

Welcome to the Newton County Schools
R. Steven Whatley, Superintendent

On behalf of the Newton County Board of Education and administrators I extend a sincere “Welcome” to all students, parents, teachers and support staff! We are excited about the opportunities for the education of our students as they anticipate the first day of school on Monday, August 3.

The mission of the Newton County Schools is to provide educational excellence for all students. Over the summer we have been preparing to meet the educational challenges of this new school year for an enrollment that will exceed over 19,500 students. In the past weeks, over 200 students have enrolled with us, students new to the school system from out-of-state and students transferring from within Georgia. We have focused on staffing our schools; reviewing data and determining school improvement plans; cleaning, painting and preparing our school buildings; providing professional training activities for teachers, administrators, and support staff; and purchasing and receiving instructional materials, supplies, and textbooks.

As the 2008-2009 school year was drawing to a close, we were already looking forward to and planning for the new school year. School and county office curriculum administrators began reviewing the 2009 test data at the classroom, school and system levels to determine our district’s strengths and weaknesses. We know that our students can compete with their peers across the state, as evidenced by the many state and national academic awards they have accumulated in recent years. Our high school graduates continue to receive several millions of dollars in scholarship awards each year and have been offered enrollment at highly respected colleges, universities, and academies across the United States.

Despite these successes, we know that not all of our students are learning and achieving at the same pace. With the information gleaned from our review of the test data, we have determined changes that are needed in the curriculum, in our instructional delivery, course offerings, and in test preparation activities. Throughout the 2009-2010 school year, we will continue to improve our instruction of the new Georgia Performance Standards—the Georgia Curriculum. Our students must be prepared, not only for school and state mandated test performance, but also for success in the workforce, or in college/technical school. To that end we, for the first school year, have all three high schools on the block schedule. This facilitates our high school students by earning additional elective credits; having expanded work-based learning through internship or apprenticeships; taking additional Advanced Placement courses; and having opportunities for dual enrollment with local colleges. Our plans also call for the addition of a centralized Career Academy.

We welcomed to the district in two days of orientation activities over 100 new certified staff members who will be working in the Newton County Schools this school year—some due to replacing retirees, others due to hiring to meet maximum class size requirements in grades kindergarten through twelve, student enrollment growth in the

system, and the opening of our two new school facilities---Live Oak Elementary, at the intersection of Kirkland and Jack Neely Roads and Liberty Middle School on Salem Road.

We have spent the summer preparing our facilities for the students. Housing students in a county with a growing population is always a challenge. An indication of that growth is the fact that on the last day of school for last school year, 2008-2009, the enrollment of the Newton County Schools was almost 300 students more than the previous school year's last day. In addition to the two new school openings this year, we will be completing construction on the classroom addition at Alcovy High School to accommodate 1000 students. Yet, even with these new facilities and additions, 155 portable classrooms will be needed to help house the growth in student population and meet state class size mandates. The construction of these and other schools and renovations and modifications to existing facilities have been made possible in large part due to the passage in September, 2007, of SPLOST. The Board of Education and administration thank you for supporting our SPLOST III for Schools, which provides the local portion of funds for school construction.

Our school and system level instructional, support and administrative staffs consist of over 2750 employees, including teachers, paraprofessionals, media specialists, psychologists, social workers, counselors, nurses, and administrative staff members. Many of these individuals have been enrolled this summer in classes that will further enhance their professional skills. In addition, many teachers have worked in their classrooms preparing for students to have the best school year ever.

Our support staff employees in the school nutrition, clerical, maintenance/custodial and transportation areas have worked diligently in preparation for the opening day of school. Our school nutrition employees have been involved in workshops in preparation of providing nutritious breakfasts and lunches for students. For convenience to parents, our MealpayPlus program allows a parent or guardian to prepay school meals in an account established for each child. Over 2,600,000 lunches and 1,000,000 breakfasts were served last year. Our maintenance and custodial crews have also been working extremely hard to ensure that the 24 facilities are neat, clean, and properly functioning when school reopens.

Our fleet of more than 260 buses has passed inspections and is ready for the first day of school. The bus routes have been revised in order to accommodate increased enrollments and the new attendance areas for Live Oak, Liberty, and two parent involvement theme schools. Transportation routes will be posted at each school's open house. Last year our buses traveled almost 5,000,000 miles transporting students to and from school and to extracurricular events. We are reviewing transportation services to determine how dollars can be saved, especially in light of the cost of fuel.

Through various means such as newspaper, website, telephone messaging, electronic newsletters and school council and key communicator groups, we are increasing communication among the home, school, and the community. Throughout the

year our automated telephone messaging system will provide parents important information. Please keep your student's contact information current, so you will be able to receive this communication. Our website will also be continually updated with information for parents and students. This year, we will launch a public awareness campaign called "Be There" to showcase not only the importance of, but also provide tips for parent involvement. In addition to these communication strategies, we are opening two parent involvement theme schools—Fairview Theme and Clements Theme, to provide local choice option for elementary and middle school parents to participate in a more in-depth partnership in the education of their students.

Additionally, the system is implementing a new, web-based centralized student data management and records retention system called Infinite Campus. Individual student information on attendance, grades, and discipline will be available online through Infinite Campus after September 1.

Progress is being made even as we have had a reduction in the state and local revenue stream. We have a balanced general fund budget for operations and maintenance which exceeds \$158,000,000, but part of that is a reserve to get us through these tough economic times, which may include delays or additional cuts in state or local revenue. Approximately 87% of our budget is used for salaries and benefits across all areas of the general fund budget, many of which are set for a contract year. We recently were notified that the state would withhold from our revenue not only the equivalent of three days of pay for teachers, but also make an additional 3% cut in our lowered state revenue. This new series of cuts amounts to in excess of \$4,000,000 and does not include previous state cuts of over \$7,000,000. In addition to these FY 10 cuts, the school district since fiscal year 2005, has not received from the state over \$11,000,000 earned and owed to school system due to state budget cuts and austerity reductions. To provide for some of our needs, our grant writer has secured during the 2008-2009 school year over \$1,000,000 in grants. Serious financial adjustments were made during the last fiscal year and in planning for this year by severely limiting spending and cutting staff at the system and school levels.

Despite the economic challenges we face, our mission is to meet the educational needs of our students in a safe and orderly environment. Please be assured that the Board of Education and this administration always welcome your input and encourage your suggestions and support. As a community, our most important assets are our children. They deserve the best education we can provide. Their futures and ours depend on that.

If you have a specific school-related question, the staff at your child's school is ready to assist you in a friendly and efficient manner. Together we can work to accomplish the mission of the Newton County Schools—providing educational excellence for all students.
