

August 28, 2012

Dr. Cheryl Atkinson, Superintendent of Schools
DeKalb County Public School System
1701 Mountain Industrial Boulevard
Stone Mountain, GA 30083

Dear Dr. Atkinson:

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI) has received numerous complaints containing allegations that the DeKalb County Public School System is in violation of the AdvancED Accreditation Standards and/or Policies. SACS CASI is an accreditation division of AdvancED.

The primary concerns shared in the complaints are that the Board of Education has failed to conduct itself in accordance with locally approved policy, state law, and the AdvancED Accreditation Standards. In addition, the complaints allege that the Board of Education has failed to ensure that the financial resources of the school system are budgeted and allocated within the means of the school system as well as in accordance with local policy and state law.

As a result, there is significant concern as to whether or not the school system is meeting at least two of the five Standards required for accreditation. The Standards initially in question are Standard Two: *Governance and Leadership*, and Standard Four: *Resources and Support Systems*. The Standards read as follows:

Governance and Leadership – The system operates under governance and leadership that promote and support student performance and school effectiveness.

The following indicators further define the Standard:

- The governing body establishes policies and supports practices that ensure effective administration of the system and its schools.
- The governing body operates responsibly and functions effectively.
- The governing body ensures that the leadership at all levels has the autonomy to meet goals for achievement and instruction and to manage day-to-day operations effectively.
- Leadership and staff at all levels of the system foster a culture consistent with the system's purpose and direction.

- Leadership engages stakeholders effectively in support of the system's purpose and direction.
- Leadership and staff supervision and evaluation processes result in improved professional practice in all areas of the system and improved student success.

Resources and Support Systems - The system has resources and provides services in all schools that support its purpose and direction to ensure success for all students.

The following indicators further define the Standard:

- The system engages in a systematic process to recruit, employ and retain a sufficient number of qualified professional and support staff to fulfill their roles and responsibilities and support the purpose and direction of the system, individual schools and educational programs.
- Instructional time, material resources and fiscal resources are sufficient to support the purpose and direction of the system, individual schools, educational programs and system operations.
- The system maintains facilities, services and equipment to provide a safe, clean and healthy environment for all students and staff.
- The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning in support of the purpose and direction of the system.
- The system provides, coordinates and evaluates the effectiveness of information resources and related personnel to support educational programs throughout the system.
- The system provides a technology infrastructure and equipment to support the system's teaching, learning, and operational needs.
- The system provides, coordinates and evaluates the effectiveness of support systems to meet the physical, social and emotional needs of the student population being served.
- The system provides, coordinates and evaluates the effectiveness of services that support the counseling, assessment, referral, educational and career planning needs of all students.

One allegation listed among the complaints is that the Board of Education has failed to be good stewards of the school system's financial resources for at least the past five years. Some of the examples noted include adopting budgets that do not adequately meet the financial expenses of the school system including such areas as legal fees and utilities.

Another concern recorded is the board's interference in the day-to-day operations of the system by working to minimize and neutralize the administration of the school system. It is reported that the board has at the least, blurred the lines between board governance and administrative leadership and at the worst, stepped into the role of administrative head of the school system. Such instances include undue influence on the hiring of personnel, interference with budgeting procedures and accounting, and undermining the authority of school administrators and supervisors throughout the system.

Finally, the complaints outline concerns regarding individuals on the Board of Education who repeatedly and knowingly violate locally adopted Board policy. Such instances include individuals releasing confidential information that was shared during called Executive Sessions of the Board; Board members making requests directly of individual staff members thereby violating the school system's policy on line and staff authority; and Board members' excessive requests for information that go beyond the authority of individual Board members and are not directed by actions of the whole Board.

In keeping with AdvancED's Accreditation Policies, the school system is required to respond to these complaints and allegations. Your response should be received in the AdvancED Georgia office no later than 30 days from the date of this letter. If, after review of your response, we believe the DeKalb County Public School System may be in violation of the AdvancED Accreditation Standards or policies, a Special Review Team may be appointed to visit the school system.

Should you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



Mark A. Elgart, Ed.D.
President/CEO
AdvancED

cc. Dr. Eugene Walker, Chair, DeKalb County Board of Education
Dr. Annette Bohling, Chief Accreditation Officer
Mr. Warren Jacobson, Vice President, Public School Systems
Dr. Mike Bryans, Director, AdvancED Georgia