Whitfield County Schools

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Section I

Executive Summary of the School System Profile

Standards Assessment Report
AdvancED District Accreditation

For NCA CASI and SACS CASI Districts

http://www.whitfield.k12.ga.us

Executive Summary of School System Profile

Whitfield County is located in northwest Georgia at the southern end of the Appalachian Mountains. It is about 30 miles south of Chattanooga, Tennessee, and 80 miles north of Atlanta along the I-75 corridor. The county shares a northern border with Tennessee and covers nearly 290 square miles. The city of Dalton is the principle location for government and industry.

As a leading industrial center in the country, Dalton confidently proclaims itself the "Carpet Capital of the World." Crown Cotton Mill was the first large-scale manufacturing plant in north Georgia and brought economic growth to Whitfield County in the late 19th century. The Great Depression and the General Textile Strike of 1934 dealt severe blows to Crown Cotton Mill, which managed to stay in operation until 1969. Whitfield County still testifies to the strong legacy of the bedspread and carpet industries.

By the end of the twentieth century, 80 percent of the carpet produced in the United States, and more than 70 percent of the world's carpet, was produced by four companies located in Georgia, three of them—Beaulieu of America, Mohawk, and Shaw Industries—located in Whitfield County.

Immigration and Education

The Whitfield County School System was established in 1872. The system began as numerous one room school houses whose primary purpose was to educate children when they were not needed on the family farm. It evolved to the current established system comprised of 12 elementary schools, five middle schools, two traditional high schools, one Career Academy, one special purpose high school, and one alternative high school. With a student enrollment of 13,570, the Whitfield County School System is currently the twenty-sixth largest of the 180 systems in the state of Georgia and is experiencing a significant increase in student enrollment.

According to the 1990 census, Whitfield County had 72,462 residents (93.2 percent white, 4.0 percent African American, and 3.2 percent Hispanic). In 2006, U.S. Census estimates indicate the population in Whitfield County has grown to 92,999 (64.9 percent white, 3.8 percent black, and 29.3 percent Hispanic). The increase of Hispanic residents in the county is a consequence of the labor shortage experienced in the carpet industry during the 1990s. Hispanic immigrants moved to Whitfield County to fill the jobs in carpet manufacturing, and as a result 34 percent of the students in Whitfield County School System today are Hispanic.

In addition to the public schools, the county supports Dalton State College, a unit of the University System of Georgia. In a unique educational agreement for Northwest Georgia and perhaps the state, Whitfield County School System has agreed to host a facility for Dalton State College at its Career Academy campus. The college offers two-and four-year programs in areas ranging from education to medicine.

Central Office Structure

The current superintendent, Dr. Katie Brochu, is in her fourth year as superintendent of Whitfield County School System. Dr. Brochu indicated that one of her initial goals was to ensure an effective and efficient staff at the system level. In spring of 2006, an external consultant was contracted to analyze the school system's organizational structure. From an organizational perspective, the question was, "How should the system's central office be staffed and organized to best serve the needs of the school system and the citizens of Whitfield County?" The study was commissioned to secure an external perspective of the organizational structure, roles, relationships and responsibilities of the central office and how those might be revised to improve the quality of service to schools and other constituents.

As a result of this study, the structure was changed and is reflected in the following chart.
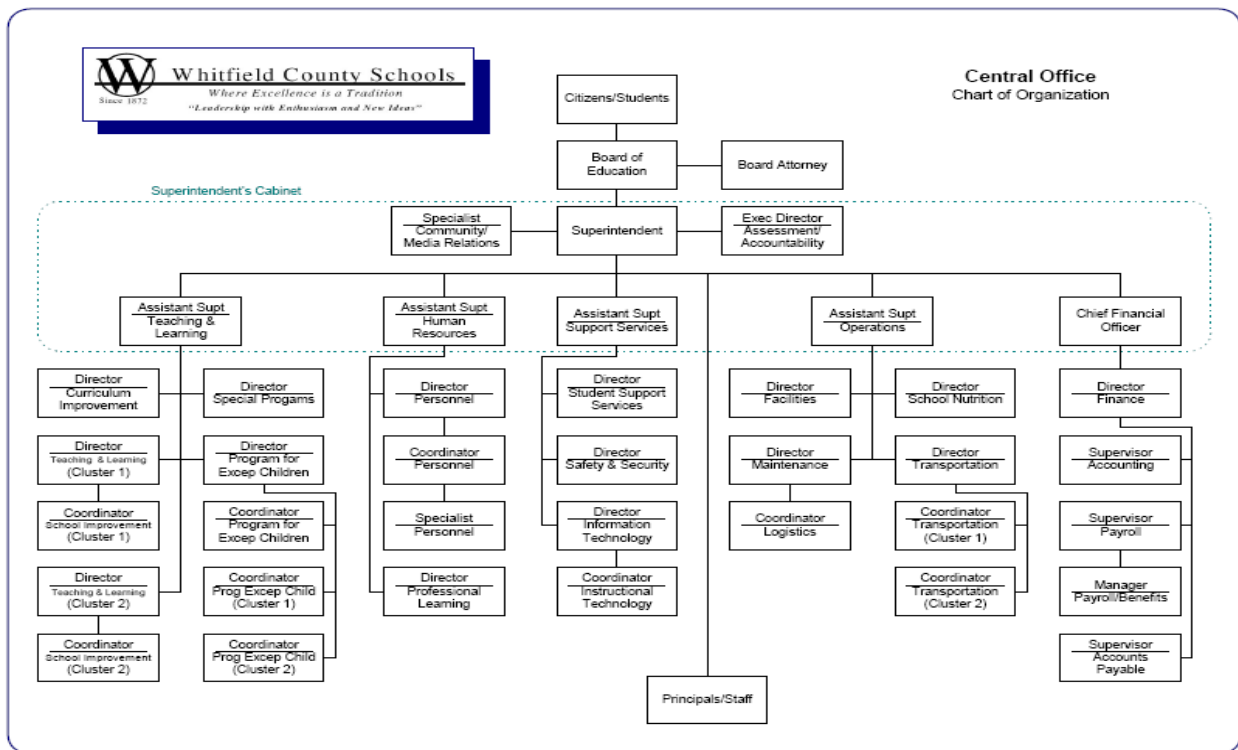
Central office personnel are responsible for ensuring that the adopted curriculum is appropriately implemented in each school through working effectively with principals, assistant principals, curriculum coordinators, instructional specialists, classroom teachers and others. The most important function of schools is the instruction of students through the system and state-mandated curriculum. A significant number of the central office personnel comprise the Teaching and Learning team which seeks to address the system's core business of providing engaging work for students.

System Vision, Mission, Beliefs and Goals

The Whitfield County School System's vision, mission, and beliefs were developed in 2005 by the System Design Team. This team consists of both certified and classified staff members from across the system, guides the implementation of the Schlechty framework, and provides direction to the system. The System Design Team solicited stakeholder input in the process of generating the vision and goals. The superintendent presented an initial draft to personnel at each school and requested their feedback. School board members and school councils also provided input.

Vision
We envision a responsive school district that is focused on students and that is valued and respected by the community.

Mission
Our mission is to increase student learning by providing students and staff with meaningful, challenging, and engaging educational experiences in a safe and supportive environment.

Beliefs
1. We believe in our school district having an innovative unified focus resulting in it being responsive to the needs of students, parents, and the community at large.

2. We believe our core business is providing students with engaging, challenging, and meaningful work.

3. We believe the role of teacher is leader and designer of engaging, challenging and meaningful learning experiences for students.

4. We believe all of our personnel, parents, and other community members are vital to the education of our students whose attention and commitment must be earned.

5. We believe all of our students, personnel, and parents deserve a safe, inviting, non threatening learning environment where they are treated with dignity and respect.

Goals
Developing a Focus on Students

Throughout the school system there is a clear focus on students and on the quality of the work provided to students—work that students find interesting, challenging, and satisfying and that results in students learning what is expected by schools, parents, and the community.

Patterns of Engagement

Nearly all classes are highly engaged, and when they are not, teachers make every possible effort to redesign the pattern of activity in the classroom so that more students are engaged.

Indicators of Measurement:

1. Most classrooms can accurately be characterized as highly-engaged classrooms.

2. Teachers intentionally plan the work they provide to students in ways that reflect attention to building in those qualities that show the most promise of increasing engagement.

3. When the pattern of student engagement differs from that which teachers want or expect, teachers analyze the work provided to discover what might account for the difficulty and take corrective action.

4. Teachers commonly work together to analyze the characteristics of the work they are providing students and provide each other assistance and advice regarding ways of making the work more engaging to students.

Student Achievement

Parents, teachers, the principal, and the board of education, as well as others who have a stake in the performance of the schools, are satisfied with the level and type of learning that are occurring.

Indicators of Measurement:

1. There are solid data upon which to base judgments regarding student achievement.

2. Central office personnel, parents, teachers, community leaders, and state officials are confident that they have an accurate picture of the level of student achievement.

3. In general, parents are satisfied that their children are progressing the way they believe the children should progress and are learning what they need to learn.

4. Those who receive students from this school (middle schools in the case of elementary schools, high schools in the case of middle schools, institutions of higher education and employers in the case of high schools) are satisfied that students from the school are learning what they need to learn to succeed in the receiving environment.

5. Students who have attended the school and have moved to other schools or places of work believe that they learned what they needed to learn while in attendance here and have an overall favorable judgment of the quality of their experience in the school.

Content and Substance

Teachers and administrators have a clear, consistent, and shared understanding of what students are expected to know and to be able to do at various grade levels. This understanding is consistent with such official statements of expectations as state standards and standards established by local boards. Teachers and administrators also have a reasonable assessment of student interest in the topics suggested by these expectations and standards.

Indicators of Measurement:

1. Most teachers can articulate what students under teachers' tutelage are expected to know and to be able to do.

2. Teachers are in agreement regarding what students are to be expected to know and be able to do.

3. The views teachers have about what students are able to learn are generally the same as the views of the principal.

4. The ideas, propositions, and facts that are presented or made available reflect the best understandings of experts in the field of concern and are consistent with the views and lines of argument presented by scholars in the relevant disciplines.

5. Teachers have conducted a careful review of standardized tests (local and state sponsored) to determine the content students are expected to master.

6. Teachers are generally satisfied that those things that are being tested are things that should be taught to students even if there were no testing program.

7. Teachers provide students with a wide range of activities that call on them to work with content and processes that have been identified as worth knowing and mastering.

A Safe Environment

Students and parents feel that the school, as well as each classroom, is a physically and psychologically safe place: success is expected and failure is understood as a necessary part of learning, there is mutual respect between and among faculty and students, and the fear of harm or harassment from fellow students and demeaning comments from teachers is negligible.

Indicators of Measurement:

1. As measured by such criteria as the number of discipline referrals, acts of violence, and threatening behavior, this school and each classroom in it are objectively safe environments.

2. Students and teachers feel that they are safe.

3. The faculty and the administration in this school treat each other with respect and deference. For example, conversations and discussions in the teachers' lounge and in faculty meetings are friendly and civil; they seldom reflect hostility, snide remarks, or general lack of courteous behavior.

4. Faculty members treat students with respect.

5. Students are respectful of each other, faculty members, and other adults in the school.

6. When students interact in peer evaluations, for example, the interactions are respectful, friendly, and supportive.

7. When students fail to meet standards but are making sincere efforts, the teacher and the students accept the failure as a normal part of the learning process.

8. It is expected that nearly all students will meet standards at some point, and when they fail to do so, teachers or other adults work directly with the students to diagnose the cause of the failure and correct the situation.

9. Students are provided feedback on their performance on a regular basis, not just at the time that grades are given or distributed.

10. Students have access to the resources needed (people, time, and technologies in particular) to provide optimum opportunities for success.

11. When a student, after numerous tries, fails to meet standards, faculty members work together to find new approaches to the task.

Staff Engagement

Teachers, administrators, and support staff employed by the school district are satisfied with their work and understand how their roles contribute to the system's direction.

Indicators of Measurement:

1. There are solid data upon which to base judgments regarding staff engagement and job satisfaction.

2. Most staff report a high level of job satisfaction.

3. Most staff understand their role and how their job contributes to the core business of the school district.

4. The school district intentionally implements recruitment and induction strategies consistent with the values, beliefs, mission, and vision of the school district.

5. Most staff report a high level of trust and support for innovation.

For additional information including a list of artifacts related to each goal, visit www.whitfield.k12.ga.us

Programs and Services

The Whitfield County School System serves 13,570 students from pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade. The system consists of 22 schools; 12 elementary schools (kindergarten through fifth grade), five middle schools (sixth through eighth grade), two traditional high schools (ninth through twelfth grade), one Career Academy, one special purpose high school, and one alternative high school.

Curriculum Framework

Whitfield County School System's teachers and administrators work hard to incorporate programs and services that enhance the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) and engage students in both the content and method of delivery. We believe that our core business is providing students with engaging, challenging, and meaningful work. Students are viewed as customers whose attention and commitment must be earned. The following design qualities developed by the Schlechty Center provide guidance as teachers create experiences for students at all levels in various programs. The Design Qualities of Content are used to plan all lessons, while the Design Qualities of Choice are used selectively when they are appropriate to the topic and learners' developmental needs.

Design Qualities of Context	**Design Qualities of Choice**
➢ Content & Substance ➢ Organization of Knowledge ➢ Clear & Compelling Product Standards ➢ Protection from Adverse Consequences	➢ Product Focus ➢ Affirmation ➢ Affiliation ➢ Novelty & Variety ➢ Choice ➢ Authenticity

Student Programs and Services

The design qualities are fundamental to all services and programs offered to Whitfield County students. Descriptions of select services are as follows:

- **AIMSweb** - A scientifically based, formative assessment system that 'informs' the teaching and learning process by providing continuous student performance data and reporting improvement to parents, teachers, and administrators to enable evidence-based evaluation and data-driven instruction.

- **After School Care** - Elementary students may stay beyond school hours from 2:30 until 6:00 p.m. for a small fee. Students are assisted with their homework and also engage in recreational activities.

- **ConnectED** – This service provides the ability to strengthen relationships with parents and students by communicating using a personalized message.

- **Crossroads Academy** - This facility serves middle and high school students who have been removed from a regular classroom due to chronic discipline issues. While temporarily attending this school, students are offered the services they need to succeed academically.

- **D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education)** - This program gives our students the skills needed to avoid involvement in drugs/alcohol, gangs, and violence. A police officer leads a series of classroom lessons that teach students in upper elementary grades how to resist peer pressure and live productive drug- and violence-free lives.

- **Early Head Start Program** - Whitfield County currently has three Early Head Start Programs in place with one class being at the special-needs Pre-Kindergarten Center. This class provides inclusion opportunities for Pre-Kindergarten students with disabilities.

- **Early Intervention Program (EIP)** - This program is state-funded and designed to serve students who are at risk of not reaching or maintaining academic grade-level performance in kindergarten through fifth grade. Whitfield County School System serves EIP students in all 12 elementary schools.

- **English to Speakers of Other Language (ESOL)** - Each school has an ESOL program in place through Title III funds. The goal of this program is to provide instructional support to English Language Learners (ELLs) as they balance learning new content while learning a new language. Schools use a variety of instructional models including the sheltered approach which has the dual focus of teaching English language acquisition in tandem with content area instruction. The co-teaching method is also offered when appropriate so that English Language Learners can remain in the regular education classroom and receive language support services. This allows the ELLs to experience the GPS curriculum while receiving the services they need. ELLs

participate in a Newcomer Program until they acquire the basic communication and academic language needed to be successful in content area instruction. The goal is to move students into sheltered or co-teaching environments as quickly as possible.

- **Exceptional Student Services (ESS)** - This department is responsible for overseeing all services and provisions for students with disabilities ages three to 22, as well as students who are gifted. Students with disabilities receive all services to which they are entitled under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA). Services are detailed through Individualized Educational Programs (IEP) for each eligible student. A Free and Appropriate Public Education is provided in the Least Restrictive Environment for each student with disabilities with more than 70% receiving special education services in the general education setting for the majority of the school day. The full continuum of services, including resource and self-contained, is also offered in order to meet the needs of individual students. Gifted students receive appropriate services in the resource setting at the elementary level with opportunities for enrichment in the general education setting. At the middle and high school levels, coursework is differentiated in order to challenge gifted learners. Advanced Placement (AP) and Georgia Virtual School courses are also offered in order to further challenge high-achieving students including those identified as gifted. The ESS department strives to support each school as they meet the challenges of providing appropriate and engaging work for exceptional students.

- **Georgia Virtual School** - Middle and high school students have the opportunity to enroll in courses not offered at their school through this online resource. Students can also use Georgia Virtual School for credit recovery. This service is offered by the Georgia Department of Education.

- **Graduation Coaches** - These staff members work in a guidance capacity to help middle and high school students understand the importance of staying in school until graduation. Graduation Coaches assist students academically in small groups or tutoring sessions. They act as liaisons between students and teachers in an effort to support instruction. They also prepare students for post secondary educational opportunities. The ultimate goal is for students to graduate from high school and become successful contributing citizens.

- **Instructional Extension Programs** - Schools identify and serve struggling students in the areas of reading and math. Instructional Extension services can occur during the school day or beyond school hours. Qualifying students receive small group and targeted instruction in addition to their regular instruction.

- **Instructional Specialists** - Several of our schools have chosen to utilize Title I to fund Instructional Specialists. These specialists assist the regular classroom teacher with instructional strategies to use with struggling students. They provide on-going professional learning opportunities for the staff at their respective schools.

- **NovaNET** - Designed for grades 6-12, NovaNET is a comprehensive, online courseware system that meets diverse student needs. This provides thousands of hours of research- and standards-based, interactive curriculum and integrated assessments. The software assesses student skills, offers individualized, diagnostic instruction, and strengthens basic skills that will provide a solid foundation for future learning. NovaNET is used at the high school level for credit recovery and is making a positive impact on the system's graduation rate.

- **Outreach Coordinators** - This is a service provided by the Family Support Council, a local umbrella agency which connects families to local services. School Outreach Coordinators are non-certified. They typically have a caseload of 20 families with elementary school students with a focus on kindergarten and first grade.

- **Parent Involvement Coordinators** - Six Parent Involvement Coordinators serve 20 schools in our system. These Parent Involvement Coordinators serve all families; however, all six are bilingual which enables them to provide strong support to Hispanic/Latino families. They lead parent workshops on various topics and develop on-going relationships with the families they serve. Enhancing communication is a major part of their role. They assist with translation of system-, school- and classroom-generated documents, parent conferences and school meetings when needed.

- **Phoenix High School** - As a special-purpose high school, Phoenix offers students a flexible schedule of day or evening classes. Phoenix serves students whose life circumstances prevent them from attending or being academically successful in a traditional high school program. The school is jointly funded and governed by the Whitfield County and Dalton Public Schools' boards of education.

- **Pre-Kindergarten** - We currently have five schools that operate a state-sponsored pre-kindergarten program. These programs help students to be better prepared for the academic and social adjustment to kindergarten. With the rapid influx of Hispanic/Latinos to WCS, an additional goal of the pre-kindergarten program is to strengthen students' English acquisition skills. In addition, a pre-kindergarten special education center is located on the campus of one of our middle schools.

- **Reading Recovery (RR)** - Currently, eight schools offer the Reading Recovery Program, with plans to expand to all 12 elementary schools. Through RR, first-grade students who are identified as at-risk for reading failure receive an additional 30 minutes of individualized instruction daily from a RR teacher.

- **Response to Intervention (RTI)** - In response to state and federal legislation, the Whitfield County School System's elementary schools have created their own Pyramid of Interventions. These pyramids are models which detail the levels of support that are available to struggling general education students. Each school's plan contains the evidence-based interventions they will utilize once students have been identified through progress monitoring. The goal is to assist students in a timely manner before they fall behind their peers in mastering the standards.

- **Standards-Based Report Cards** - All 12 elementary schools are using standards-based report cards to convey student performance to parents/guardians of kindergarten through second-grade students. Three schools have fully implemented standards-based report cards in kindergarten through fifth grade. This grading system allows parents to understand student progress on a continuum as opposed to a letter-grade system.

- **Title I** – Federal funds based on the economically disadvantaged student population are used to provide instructional support to elementary and middle school students. Each Title I school decides how Title I funds can best address the learning needs of their students through their school improvement plan. Homeless and migrant high school students also receive benefits through Title I.

- **Whitfield County Career Academy** - The Whitfield County Career Academy is a charter school with multiple career-related options such as child development, culinary arts, graphic arts, construction, automotive, computer information technology, robotics and automation. Students may attend the Career Academy full-time or choose to attend part-time with the remainder of their day scheduled at one of the traditional high schools.

Staff Programs and Services

Additionally, the following programs and services are offered to schools and their staffs:

- **Data profiles** - Members of the Teaching and Learning Team work with school leaders to create a data room at each school intended to track student performance over a three-year period. This information is updated annually by using a provided template and used to revise school improvement plans and to make informed instructional decisions.

- **Leadership Academy** - This academy is designed for individuals from across the system who want to enhance their skills as innovative leaders and designers of quality work that engages both students and staff members. Participants work to develop a deeper understanding of fundamental concepts such as the nature of engagement, the core business, and systems thinking. Each participant works to develop a personal leadership plan, explore the role of teacher as leader, create an action research project, and develop appropriate strategies for causing and sustaining change.

- **New Teacher Induction** - It is the goal of WCS to recruit and retain the best teachers available who have a commitment to developing quality work for students and view themselves as "teacher leaders." The purpose of the on-going professional learning process is to promote a clear understanding for new employees about what the learning organization expects of them and what they can expect of the organization. New teachers are oriented to embrace the norms and values of the organization which

are based on Schlechty ideals. Additional support is provided throughout the year by offering professional learning opportunities addressing classroom needs.

- **Technology Help Desk** - This web-based tracking system enables the technology department to be responsive to the needs of schools and system employees. Staff members log in information regarding technology problems so that technology workers can address these issues in a timely fashion. The more rapid response allows technology to be functional and available for student use.
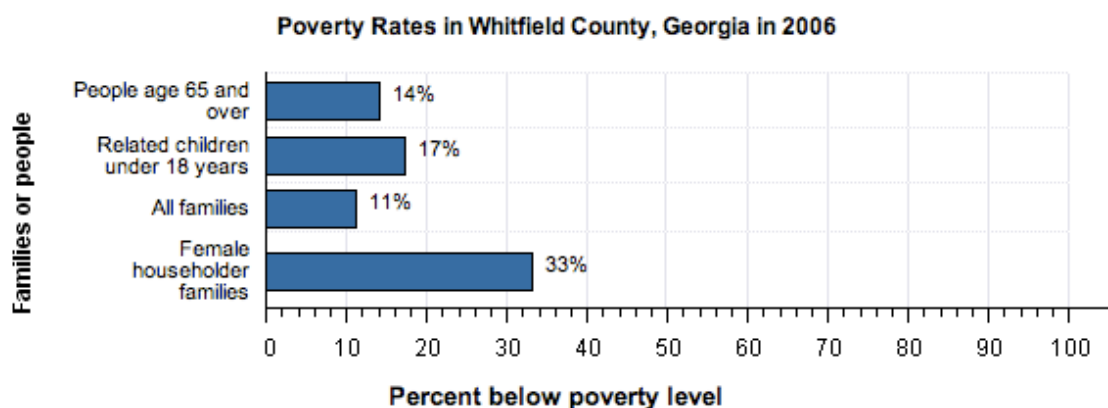
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Community Characteristics

According to the U.S. Census Bureau 2006 estimate, the population breakdown of Whitfield County by ethnicity is as follows: 64.9% white, 29.35% Hispanic/Latino, 3.8% African American and 1.2% Asian.   It is important to note the rapid rate at which the Hispanic/Latino subgroup increased over recent years.

The U.S. Census Bureau estimated that in 1990, 2,321 Hispanics/Latinos resided in Whitfield County. This is in sharp contrast to the 2000 census that reported that 18,419 Hispanics/Latinos were residents. The 2006 Census estimate indicates that approximately 30% of the residents of Whitfield County are of Hispanic/Latino origin.

The table below suggests that many children in the Whitfield County area are affected by poverty. In 2006, 17% of children under the age of 18 were living below the poverty level.

Poverty Rates in Whitfield County, Georgia in 2006

| Families or people	Percent below poverty level
People age 65 and over	14%
Related children under 18 years	17%
All families	11%
Female householder families	33%

Source: American Community Survey, 2006

Increasing the graduation rate continues to be a focus in the Whitfield County School System. Refer to the chart below for data from the U.S. Census Bureau regarding the educational attainment of people in Whitfield County.

**The Educational Attainment of People in Whitfield County, Georgia in 2006**
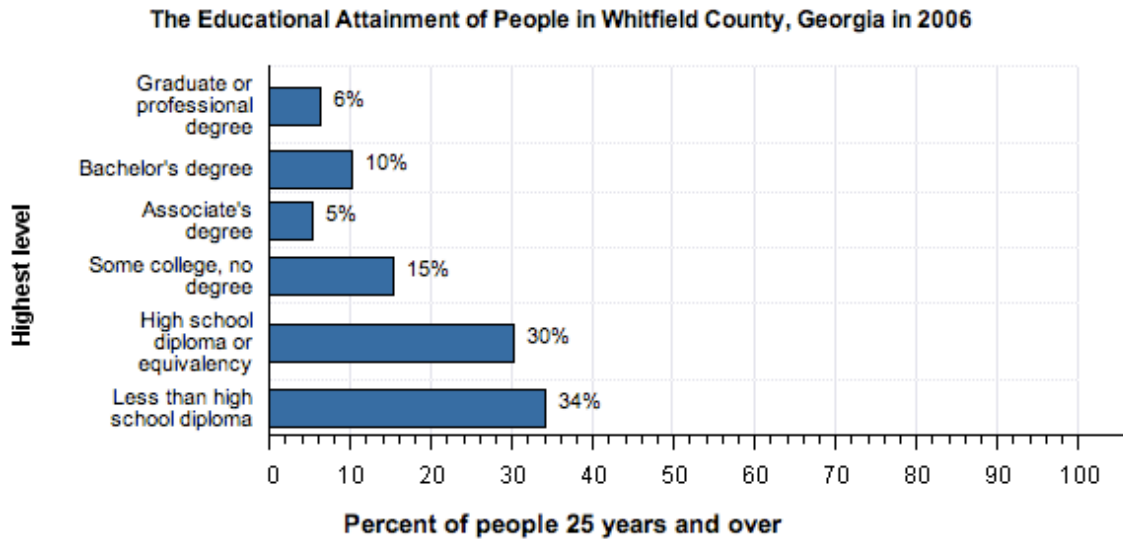
Source: American Community Survey, 2006

Census data suggests that the population of Whitfield County is primarily young. Thirty percent of the 2006 population was under18.

The Age Distribution of People in Whitfield County, Georgia in 2006
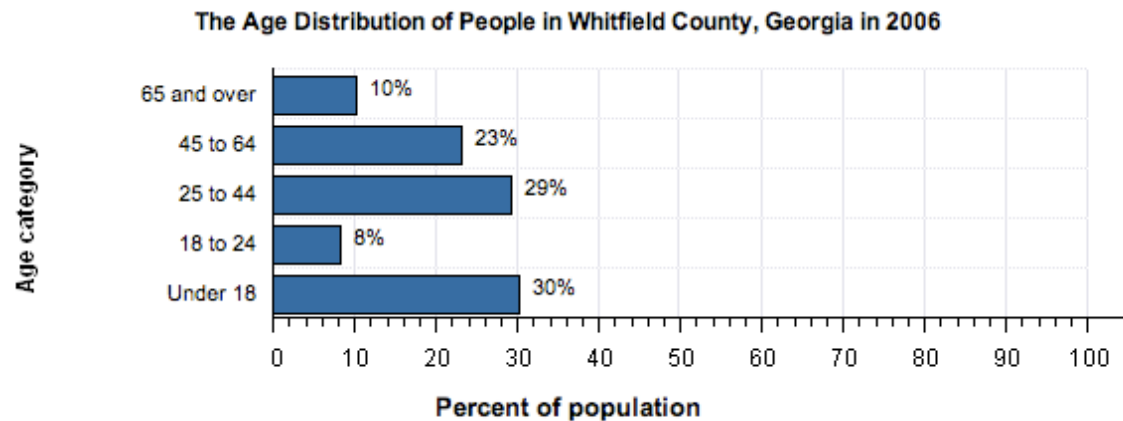
Source: American Community Survey, 2006

This presents a unique challenge for our school system as we work to serve the needs of this large group. The following table provides an overview of the student population growth in the school system during a five-year period.

Student population 2002-2006
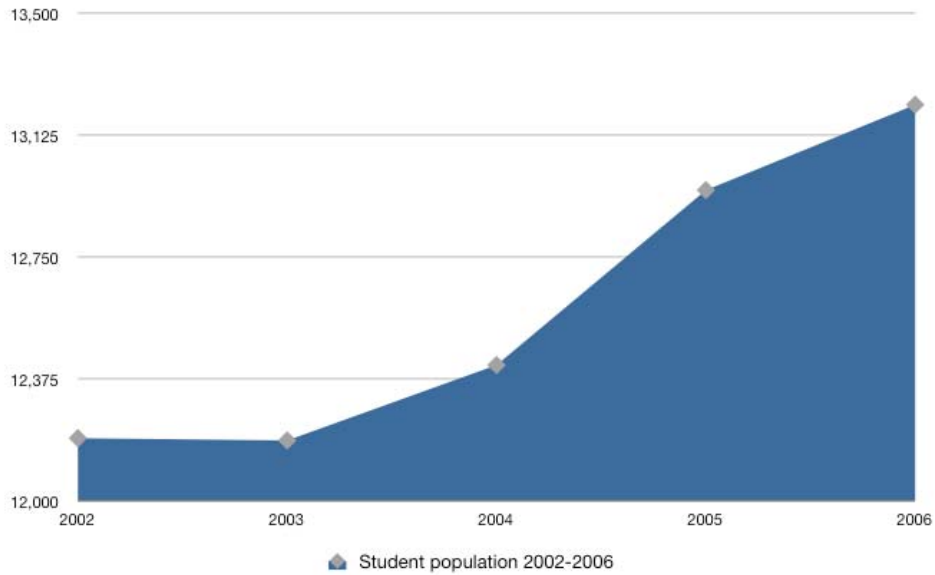
Additional demographic information regarding Whitfield County can be found at:

http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/NPTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=05000US13313&-qr_name=ACS_2006_EST_G00_NP01&-ds_name=&-redoLog=false

Student Characteristics

The data in the following tables represent student demographic information for the past three years including current data regarding the number of students who are attending Whitfield County Schools.

Whitfield County Schools
Students by Race/Ethnicity
2005-2009

Category	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
	%	%	%	%
Total Students	100	100	100	100
White	64	62	60	60
African-American	2	2	2	2
Hispanic	30	32	33	34
Asian	1	1	1	1
Multi-racial	3	4	4	4
ESOL	10	11	13	13
Students with Disabilities	11	10	10	10
Economically Disadvantaged	53	56	58	58

Whitfield County Schools Enrollment Trends
Students by Race/Ethnicity
2000-2008
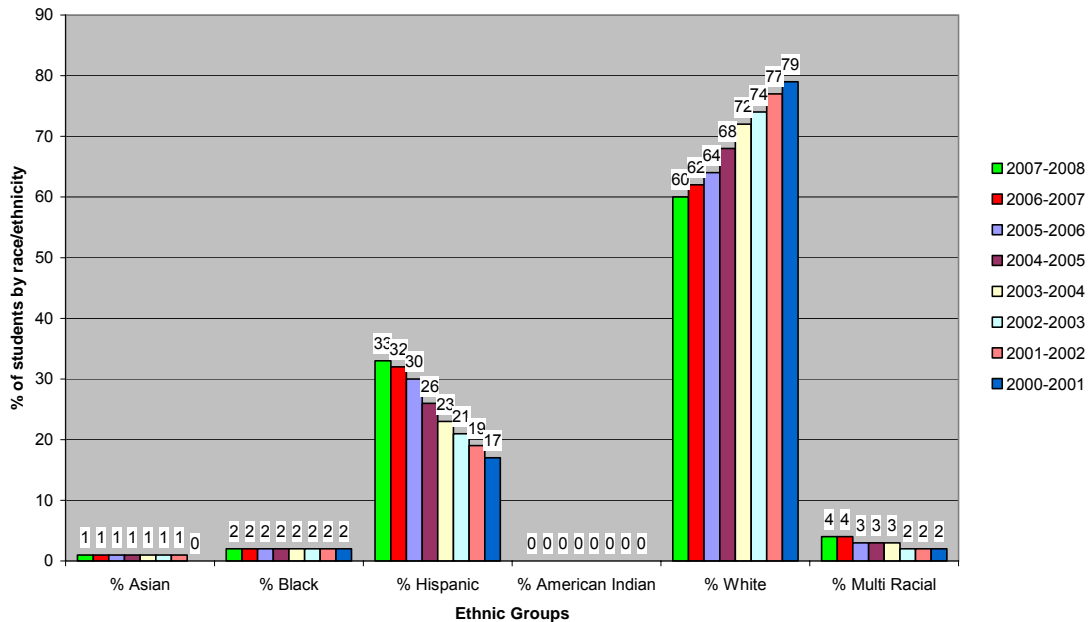
The Whitfield County School System student population consists of primarily two ethnic groups, Hispanic and White, with small percentages of Asian, Black, and Multi Racial. Over the past six years, there has been a slight decrease in the White student population while the Hispanic population has increased proportionately. Over the past three school years, the ESOL subgroup has increased by approximately 200 students per year.

Whitfield County Schools
Mobility Rate
2003-2007

Level	2003-2004		2004-2005		2005-2006		2006-2007	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Elementary	1245	19	1231	19	1242	18	1279	18
Middle	563	18	573	18	490	16	536	17
High	1407	37	1367	35	1487	36	1497	36

Report Information:
Mobility rates are calculated from the Student Record enrollment data for each school year. A 'mobile' student is one who enters or withdraws from school after September 1 of the school year in question.

It is important to note that mobility, most significantly at the high school level, is an issue faced by the system as evidenced by the above data. While these mobility rates have stabilized and are not increasing at the current time, a substantial number of students move during the course of the school year and experience gaps in instruction.

Whitfield County Schools
Title I Program
2003-2009

School Year	Number of Eligible Schools	Number of Schools Served Targeted Assistance	Number of Schools Served Schoolwide
2003-2004	9	0	9
2004-2005	10	1	9
2005-2006	12	2	10
2006-2007	15	2	13
2007-2008	17	2	15
2008-2009	17	0	17

Report Information:

The status of each Title I school is determined from the information reported in the Student Record data collection.

In 2008, 55% of Whitfield County students were in the economically disadvantaged category. For this reason, the number of schools with Title I programs has increased. Currently, all 12 elementary schools and all five middle schools are school-wide Title I programs.

MAJOR TRENDS AND ISSUES

Student Population Growth and Changing Demographics

Since 2002, the Whitfield County School System has experienced substantial growth in its overall student population as well as within specific subgroups such as English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) and the economically disadvantaged. Refer to the table on page 33 of this document.

The above noted growth to the overall student population has led to increased needs for additional schools, related staff and resources. Currently a fourth high school is being planned. This school will be in the northeast region of Whitfield County and is scheduled to open in 2011. An additional elementary school, which will serve students in the southeast region of the county, is also being planned and is scheduled to open fall of 2009.

Associated with this growth are needs for facilities, technology and other resources. Whitfield County voters approved a local ESPLOST in September 2006 and this funding will allow the system to address facility needs. This vote is an indicator that local taxpayers are supportive of the school system's vision/mission and its related efforts.

Technology

In response to an ever-increasing technological society, Whitfield County Schools are implementing a system-wide focus on technology that began in the summer of 2007. Each school was allocated funds in order to increase the technological resources in its building. School administrators, their leadership teams, design teams, and staffs developed a plan which would most effectively strengthen their current technological capabilities. Materials which schools have elected to purchase include--but are not limited to--desktop computers, laptops, LCD projectors, wireless networks, servers, ACTIVboards, ACTIVslates, and iPods. Related professional learning sessions are conducted to support teachers as they integrate new forms of technology into their teaching methodologies.

Whitfield County School System is exploring new ways to increase both communication and instructional opportunities through internet resources. Having educational tools in place which can be accessed beyond the four walls of the classroom offers many benefits for all students. Middle and high school students who are experiencing difficulty may review targeted skills through NovaNET and Georgia Virtual School's credit recovery programs. All students at these grade levels can take virtual classes through Georgia Virtual Schools, allowing them access to less commonly taught curricula which are not offered in our schools. These resources also allow students to continue their learning during illness or in the event of natural disasters.

SYSTEM STRENGTHS

Shared Focus

Through the leadership of the Whitfield County Board of Education and superintendent, the Whitfield County School System began four years ago working toward achieving system standards within a continuous improvement model outlined by the Schlechty Center for Leadership in School Reform. This partnership has a tremendous impact on the way the system conducts its core business of providing quality work and services for its students. A System Design Team was created with teacher, support staff, and leader representation from across the entire system. This team has worked to develop a system-wide vision and goals. Additionally, the team focuses on building capacity by creating structures for continuity and results-oriented decision making.

Numerous professional learning opportunities have also been generated in response to our partnership with the Schlechty Center. Teachers and system leaders have attended Schlechty Center conferences to learn more about the urgency to change instructional practices and how to design engaging work for students. Consultants have provided on-site training as well. This professional learning has been pervasive and consistent

throughout the system, often including personnel who serve students outside of the classroom such as transportation personnel, food service employees, clerical staff, as well as administrators. School board members have supported this initiative by attending professional learning sessions, contributing ideas, and using the Schlechty framework as a basis for decisions. WCS understands the impact that all employees have on students.

In response to initial professional learning sessions, schools and groups across the system have embarked on book studies through which they seek more information to address system vision and goals. Design teams were developed at the school-level and are working to improve the quality of work available to students.

Renewed Focus on Collaboration

With the implementation of the Georgia Performance Standards, we are experiencing new interest in collaboration. Teachers are working together in various ways within their schools while partnering with other schools across the system. The Teaching and Learning Team facilitates monthly afternoon meetings in which various grade levels meet to discuss curriculum topics and share ideas. Southeast and Northwest High School maintain a focus on high school graduation by sponsoring collaborative sessions with their feeder schools to create a sense of community and unity among students at all levels.

School groups utilize both vertical and horizontal planning with an emphasis upon the transitions that students make between elementary, middle, and high school levels. Collaboration between the Whitfield County School System and Dalton State College will ease the transition from high school to college.

During the spring of 2008, The Whitfield County School System held a "Celebration to Commitment" event. This experience gave schools across the system the opportunity to collaborate and share what their individual design teams had accomplished during the school year. Participants learned about class scheduling, engaging work, and using protocols to guide instructional conversations--are all tied to the Schlechty framework.

Teacher Induction

An additional strength of the school system is the emphasis on the recruitment and retention of qualified and dedicated teachers. The system seeks individuals who have a commitment to developing quality work for students and view themselves as "teacher leaders." The human resources department has developed a professional learning process with the goal of promoting a clear understanding of system expectations. New teachers are oriented to embrace the norms and values of the organization which are based on Schlechty ideals.
During this intensive two-day training, inductees participate in a Working on the Work Foundations course. Topics include "Ways to Measure Engagement," "Schlechty's 10 Design Qualities," "Design vs. Plan," "Bloom's Taxonomy," and "Protocols to Enhance Collegiality." Additional support is provided throughout the year by offering teachers

opportunities for networking and professional development. The following table details intended results of the Foundations training:

Intended Results:
- Understanding the relationship between engaging work for students and the desired results for schools.
- Identify and understand the characteristics of engaging work for students.
- Design an engaging learning experience for students.

Guiding Questions:
- What are the essential concepts and components of the Working on the Work framework?
- How does the Working on the Work framework provide us with a way to think about and design quality work for students?
- What does the Working on the Work framework mean for the roles of teachers, principals, and system-level leaders?

Needs

Data-driven Decision Making and Progress Monitoring

Within the Schlechty framework, one of the six critical systems that support a learning organization focuses on data collection and transmission of knowledge to stakeholders. Data and its impact on the decision-making process is an important component of this area. Schools are using various software to assist with data management; however, the lack of a common data management tool is a challenge the system is addressing.

During the 2007-2008 school year, Whitfield County Schools hired a technology consultant to assess the system's technology capacity and to assist in generating a plan for implementing needed improvements. The recommendation from the consultant was to address infrastructural needs before purchasing or subscribing to large-scale software and data assessment tools. The infrastructure is currently being addressed, and plans are to select and implement a new data management system beginning in January of 2009.

Data management programs such as AIMSweb and Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) are currently under consideration for purchase by the system to be used for tracking student performance data. Students will be assessed regularly, and the resulting formative data will allow teachers to tailor instruction to meet the current educational needs of each student. Teachers are able to intervene promptly before students have fallen significantly behind. Once intervention plans are in place, the on-going formative data determines their effectiveness so that instructional modifications can be implemented to maximize student progress.

Choice in Curricular Opportunities

- The Whitfield County School System realizes the importance of offering students multiple opportunities to obtain an education. At the middle and high school levels, Georgia Virtual School is offered to allow students to enroll in classes not available at their local school. Students take the online class at home or school with assistance provided by a supervising teacher.

- NovaNET is an additional curricular opportunity which allows students to recover credit online. Students progress at an individual pace and are assessed regularly to monitor learning progress.

- Video streaming is used to increase content development beyond the traditional classroom textbook. Several content areas are enhanced through the use of online videos.

- High school students have the opportunity to enroll in classes at their traditional high school while simultaneously taking career tech classes at the Whitfield County Career Academy.

While these opportunities allow students to learn content in nontraditional formats, the Whitfield County School System realizes the need to continue to expand its educational opportunities and choices for students. With the advancement and growth in technology, the learning style preference of students has changed. Therefore, the instructional methods and philosophy of the system must also change to meet the needs of the students. Offering students choice in curricular opportunities will remain a focus in the upcoming years.

Ongoing Professional Learning

With the system focus on Schlechty Center principles, pervasive professional learning for all staff members is a continued need. Professional learning experiences consisting of conferences, workshops, collaborative discussion groups, design teams, and book studies will be offered to a wide variety of staff members. This opportunity will include representation from all departments and job descriptions. The goal is to provide a continuing induction process to ensure all staff members understand and implement the framework, as well as support the system's vision.

As new forms of technology are purchased and introduced, it is critical that professional learning address how new instructional tools will be integrated into instruction. Teachers attend workshops at the national to school levels to learn introductory information and then work collaboratively with peers to develop proficiency. It is believed that professional interaction and peer support will increase the daily use of technology in instructional experiences. When teaching digital natives, the appropriate use of technology provides additional avenues of student engagement.

With the implementation of the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS), educators from across the system are participating in professional learning in various content areas. Teachers are working collaboratively to design units that will actively engage students in the learning process. Supplemental experiences related to these standards allow participants to develop common pre/post-assessments, sequencing charts, and performance tasks. Representatives from all schools have collaborated in these efforts, resulting in more comprehensive and quality instructional tools.

In response to the rapid influx of English Language Learners (ELLs), there is an on-going need to provide training that facilitates culturally responsive teaching. Strategies which recognize how language is learned and which build upon the similarities between languages are emphasized. The goal is for ELLs to learn content knowledge and English simultaneously. ESOL teachers at all levels have been trained to use the WIDA (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment) frameworks. Additional information regarding these frameworks may be found at: http://www.wida.us/. ESOL teachers work collaboratively to share this information with homeroom and content teachers as they work within the co-teaching model. In the near future, book studies and professional learning workshops will focus upon how to strengthen co-teaching instruction for both ESOL teachers and the teachers they support.