



## **Superintendent's Comments Announcing a Comprehensive Review of Gwinnett County Public Schools' Student Conduct Behavior Code**

November 21, 2019

The mission of Gwinnett County Public Schools is to pursue excellence in academic knowledge, skills, and behavior for each student, resulting in measured improvement against local, national, and world-class standards. When we speak of this mission, it is not unusual to focus on the academic knowledge and skills part because that is the essence of our core business. But excellence in behavior also is crucial to the culture and climate of a school and, consequently, our students' ability to learn. It is incumbent on us, therefore, to make sure we provide safe and orderly schools where teaching and learning can thrive free of disruption.

The Board of Education's student conduct behavior code is key to our efforts in this regard. Set forth in Policy JCD, the code communicates the high expectations we have in terms of student behavior. It helps protect the learning time of not only the vast majority of our students who never misbehave, but also of the disruptive students who need structure and boundaries around their actions. The discipline code also supports the work of our teachers and administrators as they strive to create positive environments in their local schools throughout the district.

For many years a primary objective has been to ensure that the student conduct behavior code is firm, fair, and flexible. The Board of Education and I have confidence in our discipline code, in the training our employees receive in implementing it, and in how discipline is carried out in our schools. However, we are hearing from some in the community who have concerns that a disproportionate number of students of color are being disciplined. They also have

questions about the consequences given to students who misbehave. We are sensitive to their concerns and want to be sure we do not have any blinders on when it comes to an issue that impacts students in such significant ways.

That is why I am directing staff to begin right away a comprehensive review of Policy JCD, the Student Conduct Behavior Code, and the operational practices associated with implementing the policy. The Board of Education and I feel strongly that our citizens should have confidence in and support for the policy governing and guiding the Student Conduct Behavior Code and its implementation practices, believing that it serves *all* students and discriminates against none. Although the Board of Education considers updates to the policy each year to incorporate revisions mandated by changes in State law or State School Board rules, we feel it is time for a more in-depth review, similar to ones we have done periodically in the past. We expect the review committee's work to conclude by April 1 of the current school year.

This review will involve a number of people, including employees, parents, students, and citizens from our community. A process for identifying the members of the committee is in development, and I have tasked Eric Thigpen, executive director of Academic Support, to chair this committee. Dr. Steve Flynt, associate superintendent for School Improvement and Operations, will serve as an ad hoc member of the committee.

We look forward to getting started on the review to ensure Gwinnett County Public Schools is in the best-possible position when it comes to the complex issue of ensuring firm, fair, and flexible approaches to student discipline. This is an important and timely issue that affects not only GCPS, but school districts and communities throughout our state and nation.