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One Team, One Goal: Student Success

August 3, 2021

Re: Inquiry

To: Representative Erick Allen

Representative Allen,

Thank you for your letter. As you mentioned, the start to this school year presents different, but similarly complex, challenges as the last. During this challenging and uncertain time, we are fortunate to live in a county willing and able to support the District offering high-quality educational choices to students and their families, whether virtual or face-to-face.

During the 2020-21 school year, we received input from our students' parents regarding education opportunities this fall. In response to that feedback, one of my highest priorities has been providing additional learning choices for our students and families. The District's staff did tremendous work in building additional online learning options and opportunities, including a new online learning academy, a new elementary virtual program, and improving online education overall. This spring, we were pleased to offer Cobb's 110,000 students and their families an opportunity to select the environment they believed best for their student(s), and committing to provide the high-quality education for which the District is nationally known in the environment of their choice – something many districts are unable to do.

Unfortunately, because of planning and budgeting needs, this required establishing a date by which a selection needed to be made. I understand the desires of parents contacting your office, and I wish it was as simple as flipping a switch, as some critics suggest; however, the logistics involved in staffing and financing online and face-to-face learning programs for 110,000 students are complex and interrelated. Perhaps even more than in face-to-face learning, providing teaching and educational support in a virtual environment is a significant undertaking, one requiring months of planning, budgeting, and hiring. Given the school year has already begun, making significant and abrupt changes in online learning options at this point would likely (and negatively) impact virtually all Cobb students and teachers.

As ever, I appreciate your letter and counsel. However, I greatly appreciate you reaching out to me directly. As you know, we are currently facing a Cognia investigation, one particularly focusing on governance. As you stated when the investigation was announced, it is likely to bring unnecessary disruption to our outstanding school system. Perhaps the last thing we need are allegations that educational decisions in the District are shaped by external political pressure. Consequently, I greatly appreciate your professionalism in reaching out to me directly to discuss this. Please know my door is always open, and you are always welcome.

Best regards,
Chris Ragsdale
Superintendent

CC: Randy Scamihorn, Jaha Howard, Leroy Tre' Hutchins, David Chastain, David Banks, Charisse Davis, Brad Wheeler

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