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To: Dunwoody-Chamblee Community Families and Partners
From: Dr. Devon Q. Horton, *Superintendent*
Subject: Update on the Dunwoody-Chamblee Elementary School Project
Date: August 2, 2023

This memorandum provides important updates on the elementary school project in the Dunwoody-Chamblee area, initiated in 2019, to address the anticipated enrollment growth in the Dunwoody area. As part of our commitment to transparency and fiscal responsibility, we are sharing the latest developments related to the project's general contractor and architectural firms.

The DeKalb County School District (DCSD) has terminated project contracts with *CGLS Architects* and *Evergreen Construction*. DCSD notified both entities of this decision on April 14, 2023. This decision was made for several reasons, which are detailed below.

Despite these recent actions, this project has not been canceled. As always, we prioritize delivering our students with the best possible learning environments while maintaining a prudent approach to managing and allocating our resources.

Background, Timelines, and Developments

In 2019, the school project in the Dunwoody-Chamblee area was proposed as a 950-seat prototype design to meet the expected increase in enrollment in that area. At the time, DCSD's primary objective was to provide immediate capacity relief to accommodate projected enrollment growth. Subsequently, in 2020-2021, we hired *CGLS Architects* and *Evergreen Construction* to design and execute the plans, which were then submitted to the City of Dunwoody for permitting and construction.

However, since the project's inception, several factors have evolved that have led us to reassess the current needs of our school district. These include:

- Shifting Student Enrollment Patterns: During this timeframe, DCSD has documented unexpected changes in student enrollment and enrollment patterns.

- Timing: It is also important to note that this project was initiated before the pandemic and prior to the District's [Comprehensive Master Plan](#) in 2021, which called for a much more thorough approach to addressing facility capacity needs across all DCSD schools. These included *Facility Condition Assessments, Educational Suitability Assessments, Demographic Projections, Enrollment, Capacity and Utilization, and Public Input*.
- District Leadership Changes: Leadership transitions within DCSD prompted a comprehensive review of all ongoing projects, including the Dunwoody-Chamblee Elementary project.
- Contractual Fees with No Progress: During many delays, the school district found itself in an indefensible position of paying the general contractor over \$100,000 per month in contractual fees, with no construction work being done. This lengthy financial burden was unjustifiable and diverted funds that could have been used to address other educational needs.
- Significant Change Order and Redesign: As the project faced obstacles, it became apparent that moving forward would require significant change orders and redesign, which would involve considerable modifications and cost increases. Essentially, this would involve starting the project over with an uncertain timeline and budget.

What's Next?

The materials purchased for the project will not go to waste, as the District will repurpose them for future projects.

As part of our pledge to make informed decisions, DCSD will commission a new enrollment analysis. The findings will inform future decisions and recommendations regarding school construction projects, including the Dunwoody-Chamblee Elementary project.

Future actions related to this project will be firmly grounded in adhering to appropriate “rightsizing models” based on present and projected enrollments. Our overarching objective is to create sustainable and efficient school facilities that meet the evolving needs of our students and communities now and in the future.

DCSD remains firmly committed to being fiscally responsible and accountable to our community. We are fully aware of our responsibility to use our resources wisely and ensure that any school construction projects can be adjusted to align with current and projected enrollment needs.

Thank you for your understanding and ongoing support. We will keep you updated as decisions are made regarding the elementary school project in the Dunwoody-Chamblee area.