

**Forward Together: Leading
with Clarity, Consistency,
and Coherence**

Transition Plan

**Dr. Norman C. Sauce III
Interim Superintendent
of Schools**



Dear DCSD Staff, Families, and Community Members,

As a longtime teacher, principal, and district leader, I step into the role of Interim Superintendent with both humility and deep commitment. I know firsthand what our classrooms mean to our children, our families, and our community. I also know the extraordinary educators who show up for them every day.

I believe it's time for us to build on our strengths and deepen our commitment to great teaching, joyful learning, and the relationships that help every child reach their full potential. So much of a child's success in life begins in our classrooms. When students feel safe, supported, challenged, and known, they grow in ways that change their life's trajectory.

Over the next year, my focus will be grounded in the lens I know best: teaching and learning. My job is to ensure that teachers have the tools, conditions, and support they need to teach well, that students have the stability and opportunities they deserve, and that families feel heard, welcomed, and valued.

We will put renewed energy into:

- Strengthening instruction in every classroom.
- Improving mental health and wellness supports so students can learn and thrive.
- Building consistency and coherence across schools so children in every neighborhood have access to excellent learning.
- Restoring trust through transparency, responsiveness, and meaningful engagement with families.
- Creating more opportunities for students to pursue their interests, develop their talents, and prepare for their futures.

Our community is rich in diversity, talent, and devotion to kids. I have seen it as a teacher. I have seen it as a school leader. I recognize that recent challenges have left some families feeling uncertain. My commitment is to lead with steadiness, clarity, and transparency so we can restore confidence together. DeKalb's true identity is rooted in its people. In our passion, our perseverance, and our belief in our children. That is what defines us. And together, we will move this district forward in a way that honors our children and strengthens our community.

As we deepen our focus on great instruction, student well-being, and stronger school communities, we will also continue important work on the Student Assignment Project. This effort is about making sure every student learns in a school that is safe, well-resourced, and designed for our changing needs.

Thank you for your trust, your partnership, and your belief in what is possible for DeKalb County Schools. I invite you to review my Interim Superintendent of Schools Transition Plan, Forward Together: Leading with Clarity, Consistency, and Coherence – through Relationships, Receptiveness, and Responsiveness.

With respect and gratitude,



Dr. Norman C. Sauce III,
Interim Superintendent of Schools

Forward Together: Leading with Clarity, Consistency, and Coherence Transition Plan

DeKalb County School District 2024-2029 Strategic Plan Goal Areas:

- Student Academic Success with Equity and Access
- School, Family, and Community Engagement Staff Effectiveness
- Recruit, Develop, and Retain Talent
- Culture and Climate
- Mental Health and Wellness
- Organizational Excellence

Vision

To prepare students for success as lifelong learners and responsible global citizens

Mission

To promote the academic, social, and emotional growth of each student by fostering a safe, supportive, and engaging learning environment

Our North Star

Every child deserves access to excellent teaching, safe schools, strong wellness supports, and opportunities to reach their full potential.

Forward Together

Leading with Clarity, Consistency, and Coherence, is grounded in three guiding principles.

- **Clarity** ensures that families, staff, and the Board understand the rationale behind decisions.
- **Consistency** ensures that schools operate with stable and predictable systems.
- **Coherence** ensures that departments collaborate effectively, aligning resources and supports across the district in service of student success and Strategic Plan goals. We will build coherence through strong relationships, active receptiveness, and timely responsiveness.

The 3Rs define how we build trust, learn from stakeholder voices, and respond with purpose.

- **Relationships:** We will build and sustain trust-based relationships with students, families, staff, and community partners as the foundation for collaboration and shared accountability.
- **Receptiveness:** We will listen intentionally to stakeholder voices and data, valuing diverse perspectives to inform learning and equitable decision-making.
- **Responsiveness:** We will act with purpose and urgency, translating insights into aligned decisions, strategic resource allocation, and effective actions.



Forward Together: Leading with Clarity, Consistency, and Coherence Transition Plan

To move Forward Together, I will immerse, experience, and leverage by focusing on:

Strategic Priorities and Initiatives

Our work this year will be guided by the district's Strategic Plan (2024–2029) and the commitment to prepare students for success as lifelong learners and responsible global citizens.

Strong Teaching and Learning

We will support schools by strengthening literacy and math instruction, providing teachers with coaching and professional development, ensuring classrooms have the necessary materials, and creating structures for meaningful collaboration. High-quality teaching remains the cornerstone of student success.

Student Mental Health and Wellness

Students learn best when they feel safe, supported, and challenged. We will expand access to school counselors, social workers, and mental health services, strengthen behavior supports and early interventions, and partner with families to address social-emotional needs and attendance challenges.

A District That Supports Schools

Schools should feel the district is a partner, not a barrier. This year, we will simplify processes, improve communication across departments, and align resources to Strategic Plan goals. By doing so, principals can focus their time on coaching teachers and supporting students.

Family and Community Engagement

Trust grows when families feel heard and included. We will create more parent engagement opportunities, strengthen multilingual communication, and cultivate relationships with civic, faith-based, philanthropic, and business partners. We will also collaborate with early childhood providers to support kindergarten readiness and long-term student success.

The Student Assignment Project (SAP)

As part of our ongoing Strategic Plan implementation, the SAP will continue to consider appropriate recommendations for each student to access a school that is safe, well-resourced, and aligned to their needs. This project will be continue to be guided by the principles of transparency, stakeholder engagement, and fair access- to strengthen our focus on efficient resourcing and long-term support for strong teaching, learning, and wellness.

Forward Together:

Building Trust and Pride. Our work is about healing, strengthening relationships and trust, and acting with transparency. By celebrating our diversity, aligning our work across the district, and keeping students at the center of every decision, we will create conditions for every child to reach their full potential.

Capital Improvement Projects

We commit to transparent, equitable, accessible, and strategically planned Capital Improvement project decision-making. We seek to communicate and to execute these projects with precision and accountability to deliver safe, modern, and effective learning environments aligned with District priorities.



Transition Plan Goals

1.

Facilitate a successful, efficient, and positively impactful transition into the Interim Superintendent role – while quickly forging and strengthening relationships with internal personnel, cross-Divisional and external partners.

2.

Assess, develop, and expand collaborative relationships with school-based personnel, key parent/family leaders/representatives, and key external partners – to learn their perspectives, experiences, understandings, and recommendations on our Division's services.

3.

Learn the assets, barriers, and untapped opportunities experienced by a broad cross-section of internal and external stakeholders that we serve and collaborate with – to inform our current and future decision-making.

4.

Forge cohesive and seamless collaboration, understanding, and workflow amongst and between the departments within the Division of Student Services – to actualize our collective efficacy and increased capacity of broad supports for students and families.

5.

Discern and develop the most conducive systems, modes, formats, and cadence of inter-Divisional, cross-Divisional, and external partner communication and collaboration – to multiply the radius and impact of our collective services, despite divergent contexts and conditions.

Interim Superintendent of Schools Cycle of Inquiry and Action Process:

Immersing

- We will conduct multiple community forums with internal and external stakeholders to discern their experiences, perspectives, and recommendations on our current and long terms success as a District.
- Approach the Interim Superintendent's Transition Plan actions through the lens of discernment of DCSD's Strategic Plan Goal Areas and framework, Divisions' cross-functional collaboration.
- Immersion within the Districts' various Strategic Plan Accountability Framework priorities, goals, action steps, progress, and timelines – to execute the Board of Education's expectations and commitments.
- Meet with the Board Members individually to understand their expectations, observations, open questions, concerns, commendations, understandings, and timelines on the current and future needs of the District.
- Participate in a facilitated workshop series with the Governance Team, in which we establish our common understandings on communication protocols, workflow delivery, policy development and adherence, team collaboration norms, and other critical decisions impacting team effectiveness.
- Review the organizational structure, duties and responsibilities, budgets, vacancy reports, and identified resources of the District.
- Review and disaggregate demographic and participation data for student subgroups recently and currently referred for and receiving various specialized services provided by our District.
- Immersion within the District's current systems and processes to identify, refer, assess, and qualify students as eligible for the services provided (i.e. Exceptional Education, English to Speakers of Other Languages, Early Learning and Pre-Kindergarten, Gifted Education).
- Review and familiarize myself with recent and historical cognitive and non-cognitive student outcomes data for students – at the subgroup and school levels – from across all District Areas and clusters.
- Research and review District policy, regulations, common practices, and institutional memory, which influence current practices and decision making across DeKalb County School District – especially those impacting the daily learning conditions for scholars.
- Immersion within the duties, responsibilities, workflow, project status, current assets and barriers for each Division within the District.

Interim Superintendent of Schools Cycle of Inquiry and Action Process (Continued):

Immersing (Continued)

- Survey key internal stakeholders to inform on their experiences and perspectives on the strengths, challenges, assets, and opportunities for the Division (teachers, paraprofessionals, schoolhouse leaders, parents, secondary students, district leaders),
- Conduct focus group discussions and community engagement events for internal and external stakeholders: including employee work groups, parents/families, community partners, civic, faith-based, business, and intergovernmental partners,
- Review and discern historical and current Capital Improvements portfolio, project status, future prioritization, planning processes, and execution fidelity.
- Engage local faith, business, philanthropic, civic, and governmental leaders to strengthen relationships, communication, and collaborative support for District priorities.

Experiencing

- Facilitate retreat and other culture building experiences for leaders and key personnel within the Senior Cabinet, to cultivate our team dynamics, collective understanding, and common purpose.
- Meet with each Division Chief and their key action officers to understand their duties, responsibilities, major projects and initiatives, successes, challenges, and needs.
- Establish and reinforce fruitful working relationships with critical school leadership associations within the State of Georgia, including Georgia School Boards Association, Georgia School Superintendents Association, Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement, and Georgia Association of Educational Leaders.
- Meet with key representatives from each Division to understand their experiences, observations, work flow, needs challenges, and assets.
- Seek out relationships with key external partners (existing and potential) to increase the capacity, reach, and breadth of our services for each student, including those with specialized needs.
- Schedule discussions with leaders of key local partnering entities: including faith based, civic, philanthropic, cultural, intergovernmental, and business related.
- Seek out relationships with local day care and pre school providers as a means to expand our network, reach, and access to families with future DeKalb County students (aged zero to five) to provide them with resources and discernment for Kindergarten readiness.
- Observe and assess classroom instruction and school-house conditions for our scholars throughout DeKalb County – via regular school visits. Maintain a cadence of at least 5 school visits per week – with visits equitably scheduled across Areas and Board Districts.
- Meet with the Chief of Schools, Chief Academic Officer, Chief of Wrap Around Services, Chief of Student Services, and Chief of Continuous Improvement to discern their Divisions' collaboration cadence and collective decision making in terms of direct educational and developmental resource distribution for student needs.
- Review the current plans and modes of direct services provided by each Division for students, families, and schools.
- Review feedback and responses from surveys, questionnaires, focus group and community gathering events to discern and analyze trends, patterns, and actionable takeaways in our District's internal and external stakeholders' perceptions and experiences with our successes, barriers, untapped opportunities, and recommendations. Utilize these outputs to inform and develop our District's immediate, intermediate, and long-term plans for calibration of our decisions, efforts, and resource allocations.
- Understand our internal and external stakeholders' knowledge, perceptions and experiences about current conditions affecting the execution of our District's efforts to actualize our Strategic Plan goal areas and objectives, via:
 - Division Chiefs, Area Superintendents, and Principal Advisory discussions (formal and informal).
 - Deep review and analysis of recent survey and questionnaire, responses germane to District's areas of strength, development, commendations, and recommendations.
 - Meet with focus groups of internal representatives (teachers, paraprofessionals, schoolhouse leaders, parents, secondary students, district personnel) to discern their perceptions, experiences, and recommendations for the services and impact of District.
 - Deep analysis and review of meeting notes with key focus group representatives – collaboration with Department of Research and Evaluation for efficient qualitative thematic analysis.
 - Asset mapping exercises for District's personnel and fiscal resources – identify surpluses and deficits – to inform our District's responsiveness, resource distribution, and plan adjustments.
 - Elevate professional relationships and discernment of the strengths, assets, needs, and challenges of various Divisions – to execute Forward Together plans.

Interim Superintendent of Schools Cycle of Inquiry and Action Process (Continued):

Leveraging

- Elevate professional relationships and discernment of the strengths, assets, needs, and challenges of various Divisions – to execute Forward Together plans.
- Leverage existing and emerging relationships with internal and external stakeholders to develop and expand partnerships with key stakeholders – to increase our District’s capacity and impact to address the needs of our students, families, and schools – faith-based, civic, philanthropic, cultural, business, pediatric providers, preschools and day cares.
- Collaboratively formulate plans for clarity, consistency, and coherence for the workflow and collaboration amongst and between the Divisions – to achieve our Strategic Plan goal areas and objections.
- In collaboration with Georgia Department of Education, and other Georgia-based District-support entities, assess and refine our intermediate and long-term plans and needed resources to build the professional capacity of our teachers and paraprofessionals to permeate science of reading structured literacy pedagogy across the District.
- Collectively develop and implement cross-divisional communication protocols amongst Division Chiefs – to achieve our District’s common goals, coalesce our common efforts, and align our efforts to advance our Strategic Plan.
- Collaboratively develop plans for increasing impact and efficacy of classroom instruction and conditions for students receiving our services – between the Divisions of Student Services, Schools and Leadership, and Curriculum and Instruction – professional development, impact checks, and refinement of teacher supports.
- In collaboration with the Board of Education, calibrate cross-Divisional efforts to revise current and future continuous improvement plans, adjust budgets, key performance indicators, and timelines based on Work Plan results, as needed.
- In collaboration with the Board of Education, collaborate across Divisions to synthesize and apply new learning from this Work Plan - for intermediate and long-term continuous improvement of DCSD’s practices which impact student achievement and student conditions- especially our students with the most specialized needs.
- Develop and implement plans to measure impact and leverage the District’s internal and external partnerships and new knowledge from this Work Plan to multiply the reach of our resources.
- Establish regular meeting cadence, purpose, and action planning with Division Chiefs and key action officers (one-on-one, Divisional leadership teams, whole Division teams).
- Report to the Board of Education on results of these events and experiences – in a manner and format conducive to their leadership needs and decision making.





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