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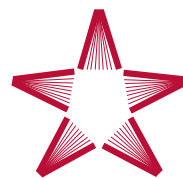
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2008

Foreword

As we enter into a new year, Georgia stands at the edge of unprecedented change. Even as we open our doors to economic development and new commercial industries, our state is being rocked by dynamic population shifts, unforeseen increases in poverty, tumultuous debates over the state's fiscal structure, and an alarming number of high school dropouts. Not surprisingly, the common thread weaving together these issues – and many more – is education. The educational policy decisions made by Georgia's leaders will impact not only the quality of our schools and the skill levels of our students but also the economic and social health of our state. Unfortunately, our educational progress is too often impeded by political inertia or the implementation of random acts. If Georgia is to move forward in 2008 and secure a brighter future for our children and our state, then our leaders need a bold, innovative, and comprehensive plan for improvement.

The Georgia Partnership's *Top Ten Issues to Watch in 2008* is our fourth annual publication exploring the educational policy, legislative, and programmatic issues that will likely take precedence in the coming year. The discussion of each issue is organized in three distinct sections, beginning with an issue overview that provides a simple introduction to the political urgency of the topic. Following the overview is the policy context, a research-based analysis of the key state and national trends impacting each issue. Finally, we highlight what is next for Georgia, drawing attention to the imminent policy decisions facing our state.

We hope that the data and commentary presented within this document help to guide conversations among policymakers, educators, and community and business leaders. Armed with reliable, comprehensive information and guided by a common vision, together we can build a plan for improving Georgia's schools and deliver on a promise to all our children – we owe you educational excellence. Nothing less is acceptable.



Dr. Stephen D. Dolinger

President, Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education

Poverty, Diversity, and the Reality of Georgia's Demographic Changes

ISSUE OVERVIEW

As with many of its neighboring Southern states, Georgia has experienced an unprecedented population shift over the past two decades. A large growth in Georgia's Hispanic population, combined with a rising concentration of low-income families, is changing the demographic fabric of our state and raising new considerations for influencers of politics and policy. While immigration reform has been a hot topic among federal and state legislators over recent years, the present reality of demographic shifts in Georgia demands that our state plan for its new population and prepare for the impact just beginning to be felt on our public services infrastructure. Our public schools are educating a new, diverse body of students, and with no past blueprint of policies to reference on this issue, Georgia's response to the population transformation will truly be historic.

POLICY CONTEXT

The demographic landscape of our state is being indelibly shaped by a number of key trends. First, our population is becoming more racially diverse. Over the next 50 years, the nation's percentage of non-Hispanic whites will decrease from 69.4 percent (in 2000) to 50.1 percent. That trend has already begun in Georgia, where increases in the proportion of Hispanic and African American residents have been accompanied by a slight decrease in the proportion of white residents (see fig. 1). The surge in Hispanic population growth has been so substantial in states such as Georgia, North Carolina, and Arkansas – states with little or no history of Latino settlement – that the region is being called “The New Latino South.”¹ Though the Latino population is still comparatively small (Hispanics currently comprise only about seven percent of Georgia's population.), the growth of this ethnic group over the past decade is fundamentally altering the demo-

graphic fabric of the South. Population forecasts suggest that the growth and diversification of Georgia's population will continue. By 2015, only New York will have a significantly larger African American population than Georgia. And by 2015, Georgia's Hispanic population will have grown another 143 percent (from the 2000 Census count).²

A second key trend that has markedly changed Georgia's demography is the rise in poverty. Historical data show that the South has long been home to a disproportionate number of families and children affected by poverty.³ A ranking of states by the percent of total population in poverty places Georgia near the bottom. With 15 percent of all Georgians classified as impoverished, our state has the 38th highest poverty rate in the nation.⁴ In 2006, slightly more than one-tenth (11.1 percent) of families in Georgia were below the poverty level. For the same year, one-fifth (20.2 percent) of Georgia's children under the age of 18 lived in

poverty.⁵ The myriad of numbers make one point very clear: Georgia, like much of the South, has arrived at a defining moment in history. A recent report highlighted that for the first time in more than 40 years, the South is the only region in the nation where low-income children constitute a majority of public school students – in Georgia, that majority is 52 percent.⁶

The demographic shifts affecting Georgia present several challenges to our state's education system and ultimate economic prosperity:

- ❖ Our public schools are serving a new majority of low-income students, many of whom already lag behind and come from communities in which many adults lack a high school or college education.⁷
- ❖ In the near future, as the Baby Boomer generation ages and retires, a growing share of the workforce will be African American and Latino – segments of the population that have long lagged behind in our schools.⁸

1 The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, *The New Latino South and the Challenge to Public Education: Strategies for Educators and Policymakers in Emerging Immigrant Communities* (Los Angeles, CA, 2004).

2 Georgia Office of Planning and Budget, *Georgia 2015: Population Projections* (Atlanta, GA, 2005).

3 Rosalind P. Harris and Jule N. Zimmerman, *Children and Poverty in the Rural South* (Mississippi State, MS: The Southern Rural Development Center, 2003).

4 Annie E. Casey Foundation, *2007 KIDS COUNT Data Book Online*, <http://www.kidscount.org/sld/databook.jsp>.

5 U.S. Census, *2006 American Community Survey*, <http://www.census.gov>.

6 Southern Education Foundation, *A New Majority: Low Income Students in the South's Public Schools* (Atlanta, GA, 2007).

7 Ibid.

8 MDC Inc., *The State of the South 2004* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004).

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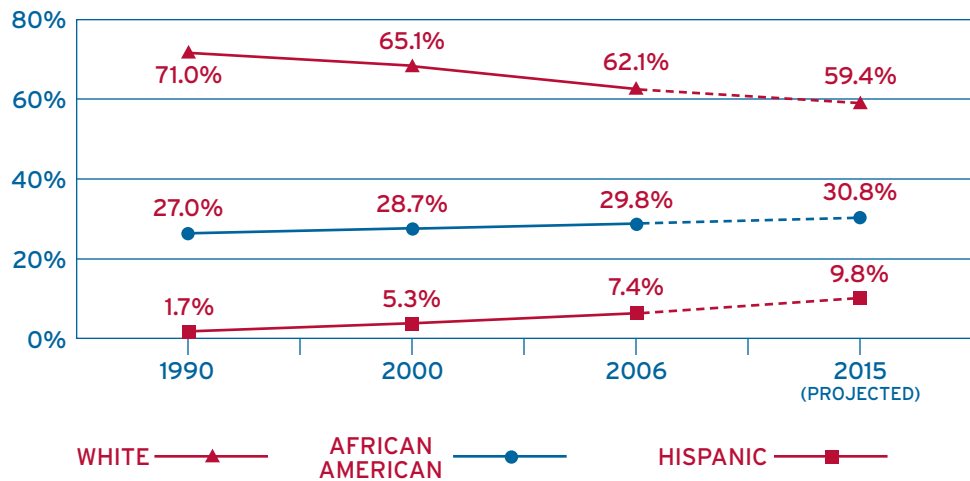
❖ A large proportion of our future workforce will have grown up in poverty, with inadequate resources at home and in school classrooms.⁹

WHAT'S NEXT FOR GEORGIA?

Today, Georgia is home to an increasingly diverse population, and recent demographic trends are forecasted to continue in coming years. These changes will be felt at all levels of our state – in our local communities, health care system, public schools, and future workforce. If Georgia is to prosper as an economic stronghold in the South and in the nation, then we must make strides to embrace and manage our state's new demographics. Our dynamic populace needs innovative public policies.

With minority and low-income students now constituting a significant proportion of our public school students, a lack of proactive initiatives by policymakers and educators could have detrimental consequences for our state. In 2007, only 60 percent of Georgia's Hispanic students and 63 percent of economically disadvantaged students graduated from high school.¹⁰ Unless educational attainment for all our youth increases alongside our growing ethnic diversity, what will Georgia's future hold? Without access to quality early learning and health care, how will our low-income students fare in kindergarten, and later, in life? Adequate resources must be allocated to ensure that minority and low-income students have access to an excellent education that prepares them to grow into

FIGURE 1 - GEORGIA'S CHANGING DEMOGRAPHY



Source: U.S. Census and Georgia Office of Planning and Budget. Note: Graph shows selected race categories, and therefore totals for each year may not add to 100.

engaged, gainfully-employed Georgia citizens. Our state's response to this challenge will be all-important in determining Georgia's future quality of life, economic prosperity, and

cultural legacy. How will Georgia embrace its growing diversity? Finally, how will our state meet the challenge of unprecedented poverty?

Poverty remains a characteristic blot upon the face of the South, a region with large swaths of rural destitution.

Since 2000, almost every Southern state has seen a rise in poverty rates, resulting from the economic sluggishness of the past half-decade.

In today's South, educational gaps contribute to economic gaps.

– excerpts from *The State of the South 2007: Philanthropy as the South's "Passing Gear,"* MDC, Inc.

⁹ Ibid.
¹⁰ Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2007 State Report Card, www.gaosa.org.

Zero to Five: Critical Needs for Critical Years

ISSUE OVERVIEW

Georgia's youngest children deserve an auspicious start in life. Yet the promises that should come with being born in one of the wealthiest and most technologically advanced nations in the world remain unfulfilled or broken for many of our state's most vulnerable citizens. Despite the proliferation of irrefutable evidence that the first few years of a child's life lay the groundwork for his or her future growth and success, there is a stark disconnect between the demand for quality health, childcare, and educational programs and our government's commitment to ensuring affordable access to such programs.¹¹ In 2007, the United States ranked second-to-last among 21 industrialized nations in an assessment of overall child well being. In the same year, Georgia ranked 41st in the nation for child health and well being. If one true measure of a nation or state is how well it attends to the fundamental needs of its children, where does Georgia stand, and what can we expect for our future?

Policies that target early childhood health, learning, and well being are critical to helping improve the academic achievement and social outcomes of all youth. Ensuring children aged zero to five have access to enriching early life experiences increases their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical foundations for later success. Moreover, providing quality health and educational programs for our youngest citizens not only affords them a brighter, healthier start in life, but also pays long-term benefits for communities and society at large.¹² Georgia has long been recognized for its groundbreaking commitment to early learning: the 1995 implementation of state-funded universal prekindergarten for four-year-olds. But now, 13 years later, research and statistics make clear the urgent need to improve our state's policies and programs for children's health and education.

POLICY CONTEXT

Child Health and Welfare

Research on early development holds several implications for parents, educators, and policymakers. Scientists have repeatedly demonstrated that the most rapid brain development occurs in the first three years of life. During this time, young children will learn to walk and talk and will build the foundations for future development.¹³ Providing safe and healthy home environments for children is, therefore, critical to their cognitive development. Given our research-based understanding of the conditions that influence whether children get off to a promising or an ominous start in life, state policymakers have the capability to craft legislation that can improve the

societal conditions and family supports of our youngest citizens. Policy decisions made at the state and federal levels can ensure that mothers and children receive adequate prenatal services and healthcare, provide family access to child development information and services, and guide significant investments to public health insurance and child care subsidies.

In Georgia, there are 816,000 children aged zero to five, some of whom already benefit from a few innovative state programs.¹⁴ Our state is known as a national leader in early health screenings and immunizations and is one of only a few states with a dedicated agency, Bright from the Start, that oversees the health and educational needs of young children.¹⁵ A

comparison of Georgia's children to those in other states, however, reveals a dismal and challenging environment for our youngest. According to the national 2007 *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, Georgia falls below the national average on nine out of 10 key indicators of child health and well being, and for overall child well being, Georgia ranks 41 out of 50 states.¹⁶ Statistics on the status of Georgia's children aged zero to five are no more encouraging (see table 1).

Early Care and Education

Just as a child's health and well being in the first five years of life provide the foundations for future development, quality early care and educational opportunities are crucial to children's cognitive growth and

¹¹ Children's Defense Fund, *State of America's Children 2005* (Washington, D.C., 2005).

¹² National Center for Children in Poverty, *Georgia Early Childhood Profile* (New York, NY: Columbia University, 2007).

¹³ Zero to Three Policy Center, *State Policies to Improve the Odds for the Healthy Development and School Readiness of Infants and Toddlers* (Washington, D.C., 2007).

¹⁴ Family Connection Partnership, "2007: Snapshot of Georgia's Young Children: ages 0-5" (Atlanta, GA, 2007).

¹⁵ Voices for Georgia's Children, personal communication.

¹⁶ Annie E. Casey Foundation, *2007 KIDS COUNT Data Book* (Baltimore, MD, 2007).

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TABLE 1 - SNAPSHOT OF GEORGIA'S CHILDREN AGED ZERO TO FIVE

Number of children aged zero to five	816,000
Percentage not receiving medical and dental preventive-care visits	46%
Percentage enrolled in nutritional programs due to low-income status	31%
Percentage born to mothers with less than 12 years of education	24%
Percentage living in households below the poverty level	23%
Percentage who lack health insurance	11%

Source: Family Connection Partnership, "Snapshot of Georgia's Young Children: ages 0-5."

future school readiness. With a growing percentage of mothers with young children in the workforce, families have an increased need for reliable, affordable, quality child-care. As children approach the preschool years, the need for childcare is replaced with a need for early learning and prekindergarten programs that stimulate children's minds, increase language and reasoning skills, and prepare them for school. Studies show that school readiness gaps exist among children as early as kindergarten, and once present, these gaps are very difficult for educators to overcome. Prekindergarten for children under five can help foster improved academic outcomes by providing children with quality learning opportunities early in life so that they begin school ready to learn. For economically disadvantaged children, who often have lower literacy skills than their more affluent peers, quality prekindergarten programs are especially significant for promoting school readiness.

The long-term benefits of high-quality early learning programs have been well documented in educational research. Children who attend prekindergarten not only enter school prepared for success, but also are less likely to repeat grades, drop out of school, or need special education throughout their school years, compared with

similar children who did not have such exposure.¹⁷ The Perry Preschool Project – perhaps the most well known longitudinal study of a prekindergarten program – found that the benefits of quality preschool experiences for three- and four-year-olds extended through age 40. Students who participated in the Perry Preschool Project experienced higher lifetime earnings, greater rates of homeownership, and less dependence on social services.¹⁸ While the primary goal of quality early care and education is affording our youngest citizens a brighter start in life, the long-term benefits of an investment in early childhood extend to local communities and society at large (see table 2). For this reason, educators, economists, and business leaders have helped lead the way in raising awareness and seeking solutions for the provision of high-quality early educational programs.

TABLE 2 - POSITIVE EFFECTS OF EARLY LEARNING

STUDENT OUTCOMES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Higher language and math skills - Better relationships with classmates - Decreased likelihood of dropping out of school - Decreased likelihood of repeating grades - Increased educational opportunities - Increased annual earnings
SOCIETAL OUTCOMES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lower crime rates - Reduced poverty and welfare rates - Lower teen pregnancy rates - Higher tax revenues - Increased homeownership - Increased civic participation - Higher rates of employment

Source: Robert G. Lynch, *Enriching Children, Enriching the Nation: Public Investment in High-Quality Prekindergarten* (Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute, 2007).

¹⁷ W. Steven Barnett et al., *The State of Preschool 2006* (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2006); Gary T. Henry, et al., Report of the Findings from the Early Childhood Study: 2001-02 (Atlanta, GA: Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, 2003).

¹⁸ Lawrence J. Schweinhart et al., *Lifetime effects: The High/Scope Perry Preschool study through age 40* (High/Scope Press, 2005).

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In Georgia, there is good news and bad news for our children. In 1995, our state became the first in the country to provide universal prekindergarten to four-year-olds. Coupled with other initiatives targeting early learning and healthy child development – such as Smart Start Georgia and Better Brains for Babies – our state’s prekindergarten program symbolizes a commitment by state-level leaders to address the needs of Georgia’s youngest citizens. But 13 years have passed since Georgia leaped ahead of other states with our model prekindergarten initiative. More and more states have recognized the value of early learning programs, and Georgia is now one of forty states and the District of Columbia that provides state-funded prekindergarten for four-year-olds.¹⁹ And while 27 states have expanded their programs to three-year-olds with new programs or expansions of Early Head Start, Georgia has made no state-level commitment to provide early education for this age group. If our state wants to be seen again as a leader in early childhood programs, then we have work to do, especially in light of the current gaps in policy and practice.

Georgia’s policies governing childcare centers belie the crucial needs for quality care in the first few years of life. The Standards of Care Program, Georgia’s set of quality standards that describe the appropriate care and education for young children, is voluntary, and childcare centers

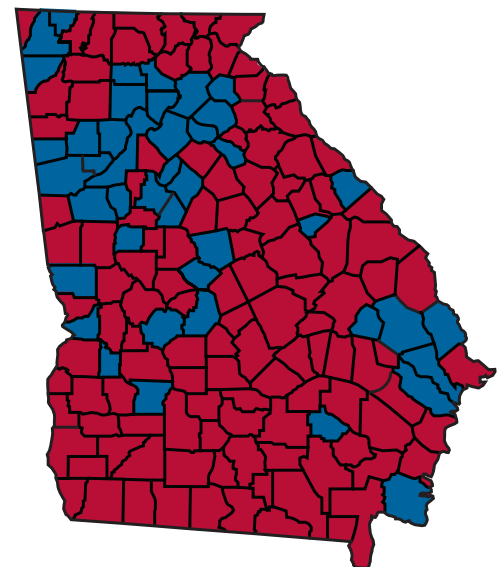
have little incentive to meet the standards. Currently, Georgia has no education or training requirements for childcare center teachers or directors, and low salaries for these positions can make it difficult for centers to retain highly effective workers. In Georgia, the average annual childcare employee salary is just over \$15,000.²⁰

Finding a quality childcare center can be even more burdensome for Georgia’s low-income families. Despite having a childcare assistance program that subsidizes the cost of care for low-income parents, Georgia was one of 17 states in 2007 with a waiting list for families applying for the program. In January of that year, an astounding 24,808 families in the state – more than twice the number from 2006 – were placed on the waiting list. Only one other state besides Georgia had a longer waiting list in 2007 than in 2006 for childcare assistance.²¹

The gap between policy and practice extends to Georgia’s initiatives for three- and four-year-olds. Though our state boasts of a universal prekindergarten program for four-year-olds, we have consistently served just over half of our total four-year-old population, and this percentage has declined since 2005. Annual increases in the number of slots available are not keeping pace with the growth in Georgia’s four-year-old population, and access to the state-funded program continues to be problematic for our large urban and metropolitan areas (see fig. 2). Though Georgia

increased the state spending per prekindergarten child in 2007, the investment remains lower than it was five years ago (with dollar amounts adjusted for inflation; see fig. 3). With state spending now equal to \$4,111 per enrolled child, Georgia is investing approximately half of what we invest in each K-12 pupil. Finally, while national quality standards for prekindergarten programs recommend that states require teachers

FIGURE 2 - GEORGIA PREKINDERGARTEN: WHOM DOES THE PROGRAM SERVE?²²



PERCENT SERVED

■ 0% - 54% ■ 55% - 100%

In 2006, Georgia’s prekindergarten program served about 73,000 four-year-olds.

Nearly 40,000 (55 percent) of those enrolled in the state’s prekindergarten were from low-income families.

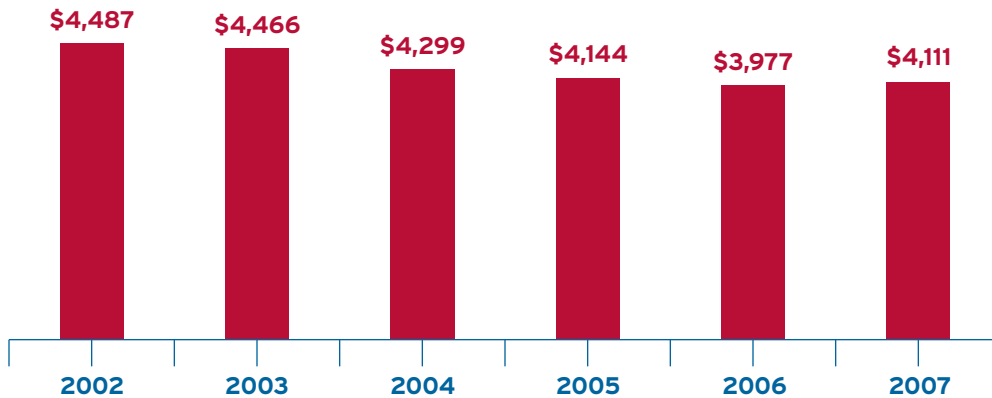
¹⁹ PreK Now, “PreK Across the Country,” <http://www.preknow.org/policy/factsheets/snapshot.cfm>.

²⁰ W. Steven Barnett et al., *The State of Preschool 2006* (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2006).

²¹ Karen Schulman and Helen Blauk, *State Child Care Assistance Policies 2007: Some Steps Forward, More Progress Needed* (Washington D.C.: National Women’s Law Center, 2007).

²² Southern Education Foundation, *Miles to Go: Georgia Pre-Kindergarten (draft copy)*, (Atlanta, GA, 2007).

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FIGURE 3 - GEORGIA STATE SPENDING PER PREKINDERGARTEN CHILD (IN 2006 DOLLARS)

Source: W. Steven Barnett et al., *The State of Preschool 2006* (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2006).

to have a four-year college degree, Georgia is one of eight states in the nation not requiring any preschool teachers to hold a bachelor's degree.²³

Just over half of the 50 states have recently expanded their early learning programs to the three-year-old population. But for Georgia's three-year-olds, there are currently no state-funded educational programs. Federally-funded Head Start and Early Start programs exist to provide comprehensive early childhood and family development services to children from birth to five-years-old, but in Georgia, these programs serve only eight percent of the three-year-old population.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR GEORGIA?

Across the country, the commitment to early learning has been bolstered by recent increases in financial resources. In the majority of states, legislators elevated funding for prekindergarten in fiscal year 2008. Nationwide, the funding increases exceeded \$525 million, bringing total state investments in early education across the country to \$4.8 billion.²⁴ The growing investment in early learning shows that more and more states recognize the importance of providing quality educational opportunities for three- and four-year-olds. In Georgia, the FY 2008 budget increased prekindergarten funding from \$309 million to \$325 million, which will allow the program to serve another 2,775 children.²⁵

While the additional funding for prekindergarten should be celebrated,

Georgia cannot stop there. For years, our state has held to its status as a national leader in prekindergarten policies and programs. However, with more states joining the movement to provide state-funded prekindergarten programs and with continuing research showing the benefits of early health and learning, it is time for Georgia to evaluate its objectives in these policy areas. How can our state ensure access to quality healthcare for all women and children, create educational opportunities for three-year-old children, expand the reach of prekindergarten programs to a greater percentage of four-year-olds, and make the most effective investments to meet these goals?

Georgia can build a brighter future for our children by increasing standards for childcare and prekindergarten programs, raising education requirements and salary levels for prekindergarten teachers, and increasing state funds to expand the reach of early learning programs. Family services that promote effective child development and quality health services can provide critical parenting skills as preparation for formal learning. Georgia's youngest residents deserve the highest quality educational opportunities right from the start. The investments our state makes in early learning will not only impact the quality of life and chance for success of our three- and four-year-olds but also the economic and social future of our state.

²³ W. Steven Barnett et al., *The State of Preschool 2006* (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2006).

²⁴ Pre-K Now, *Votes Count: Legislative Action on Pre-K Fiscal Year 2008* (Washington, DC, 2007).

²⁵ Ibid.

Georgia's Still Unfinished Business in Teacher Quality

ISSUE OVERVIEW

The importance of teacher quality remains undeniably at the forefront of educational policy. While for years research has shown teacher quality to be the single most influential school-based factor impacting student achievement,²⁶ several new reports released in 2007 again underscored the correlation between quality instruction and school success. A study of 25 school systems across the world finds that the best performers internationally share at least one common characteristic: an unwavering commitment to building and maintaining an exceptional, highly effective cadre of teachers.²⁷ In New York City, new research illustrates the effects of highly qualified teachers in closing achievement gaps: a 2007 study finds that “among teachers [of] fourth and fifth grade math students in schools with the highest proportions of students in poverty... there are substantial differences in student achievement solely attributable to differences in observed teacher qualifications.”²⁸ Yet findings at the national level suggest that in the United States, policymakers are not doing enough to positively impact the teaching profession. According to a comprehensive study of the policies that determine how teachers are prepared, certified, hired, paid, evaluated, encouraged, and dismissed in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, many states actually impede efforts to ensure that every classroom is led by a qualified teacher.²⁹

In Georgia, evidence suggests that educators and policymakers must not only renew, but intensify, their commitment to bring the necessary level of teacher quality to our state's schools. Despite steps taken in recent years to improve policies impacting the teacher profession, Georgia's overall performance in this critical area was classified as “weak but progressing.”³⁰ Additionally, Georgia continues to face high rates of teacher attrition and growing demands for entrants into the workforce. Over the next six years, our state will need an additional 22,000 teachers just to meet school enrollment growth projections, as well as another 67,000 teachers to replace those who leave the classroom due to retirement or career-change.³¹

POLICY CONTEXT

To an extent, national and state-level policymakers have responded to the ubiquitous and straightforward research conclusion that when it comes to increasing student achievement, good teaching matters. In 2001, a minimum standard for what constituted a “highly qualified teacher” was established through the No Child Left Behind Act, requiring every teacher working in a public school to be certified and to demonstrate proficiency in his or her subject matter. In May 2007, after their bill

failed to become law in 2005, Representative George Miller and Senator Edward Kennedy reintroduced the Teacher Excellence for All Children (TEACH) Act. Currently being considered in committee, the bill proposes doubling the federal investment in teacher quality by an additional \$3.4 billion in order to:

- ❖ Provide financial incentives to encourage excellent teacher and principal candidates to enter the profession and to elevate the standing of the profession;
- ❖ Create a \$200 million grant program for

institutions of higher education to recruit teachers from among students concentrating in math, science, foreign languages, special education, and English language learners;

- ❖ Increase teacher loan forgiveness from \$17,500 to \$20,000; and
- ❖ Establish new TEACH Grants to provide up-front pre-paid tuition assistance of \$4,000/year for high-achieving graduate and undergraduate students who commit to teaching a high-need subject in a high-need school for four years.³²

²⁶ Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, *Georgia's Unfinished Business in Teacher Quality* (Atlanta, GA, 2006); National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future* (New York, NY, 1996).

²⁷ McKinsey & Company, *How the World's Best-performing School Systems Come Out on Top* (2007).

²⁸ Donald Boyd et al., *The Narrowing Gap in New York City Teacher Qualifications and its Implications for Student Achievement in High-Poverty Schools* (National Center for the Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research, 2007).

²⁹ National Council on Teacher Quality, *State Teacher Policy Yearbook: Progress on Teacher Quality* (Washington, DC, 2007).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Georgia Professional Standards Commission, *The Georgia Educator Workforce 2006 Executive Summary* (Atlanta, GA, 2006).

³² Committee on Education and Labor, “The Teacher Excellence for All Children Act of 2007” (Washington, DC: U.S. House of Representatives, 2007).

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Small steps have been made in Georgia as well. In recognition of the need to devote more targeted resources and support to increasing teacher quality, the Georgia Department of Education created the Teacher Quality Division in the Office of Teacher and Student Support in January 2005. The goal of this division is to promote and support quality teaching to improve student learning in every classroom in the state. One of the first initiatives of the division was a partnership with the Georgia Professional Standards Commission and the University System of Georgia Board of Regents to adopt the *Georgia Framework for Teaching* as the state definition of quality teaching. The *Framework* identifies knowledge, skills, dispositions, understandings, and other attributes of accomplished teaching. The six domains and associated indicators provide common language and definitions for all stakeholders who are interested in quality teaching.³³

Additionally, Georgia took steps toward recognizing effective teachers when, in 2005, the General Assembly passed legislation to establish the Georgia Master Teacher Certification Program. This program provides statewide recognition to Georgia public school teachers with three years of experience who consistently demonstrate excellence in the classroom that is linked to gains in student achievement. The first group of 199 Master Teachers was named in

2006; in 2007, another 97 teachers earned this distinction.

Yet despite the policy initiatives in recent years, the data on Georgia's teacher workforce illustrates a dire need to take bigger, bolder steps in 2008 toward increasing the recruitment, retention, and equitable distribution of quality teachers throughout our state's public schools. The most recent data available shows that in FY 2005, teacher attrition in Georgia was 9.1 percent; however, the rate of attrition for newly hired teachers stands at 13.8 percent.³⁴ An analysis of trend data reveals that over the past 15 years, teacher attrition in Georgia has been steadily increasing and may reach 9.8 percent by FY 2012. Without targeted interventions to curb the exodus of teachers from our state's classrooms, this trend will continue to negatively impact our educational system.

At a time when Georgia's new high school graduation rule will require that many schools increase their supply of mathematics and science teachers, a shortage of teachers in these subjects continues to plague Georgia. For at least the past six years, secondary math and science have remained on the state's list of critical teacher shortage fields. Without an adequate supply of educators, schools must often resort to placing unqualified teachers in math and science classrooms, thus increasing the occurrence of out-of-field

teaching. In FY 2006, out-of-field teaching in Georgia increased in all four core subjects taught in high school. The highest incidence of out-of-field teaching occurred in the critical area of mathematics: of all math teachers in the state, 6.9 percent were not highly qualified in the subject.³⁵ If Georgia intends to increase its production of college- and work-ready high school graduates who have the necessary skills to compete in the 21st century economy, then growing a larger pool of qualified teacher candidates must be a focus for policymakers.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR GEORGIA?

Georgia will not be alone in debating this hot topic in 2008. At the federal level, discussions of merit pay for teachers have been closely tied to the intense debates over reauthorization of No Child Left Behind. Across the country, states are searching for state-level policy solutions that will ease the challenge of placing quality teachers in all classrooms, particularly those located in low-performing schools. A database developed by the Education Commission of the States indicates that in 2007, at least 12 states had differential pay programs that included some form of diversified salaries for teachers.³⁶ Additional research shows that in eight of those states – Alaska, Arizona, Florida, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, and Texas – a performance

³³ Georgia Professional Standards Commission, "Georgia Framework for Teaching," <http://www.gapsc.com/TeacherEducation/GeorgiaFramework.asp>.

³⁴ Georgia Professional Standards Commission, *The Georgia Educator Workforce 2006: A Report of the Supply, Demand, and Utilization of Teachers, Administrative, and Student Services Personnel in Georgia Public School* (Atlanta, GA, 2006).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Education Commission of the State, "The ECS Redesigned Teacher Compensation Database," http://www.ecs.org/ecsmain.asp?page=/html/educationissues/teachingquality/NCLB-HQTP/T_Comp.asp.

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pay component is a significant element of the overall teacher compensation program.³⁷ Other states such as Arkansas, Nevada, Mississippi, Iowa, and the District of Columbia have recently authorized or developed performance pay programs that have not yet been implemented.³⁸

Yet among the states moving forward with performance pay programs, controversy is escalating at a much faster rate than any teacher's salary. Programs in both Florida and Texas, the two states with the most comprehensive and most visible of plans, have been dragged over a very rocky path. In Florida, the Special Teachers Are Rewarded (STAR) plan met with such resist-

ance from teacher unions and administrators that in early 2007 a revised plan, the Merit Awards Program (MAP), was instituted. So far, the new plan is not proving to be any more popular with school districts, and it was estimated that only one-fourth of districts would choose to implement the program in the 2007-08 school year.³⁹

While Texas has faced less opposition to its performance pay plan, teacher groups have adamantly resisted the program, and in 2007, the \$100 million program was almost eliminated.

Georgia has been called upon to develop a comprehensive plan for restructuring teacher compensation. This was one

among five recommendations made by the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education's recent report, *Georgia's Unfinished Business in Teacher Quality*. As we embark on a new year, Georgia must review these research-based recommendations and reconsider our commitment to improving teacher quality in the state. Regression estimates project that in 2008, Georgia will need to hire 14,817 new teachers to meet the needs of our growing student population. How will we ensure that this need is met, and, more importantly, how will we build a supply of teachers who are both highly qualified and highly effective?

³⁷ Robin Chait, *Current State Policies that Reform Teacher Pay An Examination of Pay-for-Performance Programs in Eight States* (Center for American Progress, 2007).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ "States Venture Into Teacher Performance Pay," *The Garland News*, 13 October 2007.

Charter Schools and Vouchers: Weighing Georgia's "Options"

ISSUE OVERVIEW

As educators and policymakers continue the ongoing quest to uncover the most powerful and efficient tools for driving educational improvement, school choice has become an increasingly popular policy solution. Proponents of the market-based concept believe that giving parents choices in the education of their children creates healthy competition among schools, providing schools with an incentive to improve. Over the last decade, states and districts have been transforming the landscape of public education by implementing a broad array of school choice programs, the most common of which are charter schools and vouchers (see sidebar: School Choice Definitions).

SCHOOL CHOICE DEFINITIONS⁴⁰

CHARTER SCHOOLS

Founded by parents, educators, community groups or private organizations, charter schools are essentially deregulated public schools. They are funded with public taxpayer money, and exchange a decrease in regulations and requirements for an increase in accountability.

VOUCHERS

Vouchers are payments made to a parent or an institution on a parent's behalf, to be used to pay for a child's education expenses, usually at a private or parochial school. Though some voucher programs are financed through private sources, others use public tax dollars to fund tuition at private institutions.

Issues of school choice were the cornerstone of Georgia's 2007 legislative session, during which two prominent bills were passed expanding choice in education for Georgia families. The Charter Systems Act (SB 39) enabled local school boards to submit a petition to the state whereby all schools in the system may become chartered. The Act also established a Charter Advisory Committee to advise the state board on policy relating to charter schools. Additionally, the passage of the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Act (SB 10) added a voucher program to Georgia's educational offerings. Under this bill, special education students attending public schools are eligible to receive a state scholarship to attend the public or private school of their choice.

As the interest in school choice continues to grow in states across the country and among Georgia's citizens and policymakers, the 2008 legislative session is likely to produce additional proposals and deliberations about the role of school choice in Georgia's educational system.

POLICY CONTEXT

Charter Schools

Since the first charter school was founded in Minnesota in 1992, this school choice model has been widely adopted in many states. While charter school laws often vary from state to state, 41 states now have policies operationalizing charter schools, a fact that attests to their growing popularity as an educational innovation. From 1997 to 2006, the number of charters in the United States grew from 693 to 3,977, an increase of 474 percent.⁴¹

Georgia has followed national trends in

its own charter school policy development. Since the state's first charter school law passed in 1993, the number of charter schools in Georgia has grown annually. Currently, in the 2007-08 school year, 70 charter schools operate in Georgia. Of these 70 schools, 44 are start-up charters (meaning the school opened for the first time as a charter school), 22 are conversion charters (having converted from a traditional public school to a charter school), and four are state-chartered special schools. Data from the Georgia Department of Education show that the state's charter

schools serve a diverse student population: in the 2006-07 school year, over half of charter school students qualified for free and reduced lunch, and over half were of a minority ethnic group (see table 3).

Despite the rapid growth of charter schools as a reform model, the issue is not without controversy. Some educational policy analysts argue that charters, by virtue of their autonomy, can be vulnerable to financial problems and mismanagement and lack adequate oversight and accountability for academic success. Additionally, some opponents maintain that charter

⁴⁰ Education Commission of the States, "Choice," <http://www.ecs.org/ecsmain.asp?page=/html/IssueCollapse.asp>.

⁴¹ Scott A. Imberman, *Achievement and Behavior in Charter Schools: Drawing a More Complete Picture* (Houston, TX: University of Houston, 2007).

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TABLE 3 - GEORGIA CHARTER SCHOOLS BY THE NUMBERS, 2006-07

Charter School Enrollment	26,299 (2 percent of total enrollment statewide)
Total Number of Charter Schools	59
Enrollment Demographics	39% White 43% African American 9% Hispanic 5% Asian 4% Multiracial 56% Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Lunch

Source: Georgia Department of Education

schools can segregate students along racial and class lines and fail to adequately serve students with disabilities or limited English proficiency. Overshadowing all other concerns with charter schools is the question of whether charters actually do a better job of educating students. While many individual charter schools can point to their own success, the research on the effectiveness of charters as a whole is mixed. For example, a recent study of schools in Washington, D.C., found that students at the district's public charter schools significantly outperformed their peers in traditional schools. Conversely, an analysis of performance at charter schools in Ohio found the opposite outcome: charter school students lagged behind their traditional school peers on the majority of standardized performance measures.⁴²

In Georgia, the data on student performance at charter schools is promising. Over the past three years, the graduation rates for charter high schools have been higher than those in traditional public schools. In 2007, 89.9 percent of fourth-year students in charter high schools graduated, well above the state's 72.3 percent graduation rate.⁴³ An analysis of standardized test results shows that on the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests and the Georgia High School Graduation Test, Georgia charter school students' performance has improved in most areas over time.

Vouchers

Few topics stir up as much debate in the education community as the concept of providing state-funded vouchers to parents to send their children to private schools.

While proponents see vouchers as another mechanism of increasing educational choice and ultimately raising student achievement, the notion of using public funds to pay private or parochial school tuition ignites debate about the very nature of the public school system. The deep-seated controversy over vouchers may explain why, unlike charter schools, this school choice program has been implemented in only a few states, often only on a limited basis. In 2007, seven states – Arizona, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island – have tax credit programs for education expenses, including private school tuition. In addition to Georgia, eight states have adopted a publicly funded voucher policy, though in every state the program is for a targeted or limited population (see table 4).⁴⁴

Recent legislative action in Utah highlighted the raging storm of public opinion that surrounds voucher policies. In November 2007, voters in the state decisively defeated a referendum that would have created the nation's first universal-voucher program. After the voucher law was approved by a single vote in the legislature, Utah's citizens brought the issue to vote through a ballot referendum, and 62 percent of voters rejected the law. Historians pointed out that the defeat of Utah's voucher plan was predictable, as every voucher or tuition-tax-credit program to face a decision by voters on a state ballot in recent decades has been soundly rejected.⁴⁵

⁴² Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, "Charter Schools," <http://www.edweek.org/rc/issues/charter-schools>.

⁴³ Georgia Department of Education, *2007 Annual Report on Charter Schools* (Atlanta, GA, 2007).

⁴⁴ Education Commission of the States, "Vouchers," <http://www.ecs.org/html/issue.asp?issueid=149>; National School Boards Association, "Voucher Strategy Center," <http://www.nsba.org>; Dan Lips and Evan Feinberg, "School Choice: 2006 Progress Report," (The Heritage Foundation, 2006).

⁴⁵ "Utah's Vote Raises Bar on Choice," *Education Week*, 14 November 2007.

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**TABLE 4 - AN OVERVIEW OF EXISTING VOUCHER PROGRAMS
ACROSS THE UNITED STATES**

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

Sources: "Utah's Broad Voucher Plan Would Break New Ground," *Education Week*, February 9, 2007; The Heritage Foundation, *School Choice: 2006 Progress Report*, September 2006; "Publicly Funded School Voucher Programs," *National Conference of State Legislatures*; "Voucher Program Quick Facts," *National School Boards Association Voucher Strategy Center*.

Georgia's brief history with school vouchers has been no less controversial. In 2007, after much debate among lawmakers, educators, and the public, the General Assembly passed the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Act (SB 10). This bill provides scholarships for public school students with disabilities to attend eligible private schools, a public school in another district, or another public school in their own district. At the beginning of the 2007-08 school year, about 900 special needs students left Georgia public schools to enroll at private or parochial campuses using the new vouchers.

New research and case studies about the impacts of vouchers are issued continually, and they often generate as many questions as definite answers. A report issued in late 2007 about the voucher model in Milwaukee Public Schools concluded that school choice is not a powerful tool for driving educational improvement, as research showed that parents often did not make choices based on schools' academic criteria.⁴⁶ Additional research raises questions about the advantages of private over public schools, which has implications for voucher policies. According to the Center on Education Policy's research, once family background is taken into account, low-income students attending public urban high schools generally performed as well academically as students attending private high schools.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ "Choice May Not Improve Schools, Study Says," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 23 October 2007.

⁴⁷ Center for Education Policy, *Are Private High Schools Better Academically than Public High Schools?* (Washington, D.C., 2007).

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WHAT'S NEXT FOR GEORGIA?

Georgia is likely to see issues of school choice take top priority again during the 2008 legislative session. Already a focal point of discussion is House Bill 881, sponsored by Representative Jan Jones (R-Dist. 46). Introduced during the final days of the 2007 legislative session, the bill would establish the Georgia Charter Schools Commission, an independent state chartering authority to read and approve school charter petitions. While this bill could ease the replication of successful charter schools already in place, it would significantly alter the jurisdiction and accountability under

which new charters would operate, thus jeopardizing local control over educational programs.

With the first year of Georgia's Special Needs Scholarship program underway, the future of vouchers in our state's education system will depend on the implementation of the new legislation. Monitoring and evaluation of the program and of the students who take part in it will shed light on the effectiveness of this particular school choice model.

School choice often finds support from economists who see value in introducing

market competition to the educational arena. Yet perhaps the strongest rationale for school choice – whether charter schools or vouchers – is the element of family involvement. Proponents of choice contend that it allows parents to take a more active role in shaping their child's education. Conversely, challengers of school choice models counter that in this era of standards-based education, parental satisfaction should not be the ultimate measure of accountability. Georgia's lawmakers, educators, and families will continue to tackle these issues in 2008.

The Turbulent Debate Over School Funding in Georgia

ISSUE OVERVIEW

Every year the United States spends more than \$400 billion on its public elementary and secondary schools. In Georgia, as in all states, K-12 education represents the biggest item in state and local budgets. Determining how to best allocate funds to support improvements in our education system is always a contentious political issue. As in past years, school finance and funding will be a fundamental issue in 2008, and the outcomes of debates over revenues and expenditures for education will shape all other policy actions.

At least three major decisions will significantly impact Georgia's school funding in the coming year. The Governor's Education Finance Task Force released its first recommended cost model for the allocation of financial resources for K-12 schools in November 2007, and subsequent revisions will likely impact school finance legislation. A trial date of September 2008 has been tentatively set for the suit filed against the state by the Consortium for Adequate School Funding in Georgia, and both sides are busy with the legal preparations for what could be a landmark battle. Lastly, Speaker Glenn Richardson's (R-Hiram) House Resolution 900, a bill that would replace property taxes with an increased sales tax, has already begun making huge waves across the state, and its potential impact on local control and school funding is raising an alarm throughout the educational community.

POLICY CONTEXT

A state budget is considered not only the most important fiscal document but also the most important policy document as it prescribes the priority levels given to major initiatives. As signed by the governor, Georgia's current state budget (for FY 2008) allocates 56.5 percent of state funds to P-16 education (see table 5). Among the notable items in this year's budget are a three percent pay increase for Georgia's teachers, over \$26 million to fund graduation coaches in middle schools, and a partial restoration of austerity cuts. However, the budget also includes \$412 million in continued austerity cuts and sustained budget reductions within the Department of Education (\$140 million) and the Board of Regents (\$272 million).⁴⁸

As Georgia enters a new year and deliberations begin for the development of the FY 2009 state budget, funding for education will likely be impacted by many variables.

TABLE 5 - GEORGIA'S STATE BUDGET, FY 2008

**FY 2008 General Funds Breakdown
(\$18.31 billion)
(July 1, 2007 – June 30, 2008)**

Education Funding	56.5%
Medicaid and PeachCare	12.4%
Criminal Justice	10.2%
Health and Social Services	9.3%
Debt Service	4.2%
Homeowners Tax Relief Grant	2.3%
All Other Government	5.1%

Source: Georgia Budget and Policy Institute, FY 2008 Budget (Atlanta, GA, 2007).

Here we take a look at three developing issues that could have significant implications for Georgia school finance: the school funding lawsuit in Georgia; the recommendations of the Governor's Education Finance Task Force; and the proposals to reform our state's tax structure.

Consortium for Adequate School Funding in Georgia and the Education Lawsuit

Currently comprised of 51 school systems in Georgia, the Consortium is a non-profit corporation formed in 2001 to improve the financing of K-12 education in the state. The initial emphasis was on equity in the financing of Georgia's public schools, but in late 2003 the focus shifted to adequacy. The Consortium contends that the state is not fulfilling its constitutional obligation to provide an adequate education for every child in Georgia, and local school systems are being forced to absorb an increasing share of the required cost. Although this problem is particularly severe for those systems without a substantial local tax base, it affects all local school systems.⁴⁹

In 2004, the Consortium filed a lawsuit against the state to seek additional funding for Georgia's schools. The result has been a lengthy, intense struggle as well as

⁴⁸ Georgia Budget and Policy Institute, *FY 2008 Budget, As Signed by the Governor* (Atlanta, GA, 2007).

⁴⁹ Consortium for Adequate School Funding, www.casfg.org.

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increased awareness of the difficult politics surrounding issues of school funding. While the Consortium continues its efforts to reach a negotiated settlement with the state, a Superior Court judge has set a tentative trial date for September 2008.

The actions of the Consortium are part of a wave of state school finance lawsuits that began in California in 1971. Across the country, at least 45 states have battled lawsuits challenging the state funding systems. Adequacy claims, which seek to alter insufficient funding schemes in order to provide for a constitutionally adequate education, have dominated the legal landscape since 1989. About two-thirds of school funding decisions in adequacy cases are made in favor of the plaintiff.⁵⁰

Recommendations of the Governor's Education Finance Task Force (IE²)

For the past three years, the Governor's Education Finance Task Force (Investing in Educational Excellence: IE²) has been hard at work assessing Georgia's current model of school funding. Charged with the task of recommending a formula for investing in education excellence, IE² has been drawing on expert assistance to craft a transparent, simple formula that ensures all children have access to an excellent education. By looking at best practices in elementary, middle, and high schools, the Task Force aimed to determine the true cost of an excellent education and then use the model as the basis of state funding recommendations. Other aspects of the Task Force's work include making recommendations for the best partnership of state and local funds for

education and crafting a model that would balance school system flexibility with accountability.

Originally, the Task Force was slated to release its recommendations in 2007 so as to provide a model for policymakers' work on the FY 2009 state budget. However, as of this publication date, final recommendations from the Task Force have not been issued nor are committee members in agreement about how the recommended cost model should look.

Proposals to Reform our State's Tax Structure

Perhaps the most publicly visible issue with implications for school funding is the introduction of House Resolution 900, Speaker Richardson's proposal to eliminate all property and ad valorem taxes in Georgia and institute an increased sales tax on goods and services. Called the GREAT (Georgia's Repeal of Every Ad Valorem Tax) Plan, the bill is likely to take center stage as the 2008 General Assembly convenes. While the details of the GREAT Plan continue to evolve, the bill is based on Richardson's assertion that property taxes are increasing faster than personal income, thus jeopardizing homeownership for many Georgians.

Eliminating the property tax could have profound effects on the revenue and governance of local school systems. School funding would be limited to an amount decided by the state, and it would be distributed by a set formula despite the unique needs of individual local school systems. Opponents of the tax reform measure stress that the proposal to eliminate the property

tax would also eliminate all local control over how school systems are funded. Further, special locally-funded programs such as art, music, and foreign language could be eliminated under the proposed funding structure.

While the rising costs of property taxes do point to the need for Georgia to reassess its system of taxation, any reform must be preceded by a thorough analysis of the state's spending and tax growth as well as research into successful state tax models. Yet currently, many questions are being raised about the current status of Georgia's tax system and about the possible results from the proposed GREAT Plan. Research from the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute shows that as a share of Georgia citizens' income, our taxes are currently among the lowest in the country. In addition, according to a study by Georgia State University's Fiscal Research Center, eliminating those taxes through a plan such as HR 900 would result in a \$2 billion budget shortfall for the state of Georgia.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR GEORGIA?

When it comes to the issue of school funding, Georgia policymakers will be faced with a host of complex and controversial decision points. High quality, adequate investments in educational excellence are imperative to strengthening our student outcomes. As Georgia's population and student enrollment continue to grow, the need for increased revenue is even more critical. With at least three major developments in school funding simmering, Georgians have a lot to watch for in 2008.

⁵⁰ National Access Network, "Litigation," <http://www.schoolfunding.info/litigation/litigation.php3>.

No Child Left Behind: The Federal Landscape and Georgia's Lingering Achievement Gaps

ISSUE OVERVIEW

Since the 2001 introduction of President Bush's signature No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, rarely has a conversation among educators and policymakers occurred without mention of Adequate Yearly Progress, standardized tests, Highly Qualified Teachers, or proficiency standards. While many states had their own accountability systems in place long before the implementation of NCLB, the federal act brightened the spotlight on public education, created a common educational language, raised awareness of achievement gaps among student subgroups, and boldly raised the performance bar for students in all states by setting a goal of 100 percent proficiency in core subjects by 2014.

When NCLB was signed into law in 2002, it was implemented as a five-year plan, with funding set to expire on September 30, 2007. Early in 2007, conversation about the law's reauthorization began, with lawmakers and education policy experts weighing in on the changes necessary to improve the NCLB Act. However, as debates over the landmark legislation continue in Congress, prospects are fading that the law will be reauthorized before President Bush leaves office. Meanwhile, because of a clause included in the bill's original language, the current law has been automatically renewed for the 2008 fiscal year.

While Georgia waits to see what will happen with NCLB at the federal level, the time is ripe for our state to assess the educational progress made over the last five years. Despite the uncertain future of NCLB, Georgia can move ahead by examining our state-level accountability data and setting priorities to ensure that none of our schools or students are left behind in 2008.

POLICY CONTEXT

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, signed into law by President Bush on January 8, 2002, is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the central federal law in pre-collegiate education. The ESEA was first enacted in 1965 and last reauthorized in 1994. As the newest incarnation of the ESEA, the No Child Left Behind Act has expanded the federal role in education and become a focal point of educational policy. Coming at a time of wide public concern about the state of education, the legislation sets in place requirements that reach into virtually every public school in America. It takes particular aim at improving the educational lot of disadvantaged students.⁵¹

At the core of NCLB are several measures designed to improve student achievement and increase statewide

accountability for educational excellence.

Key components of the legislation include:

- ❖ Annual testing of reading and math proficiency for students in grades three to eight, and testing of students' science ability at least once in elementary, middle, and high school;
- ❖ Mandated academic progress, which requires that all students meet the "proficient" level on state tests by the 2013-14 school year;
- ❖ Adequate Yearly Progress targets for individual schools, which measure performance for schools' overall student populations and for certain demographic subgroups; and
- ❖ Highly qualified teachers in all core content areas, a designation that generally means a teacher is certified and has demonstrated proficiency in his or her subject matter.

In this era of increased federal scrutiny of public education, Georgia boasts a record of progressive action over recent years that has resulted in notable gains in student achievement and an increase in the quality of education students receive in our state's public schools. Yet our work is far from done. If our state is truly to lead the nation in student achievement by meeting and surpassing the goals set forth by No Child Left Behind, then we must take an honest look at our achievement gaps and our low-performing schools, two issues that continue to prevent Georgia from exemplifying excellence. (For a discussion of Georgia's approach to highly qualified teachers, see issue 3.)

NCLB holds schools accountable for the academic progress of every child, regardless of race, ethnicity, or income level, and therefore, the legislation has made closing

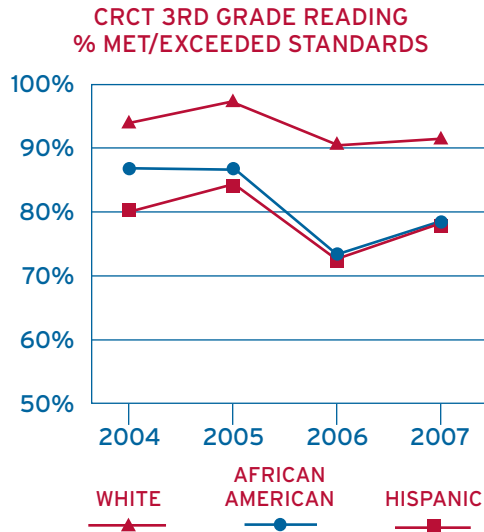
⁵¹ Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, "No Child Left Behind," www.edweek.org/rc/issues/no-child-left-behind.



achievement gaps a national priority. Additionally, this mandate of NCLB has brought greater transparency to state-reported data, as annual report cards on states' education systems must clearly describe the performance of all student subgroups. Yet in Georgia, the federal legislation has had little impact on the achievement gaps among our students. At all levels of our K-12 education system, wide discrepancies persist between the performance of white, African American, and Hispanic students and the performance of economically disadvantaged and non-economically disadvantaged students. In many cases, the achievement gaps have actually widened in recent years (see figs. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9). Regardless of when a reauthorization of NCLB is completed, or what changes might be made to the legislation, increasing Georgia's efforts to bring all children to proficiency must be a moral and political imperative.

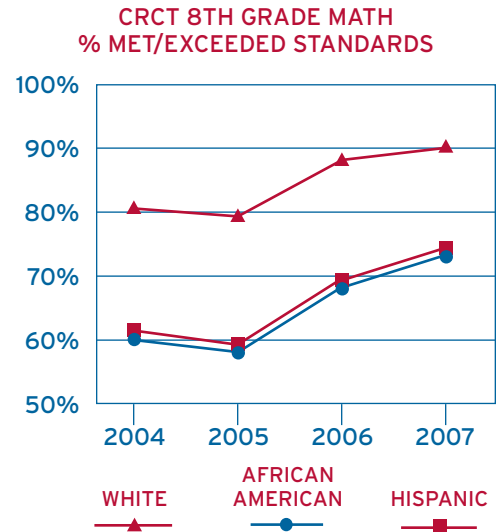
Because of NCLB, the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) designation has become a common tool for quickly gauging the success of individual schools. Now a cornerstone of educational accountability, AYP assesses a school based on its student participation in and achievement on statewide assessments. Schools that fail to meet target goals two years in a row are placed on a Needs Improvement list and must be provided technical assistance. Additionally, their students must be offered a choice of other public schools to attend.

FIGURE 4 - GAPS IN GEORGIA'S READING ACHIEVEMENT BY RACE



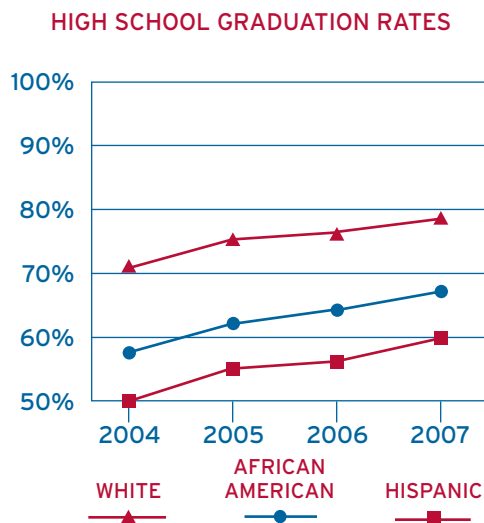
Source: Governor's Office of Student Achievement, State Report Cards

FIGURE 5 - GAPS IN GEORGIA'S MATH ACHIEVEMENT BY RACE



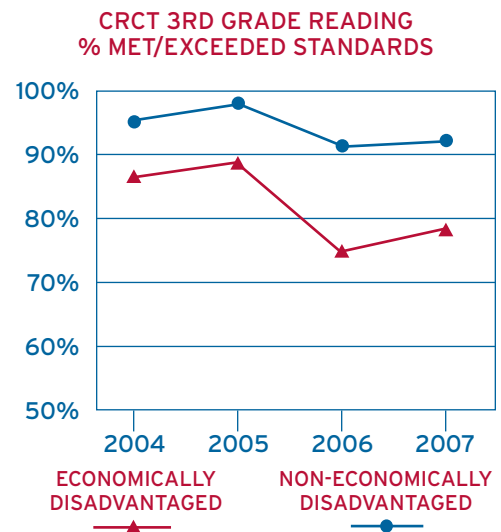
Source: Governor's Office of Student Achievement, State Report Cards

FIGURE 6 - GAPS IN GEORGIA'S GRADUATION RATE BY RACE



Source: Governor's Office of Student Achievement, State Report Cards

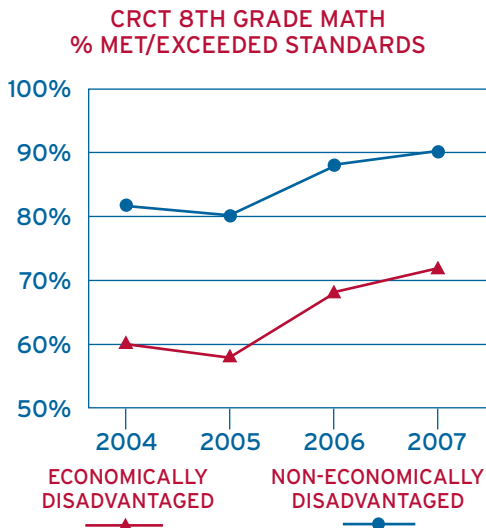
FIGURE 7 - GAPS IN GEORGIA'S READING ACHIEVEMENT BY SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS



Source: Governor's Office of Student Achievement, State Report Cards

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FIGURE 8 - GAPS IN GEORGIA'S MATH ACHIEVEMENT BY SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS



Source: Governor's Office of Student Achievement, State Report Cards

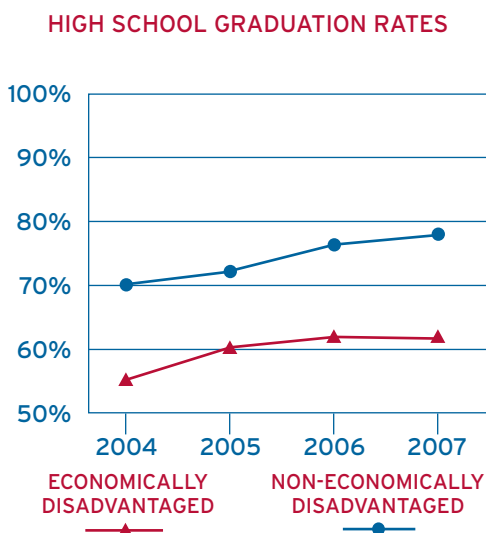
Students in schools that fail to make adequate progress three years in a row must also be offered supplemental educational services including private tutoring. For continued failures, a school may be subject to additional corrective measures including possible governance changes.⁵²

Since the implementation of NCLB, Georgia has seen steady increases in the percentage of schools making AYP. Yet as with racial and economic achievement gaps, the data on AYP reveals how much further Georgia has to go. In 2007, almost one-half of Georgia's high schools and over one-third of middle schools failed to meet AYP (see figure 10). The percentage of schools not meeting AYP in 2007 underscores the need

for continued investment in technical assistance for low-performing schools.

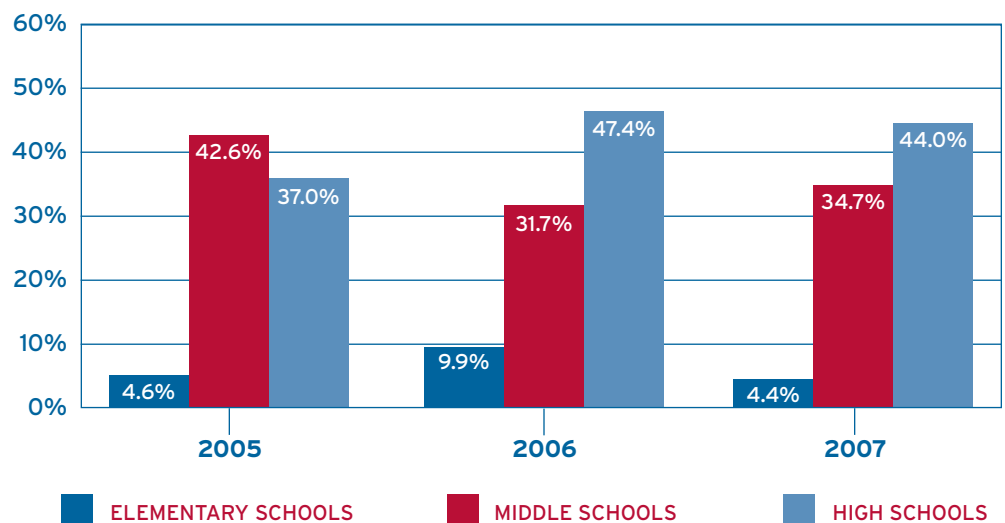
Reauthorization of NCLB would most likely bring substantial changes to the law's key components. With controversy long swirling over the legislation's mandates for student progress and teacher quality, legislators and policy influencers have been clamoring to offer suggestions for improving the federal bill. Among the many proposed amendments have been measures to develop a growth model for schools that would assess performance by yearly increases rather than a fixed level of proficiency; measures to improve teacher quality by offering professional development for educators and granting states funds

FIGURE 9 - GAPS IN GEORGIA'S GRADUATION RATE BY SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS



Source: Governor's Office of Student Achievement, State Report Cards

FIGURE 10 - UNDERACHIEVEMENT IN GEORGIA'S SCHOOLS: PERCENTAGE NOT MAKING AYP



Source: Georgia Department of Education, AYP Reports.

⁵² Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, "No Child Left Behind," www.edweek.org/rc/issues/no-child-left-behind.

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earmarked for incentives and performance pay for teachers; and the establishment of a federal Curriculum Development Fund for states to develop high quality curricular materials. Yet if negotiations for NCLB reauthorization stall in Congress this year, will the current law continue to carry our education system forward and foster increased academic success for Georgia and for the rest of the nation?

WHAT'S NEXT FOR GEORGIA?

According to press coverage of the education scene on Capitol Hill, efforts to revise No Child Left Behind are "mired in back-room negotiations in both the House and the Senate and show no signs of gaining the momentum necessary to ensure completion of the reauthorization in 2008."⁵³ While there have been more than 100 bills introduced in Congress to amend the NCLB law, political analysts predict that the 2008 presidential election will soon dominate the political world, further reducing the

likelihood that leaders in the House and the Senate can complete the NCLB renewal.

While Georgia waits to see what movement occurs at the federal level, we must determine what actions we can take as a state to increase the success of our schools and students. By carefully studying our state's educational data, we can make strategic decisions about how to invest resources and plan interventions within our public schools to close achievement gaps and ensure that no child or school in Georgia is left behind.

⁵³ David Hoff, "2007 NCLB Prospects Are Fading," *Education Week*, 7 November 2007.

Great Expectations: Increasing the Rigor of High School Education

ISSUE OVERVIEW

What should a high school graduate know and be able to do? Across the country, this question is driving debates and reforms aimed at improving the education of high school students. At national summits, within state education departments, and often with the support of organizations such as Achieve, Inc. and the National Governors Association, state leaders are rethinking the curriculum and assessments that provide the backbone of high school instruction.

The focus on high schools and on how they prepare graduates for the world beyond 12th grade has been infused with a sense of urgency, as reports from education and business organizations highlight the number of high school graduates unprepared for work or postsecondary education. Bill Gates issued one of the most resounding calls to action when, at a 2005 address to the National Governors Association, he proclaimed that “America’s high schools are obsolete... Training the workforce of tomorrow with the high schools of today is like trying to teach kids about today’s computers on a 50-year-old mainframe.” Since then, many education and business leaders have echoed that sentiment.

While the national attention on high schools intensifies and the search for quality interventions continues, the state of Georgia has good news to share. Our state boasts a record of progressive action over recent years that is transforming the educational experience for today’s high school students. With the implementation of a new world-class curriculum, a significant revision to the state graduation rule, and a new proposal to redesign the system of secondary assessments, Georgia’s Department of Education is raising the bar for our high school students and developing a rigorous educational program that will produce highly skilled, college- and work-ready graduates.

POLICY CONTEXT

The research has made it clear: too few high school students graduate prepared for the demands of postsecondary education and 21st century jobs.⁵⁴ Yet the reiteration of this finding by countless educational policy organizations and business groups suggests two points: one, the crisis is growing; and two, states are not acting with enough urgency to improve the preparation of high school students.

Our economy depends on having individuals capable of filling jobs that require education and training beyond high school, yet students are leaving high school ill-equipped to succeed in college or at work. In fact, nearly 30 percent of incoming first-

year college students are required to enroll in remedial courses in reading, writing, or math.⁵⁵ It is imperative that states not only increase the percentage of high school students who earn their diplomas but also raise the knowledge and proficiency standards in the critical skills of math, literacy, reasoning, and communication. Without taking a close look at the standards, curriculum, and assessments of secondary education, states run the risk of perpetuating the “expectations gap” – a gap between the requirements for earning a high school diploma and the must-have knowledge and skills needed for college and careers.⁵⁶

While the definition of college- and work-ready remains somewhat elusive, Georgia

has taken steps to ensure that our future high school graduates leave school with a solid educational foundation and are prepared for whatever path they choose to follow (see sidebar: Strengthening High School Education for Georgia’s Students). The work in our state has followed research-based national best practices and has been the result of collaborations among early learning, K-12, postsecondary, and business leaders. With the recent changes in course requirements for high school graduation, Georgia has joined the ranks of at least 14 other states meeting the course recommendations of the American Diploma Project and increasing the value of the high school diploma.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Achieve, Inc. *Closing the Expectations Gap 2007* (Washington, D.C., 2007).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Achieve, Inc., “Key Results from Achieve’s 50-State Survey,” <http://www.achieve.org/node/673>.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

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WHAT'S NEXT FOR GEORGIA?

In the coming year, Georgia will join the increasing number of states moving toward end-of-course exams to measure the achievement of high school students. Currently, Georgia is one of 26 states that implement or plan to implement mandated

high school exit exams. Of those states, at least eight are in the process of incorporating end-of-course tests into their high school graduation requirements. Education policy analysts report that by 2015, about 12 states will have moved to using end-of-course tests.⁵⁸

The redesign of Georgia's secondary assessment system will require careful planning and consideration of a plethora of policy implications. Among other issues, education leaders must consider which end-of-course tests would be required for graduation, how the scores would be combined or aggregated, and what performance levels on each test would denote proficiency. Additional thought must be given to how a new assessment change could impact Georgia's high school graduation rate, as student achievement on End-of-Course tests in Georgia has traditionally been much lower than that on the Georgia High School Graduation Test.

With considerable revisions to our high school curriculum and assessment system underway, Georgia is changing the face of our high school graduates. Yet the true impact of these education policy shifts will not be felt immediately. Georgia must carefully track the performance and future graduation rate of those students being taught the new curriculum and those meeting the new graduation requirements. Whether these changes result in continued increases in Georgia's graduation rate will depend on how these policies are implemented, how well teachers and school leaders are trained in the new systems, and how families, communities, and students are engaged in the process.

STRENGTHENING HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION FOR GEORGIA'S STUDENTS**The Research-Based Call to Action...****...And Georgia's Response**

❖ "The essential agenda is to improve the quality of core courses that really matter in preparing students for college and work. The time has come to improve the quality of core courses so that all students have equal opportunities to become prepared for postsecondary education—whether in a two-year or four-year institution—and for work."
- ACT. *Rigor at Risk: Reaffirming Quality in the High School Core Curriculum*. 2007

In 2005, the Georgia Department of Education issued the Georgia Performance Standards, a new comprehensive curriculum that now drives instruction and assessment for K-12 classrooms. Implementation began in 2004; the entire curriculum will be phased in by the 2011-12 school year.

❖ "For high school graduates to be prepared adequately, they need to take four years of challenging mathematics – at least through Algebra II or its equivalent – and four years of rigorous English aligned with college- and work-ready standards."
- Achieve, Inc. *Closing the Expectations Gap*. 2007

In 2007, the State Board of Education approved a new high school graduation rule, which goes into affect with freshmen entering 9th grade in the 2008-09 school year. The new rule eliminates the tiered diploma structure and increases the required number of math and science credits to four of each.

❖ "The tests that states give to students in high school should measure college- and work-ready skills. This is not the case in most states today. High school tests typically measure 8th, 9th and 10th grade skills – only a subset of the skills that students will ultimately need."
- Achieve, Inc. and National Governor's Association. *An Action Agenda for Improving America's High Schools*. 2005

In late 2007, the Georgia Department of Education issued a proposal to redesign the secondary assessment system by phasing out the Georgia High School Graduation Test and modifying the End of Course Test program. The result would be a single coherent assessment system that provides measures of student achievement directly following instruction.

⁵⁸ Center of Education Policy, *State High School Exit Exams: Working to Raise Test Scores* (Washington, D.C., 2007).

The Crisis of High School Dropouts and Unskilled Graduates

ISSUE OVERVIEW

One of the most pressing educational crises today needs little introduction. A sampling of recent articles from educational and news agencies in both Georgia and across the country reveals how swiftly and publicly the veil has been raised from this issue, giving voice to what has been called the “silent epidemic.”⁵⁹ Consider the following headlines:

“The High Cost of High School Dropouts: What the Nation Pays for Inadequate High Schools”

- October 2007 Issue Brief, Alliance for Excellent Education

“One in 10 U.S. High Schools Are ‘Dropout Factories’” - Education Week, October 29, 2007

“New Figures Show High Dropout Rate: Federal Officials Say Problem is Worst for Urban Schools, Minority Males” - Washington Post, May 10, 2007

“High School Dropouts Cost States Big Bucks” - Business First of Louisville, October 31, 2007

“A Crisis as Girls Drop Out: Georgia’s High Rate” - Athens Banner-Herald, October 31, 2007

“One-third of Northeast Georgia Students Quit School: Jobs for Dropouts Continue to Disappear”

- Independent Mail, November 4, 2007

“Operation Graduate: Business Fights Georgia’s Rising Dropout Rates”

- Business to Business Magazine, October 22, 2007

While the high school graduation rate in Georgia has increased annually, reaching 72.3 percent in 2007, the fact remains that more than one-fourth of our state’s students leave school without a high school diploma. As this number rises, so does the cost to our workforce, businesses, and communities. High school non-graduates will face reduced earning potential, increased risk of unemployment, and limited opportunities to pursue certain job and educational opportunities. Further, the localities in which non-graduates reside bear the burdens of reduced tax revenue, higher costs of health care and welfare, and lower levels of civic engagement. Although Georgia has taken steps to boost the rigor of its secondary education system and increase the knowledge and skills of its high school graduates (see issue 7), the dropout crisis remains an enormous hurdle to our state’s social and economic viability.

POLICY CONTEXT

In 2007, Georgia had 50,772 teens ages 16 to 19 who were not enrolled in school and not working. This accounted for 11 percent of all teens in the state and resulted in Georgia’s

ranking 47th of 50 states on this indicator.⁶⁰

Although the high school graduation rate in Georgia is rising, the aggregate number of non-high school graduates continues to rise as well. Over the past four years – the

period of time during which an entire freshmen class should have completed high school – Georgia has seen well over 100,000 students drop out (see table 6).⁶¹

⁵⁹ John M. Bridgeland, John J. Dilulio, Jr., and Karen Burke Morison, *The Silent Epidemic* (Washington, D.C.: Civic Enterprises, 2006).

⁶⁰ Annie E. Casey Foundation, *2007 KIDS COUNT Data Book Online*, <http://www.kidscount.org/sld/databook.jsp>.

⁶¹ Georgia Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, *School Report Cards*, <http://www.gaosa.org>.

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TABLE 6 - GEORGIA'S NON-GRADUATES

YEAR	NUMBER OF HIGH SCHOOL NON-GRADUATES
2004	34,748
2005	29,792
2006	29,893
2007	28,842
TOTAL	123,275

Source: Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement, State Report Cards

Alone, the numbers in table 6 should be enough to spur collaborative action from all stakeholders in our state's education system. Over four years, Georgia has produced a number of non-graduates that nearly equals the total enrollment of our state's largest school systems. But to galvanize a movement to end the crisis, Georgia's policymakers and public must understand the greater impact of high school dropouts – the social and economic costs of an educational system that leaves so many students behind. Consider these cumulative statistics:

- ❖ Of Georgia's public high schools, 51 percent are dubbed "dropout factories," meaning that fewer than 60 percent of enrolling ninth graders finish school four years later.⁶²
- ❖ The lost lifetime earnings in Georgia for the 2007 class of dropouts totals more than \$15 billion.⁶³
- ❖ Georgia would save more than \$746 million in health care costs over the course of the lifetime of each class of dropouts had they earned their diploma.⁶⁴
- ❖ Almost \$8 billion would be added to Georgia's economy by 2020 if minority students graduated at the same rate as white students.⁶⁵
- ❖ If Georgia's high schools graduated all college-bound students truly college-ready, the state would save more than \$75 million a year in community college remediation costs and lost earnings.⁶⁶
- ❖ If the male high school graduation rate increased by just five percent, Georgia would reap more than \$276 million each year from reduced criminal justice spending and increased individual earnings.⁶⁷

Georgia's lack of college- and work-ready youth is evident not only in our state's high dropout rate. Businesses and postsecondary institutions are experiencing an increase of high school graduates who enter college or

the workplace without mastery of the basic skills necessary to succeed – a combination of both basic knowledge and applied skills in math, science, reading comprehension, and communication.⁶⁸

To address the lack of skilled high school graduates, policymakers and education leaders are stressing the need to not only build the rigor of core classes, but also to incorporate computer and technology skills, technical and vocational programs, and foreign languages into the high school curriculum. Once considered an option only for low achieving, non-college bound students, career and technical education programs are now making a comeback as a valuable means to infuse students' educational experience with rigor and relevance. To ensure that high school graduates are in fact ready to work or to enter college – two pathways that require a remarkably similar set of skills – policymakers are again stressing the importance of dual enrollment programs, charter career academies, and school-business partnerships.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR GEORGIA?

The leaders of Georgia know that our state is facing a crisis and are stepping boldly forward to commit resources and plan interventions that will stem the tide of high school dropouts and unskilled graduates. In 2007, Georgia enhanced the graduation

62 Center for Social Organization of Schools, "Promoting Power in Georgia's High Schools," http://www.csos.jhu.edu/pubs/power/State_profile.htm.
 63 Alliance for Excellence Education, "Potential Economic Impacts of Improved Education on Georgia," http://www.all4ed.org/about_the_crisis/schools/state_information/Georgia.
 64 Ibid.
 65 Ibid.
 66 Ibid.
 67 Ibid.
 68 The Conference Board et al., *Are they really ready to work? Employer's perspectives on the basic knowledge and applied skills of new entrants to the 21st century U.S. workforce*, (2006).

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coach program by placing coaches in all middle schools. The business community is lending support by pairing volunteer community coaches with each high school graduation coach to build local business-education partnerships and help address the resource needs of schools. Career academies are opening across the state as the Department of Education works closely with the Department of Technical and Adult Education to build relevant educational options for our state's students. In November 2007, six school systems were

chosen for the Career Academy Project and will receive state funds to establish new career academies. Additionally, several educational agencies, including the Department of Education, the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, and the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, are embarking on a comprehensive, collaborative research project to better understand which of Georgia's students fail to graduate from high school and why those youth drop out.

However, the magnitude of this issue demands that Georgia's lack of skilled high school graduates remain an imperative issue over the next year. Policymakers must focus on identifying and supporting the most effective interventions for decreasing our dropouts and increasing the work-ready skills of our youth. Not only does Georgia owe all of its young adults the promise of an excellent education, but also we owe our state the capacity to excel in the knowledge economy and to boost our national and global competitiveness.

Measuring What Matters: Building a Better Information System

ISSUE OVERVIEW

- ❖ *Of Georgia's freshmen who entered high school in fall 2003, exactly how many graduated? And what exactly happened to them – which ones graduated, which type of diploma did each student earn, and where are the students who did not graduate? When and why do students leave Georgia's schools?*
- ❖ *What has been the outcome of investments, initiatives, and strategies implemented in Georgia's schools? Which reading and math programs improved student achievement? What effect have new tests and the new curriculum had on academic performance?*
- ❖ *How does the percentage of minority students in gifted and talented programs compare with that of white students? At what rate are English language learners entering Georgia high schools, and how are they doing on our state exams?*
- ❖ *Which of Georgia's teachers have the greatest effect on students' academic growth? And what forms of training and certification do the most effective teachers bring to their classrooms?*

Questions about the performance of Georgia's schools and students are numerous. Teachers, school leaders, parents, community members, and policymakers alike seek answers to these and a host of other queries, as a rapidly changing global economy demands that we produce a skilled, knowledgeable workforce. There is growing recognition of the value of quality information as an essential tool for improving schools and boosting student success.⁶⁹

As with other states, Georgia is stepping forward to answer the demand for quality data collection and analysis. Meeting this challenge and embracing the new culture of data-driven decision making require that our state make a commitment of the financial and human resources necessary to build a robust system of high-quality education data. Further, for data to truly enable policymakers and practitioners to meet the goal of improved achievement for every student, Georgia's leaders must equip stakeholders with the tools to access, understand, and use data.

POLICY CONTEXT

While educators have long collected and filed away measures of student performance – transcripts, test scores, attendance records – the issues of state-level education data collection, availability, and use are fairly new. The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act and its mandated accountability and reporting for students by subgroup required that many states greatly expand their data collection and reporting

systems.⁷⁰ In November 2005, recognizing the growing precedence states were placing on the need for quality information, 10 organizations launched the Data Quality Campaign (DQC), a national effort to improve the collection, availability, and use of high-quality education data. In just two years, the DQC has helped raise awareness about the need for state longitudinal data systems and has offered guidance to states that are building these systems.

In just a few years, “data-driven decisionmaking” has become a familiar phrase in the educational arena. As the DQC has articulated, “vital policy conversations now under way – conversations about increasing the rigor and relevance of high school, improving teacher quality, promoting higher graduation rates and reducing achievement gaps among student populations – cannot be successful unless they are informed by reliable longitudinal data.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ Data Quality Campaign, *Creating a Longitudinal Data System: Using Data to Improve Student Achievement* (2006).

⁷⁰ Data Quality Campaign, *Reporting and Analysis Tools: Helping Mine Education Data for Information Riches* (2007).

⁷¹ Data Quality Campaign, *Creating a Longitudinal Data System: Using Data to Improve Student Achievement* (2006).

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Georgia has made great strides in developing a statewide information system that enables educators and policymakers to answer the vital questions surrounding school and student performance. According to a 2007 survey, Georgia is one of only five states that currently have nine of 10 essential elements in place for a longitudinal data system. (An additional four states have all 10 elements in place.)⁷² Our state's data system will now allow Georgia to calculate a common, cohort-based high school graduation rate – part of the National Governors Association Graduation Counts Compact, which was signed by all 50 governors in 2005. Practitioners in Georgia's schools are currently being trained to use new data tools including an assessment of risk factors to help identify potential high school dropouts. And finally, a collaborative effort is underway involving the education, business, and non-profit communities to conduct

a series of comprehensive research projects aimed at better understanding why Georgia students fail to complete high school and what additional data is needed to help address this issue.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR GEORGIA?

The importance of quality information to the improvement of our education system cannot be underestimated. Given the number of overlapping issues shaping Georgia's schools – emergent minority, non-English speaking, and low-income student populations; an acute dropout crisis; a shortage of highly qualified teachers – collecting relevant information and producing useful data analysis are the means to uncovering strategies and interventions that can truly make a difference in the lives of each Georgia student.

Georgia has a number of challenges to address in the coming year. With almost

all of the essential elements in place for Georgia's longitudinal data system, our state can begin using data and information not as a hammer driving home our failures, but as a flashlight illuminating the truth in our classrooms and lighting the way toward improvement.⁷³

Additionally, decisions must be made by our state's leaders about how to use data. Should teacher placement or teacher compensation be linked to results of student achievement? What educational programs need comprehensive evaluations, and what will we do with the results? How can data from the best-performing schools in the state be used to positively impact those schools in need of improvement? The more Georgia knows about what has been and is being done in our schools the more we will understand how to positively impact our future.

⁷² Data Quality Campaign, "State of the Nation in 2007-08," http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/survey_results/state_of_nation.cfm.

⁷³ Amy Guidera, "The Power of Data in Improving Student Achievement," (Presentation at the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education Quarterly Board Meeting, Atlanta, GA, September 6, 2007).

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Replacing Random Acts with a Deliberate Educational Plan

ISSUE OVERVIEW

In September 1990, *The Business Roundtable* adopted nine Essential Components of a Successful Education System to guide the efforts of state educators and policymakers toward holistic educational improvement. Updated in 1995 and again in 2000, the framework remains a comprehensive policy agenda based on the belief that all children can and must learn at much higher levels. While almost two decades have passed since the components were first issued, they still reflect the best research, thinking, and practices identified by business and educational leaders. Moreover, the nine essential components represent a “comprehensive, integrated strategy for system change” that is needed in each state to improve student achievement. When *The Business Roundtable* first released the nine-point policy agenda, it was accompanied by this message:

“Now it is time to begin implementation [of the nine goals], state-by-state, recognizing that no single improvement will bring about the systemic change that is needed. The effort [to improve teaching and learning] requires a comprehensive approach that uses the knowledge and resources of broadly based partnerships in each state.”⁷⁴

This call to action applies to states as much today as when it was initially written. Now, more than ever, as Georgia’s educators and policymakers begin considering action steps for 2008, there is a need for an integrated approach to educational improvement. As Georgia faces the issues of a changing demography, a dropout crisis, a push for increased school choice, and an acute need for quality teachers, our actions must bear out the truth that “no single improvement will bring about the systemic change that is needed.” What will be Georgia’s vision for educational excellence in 2008?

POLICY CONTEXT

When comprehensive school reform emerged in the 1990s as a new model for improving teaching and learning, it provided school leaders and education policymakers with a new strategy for addressing the needs of low-performing schools and districts. The basic principle behind the new comprehensive approach to school improvement was that instead of a fragmented approach to addressing achievement issues, schools must overhaul their systems from top to bottom. Rather than focusing on one element, such as building a rigorous curriculum, educators began evaluating a number of integrated issues including school management, staff development, student assessment, and parental involvement.⁷⁵

While comprehensive school reform is typically used as a tool for schools in need of improvement, the theory behind this strategy has implications for state-level education systems. As opposed to the long-established method of trying to change an education system piecemeal, a comprehensive approach at the state level would focus on redesigning and integrating all aspects of the system – curriculum, instruction, assessment, teacher training and professional development, education governance and management, school funding, early learning, and parental and community involvement – in a coordinated fashion.⁷⁶ The merits of such a state-level strategy have been extolled by national policy leaders (see sidebar: Building a Statewide Strategy for Education).

In Georgia, the current issues impacting education are integrally connected, and policy action taken to address any one of the 10 topics identified in this publication would have effects on other aspects of our state’s school system. School funding impacts teacher compensation and quality; demographic changes and early learning programs affect our achievement gaps; curriculum and assessment shape the skill levels of our graduates; and quality data provides valuable input for decisions on school choice programs. Thus the complex web of educational policy and practice is spun, each issue contributing to the comprehensive and integrated whole.

⁷⁴ The Business Roundtable, *The Essential Components of a Successful Education System: Putting Policy Into Practice* (New York, NY, 1992).

⁷⁵ EdWeek Research Center, “Comprehensive School Reform,” <http://www.edweek.org/rc/issues/comprehensive-school-reform>.

⁷⁶ Education Commission of the States, “Comprehensive School Reform,” <http://www.ecs.org/ecsmain.asp?page=/html/IssueCollapse.asp>.

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WHAT'S NEXT FOR GEORGIA?

Georgia has already been recognized as a national model for interagency collaboration around the strengthening of a seamless P-16 education system.⁷⁷ Additionally, the collective work begun in 2006 by the Alliance of Education Agency Heads is advancing efforts to link the goals of the seven state educational agencies and create a unified commitment to educational improvement in Georgia. However, in the past, our state's policymakers have been criticized for failing to base education legislation on any comprehensive plan for improvement.

While Georgia has indeed made great strides in the quest to provide an excellent education for all its youth, our state remains at the bottom on national rankings of graduation rates, SAT scores, and child well being. The challenge for policymakers in 2008 will be to construct a viable plan for school success across the entire state of Georgia – a plan that replaces random acts with a focus on the interconnectedness of issues impacting our student achievement.

**BUILDING A STATEWIDE STRATEGY FOR EDUCATION:
EXCERPTS FROM NATIONAL POLICY EXPERTS**

“Achieving the educational goals of the next generation will require policy-makers and educators to view education as an integrated system, from birth through adulthood. Each of the individual elements of the educational system must be excellent in its own right, and importantly, each of them must work effectively with the other toward the system’s goal...Success in education can become widespread only if the entire educational system – from early childhood through elementary school, high school, and college – is geared toward preparing and enabling students to become successful learners and workers at a high level of achievement.”⁷⁸

“Education reform efforts are frequently done piecemeal, driven by the ideology of the particular policy leaders at that time. In a highly complex system like education, however, single-issue reform efforts (e.g., standards, choice, professional development, or class size) rarely attain their desired goals. They produce incremental improvements in operations or expectations but fail to deliver significant progress in student achievement. When various issues are linked together, however, better results can be achieved. Such broad-scale reform requires a clearly articulated goal and vision for the new education system (clearly noting how it differs from today’s) and an integrated set of actions (some of which bear fruit short-term, others longer-term) that will achieve that vision.”⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Andrea Venezia et al., *The Governance Divide: The Case Study for Georgia* (The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2006).

⁷⁸ State Higher Education Executive Officers, *Student Success: Statewide P-16 Systems* (Denver, CO, 2003).

⁷⁹ Achieve, Inc., *Creating a World-Class Education System in Ohio* (Washington, D.C., 2007).



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