— NINTH EDITION —

Top Ten Issues To Watch In 2013

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GEORGIA PARTNERSHIP
FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

JANUARY 2013

The Top Ten Issues to Watch is an annual publication of the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. Past editions are available for download on our website, www.gpee.org.

This edition was researched and written by
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Policy and Research Director

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.

GEORGIA PARTNERSHIP
FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education observed and celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2012. As we enter into our next 20 years, the Partnership team is excited by and embraces the many public education challenges that wait. Many of you reading this ninth edition of the Top Ten Issues to Watch may know us only by this popular annual report. We invite you to get to know us better.

Today, the Georgia Partnership is engaged on several fronts to improve our state's public education system. For example, we are growing education policy expertise and capacity with our Education Policy Fellowship Program and our Education Policy Toolbox found on our web site. We are informing audiences across Georgia through our Economics of Education initiative – a collaboration with the Georgia Chamber of Commerce – that clearly shows the relationship of education to personal and community economic success.

Our Critical Issues Forums through the year address key topics that Georgia must confront to move into the top tier of education states. The annual Media Symposium brings education reporters/editors together to get an inside look into areas that will assist in their reporting – presented by many of the very newsmakers who will make the headlines during the year.

The Bus Trip Across Georgia both highlights and shares best practices from many of our top schools. Business, government, education and civic leaders join us for this exciting event that has seen countless ideas adapted and adopted across the state since it began in 1993. The Partnership has assisted numerous communities improve their education systems through the Community Strategic Planning program.

There's more, much more… a variety of research and policy projects, collaborations and partnerships with other state and national organizations, a resource for the business community…just to name a few. Our voice is unique and our mission is clear: *Inform and influence Georgia leaders through research and non-partisan advocacy to impact education policies and practices for the improvement of student achievement.* The bottom line is and always has been continuous improvement and reaping the biggest returns on our state's investment in our public education system.

The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education's greatest strength is that it creates the conditions that stimulate critical change. Please visit our web site at www.gpee.org to get to know us even better (click on the QR code). Check our special 20th anniversary section on the web site to see the impact the organization has made through the years. And consider joining us through Twitter and Facebook and our mailing list. We welcome your support and participation in our work.

– The Georgia Partnership Team

Introduction

Welcome to 2013 and the ninth edition of the Georgia Partnership's *Top Ten Issues to Watch*. In the nine 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. With the release of this edition, the *Top Ten Issues to Watch,* it is fitting to consider the educational progress Georgia has made since our first issue was published in 2005.

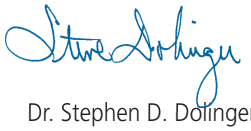
During that time, Georgia has worked hard to implement education reforms that will strengthen the birth-to-work educational pipeline and improve outcomes for all students. Among other things, the state has implemented: 1) higher standards, 2) a more rigorous curriculum, 3) a new accountability system, and 4) a statewide student information system. Taken together, these elements are expected to prepare students for the demands of college or a career and increase the global competitiveness of Georgia's workforce. These policy reforms led Georgia to be ranked seventh in the nation in a national study conducted in 2012 for having the right policies in place to improve educational outcomes.

The question for Georgia that remains is: Have these policies translated into increased outcomes for students? In some areas that answer is yes. In 2012, Georgia was the only state in the nation to show gains across all national tests: the SAT, the ACT, Advanced Placement (AP) examinations, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in Math, Reading and Science.

However, the recent release of the newly calculated graduation rate shows that Georgia is fourth from the bottom compared to the rest of the nation, with a graduation rate of only 67 percent. The rate for minority students was even lower. For example, Georgia only graduated 58 percent of its Hispanic students. This is significantly lower than other southeastern states. The graduation rate for Hispanic students was 70 percent in Louisiana, 75 percent in Mississippi, and 69 percent in South Carolina.

With all of Georgia's efforts to increase rigor and the positive outcomes on other national benchmarks, how is that students – especially minority and low-income students – are still leaking out of the education pipeline at such an alarming rate? We believe that the data and commentary presented within this document will help guide policymakers, educators, and community and business leaders to answer that question by considering the following questions: What are the policies being implemented? How well are they being implemented? Which programs are working? Where are the weaknesses?

Georgia's Race to the Top (RT3) grant outlines the state's reform agenda for improving education. Many, if not most, of our *Top Issues to Watch in 2013* stem in some way from the goals outlined in the state's RT3 plan. Regardless of how we compare with other states, a graduation rate of 67 percent is not nearly good enough. Armed with reliable, comprehensive information and guided by a common vision for excellence, we must continue to work together to ask the tough questions that focus on the continual improvement of Georgia's educational system.



Dr. Stephen D. Dolinger
President, Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education

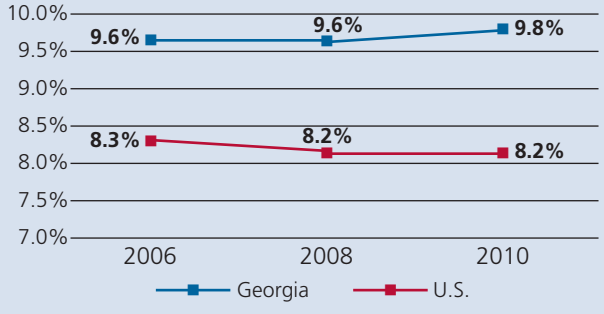
Ten Indicators for Success: Where is Georgia Today?

How does Georgia fare in producing excellent results for our citizens from birth through work? What additional progress is necessary to move our state above the national average and into the top tier of states to make Georgia a national leader?

These *Ten Indicators for Success* reveals where Georgia stands on critical indicators of child well being, educational attainment, and workforce readiness. Shown in each graph is a comparison of trends in Georgia relative to national averages. These data represent outcomes related to student achievement and success. Changes in these outcomes will require focused, collaborative work on each of the 10 issues discussed in this publication. The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education is committed to tracking these 10 indicators over time and advocating for policies and practices that will enable our state to emerge as a national education leader.

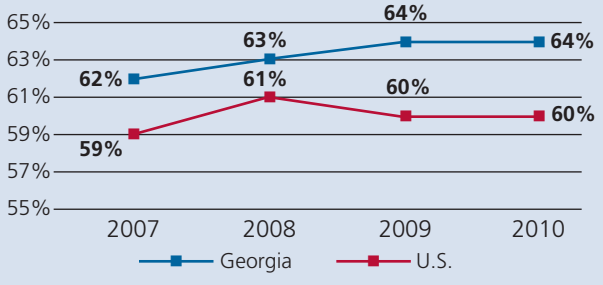
LOW-BIRTHWEIGHT BABIES, 2006-2008

Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. datacenter.kidscount.org



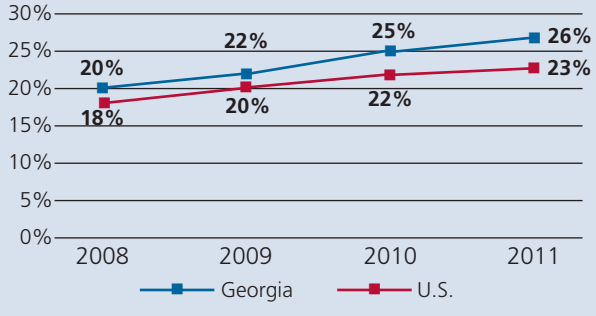
CHILDREN AGES 3 TO 5 ENROLLED IN EARLY EDUCATION, 2007-2009

Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. datacenter.kidscount.org



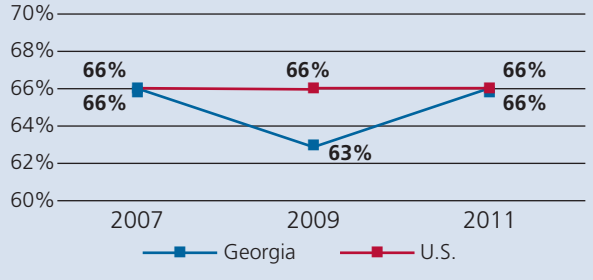
CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY, 2007-2010

Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. datacenter.kidscount.org



FOURTH GRADE READING PERFORMANCE

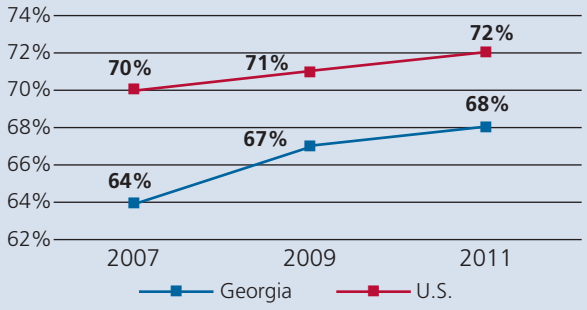
Source: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Education Progress



Note: Each graph represents the most recent data available for that indicator. This compilation of Georgia education indicators is a derivative of earlier work done by the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence in Kentucky. The Georgia Partnership thanks them for their support.

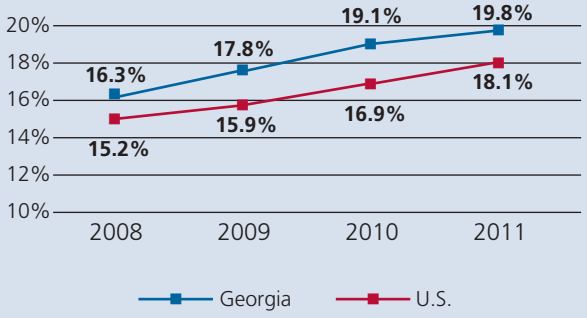
EIGHTH GRADE MATHEMATICS PERFORMANCE

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Education Progress



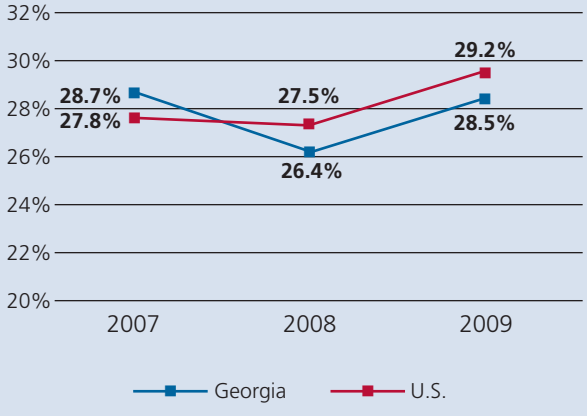
STUDENTS EARNING AP COLLECTEGE CREDIT IN HIGH SCHOOL

Source: The College Board, AP Report to the Nation 2012



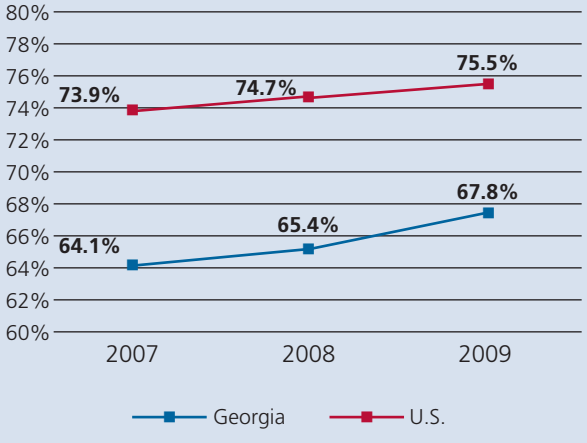
ASSOCIATE DEGREES AWARDED WITHIN THREE YEARS OF HIGH SCHOOL

Source: NCHEMS Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis



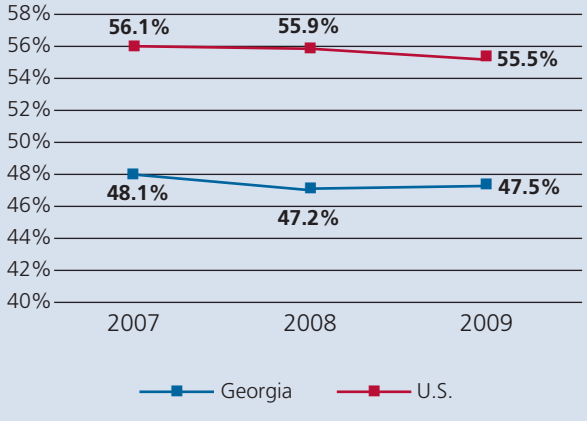
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE

Source: National Center for Education Statistics
Averaged freshman graduation rate



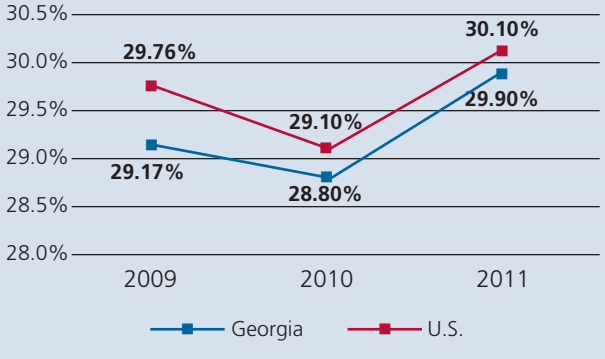
BACHELOR'S DEGREES AWARDED WITHIN SIX YEARS OF HIGH SCHOOL

Source: NCHEMS Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis



ADULTS AGES 25 TO 64 WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER, 2007-2009

Source: NCHEMS Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis



1 Race to the Top: Looking Back…Looking Forward

ISSUE OVERVIEW

In response to the crippling economic recession in 2007-2008, President Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). This legislation provided an unprecedented infusion of funds into the economy to stimulate recovery from the recession, support job creation, and invest in critical sectors such as education. In addition to providing federal aid to shore up state education budgets and increase resources for existing federal programs such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Title I services for low-income students, the ARRA established the $4.35 billion Race to the Top (RT3) fund. This fund was and continues to be the largest pot of discretionary funding for K-12 education reform in the history of the United States.[1]

With so many states still reeling from the economic downturn, the RT3 fund offered a tremendous opportunity to receive additional federal supports for educational programs. Yet the fund also represented a specific federal agenda, as attached to it was a prescriptive list of strategies believed by Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to be critical to improving public schools. As detailed in the U.S. Department of Education's (U.S. DOE) summary and guidelines, the RT3 fund was a competitive grant program designed to encourage and reward states that were creating the conditions for education innovation and reform and implementing ambitious plans in four core areas:

- Adopting internationally benchmarked standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the workplace;
- Recruiting, developing, retaining and rewarding effective teachers and principals;
- Building data systems that measure student success and inform teachers and principals how they can improve their practices; and
- Turning around our lowest performing schools.[2]

In Georgia, state leaders from the Governor's Office, the Office of Student Achievement (OSA), the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and other education stakeholders submitted a winning application during the second phase of the competition in June of 2010.

Georgia received $400 million over four years to implement its detailed plan for public school improvement. Currently, the state is halfway through the implementation process, and the funds will expire after the end of the 2013-2014 school year. In July 2012, the part of Georgia's RT3 plan related to teacher evaluations was put on "high risk" by the U.S. DOE for deviating too far from the initial proposal.[3] However, a study conducted by the Center for American Progress concluded that Georgia is meeting expectations in their implementation of the plan.[4] So, what has the state done so far in implementing RT3? What are the plans moving forward?

1 Duncan, A. "Education Reform's Moon Shot." *The Washington Post.* July 24, 2009.
2 U.S. Department of Education. *Race to the Top: Executive Summary.* Washington, DC: Author. 2009.
3 Klein, A. "Part of Georgia's Race to the Top Grant Put On High-Risk Status." *Education Week.* July 3, 2012.
4 Boser, U. *Race to the Top: What Have We Learned from the States so Far?* Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. 2012.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA?

Georgia's education reform agenda is supported by the $4 billion Race to the Top federal grant. It establishes five objectives:[5]

1. Set high standards and rigorous assessments for all students – leading to college- and career-readiness;
2. Prepare students for college readiness, transition and success;
3. Provide great teachers and leaders;
4. Provide effective support for all schools, including the lowest achieving schools; and
5. Lead the way in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields.

To date, 26 local school districts are participating in the RT3 plan. This represents approximately 40 percent of Georgia's K-12 students, and a full 44 percent of students who live in poverty. In supporting the five objectives of the reform agenda, Georgia has grouped its RT3 plan into four areas: 1) recruiting, rewarding and retaining effective teachers and leaders; 2) adopting college and career standards and assessments; 3) implementing a longitudinal data system that measures student growth and success; and 4) turning around the lowest performing schools.

Recruiting and Retaining Effective Teachers and Leaders

In support of its reform efforts, the state is committed to recruiting, rewarding and retaining effective teachers and leaders. All of the RT3 states are developing comprehensive systems of education effectiveness by developing and adopting rigorous evaluation systems that take into account student growth. These systems are intended to be conducted at least annually and provide timely and constructive feedback to inform professional development, promotion, retention, tenure decisions and, potentially, compensation.[6]

The development of a new evaluation system is one of Georgia's main accomplishments so far under RT3. Committees that included teachers, education association leaders, business leaders and others worked to streamline performance criteria. The state also approved a value-added model to judge the contribution of individual teachers and principals to changes in student test scores.

In the spring of 2012, GaDOE piloted the newly revised Teacher and Leader Keys Effectiveness System. More than 3,500 teachers from more than 550 schools participated in the pilot program. The new teacher evaluation system (Teacher Keys Effectiveness System) generates a measure of teacher effectiveness based on a combination of the following:

1. Teacher assessments based on performance standards including observations and documentation of performance related to quality performance standards;
2. Surveys of instructional practices from students in intermediate, middle and high schools; and
3. Student growth and academic achievement.

In the area of student growth, teachers in tested subjects will receive a score based on a value-added model that takes into account student growth and achievement gap reduction. Tested subjects include reading, English/ language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies for grades four through eight and all high school courses for which there is an End-of-Course Test (EOCT).

Non-tested subjects include all courses not listed as tested subjects. Approximately 70–75 percent of all teachers teach non-tested subjects for at least some portion of the instructional day. For teachers of non-tested subjects, this component consists of the GaDOE-approved Student Learning Objectives (SLOs), which utilize district-identified achievement growth measures. SLOs are determined by the district and are content-specific, grade-level learning objectives that are measureable, focused on growth in student learning, and aligned to curriculum standards.[7]

The Leader Keys Effectiveness System comprises the same type of measures pertaining to leader assessments on performance standards and student growth and academic achievement. The Leader Keys System also includes student surveys on school climate and data on student attendance and the retention of effective teachers. For a full discussion of the teacher/ leader evaluation system, please see *Issue 2: Elevating Low-Performing Schools: Keys to a successful turnaround.*

Based on the results from the first pilot, GaDOE made minor changes. It was in fact these changes, prompted by the results from the pilot, which led to the state being put on "high-alert" by U.S. DOE. The major change included not surveying younger students (primarily those under the age of eight) about their teachers' instructional practices.

In the fall of 2012, the evaluation systems were rolled out to all schools within the 26 RT3 districts. Moreover, 24 additional school districts have elected to pilot or study the systems during 2012-2013. In addition, 20 middle and high schools will be fully implementing both the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System and Leader Keys Effectiveness System during 2012-2013. The state is expected to implement the new system statewide for the 2013-2014 school year.

5 U.S. Department of Education. *Georgia Report – Year 1: School Year 2010-2011.* Washington, DC: Author. 2012.
6 Ibid.
7 Georgia Department of Education. "Student Learning Objectives." 2012. Retrieved from http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/School-Improvement/Teacher-and-Leader-Effectiveness/Pages/Student-Learning-Objectives.aspx

In addition to the evaluation system, Georgia is also focused on improving the pipeline of effective teachers, especially in high-need schools and hard-to-staff areas. To accomplish this, Georgia has partnered with Teach for America (TFA) and The New Teacher Project (TNTP) to provide alternative pathways to certification. TFA has been contracted to provide services to four metro-Atlanta districts, while TNTP is providing services to six districts that span three primary geographic clusters.

The state placed more than 100 TFA and approximately 50 TNTP candidates in schools for the 2011-2012 school year.[8] Moreover, Georgia has recently entered into an agreement with the UTeach Institute to create a pipeline for more mathematics and science majors for secondary schools.

Finally, to continue to retain and support effective teachers, Georgia has established a 50-member task force to develop teacher and principal induction guidelines that create structured and effective support for new teachers and principals. The induction guidelines are linked to a career ladder that formalizes teacher advancement. The career ladder outlines duties and responsibilities for all teachers ranging from new teachers to master to teacher leaders. It also outlines requirements on how to ascend the ladder that are related to sustained teacher effectiveness on the new evaluation system.

Adopting College- and Career-Ready Standards and Assessments

Implementing rigorous college- and career-ready standards and assessments that prepare students for success is an integral aspect of education reform in all RT3 states. For the 2012-2013 school year, Georgia implemented the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS) in K-9 mathematics and in English/Language Arts for all grades. The CCGPS will be implemented in Mathematics in all grades by 2014. Georgia was also selected as one of 26 states to lead the development of the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), which is a state-led effort to define science content and practices for all K-12 students. The first draft of the NGSS was released for public comment in April of 2012. The timeline for implementation has not been determined.

For the implementation of the new standards, Georgia has focused on professional development for school personnel. Since 2002, the state has been working to strengthen its standards in all subjects. The revised standards rolled out between 2004 and 2009 suffered a rocky implementation, primarily due to insufficient support of teacher training and professional development. In implementing the CCGPS, Georgia learned from earlier mistakes and changed how trainings were handled. Over the past 18 months, the state conducted regional trainings on the new math and reading standards at each grade level that were streamed directly to teachers in live, interactive sessions and video-taped for future reference. All CCGPS Professional Learning webinars were recorded and are being distributed by Georgia Public Broadcasting (GPB). Teachers are also able to take online courses individually, and the state's 16 regional education service agencies, or RESAs, are providing follow-up training for school and district staff.[9]

Along with the content standards, Georgia is also strengthening its assessments. Georgia is a member of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) consortia, which has been charged with developing the assessments for the Common Core that all PARCC member states will use. Scheduled for implementation in 2014, the PARCC assessments will primarily be computer based and focus on performance-based assessments. Until the PARCC assessments are ready, Georgia will continue to administer the state's Criteria-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT), though it will be transitioned to align with the CCGPS.

Implementing the Longitudinal Data System

Statewide longitudinal data systems (LDS) improve the ability of states to effectively manage, use and analyze education data to support instruction. RT3 states are working to ensure their data systems are accessible and that data support educators and decision-makers in their efforts to improve instruction.

The overall vision of the data system in Georgia is to provide seamless data access to all users throughout pre-K, K-12, and post secondary systems for students, parents, teachers, administrators and researchers. It is designed to improve instruction by delivering student data, curriculum standards and instructional resources directly to teachers electronically through a district's student information system. The objectives for the system are as follows:

- To make educational data available that supports cross agency analysis,
- To establish an environment that will support data storage and access over time, and
- To establish an environment that will both be valued by the community it supports and require minimum resources to maintain.

To date, GaDOE has implemented a statewide longitudinal data system for grades K-12 that includes a unique identifier for all students. The system provides a permanent record that contains educational data on every student for the past six years, if they were enrolled in a public school within the state.

Not only does the data system track student

8 Ibid.
9 Boser, U. *Race to the Top: What Have We Learned from the States so Far?* Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. 2012.

performance, it acts as an instructional improvement system (IIS) for teachers and administrators as well. The LDS will incorporate teacher resources tied to each of the CCGPS. The system will provide teachers and parents with valuable resources related to the questions that were missed on an assessment by an individual student. The information provided is viewable by CCGPS domain and standard. Upon selecting a standard, users will be able to view resources that are aligned to that content. GaDOE is currently building a warehouse of electronic resources that will be available for teachers and parents.

It is important to note that the LDS is only a small portion of the total IIS now being implemented under RT3. When fully operational, the IIS will combine online student assessments, professional development, teaching evaluations, metrics from the College and Career Ready Performance Index, and digital resources linked to the CCGPS to the desktop of every teacher in Georgia.

Turning Around the Lowest Performing Schools

All RT3 states are supporting local districts in the implementation of reforms to turn around the lowest achieving schools by implementing one of four school intervention models.[10]

1. Turnaround model: Replace the principal and rehire no more than 50 percent of the staff and allow sufficient flexibility to fully implement a comprehensive approach to student improvement.
2. Restart model: Convert a school to a charter school.
3. School closure: Close the school and enroll the students who attended that school in other higher achieving schools.
4. Transformation model: Implement each of the following: a) replace the principal, b) institute comprehensive instructional reforms, c) increase learning time, and d) provide operational flexibility.[11]

Under RT3 in Georgia, there are 36 schools classified as "lowest achieving" that are the focus for turnaround. Almost all of them have employed the "transformational model" for school improvement, with only three using the turnaround model. On average, GaDOE has a strong record for intervening in low-performing schools. Of the 91 schools that have received an in-depth needs assessment from a state team since 2006-2007, 74 percent have made federal performance targets and 51 percent have come off the state's "needs improvement" list.[12] For a full discussion of turnaround schools, please see *Issue 2: Elevating Low-Performing Schools: Keys to a Successful Turnaround.*

Other Measures of Success

Finally, Georgia has used the implementation of the Innovation Fund to support state reform efforts in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) fields. The Innovation Fund is a competitive grant process that encourages new and innovative partnerships among K-12 schools, institutions of higher education, nonprofit organizations, and businesses on projects to improve student outcomes.[13]

Georgia has created a $19.4 million fund to determine best practices in innovative programming related STEM education, applied learning, and teacher and leader recruitment and development to influence future education policy efforts. To date, there have been three rounds of the competitive grant process with 23 awardees. The following are some examples of the grantees:

1. The KIPP Teacher Fellows Program: A teacher induction program that will train Georgia State University and Mercer University College of Education graduates and deploy them to metro-Atlanta schools where they are most needed.
2. The Regional Charter STEM Academy: A partnership between White, Hall, and Lumpkin county school systems and North Georgia College & State University to create a tri-county STEM charter school.
3. Computational Thinking: 21st Century STEM Problem-Solving Skills for Georgia Students: The Georgia Institute of Technology will work with B.E. Mays High School and Tapjoy, Inc. to incorporate computational thinking into high school STEM curricula, teaching students to construct models to simulate, visualize and solve real-world problems.

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

Georgia has been working hard over the past 18 months to develop and implement policies and programs under RT3 that will translate into better student outcomes. Moving forward, Georgia needs to consider the overall impacts of the reform efforts being implemented and the sustainability of those programs that prove to have the greatest effect on student outcomes. Currently, two evaluations are being conducted to help inform those decisions.

The first is being conducted by the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill. This evaluation is focusing on the RT3 Early Childhood Education Initiative, being led by the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). Georgia's Early Childhood Initiative is creating a statewide professional development framework that

10 U.S. Department of Education. *Georgia Report – Year 1: School Year 2010-2011.* Washington, DC: Author. 2012.
11 The requirements under SIG 1003(g)/RT3 specify that the former principal must be replaced if the LEA/school selects either the turnaround or transformation model. There is flexibility if the principal has been in the role for two years or less AND was brought in as part of a previous reform.
12 Boser, U. *Race to the Top: What Have We Learned from the States so Far?* Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. 2012.
13 U.S. Department of Education. *Georgia Report – Year 1: School Year 2010-2011.* Washington, DC: Author. 2012.

improves classroom quality for the state's approximately 4,000 Pre-K teachers. This program focuses on key teacher-child interactions that research conclusively links to improved child outcomes. The rigorous evaluation design includes a random assignment of teachers that compares various models of professional development. The state needs to analyze the results of this evaluation to prioritize early learning resources.

The second evaluation is being conducted by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA). Under RT3, GOSA has been charged with leading the development of the RT3 evaluation plan and identifying internal and external partners who will help the state determine the impact of various RT3 projects. This evaluation has three primary goals:[14]

1. To measure how well RT3 projects prepare Georgia students for college and career success,
2. To measure how well the Lowest Achieving Schools were "turned around," and
3. To measure how well the RT3 projects created great teachers and leaders.

As with the early learning evaluation, particular attention should be paid to these results to help prioritize funding and programs moving forward.

While the final results of these evaluations are still out, there are obvious questions about next steps and challenges facing Georgia's implementation of RT3 programs and reforms. First, in terms of the new teacher and leader evaluation systems, there are always challenges in rolling-out a large scale evaluation system. The first is to establish buy-in with not only the teachers and leaders themselves, but others in the community, businesses, parents, etc. The plan must be viewed by all interested parties as fair and flexible and focused on what is really important for student outcomes – instructional practices.

Moreover, buy-in from all is especially important if this system is going to ultimately be used for differentiated compensation. Clear and agreed-upon guidelines must be established in terms of the career ladder and induction work, as well as plans for teachers that consistently do not meet effectiveness standards. A process for either further training or perhaps ultimately leaving the teaching profession must be articulated.

Although Georgia implemented Common Core Georgia Performance Standards in the fall of 2012 for reading/language arts and math, there are a number of questions that still need to be addressed, particularly in the areas of funding, professional development, and adjustment to the new standards on the part of teachers and students. Currently, funding from the federal RT3 will likely give Georgia added support in overcoming the complex challenges associated with adoption.[15] This funding is only temporary, however, and the state will need to consider how it will cover the costs of this initiative over the long term. Experts warn that teachers will need professional development in the Common Core because the standards are different from previous state standards.[16] To that end, professional development will continue to be a need for educators after RT3 funds expire, so the state should consider now how it will fund this need in the future.

Students' adjustment to the CCGPS may also prove difficult. The CCGPS will push students to read all content – not just English/language arts – on a higher level. In 2011, one-third of Georgia's fourth graders were reading below the "basic" level according to the results of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP).[17] With so many students not reading on grade level, the change in the standards will likely result, at least initially, in a drop in school achievement. Georgia should be prepared for this as students adjust to the higher expectations, but this should not be a reason to lower the bar. Our focus should instead be on giving students the support that they need to meet these higher expectations. Also, with the new expectations and their impact on test scores, the standards should be clearly communicated to all stakeholders, including parents, community and business members, and local and state leaders.

Finally, there remain challenges to turning around our lowest performing schools. Georgia has demonstrated some ability to turn around chronically low-performing schools with targeted assistance. The question that remains for the state is how to take known best-practice models to scale, especially without the RT3 funding that has supported them thus far. Most interventions require a team of school improvement specialists, expert support for building school capacity, leadership coaching, and so forth. Currently those activities are funded through a combination of RT3 funds and School Improvement Grants (SIGs), both of which are due to run out in the coming years.

Race to the Top outlines Georgia's reform agenda for improving education. Many, if not most, of our *Top Issues to Watch in 2013* stem in some way from the goals outlined in the state's RT3 plan. The challenges for Georgia moving forward are to 1) fully evaluate the reforms that have been put in place, 2) identify where there are the most student gains and why, and 3) put into place sustainability plans for funding, training and communication to support those reform efforts.

14 Governor's Office of Student Achievement. "Race to the Top." 2010. Retrieved from http://www.gaosa.org/highlights.aspx

15 One study suggests that most states receiving RT3 funds foresee less difficulty with implementing the Common Core. See Kober, N., & Rentner, D.S. *States' Progress and Challenges in Implementing Common Core State Standards.* Washington, DC: Center on Education Policy. January 2011.

16 Gewertz, C. "Educators Need Training to Understand Common Standards, Experts Warn." *Education Week.* June 30, 2011.

17 National Center for Education Statistics. "NAEP State Profiles." Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/states.

2 Elevating Low-Performing Schools: Keys to a Successful Turnaround

ISSUE OVERVIEW

Currently, the federal government offers approximately $3.5 billion in School Improvement Grants (SIG) funds and a tremendous amount of faith that "turnaround" strategies are a promising means to fixing persistently low-performing schools. Unlike traditional reform efforts, with the emphasis on incremental improvements, turnarounds seek to take schools from bad to great within a short period of time.

Historically, efforts focused on turning around the nation's lowest performing schools have not been successful. An evaluation of the school improvement plans implemented in the late 1990s and wrapped into No Child Left Behind (NCLB) found that states and districts receiving federal dollars to turn around their lowest performing schools were successful in directing those dollars to the appropriate schools. However, schools receiving the funding made "little progress in implementing the mandated components."[18] In fact, the targeted turnaround schools were less likely to implement the various required elements than were comparison schools not receiving federal assistance.

These lackluster findings about the turnaround work conducted in the 2000s followed nearly a decade of policymaker frustration with the disappointing track record of NCLB's remedies for low-performing schools: public choice, supplemental services, corrective action plans, and reconstitution.[19] The problem with many of these "remedies" is not that they could not work. In fact, given the proper levels of support and school buy-in, research has shown that they can and do work in particular situations. The shortfalls appear to have come in the quality of implementation across the schools, related in part to school leadership and the levels of support for sustainability and scalability.[20]

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA?

In 2009, the SIG program was transformed in size and scope by the passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The Obama administration announced a plan to rapidly "turn around" 5,000 of the nation's lowest performing schools. As part of the grant, each participating school received up to $2 million per year for three years to participate in rigorous, comprehensive interventions. The SIG program mandated that its funded schools choose one of four prescribed comprehensive intervention models: turnaround, transformation, restart or closure.[21] See Figure 2.1 for a complete description of each model. The concept of turnaround models was further incorporated in the Race to the Top (RT3) application process. States applying for RT3 had to commit to implementing one of the four prescribed turnaround models in their lowest performing schools.

FIGURE 2.1: SIG/ RT3 COMPREHENSIVE INTERVENTION MODELS[22]

- ***Turnaround model:*** Replace the principal and rehire no more than 50 percent of the staff and allow sufficient flexibility to fully implement a comprehensive approach to student improvement.
- ***Restart model:*** The school is converted or closed, then reopened under a charter school operator, charter management organization or education management company.
- ***School closure:*** Close the school and enroll the students who attended that school in other higher achieving schools.
- ***Transformation model:*** Implement each of the following: a) replace the principal, b) institute comprehensive instructional reforms, c) increase learning time and d) provide operational flexibility.

18 Orland, M., Hoffman, A., & Vaughn, E.S. *Evaluation of the Comprehensive School Reform Program Implementation and Outcomes: Five Year Report.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. 2010.
19 Hess, R. "Making Sense of School Turnarounds." Minneapolis: Pie Network. September 2012. Retrieved from http://pie-network.org/buzz/summit-2012/making-sense-of-school-turnaround
20 Ibid.
21 Trujillo, T., & Renee, M. *Democratic School Turnarounds: Pursuing Equity and Learning from Evidence.* Boulder: National Education Policy Center. 2012.
22 The requirement under SIG 1003(g)/RT3 specifies that the former principal must be replaced if the LEA/school selects either the turnaround or transformation model. There is flexibility if the principal has been in the role for two years or less AND was brought in as part of a previous reform.

Georgia took advantage of the expanded federal SIG program implemented by President Obama, and currently has 57 schools receiving SIG dollars for turnaround efforts. Most schools opted for the transformation model of school improvement, while one school opted for closure and three selected the turnaround model. Further, under Georgia's RT3 plan, 36 schools qualified for school turnaround intervention. Much like the original SIG schools, the majority of the RT3 schools opted for the transformational model.[23]

Unlike previous turnaround efforts, preliminary evaluation data from the first cohort of SIG schools under the ARRA grants are encouraging. A significant share of persistently low-performing schools are seeing substantial gains in student learning in just the first year of participation in the SIG program.[24] Given the difficulty of past school turnaround efforts, many were not expecting to see any dramatic changes, especially in the first year. However, initial data show that 63 percent had increases in math proficiency, and 58 percent had increases in reading proficiency.[25]

Similar to the results on the national level, Georgia has a good record for intervening in low-performing schools, primarily utilizing the transformational model of intervention. Of the 91 schools that have received an in-depth needs assessment from a state team since 2006-2007, 74 percent have made federal performance targets and 51 percent have come off the state's "needs improvement" list.[26]

There is some debate, especially among policy makers, that many schools and districts are not forcing the hard choices of committing to the closure or restart models of intervention – often viewed as the most drastic. However, studies and analysis have revealed that these may not be legitimate options, particularly for rural or hard-to-staff schools and districts. Many charter schools and management organizations are reluctant to take over failing schools, especially if there is not an apparent pool of teachers and school leaders willing to sign on.[27] The school closure model is only an option if there happens to be another medium-to-high-performing school with room to accept the students.[28] In smaller districts with only one high school or middle school, for example, closure is not an option.

Moreover, the preliminary results indicate that success does not depend on which intervention model is selected. All four of the SIG models give professionals in the schools the resources they need to be ambitious teachers and leaders. They all provide for embedded professional development, greater use of data to inform instruction, and increased learning time, including collaboration among teachers. In addition, they all provide for improved teacher evaluation systems that, for the first time, provide meaningful feedback to support instruction and a rigorous instructional program aligned with state standards.[29]

School reform leaders are now beginning to understand what is different about this round of turnaround efforts, compared to the relative failure of past efforts. Across all states, the preliminary results point toward two common elements: dynamic leaders and teachers focused on improving instruction.

Research has shown that leadership disparities explain almost a quarter of the difference in student performance found among schools.[30] In school systems, the leadership role is paramount. School districts have enormous power to support principals and teachers in driving instructional improvement. Research has shown that when district leaders effectively address specific responsibilities, they can – and do – have a profound, positive impact on student achievement in their districts.[31] Positive leadership at the district level can translate to effective leadership at the school level as well. Empowering school-level leaders is one of the most important steps districts can take to support student learning. Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to student achievement.

The second commonality of successful turnarounds is the presence of teachers and other school professionals who share a focus on improving instruction – both through expanded collaboration and through the use of data.[32] Georgia is making significant progress in focusing on instructional improvements and using data. In the spring

23 There is some overlap between the SIG schools and the schools identified for turnaround intervention under RT3. SIG schools that were in one of the 26 RT3 districts are also counted as turnarounds under RT3. However, not all SIG schools were in an RT3 district, and such schools are supported only by the SIG program.

24 Snyder, J. "A Preliminary Progress Report on Turning Around the Lowest-Performing Schools." March 29, 2012. Retrieved from http://www.ed.gov/blog/2012/03/a-preliminary-progress-report-on-turning-around-the-lowest-performing-schools/.

25 Ibid.

26 Boser, U. Race to the Top: *What Have We Learned from the States so Far?* Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. 2012.

27 Hess, R. (2012, September). "Making Sense of School Turnarounds." Minneapolis: Pie Network. September 2012. Retrieved from http://pie-network.org/buzz/summit-2012/making-sense-of-school-turnaround

28 Ibid.

29 Snyder, J. "A Preliminary Progress Report on Turning Around the Lowest-Performing Schools." March 29, 2012. Retrieved from http://www.ed.gov/blog/2012/03/a-preliminary-progress-report-on-turning-around-the-lowest-performing-schools/

30 Ibid.

31 Waters, J. T., & Marzano, R.J. *School district leadership that works: The effect of superintendent leadership on student achievement.* Denver: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning. 2006.

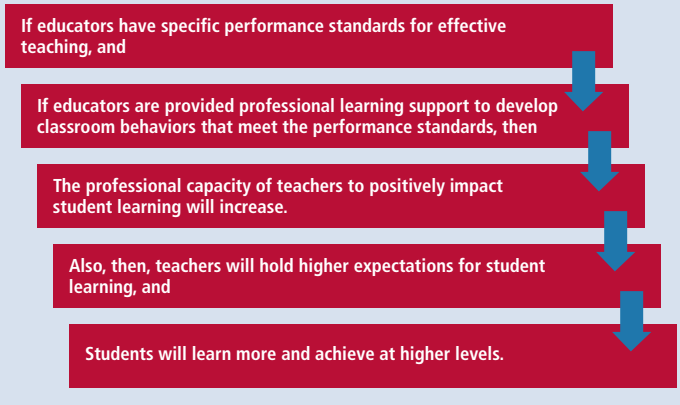
32 Snyder, J. "A Preliminary Progress Report on Turning Around the Lowest-Performing Schools." March 29, 2012. Retrieved from http://www.ed.gov/blog/2012/03/a-preliminary-progress-report-on-turning-around-the-lowest-performing-schools/

of 2012, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) piloted the newly revised Teacher and Leader Keys Effectiveness System. The new system generates a measure of teacher effectiveness based on a combination of the following:

1) Teacher Assessment on Performance Standards (TAPS), which combine the use of classroom observations, walk-throughs, and lesson plans and teacher portfolios to provide teachers constructive feedback across a variety of domains such as planning, instructional delivery, assessment, learning environment, and professionalism and communication;
2) The Surveys of Instructional Practice, which will include student surveys that ask questions along the same five domains as the TAPS; and
3) Student Growth and Academic Achievement, which will take into account student growth/value-added models.

The primary focus of the teacher effectiveness system is to help improve instruction and to better design professional development activities to meet teacher needs. Georgia's new system emphasizes regular observations and data analysis to provide teachers with real-time feedback on their classroom practices, and school leaders can use what they observe to offer meaningful professional development targeted to specific teacher needs. This should help drive professional development, which in turn can drive student outcomes. Figure 2.2 illustrates the Theory of Action, showing how the effectiveness system translates into improved student learning.

FIGURE 2.2: THEORY OF ACTION[33]



The turnaround schools in Georgia are also using a school improvement tool called Endostar, provided by the Center for Innovation and Improvement. This tool provides the schools with 34 quality indicators, each with its own support plan, to help guide turnaround efforts. Many of these indicators come directly from the new teacher effectiveness system and incorporate measures utilized in the new College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). The quality indicators also help assess the schools' progress in implementing the new Common Core Georgia Performance Standards. This tool allows for an aligned reform approach incorporating all of the state's efforts around increasing accountability and rigor as well as focused professional development around instruction and teacher effectiveness.

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

Georgia has taken small but dramatic steps towards turning around its lowest performing schools. Successful turnarounds require changing the culture, expectations and routines within a school. That begins with establishing high goals for individual teachers and staff, while providing them with the appropriate support, tools and professional development necessary to achieve those goals. In changing the culture of a school, the focus should be on policies and procedures that improve the quality of teaching and learning. This would include plans to systematically recruit and retain highly qualified teachers in turnaround schools, which historically are difficult to staff.

The new teacher effectiveness system can first be used to understand the distribution of high-performing teachers across the state and to identify which low-performing schools have a dearth of such teachers. It can then be used to inform and improve the instructional practice of all teachers.

Turnarounds also require fidelity of implementation and on-the-ground commitment from school personnel. Georgia can provide professionals working in and with turnaround schools data, research, and evaluation to local leaders. This includes providing schools with multiple indicators of effectiveness – not just test scores. With the state's new longitudinal data system (LDS), educators can now potentially track long-term academic success such as access to highly qualified teachers, college-preparatory and/or advanced coursework, graduation, and college enrollment rates.[34]

Traditionally, turnaround schools are located in neighborhoods of high poverty and high crime, both of which can easily undermine any effective school

33 Georgia Department of Education. *TKES Handbook: Teacher Keys Effectiveness System.* Atlanta: Author. 2012.
34 Trujillo, T., & Renee, M. *Democratic School Turnarounds: Pursuing Equity and Learning from Evidence.* Boulder: National Education Policy Center. 2012.

turnaround reform agenda if not addressed. Community engagement and comprehensive wrap-around services may be needed to support and stabilize the school. Resources should be applied to help struggling schools identify existing community resources that can be integrated into the improvement process. Data can be used to track outcomes related to these supports such as increased parent participation in the school, decreased school violence, reduced suspensions, and so forth.

Finally, as in all education reform initiatives, maintaining funding levels for SIG schools is paramount. The turnaround schools in Georgia have all received an infusion of federal funds – either from SIG or RT3. Those funds are limited and due to expire within the next two years, depending on when the grant started. Many of these schools achieving success under the SIG or RT3 grants will require sustained funding for their programs. For example, many schools have increased learning time for their students adding up to 300 hours of instructional time for their low-performing students. Other schools have provided incentive pay around teaching excellence in order to attract and retain high-performing teachers. With the loss of federal funding, these programs will not continue.

Moreover, Georgia's NCLB waiver has created another cohort of turnaround schools. Any Title I school categorized as a Focus or Priority school is automatically required to participate in a school turnaround plan. However, these schools will not have the benefit of the federal infusion of dollars that the SIG and RT3 turnaround schools have had. Georgia must address the funding needs for each of these schools.

In Georgia, turnaround schools can be viewed as the ultimate testing ground for the compilation of the reform efforts currently being implemented. Efforts to intervene in the lowest performing schools are focused on aligning the implementation of multiple programs such as the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards, use of technology and student data, professional development based on the new teacher and leader evaluation systems, school measures of success and improvement based on the new College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI), and so forth. The greatest indicator of success for this reform agenda would be to have it take hold in the lowest performing schools and turn them around.

3 Funding: How Do We Pay for K-12 Education?

ISSUE OVERVIEW

The headlines tell us "The recession is over!" To the average taxpayer, state official or federal budget officer, however, the recovery has been slow and treasuries have yet to return to their pre-recession levels. To make matters worse, optimism has been tempered by a series of threats to the fragile economic recovery. Such current threats range from congressional gridlock over the federal budget, European debt problems, conflicts in the Middle East and the seemingly rising frequency of natural disasters. Each of these is a threat to the slow post-recession economic recovery.

The economic downturn that began in 2007 and the slow recovery that followed has forced states to make deep cuts to education due to historic collapses in state revenues. Despite the recession technically having ended in 2009, states have continued to cut education funding. Most states, including Georgia, relied heavily on spending reductions in response to the recession, rather than on a mix of spending cuts and revenue increases. As a result, schools in 26 states are receiving less state funding in the 2012-2013 school year than they did the previous year, and in 35 states (including Georgia) school funding is currently below 2008 levels. In many states, it's far below.

According to a study published by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Georgia will have decreased state per-student spending by 14.8 percent between fiscal years 2008 and 2013. That is the seventh highest in the nation.[35] This reduction in funding must be compensated by the local districts, many of which are facing a financial crisis of their own as revenues from local property taxes decline. Many local districts are now fearful of bankruptcy. Five small districts in Georgia began the current fiscal year with no money.[36]

Concurrent with the unprecedented cuts in education funding, Governor Nathan Deal has outlined ambitious plans for the Georgia educational system within his State Strategic Plan. Among his goals are to 1) increase the percentage of third-graders reading at grade level, 2) increase the percentage of effective teachers and principals, 3) increase teacher competency and student proficiency in the STEM fields (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), 4) increase the number of Georgian's with a postsecondary degree and 5) increase public school options and flexibility. These goals are achievable through investments in increased standards, rigor, assessments and professional development.

However, while state revenues have improved over the past years, state tax collections remain approximately 5 percent below pre-recession levels, and current growth rates suggest it will take years before state revenues are able to support services such as K-12 education at pre-recession levels.[37] So the question becomes: How does the state maintain its commitment to education reform within the current economic reality?

35 Jones, W.C. "Some School Systems Fear Bankruptcy Because of State Cuts." *Rome News-Tribune.* September 15, 2012. Retrieved from http://www.rn-t.com/view/full_story/20158168/article-Some-school-systems-fear-bankruptcy-because-of-state-cuts

36 Ibid.

37 National Conerence of State Legislatures. *NCSL Fiscal Brief: Projected State Tax Growth in FY 2013.* Denver: Author. September 25, 2012.

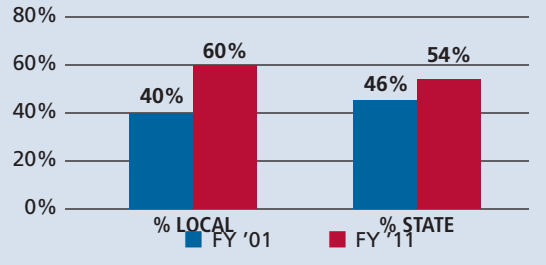
WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA?

School funding is not only a complex educational issue, but also a dynamic one. Each year, new policy considerations and legislation arise that shape the debate and structure school finance. Across the country, states and local school districts are grappling with funding formulas, tax reforms, education litigation, and the adequacy of school funds, all of which have a direct impact on the quality of local education systems.

In Georgia, the majority of state funds for public schools is provided according to the Quality Basic Education (QBE) formula, which was established by state legislation in 1985. QBE earnings are Georgia's primary mechanism for funding public schools and represent the state's estimate on what it costs to provide a quality basic education for students. The QBE earnings are used to fund both direct and indirect instructional costs. Over the years, various adjustments have been made to the funding formula, the most notable of which has been state austerity cuts. These state-level cuts, which were initiated during a time of economic decline, have significantly limited the amount local school systems receive from the state, despite the level of funding guaranteed by the QBE law.

Since the first austerity cuts were imposed in 2003, the cumulative effects have been a total reduction in state education funding of more than $3.8 billion.[38] These reductions were and continue to be particularly devastating to those local school systems without a large enough tax base to adequately supplement the lost revenue through local taxes. Figure 3.1 represents the shifts in Georgia's public K-12 education funding by revenue source.

FIGURE 3.1: K-12 EDUCATIONAL FUNDING SHIFTS (FY 2001–FY 2011)[39]



In 2012, the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute (GBPI) surveyed Georgia's 180 school districts on the impact of these funding cuts.[40] The 150 districts that responded represent 92 percent of the students enrolled in public schools. Key findings include the following:

- **Fewer school days –** Two-thirds of school districts shortened the school calendar. On average, students will be in school nearly a week less this school year compared to 2008.
- **Larger class sizes and fewer teachers –** Six out of 10 districts reported increased average class sizes. This held true even in districts where student enrollment shrank or stayed the same. The number of classroom teachers in Georgia has decreased by more than 8,500 since the 2008-2009 school year, even as the number of students has increased.
- **Teacher pay cuts –** This school year, 74 percent of districts are continuing to cut teacher work days, i.e., instituting furlough days. This is a 16 percent increase from 2009.[41]

It remains to be seen if these reductions will have an impact on the educational attainment of students. Class size has been one of the most popular topics of study in the education field, and the findings have been decidedly mixed. Across all grade levels, research agrees that reduced class sizes lead to

- More time for individual student attention,
- Increased student motivation,
- Improved behavioral and classroom management, and
- Less stress and increased teacher satisfaction with working conditions.

However, in terms of academic outcomes, only students in grades K-3 see an improvement in academic outcomes if they are in classrooms of 17 or fewer students.[42] Therefore, targeted increases in class sizes are not necessarily deleterious to student achievement. Research is clear: not all students need to be in small classrooms. However, if cuts made to instruction are broad and effect classrooms of younger children or those with a higher need of individualized instruction, those reductions may result in worsening outcomes for children.

Similarly, research on school days and instructional time has also been ambiguous. Most studies that focus on

38 Governor's Office of Planning and Budget. *The Governor's Budget Report.* Atlanta: Author. 2003–2013.
39 Georgia Department of Education. *Revenue/Expenditure Reports (FY 2000–FY 2011).* Atlanta: Author.
40 Johnson, C.D. *Survey Says: Trouble for Schools, Cuts in Education Spending Mean Fewer School Days and More Crowded Classrooms (GBPI policy report).* Atlanta: Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. October 2012.
41 bid.
42 Sykes, G., Schneider, B., & Plank, D. (Eds.). *The AERA Handbook of Education Policy Research.* New York: American Educational Research Association. 2009.

total instructional time across all subjects find no association with student achievement. For example, a summary evaluation of three high-quality international studies linking instructional time to student achievement found no significant associations between overall instructional time and achievement.[43] However, other research has demonstrated stronger positive associations when studies of instructional time were limited to time teaching math, science or civics content specifically. The same international studies that found no correlation between instructional time and overall student achievement found significantly positive correlations between increased instructional time and student math and science outcomes.[44]

It is important to note that in reducing the number of days students attend school, districts are required to keep the same level of instructional time for students. Districts make up this difference by cutting the number of teacher workdays used for professional development and teacher planning time. Multiple studies have shown direct and significant results related to targeted professional development and teacher planning time – especially in the areas of mathematics and science.[45]

Similar to results about increased class size, research suggests that a reduction in number of school days may not have an overall effect on student outcomes. But areas where Georgia has stated an expressed interest in improvement – STEM-related subjects – may be disproportionately and negatively affected through reduced teacher professional development and planning time and potentially less instructional time.

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

Education finance refers to the various formulas and systems by which public schools are funded. Many education policymakers and practitioners consider the funding of public schools to be the most critical issue in public education. Running schools – and improving them – cannot take place without the proper resources. As a policy issue, education finance is both complex and controversial. Determining how to best allocate funds to support improvements in state and local education systems is always a contentious political issue.

As previously stated, Georgia has embarked on an ambitious reform agenda aimed at increasing student achievement and the number of students graduating from high school college- and career-ready. To achieve these goals, the state has established a set of mandates for local schools and districts, including the implementation of the following:

- The new Common Core Georgia Performance Standards in Math and English/Language Arts,
- The new assessments aligned with these new standards,
- The new College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) accountability standards, and
- Career Pathways.

Determining how best to fund and support these reform efforts and provide continued operating support for our schools during a time of diminished funds will be a challenge.

During the 2011 legislative session, House Bill 192 was passed, which created the State Education Finance Study Commission to address some of these challenges. The Commission was established to study the costs and resources required to educate Georgia's children. The Finance Commission reviewed how schools are funded in Georgia, particularly with regard to core student funding, funding equity, and state and local funding partnerships.[46]

The Commission has delivered two sets of interim recommendations – in August 2011 and January 2012 – that were acted on by the General Assembly during the 2012 legislative session. These recommendations included 1) changes to the funding of school nurses to provide a greater level of state support, 2) financial support for professional learning associated with statewide strategic initiatives (i.e., implementation of the Common Core), 3) changes to the Capital Outlay Program, and 4) a shift in the reporting requirements related to home schooling reports to the Department of Education and away from the local districts.

The Commission's final recommendations were adopted on September 19, 2012, and those with a fiscal impact were prioritized for funding. Included in the final recommendations are changes in the funding of the following:

1. Classroom technology and infrastructure,
2. School counselors,
3. Student support services,
4. Professional learning,
5. Central and school administration,
6 Equalization funds, and
7. Capital outlay.[47]

43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Blank, R.K., & de las Alas, N. "Effects of Teacher Professional Development on Gains in Student Achievement: How Meta Analysis Provides Scientific Evidence Useful to Education Leaders." *SREE Conference Abstract Template.* 2012.
46 Georgia Department of Education. http://www.gadoe.org/fbo_financial.aspx?PageReq=FBOFinStudyComm.
47 Georgia Department of Education. http://www.gadoe.org/Finance-and-Business-Operations/Financial-Review/Pages/State-Education-Finance-Study-Commission.aspx.

The Commission is also proposing to implement the Georgia Statewide Tiered Accountability and Flexibility System (G-STAFS). The G-STAFS is intended to replace the State's current funding waiver options with a comprehensive flexibility/ accountability structure. Georgia's new College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) assigns a numerical score (0-100) based on a school's and district's performance across a variety of performance measures. The Commission recommends those scores be translated to a letter grade (i.e. a school with a score 90-100 would receive an 'A'). Based on their letter grade and desire for flexibility, districts will be placed in one of three categories: Strategic School System (districts with a C, D, or F), High Performing School System (districts with an A, or B), or Charter System (districts with an A-F and have entered a charter contract with the state). High Performing and Charter Systems will have blanket waivers and minimal oversight from the state. Strategic School Systems must apply for flexibility waiver and will receive increased state oversight and monitoring from GaDOE to ensure accountability. For a full discussion of the CCRPI and the G-STAFS, please see *Issue 7: The NCLB Waiver: What Grade did Your School Get.*

Coinciding with the work of the Funding Commission, in the summer of 2012, the Georgia Chamber of Commerce announced the launch of Smarter Funding, Better Outcomes, a new initiative that examines how to improve Georgia's K-12 funding system. The initiative follows prior research by the Institute for a Competitive Workforce that ranked Georgia 31st among all states for the return on its investment in education and 39th for school finance over all.

The Initiative examined Georgia's K-12 budgetary spending across four main areas: equity, flexibility, efficiency and transparency. Georgia scores well in equity, as funding amounts to districts rise in correlation with poverty rates. Second, the report found that smaller districts tend to have a higher proportion of more experienced teachers who make more money. The state does provide some funding flexibility in allowing districts to become an Investing in Educational Excellence (IE2) or Charter System, which provides funding flexibility in exchange for student accountability. However, only a small portion of the state's systems fall into either category. In terms of efficiency and effectiveness, the report found that the state's current funding formula is not designed to incentivize performance. Finally, the funding structure lacks transparency and is highly complex.

The Initiative made three broad recommendations designed to create a more efficient and transparent funding system. First, revise the QBE formula so that the vast majority of funding is allocated through a student based funding formula. Second, include as much existing state education funding as possible in the student-based formula. The report estimates a total of 90 to 95 percent of state funding could be included in the student based funding formula amount. Third, build a data and reporting systems that link funding, expenditures and student outcomes. Taken together, these recommendations were intended to produce efficiencies within the K-12 system that also drive improved student outcomes.

The large cuts that all states have made in education spending not only can have consequences on student achievement, they can also have serious consequences for the economy – both in the short term and the long term. These cuts directly impact jobs and can counteract and sometimes undermine important state education reforms.

The recommendations outlined by the State Education Finance Study Commission indicate the state's education priorities. However, it remains to be seen if Georgia is able to fund the new formula. The 2013 budget did not include any new austerity cuts from 2012. When and if the state is able to return to pre-recession levels is unknown.

4 Help Wanted: Hiring 250,000 New Graduates

ISSUE OVERVIEW

There is a storm brewing in our educational system that could have a far-reaching impact on our state's economic health. And it has nothing to do with charter schools. Georgia is short 250,000 graduates from our institutions of higher education.

In 2010, Anthony Carnevale of Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce released a study that showed by 2018, the nation will need 22 million new post-secondary degrees. However, as a nation, we will fall short of that number by at least 3 million.[48]

This shortfall is a result of increasing demand for postsecondary degrees in the workforce over the past three decades. Between 1973 and 2008, the share of jobs in the U.S. economy that required a postsecondary education increased to 59 percent – up from 28 percent. What is alarming is that continuing to do what has always been done to move students through the higher education system will not close the skills gap facing the nation.

Traditionally, policy makers and practitioners have tracked outcomes for first-time freshmen attending school full-time. These are the "traditional" students that most higher education policies and programs target. However, only a quarter of students attend full-time, attend residential colleges and have most of their bills paid by their parents. Approximately 60 percent of students attend part-time.[49]

Conversely, 75 percent of today's students juggle a combination of family, work and school while commuting to class. Among these part-time students, only about 25 percent graduate with a bachelor's degree and only 8 percent graduate with an associate's degree.[50]

To date, higher education policy decisions have been based on the full-time college student – a minority of the college-going population. This has allowed older students, students trapped in remediation classes, and students pursuing career certificates and technical degrees to be virtually ignored. Georgia, along with many other states, has finally begun to recognize the importance of the "non-traditional" student and is now including them in statewide efforts to increase the skill level of the workforce and increase the percentage of its population with a higher education degree.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA?

Postsecondary education and training has become a necessity for all young Georgians. By 2020, 60 percent of jobs in Georgia will require a postsecondary degree or certification, but only 42 percent of young adults in the state have either today.[51] Closing this gap requires 250,000 more students to complete postsecondary programs over the next eight years.

In 2011, Governor Nathan Deal launched Complete College Georgia to address the skills gap in Georgia. This statewide initiative has brought together the University System of Georgia (USG) and the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) to increase the higher education graduation rate through increased participation from traditional populations as well as engaging the wider pool of non-traditional populations. The goal is to ensure that 60 percent of our young adult population has a post-secondary degree, which equates to 250,000 new graduates. It is part of a larger effort, Complete College America, which seeks to improve postsecondary completion rates nationally.

The first step in the Complete College Georgia plan is to increase the college readiness of students graduating from high school and entering the post-secondary system.

48 Carnevale, A., Smith, N., & Strohl, J. *Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements through 2018.* Washington, DC: Georgetown University, Center on Education and the Workforce. 2010.
49 Complete College America. *Time Is the Enemy.* Washington, DC: Author. 2011.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.

Many young students already recognize the need for post-secondary training. The college enrollment rate among recent high school graduates is 72 percent, which is higher than in many other states.[52] In addition, the number of students in postsecondary institutions has soared over the last decade. Enrollment in the USG grew by 36 percent between 2002 and 2011.[53] The TCSG has seen a corresponding increase, with annual growth of almost 30 percent between FY2008 and FY2011.[54]

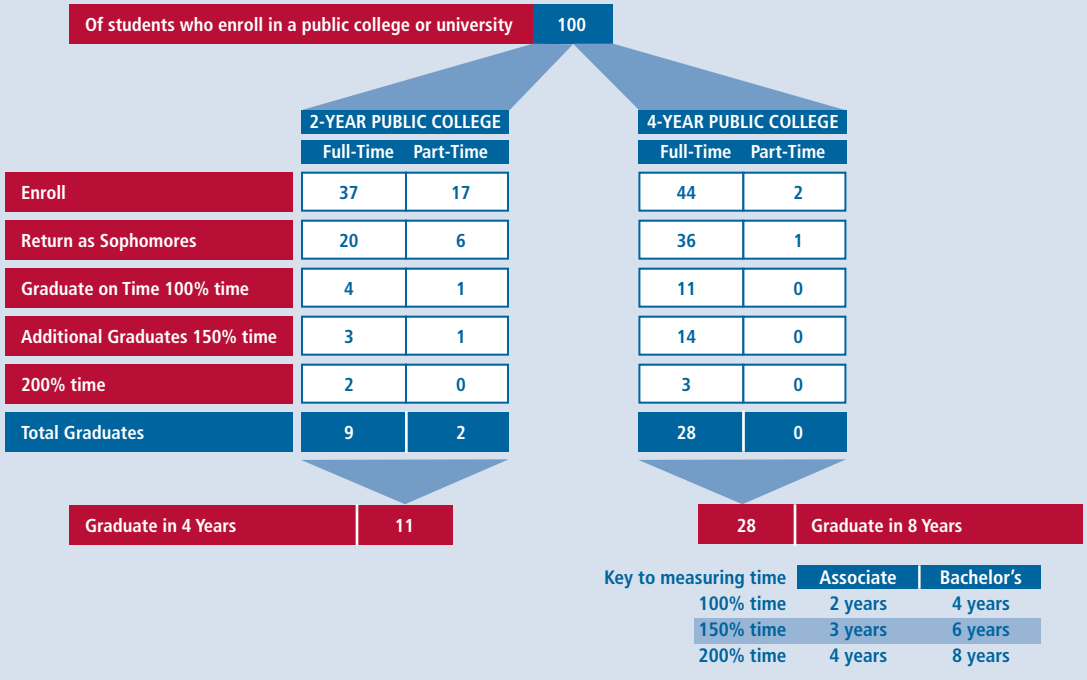
However, a significant proportion of these students will not finish the programs they begin at these institutions. More than 40 percent of students who enroll in bachelor's degree programs in the USG do not graduate, nor do 80 percent of those who enroll in two-year institutions.

There are multiple reasons for these low completion rates. First, more students are working and can afford to attend school only part-time. Our colleges and universities have historically focused their attention on full-time students who are integrated into the campus life. That dynamic is shifting. Within the USG, among those attending a state university in the fall of 2012, a full 44 percent[55] were classified as part-time, up from 39 percent in 2008.[56] Within the TCSG, 53 percent of students attended school part-time in 2011.[57]

Research has shown that part-time students are significantly less likely to graduate than full-time students. Figure 4.1 shows the graduation rates of full-time students and part-time students in a random sample. In this sample, no part-time students graduated from a four-year institution within eight years of entering and only two graduated from a two-year college within four years.[58]

A second reason for the non-completion rate is that many students come to college unprepared. A primary indicator of college readiness is graduating from high school. It is an essential step on the path to college, yet it is one that many of Georgia's students never take. They drop out, shutting the door to postsecondary study and its rewards before most are even old enough to vote. Table 4.1 presents the state's high school rate for 2010-2011.[59] The graduation rate is calculated based on the cohort of students who enter ninth grade and graduate within four

FIGURE 4.1: HIGHER EDUCATION COMPLETION RATE FOR FULL-TIME VS. PART-TIME STUDENTS



52 Collins, C. *Measuring Success by Degrees: The Status of College Completion in SREB States.* Atlanta: Southern Regional Education Board. 2010. Retrieved from http://publications.sreb.org/2010/10E13_Measuring_Success.pdf

53 University System of Georgia. "Ten Year Enrollment Report: Fall 2011." 2011. Retrieved from http://www.usg.edu/research/documents/enrollment_reports/rpt02-11.pdf

54 Technical College System of Georgia. *Technical College System of Georgia Fast Facts and College Directory 2011-2012.* 2011. Retrieved from https://tcsg.edu/

55 Office of Research and Policy Analysis. *Semester Enrollment Report Fall 2012.* Atlanta: Board of Regents, University System of Georgia. 2012.

56 Office of Research and Policy Analysis. *Semester Enrollment Report Fall 2008.* Atlanta: Board of Regents, University System of Georgia. 2008.

57 Technical College System of Georgia. *Technical College System of Georgia Fast Facts and College Directory 2011-2012.* 2011. Retrieved from https://tcsg.edu/.

58 Complete College America. (2011). "Georgia 2011." Retrieved from http://www.completecollege.org/state_data/.

59 Georgia Department of Education. "2010-2011 Report Card, All Schools, Three-Year Comparison of Graduation Rates." Retrieved from http://reportcard2011.gaosa.org/(S(z1dpl5vatgrunazgkiiiv45))/k12/Indicators.aspX?ID=ALL:ALL&TestKey=GradRate&TestType=indicators).

TABLE 4.1: HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE, 2010-2011

	2010-11
All students	67.5
Asian	79.2
Black	59.8
Hispanic	57.6
Native American	67.8
White	75.5
Multiracial	69.1
Male	63.3
Female	71.8
Limited English proficiency	32.1
Economically disadvantaged	59.4
Not economically disadvantaged	74.6

years; the rate includes adjustments for transfer students.[60]

Being ready for post-secondary study requires more than graduating from high school, however. It requires a thorough understanding of key concepts in core content areas and strong writing skills. Many students graduate from high school lacking both. One indication of this is results from End-of-Course Tests, which are given in core subjects and are more rigorous than the state's high school graduation test.[61] As Table 4.2 reveals, significant portions of Georgia's high school students fail these tests.[62]

Math has proven to be particularly challenging for many students, with a third or more of 2012 graduates failing algebra, Math I or Math II. The latter two tests have been controversial because they integrate concepts from algebra, geometry and statistics that students have persistently struggled to master. The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) thus created separate tests in algebra and geometry that can now be substituted for Math I and II.

Georgia has an additional problem beyond its current students being unprepared for college and/or career. Approximately 20 percent of the population over the age of 18 does not have a high school diploma. In some counties, more than one-third of the adult population has less than a high school education.[63] To get to our goal of 60 percent, Georgia must reach out to these adults and re-engage them in the education system.

In recent years, the growth in non-traditional students (i.e., students who have been out of the educational system for more than five years) can be seen at both the USG and TCSG. Between FY2008 and FY2011, the number of students enrolled at TCSG over the age of 40 increased 42 percent.[64] During that same time, the number of non-traditional students enrolled in the USG increased 16 percent.[65]

In addition to serving more students from the non-traditional adult population, TCSG targets adult learners through education programs that enable them to study for and earn a GED diploma. During FY2011, more than 82,000 Georgia adult learners took part in TCSG's GED instruction and testing, English as a Second Language programs, or Adult Basic and Secondary Education programs. Over the past 12 years, TCSG has awarded more than 225,000 GED diplomas.[66] These GED graduates can now transition to a college education and join the growing number of "non-traditional" students our institutions are being asked to serve.

To address these high school completion and higher education readiness issues, the Complete College Georgia plan calls for collaboration with GaDOE to increase standards and assessments for students in the K-12 system. The most visible is the adoption and implementation of the Common Core Curriculum Standards. GaDOE has also developed a new accountability system – the

TABLE 4.2: END-OF-COURSE TESTS 2011-2012

COURSE	% FAIL	% PASS	% PASS PLUS
9th Grade Literature & Composition	15.9	46.0	38.1
American Literature & Composition	10.8	58.8	30.4
Algebra	37.2	46.7	16.1
Geometry	26.4	42.9	30.7
Mathematics I	34.7	47.2	18.0
Mathematics II	46.1	45.5	8.4
Biology	27.3	42.7	30.0
U.S. History	31.7	33.6	34.7
Physical Science	22.5	33.7	43.8
Economics/Business/Free Enterprise	22.7	45.0	32.3

60 Georgia Department of Education. "Georgia Releases New Four-year High School Graduation Rate." Press release. April 10, 2012. Retrieved from http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid=33.

61 Badertscher, N. "Students Fare Better on Most End-of-Course Tests, but Not Math II." Atlanta Journal Constitution. July 3, 2012. Retrieved from http://www.ajc.com/news/news/local/students-fare-better-on-most-end-of-course-tests-1/nQWzt/.

62 Georgia Department of Education. "EOCT Statewide Scores: Spring 2012 State Summary." Retrieved from http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Assessment/Pages/EOCT-Statewide-Scores.aspx.

63 U.S. Census Bureau. "Georgia." September 18, 2012. Retrieved from State and County Quick Facts: http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/13000.html.

64 Technical College System of Georgia. *Technical College System of Georgia Fast Facts and College Directory 2011-2012.* 2011. Retrieved from https://tcsg.edu/.

65 Office of Research and Policy Analysis. *Semester Enrollment Report Fall 2012 and Fall 2008.* Atlanta: Board of Regents, University System of Georgia. 2008/2012.

66 Technical College System of Georgia. *Technical College System of Georgia Fast Facts and College Directory 2011-2012.* 2011. Retrieved from https://tcsg.edu/.

College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). To support both of these, the Department has developed a new K-16 data system. It is also expanding opportunities for high school students to earn college credits, facilitating their transition to and success in postsecondary institutions.

To build upon the work happening in K-12, under the Complete College Georgia plan, the USG and TCSG are working together to develop strategies aimed at improving higher education completion rates. Three key focus areas include 1) strengthening remedial courses, 2) shortening time to degree and 3) restructuring delivery.

Students who enter post-secondary institutions without adequate preparation are required to enroll in remedial courses that do not count toward a certification or degree program. These students have lower graduation rates than those who do not require remediation. Students who enter bachelor's degree programs in the USG and take remedial courses have a six-year graduation rate of 24 percent. Those who enroll in associate degree programs and receive remediation in the USG and or TCSG have a three-year graduation rate of 7 percent. The implications of these low graduation rates ripple across both systems given the number of students who require remediation: 59 percent of students entering the University System's two-year colleges and 48 percent of those entering its state colleges require remediation as do 26 percent of students entering TCSG.[67]

The two systems are working to improve remediation. The University System will take the following steps:

- Modularize remedial courses,
- Create alternative paths for students who are significantly behind,
- Develop options for students to work at their own pace, and
- Integrate support to teach success skills.[68]

TCSG has redesigned its remedial courses in English, math and reading. It is also developing new assessment tools to identify students' specific learning needs. Both systems are piloting their efforts with plans to expand them.

Students who progress slowly toward a degree are more likely to drop out.[69] One approach to helping students move expeditiously toward program completion is to facilitate transfers through articulation agreements and to provide timely information about transfer options. A second strategy is to allow students to earn credit for knowledge they have gained in other settings such as dual enrollment courses while still in high school, Advanced Placement (AP) credit, and the administration of Prior Learning Assessments (PLA). The PLAs will provide a pathway to enable millions of primarily non-traditional students who have stopped short of a degree but who have acquired knowledge through other means (e.g., work experience or military service) a chance to complete their education.[70]

Finally, both the USG and TCSG are restructuring their delivery systems to meet the needs of the diversifying student body. The USG will focus its restructuring in five areas:

1. Building and sustaining effective teaching,
2. Exploring and expanding the use of effective technology models,
3. Improving distance education,
4. Providing adult and military outreach, and
5. Providing science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) initiatives.[71]

TCSG is focusing on two areas of restructuring; accelerating success and creating pathways for completion. These changes are intended to produce faster, more structured pathways to the completion of a degree or certificate.[72]

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

Several years ago, the Lumina Foundation directed its mission towards a single goal: to work together with its partners across the country to increase those with a post-secondary degree and/or credential to 60 percent of the adult population by 2025. In that process, the Foundation identified key strategies that would significantly increase the efficiency, effectiveness and overall productivity of higher education across the United States. Those strategies are outlined in *Four Steps to Finishing First: An Agenda for Increasing College Productivity to Create a Better-Educated Society* and are the basis for Lumina's Four-Step Agenda.[73]

The first is performance funding. Higher education funding policies in Georgia, like those of many other states, are based primarily on student enrollment and other assorted inputs, such as the prior year's funding and current enrollment growth. Instead, policy makers should provide financial incentives to schools that focus on

67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 Complete College America. "Time is the Enemy." 2011. Retrieved from http://www.completecollege.org/docs/Time_Is_the_Enemy_Summary.pdf.
70 The University System of Georgia & The Technical College System of Georgia. *Complete College Georgia: Georgia's Higher Education Completion Plan 2012*. November 2011.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
73 Lumina Foundation for Education. *Four Steps to Finishing First: An Agenda for Increasing College Productivity to Create a Better-Educated Society*. Indianapolis: Author. 2011.

student milestones, such as year-to-year retention and graduation rates.[74]

Lumina is not the only organization to recommend outcomes-based funding for higher education. Published in 2012, the report *Leaders and Laggards: A State-by-State Report Card on Public Post Secondary Education* measured state performance in educating Americans beyond high school. Georgia received a "D" on our policy environment, primarily because the state does not have an outcomes-based funding system.[75] The report argues that an increased focus on time to degree completion would promote efficiencies within the higher education systems to move high-achieving students through the system faster and free up resources to focus on struggling or remedial students.

Some opponents argue that focusing funding simply on graduation rates will not only limit access to those who may take longer to graduate, but may also incentivize schools to water down degree program requirements and inflate grades. Those concerns can be addressed by using outcome metrics that focus on year-to-year retention rates and student progress, as well as on final graduation or certificate attainment.

Tennessee has the longest record of outcomes-based funding. The most recent iteration can be found in the 2010 Complete College Tennessee Act, which bases funding largely on student retention and degree completion rates. The metrics are also risk-adjusted; there is a 40 percent "premium" on Pell-eligible students (i.e., each counts for 1.4 students) if they graduate. This helps ensure that Tennessee promotes student success without any incentives to restrict the access of traditionally underrepresented students.[76]

Georgia has convened a new Higher Education Commission to study how the state funds higher education. Already, the Commission has recommended that the state move towards at least a partial outcomes-based funding model. Details of the model have yet to be worked out, but Georgia can and should learn from states like Tennessee and Ohio, which are leaders in linking institutional appropriations to educational outcomes, such as persistence and completion.

Second, the Lumina agenda recommends the use of student incentives in the form of tuition and financial assistance towards course and program completion. In Texas, for example, students receive $1,000 if they complete a bachelor's degree within a specified amount of time. Other states limit aid to 120 credits for bachelor's degrees.[77] As part of the Complete College Georgia plan, institutions are looking for ways to cut down on time to degree completion though efficiencies in credit transfers, dual enrollment programs, and reduced remediation time. Removing some of the systematic barriers in the time-to-degree may make the financial aid limit to 120 credit hours more palatable for struggling students.

Third, the systems of higher education should look to implementing lower cost, high-quality approaches as an alternative to traditional academic delivery in order to increase capacity.[78] These would include the use of approaches such as online and blended learning options, as well as new approaches that recognize students' prior acquisitions of knowledge and skill. This would include such programs as the Prior Learning Assessments and dual enrollment programs.

Finally, the agenda recommends incorporating business efficiencies to produce more savings and graduate more students. Improved efficiencies through joint purchasing and back office consolidations are two examples.[79]

More than 30 states are pursuing elements of Lumina's Four Steps productivity agenda, including Georgia, under the Complete College Georgia Initiative. The Foundation has awarded productivity grants to seven states that participate in their College Productivity Strategy Lab network, which provides valuable opportunities to share, identify and pursue policy solutions around Lumina's Four Steps to Finishing First. Georgia was recently named the eighth state to participate in the Strategy Lab network. By participating in this network, Georgia will continue to be a national leader in its work around post-secondary access and completion.

In this political and budgetary environment, there may be significant challenges in taking to scale the policies and practices outlined in the Complete College Georgia plan as well as other efforts to bolster the quality of public education across the P-16 continuum. However, as a state, our economic viability is contingent upon being able to fill the 820,000 job vacancies that will be available by 2018. To meet this goal, it is important that Georgia continue to move its focus to include every student, not just the traditional 18-year-old freshman entering college for the first time seeking a four-year diploma.

74 Ibid.
75 Institute for a Competitive Workforce. *Georgia Policy Environment.* 2012. Retrieved from Leaders & Laggards: A State-by-State Report Card on Public Postsecondary Education: http://icw.uschamber.com/reportcard/
76 Ibid.
77 Lumina Foundation for Education. *Four Steps to Finishing First: An Agenda for Increasing College Productivity to Create a Better-Educated Society.* Indianapolis: Author. 2011.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.

5 Ensuring High-Quality Learning for our Youngest Learners

ISSUE OVERVIEW

We have all heard the argument: "Reading proficiency by third grade is an accurate predictor of high school graduation and career success." However, more than 80 percent of children from low-income families are not proficient readers by the end of third grade. This has significant and long-term consequences not only for each of those children but for their communities, and for our nation as a whole. There is one straightforward solution that goes a long way toward fixing this problem – investments in high-quality early learning.

By now, results from studies like the Perry Preschool Project, the Chicago Child Parent Centers, and the Abecedarian Project have documented the long-term impacts of high-quality programs: school success, higher achievement test scores, lower rates of grade retention, fewer referrals for special education services and decreased likelihood of involvement in the juvenile or adult justice system.[80]

The benefits of a quality early learning program are not just limited to the individual participants. Taxpayers and the health of the national economy also benefit from investments in early learning. Studies of the long-term return on investment have shown that for every dollar invested, the taxpayer is saving up to $13 in future costs.[81] Moreover, by improving the academic skills of a large fraction of the U.S. workforce, early learning programs – especially those targeted at low-income children – would raise the gross domestic product (GDP), reduce poverty and strengthen global competitiveness. If the U.S. invested in a high-quality early learning program for all low-income children, it is estimated that by 2050, GDP would be boosted by nearly one-half of one percent, or $107 billion. Moreover, crime rates and the economic costs associated with criminal activity would be reduced, with an estimated cost savings of another $155 billion.[82]

All the research and studies are clear: there is no better return on investment for economic growth than investing in high-quality early learning. In response to the evidence, over the past decade the number of state-funded early learning programs has grown dramatically, as has the quality of such programs. However, due to budget cuts and economic hardships, many states are reducing those investments. Over the past 10 years, state investments in these programs have declined by more than $700 per child.[83] These cuts have real consequences for child outcomes. Many states already fail to provide enough funding to ensure minimum quality standards. Some states have opted to expand access to more children rather than to address quality, resulting in greater enrollment but lower standards. Other states have limited enrollment at a time when the number of low-income families in need of quality early learning is increasing.[84]

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) publishes the *State of Preschool Yearbook* report annually, which profiles state-funded prekindergarten programs in the United States. For 2011, the report concluded that data from the past decade indicate a long-term trend of eroding quality and the gradual substitution of inexpensive childcare for early education.[85] As enrollments and the demand for high-quality early care rise, the nation is experiencing a crisis in quality.

80 Vail, C.O., & Neuharth-Pritchett, S. *Realizing the Potential of Quality Early Care and Education: Longitidunal Benefits of Georgia's Pre-K Program.* 2011 State of Education in Georgia Conference. Athens, GA.
81 MIT Workplace Center. "Early Childhood Education for All: A Wise Investment." *The Economic Impacts of Child Care and Early Education: Financing Solutions for the Future.* Cambridge: Legal Momentum's Family Initiative & MIT Workplace Center. 2006.
82 Lynch, R. Exceptional Returns: *Economic, Fiscal, and Social Benefits in Early Childhood Development.* Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute. 2006.
83 Barnett, W.S., Carolan, M., Fitzgerald, J., & Squires, J.H. *The State of Preschool 2011.* New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. 2011.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA?

Georgia has long had a commitment to early learning. It was the first state in the nation to establish a state-level department responsible for early learning – Bright From the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). DECAL administers Georgia's state-funded Pre-K program, licenses child care centers and home-based child care, administers federal nutrition programs, and manages voluntary quality enhancement programs.

In 2009, researchers from the Frank Porter Graham (FPG) Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill conducted a statewide, representative study of quality across licensed child care centers and Georgia's Pre-K programs at the request of DECAL. The findings provided scientific evidence for where further investments are needed while validating DECAL's current initiatives designed to improve quality in all early learning environments across the state.

In regard to Georgia's state-funded Pre-K program, which serves four year-olds, the study found many strengths that formed a strong foundation on which to improve.[86] Most classrooms were rated as providing a medium level of global quality and providing an environment that was organized and supportive of children's emotional development. However, the quality of instructional support was generally low. The study found that even though most lead teachers had college degrees and reported participating in a variety of important trainings, their education has not yet translated into high-quality classroom practices. The findings recommended more extensive or effective professional development, as well as on-site technical assistance to provide ongoing support to teachers.

For the child care centers that serve infants through three-year-old children, findings from the study confirmed that almost all of the programs met or exceeded the basic state licensing requirements for group size and child-adult ratios. Lead and assistant teachers across all classroom types (infant through non-Georgia Pre-K four year old) reported participating in more than 15 hours of training in the past year. Most program administrators reported using a curriculum in their program and child assessments to guide instruction. Most centers also reported providing a range of services and supports to the families they serve.[87]

However, in terms of quality, on average, center-based care across Georgia was of "low" to "medium" quality, and the quality of care for infants and toddlers was lower than the quality of care for preschoolers. Thirty-five percent of preschool (two-and three-year-olds) classrooms and 67 percent of infant/toddler classrooms were rated as having low quality. Children in these low-quality classrooms likely experience environments that are inadequate for their health and safety and that do not promote their cognitive and socio-emotional development.[88]

In response to this research, DECAL is taking steps aimed at maintaining and improving quality and increasing statewide accessibility, especially among Georgia's low-income population. One key initiative is Quality Rated, a tiered quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). Nationwide, more than half of the states have implemented a QRIS to improve program quality for young children. A QRIS provides early childhood programs incentives and resources to improve quality while working through several manageable steps, or levels. At the same time, the centers receive public recognition for their achieved quality efforts.

Quality Rated was launched in Georgia in January 2012. It uses one, two and three stars to indicate programs that meet defined program standards beyond Georgia's minimum licensing requirements. The program is voluntary for all child care centers. Participating programs become eligible for free professional development, technical assistance, and financial incentive packages supported by foundations and businesses. The initial incentive of $1,000 worth of materials is available to child care providers participating in technical assistance programs with local child care resource and referral agencies. The second incentive of $500 is awarded to participating programs submitting a completed Quality Rated portfolio (phase two), thereby agreeing to an on-site evaluation within 90 days. Bonus packages to support ongoing quality improvement are awarded to programs at each of Quality Rated's one, two or three star levels. Beginning in July 2013, families will be able to verify if a provider is voluntarily agreeing to meet higher standards by participating in Quality Rated and to see the quality rating it has achieved.[89]

As of November 5, 2012 more than 1,050 child care centers have applied to participate in the Quality Rated program – 16 percent of all programs in Georgia. This represents more than 76,000 children enrolled in child care centers in 125 counties across the state. Quality Rated will also help target and aid low-income families. As previously stated, research has shown that low-income children benefit the most from investments in high-quality early education. Many low-income families receive subsidized child care through the Childcare and Parents Services

86 Maxwell, K.L., Early, D.M., Bryant, D., Kraus, S., Hume, K., & Crawford, G. *Georgia Study of Early Care and Education: Findings from Georgia's Pre-K Program.* Chapel Hill: Univeristy of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute. 2009.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Bright From the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. "Georgia's New 'Quality Rated' Program Marks Another Milestone." Press release. October 22, 2012..

Program (CAPS). Beginning in July 2013, CAPS intends to implement tiered reimbursement for Quality Rated programs that serve children receiving subsidized care. Tiered reimbursement means that child care subsidy payments will be based on the quality level of the program. The higher the Quality Rated level, the higher the subsidy reimbursement.[90]

In terms of teacher quality, DECAL is taking steps to ensure its lead and assistant teachers are highly trained and certified. As of the 2010-2011 school year, all newly hired Pre-K lead teachers must have a bachelor's degree and certification in early childhood education, and all assistant teachers must have at least a CDA (Child Development Associate) degree. Lead teachers of infants through preschool classrooms must have at least a CDA, a Technical Certificate of Credit (TCC), or a Technical Certificate of Diploma (TCD) in a field related to early education.[91]

To further the increasing quality of the early learning teaching profession, legislation will be introduced in 2013 that puts all early learning teachers under the jurisdiction of the Professional Standards Commission (PSC). The PSC was established to evaluate the credentials of prospective teachers, as well as other professional employees in public schools, to ensure they meet specified preparation standards and requirements. The PSC is also responsible for upholding the state's standards of performance and code of ethics for educators. The PSC investigates all allegations of educator misconduct and applies appropriate measures of disciplinary actions.

Finally, DECAL has implemented two new evaluations focused on raising the quality of its Pre-K program. The first is a longitudinal evaluation being conducted by FPG. Over the two-year study, researchers will compare the school readiness skills of children who attended the Pre-K program with the skills of children who did not attend the program. The following are the primary research questions being addressed:

1. Are the language, literacy, math and behavioral skills improved in children who participated in Georgia's Pre-K program, compared to those who did not?
2. Are the effects of the Georgia Pre-K program different for different groups of children, e.g., children living in poverty, or non-native English speakers?

The study is currently in the first year of data collection for children enrolled in a Pre-K program. Baseline data on these children will be released in early 2013. The results will be used to gauge the program's impact, make suggested programmatic changes, and identify key subgroups that could benefit from increased service.

The second evaluation is focusing on the Race to the Top (RT3) Early Childhood Initiative and is also being conducted by FPG. Georgia's Early Childhood Initiative is creating a statewide professional development framework that improves classroom quality for the state's approximately 4,000 Pre-K teachers. This program focuses on key teacher-child interactions that research conclusively links to improved child outcomes. The rigorous evaluation design includes a random assignment of teachers that compares various models of professional development. Upon completion, DECAL will analyze the results of this evaluation to prioritize early learning resources.

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

In its conclusions about the quality of early learning in Georgia, FPG praised the hard work Georgia has done in moving toward a universal, voluntary Pre-K program. They also noted that it is much easier to provide and maintain high-quality care in smaller, more targeted programs. The researchers noted the current quality of the Georgia Pre-K program was good, but the quality of early learning programs for younger preschool children (infants to three-year-olds) was lacking. Significant improvements on a statewide level are going to require additional resources.[92] Moreover, according to the study, the estimated per-child cost of providing a high-quality early learning program is nearly twice the amount that was being allocated for the Georgia Pre-K program at the time the study was conducted in 2009. Moreover, Georgia already spends significantly more per-child dollars in its Pre-K program than it does on early learning for infant through preschool children.

To improve the quality of early learning centers, the state needs to invest in qualified and well-compensated teachers and to support caregivers. Due to the increased demand for HOPE dollars and flat lottery sales, Georgia was forced to cut $54 million from the Pre-K budget for the 2010-2011 school year. Two consequences of these cuts were 1) reducing the school year from 10 months to nine, resulting in a 10 percent reduction in teacher pay, and 2) eliminating training and experience (T&E) supplemental pay for current certified Pre-K teachers working in a local school system, which had previously been awarded for certain degrees and experience levels.

90 Ibid.

91 Bright From the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. "Rules for Child Care Learning Centers." January 2012. Retrieved from http://decal.ga.gov/ChildCareServices/RulesAndRegulations.aspx.

92 Maxwell, K.L., Early, D.M., Bryant, D., Kraus, S., Hume, K., & Crawford, G. *Georgia Study of Early Care and Education: Findings from Georgia's Pre-K Program.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute. 2009.

This reduction had a devastating effect on teacher turnover. By the end of FY 2012, the overall retention rate was only 67 percent – meaning a full third of classrooms had new teachers. The drop was most precipitous among local school system teachers. The retention rate for local school system Pre-K teachers fell to 65.5 percent from 86.7 percent the previous year.

The good news for Georgia is that Governor Deal has been working to restore the number of Pre-K days. Earlier this year, he gained legislative approval to return the program to 170 days for the current school year and has announced his intention to push the legislature in 2013 to fund Pre-K as a 180-day program for next year.

The restoration of days has helped stabilize the teaching cohort. As of October 1, 2012, the retention rate was 77.4 percent, up from 71.8 percent this time last year. Overall, the retention rate is still lower than before the Pre-K school year was cut and teacher/experience pay was eliminated for Pre-K teachers in local school systems. On a positive note, due to changes in certification requirements since 2010, the percentage of Pre-K teachers who are certified has continued to increase.

Teacher compensation is also related to the supply of quality teachers available to meet demand. The move to have PSC regulate early learning teachers is a step toward increasing professionalization of the industry and promoting higher quality. However, most early learning teachers are paid at a relatively low hourly rate without benefits. A study of the economic impact of the early learning industry jointly conducted by Georgia State University and the University of Georgia found that lead teachers earn an average of $10.45 per hour, and the other teaching staff earn, on average, $7.94 per hour. Increased professionalization and credentialing oversight needs to be accompanied by increased compensation to maintain the supply of teachers who meet the new standards.[93]

Additionally, the state needs to support and maintain high standards across all its early learning centers to ensure healthy child development by promoting program standards and guidelines for early learning. DECAL is already taking steps in this direction. The department has completed a revision of the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards, which includes professional development for teachers and curriculum alignment with the new Common Core Georgia Performance Standards. Moreover, the implementation of the QRIS Quality Rated system provides the motivation and resources for early learning centers to improve quality. As previously stated, more than 1,050 programs have signed up to participate in Quality Rated – far more than were projected for the first year. However, of those that have signed up, only half have moved past the "registration phase" and begun phase two, the self-assessment that ends with an on-site evaluation. It still remains to be seen how the programs will rate and what level of intervention and supports will be needed to move a majority of centers to a rating of the highest quality.

Support for early education continues to grow within Georgia and across the nation. However, the current funding formula for Georgia Pre-K relies on insufficient lottery dollars that must be shared with the HOPE scholarship. DECAL has already secured private funding from foundations and businesses to help support the Quality Rated program, and the governor and Georgia legislators are working to restore Pre-K to its full 180 days. However, Georgia leaders should continue to investigate innovative strategies for funding the program at levels that ensure accessibility for all children and high quality. This is especially true for programs aimed at its youngest citizens – infants through preschoolers – as the lottery funds only support the Pre-K program, which only serves four-year-olds.

The raised visibility of the importance of early learning only re-emphasizes what early learning educators, researchers and economists have known for some time: high-quality early learning is the building block for future student success. The research also shows there is no better return on investment for economic growth than investing in high-quality early learning. It must be noted that this research emphasizes high-quality early learning for all young children, including infants through three-year-olds, not just four-year-olds in Pre-K. The programs leading to sustained outcomes for children employ a minimum level of quality standards such as class sizes, specialized training for teachers, developmental screenings and support for struggling students, and comprehensive early learning standards aligned with K-12 standards.

93 Child Policy Partnership – University of Georgia and Georgia State University. *Economic Impact of the Early Care and Education Industry in Georgia.* 2007. Retrieved from http://www.cviog.uga.edu/pdf/child-care/report.

6 STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Math

ISSUE OVERVIEW

The subjects of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) are on the forefront of educational priorities. They are grouped together in the education community not only because they are interconnected, but because they are viewed as essential to the continued improvement of the American economy and our international competitiveness.

STEM jobs are growing faster than jobs as a whole, 17 percent compared to 10 percent.[94] Employers are looking for workers with STEM skills and these workers will be able to earn a higher salary because of this demand.[95]

The demand for STEM jobs in Georgia mirrors the national trend. By 2018, the number of STEM jobs in Georgia will increase 17 percent, providing 200,000 new jobs.[96] In fact, despite an unemployment rate that hovers around 9 percent, there are currently two available STEM jobs for every unemployed person, compared to one non-STEM job for every 4.5 people (Figure 6.1).[97]

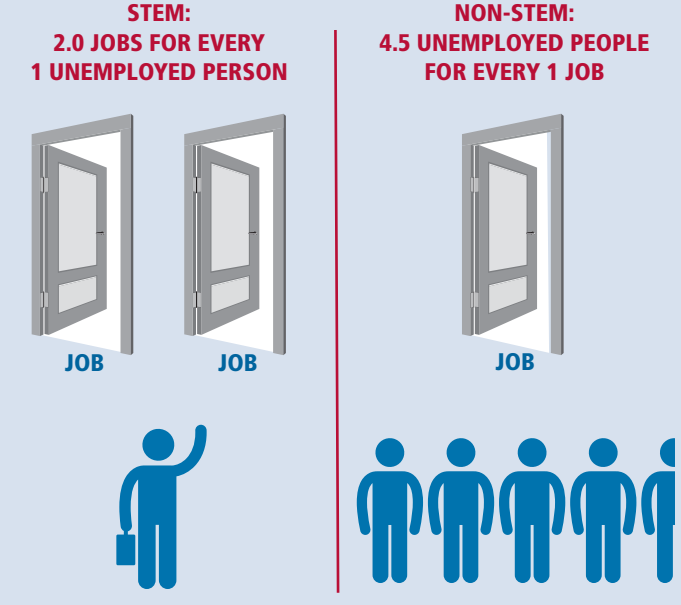
WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA?

Business and government leaders have raised concerns about the ability to meet the increased demand. Nationally, we are facing a leaking STEM pipeline (Figure 6.2). That pipline shows that of all ninth-graders in 2001 (more than 4 million), approximately 4 percent (167,000) had graduated with a post-secondary degree in any of the STEM fields by 2011.

The pipeline in Georgia looks similar. In 2009, 67 percent of our students graduated from high school. Of those, 75 percent graduated from either a two-year or four-year degree program. Of those graduating, only 10 percent had a degree related to a STEM field.[99]

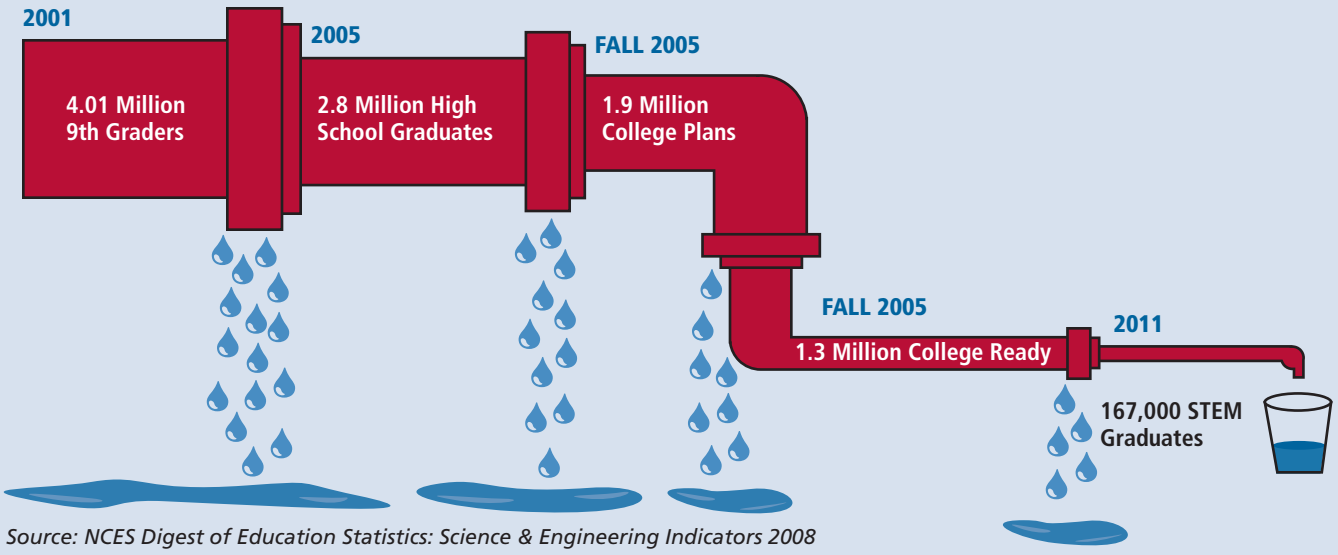
This leaking pipeline has placed the U.S. and Georgia at a competitive disadvantage with other nations. From 2000 to 2008, the annual pace of new STEM degree awards from four-year colleges in the United States increased by 24 percent. Over the same period, China increased its yearly pace of STEM college degree awards by 218 percent. In India, bachelor-equivalent degrees conferred in engineering, computer science, and information technology has more than tripled in the last seven years.[100]

FIGURE 6.1: DEMAND FOR STEM SKILLS IN GEORGIA[98]



94 Carnevale, A., Smith, N., & Melton, M. *STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.* Washington, DC: Georgetown University: Center on Education and the Workforce. 2011.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.
97 Change the Equation. "Vital Signs: Georgia." 2012. Retrieved from http://changetheequation.org/vitalsigns/#Georgia
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
100 Cooper, D., Hersh, A., & O'Leary, A. *The Competition that Really Matters: Comparing U.S., Chinese, and Indian Investments in the Next Generation Workforce.* Washington, DC: Center for American Progress and The Center for the Next Generation. 2012.

FIGURE 6.2: A LEAKING STEM PIPELINE



Source: NCES Digest of Education Statistics: Science & Engineering Indicators 2008

Georgia Department of Education STEM Focus

To address this challenge, Georgia is making it a top priority to raise student interest and create opportunities to learn more about STEM topics and careers. The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) has taken multiple steps aimed at increasing the rigor and standards around STEM education, career readiness, and teacher preparation.

A fundamental step necessary to transform Georgia into a state where students thrive in the STEM fields was the adoption of the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS).

The content is rigorous and aims to prepare students for college and the workforce.[101] For instance, the mathematics curriculum encourages students to "reason mathematically…and to make connections among mathematical topics and to other disciplines."[102] With a new curriculum prepared to better challenge students in all subjects including STEM, Georgia is taking on other projects to further STEM knowledge.

Along with the increased standards, Georgia has expanded accountability as well. The state has incorporated STEM metrics into the new College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI), as part of the state's waiver to No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This new measure offers a more comprehensive assessment of whether schools are producing students who are ultimately college- and career-ready upon graduation. As part of the index, high schools receive extra points for 1) the percent of their students completing a physics class, or 2) if a school has earned a Georgia STEM Program Certification.

In addition to adding STEM to the CCRPI measures, The GaDOE is encouraging schools to increase their focus on STEM education through multiple initiatives. Currently there are 24 middle and high schools that offer a specialization to students in a STEM subject. For instance, Chattooga High School has a Forensics and Robotics concentration. If these schools see positive results from these innovations, GaDOE is likely to attempt to expand these programs across the state. The state also certifies schools in STEM after they pass through a rigorous application process. To date, five schools in Georgia have received the STEM certification: Marietta Center for Advanced Academics, Rockdale Magnet School for Science and Technology, Gwinnett School of Math, Science, and Technology, The Center for Advanced Studies in Science, Math and Technology at Wheeler High School, and Henderson Mill Elementary School.

In 2011, Georgia mandated that all ninth graders choose a "career pathway." Currently there are 17 career clusters to choose from, ranging from business and computer science to marketing sales and service. Also included is a STEM program and other STEM-related fields such as architecture, energy systems, engineering technology, manufacturing, and transportation and logistics. The new requirement aims to stimulate student curiosity about future careers. For instance, students who already know they enjoy designing and building structures can take courses tailored to engineering. The Engineering

101 Common Core State Standards Initiative. "About the Standards." Retrieved from http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards.
102 Georgia Department of Education. "Common Core Georgia Performance Standards." 2011. Retrieved from https://www.georgiastandards.org/Common-Core/Pages/default.aspx.

and Technology concentration has five different pathways: electronics, energy systems, engineering, manufacturing, and engineering graphic design.[103]

Included in the state's Race to the Top application is Georgia's Innovation Fund program. The Innovation Fund is a $19.4 million fund that provides competitive grants to support the establishment and deepening of partnerships between local school districts, charter schools, institutions of higher education (IHEs), businesses and nonprofit organizations to advance the applied learning and academic achievement of Georgia's K-12 students.

The state intends to use the Innovation Fund to determine best practices in programming related to STEM education, applied learning, and teacher and leader recruitment and development to influence future education policy efforts.[104]

Finally, Georgia is also focusing on increasing the number of teachers in STEM fields. The UTeach program was developed 15 years ago at the University of Texas at Austin to increase the number of teachers in math and science and improve the preparation they receive. It enables undergraduate students majoring in STEM fields to earn a teaching certificate while completing the requirements of their major.[105]

GaDOE included UTeach in its Race to the Top application and awarded implementation funds through a competitive application process. Three universities – the University of West Georgia, Columbus State University and Southern Polytechnic State University – are in the first year of implementing the program.

The University System of Georgia – STEM Initiative

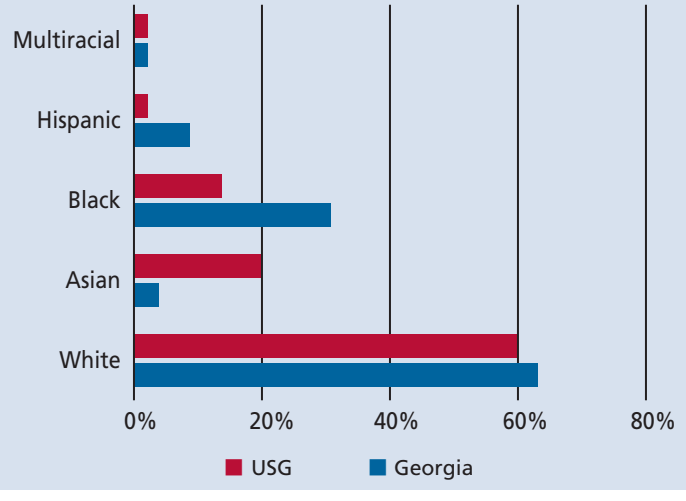
In addition to the STEM education work being conducted in the K-12 system, the University System of Georgia's (USG) STEM Initiative is designed to focus attention on and improve higher education in STEM fields across the state. It is the primary lens through which the system is focusing on post-secondary STEM education in Georgia.

The objectives of the initiative are to increase 1) the number of K-12 students who are prepared for and interested in majoring in STEM disciplines in college, 2) the success and completion rates of students majoring in STEM disciplines, and 3) the number of qualified K-12 STEM teachers. The initiative began in 2007 in response to a USG Presidential Task Force charged with assessing the future of STEM education and workforce demands across the state. Campus-level work is concentrated in two areas. One stream of funding supports faculty mini-grants to spur instructional innovation in the introductory STEM courses where success and completion are a challenge. The other supports campus-level programs designed to improve student degree completion.

In 2011, approximately 10,800 STEM degrees were awarded across the University System (approximately 20 percent of all degrees conferred by the USG). Institutions supported by the STEM Initiative granted 4,111 degrees to students in STEM fields. That represents nearly 40 percent of all STEM graduates from the University System. Successfully navigating STEM curricula is a national challenge for U.S. students. The USG STEM Initiative is an effective means for addressing these challenges in Georgia.

Despite the initial successes of the STEM Initiative, equity in access and completion remains a challenge in STEM fields in the University System. Hispanic people make up 9.1 percent of the population of Georgia, but Hispanic students received only 2.2 percent of the STEM degrees awarded by the USG. African Americans make up 31 percent of the population of the state, but received only 12.7 percent of the STEM degrees. While white students are approximately at parity with their population in the state, Asian people make up only 3.4 percent of the population but received nearly 20 percent of all the STEM degrees. For women in STEM fields, the disparity is ongoing. Despite the state being 51 percent female, only 35 percent of STEM graduates in 2011 were female.

FIGURE 6.3: PERCENT POPULATION GEORGIA VS. USG, 2011[106]



103 Georgia Department of Education. "College and Career Pathways." Retrieved from http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/CTAE/Pages/Georgia-Career-Pathways-New-Rule.aspx.

104 Georgia Department of Education. "Innovation Fund." Retrieved from http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/Race-to-the-Top/Pages/Innovation-Fund.aspx.

105 The UTeach Institute. *Replicating the Program. 2012.* Retrieved from http://uteach-institute.org/.

106 Executive Office of the President, President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology. *Engage to Excel: Producing One Million Additional College Graduates with Degrees in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics*. February 2012. Retrieved from www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/pcast-engage-to-excel-final_feb.pdf.

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

It has recently been argued that STEM is not only important to our economic development and competitiveness but to national security as well. In 2012, a 30-member taskforce of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) chaired by former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Joel I. Klein, former chancellor of the New York City Public Schools, issued a report, U.S. Education Reform and National Security. The authors stated that the small number of students studying college-level science and technology, the low overall standardized test scores, a mediocre graduation rate, persistent racial and economic achievement gaps, and civic apathy threaten our national security.[107]

To address this threat, the taskforce provided three overarching policy recommendations:

1. Implement educational expectations and assessments in subjects vital to protecting national security, specifically by expanding the Common Core to include STEM subjects;
2. Make structural changes to provide students with good school choices through enhanced choice and competition; and
3. Launch a "national security readiness audit" to hold schools and policymakers accountable for results.[108]

Georgia is already moving forward on each of these issues though curriculum development, accountability measures and teacher training, and increased flexibility for schools and districts. However, what does Georgia need to do to ensure that the policy decisions are translated into programmatic practices that lead to improved student outcomes?

Georgia was selected as one of 26 states that are leading the development of the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). This state-led effort is tasked with clearly defining the science content and practices all students will need from kindergarten through high school. The first draft of the NGSS was released for public comment in April 2012. Moreover, unlike most states, Georgia holds schools accountable for performance targets on science tests, not just reading and math. However, Georgia's "cut score" is very low compared to other national standards, meaning that the amount of answers that a student must answer correctly to be considered "meets expectations" is not rigorous enough. Currently, Georgia's set passing score for eighth-grade science falls below the "Basic" performance level of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP).[109]

Even with more rigorous standards, many of Georgia's students do not have access to challenging and engaging content, and many teachers are not adequately prepared to teach math and science content standards. In elementary schools, students currently spend an average of 2.2 hours per week on science, down from 3 hours per week in 2000. More than 20 percent of high school students attend high schools that do not offer calculus, and 15 percent of students attend schools that do not offer physics. Moreover, nearly 80 percent of students are taught a math class by a teacher who does not have an undergraduate degree in math, and only 50 percent of students are taught a science class by a teacher who had a minimum of three courses of science in college.[110]

To address this shortage, Governor Nathan Deal has named STEM in his State Strategic Plan for education. His STEM priority is to increase teacher competency and student proficiency and achievement in STEM fields through the UTeach program and through Innovation Fund grants. These initiatives are a good start toward increasing teacher competency and student outcomes. However, the state should also consider targeted programs aimed at recruiting women and minorities into the STEM fields. Currently, women make up approximately 60 percent of the population enrolled in college, but only account for 30 percent of all STEM degrees conferred. African American students comprise 33 percent of the college population, yet only account for 21 percent of STEM degrees. A concerted effort must be made to strengthen the STEM pipeline for these populations.

Finally, the predicted need for a future STEM workforce is being realized today. In February 2012, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission approved licenses for the construction of two nuclear reactors at Plant Vogtle near Waynesboro. The project is led by Southern Company/ Georgia Power, and as many as 5,000 jobs may open up during the construction of the plants, with 800 permanent jobs once the reactors are operable in 2017. Another project that will use employees with STEM qualifications is the expansion of the Savannah Port. Plans are moving forward to deepen the port's channel up to 48 feet from its current 42-foot depth. These are just two examples of Georgia's current STEM workforce needs.

As a state, we are well on our way to meeting our needs in STEM education. However, we are not there yet and it is important for Georgia to continue to push for higher standards and rigor, access for all, and smooth transitions into post-secondary schooling for all our students.

107 Council on Foreign Relations. *U.S. Education Reform and National Security* (Independent Task Force Report No 68). New York: Author. 2012.
108 Ibid.
109 Change the Equation. "Vital Signs: Georgia." 2012. Retrieved from http://changetheequation.org/vitalsigns/#Georgia.
110 Ibid.

7 The NCLB Waiver: What Grade Did your School Get?

ISSUE OVERVIEW

Over the past decade, parents, teachers, administrators and the public in general became familiar with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the accountability measure it implemented: Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Parents would ask the question: Did my child's school meet AYP? In other words, did a certain percentage of children meet the performance standards set by the state – i.e., 80 percent of all third graders are proficient in reading? If the school did not meet all of the targets for all grade levels and student subgroups, the school was labeled as failing and was targeted as a "needs improvement" school. It was straightforward and easy to understand.

However, there are genuine criticisms of NCLB and its reliance on a single measure of accountability that focuses exclusively on state tests to determine AYP. NCLB has been in effect for a decade, and many educators and policymakers agree that its major provisions are not working as intended. The law itself – known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) – was due to be reauthorized and revamped in 2007, but currently congressional efforts to reauthorize the law have reached a stalemate.

Due to this stalemate, in September 2011, the Obama administration and the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. DOE) announced that states could apply for waivers from the key requirements of NCLB. Among them are the requirements that 100 percent of all students test at the "proficient" level in reading and math by 2014, and the implementation of specified interventions in all schools and districts that are labeled "failing" or "needs improvement."[111]

To qualify for a waiver, states must apply to the U.S. DOE and meet specific requirements not currently in NCLB. To meet them, states must do the following:

- Adopt college-and career-ready standards and assessments,
- Develop differentiated accountability systems, and
- Implement teacher and principal evaluation systems that factor in student achievement growth models.

As of September 1, 2012, waiver applications had been approved for 33 states and the District of Columbia.[112] Seven more states submitted applications to the U.S. DOE on September 6, 2012.[113] The current waivers are effective through the end of the 2013-2014 school year, and states can request an extension for future years.

111 Center on Education Policy. *What Impact Will NCLB Waivers Have on the Consistency, Complexity and Transparency of State Accountability Systems.* Washington, DC: The George Washington University, Center on Education Policy, Graduate School of Education and Human Development. 2012.

112 These include Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, DC, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin.

113 These states include Alabama, Alaska, Hawaii, Maine, New Hampshire, North Dakota and West Virginia.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA?

In February 2012, Georgia was among the first 11 states to receive a waiver to NCLB. Many of the elements required for the waiver were being accomplished through the state's Race to the Top grant (RT3). By that time, Georgia was well on its way to adopting the new Common Core Georgia Performance Standards, which would ensure our state had college- and-career-ready standards and assessments. The state was also pilot-testing a new teacher/leader evaluation system that was partly based on student academic growth models. Finally, Georgia was engaged in developing a new accountability system, the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI), which measures the extent to which a school, a district and the state are successfully making progress on a specific list of accountability measures.[114]

The accountability measures in the approved state plans (including Georgia's) represent a substantial departure from the accountability requirements of NCLB. States with waivers do not have to make any AYP determinations; instead, they may substitute the AYP requirements and proficiency goals with performance designations based on state-developed accountability systems. Georgia has done this in three primary ways: 1) proficiency goals, 2) performance categories and 3) the CCRPI accountability index.

Proficiency Goals

With the exception of Louisiana, waiver states will no longer base their proficiency goals on the NCLB statutory requirement of 100 percent proficiency by 2014. Instead, states are setting long-term achievement goals. Based on a range of options provided by the U.S. DOE, Georgia's proficiency goal is to reduce by half the number of non-proficient students overall and within each subgroup (determined by race, economic, primary language, and special needs categories) within six years.[115]

Performance Categories

A significant departure in how schools are measured on their performance under the waiver is the elimination of the "Needs Improvement" status. Schools will now be categorized as Reward, Priority, Focus or Alert. The first three categories are required by the U.S. DOE to receive a waiver, but Georgia took another step to ensure that achievement gaps will be closed by creating the fourth category – Alert Schools. The Alert school measure is significant because it will give more detailed information for each subgroup than has previously been available.

Reward schools are determined in one of two ways. First, they are Title I schools that have been designated as Highest-Performing Reward Schools, that is, they are in the top 5 percent of all Title I schools and have either the highest performance for all students over three years or are schools with the highest graduation rates in Georgia. The second way is for a Title I school to be designated a High-Progress School, which requires that the school be in the top 10 percent of all Title I schools and has either among the highest progress in performance for all students over three years or is a high school making the most progress on its graduation rate.[116]

A Priority School is a Title I school in the bottom 5 percent of lowest achieving Title I schools and meets one of the following three conditions:

1. Receiving a school improvement grant (SIG),
2. Having a graduation rate lower than 60 percent, or
3. Showing a lack of progress on student achievement for more than three years.[117]

Title I schools that do not fall into the Priority School category but remain in the bottom 10 percent of all Title I schools may be categorized as Focus Schools. There are two ways a school can be identified as Focus:

1. A high school with a graduation rate lower than 60 percent, or
2. A school with the largest in-school achievement gap between the highest achieving subgroup of students and the lowest achieving subgroup of students.[118]

Finally, the Alert category can apply to all schools – both Title I and non-Title I schools. There are three ways a school can be put into this category: by having a low graduation rate, low achievement in a particular student subgroup, or low achievement in a particular subject content area. Georgia has defined "low" as a rate below three standard deviations of the state average for each subgroup. For example, if the state's graduation rate for Hispanic students is 60 percent, any school with a graduation rate for Hispanic students three standard deviations below 60 percent would become an Alert school.

114 Georgia Department of Education. NCLB/Waiver Request Letter to United States Department of Education. September 20, 2011. Atlanta: Author.
115 States are provided three alternatives to the 100 percent proficiency goal. Option A is to reduce by half the number of non-proficient students overall and within each subgroup in six years. Option B calls for 100 percent of students to be proficient by 2019-2020 based on new college and career standards. Option C is to establish an alternative goals that is similarly ambitious but achievable. (U.S. DOE, "ESEA Flexibility Request." February 6, 2012. Retrieved from www.ed.gov/esea/flexibity).
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
118 Ibid.

Supports and interventions for poorly performing schools will still be made, but Flexible Learning Programs (FLP) will replace the Supplemental Educational Services (SES) implemented under NCLB. The FLPs are constructed by Local Educational Agencies (LEAs). The state of Georgia is confident that "these new programs will improve the quality of service across the state, especially in rural districts, and provide more opportunities for parental involvement and input from local school boards about the types of interventions that are most appropriate for the schools in their communities."[119] The local school districts must submit a plan and budget to be approved by the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE). GaDOE will then monitor the program and evaluate the results. Conversely, the Highest Performing and High-Progress Title I schools will be recognized each year at the Annual Title I Programs Conference and "receive a monetary reward equal to Georgia's total reward allotment divided by the total number of reward schools."[120]

Accountability Index – College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI)

The final way that Georgia will continue to measure progress and accountability is through the new CCRPI. This new measure will determine which schools are exceeding standards across a wide variety of measures and which schools need additional supports for improvement.

TABLE 7.1: CCRPI PERFORMANCE INDICATOR CATEGORIES[121]

HIGH SCHOOL	MIDDLE SCHOOL	ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
1. Content Mastery (End-of-Course Tests)	1. Content Mastery (CRCT)	1. Content Mastery (CRCT)
2. Post-High School Readiness	2. Post-Middle School Readiness	2. Post-Elementary School Readiness
3. Graduation Rate	3. Predictors of High School Graduation	3. Predictors of Hing School Graduation

TABLE 7.2: COLLEGE AND CAREER READY PERFORMANCE INDEX, HIGH SCHOOL[122]

CONTENT MASTERY (END OF COURSE TESTS IN SOME AREAS TO BE REPLACED BY COMMON CORE ASSESSMENTS IN 2014-15)

1. Percent of students scoring at Meets or Exceeds on the Ninth Grade Literature End of Course Test (required participation rate > 95%)
2. Percent of students scoring at Meets or Exceeds on the American Literature End of Course Test (required participation rate > 95%)
3. Percent of students scoring at Meets or Exceeds on the Mathematics I/GPS Geometry (transitioning to CCGPS Coordinate Alegebra) End of Course Test (required participation rate > 95%)
4. Percent of students scoring at Meets or Exceeds on the Mathematics II/GPS Geometry (transitioning to CCGPS Analytic Alegebra) End of Course Test (required participation rate > 95%)
5. Percent of students scoring at Meets or Exceeds on the Physical Science End of Course Test (required participation rate > 95%)
6. Percent of students scoring at Meets or Exceeds on the Biology End of Course Test (required participation rate > 95%)
7. Percent of students scoring at Meets or Exceeds on the US History End of Course Test (required participation rate > 95%)
8. Percent of students scoring at Meets or Exceeds on the Economics End of Course Test (required participation rate > 95%)

POST HIGH SCHOOL READINESS

9. Percent of graduates completing a CTAE focus, or an advanced academic focus, or a fine arts focus, or a world language focus within their program of study
10. Percent of CTAE Pathway Completers earning a national industry recognized credential, or a pasing score on a GaDOE recognized end of pathway assessment (operational in 2014-15)
11. Percent of graduates: entering TCSG/USG not requiring remediation or learning support courses; or scoring at least 22 out of 36 on the composite ACT; or scoring at least 1550 out of 2400 on the combined SAT; or scoring 3 or higher on two or more AP exams; or scoring 4 or higher on two more IB exams
12. Percent of graduates earning high school credit(s) for accelerated enrollment via ACCEL, Dual HOPE Grant, Move On When Ready, Early College, Gateway to College, Advanced Placement courses, or International Baccalaureate courses
13. Percent of graduates earning 2 or more high school credits in the same world language (operational in 2012-2013)
14. Percent of students scoring at Meets or Exceeds on the Georgia High School Writing Test
15. Percent of students achieving a Lexile measure greater than or equal to 1275 on the American Literature EOCT
16. Percent of EOCT assessments scoring a the Exceeds level
17. Student Attendance Rate (%)

GRADUATION RATE

18. 5-Year Extended Cohort Graduation Rate (%)

119 U.S. Department of Education. "ESEA Flexibility Request." February 6, 2012. Retrieved from www.ed.gov/esea/flexibity.
120 Ibid.
121 Georgia Department of Education. *State of Education in Georgia: Making Education Work for All Georgians!* Fifth Annual State of Education Conference in Georgia Conference. Athens: University of Georgia. September 2012.
122 Ibid.

The basis for the CCRPI is the college- and career-ready indicators for high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools, which are grouped into three categories as outlined in Table 7.1.

Within each of the three categories are a series of indicators that measure the effectiveness of a school. Table 7.2 shows the detailed indicators of the high school categories.

Each of these scores will be combined to provide a school-wide Achievement Score, Progress Score and Achievement Gap Closure Score (See Table 7.3). The school-wide scores in the three areas will be weighted to produce the school's Overall CCRPI Score – which will be a numeric score 0-100. Schools will have an opportunity to increase their Overall CCRPI score by earning bonus points based on a fourth area – Factors for Success indicators. These indicators are voluntary for each school but are considered significant indicators for moving from adequate to excellent. Examples of such measures are the percentage of students participating in world language classes; if a school has earned a science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) state certification; or the percentage of graduates earning physics credits.

Finally, the CCRPI has two more ratings that do not factor into the Overall CCRPI score: the Financial Efficiency Rating and the School Climate Rating. The Financial Efficiency Rating will provide information about the impact of instructional expenses on student achievement and CCRPI outcomes. The School Climate Rating will reflect the school's environment and behavioral indicators, based on survey responses. Both of these ratings will be reported as a star rating from one to five stars. Figure 7.1 shows how each of the indicators come together to produce the final CCRPI score.

In addition to schools and districts receiving a total numeric score ranging from 0-100, a star rating for climate and a star rating for financial efficiency, there is legislation being considered that would also assign an overall letter grade to a district's performance. The State Education Finance Study Commission was established in 2011 to study the costs and resources required to educate Georgia's children. One of their recommendations to the Georgia legislature in 2013 will be to establish the Georgia Statewide Tiered Accountability and Flexibility System (G-STAFS).

The G-STAFS is intended to replace the State's current funding waiver options with a comprehensive flexibility/accountability structure. If the legislation passes, each school district will receive a letter grade (A – F) based on an

TABLE 7.3: DETAILS OF EACH COMPONENT SCORE[123]

Achievement Score	Scores based on current year data and carry the greatest weight in determining the overall score for schools, districts and the state.
Achievement Gap Closure	Scores based on current and prior year data and used in the CCRPI by comparing each school's high-needs learners to the state's non-high-needs learners.
Progress	Scores based on gap closure at the sate or school level and used in the CCRPI so that lower performing schools can demonstrate movement in a positive direction and higher performing schools can demonstrate commitment to excellence for all populations.

FIGURE 7.1: COLLEGE AND CAREER READY PERFORMANCE INDEX (CCRPI)[124]

CCRPI Scoring Sheet: High School

District: Central School District
School: George Washington High School

OVERALL CCRPI SCORE
TBD

ACHIEVEMENT SCORE	PROGRESS SCORE	ACHIEVEMENT GAP CLOSURE SCORE	EXCEEDING THE BAR SCORE	FINANCIAL EFFICIENCY RATING	SCHOOL CLIMATE RATING
TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆

Achievement = All Indicators
Progress = State Assessments – Student Growth Percentile
Achievement Gap Closure = State Assessments – High Needs vs. Non-high Needs
Exceeding the Bar = Additional Points Added to Overall CCRPI Score
Financial Efficiency = Operational 2013-14 – No Points – Star Rating Only
School Climate = Operational 2013-14 – No Points – Star Rating Only

123 Georgia Department of Education. "Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Accountability." R3 Summit Presentation. October 24, 2011.
124 Georgia Department of Education. *State of Education in Georgia: Making Education Work for All Georgians!* Fifth Annual State of Education Conference in Georgia Conference. Athens: University of Georgia. September 2012.

average of their schools' individual CCRPI scores. Districts will be placed in one of three categories based on their letter grade and qualify for varying levels of flexibility.

1. **Strategic School System –** Districts with a grade of C, D, or F may apply for waivers from state regulations, but must agree to high levels of oversight and monitoring from GaDOE.
2. **High Performing School System –** Districts with an A or B and/or districts that demonstrate significant growth, and maintain specified performance levels at individual schools will receive maximum flexibility and have only minimal state monitoring.
3. **Charter System –** Districts with an A-F and have entered a charter contract with the state will also have high flexibility and only minimal state monitoring as long as the district complies with the performance measures in their contract.

The implementation of this accountability system represents a change in the state's governance philosophy. GaDOE staff will be primarily dedicated to the progress monitoring and targeted support for low-performing districts – those earning a CCRPI score of C, D, or F that have not entered into a charter contract with the state. Conversely, the state will be minimally involved in the monitoring of high performing districts – those earning CCRPI scores of A or B, and/or districts that demonstrate significant growth.

Proponents of a letter grade accountability system argue that it provides easy comparisons on school and district performance. A recent study by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute recommended that a strong state accountability system has "annual determinations and designations for each school and district that meaningfully differentiate their performance."[125] These designations should not obscure the truth and should be user friendly. The report specifically recommends the A-to-F grading system.

Opponents of the grading system argue that adding a letter grade will only serve to shame low-performing school systems. It could also potentially discourage economic development for counties and for the state. If the state, or certain regions are viewed as having failing school systems, it will be harder to attract business investment and development.

A study of Florida's A+ Plan for Education, which implemented a grading system for all schools and districts, found significant improvement in student achievement among F-graded schools. These gains were the result of policy changes implemented after the grade designation – such as an increased focus on low-performing students, lengthened instructional time, block scheduling, increased resources to teachers and professional development.[126] The study concluded that the gains were due to a change in school and district policies, not due to a 'failing' label.

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

The waivers require states to adopt standards to ensure that students are college- and career-ready and that state assessments are tied to those standards. States must also adopt a differentiated accountability system that focuses on the most troubled schools and they must implement teacher and principal evaluation systems that partly take into account students' academic growth and that can potentially be used for personnel decisions.

Georgia is on track to implement each of these changes. In the fall of 2012, the state implemented the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards in Math and English/ Language Arts. The teacher/leader evaluation system was piloted in the Race to the Top districts in the spring of 2012 and expanded to more than 50 systems during the 2012-2013 school year. The new differentiated accountability system will not only ensure that the state reduces by half the number of non-proficient students overall and within each subgroup within six years, but also sort struggling schools into categories of Priority, Focus or Alert. Finally, the accountability system, by means of the CCRPI, will provide an overall score (0–100) that will inform stakeholders of how well the school is meeting the college- and career-ready standards.

One key issue for Georgia is how the state can translate this new policy into effective practice that leads to improved student outcomes. This new data system, combined with the CCRPI, provides schools with an unprecedented opportunity for subsequent school improvement and planning. The individual indicators should allow a school and a system to pinpoint where they are in need of improvement and where they excel, allowing for greater efficiency in resources and targeted interventions. The use of this data, analyzed by performance indicators and measures of achievement, progress, and closure of the achievement gap will also allow schools and districts to demonstrate their progress on improving student outcomes and closing the achievement gap.

The state is in the process of finalizing the first set of achievement data. The release of the achievement, progress, and achievement gap closure data is expected anytime. The release of the completed CCRPI school

125 Reed, E., Scull, J., Slicker, G., & Winkler, A.M. *How Can Better Standards Gain Greater Traction? A First Look*. Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute. 2012.
126 Figlio, D.N. *Special Data Opportunities in Florida*. University of Florida: National Bureau of Economic Research. 2006.

reports is scheduled to be released in the spring of 2013.

Another key issue for the state is communicating the new system to teachers, educators, parents, and the public at large. On the surface, understanding the new rating system is relatively straight forward. The CCRPI will provide an overall numerical score and star ratings along with financial and climate ratings. But the greater question is, "What is a good score?" What we do not yet know is the distribution of the scores. What happens if a 75 is the highest score achieved? Are we grading on a curve? Considering that the final calculation is based on a complex formula of categorical weights and multiple measures and targets, it is reasonable to ask, "What does success really look like?"

What also remains to be seen is whether the CCRPI total scores correlate with the categorical distinctions among Reward, Priority, Focus and Alert schools. The CCRPI score is specific to how that school is performing against set standards. The Reward, Priority, and Focus categories speak to how a school is performing relative to other Title I schools. Therefore, could a school potentially receive a Reward distinction but only rate a 65 on its CCRPI score? What does that tell a parent about his or her child's school?

Potentially less confusing would be if a school received a higher CCRPI score (such as an 88) and was placed in the Alert performance category. That would mean that overall this school is doing well meeting its standards in producing college- and career-ready students, but that it has one specific alert category, perhaps with a subgroup of students who are struggling. However, one would have to understand the nuances of both the CCRPI system and the performance categories to gain that insight.

Potentially adding a letter grade on top of these multiple measures of accountability may only serve to increase confusion and obfuscate true differences between schools and districts. Already, the natural tendency will be to translate the CCRPI total number into something similar to a grading system. If a school receives a 92, most people will equate that to an A grade. Conversely, a school that receives a 55 will be considered one that is failing, equating to an F. The purpose of CCRPI is to increase transparency within schools and districts and highlight all areas where they are performing well and areas in need of improvement. In implementing another level of reporting in the form of a letter grade, the state should be careful not to undo the initial purpose of the CCRPI. The numeric total allows greater differentiation between schools and districts, while the letter grades may hide those differences. For example, the difference between two districts maybe only one point – 80 vs. 79. One would be considered a B. That would allow the district to be in the High Achieving System category, and be equated with other schools receiving much higher total CCRPI scores, receive blanket flexibility and have minimal state oversight. While the other district would receive a C and as a consequence be labeled a 'Strategic School System,' be put under strong state oversight, and associated with other high-need failing school systems.

To address some of these issues, when the final scores are released, the state should invest considerable effort into explaining the distribution of scores and what constitutes a "good score." Transparency and public awareness are essential for Georgia in implementing this new system. While the overall score may end up being a number that correlates to a grading system (i.e., 90 equates to an "A"), the use of multiple indicators, measures and categories may not only be confusing to parents and the public, but to teachers and others within the educational system who are using this system to focus on student improvement.

8 Technology: The Next Generation of Learning

ISSUE OVERVIEW

BYOT. Wikis. Blogs. Podcasts. Edmodo. Virtual worlds. Glogster. If you are over a certain age, you may not know what any of these words mean. However, ask any kid and they know. They are using them at home and at school. And these are just a few examples of how technology is changing how students learn in the 21st century.

It is a fact that engaging students in the classroom leads to better student outcomes. In recent years, there has been a growing trend in the educational sector to bring technology into the classrooms to support online learning, blended classrooms, and teacher professional development and instructional practices.

A 2011 survey conducted by Project Tomorrow, a national education nonprofit organization, found that both students and parents see online learning and the blended learning approach as a major change to the traditional learning paradigm by providing instruction that is more individualized and tailored to students' needs. Moreover, teachers and administrators are now increasingly tapping into online learning and other emerging technologies to address their own professional development needs.[127]

In support of the emerging technologies being used to improve instruction, the Obama administration has released a National Education Technology Plan (NETP). This plan emphasizes the fundamental changes to classroom instruction. At the same time, the plan calls for increased flexibility in academic schedules and reduction of the emphasis on "seat time" to determine student promotion through grade levels.[128]

In an open letter accompanying the release of the plan, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan stated:

> [The plan] calls for applying the advanced technologies used in our daily personal and professional lives to our entire education system to improve student learning, accelerate and scale up the adoption of effective practices, and use data and information for continuous improvement.[129]

The question for educators is no longer: Should I allow students to bring their iPhones into the classroom? The question now is: How do I use that iPhone to further instruction? The 21st century classroom needs to match the needs and learning styles of the 21st century student. That means ensuring all professional educators are well connected to the content, resources, data, and peers they need to be highly effective.

127 Project Tomorrow. *Learning in the 21st Century: A 5 Year Retrospective on the Growth in Online* Learning. Irvine, CA: Blackboard K-12 and Project Tomorrow. 2012.
128 Nagel, D. "National Ed Tech Plan Puts Technology at the Heart of Education Reform." *The Journal.* November 9, 2010. Retrieved from http://thejournal.com/articles/2010/11/09/national-ed-tech-plan-puts-technology-at-the-heart-of-education-reform.aspx.
129 Ibid.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA?

When thinking about incorporating technology into the school systems, it is useful to consider three primary topics: 1) what function will the technology have, 2) how does the system guarantee access to that technology in a cost-effective way, and 3) what's the strategic plan for usability and sustainability?

In terms of functionality, Georgia has been pushing the envelope in virtual learning, blended classroom models, and its instructional improvement system (IIS) developed in conjunction with the longitudinal data system being implemented under Race to the Top (RT3). The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) has multiple virtual learning programs that are designed to move students through the educational system at their own pace, and to provide course flexibility and access that they may need, thereby cutting down on seat time for accelerated students and allowing extra time for students that need it. Taken together, these efforts can improve student engagement and ultimately the graduation rate.

The first of these programs is the Georgia Virtual School (GAVS). GAVS is fully accredited and operates in partnership with parents and schools to offer high school–level courses across the state through a teacher-led virtual classroom environment. GAVS offers a full high school curriculum as well as Advanced Placement (AP) courses and a limited number of middle school courses.[130] During the 2010-2011 school year, GAVS had more than 12,000 course enrollments, a 6 percent increase over the previous year.[131] Students taking GAVS courses do so as part of their regular school day.

The results have been encouraging. Students who participate in the online classrooms show better academic outcomes than students who take the same subject in traditional classrooms. See Figures 8.1 and 8.2.

This is not to suggest that online learning should replace traditional brick-and-mortar classrooms. It does show that for students who choose online classes for whatever reason, it is a legitimate option in terms of quality and student outcomes.

In support of its online learning programs, during the 2012 session, the Georgia legislature passed Senate Bill 289. The bill was designed to maximize the number of students taking at least one online course prior to graduation. The legislation required local school systems to focus on opportunities for participation in part-time and full-time virtual instruction programs, encourage the use of electronic devices in schools, and encourage the GaDOE to continue to develop online content for local school systems.[134] To date, GAVS has more than 145 developed courses.

A second virtual tool GaDOE offers is Credit Recovery (CR), which allows students the opportunity to retake a course in which they were not previously successful. CR courses involve self-paced learning, web-based learning

FIGURE 8.1: GAVS PERCENT END-OF-COURSE TEST PASS RATES 2011-2012[132]

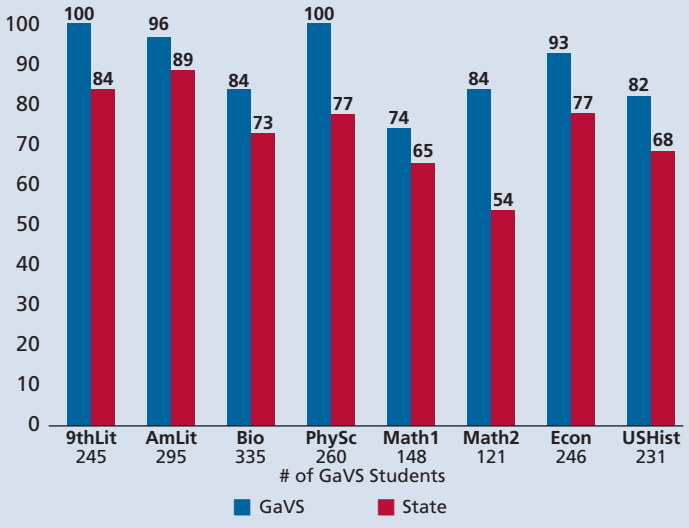
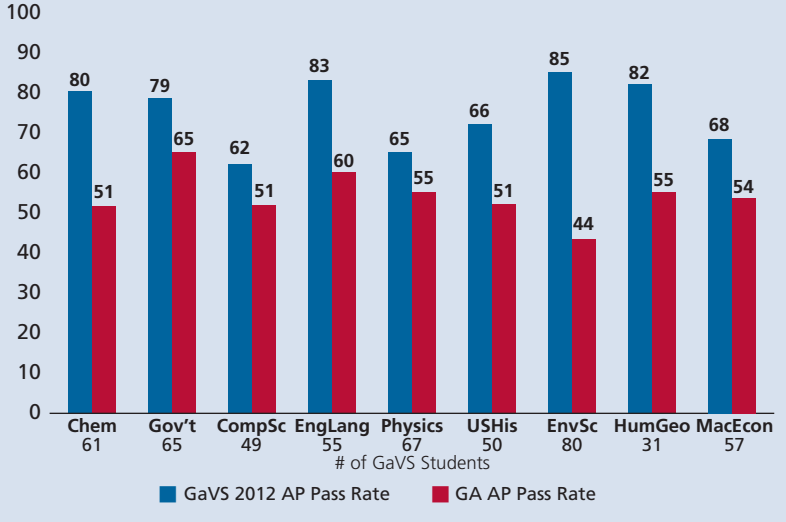


FIGURE 8.2: GAVS PERCENT ADVANCED PLACEMENT PASS RATES 2011-2012[133]



130 Georgia Department of Education. "Georgia Virtual Learning." Retrieved from www.gavirtuallearning.org
131 Evergreen Education Group. *Georgia: Data & Information.* 2012. Retrieved from Keeping Pace with K-12 Online & Blended Learning: www.kpk12.com/states/georgia
132 Barge, J. *Making Education Work for All Students.* www.gadoe.org.
133 Ibid.
134 Rogers, C., Millar, F., & Williams, T. (2012). Senate Bill 289/ As passed.

activities, and unit assessments. All coursework can be completed at home or school. While all classes include a final exam, an End-of-Course Test (EOCT) for required classes must be administered by the local school system upon course completion.[135] The CR program also had more than 12,000 enrollments during the 2010-2011 school year, an 84 percent increase from the previous year.[136]

Virtual classes (or online courses) are not the only innovative content delivery option that is being used in Georgia, or nationwide. Increasingly more common is blended learning, which brings digital resources into the brick-and-mortar classroom. In this model, students continue to receive in-class instruction from their teachers and continue to participate in other traditional classroom activities. However, the learning is supplemented by online activities, some of which can be self-directed and self-paced, while others promote student collaboration. Research has shown that this combination of traditional classroom instruction and the digital environment creates a highly personalized and more productive learning environment with better outcomes.[137] Benefits from a blended approach include:

- Access to high-quality, relevant, and engaging content in a variety of forms,
- More flexible class time and structure,
- The ability to adapt to the learning needs of students,
- Student access to multiple sources of instruction, assessments, and diagnostic tools to help direct the pace and format of their learning, and
- The ability for teachers to tailor instruction to ensure mastery for all students.[138]

The blended learning approach represents a significant shift from the traditional instructional model, primarily moving from lecture to student-centered instruction in which students become not only active, but interactive learners. The model also requires increased interaction between the student and the instructor, among students, and between students and outside resources. The format also calls for integrated formative and summative assessments for the student and the teacher to monitor progress and tailor the instructional approach.[139]

In 2011, GaDOE – using courses developed by GAVS – began working with high schools across the state to offer blended learning models in classrooms through the eSource model. Having seen positive outcomes among students taking the online courses, GaDOE knew there was an effective resource to deliver high-quality content. ESource allows that content to be delivered as part of a traditional classroom in a blended model. The eSource content includes all 145 virtual courses that were developed by GAVS and fully aligned to the Georgia Performance Standards (and Common Core Georgia Performance Standards in the areas of English/ Language Arts and Mathematics). The courses are further divided into modules related to a specific standard. If a class or an individual student is struggling with a particular standard, the teacher can supplement instruction with the content materials provided by GAVS in that specific area. Teachers participating in this program are currently using the online content for 40–80 percent of their instructional time.[140]

These new models of content delivery lead directly to the second question: How does the system guarantee access to that technology in a cost-effective way? The answer for Georgia is in its instructional improvement system (IIS), which is designed to enhance the state's ability to effectively manage, use and analyze education data to support instruction.

Georgia began developing the longitudinal data system (LDS) in the mid-2000s. By providing a unique identifier for each student enrolled in PreK-12, it is designed to improve instruction by delivering student data, curriculum standards, and instructional resources to the teacher's desktop through a district's student information system. The LDS is only a small portion of the total IIS now being implemented under RT3. When fully operational, the IIS will combine online student assessments, professional development, teaching evaluations, metrics from the College and Career Ready Performance Index, and digital resources linked to the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards to the desk top of every teacher in Georgia. Soon, parents will also have access to the same online resources as teachers to help their children with specific content standards. For a full list of tools being incorporated into the system, see Figure 8.3.

Currently, teachers are able to view several years' worth of student summative assessment data and student records. They are also able to gain access to aligned digital resources to supplement their instruction. Figure 8.4 shows all the elements of the fully developed IIS.

To guarantee access and full benefit use of this system, Georgia must increase bandwidth across the state. The State Educational Technology Directors Association

135 Georgia Department of Education. "Georgia Virtual Learning." Retrieved from Georgia Department of Education: www.gavirtuallearning.org.
136 Evergreen Education Group. *Georgia: Data & Information.* 2012. Retrieved from Keeping Pace with K-12 Online & Blended Learning: www.kpk12.com/states/georgia.
137 schoolwires. *Blending the Best of Online and Face-to-Face Learning to Improve Student Outcomes.* August 2012. Retrieved from http://www.schoolwires.com/cms/lib3/SW00000001/Centricity/Domain/36/Blended%20Learning%20Whitepaper-r3.pdf.
138 Ibid.
139 Ibid.
140 Evergreen Education Group. *Georgia: Data & Information.* 2012. Retrieved from Keeping Pace with K-12 Online & Blended Learning: www.kpk12.com/states/georgia.

FIGURE 8.3: COMMON TOOLS OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM

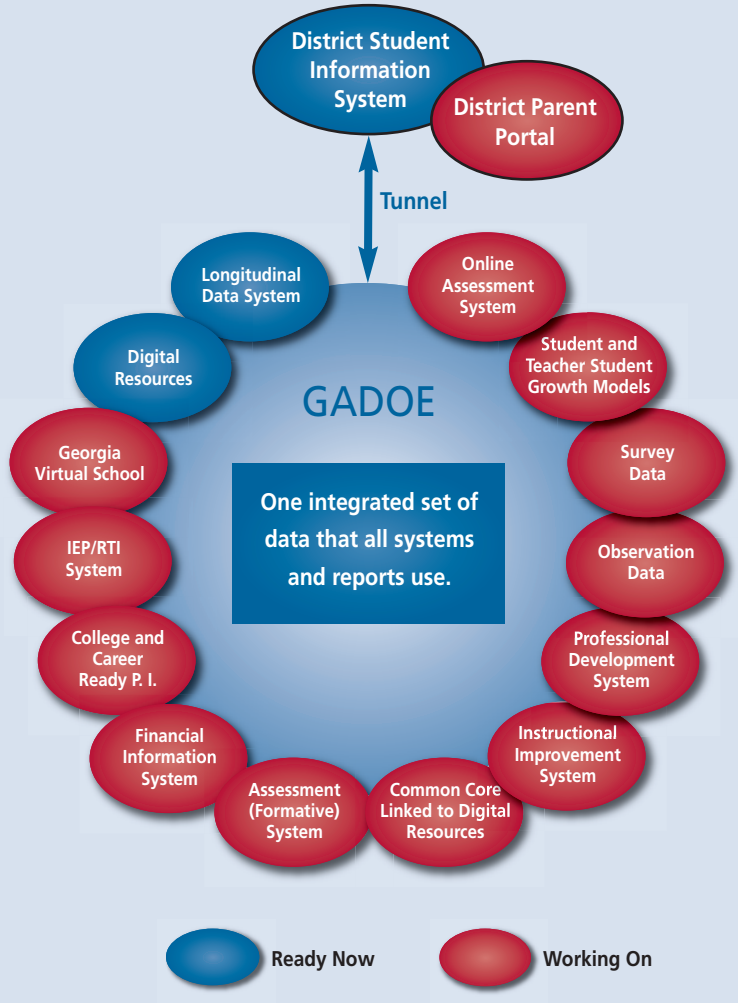
- Provides longitudinal student data available to teachers, parents and students
- Provides access to digital resources for teachers, parents and students
- Allows all student information to move with the student
- Provides access for teachers, parents and students to online courses
- Enables rollout of Career Pathways
- Enables rollout of Common Core Standards
- Enables districts to receive data on out-of-state students
- Enables districts to track students who have left the state
- Reduced the need for districts to spend money on their own data systems
- Enables teacher prep programs to train pre-service teachers on DOE data and tools
- Enables personalized training for teachers
- Enables blended learning in brick-and-mortar classrooms

(SETDA) conducted a study assessing the bandwidth needed to fully support an IIS similar to Georgia's. The SETDA concluded that schools should have a minimum of 100 Mbps per 1,000 students by 2014-2015.[141] By 2017-2018, schools will need 1 Gbps per 1,000 students. Currently in Georgia, some schools have as much as 32 Mbps, but the average is closer to 16 Mbps. Once increased to 100 Mbps, the bandwidth should allow for full integration of technology and digital resources in the schools, including:

- Access to digital resources for teachers, students and parents,
- Access to state tools,
- Use of online testing, including the new Common Core online evaluations,
- Faster access to resources,
- Use of Bring Your Own Devise (BYOD) programs,
- Reduced use of traditional textbooks, and
- Access to all data center services.

To date, Georgia has trained more than 60,000 teachers on the new IIS. The teachers are being trained on how to access student data and how to use the system in a way that promotes their own teaching, not just data reporting for compliance purposes. The use of this technology is a concerted move towards a blended learning model that emphasizes personalized learning for the student as well as the teacher.

FIGURE 8.4: FULLY INTEGRATED GADOE IIS



141 Fox, C., Waters, J., Fletcher, G., & Levin, D. The Broadband Imperative: *Recommendations to Address K-12 Education Infastructure Needs.* Wahington, DC: State Educational Technology Directors Association. 2012.

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

When incorporating technology into a school system, the third question that should be considered is: What is the strategic plan for usability and sustainability? This question is where Georgia must take action.

A stated goal of the National Educational Technology Plan is to support professional educators individually and in teams by connecting them with data, content, resources, expertise and learning experiences that can empower their teaching. Among the recommendations for aiding teachers in fully using technology are the following:

- Expanding access to online instructional materials,
- Using distance learning to provide additional educational opportunities for teachers and students, and
- Preparing teachers for online instruction and approaching teacher certification and professional development in new ways that promote the use of technology.[142]

Georgia is committed to expanding access to instructional materials through the use of the IIS. However, the development and implementation of the IIS is being funded by RT3, as are the innovation grants being given to individual school systems that often involve technology. The RT3 funds are scheduled to end in 2014. The state must not only consider the expansion of broadband access, but the sustainability and maintenance of both the network and instructional materials provided by the system.

Teacher development and training are critical. As previously stated, more than 60,000 teachers have been trained on the existing system. As teachers learn these new tools and the database expands to include new options, sustained professional development must be employed to realize the full benefits of the system as designed. Education professionals not only need to be trained on how to use the IIS, but how to use technology in general. The IIS allows for the incorporation of online digital content and other tools such as interactive white boards, iPads, Wiki sites, Edmodo, virtual lockers, and so forth. As part of that process, teachers must be at least as comfortable with technology and resources as their students.

The use of technology and professional development need not only be limited to "how to use it" types of classes. Technology itself can be used to train teachers across a variety of developmental needs. Teachers can create statewide communities of practice using social network technologies. This would be especially useful for rural teachers or those in smaller districts who do not have the same level of instructional support as teachers in larger schools or districts. Effective professional development ensures that districts and schools attract and retain high-quality educational professionals for every classroom. The knowledge, understanding and use of technology are each critical to that process.

Georgia is increasingly committed to preparing students to be highly competitive in a global 21st century world. To do that, education leaders are continuing to bridge technology and education reform priorities. The use of technology is revolutionizing how instructional materials are taught and how students learn. Georgia has long been viewed as a national leader in incorporating technology into its reform agenda. However, simply making the resources available will not be enough. Education professionals at every level must be engaged in using technology and committed to the education paradigm shift that technology represents.

142 Nagel, D. "National Ed Tech Plan Puts Technology at the Heart of Education Reform." *The Journal*. November 9, 2010. Retrieved from http://thejournal.com/articles/2010/11/09/national-ed-tech-plan-puts-technology-at-the-heart-of-education-reform.aspx.

9 Flexibility and Choice: The Issues

ISSUE OVERVIEW

"Millions of students are trapped in persistently failing public schools." So reads the headline. And the headline isn't wrong. Hundreds of thousands of children are trapped in low-performing public schools, including many in our nation's largest school districts. In New York, 125,000 students are enrolled in public schools that have failed for six or more years. In Los Angeles, 170,000 students attend persistently failing schools. In cities like Chicago (121,000), Philadelphia (63,000), Detroit (26,000) and Baltimore (22,000), tens of thousands of children are enrolled in persistently failing public schools and are missing the chance to receive a quality education.[143]

In response to this crisis, there is increasing pressure nationwide on state and district education leaders to govern school systems in ways that focus on student performance while also providing an array of options to meet the differing needs of the growing diversity of the student body. The states have responded by increasing options for flexibility and choice. As of the 2011-2012 school year, 41 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico had enacted charter school legislation, with more than 5,600 individual charter schools across the country.[144] States are also increasingly turning to vouchers and tuition tax credits. In 2011 alone, seven new private school choice programs were enacted, and 42 states introduced legislation to expand current programs.[145]

These are but a few examples of flexibility and choice options being provided to parents. There are also the more established programs like magnet schools and dual enrollment programs. In addition, states are developing emerging options related to online learning, virtual schools, and most recently the new "parent trigger" option, which allows for a majority of parents to petition to remove the leadership and staff of chronically underperforming schools.

In Georgia, Governor Nathan Deal has made the commitment to local flexibility and public choice options to improve student achievement. As part of the state's strategic plan, the governor is calling for providing traditional public school districts with options for increased flexibility in exchange for increased accountability in the form of becoming a charter district or an Investing in Educational Excellence (IE^2) district by 2013. The plan also calls for increasing the number of high-performing charter schools to promote competition, innovation and creativity while encouraging strong parental involvement.[146]

As the interest in school choice continues to grow in states across the country and among Georgia's citizens and policymakers, the 2013 legislative session is likely to produce additional proposals and deliberations about the role of school choice in Georgia's educational system. These debates will give rise to two important issues of consideration. The first is access. Families that are supposed to get choices must in fact have access to them. The second is oversight. Public officials must make sure that all schools establish and enforce rigorous standards in exchange for greater flexibility.

143 Lips, D. "A Lifeline for Students in Persistently Failing Public Schools." July 19, 2006. Retrieved from The Heritage Foundation, Education Notebook: http://www.heritage.org/research/education-notebook/a-lifeline-for-students-in-persistently-failing-public-schools.

144 Education Commission of the States. "Choice of Schools – Charter Schools." 2012. Retrieved from http://www.ecs.org/html/issue.asp?issueid=20&subissueid=0.

145 Education Commission of the States. (2012). "Choice of Schools – Vouchers." 2012. Retrieved from http://www.ecs.org/html/issue.asp?issueid=22&subissueid=333.

146 Bernhard, K. *State Strategic Plan: Developing Life- College- and Work-Ready Students.* Atlanta: Office of Governor Nathan Deal. 2012.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA?

Under former Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue, the Georgia legislature passed a bill that required all school systems to convert to either a charter system or an Investing in Educational Excellence (or IE^2) system by 2013. Governor Deal has incorporated that deadline into his strategic plan to improve student achievement. The goal of both IE^2 districts and charter districts is to provide local school districts with greater governance flexibility as a means to increasing student achievement.

In the case of IE^2 districts, as created by House Bill 1209 (2008), local boards of education can enter into multi-year contracts with Georgia's State Board of Education based on strategic plans developed in partnership with the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA). Such plans must identify specific school-level student achievement goals that are in addition to current federal accountability requirements.

Each system must have a strategic plan and a school improvement plan outlined for each school that is administered at the district level. As part of their improvement plans, systems must seek waivers for at least one of the following:[147]

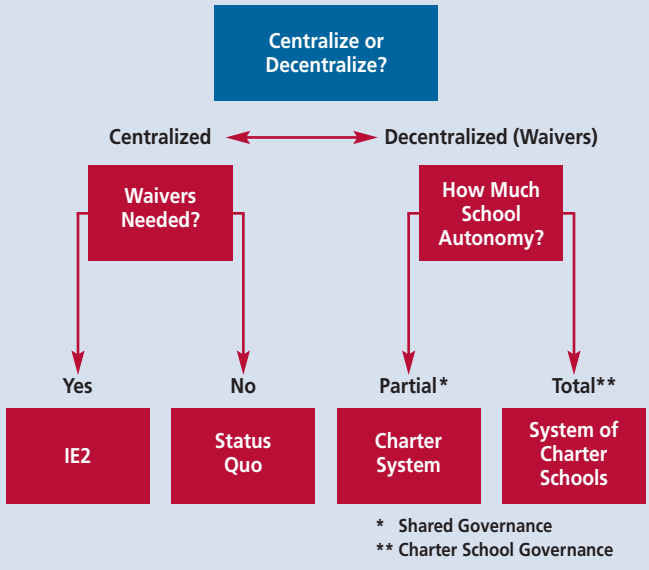
- Class size,
- Expenditure control,
- Teacher certification, or
- Salary schedule.

Systems may also seek waivers from certain Title 20 rules and regulations such as human resource practices, local board governing practices, instructional time requirements, or summer remediation programs.[148] There are currently three counties in Georgia – Gwinnett, Forsyth and Rabun – that are operating as IE^2 districts.

The Georgia Charter Systems Act, signed in 2007, allows entire school systems to convert to charter status. A charter system is not a group of charter schools; rather, the district has a charter, or contract, with the State of Georgia to increase student achievement. The charter systems have increased flexibility to operate beyond state mandates and make adjustments in staffing, teaching methods, and management in exchange for higher accountability. Charter systems are required to have significant focus on parent and community involvement and maximize school-level governance.

In Georgia, there are currently eight charter districts with approved contracts and another six with approved petitions.[149]

FIGURE 9.1: CHARTER VS. IE^2 DECISION CONSIDERATIONS[150]



In choosing whether to become an IE^2 district or a charter district, each district must decide if the primary governance structure should be centered at the district level or the school level. Depending the size, district goals, and preferred strategies in closing achievement gaps, districts may gravitate towards one or the other. Figure 9.1 provides some of the decision considerations that districts can use.

The increased flexibility has produced promising results so far. After two years as an IE^2 district, most of the elementary and middle schools in Forsyth and Gwinnett Counties met their accountability targets. The high schools in Forsyth County and about half the high schools in Gwinnett County did not meet their targets due to students not meeting their proficiency benchmark in the high school math end-of-course test.[151] It must be noted that these results are from the 2010-2011 school year, the first year the high schools were implementing the new Georgia Performance Standards mathematics curriculum, and all schools saw a drop in the percentage of proficient students in math that year.

The results for the charter systems have also been positive. During the 2010-2011 school year, Georgia had eight charter systems operating and 61 charter system schools. Of these charter systems, 74 percent of the charter system schools made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) that year. This is comparable to the 73 percent of traditional public schools that made AYP. Moreover, during that same year, charter system schools and charter system students were recognized for excellence, including the following:

147 O.C.G.A. 20-2-80 through 20-2-84.3.
148 O.C.G.A. 20-2-58 through 20-2-940.
149 The 14 districts with approved contracts or petitions to become Charter Districts are Barrow County, Calhoun City Schools, Cartersville City Schools, City Schools of Decatur, Dawson County, Dublin City Schools, Floyd County, Gainesville City Schools, Gordon County, Marietta City Schools, Morgan County, Putnam County, Warren County and White County.
150 Division of External Affairs and Policy. *Operational Systems "Decision Time."* Atlanta: Georgia Department of Education. 2011.
151 Governor's Office of Student Achievement. *Forsyth Y2 IE2 Evaluation*. Atlanta: Georgia Department of Education and the Office of Student Achievement. 2011.

- 69 percent of charter system schools were recognized as Distinguished Schools by AYP standards,
- 82 percent of Georgia's Charter System High Schools scored above state and/or national averages on the 2011 SATs:
  - 4 scored above the National Public School Average of 1483,
  - 9 scored above the Georgia Public School Average of 1431,
  - 1 was in the top 5 percent of SAT scores in Georgia,
  - 4 additional were in the top 20 percent ,
  - 3 were in the top 25 percent, and
  - 1 was in the top 30 percent of SAT scores in Georgia.[152]

While school districts in Georgia are currently trying to decide if they want to be an IE^2 or Charter district, the Georgia legislature is currently drafting legislation that will make the decision moot. The State Education Finance Study Commission was established to study the costs and resources required to educate Georgia's children. One of their recommendations will be to introduce legislation in the 2013 session to establish the the Georgia Statewide Tiered Accountability and Flexibility System (G-STAFS).

The G-STAFS is intended to replace the State's current funding waiver options with a comprehensive flexibility/accountability structure. Georgia's new College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) assigns a numerical score (0-100) based on a school's and district's performance across a variety of performance measures. The Commission recommends those scores be translated to a letter grade (i.e. a school with a score 90-100 would receive an 'A'). Based on their letter grade and desire for flexibility, districts will be placed in one of three categories: Strategic School System (districts with a C, D, or F), High Performing School System (districts with an A, or B), or Charter System (districts with an A-F and have entered a charter contract with the state). High Performing and Charter Systems will have blanket waivers and minimal oversight from the state. Strategic School Systems must apply for flexibility waivers and will receive increased state oversight and monitoring from GaDOE to ensure accountability. If the legislation passes, this system will supersede previous flexibility structures and void current IE^2 and charter system contracts. Current IE^2 districts will become High Performing School Systems category, and current charter districts will be placed in the Charter Systems category. Both will remain in those categories for the remainder of their current contracts. Upon renewal, they must meet the updated category eligibility criteria. For a full discussion of the CCRPI and the G-STAFS, please see *Issue 7: The NCLB Waiver: What Grade did Your School Get.*

While the Governor and the state are committed to providing more flexibility to local districts, Georgia is committed to providing greater flexibility and choice to parents as well. In Georgia, parents have a myriad of choice options for their children, from magnet schools to online virtual academies. In 2007, the state passed legislation for the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship (GSNS) program, which provides scholarships to children with disabilities to attend private schools. In 2008, Georgia passed the Georgia Private School Tax Credit Law, allowing private citizens and corporations to receive tax credits for donating to Georgia's Student Scholarship Organizations (SSOs). In 2009, Georgia passed House Bill 251, the Public School Choice Framework, which gives parents the opportunity to transfer to any public school within the district as long as space is available.

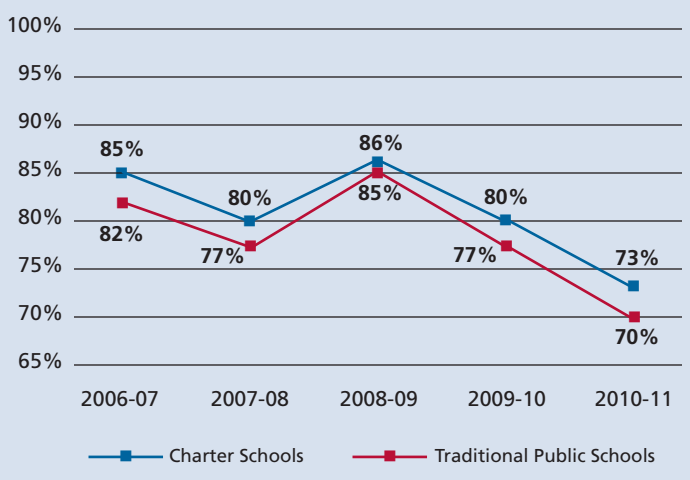
In spite of all these options, none has been more popular than charter schools. During the 2010-2011 school year 98,263 Georgia public school students were enrolled in either a conversion, start-up or system charter school. In the past three years, conversion and start-up charter school enrollment increased by almost 50 percent, from 41,582 students to 59,193 students. The 2009-2010 school year saw a 16 percent increase over the 2008-2009 school year. The positive trend continued during the 2010-2011 school year with a 20 percent increase in student enrollment.[153]

Nationally, charter school students represented 3.7 percent of all public school students in the 2010-2011 school year. Georgia charter school students represented 5.9 percent of the state's public school population. Since 2009-2010, Georgia has increased the number of charter school students by .2 percent each year when charter system students are included. Conversion and start-up charter schools represent more than half of the total charter school enrollment, including 3.5 percent of all public school students in Georgia.[154]

The research on charter schools so far has been mixed. A commonly cited study by Stanford University's Center for Educational Outcomes found that only 17 percent of charter schools in 15 states and the District of Columbia outperform traditional public schools and 37 percent perform worse.[155] A recent study of schools that are part of Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) found that test scores in reading, math, science and social studies were stronger among students in these schools, but the results were not statistically significant.[156] In short, research has been inconclusive; some charter schools show promise and others do not.

152 Georgia Department of Education, Charter School Division. *Georgia Charter Systems Annual Report: 2010-2011.* Atlanta: Author. 2011.
153 Georgia Department of Education, Charter School Division. *Chartering in Georgia: 2010-2011 Annual Report.* Atlanta: Author. 2011.
154 Ibid.
155 Center for Research on Education Outcomes. *Multiple Choice: Charter School Performance in 16 States.* Palo Alto: Stanford University. 2009.
156 Fergeson, J., et al. *Charter-School Management Organizations: Diverse Strategies and Diverse Student Impacts.* Mathematica Policy Research & Center on Reinventing Public Education. 2011.

FIGURE 9.2: PERCENTAGE OF CHARTER SCHOOLS MAKING AYP VS. TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN GEORGIA[158]



In Georgia, over the past five years, the overall performance of charter schools compared to traditional public schools has been mixed. However, both groups have traditionally demonstrated the same general performance trends. While 70 percent of all charter schools including charter system schools made AYP in 2010-2011, only 67 percent of conversion and start-up charter schools made AYP. This is a decrease from 80 percent in 2009-2010. In comparison, traditional public schools also declined from 2009-2010 to 2010-2011, although by a smaller percentage (see Figure 9.2).[157]

The growth in charter schools in Georgia has met its share of controversy. In the spring of 2011, the Georgia Charter Schools Commission (GCSC) was deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of Georgia. That issue was resolved by voters in November 2012 when they supported a constitutional amendment (58 percent in favor) to allow the re-establishment of the Charter Commission. The Commission will hear appeals from charter applications that are rejected by their local school boards and will also consider applications for charter schools that would have a statewide attendance zone. It is believed that the creation of this alternative authorizer to local school boards and the GaDOE will encourage local boards of education to be more thoughtful about charter school applications and will open the door to establishing more charter schools statewide.[159]

Georgia is also promoting the creation of charter schools through the use of the Innovation Fund. As part of the states' Race to the Top grant, the Innovation Fund is a $19.4 million fund that provides competitive grants to support the establishment and deepening of partnerships between local school districts, charter schools, institutions of higher education (IHEs), businesses and nonprofit organizations to advance the applied learning and academic achievement of Georgia's K-12 students.[160]

The state uses the Innovation Fund to determine best practices in innovative programming related to STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education, applied learning, and teacher and leader recruitment and development to influence future education policy efforts. In addition to partnering with existing charter schools and charter systems, the Innovation Fund has established charter schools focused on STEM education, such as:

- **Murray County STEM Academy:** Murray County Schools, in partnership with Georgia Northwestern Technical College, the Chatsworth-Murray County Chamber of Commerce and others will open a program focused on remediating 8th grade students and developing their interest in STEM careers.
- **Smyrna Academy of Excellence:** The Smyrna Educational Alliance, in partnership with Georgia State University, the Georgia Institute of Technology, Lockheed Martin Corp. and others, seeks to open a STEM charter school serving students in south Cobb County.
- **The Regional Charter STEM Academy:** A partnership between White, Hall, and Lumpkin County school systems and North Georgia College & State University will create a tri-county STEM charter school.[161]

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

Georgia's school choice options have always been presented with a clear goal in mind: to increase the academic achievement of students. During 2012, the choice options were dominated by debates about charter schools, charter authorizers and funding models. Now that the election has settled the question about where the state is headed in terms of authorizers, it can and should focus on specific policy areas that help to ensure the promotion and replication of high-quality charters and choice options for all families.

First, Georgia must continue to ensure that authorizers establish and enforce rigorous standards at all steps of the oversight process, and that schools are held accountable to these standards.[162] Second, the state must work directly with charters with the lowest levels of student performance that are allowed to continue to operate to improve them and have a clear plan for closure for those that don't improve.

157 Georgia Department of Education, Charter School Division. *Chartering in Georgia: 2010-2011 Annual Report.* Atlanta: Author. 2011.
158 Ibid.
159 Washington, W. "Passage of Charter Schools Amendment Heartens Some, Worries Others." Atlanta Journal-Constitution. November 11, 2012.
160 http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/Race-to-the-Top/Pages/Innovation-Fund.aspx.
161 Ibid.
162 Grove, J. *Charter Schools in SREB States: Critical Questions and Next Steps for States.* Atlanta: Southern Regional Education Board. 2012.

A 2010 Fordham Institute report found that 72 percent of low-performing charter schools across 10 states were still open and were still low-performing after five years of state monitoring.[163] Recently, the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) launched the "One Million Lives" campaign to press for changes in state law that holds charter schools and their authorizers more accountable.[164] The campaign refers to the goal getting 1 million additional children into 3,000 high-performing charter schools over the next five years. However, according to their own analysis, between 900 and 1,300 charter schools across the national are among the lowest 15 percent of academic performers in their state as measured by standardized test scores in math and reading. Therefore, by setting tougher standards for charter schools to open, and remain open, the NACSA believes these higher standards will set the path for states to engage in "smarter growth."[165]

Moving forward into 2013, issues related to transparency and accountability will most likely rise up again in the Georgia legislature. The first issue concerning transparency may be around the Georgia Private School Tax Credit Law, established in 2008. The law allows individuals and corporations to receive income tax credits for donations made to a Student Scholarship Organization (SSO). These scholarship programs allow individuals and corporations to allocate a portion of their owed state taxes to private nonprofit school tuition organizations that issue scholarships to K-12 students. The scholarship allows a student to choose among a list of approved private schools. The scholarship is used to pay tuition, fees and other related expenses. As a result, the state does not have to appropriate per-pupil education funding for those students who receive scholarships.[166]

A 2011 revision to the law limits the amount of information that each SSO has to provide, raising questions about transparency. The Department of Revenue does not require any information from SSOs other than the total number and amount of tax credits approved, the total number and amount of contributions, a list of donors and the value of each donation and tax credit, and the total number and amount of scholarships awarded.[167] Georgia GOAL (Greater Opportunities for Access to Learning), one of the largest SSOs in Georgia, is the only SSO in the state that has publicly reported specific statistical information about contributions, expenditures, and grants to students and schools. Without being able to track student outcomes, it is impossible to evaluate the program and the return on investment to the tax payer. It is expected that legislation to increase transparency concerning student achievement results and appropriate use of tax-payer dollars for this program will be introduced.

Finally, now that the dust has settled from the Charter School Amendment, expect another controversial bill to be introduced – the so-called parent trigger law. Currently, four states – California, New York, Ohio and Colorado – have passed a parent trigger law that allows parents of children in chronically failing schools to petition to unseat the school's current leadership and staff. If petitioners obtain signatures from 51 percent of parents, the schools must undergo a significant restructuring, such as 1) converting to a charter school, 2) replacing the principal and at least half of the teachers, 3) keeping the school intact but firing the principal, or 4) closing the school and sending the students to a higher performing school nearby.[168]

Unfortunately, to date there have been no examples of the parent trigger law leading to a successful turnaround of a chronically failing public school. There has only been one test case in California where 51 percent of the parents signed a petition to convert their school into a charter school. The petition was dragged down in legal fights that eventually led a judge to dismiss the petition on legal grounds. In the meantime, an opposition parent group at the school formed against the proposed charter school and felt only new leadership was needed.[169] While nobody would argue against parent involvement in a school, it appears too early to tell if a parent trigger law would in fact lead to the types of outcomes proponents envision.

In Georgia, flexibility and choice for our school districts and parents are here to stay. Too many students are trapped in chronically low-performing schools, and the increasing diversity of our student population demands options. Flexibility and choice allow for innovation and experimentation that increases student learning and engagement. However, the benefits of these options must be made available to all students. Efforts must be made to better understand which choice options are producing the best outcomes for children and how the state can expand those programs to more students – to ALL students. The implementation, sustainability and replication of those quality improvements require a system of accountability that allows for fiduciary responsibility for tax-payer dollars and accountability to student achievement. The delicate balance of these two issues requires continued dialogue among our elected business and community leaders.

163 Petrilli, M.J., & Eberhardt, T. *The Charter School Quality Agenda: What Comes Next?* Pie Network Summit Policy Brief. Minneapolis: Policy Innovators in Education (Pie Network). 2011.
164 Cavanaugh, S. "A New Campaign to Close Sub-Par Charter Schools." *Education Week*. November 28 2012.
165 Ibid.
166 Ibid.
167 Georgia House Bill 325.
168 Kelly, A. "Triggering Reform at Public Schools." **Education Week.** February 29, 2012.
169 Ibid.

10 Our Demographics: The Changing Face of Georgia's Schools

ISSUE OVERVIEW

In past elections, the catch phrase has been "It's the economy, stupid." Therefore, during the 2012 presidential election, former Governor Mitt Romney focused his presidential campaign message on the economy. Before the election, political pundits proclaimed loudly that President Obama was one of the most vulnerable incumbent presidents in history due to the slow economic recovery since 2008 and consistently high unemployment rate.[170] As it turns out, it was not the economy. It was the demographics stupid – specifically, the changing demographics.

In 2008, non-white voters made up 26 percent of the electorate. In 2012, they made up 28 percent.[171] The changing demographics were especially critical in the battleground states of Ohio and Florida. In Ohio, African American voters were 15 percent of the electorate, up from 11 percent in 2008. In Florida, Hispanics made up 17 percent of the electorate, increasing from 14 percent in 2008.[172]

While the Romney campaign may have underestimated the voter turnout of the U.S.'s minority populations, there is no question that 2010 census data revealed significant demographic shifts that could have critical policy implications in the future. A study of the new census data by the Brookings Institution reveals that the U.S. is undergoing the most significant socio-demographic change since the last huge wave of immigrants in the early 20th century.[173] The demographic trends suggest that the U.S. will add 50 million new Americans by 2025. Due to trends in birthrates, and to a lesser extent immigration patterns, over the past decade, 83 percent of the population growth has been among ethnic minorities. By 2025, it is predicted there will no longer be a majority racial or ethnic group in the U.S., meaning no one group will make up more than 50 percent of the total population.[174] Moreover, the population is expected to become considerably older. The number of those over 65 now exceeds 100 million, and that number is expected to continue to increase. In general, states and local communities can expect that their older populations will be composed of non-Hispanic whites, and their younger populations will be made up of minorities.

The country is not only becoming more diverse, it is also increasingly poor, especially among the populations that are growing the fastest. Census Bureau data released in November 2012 showed that the number of American's living below the poverty line at the end of 2011 was at an all-time high – 49.9 million (16 percent). Broken down by subgroup, poverty is disproportionately affecting people 65 and over (15 percent), Hispanics (28 percent), African Americans (25 percent) and Asians (16 percent).[175]

In 2000, the child poverty rate was 17 percent. From 2000 to 2010, the number of children living in poverty jumped from 12.2 million to 15.7 million, an increase of nearly 30 percent. The additional 3.5 million children living in poverty is nearly equivalent to the entire population of the city of Los Angeles.[176]

What do these trends mean for public education? The population that schools educate increasingly comprises children of color and those of Hispanic origin. The nation's population is also aging; as a result, those the educational system depends on for funding are increasingly older, non-Hispanic, and do not have school-aged children. Finally, the achievement gap between student groups will have increasingly more serious economic consequences both for the individual and for overall economic competitiveness. For years, minorities have been underrepresented in professions such as science, medicine and engineering.[177] With the non-minority population shrinking and the entry-level workforce increasingly made up of minorities, the nation could face serious shortages in critical professions.

170 Kuhner, J. "Why O'Bama Will Lose." *Washington Times*. October 4, 2012.
171 Pew Research Center. "Changing Face of America Helps Assure Obama Victory." November 7, 2012. Retrieved from http://www.people-press.org.
172 Ibid.
173 Katz, B., & Rodin, J. "An Impending National Transformation." May 9, 2010. Retrieved from www.brookings.edu.
174 Ibid.
175 Associated Press Staff. "49.7 Million Americans in Poverty, Census Says." November 14, 2012. Retrieved from NBC News Business: http://www.nbcnews.com/business/49-7-million-americans-poverty-census-bureau-says-1C7073315#/business/49-7-million-americans-poverty-census-bureau-says-1C7073315.
176 Annie E. Casey Foundation. *2012 Kids Count Data Book.* Baltimore: Author. 2012.
177 Crouch, R. *The United States of Education: The Changing Demographics of the United States and their Schools.* Alexandria, VA: The Center for Public Education. 2012.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA?

Over the past decade, Georgia has experienced the same population shifts as the rest of the country. Since 2000, the state added more than 1.6 million people within its borders, with the growth concentrated in minority populations. See Table 10.1 for a breakout of these trends.

Change in the student population of Georgia's public schools is reflective of the changing demographics across Georgia. An examination of the overall number of children enrolled in the K-12 system shows there has been a slight decrease in white students as a percentage of total students enrolled and a corresponding increase in the percentage of Hispanic students enrolled (3 percentage points for each). Interestingly, while the number of African Americans in Georgia has increased as a total percentage of the population, the percentage of Black students enrolled in the public school system has remained relatively constant (see Figure 10.1).

Over the past several years, Georgia has made significant inroads in closing the academic achievement gap among minorities on both state and national measures. Figure 10.2 shows the closing achievement gap in third-grade reading and eighth-grade math.

These trends have been evident on national standards as well. In 2011, on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) – the Nation's Report Card, Georgia was one of only 16 states that made progress on closing the achievement gap for fourth-grade math students between white students and African American students.

Moreover, Georgia's minority students demonstrated a significant participation and performance increase on Advanced Placement (AP) exams in May 2012 compared to May 2011. Over the last year, African American and Hispanic AP test-takers increased 5.1 percent and 13.1 percent, respectively, compared to the national increase of 3.6 percent for African American test-takers and 8.1 percent for Hispanic test-takers. Georgia's minority student AP performance also overshadowed the performance of their national counterparts, with a 17.5 percent increase in AP exam scores of three or higher for African American Georgia test-takers, and a 19.6 percent increase for Hispanic Georgia test-takers, compared to 12.5 percent and 14.0 percent, respectively, for the nation.[180]

TABLE 10.1: DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS IN GEORGIA 2000–2010[178]

	2000	2010
Total Population	8,186,453	9,815,210
% White	65.1	63.2
% Black	28.7	31.0
% Hispanic	5.3	9.1
% Asian	2.1	3.4

FIGURE 10.1: THE CHANGING FACE OF GEORGIA'S K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOLS[179]

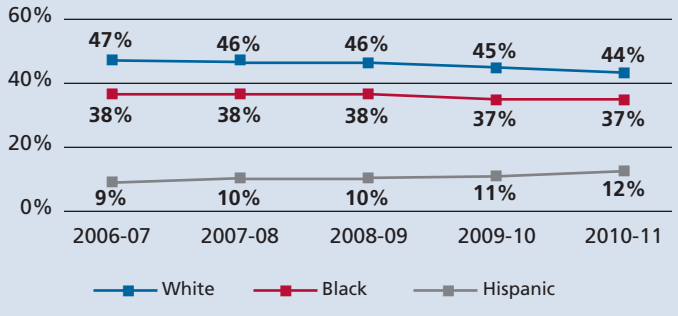
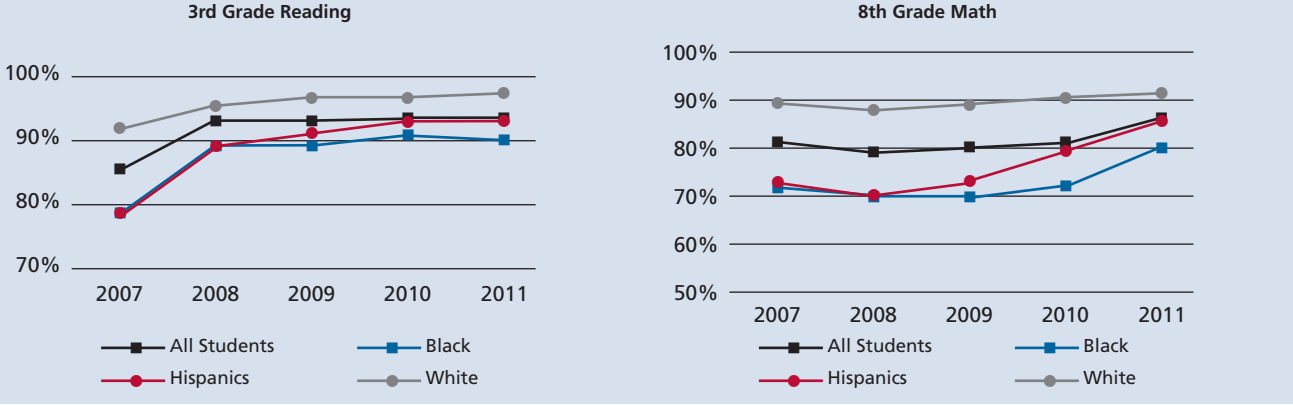


FIGURE 10.2: CLOSING ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT GAPS: PERCENT STUDENTS MEETING/EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS



178 U.S. Census Bureau. *State and County Quick Facts.* 2000/ 2010. Retrieved from http://quickfacts.census.gov/.
179 Georgia Department of Education. Note that the graph shows selected race categories, so totals for each year may not add to 100 percent.
180 The College Board. *AP:8th Annual Report to the Nation*. New York: Author. 2012.

Georgia is certainly experiencing an increase in its non-white population. However, what is concerning is the number of children living in poverty in Georgia. In 2007, approximately 20 percent of Georgia's children lived below the poverty line. By 2011, the state average was 26 percent.[181]

Georgia is the fifth-poorest state in the nation. Since the recession began in 2007, Georgia's overall poverty rate has increased by approximately five percentage points. See Figure 10.3.

As Figure 10.3 shows, Georgia's children are more likely to be living in poverty than adults. Moreover, minority children are more likely to be poor than white children. There are nearly 650,000 poor children in the state, 39 percent of which are African American and 42 percent of which are Hispanic. In nine counties, more than a third of children are living in poverty, and two counties have close to 60 percent of their children living in poverty.[183]

FIGURE 10.3: POVERTY RATES SINCE THE RECESSION[182]

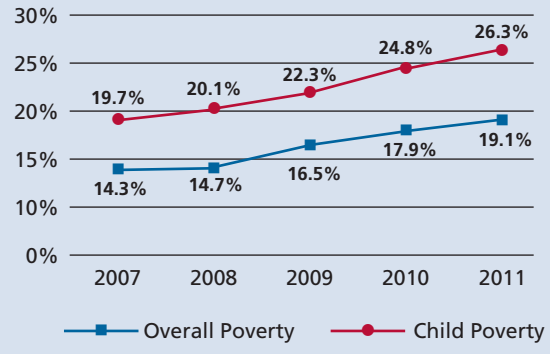
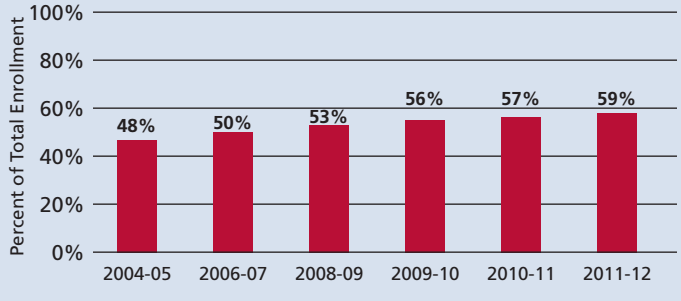


FIGURE 10.4: PERCENT OF PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE/REDUCED PRICED MEALS



That trend is reflected in the public school system as well. Since 2004, the number of children eligible for free and reduced price lunches (a standard measurement for children in poverty) has increased nearly 10 percentage points (Figure 10.4).

The economic hardships of poverty have a significant impact both on student achievement and on public school resources. The impact of poverty on children's lives is particularly devastating, as it contributes not only to reduced educational opportunities but to a host of other challenges as well. Children in poverty are more likely to suffer from asthma and other health issues, be exposed to abuse and neglect, suffer from traumatic stress and emotional disturbance, have inadequate child care arrangements, be in contact with the juvenile justice system, and eventually drop out of school.[184] Because the economic recession affected so many families, more of Georgia's children are likely to suffer from these poverty-related issues. Yet even before the recession one in seven working families lived in poverty in Georgia, and many Southern states, including Georgia, were experiencing a rise in child poverty.[185]

In Georgia, as in other states, children who live in poverty are less likely to achieve successful academic outcomes. A recent Stanford University study found that the gap in standardized test scores between affluent and low-income students has grown by 40 percent since the 1960s. In 2011, the graduation rate for economically disadvantaged students in Georgia was 59 percent, compared to 75 percent for their more affluent counterparts. Without at least a high school diploma, students from low-income families will have a difficult time breaking out of the cycle of poverty.

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

Changing patterns of fertility and immigration have contributed to a population diversification never experienced by our state or our nation. At the same time, the U.S. has an aging population whose concerns are focused on the increasing costs of health care and on their own retirement savings. In order to be successful, our public schools must address these shifting populations and the challenges they present.

181 Annie E. Casey Foundation. *2012 Kids Count Data Book*. Baltimore: Author. 2012.

182 Richie, C.S. "Fact Sheet: Georgia Poverty Still on the Rise, with Children Hit Hardest." Atlanta: Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. November 15, 2012. Retrieved from http://gbpi.org/georgia-poverty-still-on-the-rise-with-children-hit-hardest

183 Annie E. Casey Foundation. *2012 Kids Count Data Book*. Baltimore: Author. 2012.

184 The National Center on Family Homelessness. "America's Youngest Outcasts: State Report Card on Child Homelessness." Retrieved from http://homelesschildrenamerica.org; Sell, K., Zlotnik, S., Noonan, K., & Rubin, D. "The Effect of the Recession on Child Well-Being: A Synthesis of the Evidence by PolicyLab, The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia." Philadelphia: PolicyLab. November 2010. Retrieved from http://firstfocus.net.

185 Richie, C.S. "Establishing an Economic Security Task Force in Georgia: Building on Neighbor State Models and Local Efforts." Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. September 28, 2010. Retrieved from http://www.gbpi.org; Southern Education Foundation. "A New Diverse Majority: Students of Color in the South's Public Schools." 2010. Retrieved from http://www.sefatl.org.

Starting at the beginning of the educational pipeline, high-quality early learning has never been more important. Children living in poverty and minorities – especially Hispanics – benefit the most from such environments. Research is conclusive that high-quality early learning programs go a long way toward alleviating the achievement gap among minorities and among low-income children that already exists when they enter kindergarten. Without these programs, many children enter kindergarten behind and never catch up.

Second, schools must be able to respond to the increasing diversity of its students, especially the rise in non-English speakers. This means an increase in bilingual teachers of English language learners (ELL) and professional development for all teachers and school leaders around the differing needs of a varied population.

Within-school programs for ELL students must be developed to promote proficiency in reading English as well as everyday speech. Research shows that academic English proficiency is the key to student achievement.[186] Many ELL students are reclassified as proficient in English based on their oral, rather than their academic language proficiency. On average, it takes four to seven years for an ELL student to become proficient in the type of language used in textbooks.[187]

Third, Georgia schools need to be acutely aware of disparities in educational attainment by race and ethnic groups. The new accountability system that replaced the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) measure under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) does hold schools accountable for achievement gap measures and classifies them as "Alert" or "Focus" schools if they have unusually large achievement gaps. Schools and districts need to consider their outreach programs to parents, community members and businesses to engage in support programs for at-risk children. If these students' needs are not addressed, schools' ratings on the new College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) could be lower.

Finally, Georgia needs to focus on preparing students for the jobs of tomorrow. Technical and highly skilled workers are in demand, especially in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields. By 2018, the number of STEM jobs in Georgia will increase 17 percent, adding 200,000 new jobs.[188] Minorities are tradionally underrepresented in these fields. Concerted efforts must be made to not only reduce the overall achievement gaps for minority and low-income students, but those students must also become more engaged in the technology and professional fields.

Childhood poverty costs the U.S. approximately $500 billion per year, or the equivalent of nearly 4 percent of gross domestic product (GDP).[189] The fastest growing sectors of our population are also the ones more likely to be living below the poverty line. A quality education is viewed as the way out of poverty. Our nation's economic future depends on a strong educational system.

As our population shifts toward becoming a minority-majority country, our educational system must adjust to the needs of this changing demographic. Missing the importance of these trends can cost a candidate an election. It can also cost much more. Georgia is working hard in the area of education reform on a number of important fronts that show great promise. Many of them are outlined in this document as Top Ten Issues to Watch in 2013. And all are designed to produce an engaged and productive citizenry and students ready to compete on a global scale. In that regard, our goal is "the economy stupid." However, it's the demographics that are the important inputs that need to be embraced.

186 Crouch, R. *The United States of Education: The Changing Demographics of the United States and their Schools.* Alexandria, VA: The Center for Public Education. 2012.
187 Ibid.
188 Ibid.
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