Message from the CEO/Superintendent

Political climate drives ‘new normal’ for state’s schools

Whether you are talking about the national economy, a family’s checkbook, or the Gwinnett school district’s budget, today we operate in a changed financial world often referred to as the “new normal.” The changes center around shrinking revenue, more belt-tightening, and less certainty about the future. Gwinnett County Public Schools has done extremely well in managing its dwindling funds over the last decade, but it has become more difficult each year. Sadly, the solutions to our budget challenges have led unavoidably to larger class sizes and furlough days for teachers.

Major drivers of the “new normal” for school districts are the actions of lawmakers who pass laws and approve state budgets that have a negative impact on public education. This should be a grave concern to anyone who cares about our public schools. In addition to the multi-year funding challenges lawmakers have presented us, in 2012 we also are witnessing a campaign being waged to promote any educational option as long as it is not public schools.

I am referring to the campaign to promote charter or “special” schools, choice, and vouchers at the expense of the public schools that educate the majority of our state’s and our nation’s children. This spring, HR1162 passed both the Georgia House and Senate, putting a Constitutional amendment on November’s ballot that deals with who will have the power to authorize and fund charter schools in Georgia. Confusing the matter is the ballot language, which is misleading as local school districts already are authorized to establish charter schools.

Therefore, the concern is not charter schools. The issue is who has the right to authorize and oversee them, to ensure that they are accountable to the people who pay their property taxes that fund them. Your Gwinnett County Board of Education and I are not against charter schools. We have created three charter schools of our own and plan to establish more. The Board also authorized one external charter, the New Life Academy of Excellence, and extended the school’s charter when it came up for renewal last fall.

There are good charter schools in Georgia, just as there are good traditional public schools, but the converse also is true— for both kinds of schools. Rather than providing the funding, resources, and assistance that could improve existing public schools, lawmakers approved a November referendum that if approved by voters, will result in ”special” charter schools getting disproportionate legislative and financial help, thus underfunding traditional public schools and giving control and authority to the state.

The “new normal” for education could take on a whole new meaning based on the outcome of November’s election. The vast majority of the state’s children attend traditional public schools, and they stand to lose the most if this amendment passes.

I contend that most Georgians believe in, desire, and support a public education system that serves all children, that includes traditional and locally approved charter schools, and is governed by an elected board of education accountable to local taxpayers. That is why I encourage you to examine the Constitutional amendment well before you vote. Ask the hard questions about what this amendment could mean for your community’s children and their education, and decide who you want controlling your taxpayer-supported public schools, your elected school board or a state-level group with no accountability to you. November 6 will be an historic day for Georgia.

J. Alvin Wilbanks,  
CEO/Superintendent
And who wouldn’t? They’re in the last days of their senior year of high school. Graduation is around the corner. Post-high school plans are in the making. Family and friends are gathering soon to wish them well. The whole Gwinnett County Public Schools family joins in honoring the Class of 2012. Go out into the world and make it a better place. You make us proud!

In these photos, soon-to-graduate students from Grayson High, Meadowcreek High, Mill Creek High, Norcross High, and Peachtree Ridge High enjoy senior celebrations in the last days of their high school careers.
“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”

Aristotle

And in Gwinnett County Public Schools, we’re in the habit of being successful. For evidence, look no further than the burgeoning list of accolades won by students, staff, schools, and the district in the last few months of the school year… National kudos for the district’s digital learning initiatives; a nod as one of the country’s best communities for music education; recognition for the top counseling advocate in the U.S. and the nation’s Art Honor Society Sponsor of the Year; a finalist for Intel School of Distinction; a state award for economics education and the state’s top teachers in Latin, Holocaust education, art, band, and orchestra; national recognition for student teams in critical-thinking and language arts; top teams in Georgia advancing to the next level in Science Olympiad, Academic Team, Future Problem Solving, Odyssey of the Mind, and robotics; state-winning competitors qualifying for nationals in science, history, engineering, debate, business, marketing, health occupations, technology, and trade and service skills; student winners at the state and national levels in visual arts, composition, and dance; state winners in writing and web design; 105 participants in the prestigious Governor’s Honors Program; students in state competition in writing, languages, theater, and chess; state athletic championships, including Boys and Girls Swim and Dive, Wrestling, and Wheelchair Basketball; student and staff leaders in the nation, state, and community, including delegates to Girls State, Washington Youth Tour, and U.S. Senate Youth Program; and grants from businesses, foundations, and government to support teaching and learning and support postsecondary plans of our outstanding students.

Late-breaking honors include 12 new Master Teachers, awards in the arts at the state level, region-winning counselors, honors for “Financial Capability,” Boys Track and Field champs, perfect Latin papers and four-year summa cum laude scores, and top-10 awards at state and national levels for students in French, German, and Spanish.

This list reflects honors announced February through April, with a handful of awards given in the first weeks of May. More honors will be announced as the school year ends and into the summer (and dozens of honors were highlighted in the first two issues of the year).
Left: A colorful photo by AP Studio Art student Ashlee Wilson of Brookwood High caught the eye of a local TV news crew. “Just Keep Swimming” was featured in their story about the Atlanta High School Art Exhibition (AHSAE) at the annual Atlanta Dogwood Festival.

Below: Dr. Robert Patrick of Parkview High and Miriam Patrick of Duluth High—both Latin teachers—are a father-daughter duo who won accolades from the Foreign Language Association of Georgia (FLAG). They are FLAG Teacher of the Year and FLAG Teacher of Promise, respectively.

Opposite page, bottom: Earlier this month, a group of 873 musicians—students from Hull Middle and Peachtree Ridge High, along with a handful of teachers and an administrator—wielded bows and plucked strings to set a record. If accepted by “The Guinness Book of World Records,” the group will have performed as the World’s Largest Stringed Instrument Ensemble. This mega-group, playing a traditional fiddle tune called “Bile ‘em Cabbage Down,” was conducted by teachers Amanda McClellan, Dana Lu, and Janice Yoon. Why the cabbage-themed song? It’s one of the first songs that GCPS’ young orchestra students memorize so every participating student could play … without 873 music stands!

Above: Central Gwinnett High debaters (from left) Nadia Hussien, Matthew Pack, and Talha Abid hope to get into some winning arguments in Indianapolis this summer. They will join GSMST debaters headed to the National Forensic League (NFL) Speech and Debate Tournament. Matthew is Georgia’s NFL Student of the Year.

Left: Billboards and city buses in Atlanta feature “No More Silence for Us,” the grand prize winner in The Dream Art Contest: Visions of the Civil Rights Movement and America Today. The winning piece is by Song Choi of North Gwinnett High. GCPS teachers and students were featured in a promotional video for the contest and in a blog.
PAWS dogs boost reading skills

Sometimes, a listening ear and a helping hand, or paw, is all that a child needs to gain the confidence needed for success in the classroom. That’s where a trio of furry friends—Reading Education Assistance Dogs (READ)—come in for students at Berkeley Lake Elementary. 

Brutus, Java, and Bogee and their trainers—three members of the Hiller family—make up READing Paws Teams that read one-on-one with children in grades 1–5 who need a little boost to improve their reading.

Intensive training, for both dog and trainer, is required. They hold certification as registered therapy teams through Therapy Dogs, Inc., and have reading certification through READing Paws. The humans on the teams have learned about developmental reading milestones and keep in close contact with classroom teachers so they can support learning. 

Rob Hiller, who brought the reading program to Berkeley Lake, says the children bond with the dogs. “It’s great to have someone furry to lean on and read to” as they work toward reading fluency, he says. The dogs don’t judge, interrupt, or get impatient with a struggling reader. “When they’re reading to the dog, they’re not self-conscious or worried about their reading. It’s much less intimidating to read to an animal than to read to an adult,” Mr. Hiller says. As a result, the children build confidence as they build their reading skills.

Mr. Hiller lovingly describes Brutus as “160 pounds of dumb” with the perfect laid-back personality to work with children. The jowly Mastiff stands taller than most kindergartners and is eye-to-eye with 1st graders when they meet in the hallway. Java, trained by Rob’s dad Larry, is a poodle-lab mix, a Labradoodle. The stately Bogee is a Standard Poodle trained by Ginger, Larry’s wife.

While the dogs are the stars of the show, having another caring adult involved in a child’s life is a benefit, too, says Dr. FA McLeod, Berkeley Lake’s principal. The three teams visit the school weekly for six 20-minute sessions. (A couple of hours is about as long as a dog can stay focused on all that reading without needing a break.) Dog and child read two books together each week, and not without a fair amount of puppy kisses, pets, and canines used as “pillows.”

The trainers guide the sessions with prompts, like “Brutus doesn’t understand that. Can you explain it to him?”
Java, Brutus, and Bogee take a break after reading with the students at Berkeley Lake. All three are rescue dogs and have the patient and low-key temperaments that are perfect for therapy dogs.

Right: Bogee reads with a student and her person, Ginger Hiller. Below: A letter from one of her reading partners (and BFF)! Bottom: Brutus stands eye to eye with most of the school’s younger students.

and “Java may not remember that from last week. Can you remind him?”

The dogs, with “help” from their trainers, participate in Accelerated Reader (AR), a computer-based program that measures and rewards reading comprehension. The pups earn AR points and are popular attractions at AR celebrations. Mr. Hiller says it’s gratifying to see students who have worked with the READing Paws dogs earn AR recognition at the assemblies.

Known as Fireman Rob to the children, Mr. Hiller says he’s grateful that his schedule as a firefighter gives him the flexibility to give back to the school that educated his daughter and employs his wife, Laura, a 2nd grade teacher. He and Brutus also work with students with profound disabilities at nearby Duluth Middle once a month.

The three Hiller hounds, all rescue dogs, will be joined by Brownie next school year. The newest Hiller pound puppy is in training now.

Online, learn more about READing Paws and how a canine companion supports reading.
Goodbye, 2011–12!
Hello, Summer!

Well, it’s almost official… the 2012–13 school year is headed for the record books and we’re all gearing up for the summer. The GCPS family wishes a safe and relaxing summer to our more than 162,000 students and their families. We hope that you and yours have an opportunity to enjoy time with loved ones and friends and have some fun. In between the lazy days, art camps, family road trips, and baseball tournaments, students are encouraged to keep their brain “muscles” working, too! Families can find some great online resources and phone apps to “exercise” their child’s brain. And check out BeThere@GCPS, our e-newletter for involved parents, for tips on making the transition to the next level in the fall and a summertime issue coming in June on fun summer learning.

Be their favorite teacher

Teachable moments are everywhere… at bedtime, while running errands, in the kitchen, on vacation, or during a quiet moment on the back porch. This summer, we hope that you and your children can spend at least a few moments each day making memories and making the connections that can make such a difference for a child. We encourage you to be your child’s favorite teacher. Connect in meaningful ways and your simple actions will reap immense rewards at home, play, and school.

Junior Leadership Corps (JLC) is a sequence of 7th and 8th grade courses and a supplemental after-school program that prepares young people for secondary and postsecondary pathways. Through intensive leadership development, students gain the confidence, teamwork, and critical-thinking skills necessary for future success. The program also promotes healthy and balanced lifestyle choices, active goal-setting, more effective relationships, and meaningful community involvement. JLC currently is in place at Pinckneyville and Summerour middle schools, and will be added at Grace Snell and Snellville middle schools in the fall.

This spring, 110 JLC cadets, all 8th graders, participated in Toastmasters training to develop public speaking skills in preparation for the demands and challenges of leadership. Volunteers from UPS corporate headquarters and local Toastmasters clubs worked with the cadets on writing and delivering speeches, with a speech contest and celebration in April. Both parents and volunteers cited increased confidence and improved interpersonal skills as a result of the public speaking program. Following are excerpts from cadets’ inspirational speeches:

“… Fears are barriers in our lives, but it doesn’t matter how big they are. The only thing that matters is we overcome them…” Pinckneyville JLC cadet

“Quitting was something I was really good at. It was just so easy to do when I was younger. I finally noticed that quitting was just a state of mind. I believe as long as we have hope, anything is possible.” Summerour JLC cadet

“I found myself and my true calling as a leader in JLC.” Summerour JLC cadet

JLC instructors are MAJ Todd Evans (Pinckneyville) and SFC James Buckland (Summerour), with system-level coordination by Andrea Steele.
Holocaust Awareness

On April 19—Holocaust Remembrance Day or Yom Hashoah in the Jewish calendar—Alan “Woody” Morawiec, a Trickum Middle teacher, talked to the school’s 8th grade social studies classes about memories, about his father, and about shoes…heaping piles of shoes of every size and description, a tangible reminder of the more than 11 million men, women, and children killed by Hitler’s Nazis.

His father, Chaim Baruch Murawiec (1920–2009), was from Kobryn, a Polish town with a pre-war population of 14,000. “Of the town’s residents, 7,000 were Jewish. Only two Jews were known to have survived,” he says. “My father was one of those two Jews.”

Through presentations like this one and a charitable shoe drive, The Holocaust Shoe Project educates students about genocide while helping needy families.

At Trickum (and other participating schools around the country), The Holocaust Shoe Project collected 1,122 pairs of shoes during the 2011–12 school year and more than 35,000 pairs since Mr. Morawiec launched the project in 2000 while working at a school in Colorado.

The collected shoes have been donated to charitable groups locally and around the world. The collections from Trickum were donated to the Lilburn Co-op.

Mr. Morawiec says the shoe collections are not so much about reaching a goal for donations but represent “redemptive acts of loving kindness” and a remembrance of heaping piles of shoes and the horrors of the Holocaust.

Top and Above: Shoes belonging to Holocaust victims are a tangible reminder of the millions of lives lost. (Auschwitz-Shoes image©Bibi595.)

Left: Mr. Morawiec’s display at Trickum Middle tells the story of his father, one of just two Jews from the Polish town of Kobryn known to have survived the Holocaust. The town had 7,000 Jewish residents before World War II.

“Tying the World Together, One Pair of Shoes at a Time.”

"This Holocaust Learning Trunk Project provided us with meaningful discussions on tolerance and acceptance, courage and heroism, hope and standing up against hate and bigotry. We worked together and learned together and hope that students who open this trunk will use the learning materials as an important element of Holocaust education and find that compassion grows with knowledge.”

Artists’ Statement, Students of GIVE Center East

GIVE Center East was among 16 schools selected to decorate the first set of 33 Holocaust Learning Trunks this fall as part of a project of the Georgia Department of Education and the Georgia Commission on the Holocaust. Inside each decorated trunk are supplemental materials for units about World War II, the Holocaust, genocide, and positive character development. The trunks are available for check-out by middle schools around the state. Additional trunks will be decorated and available for Georgia classrooms. Mary-Bryan Giroux (below) is the art teacher at GIVE Center East.
Nearly 900 students from 44 Gwinnett schools spent Feb. 24 immersed in the 21st century world of STEM. Their day was packed with project presentations, career exhibits, a symposium of peer research, and more than 40 STEM-related seminars. The students—about half in high school, a third in middle school, and the balance participating in GCPS’ first-ever elementary fair—discussed their research with community judges. Twelve standout projects drew an invitation to present in the research symposium, with topics such as “Induced Pluripotent Stem Cell Generation with Lentiviral Vector,” “The Detection of Circulating Tumor Cells Using Quantum Dots,” and “Quantifying the Relationship between Absorbency and Oil Production in Chlorella Vulgaris Algae.” (Yes, these are high school students.) Nearly 100 middle and high school students qualified for the Georgia Science and Engineering Fair in April. Six projects won at the state fair and four advanced to the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair held May 13–18.
For FY2013, GCPS faced an $89 million shortfall and the need for a balanced budget. Learn more about the challenges in developing the $1.73 billion budget adopted by the Gwinnett County Board of Education on May 17 here and in a special budget report online.

What caused the shortfall?
- **$36 million** in additional lost local revenue with the decline in the county’s tax digest value for 2012, down 7.5% since 2011 and a decline in digest value since 2008 of 24% ($133 million in lost annual local revenue)
- **$31 million** to replace the last Federal Stimulus funds used to balance the FY2012 budget
- **$11 million** for increased employer health insurance premiums for classified employees
- **$7 million** for increased employer contributions to the Teachers Retirement System
- **$4 million** for potential new teachers for growth

How is GCPS addressing the shortfall?
- Increase most class sizes by two students—**$43 million** (Average student-teacher ratios remain within state-approved class size limits.)
- Revise staffing formulas to gain **585** positions through retirements and attrition (no layoffs)
- Cut division operating budgets by 2.5%—**$1.6 million** (Reduced by 20% reduction in past four years for a savings of $23 million annually)
- Receive additional state revenue—**$21.6 million**
- Eliminate 54 central office positions—**$2.7 million**
- Reduce charter school payments—**$2.0 million**
- Reduce contributions to local retirement system based on actuarial experience study and vesting at 10 years—**$19.0 million**

What additional steps are in place to balance the budget?
- Recommend only current items for funding (no new “improvement” items).
- Continue two furlough days for all employees (except for bus drivers and School Nutrition staff).
- Provide no cost-of-living or salary step increases. (Employees will earn in 2012–13 what they are earning now.)
- Leave vacant any district-level positions to the extent feasible.

What measures were NOT used to balance the budget?
- **NO** district-level reductions of current instructional programs.
- **NO** increase in the property tax millage rate.
- **NO** tax increase for the 8th consecutive year (24% decline in the digest value=24% reduction in property tax paid by property owners).
- **NO** additional staff furlough days.
- **NO** reduction in employee salaries.
- **NO** reduction in instructional days or instructional time.
- **NO** layoffs (staffing formula revised to gain 585 positions through retirement and attrition).

So how does the budget translate to classroom costs?
On average, the cost of educating one child in Gwinnett County in FY2013 will be $7,392, with about $3,106 of that covered by local funding. Keep in mind, that’s an average. The cost for educating students who receive additional or specialized services is higher.

As far as the budget, is the worst behind us?
Unfortunately, budget challenges will continue through the FY2014 budget with no real turnaround projected prior to the 2015–16 school year. We expect the local tax digest to continue shrinking, with an additional 4–5% decline projected for FY2014 and no net new growth until FY2016 at the earliest. All told, by then, the county tax digest will have dropped nearly 30% since FY2009 for a loss in annual revenue of $160 million.

With a mill bringing in less and less each year—$31.0 million in FY2009 versus $23.7 million in FY2013—we anticipate that current debt service millage rate will not support existing debt service requirements in the future.

We also see no end in sight to state “austerity” cuts, which will equal $113 million for GCPS in FY2013. Since state cuts began in FY2003, GCPS has lost more than $631 million in cuts to the state’s funding formula.
An additional challenge is the potential impact of the HB386 tax reform bill which will make it more difficult to budget and project revenue in the short-term with an expected revenue loss in the long-term.

Another question mark is how State Charter Schools will be funded and what impact that will have on local funding. New state revenue could be earmarked for future State Charter Schools rather than addressing the existing $1.1 billion statewide funding deficit for the traditional public schools that serve the vast majority of Georgia's children.

Lastly, we anticipate that Gwinnett's great schools will continue to attract families to the county and to our schools. And that means more students and additional strain on our already tight budget.

### Funds Comprising the Total Budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funds Comprising the Total Budget</th>
<th>FY2013 Adopted Budget 2012–13 school year</th>
<th>FY2012 Adopted Budget 2011–12 school year</th>
<th>Dollar Change Between FY12 and FY13</th>
<th>Percentage of Change Between FY12 and FY13</th>
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### What makes up GCPS’ Budget?

- **The General Fund** funds primary day-to-day operations of the school system and represents 69.7% of the Total Budget. Student achievement and the teaching and learning process are the central focus of this budget, as evidenced by the fact that 71.6% of the General Fund budget is targeted for instructional services. The budgeted expenditure per student is decreasing by 5.2% to $7,391.

- **The Special Revenue Fund** accounts for federal categorical grants such as Title I, Title VI-B, Title II, and secondary vocational grants. The majority of decreases in this fund are due to the end of federal funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

- **The Capital Projects Fund** includes state capital outlay grants, proceeds from 2008 General Obligation (GO) bonds, and tax proceeds and expenses funded by the special purpose local option sales tax (SPLOST) approved by voters in November 2011. Increases in this fund are associated with the advanced funding of SPLOST IV capital projects.

- **The Debt Service Fund** represents the budgeted principal and interest payments for outstanding debt associated with prior bond programs, certificates of participation (2004), short-term bonds issued to advance fund the SPLOST III (2007) and SPLOST IV (2012) programs, and GO bonds (2008). The principal and interest payments for the SPLOST III and SPLOST IV program will be paid with accumulated sales tax proceeds from each program and will not require a debt-service property tax levy.

- **The Enterprise Fund** reflects the budget for the operations of the GCPS School Nutrition Program. (The program is fully funded by meal payments and federal reimbursements.)

- **The Internal Service Fund** represents the operations of the school district’s worker’s compensation/risk management fund, employee short-term disability program, and the in-house print shop.
State adjusts to new way of calculating graduation rate

After years of inconsistent state-by-state reporting, a new method will be used to calculate the percentage of students graduating from the nation’s high schools. Based on requirements from the U.S. Department of Education, the new four-year graduation rate is calculated using the number of students starting high school together who graduate within four years with a regular education diploma. The previous method of calculating the graduation rate included students who took more than four years to graduate from high school.

The new calculation includes summer graduates and those who graduate early, but does not include students who don’t earn enough credits to graduate on time with their peers. Special education students and non-English-speaking students are included in a school’s starting cohort but are not considered on-time graduates if they earn anything other than a regular education diploma or if they take more than four years to graduate.

With the more narrow parameters of the new calculation, graduation rates will decline—nationally, statewide, and for every school district and local school—even though the number of graduates hasn’t changed. Georgia, GCPS, and Gwinnett high schools are no exception. The average 2011 graduation rate for Georgia with the new calculation is 67.4%, compared to 80.9% in 2010. For Gwinnett, the overall grad rate for the 2007–2011 cohort is 67.6%, a drop of 16 percentage points from the rate reported under the old formula.

Students who do not complete high school in the traditional four years are not considered on-time graduates for the purpose of graduation rates, but they are not considered dropouts either. According to the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, GCPS has a dropout rate of 3.3%, an indication that the vast majority of Gwinnett students graduate but it takes some students longer than the traditional four years.

Mark Your Calendar

Key dates for 2012–13
• Aug. 6: First day of school
• Sept. 3: Labor Day holiday
• Oct. 8: Student holiday/teacher furlough day
• Nov. 6: Student and teacher holiday
• Nov. 19–23: Thanksgiving holiday
• Dec. 20–31: Winter break
• Jan. 1: New Year’s holiday
• Jan. 2: Student holiday/teacher planning day
• Jan. 21: Martin Luther King Jr. Day
• Feb. 15: Student and teacher holiday (snow make-up day— priority 1)
• Feb. 18: Student and teacher holiday (snow make-up day— priority 2)
• March 11: Student holiday/teacher furlough day
• March 29: Student and teacher holiday (snow make-up day— priority 3)
• April 8–12: Spring break
• May 22: Last day of school

Register through June 4 for HS summer classes

June 4 is the deadline for high school students, including rising 9th graders, to register online for face-to-face summer classes (www.mypaymentsplus.com) and online summer school (www.gwinnettonlinecampus.com). Face-to-face students also may register in person on May 31 at Peachtree Ridge High. Classes run June 12–July 11 for face-to-face, and June 11–July 10 for online, with a July 4 holiday and no Friday classes. Face-to-face classes will be offered at Mountain View High, Peachtree Ridge High, and South Gwinnett High.

ES and MS summer school set

Elementary and middle school students who need more time and opportunity to learn will have that option during Gwinnett’s free Academic Summer School, (June 18 to July 12, with a July 4 holiday and no Fridays). Qualifying students in grades 3–8 are recommended for the 15-day session if they have not met requirements for promotion to the next grade. Participating students take a retest at the end of summer school to determine placement for 2012–13. Parents of eligible students are notified that their student may participate.
Stay Connected to GCPS

- Watch GCPS TV on your local cable station or stream shows online at www.gwinnett.k12.ga.us/gcpstv/
- Find Gwinnett County Public Schools on Facebook.
- Follow us on Twitter at GwinnettSchools.
- Check out the GCPS website at www.gwinnett.k12.ga.us where you can
  - Sign up for RSS feeds, and
  - Subscribe to electronic publications, including GCPS eNews and the BeThere@GCPS e-newsletter for involved parents.

There’s more!

When you see “colorful” text or these icons in an article, click to hear more, see more, and learn more.

- Click to see a video.
- Click to learn more online.
- Click for a slideshow.

Tell us what you think!
Click here to take a brief online survey about Communiqué.

Gwinnett schools stand out with writing results

A strong K–12 writing program countywide, a concerted effort to “write across the curriculum,” and practice in various genres of writing all contribute to Gwinnett’s stellar results in writing, including top marks on the state writing test for middle schoolers. On the Georgia Grade 8 Writing Assessment, which is used as a Gateway for promotion to high school in Gwinnett, eight GCPS middle schools ranked in the state’s top 20, based on average scale scores, with North Gwinnett MS taking the #1 top spot in the state and seven other GCPS middle schools ranking in the top 20. More than 12,500 Gwinnett students took the test in January of 2012. Overall, GCPS’ average passing rate remains high at 93%, with 17% of test-takers exceeding grade-level expectations. Gwinnett’s percentage of students performing at the highest level is well above the state average of 7%, and three percentage points higher than in 2010–11. For some GCPS schools, as much as a third of test-takers scored in this top range.

And, Gwinnett 5th graders continue to shine in writing. More than 12,600 GCPS students took the Georgia Grade 5 Writing Assessment in March of 2012. The district’s overall passing rate of 93% was a 1-point gain over last year’s passing rate and a system record for the current test format. Of particular interest, a higher percentage of test-takers exceeded state standards, with 24% scoring in the top performance level, compared to 22% for the 2011 administration, and well above the state average of 11%. Learn more online.

Our Vision, Mission, and Goals

GCPS’ Vision: What we aspire to be…

Gwinnett County Public Schools will become a system of world-class schools where students acquire the knowledge and skills to be successful as they continue their education at the postsecondary level and/or enter the workforce.

GCPS’ Mission: Why we exist, our core business…

The mission of Gwinnett County Public Schools is to pursue excellence in academic knowledge, skills, and behavior for each student, resulting in measured improvement against local, national, and world-class standards.

GCPS’ Strategic Goals: The plan for achieving our mission…

Strategic Goals for the school system clearly connect to the vision and mission—the “world-class” status we intend to achieve.

School Board adopts AKS aligned to Common Core

As expected, the school system’s GEMS Oversight Committee recommended changes to GCPS’ Academic Knowledge and Skills (AKS) to align the curriculum with state-adopted Common Core Standards. In March, the Gwinnett County Board of Education officially adopted the recommended changes that will guide instruction beginning in the 2012–13 school year for language arts (K–12), mathematics (K–9), and literacy standards in science, social studies, and technical education for middle and high school students. Learn more about the benefits of aligning the AKS with the state’s Common Core Georgia Performance Standards online in “An Update on the ‘Core’ of Teaching and Learning in Gwinnett County Public Schools.”
Have a great summer…

We hope you've enjoyed the new format for Communiqué this school year. We look forward to returning in the fall with more profiles from classrooms around the county, news about district-level initiatives, photo essays, online resources for families, and more!

Communiqué is produced by Gwinnett County Public Schools’ Department of Communications and Media Relations. Thanks to the staff, students, and administrators who helped us tell their stories in this issue. Special thanks to Lisa Hopper for many of the photographs, including the one above, picturing CEO/Superintendent J. Alvin Wilbanks meeting Gwinnett Braves catcher J. C. Boscan on the mound during the Gwinnett County Sports Hall of Fame Game on May 5. Mr. Wilbanks threw out the first pitch of the game. Proceeds from the event benefitted the GCPS Foundation.