

STRATEGIC WAIVER SCHOOL SYSTEM CONTRACT FOR DEKALB COUNTY

This Strategic Waiver School System contract for DeKalb County ("Contract") is entered into by the DeKalb County Board of Education ("Local Board") and the State Board of Education ("State Board") (collectively referred to as "the parties").

WHEREAS, the DeKalb County local school system is currently a Strategic Waivers School System (SWSS); and

WHEREAS, the Local Board has adopted a five-year strategic plan for improving the performance of its schools; and

WHEREAS, the Local Board desires to continue operating as a SWSS.

NOW THEREFORE, in consideration of the promises, mutual agreements, and covenants contained herein and other good and valuable consideration, the sufficiency of which is hereby acknowledged, the Parties agree as follows:

1. **Definitions.** The terms below will be interpreted in accordance with the following definitions, unless and until federal or state law, State Board of Education rules or regulations, or the state accountability system, are amended otherwise.
 - a. **Additional Targeted Support and Improvement ("ATSI") school:** A school in which any subgroup of students, on its own, would identify the school as a Comprehensive Support and Improvement school.
 - b. **College and Career Academy ("CCA"):** A specialized school established as a charter school or pursuant to a contract for a strategic waivers school system or charter system, which formalizes a partnership that demonstrates a collaboration between business, industry, and community stakeholders to advance work force development between one or more local boards of education, a private individual, a private organization, or a state or local public entity in cooperation with one or more postsecondary institutions.
 - c. **College and Career Ready Performance Index ("CCRPI"):** A comprehensive school improvement, accountability, and communication platform for all educational stakeholders that will

promote college and career readiness for all Georgia public school students.

- d. **Comprehensive Support and Improvement (“CSI”) school:** A school within the lowest performing five percent of Title 1 schools.
 - e. **Georgia Department of Education (“Department”):** The state agency charged with the fiscal and administrative management of certain aspects of K – 12 public education, including the implementation of federal and state mandates. Such management is subject to supervision and oversight by the State Board of Education.
 - f. **Material term:** An important or substantial aspect in this Contract. A change to a material term may alter the rights, obligations, interests, or relations of the Parties.
 - g. **Non-performing school:** A public school that is part of a Strategic Waiver School System and is identified as not meeting one or more of goals (a) through (e) of Section 7 of this Contract.
 - h. **State Board of Education (“SBOE” or “State Board”):** The constitutional authority that defines education policy for public K – 12 education agencies in Georgia.
 - i. **Strategic Waivers School System (“SWSS”):** A local school system that elects to request increased flexibility pursuant to O.C.G.A §§ 20-2-80 through 20-2-84.6.
 - j. **Targeted Support and Improvement (“TSI”) school:** A school within the lowest performing five percent of schools with one or more consistently underperforming student groups.
2. **Contract Term.** The State Board grants this Contract to the Local Board to operate a SWSS for a 6-year term beginning on July 1, 2024 and expiring on June 30, 2030.
3. **Responsibility.** The Local Board shall ultimately be responsible for all duties to be performed by the SWSS and the schools within the SWSS under this Contract.
- a. In addition to any local charter schools within the local school system, the

following schools are not part of the SWSS Contract:

4. **College and Career Academies.** Any CCA opened by or any existing CCA included in the SWSS must meet the definition of a College and Career Academy as defined in O.C.G.A § 20-4-37(b)(5). The SWSS must notify the Department and the Technical College System of Georgia of the opening, and the CCA must meet the following requirements:
 - a. If an existing CCA is included in the SWSS, then the current CCA's governing board would continue as the governing board of the CCA, using its current by-laws for operation and procedures for electing members.
 - b. Provide a Roles and Responsibilities Chart between the CCA governing board, the SWSS, and the CCA's higher education and business partners that includes the following:
 - Information on the CCA's decision making authority in decisions relating to personnel, finance, curriculum and instruction, school improvement goals, and school operations;
 - Information on how the CCA will be funded by the local school system and other strategic partners; and
 - Information on the services and supports to be provided to the CCA by the local school system.
 - c. The following CCAs are included in this Contract:
5. **Flexibility Allowed by Law.** In exchange for the SWSS's agreement to meet or exceed the goals and measurable objectives set forth in Section 7 of this Contract, to adhere to the interventions set forth in Section 8 of this Contract, and to be subject to the sanctions set forth in Section 9 of this Contract, the State Board grants the SWSS flexibility from the specifically identified state laws, rules, and regulations outlined in Appendix A (Flexibility Component of Contract), which is incorporated in and attached to this Contract. Pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 20-2-84, the overarching goal of each waiver request is to improve student performance. Notwithstanding this flexibility, the SWSS and each of its SWSS schools shall comply with the terms of this Contract.
6. **Accreditation.** The SWSS's accreditation shall be maintained for the duration of the Contract term.

7. **Accountability.** The SWSS shall comply with meeting the accountability component of the Contract. The 2022-2023 school year will serve as the baseline year for accountability data.
- a. **Goal 1a:** By June 30, 2026, the SWSS shall decrease the number of schools identified as CSI schools on the 2023-2024 CSI list released by the Department.
 - b. **Goal 1b:** By June 30, 2030, the SWSS shall decrease the number of schools identified as CSI schools on the 2026-2027 CSI list released by the Department.
 - c. **Goal 2a:** By June 30, 2026, the SWSS shall decrease the number of schools identified as ATSI schools on the 2023 -2024 ATSI list released by the Department.
 - d. **Goal 2b:** By June 30, 2030, the SWSS shall decrease the number of schools identified as ATSI schools on the 2026-2027 ATSI list released by the Department.
 - e. **Goal 3:** Each SWSS school that is in compliance with meeting Goals 1 – 2 of this section for the 2022-2023 baseline year shall maintain its current level of performance.
 - f. **Goal 4:** Pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 20-2-67, the SWSS shall operate in a fiscally sound manner as measured by not being designated a financial high-risk system as determined by the Department of Audits and Accounts (“DOAA”) and the Department.
8. **Interventions.** Pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 20-2-84, the Department shall impose one or more interventions for SWSS schools that have not made progress towards meeting the goals contained in Section 7 of this Contract. Interventions include the following:
- a. Implementation of the intensive school plan developed pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 20-14-46; or
 - b. Submission to DOAA the Department, or both for approval of a written corrective action plan; implementation of the approved corrective action

plan; and participation in annual trainings offered or required by DOAA, the Department, or both to address the financial risk, pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 20-2-67; or

- c. Any other interventions or requirements deemed appropriate by the Department and the State School Superintendent.

9. **Sanctions.** Pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 20-2-84, by the end of this Contract's term, if a SWSS has not met the goals outlined in Section 7 of this Contract, the State Board may impose sanctions on the non-performing schools. Sanctions include one or more of the following:

- a. Removal of school personnel, which may include the principal and personnel whose performance has been determined to be insufficient to produce student achievement gains; or
- b. Complete restructuring of the school's governance arrangement and internal organization; or
- c. Loss of, or modification of, any requested flexibility from state statutes or associated rules outlined in Appendix A of this Contract, as recommended by the State School Superintendent.

10. **Annual Monitoring.** The Local Board shall work cooperatively with the Department in annually monitoring the goals outlined in Section 7 of this Contract. Monitoring will include evaluating each school's progress toward meeting its accountability goals.

11. **Annual Report.** The SWSS shall submit an annual report to the Department according to the Department's guidelines and templates. The annual report may include, but is not limited to, an indication of the SWSS's progress towards the goals outlined in Section 7 of this Contract and the implementation and impact of the identified waivers outlined in Appendix A of this Contract.

12. **Demographic and Performance Data.** The SWSS attests to the accuracy of the demographic and performance data for each of its schools as recorded in the annual CCRPI report. If the SWSS identifies a discrepancy in the demographic and performance data contained in the CCRPI report, the SWSS must notify the Department within thirty (30) days of identifying the discrepancy.

13. **Compliance with Other Laws, Rules, and Regulations.** The SWSS and each of its SWSS schools shall operate in accordance with the United States Constitution, the Constitution of the State of Georgia, and all applicable federal, state, and local laws that may not be waived pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 20-2-82(e), including the following, which are listed by way of example and not by way of limitation.
- a. **Civil Rights, Insurance, Health and Safety and Conflicting Interests.** The SWSS shall operate in accordance with all applicable federal, state, and local rules, regulations, court orders, and statutes relating to civil rights; insurance; the protection of the physical health and safety of students, employees, and visitors; conflicting interest transactions; and the prevention of unlawful conduct.
 - b. **Asbestos Remediation.** The SWSS shall comply with the terms of any applicable asbestos remediation plan.
 - c. **Unlawful Conduct.** The SWSS shall be subject to all laws relating to unlawful conduct in or near a public school.
 - d. **Student Conduct and Discipline.** The SWSS shall maintain and implement a written policy regarding student discipline policy shall be consistent with due process.
 - e. **State Board Rules.** The SWSS comply with all State Board Rules promulgated in accordance with O.C.G.A. § 20-2-240 during the term herein that are not subject to any waiver granted in Section 5 of this Contract.
 - f. **Prohibition on Discrimination.** The SWSS shall not discriminate against students on the basis of any characteristic protected by local, state, or federal law.
 - g. **Reporting Requirements.** The SWSS shall be subject to all reporting requirements of O.C.G.A. §§ 20-2-160, 20-2-161(e), 20-2-320 and 20-2-740.
 - h. **Tuition.** The SWSS shall not charge tuition or fees to its students except as may be authorized for local boards pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 20-2-133.

- i. **Brief Period of Quiet Reflection.** The SWSS shall comply with O.C.G.A. § 20-2-1050, which requires a brief period of quiet reflection.
- j. **Individual Graduation Plans.** The SWSS shall comply with O.C.G.A. § 20-2-327 regarding Individual Graduation Plans.
- k. **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.** The SWSS is subject to all provisions of the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1232g.
- l. **Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act.** The SWSS is subject to all provisions of the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-191, § 264, 110 Stat. 1936.
- m. **QBE Formula Earnings.** The SWSS acknowledges that criteria used to calculate Quality Basic Education (“QBE”) funding cannot be waived.
- n. **Funding.** The SWSS acknowledges that, although becoming a strategic waiver system provides a local school system with some flexibility, waivers cannot be used to generate additional funding.
- o. **Early Intervention Programs.** The SWSS shall comply with O.C.G.A. § 20-2-153 related to early intervention programs.
- p. **Divisive Concepts.** The SWSS shall comply with O.C.G.A. § 20-1-11 related to divisive concepts.

Failure to operate in accordance with the provisions of this Section may result in loss of flexibility for the SWSS.

14. **Contract Extension**

- a. **Automatic Extension.** This Contract may be automatically extended upon the expiration of the Contract term if the SWSS or SWSS schools meet the goals outlined in Section 7 of this Contract by the end of the Contract term and adheres to all requirements of Section 13 of this Contract. If these conditions are met and the Local Board wishes to continue as a SWSS, it

must complete the Department's requirements for an automatic extension.

- b. **Extension to Meet Performance Goals.** During the final year of the Contract term, the Local Board may request to extend the Contract term by three years to provide additional time to meet the goals outlined in Section 7 of this Contract. If the extension is granted and the SWSS meets its goals outlined in Section 7 of this Contract during the extension period, then the three-year extension will count as the first three years of the next SWSS contract term, if granted. No more than two three-year extensions will be granted. If the Local Board wishes to extend the Contract term by three years, it shall seek an amendment to the Contract in accordance with Section 15 of this Contract.

- 15. **Amendments.** Any material term of this Contract, as determined by the Department, must be amended in writing upon the approval of the Local Board and the State Board. If the Local Board wishes to amend this Contract, it must complete the Department's amendment requirements.

- a. For amendment requests that originate with the State Board, the Department shall provide the Local Board with sixty (60) days' written notice prior to amending the Contract. The notice shall include a copy of the proposed changes. If the proposed changes to the Contract are not material, as determined by the Department, then the Department does not have to send a copy of the proposed changes to the Local Board prior to amending the Contract.

- 16. **Probation.** The State Board may place the SWSS on probation upon ninety (90) days written notice to the Local Board for reasonable cause. Reasonable cause includes the following:

- a. The SWSS's failure to adhere to any material term of this Contract, including the accountability requirements outlined in Section 7 herein;
- b. The SWSS's failure to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management; or
- c. The SWSS's violation of applicable federal, state, or local laws, rules, regulations, or court orders; or
- d. The existence of conditions that place the health, safety, or welfare of

students or staff of the SWSS in danger.

17. **Termination.** The State Board may terminate this Contract for reasonable cause upon ninety (90) days written notice to the Local Board for reasonable cause. Reasonable cause includes the following:
 - a. The SWSS's failure to adhere to any material term of this Contract, including the accountability requirements outlined in Section 7 herein;
 - b. The SWSS's failure to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management; or
 - c. The SWSS's violation of applicable federal, state, or local laws or court orders; or
 - d. The existence of conditions that place the health, safety, or welfare of students or staff of the SWSS in danger.
18. **Temporary Extension.** At the discretion of the Department and the Local Board, the Contract term may be extended for a grace period not exceeding sixty (60) days. The request for a temporary extension must be in writing and will be attached to this Contract.
19. **Non-Agency.** The Parties expressly acknowledge and agree that the SWSS is not acting as the agent of the State Board or the Department, except as required by law or this Contract. The SWSS acknowledges that it is without authority to, and will not, extend the faith and credit of the State Board or the Department to any third party.
20. **Delegation.** The Parties agree and acknowledge that the functions and powers of each party may be exercised only by each party and may not be delegated to a third party without written agreement by the Parties.
21. **Application of Amended Law.** This Contract is subject to applicable federal and state laws, rules, regulations, and state accountability requirements. Any amendments to laws, rules, regulations, or state accountability requirements cited herein will result in the correlative and immediate modification of this Contract without the necessity for executing a written amendment.

22. **Headings.** Section headings are for convenient reference only and are not part of the Contract. Section headings do not enlarge or limit any Section's contents.
23. **Non-Waiver.** No waiver of any breach of this Contract shall be held as a waiver of any other or subsequent breach.
24. **Severability.** If any provision of the Contract is determined to be unenforceable or invalid for any reason, the remainder of the Contract shall remain in full force and effect.
25. **Contradicting or Conflicting Provisions.** If any provision of the Contract is determined to contradict or conflict with any other provision of the Contract, the contradiction or conflict shall be resolved in favor of the flexibility granted pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 20-2-82.
26. **Governing Law and Venue.** This Contract shall be governed by, subject to, and construed under the laws of the State of Georgia. Any action brought against the State Board shall be brought in the Superior Court of Fulton County.
27. **Counterparts.** The Parties agree that this Contract may be executed in one or more counterparts which, when taken together, shall constitute one agreement. The Parties further acknowledge and agree that electronic signatures, as well as faxed or scanned and emailed counterpart signature copies of this Contract, shall be as effective and binding as original signatures.
28. **Entire Agreement.** This Contract sets forth the entire agreement between the Local Board and the State Board with respect to the subject matter of this Contract. All prior contracts, representations, statements, negotiations, understandings, and undertakings between the Local Board and the State Board are superseded by this Contract.

SWSS CONTRACT FOR DEKALB COUNTY

Stanley W. D'Amico
Chairperson, STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

7/16/24
(Date)

Dijon DaCosta
Chairperson, Dijon DaCosta, Sr. BOARD OF EDUCATION

8-15-24
(Date)

Devon D. Horton
Superintendent, Devon Horton

8-9-24
(Date)

Appendix A – Flexibility Component of Contract

Under O.C.G.A. § 20-2-80 and State Board Rule 160-5-1-.33, DeKalb County is seeking flexibility for all schools included in this Contract from the following state laws, rules, and regulations in exchange for greater accountability.

O.C.G.A. § 20-2-82 mandates that the goal for each waiver and variance shall be the improvement of student performance. This Appendix delineates the specifically identified state laws, rules, regulations, policies, and procedures for which a waiver is requested and the expected impact of such waivers on student performance.

Pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 20-2-84, the SWSS must request a waiver or variance of at least one of the following areas:

- Class size requirements in O.C.G.A. § 20-2-182;
- Expenditure controls in O.C.G.A. § 20-2-171 and categorical allotment requirements in Article 6 of Title 20;
- Certification requirements in O.C.G.A. § 20-2-200; or
- Salary schedule requirements in O.C.G.A. § 20-2-212.

Waiver areas selected:

Class size requirements in O.C.G.A. § 20-2-182

Expenditure controls in O.C.G.A. § 20-2-171 and categorical allotment requirements in Article 6 of Title 20

Academic Programs Flexibility Rationale:

At the heart of the district's continuous improvement framework is a focus on the instructional core. By leveraging access to grade-level, State Standards-aligned tasks for Tier 1 instruction, the district can ensure that all students receive rigorous instruction designed to improve their learning outcomes. One of the key components of this framework is a focus on cognitively rigorous and culturally responsive instructional practices. By providing system-wide professional learning and implementation support, the district can ensure that teachers have the tools and knowledge they need to help all students engage with challenging academic content. The culture and climate pillar of the district's comprehensive continuous improvement framework represents the idea that school culture plays a significant role in shaping students' academic and social outcomes. The culture of a school influences everything from student behavior to teacher job satisfaction. Educators in DeKalb County School District recognize that developing a supportive and inclusive culture is vital to creating a pathway towards equity. By leveraging system-wide professional learning and implementation support of restorative practices, the district is working to create intellectually and socially safe environments for learning. Flexibility in this area aligns with the following strategic priorities: student success with equity and access, stakeholder engagement and communications, and culture and climate.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS FLEXIBILITY		Implementation Details
Competencies and Core Curriculum, Online Learning	§20-2-140.1	Implement courses that focus on content mastery in lieu of seat time.
Competencies and Core Curriculum, Online Learning	§20-2-142	Implement courses that focus on content mastery in lieu of seat time.
General and career education programs	§20-2-151	Implement courses that focus on content mastery in lieu of seat time.
Instruction in social graces and etiquette may be waived	§20-2-187(b)	Flexibility allows the district to waive the requirement to offer instruction in social graces and etiquette.
Organization of Schools; School Administrative Managers	§20-2-290	DeKalb County School District does not employ School Administrative Managers. The District follows PSC guidelines and locally determines the highly qualified administrative staff required to ensure high quality instruction.
School Councils	§20-2-85	The District has developed a comprehensive compliance monitoring system to assess implementation of governance teams (Principal Advisory Councils). Increased opportunities for inter-school collaboration and cross-council structures result in higher levels of community engagement in targeted and district-wide initiatives. Flexibility in this area allows for community and local business partners' participation on governance teams.
School Councils	§20-2-86	The District has developed a comprehensive compliance monitoring system to assess implementation of governance teams (Principal Advisory Councils). Increased opportunities for inter-school collaboration and cross-council structures result in higher levels of community engagement in targeted and district-wide initiatives. Flexibility in this area allows for community and local business partners' participation on governance teams.
Health & Physical Education Program	160-4-2-.12	Flexibility allows the district to adjust minimum contact hours for PE.
Graduation Requirements	160-4-2-.48	Flexibility in this area allows for the substitution of equivalent or higher-level graduation requirements. DeKalb County School District requires 24 credits for graduation.

Awarding Credit	160-5-1-.15	Flexibility allows the district to award credit for course completion upon mastery of course standards at any time during the semester and waive the clock hour requirements for students to earn a Carnegie Unit of credit during the regular school year and summer school.
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Human Resources Flexibility Rationale:

The District's comprehensive approach to continuous improvement is changing the teaching and learning landscape in DeKalb County School District. One of the key components of this framework is a focus on attracting and retaining high-quality staff. By putting structures and processes in place to support communication with staff about district level decisions and actions, the district can ensure that its teachers, leaders, and staff are engaged, empowered, and motivated to provide high-quality instruction to all students. Flexibility in this area aligns with the district's strategic priority to increase staff effectiveness by recruiting, developing, and retaining highly effective staff.

HUMAN RESOURCES FLEXIBILITY		Implementation Details
School Day and Year for Students and Employees	§20-2-151	Biannually, the District engages various stakeholder groups in the development of school calendars to tailor instruction to students' diverse learning needs. This waiver allows the District the flexibility to implement school days and calendars designed for increased collaborative planning time, professional development, and instructional enrichment.
School Day and Year for Students and Employees	§20-2-160(a)	Biannually, the District engages various stakeholder groups in the development of school calendars to tailor instruction to students' diverse learning needs. This waiver allows the District the flexibility to implement school days and calendars designed for increased collaborative planning time, professional development, and instructional enrichment.
School Day and Year for Students and Employees	§20-2-168(c)	Biannually, the District engages various stakeholder groups in the development of school calendars to tailor instruction to students' diverse learning needs. This waiver allows the District the flexibility to implement school days and calendars designed for increased collaborative planning time, professional development, and instructional enrichment.

Class-size and Reporting requirements	§20-2-182	Creatively group students in ways that serve larger groups of students in innovative instructional models. Increased class size is offset with additional support services provided to students.
Professional Learning	§20-2-182(h)	Flexibility allows the district to allocate categorical funding earned through the QBE formula to areas that support our strategic plan.
Instructional Extension	§20-2-184.1	Flexibility allows the district to allocate categorical funding earned through the QBE formula to areas that support our strategic plan.
Employment, Conditions of Employment	§20-2-218	Due to the nationwide teacher shortage, situations may dictate having teachers to provide class coverage during lunch periods. As best as possible the district will provide duty free lunch. However in times of staff shortages, students must be properly supervised. Administration will employ other incentives to teachers who are requested to cover classes during their duty free lunch time.

HUMAN RESOURCES FLEXIBILITY		Student Improvement Outcomes
Class-size and Reporting requirements	§20-2-182	The District's "plus 2 waiver" provides schools a built-in, maximum class size buffer. This flexibility helps protect against the risk of exceeding maximum class sizes when enrolling new students into classes and/or courses. The waiver also provides additional flexibility during the master scheduling process. While school leaders are not encouraged to routinely use the maximum class size when creating the master schedule, they may utilize the flexibility to maximize the efficiency of their allotted staff. Without this waiver, the district would either allot more staff at an additional cost, reschedule and redistribute students, or limit the classes and/or courses which students can enroll. Flexibility in this area aligns to the following district academic performance objectives: increase the 4-year graduation rate to meet the state average; and increase content mastery achievement rates to meet the state average for all tested areas.
Employment, Conditions of Employment	§20-2-218	The provision of class coverage increases students' access to high-quality, certified instructional staff and aligns to the following district academic performance objectives: increase the 4-year graduation rate to meet the state average; and increase content mastery achievement rates to meet the state average for all tested areas.

Financial Flexibility Rationale:

DeKalb County School District's comprehensive approach to improving the school district's education quality and student achievement is outlined in its locally designed continuous improvement framework. In DeKalb County School District, the framework has had a successful impact on multiple target areas, including the area of sound fiscal stewardship. The district requires flexibility in this area to leverage long-term financial planning to ensure it has the necessary funding for its instructional core and operational priorities, resulting in a significant overall improvement in academic performance. Flexibility in this area aligns with the district's strategic priority to increase organizational effectiveness by ensuring excellent financial management and efficient use of resources.

FINANCIAL FLEXIBILITY		Implementation Details
Categorical Allotment requirements	\$20-2-167	Increase the financial transparency at the district, regional and school levels through the use of the district allocation formula (RAMP). Decentralize Business Services; and create more efficient purchasing processes. Allocate a higher degree of resources towards social emotional learning; safety, security, and other wrap around services; and support for the whole child.
Direct Classroom Expenditure Control	\$20-2-171	Increase the financial transparency at the district, regional and school levels through the use of the district allocation formula (RAMP). Decentralize Business Services; and create more efficient purchasing processes. Allocate a higher degree of resources towards social emotional learning, safety and security and other wrap around services and support the whole child.
Categorical Allotment requirements	\$20-2-183	Allocate additional local funding to support the maintenance and operational needs that have been historically deferred in excess of what is provided through the QBE program weight.