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News Release

For Immediate Release
September 14, 2018

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Three Sandy Springs Elementary Schools authorized as International Baccalaureate Schools

Another “Fulton First” has been achieved in Fulton County Schools (FCS): three Sandy Springs feeder elementary schools in the Riverwood cluster have received their official certificate of authorization for the International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Programme (PYP). The new PYP status of Heards Ferry, High Point and Lake Forest Elementary Schools makes Riverwood the first cluster to be entirely IB authorized in the district.

Riverwood International Charter School was the first to offer the IB Diploma Programme in 1999 and saw its first group of diploma candidates in 2002. Its middle school feeder, Ridgeview Charter School, followed in 2009 with their authorization for the IB Middle Years Programme. The schools are now a part of the IB World Schools global community, learning within an international standard framework that focuses on inquiry and interconnectedness. Heards Ferry principal Lisa Nash said, “We are absolutely thrilled that we are now IB PYP World Schools. It was a long process to get to this point, but certainly worth the hard work and determination.”

The PYP focuses on the heart as well as the mind of the child, and addresses social, physical, emotional and cultural needs as well as academic ones. Six transdisciplinary themes help teachers and children explore knowledge across content areas. Each grade develops a central idea and lines of inquiry for each theme to drive learning.

Five years in the making, the three schools began the authorization process by conducting feasibility studies involving discussions with stakeholders (staff, parents and community members) to determine if the IB philosophy was consistent with that of the individual schools. Application for candidacy required approval from the FCS Board of Education, followed by an implementation of the PYP. Each school has dedicated staff, PYP Coordinators, who helped drive the application process and program integration. Teachers wrote units of inquiry for each theme, and reviewed, revised and continued to develop conceptual learning opportunities for students. Finally, the International Baccalaureate Organization sent verification teams to each school to determine their progress toward meeting a set of requirements set forth in the IB Standards and Practices.

FCS Board Member Gail Dean, in whose District 3 the Riverwood cluster sits, said, “I am so proud that three Fulton County Schools in Sandy Springs have now been officially named International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme Schools. Heards Ferry, High Point and Lake Forest Elementary Schools now join with Ridgeview Charter and Riverwood International Charter School to make up the first IB Pre-K – 12th grade feeder group of schools in the district.”

Lib Roberts, High Point's PYP Coordinator, anticipates that in offering the more rigorous program throughout a student's school career, the cluster will see increased student performance and provide unlimited opportunities for students post-graduation. "The greatest benefit," said Roberts, "will be that entire generations of students will begin to see the world as a more connected place where people with varied heritages and cultures are able to celebrate and embrace our human commonalities rather than our differences."

FCS Board President Linda Bryant said, "We hope this will encourage other clusters within our district to consider this opportunity to collaborate on an all-cluster IB authorization. The knowledge and expertise the Riverwood cluster has gained from their experience can be helpful in that process."

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About the Fulton County School System. The Fulton County School System is the fourth largest school system in Georgia. More than 95,000 students attend 106 schools in the cities of Alpharetta, Chattahoochee Hills, College Park, East Point, Fairburn, Hapeville, Johns Creek, Milton, Mountain Park, Palmetto, Roswell, Sandy Springs, South Fulton and Union City.