July 14, 2015

Mr. Billy W. Hopkins, Jr., Superintendent
Morgan County Schools
1325 Point Mallard Parkway SE
Decatur, AL 35601-6542

Dear Mr. Hopkins:

Upon review of Morgan County Schools Innovation/Flexibility Zone application, I am happy to approve your truly innovative request to provide a quality educational experience for home-schooled Kindergarten–Grade 5 students in Morgan County Schools beginning with the 2015-2016 school term.

The attachment provides additional information regarding recommendations as you seek to provide flexibility in learning environments through a partnership between Morgan County Schools, home-school students, and their families in your local education agency (LEA). Please carefully consider these recommendations as you continue with your commitment to innovation in education. I applaud your forward thinking as you strive to meet the needs of all the students in Morgan County Schools and provide additional innovative routes to graduation, college, and career.

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

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Thomas R. Bice
State Superintendent of Education

cc: Mrs. Sherrill W. Parris
Dr. Philip Cleveland
Mr. Andy Craig
Dr. Melinda Maddox
Mrs. Karen Porter
Advisements and Recommendations for Approval of the Morgan County Schools 2015 Innovation Plan

1. Concerning Morgan County Schools’ request to allow K-5 students the flexibility to learn at home through a partnership with an educational software provider, be advised that:

   a. The *Alabama Accountability Act* 2013-64 does not waive the requirements for anyone when working with another entity such as distance learning or virtual learning programs, community colleges, Institutions of Higher Education, community business partners, etc., to provide instruction/services for the students in their local education agency (LEA) and might have unsupervised access to children from undergoing a criminal history background check through the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE).

   b. Pursuant to the *Alabama Child Protection Act of 1999*, as amended in 2002, when contractual obligations are established, contractors and their sub-contractors (if there are any) who are providing services on behalf of an LEA and who might have unsupervised access to children must complete the ALSDE Criminal History Background Check through 3M Cogent Systems, Inc., as a noncertified applicant for employment.

   c. Results of the background check will be mailed to the LEA disclosing confirmed convictions and pending charges. Based on the criminal history information, the superintendent of the LEA will determine whether the individual may perform services for the LEA.

2. It is recommended that the Morgan County Schools virtual learning program takes daily attendance and reports that attendance back to the home originating school of record. As a virtual program, accountability will reside with the home originating school of record. Attendance should be addressed in the Morgan County’s attendance policy.

3. It is recommended that Morgan County Schools develop a policy to determine the teacher of record that assigns the grades, the awarding of grades, and how those grades are sent from the virtual program back to the home originating school of record.
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.
RESOLUTION ON HOME SCHOOL FLEXIBILITY PLAN
MORGAN COUNTY SCHOOLS

WHEREAS, the State Department of Education and Dr. Tommy Bice, State Superintendent of Education, have issued a challenge to encourage schools to be innovative and transformational; and

WHEREAS, Morgan County Schools' intent is to serve all students residing within the district with a quality education focused on the College Career Ready Standards; and

WHEREAS, Morgan County's plan is to build community between home school and traditional public school; and

WHEREAS, the Morgan County Home School Flexibility Plan would enable kindergarten through fifth grade students to enroll in a Morgan County School and have the flexibility to learn at home through a partnership with an educational software provider, and a mentoring Morgan County teacher;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Morgan County Board of Education does hereby support the waiver application as written for the Morgan County Home School Flexibility Plan on this day ninth day of April, 2015.

Signatures

Billy J. Martin
Morgan County Board of Education Chairman

Bill G. Wilcox
Morgan County Superintendent of Education
Alabama State Department of Education
Innovation Zone/Flexibility Application

A completed Innovation Zone Plan application should be submitted via e-mail to Mrs. Karen Porter, kporter@alsde.edu.

An Innovative School System

Pursuant to the Alabama Accountability Act 2013-64, to be considered as an innovative school system, a local school system shall successfully comply with the requirements and procedures set forth by the State Department of Education regarding school 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: 2015-2016

Please complete the following information:

School System Applying:  Morgan County

School System Superintendent:  Mr. Bill Hopkins

School System Contact’s Name & Title (if different than superintendent):  Dr. Anne Knowlton, Director of Elementary Programs 256-309-2110

Contact’s Telephone Number: 256-309-2100

Contact’s E-Mail Address:  bwhopkins@morgank12.org

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School System Leadership Team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of Team Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Bill Hopkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Layne Dillard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Anne Knowlton</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>Schools Impacted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotaco School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danville Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danville-Neel Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falkville Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacey's Spring School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priceville Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sparkman School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Hill School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Morgan Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Morgan Middle</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>Innovative Plan</td>
<td>Code of Alabama 16-28-3</td>
<td>Allow Morgan County K-5 students the flexibility to learn at home through a partnership with an educational software provider</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

Morgan County Schools has fully embraced the challenge by Dr. Bice and the ALSDE to be innovative and transformational. Our system is constantly seeking ways to provide a quality educational experience for all students who reside in Morgan County. For this reason, Morgan County is requesting a waiver to the traditional public school setting to allow K-5 students the flexibility to learn at home through a partnership with an educational software provider.

At this time, there are approximately 400 kindergarten through fifth grade students who are home-schooled in our area. Some home-school students are receiving quality instruction, while others are not. Often times, these students return to public schools within the Morgan County District without having had a strong standards-based education. As a result, these students are often placed in remediation and struggle to close the learning gaps. With the change to Plan 2020, CCRS, and new accountability standards designed to increase student achievement, it is imperative that all students receive quality instruction. Morgan County Schools would like to offer home-schooled students standards-based instruction, aligned with Morgan County's pacing guides in both time and sequence,
through an online provider at no charge to the parents. These students would enroll in the Morgan County School close to their residence, be assigned a mentoring teacher at the school, but receive their instruction online supported by the local Morgan County teacher and parent(s). Because these students are enrolled in Morgan County Schools and on teacher’s rolls, they would have access to traditional classroom instruction as needed. Should students experience difficulties, they would be allowed to attend school for a pre-determined day and time for instruction with the local teacher. Students would be expected to take baseline and benchmark assessments at the local school to ensure mastery of standards. They would also take any mandated state assessments at school, following state guidelines. They may also participate in any enrichment activities of their choosing such as field trips, school programs, art and music contests, science fairs, spelling bees, clubs, enrichment classes, and any other school related activities. These students will also have exposure to Morgan County’s leadership program and will be assigned to an individual teacher advisor to foster communication between home and school. Both online and face-to-face professional development and access to resources will be provided on a scheduled basis to assist parents in the success of an online learning environment. A written contract will be put in place that list expectations for parents, students, and schools.

By providing access to a standards-based curriculum, the intended impact of this accountability waiver will ensure home school students have the opportunity to be college and career ready. Due to the fact that many home school students eventually attend one of our schools fulltime, we expect this plan to facilitate a successful transition for the child. The Morgan County district expects to partner with home school families and build positive relationships to strengthen the culture of our community. We also expect this plan will offer comparative data between traditional public school and home school student achievement, which will allow us to improve both programs.

This semester, K-5 students from eleven families are participating in an online pilot program. Students were brought into the central office at the beginning of this semester and given math and ELA assessments to determine placement. The program begins at the students’ level, identifies learning gaps, and creates a learning map for each student. The student then works through the learning maps in each subject with the help of their parent teacher. On-going formative assessments are given to determine if sufficient progress is being made. This April, when Morgan County students are taking the ACTAspire, the Pilot Program students will be given an ELA and math test on their grade level to determine how much progress has been made. Next year, parents must agree to have their students in grades 3-5 come to school to take the ACTAspire. Their scores would count as part of the Morgan County testing accountability.

Plan 2020 dictates that every student graduate from high school and every graduate be prepared to enter the work force or college without the need for remediation. By aiding K-5 home-school students access to standards-based instruction and on-going support at an early age, these students are more likely to continue on to graduate from high school and be prepared to enter the work force or college prepared. Morgan County seeks to do what is best for the "child in the chair". This means offering all students in our area an opportunity for a rigorous, standards-based education through an online educational program.
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.

Goal: Create an innovative plan for K-5 students to enroll as Morgan County School students and yet have the flexibility to learn at home through a partnership with an educational software provider

1. Objective:
100% of home school parents who enroll a child in this program will understand the program guidelines and expectations and will be provided access to training and resources on a regular basis throughout the 2015-16 school year.

Activities:
- Provide professional development for all parents on the use of the software program quarterly
- Create and provide pacing guides and resources to ensure consistency to the Morgan County School curriculum
- Signed contracts by parents and Morgan County personnel listing program guidelines and expectations will be on file at the Morgan County Central Office.

Personnel:
- Educational Software Provider
- Director of Elementary Programs
2. **Objective:**

   100% of the students enrolled in this program will be provided a mentoring teacher and access to direct instruction and school functions and activities.

**Activities:**

- Provide a mentoring school-based teacher to build relationships between home and school and to offer instruction as needed. The teacher will communicate weekly via classroom newsletters, emails, and phone calls. The teacher and parent will both be encouraged to meet as frequently as necessary to ensure student success. Teachers will document communication in a log which will be kept on file at the district level.
- Access to direct instruction will be provided as needed and scheduled between teacher and parent.
- Provide opportunities for home school students to participate in enrichment classes and activities such as field trips, clubs, spelling bees, science fairs, school assemblies, etc.
- Provide Leader in Me student workbooks for use at home. Parents will be provided with materials and encouraged to use Leadership notebooks for students to set personal and academic goals.

**Personnel:**

- Superintendent
- Building principals
- Classroom teachers
- Director of Elementary Programs

3. **Objective:**

   100% of the students enrolled in this program will be required to participate in all formal assessments administered in Morgan County Schools, including local and state assessments.

**Activities:**

- Require students to take baseline and benchmark formative assessments to ensure mastery of standards and monitor growth. A baseline assessment will be given at the beginning of school. Two formative assessments based on the Morgan County Pacing Guides will be given in November and March. A final benchmark test will be given in May to measure growth from the baseline test.
- Require students in grades 3-5 to take the ACTAspire during the state testing window
- Required students in grades K-2 to take the DIBELS assessment during scheduled testing window
- Require students in K-5 to take unit summative assessments on the school campus with school personnel present

**Personnel:**

- Morgan County District Assessment Coordinator
- Director of Elementary Programs
- Building principals
- Counselor
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).