DeKalb County Schools: Community Engagement Report

As a component of its strategic planning process, DeKalb County School District (DCSD), with the Georgia School Boards Association, conducted both an online survey and a series of eight community engagement meetings (one for each district and one for the business community) open to the DeKalb County community in the fall of 2018. This report summarizes the results of both data collection efforts across the entire district. The DCSD strategic planning team will use these results to inform the development of the strategic plan.

Survey respondents and community engagement meeting participants all answered the following four questions:

1. What are your observed strengths of DeKalb County School District?
2. What are your observed areas of challenges/weaknesses?
3. What opportunities do you see ahead for DCSD?
4. What threats do you see ahead?

For each of these four questions, survey respondents were asked to select their first and second choices from a set of possible answers or to specify a different response.

Eight hundred thirty-three DeKalb County community members participated in the online survey. The largest group (28.6%) reported that their household was zoned for District 4, with the second largest group zoned for District 1 (20.2%). **Table 1** shows the distribution of responses across districts.

Table 1. Survey Respondents' Zoned Districts

District	Number	Percentage
District 1	168	20.2%
District 2	81	9.7%
District 3	64	7.7%
District 4	238	28.6%
District 5	50	6.0%
District 6	41	4.9%
District 7	53	6.4%
Other	138	16.6%
Total	833	100.0%

Almost two thirds (64.6%) of survey respondents were parents of DCSD students. **Table 2** shows the respondents' relationships to DCSD.

Table 2. Survey Respondents' Relationship to DCSD [1]

Relationship to DCSD	Number	Percentage
Parent/Guardian	478	64.6%
DCSD Teacher	96	13.0%
Community Member	46	6.2%
DCSD Employee (no children in the district)	42	5.7%
DCSD Employee (with children in the district)	30	4.1%
Other, please specify or provide comments	20	2.7%
Student	15	2.0%
DCSD Administrator	11	1.5%
Business/Civic Leader	2	0.3%
Total	740	100.05

Six hundred seventy-one community members attended the community engagement meetings. In response to each of the four questions listed above, these participants generated a set of responses which were recorded and posted in the meeting. They voted for their top three choices on each question by placing stickers next to each choice. **Table 3** shows the number of participants in each of the eight meetings.

Table 3. Community Engagement Meeting Participation

Meeting	Number of participants
District 1	46
District 2	51
District 3	133
District 4	93
District 5	102
District 6	62
District 7	125
Business Community	59
Total	671

Question 1

What are your observed strengths of DeKalb County School District?

Survey respondents' first choices for this question were **school choice opportunities** (12.4%), **level of parental support in the district** (11.7%), and **level of focus on student achievement** (11.0%). When asked to choose a second choice, the most common response was **level of technology accessible**

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[1] Percentages do not add up to 100% because multiple responses were possible.

to students (11.4%), followed by the level of parent support in the district (9.3%) and the level of focus on student achievement (8.8%).

In response to this question, as their first choice, DCSD student respondents selected **level of extracurricular activities** available to students (33.3%); parents chose level of parental support in the district (13.9%) and school choice opportunities (13.6%). Employees selected level of focus on student achievement, and community and business members chose level of parental support in the district (20.6%). As their second choice, students (37.5%) selected school choice opportunities (37.5%); parents (10.5%), employees (15.9%), and community and business members (13.8%) chose level of technology accessible to students.

Community engagement meeting participants cast 1,136 votes on the strengths of DCSD. The most common response dealt with **technology**, with many responses mentioning Chromebooks. Additionally, 7.7% of votes were cast for responses involving **diversity**, praising the district for "cater[ing] to a diverse school district. Students voted for **extracurricular activities** (18.9%), while parents (12.3%) and community and business members (9.7%) voted for **diversity**. Employees voted for **technology** (15.5%) and **teacher salary and benefits** (14.6%).

Question 2

What are your observed areas of challenges/weaknesses?

Survey respondents chose **facilities available to students and staff** (14.0%), **level of quality instruction** (12.2%), and **policies to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers** (10.5%) as their first choices of challenges/weaknesses for DCSD. Second choice responses included **financial management of the district** (11.7%), policies to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers (10.2%), and **policies and organizational structure of the district** (9.7%).

As their first choice, DCSD student respondents selected **focus on providing students and staff a safe learning environment** (28.6%); parents selected facilities available to students and staff (17.7%); employees selected **curriculum currently in place** and policies to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers (both 14%), and community and business members selected financial management of the district, level of quality instruction, and policies to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers (all 15.6%). As their second choice, students (28.6%) and parents (13.4%) chose financial management of the district; employees chose level of parental support in the district (14.9%), and community and business members chose facilities available to students and

staff, policies and organizational structure of the district, and policies to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers (all 10%).

Community engagement meeting participants cast 1,786 votes on the challenges and weaknesses of DCSD. The most common response (10.2%) dealt with **facilities**, including mentions of leaky pipes and roofs and aging facilities. Additionally, 6.5% of votes were cast for responses involving **equity issues across the county**, referencing "two separate school systems within the district" and a north/south divide. Students (11.3%), parents (14.3%), and employees (15.0%) voted for facilities (18.9%), while community and business members (17.0%) voted for **teacher salary and benefits**.

Question 3

What opportunities do you see ahead for DCSD?

Almost half (47.9%) of all survey respondents chose **hiring/keeping quality teachers and staff** as their first choice of opportunities ahead for DCSD; the other top choices were **getting parents involved with DCSD** (11.0%) and **raising community support for DCSD** (10.5%). Second choice responses also included hiring/keeping quality staff (23.8%), **funding (state, federal)**, and getting parents involved with DCSD (both 18.8%).

As their first choice, almost half of DCSD student respondents (42.9%) selected funding (state, federal); parents (46.8%), employees (53.8%), and community and business members (41.9%) selected hiring/keeping quality teachers and staff. As their second choice, students again chose funding (state, federal) (42.9%); parents again chose hiring/keeping quality teachers and staff (24.6%); employees (23.8%) and community and business members (22.2%) chose **getting parents involved with DCSD**.

Community engagement meeting participants cast 1,343 votes on the opportunities of DCSD. The most common responses (9.5%) dealt with **career, technical, agricultural education (CTAE)**, including "job shadowing opportunities" and "more CTAE based academies," and with **partnerships with community or business organizations**, such as "collaboration with universities, government agencies, trade." Students (18.2%), voted for partnerships with community or business organizations; parents voted for **other community or business involvement** (8.6%) and partnerships with community or business organizations (8.4%); employees voted for career, technical, agricultural education (9.9%) and **STEM/STEAM** (9.1%), and community and business members also voted for other community or business involvement (37.7%).

Question 4

What threats do you see ahead for DCSD?

One quarter (25.3%) of survey respondents chose **effects of poverty on the community** as their first choice of threats ahead for DCSD; the other top choices were **political environment** (24.6%) and **funding (state, federal)** (16.3%). Second choice responses also included funding (state, federal) (25.4%), **constantly changing environment** (20.7%), and political environment (17.2%).

As their first choice, DCSD student respondents (71.4%) and employees (45.7%) selected effects of poverty on the community; parents (26.2%) and community and business members (25.8%) selected political environment. As their second choice, students (42.9%) and community members (25.0%) chose political environment (42.9%); parents (25.5%) and employees (29.1%) chose funding (state/federal).

Community engagement meeting participants cast 797 votes on the threats ahead for DCSD. The most common responses (11.8%) dealt with **teacher recruitment and retention**, including "losing teachers/shortage of teachers" and "understaffing" with **safety** (8.2%), such as "school violence/disruptions" and "points of entry (too many)." Students also voted for safety (5.5%) and teacher recruitment and retention (5.0%); parents (10.4%) and employees (17.4%) chose teacher recruitment and retention, and community and business members chose **overcrowding** (8.5%).

Conclusion

Across these four questions, several consistent themes emerged. First, DCSD community members see a wide variety of strengths in the district, including school choice opportunities, parental support, technology, and diversity. Likewise, they identify many areas of challenges or weaknesses, including facilities and instruction. Community members stressed the importance of recruiting and retaining teachers and see value in support from the larger DeKalb county community. They are concerned about the effect of poverty on and the political environment in DCSD.

Appendix 1:
Survey Results

What are your observed strengths of DeKalb County School District (DCSD)? Please choose your first choice.

Answer Choices	Student (n = 15)	Parent (n = 389)	Employee (n = 143)	Community/ Business (n = 34)	All (n = 574)
Communication practices being used	0.0%	7.2%	6.3%	2.9%	6.3%
Curriculum currently in place	0.0%	3.9%	5.6%	8.8%	4.7%
Dual Enrollment opportunities	22.2%	10.3%	4.9%	2.9%	8.9%
Facilities available to students and staff	0.0%	0.5%	0.7%	0.0%	0.5%
Financial management of the district	0.0%	0.5%	3.5%	0.0%	1.4%
Focus on providing students and staff a safe learning environment	0.0%	4.4%	6.3%	0.0%	4.5%
Level of extracurricular activities available to students	**33.3%**	6.9%	4.2%	14.7%	7.0%
Level of focus on student achievement	22.2%	9.5%	**14.0%**	8.8%	11.0%
Level of parental support in the district	0.0%	**13.9%**	5.6%	20.6%	11.7%
Level of quality instruction	0.0%	8.7%	6.3%	8.8%	8.2%
Level of support services available to students	11.1%	3.9%	9.1%	2.9%	5.4%
Level of technology accessible to students	11.1%	6.4%	11.2%	5.9%	7.7%
Methods used to assess student achievement	0.0%	2.6%	0.7%	0.0%	1.9%
Policies and organizational structure of the district	0.0%	1.0%	2.1%	0.0%	1.0%
Policies to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers	0.0%	1.5%	0.7%	0.0%	1.2%
School Choice opportunities	0.0%	13.6%	12.6%	5.9%	**12.4%**
Other	0.0%	5.1%	6.3%	**17.6%**	6.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

What are your observed strengths of DeKalb County School District (DCSD)? Please choose your second choice.

Answer Choices	Student (n = 8)	Parent (n = 371)	Employee (n = 138)	Community/ Business (n = 29)	All (n = 546)
Communication practices being used	0.0%	8.9%	7.2%	0.0%	8.1%
Curriculum currently in place	0.0%	4.9%	6.5%	0.0%	4.8%
Dual Enrollment opportunities	12.5%	8.4%	5.8%	6.9%	7.5%
Facilities available to students and staff	12.5%	1.1%	2.9%	6.9%	2.4%
Financial management of the district	0.0%	0.5%	1.4%	3.4%	0.9%
Focus on providing students and staff a safe learning environment	12.5%	6.2%	8.0%	3.4%	6.2%
Level of extracurricular activities available to students	0.0%	5.4%	1.4%	6.9%	4.4%
Level of focus on student achievement	0.0%	8.6%	9.4%	6.9%	8.8%
Level of parental support in the district	0.0%	**11.1%**	2.9%	6.9%	9.3%
Level of quality instruction	0.0%	8.4%	6.5%	10.3%	7.7%
Level of support services available to students	12.5%	4.0%	9.4%	0.0%	4.9%
Level of technology accessible to students	12.5%	10.5%	**15.9%**	13.8%	**11.4%**
Methods used to assess student achievement	0.0%	3.0%	5.1%	0.0%	2.9%
Policies and organizational structure of the district	0.0%	1.1%	3.6%	3.4%	2.4%
Policies to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers	0.0%	2.2%	0.0%	3.4%	1.6%
School Choice opportunities	**37.5%**	8.4%	6.5%	3.4%	7.7%
Other	0.0%	7.5%	7.2%	**24.1%**	9.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

What are your observed areas of challenges/weaknesses? Please choose your first choice.

Answer Choices	Student (n = 7)	Parent (n = 367)	Employee (n = 136)	Community/ Business (n = 32)	All (n = 541)
Communication practices being used	0.0%	1.9%	3.7%	0.0%	2.2%
Curriculum currently in place	0.0%	5.2%	**14.0%**	3.1%	7.0%
Dual Enrollment opportunities	14.3%	1.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%
Facilities available to students and staff	0.0%	17.7%	7.4%	3.1%	**14.0%**
Financial management of the district	0.0%	10.1%	3.7%	**15.6%**	8.5%
Focus on providing students and staff a safe learning environment	**28.6%**	2.5%	2.2%	0.0%	2.6%
Level of extracurricular activities available to students	0.0%	1.4%	1.5%	0.0%	1.1%
Level of focus on student achievement	0.0%	6.8%	4.4%	9.4%	6.3%
Level of parental support in the district	14.3%	1.9%	6.6%	9.4%	4.3%
Level of quality instruction	14.3%	**15.0%**	5.1%	**15.6%**	12.2%
Level of support services available to students	14.3%	3.3%	6.6%	6.3%	4.8%
Level of technology accessible to students	0.0%	1.6%	2.2%	0.0%	1.8%
Methods used to assess student achievement	0.0%	6.5%	9.6%	6.3%	7.0%
Policies and organizational structure of the district	0.0%	7.6%	11.0%	3.1%	8.1%
Policies to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers	0.0%	9.8%	**14.0%**	**15.6%**	10.5%
School Choice opportunities	14.3%	3.8%	3.7%	6.3%	3.9%
Other	0.0%	3.8%	4.4%	6.3%	4.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

What are your observed areas of challenges/weaknesses? Please choose your second choice.

Answer Choices	Student (n = 7)	Parent (n = 358)	Employee (n = 134)	Community/ Business (n = 30)	All (n = 528)
Communication practices being used	14.3%	3.4%	6.7%	3.3%	4.5%
Curriculum currently in place	0.0%	1.4%	9.7%	6.7%	3.6%
Dual Enrollment opportunities	0.0%	1.7%	0.7%	0.0%	1.3%
Facilities available to students and staff	0.0%	8.7%	9.7%	10.0%	8.3%
Financial management of the district	**28.6%**	**13.4%**	6.7%	**13.3%**	**11.7%**
Focus on providing students and staff a safe learning environment	0.0%	4.5%	5.2%	6.7%	4.5%
Level of extracurricular activities available to students	14.3%	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.5%
Level of focus on student achievement	28.6%	5.9%	2.2%	0.0%	4.7%
Level of parental support in the district	0.0%	4.2%	**14.9%**	3.3%	7.4%
Level of quality instruction	14.3%	7.5%	6.7%	6.7%	6.8%
Level of support services available to students	0.0%	8.7%	3.0%	6.7%	7.2%
Level of technology accessible to students	0.0%	3.1%	3.7%	3.3%	3.2%
Methods used to assess student achievement	0.0%	7.8%	10.4%	0.0%	7.8%
Policies and organizational structure of the district	0.0%	10.1%	9.7%	10.0%	9.7%
Policies to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers	0.0%	10.6%	7.5%	10.0%	10.2%
School Choice opportunities	0.0%	2.5%	1.5%	0.0%	2.1%
Other	0.0%	4.7%	1.5%	20.0%	5.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

What opportunities do you see ahead for DCSD? Please choose your first choice.

Answer Choices	Student (n = 7)	Parent (n = 365)	Employee (n = 132)	Community/ Business (n = 31)	All (n = 535)
Charter Schools	0.0%	11.5%	4.5%	9.7%	9.5%
Funding (State, Federal)	**42.9%**	10.7%	8.3%	0.0%	9.9%
Getting parents involved with DCSD	0.0%	10.1%	15.2%	3.2%	11.0%
Hiring/Keeping quality teachers and staff	14.3%	**46.8%**	**53.8%**	**41.9%**	**47.9%**
Legislation	14.3%	1.9%	3.8%	3.2%	2.2%
New Business	28.6%	0.8%	0.0%	6.5%	1.3%
Raising community support for DCSD	0.0%	9.6%	10.6%	25.8%	10.5%
Other (please specify)	0.0%	8.5%	3.8%	9.7%	7.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

What opportunities do you see ahead for DCSD? Please choose your second choice.

Answer Choices	Student (n = 7)	Parent (n = 353)	Employee (n = 130)	Community/ Business (n = 27)	All (n = 516)
Charter Schools	14.3%	9.6%	5.4%	3.7%	8.1%
Funding (State, Federal)	**42.9%**	**19.3%**	19.2%	18.5%	18.8%
Getting parents involved with DCSD	0.0%	17.3%	**23.8%**	**22.2%**	18.8%
Hiring/Keeping quality teachers and staff	28.6%	24.6%	21.5%	14.8%	**23.8%**
Legislation	0.0%	4.2%	4.6%	0.0%	3.9%
New Business	14.3%	2.8%	2.3%	0.0%	2.5%
Raising community support for DCSD	0.0%	14.2%	19.2%	18.5%	16.3%
Other (please specify)	0.0%	7.9%	3.8%	**22.2%**	7.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

What threats do you see ahead? Please choose your first choice.

Answer Choices	Student (n = 7)	Parent (n = 359)	Employee (n = 129)	Community/ Business (n = 31)	All (n = 529)
Charter Schools	0.0%	3.6%	7.0%	3.2%	4.3%
Constantly changing population	14.3%	16.4%	10.1%	19.4%	14.9%
Effects of poverty on the community	**71.4%**	18.4%	**45.7%**	19.4%	**25.3%**
Funding (State, Federal)	14.3%	19.2%	9.3%	9.7%	16.3%
Political environment	0.0%	**26.2%**	20.2%	**25.8%**	24.6%
New Business	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other (please specify)	0.0%	16.2%	7.8%	22.6%	14.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

What threats do you see ahead for DCSD? Please choose your second choice.

Answer Choices	Student (n = 7)	Parent (n = 349)	Employee (n = 127)	Community/ Business (n = 28)	All (n = 512)
Charter Schools	14.3%	6.0%	7.9%	3.6%	6.6%
Constantly changing population	28.6%	21.2%	19.7%	10.7%	20.7%
Effects of poverty on the community	14.3%	15.2%	15.7%	10.7%	14.6%
Funding (State, Federal)	0.0%	**25.5%**	**29.1%**	14.3%	**25.4%**
Political environment	**42.9%**	16.6%	18.9%	**25.0%**	17.2%
New Business	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other (please specify)	0.0%	15.5%	8.7%	35.7%	15.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Appendix 2:
Community Engagement
Meeting Results

Question 1: What are your observed strengths of DeKalb County School District (DCSD)? (1,136 votes)

Responses	Student (159 votes)	Parent (407 votes)	Employee (425 votes)	Community/ Business (145 votes)	All (1136 votes)
Technology	10.7%	3.7%	**15.5%**	**9.7%**	**9.9%**
Diversity	5.0%	**12.3%**	5.2%	5.5%	7.7%
Teacher salary and benefits	0.0%	0.0%	14.6%	0.0%	5.5%
Communication	1.9%	8.1%	4.0%	3.4%	5.1%
Parent engagement	0.6%	8.6%	4.5%	1.4%	5.0%
Leadership	1.3%	9.6%	2.8%	0.7%	4.8%
Dual enrollment	5.0%	5.2%	3.8%	4.8%	4.6%
Extra curricular activities, including sports and arts	**18.9%**	2.0%	1.4%	0.7%	4.0%
Quality of teachers	5.0%	5.2%	1.9%	4.8%	3.9%
Curriculum and course offerings	0.6%	5.7%	2.6%	5.5%	3.8%

Question 2: What are your observed areas of challenges/weaknesses? (1,786 votes)

Responses	Student (259 votes)	Parent (739 votes)	Employee (572 votes)	Community/ Business (216 votes)	All (1786 votes)
Facilities	**11.3%**	**14.3%**	**15.0%**	5.6%	**10.2%**
Teacher salary and benefits	6.7%	0.4%	3.0%	**17.0%**	0.0%
Overcrowding and class size	5.8%	5.0%	7.2%	3.1%	8.8%
Overemphasis on testing	4.5%	0.0%	7.0%	4.9%	0.5%
Equity across the county	4.0%	0.0%	3.4%	5.8%	6.5%
Teacher retention	3.8%	0.0%	1.8%	8.6%	2.3%
Communication	3.1%	0.4%	4.5%	2.3%	3.7%

Question 3: What opportunities do you see ahead for DCSD? (1,343 votes)

Responses	Student (209 votes)	Parent (521 votes)	Employee (475 votes)	Community/ Business (138 votes)	All (1343 votes)
Career, technical, agricultural education	12.4%	7.5%	**9.9%**	11.6%	**9.5%**
Partnerships with community or business organizations	**18.2%**	8.4%	8.4%	3.6%	**9.5%**
Other community or business involvement	1.0%	**8.6%**	2.1%	**37.7%**	8.1%
Technology	7.7%	5.6%	4.4%	0.0%	4.9%
STEM/STEAM	0.0%	2.1%	9.1%	3.6%	4.4%
Parent involvement	0.0%	4.4%	4.8%	8.0%	4.2%
Socio-emotional and mental health	1.4%	2.5%	7.6%	0.0%	3.9%
Early education	0.0%	2.3%	5.1%	0.0%	2.7%

Question 4: What threats do you see ahead for DCSD? (797 votes)

Responses	Student (159 votes)	Parent (407 votes)	Employee (425 votes)	Community/Business (145 votes)	All (1136 votes)
Teacher recruitment and retention	5.0%	**10.4%**	**17.4%**	6.1%	**11.8%**
Safety	**5.5%**	5.9%	11.2%	**9.1%**	8.2%
Socio-emotional and mental health	4.5%	8.4%	2.0%	0.6%	4.6%
Teacher salary and benefits	0.0%	5.9%	3.7%	2.4%	3.9%
Facilities	1.5%	1.4%	6.4%	1.2%	3.3%
Student achievement	2.0%	4.5%	2.8%	0.0%	3.0%
Overcrowding	3.5%	3.2%	0.0%	8.5%	2.7%