



Investing in Educational Excellence:

A Q&A on Gwinnett County Public Schools' IE² Partnership Contract

Gwinnett County Public Schools • 437 Old Peachtree Road, NW • Suwanee, GA 30024-2978 • www.gwinnett.k12.ga.us

General Questions on GCPS' IE² Partnership Contract:

Why did Gwinnett County Public Schools pursue an IE² Partnership Contract with the state? We pursued this partnership contract and the flexibility it provides for one major purpose—to increase student achievement throughout the district. We now have an unprecedented opportunity to be relieved of some of the state rules and mandates that negatively impact the operations of our schools.

How will this improve student achievement and schools? In the past, some schools have been able to try some innovative instructional strategies on a small scale. The flexibility granted under IE² will allow those strategies that have proven to be the most effective in improving student achievement to be implemented on a larger scale. As the Local School Plan for Improvement (LSPI) development process involves teachers, parents, and community members the entire school community has the opportunity to be involved in conversations about school improvement.

It seems that this initiative has come about quickly. Is that the case? For almost three years, GCPS leaders have talked about such a partnership contract, recognizing the potential benefits and embracing the possibilities for our high-achieving system. For the last six months, we have collaborated with the Governor's Office of Student Achievement and the Georgia Department of Education to develop a partnership contract that blends accountability, defined consequences, and greater flexibility for the good of our students and schools.

Why is Gwinnett the only school system doing this? Gwinnett County Public Schools has been and continues to be a leader in the state in terms of accountability and raising student achievement. The district's past work in regard to its improvement strategy (the Board's Theory of Action) and its Results-Based Evaluation System uniquely positioned it as being ready for this next step. As a district we have never

been larger or more diverse; however, achievement has remained high. That has not happened by accident, but rather through a strategic effort. The IE² partnership contract is a strategic initiative that blends well with initiatives already underway in the district and will help ensure that the strides Gwinnett schools have made in the past continue into the future.

What budget/financial implications will the partnership contract have on Gwinnett schools? This is a revenue neutral initiative. Although there will not be any additional funding, the partnership contract allows the district to use its current resources (both financial and human) more effectively.

Are all Gwinnett schools included in the partnership contract? No. The partnership contract does not include the district's alternative schools (GIVE East and West), special education facilities (Oakland Meadow School, Monarch School, and Buice School), and any district charter schools.

Will parents be able to transfer their students to another school if they do not agree with their school's LSPI and plans for implementing flexibility? While there is not a process tied to student transfers specifically under the partnership contract, GCPS does have a permissive transfer process already in place, as well as a NCLB-mandated Choice option for schools designated as "needing improvement."

Will teachers have the opportunity to transfer if they do not agree with their school's implementation of flexibility? The district already has a well-established process for staff members seeking a transfer to a new school or position.

How will this work for new schools—in terms of both flexibility and accountability? New schools will have the same opportunities for flexibility as existing schools. They will involve their new school communities in the development of their LSPI. Their five-year performance goals will be based on their first year of student achievement data.

General Questions: *(continued)*

What impact will the partnership contract have in terms of SACS accreditation and federal requirements (NCLB/AYP/Special Education)? Gwinnett County Public Schools is currently accredited through SACS/CASI. The partnership contract should not affect the district's accreditation renewal process. All schools, as well as the district, will still have to make AYP and meet other federal requirements. In terms of service to special needs students, the district will continue to develop and implement Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) that meet students' needs and comply with IDEA.

Questions on Flexibility:

What are schools planning relative to the flexibility options? Flexibility will be implemented with careful planning based on conversations with faculty, staff, and the community and with oversight by Area Superintendents. Opportunities will be provided this spring for school leaders to learn more about implementing flexibilities in their school and what that flexibility could look like at the school level.

What is the process for requesting and implementing flexibility at the local school? Will there be any district oversight? In this first year of implementation, school leaders will discuss flexibility with their Area Superintendent to ensure consistency and accountability.

How will changes in class size affect students and schools? How "big" will classes be? GCPS has a long history of implementing school improvement efforts that are instructionally sound, and more importantly, are in the best interest of our students. As a result, academic achievement in our schools remain high. Our record also contains extensive evidence of how much the organization values teachers, and nothing in the district's partnership contract disputes that fact. We know that overcrowded classrooms and unpleasant working conditions are not best for students, nor are they consistent with the value we place on our teachers. Our past performance is a predictor of the future... our schools will make decisions that are in the best interest of students. There is no intention to overload teachers or overcrowd classrooms.

Under flexibility, will some schools opt to not offer classes or make changes to instructional programs? Schools already have permission and the ability to offer classes that best meet the needs of their students and community while still meeting curriculum requirements (i.e. Carnegie units required for grade levels and graduation requirements).

How will flexibility impact delivery for ELL, Special Education, and Gifted? We do anticipate that there will be changes in how these programs are offered. For example, schools will be able to provide more opportunities for inclusion, serving students who previously had not been served by some of these programs. Changes in services would only be developed to improve students' opportunities for academic success and would be monitored to ensure positive results. Teachers will play a pivotal role in designing and implementing program changes. In addition, any changes in special education services must still meet the students' needs as outlined in their IEPs.

Will teacher qualifications change in Gwinnett? Will this mean uncertified teachers in classrooms? Nearly 99% of Gwinnett's teachers are designated as highly qualified under NCLB guidelines. We will continue to have high expectations for teachers and staff. Hiring teachers who are not qualified would not be part of Gwinnett's plan for improvement.

How are teacher salaries going to be affected? Will salaries be linked to accountability? At this point, we do not anticipate major changes to the teacher salary schedule.

Questions on Accountability:

Will Gwinnett students still have to meet state promotion and graduation requirements? Yes.

Will this have an effect on the system's accountability system (RBES)? The expectations of the partnership contract will be integrated into the district's RBES accountability system. RBES will continue to be how the district measures and reports school performance.

Will this add to what is already expected of schools and teachers? This should not add to what schools and teachers are doing. The accountability that is part of the partnership contract already was a part of AYP and the district's expectations for students and teachers. The partnership contract should provide schools the flexibility to make improvements without increasing workloads and/or reporting requirements.

What impact will this have on the LSPI in terms of format, schedule, development, and involvement? The district's already established Local School Plan for Improvement will continue to serve as the vehicle for outlining school goals and plans for achieving those goals. Under Gwinnett's IE² partnership contract, the traditional LSPI will undergo some modification to address each school's five-year plan for achieving its goals. In addition to addressing the accountability measures outlined under the partnership contract, schools will continue to develop goals that will improve other areas of student achievement. Principals are currently providing feedback on the timeline and format of the LSPIs with the intent of providing communication opportunities with all stakeholder groups.

What are the implications for increased accountability? When would those consequences go into effect? Schools must meet their annual RBES goals and AYP goals. Regarding IE² performance targets, schools must meet those goals by the end of the five-year period or three consecutive years during that five-year period. As the district's intent is focused on school improvement, any school not meeting its goals will benefit from additional support and interventions... the district will not wait until the end of the five-year period to offer that support.

How does this affect schools that have not made AYP? Schools will have the opportunity to enact the same flexibilities as schools making AYP. That said, some schools may focus flexibility on strategies that will help the school make AYP. Schools with a corrective action plan will continue to work with the state to fulfill the requirements of that plan.

Under Gwinnett's partnership contract, schools that do not meet their performance goals will be restructured into a charter school. How will this work? It is important to remember that school improvement is monitored on an on-going basis. Therefore, before a school faces the consequences outlined in the partnership contract the school system will

provide interventions to help schools struggling to meet their performance goals. The district will work with a school that has not met its performance goals for five years, restructuring it as a charter school that has less flexibility and control over how it delivers instruction and services.

How were the accountability measures and targets determined? The areas of accountability were developed through negotiations with the Georgia Department of Education and the Governor's Office of Student Achievement. Gwinnett's partnership contract focuses on the higher levels of performance in Reading/English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science on assessments already required by the state. Individual school performance targets were identified by referencing up to three years of historical student achievement data.

In looking at the five-year plan, I noticed that some of the school targets remain the same. Why is that? Some schools' performance targets do not increase over the five year period as those schools already have surpassed percentage of students in the state scoring in the "Exceeds" or "Advanced Honors" on the state assessments. GCPS will continue to expect these schools to help each of their students improve academically. Our students are doing very well and we want to ensure that they continue to do so.

Will individual school plans change during the five-year period to address changes in the school's population? The partnership contract allows for annual review of existing performance goals, this may include modifications to address changes in a school's population or achievement levels that occur due to redistricting or other factors.

**If you have additional questions,
contact your local school.**

Gwinnett County Public Schools
437 Old Peachtree Road, NW
Suwanee, GA 30024-2978
www.gwinnett.k12.ga.us

