

## Charter System School Flexibility Option is a Vehicle for Change

I volunteered to serve on the DeKalb County School Board because of my belief that every child enrolled in the DeKalb County School System should have equal access to a quality education. At the beginning of my tenure, the district was on the verge of losing its accreditation through SACS, it was running a \$14 Million dollar deficit; layoffs, furlough days and no cost of living adjustments had devastated employee morale.

Deep budget cuts had also negatively impacted student achievement such as reduced funding for text books, language interpreters, counselors, support staff and services. The district did not even have enough bus mechanics to service our fleet so that our children could get to school on time. My opponent does not understand or is trying to ignore the seriousness of the crisis that our school district was facing.

Our new school board, along with Superintendent Thurmond, has made extraordinary progress over the past 16 months. By eliminating the district's budget deficit, reducing furlough days, cutting the Central Office's budget by \$12 million dollars and reducing legal fees, we will ensure that our budgets place dollars closest to where student instruction is occurring in the classroom. Furthermore, the proposed budget for FY 2015 includes the removal of all remaining furlough days which will return us to a 180 day attendance calendar. We have appropriated money for the hiring of 100 new teachers and will provide the first cost of living adjustment for teachers and staff in 7 years.

The previous district had squandered its "rainy day fund" and was completely broke. We will end the current fiscal year with an estimated \$20 million dollar surplus. Mr. LeBlanc has chosen to ignore all of these unprecedented results.

Currently, the district is implementing a variety of strategies to address the graduation rate. We are utilizing Post-Secondary Transition Specialists to work with at risk students in 10 of our schools with the lowest graduation rates and the district has partnered with local colleges to offer summer preparatory courses to help students prepare for Georgia High School Graduation Tests. Thanks to a grant from AT+T we will also establish five Job for Georgia Graduates sites at McNair High School, Towers High School and three other high schools with the lowest graduation rates. These and other efforts have resulted in an improved graduation rate for 2013 from 57.3% to 60.2% and we are expecting even more of an increase for the 2014 graduation rate.

My opponent has decided to focus on labeling our communities as charter or anti-charter instead of uniting our community around equitable education for all of our children. He has placed great emphasis on the revised Druid Hills Charter Cluster Petition which is being reviewed by Superintendent Thurmond and his staff following the districts charter petition submission protocol and 2014 timeline. I have posted the 2014 timeline on my website at [www.michaelerwin.org](http://www.michaelerwin.org). While this Petition has garnered much attention, there are options on the horizon that will impact all of the children in the DeKalb County School System.

The recommended Charter System School Flexibility Option is a vehicle for change that allows each of our schools to develop its own long-term plan that involves all of our children receiving the best educational experience we can give them. It will maximize school level governance by providing each school with substantial autonomy and decision making over budgets, programs, personnel, and academic innovation. Furthermore, the recommended Charter System will not prevent the Druid Hills Charter Cluster from forming, but it will require that they obtain consensus from each of the seven school's local governance boards to work as a cluster.

I believe that our local community members, educators, parents and stakeholders will have an opportunity to form charter schools that fit the academic needs of their children and make decisions that lead to academic growth within their community schools.

We need consistency in governance, a continuous channeling of resources to the classroom and accountability for academic growth and achievement at every level. So, I ask the public to stay engaged and involved and keep an open mind as we continue to change the educational culture in DeKalb County.