

SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE



Board of Education Meeting

December 14, 2009

*The **I Care** character trait of the month for December is Trustworthy at the elementary school level, Self-Knowing at the middle school level, and Self-Knowledge at the high school level.*

Race to the Top

Race to the Top is a \$4B Federal fund that will provide competitive grants to States that accomplish the following:

a. create the conditions necessary for comprehensive education innovation and reform
b. implement ambitious plans in 4 education reform areas described in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA):

- *Standards and assessment

- *Data systems to support instruction

- *Great teachers and leaders

- *Turning around low achieving schools

c. achieve significant improvement in student outcomes, including making substantial gains in student achievement, closing achievement gaps, improving high school graduation rates, and ensuring that students are prepared for success in college and careers

In order for school systems to participate in the state's plan, the local Board of Education must sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU), which you will be asked to sign within the next few weeks. Your consideration is appreciated.

Strive 2 Thrive

A community initiative on poverty was introduced on Friday, December 11th by Co-Chairs Cynthia George and Dr. John Culbreath to approximately 200 community members. (Board Chairman Maschke is a member of the steering committee.)

Move the Mountain is an innovative model to end poverty. Several members of the Board of Education and Dougherty County School System administration attended. More information will be forthcoming.

District Accreditation Progress Report (SACS-CASI)

In 2007, the Dougherty County School System had its Quality Assurance Review visit for District Accreditation. In December 2009, the Accreditation Progress Report was scheduled for submission. The purpose of the report is to share the district's progress made toward addressing the recommendations of the QAR team.

The following is the Executive Summary:

The Dougherty County School System continues to utilize a system's approach to improve student performance results and organizational effectiveness. For several years prior to embarking on the district accreditation process, the school system's focus was continuous improvement in every school and department. The district's accreditation process provided a comprehensive framework for continually improving student achievement and district performance.

As a result of the self study, strengths as well as areas that needed to be strengthened were identified. As a result of the Quality Assurance Review Team visit, strengths were validated and recommendations were made in key areas. Since 2007, those recommendations have been key in the system's continuous improvement efforts. However, because of the system's focus on district improvement for many years, the impact on the system's overall effectiveness should be considered in the context of Dougherty County School System's journey to reach higher ground in every school and department in the district.

Since 2001-02, the Dougherty County School System has made the following progress:

- The Graduation Rate increased from 50.1% in 2002 to 75.4% in 2009 after summer school graduation.
- 72% of 11th graders passed all four GHSGT's on the first attempt in 2009.
- The Dropout Rate in grades 9-12 decreased from 7.5% in 2002 to 3.1% in 2009.
- In 2009, there was only 1 middle school dropout. (In 2002, there were 35 dropouts. These children turned 16 in the middle school and could legally drop out of school.)
- In 2009, 93.81% of our students had 15 or fewer absences.
- We have had 4 National Blue Ribbon Schools. Alice Coachman was named 2009 National Blue Ribbon School.
- Two of our schools were twice named Georgia Schools of Excellence.
- Lincoln Elementary Magnet School has been named a 2009 Georgia School of Excellence.
- Southside Middle National Title I Distinguished School in 2008. (1 of only 2 in the State of Georgia.)
- Thirteen schools are Title I Distinguished Schools, having made AYP three or more consecutive years.
- Three Non-Title I Schools have made AYP for 7 years.
- Sixteen schools total are Distinguished Schools.
- We had 5 out of Georgia's 44 No Excuse Schools named by the Georgia Public Policy Foundation in 2009.
- After completing our first year, Albany Early College achieved a high success rate on all content areas of the Criterion Referenced Competency Tests.
- Choice opportunities for children and parents have been increased through increased magnet program offerings.
- During the first round of AYP this year, 20 of 26 schools were successful. During the second round, three of the six schools that were not successful made AYP.

- 89% of the schools (23 of 26 schools) in the Dougherty County School System made AYP in 2009.

Operationally, the Dougherty County School System has continued to make great gains. As 1 of only 8 school systems in the nation as ISO (International Organization for Standardization) Certified, the operational staff continue to ensure standardized procedures and continuous improvement in each department.

- In Transportation to maximize instructional time by ensuring 97% on time arrivals.
- In Child Nutrition to ensure that our children are provided nutritious meals and that the program operates debt free.
- In Facilities to ensure efficient maintenance system wide as well as oversight in major renovations of 7 sites and the building of 6 new schools.
- In Management Information Systems to ensure continued improvement in data collection and student records.
- In Finance to ensure fiscal responsibility by reducing audit findings (financial findings only) from 7 in FY2002 to 1 in FY2008.
- In Supply Services to ensure accountability of approximately \$35M in assets by reducing asset discrepancies totaling \$492,636 in 2002 to \$28,000 in 2009.
- In Technology to ensure a student-to-computer ratio that ranks the DCSS as 7th in the state.

The challenges that still lie ahead include the following:

*The dropout rate and the graduation rate will remain challenges. Further complicating the problem, the compulsory attendance law in Georgia allows students to drop out of school at the age of 16. Regardless, the Dougherty County School System will continue to provide the support for students to be successful academically, remain in school, and graduate from high school through the implementation of the early warning system. This warning system will target students who are at risk of dropping out and not completing the requirements for graduation at early stages in their educational career. Additionally, the Dougherty County School System will continue to ensure the effectiveness of the ninth grade academy in each high school; the elementary, middle, and high school alternative education programs; and credit recovery opportunities at all levels.

*Academic achievement is a challenge when focusing on exceeding standards for children as opposed to meeting standards only. Additionally, ensuring that students with disabilities continue to make progress academically is a challenge. In order to increase the percentage of students exceeding standards as well as the percentage of students with disabilities meeting standards, the system will continue to emphasize the following:

1. Team based school improvement
2. Curriculum Academic Team visits in each school
3. Utilization of benchmark data

4. Differentiated instruction in each class
5. Integration of technology in the classroom
6. Implementation of appropriate response to intervention
7. Support of ninth grade academics
8. Inclusion model professional development
9. Highly qualified teachers in every classroom

*Although parental support has increased in recent years, parent involvement remains a challenge. In a district with 80% poverty, the challenges facing children are phenomenal and the district must work diligently to have the collaboration of the parents. Initiatives such as I Care, iParent, and early release days for parent conferences will be priorities for involving parents.

* As education funding continues to decrease at the state and local level, funding a quality education for all children has become increasingly more challenging. However, the Dougherty County School System makes every effort to reduce expenditures by a reduction in operational spending that does not impact classroom instruction.

Finally, the three pillars of accreditation: high standards, continuous improvement, and quality assurance to the entire district to ensure alignment and support between and among the district and each school are fully integrated into the improvement process in the Dougherty County School System. Therefore, the emphasis placed on continuous improvement in student achievement and district performance will remain a high priority.