FCS District News

Fulton County Schools
Where Students Come First

May 7, 2021

Dear KIPP Parents:

Recently there has been information shared about the KIPP South Fulton Academy and the Fulton County School District's agreement about opening new grades in K-5 which did not present a complete picture of the situation. In transparency, we want parents to understand all the facts in the decision-making process for your school and students.

First, we want you to know we are dedicated to serving all students who call Fulton County home, whether they are in a charter school or a traditional school.

Second, Fulton County Schools has not changed the funding formula allocated to local charter schools.

Third, the decision for KIPP to expand into lower grades at its South Fulton Academy is complex, therefore, we wanted to share some additional background with you.

KIPP Metro Atlanta schools submitted an amendment that FCS approved in September 2020. The amendment evidenced KIPP's desire to expand the grades served by KIPP South Fulton Academy to include elementary school grades beginning with the 2021-2022 school year and increase the total number of students accordingly. The plan to expand grades did not include a provision for adding an additional campus, nor did it include receiving cost center funding as a separate school. FCS funds its charter schools in the manner required by law, as set forth in the charter contract, and FCS will continue to fund KIPP in this manner for each enrolled student in August 2021 and beyond. This amendment sat for the two-month Board review period before action was taken.

Both FCS and the State Board of Education moved forward with the amendment on the basis that they were adding grade levels to an existing school, not opening a separate school (see below).

18. **PFEA – Charter Amendment – KIPP South Fulton Academy**. The State Board of Education approved a charter contract amendment for KIPP South Fulton Academy, a grades 5-8 start-up charter school approved by the Fulton County Schools Board of Education, to add Kindergarten and 1st grade in the SY 21-22 and an additional grade each year until they are a K-8 school.

Our team and the FCS finance department reviewed the amendment and executive summary voted on by the Board, which again, only concerned the addition of grade levels, not a separate school site. As such, cost center funding was not approved for the additional grade levels. KIPP determined that adding additional grade levels to its South Fulton Academy without receiving this cost center funding, which is only allocated for new and separate schools, would create a financial deficit for KIPP to carry in the coming years, totaling almost $1.8 million dollars. Rather than assuming that financial risk, the KIPP Board chose to delay the arrival of their kindergarten class until next school year to allow for additional budget planning.

It should also be noted that over the last 5 years, Fulton County Schools has seen an overall decline in student enrollment following a national trend, which was exacerbated by the COVID pandemic. The decline has been most pronounced in early grades, particularly kindergarten. In fact, FCS will see a loss

of approximately $20 million in state funds in the upcoming fiscal year due to our decline in enrollment. Some charter schools may not be seeing the same trend in enrollment, but the impact to all schools in our area in undeniable. In these exceptional times, FCS cannot divert additional funding to KIPP outside FCS's established funding protocols and must continue funding KIPP according to state law and the charter contract.

Please know FCS recognizes KIPP South Fulton Academy as a viable and high-performing charter school. We look forward to continuing our partnership with KIPP and supporting their efforts to expand their offering to the primary grades K-4.

If you have any questions, you can contact us at 470-254-6800 or charterschools@fultonschools.org.

Thank you!

Fulton County Schools
Where Students Come First