

NEWTON COUNTY SCHOOLS

Achieves

SPIRIT | PRIDE | EXCELLENCE

Duke Bradley III, Ph.D.



Superintendent's
90 Day Entry Plan

REPORT

February
2024



STRONG FOUNDATION
BRIGHT FUTURE

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Newton County BOE

Abigail Coggin, District 5, Board Chair
Shakila Henderson-Baker, District 3, Vice Chair
Trey Bailey, District 1
Eddie Johnson, District 2
Anderson Bailey, District 4



Board Engagement



The Newton County Board of Education has demonstrated a commitment to ensuring student success for every child while also advancing the mission and vision of the district. To that end, I am grateful to work with a governance team that observes and adheres to the Georgia School Boards Association Standards of Effective Governance¹.

These Standards, which outline the performance expectations for public Boards of Education, help to establish a clear path for responsible governance. By adhering to them, our Board is equipped with a tool that establishes a foundation for optimal performance, strategic decision-making, and the overall advancement of the district's mission.

Initial Actions

- Conducted one-on-one meetings with each Board Member to determine personal interests, passions, and desires for the district.
- Participated in a capstone, post appointment training with the Georgia School Boards Association.
- Established initial Superintendent and Board Member communications expectations (emergency matters, weekly updates, and special circumstances).
- Solicited feedback on initial engagement activities.
- Finalized the Superintendent's Evaluation.

¹ <https://gsba.talentlms.com/standards>





Upon assuming the role of Superintendent in Newton County Schools, I was tasked by the Board of Education to explore three distinct organizational focus areas:

1. Academics | 2. Operations | 3. Culture and Engagement

While specific aspects within these categories were identified for more detailed exploration, the broader objective was to fully understand the ongoing activities within the district, identify areas of success, and highlight opportunities for improvement. To achieve this, an Entry Plan was developed that outlined clear goals and objectives.

The purpose of the plan was to ensure a successful transition related to the Board's identified priorities. Additionally, the plan also reflected an effort to make a reliable assessment about the district's strengths and opportunities for improvement.



90 Day Entry Plan

Goals

- Develop** familiarity with the district's standard operations, common procedures, and communication protocols.
- Gather** insights about the district, the community, students, and personnel.
- Identify** challenges and barriers that hinder the Board's priorities.

Objectives

- Clearly communicate the steps for a successful transition** into the Superintendency of Newton County Schools, structured around the themes of listening, learning, and engaging.
- Articulate an initial action plan** for understanding the Board of Education's primary areas of interest, specifically Academics, Culture, and Operations.

What the School Board & Community need from its Chief Executive

As a part of my pursuit of these goals and objectives, I have kept in mind the qualities and immediate aspirations that the Board of Education and community have signified are most desired.

- A collaborative, professional, productive, and visionary Superintendent.
- A leader who creates opportunities for stakeholders to participate in shaping the future of the district.
- A leader who positions the school district to function as a stabilizing force within the community; to be a unifying agent.



Dear Newton County Community,

Several weeks ago, I accepted the Superintendency of our beloved school district, vowing to be a leader who will facilitate the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of our community. In keeping with that promise, it has been important for me to take the time to position myself in a way that allows the community's sentiments about the future of our school district to be heard.

Throughout the course of my first three months in Newton County, I have had the good fortune of engaging with several stakeholder groups - students, teachers, administrators, business and civic leaders, elected officials, and many others. Not only have I enjoyed meeting new people, I have also enjoyed listening to deeply held passions about our schools. It is clear, perhaps more than I anticipated, that there is a desire for our district to engage in transformative work that positions our young people to lead lives that reflect their interests while also enabling them to be competitive in their pursuits. And while our district's legacy of excellence has sustained us for many years, there is also a clear desire to usher in a more expansive vision for the district; one that is inspired by the unapologetic pursuit of excellence.

I consider this to be incredibly challenging work, but work that is also manifestly necessary. And so I extend a hearty and sincere thanks to every person who has shared an insight, made a suggestion, or otherwise given time to help me better understand the inner workings of our district. Maintaining a spirit of collaboration will be vital to our work going forward and will remain an indispensable part of my leadership effort.

Here, I offer my 90 Day Report - an accounting of what I've learned and observed over the past few months, aligned to the expressed interests of our Board of Education. You should know that we are doing well in so many areas, and in others - we have work to do. But there is no doubting the spirit, pride, and excellence of Newton County, each serving as foundational elements to what I believe will propel us into a new era of success and achievement.

I remain grateful to be a part of this amazing community and I look forward to creating the next chapter of Newton County Schools together.

Sincerely, *Duke*



Familiarization & Engagement

with the School District and Newton Community

All **24** schools

and over **173** classrooms visited!



Focus Groups

- NCS Classified Staff Members
- NCS Certified Staff Members
- NCS Superintendent Student Advisory Council
- NCS Teachers of the Year
- District Office Personnel
- High School Principals
- Middle School Principals
- Middle School Assistant Principals
- Elementary Principals
- Bus Drivers and Monitors
- School Supervision Administrative Leaders

Civic, Community, & District Engagement

- Community Listening Sessions x2 (Clements MS and Eastside HS)
- Newton Education Foundation Relaunch (Keynote speaker)
- Newton County MLK Holiday Observance (Keynote speaker)
- Newton County Kiwanis Club (Guest Speaker, February convening)
- Newton County Chamber of Commerce Board Meeting
- Newton County Chamber of Commerce Pre-Legislative Breakfast
- Newton County Board of Health Meeting (2)
- Alcovy HS Varsity Football
- Eastside HS Varsity Football (Cartersville, GA)
- Newton HS Varsity Football
- NCS District Science Fair
- Mansfield Elementary Book Parade
- Community Connections Meetings (Alcovy HS, Newton HS and Eastside HS)
- Clements Middle School Student Award and Recognition Event
- 15-Year Afterschool Program Celebration (NCS STEAM Academy)
- Georgia Chamber of Commerce Eggs and Issues
- Congressman Mike Collins visit to Newton College and Career Academy
- Newton County Arts Association Winter Production of The Nutcracker
- Newton County Schools Literacy Extravaganza
- Georgia Educator Consortium Legislative Luncheon
- Campus Tour, Oxford College at Emory University
- Homegoing Service for NCS student
- Published Op-Ed in honor of American Education Week (Covington News and Newton Citizen)
- Grace United Methodist Church (Guest Speaker, Sunday Service)
- Published Op-Ed in honor of Black History Month (Author)
- Leadership Newton (Guest Speaker)

Operational Visits

- NCS Transportation Center
- NCS Professional Development Center at Palmer Stone



Community Leadership

Newton County Board of Health (Board Member, Ex Officio)
Newton County Chamber of Commerce (Board Member)
Newton Tomorrow (Executive Committee Member)



Business & Civic Leader Engagement

Badia Ahad, Dean, Oxford College
Katie Comer & Henry Thornton, Meta
Harold Cooper, County Manager, Newton County, GA,
Hillary Edgar, Judge, Newton County Juvenile Court
Serra Hall, President, Newton County Industrial Development Authority
Debbie Harper, President, Newton County Chamber of Commerce
Lindsey Petrini, CEO, Piedmont Newton
Gail Rothman and Loucy Hay, Newton Education Foundation
Tami Thomas, Judge, Newton County Magistrate Court
Dwahn Turner, President, AJT Foundation

Immediate Priorities

Notwithstanding the 90 Day areas of focus as determined by the Board of Education, I have been committed to modeling the kind of leadership that I believe is important to ensure a transparent and connected administration. In all of my public messaging to date - **Call-to-Action OpEd** I have made a special effort to reinforce the themes of unity, engagement, and visibility.



UNITY
Bring People Together

ENGAGEMENT
Remain Involved and Connected

VISIBILITY
Be Present and Available

ONE NEWTON

I have also worked to **connect with our community** through multiple media platforms - sharing insights into my daily experiences around the district while also highlighting the observations that I've made. Going forward, I will continue sharing uplifting stories that celebrate students, staff, and our schools - presenting them in their best light. Through this effort, I hope to activate the passions of our community while inspiring a new vision of excellence.

Providing Educational Excellence for All Students

Pursuant to the mission of Newton County Schools, our work is informed by the pursuit of providing educational excellence for every child. Furthermore, while there are multiple factors associated with providing a quality educational experience for children, the Newton County Board of Education has identified three specific areas to explore for strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement.

Focus Areas



Academics

- Literacy
- Achievement Gaps
- Balanced Programmatic Access



Operations

- Project Management Accountability
- Leadership & Structure
- Organizational Structure



Culture & Engagement

- Internal Transparency
- External Transparency
- Internal Communication



Foundation of Excellence

Although the Board of Education has provided three specific areas to probe as a part of the Superintendent's entry plan, several immensely successful aspects of the district stand out as foundational to our success.

Unified Governance Team

The Newton County Schools Governance Team operates with a unified purpose, aligning its practices with the GSBA Standards of Effective Governance. A shared commitment to strong governing leadership helps to ensure consistency of practice among each member and an environment that enables sustained organizational progress.

Our People

The faculty and staff of Newton County Schools stand as our greatest asset. In each area of the district, there are passionate, hard-working, long-standing, and highly skilled individuals. They serve as the foundation upon which the district has been built, and they represent the trailblazers who will help to usher in a new era of achievement.

College and Career Preparation

The manifest of Newton County Schools' mission of providing excellent education for every child is reflected in the opportunities made available to them upon graduation. Our students have not only successfully transitioned into the world of work - with hundreds earning industry endorsements while benefiting from career-aligned, school-based instruction, but they also graduate with the tools and knowledge necessary to pursue their post-secondary ambitions.

The Arts

The Arts represent an important part of educational programming in Newton County Schools. Award-winning bands, dance training and performances, and other

organized efforts to identify, cultivate, and highlight the artistic skills of our students uniquely position our district as a leader in arts education.

Athletics

Athletics plays a major role in the school system's vision of all students being well-rounded and prepared for the future. Middle and high school students participate in basketball, cross country, dance, Esports, football, soccer, softball, track and field, wrestling, and competition cheer. High school students also participate in baseball, bass fishing, golf, flag football, riflery, swimming, tennis, and volleyball.

Regionally & Nationally Competitive Scholars

Students from Newton County Schools have myriad opportunities to compete with their peers beyond our school system. Our students are regularly awarded in robotics contests, the Special Olympics, Literacy Days, and other co-curricular events that are held at the regional, state, and national levels. Our students' success is a testament to the collaborative efforts of our entire community.

Connected & Engaged Community

The greater Newton County community is strong, connected, and committed to advancing the objectives of the school district. Longstanding institutional partnerships are in place, committed organizations renew their support for the district annually, and auxiliaries like the Newton Education Foundation are organized for the express purpose of enhancing the quality of education for students in the county.





Scan to review full report

Key Actions

I met with school board members, district administrators, department heads, and multiple other stakeholders to gain clear understanding about the current state of academics within the district - specific to the Board of Education's priorities.

First, it is important to note that literacy is appropriately positioned as a top priority for the district because it is the foundation upon which expansive student access, achievement, and competitiveness at the secondary and post-secondary levels are rooted. Additionally, the extent to which all students are positioned to meet their full potential and subsequently access quality instructional programming represents a crucial step towards improving educational outcomes.

FINDINGS

LITERACY

Encouraging Observations

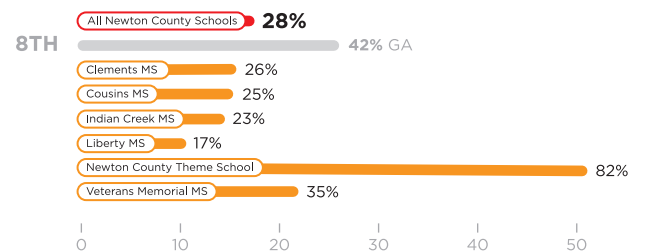
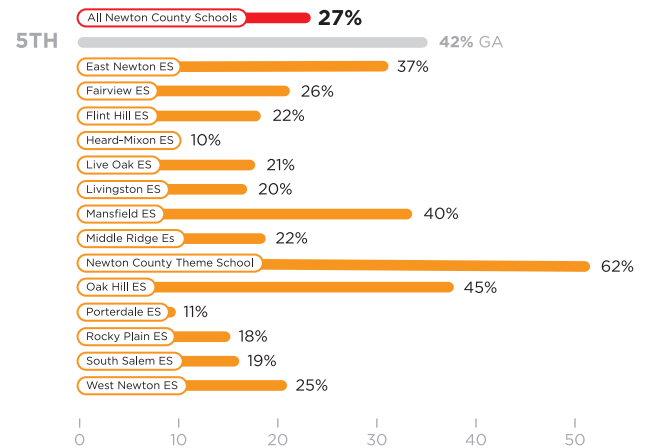
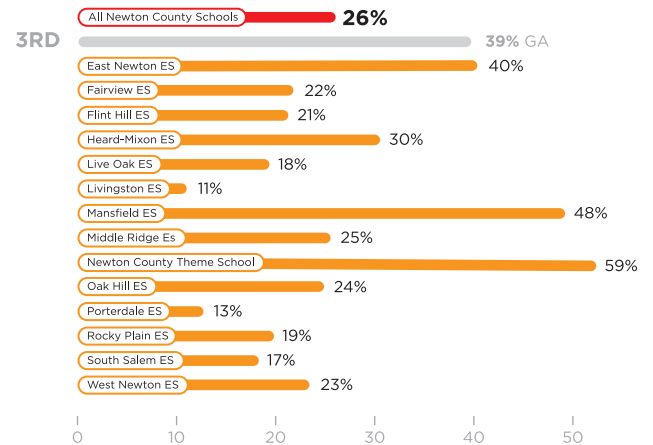
There exists an **awareness across the district** and across all schools that current literacy rates are unacceptable and performance is misaligned with the outcomes desired by the community and the Board of Education.

Schools have made **significant investments** in supplemental literacy materials to address student needs and to offset existing performance gaps.

Auxiliary programming (e.g. 2024 Literacy Extravaganza and Literacy Days) represent organized, **supplemental efforts** which are intended to energize the community around the importance of literacy within the district.

NCS ELA Performance Data

(2023 Milestones - Proficient and Above)



IMPACT

The impact of the district's overall literacy performance is compounded in the upper grades (6-12) when advanced coursework becomes more rigorous.

Achievement and competitiveness in advanced classes are also correlated to student's readiness for those courses, as measured by literacy performance.

Data Summary

The majority of Newton County School's students in grades 3, 5, and 8 are not proficient readers based on the 2023 Milestones examination.

Additional Findings

- The district is in need of a clear and articulable philosophy on literacy instruction.
- Disparate academic resources and varied instructional practices persist across most schools at every level.
- Essential supports are in place (instructional and financial) but they are too few and are applied differently.





FINDINGS

ACHIEVEMENT GAPS



Scan to review full report

ACADEMICS

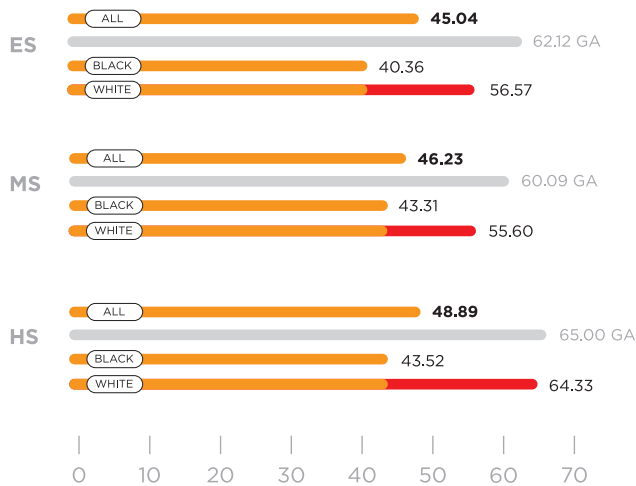


Encouraging Observations

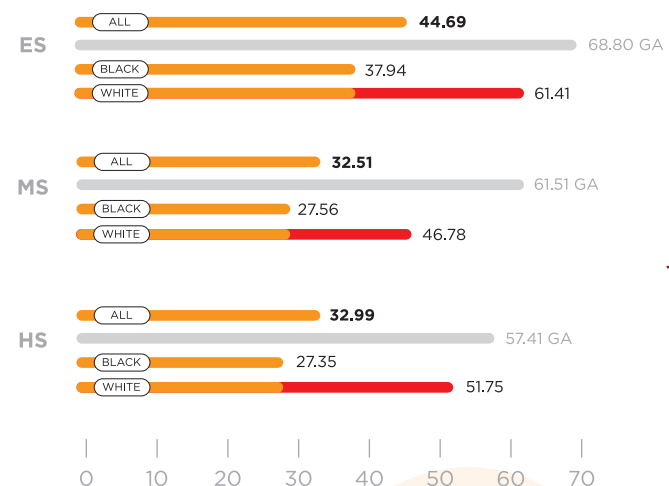
School leaders have worked to **identify the root causes** of achievement gaps and have deployed strategies to offset the negative impacts that those achievement gaps create.

School leaders, through Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) and other improvement systems, **regularly review and analyze data** to identify trends that contribute to known achievement gaps.

NCS ELA Achievement Gaps Data (CCRPI 2023)



NCS Math Achievement Gaps Data (CCRPI 2023)



Data Summary

Deep and persistent achievement gaps are pervasive throughout Newton County Schools – at every level; elementary, middle, and high school. These gaps, which are often rooted in disparities related to socio-economic status, race, or other demographic factors, are actually common among all demographic categories in our district. Unaddressed, these gaps will significantly hinder student success.

IMPACT

Bridging existing achievement gaps will be crucial for creating a more equitable school system and enable students to thrive academically, pursue their aspirations, and achieve stated goals and expressed ambitions for the students of Newton County Schools.

Additional Findings

- Achievement gaps are more pronounced among Black and Special Education students compared to their other race counterparts.
- Aggressive, commonly applied efforts to identify at-risk students must begin at the primary grade level(s) – coupled with meaningful and quality intervention.
- Rigorous, standards-based instruction must be delivered to all students as the primary method to avoid the widening of existing achievement gaps.

FINDINGS

BALANCED PROGRAMMATIC ACCESS



Encouraging Observations

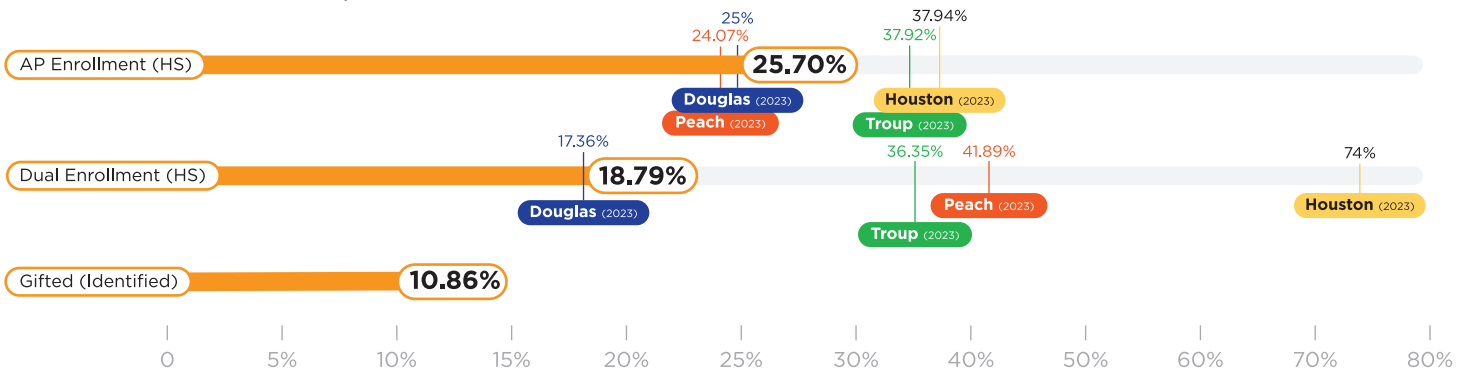
Students in Newton County Schools have **access to a variety of advanced, specialized academic programs**. Among those offerings include Gifted Programming, Advanced Placement, and Dual Enrollment courses.

Several STEM-related programs are available within multiple modalities across the district. Chief among them include Vex Robotics, after-school STEM enrichment, specialized grant funded projects, and numerous STEM-related and CTAE offerings.

The district's specialized, advanced academic programs are identifiable and **highly desirable by both parents and students**. Programs that have an enrollment cap are at capacity.



Newton Student Participation in Advanced Academic Programs (2024) with comparative data



Data Summary

- As a general matter, **a representative number of students in Newton County Schools participate in specialized, advanced academic programs**. Although most of these programs are relatively common across the spectrum of traditional public schools, a few are unique to Newton County. For example, Academy of Liberal Arts at Newton High School (ALANHS) and the STEM Institute at the Newton College and Career Academy both represent programs with creative design features. They are also similar because they have stringent requirements for access.
- For the district's traditional program offerings, (Gifted, Dual Enrollment, Advanced Placement, and Honors) enrollment numbers across our traditional high schools and the Newton College and Career Academy can be improved. It is worth noting, however, that compared to school districts in the state of Georgia with similar demographics, **Newton County Schools has a nominally higher percentage of students participating in Advanced Placement Courses**.
- In elementary, our district does not offer advanced mathematics for 3rd or 4th grade students at all - and 8th grade students participating in high school credit bearing courses is minimal compared to districts of similar size and demographics.
- Considered together, the district provides access to a variety of advanced courses and specialized programs. However, **the extent to which students can access these courses and programs is informed by several barriers that have a limiting affect**; among those include program design, teacher credentials, scheduling challenges, course/program entry criteria, and transportation.

Overall Academics Summary and Reflections



Inclusive access to signature programming and post-secondary pathways is important, but cannot alone solve for students' competitiveness in college and career. Opportunities can be created for students, but it is only with a strong foundation in literacy that they will be able to leverage those opportunities to pursue and achieve their post-secondary goals and aspirations.



There are clear opportunities to strengthen the district's academic infrastructure – focused mainly on ensuring that foundational instructional components are in place (e.g. guaranteed and viable curriculum; instructional framework; clear intervention processes; common assessment strategy). As it stands some of these foundational academic components are in place in schools, but not all. These findings are evidence of disparate practices which have been inconsistently applied - resulting in unpredictable outcomes and imbalance in the overall student experience.



There is an eagerness among stakeholder groups to better clarify our approach to improving student outcomes – in a systematic way. Going forward, it will also be vital to ensure that teachers have access to impactful, high quality materials while also determining what data we will prioritize along with the appropriate tools that will effectively measure student progress.



As a school district, we must also pursue a culture of high expectations for both students and adults.

Priority Actions

Alignment Policy

Update district policy to specifically prescribe the beliefs, practices, and component parts of an aligned system of teaching and learning.

Literacy Strategy

Develop a clear and comprehensive literacy strategy coupled with essential, research-based resources that correspond with that strategy.

Delivery & Assessment

Strengthen the instructional core by identifying and clarifying common expectations for planning, instructional delivery, intervention, and assessment.

Instructional Supervision

Provide clear and consistent systems of support and supervision for instructional personnel.

Expand Advanced Access

Re-evaluate and re-imagine the systems that limit student access to specialized, advanced academic programming.



² "Early literacy plays a pivotal role in shaping a child's future academic success and lifelong learning by honing crucial language acquisition, phonological awareness, and comprehension skills. Through parental involvement, direct instruction, and interactive strategies, these essential skills can be nurtured. Ultimately, the cultivation of early literacy skills contributes to enhanced school readiness, lifelong learning, the empowerment of individuals, and the establishment of a solid foundation for intellectual growth." <https://www.voyagersopris.com/vsl/blog/the-power-of-early-literacy>

³ Proficient learners demonstrate proficiency in the knowledge and skills necessary at this grade level/course of learning, as specified in Georgia's content standards. The students are prepared for the next grade level or course and are on track for college and career readiness. <https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Assessment/Pages/Georgia-Milestones-ALD.aspx>

⁴ The Georgia Milestones Assessment System is a comprehensive summative assessment program and represents a single system of summative assessments that span all three levels of the state's educational system – elementary, middle, and high school. The system is designed to send consistent signals about students' preparedness for the next level, be it the next grade, course, or endeavor, such as entering college or beginning a career after leaving the K-12 educational system.

⁵ "The achievement gap in education refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students. The achievement gap shows up in grades, standardized-test scores, course selection, dropout rates, and college-completion rates, among other success measures. It is most often used to describe the troubling performance gaps between African-American and Hispanic students, at the lower end of the performance scale, and their non-Hispanic white peers, and the similar academic disparity between students from low-income families and those who are better off." <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/achievement-gap/2004/09>

⁶ Professional learning community (PLC) An ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. Professional learning communities operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous job-embedded learning for educators. <https://www.allthingsplc.info/about>

OPERATIONS



As a large and complex school district, it is vital that Newton County Schools achieve operational excellence. To meet this objective, a premium must be placed on making sure that the appropriate resources (human and fiscal) are in place and that investments made by the district are adequately aligned with stated priorities.

Board Priorities

Project Management Accountability | Leadership and Structure | Organizational Structure

Key Actions

I met with school board members, district administrators, department heads, and multiple other stakeholders to understand the current state of operations within the district – specific to the Board of Education’s interests. Additionally, I collected and reviewed data generated from various sources to inform an initial assessment and develop findings.

FINDINGS

PROJECT MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Encouraging Observations

Systems are in place that ensure effective management of projects. Weekly project reporting to the Board of Education has enhanced transparency and accountability.

The recently adopted capital improvement plan is comprehensive, appropriately aligned with the needs of the district, and demonstrates a timely and responsible allocation of financial resources.

Recommended Actions

There is a need for project management support within the organization to enhance efficiency.

There is an opportunity to enhance public reporting transparency through the development and implementation of refined systems, improved communications, and through a more expansive use of resources currently in place.





FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP & STRUCTURE

Encouraging Observations

District leaders possess a wide range of experience and demonstrate an awareness that their individual and collective effectiveness is a determinant to organizational success.

Recommended Actions

There is a compelling need to adjust the district's leadership structure to enhance efficiency. This adjustment ensures that leadership roles align with organizational goals while promoting streamlined operations and stronger departmental collaboration.

Certain positions within the organization require clarity and appropriate departmental positioning.

¹ Upward and downward (vertical) communication flows generally follow the formal hierarchy within the school organization. However, greater size and complexity of organizations increase the need for communication laterally (horizontally) or across the lines of the formal chain of command (Lunenburg, 2010).



FINDINGS

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



Encouraging Observations

Within the current organizational structure, there are numerous dedicated employees who consistently demonstrate a strong commitment to the school system.

Observations Requiring Action

Departments could benefit from improved year-long planning efforts and targeted work that corresponds with clearly stated organizational goals. Well intentioned, yet misaligned work has the effect of yielding organizational confusion and disparate outcomes. Additionally, widely practiced, and unmonitored autonomy can also lead to disjointed efforts that hinder the achievement of desired outcomes.

There is an opportunity to establish more explicit alignment between departmental functions and overarching organizational goals. Placing a premium on a standard, purpose-driven approach to pursue work objectives could be useful.

The organization lacks key positions that could improve productivity. There are several examples of individuals who take on critically important roles without the benefit of a capable designee. Furthermore, the absence of redundancies creates significant organizational risk.

IMPACT

Organizational alignment, efficiency, and improved business functions are central to productivity. The extent to which these qualities are present within the district currently hinges on hard working, dedicated people who perform their jobs well rather than processes that have been strategically designed and implemented. The sustainability of current practices coupled with limited personnel produces risk and creates limits on the ability to pursue new work, projects, and objectives.





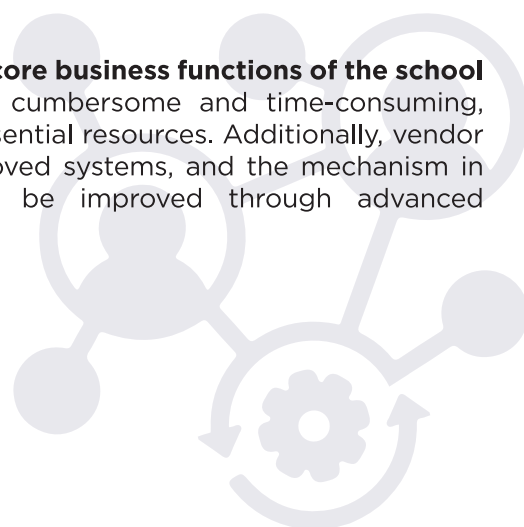
Overall Operations Summary and Reflections



1 Having met with multiple groups of classified employees, improved compensation has emerged as an area that requires attention. Even among certified staff members, particularly school-based administrators, prioritizing classified personnel compensation has been elevated as an area worthy of comparison, study, and potential action.



2 There are clear opportunities to improve the core business functions of the school district. Currently, requisition processes are cumbersome and time-consuming, thereby impacting the timely acquisition of essential resources. Additionally, vendor payment processing could benefit from improved systems, and the mechanism in place to support employee requests can be improved through advanced technologies and additional personnel.



Priority Actions

Roles Study

Conduct a compensation and classification study. The study would include an analysis of the roles and positions within the organization to determine appropriate pay levels and job classifications. The goal would be to ensure that employees are compensated based on the responsibilities and requirements of their positions.

ERP System

Explore the district's readiness to purchase an integrated Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system tailored to the unique needs of our school district. This system would address inefficiencies by automating requisitions, purchase orders, vendor payments, payroll, hiring processes, budget analysis, and employee support functions - thereby improving efficiency, accuracy relative to the organization's business operations.

Regular Reporting

Provide monthly presentations to the Board of Education and the public and provide weekly Board reports to ensure project transparency and accountability.

Roles & Responsibilities

Clarify certain roles with updated job descriptions.

MULTIPLE CHOICE

How satisfied are you with the overall communication from Newton County Schools (district communications).

Answer Choice	0%	100%	Number of Responses	Responses Ratio
Very Satisfied			431	36%
Satisfied			491	42%
Neutral			162	13%
Dissatisfied			49	4%
Very Dissatisfied			32	2%
Total Responses			1165	100%

Pursuant to the vision of the Board of Education, Newton County Schools will continue to prize effective communication, both internal and external. Under my leadership, we will aspire to implement a values-based communication strategy - informed by a commitment to accuracy, timeliness, transparency, and various other qualities that correspond with stakeholder interests.

Board Priorities

INTERNAL TRANSPARENCY | EXTERNAL TRANSPARENCY | INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Key Actions

Over the past months, several listening sessions were conducted which were intended to solicit and gather feedback from community stakeholders, students, and staff ensuring that there was a platform to provide unique insights on how the school district can improve and to highlight where the district is performing well. A significant focus during these sessions was on communications. Additionally, the district Communications team conducted a survey to assess stakeholder satisfaction. Monthly evaluations of social media activity and engagement as well as the recent implementation of Google Analytics for the district website provided insights into usage patterns and subsequent focus areas for improvement.

“I love how well the district keeps us informed; the messenger calls are helpful and we’ve come to expect them when something happens. I’d like to see the schools work on their communication. More consistency is needed.”
- Alcovy High School Parent

FINDINGS

DISTRICT COMMUNICATIONS

Encouraging Observations

The district employs **multiple communication methods** to inform stakeholders of essential happenings throughout the district.

The **district prioritizes direct and personalized communication** - leveraging the familiarity of select personnel to keep stakeholders informed on critical matters.

IMPACT

According to findings from the district administered communications survey, 72% of respondents (parents and/or employees) expressed overall satisfaction with district communications, while only 6% reported dissatisfaction. Out of 1,165 survey participants, School Messenger phone calls and district emails were identified as the preferred communication methods. Push notifications from Remind and social media usage followed in preference.

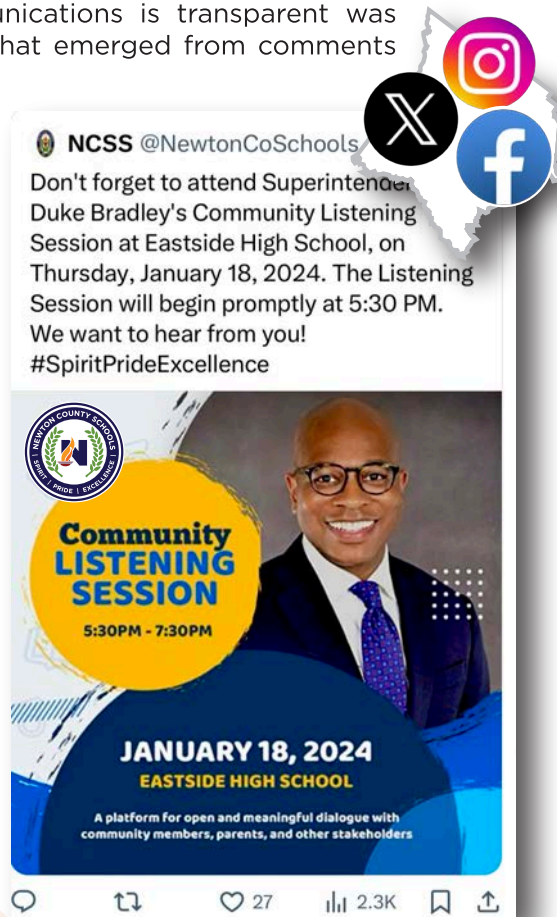
FINDINGS

INTERNAL/EXTERNAL TRANSPARENCY

Data regarding the extent to which district communications is transparent was primarily anecdotal - coupled by several references that emerged from comments generated during planned listening sessions. Specifically, district office personnel expressed a desire to know more about the happenings of the district within a formal cadence - perhaps by making use of an activities calendar or a tool with similar functionality.

Additional Findings

Communication is a clear strength of the district, verified through both quantitative measures and direct stakeholder feedback. As our community continues to grow and become more diverse, it will be important to evaluate the ways in which the district can become more sophisticated in the systems that we deploy to communicate with stakeholders. For example, there may be value in investigating where systems of redundancy are lacking - whereby there is currently significant reliance on the production capacity of select personnel rather than on a systems-based approach to communication. There may also be an opportunity to explore how to strengthen communications with second language parents and families, prioritizing engagement with persons who have limited English proficiency.



Priority Actions

Expand Reach

Explore ways to expand the reach of communications - extending to the full range of stakeholders within our community.

Ensure Redundancy

Develop systems of redundancy.

Enhance Brand

Curate a modern, elevated, and recognizable organizational brand.

Clarify Expectations

Clarify common expectations for school-based communications; develop systems of ongoing support.

Develop Strategy

Develop a social media strategy; aligned to organizational values and priorities.



Over the course of my first 90 Days, I have engaged with multiple stakeholder groups. Much of my engagement has been focused on listening to the desires of our community, learning about their hopes, dreams, and aspirations. Not only have I emerged from this period of engagement with deeper knowledge about the district, but I also have a clearer sense of what our community expects from the school district.

“Most of our schools are good and most of our teachers pretty good. But I don’t think we should settle for that. I’d like to see our district look to the future, look at what other districts are doing – and then surpass them all. I think we can do it.”
 - Alcovy High School Student

STUDENT REFLECTION THEMES

- Increasing academic opportunities for students across all schools
- Increasing teacher efficacy (engagement, connection, empathy, cultural competency)
- Advancing safety
- Improving the marketing of all schools
- Creating consistency of practice across all schools

“We would like to see an effort to close the literacy gap that exists in the county. We also need to increase opportunities for all children and review district policies. We are a good school system, but we can be better.”
 - Clements Middle School Parent

PARENT REFLECTION THEMES

- Intensifying the focus on literacy
- Creating more opportunities for students at all levels to take higher level courses
- Improving school-based customer service and communication
- Creating consistency of practice across all schools





STAFF REFLECTION THEMES

- Increasing academic opportunities for students across all schools
- Increasing teacher efficacy (engagement, connection, empathy, cultural competency)
- Advancing safety
- Improving the marketing of all schools

“We love Newton County Schools, and we love the kids. We love working with one another. I really think that that’s what makes this place special. We just need a little help and we need better pay. That will go a long way.”

- NCS Transportation Specialist

“I am interested in the big picture – our goals and objectives for the future. I wonder if we are properly preparing our children for the future. Are we preparing them for life after high school?”

- Newton High School Teacher

TEACHER REFLECTION THEMES

- Advancing compensation
- Being treated with respect as professionals
- Honoring basic teacher entitlements (duty free lunch and planning time, professional learning, etc.)

“Our teachers want to improve. We all do. But I don’t see that happening without consistent professional learning. That’s going to be key for us going forward.”

- Middle School Assistant Principal

ADMINISTRATION REFLECTION THEMES

- Creating deep, meaningful, and consistent professional learning opportunities
- Intensifying teacher recruitment
- Eliminating barriers to student access
- Improving compensation for classified personnel (paraprofessionals in particular)



The Opportunity

If I have learned anything over the past three months, I've learned that Newton County is a special place - filled with special people. And while I have recently been given the unique opportunity to explore our school district and make recommendations for improvement, I also believe that within each of my findings, there is an opportunity.

We can build on the foundation of excellence.

Right here in Newton County, I am convinced that we can build on the foundation of excellence that has been established by those who have preceded me and move into a new era of achievement and excellence. Building off of the passions of our community, the resources that are in place, and the collective desire to put the needs and interests of our children first, it is possible to make ourselves anew. This all seems aspirational, I know, but I have also come to know that the desires of our community to have an excellent school district are both realistic and worthy of pursuit. In fact, what is the alternative?

We can be the fastest improving district in Georgia.

I submit to you that we can be the fastest improving school district in all the state of Georgia. We can become a model school district while emerging from a community in the midst of change. We can continue to thrive in the arts and athletics, and we can be a leader in workforce development just the same -- but we can also be a school district where skillful educators are known to produce thriving students who are capable and prepared to achieve whatever it is that they desire.

Board, you have given me a charge, and I, in turn charge our community. Let us seize the opportunity to build upon the foundation already in place, to dream upon new and different ways of doing things, and to declare that today is a new day for Newton County Schools.



This is **our time.**

This is **our opportunity.**



We can become a model school district.

VISION

All students will be well-rounded and prepared for the future.



Providing educational excellence for all students.

MISSION



Achieves

SPIRIT | PRIDE | EXCELLENCE

Students are our first priority.

