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AdvancED Sees ‘Recognizable Progress’ in DeKalb Schools’ Efforts To Meet SACS Accreditation Guidelines

A new report from AdvancED finds that the DeKalb County School District has made “recognizable progress” in creating the foundations to address the issues raised by SACS when the district was placed on probation late last year. At that time, AdvancED noted that there were 11 “required actions” the administration and board must take in order to regain unconditional accreditation. The most recent monitoring report shows the district is making considerable advances in all areas.

“We are encouraged that AdvancED has taken note of the hard work we’re doing,” said Interim Superintendent Michael Thurmond. “The administration and the board are working to ensure that we meet the 11 required actions of SACS and that we regain full and unconditional accreditation. Our No. 1 objective is to get this school system on a solid and stable footing with our accreditors – but also with our parents, taxpayers and citizens by delivering educational excellence to our schoolchildren. We are heartened to know that SACS has acknowledged our progress.”

An AdvancED monitoring team visited the school district May 15-17, and conducted extensive interviews with internal and external stakeholders. Their findings:

- Since the arrival of Mr. Thurmond in February 2013, the district has re-established a planning team to develop and implement a strategic plan to guide the direction of the system. Mr.

Thurmond “was ever-present throughout the visit and displayed a strong sense of pride and hope for the district throughout the monitoring activities,” the report states. “In stark contrast to the October 2012 Special Review Team visit, the climate during the Monitoring Visit interviews was positive, open and collegial.”

- Stakeholders are encouraged by the steady progress of the new board and administration, and “staff at all levels expressed a renewed sense of hope and optimism for the district based upon the actions of the new Board and interim Superintendent.”
- The board and superintendent are working together to move the system forward by providing opportunities for academic excellence for students, and a structure now exists to ensure that board members are honoring the chain of command when communicating with stakeholders. “The vast majority of staff described a new work culture and environment in which they felt empowered to perform the jobs for which they were hired without the micromanagement and interference of board members,” the report states.
- AdvancED also took note of the district budgetary progress. “The sudden change in the financial forecast resulted from the availability of unexpected fiscal resources to support the district’s drastic need to improve academic and instructional programs,” according to the report.

AdvancED provided a cautionary note due to the short-term appointments to the board and superintendency, as well as “the possibility of judicial intervention.” But Board Chairman Melvin Johnson said the district will be able to demonstrate that its progress is sustainable. “We are institutionalizing the progress we’re making so there will be no backsliding,” said Dr. Johnson. “Our objective is not short-term progress, but progress that is sustainable and has the effect of stabilizing the system while shifting the focus to educational excellence and student achievement.”

“We’re making progress,” said interim Superintendent Thurmond, “and it is progress that will last.”

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