



Standards Assessment Report
AdvancED District Accreditation

Newton County School System

Covington, Georgia

August 2008

System Profile--Newton County School System

January, 2008

The Newton County School System is in a fast-growing county 30 miles east of Atlanta. The Census Bureau reports that the population of the county grew from 41,808 in 1990 to 62,001 in 2000 and was estimated to be over 91,000 in 2006. The Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development projects that the population of the county will be over 100,000 by 2010. As the county has grown, the school system has grown as well. Since 1993, eleven new schools and 157 additional classrooms have been constructed, and major renovations were completed at many of the district's existing schools. In addition, a new elementary school and a new middle school are currently under construction and scheduled for completion in summer, 2009. The school system currently serves over 19,000 students in 21 schools, including 13 elementary schools, four middle schools, three high schools, one alternative school and one charter school.

Newton County residents are proud of their growing school system. Recent years have shown improvement in student achievement on standardized tests, and the system's average SAT scores have surpassed state and national averages for several of the past five years. The high school graduation rate has also been increased to well above the state average. In the 2006-2007 school year, the Newton County School System made Adequate Yearly Progress in 18 out of 18 areas. The school system did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress for the 2007-2008 school year, due to the performance of the students with disabilities subgroup in math and reading and the economically disadvantaged subgroup in math. All schools are fully accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and offer a challenging curriculum based on the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS).

In keeping with our mission "to provide educational excellence for all students," planning meetings were held during the 2006-2007 school year to refine the district's Mission Statement, Beliefs and Goals and to develop a district improvement plan to meet the needs of a growing and increasingly diverse student population. Four major goals based on the Georgia Performance Standards and the No Child Left Behind legislation were identified as the basis for the system's instructional improvement plan:

1. By 2013-2014, all students will reach high standards, at a minimum attaining proficiency or better in reading/language arts and mathematics.
2. All limited English proficient students will become proficient in English and reach high academic standards, at a minimum attaining proficiency or better in reading/language arts and mathematics.
3. All students will be taught by highly qualified teachers.
4. All students will be educated in learning environments that are safe, drug-free, and conducive to learning.

The Newton County School System is working on a number of programs and strategies that will help reach these goals. These include the development of comprehensive curriculum guides for each course, including curriculum maps, units, and daily lesson plans that address GPS standards, common assessments and benchmark assessments. In addition, the system is addressing the need to provide additional resources and training for teachers to more fully

integrate technology in classroom instruction; as well as professional learning opportunities in differentiated and learner focused instruction; and reading and writing across the curriculum. Finally, additional opportunities for remediation will be provided through programs before, after, and during school, as well as in the summer.

Because we believe that education must involve all members of the community, the system will provide opportunities for parents and community members to serve as partners in the educational process through participation on school councils and committees, public education forums and dialogues, and volunteer programs. Through the use of translators, home-school communication in the students' native languages, and teachers working with parents in an extended day format, parents of limited English proficient students will also be encouraged to become active participants in their children's education.

Perhaps the best way to improve education is to hire and retain highly qualified teachers. Therefore, the Newton County School System is working to promote a system-wide job fair, to monitor and advise teachers on a regular basis regarding coursework and testing required to become highly qualified, to recruit teachers in shortage areas, and to support teachers through mentoring programs and financial support for required testing and participation in teacher induction programs.

In order to ensure that all students are educated in environments that are safe, drug-free, and conducive to learning, the system will continue and enhance character education and the safe and drug-free curriculum; will work to reduce the incidence of drug and weapons code violations; and will establish an attendance protocol to monitor attendance patterns on an on-going basis. The data are analyzed frequently and preventive measures put in place.

Newton County School System

Student Demographic Information

2006-2007 Demographics from the Georgia Report Card

Total Enrollment, Spring, 2007: 17,928

Enrollment by Demographics:

Asian	1%	Students with Disabilities	13%
Black	47%	ESOL Students (ELL)	2%
Hispanic	5%	Free/Reduced Meals	52%
White	44%		
Multiracial	3%		

2007-2008 Demographics from Fall, 2007 FTE Count

Total Enrollment, Fall, 2007: 19,111

Enrollment by Demographics:

Asian	1%	Students with Disabilities	14%
Black	50%	ESOL Students (ELL)	2%
Hispanic	4%	Free/Reduced Meals	53%
White	41%		
Multiracial	4%		

Additional Demographic Information—Newton County (from Georgia Report Card)

FY 2007 Average Monthly Food Stamp Households: 4,439

FY 2007 TANF Families: 293

2007 Unemployment Rate: 5.9%

2004 Per Capita Income (latest available): \$22,857

Newton County School System

Average 12th Grade Performance on ACT and SAT, 2006-2007

ACT (N=365)¹

TEST AREA	COUNTY	STATE	NATIONAL
Composite	19.3	20.3	21.2
English	18.8	19.9	20.7
Math	19.1	20.3	21.0
Reading	19.5	20.6	21.5
Science Reasoning	19.4	20.1	21.0

SAT (N=275)²

TEST AREA/ SUBGROUPS ³	COUNTY	STATE	NATIONAL
SAT Total/All Students	1425	1458	1495
Verbal/Math/All Students	961	980	1007
Verbal/Math/Black Students	888	859	855
Verbal/Math/White Students	1013	1037	1054
Verbal/All Students	480	489	498
Verbal/Black Students	442	434	429
Verbal/White Students	508	517	522
Math/All Students	481	491	509
Math/Black Students	446	425	426
Math/White Students	505	520	532
Writing/All Students	464	478	488
Writing/Black Students	428	425	420
Writing/White Students ⁴	N/A		

Notes: ¹ACT average scores for subgroups are not available on the Georgia Report Card.

²There is an error in total number of students or number of students in subgroups taking the SAT test on the Georgia Report Card; numbers do not add up to 275.

³Only two subgroups (Black and White) are reported for Newton County on the SAT. There were too few students from other subgroups to count.

⁴There is an error in average writing scores for White students reported on the Georgia Report Card. The averages reported are the same as those for Black students. Since the average scores for all students in this area were significantly higher than those for Blacks, this is an obvious error.

% of Students Not Meeting Standards

2008 Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT)

TEST	ALL STUDENTS	BLACK	WHITE	HISPANIC	F/R Data Not Yet Available	SWD
Grade 1						
Reading	12	17	7	9	*	28
Eng/LA	18	23	14	25	*	44
Math	18	25	11	19	*	38
Grade 2						
Reading	11	14	7	8	*	40
Eng/LA	24	32	16	22	*	58
Math	21	32	11	10	*	50
Grade 3						
Reading	16	22	11	15	*	42
Eng/LA	15	19	11	12	*	36
Math	36	45	27	31	*	62
SS	14	18	9	9	*	26
Science	31	41	19	29	*	54
Grade 4						
Reading	18	23	12	13	*	49
Eng/LA	18	22	14	13	*	47
Math	38	47	29	21	*	62
SS	13	17	9	4	*	35
Science	34	45	21	30	*	58
Grade 5						
Reading	18	23	13	17	*	51
Eng/LA	14	18	10	12	*	44
Math	37	44	28	44	*	76
SS	15	20	9	12	*	42
Science	37	50	22	40	*	67
Grade 6						
Reading	11	14	9	8	*	42
Eng/LA	16	18	14	11	*	40
Math	38	44	32	33	*	63
SS – DOE invalidated Scores	-	-	-	-	-	-
Science	42	51	31	34	*	62
Grade 7						
Reading	15	19	9	12	*	47
Eng/LA	13	16	9	8	*	43
Math	25	30	18	21	*	66
SS – DOE invalidated Scores	-	-	-	-	-	-
Science	30	37	21	28	*	66
Grade 8						
Reading	9	11	8	13	*	40
Eng/LA	12	13	10	11	*	47
Math	40	48	31	36	*	80
SS	48	59	34	50	*	74
Science	41	52	29	38	*	72
Writing	23	27	19	18	*	62

% of 11th Grade First-time Test Takers Not Meeting Standards on 2008 Georgia High School Writing Test (GHSWT) and Graduation Tests (GHSGT)

- Free/Reduced data is not yet available.

Test	All Students	Black	White	Hispanic	F/R Meals	SWD
GHSWT	8	10	5	11	*	31
GHSGT Eng/LA	9	11	7	13	*	22
GHSGT Math	8	15	6	12	*	25
GHST SS	14	23	11	14	*	24
GHST Science	14	21	10	17	*	27

% of Students Not Meeting Standards on End of Course Tests (EOCT)

EOC Test	All Students	Black	White	Hispanic	F/R Meals	SWD
Grade 9 Lit/Comp	31	35	22	36	*	66
American Lit/Comp	25	28	19	15	*	70
Algebra I	47	52	35	49	*	77
Geometry	51	61	36	40	*	73
Biology	40	48	28	42	*	68
Physical Science	43	50	31	43	*	67
U. S. History	55	63	37	63	*	76
Econ/Bus/ Free Enter.	32	44	28	Too Few Students	*	63

2006-2007 High School Graduation Rate

All Students	Black	White	Hispanic	F/R Meals	SWD
79.7	76.6	82	88.5	79.8	32.3

Vision & Purpose

STANDARD: The system establishes and communicates a shared purpose and direction for improving the performance of students and the effectiveness of the system.

Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it commits to a purpose and direction that is shared system-wide. The leadership establishes expectations for student learning aligned with the system’s vision that is supported by system and school personnel and external stakeholders. These expectations serve as the focus for assessing student performance and district effectiveness. The system’s vision guides allocations of time and human, material, and fiscal resources.

Indicators Rubric

Please indicate the degree to which the noted practices/processes are in place in the school system. The responses to the rubric should help the school system identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement as well as guide and inform the school system’s responses to the focus questions.

INDICATORS		Not Evident	Emerging	Operational	Highly Functional
In fulfillment of this standard, the system:					
1.1	Establishes a vision and purpose for the system in collaboration with its stakeholders			X	
1.2	Communicates the system’s vision and purpose to build stakeholder understanding and support			X	
1.3	Identifies system-wide goals and measures to advance the vision			X	
1.4	Develops and continuously maintains a profile of the system, its students, and the community			X	
1.5	Ensures that the system’s vision and purpose guide the teaching and learning process and the strategic direction of schools, departments, and services			X	
1.6	Reviews its vision and purpose systematically and revises them when appropriate			X	

Definitions

Not Evident	Little or no evidence exists
Emerging	Evidence indicates early or preliminary stages of implementation of practice
Operational	Evidence indicates practices and procedures are actively implemented
Highly Functional	Evidence indicates practices and procedures are fully integrated and effectively and consistently implemented

The system establishes and communicates a shared purpose and direction for improving the performance of students and the effectiveness of the system.

Understanding that the purpose of the Newton County School System (NCSS) should reflect the values and expectations of the entire community, the Superintendent, central office staff, and members of the Board of Education aggressively sought the input of every segment of the citizenry. Many meetings, surveys, workshops, personal interviews, and online comments of different stakeholders paved the way for the district's strategic plan. The work began with focus groups and meetings conducted by the Superintendent, Dr. R. Steven Whatley. Stakeholders involved in this process included board of education members, district leadership personnel, school administrators, parents, community/business leaders, school councils, teachers, clergy, and students. Out of the work came a District Strategic Plan with a vision and purpose to "Provide Educational Excellence for All Students." This purpose is the foundation for all school/system improvements, use of resources, and improvement in student learning. The vision and purpose of the NCSS and the member schools is consistently communicated to stakeholders via a wide range of media initiatives including websites, news releases, newsletters, public forums, informational meetings, open houses, student handbooks, and many other public venues.

The NCSS Strategic Plan identifies four specific performance goals based on No Child Left Behind standards:

1. All students will reach high standards, at a minimum meeting state standards or better in reading/language arts and mathematics; (this includes all subgroups)
2. All limited English proficient students will become proficient in English and meet state standards.
3. All students will be taught by highly qualified teachers; and
4. All students will be educated in learning environments that are safe, drug free, and conducive to learning.

Once these goals were selected, Dr. Whatley led the charge in expecting school improvement plans to faithfully articulate district goals and expectations. Additionally, the Superintendent regularly addresses civic groups and local governmental agencies to deliver pertinent information regarding the NCSS vision, purpose, academic achievement of the schools, and other items related to the success of the district. Following the Superintendent's example, numerous other district leaders are actively involved in a number of civic/community groups, all of which afford opportunities to communicate the vision and purpose of the district. These groups include, but are not limited to, Rotary, Kiwanis, Chamber of Commerce, Newton County Education Roundtable, individual School Councils, PTOs, DeKalb Technical College, Georgia Perimeter College – Newton Campus, Oxford College of Emory University, the Fine Arts Association, and many more.

District balanced scorecards (BSC) include information from as far back as 2002, providing a quick glance assessment of a number of trends, strengths, and needs. District leaders meticulously analyze this data before establishing performance goals that target specific areas of deficiency while at the same time optimizing points of strength and accomplishment. Early in 2007, the district leaders developed a success map that charted the data to be measured and included on a Balanced Scorecard for the first time. This data was not limited simply to test scores. Many other factors were included, such as attendance rates, graduation rates, county/school district profile information, and other related demographic and statistical details. The scorecards are then reviewed for accuracy and applicability and distributed to stakeholders as an informational resource. Schools, using the district format as a guide, then develop local

scorecards for distribution to their stakeholders. Associated performance graphs are prominently displayed throughout the district and are kept up-to-date to reflect the most current achievement. Additionally, this information is routinely briefed to the members of the board of education, individual school councils, school faculties, and included on the applicable websites.

Student achievement information is collected from a wide range of sources, including, but not limited to, GHSGT, CRCT, ITBS, EOCT, graduation rates, attendance reports, etc. The disaggregated data is scrutinized to determine the best courses of action not only for the district, but also for individual schools and classes. The resultant performance standards expectations are clearly articulated throughout the district and are effectively tracked through a series of well-designed balanced scorecards.

The school improvement process is the collection/dissemination vehicle that completes the informational loop regarding the district's vision and purpose. All plans in the Newton County School System are considered vibrant, living documents that identify the vision, mission and goals of the district and provide the impetus to meet those goals. The Superintendent enthusiastically spearheads these efforts. When he is meeting individually with each school principal, he not only communicates his expectations, but he also provides valuable feedback on each school's plan for improvement. Furthermore, he embodies the concept of shared beliefs, vision, and purpose through his interaction with members of the board of education and the community. Also, a Key Communicators Group consisting of School Council members and PTO Presidents meets with the Superintendent once each semester to provide input and feedback regarding the district's vision and purpose.

Every detail of each plan is examined and reviewed annually as part of the district's strategic planning process. At the annual planning retreat, the Superintendent delivers a proposed Comprehensive System Improvement Plan (CSIP) to the board members for their consideration and comment. Targeted areas are then identified and resources allocated to address areas of deficiency and bolster areas of proven accomplishment.

The vision and purpose of the Newton County School System is clearly evident in its motto "Spirit, Pride, and Excellence." The determined spirit of triumph; the pride in accomplishment; and the continuous expectation for excellence, whether it be for students or teachers, are the guiding principles that ensure a crystal clear focus on the district's vision and purpose. The district leadership clearly communicates expectations for student learning that are in total alignment with the system's vision and are enthusiastically supported by all stakeholders. In the final analysis, the NCSS vision and purpose guide the efforts and resources of the entire district to ensure that every child has every opportunity to succeed in Grades PreK–12 and in the years that follow.

Governance & Leadership

STANDARD: The system provides governance and leadership that promote student performance and system effectiveness.

Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it has leaders who are advocates for the system’s vision and improvement efforts. The leaders provide direction and allocate resources to implement curricular and co-curricular programs that enable students to achieve expectations for their learning. Leaders function with clearly defined authority and responsibility and encourage collaboration and shared responsibility for system and school improvement among stakeholders. The system’s policies, procedures, and organizational conditions ensure equity of learning opportunities and support for innovation.

Indicators Rubric

Please indicate the degree to which the noted practices/processes are in place in the school system. The responses to the rubric should help the school system identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement as well as guide and inform the school system’s responses to the focus questions.

INDICATORS		Not Evident	Emerging	Operational	Highly Functional
In fulfillment of this standard, the system operates under the jurisdiction of a governing authority that:					
2.1	Establishes and communicates policies and procedures that provide for the effective operation of the system				X
2.2	Recognizes and preserves the executive, administrative, and leadership authority of the administrative head of the system				X
2.3	Ensures compliance with applicable local, state, and federal laws, standards, and regulations			X	
2.4	Implements policies and procedures that provide for the orientation and training of the governing board				X
2.5	Builds public support, secures sufficient resources, and acts as a steward of the system’s resources			X	
2.6	Maintains access to legal counsel to advise or obtain information about legal requirements and obligations				X
2.7	Maintains adequate insurance or equivalent resources to protect its financial stability and administrative operations				X
In fulfillment of this standard, the system has leadership that:					
2.8	Provides for systematic analysis and review of student performance and school and system effectiveness			X	
2.9	Creates and supports collaborative networks of stakeholders to support system programs			X	
2.10	Provides direction, assistance, and resources to align, support, and enhance all parts of the system in meeting organizational and student performance goals			X	

2.11	Provides internal and external stakeholders meaningful roles in the decision-making process that promote a culture of participation, responsibility, and ownership			X	
2.12	Assesses and addresses community expectations and stakeholder satisfaction			X	
2.13	Implements an evaluation system that provides for the professional growth of all personnel			X	

Definitions

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Emerging	Evidence indicates early or preliminary stages of implementation of practice
Operational	Evidence indicates practices and procedures are actively implemented
Highly Functional	Evidence indicates practices and procedures are fully integrated and effectively and consistently implemented

The system provides governance and leadership that promote student performance and system effectiveness.

The Newton County Board of Education consists of five members elected by the citizens of Newton County. All members are elected by geographic district for a four-year term, and terms are staggered to ensure continuity on the board. Although members are elected from a particular district, each member serves by representing all of the children in the Newton County School System.

The Newton County Board of Education adopts written policies in accordance with board policy, BDC-Policy Adoption, which requires policies to be presented and discussed one month and then voted on the following month. This 30-day waiting period is a time to receive staff, community and employee input. The Board has adopted the coding system as recommended by the Georgia School Boards Association. The Newton County Board of Education Policy Manual is available for review or print on the school system’s public website, www.newtoncountyschools.org .

Policy is developed as required by changes in state law, state board of education rules, as recommended by the Superintendent or as recommended by the local board of education. Review of board policy is ongoing. As new policies are developed or current policies revised, they are disseminated at monthly leadership meetings and discussed with school administrators for their input and policies are available for any interested stakeholder to review. The Board will place new and revised policies on the table for a month prior to taking action allowing time for public input.

The Newton County Board of Education recognizes its role as a policy-making body and permits the leadership team of the system to implement policies and develop procedures without interference. Administrative procedures are developed as needed or required for specific directions in implementing policy. The Superintendent serves as the Chief Executive Officer of the system under the direction of the Board of Education. School site administrators operating within the guidelines of federal and state laws, State Board of Education rules, Newton County Board of Education policy, and local administrative procedures are allowed to operate each school site by establishing school level procedures that are outlined in the school’s teacher and student handbooks. Each school principal, working with the system personnel administrator, makes recommendations to the Superintendent regarding personnel decisions at his/her assigned

school. Because the Board recognizes its role as a policy-making body, a culture of site-based management is encouraged and fostered.

In an effort to improve accessibility for stakeholders and employees, all Board agendas and minutes of meetings are posted on the system's public website. Further, all Board meeting agendas providing links to each agenda item is posted on Sharepoint, <http://sharepoint.newton.k12.ga.us> for administrative and Board review. All Board members access board meeting documents via a computer at each meeting.

The Newton County Board of Education policies provide for the orientation and training of the governing board. The Newton County Board of Education is a member of the Georgia School Boards Association. In December 2007, at its annual winter meeting, the Georgia School Boards Association recognized the Newton County Board of Education as a "Board of Distinction" as a result of meeting and exceeding the standards for the school boards set by Georgia School Board Association. New board members are required to attend twelve hours of training during their first year and receive a minimum of six hours of training annually. Board members and the Superintendent regularly attend the two yearly state-wide meetings offered by Georgia School Boards Association in order to stay abreast of current education trends and issues. The superintendent and the Board chair attend the GSBA board chair workshop each year and all board members complete a board self-assessment for the purpose of improving services for the children of Newton County.

The Newton County Board of Education has legal counsel on retainer who advises the Board on legal requirements and obligations that exist in the state, federal, or other jurisdictions in which it operates. The Board has had a long-standing attorney client relationship with local attorney, W. Kent Campbell, since 1972. Mr. Campbell attends annual legal seminars hosted by Georgia School Boards Association and works closely with Mr. Sam Harben and Mr. Phil Hartley, who are recognized state-wide as legal experts in the field of education law. Mr. Campbell handles all real estate transactions and local legal issues. The Board subscribes to e-Law from the Georgia School Boards Association to provide general guidance to local administrators in decision-making relative to personnel and student rights. Through professional learning, the Board provides a legal update for all system and school administrators at the beginning of each school year and as needed throughout the year.

The Newton County Board of Education maintains required and adequate insurance to protect its financial stability. The fiscal strength of the district is protected by several insurance policies and bonding of specified employees. These policies cover general liability, legal liability, property and casual losses, vehicle collision, state required workers' compensation and unemployment. The system maintains a reserve balance adequate to handle any unexpected financial emergency. The state of Georgia provides insurance for teachers to assist with legal claims. The Board also provides for payroll deduction for employees who wish to join either of the two state-recognized teacher organizations, Georgia Association of Educators and Professional Association of Georgia Educators.

The Newton County Board of Education allocates and aligns the human, instructional, financial and other resources in support of the vision, mission, beliefs, and expectations for student learning through the development and implementation of the system's Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan is posted on the system's public website and each school's improvement plan includes goals and resources aligned with the system plan.

The focus of central office personnel is to provide support and encouragement to schools in their daily operations and improvement efforts. The leadership staff of the Newton County Schools enjoys a strong collaborative relationship as it strives to promote student performance. The Superintendent has made student performance an integral part of principal evaluations. NCSS provides various methods of systemic analysis and review of student performance, as well as school system effectiveness checks. These methods include AMOs (Annual Measureable Objectives) that the state established and the system monitors. Its effectiveness is displayed in the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report and is collectively reported through the district's Balanced Score Card. These metrics include student attendance, test scores, and other information in regard to the system's AMOs. The district's Balanced Score Card provides the superintendent and stakeholders a glance at assessments over time. This information is used to set goals and target needs. This data is fundamental and drives each school's improvement plan and ensures that the system's vision and purpose are followed. These plans are visited during regular monthly program meetings, BOE Quarterly Planning meetings and School Council meetings and involve district personnel as well as school and community stakeholders. Data rooms are being utilized to highlight areas of strength and areas in need for improvement. School leadership teams and grade level members can quickly see at a glance student growth analysis. Principals received training in the Interactive Results Management System which support them in intensive data analyzes. Recently three schools in the system participated in the Georgia Assessment for Performance on School Standards: Closing the Gap (GAPSS) which examined the curriculum, assessment, instruction, professional learning, school culture, planning and organization, leadership, student, family, and community involvement and support of each school. This data was meticulously analyzed and a plan was developed for improvement. The GAPSS process is being implemented throughout the system.

Newton County has carefully laid the ground work for meeting individual needs of all students through the Department of Education's Pyramid of Intervention (POI) and Newton County's Response to Intervention (RTI). The RTI process purposes are to review school-wide behavior and academic data, screen and identify students needing additional academic and/or behavior support and to plan and implement and modify interventions for meeting the needs of students. Administrators, teachers and paraprofessionals are participating in on-going professional learning in the implementation of this process, as well as best practices in teaching strategies for meeting the needs of students.

Dr. Steve Whatley, School Superintendent, values the employees in Newton County and leads the charge for equity of learning opportunities to improve the system's performance. The district's Strategic Plan with a vision and purpose to "Provide Educational Excellence for All Students" has emphasized the need for an on-going learning environment. Leadership has allocated resources for many professional learning opportunities such as the Teacher Induction Program (TIP) to provide extra support for new teachers, extensive training for paraprofessionals, on-going training in GPS, RTI, Data Analysis and Technology.

Teaching & Learning

STANDARD: The system provides research-based curriculum and instructional methods that facilitate achievement for all students.

Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it implements a curriculum based on clear and measurable expectations for student learning that provides opportunities for all students to acquire requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The system ensures that teachers use proven instructional practices that actively engage students in the learning process; provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills to real world situations; and give students feedback to improve their performance.

Indicators Rubric

Please indicate the degree to which the noted practices/processes are in place in the school system. The responses to the rubric should help the school system identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement as well as guide and inform the school system's responses to the focus questions.

INDICATORS		Not Evident	Emerging	Operational	Highly Functional
In fulfillment of this standard, the system:					
3.1	Develops, articulates, and coordinates curriculum based on clearly- defined expectations for student learning, including essential knowledge and skills			X	
3.2	Establishes expectations and supports student engagement in the learning process, including opportunities for students to explore application of higher order thinking skills and investigate new approaches to applying their learning			X	
3.3	Ensures that system-wide curricular and instructional decisions are based on data and research at all levels			X	
3.4	Supports instruction that is research-based and reflective of best practice			X	
3.5	Supports a curriculum that challenges and meets the needs of each student, reflects a commitment to equity, and demonstrates an appreciation of diversity			X	
3.6	Allocates and protects instructional time to support student learning			X	
3.7	Maintains articulation among and between all levels of schooling to monitor student performance and ensure readiness for future schooling or employment		X		
3.8	Supports the implementation of interventions to help students meet expectations for student learning			X	
3.9	Maintains a system-wide climate that supports student learning			X	
3.10	Ensures that curriculum is reviewed and revised at regular intervals			X	

3.11	Coordinates and ensures ready access to instructional technology, information and media services, and materials needed for effective instruction			X	
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Emerging	Evidence indicates early or preliminary stages of implementation of practice
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Highly Functional	Evidence indicates practices and procedures are fully integrated and effectively and consistently implemented

A quality system provides a research-based curriculum and instructional methods that facilitate achievement for all students.

The curriculum used in Newton County Schools is based on the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) and Georgia Performance Standards (GPS), the state-wide curriculum for Georgia established by the Georgia Department of Education. Georgia is phasing out the Quality Core Curriculum and replacing it with a more hands-on, performance-based curriculum entitled Georgia Performance Standards. This curriculum represents the minimum of what teachers should teach and what students should know. Newton County teachers are encouraged to incorporate extra activities and projects that will stimulate in-depth learning and higher-order thinking skills. Focused walk-throughs assist administrators and peer teachers in determining areas of strength and areas needing improvement.

Newton County Schools’ curriculum directors, school administrators, and department chairs have facilitated the replacement of the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) with the Georgia Georgia Performance Standards (GPS), which includes learning units for the course or grade-level subject area. These units are available to all teachers on the Newton County Schools’ Sharepoint Site. In addition, information regarding the learning units is available to parents via the Newton County Schools’ website. All learning units are updated each summer. Textbooks to support learning units are adopted on a 7-year cycle. This adoption cycle includes updates to media and technological resources. The Newton County Schools’ Program Planning Guide and School Handbooks are updated on a yearly basis and include changes/revisions in state and local curriculum and policies.

At the beginning of the process of developing learning units, teachers, led by curriculum directors, unpacked standards, determined essential focus/unit questions, designed curriculum maps, and developed units that sequenced the performance standards. Schools have developed common planning times and grade level teams as much as possible in order to facilitate collaboration among teachers. Data analysis from CRCT, GHSGT, and EOCT results are used to determine the emphasis and the amount of time given to specific skills and concepts. This process allows teachers and administrators to monitor the vertical alignment of the curriculum across grades. Data rooms in all schools provide a quick glance at the scope of curriculum areas for each grade level. Professional learning activities emphasizing research-based best practices are provided for teachers on an on-going basis. Newton County teachers have been trained in *Learning-Focused Schools* research and Differentiated Instruction, providing them with the skills to lead students in exploring application of higher order thinking skills and investigating new approaches to applying learning. Teachers are trained to use a variety of performance assessments guided by instructional rubrics and teacher commentary that serve as tools for strengthening student learning.

To ensure that the curriculum challenges and meets the needs of each student, regardless of ethnicity, intellectual ability or disability, gender, or economic status, a plan for Response to Intervention/Pyramid of Interventions has been developed for all grades. The use of this process is intended to strengthen the implementation of intervention strategies and the special needs identification process. Any student identified as special needs receives instruction tailored to his/her individual needs as stipulated in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP). These plans ensure that all students receive the essential knowledge and skills required in each subject area. Instructional extension is provided for high school students to recover credit through a system-supported night school program. After school and/or Saturday School is provided for middle and elementary students for remediation purposes.

Each school in Newton County has a School Improvement Plan that involves an on-going self-examination process. Each school's plan includes a formulation of beliefs and mission of the school, identification of desired learner outcomes, and analysis of instructional effectiveness based on a wide range of data, i.e., test data, discipline data, attendance data. Professional development is planned based on the needs outlined in the SIP. Through these plans, priorities for expenditures are developed to ensure that funds are spent on effective research-based teaching and learning practices and products. These plans also address the protection of instructional time through priority goals and on-going assessment. Benchmark assessments, data analysis/data rooms, and planned transitional activities from elementary to middle, middle to high school and high school to postsecondary maintains the articulation among and between all levels of schooling, monitoring student performance, and ensuring readiness for future schooling or employment. K-12 administrators meet on a monthly basis emphasizing collaboration focused on student learning. With the addition of new Georgia Performance Standards, Newton County has just begun the process of vertical teaming and articulation in regard to the new standards. Elementary, middle, and high school mathematics teachers began their first meetings together during the 07/08 school year. Band and Chorus teachers from all levels have met throughout the past two years to plan budget requests based on curriculum needs. Plans to increase meetings of teachers at all levels in *all* GPS subject areas are being developed. Administrators are participating in Vertical Teaming Workshops provided through the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement.

Student learning is supported through ready access to instructional technology, information and media services and materials needed for effective instruction. Newton County employs a Director of Technology, an Instructional Technology Teacher at the System Level, a Director of Student Information Systems; technicians are available for support in all schools. Highly-qualified media specialists provide instruction and training to students to use resources and tools available through media centers. School computers and internet access in classrooms, computer labs, and the media center provide students with easy access to information. Students are provided multiple opportunities to extend their classroom learning experiences through independent research. Other resources available in Newton County Schools include Smart Boards, LCD Projectors, Assistive Technology, and multiple instructional software/web-based programs including credit recovery programs such as Nova-Net and Georgia Virtual School. All teachers have access to the Newton County Schools' Sharepoint site where units are posted and teachers and administrators are able to interact on-line. Parents have access to their child's grades through the use of *Student Track* via the internet.

Documenting & Using Results

STANDARD: The system enacts a comprehensive assessment system that monitors and documents performance and uses these results to improve student performance and system effectiveness.

Impact Statement: A school system is successful in meeting this standard when it uses a comprehensive assessment system based on clearly-defined performance measures. The assessment system is used to assess student performance on expectations for student learning, identify gaps between expectations for student learning and student performance, evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction, and determine interventions to improve student performance. The assessment system yields timely and accurate information that is meaningful and useful to system and school leaders, teachers, and other stakeholders in understanding student performance, system and school effectiveness, and the results of improvement efforts.

Indicators Rubric

Please indicate the degree to which the noted practices/processes are in place in the school system. The responses to the rubric should help the school system identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement as well as guide and inform the school system's responses to the focus questions.

INDICATORS		Not Evident	Emerging	Operational	Highly Functional
In fulfillment of this standard, the system:					
4.1	Establishes and implements a comprehensive assessment system, aligned with the system's expectations for student learning, that yields information which is reliable, valid, and bias free			X	
4.2	Ensures that student assessment data are used to make decisions for continuous improvement of teaching and learning			X	
4.3	Conducts a systematic analysis of instructional and organizational effectiveness, including support systems, and uses the results to improve student and system performance			X	
4.4	Provides a system of communication which uses a variety of methods to report student performance and system effectiveness to all stakeholders			X	
4.5	Uses comparison and trend data from comparable school systems to evaluate student performance and system effectiveness			X	
4.6	Demonstrates verifiable growth in student performance that is supported by multiple sources of evidence			X	
4.7	Maintains a secure, accurate, and complete student record system in accordance with state and federal regulations			X	

Definitions

Not Evident	Little or no evidence exists
Emerging	Evidence indicates early or preliminary stages of implementation of practice
Operational	Evidence indicates practices and procedures are actively implemented
Highly Functional	Evidence indicates practices and procedures are fully integrated and effectively and consistently implemented

The system enacts a comprehensive assessment system that monitors and documents performance and uses these results to improve student performance and school effectiveness.

Administrators and teachers at all levels collaboratively examine and analyze a wide array of test results and patterns of achievement to foster initiatives that reflect accurate and measureable evidence of student progress. In accordance with NCLB requirements and the NCSS strategic plan, the district has implemented a comprehensive and systematic assessment of student and school achievement data that includes, but is not limited to, results from the following: CRCT, GHSGT, ITBS, PSAT, SAT, ACT, EOCT, AP, Georgia Writing Assessments, etc. The resultant analyses are painstakingly disaggregated into appropriate subgroups that are aligned with school and district improvement plans. The ensuing information is incorporated into comprehensive balanced scorecards which are shared with building level administrators and teachers to further examine both formative and summative assessment data by subgroup and domain in order to craft appropriate and applicable instructional decisions.

In October 2007, the Superintendent assigned the book *Closing the Achievement Gap: No Excuses* for all administrators to read. Afterward, he reviewed the salient points of the book with all principals at a leadership meeting. At the same time, the district aggressively engages stakeholders to assist in the development of the strategic plan and CSIP to ensure that all parties have a chance for review and comment prior to final publication of the document. After completion of a school's SIP, the principal will then present the plan to the Superintendent and to the Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction in the fall. Feedback is given in the form of recommendations and commendations and the plan is updated accordingly. In January, the principal again reviews his/her SIP with the Superintendent at a mid-year school improvement conference. At this time, school/student progress is assessed and revisions made to the plan in response to the plan evaluation. At the end of the school year, stated goals and actual accomplishments are examined to identify the best course of action for the upcoming school year. The district Curriculum and Instruction staff assist each school in determining the most efficacious interventions to improve student achievement.

The system's strategic plan is the road map that guides the development of the CSIP and the schools' SIP. Although individual schools are expected to generate plans that reflect the stated goals of the CSIP, each school is allowed a considerable amount of autonomy and flexibility in including action items unique to a particular school.

As is true with all instructional and organizational decisions, student data is collected from a wide range of sources to determine specific areas of need, and to establish both school and district goals. Results from the ITBS, Georgia Writing Assessments, CRCT, EOCT, GHSGT, SAT, ACT, as well as AYP measurements are used to develop district and school balanced scorecards (BSC). Other student related factors such as discipline and attendance records, and graduation rates are also included on the BSC. The compiled information is scrutinized and instructional decisions are made to optimize student achievement. Newton County Schools use a variety of instructional initiatives to assist with the academic needs of students: County-wide

Benchmark Assessments, New Century Instructional Software Program, Title I - Supplemental Educational Services, Learning-Focused School Strategies and frequent progress monitoring. All relevant support systems of the Newton County School System are departmentalized and include the following: Transportation, Food Services, Technology, Maintenance and Custodial/Warehouse. A thorough evaluation process is in place to assess the effectiveness of each support system. Every department files regular reports with the Associate Superintendent of Administrative Services, who then analyzes each report and provides feedback as appropriate. Evaluations are completed at every administrative level to improve instructional and organization effectiveness.

The Newton County School System recognizes the value of effective communication in improving system performance, school performance, teacher performance, and, most importantly, student achievement. At both the district and school level, numerous practices and a variety of methods have been implemented to insure ample communication to all stakeholders. Monthly meetings are conducted with the central office staff, administrative teams, and curriculum directors to discuss academic and operational issues. Each school, in turn, holds monthly school improvement, leadership team, faculty, grade-level, departmental, and administrator meetings to do the same. Parents are kept abreast of important information through a variety of sources. Newsletters, PTO meetings, School Council Meetings, school websites, StudentTrack, Open House, phone message systems, school message signs, school handbooks, and student planners provide valuable information for parents and students. Stakeholders also receive valuable information through the system's annual report, public board meetings, in press releases, and on the system and school websites.

The district's Testing Director and Curriculum & Instruction department maintain both current and longitudinal data of students, schools; the district staff is responsible for the management and distribution of the data. Once the data is received, it is compiled and distributed to stakeholders through press releases, websites, BSC's and various school publications. Through the use of AYP reports and the Georgia Report Card, data comparisons are made to systems of like size and demographics.

The district publically exhibits documented student performance in data rooms and on balanced score cards that are accessible to all stakeholders. Data rooms have been established at both the district and school levels and currently provide a wealth of readily available information to all stakeholders. Once data is received, the central office and each individual school update their data rooms. Large, colorful charts are prominently displayed to provide clear comparisons and easy analysis of student growth. In addition to data rooms, the school system and each school use a balanced score card to record selected data that presents student achievement in a simply and easily understood format. These score cards also allow for yearly comparisons and provide evidence in student growth by grade level and by cohort groups.

The Newton County School System maintains a comprehensive student database through School Administrative Student Information (SASI), a data management system that provides the district and schools with access to virtually all student data from demographic information, to grades, to discipline and attendance. This password protected database only allows access to confidential student personal information on a "need-to-know" access rights basis. The Director of Technology and Director of Student Services determine accessibility rights and limit system rights based on staff/faculty/administrator duties and responsibilities. Student records are regularly updated in accordance with state guidelines to insure their accuracy and for state reports.

Resource & Support Systems

STANDARD: The system has the resources and services necessary to support its vision and purpose and to ensure achievement for all students.

Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it has sufficient human, material, and fiscal resources to implement a curriculum that: enables students to achieve expectations for student learning, meets special needs, and complies with applicable regulations. The system employs and allocates staff who are well-qualified for their assignments. The system provides ongoing learning opportunities for all staff to improve their effectiveness. The system ensures compliance with applicable local, state, and federal regulations.

Indicators Rubric

Please indicate the degree to which the noted practices/processes are in place in the school system. The responses to the rubric should help the school system identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement as well as guide and inform the school system's responses to the focus questions.

INDICATORS		Not Evident	Emerging	Operational	Highly Functional
In fulfillment of this standard, the system:					
	Human Resources				
5.1	Establishes and implements processes to recruit, employ, retain, and mentor qualified professional and support staff to fulfill assigned roles and responsibilities			X	
5.2	Establishes and implements a process to assign professional and support staff based on system needs and staff qualifications as may be required by federal and state law and regulations (i.e., professional preparation, ability, knowledge, and experience)			X	
5.3	Establishes and implements a process to design, evaluate, and improve professional development and ensures participation by all faculty and staff			X	
5.4	Ensures that staff are sufficient in number to meet the vision and purpose of the school system and to meet federal and state law and regulations, if applicable			X	
	Financial Resources				
5.5	Engages in long-range budgetary planning and annually budgets sufficient resources to support its educational programs and to implement its plans for improvement			X	
5.6	Ensures that all financial transactions are safeguarded through proper budgetary procedures and audited accounting measures				X
	Physical Resources				

5.7	Maintains sites, facilities, services, and equipment to provide a safe, orderly, and healthy environment				X
5.8	Establishes and implements written security and crisis management plans with appropriate training for stakeholders			X	
5.9	Implements processes and plans for maintaining and improving sites, facilities, and equipment			X	
5.10	Provides technology infrastructure and equipment that is up-to-date and sufficient to accomplish the system's goals			X	
Support Systems					
5.11	Provides and coordinates support services that meet the health, counseling, nutrition, safety, co-curricular, transportation, and special learning needs of all students				X
5.12	Provides student support services coordinated with the school, home, and community			X	

Definitions

Not Evident	Little or no evidence exists
Emerging	Evidence indicates early or preliminary stages of implementation of practice
Operational	Evidence indicates practices and procedures are actively implemented
Highly Functional	Evidence indicates practices and procedures are fully integrated and effectively and consistently implemented

The system has the resources and services necessary to support its vision and purpose to ensure achievement for all students.

Human Resources

The Newton County School System utilizes a rigorous schedule for recruiting new employees. As the yearly needs of the school system are identified and assessed, efforts are made to interview and employ highly qualified staff through a variety of means. Potential applicants apply through the Teach Georgia website and/or electronically on the Newton County School System website. System representatives attend numerous recruitment fairs throughout the United States to ensure a diverse pool of qualified applicants. The district offers competitive benefits and local supplements to attract teachers to the system.

Staff retention is based on maintaining proper certification levels, successful evaluations, system needs and state and federal guidelines. Newton County School System requires evaluations for all employees. Teachers are evaluated using the Georgia Teacher Observation Instrument and the Georgia Teachers Duties and Responsibilities instrument. Some other positions, such as counselors, media specialist, and speech pathologist are evaluated using the Georgia evaluation instrument relevant to their position. All classified employees are evaluated annually using the Newton County Classified Evaluation.

NCSS evaluates staff needs based upon SACS guidelines, state class size rules, projected enrollment, school improvement plans, course requirements, system needs, and available financial resources as well as federal requirements.

Financial Resources

The Newton County Board of Education maintains financial records in compliance with accepted accounting procedures. The system's financial records undergo an annual audit conducted by the Georgia Department of Audits. Audits are also conducted on the SPLOST funds collected. School financial accounts are audited annually. All audit reports are kept on file at the Central Business Office and are available for review upon request. Led by the Associate Superintendent for Administrative Services and the Business Manager, a budget is prepared yearly to meet the needs of the school system.

The NCSS and Board of Education secures income from local, state and federal sources to provide funding for educational programs and support operational functions of the district. State funding is earned based on FTE counts through the Quality Basic Education formula and state grants. Federal funds come to the system through programs for special populations of students, vocational education programs and grants for various programs. The Newton County Board of Education has proposed, and voters have consistently and overwhelmingly passed Educational Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) and General Obligation Bond referendums which have funded construction of new buildings, reduction of debt, additional system technology and the purchase of buses. Each year during the budget development process, the Board of Education establishes a millage rate that secures local tax funds to insure the availability of educational services to the children of Newton County. In each of its public monthly work sessions, financial reports are provided to the Newton County Board of Education including a statement of receipts and expenditures for the year to date as well as a summary comparison to the previous year.

Physical Resources

Newton County Schools are engaged in the process of preparing students to become good citizens and leaders for the future. We have spirit, pride and excellence as our goal and motto as we provide for the students in the school system. A safe, nurturing, and challenging learning environment for all students is the goal of the Newton County School System. The schools in the system comply with all local, state, and federal laws and regulations through annual, monthly and routine inspections. The following activities are utilized to insure safe, orderly, and healthy school environments:

- Safety and emergency plans in each school that have been approved by the Georgia Emergency Management Agency
- Close working relationship with the Newton County Emergency Management Agency
- Monthly fire and tornado drills
- Safe and drug free schools
- Drug and tobacco free environment
- School resource officers in middle and high schools
- Lock-down drills
- Heart defibrillators in each school
- Full-time nurses in all schools
- Sheriff's Office Gang Training

The Local Facilities Plan is the document that provides direction for facility growth, modification, and renovations. The plan is approved by the Newton County Board of Education and the Georgia Department of Education. The plan covers a five year period and is updated annually. In general, the facilities of the NCSS are in excellent condition as over the past 15 years we have undertaken an aggressive building program of constructing new schools and classroom additions as well as investing in major renovations to older schools. We currently have two new schools and a major classroom addition at our newest high school under construction. We are proud of the funds budget in our maintenance function that enables us to keep our schools properly maintained. Plans are always being implemented to ensure that students and employees are housed in the best possible facilities.

Support Systems

NCSS provides a comprehensive range of student support services to address the health, counseling, nutrition, safety, co-curricular, transportation, and special learning needs of students. School health services are provided by school nurses assigned to each school location. The School Nutrition program provides nutritious meals to all students regardless of income. Each school has its own cafeteria for providing both breakfast and lunch service.

The Transportation Department operates a fleet of 261 school buses. All students are provided the opportunity for school transportation. Co-curricular education programs provide for the social and physical growth of students in the Newton County School System. After school programs at the elementary schools often include clubs for student exploration and participation, while middle and high schools offer many opportunities in athletic, academic and curriculum connected groups.

Additional student support services are provided by counselors, psychologists, social workers, mental health clinicians and resource officers. Counseling services are offered at each Newton County school. System assigned school psychologists complete evaluations for students referred through SST (Student Support Team). Social Workers work with families to address various academic, health, and attendance needs. Crisis clinicians are available to provide immediate counseling and referrals to community mental health services. School Resource Officers are provided at each middle and high school through a collaborative effort with the Newton County Sheriff's Office.

Economically disadvantaged students, limited English proficient students, students with disabilities, homeless students, and other students who need help in meeting state academic standards are served through a variety of educational programs. Graduation coaches have been placed in all middle and high schools to assist students in meeting their academic goals and to increase the graduation rate.

Stakeholder Communications & Relationships

STANDARD: The system fosters effective communications and relationships with and among its stakeholders.

Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it has the understanding, commitment, and support of stakeholders. System and school personnel seek opportunities for collaboration and shared leadership among stakeholders to help students learn and advance improvement efforts.

Indicators Rubric

Please indicate the degree to which the noted practices/processes are in place in the school system. The responses to the rubric should help the school system identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement as well as guide and inform the school system's responses to the focus questions.

INDICATORS		Not Evident	Emerging	Operational	Highly Functional
In fulfillment of this standard, the system:					
6.1	Fosters collaboration with community stakeholders to support student learning			X	
6.2	Uses system-wide strategies to listen to and communicate with stakeholders			X	
6.3	Solicits the knowledge and skills of stakeholders to enhance the work of the system			X	
6.4	Communicates the expectations for student learning and goals for improvement to all stakeholders			X	
6.5	Provides information that is meaningful and useful to stakeholders			X	

Definitions

Not Evident	Little or no evidence exists
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Operational	Evidence indicates practices and procedures are actively implemented
Highly Functional	Evidence indicates practices and procedures are fully integrated and effectively and consistently implemented

The system fosters effective communications and relationships with and among its stakeholders.

Employees in the Newton County School System believe that communication is vital to success. The district strategic plan is aligned with the communications plan and with the district's beliefs, mission, goals, and policy. Customer service, which includes providing information for and demonstrating courtesy toward everyone, has become increasingly important. During the fall of 2007, the district had a customer service audit done which identified some areas in need of improvement. As a result, professional learning for various employees has been instituted to improve customer service. Various means of communication are utilized to keep staff and community clearly, effectively, and positively involved in and informed of school and district operation and news. Communication occurs within the system as follows:

Board of Education Communication: District employees ensure that Board of Education members are equipped with the information needed to do their jobs well. New Board members are provided orientation by district staff and by the Georgia Schools Boards Association. All board members are kept informed of current events via weekly emails, meeting packets and interim communications as needed. In turn, the Board of Education Members and district personnel ensure that all employees are kept informed of their recent actions through the monthly publication entitled *Board Briefs*. This document is emailed to employees. At each Board of Education meeting an opportunity for public participation is offered for constituents to share their concerns.

Student Information Software System (SASI): Teachers and administrators have access to a variety of student data including attendance, grades, schedules, cumulative records, parent information, emergency information, special services, and assessment data through this information system.

StudentTrack: Parents and students have access, via the internet, to view student grades for students in grades 6-12 as well as discipline and attendance for students in grades PK-12.

District and School Websites: The district web site is a source of current information for staff, parents, students and the general public. Board agendas and minutes are posted on the web site. The "NCSS News" bulletin board features items of interest. A "Contact NCSS" link is provided to ensure that the general public has a way to communicate directly with district employees. All inquiries from this site are forwarded to the appropriate employee for immediate contact with the person sending the request. In addition, information exists regarding curriculum and instruction, human resources, professional learning, individual schools (including links to individual school websites), nutrition services (including menus), calendars and a variety of other topics. The district website was redesigned and launched in January 2008. Stakeholders actively participated during the redesign process. The system Public Relations Department was recently awarded the Golden Achievement Award from NSPRA (National School Public Relations Association) for the process in which it implemented the new site and incorporated stakeholder input.

Email System: All staff members are able to effectively communicate inside and outside the district through the district email system. Relevant news blasts are sent when necessary to all employees and stakeholders. Employees have access to email via the internet so they may retrieve communication when they are away from their schools.

SharePoint: The NCSS has an intranet site on which a large amount of information is stored and through which information is communicated. A district calendar is maintained on the SharePoint

site so that administrators are aware of all district happenings at a glance. Documents are stored on the intranet for shared use by administrators, teachers and staff members. The instantaneous information provided through the intranet enables a better work flow and a quicker turn around.

School Messenger: The NCSS has recently purchased *School Messenger* as a means by which communication with parents can occur on important school information and events. All schools have access to this technology.

Balanced Scorecard: The NCSS Balanced Scorecard is a tool through which all stakeholders can view educational and operational progress in several areas.

Public Relations Director: The NCSS employs a Public Relations Director to ensure that communication among and between staff, stakeholders, and schools are clear and effective. The Director also maintains the district web site to ensure timely and accurate information.

Local Media: The local news media are invited to attend all Board of Education meetings and special school events. Because they regularly publicize NCSS news, the media are an effective conduit from the schools and district to the community stakeholders.

Teacher Forum: The Superintendent meets monthly with two teachers from each school to communicate information from a district perspective. In addition, teachers are encouraged to submit questions and concerns to their respective Forum representatives so that the Superintendent can respond. Minutes of these meetings are disseminated to stakeholders.

Publications: The district publishes several documents to equip stakeholders with pertinent information. Student handbooks are printed in the student agendas to ensure that every parent and student has a copy. Communication occurs regularly to parents through school newsletters and teacher newsletters and PTO/PTA newsletters. The NCSS Board of Education Policy Manual is posted on the district web site for the general public and district employees to access. In addition, brochures, flyers and special publications are provided as needed.

Leadership Meetings: The Superintendent conducts regular monthly meetings with principals and program directors to provide information and receive feedback about programs and issues.

Early Release: Four early release days are included in the district calendar during the school year for parent-teacher conferences. Parents are encouraged to meet with their child's teacher during these designated times.

Superintendent Stakeholder Meetings: The Superintendent meets with School Council Chairpersons and PTO/PTA Presidents from each school. During the meetings, important information is shared regarding district and school initiatives and participants are given an opportunity to ask questions and share concerns.

Superintendent Student Meetings: The Superintendent meets with students from the high schools. Again, important information is shared regarding district and school initiatives and participants are given an opportunity to ask questions and share concerns.

Relationships with community agencies are vital to the on-going successful operation of the Newton County School System. Individuals from the mental health sector, law enforcement, the

Department of Juvenile Justice, the United Way, the American Cancer Society, the Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs, the Newton County Chamber of Commerce, and many others have been invited to participate and form relationships with the school system. School system employees have engaged in joint professional learning sessions with law enforcement on topics such as gang prevention and awareness and with the Department of Juvenile Justice to understand the process of dealing with delinquent youth. School counselors have invited community agency employees from the Department of Family and Children's Services, Mental Health, KidsNet, and others to provide informational sessions relative to their roles as school counselors.

School system employees are active in raising money for the community through charitable organizations such as United Way, the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, and the Salvation Army. The district office employees as well as school employees hold food drives for the local food bank to assist families in need. Many school system employees are active in local civic organizations and churches. Many hours of volunteer service are given by the employees of the NCSS in order to make the community a better place for children to live and get an education. Administrators at the school level have active school councils, parent-teacher organizations, booster clubs, and family nights to communicate with and encourage involvement of stakeholders and to continue the building of strong relationships. The district also employs a Parent Involvement Coordinator through Title I funds to strengthen the link between parents and schools.

Teachers new to the NCSS participate in a Teacher Induction Program (TIP) in which they are introduced to some important policies and procedures and professional learning relative to teaching in general and to the school system. This takes place prior to the beginning of pre-planning. In addition, new teachers are required to participate in four-six afternoon sessions throughout their first year of teaching on topics such as special education, classroom management and the Educators' Code of Ethics. All of these activities take place at the district level. Individual schools assign mentors to ensure that new teachers are inducted and acculturated into individual schools.

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

STANDARD: The system establishes, implements, and monitors a continuous process of improvement that focuses on student performance.

Impact Statement: A system is successful in meeting this standard when it implements a collaborative and ongoing process for improvement that aligns the functions of the system with the expectations for student learning. Improvement efforts are sustained and the system and its schools demonstrate progress in improving student performance. New improvement efforts are informed by the results of earlier efforts through analysis of student performance, system effectiveness, and assessment of the improvement process.

Indicators Rubric

Please indicate the degree to which the noted practices/processes are in place in the school system. The responses to the rubric should help the school system identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement as well as guide and inform the school system's responses to the focus questions.

INDICATORS		Not Evident	Emerging	Operational	Highly Functional
In fulfillment of this standard, the system:					
7.1	Engages in a continuous process of improvement that articulates the vision and purpose the system is pursuing (Vision); maintains a rich and current description of students, their performance, system effectiveness, and the community (Profile); employs goals and interventions to improve student performance (Plan); and documents and uses the results to inform future improvement efforts (Results)			X	
7.2	Engages stakeholders in the processes of continuous improvement			X	
7.3	Ensures that each school's plan for continuous improvement is aligned with the system's vision and expectations for student learning			X	
7.4	Ensures that each school's plan for continuous improvement includes a focus on increasing learning for all students and closing gaps between current and expected student performance levels			X	
7.5	Provides research-based professional development for system and school personnel to help them achieve improvement goals			X	
7.6	Monitors and communicates the results of improvement efforts to stakeholders			X	
7.7	Evaluates and documents the effectiveness and impact of its continuous process of improvement		X		
7.8	Allocates and protects time for planning and engaging in continuous improvement efforts system-wide		X		

7.9	Provides direction and assistance to its schools and operational units to support their continuous improvement efforts			X	
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Definitions

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Emerging	Evidence indicates early or preliminary stages of implementation of practice
Operational	Evidence indicates practices and procedures are actively implemented
Highly Functional	Evidence indicates practices and procedures are fully integrated and effectively and consistently implemented

A quality system establishes, implements and monitors a continuous process of educational improvement.

The Newton County School System has implemented a District Improvement Plan that is aligned with its stated vision, mission, and beliefs to lay the foundation for district-wide improvement. Collaboratively, stakeholders developed comprehensive initiatives that identified plans of actions and milestones for student achievement; they also sought to develop quality assurance measures that would quantify and provide the framework for a process of continuous improvement. Each individual school’s improvement plan reflects the overall vision, mission, goals, and purpose of the district. Leadership and school improvement teams at school and district levels monitor and ensure appropriate school compliance.

The district relies on the input of stakeholders to develop school improvement strategies. It communicates ongoing improvement efforts with stakeholders through a wide range of sources, such as news releases, public board meetings, newsletters, PTOs, Open Houses, websites, public forums, school councils, faculty meetings, and local cable access. The goal is to ensure that all stakeholders are accurately and continuously informed of school district progress and plans.

The district utilizes several methods to validate the continuous improvement process. This dynamic process is spearheaded by the superintendent, district staff, and members of the board of education. Toward the end of the school year, the group reviews and analyzes most current student achievement data and develops a proposed District Improvement Plan. This rough draft is then shared with stakeholder groups, including but not limited to school personnel, students, parents and community leaders to validate its applicability and practicality. After incorporating the input and suggestions of the stakeholder groups, a final draft is published and disseminated. The district’s action plan includes detailed performance data in the form of comprehensive balanced scorecards to record and track progress toward all identified goals and objectives. With a clear understanding of system goals and objectives, schools then review and disaggregate the pertinent data and incorporate it into their improvement plans. Baseline data and indicators reflect information specific to each goal. School-specific achievement information is continuously monitored and analyzed to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses in a timely manner. Once a deficient area is noted, the school, with the support of the district, implements aggressive and relevant interventions that are guided by a focus on student learning. While each school’s achievement plan reflects the student achievement priorities of the District Improvement Plan, they are afforded considerable latitude and flexibility in incorporating school unique items regarding student achievement.

Of prime concern in the district and school improvement plans is closing the achievement gap between identifiable subgroups. Many initiatives have been implemented to address this all

important issue. In the fall of 2007, the superintendent instructed school and district administrators to read Closing the Achievement Gap: No Excuses. He then led a discussion of the book and shared his insight and expectations regarding the importance of closing the achievement gap in Newton County. As a result, programs are now in place to address this pressing concern. Under the superintendent's guidance, schools throughout the district have expanded remedial opportunities such as NovaNet, night school, Saturday school, Georgia Virtual School and summer remediation instruction to help at-risk students. Additionally, event specific programs, such as the *Big Blue Blitz*, that prepares students for the Georgia High School Graduation Tests, have been initiated to help students succeed. Other programs include *Learning Focused Schools*, "Its Not Too Late To Graduate Parent Meeting", content mastery strategies, collaborative teaching at all school levels, modified schedules at the high schools to take advantage of extended class periods, middle school remediation classes during the connections block and other community involvement opportunities. Student progress is measured on state mandated assessments and recorded on balanced scorecards with deficient areas highlighted. As a result, progress has been made toward closing the achievement gaps, particularly in math.

The district leadership fully recognizes that quality professional development is an integral part of the district's improvement plan; consequently, efforts are being made to provide all staff members with high quality training, based on research-based programs, needed to successfully implement all initiatives. Many resources are tapped to provide this training, such as RESA (Regional Educational Service Associations), GLRS (Georgia Learning Resources System), guest speakers, online courses, and expert consultants. Collaborative planning among district and school personnel is a priority when determining the professional development needs of the district.

At intervals within the process cycle, each school reviews the goals and strategies to determine the level and effectiveness of implementation based on available data. Student performance data are examined and projected success is articulated. The district updates balanced scorecards as information becomes available and goals are modified or validated as prescribed. Improvement programs are evaluated based on their measured effectiveness. Necessary adjustments are made. Stakeholders are kept informed of documented progress and projected expectations via the same previously stated informational outlets. At the same time, stakeholders are involved with the development of subsequent strategic and district improvement plans through the established improvement process (committees, forums, board meetings, etc.). The Director of Public Relations further disseminates achievement data to stakeholders through system and school websites, press releases, newsletters and the annual report.

Pre-planning and post-planning days, along with professional learning days, are built into the school calendar for additional training for teachers. Often, stipends are paid to teachers for their efforts in developing various instructional programs and curriculum guides during the summer months. Schools are strongly encouraged to use creative scheduling to provide the staff with professional learning opportunities which target student achievement.

The guiding document for providing direction and assistance for school improvement stems from the District Improvement Plan. A steering committee consisting of stakeholders from the system and community is continually working to develop the next phase of the plan which includes alignment and integration of all plans.

Under the personal direction of the superintendent, the administration and board of education members regularly schedule and attend retreats and workshops to develop plans of action and

milestones necessary to chart the district course for continuous improvement. Actions are scrutinized and assessed for their value in ensuring the highest levels of student achievement.

Peer-to-Peer Practice Submission

The following schools have posted Peer-to-Peer practices on the Advanc-ed.org/resourcenetwork website:

Alcovy High School
Newton High School
Livingston Elementary School
Middle Ridge Elementary School

Conclusion

The mission of the Newton County School System is to provide educational excellence for all students. The Superintendent and the Board of Education, in conjunction with various stakeholders, created a District Improvement Plan that places emphasis on ensuring that high quality teaching takes place in every classroom, every day. Besides the rigorous recruitment plan to find and attract the highest quality teachers and administrators, an expanded emphasis on providing superior professional learning opportunities is underway. The Board of Education is fully supportive of the improvement initiatives presented by various stakeholders, and even in this era of decreasing revenue for education, their dedication is persistent and unwavering.

Several strengths are clearly evident within the Newton County School System. Probably the greatest strength lies in the highly dedicated employees, from the custodian who is proud of “his” school to the teachers who “adopt” their students to the administrators who work night and day to enhance the quality of their school and system. The Newton County School System is the largest employer in the county; the school system employed 2,675 staff members (1,489 certified and 1,186 classified) as of August 1, 2008. The percentage of highly qualified teachers is 96.6 serving in Title I schools and 94.6 serving in Nontitle I schools. The percentage of highly qualified paraprofessionals is 98.8.

The Board of Education has endorsed an extensive building plan; eleven new schools and 157 additional classrooms have been constructed since 1993 and many of the existing schools received extensive renovations. Currently, one elementary school and one middle school are under construction. Additionally, plans are underway to provide the most up-to-date technological resources possible in all facilities, thus ensuring that the students of Newton County are educated in 21st century facilities.

The community support of the Newton County School System is extraordinary. This has been proven repeatedly over the years as multiple SPLOST and bond referendums have been passed with overwhelmingly positive results. The most recent vote was held in September 2007 with 86% of the voters in support of the referendum. The system also enjoys a working relationship with several local higher education institutions, with Dekalb Tech, Gwinnett Tech, Oxford College and Georgia Perimeter serving as the institutions of choice for students pursuing joint enrollment options. The Newton County Arts Association provides opportunities for large groups of students to attend fine arts presentations on an annual basis. Kids Net, a local support organization consisting of the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Department of Family and Children’s Services, and the Mental Health Department, all work collaboratively with the school system to provide the help necessary to children in need.

All strengths aside, Newton County has its fair share of challenges and limitations. The greatest challenge faced, similar to many districts, is the lack of consistent parental involvement. To address this deficiency, several schools implemented the Project Appleseed program this year, in addition to continuing their other involvement initiatives. Unfortunately, many parents still believe that the school is a single entity unto itself in charge of not only educating the children, but also providing nutritious meals, quality nursing services, and character education. Nevertheless, the teachers and administrators continue to offer opportunities to bring the parents into the schools to provide the support and encouragement for their students. It is an on-going challenge that will continue to be met head-on.

Newton County has faced an explosive population growth in recent years, thus the need for many new schools and classrooms. The Census Bureau reports that the population of the county grew from 41,808 in 1990 to 62,001 in 2000 and was estimated to be over 91,000 in 2006. The student population reflects the overall growth, with enrollment growing from 11,002 students in 2000 to 18,917 as of February 1, 2008. For a while, it seemed that schools couldn't be built fast enough to house the influx of hundreds of students each year. As a result, trailers had to be added as temporary classrooms at most schools - 157 trailers on site as of February 2008. Overcrowded buildings continue to be a challenge that is being addressed in the five-year facilities study. Between July 2008 and July 2012, four new elementary schools, two new middle schools, one new high school and multiple renovations and classroom additions are planned.

The Newton County School System has the vision, goals, outstanding personnel, and abundant community support to move from good to great. While it's always difficult to take an objective look at oneself during a self-assessment activity, this SACS review has provided the system an opportunity to reflect on the many positive accomplishments of the past years, while at the same time, face the reality that there are a few weak areas that can be strengthened and enhanced. The five year Facilities Plan promises to reduce the school overcrowding and the District Improvement Plan includes several strategies to improve parental involvement and student achievement. The hard work and dedication will continue as efforts to ensure a quality education for the students of the Newton County School System are taken to the next level.