

State of the District

Look at this beautiful day we've been gifted! Good evening to our Board Chair Mrs. Vickie B. Turner, Vice Chair Mr. Dijion DaCosta, Members of the Board of Education. Our CEO and Former Superintendent Mr. Michael Thurmond parents and guardians, students, community leaders, and all of you who make up our DeKalb County School District. Thank you to our AMAZING AMZING Staff who put this event together. Some have been out here since 5:00am setting up. This speaks to their standard of excellence, pride in district, and commitment to our scholars and community.

It is important to seek understanding of our place, and that of our ancestors, within the history of this land. It's a mixture of our blood, our past, our current, and our future. As we begin today, we must first acknowledge and give honor to the people of the Muscogee Creek Tribe whose origin began in Georgia and the Tribe of Eastern Cherokee and acknowledge the indigenous history of Dekalb County and the very land on which we stand. www.nationalgeographic.org Today, this 23rd day of February, we speak the name of Ahumaud Aubry, on this day...February 23, the day of his death.

On this day we acknowledge over the 500,000 lives lost to COVID 19 in our nation. We sit in honor of these mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, and friends and we will continue to keep their families in our thoughts and prayers.

"Of the most celebrated tribes of Africa, no tribe was considered to have warriors more fearsome or more intelligent than the mighty Masai. Some are therefore surprised to learn their traditional greeting. "Kasserian Ingera" meaning "and how are the children?"

*This greeting acknowledges the high value that the Masai place on their children's well-being. Even warriors with no children of their own would always give the traditional answer, **"All the children are well."** Meaning, of course, that peace and safety prevail, that the priorities of protecting the young, the powerless are in place, that Masai society has not forgotten its reason for being, its proper functions and responsibilities. "All the children are well," means that life is good. It means that the daily struggles of existence, even among a poor people, do not preclude proper caring for its young." Reference-from speech*
<https://www.safetolearn.com/about-the-masai-warriors.html>

We are delighted to be here with you this evening, to share the state of our OUTSTANDING district. Our district is strong. Our district is thriving. Our district is successfully manifesting and reflecting the mosaic that we are, WE ARE DEKALB. We represent over 185 Languages. Our beautiful mosaic made of many ethnicities who share a common set of traditions, ancestry, language, history, culture or religion all residing within DeKalb County Schools. The vision of the DeKalb County School District is to inspire our community of learners to achieve educational excellence. Our mission is to ensure student success, leading to higher education, work, and lifelong-learners- **TO ENSURE THAT ALL THE CHILDREN ARE WELL.** We are elevating the DeKalb experience to a new standard of excellence. As eloquently conveyed by the talented Amanda Gorman, “if we merge mercy with might and might with right, then love becomes our legacy and change our children’s birthright.” You see, every child is born with an innate genius. It is our honor to support each scholar along the Pathway to their preferred future (<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/books/amanda-gorman-inauguration-hill-we-climb.html>)

We are living in an unparalleled period. A period, that for some, exacerbates circumstances and inequities that have long existed. We recognize **AND** answer the call for remediation as we also ACCELRATE our scholars’ performance. We answer the call to create world class wrap around services and access to mental health supports.

We recognize and answer the call of our students who are differently abled and our Bilingual learners to shift from a deficit approach to seeing all the assets our children bring.

We recognize and celebrate the linchpin in it all, our amazing teachers and staff, who continue to answer the call of support for our scholars and their commitment to Dekalb County. So many who are daughters and sons of this great district and are committed to his legacy of excellence. and we say THANK YOU! Because of you **the children are well.**

The DeKalb County School District is moving onward and upward. We are preparing our scholars for the future through award-winning programs and career pathways that will chart their course into our ever-evolving global society. Whether they aspire to matriculate and EXCEL in a two or four-year college, serve in our armed forces, or provide occupational services in family Sustaining careers, many that this pandemic has revealed are truly essential. **This** is our vision for the Dekalb County School district graduate.

To foster this continuum of student success, we will structure our strategy around six targeted goals. These goals represent wonderful opportunities to enhance our strengths, capitalize on areas of improvement, and honor our legacy commitments. Our goals are purposeful and intentional and guide the work of the district at every level of the organization.

The first of these goals is Student Success with Equity and Access. Our scholars will have access and opportunity for increased offerings, allowing them to be not only prepared, but globally competitive. Barriers to educational excellence will be eliminated by the provided by the expansion of our wrap around services wraparound services that offer support inside and outside of the classroom or learning environment. Our goals focus on increasing the graduation rate, increased implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), target attendance improvement, and increase collaboration with Parent and Family Engagement. Scholars will also have access to a robust cadre of innovative school options which include the expansion of Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education, also known as CTAE. There are so many reasons why we love Dekalb! We know that we have the most Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) certified Schools in all of GA! We have a dynamic portfolio of school options and programs including International Baccalaureate, Montessori, as well as our nationally recognized Early Learning Program which offer foreign language to our youngest scholars, as well as the Dekalb Early College Academy that was recognized as National Blue Ribbon Distinguished School this Fall.

CTAE is the future and the future is now. Dr. Paul Camick, Director of CTAE, affirms that it "...brings relevance to our students' high-level academic skills and

fosters supportive relationships between our students and their teachers, counselors, and employers. Thanks to her CTAE Engineering courses, Brooke Sloan, one of our Tucker High School scholars, is interested in several careers she never knew existed. With 198 Pathways and 60 Industry Certified Programs, graduates are positioned for great careers and many are immediately work-ready. Healthcare workers continue to work fervently treating patients, Logistics workers continue to organize and execute the delivery of items to our stores and homes, as well as our brave Firefighters who are the first to arrive on the scene of medical calls and risk their lives to save others in fires. This is now; this is CTAE.

Georgia, the new home of the film industry, boasts the employment of tens of thousands of workers in jobs that our scholars can eventually benefit from by studying Arts, Audio/Visual Technology & Communication. Students are prepared for careers in Film Production, Video Content Production, Lighting Technology, Sound Technology, and many more!

Let us not forget Information Technology... Information Technology has allowed us to continue connecting with others during a pandemic by way of online platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Information Technology also provides our students, as well as some adults, with gaming systems to occupy time once they've had enough of the online meetings. The DeKalb County School District currently offers 17 Career Pathway Clusters with more opportunities on the way.

Our scholars can graduate as Pathway Completers and many are immediately employment eligible. This is now; this is CTAE. This is CTAE in the DeKalb County School District.

These are just some of what makes the Dekalb County School System the number one choice for families within our county- **The children are well.**

This pandemic has illuminated the creativity and innovative spirit of our educators. It has allowed for the expansion of world class programs such as Digital Dreamers. Our students have received awards and national acknowledgements such as Mr. Zae Brewer from Lithonia HS who received the United States Senate Youth Program Award, which is a \$10,000 scholarship...

However, it is a reality that COVID-19 and the 2020 move to virtual instruction has impacted student achievement.

Each year baseline data is collected in an effort to assess the current levels of student performance in key areas. As the chart demonstrates, our data reveals both growth and regression for different grade levels. The average losses in Math in grades 4-9 are relatively modest, with the greatest loss being slightly over three months for grade 8. However, in grade 10 you will notice there were learning gains.

Results in Reading and Language Use reflect those seen in Math, with modest losses of less than three and a half months. Results for grade 10 also showed gains as well.

In Science we see results consistent with those in Reading and Language Use, yielding learning losses of three months or less.

It appears that learning losses between the winter 2020 and fall 2020 assessment periods, while considerable, were not as large as early projections suggested. Average losses were mostly in the range of one to three months out of a typical 10-month school year of achievement growth.

As you've seen, we are aware of the learning losses for some of our scholars. And are implementing specific strategies to address these gaps- including Extended Learning Wednesdays, and Summer Bridge Programs such as Rising Scholars, BILINGUAL LEARNER HERITAGE ACADEMIES, to address the areas of regression experienced by our students.

Goal Area 2 focuses on Stakeholder Engagement and Communication. Our stakeholders are essential to the effective operation of our school district. Open lines of communication are a must. The welcoming and embracing of stakeholder

engagement is a must. To build a community of trust, we pledge to you **transparency**, and an infrastructure to be great partners with external supporters who share our committed to students success.

We commit to establishing a district-level methodology to provide support and assistance for our English language learners families. We are increasing opportunities to empower all voices in the decision making of our district and creating a welcoming environment so that ALL of Dekalb is empowered to advocate for our children.

This year, we have expanded our Superintendent's Community Advisory Committee with leaders from our faith-based institutions, higher educational institution, community-based organizations and philanthropic community. We formed a phenomenal Medical Advisory committee that has supported us as we continue to navigate through the pandemic. We look forward to continuing to build relationships with communities that expressed a feeling of isolation and marginalization within the school system. We are elevating Dekalb to a new standard of excellence. WE are DEKALB and the children are well.

With Goal 3, our focus is on Staff Effectiveness. Our scholars' success and thirst for knowledge hinges upon exposure to effective teachers and staff. One of our awesome teachers, Ms. Sabrina Davis at Arabia Mountain High School shares with us that "The best part of being an agriculture instructor is exposing urban students to various agriculture life experiences and careers in fields such as: horticulture, agriculture, engineering, and veterinary science ... Our students don't come in understanding what they can do with agriculture. But you expose them to it, and they light up, and they want to do more."

To facilitate effectiveness and preparedness, staff will engage in ongoing professional development that will sharpen and hone their craft. Such as: The Wallace Foundation, Harvard Graduate School of Education, and our much-anticipated Leadership English Language Learner conference. Additionally, we have partnered with Dr. Gholdy E. Muhammad from Georgia State University on

culturally responsive education to teach our middle grades teachers how to connect their teaching to the human condition and to frame their teaching practices in response to society. Our legacy commitment not only provides for teacher effectiveness, but also the recruiting and retaining of the highest quality instructors. Ensuring that our staff has all of the tool to address our delivers learners further supports our commitment to equity and access.

Goal 4 targets Culture and Climate. We've listened, and the DeKalb County School District is dedicated to enhancing the relationship with our community stakeholders through **greater transparency in all areas**, stellar customer service at all levels, and promoting high academic achievement throughout every corner of our diverse district. We are committed to transforming the way we support disconnected youth, improve college and career readiness for all students, and continuing to develop programs that educate and empower our diverse students.

This year our BOE proclaimed the First Black Lives Matter Action week in Schools. This provided our scholars and staff the opportunity to unpack social justice issues and begin Dialogue about our hopes and dreams for a more united DEKALB.

This year we are also expanding our work with the My Brothers Keeper Alliance and My Sisters Keeper programs. We look forward to inducting our first 25 chapters at the March 15th Board meeting.

Lastly, we've begun work with the GALLUP organization to explore specific strategies to increase employee morale and engagement.

With Goal 5 we address Organizational Excellence. The operation of our organization is another one of our top priorities. Public confidence hinges on structured, efficient operations. Please know that we hear you and are diligent in our strategies to increase and improve procedures for clean audits and transparency in budget development, expenditures, and procurement. This includes moving towards zero-based budgeting, and addressed long standing audit findings. This year we hit deadlines by accelerating the completion of our draft financial statements and submitting these statements to the state auditor by December, which moves us towards timely financial reporting. We will also honor

our commitment to establishing a Foundation that will develop philanthropic partnerships dedicated to funding scholarships for our students. We will also assure staff effectiveness by ensuring optimal alignment from the top to the bottom of the organizational chart, along with setting a standard for work-life balance for all employees.

We continue to strengthen our Regional Superintendent structure and realigned our organizational structure to provide targeted supports closest to the schoolhouse and students, in contextual appropriate ways by school, and by region.

Our final goal, Goal 6, will focus on our facilities. Our scholars deserve to be educated in facilities that are welcoming, accommodating, properly climate controlled. Stakeholders, we are listening, and we are moving into action. This year we've expanded our operations team and have improved the turnaround time for work orders, and real time needs in our building. We are committed to implementing the DCSD Comprehensive Master Plan to provide a roadmap for addressing overcrowding, building new facilities and improving existing infrastructure. We are committed to taking a strategic look at our School Choice programs to provide **excellent opportunities for all families in all communities**. To us this is equity and access. We encourage you to follow our journey and progress, and hold us accountable

DCSD...

During this unprecedented time, we have demonstrated to ourselves and to each other that we are a dynamic community and while our perspectives and positions may differ our love for our scholars is shared.

To this end -We are poised to provide the option of return to face-to-face instruction for families who would like this format effective Tuesday, March 9, 2021. Please visit our website for additional detailed information. While we recognize that there will be challenges ahead. WE ARE READY! We have been

one of the most conservative school systems in our response to the pandemic, but we are ready to welcome our scholars back into the buildings. We ask that the community continue to support us as we take this tremendous step.

The DeKalb County School District will continue to elevate to a new standard of excellence, eliminating barriers to success, celebrating inclusion of ALL of Dekalb...

All of this so when asked how are the children, we can truly answer **all the children are well.**

DeKalb County We WILL continue to RISE UP!!!