



Executive Summary

Newton County School System

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Introduction

Every school system has its own story to tell. The context in which teaching and learning takes place influences the processes and procedures by which the school system makes decisions around curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The context also impacts the way a school system stays faithful to its vision. Many factors contribute to the overall narrative such as an identification of stakeholders, a description of stakeholder engagement, the trends and issues affecting the school system, and the kinds of programs and services that a school system implements to support student learning.

 The purpose of the Executive Summary (ES) is to provide a school system with an opportunity to describe in narrative form the strengths and challenges it encounters. By doing so, the public and members of the community will have a more complete picture of how the school system perceives itself and the process of self-reflection for continuous improvement. This summary is structured for the school system to reflect on how it provides teaching and learning on a day to day basis.

Description of the School System

Describe the school system's size, community/communities, location, and changes it has experienced in the last three years. Include demographic information about the students, staff, and community at large. What unique features and challenges are associated with the community/communities the school system serves?

Newton County, named after Sergeant John Newton, a soldier of the American Revolution, is located approximately 30 miles east of Atlanta. Newton County is adjacent to Walton, Morgan, Jasper, Butts, Henry, and Rockdale counties and spans 280 square miles. The county seat is Covington and the other cities are Mansfield, Porterdale, Newborn, and Oxford. A unique feature of Newton County is that it houses three college campuses and one university campus: Georgia Perimeter College, Oxford College of Emory University, Georgia Piedmont Technical College, and Troy University. According to the US Census Bureau, the population of Newton County has grown from 99,958 residents in 2010 to 101,505 residents in 2012, an increase of 1.5%. Esri forecasts for Newton County indicate by 2016, the population of Newton County will be 106,307 residents, representing an approximate increase of 5%. As of 2012, 7% of the community was under the age of five and approximately 28% of the population was under 18. The racial make-up of Newton County as of 2012 is 54.9% white, 41.8% African American, 0.3% American Indian and Alaska Native, 1.1% Asian, 0.1% Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, 1.8% multiracial, and 4.8% Hispanic or Latino. The estimated median income for a household in the county from 2008-2012 was \$51,335 compared to Georgia's median income during that same period of \$49,604. About 12.2% of families and 14.6% of the population were below the poverty line, including 18.8% of those under age 18 and 13.9% of those over 65. The county was ranked among the 10 fastest growing counties in the nation early from 2000-2007.

The Newton County School System (NCSS) plays a major role in the community as it is the largest employer in Newton County with some 2,519 total employees, 1,571 of whom are certified. Of those 1,571, some 1,413 serve as teachers. Of our 1,413 certified staff members, 4 have Trade and Industrial Certificates; 403 have bachelor degrees; 685 have master degrees; 397 hold a specialist degree; and 86 have a doctorate degree. Overall, 99% of NCSS teachers and 100% of NCSS paraprofessionals are highly qualified. The Newton County School System is operating under a \$149,493,000 budget with a \$13,628,766 fund balance. The current millage rate is at the state limit of 20. The Newton County School System's 23 public schools house and serve approximately 19,500 students with 52% of the student body African American; 36% white; 6.5% Hispanic; 4% multi-racial; and the remainder is 1.5% Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian. Approximately 3.7% of Newton County School System students are English Language Learners; thirty different languages are spoken as our students' native language. Overall, 66.95% of NCSS students are eligible for free and reduced price meals. Since 2008, NCSS has opened six new schools--South Salem Elementary, Live Oak Elementary, Liberty Middle, Flint Hill Elementary, Newton College & Career Academy, and the replacement for Newton High School. Overall, NCSS is comprised of thirteen elementary schools, five middle schools, three high schools, a K-8 theme school, and the College and Career Academy. Challenge Charter Academy closed at the end of the 2012-2013 school year after leadership was informed the school's state charter petition would be recommended for denial by the state department of education. Over the last decade, NCSS has seen tumultuous changes. Addressing the changes has been integral to the strategic planning process as we have had to come to grips with our understanding of "doing more with less." In the early 2000's, Newton County was ranked one of the ten fastest growing counties in the nation. However, due to a combination of rapid overgrowth in the residential sector and subsequent foreclosures, by 2009 Newton County landed on the opposite end of the spectrum when it made it to USA Today's list of top 20 most economically distressed counties in the nation. This dramatic and sudden development impacted the school system. The NCSS saw a decrease in the rapid rate of student enrollment as well as an almost overnight decline in the tax digest. Coupled with the state of Georgia's financial woes directly impacting state education funding through "austerity reductions," school system personnel expected striking financial adjustments would be necessary and immediately began working to mitigate the negative impact. As such, between 2008 and 2010 the school district made historic budget cuts of approximately \$18.3 million and commenced yet another round of budget cuts representing an additional \$8.2 million reduction in the 2011-2012 school year. The cuts of 2011-2012 included changing all high schools' scheduling from a 4

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x 4 block to a seven period day; closing the district-operated alternative school to contract instead with Ombudsman, a private alternative school option; implementing a three-tier student transportation system; reorganizing and reducing maintenance and custodial staffs; further reduction of central office staff; reduction in school administration; increasing class size and requiring a 10% cut in all central office budgets. NCSS faces unique challenges in achieving the mission of educational excellence for all students. The school system and schools monitor improvement efforts and develop interim action plans so as to address ongoing opportunities for improvement. The school system has lost approximately \$86,716, 647 in austerity reductions over the last ten years. However, the community continues to demonstrate its commitment to the school system as a SPLOST referendum was passed in March 2013. Although Newton County appears to be heading out of the economic downturn, the school system will have to contend with the economic fallout as it continues to carry out its vision and mission.

System's Purpose

Provide the school system's purpose statement and ancillary content such as mission, vision, values, and/or beliefs. Describe how the school system embodies its purpose through its program offerings and expectations for students.

The mission of the Newton County School System is to provide educational excellence for all students. The Newton County School System envisions students, who through a rigorous and relevant education will be able to think critically in order to produce, perform, create, and communicate their knowledge competitively to a hyper-connected, global audience. Our school system's non-negotiable goals are Increased Student Achievement and More Effective Teaching. Our strategy to accomplish these goals is two-fold. At the school system level, we work on 1) building the capacity of personnel to deliver high quality instruction through using research-based instructional strategies in classrooms, 2) building the background knowledge of students during the school day, and 3) integrating the use of technology in classroom lessons. At the school building level, we ensure high-functioning professional learning communities (PLCs) in each school with a definite time and place to meet and an agenda of work centered on instruction and its outcomes for students through ongoing question-asking and action steps. By executing a focused strategic plan, our ultimate goal is to succeed in Teaching For Learning For All.

The district has developed a comprehensive infrastructure for meeting its goal of increased student achievement. Our system executes its mission by contracting with Dr. Dan Mulligan to provide teachers with instructional expectations and skills via Classroom Instruction that Works and Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement. Dr. Mulligan also has been contracted to provide professional learning opportunities for administrators, content specialists, content leaders, and teacher leaders addressing effective research-based instructional strategies and the development of rigorous lessons. The district utilizes instructional coaches, content specialists and leaders to lead the development of viable curriculum maps and course syllabi, and teachers utilize planning times to collaborate with grade and content-specific colleagues.

The district has a heavy emphasis on technology integration. The system is a leader in various technological initiatives such as Bring Your Own Technology. The system features wireless capacity throughout the district, and classrooms are equipped with technology including, but not limited to, ActivBoards, interactive projectors, and mobile technology including iPads, laptops, and student-owned smartphone devices. The school system's most innovative endeavor would be its recent acquisition of audio enhancement and ViewPath technology. Currently installed in our middle and high schools, audio enhancement allows for teachers and students to amplify their voices so that conversation is clearly heard throughout the room. The ViewPath system allows for teachers to record segments of the class for teaching, professional learning, and classroom management purposes.

Newton County Schools have developed several programs to support the multiple needs of all learners. Schools work in conjunction with after-school programs to ensure students who need additional learning time have opportunities to work under the supervision of highly qualified teachers. They also provide multiple opportunities for students at-risk to participate in content reviews prior to high-stake assessments. NCSS utilizes the services of instructional coaches and graduation coaches to monitor student progress and assist with recommendations for interventions.

Students who excel in the Newton County School System are engaged through our gifted programs and specialty offerings. Several elementary schools are creating STEM classrooms to enhance the early school experience. NCSS has also enhanced partnerships with local colleges and universities to ensure student access to dual enrollment opportunities. NCSS offers numerous Advanced Placement courses, and all three high schools were recognized in 2013 as Georgia Advanced Placement STEM schools for their math and science AP offerings. In 2011, the school system opened the Newton College and Career Academy (NCCA) for high school students. This academy provides career pathway courses that promote workforce development and career readiness for students who wish to pursue a vocational pathway of study. There is a STEM Institute at NCCA for students entering high school that caters to students who demonstrate an aptitude for science, math, engineering, and technology. Newton High School draws high school students from across the district to its Academy of Liberal Arts at [Newton High School \(ALANHS\) program, which focuses on a liberal arts education.](#)

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In efforts to meet our non-negotiable goal of more effective teaching, we ensure that high functioning and highly effective Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are utilized to support continuous improvement and to create a culture of high expectations for students and staff. To reach this goal, the district has implemented the "Plan, Do, Check, Act" cycle to ensure PLCs are functioning at a high level and provides professional learning opportunities addressing effective Professional Learning Communities. Professional learning communities in Newton County Schools set defined dates, times, and a location for meetings so that this work is a priority among staff members. Participants focus on the development of common lesson plans that address the curriculum, best instructional practices, and assessment of students. Staff members share best practices and constantly refine their work through the PLC format. This work is supported by the school and district through on-going professional learning that remains focused on our non-negotiable goals and our two-fold strategy that supports Teaching For Learning For All.

Notable Achievements and Areas of Improvement

Describe the school system's notable achievements and areas of improvement in the last three years. Additionally, describe areas for improvement that the school system is striving to achieve in the next three years.

The Newton County School System (NCSS) has had notable achievement and areas of improvement over the last three years. In 2012, Newton County School System demonstrated improvement in 7 of 9 high school subjects tested by Georgia's End-of-Course Tests (EOCTs) and outperformed the state in 5 of 8 high school subjects. In addition, Newton County School System demonstrated improvement in 22 of 30 instances on Georgia's Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCTs) for a 73% improvement.

In 2013, NCSS surpassed or met the state level of performance in 5 of 6 comparable assessment areas. Students outperformed the state in Economics, Physical Science, and United States History as measured by EOCTs. The system matched the state average in both 9th grade literature and Math II. The district also posted improvements in 5 of 6 comparable areas: 9th Grade Literature; physical science; U.S. History; Economics; and Math II.

NCSS showed increases in both elementary and middle CRCT scores for the 2012-2013 school year. On the Math portion of the CRCT, the number of students meeting or exceeding showed great gains in the fourth, fifth, sixth, and eighth grade. The number of students exceeding expectations also showed tremendous gains in fourth, fifth, sixth, and eighth grade. NCSS Reading showed great improvement with 5 of 6 grade levels posting improvement. The number of students exceeding targets on the Reading increased across the board with third through eighth grade reporting increases. Science results also showed tremendous improvement, with the number of students meeting or exceeding standards increasing in fourth, fifth, sixth, and eighth grade. The students exceeding expectations increased in fourth through eighth grade. Newton County students showed the greatest improvement on the Social Studies CRCT in 2013--both the number of students meeting or exceeding standards and the number of students exceeding standards increased in all grade levels (3rd through 8th).

Since 2011, the district has expanded its AP (Advanced Placement) course offerings and increased enrollment in the courses. In 2013, the enrollment for AP courses was 1997 compared to only 647 in 2011. Additionally, 3 of 4 Core subject areas have seen steady increases in the number of students scoring a 3 or higher on AP exams. Overall, the district has seen a 27% increase in the number of students taking AP exams since 2011. Alcovy High School was named an Advanced Placement (AP) Access and Support School in both the 2011-2012 school year and the 2012-2013 school year. During the 2012-2013 school year, Alcovy High School, Newton High School, and Eastside High School were named AP STEM schools to recognize their efforts in providing students with the opportunity to take AP exams in the areas of mathematics and science. In 2013 the district produced 72 AP Scholars.

NCSS elementary schools have achieved notable success. Middle Ridge Elementary School was named a National Blue Ribbon School--one of only nine in the state for the 2012-2013 school year. Over the past two school years Heard-Mixon Elementary, Newton County Theme School at Fiquett, Porterdale Elementary were named Georgia Title I Reward Schools for high progress. In addition, Heard-Mixon Elementary, Flint Hill Elementary, South Salem Elementary, Livingston Elementary, and Rocky Plains were named Georgia Title I Distinguished Schools in 2012 and Heard-Mixon Elementary was also named Georgia School of Excellence!

NCSS Middle Schools have also achieved notable accolades. Indian Creek Middle School was named a 2011 Georgia Breakout Middle School. Additionally, an Indian Creek Middle School teacher was also named a StudyBlue Ambassador. Liberty Middle School was named a Georgia Title I Reward School for high progress during the 2012-2013. The school was also recognized for "outstanding progress on state criterion referenced competency tests" by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement. Veterans Memorial Middle School's media specialist was named the 2012 South Metro District Library Media Specialist of the Year by the Georgia Library Media Association. Clements Middle and Cousins Middle have been recognized by the state of Georgia for the successful implementation of the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program.

In addition to Alcovy High School's above mentioned accomplishments, the school was named a Georgia Title I Reward School during both the 2011-2013 and 2012-2013 school years. The school also won the regional Helen Ruffin Reading Bowl in 2012. Eastside High School's

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Academic Team won the state Academic Bowl in 2012 and 2013. The school's Future Business Leaders of America won the state tournament two years in a row and placed 2nd at the National FBLA conference. Additionally, the school's Mock Trial Team placed 2nd in regional competition in its 2nd year. Newton High is nationally known as the first high school in the nation to offer a course in epidemiology. Newton High also received the High Flying Schools Award-only one of five in the nation and the school's FFA Chapter was named a Two-Star Winner in the National FFA National Award Program! The school was also named a Georgia Title I Reward School for High Progress during the 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 school years and was one of four schools in the state to receive the SSTAGE promising practices award for the 2012-2013 school year. The Newton College and Career Academy (NCCA) was opened in 2011 to enhance academic achievement and provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in postsecondary education and the workforce. Students at NCCS have the chance to connect more directly with their career paths and earn industry credentials in addition to their high school diploma. In 2013, NCCA was one of only 17 schools in the nation to receive recognition as a Ford Next Generation Learning Community.

Additional Information

Provide any additional information you would like to share with the public and community that were not prompted in the previous sections.

Ms. Samantha Fuhrey became the district's first female superintendent in July 2013. She replaced retiring superintendent Dr. Gary Mathews, who guided the district from 2010-2013. While Ms. Fuhrey is the new superintendent, she is not new to the district. Despite doing a national search, the school board ultimately chose to hire from within. Ms. Fuhrey had previously served the district as Deputy Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Executive Director for Secondary Education, Director of Professional Learning, and principal of Indian Creek Middle School. After Mrs. Fuhrey became Superintendent, Newton High School principal Dr. Craig Lockhart was chosen to serve as Deputy Superintendent of Schools. The Deputy Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction position was split into two positions--director of elementary and director of secondary schools. Mrs. Fuhrey is a decisive leader who uses a team based approach to decision making. When Dr. Mathews became superintendent, one area he chose to improve was communication. He wrote monthly newsletters, held teachers forums, community forums, and established an email network of community leaders that he used to share important information concerning the district. Ms. Fuhrey has continued and enhanced the communication plan that Dr. Mathews originally implemented by creating a Student Advisory Council, a Graduate Council, and a program to obtain information on the successes of Newton County School System's alumni. Ms. Fuhrey hopes to continue to increase the level of support and involvement of all stakeholders in the community. In addition to maintaining the aforementioned programs, Ms. Fuhrey has conducted three Education Summits in which parents and community stakeholders were invited to learn about the mission and direction of the school system. Ms. Fuhrey has also promoted the use of Twitter as a form of professional learning and communication tool for the district. By following the hash tag #NCSSBeTheBest, educators and supporters of the school system share best practices and school-related events with each other in efforts to promote a positive academic culture that is beneficial to all.

Our non-negotiable goals are increased student achievement and more effective teaching. To accomplish these goals, the district has implemented a Board approved strategic plan to guide implementation of district and school based strategies. The strategic plan is a fluid living document that is continually referred to and revised with input from all stakeholders. It is the basis for everything we do as a district.