

*My Statement regarding my vote for the superintendent August 29, 2011:*

Along with others on the board, I am disappointed in the outcome of our Superintendent Search. The decision of who to hire as a superintendent is the most important one made by a school board. I recognize that we have a terrible problem in DeKalb with student achievement. Our achievement measurements lag behind other metro districts and even rural Georgia counties that are identified as being in “persistent poverty” and spend far less per student. I realize that it makes some of us uncomfortable to admit where we are. Often I hear leaders give soft criticism that is buffered by a retort about how there is much going well. Indeed there are individual stories of success but we mustn’t ignore what the data is telling us in aggregate. We are failing our children. We are failing the taxpayer.

I judged every candidate by the content of their record. I wanted to find a superintendent that had a record of demonstrable success raising academic achievement levels; someone who understands what excellent instruction looks like. I have been dismayed by the rhetoric of some of my colleagues and even official statements made by the district. We lose credibility with the public when we say things that are not factually accurate; no matter how much we wish they were true. The good citizens of DeKalb pay our salaries and we must be honest with them; even when the truth is uncomfortable. We cannot afford denial or to blame someone else for our problems.

On Friday, the Board participated in a training session conducted by AdvancED, the parent company of SACS who accredits the district. Our presenter said that, “You have a responsibility to your constituents. That’s a reality.” She continued with, “You have the responsibility to link to them and bring in their voice.” What I heard and communicated was a desire for someone extremely well qualified with a record of increasing student achievement; someone that would bring in the best and brightest talent to infuse innovation and best practices across the district at every level; particularly, principals and top level administration positions. Our training session presenter went on to discuss stakeholder engagement. “Are our stakeholders committed to the same things we are?” The experience of this search indicates to me that we as a board are not strategically aligned with a large portion of our community. This misalignment has the potential to erode community support for our schools. It could provide for the election of board members that are ever more divisive and widen the gaps between various groups in our diverse communities. I assure you that listening, accepting and acting on the concerns of the voices I represent is imperative to the health of the district.

I believe we saw other candidates with better records and potential to redevelop talent within our district. Unfortunately as you know, our search process was hampered by leaks that were designed to scuttle any forward motion with or about some candidates. I think the most important question about the process and leaks, is, “Why did that happen?” Why did we reject candidates with better records? Why?

My vote today also reflects my dissatisfaction with the superintendent’s contract. I do not think it is in the best interests of the taxpayers.

There are those among us that believe that expressing one's honest opinion isn't good boardsmanship. I disagree. It would be a disservice to the children and citizens of this county if I gave them something less than my honest assessment and explanation regarding my vote. Furthermore, our nation is founded on respect for dissent and it is a protected right. While board service is unique among elected offices, it mustn't mean that your voice is silenced publically. My constituents demand that I keep them informed and I shall continue to do so no matter the personal cost.

Please know that after the vote today, no one will work harder than me to make Dr. Atkinson a successful superintendent. My greatest hope is that in 12, 24 and 36 months from now, I can report back to you on her successes. As she begins the leviathan task of improving our district's academic achievement measurements, I will give her clarity on my perspective of the challenges and solutions. Please join me in this effort. Now is not the time to disengage from the system. Please continue to participate by letting your voice be heard and working to improve the educational lives of nearly 100,000 children.