NINETY DAY ACTION PLAN

Michael L. Thurmond
Interim Superintendent
DeKalb County School District
Presented: April 30, 2013
Dear DeKalb County School District Stakeholders,

My first two months on the job have provided a unique opportunity for me to engage a cross section of DeKalb County School District (herein DCSD) stakeholders in open, honest and frank discussions. I have listened and learned. Now is the time for leadership.

Working in partnership with Chairman Melvin Johnson and the members of the DeKalb County School Board (herein the Board), I have researched, evaluated and reviewed student achievement data, policies and processes, budget resources, organizational culture and structure. One conclusion gleaned from my efforts is incontrovertible. DCSD assets far outweigh our deficits and the opportunities for growth are limitless.

We are learning from our past mistakes but we will not dwell upon them. The agenda for the next ninety days will be challenging and rewarding. We will demonstrate significant institutional progress to AdvancED/SACS monitors, balance the FY 2014 budget and prioritize student academic achievement and career readiness. District employees, the Board, students, parents, business leaders and external stakeholders will be called upon to help re-envision, refocus and rebuild the DCSD.

Moving forward we will continue to build consensus and establish mutually beneficial partnerships with stakeholders throughout DeKalb County. We were once and will again be recognized an elite public school district. I am convinced that our best days are yet to come.

Regards,

Michael L. Thurmond
Interim Superintendent
Executive Summary

The document outlines the strategic focus of the DCSD for the next ninety days. The plan includes five major goals and objectives:

- Address AdvanceED/SACS action items and work to achieve unconditional accreditation status;

- Develop and implement a balanced budget for FY 2014;

- 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 district stakeholders.
GOAL #1: Address AdvancED/SACS action items and work to achieve unconditional accreditation status

On December 17, 2012, the DCSD was placed on Accredited-Probation by AdvancED/SACS and directed to address eleven required actions by December 31, 2013. We have established an AdvancED/SACS response team charged with the responsibility of developing action plans and completing the work required. This team is comprised of representatives from each DCSD division, principals, and support staff. We are currently “in progress” on each required action with detailed work plans. The district will welcome an AdvancED/SACS monitoring team in May 2013. We will present evidence of progress completed and action plans for long term sustainability.

Actions:

- Engage expert governance practitioners to assist with rebuilding the DCSD governance structure and promote best in class governance practices
- Hold ongoing meetings with AdvancED/SACS for technical assistance support
- Submit Institution Progress Report to AdvancED/SACS during May 2013 monitoring visit
- Complete execution of FY 2013 deficit elimination plan
- Engage expert practitioners to assist with strategic planning process
- Participate in Board training

DeKalb School of the Arts
GOAL #2: Develop and implement a balanced budget for FY 2014

The DCSD faces serious fiscal challenges and unique opportunities in the development of the FY 2014 budget. State mandated cost increases for health benefits, retirement contributions and salary step increases will increase expenditures. Property tax revenue continues to decline because real estate values have yet to recover from the effects of the Great Recession. The district will benefit from a modest increase in state revenue because of student population growth.

Actions:

- Establish budget priorities based on Board budget parameters
- Hold public hearings to receive stakeholder input for the FY 2014 budget
- Review the district’s FY 2013 budget, forensic audits, financial reports, budget development processes and recent public and private financial and personnel audits, including financial projections and resource allocations
- Realign resources to improve academic achievement and career readiness
- Eliminate excessive legal fees
- Evaluate senior level personnel prior to contract renewal
- Revise and redeploy Title1 and Title 2, Race to the Top and other state and federal grant programs to improve academic achievement and career readiness. Invest in parent, adult guardian and mentor involvement
- Compare best practice financial controls and accounting systems and compare to current DCSD policies and procedures
GOAL #3: Prioritize student academic achievement and career readiness; Invest in parent, adult guardian and mentor involvement

The administration will engage nationally recognized curriculum and instruction experts, district instructional team leaders, classroom instructors, parents and other stakeholders to develop strategies that will improve academic achievement and career readiness. Review DCSD recruitment policies and the hiring, training and assignment of principals, teachers and support staff. Evaluate curriculum, program offerings, and curriculum alignment with common core college and career readiness standards. Analyze student achievement and career readiness data to determine best practices. Develop a more holistic understanding of the root causes of low student achievement and school performance.

Actions:

• Decentralize decision-making authority by redefining the role and responsibilities of regional superintendents

• Research and document the importance of parent, adult guardian and mentor involvement and its correlation with student academic achievement and career readiness

• Identify, document and model innovative best practices that support and enhance academic achievement and career readiness

• Expand gifted and advanced placement offerings and opportunities

• Review the instructional program, practices, curriculum, and support materials for improving student achievement and career readiness with a specific focus on English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and special education students

• Construct “multiple pathways” to success for DCSD graduates who choose not to attend two or four year liberal arts institutions

• Evaluate academic achievement and career readiness data from under-performing schools, conduct a holistic root-cause analysis and develop a corrective action plan

• Strengthen, repair and establish DCSD partnerships with state and federal education and training agencies, business organizations, human service agencies and nonprofits
GOAL #4: Develop and implement a plan that will improve operational efficiency

Review executive summaries from division leaders, directors and coordinators of major initiatives, review project timelines, funding sources, current status and access potential opportunities, problems and risks. Conduct a personnel audit of each division to determine strengths and identify needs for improvement. The goal is to enhance student academic achievement and career readiness by more effectively utilizing and deploying central office, school based and support personnel resources.

Actions:

- Identify senior leadership team
- Review central office organizational structure to determine alignment with improved student academic achievement and career readiness
- Develop a continuous improvement plan for fleet services
- Evaluate senior staff on core competencies and determine needs to build capacity
- Initiate needed fiscal procedures and practices to reduce costs and improve fiscal responsibilities
- Review the district’s information technology systems and initiatives
- Review the district’s capital outlay program and plans for growth and expansions

Clarkston High School
GOAL #5: Rebuild trust with internal and external stakeholders

I have met with students, teachers, parents, parent-teacher organizations, parent councils, business leaders, local and state elected officials, board members, state education leaders, higher education, teacher organizations, non-profit and civic organizations, faith-based leaders, other school superintendents, employees, community partners, and the media. These listening and learning sessions afforded me the opportunity to hear the concerns of all stakeholders. The common theme among stakeholders was put student academic achievement first, direct available resources to the classroom, eliminate waste and mismanagement, review central office staffing patterns, support teachers and involve parents and stakeholders partners in the decision making process. We will rebuild public trust and confidence through deliberate actions grounded in transparency, open communication, collaboration and shared responsibility.

Actions:

• Reestablish a communications office to provide timely and accurate information to the public
• Review the 2011-2012 communications audit
• Develop a strategic communications plan
• Review communication policies and procedures
• Build capacity among schools and central office to improve communication
• Establish routine meetings and communications channels with various stakeholder groups
• Hold regular media briefings to share district information
Deliverables/Outcomes:

- Unified Board/Superintendent governance team focused on improving student achievement and career readiness
- Balanced budget that better aligns resources to support academic achievement and career readiness
- Decentralized decision-making authority
- Increased investments in parent, adult guardian and mentor involvement
- Initiation of a comprehensive strategic planning process and framework
- More fiscal and organizational accountability
- More effective communication with internal and external stakeholders
- Improved internal and external customer service
- Improved employee morale
- Improved fleet services

Timeline:

The Ninety Day Action Plan will be implemented from May through July 2013. The Superintendent will continue to work with Chairman Melvin Johnson, and the Members of the Board of Education and district stakeholders to ensure that every student enrolled in our schools will have equal access to a quality education.