

Thomas County School System

Strategic Improvement Planning Report

March 2014





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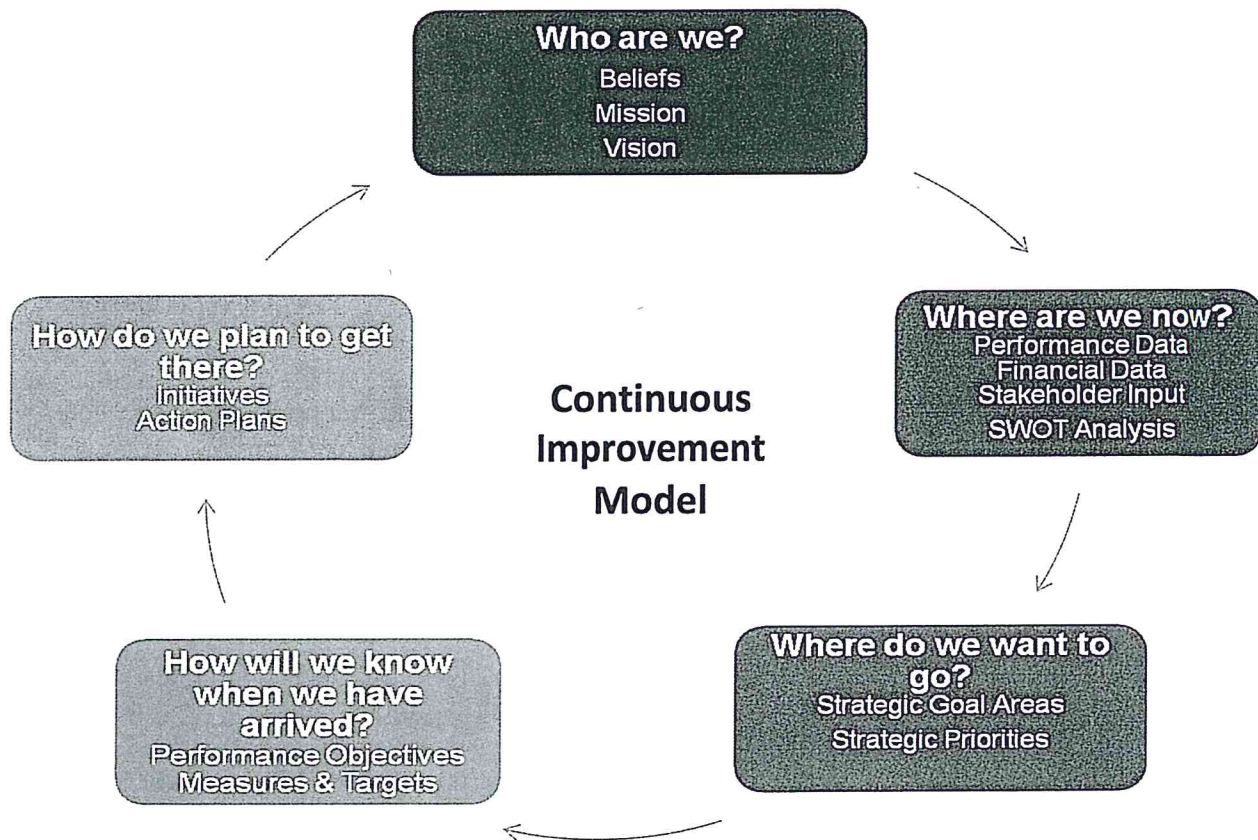
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Strategic Improvement Planning Executive Summary

The Board of Education of the Thomas County School District voted to use a process developed by the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA) and Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI) to develop an updated strategic improvement plan for the school district. This comprehensive process engaged the community and all stakeholder groups to create universal ownership and support for district and school improvement. Highlights of the process include:

- A comprehensive community engagement component to allow stakeholders to have a voice in the strategic improvement planning process
- A diverse planning team that represented stakeholder groups to develop the plan
- A facilitated planning process that assisted the planning and action teams in analyzing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the school district and developing/defining the mission, vision, beliefs, goal areas and elements of the strategic improvement plan
- A facilitated process to work with experts within the district and community on developing initiatives and action steps to implement the plan



The strategic improvement planning process follows a continuous improvement cycle designed around the five questions listed in the visual above. This process begins with a community engagement session and survey of stakeholders. The entire process usually takes 8-10 months to complete and is divided into the following phases.

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Phase I

Community Engagement: In March 2013, the strategic improvement planning process began with a community engagement session, involving representatives from all stakeholder groups and a stakeholder survey to gather vital input from the community.

Planning Team: In June 2013, a group of more than thirty-seven people representing stakeholder groups from the school board, central office, schools, parents, students, business and other community representatives were assembled to answer the questions: “Who are we”, “Where are we now”, and “Where do we want to go”. Specific outcomes include a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis, developing beliefs, mission and vision for the district, and developing strategic goal areas and priorities for the strategic improvement plan.

Action Teams: In September five smaller teams totaling thirty-seven people were assembled to answer the question “How will we know when we have arrived”. The action teams looked at each proposed strategic goal area and identified the performance objectives, measures and targets to answer this question. Additionally, the action teams began to look at the initiatives and action steps that might be needed to answer the fourth question of the GSBA Strategic Improvement Planning Process, “How do we plan to get there”.

Action Team Report to Planning Team: In January 2014, the Action Teams delivered a report of their work back to the Planning Team. The planning team reviewed the action team’s work, discussed priorities, implications and made recommendations for additions or changes that might be needed.

Phase II

GSBA/GLISI Report to the Board of Education: In January 2014, representatives from GSBA/GLISI present a report of the strategic improvement plan to the board. The board reviews the report, offers input and considers approval of the plan for 2014-2017.

Board and Staff: Once the board has adopted the work of the Planning and Action Teams, specific initiatives, and action steps necessary to execute the plan will be investigated and/or implemented as necessary. These initiatives will be investigated and/or implemented at the board, district, school (School Improvement Plans) and community levels.

Phase III

Alignment: The plan initiatives and action steps will be aligned to the districts and school budgets, as well as board, superintendent and leader evaluations. Additionally, school improvement plans and other system action plans will be aligned with the new strategic improvement plan.

Phase IV

Execution, Monitoring and Reporting: After alignment of the plan, district and school staff in conjunction with the board will execute, monitor, and report on the plan as well as ensure an ongoing process to review and update the plan as needed.

Thomas County Schools’ Commitment to Ongoing Process: Action Team performance measures and suggested initiatives/action steps have been documented for follow-up. These suggested initiatives/action steps are not inclusive of school-based initiatives that may be developed to support and meet specific established goals. In keeping with the school district’s philosophy, there will be continued focus on systemic processes and goals to improve the district, but differentiated models are

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encouraged at the local school levels. Where needed, a task force will be created to further explore suggested system level strategies and initiatives. School-based governance and leadership teams are in place to foster the development of appropriate action items in support of school-based initiatives to support and meet specific established goals, performance measures and strategic priorities.

eBOARD Strategic Plan Software: One of the most important aspects of the Strategic Improvement Planning Process is the ability of the school district to use GSBA's eBOARD Strategic Plan Software to assist with the execution, monitoring, and reporting of the plan. GSBA's eBOARD Strategic Plan Module makes the process easy for district staff and the school board. Plan items can be easily updated by staff allowing users to filter the plan by staff, department, status, priority, date, etc. As the plan is updated, results are reported on through the Strategic Dashboard, Balanced Scorecard and Goal Alignment report. eBOARD helps to keep everyone informed and provides real-time status updates of the plan in a transparent fashion.

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Mission

Teaching students to gain the skills, knowledge, and positive values that ensure success as productive citizens in an ever-changing world.

Vision

Thomas County is a premier school district providing innovative opportunities that prepare world class students.

Beliefs

In Thomas County, we believe:

- All students can learn with quality resources in a safe, clean and supportive environment
- A rigorous, relevant, and effective education enables students to reach their potential
- Classroom instruction should connect to individual students' experiences and interests in order to foster and support a diverse learning environment
- Positive communication fosters strong relationships among parents, teachers, students, and community
- The effective use of technology is critical to preparing our students for an ever-changing society
- Fine Arts, foreign languages, athletics, career and extra-curricular opportunities are essential components of a well-rounded education
- Counseling and guidance support are crucial to student development
- Students deserve a caring, professional, and dedicated staff
- Students need to demonstrate responsibility and respect for the learning process

Strategic Goal Areas and Performance Objectives

Goal Area I – Student Achievement

- To ensure mastery of curriculum
- To provide effective instruction
- To provide program diversity

Goal Area II – Learning Environment

- To provide a respectful, supportive, welcoming learning environment
- To ensure a safe and disciplined learning environment
- To ensure effective alignment within and among schools and the district

Goal Area III – Operational Support

- To provide emotional care and health support
- To maximize technology use
- To optimize financial resources

Goal Area IV – Continuous Improvement

- To recruit and retain highly qualified teachers
- Develop a System-Wide Professional Development Plan
- To identify, train, and support teacher leaders

Goal Area V – Parent and Community Support

- To increase community involvement
- To increase parent involvement
- To increase staff communication with stakeholders

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Thomas County Schools Strategy Map



Thomas County Schools Cause and Effect Strategy Statement

If we effectively involve all stakeholders, provide a highly qualified, continuously developing staff, practice fiscal responsibility, and provide an organized, safe, and respectful learning environment, then, our students will be prepared for life after graduation.

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Strategic Goal Area I: Student Achievement

Goal Area Priorities:

- Sub-group Performance
- All Content Areas
- Transparency

Performance Objective I.A – Increase student mastery of curriculum

Possible Measures:

Possible Targets:

For All students and all subgroups:

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| • % of students in grades 1, 3, and 6 who score at the 50th percentile or above on the ITBS. | 3% increase |
| • % of students in grades 3-8 meeting or exceeding all five areas on CRCT | 5% increase |
| • % of students in 9-12 meeting or exceeding state standards (EOCT, SLOs) | 5% increase |
| • % of students in 9-12 that make a 3+ on AP test. | 5% increase |
| • % of students in 4-year COHORT graduating on time. | 10% increase |
| • % of students meeting or exceeding on the state writing standardized assessment. | 5% increase |

Possible Initiatives:

1. CCGPS Initiative

- Ensure professional development that is cross-curricular is provided on CCGPS; including gifted, ELL, Special Education, other non- classroom teachers.
- Arrange collaboration among each academic area (vertical among all levels of system)
- Support implementation of CCGPS with continued job-embedded professional learning, especially during the initial years of roll-out
- Review and revise curriculum maps
- Provide SLDS training and conduct monthly data reviews of student achievement, discipline and attendance led by building administrators, leadership teams, and teacher leaders
- Adopt text, technology, and instructional resources that align to CCRPI indicators in a timely manner as the system budget allows

2. Standards-based instruction Initiative

- Schedule grade level regularly/subject area collaboratively
- Implement TKES and LKES evaluation system
- Conduct peer walk-throughs
- Provide consistent amount of time to effectively implement writing and literacy standards

3. Assessment Initiative

- Revise unit assessments to include constructed response questions
- Increase use of Depth of Knowledge (DOK) questions/activities and provide teacher training
- Align assessment with curriculum map and CCGPS

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Performance Objective I.B – To provide effective instruction	
Possible Measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of students in grades K-12 showing growth on pre and post subject specific assessments. • % of alternative school students passing CRCT, EOCT, and GHSWT 	Possible Targets: 3% increase 3% increase
Possible Initiatives: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Planning/Training Initiative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze the pretest and posttest data from Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) and other test data • Provide professional development and planning/practice time • Use results for reteaching/remediation • Provide on-going RTI training 2. Strengthen Core Classroom Instruction/Improve Student Attendance Initiative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Technology Initiative</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide training for appropriate use of technology by faculty, staff and students ○ Utilize technology that is updated and current for student enrichment <u>Assessment Initiative</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Use testing data target domains for improvement ○ Provide effective remediation for at risk students ○ Provide support classes for at risk students ○ Align classroom questioning techniques and formative and summative assessments to CCGPS and include an increased percentage of Depth of Knowledge (DOK) question stems for all students 3. Engaged Learners Initiative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop student accountability • Ensure Active learners (Attentive) • Monitor Attendance • Use Lexile appropriate material 4. Expand Alternative School program to full day Initiative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve academic achievement of students in CrossRoads • Allow students in CrossRoads to earn elective credits toward career pathways 5. Attain new charter for Bishop Hall Initiative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase student capacity at Bishop Hall • Enroll 8th graders at Bishop Hall in order to accommodate above age 8th graders 	
Performance Objective I.C – To provide program diversity	
Possible Measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of student participation in CTAE/Prep Academy, MERIT, AP, Dual Enrollment, Virtual Learning, Bishop Hall Charter School 	Possible Targets: 3% increase

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Possible Initiatives:

1. Participation Initiative

- Provide challenging opportunities

2. New Programs Initiative

- Expand the fine arts program in grades 5 and up to include a strings program, a dance program, and an expanded drama program.
- Develop more academically-related electives and extracurricular opportunities at the high school level to attract and retain students
- Develop a speech and debate team
- Develop a Mock Trial team and expand the robotics team

3. Graduation Rate/College and Career Readiness Initiative

- Implement a student survey based on college and career readiness
- Train faculty in differentiation/RTI
- Serve students by academically appropriate Hi-Q teachers
- Review data to ensure appropriate placement

4. Subgroup Initiative

- Provide needs assessment/interest of students (parent/student awareness)
- Develop common unit designs
- Develop grade level & department common assignments

5. Continuous professional learning Initiative

- Create a system and school level redelivery plan/process for professional learning
- Provide training on GA DOE tools
- Continue to use digital evaluation tools
- Implement/create student E-portfolios

Strategic Goal Area II: Learning Environment

Goal Area Priorities:

- Internal communication
- Safety

Performance Objective II.A – To provide a respectful, supportive, welcoming learning environment

Possible Measures:

- Increase % of positive responses on stakeholder surveys related to the learning environment.
- Increase % of maintenance work orders addressed within 48 hours.

Possible Targets:

- 3% increase
- 3% increase

Possible Initiatives:

1. School Culture Initiative

- Review and administer stakeholder survey to parents, students and teachers regarding the learning environment
- Expand Director of First Impression training to school office personnel
- Provide opportunities for celebrating staff and student successes

2. Facilities Management Initiative

- Adhere to the schedule as established
- Train teachers to use the work order system for maintenance and custodial issues
- Develop a plan to maintain cleanliness and appearance of buses

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Performance Objective II.B - To ensure a safe and disciplined learning environment	
Possible Measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrease % of discipline referrals from the previous year • Communicate annually updated safety plans to all staff and students • Sign-in sheet – acknowledgment of training • Report monthly fire/severe weather drills online 	Possible Targets: 5% decrease Annually 100% of faculty and staff trained 100% of all schools report monthly drills online
Possible Initiatives: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. School Safety Initiative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update safety plan yearly • Conduct routine safety drills • Communicate safety plan with stakeholders each year • Implement student evacuation plan and CO2 plan 2. Behavior Management Initiative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop peer mediation plan • Utilize TKES to determine which teachers need professional learning in classroom management strategies • Continue use of Behavior Intervention plans • Develop mentorship program including community and student resources 	
Performance Objective II.C – To ensure effective alignment within and among schools and the district	
Possible Measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase % positive responses to the student preparation questions on the survey of teachers in transition years (1,3,5,9) • Decrease % discipline referrals in all schools • Decrease % discipline issues by type among schools 	Possible Targets: 3% increase 5% decrease 3% decrease
Possible Initiatives <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Internal Alignment Initiative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule time for peer walkthroughs • Schedule time for grade/subject collaborative planning (horizontal and vertical) 2. External Alignment Initiative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule time for teacher transition meetings between schools • Continue stakeholder meetings such as orientation and open houses • Review school level discipline policies and update plans based on discipline data across schools 	
Strategic Goal Area III: Operational Support	
Goal Area Priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiscal integrity 	
Performance Objective III.A – To improve emotional care and health support	
Possible Measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase % of satisfaction with resources • Increase staff use of instructional technology • Increase student use of technology • Increase the effective monitoring of software usage 	Possible Targets: 5 % increase 5 % increase 10% increase Run monthly and/or quarterly diagnostic reports

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Possible Initiatives:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Employee Initiative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer light duty positions for employees returning from workman’s comp claims • Provide safety incentives • Investigate cause and patterns of accidents 2. Student/parent Initiative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicize attendance protocol • Provide wellness information via electronic and printed media • Continue partnership with Health Department • Reinstate counselor positions as budget permits 	
Performance Objective III.B – To maximize technology use	
Possible Measures:	Possible Targets:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase % satisfaction with resources • Increase staff use of instructional technology • Increase student use of technology • Increase the effective monitoring of software usage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5% increase until positive responses are 90% 5% increase until 100% of staff use technology consistently 5% increase until 100% of students use technology consistently 5% increase until 100% of students use technology consistently
Possible Initiatives:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Instructional Initiative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide professional learning on Student Longitudinal Data Software (SLDS) • Provide meaningful professional learning on software and hardware • Conduct a needs assessment 2. Operational Initiative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide professional learning for technicians • Provide replacement plan for hardware • Analyze response time on tickets • Analyze up to date infrastructure and devices as budgets permit 	
Performance Objective III.C – To optimize financial resources	
Possible Measures:	Possible Targets:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual increase in fund balance • Increase staff awareness of budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase 3% until 15% reserve is achieved Determine baseline
Possible Initiatives:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maximize Income Initiative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor FTE class size • Provide funding awareness for administration • Provide positive public relations 2. Efficient Spending Initiative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrease cost of energy consumption • Research alternative energy sources • Align school discretionary budget allocations with actual budget needed 	
Strategic Goal Area IV: Continuous Improvement	
Goal Area Priorities:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a System-Wide Professional Development Plan • Ensure targeted professional learning for faculty and support staff • Communication • Technology 	

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Performance Objective IV.A – To recruit and retain highly qualified teachers	
Possible Measures:	Possible Targets:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to hire highly qualified faculty and staff in his/her of instruction. • Increase the diversity and experience of faculty and staff. 	<p>100 % of all staff</p> <p>3% increase</p>
Possible Initiatives:	
<p>1. Hiring Initiative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a diverse recruiting team • Recruit in geographically diverse regions • Placement of highly qualified teachers in his or her area of cert flexibility (area, grade level, certification when possible) <p>2. Retention Initiative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide retention supplements to retain teachers in Pre-K where salaries have been frozen by the state as funding permits • Provide retention supplements in critical need areas where turn-over rate is high and where teacher supply is limited as funding permits • Increase local supplements for teachers who have progressed on the state salary schedule to the point that they are no longer receiving state salary step increases as funding permits • Develop a three year mentoring program • Provide professional learning related to specific job duties • Provide clear communication system wide • Restore 190 contract as budget permits <p>3. Staff Recognition Initiative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly communicate staff and student recognition (ex: BUZZ) • Recognize years of service, added duties, advanced degrees, etc. • Recognize personal life events • Hire highly qualified teachers in his or her area of certification with flexibility (area, grade level, certification when possible) 	
Performance Objective IV.B - Develop a System-wide Professional Development Plan	
Possible Measures:	Possible Targets:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System-wide Professional Development/Learning Plan • % of schools using uniform documents • Staff satisfaction surveys for the professional learning program • Redelivery or classroom implementation completed and documented • School developed lists of planned annual professional learning prepared by each school's leadership team • Progress on School Improvement Plan 	<p>100% implemented</p> <p>100% implemented</p> <p>80% implemented</p> <p>90% implemented</p> <p>Implemented by September</p>

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Possible Initiative:

1. Ensure Targeted Professional Learning Initiative

- Establish a System Instructional Team
- Schedule System Instructional Team meetings with school leadership teams to assess professional learning plans for each school year
- Conduct Quarterly System Instructional Team meetings
- Create and implement consistent system process and procedures for professional learning and communicate the plan to all schools
- Ensure alignment of system professional learning plan to school level plan based on school improvement plans, school literacy plans, formative and summative student data, progress monitoring data and needs assessment survey data
- Provide training on the electronic professional learning tracking system for all faculty and staff members at each school and at the district level
- Provide step-by-step procedures for professional learning tracking system on the website for all employees

Performance Objective IV.C – To identify, train, and support teacher leaders

Possible Measures:

- % of specialized groups trained

Possible Targets:

100% of specialized groups trained as needed

Possible Initiative:

1. Professional Learning Initiative

- | | |
|--|--------------------|
| • Provide continuous job-embedded professional learning | 100% participation |
| • Provide system-wide professional learning opportunities for teachers | 100% participation |
| • Cascade system Professional Learning plan to the school level | 100% participation |

Strategic Goal Area V: Parent and Community Support

Goal Area Priorities:

- Involvement
- Identify and Utilize Community Resources
- Foster Positive Relationships Among All Students and Stakeholders
- Increase Stakeholder Communication

Performance Objective V.A - To increase community involvement

<p>Possible Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase number of individual schools' Bee Partner • Increase number of school related publications • Increase number of public presentations 	<p>Possible Targets:</p> <p>5% increase</p> <p>5% increase</p> <p>5% increase</p>
<p>Possible Initiatives:</p> <p>Communication Initiative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase use of social media to communicate with parents and the larger community • Work with Family Connection and Head Start to develop a list of outside aid agencies and counseling services • Increase the number of classroom and school-wide guest speakers • Increase the number of job shadowing opportunities and field trips • Establish grade/team/pod partnerships with local businesses • Create Quarterly system-wide newsletter • Conduct Open Houses at each school • Thomas County Middle School parent/career advisory committee 	

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Performance Objective V.B - To increase parent involvement	
Possible Measures:	Possible Targets:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase number of survey feedback responses • Increase number of parent volunteers • Increase number of opportunities offered to volunteer • Increase awareness of how parents can volunteer • Increase number of parents signed up for the Parent Portal and Remind 101 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10% increase 5% increase 5% increase Handbook, website, flyers 10% increase
Possible Initiative:	
1. Parent Involvement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the number of posts on system and school websites • Categorize website information by department and topic for ease of navigation • Upload resources for parents like recorded workshops and guidance for the parent portal • Conduct a yearly needs assessment to determine topics and time for workshops • Provide yearly workshops based on needs assessment • Provide parenting skills workshops • Expand WatchDogs program • Implement ideas from Family Engagement Conferences • Survey participants on value of workshops 	
Performance Objective V.C - To increase staff communication with stakeholders	
Possible Measures:	Possible Targets:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase number of staff speaking engagements • Increase number of classroom and school level publications • Increase number of communications sent using Web 2.0 tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5% increase 5% increase 10% increase
Possible Initiatives:	
1. Staff Communication Initiative	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review needs assessment • Hold grade level/department meetings to review needs assessment • Maintain current calendar of events • Share sports/competition schedules • Share extra-curricular opportunities • Update website with current calendar events • Publish Eligibility Requirements • Share survey results • Create How-To Flyers for Parents 	
2. Parent Communication Initiative	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase Web 2.0 usage by faculty • Post homework and project assignments • Update marquee signs at each school • Submit board resolutions in a timely manner 	
3. Community Participation Initiative	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in community organizations • Submit newspaper articles 	

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Appendix I: Participants

Action Team Members

Academics

Lisa Williams, Chair
Carroll, Leigh
Haydel, Doug
Holland, Carrie
Kornegay, Laura
Mayhall, Michial
Pope, Brecca
Warthen, Mary

Continuous Improvement

Carol Sprague, Chair
Cartright, Robin
Creech, Dara
Harrison, Robbie
Hugans, Melvin
Thompson, Catherine

Learning Environment

Beth Adams, Chair
Hebron, John
Matthews, Lamar
Rehberg, Erin
Sellers, Ashley
Sweeting, Scott
Thompson, Lucy
Ward, Heather

Operational

Dr. Scott James, Chair
Dawson, Laurie
Eidson, Katie
Holland, Joey
Knight, Debra
Parsley, Marcus
Stolarik, Aaron
Young, Robert

Parent Involvement

Dr. Bob Dechman, Chair
Barrow, Delisa
Larkins, Cheryl
Miller, Mason
Porter, Renee
Rogers, Nancy
Ross, Emily
Thompson, Jamie

Planning Team Members

Adams, Beth
Barrow, Delisa
Bryan, Alfred
Cain, Gwen
Carroll, Leigh
Cartright, Robin
Carver, David
Chavaux, Melanie
Creech, Dara
Davis, Stacey
Dawson, Laurie
Dechman, Bob
Eidson, Katie
Gaskin, Rachel
Groom, Myrna
Griffis, Anna
Griner, Madelyn
Hancock, Wanda
Harrison, Robbie
Haydel, Doug
Hebron, John
Hinckley, Donita
Holland, Carrie
Holland, Joey
Hugans, Melvin
Jackson, Charlene
James, Scott
Jones, Jessica
Kilgore, Alexis
Knight, Debra
Kornegay, Emily
Kornegay, George
Kornegay, Laura
Lambert, Janet
Lane, Ashley
Larkins, Cheryl
Manning, Michelle
McElroy, Annie
Miller, Mason
Mobley, Sharon
Moye, Feraby
Odom, Chris
Owens, Liz
Parramore, Kelly

Parsley, Marcus
Pollock, Leigh
Pope, Brecca
Porter, Renee
Rehberg, Erin
Rogers, Nancy
Ross, Emily
Sellers, Ashley
Sprague, Carol
Stolarik, Aaron
Thompson, Catherine
Thompson, Lucy
Thompson, Jamie
Ward, Heather
Williams, Lisa
Williams, Stephanie
Warthen, Mary
Wooten, Cindy
Wolters, Barbara
Young, Kelly
Young, Robert

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Appendix II:

Thomas County School System Community Engagement Session

Community Forum – March 19, 2013

Online Survey – March--April 2013

Prepared by: Laura D. Reilly, Georgia School Boards Association

To assist the Strategic Planning Team with their work, the Thomas County School System engaged its community in a process to gauge the thoughts, feelings and perceptions that stakeholders hold regarding the district – before the plan was developed. The engagement initiative, designed and implemented by the Georgia School Boards Association, included a community conversation and an online survey. A genuine effort was made to make the process as inclusive and transparent as possible. Participants of the community engagement initiative responded to the following questions:

1. To be the best it can be, what should the Thomas County School System preserve/keep?
2. To be the best it can be, what should the Thomas County School System change/do differently?
3. What do you think are the top challenges faced by the Thomas County School System?
4. What do you think are the top challenges faced by the students in the Thomas County School System?
5. As a community, what do we want our public schools to provide for students?

The intention of this report is to provide a collection of the best thinking of school and community members regarding the five questions presented. The information gathered is qualitative and seeks to focus attention on those areas where participants found common ground. Members of the strategic planning team will use the input of the community to assist them in developing a plan to move the district forward.

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The Format

Community Forum

During February and March, the district worked to recruit participants to attend the community engagement session. The meeting was advertised in the local newspaper, on the district's website, through school announcements and at meetings throughout the district.

At the community forum on March 19, 2013, at the Thomas County Central High School, over 300 participants heard a presentation on the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA) strategic planning process, educational issues, school district achievement data and the process for small group discussion. Participants were randomly divided into smaller groups in which to hold their conversation.

Volunteer facilitators agreed to lead the discussions and take notes. The facilitators were not school system employees.

Facilitators did not ascribe any individual's name to comments written in the notes of the small group discussions. At the conclusion of the discussion, participants prioritized their lists of comments by marking the three ideas or comments they thought were most important for each question asked.

GSBA staff transcribed all of the notes. Laura Reilly compiled the report by sorting the comments and using the results of each group's prioritizing activity to determine the top issues cited by the groups for each question.

Online Survey

An online survey using the same questions offered additional input opportunities. If they desired to do so, participants could provide additional comments on all questions and on the survey as a whole. The choices listed for questions were used only to add structure to the survey and avoid ending up with lists of comments in no order or context.

SurveyMonkey was used as the online survey tool.

The Response

More than 300 community members, teachers, students and staff participated in the community forum. There were 17 discussion groups. Attendees of the community forum were not asked to identify themselves, but administrators for the district noted that there was a wide cross section of employees, parents and community members. A special note needs to be made regarding the tremendous effort on the part of the superintendent and his staff to promote the meeting and recruit stakeholders to attend the meeting. In addition, a tremendous effort was put into finding neutral facilitators who were not school system employees. Recruitment is the most time consuming and critical part of successfully engaging stakeholders. Promotion of the survey also yielded good results as 243 people completed the online instrument. On the survey, 42 percent identified themselves as teachers, 41 percent identified themselves as parents and 9 percent said they were classified employees.

Reasons to be Proud and Assets to Build Upon

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When asked, “To be the best it can be, what should the Thomas County School System preserve/keep?” the following represents the areas of greatest agreement among survey respondents and community conversation participants:

- 1) **Special Programs** – Participants of the community conversation selected numerous special programs as assets and programs they wished would be preserved. Twelve of the 17 discussion groups selected the “Three-Year-Old Program” or special needs children as a top three program they wished to be preserved. Participants noted that the initial cost of the program paid off as the children progressed through school. Six of the 17 groups chose the MERIT program as one they are proud of and wished to be preserved. Five groups noted the variety of programs offered by the school system as a strength and one that should be continued. Included were drama, band, art, athletics and after school programs.
- 2) **Communications and Technology** – Four groups cited the system’s use of technology to communicate and share instruction as a top three asset. Parent portal, the email system, Infinite Campus, the district’s website and the technology staff were noted.
- 3) Other issues and/or topics that were chosen as a top three asset by at least three groups were:
 - **Highly qualified teachers and staff** – This was also the overwhelming first choice of online survey participants.
 - **Fine arts and physical education** – Three groups noted their desire to continue these programs and save them from any further cuts.
 - **PREP Academy**
 - **Efforts to communicate with parents**
- 4) Top five assets and/or reasons for pride chosen by survey participants were (numbers for first choice and second choice were added together to determine top five):
 - 1st – **Highly qualified teachers** (chosen by 65 as first choice and 40 as second choice)
 - 2nd – **Current focus on students and student achievement** (chosen by 29 as first choice and 28 as second choice)
 - 3rd – **Quality teachers based on student achievement** (chosen by 27 as first choice and 17 as second choice)
 - 4th – **Safety and discipline** (chosen by 13 as first choice and 27 as second choice)
 - 5th - **Technology and communications** (chosen by 17 as first choice and 19 as second choice)

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Possibilities for Change and Growth

When asked, “To be the best it can be, what should the Thomas County School System change or do differently?” the following represents the areas of greatest agreement among survey respondents and community conversation participants:

1) **The need for more counselors and counseling services** – This was the only issue that was chosen as a top three area needing improvement by more than four groups. Five of the 17 groups chose this as a top three choice. Four other groups also discussed this issue. At the center of the discussion was the need for additional counselors to assist students with guidance on course work and personal issues, providing career counseling, offering these services in Spanish, and beginning these services in earlier grades.

2) **Curriculum issues** – Three groups chose this as a top three area needing change and/or improvement. Two other groups also discussed this. Details mentioned included:

- Offer more fine arts programs at all grade levels
- Using more technology in the classroom (instructional use)
- Move toward performance-based learning
- Offer more support for the “regular” curriculum
- Provide students with math skills they can use in work situations like counting change and percentages
- Offer additional opportunities for gifted students outside of MERIT
- Offer additional exploratory courses

3) **Class size** – Reducing the class size was chosen as a top three choice by three of the 17 discussion groups. This was also the first choice on the online survey. There was a lot of discussion about how class size is affecting instruction, discipline and morale. It is understood that this is a funding issue.

4) Top five areas needing change and/or improvement chosen by survey participants were (numbers for first choice and second choice were added together to determine top five):

- 1st – **Class size (reduce the class size)** (chosen by 68 as first choice and 34 as second choice)
- 2nd – **Improving parental involvement** (chosen by 26 as first choice and 27 as second choice; this was also discussed in five of the discussion groups)
- 3rd – **Improve the way students are assessed** (chosen by 19 as first choice and 22 as second choice)
- 4th – **Improve on and increase the use of technology** (chosen by 20 as first choice and 17 as second choice)
- 5th – **Assistance for at---risk students** (chosen by 10 as first choice and 22 as second choice)

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Top Challenges Faced by the School District

When asked, “What are the top challenges facing the Thomas County School System?” the following represents the areas of greatest agreement among survey respondents and community conversation participants:

1) **Funding/Budget Cuts** – Eleven of the 17 groups cited funding as the top challenge for the school district. This was also the top choice on the online survey. Under the general heading of funding, the discussion centered on the need to look at a millage increase, the cost of health insurance and simply needing increased funding.

A number of issues that are affected by funding were mentioned as well; they are:

- **Increased class sizes resulting in increased workloads, doing more with less and having fewer support staff** --- This was chosen as a top three choice in eight of the 17 discussion groups. It was also discussed in four other groups.

- **Retaining highly qualified teachers and staff** – Three groups chose this as a top three choice and another five groups discussed it. It also came out as the fourth highest challenge cited on the online survey. The concern is that reduced salaries will lead the best teachers and staff to seek employment elsewhere.

2) **Parental involvement and support** – Nine out of the 17 groups voted this a top three challenge for the district. It was discussed in another two groups and was also the third highest challenge cited on the survey. Details included needing to make parents and grandparents feel more comfortable in schools, the need for parent involvement coordinators and finding ways to increase attendance at parent workshops and gain more support from parents with discipline issues.

3) **Discipline, safety and security** – Five of the 17 groups voted this as a top three challenge for the district. It also was the second highest rated challenge on the survey. Specifics included working on solutions to bullying, lifting restrictions on teachers in handling discipline, behavior on the buses and enforcing policies and procedures in a consistent manner.

4) Top five system challenges chosen by survey participants were:

- 1st – **Funding** (chosen by 72, or 30 percent of survey takers)
- 2nd – **Discipline and safety issues** (chosen by 43, or 18 percent)
- 3rd – **Parental involvement** (chosen by 29, or 12 percent)
- 4th – **Retaining quality staff and teachers** (chosen by 24, or 10 percent)
- 5th – **Curriculum issues** (chosen by 17, or seven percent)

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Top Challenges Faced by the Students

When asked, “What are the top challenges facing students of the Thomas County School System?” the following represents the areas of greatest agreement among survey respondents and community conversation participants:

- 1) **Bullying, discipline and peer pressure** – Six of the 17 groups at the community meeting said this is one of the major challenges faced by students in Thomas County. Another two groups discussed the issue. Related to this, three groups chose “Peer Pressure” as a top three challenge for students.
- 2) **Lack of parental involvement and support** – Six groups voted this as a top three challenge for students and two other groups discussed it. This came in second on the online survey. In a related issue, three groups at the community conversation chose the lack of resources for parents as a top three challenge for students. This included parents not reading to their children at a young age.
- 3) **Lack of counseling and guidance support** – Four groups at the community meeting chose this as a top three challenge for students.
- 4) **Lack of life skills, personal accountability and motivation** – Three groups chose this as a top three challenge facing students and another three groups discussed it. This was the top challenge cited in the online survey.
- 5) Top five student challenges chosen by survey participants were:
 - 1st – **Lack of life skills, personal accountability and motivation** (chosen by 71, or 30 percent)
 - 2nd – **Lack of parental involvement** (chosen by 31, or 13 percent)
 - 3rd – **Lack of adult role models** (chosen by 22, or 9 percent)
 - 4th – (tie) **Life challenges, home life, poverty** (chosen by 18, or 7 percent)
 - 4th – (tie) **Being ready for college** (chosen by 18, or 7 percent)
 - 5th – **Changing economy/fewer job opportunities** (chosen by 16, or 6 percent)

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What the Community Wants the District to Provide Students

When asked, “As a community, what do we want our public schools to provide for our students?” the following were top issues:

- 1) **Community involvement and support** – Eight of the 17 groups at the community meeting chose this as one of the top three things they want the community to provide the schools and students. Another two groups discussed this. Community involvement and support was described as financial support, local businesses offering internships and adult mentors, volunteer tutors and fundraisers.
- 2) **Counseling services** – Four of the 17 groups at the community meeting said this was a top three choice for what the community wants for students.
- 3) **Including life skills in the curriculum**– Four discussion groups chose this as a top three option for what the community wants the district to provide for students. Ideas shared in the discussion include: offering this coursework after hours or before school, incorporating character education throughout the curriculum, engaging students in setting short- and long-term goals and teaching social skills like respect and courtesy.
- 4) **Safe, clean, orderly environment** – Although only three groups chose this as a top three issue, it was discussed in three other groups. It also came in second on the online survey.
- 5) **Well rounded curriculum that includes art, PE, music, technology, life skills and professional etiquette** – This was a top three choice for three discussion groups and came in first on the online survey.
- 6) **More technology** – Three groups chose this as a top three issue and it came up in another two groups.
- 7) Top five ideas from the online survey for what the community wants schools to provide students were (numbers for first choice and second choice were added together to determine top five):
 - 1st – **Well rounded education that includes the arts, physical education, technology and life skills** (chosen by 56 as first choice and 47 as second choice)
 - 2nd – **Safe environment** (chosen by 26 as first choice and 43 as second choice)
 - 3rd – **A quality education that includes opportunities for technical and career programs** (chosen by 25 as first choice and 31 as second choice)
 - 4th – **A quality education that focuses on the basics (math, science and language arts)** (chosen by 31 as first choice and 19 as second choice)

 - 5th – **Global Pre--K** (chosen by 26 as first choice and 13 as second choice)

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Appendix III: Planning Team Stakeholder Wants and Expectations Summary

During the planning team session participants were asked to summarize the wants and expectations of the students, internal and external stakeholders of Thomas County Schools based on the focus group and survey results.

Students	<p><u>Wants and Expectations</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Challenged 2. Safe 3. Ready 4. Fun 5. Variety of opportunities to succeed 6. Learn 7. Life skills/experiences 8. Career pathways for future 9. Understand how to apply knowledge learned by doing hands on choice experience 10. Clean bathrooms 11. College preparedness/career preparedness 12. Diverse teaching styles 13. Lunch flexibility 14. Transition between classes more structured 15. Need relevance 16. Need to belong 17. Purposeful learning 18. Don't want to guess why they are there 19. Safe 20. Clean facility, adequate supplies, diverse instruction with varied teaching opportunities in and out of school, doors opened more resources 21. Relevance and depth of curriculum 22. Respected and valued 23. Innovative and creative teaching 24. To feel safe 25. To be prepared for a variety of options after high school 26. To be competitive for college and the work force to be cared for
Internal Stakeholders	<p><u>Wants and Expectations</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Supportive environment 2. Respect 3. Loyalty 4. Trust 5. Focus on reading comprehension and critical thinking 6. Increased home support 7. Dedicated students 8. Individual student success 9. Supportive administration/Community 10. Positive learning environment with uninterrupted maximal

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	<p>instruction time.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Motivated accountable students with the support and respect of external stakeholders 12. Communication at all levels 13. Increased data awareness 14. Positive, professional rapport 15. Relevant professional development 16. Support from community & parents 17. Administrative support valued 18. Students with a work ethic and that want to learn 19. Supported by parents and school family 20. Structure, order 21. Consistency 22. Continue to have ability to provide input to system administration. 23. Feel welcome in the schools 24. Students to feel safe 25. Work ethics 26. Positive communication 27. Input to be valued 28. Skilled workforce 29. Dedicated staff who like kids/enjoy their work 30. Versatility /adaptability/flexibility, more parental involvement and support 31. Involvement and support lifelong-learners knowledgeable about subject matter and age group
<p>External Stakeholders</p>	<p><u>Wants and Expectations</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I want my children to receive valuable and meaningful skills in a safe environment to prepare them for the next step. 2. Productive citizens 3. High-performing /quality workers 4. Educated problems solvers 5. Wants the educational experience to maximize student potential 6. Well rounded individuals that possess soft skills, work ethic and sense of social responsibility 7. Communication 8. Graduate preparedness/work ready 9. Involvement 10. Students that can think 11. Flexibility 12. Respectful vs. Courteous 13. Students that can read, write, and speak 14. Students with a work ethic 15. Students with decorum professional dress, eye contact 16. Dedicated, empathetic, enthusiastic, qualified, loving nurturing staff. 17. Open communication

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Appendix IV: Planning Team’s Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis

1. What is unique about the school district and its community?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Kornegay • Archbold • Plantations • Historical District • Downtown • Flowers Bakery • Public/Private • Universities • YMCA • Center of the Arts • TCRC • Boys/Girls Club • School district setup • Age- appropriate instruction and resources • Centralized schools within large/community • Pre-K Program • Mass Media Program • Diversity of extracurricular activities • Sense of community connections • Structure of grades/buildings • Transportation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership style • Detail Oriented • Responsive • Part of the team • Industry • Planning for future • Bee Partners • Close connections to post-secondary schools • Multiple pathways to success • School to work • School to tech • School to college/university • School system organization • Merit Program • Wide economic diversity • Highly qualified staff • Charter School • Family Oriented • Educational programs (SWGTC, TU, VSU, Bainbridge College, ABAC, Albany State)
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2. What do we want to make sure that we maintain? Keep?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prep Academy Merit • 3 year old program • 2 grade schools • Strong athletics, Arts, Sciences • Music Fine Arts • Transportation • Bishop Hall • Counselors • Nursing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple pathways to success • School to work • School to tech • School to college/university • School system organization • Merit Program • Wide economic diversity • Highly qualified staff • Charter School
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**3. Where are we now?
SWOT Analysis**

INTERNAL	
Strengths	Weaknesses (Working On)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated • Qualified Staff • Variety of programs to meet student needs • Current Technology • Financial planning • Focus • District Leadership • Highly-qualified staff • Curriculum alignment • School level • Strong Leadership • Accelerated and remedial programs • Safe learning • Professional Learning • Curriculum Leadership • Data Driven • Commitment to Excellence • System organization • Research strategies • Diversity of Programs • Facilities • Teacher Retention • Program diversity • Higher learning opportunities • Stronger economy than surrounding counties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduation rate • Technology • Class size • Parent Involvement • Student responsibility/motivation • Campus Safety • RTI/ Student readiness for promotion • Student growth • Discipline consistency • Guidance in schools • Retention rate • Cleanliness • Financial reserves • Challenging the average students • Vertical Alignment • Mind-shift change • Parent involvement • Student achievement • Consistency in all grades • Reduce furlough days • Cultural awareness of students • Fully utilizing technology

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EXTERNAL	
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School choice-recruitment • Active Chamber of Commerce • Post-secondary options in the community • Appealing community-Plantations, downtown, healthcare, existing industry • SPLOST • Business development • Other districts budget woes • Local foundations • Partnerships • Expand watch-dog program • Bee Partners/Building relationships • Local governance/opportunity to learn civics • Scholarships • Advance Education entities • Common Service • Extend COPS program • Variety of Industries • Expansion of crisis center • Downtown conference center • Offer transfer credits through SWTC • Social media to involve and inform the community & parents • Use of student supplied technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School choice- City/private • Southwestern closing • Reduction of state/federal funding • Family breakdown-single parents, grandparents, teen pregnancy • Charter School Legislation • Political Isolation • Closing of businesses • Lack of positive male role models • Low average/Income Jobs • Lack of multicultural/global resources & activities • Budget • Economy • Social Media

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Appendix V: Alignment with the Vision for Public Education in Georgia

Vision Recommendations	Plan SG/PO or Page #
Chapter 2 – Vision	
2.1 Promote public education as the cornerstone of American Democracy.	
Chapter 3 – Early Learning and Student Success	
3.1: Create through a state-wide initiative an Early Learning collaborative in each county of the state that includes all human services organizations.	N/A
3.2: Create public-private partnerships in local communities between local businesses and educational and human services organizations for the purpose of establishing early childhood initiatives that address healthy child and family development and economic benefits to the community.	N/A
3.4: Provide an opportunity for all children from birth to five-years-old to participate in high-quality, full-year, full-day educational experiences that are designed to promote all aspects of a child's development, from cognitive to social and emotional development in the home or in the care of a licensed public or private care provider.	N/A
3.5: Adopt a pre-kindergarten through grade 3 integrated education model for all children ages four through eight.	N/A
Chapter 4 – Teaching and Learning	
4.1: Create collaborative learning communities and implement expert coaching in all schools.	I.A.1
4.2: Integrate fully a variety of technologies to support student learning and facilitate assessment.	I.C.4 III.B.1
4.3: Develop challenging and dynamic curricula that is sufficiently flexible to meet the diverse needs of students and to support higher-order thinking.	I.A.1
4.4: Develop a comprehensive and balanced system of assessments that is useful in guiding the work of teachers and students.	I.A.1 I.A.3
4.5: Ensure that all teachers understand and use differentiated strategies effectively in the instruction and assessment of students.	I.C.2
Chapter 5 – Teaching and Learning Resources	
5.1: Examine currently adopted and proposed alternative models for the delivery of educational services for the purpose of determining their effectiveness in terms of student learning, needed resources, and feasibility for adoption/adaptation by school districts over the state	I.A.2
5.2: Ensure full technology integration into the classroom by providing access to adequate resources, equitable infrastructure and professional learning opportunities for teachers	I.B.2
5.3: Develop, implement and maintain a comprehensive, state-wide, longitudinal data system	I.A.1
5.4: Develop local protocols for collaboration among school systems, other educational entities, public service agencies, business and industry and the community served in decisions related to school siting, school safety, and the co-location of community services.	N/A

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Chapter 6 – Human and Organizational Capital	
6.3: Provide comprehensive recruitment, induction, and retention strategies for all local school districts.	
6.4: Pilot teacher and leader compensation programs to evaluate the effectiveness and viability of selected compensation scenarios.	
6.5: Examine organizational structures and processes to ensure support of student learning and provide for distribution of leader responsibilities at all levels within the district.	I.A.1 II.B.2 IV.B.1 IV.C

Chapter 7 – Governance, Leadership and Accountability	
7.4: Change the method of selection of members of local boards of education from a choice between partisan and non-partisan elections to non-partisan elections only.	N/A
7.7: Establish and maintain high reliability organizations through development of local school district leadership teams.	IV.B.2 IV.C
7.9: Develop and implement at the local school district level an accountability system based on local district educational goals that are aligned with state educational goals and state accountability system, and which include clearly defined measures of school district, school and student success.	Phase IV of Plan

Chapter 8 – Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy	
8.1: Make each school and district an inviting place to be for students, parents, staff, and the larger community.	
8.2: Establish each school as the center or hub of the community in which it exists.	
8.3: Determine stakeholder perceptions of schools and school districts.	I.A.1
8.4: Develop a culture and climate that foster innovation and responsible risk-taking.	
8.5: Develop school and district cultures that are sensitive and responsive to the cultural, racial, ethnic, and socio-economic make-up of the communities they serve.	
8.6: Develop safe, orderly, supportive learning environments built on respect and encouragement where all individuals believe they can make a positive difference.	II.B.1 II.B.2
8.7: Get to know and be willing to truly listen to the students in our schools.	II.A.1 II.B.2

Chapter 9 – Financial Resources	
9.2: Identify in both state and local budgets for public education sufficient fiscal resources for implementing both a comprehensive data system and an evaluation system that uses data to measure and improve effectiveness in meeting objectives for enhanced student learning.	I.C.1 I.C.2 I.C.3
9.3: Initiate an ongoing process at the local district level for systematically evaluating all expenditures to enable the development and adoption of budgets that are focused on district strategies for maximizing student learning.	III.C.2