
October 28, 2014

Dear Parents and Community Members:

As you may already know, City Schools of Decatur is one of the top school systems in the state of Georgia, and our goal is to be one of the top ten systems within the nation. Over the years that I have been your Superintendent, the system has developed two detailed Strategic Plans with concrete targets and timelines.

I am sure that if you subscribe to our eBlasts, Facebook Page, read the Annual Reports or School Board Meeting Agendas on eBoard, you are aware that our enrollment has been growing at a rapid rate over the last seven years. On several occasions, the School System has been on the news speaking about the growth we are experiencing as the fastest growing school district in the state.

We opened the first new school (the 4/5 Academy at Fifth Avenue) in forty years and just reopened Westchester Elementary School to alleviate some of the overcrowding. The School Board and I have used the SPLOST revenues judiciously to add classroom wings at Oakhurst, Renfro, Winnona Park, Clairemont and Fifth Avenue. In addition, our students and the Decatur Community have certainly enjoyed the expansion of DHS with the Career Academy and the new Gymnasium/Performing Arts Center.

The School Board and I continue to be mindful of the impact education has on our taxpayers. We have been fiscally responsible even during the very tough years of the recession. Just a few months ago, the School Board voted to reduce the millage, the second time in ten years.

In my tenure with City Schools of Decatur, I have commissioned enrollment studies and projections no less than four times in the 12-year period. Each time we have met the expected growth, sometimes years earlier than predicted. We are now working with the City to develop the projections and impact of annexation. Our preliminary enrollment information points to an enrollment projection of approximately 7,000 students in 2020. This number is one that seems to be incomprehensible to many people. However, the school system has grown from a little over 2,000 students in 2003 to over 4,000 in the last decade. Five-year projections' moving out to 2020 show growth continues.

Clearly, the Board and I have taken steps on existing campuses to deal with the growth. We have strived to do the best job possible with what we have in terms of space and money. At this point, within the city limits, there is little possibility for a site or development of a new school to help ease the growth. Preliminary reports indicate that the annexation being proposed will add approximately 747 children to the mix. This does not change the fact that the school system needs to move on with the Master Plan to expand the High School and the Middle School on the existing campuses and must also add at least one elementary school (possible K-3/4/5) on a new site.

There is no denying that the City of Decatur is a sought-after location. That is to the credit of our city leaders. There is also no denying that the School System (City Schools of Decatur) is a leader among Georgia public schools. I personally appreciate the support for the school system from the Decatur community.

When being interviewed by news media regarding our growth, many want to solely lay blame on the surrounding systems. I tend to disagree. We should be thankful to our teachers and staff for their dedicated efforts and to our School Board for clear direction and emphasis on instructional initiatives as well as efforts to make life much better for all of our children.

I hope you will join me as we continue to work to find an answer to this challenging issue.

Sincerely, 
Dr. Phyllis Edwards, Superintendent

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