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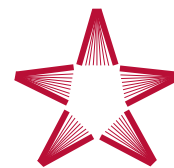
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Top Ten Issues to Watch in 2009



GEORGIA PARTNERSHIP
FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Drawing on current research, national trends, and state policy developments, the Georgia Partnership has identified 10 issues that will likely impact public education in the coming year. The discussion of each issue is organized in three distinct sections, beginning with an issue overview that provides a simple introduction to the political urgency of the topic. Next is the policy context, a research-based analysis of the issue, and lastly, we highlight what is next for Georgia, drawing attention to the imminent decisions and changes facing our state.

FOREWORD

Welcome to the 5th edition of the Georgia Partnership's *Top Ten Issues to Watch*. In the five years since we released the inaugural edition of this publication, the Top Ten has become one of the Partnership's signature efforts, and its release each year is anticipated by education stakeholders across the state. Providing background research and exploring the policy context for those issues that we know will shape public education in Georgia over the coming year is an integral part of our mission to inform and influence state leaders. Since its inception, the *Top Ten Issues to Watch* has been used to inform policy decisions, as required reading for college-level education courses, and as a resource for organizations in other states that are also working toward the goal of excellence in education.

With the release of this 2009 edition, it is fitting to consider the educational changes Georgia has undergone in the half-decade since our first issue. Over those years, enrollment in our public schools has grown more than seven percent, and we are now serving more than 1.6 million students in our public classrooms. Georgia's prekindergarten program has grown its capacity, offering the early education opportunity to nearly 10,000 more 4-year-olds in 2008 than in 2004. High school graduation rates have improved from 69.4 to 75.4 percent. And new partnerships such as the Alliance for Education Agency Heads have been formed to strengthen multi-agency collaboration and drive statewide progress toward achieving excellence.

However, challenges remain. Longtime readers of the *Top Ten* may notice that some of the topics in this edition have appeared in a previous year's publication. For all the positive change our state has recently seen, Georgia's leaders still struggle to reduce our number of high school dropouts, to produce and retain effective teachers, and to secure an adequate level of funding that affords all our students the same opportunities for success.

At the Georgia Partnership, we are committed to joining with policymakers, business leaders, and education practitioners throughout the state to craft policies and promote best practices that will bring us closer to our goal of excellence in education. The information and analysis provided in the following pages are intended to facilitate this collective work. Do not hesitate to call on the Partnership as you watch these issues take shape in 2009. Armed with accurate, comprehensive information and a vision of excellence, we can work harder and reach higher this year. Our children and youth are waiting.



Dr. Stephen D. Dolinger

President, Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education

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ISSUE OVERVIEW

As we release this edition of our annual *Top Ten Issues to Watch* publication, the nation is abuzz with anticipation of the historic presidential inauguration that will soon take place in our nation's capital. After a long and fierce election campaign, Barack Obama will take the national leadership reins in January, inheriting a United States rocked by foreign wars and alarming economic turmoil. As the president-elect assembles his Cabinet and contemplates his course of action for the crucial period of the first 100 days of his presidency, education advocates and practitioners throughout the country are clamoring to offer advice and raising cautious hopes for how Obama and his new Secretary of Education Arne Duncan might shape the American education landscape.

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1: Federal Education Landscape: Is Change Coming?

ISSUE OVERVIEW, *continued*

Perhaps the most prominent federal education policy awaiting Obama's mark is the nearly seven-year-old No Child Left Behind Act, which was one of President Bush's signature domestic accomplishments. The law was due for reauthorization in 2007, but the process stalled, creating the expectation that our country's next president would tackle the renewal of this controversial law. In fact, during his campaign, Obama cited the need to reform No Child Left Behind as one goal of a comprehensive education agenda that also included proposals to expand prekindergarten programs and improve teacher quality.

Any policy action at the federal level will be played out in each of Georgia's schools and classrooms. Obama has pledged to deliver the change we need to America. What will that look like for education? How will the new federal administration shape the policies and practices that are implemented in our local schools and education departments?

POLICY CONTEXT

"Our kids and our country can't afford four more years of neglect and indifference. At this defining moment in our history, America faces few more urgent challenges than preparing our children to compete in a global economy. The decisions our leaders make about education in the coming years will shape our future for generations to come. They will help determine not only whether our children have the chance to fulfill their God-given potential, or whether our workers have the chance to build a better life for their families, but whether we, as a nation, will remain in the 21st century the kind of global economic leader that we were in the 20th century." — **BARACK OBAMA, SEPTEMBER 9, 2008, DAYTON, OHIO**

In 2007, Strong American Schools launched the campaign ED in '08, a nonpartisan public awareness and advocacy effort aimed at elevating discussion among America's leaders about the need for education reform. Chaired by Roy Romer, a former governor and school superintendent, and supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, ED in '08 sought to unite all Americans around the crucial mission of improving our country's public schools by elevating the discussion to a national stage. The campaign published media and print advertisements to draw attention to the United States' falling position among international education systems.¹

Despite a commendable effort, how well the ED in '08 campaign fared is debatable. The results of several voter polls conducted throughout 2007 suggest that education never became a top concern among Americans. With the issues of a global economic crisis, the Iraq war, and energy independence taking center stage throughout the recent presidential campaign, Americans heard little from the candidates about education. Though never denied as an important domestic policy concern, education took a back seat in candidate debates, media coverage, and campaign-trail speeches.

¹ Strong American Schools, www.strongamericanschools.org.

1: Federal Education Landscape: Is Change Coming?

Yet Barack Obama's political platform did include an expansive agenda for education reform, even if it was not the centerpiece of his campaign. In acknowledgement of the linkages between high-quality education and secure employment, global opportunities, and strong communities, Obama deemed his proposed program the "Plan for Lifelong Success Through Education." The plan includes policy developments to address nearly every stage of the education pipeline.²

► Reform No Child Left Behind

Obama has said that he believes in the overarching goal of this federal law — ensuring that all students can meet high standards — but contends that the law has significant flaws that must be addressed. He proposes to provide additional funding for states to develop improved assessments that measure higher-order thinking skills. He has also called for the accountability arm of No Child Left Behind to focus on incentives for school improvements rather than sanctions for failure and to consider measures beyond just reading and mathematics assessments.

► Invest in Early Education

Under Obama's "Zero to Five" plan the federal government would invest \$10 billion per year to expand Early Head Start and to establish grants that help states create or expand early care and education programs for pregnant women and young children. Additional aspects of this coordinated strategy for early education include: expanding the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, increasing funding for the Child Care Development Block Grant program, and establishing a Presidential Early Learning Council.

► Recruit, Prepare, Retain, and Reward Teachers

The goal of Obama's teacher quality agenda is "to fundamentally transform the teaching profession."³ To this end, his plan includes the creation of scholarships to pay for the undergraduate, graduate, or alternative training for teachers; funding for the development of a nationally-available teacher performance assessment; and the establishment of grants to encourage and reward mentoring programs. Obama has also pledged to provide federal monies to support the efforts of

districts willing to experiment with innovative teacher compensation systems.

► Strengthen K-12 Education

To address the needs of our nation's public schools, Obama plans to double funding for the Federal Charter School Program to support the creation of more successful charter schools and address the dropout crisis by passing legislation to provide funding to school districts to invest in intervention strategies in middle school. Additionally, he will create a national "Make College A Reality" initiative that aims to increase students taking AP or college-level classes nationwide 50 percent by 2016.

► Improve Higher Education

Obama plans to make college affordable for all Americans by creating a new, \$4,000 American Opportunity Tax Credit. Recipients of the credit will be required to conduct 100 hours of community service. Further, he promises to simplify the financial aid process by eliminating the current federal financial aid application and enabling families to apply simply by checking a box on their tax form.

Obama brings an ambitious education reform agenda with him to Washington. Already vying for his attention are countless education organizations, policy experts, and concerned citizens, offering opinions on his education proposals and advice for how the new President should shape education-related legislation. But what remains to be seen is how the President's education goals will be prioritized among the myriad of international, financial, and domestic issues facing our federal policymakers in 2009. Though it is hardly arguable that our country's education system is in crisis, and that immediate attention to the state of our schools will in turn impact our economy and workforce, the best efforts of Obama's administration as well as of education advocacy groups may be trumped by other federal priorities.⁴ As one recent political commentary suggests, "Obama faces major challenges: a cratering economy, a broken healthcare system, two wars, poverty and growing inequality, and the stained reputation of the United States in the world."⁵ Education is notably omitted from the list.

² "Barack Obama and Joe Biden's Plan for Lifetime Success Through Education," The Obama campaign website, www.barackobama.com/issues/education.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Robert Tomsho & John Hechinger, "Obama is Expected to Put Education Overhaul on Back Burner," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 11, 2008.

⁵ "The First 100 Days," *The Nation*, November 13, 2008. www.thenation.com/doc/20081201/editors.

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WHAT'S NEXT FOR GEORGIA?

While Georgia's students, policymakers, and school practitioners wait to see what changes Obama will bring to the federal education landscape, our state is responding to a few recent announcements issued by Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings and the U.S. Department of Education. Foremost, in July 2008, Georgia was named one of six states that will pilot a differentiated accountability plan under the current iteration of the No Child Left Behind Act. Additionally, in October, the Education Department announced a set of new regulations for NCLB that will add new requirements for states, districts, and schools.

Secretary Spellings announced the differentiated accountability pilot project in early 2008, largely in response to criticisms that the NCLB system establishes accountability measures that are one-size-fits-all. Seventeen states applied to join the project, and Georgia was one of six — including Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, and Ohio — to receive approval for their plans.⁶ Already in implementation, Georgia's plan allows for greater flexibility that will give more students the opportunity to receive federally-funded tutoring. Included in the state's new plan are the following provisions:

- School systems will have the option of offering free tutoring to students at first-year "Needs Improvement" (NI) schools. The systems can then offer public school choice to students at second-year "Needs Improvement" schools. Previously, NCLB required that public school choice be offered first.
- Consequences for schools in years three and four of "Needs Improvement" status are tiered, meaning that the requirements for corrective action plans are based on a school's academic achievement rank.

- Schools that remain in Needs Improvement for five or more years are placed in a new category called "state-directed." These schools will enter into an improvement contract with the Georgia Department of Education, and a state director will be assigned to the school full-time to assist with implementation.⁷

Hopes are high that Georgia's new, more flexible accountability system will increase the number of students receiving supplemental tutoring, thereby helping to boost student achievement across the state. Along with the other five states piloting new plans, Georgia will be under close scrutiny by officials at the U.S. Department of Education. The experiences of these states will help inform policymakers when (and if) the issue of NCLB renewal resurfaces during the next Congressional session.

Despite the likelihood of impending legislative changes to the NCLB Act in 2009, the Secretary of Education issued a set of new regulations for the law that took effect in November 2008. States are now required to adopt the same method of calculating high school graduation rates and to make public data that compares student achievement on state tests with national-assessment scores. The requirements for graduation rate calculation reflect the Graduation Counts Compact, a commitment made in 2005 by the governors of all 50 states to use a more consistent and more accurate graduation rate formula. According to a 2008 report by the National Governors Association, Georgia plans to begin reporting our high school graduation rate using this method — a four-year adjusted cohort rate formula — in 2009.⁸

As we enter into a new year, our state and country remain beleaguered by data that suggest we are losing our footing as a well-educated, internationally competitive nation. Now, at the crossroads between two very different federal administrations, the American people wait to see whether our new President will elevate public education to a higher level of national significance. ★

⁶ David Hoff, "NCLB Leeway Allows States to Hone Plans," *Education Week*, July 16, 2008.

⁷ Georgia Department of Education, "Georgia Approved to Use "Differentiated Accountability," Press Release, July 1, 2008. www.doe.k12.ga.us.

⁸ NGA Center for Best Practices, *Implementing Graduation Counts: State Progress to Date, 2008*. www.nga.org.

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ISSUE OVERVIEW

2008 will long be remembered as the year that financial realities came up sharply against habits and ways of living. As the year progressed, our nation’s troubling economic times were spelled out almost daily in news headlines and manifested in falling stock values, rising unemployment rates, and ballooning budget shortfalls. Not surprisingly, a year-end report from the National Governors Association and the National Association of State Budget Officers reported that “state fiscal conditions slowed for most states in fiscal 2008 and have continued to deteriorate in fiscal 2009.”⁹

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2: In Dire Straits: Education Funding and Economic Crisis

ISSUE OVERVIEW, *continued*

As shown in Table 2.1, it did not take long for the fiscal crisis to reach the public education sector. In state after state, shortages in revenue forced education departments to reduce spending and, in some cases, make cuts in program or personnel. The economic slowdown in Georgia prompted Governor Perdue to ask for a 2 percent reduction in the funding formula for school districts. At the local level, some school districts in the state have been forced to implement cost-saving measures that include reducing student transportation plans, eliminating staff in the district office, and cutting extracurricular activities.

TABLE 2.1. HEADLINES REVEAL FISCAL CRISIS IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

Financial Crisis Now Striking Home for School Districts

Education Week. October 15, 2008.

“The crisis besetting U.S. and world financial markets is hitting school districts hard, as they struggle to float the bonds needed for capital projects, borrow money to ensure cash flow, and get access to investment funds locked up in troubled institutions.”

State Budget Chills Send Shivers Through K-12 Circles

Education Week. November 12, 2008.

“With California’s fiscal outlook worsening, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger last week called state lawmakers into a special session to balance the current budget, while governors in Mississippi, New York, and several other states sounded alarms about their own revenue problems.”

States Scramble to Contain Ed. Shortfalls

The Associated Press. November 21, 2008.

“Budget woes continued to affect education funding around the nation, as states struggled to ward off major shortfalls under a teetering economy.”

Strapped Schools May Boost Class Sizes

Washington Post. December 5, 2008.

“Worsening budget conditions are pressing school officials in the Washington area and across the country to consider backing away from what has become a mantra of education: Kids learn best in smaller classes.”

Several other issues compound the fiscal reality for our state’s public schools. The ongoing battle between the Consortium for Adequate School Funding and the state continues to raise questions regarding Georgia’s constitutional obligation to provide an adequate education for all children. And after the Governor’s Education Finance Task Force failed to deliver a new model of school funding over its four years of work, stakeholders continue to wait for a proposed new funding formula for education. Such a formula may emerge from the work of the Senate Education Funding Mechanisms Review Study Committee that was established during the 2008 legislative session. Charged to “review and evaluate the efficacy and sufficiency of...funding mechanisms in meeting the needs of Georgia’s schools and students,” the committee is expected to issue recommendations before the 2009 session of the General Assembly convenes.

POLICY CONTEXT

The gravity of our nation’s economic downturn became strikingly clear near the end of 2008, and in the coming year it will shape policymaking in all public sectors. A National Conference of State Legislatures survey of the nation’s state legislative fiscal officers recently reported that 15 states are forecasting double-digit budget gaps in FY 2010.¹⁰

⁹ National Governors Association and the National Association of State Budget Officers, *The Fiscal Survey of States*. December 2008. www.nga.org.

¹⁰ National Conference of State Legislatures, *State Budget Update: November 2008*. www.ncsl.org.

2: In Dire Straits: Education Funding and Economic Crisis

For Georgia the projected budget gap is \$2.1 billion, or 10.4 percent of the state's general fund.

The dire fiscal situation has heightened stakeholders' interest in and awareness of education taxes and spending. As a 2008 report from the School Finance Redesign Project declares, "Education finance has emerged as one of the most salient public policy issues of the new century."¹¹ The report goes on to explain that state and local education officials have faced increasingly difficult fiscal decisions brought on by a slowing economy and budget deficits. At the same time, policymakers and practitioners have debated the level of resources needed to accomplish the goals set forth by the nation's No Child Left Behind Act and have raised questions about who should fund that effort.¹² In Georgia the current economy will significantly complicate the work of policymakers and practitioners who must balance fiscal realities with the need for statewide academic improvements and the ongoing debate over adequacy in school funding.

Much attention has been placed on the issues of adequacy and equity in Georgia's education funding, due in large part to the establishment of the Consortium for Adequate School Funding in Georgia. Currently comprised of approximately 50 school systems, the Consortium is a non-profit organization formed in 2001 to improve the financing of K-12 education in the state. The Consortium contends that the state is not fulfilling its constitutional obligation to provide an adequate education for every child in Georgia (see Table 2.2), leaving local school systems to absorb an increasing share of the required cost. Although this problem is particularly severe for those systems without a substantial local tax base, it affects all local school systems.

TABLE 2.2. EDUCATIONAL ADEQUACY IN THE GEORGIA CONSTITUTION

The provision of an **adequate public education** for the citizens shall be a primary obligation of the State of Georgia. Public education for the citizens prior to the college or postsecondary level shall be free and shall be provided for by taxation.

– GEORGIA CONSTITUTION, ARTICLE VIII, SECTION I

In 2004 the Consortium filed a lawsuit against the state to seek additional funding for Georgia's schools. The result has been a lengthy, intense struggle as well as increased awareness of the difficult politics surrounding issues of school funding. Several developments in 2008 impacted the work of the Consortium, which was expected to begin trial in October. Shortly before the trial date the Consortium withdrew its original lawsuit on the state's constitutional obligation in education, but currently reports that "a new complaint is being prepared for filing in an appropriate venue."¹³ Meanwhile, in September 2008, Governor Sonny Perdue requested an official opinion from the Georgia Attorney General "on the legality of local school districts using taxpayer dollars to fund a lawsuit against the state over education funding."¹⁴ That issue has not yet been resolved.

In addition to the Consortium's pending lawsuit against the state, Georgia's school finance structure is drawing increasing criticism from stakeholders who wish to see a new funding formula crafted for public education. Many experts argue that the current Quality Basic Education (QBE) Funding Formula, which was established in 1985, is well outdated and has never actually been fully funded. Over the years, various adjustments have been made to the funding mechanism, the most notable of which has been state austerity cuts. These state-level funding cuts, which originated during a time of economic decline, have significantly limited the amount of revenue local school systems receive from the state, despite the levels of funding guaranteed by the QBE law.

Since the first austerity cuts were imposed in 2003, the cumulative effect has been a total reduction in state education funding of more than \$1.5 billion. This figure represents the funds that were earned by school systems per student enrolled, but that were cut by state leaders. While the cuts signify a distressing trend in Georgia's educational finance, they are particularly devastating to those local school systems without a large enough tax base to adequately supplement the lost revenue through local taxes. Shown in Table 2.3 are the austerity reductions in state education funding over the past eight years.

¹¹ National Working Group on Funding Student Learning, *Funding Student Learning: How to Align Education Resources with Student Learning Goals*. Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington Bothell. October 2008.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Consortium for Adequate School Funding in Georgia, "Frequently Asked Questions," December 14, 2008. www.casfg.org.

¹⁴ "Governor Asks Attorney General for Opinion on Using School Funds to Pay for Adequacy Lawsuit," State of Georgia Press Release. September 25, 2008.

2: In Dire Straits: Education Funding and Economic Crisis

TABLE 2.3. AUSTERITY REDUCTIONS IN GEORGIA'S STATE FUNDING FOR EDUCATION

FISCAL YEAR FUNDING	AUSTERITY REDUCTION IN STATE EDUCATION
2009	\$92,959,815
2008	\$142,959,810
2007	\$169,745,895
2006	\$332,835,092
2005	\$332,838,099
2004	\$156,800,956
2003	\$283,478,659
2002	—
TOTAL CUMULATIVE REDUCTION, FY02-FY09	\$1,511,618,326

Source: Georgia Department of Education, "Midterm Statewide Allotment Sheets."

WHAT'S NEXT FOR GEORGIA?

Georgia's policymakers and practitioners are not alone in their call for education finance reform. Several years ago the Center on Reinventing Public Education created the School Finance Redesign Project to help elected officials better understand how the finance system works and to identify the options that they have in allocating resources to support K-12 education.¹⁵ As part of the Project's work, the National Working Group on Funding Student Learning was assembled. Guided by the notion that

"education finance needs to be redesigned to support student performance," this group worked to craft a new vision of learning-oriented education finance. The recommendations that emerged from their 2008 report stress the need to connect education dollars to student-achievement goals and outcomes, provide better information about how money is spent, and fund research that is more closely aligned with the classroom.¹⁶

National research and expertise can guide Georgia's leaders in the challenging work of education finance that lies ahead in 2009. As the debate continues on adequacy, equity, and the appropriate mechanisms for funding Georgia's schools, it is imperative that the policy discourse gives serious consideration to the new demands placed on the state's schools. Even schools with a record of excellent student achievement face the challenges of federal mandates, state accountability, and the unique needs of diverse student populations. Do these new demands require new ways of funding?

In the coming year public school funding could be impacted by a number of political and legal occurrences in Georgia. The forthcoming recommendations of the Senate Education Funding Mechanism Review Study Committee could result in legislation that amends the current QBE formula. Developments in the Consortium's lawsuit against the state have the potential to radically alter how the state funds education. And overshadowing both of these issues, the economy will continue to force policymakers and educators to trim costs and craft innovative cost-saving measures in our public schools. ★

¹⁵ Center on Reinventing Public Education, "School Finance Redesign Project," www.crpe.org.

¹⁶ Michele McNeil, "Overhaul School Finance Systems, Researchers Urge." Education Week, November 5, 2008; National Working Group on Funding Student Learning. Funding Student Learning: How to Align Education Resources with Student Learning Goals. Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington Bothell. October 2008.

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ISSUE OVERVIEW

Two years ago, Georgia joined the handful of states that have enacted a publicly funded voucher program. The 2007 passage of Senate Bill 10 (S.B.10) established the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program which provides scholarships for public school students with disabilities to attend eligible private schools. But the voucher program was not approved without a struggle. Proponents of S.B. 10 faced a contentious battle, as policymakers and advocacy groups were vehemently divided over the issue. It was not until the last day of the 2007 legislative session that the bill received its final consideration in the Georgia House of Representatives. After much debate, the vote by legislators was 90 yeas to 84 nays. In order for the bill to pass, 91 supporting votes were needed, and the final decisive vote was cast by the Speaker of the House.

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3: The Resurfacing Debate on School Vouchers

ISSUE OVERVIEW, *continued*

Though the voucher bill passed that year, its difficult journey from idea to implementation illustrates the intense political controversy roused by the notion of using taxpayer funds to pay private school tuition. Despite the storm of conflicting public opinions on vouchers, such policies continue to emerge from Georgia's policymakers as the solution to our educational woes. During the 2008 legislative session Senate Bill 458 (S.B. 458) sought to expand the use of vouchers in our state's public education system. The bill proposed to offer a private school voucher to students who attend a school that loses or fails to attain accreditation or a school that is designated as Needs Improvement for seven consecutive years. After clearing the Senate by a narrow vote (32 to 21), the bill was tabled and never brought before the House for a final vote.

Georgia is set to engage in another fierce debate on vouchers in the coming year. In late 2008 Senator Eric Johnson brought forth his vision for educational change in Georgia. Arguing that competition and choice will drive school improvement, Johnson proposes that the state "be truly bold" and "give vouchers equal to the taxes spent on education to every child to attend any private school that will accept them."¹⁷ Whether Johnson files voucher legislation or whether S.B. 458 resurfaces in 2009, the conversation on this element of school choice will undoubtedly continue this year among policymakers and practitioners.

POLICY CONTEXT

Vouchers are payments made directly to a parent or an educational institution from public or private sources to be used for the expenses of a child's education, usually at a private or parochial school. In practice, most voucher policies target special populations (e.g., low-income students or students with special needs) or aim to serve the needs of students living in rural areas with no nearby public schools.¹⁸

The first statewide school voucher programs were established in Vermont and Maine in the late 1800s to provide funding for students who resided in rural areas with limited or no access to public schools. Not for another 100 years were vouchers implemented as a strategy for educational reform (rather than a solution for school access) when the Milwaukee School Voucher program was established in 1990. Since then, the voucher movement has been slow to grow. Currently, only nine states and the District of Columbia operate publicly funded voucher programs, and in every state the program serves only a targeted or limited population. Table 3.1 provides an overview of state voucher policies.

The uncertain future of Arizona's voucher program, which was recently brought before the state courts, raises concerns about the legality and sustainability of programs in other states. In May 2008, an Arizona state appeals court struck down the two state laws that authorized private school voucher programs for children with disabilities and those in foster care. A three-judge panel ruled unanimously that the programs violate a provision of the state constitution prohibiting taxpayer aid to any church or "private or sectarian school."¹⁹ The issue now awaits

¹⁷ Senator Eric Johnson, "Put Children First." Speech delivered July 31, 2008 at the Milton Friedman Legacy for Freedom event in Atlanta, GA. Text available at www.gppf.org.

¹⁸ Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, *Education Policy Primer: 2008-09 Edition*. www.gpee.org.

¹⁹ Mark Walsh, "The School Law Blog." *Education Week*. May 15, 2008.

3: The Resurfacing Debate on School Vouchers

action by the Arizona Supreme Court which has agreed to review the Court of Appeals ruling.²⁰

Given the controversy on vouchers among policymakers and the public, it is not surprising that programs have passed in only a small number of states. According to a 2008 national survey, Americans are evenly divided on the issue of vouchers. Among the adults surveyed, 40 percent supported vouchers and 40 percent opposed, with the remaining one-fifth of the population refusing to take a definitive position.²¹ Public opinion could be informed —

and possibly swayed — by the results of research on the impacts of vouchers. However, the problem is that research on vouchers is much like public opinion, with no clear consensus on either side of the issue. Many of the studies conducted to gauge the effects of vouchers have been inconclusive or have found differences in student achievement that are not statistically significant.

In 2008, researchers from Princeton University and the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago conducted a review of existing research on the impact of education vouchers on student achievement.

TABLE 3.1. OVERVIEW OF VOUCHER PROGRAMS IN THE UNITED STATES

STATE	YEAR ENACTED	PROGRAM OVERVIEW
Arizona	2006	Provides scholarships of up to \$5,000 for children in foster care; a second voucher program is available for students with disabilities.
District of Columbia	2004	The Opportunity Scholarship Program, a federally funded program, provides vouchers for low-income students.
Florida	1999	The McKay Scholarship Program provides vouchers for students with disabilities.
Georgia	2007	The Georgia Special Needs Scholarship provides vouchers for eligible students with disabilities.
Louisiana	2008	The Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program grants vouchers to low-income children in elementary grades enrolled in New Orleans public schools identified as “failing” under the state accountability system.
Maine	1873	Students from families in small towns that do not have a public school are awarded scholarships to attend public or private schools of choice. The program does not allow students to attend religious schools.
Ohio	1995, 2003, 2005	In Cleveland, vouchers are available to low-income students (1995). Statewide, students with autism are eligible for vouchers (2003). Statewide, students enrolled in low-performing public schools can receive vouchers (2005).
Utah	2004	The Carson Smith Scholarship Program provides vouchers for students with disabilities.
Vermont	1869	Allows students who reside in towns without public schools to attend a public or nonsectarian private school either within Vermont or outside of the state.
Wisconsin	1990	The Milwaukee School Voucher program provides low-income students with scholarships to attend private or parochial schools.

Sources: “Utah’s Broad Voucher Plan Would Break New Ground,” *Education Week*, February 9, 2007; The Heritage Foundation, *School Choice: 2006 Progress Report*, September 2006; “Publicly Funded School Voucher Programs,” *National Conference of State Legislatures*; “Voucher Program Quick Facts,” *National School Boards Association Voucher Strategy Center*; “Recent State Policies/Activities: Vouchers,” Education Commission of the States.

20 Paul Davenport, “Ruling on Arizona vouchers could have broad reach,” *Associated Press*, December 9, 2008.

21 William Howell et al., “The 2008 *Education Next* – PEPG Survey of Public Opinion,” *Education Next*, Fall 2008.

3: The Resurfacing Debate on School Vouchers

“The best research to date finds relatively small achievement gains for students offered education vouchers, most of which are not statistically different from zero.”

– CECILIA ROSE, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY, AND LISA BARROW, FEDERAL RESERVE BANK OF CHICAGO

Despite the theory that competition should improve the public education system, the study concluded that “the best research to date finds relatively small achievement gains for students offered education vouchers, most of which are not statistically different from zero.”²² Many questions remain about the long-term impact of vouchers on outcomes such as high school graduation and college enrollment, as the most credible research has focused on short-term academic gains for students. Nevertheless the collective evidence suggests that “expectations about the ability of vouchers to substantially improve achievement for the students who use them should be tempered by the results of the studies to date.”²³

Finally, in recent years, increased school accountability and the rise of business-inspired educational practices have brought private-sector expectations for performance and liability for results to the forefront of the public school arena. Consequently, it would be expected that any new legislation concerning vouchers would require that private schools receiving taxpayer dollars adhere to the following practices:

- Employ fully certified teachers;
- Administer standardized tests used by the state to measure student achievement and report the results to the public; and
- Publish the manner in which they expend the public monies they receive.

WHAT’S NEXT FOR GEORGIA?

Georgia’s Special Needs Scholarship Program (GSNS) will soon enter its third year of implementation. While no data yet shows the impact of the program on students’ academic achievement, the use of the vouchers expanded over the program’s first two years. According to the Georgia Department of Education, the number of participating students and private schools increased

from year one to year two of the GSNS program. In the 2007-08 school year, the program served 899 students enrolled in 117 private schools; the following year, 1,596 scholarship students were enrolled in 145 private schools. The average annual scholarship amount for students is \$6,331.²⁴

For policymakers to have a clear understanding of how the GSNS impacts our public education system there is a critical need for a thorough evaluation of the program’s outcomes. Has the GSNS provided our students greater opportunities for academic success? Are we improving educational outcomes for Georgia’s children? Answering those questions would seem imperative for policymakers considering new legislation to augment our state’s voucher program.

The Partnership raised the issue of vouchers as a hot topic in 2008:

“Few topics stir up as much debate in the education community as the concept of providing state-funded vouchers to parents to send their children to private schools. While proponents see vouchers as another mechanism of increasing educational choice and ultimately raising student achievement, the notion of using public funds to pay private or parochial school tuition ignites debate about the very nature of the public school system.”²⁵

One year later, the context and ensuing controversy remains much the same. Georgia’s students need a commitment from policymakers and practitioners to focus on systemic reforms that will bring the promise of educational excellence to every classroom in the state. With no clear evidence validating the benefits of vouchers, they may not be the silver bullet reform mechanism for which some policymakers are searching. Yet the issue is sure to be a resounding theme throughout 2009. ★

²² Cecilia Rose and Lisa Barrow, *School Vouchers and Student Achievement: Recent Evidence, Remaining Questions*. August 6, 2008. Publication forthcoming in *Annual Review of Economics*, Volume 1, 2009.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Georgia Department of Education, *2008-2009 Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program (GSNS) Preliminary Data Report*. November 18, 2008. www.gadoe.org.

²⁵ Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, *Top Ten Issues to Watch in 2008*. www.gpee.org.

4

ISSUE OVERVIEW

A wealth of research over the past years has focused on the issues of teacher quality and teacher supply, drawing attention to the critical need to address these areas of education policy in Georgia.²⁶ Finally, concerns regarding the quality of our educator workforce, long understood as the most critical component affecting student achievement, are gaining significant traction in Georgia, as evidenced by political action in 2008. House Resolution 1103, which was passed by the state’s General Assembly last year, established the Joint Study Committee on Teacher Training and Certification. This committee met throughout the fall of 2008 to assess the current status of educator preparation in Georgia, and the group’s legislative recommendations will guide the work of the legislature in 2009.

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4: Growing Our Supply of Effective Teachers

ISSUE OVERVIEW, *continued*

Additionally in 2008, the Alliance of Education Agency Heads (AEAH) directed Kelly Henson, Executive Secretary of the Professional Standards Commission, to establish a statewide taskforce to address the shortage of mathematics and science teachers. The taskforce brought together business leaders, educational policymakers, and school practitioners to study current conditions in Georgia and devise a set of proposals that could strengthen our teacher workforce. A final report was issued by the taskforce in August 2008, and the recommendations it offers are also expected to emerge as proposed legislation in the coming year.

Our students need effective, high-quality teachers, and Georgia is beginning to move more quickly toward that goal. Our state is poised to enact new policies and programs that will strengthen our supply of teachers and help drive improvements in education this year.

TABLE 4.1. QUALITY COUNTS: GEORGIA’S GRADES FOR THE TEACHING PROFESSION

INDICATOR	GEORGIA’S GRADE	U.S. AVERAGE
General Indicator: The Teaching Profession	B (83.0)	C (73.0)
Subcategories:		
Accountability for quality	84.4	72.9
Incentives and allocation	85.3	73.0
Building and supporting capacity	79.4	73.2

Source: Editorial Projects in Education, *Education Week: Quality Counts: Tapping Into Teaching*. Vol. 27, No. 18. January 10, 2008.

POLICY CONTEXT

In 2008 the annual *Quality Counts* report issued by *Education Week* took a slightly different approach to grading states on their efforts to improve public education. In the category of the teaching profession, *Education Week* expanded the focus of their analysis to include three major areas in which states can effect improvements in the teacher workforce: accountability for quality; incentives to attract talented people into teaching and keep them there; and initiatives to build and support effective teaching.²⁷ Based on their efforts in each of these indicators, states received an overall numerical score (on a scale of 1 to 100) and an accompanying letter grade based on the conventional academic achievement scale. For its policies related to the teaching profession, Georgia emerged as a national leader in 2008. Our state was awarded a letter grade of “B” and a corresponding numerical grade of 83.0, giving Georgia a ranking of fifth among all other states for this indicator. Shown in Table 4.1 is a breakdown of Georgia’s score in subcategories of the teaching profession.

²⁶ Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, *Georgia’s Unfinished Business in Teacher Quality*. Atlanta, GA. 2006. www.gpee.org; McKinsey & Company, *How the World’s Best-performing School Systems Come Out on Top*. 2007; National Council on Teacher Quality, *State Teacher Policy Yearbook: Progress on Teacher Quality*. Washington, DC, 2007.

²⁷ Editorial Projects in Education, *Education Week: Quality Counts: Tapping Into Teaching*. Volume 27, No. 18. January 10, 2008.

4: Growing Our Supply of Effective Teachers

“Nationally, approximately 44.7 percent of the high school students in biology/life science, 61.1 percent of the students in chemistry, and 66.5 percent of the students in physics are being taught by teachers who have no academic major and certification in that specific teaching field.”

– REPORT OF THE GEORGIA ALLIANCE FOR EDUCATION AGENCY HEADS MATH/SCIENCE TASK FORCE, AUGUST 2008

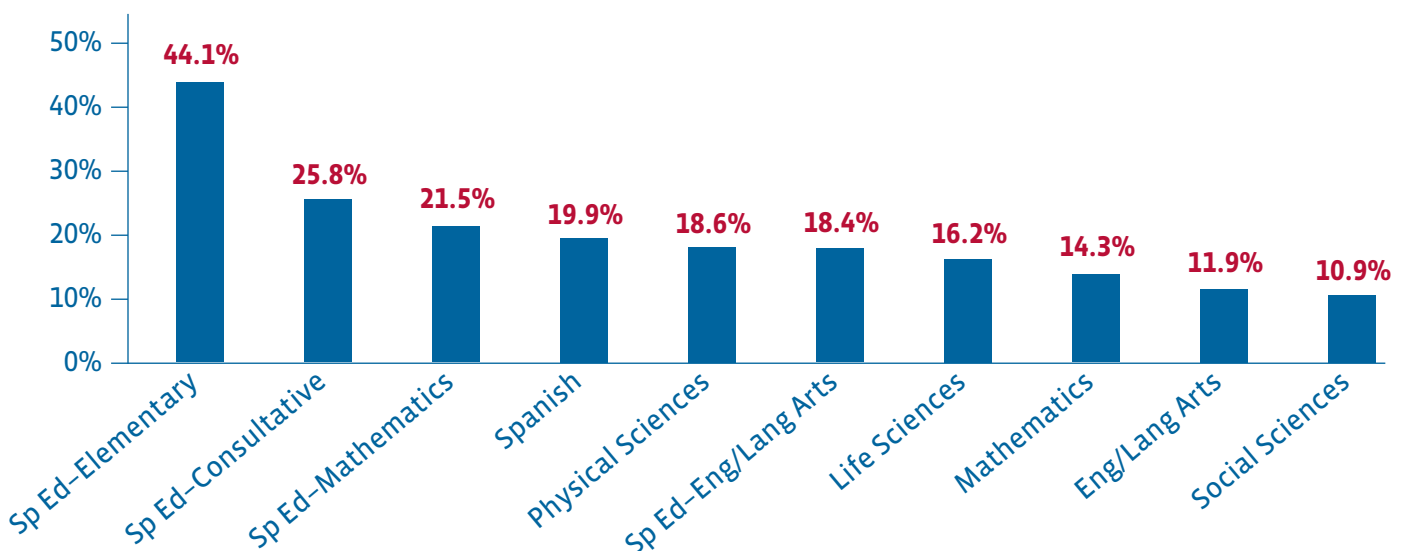
state’s classrooms remains a challenge. And improving teacher professional development, rethinking compensation structures, and strengthening working conditions still stand as key goals.

In particular, the need to build a system that will bring more math and science teachers into our public K-12 classrooms has emerged as a priority across the nation. In 2007, a report submitted to Congress estimated that nationally approximately 44.7 percent of the high school students in biology/life science, 61.1 percent of the students in chemistry, and 66.5 percent of the students in physics are being taught by teachers who have no academic major and certification in that specific teaching field.²⁸ Further, according to the Business-Higher Education Forum, our country will need an estimated 280,000 new math and science teachers by 2015. Not surprisingly, this shortage is particularly severe in classrooms that serve our nation’s poorest students.²⁹

Despite the recognition of Georgia’s progress in strengthening our policies governing the teaching profession, our state joins many others that still face formidable challenges in this policy area. With a growing student population, the demand for teachers will continue to steadily increase in the coming years. Ensuring that highly-qualified teachers are equitably distributed across our

Data on Georgia’s teacher workforce reveal that in addition to facing a high number of math and science teachers who lack full certification in their teaching field, our state has similar challenges in recruiting educators with a certificate in special education

FIGURE 4.1. PERCENT OF GEORGIA TEACHERS WITHOUT FULL CERTIFICATION, HIGHEST 10 SUBJECT AREAS, 2007-08 SCHOOL YEAR



Source: Professional Standards Commission. Presentation given to the HR 1103 Teacher Certification Study Committee. August 2008. www.gapsc.com.

²⁸ The Alliance for Education Agency Heads Math/Science Task Force, *Report of the Alliance Math and Science Task Force*. August 2008. www.gapsc.com.

²⁹ Business-Higher Education Forum, *An American Imperative: Transforming the Recruitment, Retention, and Renewal of Our Nation’s Mathematics and Science Teaching Workforce*. 2007. www.bhef.com.

4: Growing Our Supply of Effective Teachers

fields. Shown in Figure 4.1 are the 10 subject areas in which Georgia has the highest percentage of teachers without full certification.

Georgia’s leaders are using data such as that presented above to make informed decisions about what policies could best effect positive change in our classrooms. As detailed above, the Alliance of Education Agency Heads’ Math and Science Task Force drew on data about Georgia’s current educator workforce to inform its work. Among the group’s recommendations, which may form the basis of State Legislation this year, are the following:

- Increase the number of educator preparation programs in the sciences;
- Add an alternative route to certification for teaching core content in high school and middle school;
- Create a new “adjunct faculty” license;
- Develop new teacher induction programs;
- Introduce differentiated pay for new math/science teachers;
- Introduce differentiated pay for early childhood educators with math/science endorsements;
- Introduce math/science cancelable college loans; and
- Expand distance learning technology.³⁰

WHAT’S NEXT FOR GEORGIA?

Teacher quality has been addressed in every issue of the Georgia Partnership’s Top Ten Issues to Watch. As we asserted in 2007, this policy topic “is increasingly recognized as a critical component of national efforts to strengthen education as the bridge to assuring America’s competitiveness in the 21st century.”³¹ Ensuring that our state has an abundant supply of fully-certified, effective teachers is imperative to the success of all other education policy initiatives. Without a knowledgeable, skilled educator in every classroom, we will never realize the full potential of a more rigorous curriculum, expanded early learning opportunities, or an improved governance structure.

Georgia has made improvements in teacher quality over the years, but in 2009, additional changes could come to the policies that shape the state’s teaching profession. Policymakers will receive recommendations from two key expert groups, the Alliance Math/Science Task Force and the Joint Study Committee on Teacher Training and Certification. Our state’s leaders have an opportunity to help unlock greater teaching potential and enhance student learning in our public schools. Let us hope that their actions uphold the importance of teacher quality in Georgia. ★

³⁰ The Alliance for Education Agency Heads Math/Science Task Force, *Report of the Alliance Math and Science Task Force*. August 2008. www.gapsc.com.

³¹ Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, *Top Ten Issues to Watch in 2007*. www.gpee.org.

5

ISSUE OVERVIEW

Typically a concern only within local communities and school districts, the work and structure of local school boards have recently gained greater statewide attention in Georgia. In 2008, the unfortunate story of one local board's role in the loss of accreditation for an entire urban school district caught the attention of education stakeholders throughout the state. During this timeframe, school board governance also became the focus of an advisory panel appointed by the State Board of Education. A resolution issued in April 2008 called on the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, and AdvancED to establish an advisory panel on the issue of local school board governance. The panel was charged to work with education advocates and stakeholder groups to research best practices and policies for school board operations.

continued...

5: Striving for School Board Excellence

ISSUE OVERVIEW, *continued*

In 2009, as one district works to regain national accreditation, Georgia will continue to see the impact local boards can have on students, schools, and the local economy. Additionally, the recommendations of the advisory panel, the Commission for School Board Excellence, will likely become an issue of high priority during the 2009 General Assembly.

POLICY CONTEXT

Many would consider America's school boards an example of democracy at its most grass-roots level. With roots in the locally controlled schools of the New England colonies and in the common school movement of the mid-19th century, school boards have a long history in the American system of public education.³² Today there are more than 14,000 local school boards operating in the United States, allowing locally-elected citizens to participate in education governance by providing direction and oversight to public schools in a community.³³ Yet, as with so many aspects of our public schools, local boards have been riddled with controversy in recent years. With growing attention on the flattening world of the 21st century and the increased role of accountability in education, the role of school boards has been criticized and questioned. Critics are concerned that school boards have become just another level of school administration, often micromanaging the school district. Additionally, critics charge that school boards are increasingly divided by the political agendas of individual board members and do not communicate effectively with the public stakeholders.³⁴

School Boards: Integral to American Democracy...

"Local school boards are part of the American landscape... As Americans, most of us believe in the democratic concept of lay control of political functions, from the statehouse to Capitol Hill. The process begins with our local schools. We trust that reasoned people who are not 'education experts' are qualified to set policy and govern the schools, to represent the 'public' in public education. After all, education, in large part, reflects community values. Who better to set the policy and direction for this values-laden enterprise than local community members?"

**- NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION,
"DO SCHOOL BOARDS MATTER?," WWW.NSBA.ORG**

Or a Broken Construct?

"The familiar — even cherished — practices of school boards are strangling public education. Most of what school boards currently do is a travesty of their important role. Much of what is published for boards reinforces errors of the past or, at best, teaches trustees how to do the wrong things better. In my opinion, school boards don't need improvement so much as total redesign."

**- JOHN CARVER, "REMAKING GOVERNANCE,"
AMERICAN SCHOOL BOARD JOURNAL, MARCH 2000**

³² Frederick Hess, "School Boards at the Dawn of the 21st Century: Conditions and Challenges of District Governance," 2002, National School Boards Association.

³³ Education Commission of the States, "School Boards," www.ecs.org.

³⁴ Donald McAdams, "The New Challenge for School Boards," Education Commission of the States, 2002.

5: Striving for School Board Excellence

Though limited research exists to link the actions of school boards to increases in student achievement, a board's potential impact on other areas of students' academic experience cannot be understated.³⁵ In Georgia, anecdotal evidence has clearly shown that a dysfunctional school board can have dire consequences for an entire community. In late 2008, the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges (SACS) rescinded accreditation from the 50,000-student Clayton County School System, citing instances of misconduct by the school board that included violations of open-

meetings laws and interference in personnel matters.³⁶ Since the decision was issued by SACS, Clayton County has seen a mass exodus of more than 3,200 students from its schools. With the sharp decline in student enrollment, the school system could now be faced with a loss of \$27 million in state funds.³⁷ Thus, in the coming year, Clayton County Schools will be struggling to regain accreditation while also addressing a new set of budget woes, two consequences of the school board's actions.

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING SCHOOL BOARDS

CATEGORY 1: Board Governance & Accountability

- Establish an oversight process accountable for collecting standardized student achievement performance information.
- Provide the necessary early school system assistance and intervention to address underperforming academic systems, accreditation problems, financial and abuse of power issues.
- Establish a review panel and investigation process to address and to resolve persistent school system and/or board performance issues.
- In case a school system continues to fail, temporary oversight and control by a receivership authority is appropriate and necessary.
- Establish a state-wide code of ethics and conflict of interest guidelines for public school system board members.

CATEGORY 2: Education Task Force

- Convene a task force of education leaders and organizations to address the following three areas of school board focus:
 - Board roles and responsibilities
 - Statewide school performance standards
 - Comprehensive board member education and proficiency

CATEGORY 3: Board Candidacy & Elections

- Establish into law the size of a Georgia public school board as a minimum of five and maximum of seven members.
- Establish new election guidelines to provide for 4-year staggered terms of office, running in non-partisan elections held on a general election cycle.
- Establish additional statutory qualifications for school board candidacy to include requirements for self-disclosure, adherence to the statewide code of conduct and conflict of interest guidelines and to submit to background checks and drug screening by the GBI.
- Require board member disclosure during election cycle of adherence to ethics and conflict of interest guidelines and training compliance.

Source: The Commission for School Board Excellence, *Final Report*, September 10, 2008.

³⁵ Deborah Land, "Local School Boards Under Review: Their Role and Effectiveness in Relation to Students' Academic Achievement," Johns Hopkins University Report No. 56, January 2002.

³⁶ Linda Jacobson, "Loss of Accreditation Rocks Georgia District," EdWeek September 3, 2008.

³⁷ Laura Diamond, "Student Exodus Costs Clayton Schools \$27M," Atlanta Journal-Constitution, November 24, 2008.

5: Striving for School Board Excellence

As the story in Clayton County unfolded, a group of business leaders and education practitioners in Georgia were working to study state and national best practices in school board governance. As detailed above, four organizations formed a task force known as the Commission for School Board Excellence. Guided by an Advisory Committee and a Working Group, the Commission spent 90 days examining research and calling on experts to discuss the best models and most effective practices of school boards. In September, the Commission issued a set of final recommendations for strengthening the performance of school boards across Georgia (See box: Commission Recommendations for Improving School Boards).

WHAT'S NEXT FOR GEORGIA?

As this publication goes to press, another school system in Georgia is facing the possible loss of accreditation. Much like the situation in Clayton County, the problems for Haralson County Schools are rooted in the behaviors and malpractices of the local school board. The coming year will be a telling one for both of these school districts, as one works to regain accreditation while the other tries not to lose it. In both instances, the work of a handful of school board members will determine the immediate future of thousands of school children. Never has governance at the local school system level meant so much.

The Georgia School Boards Association provides training and guidance to local boards throughout the state, and their good work is apparent in the majority of high-quality, effective boards governing systems across Georgia. Nevertheless, school board governance will likely become a hot topic in Georgia's 2009 General Assembly, as several of the recommendations issued by the Commission for School Board Excellence require legislative action. While the recommendations are based on research and national best practices, several elements could create public controversy and foster a political struggle. According to the proposed qualifications for school board candidacy, an individual wishing to run for a school board seat must have a high school diploma or GED, cannot be employed by a public or private K-12 school or school system, must submit to and pass a drug screening, and must be a U.S. citizen. (Additional requirements also apply; these listed are likely to be the most contentious.) State policymakers will be faced with the difficult task of trying to improve school board efficacy across Georgia without compromising the basic democratic principles that local school boards represent. ★

6

ISSUE OVERVIEW

In September 2008, Dennis Lockhart, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, addressed a group of more than 150 top business and civic leaders from around the country who were gathered to discuss why the business community should help make young children a national economic priority.³⁸ Speaking with “the zealotry of a recent convert,” Lockhart stressed the importance of early childcare and prekindergarten as “not just as an education and social policy concern but also as an economic development issue.”³⁹ In his words,

“While education can take place in a childcare or home setting, the biggest social and economic benefits associated with early education flow from investments in high-quality curriculum-based pre-kindergarten programs that begin as early as age 2. The highest returns come from investing in financially disadvantaged children who are at risk of failure later in life because they haven’t gotten a solid educational start.”⁴⁰

continued...

6: Early Learning: Our Work Must Continue

ISSUE OVERVIEW, *continued*

Business leaders like Lockhart are increasingly joining the advocacy movement to champion investments in early education. Their efforts, combined with the outreach and influence of organizations such as the Partnership for America’s Economic Success and the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, are helping to communicate broadly the research-based message that investments in this nation’s youngest citizens will strengthen the long-term economic health of our country.

Georgia became a national leader in 1995 when our state became the first in the country to provide universal prekindergarten to 4-year-olds. Yet now, 14 years later, Georgia has still not fulfilled that commitment to early education. As a recent report by the Southern Education Foundation states, “In 2008, the public promise of universal access to high-quality prekindergarten services has become and is largely illusory.”⁴¹ In this new year, it is time for Georgia to bridge the disconnect between promise and reality, between research and practice, and ensure that all of our children have the educational, economic, and health supports they need early in life. Our children deserve this, and our state depends upon it.

POLICY CONTEXT

Two events sponsored by the Georgia Partnership in 2008 signaled both the growing significance of early learning as a statewide policy issue and the Partnership’s commitment to raising the issue’s priority level among business, education, and government leaders. In February, the Partnership’s Quarterly Board Meeting featured two prominent experts in the field of economics, early care, and education. The Director of the Partnership for America’s Economic Success along with an economist from Northwestern University offered data and research to drive home the message that we must make young children the top economic priority of the nation.

In August 2008, the largest audience to attend a Partnership Board Meeting, more than 160 people, heard the program “Tending to Our Future: The Status of Georgia’s Children.” Speakers representing four statewide organizations — Voices for Georgia’s Children, Georgia Family Connection Partnership, Southern Education Foundation, and Georgia’s Department of Early Care and Learning — focused on children’s issues and discussed their recent reports and early childhood initiatives.

Several other actions in 2008 helped bring the issue of early care and education to the political forefront. A resolution passed by the Georgia General Assembly during the 2008 legislative session established the House Study Committee on Georgia’s Pre-K Program. The committee was charged to undertake a study of the conditions, needs, issues, and problems of the state’s prekindergarten program and issue recommendations prior to the start of the 2009 session.

³⁸ Partnership for America’s Economic Success, “Business Leaders Agree Increasing Investment in Nation’s Youngest Children Should be National Economic Priority,” Press Release. September 22, 2008.

³⁹ Dennis P. Lockhart, “A New Convert’s Views on Early Childhood Education.” Speech given at the Telluride Economic Summit on Early Childhood Investment, September 22, 2008. Text available at www.frbatlanta.org.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Southern Education Foundation, *Time to Lead Again: The Promise of Georgia Pre-K*. Atlanta, GA. 2008.

6: Early Learning: Our Work Must Continue

Additionally, Voices for Georgia's Children began its work to build a statewide coalition focused on improving policy and investments for young children ages 0-5. The new coalition will focus on several key priorities including prekindergarten expansion, child care subsidy funds, home visitation support, and the potential for a Medicaid family planning waiver to support additional prenatal care.⁴²

At the federal level several prominent political leaders stressed the value of early education. In the November 2008 issue of the Congressional newspaper *Roll Call*, Colin Powell urged members of the 111th Congress to “put children first.”⁴³ His words made clear the need to focus political will on our nation's youth:

“We don't hear much about America's children in our national economic debate. But they are intricately connected to the dire economic consequences we face as a nation — and their well-being must be a critical part of the solution...To move forward as a nation, the 111th Congress must put our children first. This means taking a fresh look at our priorities and ensuring that all children have quality health care, an excellent education and the necessary services to help lift them out of poverty. It means acknowledging that the economic

“As it has become clear that disadvantage becomes established in the earliest years of life, so it has become necessary to focus our concern on what happens in those early months and years. It is here that action can be taken that will enable all children to become all that they can be. And it is here, if at all, that the self-perpetuating cycle of disadvantage will be broken.”

– UNICEF, THE CHILD CARE TRANSITION, INNOCENTI REPORT CARD 8, 2008

slowdown profoundly affects children, and offering solutions that enable working families to keep their jobs, stay in their homes and prepare children for college, work and life. It means raising awareness of children's issues and sending a message that our economic future depends on our commitment to investing in our children.”⁴⁴

Americans also heard of the critical need to invest in our children during the 2008 Presidential campaign. Barack Obama's platform included his plan to launch a comprehensive “Zero to Five” plan that will provide critical support to young children and their parents.

With the plethora of research linking early childhood investments with improved social and economic outcomes and the outpouring of advocacy on behalf of young children, what progress has Georgia made on this front? What is the current status of our youngest citizens?

Health and Well-being

According to the 2008 KIDS COUNT data, Georgia ranks 40th in the nation for overall child well-being. While this represents an improvement from 2007, when Georgia ranked 41st, the data reveals that the status of our state's children remains alarming. Georgia ranks below the national average on all 10 of the key indicators of child health and well-being and falls among the bottom 10 states on five of the indicators:

- 45th in the percentage of children living in single-parent families;
- 43rd in the percentage of low-birthweight babies;
- 43rd in the teen birth rate;
- 42nd in the infant mortality rate; and
- 41st in the percentage of high-school dropouts.⁴⁵

Many of Georgia's children lack economic security, as evidenced by widespread instances of child poverty. More of our state's children live in poverty now (20 percent) than six years ago (18 percent).

⁴² For additional information on the new Zero to Five Coalition, visit the website of Voices for Georgia's Children at www.georgiavoices.org.

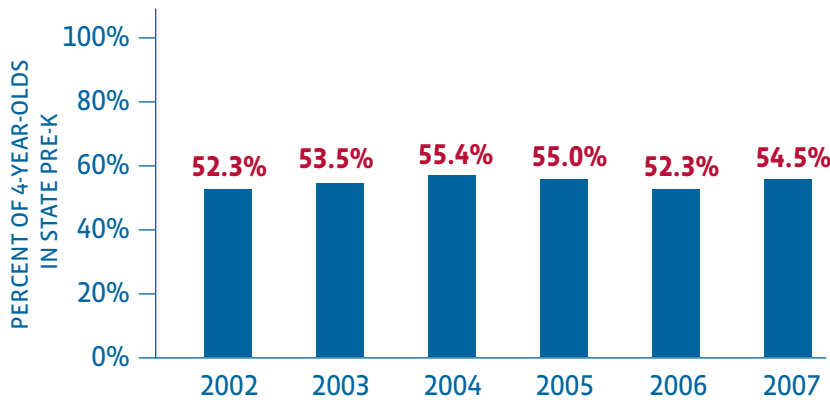
⁴³ Colin Powell, “To Restore Economic Health, Congress Must Put Children First.” *Roll Call*. November 20, 2008.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Georgia Family Connection Partnership, “National Study Shows Georgia Mired in Low Birthweight and Child Poverty, Combating Juvenile Injustice.” Press Release. June 12, 2008. www.gafcp.org.

6: Early Learning: Our Work Must Continue

FIGURE 6.1. PERCENT OF ELIGIBLE 4-YEAR-OLDS ENROLLED IN GEORGIA PRE-K



Source: Southern Education Foundation, *Time to Lead Again: The Promise of Georgia Pre-K*.

Couple these state-level statistics with international data on child well-being and the situation grows even more dismal. A 2008 report by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre assessed the performance of 25 countries in the OECD based on a set of minimum standards for protecting the rights of children in their most vulnerable and formative years.⁴⁶ Researchers found that the United States met only three of the 10 standards, placing our nation in the bottom ranks. Among the other OECD countries, our nation had one of the lowest percentages of 4-year-olds and 3-6 year-olds enrolled in early education. Additionally, the United States has the second-highest rate of infant mortality and the fourth-highest rate of low-birthweight babies.⁴⁷

Prekindergarten

A recently-issued comprehensive report on Georgia's public prekindergarten program claims that enrollment and access is "stuck near half-full."⁴⁸ Current data reveal that the program's claim to offer "universal" education to 4-year-olds is a misnomer. As shown in Figure 6.1, during the last several years, the percentage of 4-year-olds enrolled in Georgia prekindergarten has remained almost static and has never exceeded 55 percent.

Though Georgia made a bold and innovative move by establishing the prekindergarten program in 1995, our progress in early education has slowed over the years. Today Georgia's prekindergarten program "no longer leads the nation in any vital area: enrollment, high-quality standards, or per-child expenditure."⁴⁹ Consider the following facts:

- ▶ During the 2006-07 school year, the Pre-K programs in 43 Georgia counties served less than half of eligible 4-year-olds.⁵⁰
- ▶ In constant 2007 dollars, Georgia Pre-K expenditures per child were approximately \$4,478 in 1998 and only \$4,010 in 2007.⁵¹
- ▶ Georgia Pre-K has met eight of 10 of the benchmarks for high quality established by the National Institute for Early Education Research. In 2007, 10 other states exceeded and nine matched Georgia's quality rating.⁵²

WHAT'S NEXT FOR GEORGIA?

The research is plentiful and clear, and the advocates are committed and persistent. Investments in early care and education lead to improved social, economic, and educational outcomes for individuals and society. In Georgia, more organizations and leaders from diverse policy sectors are joining the call to "put children first." Yet despite these efforts, the data on child well-being and early education in our state remain discouraging. What will it take for Georgia to move ahead and for all our children to enjoy access to high-quality care and early life experiences that lay the foundation for their success in life?

Nobel-prize winning economist James Heckman has remarked that "investing in disadvantaged young children is a rare public policy initiative that promotes fairness and social justice and at the same time promotes productivity in the economy and in society at large." In 2009, Georgians will watch to see what emphasis our policymakers place on early education and child well-being. Our state has much to gain from increasing our attention to these matters. Conversely, if we continue to shirk our responsibilities to our state's children, we have much to lose. ★

⁴⁶ Note: OECD is the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the international organization of the industrialized market-economy countries.

⁴⁷ UNICEF, *The child care transition, Innocenti Report Card 8, 2008*. UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence.

⁴⁸ Southern Education Foundation, *Time to Lead Again: The Promise of Georgia Pre-K*. Atlanta, GA. 2008.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

ISSUE OVERVIEW

To date, the resounding discussions of American educational policy in the 21st Century have focused on our country's slipping rank among other industrialized nations.

Legitimate concerns about that public school students in the United States have fallen behind their international counterparts. Our increasing difficulties in preventing high school dropouts and in producing a skilled, competitive workforce threaten to undermine America's advantage in the global economy. To address this issue, policymakers and business leaders have spent the past few years calling for increased investments in quality early learning programs and initiatives to increase our numbers of college- and work-ready high school graduates.

continued...

7: The Vanishing Middle

ISSUE OVERVIEW, *continued*

One area of policy that has been noticeably omitted from these discussions is achievement at the middle school level. Advocacy and reform efforts have addressed the beginning and the end of the academic pipeline while largely ignoring the educational practices impacting students in the grades between elementary and high school. Yet, significant evidence indicates that “the seeds that produce high school failure are sown in grades 5-8.”⁵³ Studies by Robert Balfanz, a researcher at Johns Hopkins University, have found that nearly 40 percent of eventual high school dropouts could be identified in the 6th grade and 75 percent by the 9th grade.⁵⁴ Strategies to improve achievement in the middle grades and support seamless transitions at each level of the public school system should be part of a comprehensive plan to strengthen the performance of students in Georgia and the rest of the nation.

POLICY CONTEXT

Initially, the middle school was designed as a transitional site where adolescents could master academic skills in an environment that nurtured their social and emotional development. The concept of the middle school was linked more closely to a student's age and developmental needs than to a set of academic best practices. But research clearly shows that the middle grades are a critical period of time for learning, and success in these grades can predict future attainment. Children who are not calculating geometry and algebra on grade level by the end of 8th grade are less likely to be successful in post-secondary education. Additionally, studies of students in urban school systems have shown that children who successfully navigate 6th to 9th grade graduate from high school at a rate of 75 percent or higher, as compared to a graduation rate of 20 percent or lower for those students who experienced academic failure in the middle grades.⁵⁵ By the time students transition to high school, those who are at risk of dropping out may need intensive individual support or other supports to re-engage them in the purpose of education.⁵⁶ As is confirmed in a recent study by ACT, “the level of academic achievement that students attain by 8th grade has a larger impact on their college and career readiness by the time they graduate from high school than anything that happens academically in high school.”⁵⁷

Despite what we know about the importance of student achievement during the middle years, performance indicators suggest that our schools have not provided the instruction needed to foster success among our nation's adolescents. Results of the 2007 administration of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed that only 29 percent of 8th graders were proficient in reading, and only 31 percent demonstrated proficiency in mathematics.⁵⁸ According to findings from ACT's EXPLORE assessment, fewer than two in 10 8th graders are on target to be ready for college-level work by the time they graduate from high school.⁵⁹

⁵³ Cheri Pierson Yecke, *Mayhem in the Middle: How middle schools have failed America – and how to make them work*. 2005. Thomas B. Fordham Institute.

⁵⁴ American Youth Policy Forum, “Improving the Transition from Middle Grades to High Schools: The Role of Early Warning Indicators,” *Forum Brief*, January 25, 2008.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Dynarski, M., Clarke, L., Cobb, B., Finn, J., Rumberger, R., and Smink, J. (2008). *Dropout Prevention: A Practice Guide* (NCEE 2008-4025). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>.

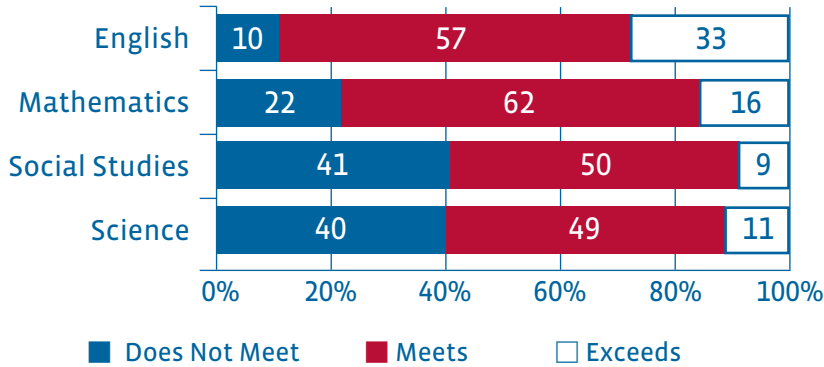
⁵⁷ ACT, *The Forgotten Middle: Ensuring that All Students Are on Target for College and Career Readiness Before High School*. 2008.

⁵⁸ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, NAEP Score Reports.

⁵⁹ ACT, *The Forgotten Middle: Ensuring that All Students Are on Target for College and Career Readiness Before High School*. 2008.

7: The Vanishing Middle

FIGURE 7.1. 8TH GRADE PERFORMANCE ON GEORGIA'S CRCT, 2008



Source: Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement

In Georgia, the data is even more alarming. Only one in four of our state's 8th graders achieved proficiency in math and reading on the 2007 NAEP. Results from the 8th grade Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) suggest that even on our state assessments, far too many students perform below standards. As shown in Figure 7.1, 40 percent of 8th graders do not meet standards in social studies or science, two core academic subjects. Many of our middle school students are dropping out of the education system before they even reach high school. During the 2007-08 school year, 2,022 students in grades 7 and 8 dropped out of Georgia's public schools. Averaged over the length of the traditional school year, this dropout rate equates to at least 11 middle school students leaving school permanently each day.

With much of the recent attention of federal policy and national reform efforts focused on early grades and high school completion, middle schools have not been part of the conversation on educational improvement. Nor have they been named as part of the solution to lagging high school achievement and low graduation rates. There is a clear need, in Georgia and across the nation, to heed the research on middle school achievement. Policymakers and practitioners must acknowledge the importance of success in the middle grades as a foundation for future success. Without a targeted effort to improve the education of our middle school students, we may never meet the goal of reducing high school dropouts and producing more college- and work-ready graduates.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR GEORGIA?

In 2006, the Partnership called for an increased effort to strengthen middle grade performance. That year's *Top Ten Issues to Watch* argued that:

"The importance of improving middle grade achievement is critical and all policy possibilities should be given reasonable consideration...The linkages between middle school performance and high school completion rates suggest that unless Georgia gives immediate attention to creating a seamless transition, the state is unlikely to observe significantly improved high school completion rates."⁶⁰

State leaders have made efforts in recent years to address the middle school achievement issue. The Department of Education has continued its roll-out of the Georgia Performance Standards, a curriculum that challenges students with greater rigor and higher standards. In 2007, Governor Perdue and Georgia's General Assembly authorized funding to place Middle School Graduation Coaches in middle schools throughout Georgia beginning with the 2007-08 school year. These coaches are tasked with providing prevention and intervention programs for at-risk middle school students to help prepare them for their high school and post-secondary careers.⁶¹ While anecdotal evidence suggests that these coaches are having an impact on reducing dropouts, no formal evaluation mechanism is yet in place to assess the program's true success.

During the 2007-08 school year, 2,022 students in grades 7 and 8 dropped out of Georgia's public schools. Averaged over the length of the traditional school year, this dropout rate equates to at least 11 middle school students leaving school permanently each day.

⁶⁰ Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, *Top Ten Issues to Watch in 2006*.

⁶¹ Communities in Schools has partnered with the Georgia Department of Education to implement the Graduation Coach Program. Additional information can be found at www.cisga.org/partnerships/coach.php.

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To continue making progress toward excellence in education, policymakers must bring middle school practices and achievement into the larger policy discussion. Without strengthening the academic experience delivered in our public middle schools, our best efforts at improving early education and high school graduation will carry us only so far. Examples of exceptional public middle schools can be found throughout the state, and many have been showcased as part of the Georgia Partnership's Annual Bus Trips Across Georgia. Of particular note are the KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) Schools, public charter schools that have changed the educational landscape for hundreds of Atlanta children. In recognition of the importance of providing a high-quality, college-preparatory education to all middle school students, the KIPP school model incorporates several components to foster student success: high expectations for student achievement, more time for learning, and a partnership between students, parents, and teachers. Based on results from the state CRCT, both KIPP WAYS Academy and KIPP South Fulton Academy are recognized as two of the top schools in Georgia. While the KIPP program is just one example of innovation at the middle school level, the schools'

achievement results suggest that Georgia's educational leaders can learn a great deal from this set of practices.

Additionally, through a partnership between the Georgia Department of Education and the University System of Georgia, middle school students throughout the state now have the option of enrolling in Early Colleges. These small schools offer a rigorous academic program that allows students to work toward a high school diploma while simultaneously earning college credit. Currently, there are six Early College sites in Georgia that serve the middle grades.

Too many of Georgia middle school students are vanishing from our classrooms. And too many of those who remain do not master the academic skills they need to be successful in high school. Our state's low middle school achievement and high middle school dropout rates demand our collective attention. To echo the message of recent research, "it is crucial that we intervene with the students in the Forgotten Middle...to ensure that they enter high school ready to benefit from high school coursework."⁶² ★

⁶² ACT, *The Forgotten Middle: Ensuring that All Students Are on Target for College and Career Readiness before High School*. 2008.

8

ISSUE OVERVIEW

The importance of understanding and eliminating achievement gaps is critical as the United States grows more diverse. Southern states in particular have been significantly impacted by changing demographics as migration patterns have led to a greater percentage of Hispanic and African American residents in the South. The U.S. Census has named Georgia one of three states that are next-in-line to become “majority-minority,” a term applied to states in which more than 50 percent of the population is comprised of individuals other than single-race non-Hispanic whites.⁶³ As the make-up of our general population changes, so does that of our public school student body. In the 2007-08 school year, black and Hispanic students in Georgia comprised 38 and 10 percent of public student enrollment, respectively.

continued...

8: Grave Disparities in Student Achievement

ISSUE OVERVIEW, *continued*

With such marked demographic trends shaping this state, never has it been more important, nor so necessary, to evaluate the educational progress of population subgroups in our public schools. And the sobering truth from a close analysis of the academic achievement of Georgia’s African American and Hispanic students is that, as a state, we are failing to deliver on the educational promise granted to these students. With high school graduation rates and assessment results that lag well behind those of their peers, our black and Hispanic students — who represent the demographic future of Georgia — deserve the undivided attention of policymakers and practitioners as we enter a new year. The future economic vitality and productivity of Georgia and of the nation will depend on the academic preparation and support all students receive in public schools today.

POLICY CONTEXT

To evaluate how well Georgia educates its public school students, a thorough understanding of who those students are is imperative. The rapidly growing population and changing demographics in Georgia are putting a new face on this Southeastern state, a phenomenon that directly relates to the status of our educational system.

From 2000 to 2007, Georgia was the fourth fastest growing state in the nation on both a numerical and a percentage basis. During that time frame, the resident population of the state increased 16.6 percent, making Georgia the ninth most populous state in America. According to 2007 Census estimates, three of the nation’s 10 fastest-growing counties were located in Georgia. As the general population increases in the state, so do the concentrations of certain minority groups. Currently at 29.9 percent of the total state population, Georgia has one of the most rapidly-growing African American populations and the fourth largest of any state.⁶⁴ Similarly, Georgia’s Hispanic population has increased remarkably in recent years, such that Georgia is now known as one of the nation’s “new” Hispanic states.⁶⁵ From 2000 to 2006, this minority group grew by 59.4 percent, giving Georgia the second highest Hispanic growth rate among all states. Finally, our state has also seen a marked increase in the number of Limited English Proficient (LEP) children in prekindergarten to 5th grade. From the years 1990 to 2000, this student group increased by 255 percent, making Georgia one of the 10 states with the fastest growing LEP student populations.⁶⁶

The demographic trends illustrated by the data above make it vital for Georgia’s leaders to examine the academic achievement of our various specific student populations. Such analysis is not a new policy action. For several decades, researchers and educational organizations have disaggregated data and analyzed the gaps in attainment among different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups of students. In recent years, greater attention has been given to achievement gaps across the country, due in large part to the federal accountability mandates

⁶³ U.S. Census, “U.S. Hispanic Population Surpasses 45 Million: Now 15 Percent of Total,” Press Release, May 1, 2008. Four states – Hawaii, New Mexico, California, and Texas – and the District of Columbia are currently “majority-minority.” Next-in-line to earn this description are Nevada, Maryland, and Georgia.

⁶⁴ U.S. Census, Data analysis by the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education.

⁶⁵ Richard Fry and Felisa Gonzales, *One-in-Five and Growing Fast: A Profile of Hispanic and Public School Students*. Pew Hispanic Center. August 2008.

⁶⁶ Randy Capps et al., *The New Demography of America’s Schools: Immigration and the No Child Left Behind Act*. The Urban Institute, September 2005.

8: Grave Disparities in Student Achievement

of the No Child Left Behind Act. NCLB holds schools accountable for the academic progress of every child, regardless of race, ethnicity, or income level, and therefore, the legislation has made closing achievement gaps a national priority. Additionally, this component of NCLB has brought greater transparency to state reported data, as annual report cards on states' education systems must present disaggregated data that clearly describe the performance of all student subgroups.

Across the country, practitioners have emulated best practices, raised standards, and strengthened teaching in order to raise achievement levels for all students and eliminate the gaps between the performance of white and non-white peers. Yet the attention given to this issue has resulted in only marginal improvements at the national level. Results from the long-term National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show that white students continue to outperform black and Hispanic students in both reading and mathematics.⁶⁷ To many education stakeholders, such national data suggest that progress has been too slow in bringing excellence to all our students. In the words of one national advocacy organization:

“More than 50 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, most children of color in this country are still denied the education they need. The education they need to find meaningful and well-paying jobs. The education they need to thrive in college. The education they need to participate fully in this nation's economic and civic life.”⁶⁸

TABLE 8.1. EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT IN GEORGIA: 4TH GRADE NAEP RESULTS

GEORGIA'S 4TH GRADE NAEP PERFORMANCE, 2007			
Subject	Student Group	% of Students At or Above Proficient	National Rank*
Mathematics	White	46	30 of 51
	Black	13	33 of 46
	Hispanic	20	28 of 46
Reading	White	40	23 of 51
	Black	14	22 of 43
	Hispanic	21	8 of 45

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

*Note: The NAEP is administered to students in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. A national rank among less than 51 comparison groups indicates that some states did not meet the reporting requirement for a specific student subgroup.

TABLE 8.2. EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT IN GEORGIA: 8TH GRADE NAEP RESULTS

GEORGIA'S 8TH GRADE NAEP PERFORMANCE, 2007			
Subject	Student Group	% of Students At or Above Proficient	National Rank*
Mathematics	White	37	34 of 50
	Black	11	19 of 41
	Hispanic	16	21 of 43
Reading	White	38	23 of 50
	Black	13	21 of 42
	Hispanic	17	16 of 42

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

*Note: The NAEP is administered to students in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. A national rank among less than 51 comparison groups indicates that some states did not meet the reporting requirement for a specific student subgroup.

When the results of the 2007 NAEP administration were released, Georgia celebrated the fact that “[our] students scored at all-time highs on the NAEP in math and reading.”⁶⁹ But a closer look at the achievement of various subpopulations in the state should give us all great cause for concern. As measured by standardized assessments and graduation rates, the educational attainment of Georgia's black and Hispanic populations is, at best, sobering. However, in a state that is increasingly recognized for its unique demography, another description of our students' achievement might be disconcerting, unjust, or even tragic.

67 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Minorities*. September 2007.

68 The Education Trust, *Yes We Can: Telling Truths and Dispelling Myths About Race and Education in America*. September 2006.

69 Georgia Department of Education, “NAEP Scores Show Historic Gains.” Press Release, September 25, 2007.

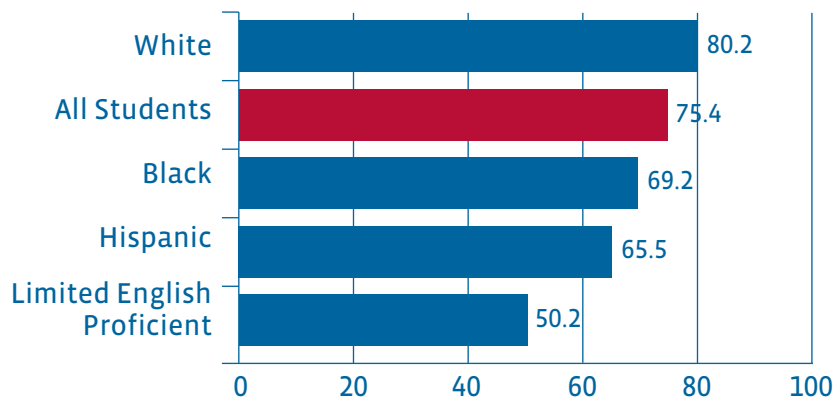
8: Grave Disparities in Student Achievement

Researchers agree that the congressionally-mandated National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the best tool available for drawing state-by-state comparisons of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas at each grade assessed. Student performance on NAEP is scored at one of three levels: *Basic*, *Proficient*, and *Advanced*. Often educational reports use NAEP scores at or above the basic level to gauge educational attainment. But in an era when business leaders and policymakers are continually calling for higher academic standards that prepare students for the 21st century workforce, a better measure of our success is in how many of our children are deemed *proficient* on these assessments. It is the proficient level of performance that represents "solid academic performance for each grade assessed."⁷⁰ Students reaching this level have demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter, including subject-matter knowledge, application of such knowledge to real-world situations, and analytical skills appropriate to the subject matter.⁷¹ Shown in Tables 8.1 and 8.2 are the percentages of Georgia's students scoring at or above the proficient level in the critical areas of 4th and 8th grade mathematics and reading.

According to the national rankings of NAEP scores, Georgia's student populations score near the middle of the distribution. Notable exceptions are the performances of our Hispanic students on reading assessments, particularly in the 4th grade. While we can celebrate this data for some of what it reveals — that Georgia is not at the very bottom, as so often occurs when states are ranked by educational indicators—we must give diligent attention to the gravity of what our state's NAEP performance means. More alarming than the wide gaps between the scores of white and non-white students are the abysmally low levels of achievement reported for our black and Hispanic students. In Georgia, only 13 percent of African American 4th graders are proficient in math, 14 percent in reading. Of our Hispanic students in the 8th grade, only 16 percent are proficient in math, 17 percent in reading. What does this say about our educational priorities and our state's future?

Concerns for the educational success of Georgia's various student subgroups extend to the high school level, where large numbers of our Black, Hispanic, and Limited English Proficient students fail to earn their high school diplomas. According to state-reported graduation rates, only half of Georgia's LEP students completed high school in 2008. Among Hispanic students, only slightly more than six of every 10 graduated. For our black students, seven of every 10 earned their diploma. Shown in Figure 8.1 are the most recent graduation rates for Georgia's students. While these numbers have improved over recent years, educators and policymakers owe these students a commitment to greater progress. Race and ethnicity can no longer be a predictor of students' persistence through Georgia's public schools.

FIGURE 8.1. GEORGIA'S PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES, BY SUBGROUP, 2008



Source: Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement

A 2008 report by the Schott Foundation for Public Education substantiates the view that Georgia, because of the alarming achievement of certain student populations, should be considered a "state of emergency."⁷² The report takes a pointed look at the educational attainment of black males. Drawing on data from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, the report contends that "states with large Black enrollments educate their White, non-Hispanic children, but do not similarly educate the majority of their Black male students."⁷³

⁷⁰ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. "The NAEP Glossary of Terms." <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/glossary.asp>.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Schott Foundation for Public Education, *Given Half a Chance: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males*. 2008. www.blackboysreport.org.

⁷³ Ibid.

8: Grave Disparities in Student Achievement

While the educational inequities that impact black male achievement are national and pervasive, Georgia is frequently singled out in the Schott report for its discouraging educational trends. Among the report's findings:

- The one million black male students enrolled in the New York, Florida, and Georgia public schools are twice as likely not to graduate with their class as to do so.
- Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, South Carolina, and Wisconsin graduated fewer black males with their peer group than the national average.
- Georgia is one of the 10 lowest performing states for black males. National data shows that in 2006, 40 percent of black males in Georgia graduated from high school, as compared to 47 percent of Hispanic males and 58 percent of white males.
- Richmond County, Georgia is one of the 10 lowest performing school districts in the nation for black males, with a 2006 high school graduation rate of 31 percent for this student group.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR GEORGIA?

When the Partnership released its first *Top Ten Issues to Watch* publication in 2005, one of the focus areas was Georgia's achievement gap. In that report, we stressed that "[the state's] demographic shifts alone suggest that any conversation about meeting adequate yearly progress and improving student achievement must deliberately include addressing the achievement gaps."⁷⁴ In that year, data for the state of Georgia revealed that 15 percentage points separated the graduation rates of black and white students, which stood at 57 and 72 percent, respectively. The difference between white and Hispanic students' graduation rates at that time was 22 points, with 49 percent of the latter group earning their diplomas. As Table 8.3 portrays, Georgia has made some progress in closing these gaps over the past five years. But have our efforts been bold enough? Should we be satisfied with our improvements?

TABLE 8.3. CHANGES IN GEORGIA'S STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT GAPS, 2004-2008

Year	White-Black Graduation Rate Gap (percentage point difference)	White-Hispanic Graduation Rate Gap (percentage point difference)
2004	15	22
2005	13	20
2006	12	20
2007	12	18
2008	11	14

Source: Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement

Consider the future of this issue. If Georgia continues to narrow the gaps in high school completion rates at a rate equal to the average annual change of the past five years, our white and Hispanic students will achieve equal performance in the year 2017. For white and black students, the year will be 2018. Beginning now, Georgia must answer the call for a *Broader, Bolder Approach* to education as was presented in 2008 by a task-force of national leaders convened by the Economic Policy Institute. As the group declares in its policy statement, "It is a violation of the most basic principles of social justice that a country as wealthy as ours denies the opportunities that come with a high-quality education to a substantial proportion of our young people."⁷⁵

It is time to curb our celebrations of small educational gains and to focus instead on the reality of how dismal the educational promise is for so many of Georgia's youth. We are failing too many of our students and jeopardizing the economic future of our state. Out of concern for educational excellence, social justice, and economic vitality, Georgia's policymakers must devote time and resources in 2009 to studying the achievement of our diverse student populations. Through honest discussions of race, demography, and educational attainment, and with the assistance of experts who understand the social and economic factors compounding the issue, Georgia can move ahead. ★

74 Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, *Top Ten Issues to Watch in 2005*. www.gpee.org.

75 A Broader, Bolder Approach to Education. <http://www.boldapproach.org/statement.html>.

9

ISSUE OVERVIEW

A 2008 report published by The Education Trust finds that “among industrialized nations, the United States is the only country in which today’s young people are less likely than their parents to have earned a high school diploma.”⁷⁶ This statistic signals the frightening reality of underachievement in our nation’s public school system, which was built upon the notion of providing educational opportunity to all Americans.

In Georgia the situation is even more disquieting: despite annual improvements in our number of high school graduates, our state continues to have one of the worst completion rates in the nation. Within the state a wide range of graduation rates among local school systems gives reason for concern. While Georgia’s percentage of high school completers reached an all-time high of 75.4 percent in 2008, there were 105 (of 180) districts whose graduation rate fell below the state average.

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9: Five Georgias: Connecting Education and Community

ISSUE OVERVIEW, *continued*

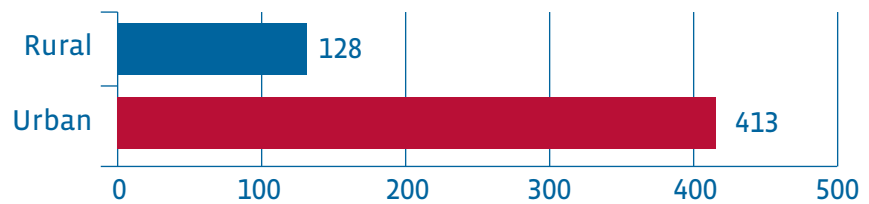
Critical to an analysis of high school graduation rates is an understanding of place and the intersections of demography, community, and educational attainment. A landmark study by researchers at Johns Hopkins University affirmed what many educators know anecdotally, that poverty is the fundamental driver of low graduation rates. From an analysis of high schools across the country, these researchers found that “there is a near perfect linear relationship between a high school’s poverty level and its tendency to lose large numbers of students between ninth and twelfth grades.”⁷⁷

The demography of Georgia’s counties is varied, and regional differences in economy and population directly impact students’ educational outcomes. Rarely will a one-size-fits-all policy approach succeed in driving improvements for all our state’s students. Building stronger schools depends on understanding place and drawing on the resources and commitment of individual communities across the state.

POLICY CONTEXT

Research has clearly shown the vital roles that good schools and a well-educated population play in strengthening the local economy and fostering community engagement.⁷⁸ Yet because of varying socioeconomic conditions, initiatives to improve education will yield different outcomes across communities. Additionally the distinct needs and current educational status of individual communities suggest that one-size-fits-all reform efforts may not return equal benefits to all regions. The difference may be most pronounced among rural and urban areas, as evidenced by a study comparing the effects of high school completion (including postsecondary education) on per capita income in urban and rural areas. The result, shown in Figure 9.1, is striking:

FIGURE 9.1. THE RETURN TO EDUCATION IN RURAL AND URBAN COUNTIES



Dollars per capita that result from a one percentage increase in adults with a high school degree or more.

Source: Stephan J. Goetz and Anil Rupasingha, “How the Returns to Education in Rural Areas Vary Across the Nation.” In Southern Rural Development Center, *The Role of Education: Promoting the Economic and Social Vitality of Rural America*. January 2005.

⁷⁶ Anna Habash, *Counting on Graduation*. The Education Trust. Fall 2008.

⁷⁷ Robert Balfanz and Nettie Legters, *Locating the Dropout Crisis: Which High Schools Produce the Nation’s Dropouts? Where Are They Located? Who Attends Them?* Johns Hopkins University. September 2004.

⁷⁸ Southern Rural Development Center, *The Role of Education: Promoting the Economic and Social Vitality of Rural America*. January 2005. www.ruraledu.org; Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, *The Economics of Education: 2nd Edition*. August 2007. www.gpee.org.

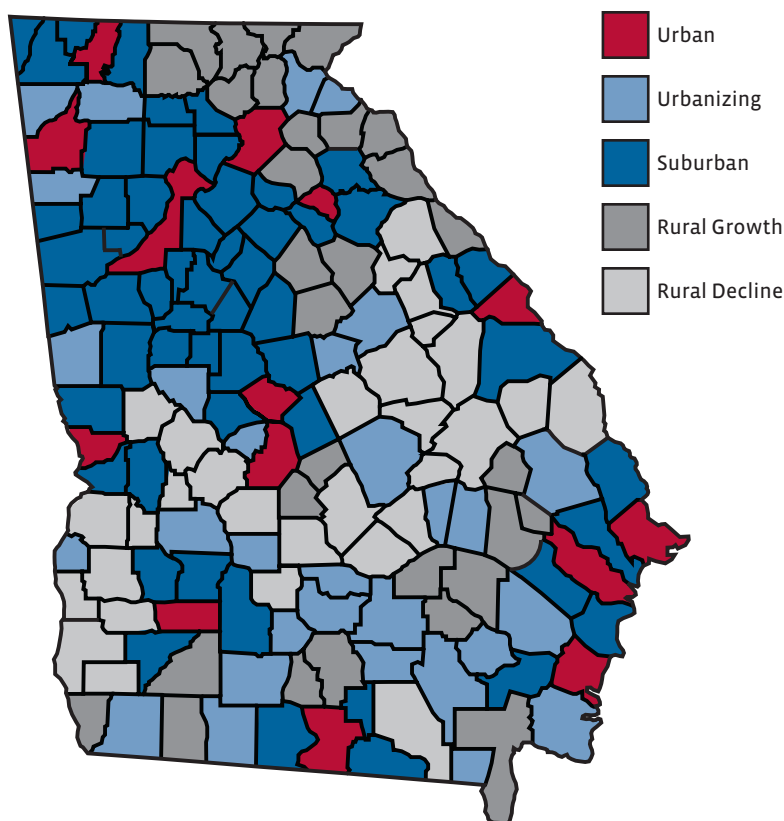
9: Five Georgias: Connecting Education and Community

“We compare what would happen to per capita income in a rural county if the share of high school (or more) graduates would increase by 1 percentage point with what would happen in an urban county. The returns to education — measured as an increase in the share of individuals with a high school or higher degree — in rural areas [are] less than one-third (31 percent) that of urban areas. In other words, a 1 percentage point increase in the share of high school graduates in a typical rural county only raises per capita income in that county by \$128; in an urban county, on the other hand, the income increases by \$413.”⁷⁹

Understanding the different ways education can shape communities is of particular importance in Georgia, where our 159 counties constitute a patchwork of rural, urban, and suburban areas. Dr. Douglas Bachtel, a renowned demographer in the state of Georgia, created the concept of “Five Georgias” to emphasize the variety of populations and economies within our state boundaries. As depicted in Figure 9.2, the state is divided into five multiple areas:

- Urban (comprised of 14 counties);
- Urbanizing (29 counties);
- Suburban (56 counties);
- Rural Growth (30 counties); and
- Rural Decline (30 counties).⁸⁰

FIGURE 9.2. FIVE GEORGIAS: DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES BY COUNTY



As detailed in Table 9.1, the economic characteristics of each of the Five Georgias have a direct impact on the educational attainment and vitality of local communities. In particular, those counties classified as urban or in rural decline are often marked by high levels of poverty, which correlates with both reduced educational opportunity and an increased need to improve school quality. Concentrated poverty — though it may manifest differently in rural and urban settings — is also associated with a number of other policy issues that can complicate efforts to advance education. Research has shown that concentrated poverty may discourage private-sector investment, contribute to higher crime rates and negative health outcomes, and generate higher costs for local government.⁸¹

While the percentage of students living in poverty has increased for Georgia as a whole, specific regions of the state face a particularly challenging set of demographic circumstances.⁸² Nearly one in three counties in Georgia are classified as areas in persistent poverty. Developed by the USDA Economic Research Service, this classification applies to counties in which 20 percent or

Source: Dr. Douglas Bachtel, “Five Georgias Concept,” The University of Georgia College of Family and Consumer Sciences. www.gafacts.net.

79 Stephan J. Goetz and Anil Rupasingha, “How the Returns to Education in Rural Areas Vary Across the Nation.” In Southern Rural Development Center, *The Role of Education: Promoting the Economic and Social Vitality of Rural America*. January 2005. www.ruraledu.org.

80 Douglas Bachtel, “Five Georgias Concept.” *Georgia Facts: Georgia County Facts and Figures*. 2008. The University of Georgia College of Family and Consumer Sciences. www.gafacts.net. Note: The urban, urbanizing, and suburban classification were developed utilizing the U.S. Office of Management and Budget categorization of metropolitan designations based upon data from the 2000 Census of Population. The rural growth and rural decline classification uses nonmetropolitan county designations from the 1970 to 1980 time period showing both population growth and decline.

81 Elizabeth Kneebone and Alan Berube, *Reversal of Fortune: A New Look at Concentrated Poverty in the 2000s*. The Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings. August 2008.

82 Southern Education Foundation, *A New Majority: Low Income Students in the South's Public Schools*. 2007. www.southerneducation.org.

9: Five Georgias: Connecting Education and Community

TABLE 9.1. THE FIVE GEORGIAS DEFINED

AREA CLASSIFICATION	DESCRIPTION
Urban	Urban counties are the core centers for the state’s 15 metropolitan areas. They are the hub of the state’s social, economic and cultural activity, yet many residents are young, poorly educated, live at or below the poverty level, and generally do not possess the marketable job skills necessary to compete in an increasingly technologically oriented environment.
Urbanizing	These counties have expanding populations due to the growth of viable job opportunities and infrastructure improvements such as access to transportation, quality of life improvements, including education, housing, medical facilities, and cultural attractions.
Suburban	Suburban Georgia can basically be characterized as being predominately white and affluent, with large percentages of residents having high educational and income attainment levels, although some exceptions do occur.
Rural Growth	These areas tend to be characterized by having either scenic beauty or some type of physical landscape that makes them attractive places for tourism or retirees. In addition, some of these areas are located near a military base or a regional growth center capable of sustaining or attracting economic growth.
Rural Decline	This area is perhaps the one in greatest peril. These counties are characterized by long-term population loss, lack of employment opportunities, low levels of infrastructure and business development, a legacy of low educational attainment and skill development, health problems including limited access to medical facilities and health care professionals.

Source: Dr. Douglas Bachtel, “Five Georgias Concept,” The University of Georgia College of Family and Consumer Sciences. www.gafacts.net.

more of residents were poor as measured by each of the last four censuses (in 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000). As listed in Table 9.2, of the 50 Georgia counties in persistent poverty, 38 have a 2008 high school graduation rate that falls below the state average. For these communities the intersections of poverty, economic development, and educational opportunity are unmistakable.

WHAT’S NEXT FOR GEORGIA?

At the aggregate level Georgia has seen rapid population growth and improvements in educational attainment over recent years. But the connections between education and place, along with the

great demographic variety within the state, suggest that policy-makers must begin to focus on targeted, community-based strategies for improvement. The intricate links among the health, education, and business sectors further reveal a need to build bridges among policy sectors and work cohesively to improve the outcomes for all our state’s children.

As our state leaders consider the needs of individual localities, the involvement of community members cannot be overlooked. An assessment of a community’s needs and its available resources for change must draw upon the knowledge and input from an area’s

9: Five Georgias: Connecting Education and Community

**TABLE 9.2. POVERTY AND DROPOUTS IN GEORGIA:
COUNTIES IN PERSISTENT POVERTY WITH HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES BELOW THE STATE AVERAGE (75.4%)**

COUNTY	2008 GRADUATION RATE	COUNTY	2008 GRADUATION RATE
Atkinson County	63.0	Marion County	74.6
Bacon County	75.0	Mitchell County	69.9
Ben Hill County	65.9	Peach County	74.9
Brooks County	58.2	Randolph County	73.1
Burke County	60.9	Stewart County	57.9
Calhoun County	71.2	Sumter County	55.5
Candler County	64.4	Talbot County	60.0
Clarke County	63.1	Taliaferro County	68.0
Clinch County	75.3	Tattnall County	73.6
Crisp County	68.4	Taylor County	72.0
Dooly County	61.3	Telfair County	74.2
Dougherty County	63.3	Terrell County	57.2
Early County	73.5	Toombs County	66.0
Emanuel County	63.1	Treutlen County	65.4
Evans County	71.6	Turner County	60.8
Grady County	71.4	Ware County	63.3
Jenkins County	72.3	Warren County	70.1
Johnson County	60.9	Washington County	73.8
Macon County	65.1	Wheeler County	70.5

**TOTAL # OF COUNTIES IN PERSISTENT POVERTY & WITH LOW GRADUATION RATE:
38 OF 159 (23.4% OF ALL GEORGIA COUNTIES)**

Source: USDA Economic Research Service and Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement

business, education, government, and religious leaders. In fact, research by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform found that community organizing has “stimulated important changes in educational policy and practices,...is helping to expand school-level capacity,...and is increasing civic engagement.”⁸³

Within Georgia are many counties and regions suffering the negative consequences of low educational attainment, high rates of poverty, and unstable economies. In the coming year we must take a hard look at data, mobilize community resources, and engage in serious dialogue about how to revitalize many of our schools and communities. ★

⁸³ Kavitha Mediratta, Seema Smith, and Sara McAlister, *Organized Communities, Stronger Schools: A Preview of Research Findings*. Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. March 2008.

10

ISSUE OVERVIEW

It has been more than three years since Bill Gates issued his now-famous assessment of our country's public schools. At a 2005 address to the National Governors Association, he proclaimed that "America's high schools are obsolete...Training the workforce of tomorrow with the high schools of today is like trying to teach kids about today's computers on a 50-year-old main-frame." These words echoed the sentiments of many prominent business leaders, who were alarmed by our nation's low rate of high school graduation and growing number of individuals who lacked the necessary skills for today's workforce. Concern stretched across policy sectors, and soon leaders in education, government, and business joined Gates in his call for a radical transformation of the public school system.

continued...

10: The Future of Public Education

ISSUE OVERVIEW, *continued*

As the global economy changes the way Americans do business, and the 21st century demands new knowledge and skills of its workers, public schools are facing intense scrutiny. There is a widespread belief that the curriculum and structure of yesterday's classrooms have lost their value. Today public schools stand at the center of a firestorm, with increased accountability, budget cuts, and the push of vouchers and charter schools raising fundamental questions about the relevance of our hundred-year-old education model.

Already a group of state leaders is at work to "investigate innovative ways to create long-term, comprehensive education reform to make Georgia more globally competitive."⁸⁴ Appointed in July 2008 by Governor Perdue, this working group is charged with reviewing the provocative national report *Tough Choices or Tough Times* issued by the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce in 2007. Recommendations from the group on how to effect change for Georgia's educational system are expected before the end of the 2009 legislative session.

What are the mission and vision of our public schools? How much change does our system really need, and how far will Georgia's policymakers go in seeking a radical transformation of education? Our state's leaders will grapple with these questions in the coming year as they consider the future of public education in Georgia.

POLICY CONTEXT

The seeds of public schools were planted soon after the American Revolution by some of our nation's most influential early leaders. Thomas Jefferson and John Adams were two of the first to call for the creation of publicly-funded schools, citing their belief that "the survival of the new republic depended on citizens with sufficient education to govern themselves."⁸⁵ In 1785 the first federal law was passed that designated a portion of revenues to fund public schools, and some states soon followed suit with their own laws to fund the schools. With the help of reformers like Horace Mann, the first secretary of a state board of education, public schools began to take hold in communities throughout the country over the course of the mid-19th century. By 1918 all states had compulsory attendance laws that required children to attend school at least through the elementary grades.⁸⁶

Throughout history Americans have placed great hopes in the system of universal public education as a means to drive societal improvements. The early reformers believed that public schools held the potential to "transform children into moral, literate, and productive citizens; eliminate poverty and crime; quell class conflict; and unify a population that was becoming more ethnically diverse."⁸⁷ Public schools were seen as an integral aspect of democratic society, with a far-reaching mission that included more than just the transfer of academic knowledge.

⁸⁴ "Governor Perdue Appoints Working Group to Study Education Policies and Practices to Make Georgia More Globally Competitive," Press Release, July 10, 2008. www.georgia.gov.

⁸⁵ Center of Education Policy, *Why We Still Need Public Schools: Public Education for the Common Good*. 2007.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

10: The Future of Public Education

The Center of Education Policy characterizes the public missions of our schools by six themes:

1. To provide universal access to free education;
2. To guarantee equal opportunities for all children;
3. To unify a diverse population;
4. To prepare people for citizenship in a democratic society;
5. To prepare people to become economically self-sufficient; and
6. To improve social conditions.⁸⁸

Our country's land, economy, and people have changed dramatically over the last 200 years. Yet the core missions of public education are as essential today as they were when the common school was first envisioned. As the demography of America's schools shifts and our population grows more diverse, issues of equity and access to opportunities remain critical. To secure the future of our nation and the stability of our economy, we must instill civic values in our youth and remain committed to investing in public schools.

But have times changed so drastically in America that we must completely overhaul the public education system in order to fulfill our public missions and meet the needs of our students? With economists drawing attention to the new global marketplace and business leaders stressing the need to improve our competitiveness, many political and educational leaders have begun calling for radical transformation. According to a recent report by the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, chaired by a prominent Georgia educator, our current workforce and educational status demand nothing less than broad systemic change.⁸⁹ In the words of the Commission:

“The core problem is that our education and training systems were built for another era, an era in which most workers needed only a rudimentary education. It is not possible to get where we have to go by patching that system. There is not enough money available at any level of our intergovernmental system to fix this problem by spending more on the system we have. We can get where we must go only by changing the system itself.”⁹⁰

On the contrary, there are public school advocates who believe that our system is on the right track and that positive change is occurring already in classrooms across the country. Studying the examples of innovative school leaders who, along with a dedicated teaching staff, have achieved excellence may prove just as beneficial as reviewing an entirely new model of public education.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR GEORGIA?

For those stakeholders who contend that the American public education system is in crisis, Georgia must represent a most urgent need for change. Even with recent annual increases in our high school graduation rate, Georgia continues to lag behind other states in many rankings of student achievement. Our public education system is being rocked by dynamic population shifts, unforeseen increases in poverty, tumultuous debates over the state's fiscal structure, and an alarming number of high school dropouts. The actions of our legislature in recent years have compounded the problem. With no comprehensive education plan to guide the state's efforts, policymakers have left public schools to contend with continuing austerity cuts, random acts of improvement, and threats to local funding and control.

In 2009 Georgia's public schools remain embattled. Yet during these tough times amidst these sociopolitical dynamics, the guiding vision of our forefathers still holds true. Now, more than ever, it is vital to reconsider the fundamental value of public education to individuals and to states and to remember its role as a harbinger of hope, a precursor to economic wellbeing, and a cornerstone of democracy. We have a legal and civic obligation to provide all our children access to an excellent public education, one that prepares them for success and engagement as American citizens. The challenge facing policymakers and practitioners today is to improve the quality of our public schools and the achievement of all our students while remaining true to the democratic foundations of the universal public education system. ★

⁸⁸ Center of Education Policy, *Why We Still Need Public Schools: Public Education for the Common Good*. 2007.

⁸⁹ The New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce was chaired by Charles B. Knapp, the President Emeritus of the University of Georgia.

⁹⁰ The New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, *Tough Choices or Tough Times*. 2007. National Center on Education and the Economy. www.skillscommission.org.

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OUR MISSION

*Inform and influence Georgia leaders through research and
non-partisan advocacy to impact education policies and practices
for the improvement of student achievement.*