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Dr. Cheryl L. H. Atkinson

September 12, 2012

Mark A. Elgart, Ed.D.
President/CEO
AdvancED
2520 Northwinds Parkway, Suite 600
Alpharetta, GA 30009

Re: Response to AdvancED SACS letter dated August 28, 2012

Dear Dr. Elgart:

In accordance with AdvancED Accreditation Policies, the DeKalb County School District acknowledges receipt of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI) letter, dated August 28, 2012. We are committed to the AdvancED SACS Standards and welcome and embrace the assistance of AdvancED in ensuring we are meeting the Standards.

The District acknowledges challenges from the past and is committed to continuing to address and comply with all AdvancED SACS Standards, including the two specifically referenced in your letter. In that regard, the DeKalb Board of Education has worked cooperatively and collaboratively with AdvancED over the years and more specifically over the last several months. During its comprehensive site visit in March 2012, all information requested by SACS was presented by the school system to the team in a timely and accommodating spirit. Upon receiving SACS' recommendations for improvement, the Board and the Superintendent began immediately to implement plans for progress. Specifically, six months ago (March 2-6, 2012), the SACS AdvancED Quality Review Team gave a report and rated all the Standards. Standards #2 and #5 received "emerging" and "operational" respectively.

The District has implemented plans to improve upon all standards. We are continuing to make necessary changes to address specific concerns that have been expressed by SACS, Board Members and community members. In that regard, the Board has worked cooperatively with AdvancED SACS through numerous work sessions, as well as the extensive training sessions recommended by AdvancED.

We are working daily to make huge strides to sustain continuous improvement and to provide the best education possible for the students in DeKalb County. Progress is ongoing and we have not stopped working on any concerns. Some issues take longer than others to resolve, but we are continuously striving to achieve excellence on all SACS Standards.

As the new Superintendent, I have worked with the Board to address the budget and financial concerns and have aligned the budget within our projected revenue. We will monitor the FY 2013 budget carefully for compliance.

Since I became Superintendent less than a year ago, I have listened to concerns from the Board, students, community, and staff and responded by implementing a number of systemic changes which have been approved and/or supported by the Board and designed to move the District forward, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Initiated a Board-approved forensic audit of the District's financial records performed by KPMG, which is currently under way.
- Implemented a modified zero-based budgeting process that led the Board to approve the FY2013 budget with \$78.5 million in reductions and a millage rate increase of 1 mill generating \$14.7 million in additional revenues.
- Established an internal legal affairs division to manage and reduce costs of legal services provided to the District and to develop and maintain a District-wide audit plan to ensure integrity in finance and operational processes.
- Restructured the central office for greater efficiency and effectiveness which resulted in the elimination of 303 personnel.
- Developed the Excellence for Education Strategic Plan which provides the blueprint for improving DeKalb Schools and the vision, mission, guiding principles and the five core goals.
- Implemented the Board approved Theory of Action for Change which drives our decisions and deliberations around the District for improvement.
- Implemented the Aligned Management System for greater accountability of system processes and resources which provides a vehicle to monitor organizational performance.
- Introduced the Balance Scorecard (BSC) most recently in draft form to align the District initiatives to the vision and strategy of the organization. The BSC is available on the District's website.
- Completed a salary compensation and classification study performed by Management Advisory Group (MAG) Inc. and approved by the Board which resulted in greater efficiency of salary alignments for all District personnel, including central office staff.
- Commenced the development of an E-Book technology program that will deliver electronic technology devices to the students for instructional use.
- Implemented a Comprehensive Leadership Development Program that provides a succession plan for the District. The focus areas include the Aspiring Leaders Academy, New Principal Induction, Principals Academy, and Executive Leadership Academy.
- Ensured that all students have Art, Music, and Physical Education in every elementary school and that Instrumental Music is offered at all elementary schools.
- Delivered a new curriculum aligned to common core standards with the collaboration of over 600 teachers and administrators. Our students will be assessed quarterly with new benchmarks aligned to the new curriculum.
- Conducted District division audits in the following areas: Human Resources, Curriculum and Instruction, School Leadership and Operational Support, and Communications.
- Commenced the development and implementation of a district-wide Communications Plan that facilitates bi-directional communication with all internal and external stakeholders and increases opportunities for engagement of school councils and parent involvement and participation.
- Changed District staff payroll from monthly to bi-monthly as a result of feedback received at staff fireside chats.

We are proud of our accomplishments and recognize there is still much work to do. We plan to stay focused in moving our District forward with the goal of *Victory in Every Classroom*.

Sincerely,



Cheryl L.H. Atkinson, Ed.D.

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