

05/01/2013 – DCPC

Dunwoody Chamblee Parent Council

Public Questions Summary

- Administration needs to stop telling principals to control their parents.
- What are your thoughts on the charter clusters and dual accreditation?
- Exactly what is your strategy to get parents in low performing schools more involved?
- I disagree with you on dual accreditation. Also, school councils have been neglected, underfunded, and need a larger role in the schoolhouse employees.
- We are looking for some big moves to show that you mean what you say.
- Numerous people take exception to Thurmond's opposition to dual accreditation.
- We have a nepotism policy. Please stop saying we don't.
- Class sizes are too big.
- Will you reduce furlough days or class sizes?
- Involvement in the arts improves student achievement.
- Where is DCSD on STEM certifications?

Meeting Transcription

Thurmond

Good Morning. First of all, I'd like to thank the parents and stake holders. They've been so supportive of Dunwoody High School and schools in this area. This is an outstanding parents council and I want to encourage them to continue the good work to help, not just this area, but this school district restore itself.

I'm happy to report that throughout the district as I travel around DeKalb County. I'm beginning to receive more and more good news about progress that is being made. This morning in the AJC it was announced. And I'm proud to announce that the upcoming graduation season, we will have Governor Deal will actually deliver 2 graduation addresses. One at Chamblee High School ???. Another outstanding graduation speakers is also Dr. Mark Elgart will also be one of our graduation speakers along with former Attorney General Thurbert Baker, the president of Clark Atlanta University, ??? local bank, of course representative

[Darshawn Kendra ???] will speak at my alma mater, which is Towers High School.

This week, yesterday, pursuant to my employment with the DeKalb County School District, I released to the board and to the public, a 90 day action plan. An exciting process to develop and I've had some conversations with board members as we look forward to the next 90 days as we continue to lay the foundation for progress in this district.

[2:03] We are prepared for the upcoming AdvancED/SACS monitor visit. We have a team of about 25 individuals who worked literally night and day preparing for the visit. We look forward to it. We're excited about it. And, I'm happy to report again, that Dr Elgart in private and in public has stated that it is unlikely that this district will lose its accreditation. And he said to me on more than one occasion that he is very excited about the progress that is being made. And his team, individuals at AdvancED, and representatives from our district have ongoing conversations and are working together, myself and them to assure that we remove the conditional accreditation from this district.

[3:01] But, the most important thing that happened this week was that we had representatives from four parent councils ??? to meet. I received an email yesterday from one of the organizers of that meeting. And what was recorded, I think was phenomenal. Literally, for the first time, or at least the first time in many, many years, we had representatives, parents, stake holders from all across this district come together. And I want to thank you all for participating. It was a unique, and I think historic moment. Because at the end of the day, unless we all rise and consequently, this district can not be the great district that I think it should be.

[4:02] More good news. US News and World Report reported. And the media covered it in passing that of the 15 highest performing, top high schools in the state of Georgia, 3 of them are located in DeKalb County. ??? ... by the way, Dunwoody, of course, is the best. DeKalb School of the Arts, Chamblee Charter, and Arabia Mountain. And a reporter asked me, what's the significance of that? Well, first of all, these 3 schools are located all across the district. It reaffirms, that with the right support and resources, not only that all children can learn, but all children can prosper and be successful in their educational careers.

[5:16]

The cornerstone of what we want to accomplish in F.Y. '14 will be based primarily on how we engage and work through the budget challenges that we face. More good news, if you can call having \$16 million dollars deficit projected, good news. And only in Georgia and in America in this climate can we say that. Because, if you look at our neighbors, Cobb is working to overcome \$80 – \$90 million dollar deficit. Atlanta Public Schools, \$30 – \$40 million dollar deficit. To our south, Fayette County, which is much smaller than our district, working to overcome a \$16 million dollar deficit. We are projected, primarily, the only evidence of mandated increases and insurance costs and health costs and step increases mandated by the state, a \$16 million dollar operating deficit for F.Y. '14. This is a huge improvement from the \$80 to \$90 million dollar deficit you all struggled with during this fiscal year. But I see this as a great opportunity. It's a great opportunity to refocus, re envision, redirect resources and our agenda in this school district. We are fully engaged in this process. We have two more budget hearings scheduled and I encourage you to attend. I'm looking forward to presenting an F.Y. '14 budget, cause I think it'll point us and direct us in the right direction. That's going to result in continued enhancing of educational academic achievement as well as career readiness for all of our students.

[7:21]

I'll stop there. I've been struggling with kind of a hoarseness. But my voice might be wavy, but my spirit is strong. And I am more excited and more enthusiastic about the future of this district, about the future of our state and our nation as it relates to public education, than at any point in my life. This is a wonderful, wonderful opportunity. And, quite frankly, enough though our friends and people come up and say, you know what, we want to offer you our condolences. We feel so sorry for you. At first it didn't bother me, but now I'm a little ticked off. Because, you know what? I'm having the time of my life. This is a great opportunity, blessed really, to address the most critical issue facing the future growth and development, of not just this county, or state, but our nation. Thank you.

Questions ??

Lynn Deutsch: [9:29]

Mr. Thurmond, you have spoken repeatedly about parental involvement. And, I know it's something very important and I know that there's a tremendous amount of research about the connection between student achievement and parental involvement. Parental involvement takes many shapes and many forms from ??? to supervising homework, ... providing the tutor they need. In the lower, less intensive levels of parental involvement in schools, that involvement, on the advocacy side for either your child's or child's school involvement, you have employees in the system that discourage that. Who actively work against parents who make issue of something whether it's appropriate or not and often from my perspective, and I have a big picture perspective. I'm not involved in any one particular school. But you have employees who will tell principals to control their parents. And I gotta tell you something, first and foremost, it's not a very wise ploy for these parents to be controlled when their advocating for their children or their children's schools. To me that is critical ??? reaching out to parents when the research says just the opposite of what you need to do.

[11:08] Secondly, I'm afraid that you have on your staff, staff members who attitudes don't reflect your core values. And, so, I just hope, and there's not really a question here, it's just a statement of fact, because it makes you mad when a central office employee tells a principal to control their parents. Because parents can't be controlled. They're passionate about their children, they're passionate about their child and when they see a wrong, they want to right it. And maybe they complain too much and ??? , but that's just part of being in a school system of what you want, and that's involved parents. And, so, that's just a heads up. But, it makes my skin crawl. It makes a lot of parents very discouraging when principals are pushed back because their parents are advocating. So, thank you.

Thurmond: [12:05]

Great comment. Let me follow up on her statement that I think is profound. It was interesting, I don't read the blogs, but I happen to notice something on the blog this morning when I woke up as it related to my 90 day plan, it's all this about the

same old stuff. But if you read it for enlightenment and understanding, at the core of how I think we can improve academic achievement and career readiness in DeKalb County, is just my ??? value of parent or adult guardian and mentor involvement. I mentioned DeKalb School for the Arts, mentioned Chamblee Charter, I mentioned Dunwoody and I mentioned Arabia Mountain. What do all 3 or 4 of ... 4 of those high achieving schools have in common? They have very active parent, adult guardian, mentor involvement. And you know, we've talked about both sides of the divide and the region divide. But just think about that, it works. Doesn't matter where you live, doesn't matter where you work, it works. The latest studies Whether .. Maybe some people don't understand it, they see parent involvement really as a hindrance more than it helps and it can be. You all must admit. What we have to do is invest in building capacity among our parents, adult guardians and mentors to support our efforts. Look, increased class size, your teachers, your resources, this is the budget we got. The most important, untapped resource that we have right now is what ... parents.

[14:25] The state Senator Millar ... is back there ... give him a hand. ??? ...no daily problems from the state in terms of budget challenges. No rescue ??? from the federal government. The upside potential is with our parents. Now what I've done, also, and the research is clear. And, by the way, parental involvement that has the greatest influence on a child is not the involvement that occurs in the school, it's the involvement that occurs where ... at home.

And what we're going to, and I have ... I've worked with DeKalb Parenting Student Association ??? and we have plotted, district wide, and evaluated, not the effectiveness, but the level of activity of our various PTSAs, school by school. And I ??? performance outcomes schools by schools, school by school. The schools that are achieving at or above district, state and sometimes national averages. You know what ??? They have very active, engaged parents. The schools that are challenged, not only are the parents not active, but some of the parent councils do not exist. What's more telling, particularly in our Title I schools. We have a large amount of resources that can, and I argue, should have been invested in building capacity of those PTSAs. See, we talk about the achievement gap, but I argue that achievement gap is just a symptom of parent involvement gap. The problem with public education today is that we've allowed politicians, ????? We've allowed politicians to shift all of the responsibility to educating our children on to whom ... teachers. If you look at the reform movement, the high stakes testing movement, who is being evaluated and who bares the consequences when children don't achieve ... teachers. And indirectly who else ... principals. It's as if parents have no responsibility. ??? advocated in this reform movement have not appreciated the value and some instances marginalized the significance of parents, adult guardians, and mentors. When all the studies say the greatest influence comes from ... parents. But you have ??? movements that basically ignores any involvement in who ... parents. This is going to change. And this is one area that we have the resources to make a difference. All we need is the will, which I believe we have, and we will train those who work in this district to appreciate it. For those that do, we'll support them. For

those that don't, we'll educate them. For those that won't, we'll get somebody else that will. Fair enough?

Senator Fran Millar: [18:38]

2 or 3 things I'd like to comment on and it ties into parental involvement. ??? half this county right now, people are looking at these charter clusters. I think there's going to be an application ??? Druid Hills area. And ??? involved parents, ??? listen to them, they have good ideas, and have to go forward with them. And based upon what I've seen so far, ??? Druid Hills people, they've been pretty active ??? make this application. I hope, I hope that you can support something like this, because I think that's the key to get people thinking about their whole totality ??? private school, middle school, high school, that's what they're doing. That's the first thing I'd like you to comment on.

Second thing I want you to comment on, is Councilman Nall's been working on dual accreditation. And I think the board's going to be given a resolution ??? moving forward on this. I think it's a really good idea for one reason alone. I'm very concerned and I agree with what you say, I don't think we're going to lose our accreditation this year. But, what I'm concerned about, a year from now, July 2014, that we elect some wrong people to our board. And if that happens, I think we could be in serious trouble. And, without this school accreditation, the people sitting in this room with their kids are going to be the ones suffering the penalty. I don't want to go through that again. Taking care of Hope Scholarship for 2015 legislation. This accreditation thing is very important to the people in this room. If we get this school accreditation and Dr. Elgart doesn't have a problem, I hope you can support it and have it happen.

So, those two things. The charter cluster thing and dual accreditation. What do you think?

Thurmond: [20:28]

Councilman Nall's been working very, very hard on this issue. Y'all ought to give him a hand, cause he is really ... almost to the point ... naw, I'm just kidding. He's a good friend and we talked on 2 or 3 occasions and we'll continue to work together. My focus is on gaining full accreditation for the entire district. It just is. ??? That's what I was hired to do. And that is my focus. And what I've said to Terry and I've said to others here, is that I will not support anything that undermines the value of that effort. Because, at the end of the day, we have 21 ... we have schools all across the district that must be accredited. I understand, I get your concern. But, my concern is for 99,000 children.

And, let me tell you why I'm talking ... PTSA ... and one of the concerns they have is overcrowding at Tucker in the coming years. And, what was driving this overcrowding is that parents in other parts of the county are using affidavits to enroll their children at Tucker, or a Dunwoody, or at Chamblee. See, what we have to understand is, fundamentally, if you talk to parents across this district, they all want the same thing. They want a good education for their child. And parents who are involved will find a education way to get ????. What I said to the parents at Tucker, the way we're really going to ??? at Tucker, is that we're going

to have to improve the schools at Towers, and South Side. Does that make sense? We can't all have charters, and I love charters, I love theme schools. But at the end of the day, I got fix these schools. You lift from the bottom. You gotta lift from the bottom. Now I mentioned ??? I recruited her. She's a graduate from Towers High School. Our high school, let me tell you, ????. Cause, when I look at performance in DeKalb, time and time again, Towers struggles. It struggles. I grew up in the ???, if you want to lift a heavy box, you gotta lift it from the bottom. And, so my focus is district wide. And I encourage parents to what you think is right. But at the end of the day, I have to do what I think is right for 99,000 students. One of my favorite quotations from a great philosopher, "Needs of the many must always outweigh the needs of the few". Do you know who said that ... Spock. If we help the schools that are challenged, we will help the schools that are performing well. That's a tough, tough, tough, thing to really grasp and understand. I get it, so these issues are not really ??? I encourage you to do what you think is best for your school, your child, your district. But you have to recognize that my mission, my imperative is for every child, including yours. Do what's in all of our best interests. So ??? but we have different roles that you would expect me to exercise and I will expect you to exercise. Is that fair. And at the end of the day, I hope we can come to a consensus where no one is happy but everyone walks away feeling better. This is how the general assembly works, isn't that right. This is how it works, this is how democracy works. And hopefully, we both ??? DeKalb School District. We have to lift up the schools that are not performing well. And, by the way, and I believe we have a strategy that we can put in place. We have the resources, that's going to result in higher academic achievement and ????. Y'all want to know what convinces me, the people sitting in this room. It works. It works in Dunwoody doesn't it? It will work throughout the district.

Speaker2: [25:38]

I was just going to say, can you elaborate on the strategy exactly? I know you want to get more parental involvement, but can you give me building blocks? Can you tell me what exactly are you doing to go out into the community to get parents involved, so increase those schools ???.

Thurmond:

???? First, it was incumbent upon me to reach out, as I reach out to you and reach out to parents across the district. To reach out to parents in Clarkston who may not ??? on a primary level, to encourage the ??? to participate in the education ??? of their children. And to let them know, that they will have a partner ... they lady that spoke first said something that I've heard on more than one occasion. That in some schools, some areas, parents feel as though they are not welcome. And whether it's real or perception, that when they reach at this level, it does not matter. If it's real, then we can change it. If it's a perception, we need to correct it. And, next we have to ... we assume that all parents know why it's important to come to a parent teacher conference ???, why it's important to participate with the council. That's an assumption that doesn't necessarily bare

reality. We must build capacity. See, there are parents not like you and I who don't have the resources that you and I have been blessed with. Who really can't take off Wednesday morning, and sit there ????. Just can't. Or could and don't know that they should. We can build that capacity, cause the one thing that compelled me, and I was talking to a parent, I said ??? think about. We know that because you live in a ??? community doesn't mean you don't love your child. Does it matter what your income is when it comes to loving your child or your children. Somebody said, we love our children. Parents in other parts of the county love their children too. We can build capacity to help them be more supportive in those efforts. And we can have district personnel who appreciates the efforts, and you know it may not be, I could make the type of investments that you make, ???, there are people that buy houses. There are folks have loans and resources to get contractors to come in and remodel and put it on the market and resell it, at least before the great recession. And there are others who use ??? and engage in the same process. You may not have the same bank account, but you can at least balance that through ??? in your child's education ????. I know it works. I've seen it work. We have high performing schools all over. Some of them Title I, they perform ??? one thing has become, very active, engaged parents.

So you'll see more of it in the budget, that's the other thing. You know, I came at the tail end of the F.Y. '13 fiscal year. This budget had already been voted upon and put in place. So I had 3 months really, to first put out the fires that were raging, so that you and I could have this conversation. But then, in F.Y. '14 we get an opportunity to really put meat on the bones in terms of the vision or strategy we think we can use to go forward. And what I'm saying, is the good news is unlimited resources. Not unlimited, but large amounts of resources to do just we are talking about that we've not used in the past that we could have used in a more efficient and effective way.

Page Olsen [29:48]

Good morning, Page Olsen, thank you for coming to Dunwoody today. I'm not really sold on the fact that a site based accreditation would be contra to and work against a system wide. I think it would parallel and almost enhance and help with a system wide accreditation. I think this audience will be a tough sell that it would work against it. So, I think we should have a bit more discussion about that. People here are pretty serious about options for their children, and they should be because the kids work really hard to have opportunities beyond the boundaries of Georgia. And that's what we're talking about.

Secondly, Susan asked about how to get parents involved. A long time ago when school councils were established by legislation, you could not sit at a school council meeting until you had 2 full days of training. And in those 2 full days of training you completely understood the umbrella of responsibilities that you had. And kind of the power that you were given as an elected parent to serve on that council. And through the years that's dwindled to basically 0. So, number 1 if I were a board member, I would seriously address, and I guess it's being addressed right now in terms of policy, what position school councils will play in

the hiring of their principals and hopefully assistant principals. And that should go beyond just sitting in a highly constructive, short list, interview that's very, very controlled and basically the outcome has already been determined. Who that principal, who that leader's going to be for that school. School councils that are prepared to handle that type of information, and you just said that with the PTAs that you've looked at, you can pretty much tell who's involved and who's not involved. So, there are schools that are very capable of handling that responsibility. So, I would hope that as we encourage parents to get involved, that that becomes a very good part of the decision making process. Those school councils are involved. And they also need to get the proper training. They need to look at financials of the schools, they need to be rewarded the opportunities to look at every single thing they've been offered to look at under the legislation that allows for them to do that, so they can be better spokespersons for that parent community. I would hope that in the next year, that is something that is taken very seriously and we get our school councils up to par. Because parents do have a lot of power, they just don't realize what power they've got. And that's a really good place to start.

Thurmond: [32:50]

I agree with that. What's being proposed there, the policy on the table is being discussed ??? the council hiring the principal is that the council would have an advisory role. And primarily because, when seek employment, often times background checks contain confidential information that by law can not be shared with the general public. I think it would be improper to allow people not employed, access to all the information. So, that becomes a problem.

Page Olsen:
Not a resume.

Thurmond:

Well, we also conduct background checks ... it goes beyond that. If you all applied for jobs and were in this situation, ??? in human resources in personnel, you'd know that ??? often times turned up that ... if it was you or I in that position, you'd not want to share with the general public. So, that's one caveat that you have to consider when talking about the hiring of a principals. And, that always comes up.

I think the other issue, dual accreditation. It seems that you've associated dual means equal. But in this case it doesn't. You're not seeking equal accreditation. Because these two accrediting agencies are not equal. Dual suggests equal, but these two agencies are not equal. No one argued that. One accreditation primarily the state level and one at a national. And I think that the discussion needs to be clarified so that people will understand what one means opposed to the other. Now, I'm not opposed to having two. But one you're required by law in the state of Georgia. You must be accredited. The other is an option. And we make those decisions all the time ????. Some things are necessities and some things are optional. In my world, you address the necessities first. And then you

reach for the things that might be optional. You just prioritize in your life. You do it every day, with your children, in your home, in your lives. You have to have some things that are not optional. And, having a fully accredited school district is not an option. One of the the things I said to Terry, and I'll share with you all. In fact, what I need is your help to win full accreditation that everyone must have including you. This high school. So, as we seek dual, while we're working for the accreditation for this high school too, we need your help. That's why we have the parent council meeting from district wide. The ladies from Tucker asked me, Alison asked me what can we do? I said, first of all, if it's true, ??? progress has been made in terms of where the district was on December 2012. If it's true. If it's true that, on a general sense, the lines of communication have been opened and whether we agree with it or not, we are engaged in a normal conversation ??? which is one of the things that SACS mentioned should take place. If it's true, then I'd hope that this council could acknowledge that. If it's true that there were concerns regarding elementary school levels, success for all, the teachers felt that their voices had not been heard and then we made a decision to go back and involve them and hear their voices. If it's true, and you can acknowledge that that would be important to me. If it's true, that parents felt that they were not engaged and involved in the decision of the balanced calendar and that the current administration heard that and based on those concerns, delayed the implementation of it so we could get more higher quality input from parents, which is a concern that SACS had. If you could acknowledge that that would be ... and if it's true that all across the district, not just parents, teachers and administrators express their concern to me that promotion and hiring based on relationships and family relationships and that we will on this week impose and implement and enforce a strict nepotism policy. One that did not exist in the district. If that's true and you will acknowledge that. All I'm saying to you folks is that the suggestion is, and I don't think it's true, and I don't think that's what you mean, is that the movement for dual accreditation suggests that nothing is being done. I'm not saying your saying that. But unless you're saying that's not the best solution, then you will leave it up to the public to interpret the message. And, I'm asking you not to do that. If it's true.

Senator Fran Millar [38:50]

I've gotta disagree, here's the process. The people in this room, you and I, can't control who we elect to school boards. A year from now in July, no matter how many things you do now, all the good things we all want full accreditation. But if we reelect the wrong people down there and end up losing accreditation, if we don't have a fall back position at our individual schools, the kids get penalized. It's not ... no ones against ... everyone wants regional, national accreditation. This is just a fall back position just in case ... we can't control that. We're not Chicago.

Thurmond: [39:35]

I love senators. It's interesting when an elected official worries about who gets elected. You gotta go hmmm. Elected officials are worried about what

type of elected official y'all elect. Cause, you all elect him, so you obviously do a good job ... Listen. I can't control who gets elected in 2014. I really can't. He's right. No one can. Now, you can influence it. And, one of the things I've said, one of the things I've said. I've said, which is quite interesting, people say I like my school board representative. I like Nancy Jester, cause she does her job. But you know, these district lines. They don't exist. You can actually influence the election of every single school board in the district. There is no state law that prevents anybody in this room from providing resources, helping ??? in any school board election in the county. Fran Millar could go down to South DeKalb and pick out a school board member he doesn't like. And endorse him and I guarantee he won't win. And that's fine. All I'm saying, my point is simply this though. Acknowledge progress being made. I'm not saying that everything is right. I'm not saying we don't have a million miles to go. But, it's a little bit disconcerting for me. **And I'm telling you, there are people who want DeKalb to not have any accreditation. Period. They want the very worst for this district. They want it to collapse in on itself. And any opportunity they have to misinterpret through disinformation any act you take will be used against us. And I'm asking you not to discount that reality because I know it exists.** Is that fair. I'm not saying, don't do. But ??? if there's a way out I'm not going to acknowledge that cause if I acknowledge that then ???.

Speaker3: [42:17]

I'm ??? with Vanderlyn. I watched the news, for instance, a couple of years ago when Chrysler had a change of leadership and the reporter asked him, everyone else before you has said we're going to be new, our cars are going to be better quality, and they ????. I'm so encouraged that you released your 90 day plan. It's unfortunate that all the 90 day plans before you weren't really delivered on. I think that parents, and at least I'm speaking for me, I think I'm speaking for some others, I think we're looking for some big moves to show that you mean what you say and that the communications part for the 90 day plan struck me as a really good opportunity to show leadership in what you want to do for the district. What I'd like to see, and I don't think I'm alone in this, is to see a commitment to some sweeping changes. To say, during budget time, I'm going to put in a budget with no furlough days, or I'm going to put in a budget where we're not going to ask for class size waivers this year. We're going to put the check register online. Really big things that the blogs that you don't read, that I would strongly encourage you to start reading. Those are parents, they're involved parents. These are parents that have tried time and time again for ??? and have come up against brick walls. And, in spite of all of that, have analyzed the ??? and done the things that Nancy Jester has done ... trying to do ... figure out what we can do to make this district be all that it can be. And I think that, we're just really hoping that you can just provide that leadership, but do it in a way that we can stand behind it and say, you know what, that guy's putting his money where his mouth is. And, you know, if you're saying there's a \$16 million dollar short fall as opposed to the \$80 or \$90, then cynical me is waiting for Michael Perone to say, Oh we were wrong about that. It's really \$80 million dollars. I'd like to see you say, you're fired when

that happens. And I think we need some really strong leadership, you aren't afraid to make the tough decisions. You have to take a position in that you said hey, I'm going to do this for a year and then I'm outta here. And that's the type of person we need to make those strong decisions and not worry about the political fallout. So, if you could just talk a little about the budget process and what you plan to do in the budget process to make sure our classrooms aren't going to continue to pay the price for what's going on in the central office.

Thurmond: [45:03]

??? this position a lot, is outside the natural order. **No way I'm supposed to be the Superintendent in DeKalb County. It's going outside the natural order of things. That was a very empowering and enlightening moment for me,** but I remember, ... ??? outside of that. What system changes ... especially in a situation that's sitting in a crisis situation, you know, I count my small blessings every day. I woke up this morning and read ... ??? ... DeKalb school system. That's a blessing. That's a blessing we didn't always share. The only news about DeKalb is that the government decided to ??? in 2 high schools in DeKalb County. When most districts are ???. That's a step in the right direction. ???... Things occur. We now have a school ready to post it online. I said what? That's important. So, what I try to do is make sure that every ... tomorrow is better than today. I'm not going to be overwhelmed with these issues, evolve over the ??? of the decade. I had a meeting 2 weeks ago with Robert Freeman, a former superintendent. I invited him to come and sit and talk with me.???? And what was interesting is he had never seen the name Robert Freeman so that was a special moment.??? And one of the things he told me though, and you know his story, I love institutional history. He said ??? 2001. They've been ignored and passed over. ????? Even when we're running out of money. First, you have to understand that. And so, what we have to do is evolve and to accommodate ???. There will be things in this budget that ??? should have been made that haven't been made. We're not going to spend \$9.2 million on attorney's fees in 2014. Right? Today, I sign personally on every check ??? . We've got great lawyers. I'm an attorney. We've got some of the best legal minds representing us. But as I told y'all, you got Cadillac minds, but we're on a Chevrolet budget. ??? So we're going to spend less money on lawyers. Guess what \$6 million dollars will do ... right. Cover the deficit, but also invest in things we're interested in. I wish I could guarantee to you that the sun and 6 months ... ??? ... cause I wouldn't be telling you the truth. What I am telling you is that, as I travel around this district, as I talk to my employees. Last night I was at the senior citizens center. They were honoring a former teacher there at Tucker High School at the senior citizens dinner. And I had 3 former retired DeKalb teachers come up and 2 current employees. And they all say the sam thing, well we're ???

Speaker3: [49:16]

How do we spread that to all the teachers?

Thurmond:

You say it. You say it if you believe. Only if you believe it, you say it. That's the point. Only if you honestly believe. Only if you can see some evidence of it, you say it. But if you do, then you're obligated to say it. But if you sit silent, then I think you're doing the district a disservice. That's all I'm saying. And, not that we know ... ??? ... Mike Thurmond ... ??? ... that's not going to last. That's not going to tell you. But I see some positive change. What was the guy, Chris Lunde, he sends me 10 emails a day. Kirk Lunde. He is the consummate ... he's always there. He wrote a letter to one of the blogs. The parent involvement thing, ... ??? ... He's one of my harshest critics. But I appreciate the fact that he has the integrity to still be a harsh critic, but at least to acknowledge when we do get something right. 3 of the 15 high performing schools are in DeKalb County, don't credit to me, I didn't do it. But at least acknowledge they're our schools. There are hundreds of schools not on accreditation probation that didn't have one single school on the list. So, it can't be all chaos, bad and wrong. It just can't. It goes against logic and reason. ??? ... you can't have 3 schools, North, Middle of DeKalb and South DeKalb ranked in the top 15 and have a totally dysfunctional school district. Doesn't stand to reason.

Terry Nall: [51:27]

I have to take exception to your comment about dual accreditation and it's really troubled me. You suggested that Dunwoody High School is the only school interested in dual accreditation and that your concern with 99,000 students. There is not a person in this room, I guarantee you, that would only be interested in Dunwoody High School, or only interested in North DeKalb and not all 99,000 people and I think that's disingenuous to suggest that. I'll also tell you that Dr Carvin Brown, who is the executive director of the Georgia Accrediting Commission, also disagrees with you in that he states, and I just received this email today. This will be going to the board along with the rest of the package I have submitted to the board for Monday's vote by the way at the work session. This Monday, May 6th. He says that in the past 2 decades only 1 out of state, private college, refused to accept GAC accreditation. And that school is George Waters College in Jacksonville, Florida. They insisted on regional accreditation only. That mirrors the research I've put into this about other schools. That student that graduates from Arabia, that very school you cited as best in the country, that's on the South side of DeKalb, that's applying to go to college should have every bit as much as a right for an accredited high school in the event that SACS pulls its accreditation because the Supreme Court overturns the law that installed 6 new members of the board or as Fran said, we have adverse elections next July. So, to make this, this is only about Dunwoody, this is only about North DeKalb, is just disingenuous. Please do not walk away with that idea. Do not spread that anywhere else. The request for accreditation as you well know in the letter I sent you and ??? conversations I had with you, from day one, this has to be a county wide solution. Not just Dunwoody. I'd like to ask you a very specific question. We've heard a lot of generalities today quite frankly, I want to ask you 2 very specific questions.

These are just 'yes' and 'no' questions. Your budget is going to be released next week, or so you say, will your budget eliminate the furlough days for the teachers? Will your budget reduce class size? By now, I would think you would know if that's in the budget.

Thurmond: [54:13]

No, we're not going to reduce all the furlough days for teachers. We're looking at a \$16 million dollar deficit going into the budget. That's not happening. But to your point, Terry, what I said was, that there are individuals who will interpret it that way. And I think that you have to understand and you agree, that is absolutely true. That it has been for decades, interpreted that way. One of the issues raised by SACS was that we have become a district comprised of individual schools who care little about the interest of other schools. Of neighborhoods, of feeder patterns, and that was one of the issues raised by SACS which is what I said. And it's in the report, time and time again that's what the board was slammed for. Because board members appeared, at least to them, to be concerned about their districts. And one of the things that came from the discussion was that school board members are elected by district, but they must by law represent the entire school district. You can't represent the district that elected you. It violates state law. ??? policy as it relates to our school board membership ??? and that, according to them, was one of the great deficits causing problems on the school board. That everybody seemed to be more concerned about their district, their school, everybody but Nancy, their school, their district, and not concerned about the entire school district. It was said over and over again. And I'm not going to say, you can go read the report. And what I said to Terry, and what I'm saying again, is that there will be people that can that will interpret this in that same vein whether it's true, I'm not saying it's true. I'm saying I understand the ??? of politics and I understand the ??? of people's opinions. And it just isn't ???

Don McChesney [56:22]

I'd like to agree with what Mr Nall was saying. You have to understand that SACS is not a ????? **The other thing is I have been to two parent meetings where I've heard you say there is no nepotism policy. I was the chair of the policy committee, policy GAG. GAG is a part of our ethics policy and in that policy it specifically mentions who was affiliated with board members or any other members down to brothers, sisters, mothers, aunts, uncles, cousins, I mean, it specifically said that.** The only thing that was missing was the word Nepotism. So, I think that somebody might have given you misinformation on that and I think it would be wise to state ??? very specific as to who could be hired and who could not be hired.

Thurmond

There is a policy about hiring of family members. But to Superintendent Freeman which was interesting. I'm glad you brought that up. He said, Michael next time you're at one of those meetings and someone brings up the issue of nepotism

and hiring of family members and friends, you tell them it was my fault. I said, are you sure Dr Freeman? Cause when I was Superintendent, I made a concerted effort to hire family members of other employees and even board members. Because I thought it was the right thing to do for the district. I believe when I was Superintendent, that having family members working together in the school district would build cohesion and comradery. And then he went on to say I was Superintendent when the federal lawsuit was filed. And the district was found to have engaged in systematic discrimination against African Americans. And we did not have enough African Americans working in the district. And I had to go out and recruit African American teachers to come to the district. What I would do is scour the Southeast and if I found 1 qualified teacher, I would do what I could to hire the spouse and bring both of them to the district. He said it's my fault. And the problem is, when I left the policy kept right on going. And if it's on the books, it was not in practice. I'm just telling you, so what you have not ??? not just policy, but you gonna have an implementation that enforces it. Prospectively going forward. And ??? let me tell you folks, that if we had a policy, nobody followed it, it was like the number 2 behind salary increases, this was the number 2 issue raised by employees and stake holders in the district. The hiring and promotion of family and friends. So, even if we had it, but it' not respected, not adhered to, then in my mind we don't have it. And what you said is true. The word is not used, which I thought was kind of interesting too. You really have to look for it to find it.

Stan Jester: 59:49

So, you're going to pass another policy?

Thurmond:

No. Well, we're passing another policy, but we're implementing a strong ... we're going to implement reporting, a confidential 1800 number that if you have a belief or complaint that someone's been hired erroneously based not on qualifications you can make the complaint. We're going to have our internal auditors investigate and you have to seem legitimate if you want to take this seriously.

Stan Jester:

Why can't you just implement the old one?

Thurmond:

It wasn't strong enough. It doesn't really make sense.

Nancy Jester:

It does to the extent that if you don't report a relationship, you can be turned in.

Thurmond:

You have a policy, but [back and forth between Michael Thurmond and Nancy Jester] The benefit of being Superintendent is that you can pass our policy.

Nancy Jester:
I thought it was the board's policy.

Thurmond:
No, it was my policy that I presented to the board.

Stan Jester:
So, we do have one, it's just not been implemented.

Thurmond:
It's weak and I think not real appropriate and we have a better one.

Speaker5
2 very quick things. 1, you asked us to acknowledge that what has improved in DeKalb County. ??? ... if you could acknowledge to us these parents that the **class sizes are too big.**

Thurmond:
Oh, absolutely.

Speaker5
And, if you could also tell us if DeKalb will once again be asking for a waiver from the state that there class sizes be 8 students higher than the state maximum.

Thurmond:
It's a status quo budget.

Speaker6
Are you submitting a waiver for our class sizes to be above the state levels again?

Thurmond:
I have not made that final decision yet.

Speaker7
I have 2 children in DeKalb. 1 in the School of the Arts and one at Vanderlyn. All involved in the arts. And, you've stated that all of the schools that are high achieving schools have had high parental involvement. Have you done ??? of ??? there have been from the kids. Cause you know DeKalb School of the Arts, obviously, in the name, they have a lot of arts involvement. Dunwoody does a lot of arts involvement. Chamblee has a lot of arts involvement. I'm not sure if Arabia Mountain does. But there has been study after study showing improvement of reading, writing and arithmetic scores if children have arts involvement, in particular music. So, I'd like you to consider looking at that and maintaining arts

funding. And also increasing DSA ??? fine arts teachers this year because of magnet cuts, I know Kittredge lost some magnet teachers also. Please, please, please continue funding the arts and increase your arts funding cause I think your scores will improve if you increase arts involvement.

Thurmond
Thank you.

Speaker8

I just want to jump on that. Maybe you can talk about DeKalb Counties incentive to become STEM certified in schools. STEM being Science – Technology – Engineering – Math. With the arts, some call it STEAM. I think there are a lot of schools, you mentioned the top schools in the country, well GSM is Gwinnett School of Science and Technology is number 3 in the country. It's a Gwinnett school and they are super role model to follow for STEM certified schools. We have Georgia STEM day coming up on Friday. We announced that. Is DeKalb County involved in that?

Thurmond

Ms Bricston, you might want to help with that. We have some STEM certified schools. Tell us about it.

Bricston

Henderson Elementary School is one of the first elementary schools in the state that is STEM certified. We also have several schools. In fact, Hightower has their visitation on the 6th of May to become STEM certified right here in Dunwoody. So, our schools are applying individually, I know Mr Maloof is working on that. Several schools and several are working on STEAM. Each school has the opportunity and so they are working to go through and put those applications ... teachers are very excited. All of this is aligned with our CCRPI which we are extremely excited about. One of the great things you all which I think is going to help this district is the state curriculum is focused on lots of different things. It gives every school ... I think there ... works here in Dunwoody, it will be also be very important for all the schools in all DeKalb .. the key piece is, Mr Thurmond is saying, we've got to let people know about it and what is out there. And that's part of your council, and making sure that you're aware, that your principal's informing you and each one of these schools is making sure they are focusing on what you need. Each school is going to be different. We can't sit here and make a blanket statement that all schools need to be STEM or STEAM or whatever it is. Every community has its need, every community has what you all are interested in, and that's the beauty of having community schools because they meet the needs of your individual schools. So we are very much engaged in that. And we are looking forward to seeing more schools come on DeKalb County as STEAM or STEM.

Speaker9

Superintendent Thurmond, thank you for coming. I want to commend you for standing up for all the children of DeKalb. And as you continue, I want you to know that all parents love their children. And when you look at parents that continue to be wronged by DeKalb County and they continue to be told something else happened. That's why we don't ??? and that's one issue.

Another issue is, I'm not happy with the way ??? approach education, especially in Dunwoody. Everyone is ??? their children to get certified. Because they get to Peachtree or high school, they know their children are tracked. There's all these different ???. What are we doing to ... ??? ... at Dunwoody Elementary we have 1 ??? math teacher, 1 Reading ??? teacher, but we have 3 gifted teachers. We have teachers telling parents how to ??? to get to class. Like some ?????

.....

Also, I'd urge you to implement professional development for teachers. What's expected, what does a classroom ??? what does homework look like. I'm tired of having to say a silent prayer that at least 2 out of 3 of my teachers or 1 out of 3 are good teachers.

Also, ?????.....????..... What are we doing to make sure our college bound students are getting ??? Maybe we can have Michelle Rhee come down.

Thurmond

In the 90 day plan, there is one line around academic achievement. ??? we must create multiple pathways to success for our children. That is one of the most principle statements in the plan. I was just looking up a study that was provided to me. About 20 percent of high income kids graduate from a 4 year college or institution.

[7 minutes left.]