March 17, 2016

Dr. Brandon Payne, Interim Superintendent
Cullman County Schools
Post Office Box 1590
Cullman, AL 35056-1590

Dear Dr. Payne:

Upon review of Cullman County Schools Innovation/Flexibility Zone application, I am happy to approve your Innovation Zone plan to “ensure students graduate with the skills needed to meet the growing workforce within Cullman County.” Attached are approval recommendations for implementing the requests made in Cullman County Schools Innovation/Flexibility Zone application.

Your continued commitment to innovation in education will provide exceptional opportunities to meet the needs of each of your students and prepare each for college and/or career in the 21st century. It is evident that the Cullman County Schools plan for innovation ensures increased learning opportunities for accelerating students on a trajectory that will lead to success.

Please remain in communication with Mrs. Karen Porter to share your successes, challenges, and lessons learned that will be valuable to our moving our state forward and to providing helpful guidance to other districts as they develop innovative plans.

Sincerely,

Thomas R. Bice
State Superintendent of Education

TRB:KWP:DK

Attachment

cc: Mrs. Sherrill W. Parris
    Dr. Philip Cleveland
    Dr. Melinda Maddox
    Mrs. Karen Porter
Qualifications and Recommendations for Approval of the
Cullman County 2016 Innovation Plan

1. The district should be advised of the Virtual School Act No. 2015-89 and align its policy accordingly before the beginning of the 2016-17 school year. It is recommended that the district keep in mind the following advisements:

- The virtual school is coded as a virtual program until 250 full-time virtual students have enrolled.

- The virtual program does not earn foundation units such as principal, assistant principal, counselor, and librarian. A virtual program will provide the administrator and other staff necessary to operate the virtual program. Teacher units are earned by the home-originating school of record. A policy should be developed to determine the online teacher of record and awarding of grades.

- The students are enrolled in their home-originating school of record, and the virtual program takes daily attendance and reports it back to the home-originating school of record. Accountability for a virtual program is reported with the home-originating school of record. As a virtual program, ADM funding and accountability will reside with the home-originating school of record. Attendance, grades, and all other data will be reported through the home-originating school of record.

- The district may have all of its full-time virtual students report to one school for testing and facilitation without meeting the requirement of 250 full-time virtual students for a school. The district may allow students at home to come to the virtual program site only for testing and mentoring help or attend at the virtual program site as needed. The district sends grades from the virtual program back to the home-originating school of record.

- The district is strongly encouraged to provide each student with counseling related to his/her career path planning with all virtual learning options. School personnel should be aware and advise students on courses not accepted by a student’s chosen institution of higher education. Caution should also be given to Alabama High School Athletic Association/NCAA rules imposed on traditional public school students when determining career path/courses in order to assure retention of eligibility.

- The district is reminded that if the virtual program or virtual school requires working with another entity such as community colleges, institutions of higher education, community business partners, etc., to provide personnel to provide instruction/services for the students in its district, and these persons might have unsupervised access to children, the Alabama Accountability Act 2013-64 does not waive the requirements for anyone who has unsupervised access to children from undergoing a criminal history background check through the ALSDE.
2. The district should be advised that dual enrollment program students may earn one high school credit for any three+ semester credit hours or five+ quarter credit hours at the postsecondary level:

- Per State Superintendent Memorandum FY15-1014 – On March 11, 2015, the Alabama State Board of Education amended the *Alabama Administrative Code*, Rule No. 290-3-1-.02, pertaining to secondary course credit awarded for the postsecondary course work through dual enrollment. The new rule is “one (1) three semester hours postsecondary/college-level course shall equal one (1) high school Carnegie credit in the same or related subject.”

3. The district should be advised that in order for any postsecondary instructor who may be considered as a teacher of record with the ability to enter grades and attendance for students to not be considered out of field, the course codes for dual enrollment 9000 series must be used. These instructors must be reported to the ALSDE in LEAPS Schedules as the Dual Enrollment Instructor teacher role and the class type will be coded as Dual Enrollment Class taken from college or university for grades and attendance to be entered.
December 17, 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

Cullman County Schools is excited to offer Fast Track, Fast Track for Industry, and Dual Enrollment programs to our students. In addition, the Cullman County Board of Education would like to implement a virtual learning program designed to meet the educational needs of a diverse student population. The district's Strategic Plan, which was developed with the input of parents and community members, revealed the need for innovative programs to ensure students graduate with the skills needed to meet the growing workforce within Cullman County. These innovative programs will help the district meet Plan 2020 goals and ensure students graduate college and career ready.

It is the intent of the Cullman County Commission on Education to request a waiver through the Innovation Zone/Flexibility Application and pursue a flexibility contract as a way to meet the various educational needs of our students. Cullman County is a rural, low socio-economic community located in the transition area of the Appalachian Region. It is our desire to offer state-of-the-art learning programs designed to ensure that our students graduate with the skills and knowledge needed to meet the growing workforce needs of Cullman County and North Alabama, and as a result to break a cycle of poverty.

Through partnerships with the Alabama State Dept. of Education, Career Technical Education, Wallace State Community College, and local business and industry, students will gain valuable insight into career opportunities available throughout North Alabama. Innovative programs will place students in their career paths at an earlier age and provide opportunities for them to graduate high school while pursuing an associate degree and/or earning an industry recognized credential. Our partnership with business and industry has provided new opportunities for our students to participate in apprenticeship programs in a field of study they wish to pursue. As a result, students will be better prepared and will possess the skills and the knowledge needed to meet the workforce demands in Cullman County and North Alabama. As "baby boomers" continue to retire, we can expect to see a shortage of workers in our community and throughout the state. Millennials are the first generation to have access to the internet and other technology devices during their formative years. Therefore, it is imperative that we develop innovative and rigorous educational programs to ensure industries continue to locate and expand their businesses in our community.
We respectfully request approval for the attached Innovation Zone/Flexibility Application.

We appreciate your consideration in the matter.

Sincerely,

Brandon Payne  
Superintendent

Gene Sullins  
Board President
INNOVATION ZONE

Alabama State Department of Education
Dr. Thomas R. Bice, State Superintendent of Education

INNOVATION ZONE/FLEXIBILITY APPLICATION

Provide greater flexibility in meeting the educational needs of a diverse student population

Improve educational performance through greater school autonomy and managerial flexibility to administer programs and budgetary matters

Provide greater control to local decision making

Leverage new methods and tools to improve outcomes and solve persistent problems

Challenge to make important choices

Enable an entirely new way of thinking
An Innovative School System

Pursuant to the Alabama Accountability Act 2013-64, to be considered as an innovative school system, shall successfully comply with the requirements and procedures set forth by the State Department of Edu
flexibility contracts.

Innovative School System Components

Flexibility Contract: “A flexibility contract between the local school system and the State Board of Education wherein a local school system may apply for programmatic flexibility or budgetary flexibility, or both, from state laws, regulations, and policies, including regulations and policies promulgated by the State Board of Education and the State Department of Education.”

Innovation Plan: “The request of a local school system for flexibility and plan for annual accountability measures and five-year targets for all participating schools within the school system.”

The Flexibility Contract and the Innovation Plan - The Flexibility Contract sets forth the local school system’s request for relief from specific mandates in state law, regulations, and policies. In exchange for the requested flexibility, the local school system proposes an Innovation Plan to meet annual accountability benchmarks and its five-year targets.

Flexibility Contract and Innovation Plan Requirements

Contract Requirements:
The proposed Innovative School System shall:
1. Submit to the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) a letter of intent to pursue a flexibility contract.
2. Submit to the ALSDE a Resolution adopted by the local board supporting the intent to pursue a Flexibility Contract, the proposal, and the anticipated timeline of the local school system. (The submitted resolution indicates that an opportunity for full discussion and public input, including a public hearing, was provided before submitting a Flexibility Contract proposal to the ALSDE.)
3. Submit to the ALSDE a document of assurance stating the local board shall provide consistency in leadership and a commitment to the state standards, assessments, and academic rigor.
Innovation Plan Requirements:
The proposed Innovative School System shall:
1. Submit to the ALSDE the school year that the local school system expects the Flexibility Contract to begin.
2. Submit to the ALSDE the list of state laws, regulations, and policies that the local school system is seeking to waive in its Flexibility Contract.
3. Submit a list of schools included in the innovation plan of the local school system.
4. Submit to the ALSDE the final Innovation Plan, as recommended by the local superintendent of education and approved by the local board of education.

Upon receipt of the Innovation Plan/Flexibility Contract by the ALSDE, a letter of confirmation of receipt will be sent to the local superintendent and the process for review will begin. Within 60 days, the innovation plan will be placed on an Alabama State Board of Education work session and regular meeting agenda for discussion and final determination. The school system will receive written notification of approval or non-approval. Should the innovation/flexibility plan be denied, an outline of procedures and necessary steps to amend and resubmit will be communicated to the local superintendent.

Innovation Plan Assurances

The following are requirements that cannot be waived:
- Those imposed by federal law
- Those related to the health and safety of students or employees
- Those imposed by ethics laws
- Those imposed by open records or open meetings laws
- Those related to financial or academic reporting or transparency
- Those designed to protect the civil rights of students or employees
- Those related to the state retirement system or state health insurance plan
- Those that would compensate an employee at an annual amount that is less than the amount the employee would otherwise be afforded through the State Minimum Salary Schedule
- Those that would involuntarily remove any rights or privileges acquired by any employee under the Students First Act of 2011, Title 16, Chapter 24C, Code of Alabama 1975
- Those that would deny any right or privilege granted to a new employee pursuant to the Students First Act of 2011
- Those that would authorize the formation of a charter school

Certifying Signatures of the Local Superintendent and Local Board President

To be considered as an Innovative School System, we certify that we comply with the requirements of Act 2013-64 and procedures set forth by the Alabama State Department of Education regarding Flexibility Contract requirements and Innovation Plan requirements.

Please sign below:

[Signatures]
Local Superintendent (Date)  Local Board President (Date)
Section 1 - Applicant Information

Indicate the intended school year for implementing the Innovation/Flexibility Plan: 2015-16

Please complete the following information:
School System Applying: Cullman County Schools
School System Superintendent: Dr. Brandon Payne
School System Contact’s Name & Title (if different than superintendent): Mr. Jeff Curtis, Career Tech Director
Contact’s Telephone Number: 256-352-7862
Contact’s E-Mail Address: jcurtis@ccboe.org

Please complete the chart below for system leaders responsible for supporting the plan (add rows as needed):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Team Member</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brandon Payne</td>
<td>Interim Superintendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff Curtis</td>
<td>Career Tech Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Patrick</td>
<td>Secondary Curriculum Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T.J. Franey</td>
<td>Special Projects Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiffanye Mitchell</td>
<td>Special Education Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce Ellard</td>
<td>Technology Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron Whaley</td>
<td>Maintenance Supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derinda Duke</td>
<td>School Improvement Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed Roberson</td>
<td>Chief School Financial Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy Crider</td>
<td>School Board Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita Kilpatrick</td>
<td>Good Hope High School Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shane Barnette</td>
<td>West Point Intermediate School Principal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please complete the chart below for each school involved/impacted by the plan (add rows as needed):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of School</th>
<th>Principal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fast Track Academy</td>
<td>Jeff Curtis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast Track for Industry</td>
<td>Jeff Curtis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section 2 - Specific Waiver Requests
Indicate the specific type(s) of policy or code that prohibit or constrain the plan from which you wish to request a waiver.

Indicate in the table below the waiver request type(s) that apply:
- **ALSDE Policy Waiver Request** (Specify memorandum, etc., outlining policy)
- **Alabama Administrative Code (AAC) Statute Waiver Request** (Specify AAC Rule No., etc.)
- **Code of Alabama 1975 Waiver Request** (Specify law, etc.)

*Insert additional rows as needed:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Waiver Request Type</th>
<th>Flexibility Requested</th>
<th>Impact of the Waiver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAC Rule 290-3-1-.02 (2) (a)1</td>
<td>The school year shall consist of a minimum of 180 teaching days. 1080 instructional hours</td>
<td>This waiver allows the students to follow a college schedule and possibly participate in an apprenticeship program with local business and industry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT 2015-430</td>
<td>The length of the school day shall be at least six (6) hours of actual teaching exclusive of lunch and recess.</td>
<td>This waiver allows the students to follow a college schedule and possibly participate in an apprenticeship program with local business and industry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAC Rule 290-3-1-.02 (2) (a)2</td>
<td>A student shall not earn credit toward graduation for a course that duplicates course content for which credit has already been awarded.</td>
<td>Students in a college program may take coursework for dual credit that meets the college program requirements for a degree or program certificate. Students in the 9th grade 2012-2013 cohort may substitute a diploma requirement with a course required for the college program which meets 4x4 credits (Ex. Student takes MTH 116 in place of Precalculus after Algebra II with Trig because MTH 116 is required for college program). The state has defined postsecondary courses as being on a higher level than secondary courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AHSD (One Diploma) Requirements Document</td>
<td>Beginning with the class of 2013-2014, postsecondary equivalent courses are allowed as substitutions for core high school courses.</td>
<td>Students in the 9th grade 2012-2013 cohort will need to substitute courses but will not have time to meet the “one diploma” requirements, such as Career Preparedness. Many of the Career Prep requirements are built into the Fast Track for Industry and Academy programs. These students are finalizing their career choices in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics Pathways Memorandum May 26, 2015</td>
<td>Algebra II is a terminal course.</td>
<td>their programs. Students may need to substitute dual enrollment art or music courses to meet the three art elective pathway requirements or the 0.5 fine art requirement for current seniors. Students who have not met their PE requirement may need to take a dual enrollment PE course to meet the LIFE PE requirement for graduation. Students in Fast Track for Industry or Fast Track Academy programs may take dual enrollment courses after Algebra II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAC Rule 290-3-1-.02 (9) (d)</td>
<td>A school year consists of the regular academic year plus the following summer school.</td>
<td>Students in Fast Track Academy or Fast Track for Industry will need to be on the calendar for Wallace State which runs from summer term through spring term. Students will complete senior requirements during the college summer term, allowing them to apply for Pell Grants to complete their post-secondary program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
High School Fast Track to College Program

a) The State Superintendent of Education, the Chancellor of the Department of Postsecondary Education, and the Alabama Commission on Higher Education shall develop a plan for a high school fast track to college program that offers qualified individuals an opportunity to earn a high school diploma while earning credits for a certificate program or an associate’s degree.

(b) To be eligible to earn a high school diploma pursuant to this section, an individual shall be either:

(1) Eighteen years of age and not currently enrolled in school.

(2) Between 16 and 18 years of age with consent from an administrator of the high school in which the individual is currently enrolled.

(c) To complete the requirements for a high school diploma pursuant to this section, the individual shall satisfy all graduation requirements as required by law.

As stated above, students in the senior cohort may need to substitute dual enrollment courses required for their college program for high school requirements. Substitution of courses is a component of the “one” diploma.

Examples: MTH 116 may be substituted for Precalculus because that is the math that is required for the post-secondary program. PED 100 may need to be substituted for LIFE PE, and ART 100 may substitute for an art requirement.

Section 3 - Vision

Creative Vision for the Plan

Please describe the plan’s vision, goals, and innovative features for student success that will be addressed. Share the purpose and expected outcome for students. Also include the intended impact of the flexibility requested in the innovation plan. Include how the proposal reflects Alabama’s PLAN 2020 and/or the system’s strategic plan. If applicable, share data, best practices, and any community and stakeholder support that support the plan.
As part of the district strategic planning process, students, parents, staff, and community members were surveyed. The results indicated priorities suggested for improvement for the district. The top priority according to the survey was to increase the number of students who are college and/or career ready.

Based on this survey data, Cullman County Schools, in partnership with Wallace State Community College, has established the Fast Track Academy and Fast Track for Industry programs. These two innovative programs provide opportunities for Cullman County students to take dual enrollment classes toward an associate's degree and/or industry certification while also completing requirements for the Alabama High School Diploma.

Students attending the Fast Track Academy or Fast Track for Industry programs attend college classes which correspond to their selected programs and work with highly qualified Cullman County instructors on Compass Learning (high school content) that is required for a high school diploma but not included in the college program. Students are monitored every four weeks to make sure they are making adequate progress in both college and high school courses.

Upon completion of the Academy program, students leave with a high school diploma and an associate's degree or significant coursework that transfers to a four-year institution. Students leaving the Fast Track for Industry program graduate high school with an associate's degree or a certificate leading to employment in business or industry.

Fast Track Academy and Fast Track for Industry meet the intent of PLAN 2020. Students are leaving Cullman County Schools with a diploma and are prepared for college, the workforce, and life in the 21st century.

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**Section 4 - Goals, Evaluation, and Sustainability**

**Aspirations, Expectations, and Communicating Outcomes**

Please specify measureable goals, objectives, activities, and a timeline for meeting the identified outcomes of the plan. Please specify any alternative accountability measures/benchmarks to be put in place as a result of the flexibility requested. Share how the Innovation Plan will be monitored and evaluated, and how results will be reported. Indicate how the impact on increasing student success and/or other stated goals and objectives will be shared within your school system and beyond (e.g., students, teachers, parents, community, MEGA, CLAS). Share how implementation of this Innovation Plan will be sustained by current leadership.
Cullman County Schools Strategic Plan

1. Ensure students graduate high school college and career ready for the 21st century.

1.1 Increase academic performance across all schools and sustain progress toward 100% graduation rate.

Goal: The graduation rate for the district will increase from 87% to 90% in five years.

Goal: 90% of Fast Track students will meet the College and Career Readiness Indicator of transcripted, post-secondary credit the first year.

Goal: Within five years, 100% of Fast Track students will receive transcripted, post-secondary credit.

1.2 Develop, deploy, and expand programs across all schools equitably to drive student engagement and achievement: STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) program with an addition of Arts, student leadership program, and expand career technology opportunities.

Goal: Increase number of career technology program options from 18 to 30 (40%).

Goal: Increase the percentage of students enrolled in a career tech program by at least 10% (from 749 during 2014-2015 school year to 872 during 2015-2016).

The program is monitored every four weeks by teachers and administration of the Fast Track program. Students not meeting proficiency level have to sign a contract to commit additional time to online coursework.

Success of the Fast Track program will be reported at regularly scheduled Board of Education meetings.

The Fast Track program will be evaluated yearly based on student success in post-secondary dual enrollment courses. The stated goal is that 90% of students will receive transcripted, post-secondary credit during the first year of the program. The goal for year two of the program is 95%, year three is 98%, year four 99%, and year five 100%.

Section 5 - Assurances, Documentation, Submission

Flexibility and Innovation Plan Submission Requirements
In order to assure that the application is complete, verify that:

- All assurances, documents, resolutions, and certifying signatures, or any other requirement as specified in the Alabama Accountability Act 2013-64, and any outlined within the application, are included (pages 2 and 3, An Innovative School System).
- Specific waiver requests for relief from rules, policies, code, etc., have been included (page 5, Specific
Waiver Requests).
• The innovation plan reflects the vision and goals of Alabama PLAN 2020 and/or the school system strategic plan (page 5, Waiver Summary).
• Any data collected or disseminated does not violate the privacy rights of any student or employee.

Submitting the Innovation Plan:
• It is requested that the Innovation Plan/Flexibility Contract be submitted electronically. The superintendent will receive a letter confirming the date of receipt of the Innovation Plan. Within 60 days, the approval or non-approval status will be communicated to the local superintendent.
• Communication and collaboration during the process is welcomed and encouraged. All questions regarding the Innovation Plan/Flexibility Waiver should be directed to Mrs. Karen Porter (kporter@alsde.edu or 334-242-8154).
RESOLUTION

It is the desire of the Cullman County Board of Education (CCBOE) to authorize the Superintendent to request waivers through Innovation Zone/Flexibility Applications as a way to meet the educational needs of a diverse student population. The need for innovative programs is based on the system’s Strategic Plan developed with input from parents and community members.

WHEREAS, the CCBOE has developed partnerships between the Alabama State Department of Education, Career Technical Education, Wallace State Community College, and local business to ensure that the system is offering state-of-the-art learning programs designed to meet the growing workforce needs of Cullman County and North Alabama. The innovative programs are described in the Innovation Zone/Flexibility Applications.

WHEREAS, it is the desire of the Cullman County Board of Education to proceed with the Innovation Zone/Flexibility applications and to approve innovative programs; consequently, District Administration may take all necessary steps to complete the application process in order to receive approval of said applications.

RESOLVED, as follows:

1. That the Cullman County Board of Education authorizes the Superintendent to apply for waivers through the Innovation Zone/Flexibility Application; and that District Administration may take all necessary steps to complete the application process in order to meet the educational needs of a diverse student population, through the innovative programs described in the Innovation Zone/Flexibility Applications.

DATED this the 17th day of December, 2015.

______________________________  ______________________________
GENE SULLINS, PRESIDENT        JASON SPEEGLE

______________________________  ______________________________
CHRIS CARTER                     WENDY CRIDER

______________________________  ______________________________
KENNY BROCKMAN                   MIKE GRAVES

______________________________  ______________________________
JAMES THOMPSON
State of Alabama

County of Cullman

Sworn to and subscribed before me this date, Gene Sullins, Jason Speegle, Chris Carter, Wendy Crider, Kenny Brockman, Mike Graves, and James Thompson have signed the foregoing conveyance, and have acknowledged before me that each has executed the same voluntarily on the day the same bears date.

Given under my hand this 17th day of December, 2015.

[Signature]

NOTARY PUBLIC

My Commission Expires: 11/12/17
DOCUMENT OF ASSURANCE

It is the intent of the Cullman County Commission on Education to request a waiver through the Innovation Zone/Flexibility Application and pursue a flexibility contract as a way to meet the various educational needs of our students. Further, it is the intent of the Cullman County Board of Education to provide consistency in leadership centered around the Alabama state standards, assessments, and academic rigor.

DATED this the 14th day of January, 2016.

GENE SULLINS, PRESIDENT  JASON SPEEGLE
CHRIS CARTER  WENDY CRIDER
KENNY BROCKMAN  MIKE GRAVES
JAMES THOMPSON

State of Alabama
County of Cullman

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Given under my hand this 14th day of January, 2016.

NOTARY PUBLIC

My Commission Expires: 11/21/17

SEAL