

Laura S. Neely, Ph.D.

PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

Accomplished educational leader with nearly 30 years of progressive experience spanning classroom teaching, school leadership, and district-level strategy in one of Georgia's largest school districts. Fifteen years as a DCSD elementary principal, across both an attendance-zone school and a high-demand magnet program, included direct responsibility for school choice administration under Georgia's HB 251 intra-district transfer law, McKinney-Vento enrollment, residency verification, capacity management, and partnership with families navigating the enrollment process. Currently serving as Interim Director of PK-12 Curriculum and Instruction across a 90,000-student system, where large-scale program leadership, multi-site enrollment operations, district-wide data analysis, policy development, and cross-divisional collaboration have sharpened a skill set tailored to leading complex, district-level operational functions. A consistent record of translating enrollment and performance data into action, building stakeholder trust across schools, families, and community partners, and managing high-stakes processes with accuracy and equity has prepared me to step into the role of Executive Director of Student Assignment, leading the district's registration, school choice, boundary, projection, and records functions with the systems thinking, fiscal awareness, and family-centered judgment the role demands.

EDUCATION

Mercer University, Atlanta, GA

Ph.D., Educational Leadership and Administration	2011
Educational Leadership Add-on Certification Program	2007
Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society Doctoral Student Advisory Committee	

Brenau University, Gainesville, GA

M.Ed., Middle Grades Education (Math and Science)	2005
Kappa Delta Pi Honor Society University Judiciary Council	

Ohio University, Athens, OH

B.S., Elementary Education, Minor in Mathematics	1996
Alpha Delta Pi	

CERTIFICATION

Georgia Educator Certificate: Educational Leadership – Tier II / L-7 (exceeds the L-5/PL-6 minimum required for this role), P-5, Middle Grades ELA, Math, Science, Social Studies, Gifted In-field
Georgia Literacy Academy (HB 538)

CORE COMPETENCIES

Student Enrollment and Registration Operations | School Choice, HB 251 Transfers, and Magnet Program Administration | Residency Verification and Investigations Partnership | Enrollment Data Analysis and Projections | Boundary and Capacity Planning | McKinney-Vento and Equity-Centered Enrollment | Policy Development, Interpretation, and Compliance | Family and Community Engagement | Stakeholder and Board Communication | Cross-Divisional Collaboration | Large-Scale Program and Process Design | Change Management | Budget and Fiscal Stewardship | Staff Development and Departmental Leadership

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Interim Director, PK-12 Curriculum and Instruction

October 2025 to Present

Division of Teaching and Learning, DeKalb County School District

- Built and operationalized the enrollment framework for Scholars Academy, a district-wide summer learning program serving approximately 3,000 students across 18 host sites, designing the eligibility, outreach, and

registration process for a pool of approximately 100 schools and 28,000 students. Redesigned outreach and enrollment procedures and direct engagement with school teams more than doubled enrollment over the previous year.

- Directed revision of instructional frameworks across all content areas, coordinating timelines, deliverables, and approvals across multiple coordinators and stakeholders, running the kind of cross-team operational process required to manage department-wide change.
- Manage a multi-category departmental budget spanning materials, professional learning, contracts, vendor agreements, and operations, overseeing purchase orders and ensuring fiscal accountability, supporting the district's role as good fiscal agents through resource decisions that flex with shifting program enrollment and demand.
- Serve on cross-divisional leadership teams including School Improvement Planning, Advanced Academics Committee, Literacy Planning Team, Instructional Technology Committee, and Summer Learning Programs Committee, partnering routinely with Operations, Student Services, Communications, and School Leadership to align policy, process, and student-facing programs across divisions.
- Oversee district-wide curriculum and instruction strategy, supervising 13 content-area coordinators and an administrative assistant, ensuring alignment with the district strategic plan and Superintendent priorities.
- Ensure departmental alignment with the district strategic plan, connecting program initiatives, professional learning, and curriculum design to district-wide goals and Superintendent priorities.
- Conducted district-wide data analysis across 90,000+ students using MAP Growth, producing executive summaries with predictive analytics, subgroup disaggregation, and trend identification, and delivering data-driven recommendations to the Chief Academic Officer and division leadership, applying the same analytic discipline required for enrollment projections, capacity analysis, and demographic forecasting.
- Co-authored a district policy framework aligned to state law, contributing to a three-part governance structure including board policy, administrative regulation, and implementation plan. This is direct experience translating statutory requirements into board-ready policy, procedure, and operational rollout.
- Designed and facilitated professional learning for principals and assistant principals, modeling coaching-centered leadership and supporting school leaders in translating policy and research into practice across school sites.

Principal

February 2013 to October 2025

Kittredge Magnet School for High Achievers, DeKalb County School District

- Led all operations for Georgia's top-performing elementary school, a district magnet program, for over 12 years, overseeing 60+ staff, 550+ students, and the full annual cycle of registration, enrollment, residency verification, records management, and family communication.
- #1 Elementary School in Georgia by U.S. News and World Report for four consecutive years (2023 to 2026); grew CCRPI from 91 to 108.3 under the original formula, then sustained 99.5 to 100 annually following the 2018 scoring redesign.
- Exceeded MAP Growth projections by 200% annually; achieved top statewide End-of-Grade results across all subjects (2016 to 2025).
- Administered magnet program enrollment end-to-end, including registration, parent orientation, program marketing and tours, lottery placements, waitlist management, and family communication across a multi-step school-choice process.
- Partnered with district residency investigations officers to verify student residency, resolve enrollment disputes, and ensure compliance with district enrollment policy while maintaining a family-centered tone with parents and guardians.
- Worked directly with the district's homeless programs team and McKinney-Vento liaison to enroll and support students experiencing homelessness, removing barriers to school access and ensuring continuity of services for the most vulnerable families.
- Managed grade-level capacity, classroom assignments, and class-size compliance against shifting magnet enrollment demand, balancing program integrity, equitable access, and facility constraints.
- Built a school-based observation rubric aligned to CSIP goals within the TKES framework, improving instructional feedback quality and teacher morale around the evaluation process.
- Provided one-to-one instructional coaching to teachers not meeting MAP growth targets, consistently producing Fall-to-Spring growth exceeding projections.
- Expanded fundraising revenue from \$25K to \$175K annually, enabling capital improvements, teacher training, and enhanced student programs.

- Maintained a 96% to 99% staff retention rate and mentored 10+ staff members into leadership roles across DCSD.
- Mentored assistant principals and emerging school leaders through structured coaching, supporting placements into principal and district-level roles and contributing to DCSD's leadership pipeline.
- Managed all aspects of organizational performance including HR, budgeting, facilities, compliance, crisis response, and high-volume stakeholder communication with parents, district leadership, and community partners, including fielding and resolving complaints regarding enrollment, school choice, and student records.
- Launched ROAR, a positive behavior intervention program recognizing respect, organization, attitude, and responsibility, in response to increased post-pandemic behavior incidents.
- Recognized as Principal of the Year, Specialty Area (2025) and led the school to National Blue Ribbon Awards (2004, 2012, 2018).

Principal

July 2010 to March 2013

Oak Grove Elementary School, DeKalb County School District

- Directed school operations, registration, staff performance, and student achievement for a diverse attendance-zone school community, managing the full registration cycle, residency verification, and high-volume family communication.
- Administered HB 251 intra-district transfer requests, evaluating applications against available space, communicating decisions to families, and partnering with the district's McKinney-Vento liaison to enroll and support students experiencing homelessness, removing barriers to school access across a mobile family population.
- Created a new school foundation to strengthen parent and community partnerships.
- Led the school to be named a Georgia School of Excellence (2011).
- Implemented leadership systems that improved instructional alignment, assessment rigor, and community engagement.

Assistant Principal

August 2007 to June 2010

Kittredge Magnet School for High Achievers, DeKalb County School District

- Supported school leadership in operations, instructional supervision, and faculty development.
- Served as acting AP for two schools simultaneously during a leadership transition, ensuring continuity of operations.
- Increased gifted student identification rate by 15% through improved screening processes, outreach to underrepresented families, and equity-focused review, expanding access to a school-choice program for students who had previously been overlooked.
- Piloted technology and instructional programs later adopted district-wide.
- Mentored new assistant principals across the district, building leadership pipeline capacity.

Teacher

1997 to 2007

DeKalb County Schools, GA and Northmont City Schools, OH

- Taught elementary and middle grades math, ELA, and gifted education, consistently achieving high student growth outcomes across multiple grade levels and settings.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

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- Principal of the Year, Specialty Area, DeKalb County School District (2025)
 - DCSD Spotlight School (Spring and Fall 2025)
 - #1 Elementary School in Georgia, U.S. News and World Report (2023, 2024, 2025)
 - Georgia Literacy Leader and Math Leader School (2024)
 - National Blue Ribbon School, U.S. Department of Education (2004, 2012, 2018)
 - Georgia School of Excellence, Georgia Department of Education (2011)
 - Leader Keys LAPS Level IV (2018 to 2025)
 - ARISS Space Station Contact School (2020)
 - Top Gallup Q12 Employee Engagement Scores (90th percentile and above)

- Multiple, year over year, state-level recognitions from GOSA and GaDOE for top 5% performance in achievement and growth

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS

National

- *Leadership Conversations: Shifting the Focus from Compliance to Growth* -- California Association of Leadership in Education (2026)
- *Turning Data into Decisions* -- California Association of Leadership in Education (2026)
- *Pivot Table Party* -- Texas Computer Education Association (2025)
- *The Low Down on Low Inference Feedback* -- Innovative Schools Conference, New York (2023)

State

- *Differentiation: Models, Management and Leadership* -- Georgia Gifted Coordinators Conference (2014)
- *Pathways to Leadership* -- Mercer University Leadership Conference (2012)
- *Finishing the Dissertation* -- Mercer University Leadership Conference (2012)

District

- *Structured Literacy Pre-K to 5, Learners, Literacy, and Leadership: Coaching for Impact* -- Principal's Learning Opportunity (2026)
- *The Low Down on Low Inference Feedback* -- DCSD SLC (2025)
- *Data Protocols that Move the Needle* -- DCSD SLC (2024)
- *Effective Use of Data* -- Principal's Learning Opportunity (2023)
- *Assessment Strategies for Continuous Improvement* -- Specialty Area (2023)
- *Innovative Recruitment Strategies* -- Region 1 Retreat (2023)
- *Formative Assessment and Illuminate* -- Region 1 Retreat (2022)

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE

District School Improvement Planning Team	2025-2026
Advanced Academics Committee	2025-2026
New Teacher Orientation Planning Team	2025-2026
District Literacy Team	2025-2026
District Instructional Technology Collaborative Team	2025-2026
Summer Learning Programs Committee	2025-2026
Superintendent's Principal Advisory Committee	2024-2025
Student Success Skills Backpack Pilot	2024-2025
Principal Mentor	2020-2025
Accreditation Steering Committee (SACS/AdvancEd/Cognia)	Five-year cycles, 2001-2021
District Calendar Committee	2021
Virtual Learning Committee	2020
SLC Planning Committee	2019
Google Classroom Pilot	2018-2020
Bring-Your-Own-Device Pilot	2014-2020
Learning Management System Selection Committee	2015

COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP

President

2021 to 2023

Chamblee High School Swim and Dive Booster Club

- Led fundraising, operations, and parent engagement for the athletic program; doubled annual fundraising revenue.
- Oversaw upgrades to pool and event equipment and organized athlete nutrition and training support.

President / Treasurer / Communications Chair

2011 to 2022

Lindmoor Woods Swim and Tennis Club

- Served in multiple executive board roles for a community organization with 210 member families and a \$150K annual budget.
- Directed governance, finance, and facilities operations including major renovations of grounds, pool, and tennis courts.
- Grew membership from 150 to 210 families and introduced pickleball programming to expand community engagement. Maintained 100% volunteer participation for community events and initiatives.