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Gwinnett County Public Schools has read the March 2007 Grand Jury Presentments and the Grand Jury’s finding of “no evidence of knowledgeable wrongdoing” by anyone in regard to the system’s financial procedures. That being said, school system leaders expressed shock and dismay that the recommendations were allowed to be developed and published by the Grand Jury in its presentments without providing school system leaders an opportunity to respond to the matters brought before it.

“In light of the school system’s record of always being available to answer questions for the Grand Jury, we are stunned that the District Attorney’s office did not provide us an opportunity to respond to the concerns presented this year,” said CEO/Superintendent J. Alvin Wilbanks. “Had we been given the chance to appear before the Grand Jury, we could have provided evidence that the issues raised had already been addressed by the school system. The Grand Jury would have had the benefit of receiving information that would have led to the same conclusion— there was no wrongdoing— and the jurors would have been reassured that there were processes in place to address their concerns. I intend to follow up with District Attorney Danny Porter to discuss the Grand Jury process and why we were not called upon to address the allegations, which we suspect were lodged by a disgruntled former employee.”

Mr. Wilbanks added that Gwinnett County Public Schools takes very seriously its responsibility to taxpayers in regard to fiscal oversight. Audits are conducted for the purpose of identifying instances in which procedures have not been followed so that the system can correct them and prevent such occurrences in the future. It is the
responsibility of the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) to address those situations, enforce
the Board’s fiscal policies, and educate school employees on proper financial
management and accounting procedures. “Obviously, the ultimate responsibility rests
with me to ensure this is done,” says Mr. Wilbanks. “When any infraction has been
brought to my attention I have always taken appropriate action.”

The Grand Jury suggests that some employees of the school system may not fully
understand their obligations in regard to the handling and disbursement of school
funds. The examples cited in the presentments occurred during the tenure of former
CFO Jeff Weiler, who was forced to resign last year under a cloud of controversy
related to performance issues and an improper relationship with a female subordinate.

The “clear set of guidelines to address financial issues” that the Grand Jury
recommends the school system put in place were in effect when Mr. Weiler was CFO, and they remain so today. The former CFO’s lack of oversight and leadership in this area led Superintendent Wilbanks to challenge the system’s new CFO Rick Cost, who has been in the position since October 2006, to ensure that all fiscal policies and procedures are followed to the letter. Mr. Cost also is working to strengthen procedures where necessary while seeing that staff are properly trained to carry out their fiscal duties.

“The issue of public trust is critical to the success of the school system,” said Mr.
Wilbanks. “We continue to be adamant about providing the oversight necessary to
ensure we honor the letter and intent of our fiduciary responsibilities.”