

**1. *What challenges is your school district facing?***

***Provide a brief description of the specific issues that, if resolved, would allow you to consider your school district a complete success.***

With a steady and growing enrollment of over 101,000 students, 6,000 teachers, and 14,000 employees, the DeKalb County School District (“DCSD”) is the third largest school district in the state of Georgia, and one of the largest in the nation. It serves an incredibly diverse cross-section of the Georgia public, as well. Our students come from both affluent families and families affected by deep, generational poverty; households where English is spoken to relocation homes for international refugees; and households where both parents possess multiple post-graduate degrees to temporary homes where caregivers have little to no formal schooling beyond high school. The diversity of background, perspective, and need that our 101,000 students and their families pose cannot be overstated, and the challenges serving such a diverse population cannot be ignored.

The magnitude of DCSD’s responsibility to the diverse student population and community it serves requires a constant dedication to improvement throughout all levels of the organization. DCSD has exited a period marked with instability in its governance, management, and operations, and the District now stands ready for the transformation and growth it needs, knowing that the path forward requires rebuilding the trust of its community for an engaged and meaningful partnership. Of the flexibility options available in Georgia, DCSD, its leadership, and its community chose the charter system model because it provides a framework for building this engaged and meaningful partnership between the District and those it serves. It also provides the flexibility to innovate at every level of the school district, empowering schools to adopt strategies and interventions customized to the individual needs of their student populations while allowing the District to improve its operational efficiency. Furthermore, the charter system model best aligns with the District’s 2014-2019 Strategic Plan.

DCSD and its stakeholders have identified the following four challenges, each with specific areas of focus, as the top challenges facing the District at this point in time:

- 1) Supporting diverse students to increase academic achievement

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*Aligns with DCSD Strategic Goal of Student Success with Equity and Access*

Specific focus areas include:

- Improving achievement among low-income students
- Improving achievement among students with limited English proficiency
- Improving achievement among academically advanced and gifted students

2) Preparing students for graduation, college, and career success

*Aligns with DCSD Strategic Goal of Student Success with Equity and Access*

Specific focus areas include:

- Increasing high school graduation rate
- Better preparing students for post-graduation opportunities

3) Attracting, motivating, and retaining highly effective staff

*Aligns with DCSD Strategic Goals of Staff Efficacy and Excellence and Organizational Effectiveness and Efficiency*

Specific focus areas include:

- Attracting, motivating, and retaining high quality teachers
- Attracting, motivating, and retaining high quality principals
- Attracting, motivating, and retaining high quality central office staff

4) Improving organizational culture to increase academic and operational achievement *Aligns with*

*DCSD Strategic Goals of Organizational Effectiveness and Efficiency, Internal and External Communication, and Stakeholder Engagement*

Specific focus areas include:

- Creating a Central Office that supports schools and high quality instruction
- Improving District partnership with its community and families
- Increasing District collaboration with external partners, such as institutes of higher education and local businesses

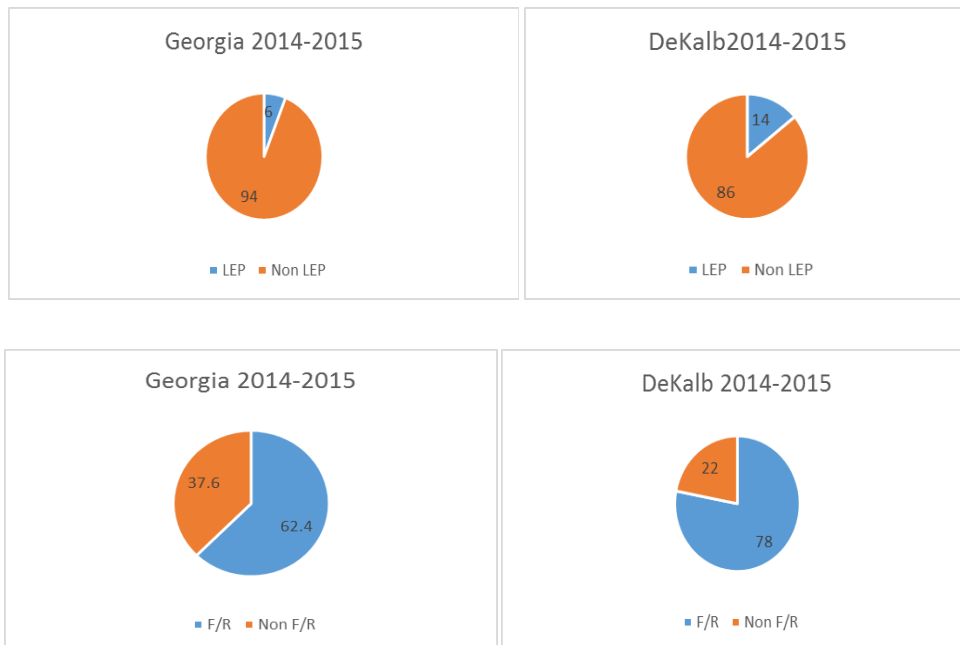
# DeKalb County School District

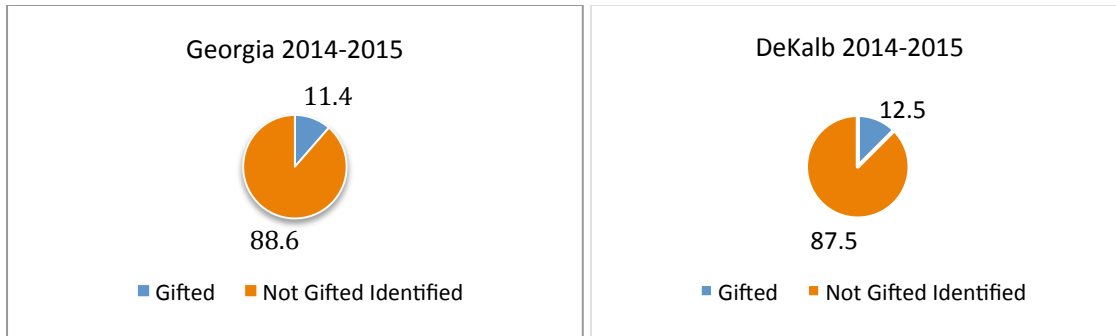
These challenges and specific focus areas represent the priorities identified by the DCSD community, stakeholders, and leadership as the most pressing areas for the District’s improvement. Each is aligned to one or more of the strategic goal areas identified in the DCSD 2014-2019 Strategic Plan and is further discussed below.

## *Challenge #1: Supporting diverse students to increase academic achievement*

The immense amount of diversity within DCSD coupled with the immense need many of our students have upon entering the school system poses a number of significant challenges, complicated further by the magnitude of operations required to serve such a large, diverse population effectively. Diversity is present in every aspect of the DCSD student body, across traditional characteristics, such as race, nationality, and socioeconomic status, but also across learning styles, preferred modalities, and needs for differentiation. DCSD seeks to improve its services and supports to its diverse student population, particularly focusing on three primary areas of need: low-income students, limited English proficient students, and academically advanced/gifted students.

Figure A





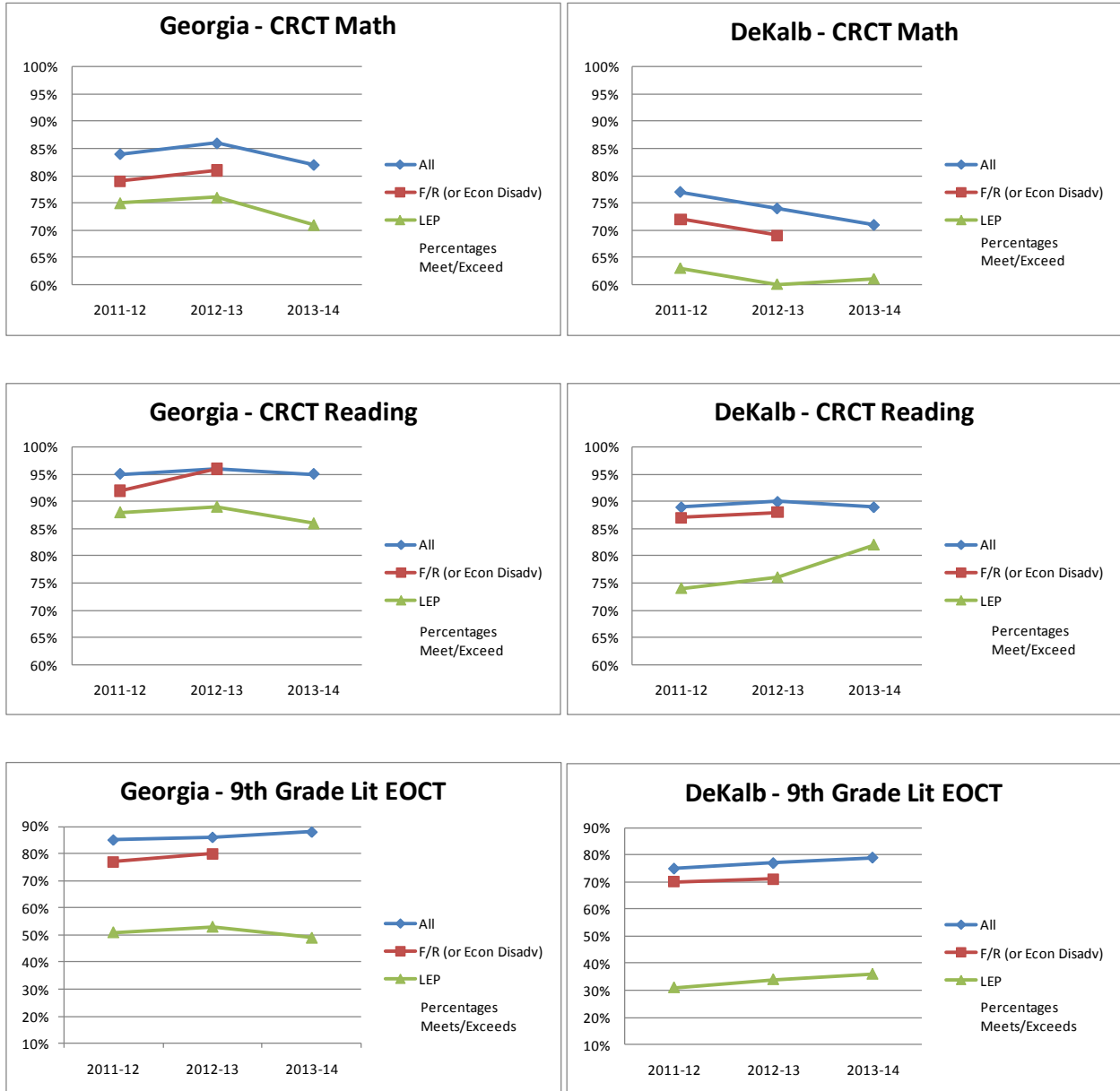
1. *Improving achievement among low-income students*

DCSD serves a significantly greater proportion of students in poverty than the state average as defined by Free and Reduced lunch status (F/R). While DCSD has made recent gains in student academic growth, the charts in Figure B show that the performance of low-income students in the District is below the state average. Furthermore, the District has completed several data analyses of Federally identified racial subgroups and has discerned that within these subgroups, students suffering from the effects of poverty score lower on average on standardized assessments than those students from the same racial subgroup that are not impacted by poverty. Being that the District's F/RL population continues to increase each year and currently represents nearly three-fourths of the District's total student population, strategies and further interventions are direly needed to address the needs and achievement of DCSD's low-income students.

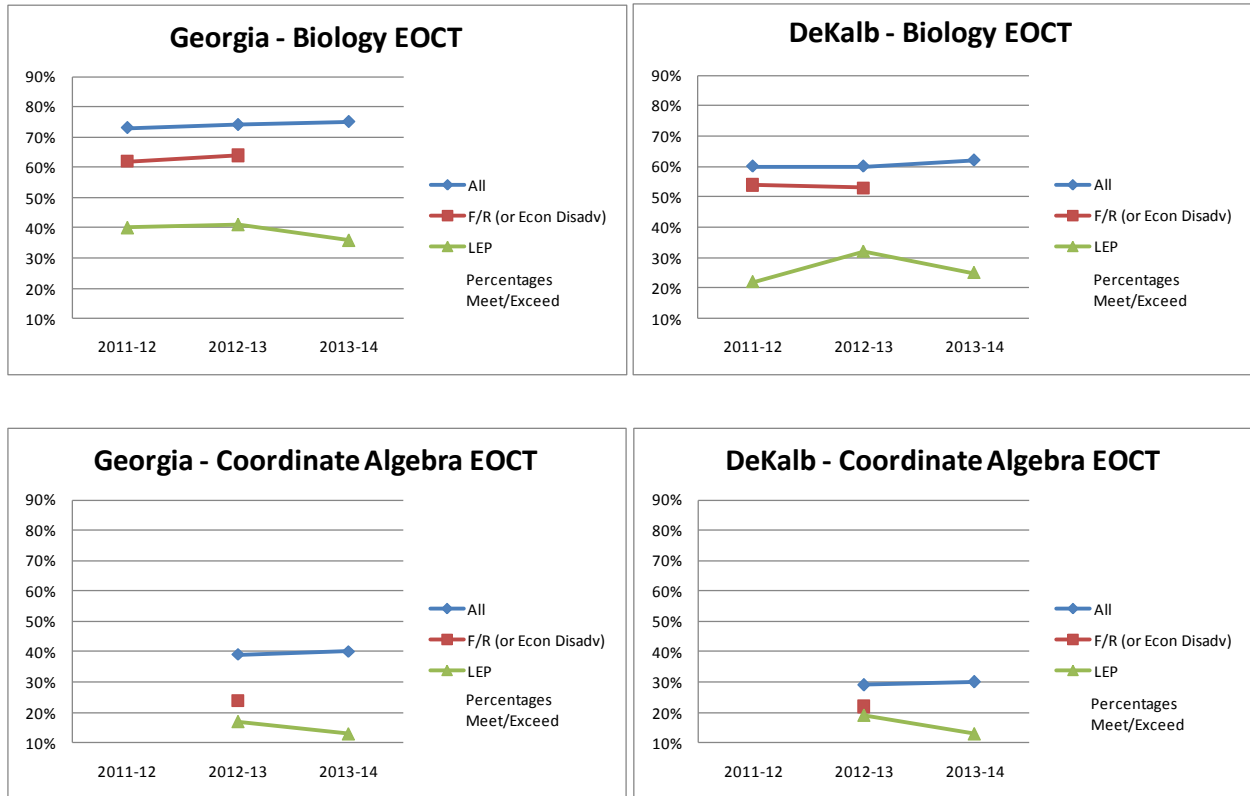
2. *Improving achievement among students with limited English proficiency*

The percentage of students with limited English proficiency in DCSD is more than twice that of the state average. As indicated in Figure B, these students perform below the level of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students across the state in CRCT Math, although DCSD's LEP students are now approaching the state average in Reading and are at the same level in Algebra. Furthermore, DCSD's performance in moving limited English students among performance bands on the ACCESS test is significantly below the state performance target.

Figure B



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Within the limited English population, DCSD faces unique challenges due to the number of nationalities and languages represented. Approximately 160 nationalities speaking more than 140 languages attend DCSD schools. The number of students with a home language other than English is approximately 21,000. These factors result in challenges not only related to language instruction, but also in addressing cultural differences and parental involvement.

Many of the limited English students in DeKalb are recent immigrants, and of those, over 4,000 are refugees who have experienced significant trauma. Many are from war-torn areas and have not experienced any formal schooling prior to entry to the school system. This presents additional challenges such as students who have been unschooled for considerable periods of time, children who have no literacy skills in any language, and children dealing with the emotional consequences of traumatic, and sometimes horrific, events that most adults in the United States have never experienced. For those students who are of high school age, these issues are extremely difficult to address in the remaining years the students have in school, particularly if their academic performance is already significantly below their

age-based grade level.

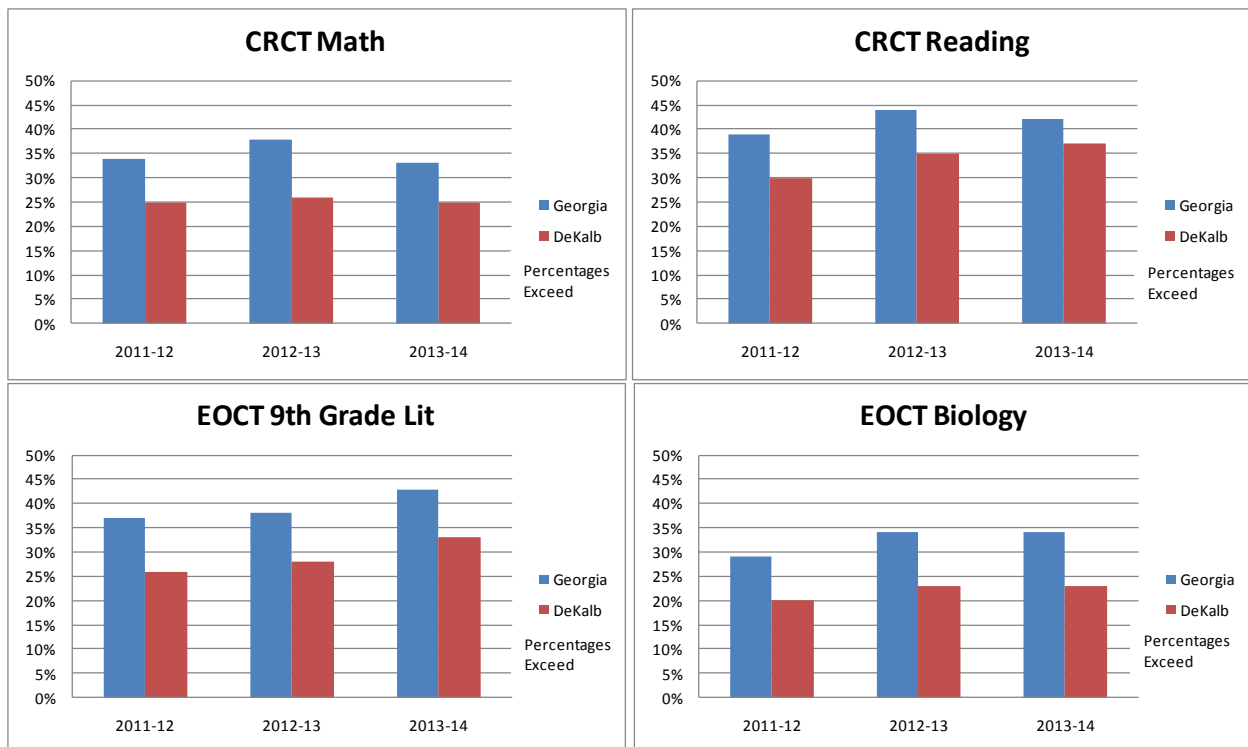
The performance of LEP students and the broad spectrum of unique needs they present indicate that innovative instructional methods are needed to improve their academic achievement.

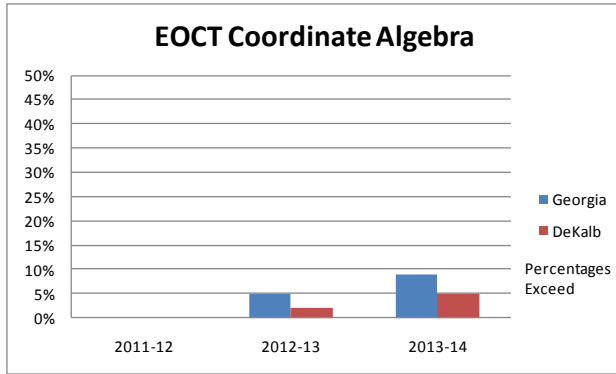
3. *Improving achievement of academically advanced and gifted students*

Approximately 12.5%, or 12, 625 students in DCSD are currently identified as gifted, slightly higher than the state’s average of 11.4%. Of these students, only 55% receive credit for AP, IB or post-secondary courses. Furthermore, while DCSD has made year-to-year improvements in the number of students exceeding the standards on state assessments, the overall percentage of DCSD students exceeding standards on the CRCT and EOCT tests remains below the state average.

The District believes that the achievement of its academically advanced and gifted students will improve if they are provided with an engaging and relevant curriculum customized for their learning modalities that prepares them for post-secondary success.

Figure C





Of the flexibility options available for Georgia school districts, DCSD believes that the charter system model provides the best framework for embracing diversity by allowing school-site customization to meet the individualized needs our students present.

*Challenge #2 Preparing students for graduation, college, and career success.*

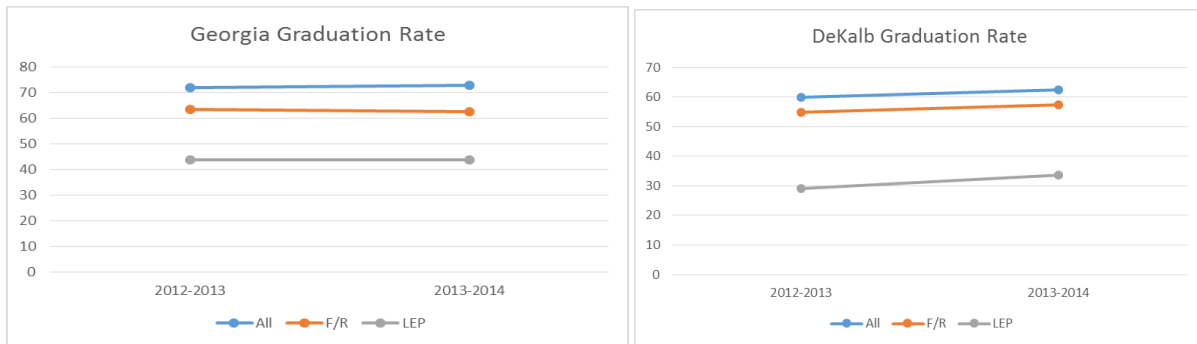
While our diverse students need improved academic programming, support, and intervention at every level of their education, additional efforts are needed to prepare our students to graduate and to ensure their success in their post-secondary endeavors. DCSD shall use the flexibility afforded by the charter system model to focus on increasing the District’s graduation rate and improving our graduates’ preparation for college and career success.

*1. Increasing the high school graduation rate*

As indicated in Figure D, DCSD’s performance on the cohort graduation rate reported for the past two years is significantly below the state average. While DCSD has improved its graduation rates in all three areas, all are significantly lower than the state average.



Figure D



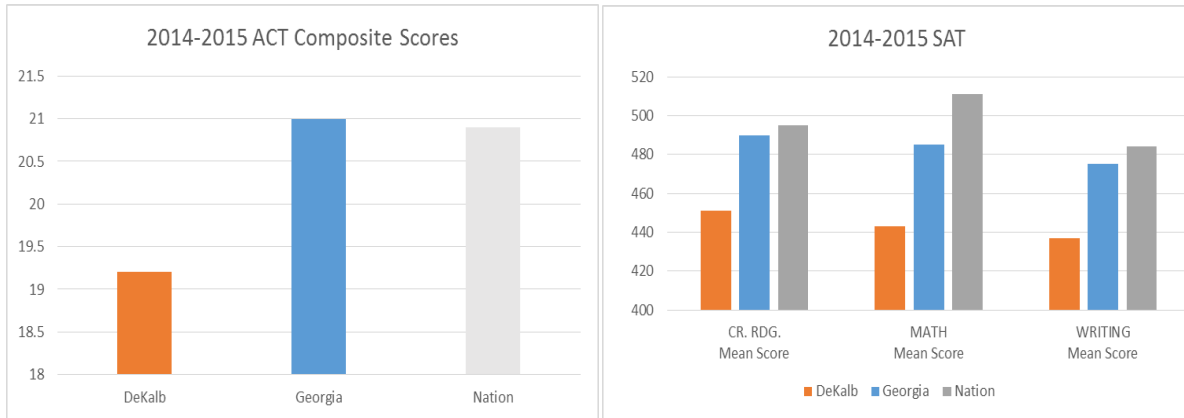
DCSD's low performance in this critical domain for student success demonstrates the seriousness of the need for both improvement and a new paradigm to facilitate it.

*2. Better preparing graduates for college and career success*

DCSD must do more than increase its students' graduation rate, however. The District must also increase the preparation of its graduates for college and career readiness. Fifty-five percent of DCSD students earn credit for at least one Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB) or dual enrollment course, and 78 percent complete a career pathway. These numbers indicate that the level of enrollment in courses aligned with post-secondary success is significant, although there are still opportunities for improvement. For example, the percentage of students meeting the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) indicator of post-high school readiness based upon academic performance is only 47 percent, thus indicating that large student enrollment in these advanced courses does not equate to content mastery. This indicates that the quality of instruction and level of content mastery must be improved, and the opportunity for local schools to request innovative strategies can address this gap.

Additionally, the scores of DCSD students on the ACT and SAT fall below state and national averages.

Figure E



DCSD’s students must be able to compete with both their state and national peers on national assessments utilized for college entrance, and until significant progress in both the graduation rate and college and career readiness are made, the District must target improvement in this area as a priority.

*Challenge #3 Attracting, motivating, and retaining highly effective staff*

Many of America’s top business leaders support the notion that human capital can make or break an organization, and nowhere is this more true than in education. Without strong teachers in the classroom, strong leaders in the school building, and strong staff at central office supporting those leaders, DCSD cannot address the myriad challenges facing the District today. Therefore, the recruitment, development, and retention of highly skilled, effective human capital is of utmost importance to DCSD’s future success.

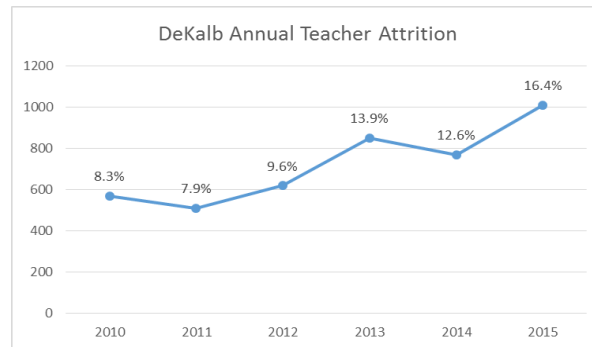
*1. Attracting, motivating, and retaining high quality teachers*

Research clearly shows that a highly effective teacher is the most influential factor in improving student achievement. As such, DCSD must continue to improve its human resources functionality so that it can attract highly effective teachers to the District’s employment, and then once there, retain those individuals while developing them to meet the needs of our diverse student population. Figure F below

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shows the number and percentage of DCSD teachers who leave voluntarily each school year. In 2013, 851 teachers voluntarily resigned, followed by 770 teachers in 2014; however, it is also worth noting that out of over 6,000 teachers employed with the District at the start of the 2014-2015 school year, 1,244 of them held 20 or more years of experience. While some of these voluntary resignations are due to retirement, other teachers leave DCSD employment in order to receive higher compensation in nearby districts, or due to issues with school climate and the District's organizational culture. If DCSD wishes to both attract and retain highly effective educators, it must innovate and improve the quality of employment and career opportunities in the District.

Figure F



While the rate of attrition creates a challenge for DCSD, it also creates an opportunity. With an emphasis on improved working conditions, incentives, and supportive professional development, DCSD can replace exiting teachers with highly effective teachers who are motivated to remain in the school District, which will in turn help to raise student achievement.

### *2. Attracting, motivating, and retaining high quality principals*

Second to the influence of teachers in affecting student achievement is a highly effective school leadership. This is another area that is both a challenge and an opportunity for DCSD. With 120 schools, the DeKalb County School District has hired 50 principals in the past three years. As principals exit, experienced, innovative school leaders who are motivated to remain in their schools must be identified and be prepared to replace them. DCSD has already begun the work of revamping its human resources

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systems to better identify highly effective candidates for both teaching and leadership positions, but this work will benefit from the additional opportunities that charter system flexibility can provide.

### *3. Attracting, motivating, and retaining high quality central office staff*

In order to support the extensive work needed to transform DCSD's schools, DCSD must have a dedicated, well-trained central office staff that can support our schools in achieving their goals. Historically, DCSD has struggled with Central Office divisions and departments operating in silos, protecting their functional elements without meaningfully collaborating with other Central Office staff. While the work to increase Central Office efficiency and productivity has been ongoing through the last several administrations, the arrival of DCSD Superintendent Dr. Green has reenergized this area as a strategic priority. Dr. Green's vision for DCSD's central operations is to shift Central Office's focus to supporting schools to deliver a high quality curriculum through high quality instruction. Under Dr. Green's leadership, instruction and student academic performance will be the focal point in any decision-making process at the District level, and through improved selection, training, and management, DCSD's Central Office staff team will provide the supportive network to lift our schools to higher achievement.

### *Challenge #4 Improving organizational culture to increase academic and operational achievement*

Due to systemic issues with governance and leadership, the DeKalb County School District was categorized as Accredited on Advisement in January of 2011. When matters did not improve, the District was downgraded to Accredited Probation in the fall of 2012, along with a list of required actions targeted primarily at improving the leadership and governance of the DeKalb County Board of Education. In addition to building a strong governance model for the board, the District was also required to address many of the ancillary negative effects caused by its divided leadership, such as outdated infrastructure, ineffective budgetary controls, and a poor organizational culture. In the years since, both the new DeKalb County Board of Education and District administration have had to take a hard look at how the District operates, working closely with our accreditation partner, AdvancEd, to systematically identify and address pervasive issues in the District's organization, leadership, and governance on the path back to full

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accreditation.

While the District has made significant progress, particularly in creating a healthy budget, upgrading the District's technology infrastructure, and successfully transitioning to a seven-member governance board, and has accordingly been upgraded to Accredited Warned, then upgraded again to Accredited under Advisement, the work is not yet complete. Furthermore, the threatened loss of the District's accreditation has led to a justifiable lack of trust in the District among the DCSD community and the public at large. This rift requires a rebuilding of that trust, and DCSD believes that the charter system model can provide the framework for engaging with our community, sharing governance, and working together to raise the achievement of our students and schools. To achieve a healthy, productive organizational culture that places student success at the core of its business, DCSD and its stakeholders have identified the following focus areas to accomplish these goals.

### *1. Creating a Central Office that supports schools and high quality instruction*

Now more than ever, it is critical that DCSD revamps its processes and systems to ensure efficiency so that its staff can accomplish the large tasks at hand. To that end, Dr. Green has emphasized shifting the focus of all DCSD departments to support schools and their communities first and return to the core business of teaching and learning. This requires an examination and improvement of the District's productivity as it relates to financial decisions and budget development designed to improve teaching and learning outcomes; improvements in the District's ability to assess instructional practices, programs, and curriculum to adjust, improve, or abandon those elements that are ineffective and not supporting our core business; and monitor carefully to ensure an adequate and equitable distribution of resources, programs, and personnel to all of the District's schools.

### *2. Improving District partnership with its community and families*

As discussed above, the District must rebuild its reputation in its community and with its families. DCSD cannot address the large-scale issues facing its student population without the help, support, and

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buy-in of its families throughout the District. The current vehicle for this collaborative partnership, the local school advisory council (LSAC) is inconsistently utilized among DCSD's schools. With increased autonomy and the stronger framework in place designed for Local School Governance Teams (LSGTs) under the charter system model, DCSD believes that parents, community members, and staff will be inspired to come together to devise strategies and interventions that work best for their individual student populations.

Furthermore, the need to engage the District's underrepresented families that are often excluded from participation in their child's education is critical. With language barriers, cultural barriers, and barriers to access, such as limited mobility, many of the District's neediest students and families have been unable to have a meaningful voice in the District's future. The District understands that, to meet its strategic goal of ensuring equity and access for student success, it must take ownership over this lack of parental engagement and remove some of the systemic barriers that prevent it from occurring. Through the use of interpreters, improved communication plans to target these underrepresented communities, and community outreach, DCSD is hopeful that the important work of rebuilding a DeKalb County School District that meets the expectations and needs of all its families can begin.

### *3. Increasing District collaboration with external partners, such as institutes of higher education and local businesses*

With an enrollment of over 101,000 students and growing, DCSD is responsible for the education and development of a large subset of the metro Atlanta area's youth. It behooves both the District and members of the greater Atlanta community to partner together to provide valuable opportunities for our students to become productive and engaged citizens of Georgia. With increased collaboration with institutes for higher education and local businesses, DCSD can provide its students with greater access to dual-enrollment opportunities, vocational training, and credit-earning internships. DCSD can also utilize these partnerships to attract the next generation of highly effective educators, leaders, and professionals to add to the District's portfolio of talent.

**2. *What is the rank order priority of these challenges (from most to least important)?***

While DCSD and its stakeholders believe that a unified approach which addresses all of these challenges is critical due to their interdependent and related nature, the challenges are listed in order of priority from most to least important, placing the support and education of DCSD's large and diverse student population first, followed by preparing DCSD's students for graduation and post-secondary opportunities, recruiting and maintaining a highly qualified staff to accomplish those goals, and improving the District's organizational culture and relationships throughout the community.

**3. *Which of these challenges will your school district be able to address by becoming a charter system?***

DCSD will address all of these challenges through the charter system model. By allowing local schools the opportunity to implement innovative practices specific to their populations, the diversity of our students' needs and learning styles can be better accommodated. Both schools and the District will be able to adopt innovative programs designed to decrease dropout and improve graduation rates, and schools will be able to select and offer coursework that both excites and prepares our students for college and career success beyond. Through flexibility and increased community engagement, schools will receive the staff they need and utilize them to increase student achievement. DCSD will be able to better recruit, train, and retain highly effective staff at all levels of the organization. Lastly, the charter system framework provides a powerful tool to engage the DCSD community in important decision-making for their schools and students, providing the type of meaningful collaboration needed to heal the rifts within the greater DCSD community and instill trust again in the operations of the District.

**4. *What specific actions will your district take to address each of these challenges during its five-year charter term; and,***

**5. *Provide a clear explanation of how each of these specific actions will lead to the specific challenge being addressed.***

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These questions will be answered together for clarity.

While DCSD was once marked as a system in upheaval and transition, this historical background has created a sense of urgency among DCSD's new leadership, the local Board, and community to make certain that the District never returns to that state. With a new superintendent, a newly constituted and configured Board of Education, and a new Strategic Plan, DCSD is prepared to tackle its institutional shortcomings and the challenges inherent in serving its large, diverse, and needy population.

### *Current Strategies and Interventions*

While considering its options for flexibility, DCSD has not waited to begin the important work of its transformation. A high-level account of some current strategies and interventions in use by DCSD to address its challenges include:

#### Challenge #1: Supporting diverse students to improve academic achievement

- *Improving Curriculum and Instruction:* Creation of the CIA<sup>2</sup> Initiative which includes a full curriculum audit to determine whether 1) the District's written curriculum is rigorous, 2) the written, taught, learned, and assessed curriculum is appropriately aligned, 3) the curriculum allows for effective evaluation of students with disabilities, English learners, gifted students, and economically disadvantaged students, 4) the District's assessments are rigorous and calculated to measure the learned curriculum, and 5) budget development and financial decisions support improved teaching and learning outcomes. Identifying and addressing any weaknesses in the curriculum in this systematic manner will create a solid foundation for the District's transition to charter system.
- *Supporting Schools in Need:* Creation of a District Effectiveness Team to provide support, monitoring, interventions, and mobilization of resources to fifty-four of the District's most challenged schools; improved implementation of continuous improvement plans for use by principals in all schools to target specific strategies and goals to be monitored quarterly and updated annually; and assignment of regionally-based Professional Learning Facilitators geared for that region's specific



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needs.

- *Increasing resources to support diverse learners:* Providing educators with increased access to tiered professional learning around mathematics, literacy, and STEM to reach the neediest students; implementing requirements for English Language endorsements for regions with high LEP populations; provision of student success tutors; creation of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Environment framework with a district-wide learning management system, internet services for needy families, and student access to Outlook 365 Student Advantage; provision of additional academic services for homeless, neglected, and delinquent students; and parent training available virtually and at parent centers to aid in student success.

### Challenge #2: Preparing students for graduation, college, and career success

- *Increasing Opportunities:* Increasing partnerships with local universities and trade schools for joint enrollment opportunities and credit-earning skills training; increasing rigorous AP course availability and IB programming throughout the district; increasing language immersion programming; and family-g geared training on college and career opportunities, financial aid, and application strategies available virtually and at regional parent centers.
- *Increasing Remediation Opportunities:* Creation of additional extended day, Saturday and summer tutorials for remediation, and credit recovery; provision of supplemental transportation to ensure student access to additional remediation opportunities; reduction of class size in core content areas in Title I schools; and outreach and additional academic services to students at risk for dropout.

### Challenge #3: Attracting, motivating, and retaining highly effective staff

- *Teacher, Leader, Staff Recruitment:* Implementation of effective human resource management systems to replace outdated district hiring infrastructure; increasing focus on customer service throughout onboarding process; early and aggressive recruitment efforts with university partners to identify and recruit highly effective new teachers and leaders for district employment; and early

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contracting for both teachers and principals in hard-to-staff subjects and areas.

- *Teacher, Leader, Staff Development:* Increasing job-embedded training opportunities for teachers, principals, and central office staff; the Paraprofessional-to-Teacher Initiative which identifies highly effective instructional paraprofessionals and provides professional development, training, and support to gain full certification to increase teachers in hard-to-staff areas, such as special education; use of academic coaches throughout district; a District professional learning Catalog with self-selected courses aimed at differentiating support for teachers, principals, and staff; and development and implementation of a performance management instrument for central office staff.
- *Teacher, Leader, Staff Retention:* Review and study of DCSD compensation; review of employee incentive models; development of a cross-functional taskforce dedicated to improving employee retention; and development of additional supports and mentoring for new hires; budgetary set-asides of \$10 million for potential renewal of supplemental retirement plan contributions.

### Challenge #4: Improving organizational culture to increase academic and operational achievement

- *Improving Central office supports:* Implementation of routine monitoring and visits by Central Office staff to increase understanding and buy-in of the school-support model of central office administration; creation of a central office theory of action and SMART goals describing how the central office will improve the growth and achievement of all of DeKalb's students going forward, particularly in terms of budget design, data collection and interpretation, curriculum support, and state accountability; implementation of a Change Management process; and increased budgetary controls and reporting to unit managers.
- *Increasing family engagement:* Creation of regional parent centers with instructional resources, parent workshops, and student learning tools on a lending basis; parent-school liaisons; Academic Parent-Teacher teams (APTT model); Parents Assuring Student Success (PASSport) training, an innovative program that encourages parents to become facilitators of learning and provides specific strategies to help parents teach children study skills; and creation of the Parent Portal and app allowing increased

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communication between families and schools and up-to-date information regarding student progress.

- *Increasing District accountability:* creation of intensive annual goals and objectives with quarterly monitoring for schools on CCRPI scores, closing the achievement gap, increased graduation rate, student grade-level lexile score improvement, and school climate ratings.

Many of these current strategies and interventions currently being utilized can be strengthened and expanded by the flexibility offered through charter system status.

### *Charter System Strategies and Interventions*

Should DCSD receive approval for its charter system proposal, DCSD will be able to expand the scope of its new strategic focus on district improvement and accountability through the gaining of valuable thought partners in the form of Local School Governance Teams (LSGTs). DCSD has already begun the process of releasing additional autonomy to the school level through the creation of school-level strategic improvement planning processes; involvement of the community in Title I resource planning; and providing principals with additional autonomy in hiring decisions to fit their schools' needs. While this is a start, DCSD understands that it must continue to release decision-making authority to the school level, creating both strong, empowered principals as well as strong LSGTs who have the means and the voice to implement real change for their student populations.

With charter system status, DCSD will distribute the power to innovate throughout all levels of the District. While the District can use the flexibility from educational regulations to rethink how it accomplishes its core business of ensuring high quality teaching and learning, clusters will be able to innovate in groupings according to their need, and schools will be able to innovate to their specific needs. While a more comprehensive set of examples are contained in Attachment 1, the following section contains representative examples of both district and school level strategies designed to address DCSD's challenges. These examples were generated through a series of interactive sessions with teachers, students, principals, District leaders, and the District's Flexibility Advisory Committee (FAC) that

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includes parents, teachers, principals, community members, central office staff, and a Board representative. It is important to note that the school-level strategies discussed below are merely examples of the types of innovative strategies that our LSGTs may choose to pursue.

Challenge #1: Supporting diverse students to improve academic achievement

### *1. Improving achievement among low-income students*

DCSD will create flexible processes for schools wishing to provide increased instructional time, flexible scheduling, and additional supports for low-income students who are below desired levels.

Decades of research have shown that low-income students need more instructional time to keep pace with peers who arrive to school with a greater level of academic background knowledge.

Compounding this issue, low-income students experience an academic slide during the summer months and school breaks when other students may stay on track or make slight progress. In his book, *The Educators Handbook for Understanding and Closing Achievement Gaps*, Joseph Murphy quotes Entwisle, Alexander and Olson (2000) as finding, “The increasing gap in test scores between children and families of high and low socioeconomic status over the elementary-school period thus accrued entirely from the differential gains they made when school was closed: that is, during the summer months.” Effective charter school networks all utilized increased academic time as a primary strategy for improving student achievement via longer school days, weekend classes, and summer learning opportunities.

DCSD will allow its schools flexibility to modify the state-mandated delivery models for EIP and Remedial programs so that low-income students have additional time for content area instruction, rather than integrating interventions during regular classroom instructional time which only replaces one form of instruction with another. These flexible models will be selected at the school level based upon the unique needs of each school population and may include core content instruction after school, during breaks or during summer, or creative integration of non-core subjects with remedial instruction such as creating an art class that focuses on basic math skills or a social studies course that integrates reading remediation.

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Furthermore, schools may utilize teachers outside primary areas of certification during specific segments of the school day to create very small instructional groups for all students in reading and math. This would not change the teacher of record for purposes of Title I highly qualified compliance, but would instead be a method to provide supplemental instruction.

Schools may also adjust scheduling so that the amount of time spent in specific subjects and courses is aligned with student needs rather than state mandated minimums. In this manner, science and math blocks may be longer than reading blocks, since reading is a subject where low-income students are on par with others. Courses and subjects may be integrated such as language arts and social studies to allow more time for instruction in math and science. Supplemental remedial support in reading or math may replace electives at middle and high school or be integrated with “specials” at the elementary level. Creative means of meeting requirements such as health and physical education may be utilized to free up time during the school day for supplemental instruction based upon student needs. Some schools may even choose to implement gender-based classrooms to further increase focus on instruction.

As a district-level strategy, DCSD will refocus the work of its curriculum and instruction division to support school-level strategies and interventions through a collaborative Innovation-on-Demand program. For example, a LSGT may be interested in one of the above-described strategies but require additional expertise and manpower to transform their strategies into an implementable program. The LSGT can utilize the DCSD curriculum and instruction team to provide this bench strength, which aligns with the vision and intended purpose of DCSD Central Office to support schools first. Over time through this collaboration, DCSD and its schools will have developed a menu of available innovative programs, strategies, and interventions that schools can choose from depending on their specific needs, increasing replication of concepts that work easily.

DCSD may also use its charter system flexibility to support its low-income students by utilizing many of the same strategies discussed above, particularly in its schools presenting the greatest need where intervention is necessary prior to the school’s full incorporation of the charter system model. DCSD will

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also be able to funnel additional resources to its schools presenting the greatest need.

### 2. *Improving achievement among students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP)*

DCSD will create flexible processes for providing increased instructional time, flexible scheduling, and additional supports for limited English students who are below level.

As with low-income students, students with limited English proficiency need more instructional time to keep pace with their English-speaking peers. Further compounding the struggle for this population of students is that academic background knowledge for LEP students may be missing, particularly among refugee students, and it is certainly made more difficult by the differences in language. LEP students may also experience an academic slide during the summer months and school breaks, particularly in homes and communities where English is not the primary spoken language.

Schools may utilize flexibility to modify the state-mandated delivery models for ESOL programs so that LEP students have additional time for content area instruction, rather than integrating interventions during regular classroom instructional time, which only replaces one form of instruction with another. These flexible models will be selected at the school level and based upon the unique needs of each school population. Like the flexibility opportunities for low-income students, these models may include core content instruction after school, during breaks or during summer, or creative integration of non-core subjects with remedial instruction. This curricular integration is particularly critical with limited English students of high school age, who have little time to learn the language, catch up academically, and meet graduation requirements before aging-out of the public education system.

Schools may also utilize teachers outside primary areas of certification during specific segments of the school day to create very small instructional groups for all students in reading and math, including ESOL certified teachers.

As a district-level strategy, DCSD will utilize its flexibility to increase ESOL endorsements for teachers in targeted regions where the LEP population is high. DCSD may also utilize its flexibility to

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provide summer language intensives for LEP students, additional language resources for both families and students in the regional parent centers, and to hire international teachers with non-traditional credentialing to serve as additional school-based supports.

### *3. Improving achievement among academically advanced and gifted students*

While approximately 12% of DCSD students are identified as Gifted according to the state criteria, this percentage does not adequately represent the numbers of DCSD students who would benefit from Gifted program teaching strategies. Limited English students face language barriers that make it difficult for truly gifted students to qualify for the program given the current assessment methods. Low-income students are historically under-represented in Gifted services although many could benefit from the high-order thinking and creativity characteristic of the Gifted program. Each of these student groups would have greater numbers of students qualifying for gifted services if the assessment methods allowed for greater emphasis on creative thought processes rather than prior knowledge and/or English proficiency. For these reasons, schools may choose to waive Gifted program delivery requirements to make them accessible to greater numbers of students who could benefit from exposure to these higher-order thinking skills.

Schools can also utilize their flexibility so that the models used for Gifted program delivery can be redesigned to meet its students' needs without creating the perception of exclusion through pull out programs. Such exclusion creates a culture and classification of gifted and non-gifted students. It also has the potential to prevent Gifted program students from fully participating in needed classroom instruction. Alternative delivery models may involve rigorous, accelerated instruction for all students, such as robotics or science labs, with differentiated lessons or materials for the Gifted program students that are parallel to the lessons or materials for other students.

Schools could use their Gifted teachers at elementary and middle school to support all students during portions of instructional time through teaching small groups of students who are capable of mastering accelerated curriculum. Both schools and DCSD can also create additional opportunities for

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students to successfully participate in Advanced Placement courses such as peer mentoring programs, tutoring during an extended day, or extended time for AP courses by reducing other course requirements through waivers, content mastery, or creative scheduling.

As a district-level strategy, DCSD may also use its flexibility to encourage and support teachers in gaining Gifted endorsements to increase the use of creative, higher-order thinking skill-based lesson planning for all students. With greater exposure to problem-solving strategies and creative lesson-planning with differentiation for all levels of learners, DCSD students will be better equipped to exceed the standards in more subjects.

Challenge #2: Preparing students for graduation, college, and career success

### *1. Increasing the high school graduation rate*

A recent systematic review of research exploring dropping out of high school indicates that grade retention is one of the most powerful predictors of high school dropout. It should be noted, however, that social promotion will not support student success either, so the District must seek a method to remediate struggling students without increasing the possibility for having a student leave school before graduating.

While schools may utilize waivers of seat time, pacing, scheduling, or other regulations to implement innovative dropout prevention strategies, DCSD's graduation rate must be addressed holistically as a District, as well. For example, DCSD will explore and design flexible "bridge" programs for students who are not yet academically ready for the next grade level, with particular emphasis on those transitioning from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school. Such programs may be located at the "next level" school or at the current school. Students will be placed in the subsequent grade level for purposes of student reporting while being remediated on prior content that is scaffolded to on-level curriculum.

Content mastery will be utilized in lieu of seat time for a number of situations, including allowing students to make up failed courses during school-year breaks, over the summer, or during an extended



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day. In a study of eight high-performing charter high schools serving at-risk students, USDOE researchers found that such schools teach for mastery. Students are given remediation, acceleration, and more time on task to learn and master key academic standards. At these schools, if learning requires more time, more time is provided. All have developed longer school days or school years and some have added summer and weekend academics (*Charter High Schools: Closing the Achievement Gap*, WestEd for U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Content mastery will also be used in lieu of seat time for accelerating students by awarding credit for demonstration of prior knowledge and placing such students in higher level courses.

Schools can also take advantage of increased blended learning opportunities for students who need to participate at non-traditional times due to work or family arrangements. Similar to a post-secondary environment, students would access online instruction for part of their coursework and attend classes two or three times a week at a non-traditional, “open” location with classes scheduled based upon student needs, such as in the evening and on weekends. Such students would be considered full-time enrollees for FTE purposes but would engage in instruction both online and in physical classroom. This will allow students who otherwise may drop out due to work or family obligations, or simple lack of interest, to stay on track for graduation.

### *2. Better preparing graduates for college and career success*

Career pathways can serve as a mechanism to keep students engaged and prepare them for post-secondary options while completing high school. DCSD seeks to have more students complete higher-level career pathway courses and experience relevant work-study programs, internships, and apprenticeships, and providing these opportunities will require both school and district-level strategies. For example, schools may seek approval for new courses and pathways designed to excite and inspire their unique student populations. A cluster may decide to incorporate entry-level career pathway courses at the middle school level for high school credit so that students who are able and interested can get a head start and take their education further than high school allows. At the district level, DCSD will seek

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partnerships with businesses and industries so that community instructors and alternatively certified teachers may be used to teach such courses, with a focus on content knowledge within the career area. DCSD will also create additional dual-enrollment opportunities as well as the establishment of additional Career Academies. Schools may also utilize their flexibility to increase access to dual enrollment courses by providing them on their campuses so that more students can participate.

Additionally, schools may utilize a seat time waiver to allow greater opportunities for credit-bearing internships and apprenticeships in the high school grades. Combined with a better-integrated alignment with technical and community college joint-enrollment, this will assist students in seeing the relevance of finishing high school while preparing them with skills to either enter the workforce with a certification to work in a high-demand field, or with sufficient credit to complete a two- or four-year degree in a realistic timeframe.

Similar innovative practices are a hallmark of the Broad Prize winning Houston Independent School District, which focused resources on dual enrollment and career pathways to improve high school success. The student population of Houston is very similar to DCSD so such effective approaches should be replicable with equal success.

### Challenge #3: Attracting, motivating, and retaining highly effective staff

#### *1. Attracting, motivating and retaining high quality teachers*

Both school-level and district-level strategies may be used to develop and retain highly effective teachers, but DCSD understands that the challenge of attracting, motivating, and retaining highly effective teachers begins with making the District a good place to work. As such, DCSD will utilize its flexibility to make working for DCSD an attractive and preferential opportunity for the top talent in education in Georgia.

District-level strategies may include modification of the state salary schedule in order to attract high quality teachers to hard-to-staff subject areas. Additionally, incentives will be considered for the most effective teachers to retain them in DCSD schools. This practice has been successful in attracting

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and retaining teachers in several nationally recognized urban districts including Duval County, Florida. Urban districts surrounded by more affluent suburbs, such as Pittsburgh and Denver, have found incentives for effective teachers to be a successful mechanism to attract and retain high performing teachers in their classrooms.

Furthermore, DCSD will utilize certification flexibility to create a pool of highly effective but non-traditionally prepared teachers for the needs of specific schools and regions. International teachers, particularly with experience in those areas of the world represented by the student population in the District, may be hired, as well as part-time community instructors with subject area expertise in innovative courses and subjects that align with student needs and interests. At the school or cluster level, schools may determine to share staff positions to maximize limited resources. School-level strategies can also propose creative utilization of teaching staff to provide better instruction, programming, and interventions.

In schools with a particularly acute student need, teachers may be required to gain specific endorsements in order to continuing to teach at the school. Depending on the student population this could include ESOL or Gifted endorsement. As an example, in the nationally recognized Corona-Norco School District near Los Angeles all teachers are required to gain Sheltered Observation Instructional Protocols (SIOP) certification.

From an employee development perspective, DCSD will also create a mentoring program where highly effective teachers receive release time to perform classroom observations, provide feedback, and offer push-in job-embedded professional development to new teacher mentees. Schools can develop and adopt specific professional development programs geared towards the needs of their school, waiving school calendar requirements to afford additional time for such programs. Schools can also utilize open resource allocations to hire staff outside of state mandated hiring guidelines to meet the needs of that particular school, for example, utilizing allocations to hire additional teacher aides or tutors.

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DCSD will also pursue the creation of grow-your-own teaching programs by supporting its own pools of available talent. For example, DCSD may expand upon the Para-to-Teacher program, which supports instructional paraprofessionals on their path to Special Education certification, and DCSD may also create a Young Educator pathway to encourage high school students interested in education careers to take an active role in tutoring for credit at nearby elementary and middle schools, or in district tutoring and credit recovery programs. With additional flexibility and access to resources, DCSD could even consider providing stipends to eliminate college debt for former DCSD students that come back to DCSD as teachers.

### *2. Attracting, motivating and retaining high quality principals*

In the past three years alone, the DeKalb County School District has hired fifty principals, a number greater than the total number of principals in most Georgia school districts. These principals will require strong leadership and support from within the District in order to meet the needs of our schools. Accordingly, DCSD has applied for a competitive grant from the Wallace Foundation to develop intensive professional development to principals and their supervisors, with the hopes of garnering support to create innovative principal preparation, selection, and supervisory practices.

Many of the strategies discussed for attracting teacher talent also apply to principals. In addition to competitive salaries, incentive programs, and innovative professional development, DCSD may also utilize certification flexibility to hire non-traditional principals, particularly for its non-traditional schools at the high school level. Individuals with strong career preparation or college-level experience, but who might not have K-12 leadership certification, could be valuable assets to DCSD schools.

DCSD may also utilize flexibility regarding contracting requirements to secure the top talent in teachers and principals by offering competitive contracts early to preferred candidates. Furthermore, to ensure that new teachers and principals are a good fit in their positions, DCSD may consider utilizing contracting flexibility to implement contract probationary periods, as Fulton County Schools has.

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DCSD also understands the value of providing a smooth onboarding process to secure highly effective candidates for all positions, which is why it will utilize its flexibility and resources to continue to improve HR systems so that candidates are treated professionally and receive the information needed to make their employment decisions quickly.

As a school-level strategy, beyond setting preferred attributes for open positions and involvement in the selection of the principal when vacancies arise, the school could utilize open resource allocations to hire staff outside of state mandated hiring guidelines to meet the needs of that particular school, for example, utilizing allocations to hire administrative support to allow principals to devote more time to instructional leadership. This would serve as a valuable incentive to many principals burdened by the day-to-day administrative aspects of the position.

### *3. Attracting, motivating, and retaining highly effective Central Office Staff*

While there are not specific legal barriers to addressing this focus area, DCSD can better improve the selection, motivation, and retention of highly effective Central Office staff through the flexibility provided by charter system generally, particularly by better use of resources. With charter system status, DCSD will be able to focus on doing better business and utilizing its limited resources to build a strong organization. Through the more efficient use of resources, DCSD can improve its HR systems and continue to improve its onboarding process to ensure that talented candidates do not opt out due to frustration with DCSD hiring practices.

Furthermore, the charter system model aligns with the emphasis on school support as Central Office's number one priority. Rather than receiving directives from DCSD Central Office, schools will be able to ask DCSD for the supports and resources they need and want to pursue. Charter system presents a framework for a culture shift where Central Office is encouraged to "Get to Yes," rather than an emphasis on compliance for the sake of compliance. These barriers that are common in many governmental organizations will take time to remove, but it begins with recruiting open-minded candidates, developing

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talented staff to embrace and lead the culture shift from within, and retaining the Central Office staff who can make charter system and its principles of shared governance a reality for DCSD.

Challenge #4: Improving organizational culture to increase academic and operational achievement

### *1. Creating a Central Office that supports schools and high quality instruction*

As discussed above, DCSD needs to shift its organizational culture, beginning with Central Office, to one that places school support at the very top. Only with this model can DCSD improve its core business of teaching and learning, and the charter system framework directly aligns with and, in fact, requires such a shift in organizational thinking and management. DCSD will use the charter system as an opportunity to reconfigure how its divisions operate so that every decision, from budget to personnel to transportation, is made in a way that supports schools and their needs first and foremost.

DCSD can also use the charter system model as an impetus to examine its own policies, procedures, and processes to ensure that it is not creating unintentional barriers to school improvement. It can also open a dialogue with the State Department of Education in areas like Title I to examine how DCSD can utilize its flexibility to better allocate its limited resources while maintaining equity and compliance with federal law.

### *2. Improving District partnership with its community and families*

In order to rebuild the trust and repair the damaged relationships DCSD has with many of its stakeholders, DCSD must improve its communication, transparency, and collaboration. These are already specific focal points for DCSD's 2014-2019 Strategic Plan, and an area where AdvancEd has provided guidance and support. While DCSD has already begun this work, the charter system model can take the District's efforts to the next level through its direct empowerment of parents and community members' voices at the school, cluster, and district level through the creation of LSGTs and Cluster Advisory Councils (CACs).

At the school level, LSGTs can become the means for engaging the broader community and network of underrepresented families by conducting a review of the school's communication policies and

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identifying and removing barriers that prevent parent and stakeholder engagement. LSGTs and CACs can form partnerships in the community to benefit their schools, clusters, and regions. LSGTs can also work together through their CAC to form economies of scale and to set a strategic focus for their cluster.

DCSD will utilize the LSGT and CAC structures to better disseminate information about key district initiatives to its stakeholders for their input and feedback.

### *3. Increasing District collaboration with external partners, such as institutes of higher education and local businesses*

DCSD students need a variety of supports due to their diverse backgrounds, home life, and needs. Unfortunately, there is not enough funding in the world to undo some of the emotional damage and trauma our students have experienced, but through partnerships, particularly with wraparound service providers, mental, emotional, and physical health clinics, and community organizations, DCSD can help rally the additional support its students require to thrive.

DCSD can also increase the academic opportunities available to its students through increased collaboration with universities, colleges, and trade schools. As discussed previously, these kinds of partnerships are critical for taking our students to the next level and preparing them for both graduation and the opportunities beyond. By utilizing the flexibility from seat time, pacing, course approvals, graduation requirements, internships, CTAE eligibility, and other programmatic delivery requirements, DCSD can utilize these external partnerships to provide innovative educational programming that increases student content mastery, engagement, and preparation for college and career.

### *6. Although you will be granted a broad flexibility waiver if you are granted a charter, please list the specific Georgia law or State Board rule that must be waived to allow your district to implement each specific action.*

Please see **Attachment 1** for a list of both school and district level strategies and the waivers they require.

*Please also list the waivers you have used during the past five years (including those granted to*

*the entire state, e.g. class size) and what goals they helped you accomplish during those five years?*

| SBOE Meeting date (passed) | Waiver & Rationale   | Length approved   |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| <b>6/14</b>                | SBOE Rule 160-5-.29 Minimum Direct Classroom Expenditures (3)(b) and O.C.G.A. § 20-2-171 (b)(4) as authorized by O.C.G.A. § 20-2-244 to reallocate resources           | DeKalb passed resolution in May 2014.<br><br>For 2012-2013 (previous) |
| <b>2/14</b>                | Blanket SBOE exemption of all statutory and regulatory class size maximums for the 2014-2015 school year contingent on local board resolution, for budgeting purposes. | DeKalb passed resolution in June 2014.<br><br>For 2014-2015           |
| <b>2/13</b>                | Blanket SBOE exemption of all statutory and regulatory class size maximums for the 2013-2014 school year contingent on local board resolution, for budgeting purposes. | DeKalb passed resolution in August 2013.<br><br>For 2013-2014.        |
| <b>2/12</b>                | SBOE exemption of all statutory and regulatory class size maximums for the 2012-2013 school year contingent on local board resolution, for budgeting purposes.         | DeKalb passed resolution in July 2012.<br><br>For 2012-2013.          |
| <b>2/11</b>                | SBOE exemption of all statutory and regulatory class size maximums for the 2011-2012 school year contingent on local board resolution, for budgeting purposes.         | DeKalb passed resolution in April 2011.<br><br>For 2011-2012.         |

**7. *Indicate the timeline for implementation of each specific action (listed in #4 above).***

Implementation of each specific action will be dependent upon the innovations approved by each Local School Governance Team (LSGT) in line with their School Improvement Plan. It is essential that innovations be carefully considered to best meet the needs of student in each school, rather than adopted wholesale without regard to school context, student achievement data, and prioritization of needs. This will be the work of the LSGTs during Year 1 of implementation. In Year 2 of implementation, local schools will begin implementation of the strategies and interventions developed and vetted in alignment with their schools’ strategic plans.

For a comprehensive timeline of implementation, please see **Attachment 3**.

**8. *Indicate which of these specific actions (listed in #4 above) represents an innovation for your school district.***



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While some of the above practices may currently be in place in some sites across the district (including start-up and conversion charter schools), as systemic responses to student needs, all of these actions represent innovations for the DeKalb County School District.

### PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS

#### **9. *What are your school system's specific student performance expectations for your five-year charter term?***

##### **Specific Performance Expectation 1:**

DCSD proposes to increase the high school graduation rate to 80 percent for the all-students category by the end of its five-year charter term as measured by the College and Career Ready Performance Index.

Given the upcoming changes to state assessments and potential modifications to student performance targets by the Georgia Department of Education, DCSD will utilize the CCRPI and Beating the Odds (BTO) goals listed below as its remaining performance expectations.

##### Goal 1:

During each year of its first five-year charter term, the Charter System shall “beat the odds” as determined by a formula measuring expected student growth. The Beating the Odds analysis is a cross-sectional, fixed effects regression model that uses the following factors from the CCRPI school-level dataset, GaDOE student record file, and GaDOE CPI data.

##### A. Student-based Factors:

- Percentage of students identified as African American;
- Percentage of students identified as Hispanic;
- Percentage of students identified as White;
- Percentage of students identified as Other;
- Percentage of students identified as qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch;
- Percentage of students identified as Students with Disabilities;

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- Percentage of students identified as English Learners;
- Percentage of students identified as Gifted.

### B. School-based Factors:

- School Size (FTE);
- Student/Teacher Ratio;
- School Configuration/CCRPI Score Type (i.e. Elementary, Middle, High);
- Locale Type (i.e. City, Town, Rural);
- District Performance (Fixed Effect).

### Goal 2:

During each year of its first five-year charter term, each System Charter School shall “beat the odds” as determined by a formula measuring expected student growth. If each System Charter School fails to beat the odds in Year 1 of the charter, the Charter System shall decrease the number of System Charter Schools not beating the odds during Years 2 and 3 at a rate so that all System Charter Schools will beat the odds in Year 4.

### Goal 3:

The Charter System will demonstrate proficiency and/or improvement on the CCRPI.

- A. Measure 1: For new Charter Systems first converting in 2015 or later, using Year 1 of the charter term to establish a CCRPI baseline, the Charter System’s CCRPI score shall be equal to or better than the State in Year 2, and better than the State in Years 3-5 of the charter contract.
- B. Measure 2: If the Charter System’s first-year CCRPI score is lower than the State, the Charter System shall have until the end of Year 2 of the charter term to close the gap between the Charter System and the State.

- C. Measure 3: In Years 3-5 of the charter term, the Charter System's CCRPI score shall be better than the State.

## LOCAL SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

***10. Explain how your system will transition from Local School Advisory Councils to effective and fully functioning decision-making Local School Governance Teams (LSGTs).***

Currently, Local School Advisory Councils (LSACs) are inconsistently utilized across the District. Because of concerns voiced during community engagement sessions, FAC sessions, and public hearings, DCSD has given extensive consideration as to how to best transition its current LSACs, both operational and otherwise, to high functioning LSGTs with adequate support. To accomplish this, DCSD has created an innovative model of governance and support that provides built-in support mechanisms for its LSGTs through the utilization of DCSD's cluster organization.

Unlike many large, urban school districts DCSD has created high school clusters that have almost complete alignment among the elementary, middle and high school attendance zones, with each cluster including one high school, one middle school, and an average of four elementary schools. As a result, clusters serve students with similar needs and demographic characteristics. For that reason, in addition to implementing LSGTs at each school, DCSD create a Cluster Advisory Council (CAC) in each cluster supported by its Regional Superintendent's office. These CACs will advise and provide input and support for individual LSGT processes, training, and resources within each cluster. CACs will serve as resources for individual LSGTs who may need support in garnering parent and community engagement or coordinating innovative practices across multiple schools within the cluster. The CAC will not have governance over individual schools, however, and will instead serve in an advisory or collaborative role only. The CACs will also be utilized to provide recommendations on proposed school innovations that impact the full cluster, such as additions to the curriculum or adjustments to school schedules to ensure alignment among schools. For innovative proposals that impact the entire cluster, each affected LSGT

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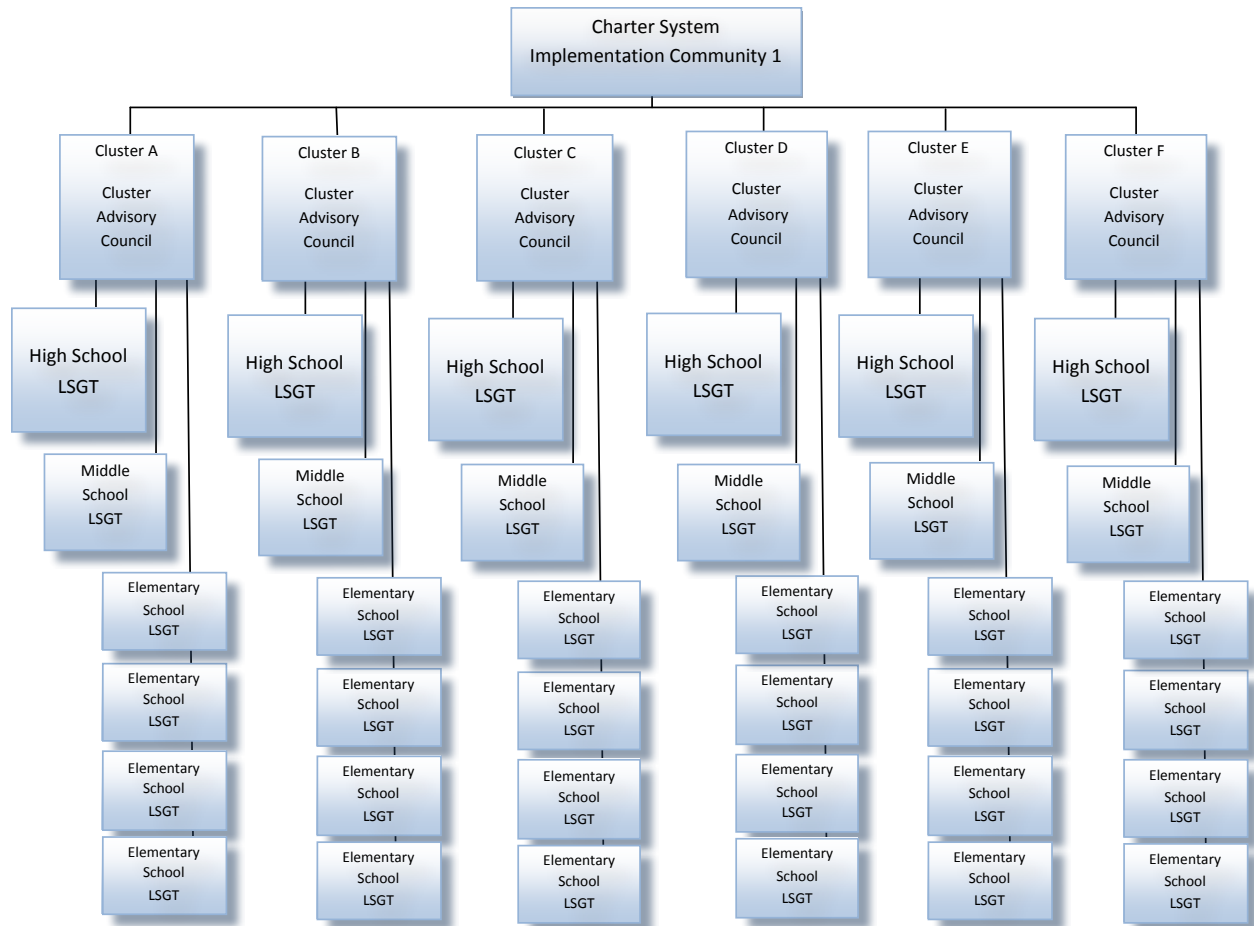
must vote to approve that proposal. CAC membership will consist of every principal (or designee) in the cluster as well as an LSGT member to be appointed by each LSGT as their CAC representative.

Due to the large number of schools to be included in the DeKalb charter system (120), the only responsible way to manage the implementation while ensuring fidelity to the charter system design and concepts is to stagger the implementation of schools over the next three years. DCSD will stagger this implementation by clusters to gain the benefits of cluster implementation discussed above. The cohorts, called Charter System Implementation Communities (CSICs), will be launched over the next three years with all participating schools integrated by the end of the three-year period. At least six of DCSD's eighteen clusters will be included each year. This staggered implementation has multiple benefits, including:

- Ensuring fidelity to the charter system models and practices;
- Allowing adequate support for success;
- Creating a learning community among and across participating clusters within each CSIC, of a size that the school and LSGT leaders can be convened to share practices and address common issues;
- Building capacity and support for communities to ensure the success of each LSGT.

The following image illustrates the CSIC design:

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The nationally recognized San Diego school district has focused on community-based education reform, with an emphasis on revitalizing neighborhood schools. Their approach is characterized by councils in each of the clusters similar to what is being proposed in DCSD. San Diego’s cluster councils are comprised of the schools’ principals, parents, and community representatives and serve as a forum for stakeholders to discuss common needs, concerns, and challenges. These councils, coupled with site-based management and decisions at the local school level, have proven effective in improving student achievement. DCSD believes that a similar approach to local school governance in DCSD can lead to greater student performance.

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Implementation of the CSICs will begin with at least six of the District's eighteen clusters, including one in each of the five regions. The selection of these initial clusters may be based upon the following criteria:

- Active Local School Advisory Councils:

Engaged stakeholders are critical to the success of any LSGT, CAC, or CSIC. Strong local school advisory councils and/or parents, teachers, and community members that demonstrate a readiness and eagerness for local school engagement would be a critical component for consideration.

- A preponderance of Proficient or Exemplary principals:

Leading in a charter system requires an instructional leader that works collaboratively with the school community. The school leaders in the first CSIC must be model leaders who will serve as exemplars for operating in a more autonomous school environment with distributed leadership. They must also be open to innovation and capable leaders of change.

- A mix of student demographics and achievement levels:

It is essential that the first CSIC serve as a model to solidify the implementation details of the charter system. They must also develop innovative practices that are applicable to all DCSD schools. Therefore, it is essential that the schools and clusters of the first CSIC are representative of all 100,000 of the District's students and families.

Additionally, DCSD's three non-cluster high schools will be included in this first CSIC. These are the DeKalb Early College Academy (DECA), Arabia Mountain High School, and DeKalb School of the Arts (DSA). These three high schools draw students from across the school district. Due to their focused curriculum, they have a high state of readiness for innovation and meet the criteria listed above.

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***Provide a timeline that shows all the major steps in this transition, including the timing of the formation of LSGTs, the training of principals and LSGTs, and anything you deem important in making this critical transition for decentralized/distributed decision-making.***

This chart is based upon the expectation that the DCSD Charter application is considered and approved for a July 1, 2016 start date.

| Phase 1: Charter System Implementation Community 1*  |                        |
|--|------------------------|
| Identify clusters to be included in CSIC 1.  | Spring 2016            |
| Provide an orientation to CSIC 1 principals on charter system expectations, design, and next steps.  | Spring 2016            |
| Create LSGT By-laws, including processes for election, code of conduct, meeting expectations, removal procedures, and processes for submitting decisions and recommendations to the superintendent for approval by the LBOE. | Late Spring 2016       |
| Design election and appointment processes.   | May 2016               |
| Hold meetings in CSIC 1 clusters and schools to discuss the charter system design, LSGT opportunities and expectations.  | May 2016               |
| Parents and teachers submit notice of intention to run for election, schools communicate candidate information to school community.  | August 2016            |
| LSGT elections.  | August 2016            |
| Appointment of LSGT members.   | August 2016            |
| Training of LSGT members.  | September 2016         |
| Convening of Cluster Advisory Council.   | September 2016         |
| School improvement and strategic planning  | October 2016           |
| Development of strategies and interventions aligned to school improvement goals and strategic plan   | November-January 2017  |
| Vetting, consideration, feedback, and approval of LSGT strategies and interventions  | November-February 2017 |
| Budget review and recommendations process  | February-March 2017    |
| Monitoring of annual school improvement goals and LSGT self assessment   | March-May 2017         |
| Updating School Improvement Goals, Strategic Plan, and Title I planning  | Summer 2017            |

\* Note, this process will repeat on the same timeframe for CSIC 2 beginning in early Spring 2017 and CSIC 3 for early Spring 2018.

***Include information about the steps that have already occurred or will occur to inform all stakeholders of the new governance structure.***

The District has presented the contents of the DCSD application, including proposed governance structures, with the Flexibility Advisory Committee (comprised of District leadership, staff, principals, teachers, parents, business partners, higher education partners, and community members) and with each region of the District through several rounds of Community Engagement Sessions. Stakeholders were specifically requested to provide feedback on the structure of LSGTs and CACs to ensure that the

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structures would be effective and representative of the DCSD community at large. This input has been critical to the overall design and function of the LSGTs. In the most recent round of Community Engagement Sessions, requests were made to adjust the elections and appointments structure. These changes were made, and the structure now reflects DCSD most recent stakeholder input.

Once the DCSD Board approves the District’s charter system application and it is submitted to the Georgia Department of Education, the District will immediately begin the process of establishing a structure at the central office to support LSGTs. To that end, both internal and external stakeholders will be invited to participate in designing that structure to ensure that the final design best supports the work ahead.

***11. Address the formation of the local School Governing Teams, including how members are selected, the terms of members, and how and why members may be removed.***

Each LSGT will consist of ten members except at the high schools, which will have eleven with the inclusion of a non-voting student member; however, each LSGT will have nine voting members. All members will serve two-year terms, except for the first year in each phase when such terms will be staggered. The high school student will serve a one-year term. The following chart shows each type of member and the selection method.

| <b>Member Type</b>                                 | <b>Selection Method</b>   |
|--|---|
| Principal  | Ex Officio member.  |
| Parent/Guardian 1                                  | Elected by parents.   |
| Parent/Guardian 2                                  | Elected by parents.   |
| Parent/Guardian 3                                  | Elected by parents  |
| Swing Seat (Parent, Business, or Community Member) | Appointment by principal to ensure diversity of the LSGT reflects the school population and all necessary skill sets are present on the LSGT  |
| Teacher 1  | Elected by the staff of the school.   |
| Teacher 2  | Elected by the staff of the school.   |
| Staff or faculty member                            | Nominated by the principal for appointment by the LSGT.   |
| 1 Business representative (non parent)             | Nominated by the principal for appointment by the LSGT. District partnerships with civic and business organizations such as Rotary, Chamber of Commerce, Leadership DeKalb, Kiwanis, 100 Black Men, and other organizations will be utilized to create a pool of business representatives interested in serving on LSGTs throughout the county. |
| 1 Community member                                 | Nominated by the principal for appointment by the LSGT. In order to build   |



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|   |  |
|---|--|
| (non parent)                                | support for schools within their community this individual should be a non-parent representative.  |
| 1 student (at high school only, non-voting) | Nominated by the principal for appointment by the LSGT in order to ensure the diversity of the LSGT is representative of the school community. |

Due to the diversity of DCSD, it is essential for effective and representative local school governance that all families in the school community are represented. Some members of the DCSD community are not as comfortable standing for election and engaging in public as others. The potential lack of diversity and representation of the school population on the LSGT was a frequent concern during input sessions on the DeKalb Charter System design. In order to ensure that all students and their interests are represented in the deliberations and decisions of the LSGT, the principal will appoint one parent/guardian, community member, or business representative to balance the diversity of representation on the LSGT after elections have occurred. This is intended to ensure that all groups have a voice in school governance, including those with fewer resources, smaller social networks, language barriers, or cultural differences. At the high school level the student representative, who is non-voting, will also be appointed to balance the diversity of representation and bring a needed student perspective to the work of the LSGT. This structure was formulated through the work of the Flexibility Advisory Committee and presented to the public through community engagement sessions for feedback and refinement.

The first election for each cohort will take place in August of that CSIC’s implementation year. Elections will be conducted by secret ballot at the school-site, and if resources allow, virtually as well. Terms will be staggered to two- and three-year terms (excluding the high school student and Principal) in order to ensure that DCSD has as smooth of a transition to charter system status as possible. Thereafter, elections and appointments will be held in March-April so that new members can be trained and participate in the strategic planning and school improvement process that will occur over the summer months after the initial roll-out. Should a vacancy occur prior to the expiration of a member’s term, the vacancy will be filled by an individual of the same designation (Parent, Staff, Community member, etc.) that is nominated by the principal and ratified by the remaining LSGT members with a 2/3 vote.

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Voting LSGT members may be considered for removal for violating the LSGT Code of Conduct, the Code of Ethics, or the Conflict of Interest Policy. If there is concern that a LSGT member may be in violation of his or her duties as prescribed by the abovementioned documents, then that concern should be presented to the LSGT Chair, Principal, and District Liaison for consideration, consultation, and potentially an investigation into the veracity of the complaint. If a LSGT member is found to have violated the Code of Conduct, Code of Ethics, or Conflict of Interest Policy and removal is warranted, the LSGT chair will present the removal as a motion under Robert's Rules of Order. Removal of a voting LSGT member will require 2/3 vote of the entire voting LSGT, not just those present at the meeting. Removal of the student member due to violation of the codes shall be made subject to the LSGT Chair and Principal's joint determination.

***12. Use the Charter System Application – Local School Governance Matrix to show how the Superintendent will share with Local School Governance Teams his/her authority to develop recommendations to the Board of Education.***

DCSD will distribute meaningful decision-making authority to its LSGTs by maximizing school-level governance in accordance with state law, State Board Rule, and the charter system contract, should DCSD be approved. In addition to the work of the LSGT which is described in greater detail below, LSGTs will have the ability to develop their own school-specific strategies and interventions that align to the LSGT school improvement and strategic plan through the Innovation Proposal process.

The Innovation Proposal process was developed as a way to responsibly monitor the use of charter system flexibility by DCSD schools and Central Office. Use of the flexibility must be geared towards improving student achievement and assessed for any unintended consequences that may expose students, parents, teachers, DCSD employees, or the District itself to harm. The Innovation Proposal process ensures that every strategy is based on the paramount objective of increasing student achievement, and that each proposal is carefully vetted against the DeKalb Flexibility Risk Criteria. These criteria were reviewed with principals, teachers, and students; in community input sessions held in

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each of the five regions; and with senior leadership. All parties found these criteria to be necessary and reasonable checks on Innovation Proposals to ensure safety and responsible use of flexibility.

| DeKalb Flexibility Risk Criteria   |
|--|
| ✓ Maintains or increases results in CCRPI tested areas.  |
| ✓ Does not exclude or give preference to student or community groups.  |
| ✓ Ensures student safety.  |
| ✓ Does not impact surrounding schools (unless endorsed by Cluster Advisory Council).   |
| ✓ Does not increase district budget (except for innovations approved for use of charter system funds).                                 |
| ✓ Does not affect federal funding.   |
| ✓ Does not affect capital funding.   |
| ✓ Maintains economies of scale in district operations in such areas as nutrition, transportation, and contracting.                     |
| ✓ Does not conflict with standard operating procedures in contracting, employment processing, and compliance with federal regulations. |
| ✓ Does not involve legal action or incur liability for the school or district.   |
| ✓ Does not interfere with maintenance and upkeep of physical facilities.   |
| ✓ Complies with Georgia High School Association rules.   |

After the LSGT creates and approves school improvement goals within the framework of a school strategic plan, the LSGT will develop and vet their Innovation Proposals with their school community. Innovation proposals must be specifically geared to address the priorities identified within the school strategic plan, researched, and approved by the LSGT after receiving and considering public input from their school community. As discussed previously, if the Innovation Proposal affects the overall cluster, then it must be reviewed by the CAC and potentially voted on by each LSGT in the cluster prior to submission to the District for consideration against the DCSD Flexibility Risk Criteria. Provided that the Innovation Proposal does not trigger a concern against the Risk Criteria, the Innovation Proposal will be approved and implemented in the following school year.

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### **The Work of the LSGT**

LSGTs have the following duties each year of the charter system term:

- Develop and approve School Improvement Goals
- Incorporate School Improvement Goals into a LSGT-developed School Strategic Plan
- Participate in Title I planning efforts at the school level
- Conduct interviews of candidates when Principal vacancies occur and submit feedback and recommendations to the Regional Superintendent and Superintendent
- Review, consider, and approve budget recommendations and resource allocations
- Participate in annual governance and LSGT duty training
- Attend and participate in LSGT meetings pursuant to the LSGT By-Laws, Code of Conduct, Code of Ethics, and Conflict of Interest Policy
- Appoint LSGT representative to serve on CAC
- Utilize CAC representative to report LSGT feedback on cluster and DCSD-wide initiatives
- Develop Innovation Proposals aligned with the LSGT strategic plan

The LSGT will have a special working relationship with the Principal. While the Principal will maintain the day-to-day management and authority over operations at the school, the LSGT will serve as a strategic partner and both voice of and bridge to the community. The LSGT will be focused on strategy, governance, and school improvement first and foremost and will not serve as a stop on the chain of command on individual student and staff-level concerns, as many of these issues implicate federal and state confidentiality laws and are not appropriate for the LSGT to consider. The Principal will, in many ways, act as the Chief Executive Officer for the school, reporting to the LSGT on initiatives that pertain directly to the school's improvement goals and strategic priorities. The LSGT in turn will help the Principal to think strategically about the school's needs and how to address them, mobilizing community

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involvement and resources. Both will learn to collaborate together to increase school improvement and move their school forward.

The specific areas and levels of LSGT authority are outlined in the *Local School Governance Matrix, Attachment 2*.

**13. *Highlight the differences between the current local school advisory council structure and the new structure your new charter system will implement.***

The structure of the LSGT will be larger and more representative than the current Local School Governance Council (LSAC). Currently, LSACs have a minimum of seven members: four parents/guardians, two certified teachers, and the principal. All parent/guardians are elected to the LSAC. The LSGT structure allows for three elected parent/guardians and an appointment of a parent/guardian, community member, or business representative to ensure balanced representation, as described previously. The LSGT will also include a staff member who may not necessarily be a teacher so as to allow representation across each school's full faculty and necessary perspectives to address the goals in the School Improvement Plan. The LSGT will include a business partner and member of the community-at-large to ensure the necessary skill set for sound decision-making and to build commitment and support for the school within the community. This external stakeholder involvement is also necessary to build trust within the broader community through inclusive governance that allows members of the community who do not have children in public school to be represented.

Additionally, the authority of the LSGT will extend beyond that of the LSAC. The LSAC currently makes recommendations to increase student achievement and to create a school improvement plan. Local School Advisory Councils represent the interests of that school council to the principal, who in turn conveys the information to the Regional Superintendents, Superintendent, and if necessary, the Board of Education. The LSAC does not approve School Improvement Plans or use of resources, nor do they inform the design of the budget or new staff positions. They do not approve school innovations or

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other practices such as school-wide discipline and parent engagement. The LSGT will have meaningful authority that extends beyond the current practice of providing input to the principal by the LSAC.

Lastly, DCSD will devote additional effort to building capacity in its LSGTs and providing support mechanisms to ensure that they are highly effective, informed, and functional agents for positive change in their schools. Extensive training and outreach to underrepresented individuals in the school and greater community will build stronger and more inclusive LSGTs, and with the additional authority, these LSGTs will have a meaningful voice in the future of their schools and DCSD as a whole. Furthermore, the addition of CACs will help to build strong cluster communities with aligned strategic goals, which will become increasingly important as DCSD offers more STEM, IB programming, joint enrollment, and college/career pathways.

***14. Describe the governance training to be provided to principals and members of the Local School Governing Teams in order to build the capacity needed to make decisions in the areas included in the spreadsheet.***

LSGTs will be required to participate in annual training sessions that will be initially organized by each CSIC and supported by DCSD. The initial LSGT training will cover basics of school governance including open meetings and open records laws, Roberts Rules of Order, and effective meeting practices. Additionally, the training will cover specifics of the DCSD LSGT By-laws, including the Conflict of Interest Policy, Code of Conduct, and Code of Ethics. LSGTs will receive the fundamentals of data review and interpretation so they can build strong school improvement goals that are based on student performance trends at the school. They will also review the Innovation Proposal process, the DeKalb Flexibility Risk Criteria, the School Improvement Plan process, and an overview of the budgeting process. Time will be built into the training to allow LSGT members to meet fellow members in their clusters, practice new skills, dialogue about the appropriate implementation of LSGT authority, and participate in the design of the Cluster Advisory Council processes.

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In addition to the initial LSGT training, LSGTs will receive shorter trainings throughout the year specific to the work cycle. For example, prior to the strategic planning process, LSGTs will receive information about how to create an effective strategic plan. This blend of general and specific trainings will ensure that LSGT members are familiar with the high-level overview of their role immediately upon election while receiving shorter, in depth trainings at critical times throughout the year when that training becomes relevant to the immediate work at hand. *Please see Exhibit 6 for more information.*

**15. Provide the name of the provider(s) of LSGT training that you are considering approaching, if known.**

DCSD will utilize its in-house talent to develop trainings for LSGTs as much as possible. If additional expertise is necessary, DCSD will utilize its District procurement processes to secure a School Governing Team training provider.

**16. Provide the name and contact information of an employee of the charter system that will facilitate communications between the Department and the chairpersons of the Local School Governing Teams in your charter system.**

Trenton Arnold, Regional Superintendent, 678 676-0671.

**17. Explain how your system will transition its central office from a Compliance Culture (where success is measured by simply achieving requirements) to an Achievement Culture (where success is measured by achieving high expectations).**

The District has already begun this transition by engaging the senior leadership in lengthy and meaningful conversations about the benefits and boundaries of local school governance. There is a genuine commitment to allowing local school flexibility as a means of best serving the needs of our students. The senior leadership embraces the DeKalb Flexibility Risk Criteria as setting the boundaries for local school autonomy and is committed to allowing flexibility within these criteria. During the course of the charter system design, the senior leadership participated in meaningful discussion of the

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criteria and levels of local school autonomy on six separate occasions. Additionally, these criteria have been reviewed with all school principals, teachers, and the broader community.

Through the District's recent AdvancED reviews and strategic planning processes, the DeKalb County School District has established a strong focus on student achievement results as the basis for management and decision-making. Clear lines of authority have been established, and strong Regional Superintendent offices have been created to support principals and communities in obtaining greater student performance results. The challenges identified within this application have been previously identified and are those that the District has been continuously addressing. The District is proud to acknowledge its growth and achievement so far and knows that with additional support and buy-in from its community, it can continue to improve student achievement through a focus on increased accountability.

Furthermore, with the arrival of Dr. Green and the implementation of the DCSD 2014-2019 Strategic Plan, DCSD has created specific, aggressive annual goals for its own performance that reflect its new emphasis on high expectations, accountability, and a refusal to settle for less than what's best for DCSD students. The District's commitment to continuous improvement planning at the school level is a prime example of how DCSD has already begun its shift from compliance to achievement. Previously, schools created these plans as a requirement. Once developed, there was no accountability for schools to actually implement these plans, and the plans themselves were often shelved and forgotten. Now, DCSD provides in depth training to schools on how to create an effective plan and subsequently implement that plan, monitoring it closely not for compliance purposes but to ensure that schools follow through on their selected strategies to raise student achievement. If identified strategies within these plans are unsuccessful, schools are encouraged to revise their plans and move on, but the focus remains on using these plans as tools for achievement, not merely proof that plans were made. This change indicates the shift within DCSD that has already begun, that of placing support for DCSD schools as a top priority rather than checking off the boxes.

DCSD, its leadership, staff, educators, parents, and community members have chosen the charter



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system model because it provides a framework for community engagement and collaboration that DCSD requires in order to meet its high expectations for itself and its students. Without rebuilding the trust and engagement of the DCSD community, DCSD will continue to struggle because the needs our students present cannot be addressed in the length of a single school day. It will take more. The kind of change DCSD needs in order to provide the best educational opportunities for *all* of its students will require effort and teamwork among its own diverse community. It will require late nights, long meetings, and early Saturday mornings, heated discussions, research, and differences of opinion. It will require that schools come together and place the interests of the students not at the table first, and it will require a Central Office that supports its schools and pushes them to new heights. The charter system model provides a certain amount of freedom and flexibility from compliance-based thinking, and DCSD and its community will capitalize on this flexibility to improve the District holistically and at each and every school, using achievement as the metric for success and the guiding principle for every decision.