



Executive Summary

Cartersville City 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?

The essence of Cartersville City Schools is captured in the district's vision statement - "A Tradition of Excellence - Making It Personal." The school district enjoys a history steeped in tradition and excellence which endeavors to focus on the needs of individual students. District and school staff are committed to providing a quality education program in a caring and nurturing environment; one that promulgates learning and safety as high priorities. The school system "makes it personal" by emphasizing that students are not just numbers or data points. Each student represents a life that has the potential for success and the opportunity to contribute value back to the community. Cartersville City Schools is as much about beliefs, attitudes, and culture as it is about implementing strategies and programs.

With a population of over 19,850 and ranking 38th in relative size among Georgia's cities, Cartersville boasts a rich standard of quality living. Visitors as well as residents have come to recognize the balance of a small town atmosphere and one that is culturally blessed. Cartersville is home of several nationally recognized museums generally not found in cities its size. The Booth Western Art Museum houses the country's largest permanent exhibition space for western art and also displays original works of every United States President. The Tellus Science Museum offers a world class 120,000 square foot interactive gallery dedicated to science exploration and exhibition including a state-of-the-art planetarium. The Etowah Indian Mounds are the focus of the most intact display of Mississippian Culture in the southeast. The newly open LakePoint complex, a premier sports vacation destination, is home to several world-class venues featuring competition across multiple scholarship-based sports on the 1300 acres site. These features, coupled with quality parks and nearby recreation facilities, make Cartersville a desirable place to visit, to live, and to work.

The school district also enjoys a history of tradition and prominent place in the community. One of 21 independent public school systems in Georgia, Cartersville City is composed of four schools each with a reputation of quality. Cartersville Primary (CPS) houses students Pre-Kindergarten through second grade; Cartersville Elementary (CES) has grades three through five; Cartersville Middle (CMS) contains grade six through eight; and Cartersville High (CHS) has grades nine through twelve. With this organizational scheme, there are no internal attendance zones and no feeder school patterns. The community has supported this concept of having all students of a particular grade go to school together in a continuous flow and it has served the needs of students. Everyone in Cartersville is a Purple Hurricane from Pre-K through grade twelve and beyond.

The district has an enrollment of approximately 4422 students with 956 - 1264 in each of the four schools. This represents a 12.1% growth over the last ten years and 5.1% over the last three years (214 students). Demographically, the district reflects changing trends seen in the general community with 51.1% Caucasian, 23.0% Black, 18.6% Hispanic, 2.0% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 5.3% mixed and other ethnic backgrounds. Included in the enrollment numbers are approximately 530 non-resident K-12 students who apply, meet established criteria, and pay a nominal fee to attend the city schools. The number of students qualifying for free and reduced meals continues to grow steadily and is currently about 56% district-wide.

The district employs 424 staff members including 301 certified professionals, 263 of which are classroom teachers. Over 81% of the instructional staff possess advanced degrees and historically the district has had 100% of its teachers and paraprofessionals meet "highly qualified" requirements every year since the requirement's inception. The turnover rate of teachers is relatively low compared to state averages. Cartersville is a desirable place to work and teachers tend to stay out of choice. Vacancies generally only occur when there is a

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retirement, spouses get transferred, or an employee elects to stay home with small children. Because of significant increases to the district's required portion for employee health care premiums, the district has outsourced the staffing of all paraprofessionals, custodians, bus monitors, and one-half the cafeteria staff over the last few years. This conscience decision has helped keep the district from having to make other cuts which may have otherwise had great negative impact on classroom instruction.

For the past five years the Primary (CPS), Elementary (CES), and Middle (CMS) schools have operated as school wide Title I programs. For 2016-17, Cartersville is one of three Georgia districts piloting the consolidation of federal funding grants (Title I, Title II, Title III) to provide flexibility to the schools in serving the needs of students. Each school offers gifted education, art education, music education, and physical education instructed by in-field content certified teachers. In addition to a strong college preparatory program of study, the high school offers career/technical programs in business, technology, applied health science, graphic arts, broadcasting, engineering, and automotive services. The business program is industry certified and went through re-certification in 2015-16. In 2014-15 the high school launched an on-site college dual enrollment program with Embry-Riddle University, the largest aeronautical institution of higher learning in the world. Additionally, many high school students take advantage of dual and joint enrollment programs offered at nearby colleges and universities. Each of the schools has been continuously accredited through AdvancED/Southern Association of Colleges and Schools since their initial accreditation (CPS - 1988, CES - 1967, CMS - 1967, CHS - 1914).

Despite significant cuts and decreases in state funding and the local tax digest in recent years, the district has maintained financial stability through those lean times. The School Board recently lowered the tax millage rate to 16.52 in light of recent growth in the digest. One mil of local taxation generates \$875,617. Approximately 43% of the system's budget comes from local funds. While many districts across the state had to make cuts in personnel and services, Cartersville City continues to operate at a full 180 days of instruction for students, 190 days employment for teachers, and no cuts to any program or services.

The district has made a concentrated effort over the past several years to eliminate its bond debt. In 2005 the district's bond indebtedness was \$32 million. By 2012 the figure was cut to under \$17 million; and in November 2015 the system paid off all bonds and is now debt free. The citizenry of Cartersville and surrounding Bartow County have been supportive of the district as evidenced by the passage of five Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) votes [1997, 2002, 2007, 2010 and 2015]. SPLOST funds are generally used to fund capital projects, renovations, and technology initiatives.

In 2010, Cartersville City Schools petitioned the State Board of Education and was granted a System Charter giving the district broad flexibility in its operation and a blanket waiver from most state rules, laws, and regulations governing education. In exchange, the district has established far-reaching goals for itself as a contract with the state. The flexibility granted by the charter is designed to optimize several advantages, including 1) increasing the motivation to implement innovative ideas and creative solutions; 2) expanding flexible grouping and scheduling to allow enhanced opportunities without restrictive limits; 3) providing greater opportunity for parents and the school to work collaboratively; and 4) implementation of instructional segments that are not necessarily constrained by time and space barriers. The philosophy behind the charter initiative is to change the attitude of stakeholders from one of "we've always had to do it this way" to a culture of "let's see how we can make this work."

Even though each school in the district is considered a charter school in its own standing, each operates under the umbrella of the district. Cartersville is a school system, not a system of schools. It is necessary that each school adhere to common guiding principles and a coherent vision in order to prevent any dysfunction within the family. This is sometimes a challenge when one school wants to go off in a direction that cannot be supported by the district or is in conflict with the other school.

For 2016-17 there is a new principal at three of the four schools (CPS, CES and CMS). Although two of these individual have previous principalship experience, change always causes some uncertainty and requires time to be embedded in an organization's make-up.

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The reputation of the Cartersville City Schools continues to bring new students into the district who seek a quality education geared toward the success of each student. The district is committed to its vision and mission. Students are the business, the focus, and the purpose of the district. The school system plays a major role in contributing to the quality of life the Cartersville community has come to enjoy and expect.

"Making it personal" is the culture and foundation upon which continuous improvement hinges.

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 vision statement for Cartersville City Schools is not just a phrase on paper but is a culture within which the district and its schools operate. The vision statement drives and supports the mission to "prepare students for the challenges of progress and change, through the development of the skills necessary to become lifelong learners, in order that they may live successful and productive lives." The vision and mission are based upon a set of identified core values which guide district operations, decision making, and intent. Those core values include:

- * Leadership
- * A Sustaining Purpose
- * Commitment to the Success of Each Student
- * Learning Focused Education
- * Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals
- * Continuous Improvement
- * A Meaningful Workplace
- * Involvement of Stakeholders
- * Character

Key to the success of promulgating the vision and purpose is consistent communication through a variety of avenues and intentional strategies, including but not limited to: district and school websites, school governance councils, parent-teacher councils, social media, print publications, and access to local media outlets. All stakeholders are expected to live and work by these fundamentals. It is not so much making the statements known as it is about living them out in the day-to-day operations of the school system.

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.

Cartersville has weathered a significant financial storm experienced by school districts throughout the state. In doing so, the district has not made cuts to any programs or personnel, implemented any staff furlough days, or reduced the number of instructional days. While many districts were furloughing staff and reducing the number of school days, Cartersville has maintained a full instructional calendar and program. Furthermore, the district has become debt free by paying off all bond indebtedness, approximately \$17 million, in the last four years. In 2014-15 and 2015-16, the district provided a one-payment salary increase to all staff of approximately 3% each year. In 2016-17, the district has continued that 3% increase plus added approximately an additional 3% and made these increases permanent in the salary schedules.

During the last few years the district has managed steady growth in student population effectively within the current facilities. This will be a continuing challenge and has led to this issue being included as a goal with the System Strategic Plan. All four schools are currently operating at relatively high capacities. The growth influx has had the additional challenge of an increasing diverse demographic. The district has been hit hard with a significant increase in special education students including those with more severe disabilities and needs. Schools have also seen an increase in the number and percentage of struggling learners or learners with more deficiencies in their academic skills and personal lives.

The renewal of the System Charter in 2015 stands as a testament that the district has made improvements and is on the right path. The district was able to demonstrate to the State Board of Education that Cartersville deserved to continue its charter status for an additional 10 years. The goals and increment measures within the System Charter will challenge the schools to search for optimal ways to meet the needs of all students especially in light of the growth and demographic trends experienced over the past few years.

The district has made progress on its improvement goals as stated in the System Strategic Plan/System Charter. Since 2015-16 was really only the first year of the renewed charter and subsequent measure of progress, more longitudinal data is needed to formulate accurate conclusions on any long term gains. The district has implemented several benchmarking measures, however, to continue its focus on individual student progress and success. Even though the district made progress on its goals, not every measure objective was met for this first year. Continued emphasis on the measures in the goals and objectives will help keep the district and its school focused.

The district has made significant improvements in its technology infrastructure, protocols, and number of devices. Over the past three years Cartersville has instituted a standardization of technology equipment and protocols in order to continue to effectively support the needs of the district and schools. As more technology options become available, it is critical the district maintain a unified focus that is systemic and sustainable.

Additional Information

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

It is readily apparent that the vision and mission of the Cartersville City Schools permeates its function and operation. "A tradition of excellence - making it personal" is a way of life and culture throughout the school system. Stakeholders are very proud of the tradition in Cartersville and tout its accolades. However, no one should completely rest on past laurels. The commitment to "making it personal" rings clearly from the superintendent, board, district leadership, school administration, teachers, and support staff. Students are not just numbers or data points in Cartersville. The blending of a caring spirit and nurturing environment, along with high expectations for achievement and success, are what make Cartersville City Schools a desirable place for students, staff and community.

There is a strong element of trust and confidence between the various components of the system including the Board of Education, leadership, school staffs, support personnel, parents, and community. In the true sense of the charter, Cartersville stakeholders are partners together in moving the district and its schools forward.