Career Connections
Message from the CEO/Superintendent

Building civic capacity to support public education

A system of world-class schools... it’s what we aspire to become as a school system. And, based on the school district’s recent review of its vision, mission, and strategic goals, it is a vision shared by educators and community members alike. Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) has earned the reputation as a high-performing school district that provides a quality and effective education for every student.

Sustaining that success requires the district to continuously review where it is today and envision what the organization must be in the future. Over the years, GCPS’ vision, mission, and strategic goals have helped to keep the focus on the main thing—teaching and learning. During our review of these foundational components, we received input from parents, community members, and educators... input that led to recent modifications revisions recently approved by the Gwinnett County Board of Education. In addition to updating these key pieces of the school system’s strategic direction, we also felt it was important to clearly define the characteristics found in a world-class school. After all, our goal is to become a system of world-class schools... because that is where the work is done, that is where we have the most impact on students, and that is where we can make the biggest difference.

J. Alvin Wilbanks, CEO/Superintendent

Schools host community leaders

American Education Week in November brought 133 members of Gwinnett’s business community into local schools to serve as “Principal for a Day” and, in one case, “Superintendent for a Day.” Co-sponsored by the school district and the Gwinnett Chamber, the annual event gives business leaders a first-hand look at the exciting innovations in our classrooms and the challenging work done so well by education leaders and classroom teachers. Said one participant, “I am blown away by the use of technology and the students’ abilities on devices and computers. These students are clearly being educated for the future.” We appreciate the support of our community partners and their investment in our students.

Mary Hughes of Girl Scouts of Greater Atlanta and Walnut Grove Elementary students

There’s more!

When you see “colorful” text or these icons in an article, click to hear more, see more, and learn more.
Deadlines approach for charters, program sign-up
Following are remaining open enrollment opportunities for charter schools and programs to register for 2015–16:

- **Gwinnett Online Campus** (Register through Feb. 28, rising 4th–12th graders, remaining info session on Feb. 26)
- **Maxwell High School of Technology** (Registration now open, open house Feb. 26)
- **North Metro Academy of Performing Arts** (Open enrollment for grades K, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7 through April 1)
- **Grayson High Technical Education Program** (Registration now open)

**Note:** Open enrollment has closed for *Gwinnett School of Mathematics, Science, and Technology*, and *New Life Academy of Excellence*.

Calendar set for 2015–16 school year
Circle Monday, Aug. 10, 2015, on your calendar. That’s the first day of the 2015–16 school year. Find the GCPS calendar for 2015–16 online.

GWINNETT COUNTY SCHOOL BUS STOP-ARM ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM

Cameras installed for school district’s stop-arm enforcement program
Illegally passing a stopped GCPS school bus — and having the act caught on camera — could cost motorists up to $1,000. Stop-arm cameras are now in use on several hundred Gwinnett buses. Drivers who violate the law will receive a citation, with fines ranging from $300 to $1,000. Online, learn more about how drivers should respond to a stopped bus, depending on the type of roadway, and find bus safety tips for families.

New schools prompt change in boundaries
During the fall, GCPS conducted a major redistricting effort to create a new cluster, establish attendance zones for several new schools, and balance enrollment for existing schools. Feedback from community and staff members prompted adjustments to draft maps. The final maps were approved by the Gwinnett County Board of Education at a Dec. 18 meeting, with provisions for additional permissive transfers in some areas. Find the approved boundary maps on the GCPS website.

Spring calendar reminders
- **March 13** Inclement Weather Make-up Day (make-up for Feb. 17)
- **April 6–10** Spring Break

Don’t just think about it — prepare for bad weather
Snow, ice, and bitter temperatures can cause school closings and delays. Learn more about the district’s inclement weather procedures on the GCPS website.

District names new high school, taps principal
Gwinnett’s newest high school has a name and a leader. *Discovery High* will open in August, led by Principal John Campbell (previously at Osborne Middle). Feeder schools in the newly formed Discovery Cluster include Alford, Baggett (opening in August), Benefield, and Cedar Hill elementaries, and Richards Middle. The new high school will house an entrepreneurship center, two Junior Achievement programs for middle school students, and other instructional innovations. (Check out a virtual tour.) Principals for the three other new schools — Baggett, Graves Elementary, and Jordan Middle — will be named this spring.

Other GCPS news…
- The State Board of Education approved GCPS’ IE2 Partnership Contract which gives the district flexibility to innovate and waivers from some rules in exchange for increased accountability.
- GCPS posted a 98.1% average passing rate on the Georgia High School Writing Test, a graduation requirement.

Kindergarten Registration
May 7, 2015
What did you do to prepare yourself to enter this field?

What do you enjoy most about your job?

What is the hardest part of your job?

On Nov. 14, the Gwinnett Center became a hive of activity. Over the course of three hours, more than 3,600 middle school students buzzed through the aisles—some walking in groups, others clustered around booths and businesses that captivated their interest, and all grasping their clipboards filled with pages of interview questions. These GCPS 8th graders were clearly focused on their future careers.

Some 350 local business leaders shared their professional expertise with students in the first-ever GCPS Career Connections Exhibition. This event featured 165 metro Atlanta employers, representing each of the College and Career Academies currently offered this school year at Gwinnett’s five Academy high schools—Central Gwinnett, Lanier, Meadowcreek, Shiloh, and South Gwinnett. The intent? To help students make an
informed choice in selecting an area of focus when entering 9th grade at an Academy high school.

“The students who have their plans, they already know what they’re going to do and what college they’re going to attend... I think that’s very impressive,” said Tim Davis, representing Heatcraft. “When I was their age, I had no idea what I was going to do. It’s really surprising that you have someone in the 8th grade with that much ambition and drive.”

For students who hadn’t yet planned their futures, the exhibition presented a wide range of careers, from culinary ventures to electrical contracting apprenticeships, and veterinary fields to film and broadcast production companies. A big hit was one of the Southeast’s largest video game studios.

“The students have been so well-mannered and excited to be here, added Pam Ledbetter, president of Accent Creative Group. “They have really been anxious to learn and they’ve presented some interesting questions.”

“The best part of the day has been our business partners,” says Jody Reeves, GCPS’ executive director for Academies, Career, and Technical Education. “They have really jumped in and are having a great time talking to our students about their futures. They are really investing in our students and our community, and to see this many people taking time from their own jobs to speak to our students, really says a lot.”

Click for more photos from the Career Connections event.
Amanda, a junior at Brookwood High, plans to be a computer programmer. Her AP Computer Science course is giving her a head start on her college coursework. Ryan, a senior, took computer science classes last year and currently is enrolled in a Number Theory and Cryptography class offered through Georgia Tech. A budding mathematician, he says coding is a powerful tool and a useful way of thinking.

Amanda and Ryan are among the nearly 6,000 students currently taking computer science classes in Gwinnett high schools. Starting next year, even more GCPS students will have access to computer science as instruction in coding is integrated into math and science classes at the middle school level and additional computer science classes are offered in our high schools. A new partnership with Code.org and two other metro Atlanta school districts will allow GCPS to build a community of computer science teachers, expand offerings to our students, and expose more young people to one of the fastest-growing career fields in the country.

“As the demand for computer science teachers increases, our partnership with Code.org will provide teachers with the quality staff development and support they need to successfully bring computer science to more and more of our students,” says Crystal Furman, a computer science teacher at Brookwood who is coordinating the initiative.

Through the four-year pilot program, Code.org, a non-profit education organization, is providing the Gwinnett, Forsyth, and Fulton school districts with nationally recognized computer science courses, curriculum resources, and multi-year professional development at no cost to the district. Participating teachers will get their first training this spring, with the new classes for students launching in the fall.

“The first step: Learning to think like a computer program!” These Hour of Code activities put Brookwood Cluster students and parents in the right frame of mind, so they understand how to give instructions once they’re in front of a monitor. Check out an “unplugged” demo and learn more about this international initiative.

“From phones to cars to medicine, technology touches every part of our lives. If you can create technology, you can change the world.”

Susan Wojcicki, CEO, YouTube
**Why computer science?**

Technology is everywhere. But, behind every gadget, computerized application, and techno-task is a person (or people) who wrote the computer program that makes it all work. Kids are voracious technology consumers, but it’s becoming increasingly important for them to learn the skills they’ll need to be tech producers as well.

*Curious. Analytical. Imaginative. Innovative. Adaptable.* Those 21st century traits are critical to preparing our students for what comes next... in many cases, careers that don’t yet exist, and, in most cases, a career that in some way involves technology. While most fields will require at least some tech skills, the field of computer science will be a go-to option for students who are strong critical thinkers and problem solvers, particularly those with an interest in math and science.

This fast-growing field encompasses a range of careers—from computer programming and software development to engineering and design. (Programming is growing at twice the national average for other careers.) While more students are looking at math and science careers, Code.org notes that 60% of the jobs in that sector will be computing jobs, yet only 2% of students in math and science degree programs are pursuing a computing degree. In fact, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, some 1.4 million computing jobs will be available in 2020, but fully two-thirds of those positions could go unfilled because not enough students are graduating with related degrees.

**Increasing participation**

A number of organizations are working to increase computer science participation for all students, particularly girls and students of color who are under-

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**What is Blockly?**

The people who develop applications—including the wide array of games that help kids learn computer programming—use this web-based visual editor from Google. What the end user of these educational applications sees is a drag-and-drop “block” that represents a particular command or action. (Each block reflects a line of programming code in JavaScript, Python, Ruby, or another programming language.) By plugging together the blocks, the user essentially “writes” a program. With these beginner programming applications, writing code is as easy as popping together LEGO. With Blockly Games, use this great tool to learn programming and explore the world of computer science.

*Customize this yeti* and program it to dance at www.madewithcode.com. You also can try out simple GIF animation and beats programming, or more advanced projects like websites and phone apps.

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Games, like these from Code Studio, introduce kids to how coding works. Whether building a snowflake with the Frozen cast or learning code to play Angry Birds, students stay engaged and want to learn more.
represented in tech programs at the college level and in tech-related careers.

“We would love to see more female and underrepresented minorities taking these classes,” says Brookwood teacher Crystal Furman. “It is the belief of the computer science community at large that the best solutions come from a diverse group of people working together to solve problems.”

Amanda says that she sees a career for herself in computer science, but also a way to help her community. “Through coding, I believe I can inspire others to take a leap into the world of computer science,” she says. “Coding is the future.” Her advice for other girls who are considering a career in computer science? “[Don’t] feel intimidated and always believe in your abilities. Never be afraid to ask questions. The key idea to remember is that ‘results have no gender.’”

Computer science in other disciplines

While not pursuing a computer science career, Ryan knows that coding and computing will be part of his future in mathematics research. He’s excited about how researchers can harness the power of computing to solve difficult theoretical problems. (Check out a collaborative computing project that discovered a prime number with more than 17 million digits!) Ryan describes coding as a puzzle that allows him to creatively work through a problem to find a solution. “I learned the necessary pieces and fundamental concepts [of coding] in class,” he says, “and each new problem was just a new way to put together these pieces.”

While a computing career may not be for everyone, students shouldn’t write off coding as an important skill set. Coding can be an important tool in any field—from the arts to finance, healthcare to communication, and manufacturing to security. Computers and coding skills can be used to create sculptures, design clothes, make music, fix cars, build buildings, develop schedules, tell stories, and much more. Coding is for everyone!

Hour of Code is an international event for students and their families, designed to demystify computer science and show that anybody can learn the basics. In just 60 minutes, students (and adults) learn that computer science is fun, easy, and accessible for all ages. In the fall, at schools across Gwinnett County, kids got a taste of coding through engaging, hands-on activities. This exposure can open the door for more students to study computer science and enter related fields.

You can try your hand at coding with some of the online activities in the box above, and watch for the Hour of Code next fall!

Take the next step

- **Code.org**—Tutorials and activities.
- **Made with Code**—Projects and encouragement for girls, who are underrepresented in the computing field.
- **App Inventor**—Write apps for your Android phone or tablet.
- **Hopscotch**—Programming for iPad.
- **Scratch**—A free programming language from MIT. Check out video tutorials here.
- **Codecademy**—Dive into JavaScript, Python, Ruby, or PHP.
- **Khan Academy**—Learn how to program and how to create webpages.
A Jenkins 4th grader shares a short animated video, created with the Tellagami mobile app, with a visiting educator.

Teach the teachers

A professional development session is underway in the Jenkins Elementary Media Center where 75 teachers, technology specialists, and administrators from around GCPS are gathered for an eCLASS technology showcase. Nothing unusual about that... except that the trainers can all order a kid’s meal. A group of 53 K–5 students are showing off animated videos, presentations, websites, blogs, and digital discussion boards created with some of the online tools and digital applications used in Gwinnett classrooms. The excitement level is high as the educators see the ease with which the children demonstrate how Animoto, Skitch, Thinglink, Blabberize, PowToon, Prezi, Symbaloo, and other digital tools are used to support learning.

“The showcase was important for our students because it allowed them to be the teacher and share their knowledge,” says Brenalee Alford, a technology coach at the school and one of the event’s organizers. She notes that even the youngest students had something to teach the adults, sharing PowerPoints about their favorite books with confidence.

The visitors also observed digital lessons in action during classroom visits and targeted breakout sessions. (Click on the digital tools in bold to see what all the excitement’s about!)}

Student-launched website takes on food insecurity

Peachtree Ridge High senior Jack Griffin has never worried about where he’d find his next meal, but a news program about children living with food insecurity opened his eyes to a growing problem in his community. (More than half of GCPS students qualify for free or reduced-price meals at school.) His solution? FoodFinder, a geo-located, native-mobile website that connects families with nearby food resources, such as food banks, soup kitchens, and co-op ministries. The site searches a database of nearly 100 resources in the county, based on the searcher’s school or home address. The site has seen thousands of unique visitors since the start of the school year. Jack funded site development for FoodFinder through an Indiegogo crowdfunding campaign. This spring, the teen and his support team—members of the National Honor Society at his school—are working to expand the site to serve all schools in Georgia and more than half a million food-insecure students in the state. Jack’s tech-enabled solution to food insecurity won a 2014 Excalibur Award from the Technology Association of Georgia for the “Most Creative Solution” in the Non-Profit Category. A downloadable mobile app is next for FoodFinder.

Meadowcreek team promotes fitness with app

A team of Meadowcreek High students is promoting a healthy lifestyle for their peers with their awarding-winning design for a mobile app. An entry in the 3rd annual Verizon Innovative App Challenge, “Teen Fitness” was one of two Best of State winners for Georgia and was tapped as one of eight Best of Region winners, earning $5,000 toward STEM education at their school. “At Meadowcreek we support learning through doing,” says Principal Tommy Welch. “The Verizon Innovative App Challenge offers Meadowcreek students an opportunity to participate in a rich, project-based learning experience that fosters teamwork and encourages them to explore new ideas and consider future careers in STEM.”
**Rise up, Winn Holt!**

This fall, *Winn Holt Elementary* students ran fitness drills with hometown heroes from the *Atlanta Falcons* in the kickoff for the team’s 8th annual *First Down for Fitness* program. The statewide program encourages students to “rise up” and get fit, with an hour of active play each day for a healthier lifestyle. The children were inspired to play hard and have fun through the event, which featured Falcons kicker Matt Bryant and teammates Lamar Holmes and Sean Baker. The incentive-based program is part of the *NFL Play 60* movement.

**Click** for a video on the Falcons’ *Play 60* event at Winn Holt Elementary.

**Click** for more photos from the Falcons’ visit to Winn Holt.

**TOUCHDOWN!**... A Winn Holt Elementary student “scores” with physical fitness drills during a visit from the Atlanta Falcons during the fall.

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**How can parents be involved in their child’s education?**

*Following are a few tips from Dr. Sharon Smith, GCPS’ 2015 Teacher of the Year. Dr. Smith serves as Gifted Language Arts (Grades 1–2) and Early Intervention Program Teacher and Literacy Coach at Brookwood Elementary.*

- **“I try to emphasize to parents that, if they want their child to value education, they must model this same value.”** Dr. Smith observes that our busy lifestyles sometimes lead us to talk “at” our children about school—*What do you have for homework?* However, parents can show education is a priority when they talk “with” kids—*What did you learn today and what do you think about that?*

- **“Be involved in whatever capacity that you can with your child’s school, class, and teacher.”** She says that while not every parent can volunteer in the school building, technology and resources can bring “school” to them, even if it’s just a regular “check-in” e-mail between home and school.

- **Know that “education is a partnership between the school and the home.”** Dr. Smith says that, working together, teachers and families can foster a positive relationship that provides a solid foundation for student success.

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**Looking for more tips for parents?**

*Click* for dozens of *Be There* parent tipsheets, including our latest tips:

- Managing ADHD/ADD
- Taming test-taking anxiety
- Tips for a productive IEP meeting
- Strategies for relieving stress
- Support for grandparents raising children with special needs
Produced by the award-winning GCPS TV team, “Focus Moments” are bite-sized videos that cover a range of school-based stories, good news, and quick-takes on events around the district. Click the icons on these pages to enjoy these “Focus Moments,” and check out more of these timely, short vignettes in our online OnDemand Library.

Nature run... Members of the North Gwinnett Middle running club have access to a wooded running trail on the campus, thanks to the efforts of a former student working on his Eagle project.

Racing to learn at Collins Hill High... An in-house field trip on STEM careers from Mazda Motorsports, Road Atlanta, and the Environmental Protection Agency demonstrates how Racing Accelerates Creative Education (RACE).

GCPS grads return to Gwinnett to teach... Hundreds of our graduates come back to the district after college to teach, aspiring to be like the teachers who inspired them.

Kohl’s Healthy Halls grant brings healthy fun to Walnut Grove Elementary... Students enjoyed learning “Strong4Life” habits from the actors of TellTale Theatre.

ParenTVision... Find tips for parents on communication, safety, and more with these GCPS TV videos.
An elementary teacher who refers to herself as “a successful product of Gwinnett County Public Schools,” Dr. Sharon Smith is the 2015 Gwinnett County Teacher of the Year (TOTY). Gwinnett’s TOTY is a proud public school graduate, attending Brookwood Cluster schools in grades 1–12. She says that the district’s teachers exemplify the PUBLIC in public schools, noting that Gwinnett’s outstanding teachers are “Powerful, Unrelenting, Bold, Legendary, Innovative Creators” who are dedicated to ensuring success for their students and their schools.

Dr. Sharon Smith
Brookwood Elementary Gifted Language Arts (Grades 1–2) and Early Intervention Program Teacher and Literacy Coach
2015 Gwinnett County Public Schools Teacher of the Year
2015 Elementary School Teacher of the Year

Randi Hill
Gwinnett Online Campus
Local School Technology Coordinator
2015 High School Teacher of the Year

Cindy Apley Rose
Couch Middle
Mathematics teacher
2015 Middle School Teacher of the Year

Check out highlights from the Teacher of the Year banquet.

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