and behavior. Another significant aspect of the Board's focus has been a deliberate effort to avoid undermining the authority of the superintendent and helping to create a culture supportive of school system leaders in managing day-to-day operations of the system and schools. Stakeholders also appear to be encouraged by the leadership of the new Board and administration.

However, stakeholder groups and staff members alike share concerns regarding whether the school system can sustain this progress when faced with the inevitable change in Board and superintendent leadership. Of immediate concern may be the upheaval that may result from impending legal rulings by the Georgia Supreme Court and the Georgia Office of State Administrative Hearings. An additional change in leadership could undermine the progress made in the last few months, and yet it is critical to the success of the system to demonstrate sustainability in the newly displayed practices.

The report indicates that the school system has made progress on all 11 Required Actions. The report provides directives to guide next steps and support sustainability of this progress. The DeKalb County School District must make significant and sustainable progress or complete each of these Required Actions prior to December 31, 2013. As steps are implemented to address the Required Actions, system officials should ensure that appropriate evidence, including documentation of results, is maintained.

Mr. Michael Thurmond

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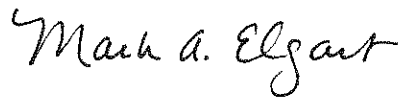
July 3, 2013

As outlined in the October 2012 Special Review Team report, the DeKalb County School District will remain in the status of Accredited Probation. At the time of the Monitoring Visit in December 2013, the Monitoring Team will review the accreditation status of the system. The school system shall submit an Institution Progress Report no less than three weeks prior to this scheduled visit.

Please note that it is the responsibility of school system officials to share the contents of the report with the Board of Education and the community.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the Monitoring Review Team Report for the DeKalb County School District or addressing the Required Actions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark A. Elgart". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M".

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

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



## **Monitoring Visit Report**

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

**Dates of Visit:**

**May 15-17, 2013**

# Monitoring Visit Report

## Introduction

This report summarizes the findings of the Monitoring Team Visit held on May 15-17, 2013 to the DeKalb County School District. The purpose of the visit was to review the school system's progress toward addressing Required Actions resulting from the Special Review Team visit on October 17-19, 2012.

## Activities of the Monitoring Team

In preparation for the Monitoring Visit, 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 50 stakeholders representing Board Members, Central Office staff, principals, teachers, and community members
- Artifact review
- Team deliberations and report preparation

## 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.*

#### Progress Status:

Indicate the progress the DeKalb County School District has made toward addressing this Required Action.

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

#### Summary of Findings:

Research (Dervarics and Eileen O'Brien, 2011) shows that high-performing school districts consistently exhibit particular defining characteristics. One such characteristic is the existence of a Board that has developed a working relationship with its superintendent based on mutual respect, collegiality, and a joint commitment to student success. Similarly, the AdvancED Standard 2 requires "[m]embers [to] comply with all policies, procedures, laws, and regulations and function as a cohesive unit for the benefit of effective system operation and student learning." During the Monitoring Visit, evidence confirmed that the members

of the newly constituted Board are exhibiting behaviors and norms consistent with this characteristic. However, while the Board is showing promise in creating a culture based on mutual respect and shared responsibility, its ability to sustain this effort and institutionalize these highly functional norms over a period of time will be the true test of its success. AdvancED's experience in working with school systems across the United States has consistently found that having one or more board members who function contrary to this shared vision and respect makes the governing body vulnerable to dysfunctional behavior. The capacity of individual board members to come together as a whole has a significant and enduring impact on the effectiveness of the Board's operational performance. One of the major tasks facing this district is designing and implementing with fidelity a comprehensive written plan describing a structure that will unify the Board so that it can fulfill its mission to serve the needs of all of its students.

Another essential characteristic of high-performing school districts (Dervarics and Eileen O'Brien, 2011) is the existence of a school board that works collaboratively as a team with the superintendent, and where each entity understands and respects the role of the other. This characteristic also aligns with AdvancED Standard 2 which states, "[t]he governing body consistently protects, supports, and respects the autonomy of the chief executive officer to accomplish goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations of the system and its schools. Given the long history of individual board members acting independently and undermining the authority of the superintendent to lead and manage day-to-day operations, clearly separating the duties of the Board and superintendent is an essential component of a plan for the district to maximize the effectiveness of the Board.

The short term appointment of six members of the current Board, the possibility of judicial intervention in the composition of the current Board and the short-term commitment of the interim superintendent left the Monitoring Team with serious concerns about the sustainability of the progress observed during the visit. Maintaining a highly functional governing board with complementary board-superintendent relations is a critical element for this district's long-term success. The district must develop a plan that will establish the operational framework to guide, monitor, and evaluate the effectiveness of the Board. Additionally, the plan should incorporate a process to communicate the results of this evaluative process to the broader community in order to establish trust and community support. Such a plan is essential to providing the Board with the direction and continuity it needs so that it can sufficiently focus on improving the educational outcomes of students throughout the district.

The district has provided evidence of a "plan" that consists of two general paragraphs, two training resources, and a list of several policies. However, this information has been gathered without the benefit of a high level and comprehensive plan that provides a blueprint to unifying the governing board. The district's development of a more comprehensive plan should identify the skills and resources that the Board needs so that it can more effectively focus on the needs of students. This Required Action calls for the district to establish a plan that will build and sustain a professional and collegial decorum among board members and between the Board and the superintendent while adhering to the roles and responsibilities attached to each. Despite the fact that evidence verified that a considerable amount of planning has occurred at the district level, only fragments of a plan exist. At this point, a viable plan does not appear to be in the formative stages of development.

**Directive:**

- 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 district 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.

**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.*

**Progress Status:**

Indicate the progress the DeKalb County School District has made toward addressing this Required Action.

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

**Summary of Findings:**

On March 13, 2013, Governor Nathan Deal announced the appointment of six new board members. These newly appointed members joined recently elected board members who served as Board Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and another member. The current Board has created a strong foundation and framework for progress in a very short period of time. However, the issue of board composition continues to be a challenge for the district. The appointed board members' terms will expire in 18 months when the size of the board will be reduced from nine to seven members. Of more immediate concern may be the upheaval that may result from impending legal rulings by the Georgia Supreme Court and the Georgia Office of State Administrative Hearings. On June 3, 2013, the Georgia Supreme Court heard arguments challenging the constitutionality of the 2010 statute that authorizes the Governor to permanently remove school board members upon the recommendation of the Georgia State Board of Education. Additionally, the former board chair and four other suspended members are currently seeking reinstatement through actions before the Office of State Administrative Hearings. In the interim, they are still officially recognized by the district as members of the Board and are still receiving compensation. The district's website labels the members as "[s]uspended board members pending the outcome of the appeals process." The outcome of these rulings may have a material impact on the ability of the district to meet the Required Actions and to sustain and build upon current progress.

A review of board agendas, minutes, and board policies as well as interviews with various stakeholder groups indicated that the Board and Superintendent have made deliberate attempts 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. To comply with these stipulations, the Board has revised some existing policies and/or adopted new policies that address several areas: Policy BH – Board Code of Ethics, Policy BHA – Board Member Conflict of Interest, Policy BCBI – Public Participation in Board Meetings, Policy BBI – Board Staff Communications, Policy BBC – Board Committees, and Policy

BHB – Nepotism. These policies clarify board members' roles, responsibilities, and decorum as well as promote ethical behavior and prohibit nepotism.

Another governance rule that has significant implications for the Board is Policy BDC – Policy Development and Adoption, which delineates the process for policy development, revision, rescission, and adoption. Policy-making is a critical board responsibility. In order to be effective in this role, board members must have an in-depth awareness of existing policies. However, the last statement in Policy BDC states, “[t]he [s]uperintendent annually shall review the policy manual of the Board and report recommended changes...”. This policy does not include a review process for the Board itself. If another policy describes the Board’s policy review procedure, a cross reference is not indicated.

Board members who were interviewed expressed their commitment to confining their role to policy-making to ensure that the system is a well-run organization. Evidence cited during interviews verified that Board actions and decisions have improved since March 2013. Stakeholders reported witnessing significant improvements during the past two months. Board members also have expressed a commitment to avoiding interference in the day-to-day operations of the district or otherwise micromanaging the system. Board members repeatedly communicated that they represent the interests of the entire school system, not just individual voting districts.

Board members described their relationship with each other and with the Superintendent as being based on mutual respect and professionalism. Their comments validated the level of their respect for the knowledge and expertise of other board members and for the Superintendent. By all accounts, board professionalism, communication, and adherence to the code of ethics and chain of command are becoming part of the cultural norm. Board members displayed a sense of pride about their efforts to perform as an effective governing body. The Board has eliminated standing committees in an effort to stay focused on their roles as members of the entire Board and reduce fragmentation. Given the district’s need for a comprehensive plan to guide and drive improvement, an ad hoc committee of board members has been established and is actively participating in developing a strategic plan to set the direction for the system. Artifacts included a reference to the governing body evaluating its decisions and actions annually to ensure they are in accordance with defined roles and responsibilities, a formally adopted code of ethics, and conflict of interest policies. However, evidence did not indicate that the governing body had implemented the evaluation process or identified a time frame for initiating such a process.

Another essential area is professional learning for new board members. Meeting minutes indicated that the Board has begun a series of training sessions conducted by the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA) on topics ranging from Roles and Responsibilities and Effective School Board Meetings to Finance and Planning for Sustained System Improvement. The Board also has contracted with the McKenna Long and Aldridge (MLA) Governance Center for assistance in “adopting best practices used around the country at high-performing organizations in areas such as financial controls and stakeholder input in order to maintain full accreditation and ensure accountability and transparency for DeKalb citizens and taxpayers.” One example of the work of the MLA Governance Center was seen in a workshop PowerPoint presentation on Board Norms and Board Decorum. Additionally, the Board and Superintendent have consulted with representatives from the State Department of Education, the President and CEO of AdvancED, and a well-respected former superintendent.

Board meeting agendas showed a noticeable change in the number of meetings between January and May 2013. Evidence revealed that nine meetings occurred on six different dates within the month of January. Of these meetings, seven were called meetings. In February 2013, the Board held fifteen meetings, thirteen of which were called meetings in addition to a training session on February 20. In March, records showed one meeting date where a legislative meeting was followed by a called meeting. Agendas for April 2013 included four meeting dates with three called meetings and a public budget hearing. At the time of the Monitoring

Visit, only one meeting had occurred in May. However, the website listed two additional public budget hearings. The decrease in the number of monthly meetings during the past two months, which has occurred alongside the seating of the six new board members, underscores the Board's commitment to effective governance, a strategic focus on academic achievement, and avoidance of micromanaging the operations of the district.

Despite the promise shown by current Board behavior, which appears to promote effective system performance and student learning, a major concern is the fact that sufficient time has not elapsed to determine the stability of the positive changes that have occurred. For this reason, continued monitoring will be critical until it is apparent that positive board relations and behavioral norms have become institutionalized and that the system has a plan to ensure that gains are sustained.

**Directives:**

1. Implement a systematic 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 systematic structure for board training and evaluation to ensure that in-depth training and evaluation are institutionalized and built into continuous improvements efforts.

**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.*

**Progress Status:**

Indicate the progress the DeKalb County School District has made toward addressing this Required Action.

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

**Summary of Findings:**

Evidence indicated that the newly configured governing body has developed and adopted norms that set parameters for how the Board is expected to function. During interviews, individual board members frequently shared that the norms promote self-governance. In essence, board members seemed to view the norms as a definitive framework to help guide their performance. Primarily, it appeared that the norms encapsulated some significant descriptors from several board policies specifically in the areas of board interaction, community engagement, communications, time management, media, and public relations. On May 6, 2013, the agenda for the Board Work Session included Board Norms as a discussion item for the Committee of the Whole meeting, and the agenda for the Legislative Meeting showed Board Norms as an action item as well. Board members have exhibited a significant commitment to abiding by the established



norms in governing the district. During interviews, internal and external stakeholders confirmed the professional and courteous demeanor of board members and the evolving culture changes in the district.

Additionally, the Board has abolished its working committee infrastructure, thereby, eliminating a system that resulted in opportunities for board members to interfere with the administrative functions of the day-to-day operations of the district. Adopted on March 10, 2013, Policy BBC – Board Committees defines the constraints of working committees noting that “[their] existence and charge come from the Board...” However, the policy authorizes the creation of special committees that are dissolved upon completion of a specific task or by Board action. The policy specifies that the board chair identifies the committee chair and determines the composition of board-appointed committees. Board-appointed committees may include representatives from various stakeholder groups such as board members, staff, students, and community members. While establishing a process for forming special committees, the policy also includes procedures for dissolving these committees.

As the Board attempts to revise the committee policies, conflicts between new and pre-existing policies may arise. For example, in Policy BBC, Section A.3, the policy states, “[t]he Board shall not establish standing committees for general or specific purposes” and, yet, Policy BDC, last revised on April 18, 2011, states, “[t]he preliminary draft will be submitted to the Board Instruction & Policy Committee for review and input, with copies to all Board members.” This statement identifies a Board Instruction and Policy Committee, whose existence will conflict with the intent of Policy BBC – Board Committees.

Newly appointed board members are working diligently to ensure that system- and school-level leadership has the autonomy to meet district goals for instruction and achievement. More significantly, board members have exemplified behavior commensurate with this expectation. Board members have demonstrated their knowledge and awareness of the various components of their roles to facilitate the success of the district in ultimately strengthening teaching and learning.

Repeatedly, stakeholders described the vast difference in district operations within a two-month period. They characterized current Board and Superintendent relations as cohesive and professional with a primary focus on academics, especially during budgetary discussions. Several stakeholders stated that the current Board models the attributes of the type of governing body that the district needs. School-based administrative personnel indicated that they were encouraged by the professional and collegial relationships that now exist between the Board and the Superintendent. More specifically, stakeholders indicated that the Superintendent is a good listener and communicator who is passionate about student achievement and parent engagement. Stakeholders also described the Superintendent as a leader who holds everyone accountable and models professionalism and collaboration.

Interviews with representatives from various stakeholders groups confirmed that the current governing board and Superintendent are working together to move the system forward by providing opportunities for academic excellence for students. According to evidence gathered during each previous Special Review Team visit to the district, micromanagement has been an ongoing, destructive, and central feature of the behavior of the governing body. However, the governing body’s current operational framework promotes an explicit role differentiation for the Board and superintendent. At this point in time, this new framework appears to have eliminated the practice of individual board members acting independently and undermining the authority of the superintendent to manage day-to-day operations of the district. At all levels, district staff reported that the new board members were now redirecting complaints from stakeholders back through the proper chain of command for resolution. This adherence to a chain of command by the Board has allowed the staff to focus on meeting the needs of operating the district instead of meeting the demands of individual board members. Cultivating and sustaining the evolving culture change over time will help to establish a climate that promotes a focus on system effectiveness and academic achievement.

**Directive:**

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

**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.*

**Progress Status:**

Indicate the progress the DeKalb County School District has made toward addressing this Required Action.

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

**Summary of Findings:**

Interviews with the board members, Superintendent, district staff, and school-based administrative personnel confirmed that the governing body and leadership have established and identified specific budget parameters for the FY2014 Budget. These parameters include criteria such as direct dollars to impact classroom instruction and improve student achievement, reduce legal fees to provide more dollars for instruction, conduct a personnel audit of district staff, eliminate furlough days, analyze all district programs to ensure a positive return on investment, and positively impact academic achievement to provide a framework for budgetary discussions and development. Stakeholder interviews with representatives from various stakeholder groups validated that the budget development process is being driven by these factors.

The interim Superintendent has developed a Ninety-Day Action Plan that outlines five major goals and objectives slated for implementation between May and July 2013. One of the goals is to develop and implement a balanced budget for FY2014. Interviews with the Board and other stakeholders confirmed that action steps are being implemented to ensure stakeholder participation in the budgetary process and adherence to parameters established by the Board. Interviews indicated that consensus exists among board members to allocate resources based upon need in order to improve student achievement across the district.

Several board members articulated that their governance vision is being driven by a focus on a unified school system and not by individual voting districts. Through interviews with district staff and parents, it became apparent that the Board has moved away from the previous political and territorial bickering that characterized the demeanor of the previous Board. With this commitment to a professional and collegial working environment, the Board and district leadership display a unified focus on student achievement. Interviews with district staff and school-based administrators verified that the focus of the newly constituted governing board and Superintendent has been on academics, transparency, and accountability. District leadership also has begun to consider various alternatives to ensure financial support for instructional programs. For example, board members indicated that the dollars saved as a result of the cost reduction in legal fees could strengthen the instructional focus of the district. Increasing fiscal allocations to promote

academic achievement is an example of the commitment of the governing board and leadership to ensuring that the goal of academic excellence for all DeKalb students guides budget development for FY2014.

Allocating resources to support instructional performance involves aggregating data to support the feasibility of fiscal decisions. One board member offered the example of the financial allocation for translators. In an effort to gain more accurate information about some of the challenges confronting the district, the Superintendent asked the system to conduct an analysis of its demographics to “put a face” on the students in the district. A subcommittee focused on the statistical composition of English Language Learners (ELL) and Special Education students. As a result, an updated profile provided information that will guide the allocation of resources based on need. In this instance, the allocation was provided for translators to more effectively serve the growing number of ELL students.

Interviews with stakeholders confirmed that the district needs a comprehensive and viable strategic plan to ensure that the positive changes in the district will lead to a sustainable culture shift focusing on academic achievement. Further, stakeholders acknowledged that the interim Superintendent’s Ninety-Day Action Plan is a step in the right direction to establish a system-wide purpose and direction. However, supporters acknowledge that a strategic plan is absolutely essential to the long-term success of the district. A strategic plan will provide a more comprehensive and holistic approach to developing the infrastructure necessary to support efforts to guide the district’s overall direction, allocate human, material and fiscal resources, and evaluate system effectiveness and student achievement.

The district has established an ad hoc Strategic Planning Committee that has begun the process of developing a blueprint to guide its work in determining the district’s purpose and direction. Interviewees discussed this committee’s detailed analysis of the district’s previous strategic plans and the processes involved in their development. Furthermore, they identified the need for buy-in by internal and external stakeholders as a major criterion for the strategic plan to become a systemic and sustainable management tool. Prior strategic plans developed by the district have faltered due in part to ongoing governance and leadership changes. This failure indicates a lack of a systemic approach to improvement that would enable the district to withstand periodic shifts in governance and leadership.

In relation to financial issues, the district has had a dramatic turn of events related to its fiscal management. On March 27, 2013, WABE, Atlanta’s NPR Station, reported that the district’s interim Superintendent acknowledged “a possible \$24 million shortfall in the budget” when he met with DeKalb community members and business leaders to discuss the future of the system. Approximately two months later, WABE reported on May 28, 2013 that the interim Superintendent “expressed caution in talking about the newly-projected school budget surplus of \$12 million.” Apparently, budget projections had swung out of the red and into the black in a very short period of time. The sudden change in the financial forecast resulted from the availability of unexpected fiscal resources to support the district’s drastic need to improve academic and instructional programs. The October 2013 Special Review Team report focused on the recurring pattern of financial mismanagement. The report stated, “[w]hile policies provide requirements of fiscal management, Board practice has not demonstrated effective oversight of fiscal management as exemplified by the district’s current deficit spending.” At this point in time, the Board has limited its fiscal role to budget and strategic oversight, thereby empowering the superintendent and district staff the autonomy necessary to manage financial resources to meet the needs of the district’s students.

According to recent reports on the district’s fiscal health, after the intensive, long-lasting fiscal crisis, the district has experienced a reprieve in terms of revenue. However, the district still faces the challenge of stabilizing its financial operations with the recent change in the position of Chief Financial Officer. Additionally, the district must develop and implement a financial structure that creates and maintains economic sustainability in order to preserve financial solvency. To further develop and sustain the evolving culture of transparency and stakeholder engagement, the governing board and superintendent should use the

recent financial budget challenges as an opportunity to discuss in a transparent manner how the delayed closing of the FY2013 financial operations impacted the district's ability to accurately predict its projected revenue and expenditures for the FY2014 budget.

**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.

**REQUIRED ACTION 5:**

*Establish and enforce a policy that board members honor the chain of command when communicating with stakeholders.*

**Progress Status:**

Indicate the progress the DeKalb County School District has made toward addressing this Required Action.

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

**Summary of Findings:**

Interviews with board members and school-based administrative personnel validated that a structure now exists to ensure that board members are honoring the chain of command when communicating with stakeholders. Board members confirmed that their visits to schools were the result of "invitations" received through the superintendent's office. Further, board members discussed policies that clarified their communication with the superintendent and district staff. During interviews, several board members gave specific examples of how they have had to inform and educate stakeholders about the protocol for resolving issues when asked to intervene with the administration. They indicated that they routinely follow the protocol by directing stakeholders to use the proper administrative channels. Board members' explanations clearly reinforced other stakeholders' comments about the integrity of chain of command and revealed a significant departure from the previous Board's practice of intervening on behalf of constituents.

During interviews with district staff, almost all interviewees referenced the Board's adherence to the adopted Board Norms and Policy BBI – Board-Staff Relations to confirm the existence of an established chain of command for communicating with stakeholders. In addition, they acknowledged that this was a significant improvement from practices by members of the previous governing board. However, upon review, it is apparent that Policy BBI – Board-Staff Relations makes only a cursory reference to the chain of command:

*All communications or open reports to the Board or any of its subcommittees from principals, supervisors, teachers, or other staff members will be submitted through the Superintendent. Staff should not contact Board members regarding school or District business, and staff interests or concerns should be communicated through the chain of command unless otherwise directed by the Superintendent.*

A school system with a history of board member interference in the day-to-day operations of the administration should have a more robust policy for ensuring adherence to chain of command.

A more effective chain of command policy would include a descriptive process for all stakeholder groups, both internally and externally. The current policy fails to precisely and categorically address all aspects of the

chain of command and lacks specific enough content to ensure that there is no misunderstanding of roles and responsibilities. Once developed and approved, the more robust policy addressing chain of command must be communicated to all staff and board members. Another critical component to ensuring conformity to chain of command is identification of a process to ensure that stakeholders are fully informed about policies and procedures. Nevertheless, all stakeholder groups appear to be informed about the recently developed Board Norms that have contributed to a climate that almost all stakeholders and staff characterized as a new atmosphere of hope and optimism for the district. In addition, the staff identified that the board members' adherence to the chain of command has freed them to perform the work for which they are responsible as opposed to meeting the demands of individual board members.

**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 district.

**REQUIRED ACTION 6:**

*Ensure a robust district diagnostic assessment program (universal screener, progress monitoring probes, and benchmarks included) that is a systematic and a regular component of the district'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.*

**Progress Status:**

Indicate the progress the DeKalb County School District has made toward addressing this Required Action.

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

**Summary of Findings:**

Interviews with some district-level administrators indicated that the system's interpretation of providing a district diagnostic assessment program is a four-step implementation process that includes: 1) a universal screener; 2) a progress monitoring tool; 3) benchmarks; and 4) the State's Longitudinal Data System (SLDS). However, this approach to creating a district diagnostic assessment program fails to reflect the scope of this Required Action. Interviews and documentation did not indicate a broader, more robust approach to assessment, how results of these four potential components of assessment would be used to inform instructional and operational decisions, or how governance and leadership would review and share results with the public. One district level administrator did in fact demonstrate a more thorough understanding of the comprehensive nature of the Required Action. Said administrator understood that the use of a universal screener is one tool that needs to be employed to address the systematic nature of assessment and not the full measure of the Required Action.

During the 2012-13 school year, the district implemented the Common Core Curriculum in English/Language Arts and Mathematics and the Anchors and Literacy Standards for other content areas. The planning and preparation for Common Core was in place prior to the Special Review Team visit to the district in October 2012. In collaboration with Pearson Learning, the Curriculum and Instruction staff and the Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Professional Learning (CIAPL) team developed and implemented

district wide benchmark assessments. Results listed in the district's Balanced Scorecard show extremely low achievement in many areas and a decline in some scores as the year progressed. Interviews with principals indicated that these results were discussed at the school level where they were used to make instructional decisions. The team found no evidence that the benchmark results were reviewed or shared with the Board or superintendent or that the results were used to inform instructional decisions at the leadership level.

Documentation and interviews with district staff revealed a singular focus on the selection of tools required to meet this Required Action rather than the development of a comprehensive and systemic process. Following review of four potential universal screening instruments, the district has selected a tool for reading and mathematics that has been projected in the 2013-14 budget. Both the universal screener and progress monitoring are tied to RTI modules and processes.

A district-level administrator explained that the district uses two dashboards of longitudinal data. The SLDS is accessed through eSIS and the district's data through another format. Currently, it is not possible to merge the two systems. It was unclear who has access to each data catalog and how these data are used. Interviews further revealed that achievement data are not generally shared with the Board, and it was unclear how data are shared with the superintendent. As the district begins to focus its operations on meeting the academic needs of all of its students, the use of student achievement data at all levels becomes vitally important to successfully implementing and monitoring all strategic and operational plans. The decisions of the Board need to be informed by the available data in order to ensure that strategies are implemented with fidelity to provide support and resources to areas of opportunity and need so that the students can meet the academic goals of the district.

**Directives:**

1. Develop protocols for sharing available data with the superintendent, board, senior leadership, and the 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.

**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.*

**Progress Status:**

Indicate the progress the DeKalb County School District has made toward addressing this Required Action.

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

## **Summary of Findings:**

Evidence verified that the district has begun to address the need to develop a formal change management process for new system initiatives. The district has set forth a preliminary framework for the process. Documents indicate that staff provided input and feedback through surveys. However, several interviewees were unfamiliar with the concept and/or procedures related to district related change management. Nevertheless, some interviewees, especially those in positions directly related to local school operation, were familiar with benchmark assessments in terms of the timeline for administration, monitoring procedures, and using results to improve classroom instruction and student learning. Also, staff made reference to the alignment of the district's benchmarks with the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards and their use in determining the effectiveness of the district's instructional programs.

Further review of evidence provided by the district revealed that establishing a formal change management process is in its developmental stages. The district appears to be actively collecting data and information to inform the design of a process. These efforts include administering surveys to various stakeholder groups, researching concepts by reviewing the literature for best practices, and contacting other school districts for feedback on their systems and processes. The evidence provided by the district included a sequence of actions, next steps and identified planned activities but failed to include a timeline, persons responsible, monitoring, and evaluation strategies necessary to ensure the implementation and completion of initiatives.

Although the district has begun to address this Required Action, the district's efforts appear to be in the initial stages of progress. Next steps should include professional learning related to the change management process for implementing various initiatives. Because effectuating change is a tremendous challenge, especially for a large bureaucracy, providing professional development would permit the governing body, leadership, and other staff to understand the depth and scope of the change process. A system's ability to implement with fidelity and scale at all levels new processes, programs, and initiatives is extremely challenging for the healthiest of systems and nearly impossible for systems hampered by ineffective governance and leadership. Therefore, the need to create a formalized change management process is vitally important to the continuous improvement of the DeKalb County School District.

## **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.

**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 district. Support this action by researching appropriate training for teachers and staff to ensure technology's effective use in daily instruction.*

**Progress Status:**

Indicate the progress the DeKalb County School District has made toward addressing this Required Action.

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

**Summary of Findings:**

Based on information presented in the Institutional Progress Report, Technology Audit, Technology Project, and interviews, the Monitoring Team found that the system has developed a thorough, comprehensive audit of its available technology. Staff conducted an assessment of hardware, software, network, and other components of the infrastructure as well as technology projects. Staff also analyzed current inventory, capacity, resources, and future needs. A plan has been developed and approved for the distribution of hardware, software, peripherals, wireless capability, and infrastructure support. The district's technology infrastructure analysis included both instructional and administrative technology needs. Care was given in planning to anticipate and allow for future developments without having to completely retool the system. An example of the district's practice of anticipating and planning for future needs is the inclusion of virtual desktops as a means of avoiding the obsolescence of a large supply of equipment. The technology plan that the system is required to submit to the State Department of Education has been revised to include this latest initiative.

While evidence verified that the district has completed a needs assessment with an internal audit across the system, existing documentation did not show that the district had developed a process to determine the appropriate and equitable allocation of technology throughout the district. Another component of this Required Action is the need to research appropriate training for teachers and staff to ensure the effective use of technology in daily instruction. Informed by research results, the district should develop a professional learning plan that successfully leverages the district's technology resources to deliver a 21<sup>st</sup> century educational experience to all its students. An effective professional learning plan would address the training needs of staff and continuous improvement goals of the district as well as identify a process to systematically monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the plan. To broaden its effectiveness, a component of the professional learning plan would include verification that instructional staff implemented in their classrooms lessons learned in professional development activities.

**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 district.



## REQUIRED ACTION 9:

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

### Progress Status:

Indicate the progress the DeKalb County School District has made toward addressing this Required Action.

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

### Summary of Findings:

Review of information provided by the district revealed and interviews confirmed that the system has identified a comprehensive and strategic action plan to communicate to stakeholders about the differences between programs and financial resources available to schools. Procedures include data collection from schools to determine the nature and cost of existing programs as well as the availability of financial resources. Additionally, staff members have begun to develop a clearly defined communications plan that will enable the district to articulate the differences between programs and financial resources available to schools. To facilitate the strategic planning process, the district contracted with Education Planners at the request of the most recent former superintendent to conduct an evaluation of curricula-based programs and a review of professional development initiatives.

A comprehensive assessment of curriculum-based/supplemental programs was completed in January 2012. The report presented findings and recommendations related to the following areas: Supplemental Programs, After School Programs, Curriculum, and Professional Learning. In relation to assessment, a significant finding identified in the report was "a lack of coordination between schools and the central office, specifically the Curriculum and Instructional Division, in the selection and monitoring of programs aimed at improving student achievement." In addition, the report identified survey results that showed more than 300 separate programs being used in schools. Significantly, schools were not always aware of programs available from the district and the central office was not always aware of programs being used in the schools. Another critical finding revealed by the Education Planners report showed that principals were not always able to accurately identify the number of students served by a program or the cost per student. Also significant is the finding that principals were often unable to determine if programs were aligned with district goals or effective in improving student achievement.

Evidence provided for the May 2013 Monitoring Visit revealed that the district organized a committee structure to address creating a plan to communicate to stakeholders the differences between programs and financial resources available to schools. However, the work did not begin in earnest until April 2013 at which time a committee met and identified high-level action steps. The committee includes representation from four district level departments: Curriculum and Instruction (C&I), School Leadership and Operational Support (SLO), Instructional Technology, and Finance. The charge to the committee was to develop a plan to help provide definition for the district's various programs. Two broad categories were established as follows: 1) programs specific to student groups and/or funding sources such as gifted/high achievers; Special Education; English Language Learners (ELL); Career, Technical and Agricultural Education (CTAE); Title programs; and 2) programs for tiered interventions and defined as core, comprehensive, supplemental, and whole school reforms. Also, the committee was tasked with compiling a list of existing programs as well as the associated costs of said programs and identifying available funding sources.

The district has developed a definition of an instructional program which is identified as “a planned series of events or activities that support student achievement, including but not limited to commercially purchased items or materials developed at the local or district level.” Developing and communicating this definition would assist the district in fostering a common understanding in all schools of the meaning of a program. To enhance its operational effectiveness, the committee divided into subcommittees to establish criteria for “programs” as well as establish subcommittee tasks, timelines, and outcomes.

To ensure consistent reporting of existing programs across the district, records showed that one of the subcommittees developed and distributed a template to principals for the purpose of reporting school-level programs and sources of financial support. The district disseminated the template via e-mail to principals on May 1, 2013 with a due date of May 24, 2013. Upon receipt of program lists from schools, the School-Based Program Committee will be responsible for reviewing the lists for the purpose of organizing and analyzing the information to make decisions to renew, remove, or add programs.

Action steps in the communications plan include the use of existing channels of communication beginning in July 2013 to provide information to stakeholders about the differences between programs and financial resources available to schools. However, dates for several steps in the timeline have not been identified for the completion of activities between collecting data and distributing a user-friendly report.

Based on evidence, the district recognized that its operation is in the beginning stages of addressing communication to stakeholders about the differences between programs and financial resources available to schools. Further, the system appreciates the breadth and scope of the work that lies ahead. At this point in time, staff members are in the information gathering process to identify existing programs and financial resources available to schools. The next and highly critical steps of analyzing the information to make informed decisions as to which programs are producing desired results have yet to be taken. Stakeholder interviews consistently revealed the district is working to identify return on investment (ROI) criteria that will serve as a guide for decision making related to resource allocation.

The district did not provide evidence that it has formalized the identification of the ROI criteria related to instructional and supplemental programs. Further, the district has not identified a process to ensure systematic program evaluation that utilizes multiple data sources aligned with student achievement. Systematic program evaluation is a critical next step for the district as it works to ensure that decisions made to renew, remove, or add new school- and district-wide programs are based on consistently applied criteria reflecting equitable opportunities for all students. As a component of the process, the district must provide consistent, coordinated direction and support for schools. Interviews with school- and district level administrators revealed a renewed focus on coordination and support between the district and its schools. However, the district must engage in the difficult task of evaluating all of its programs to determine which programs need to be continued in order to meet the needs of its students and which programs need to be discontinued to ensure efficient use of fiscal resources.

**Directive:**

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

## 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.*

### Progress Status:

Indicate the progress the DeKalb County School District has made toward addressing this Required Action.

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

### Summary of Findings:

A review of evidence revealed that since the 2005-2006 school year, the district has provided a Parent Portal for timely communication to parents about the results of students' progress. As a result, parents can access students' grades, attendance, and other informational items. In order for the Parent Portal to work as designed, parents must first activate the resource. In order to access the portal, parents open accounts using unique, protected passwords for security and limited access. During the 2012-2013 school year, approximately 23% of parents have opened accounts to access student information. The focus of the team charged with enrolling students in the Parent Portal has centered on providing accounts for each student registered in the district. Work is in progress to establish these accounts with attention to proprietary issues at each school level.

Agendas of team meetings indicated that some discussions have focused on the larger issue of why parents have not yet established accounts. Interviews with principals revealed that three major impediments have prevented parents from registering to use the Parent Portal to retrieve student information: computer access, language barriers, and motivation. District documentation did not address strategies for overcoming these barriers. However, one principal described a proactive approach for engaging parents that involved making school computer labs available for extended hours, displaying posters and notifications encouraging parents to access the parent portal, and offering parent training sessions to assist parents in establishing and accessing accounts.

Another principal revealed that the majority of the parents in the school do not speak English, and it is extremely difficult for them to navigate the portal. This school does have an innovative parent incentive program that could be expanded to include logging on to the Parent Portal. The number of parents with language barriers presents a challenge for the district, which will need to consider the availability of interpreters and English Language Learners (ELL) staff to assist non-English speaking parents. Additionally, students, who often serve as interpreters for their parents, could be asked to assist parents with navigating the Parent Portal. Two principals indicated potential partnerships with public libraries as a resource to provide computer access for those parents without internet access.

The effective use of the Parent Portal by teachers and students provides access to an invaluable tool. By providing students with access to real time assessment data and feedback, the district will empower its students to take greater ownership and control of their education.

**Directives:**

1. Identify and implement district wide strategies to promote the use of the Parent Portal to increase the number of parents, teachers, and students actually 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.

**REQUIRED ACTION 11:**

*Re-establish the district's strategic planning team for the purpose of effectively implementing the DeKalb County School System Strategic Plan to guide the direction of the district.*

**Progress Status:**

Indicate the progress the DeKalb County School District has made toward addressing this Required Action.

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

**Summary of Findings:**

The district has taken significant steps to address the need for a strategic planning team. Consistently, interviews with various stakeholder groups revealed their ability to reference the Superintendent's Ninety-Day Action Plan and the failure of past efforts to successfully implement the district's strategic plans. The district outlined a chronology of strategic planning efforts following the AdvancED Special Review Team visit from January 24-26, 2011. The chronology identified a comprehensive planning process from March 2011 through June 2012 that included the following: 1) a cross-section of stakeholders in the planning process; 2) a study of strategic plans from other school systems and various planning models; 3) community engagement sessions in which 300 stakeholders participated; 4) an online survey administered to collect additional input from community stakeholders; and 5) the findings which were distributed to members of the planning team and considered during a two-day planning retreat in October 2011. During this retreat, the district identified goal areas and formed Action Teams consisting of parents, teachers, and administrators for each goal area. Action Teams were charged with the task of identifying performance objectives for each goal area. Four draft action plans were submitted to the previous superintendent's cabinet to review and ensure alignment with the Theory of Action for Change and the 90-Day Entry Plan. The revised plan was presented to constituent groups for feedback. The administration presented the finalized Excellence in Education Plan to the Board in February 2012. However, this plan was not successfully implemented. The chronology of activities from March 2011 through February 2012 confirms the district's engagement in an extensive strategic planning process. While the district displayed success in completing the planning process, the system's efforts fell short in implementing the plan. This implementation gap further supports the need for a formal management process for system initiatives.

Since the arrival of the current superintendent in February 2013, the district has focused on re-establishing the district's planning team for the purpose of effectively developing and implementing a strategic plan to guide the direction of the system. The process thus far has included the assignment of staff to research the history

and success of strategic plans for the purpose of providing a broad understanding of how the district has fared in implementing strategic plans in the past. The study revealed there has not been a high degree of fidelity in implementing the plans. The inability of the district to focus on strategic planning as a systemic process underscores the Board's long-standing difficulty and history of losing sight of student learning and achievement as well as its role in ensuring that policies are in place to support resource allocation that aligns with the system's strategic goals.

Evidence revealed that in March 2013 the district re-engaged the strategic planning team. A review of the most recently developed district plan revealed misalignment of the vision, mission, goal areas, performance objectives, and resources. As a result of this lack of alignment, the district made the decision to engage in a planning process to develop a new strategic plan. The Board has implemented an ad hoc committee structure, and one of the committees has the responsibility for leading the strategic planning initiative. At the time of the Monitoring Visit, the district had developed a Request for Proposal (RFP) to identify a consultant to facilitate the strategic planning process. The time frame specified that the district would begin the planning process during the month of July. During the months of August and September, the plan involved focusing on community engagement to elicit extensive and meaningful input and feedback from community stakeholders. During the months of October and November, the district indicated that staff would refine drafts based on additional feedback before the final plan was presented to the Board for adoption.

In an effort to bridge the current gap in district operations without a functional strategic plan to guide the district, the district has mobilized around the Superintendent's Ninety-Day Action Plan (May-July 2013). This plan identifies five major goals and objectives:

- Address AdvancED action items and work to achieve unconditional accreditation status.
- Develop and implement a balanced budget for FY2014.
- Prioritize student academic achievement and career readiness; strengthen parent, adult guardian, and mentor involvement.
- Develop and implement a plan that will improve operational efficiency throughout the district.
- Continue to rebuild trust with internal and external stakeholders.

During interviews, stakeholders consistently recognized the Ninety-Day Action Plan as the blueprint the district is currently following, and they reiterated that the goals of this plan will be incorporated into the district's new strategic plan. Interviews further revealed that the district is once again focusing on student achievement and operational effectiveness. The refocused agenda has begun to generate a strong sense of hope for the future among board members, district leaders, and community representatives. Additionally, interviews indicated that stakeholders recognize that the district must function as a unified organization and not based on the election districts of individual board members. This is a significant cultural shift for the governing body considering the majority of the responses of board members during the October 2012 Special Review Team visit. At that time, interviews revealed a consistent emphasis on "my district" with the majority of board members prioritizing the needs of a particular voting district rather than considering priorities as a unified school system.

During interviews, board members consistently expressed a strong commitment to the strategic planning process and recognized that it provides the structure necessary to support and increase academic and operational effectiveness across the district. Board members recognized the connection between accountability in job performance and the successful implementation of the plan.

While the district has accomplished a significant amount of preliminary work to re-establish the strategic planning team, it needs to complete the RFP process. Upon selecting a strategic planning facilitator, the district will be well positioned to engage in a successful strategic planning process. The Superintendent has begun to develop a strong sense of trust and hope among stakeholders that have created a sense of ownership

and support for initiatives such as the strategic planning process. The challenge will be to implement with fidelity the strategic plan, maintain a systemic and systematic process of accountability based on the plan, and establish governance and management structures designed to monitor, evaluate, and communicate the district's progress on said implementation to stakeholders.

**Directive:**

1. 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.

## Closing Comments

In preparation for the Monitoring Visit, the Monitoring Team completed an extensive review of evidence that included various documents and artifacts provided by the DeKalb County School District. These documents and the intensive interview process validated that the newly configured Board has made progress in designing a framework to guide execution of its roles and responsibilities within the context of professional and collegial decorum and behavior. Another significant aspect of the Board's focus has been a deliberate effort to avoid undermining the authority of the superintendent and helping to create a culture supportive of district leaders in managing day-to-day operations of the system and schools. While evidence verified a number of noteworthy changes in the district, it is too early to determine the district's ability to stabilize and maintain the patterns of behavior, management procedures, fiscal operation, and adherence to AdvancED Accreditation Standards and Policies. As evident by its work in response to the eleven Required Actions, it is clear that the district is beginning to make a concerted effort to exhibit its commitment to comply with the Required Actions and the AdvancED Accreditation Standards.

The Institutional Progress Report indicated that the district has begun to determine how it needs to proceed in order to build and subsequently maintain a structure for sustaining its progress in the long term. The 45-page report consistently identified evidence that the district had begun the process of examining its current status in relation to long-range goals. Whereas, the majority of the Board was installed on or about March 13, 2013, the current Board had been governing the district for only two months when the Monitoring Visit occurred. The current Board includes three members who began their term on the previously constituted Board. Nevertheless, the three holdover board members appear to be adopting the governance norms of the current Board and not perpetuating the governance issues that plagued the suspended board members. The superintendent of five months was ever-present throughout the visit and displayed a strong sense of pride and hope for the district throughout the monitoring activities. In stark contrast to the October 2012 Special Review Team visit, the climate during the Monitoring Visit interviews was positive, open, and collegial. Critical to the success of the district will be demonstrating sustainability in newly displayed practices. Stakeholders appeared to be very encouraged by all progress of the new Board and administration. Likewise, staff at all levels expressed a renewed sense of hope and optimism for the district based upon the actions of the new Board and interim Superintendent. The vast majority of staff described a new work culture and environment in which they felt empowered to perform the jobs for which they were hired without the micromanagement and interference of board members. While encouraged by the change in culture, staff consistently communicated a deep concern regarding the ability of the district to sustain this progress when faced with the inevitable changes in Board and superintendent leadership.

The Monitoring Team concluded that the district has made recognizable progress in creating the foundations to address the specifications of the eleven Required Actions. The overall progress of the district in addressing the Required Actions is still evolving and significant work remains to be accomplished. Therefore, the district should continue to devise, implement, and sustain action plans to meet the Required Actions and restore the district's compliance with the following AdvancED Accreditation Standards and/or policies: AdvancED Standard 2: *Governance and Leadership* and AdvancED Standard 4: *Resources and Support Systems*. The Required

Actions and directives contained within this and previous reports are designed to help facilitate change in the district to support the establishment of responsible governance and leadership that will promote, support, and sustain system effectiveness and student learning for DeKalb County School District's approximately 99,000 students and 14,000 employees. The district is encouraged to discuss these directives with AdvancED to gain assistance and support in directing its efforts.

The DeKalb County School District will remain in the status of Accredited Probation. At the time of the Monitoring Visit in December 2013, the Monitoring Team will review the accreditation status of the school system.

### **Next Steps - Using and Acting On The Report**

A copy of this report is being provided to the superintendent. The district should use the report to guide its response to the findings and its improvement efforts. To validate its progress in completing the Required Actions, the district must submit a detailed Institution Progress Report in December 2013. The district will identify and document steps taken since the May 2013 Monitoring Team visit to address the Required Actions set forth in the Special Review Team Report from October 2012. In addition, the district will provide substantive evidence to verify its progress with the Required Actions and ongoing compliance with AdvancED Standards and Policies. This Institution Progress Report must be submitted two weeks prior to the December 2013 Monitoring Visit. Finally, the district must host a Monitoring Team visit by December 31, 2013 to verify the information and evidence contained in the report and to determine the district's completion of the Required Actions and adherence to the AdvancED Standards and Policies.

# About AdvancED®

## Background

Dedicated to advancing excellence in education worldwide, AdvancED provides accreditation, research, and professional services to over 32,000 institutions in more than 70 countries. AdvancED provides accreditation under the seals of the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), 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 and adhere to 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 process of continuous improvement focused on improving student performance and organizational effectiveness.

**3. Demonstrate quality assurance through internal and external review.**

Institutions engage in a planned process of ongoing internal review and self-assessment. In addition, institutions host an external review team at least once every five years. The team evaluates the institution's adherence to the AdvancED 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 visits may be conducted during this time to ensure that the institution is making progress toward the Required Actions.

## A Process of Continuous Improvement

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