

Top Ten Issues To Watch In 2014



GEORGIA PARTNERSHIP
FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION



GEORGIA PARTNERSHIP FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education passed its 20th birthday in 2012 on the run and hasn't looked back since.

One thing is for sure, we aren't slowing down because there is so much work to do. The Partnership team is excited by and embraces the many public education challenges that are ahead. Many of you reading this tenth edition of the Top Ten Issues to Watch no doubt know our work well, but to those who may not be as knowledgeable, we invite you to get to know us better.

What exactly do we do? Here are a few examples of our work:

Our annual Media Symposium held in conjunction with the new legislative session each January brings education reporters and editors from around the state together to hear from experts in several fields including funding, teacher preparedness, early learning, and many more education policy areas. A panel of legislators also provides insight on the key education issues they will be grappling with during the session. Our Top Ten report is always officially released at the Symposium.

Our fourth edition of *Economics of Education* publication is now available. Since we first partnered with the Georgia Chamber of Commerce in 2004 to create this report and related briefing, we have literally visited every corner of the state informing audiences of the inextricable link between education and economics. As we start the new year, we are presenting **Education and Workforce Development Summits** in each region of the state, taking a close look at how their education systems are impacting their local economies. We are facilitating meaningful dialogue that often leads to change and improvement.

Our Education Policy Fellowship Program (EPFP) since 2008 has been creating leaders who better understand the intricacies of the decision process and the impact of those decisions. The Policy Toolbox found on our web site is a unique resource that immediately places a wealth of information literally at the fingertips of anyone across our state.

Since its inception in 1992, the Georgia Partnership has been informing audiences using a variety of methods. Among those are the Critical Issues Forums. These presentations, held periodically during the year, address key education topics and are often presented by national and state education leaders alike and are attended by business, government, education, and civic leaders.

These are just a few of the areas the Georgia Partnership is regularly involved in but there's more, much more...research and policy analysis, business community support, community engagement programs, collaborations and partnerships, just to name a few.

The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education's greatest strength is that it creates the conditions that stimulate critical change.

Visit our web site at www.gpee.org or click on the QR code. For up-to-date news and information follow us on Twitter and Facebook and join our mailing list. We welcome your support and participation in our work. Our door is always open.



| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Ten Indicators for Success – Where is Georgia today? | 2 |
| ISSUE 1: College and Career Ready Standards – A must | 4 |
| ISSUE 2: The Next Generation of Student Assessments – A road map | 8 |
| ISSUE 3: Teacher Preparation Programs – A new beginning | 11 |
| ISSUE 4: Accountability – Measuring teacher and leader effectiveness | 15 |
| ISSUE 5: School Climate – It matters, a lot | 19 |
| ISSUE 6: Early Learning – Closing the achievement gap | 24 |
| ISSUE 7: Work Ready Students – The goal | 27 |
| ISSUE 8: Barriers to Higher Education Completion – Clearing the hurdles | 31 |
| ISSUE 9: Governance Strategies – Keys to success | 36 |
| ISSUE 10: Puzzle Pieces – Putting it all together | 41 |

January 2014

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

Author

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Our Mission

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



Special thanks to AT&T for their support of this publication.



Introduction

Welcome to the 10th edition of the Georgia Partnership's *Top Ten Issues to Watch*. It is hard to believe it has been 10 years since the release of the inaugural edition of this publication. During that time, the *Top Ten* has become one of the Partnership's signature efforts, and its release each year is anticipated by education stakeholders across the state.

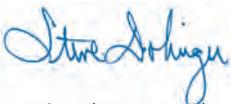
Over the past decade, Georgia has done a good job identifying areas of education reform that will lead to increased student outcomes and high school graduates who are ready for college or to embark on a career. As discussed in this issue, the state has implemented a myriad of reforms across the entire education pipeline, beginning with early learning and ending with increasing the number of postsecondary graduates. Many of these reforms focus on increasing academic rigor, assessments, and educator evaluation systems. As Georgia educators move to implement these changes, they face many challenges.

The first is the increasing poverty rate. More than 1 million children from low-income families were enrolled in Georgia public schools in 2013, 60 percent of the enrolled population. This represents a 15 percentage point increase over the past decade. At a time when more rigor is being introduced and accountability is increasing, schools are experiencing a rise in the number of students who are more likely to need additional help with reading, math and other subjects.

This increased need is being met with a decrease in resources. During the same time period that the number of low-income children in public schools increased, state funding decreased. School systems saw a cumulative statewide austerity cut from 2003 through 2014 of \$7.6 billion. Clearly, simply spending more money will not necessarily produce better outcomes for students. However, educators are struggling under the increasing burden of being asked to "do more with less" with a population of students whose needs are outpacing resources available to help them.

Income inequality has increased dramatically over the past decades, made worse by the recession. Recent research shows that American children are less likely than their counterparts in other developed nations to make more money than their parents. Within the United States, students living in Georgia, and Atlanta specifically, are significantly less likely to work their way out of poverty than those living in other parts of the nation. A strong educational system is the key to breaking the cycle of poverty that has plagued our state.

We believe that the data and commentary presented in this document will guide conversations with policymakers, educators, and community and business leaders about these challenges and opportunities. Armed with reliable, comprehensive information and guided by a common vision for excellence, together we can target strategies that will ensure educational success and a brighter future for all of our students, our state, and our nation.



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



Sylvia E. Russell
President – Georgia, AT&T



Ten Indicators for Success – Where is Georgia today?

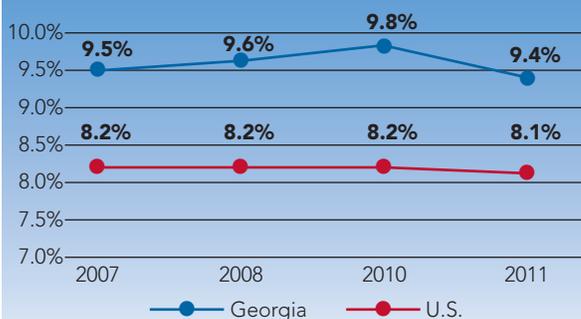
How does Georgia fare in producing excellent results for our citizens throughout the birth to work pipeline?

What additional progress is necessary to move our state above the national average and into the top tier of states to make Georgia a national leader?

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

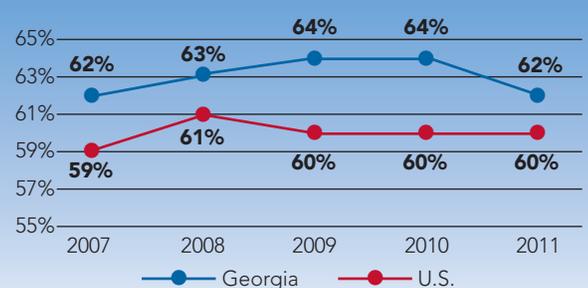
LOW-BIRTHWEIGHT BABIES, 2007-2011

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



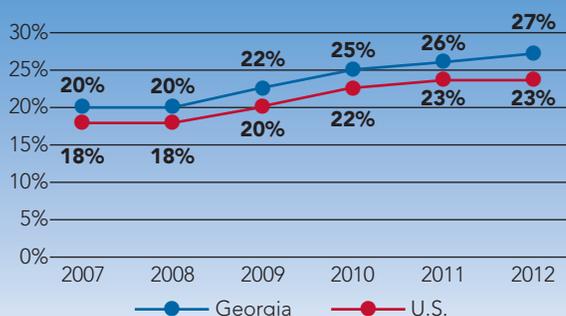
CHILDREN AGES 3 TO 5 ENROLLED IN EARLY EDUCATION, 2007-2011

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



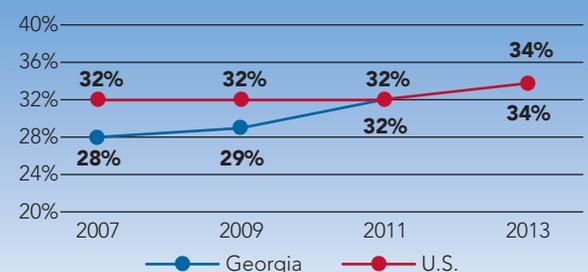
CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY, 2007-2012

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



FOURTH GRADE NAEP READING: AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT

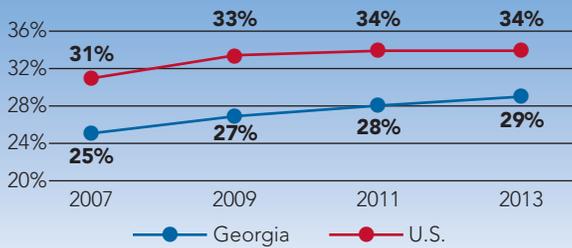
SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Education Progress





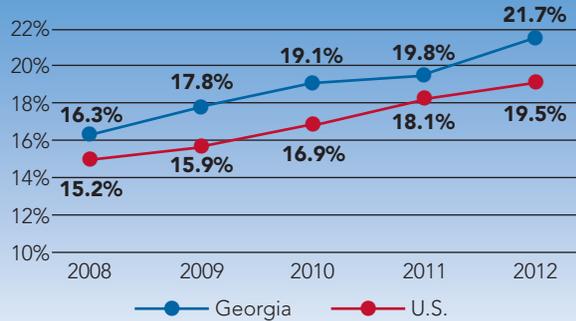
EIGHTH GRADE NAEP MATHEMATICS: AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT

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



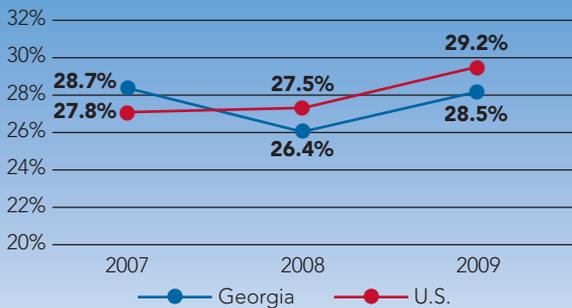
STUDENTS EARNING AP COLLEGE CREDIT IN HIGH SCHOOL

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



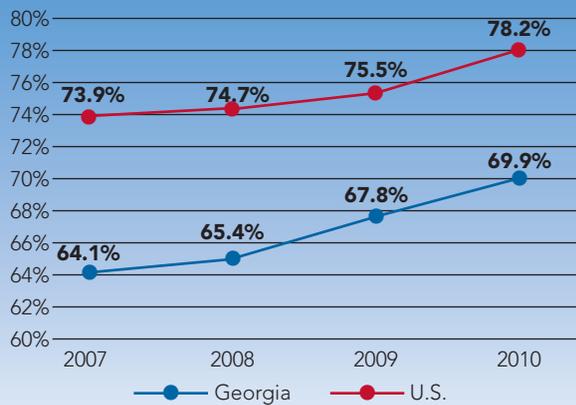
ASSOCIATE DEGREES AWARDED WITHIN THREE YEARS OF HIGH SCHOOL

SOURCE: NCHEMS Information Center for Higher Education
Policymaking and Analysis



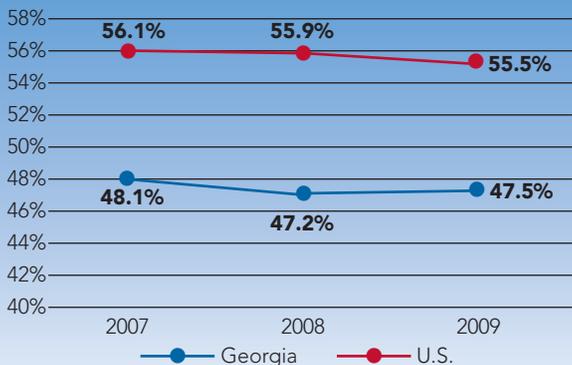
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics
Averaged freshman graduation rate



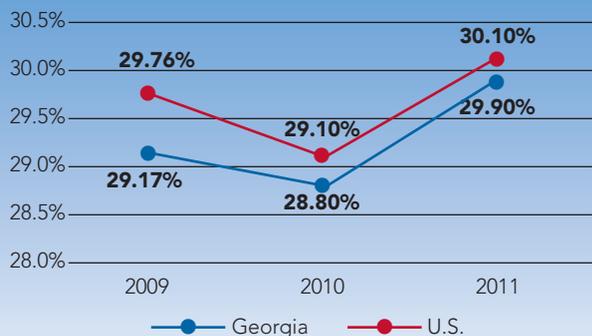
BACHELOR'S DEGREES AWARDED WITHIN SIX YEARS OF HIGH SCHOOL

SOURCE: NCHEMS Information Center for Higher Education
Policymaking and Analysis



ADULTS AGES 25 TO 64 WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER, 2009-2011

SOURCE: NCHEMS Information Center for Higher Education
Policymaking and Analysis





ISSUE 1: College and Career Ready Standards – A must

ISSUE OVERVIEW

A recent study estimates that if the United States improved enough to become a top-performing nation on international assessments between 2005 and 2025, by 2037 its gross domestic product (GDP) would be an additional 5 percent higher than if skills remained steady. Raising standards within the U.S. would produce even more gains over a longer period of time. By 2080, America's GDP would be 36 percent higher than would be the case if the country remained at its 2006 level in math and science.¹

One such international benchmark is the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), administered and organized by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to 65 participating countries, including all 34 OECD member countries. The PISA is administered every three years to 15-year-old students to measure how well they can apply content knowledge across reading, mathematics and science to real-life situations. According to 2012 data, compared to the U.S.:

- 19 countries had higher average scores on the reading literacy assessment, and only 15 percent of U.S. students scored at a level considered "capable of difficult reading tasks" and "critically evaluating a text."²
- 29 countries scored higher on the math assessment than the United States, with only 9 percent of U.S. students scoring at a level considered "capable of completing higher order tasks, such as solving problems that involve visual or special reasoning."³

As a result of indicators such as the PISA, state governors from across the nation came together in an effort to increase the level of rigor of our educational standards to match those of the highest performing nations. The National Governor's Association (NGA) and the Council for Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) coordinated an effort beginning in 2007 to support states in developing standards in English/language arts (ELA) and mathematics that are internationally benchmarked to allow students to compete globally, and were college and career ready to ensure all students are prepared to succeed in education and training after high school. These standards became known as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA?

Georgia has joined with 45 other states and the District of Columbia in formally adopting a set of core standards for kindergarten through high school in ELA and mathematics. The Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS) are the result of infusing the CCSS into the existing Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) to add a level of rigor and a consistent framework to prepare all students for success once they graduate from high school.

Georgia's previous GPS standards were widely believed to be among the strongest in the nation. However, our students were still not performing at a level that allowed a majority to be successful after completing high school. When the state was deciding whether to incorporate the

new Common Core standards, Georgia leaders examined how well the existing standards were preparing students for college-level work. On the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the "nation's report card," only 32 percent of Georgia fourth graders scored proficient in reading, and only 28 percent of eighth graders were proficient in mathematics. At the same time, the state tests in 2009 indicated that nearly 90 percent of our fourth graders were reading "on grade level" and more than 80 percent of our eighth graders were on grade level in math.⁴ Students were meeting and exceeding Georgia standards. They were not meeting college and career ready standards.

This became evident when high school graduates moved on to higher education. In 2011, more than

1 Hanuchek, E., & Woessmann, L. "The Role of Cognitive Skills in Economic Development." *Journal of Economic Literature*, 46 (3), 607-668. 2008.

2 U.S. Department of Education *Performance of U.S. 15-Year-Old Students in Mathematics, Science, and Reading Literacy in an International Context*. International Center for Educational Statistics. (NCES 2014-024) 2013.

3 Ibid.

4 Governor's Office of Student Achievement. 2009 Report Cards.



37 percent of all students entering a two-year college required remediation.⁵ Depending on the institution, that percentage was as high as 50 percent. At four-year institutions, approximately 20 percent of the entering freshmen required remediation.⁶

When the NGA decided to raise the standards across the nation, Georgia was a leader in working to increase the rigor and expectations for all students. Former Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue co-chaired the initiative at the NGA to develop the new standards. Due to Georgia’s leadership and the strength of the existing standards, much of the GPS was replicated in the Common Core.

The standards themselves were developed through a lengthy process in 2009 that involved examining standards from states and high-performing nations, NAEP-established college and career ready standards, academic research, assessment data on college and career ready performance, and input from teachers, educators, business, higher education leaders and the general public.⁷ The Georgia State Board of Education (SBOE) adopted the standards in 2010, and districts implemented them at the start of the 2012 school year.

CCGPS TIMELINE⁸

- 2008** NGA and CCSSO begin the Common Core effort; NGA chooses Gov. Sonny Perdue as co-chair.
- June 2010** National release of Common Core standards at Peachtree Ridge High School in Suwanee, Georgia
- July 2010** Georgia State Board of Education adopts the Common Core standards after a public review/comment period.

It must be made clear that the CCGPS are a set of standards, not a curriculum. Standards are designed to outline what students should know at a certain point in their education so that when they graduate from high school, they are ready for college and/or career. A curriculum involves how standards are taught, including

teaching methods, lesson plans, textbooks, reading materials and so forth. The CCGPS outlines the standards – the goals – but local school districts and teachers are left to develop their own curricula.

Some opponents to the Common Core argue they are not as rigorous as they should be and are, in fact, not better than the old GPS standards.⁹ In 2010, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute compared the new Common Core ELA and math standards to the standards in all 50 states.¹⁰ The report found the standards were superior to those in 37 states. However, in Georgia, the authors found the existing standards to be “at least as clear and rigorous as the Common Core standards.”¹¹

Achieve, a national non-profit education research organization that had been involved in the Common Core, also conducted a comparison of the GPS to the Common Core in 2010. Their analysis found that 81 percent of the GPS ELA standards and 90 percent of the Georgia math standards matched the Common Core.¹²

To address these differences, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) conducted an in-depth alignment study of both the ELA and math standards. State mathematics leaders found that nine GPS standards were not represented within the Common Core, four in elementary school and five in high school. In January 2011, GaDOE convened approximately 4,000 Georgia math educators to conduct an assessment on the unmatched standards. The elementary review teams concluded that the unmatched standards could be addressed through instructional strategies. The high school review teams deemed the content of the unmatched standards to be nonessential to the scope of expectations for all students and concluded that the missing content would be addressed in advanced mathematics coursework.¹³

Concerning mathematics, Georgia is allowed to and does offer algebra in the eighth grade. The Common Core standards cover what every student should know to be ready to enter college or embark on a career – generally thought to be content up to and including Algebra II. Georgia does offer, and will continue to offer, higher level mathematics courses for students wanting to go beyond basic math standards. These course standards are outside the scope of the CCGPS.

5 Complete College America. “Georgia, 2011 Data Sheet.” *College Completion Data*. 2011.

6 Ibid.

7 Georgia Department of Education. *Common Core Georgia Performance Standards*. Atlanta: Author. 2013.

8 Georgia Public Policy Foundation. *Background Analysis of the Common Core State Standards as They Relate to Georgia*. Atlanta: Author. 2013.

9 Ibid.

10 Carmichael, S., Wilson, W. S., Porter-Magee, K., & Martino, G. *The State of the Standards – and the Common Core – in 2010*. Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute. 2010.

11 Ibid.

12 Georgia Public Policy Foundation. *Background Analysis of the Common Core State Standards as They Relate to Georgia*. Atlanta: Author. 2013.

13 Georgia Department of Education. *Reponse to Common Core Confusion Article*. Atlanta: Author. 2013.



In terms of ELA, the Georgia review team found the 19 percent of GPS standards that did not match those of the Common Core included an increase in the depth at which standards are taught, an increase in the level of learning, more emphasis on reading more complex texts, a balance of informational and literary reading, a focus on a balance of reading and writing, and a focus on text evidence with explanations for responses to questions.¹⁴ The GPS area of handwriting was stronger than the Common Core, so those elements were added.

When the SBOE adopted the Common Core for ELA, a few GPS standards were added where it was felt the GPS standards were higher (e.g., cursive and legible writing). The review team in 2011 did not find a need to add math standards at that time. However, Georgia's standards review process allows for edits in the existing standards, along with additions and deletions. The current process requires a 60-day public review followed by SBOE approval. As Georgia educators become more familiar with the CCGPS, the need for amendment and revision is likely to surface. The flexibility built into the CCSS adoption provides a process for these changes.¹⁵

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

Over the past year, opposition to Georgia's adoption of the CCGPS has increased. Some argue that education has historically been the responsibility of the individual school districts and the states; therefore, these national standards violate states' rights. To address these concerns, on May 15, 2013, Governor Deal signed an executive order that "firmly asserts the state's sovereignty over educational standards."¹⁶ The Governor went on to say, "This executive order aims to send a clear and unambiguous message that, in Georgia, we will maintain local control over curriculum while working diligently to achieve high educational standards."¹⁷

As part of that control, Governor Deal has asked the SBOE to formally review and evaluate the Common Core national guidelines and rate how they measure up against the previous GPS. The SBOE is currently gathering review materials and will work throughout 2014 on this process. The SBOE is taking the right course of action to examine the standards, determine where they are strong and identify any areas where they may be weaker and augment them accordingly. The reviewers should pay particular attention to the STEM fields, as that is a primary growth industry in the state.

The SBOE was also asked to "formally un-adopt" the sample reading lists that were attached to the national standards. Known as "Appendix B," the suggested reading lists were provided to states by the developers of the Common Core as examples of the level of rigor and text complexity that should accompany each grade level. Georgia had never formally adopted the appendix; however, in November 2013, the SBOE asked the GaDOE to remove specific references from the GaDOE website and to make it clear to school districts that Appendix B is not a list of text exemplars approved by the SBOE. Instead of developing a list of recommended texts, the SBOE asked the GaDOE to develop a list of "Things to Consider" when choosing texts for students.

Many opponents have also argued that the state legislature should have been involved in the adoption of the standards. However, state legislatures rarely approve educational standards, as that process is generally left to the individual state boards of education. The Georgia General Assembly had no involvement in the adoption of the previous Quality Core Curriculum adopted in 1985 or the GPS adopted in 2004. In fact, only four states required legislative approval to adopt the Common Core: Idaho, Kentucky, Maine and Washington.¹⁸

Related to the issue of local and state control, many opponents have argued that states were co-opted into adopting the standards because the federal government required all Race to the Top applicants and states applying for waivers to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law to adopt "college and career standards." When the Race to the Top application was released in 2009, the Common Core were the only recognized college and career ready standards, forcing states to quickly adopt standards they were not familiar with in order to qualify for federal money. This is a legitimate concern for cash-strapped states that felt they had no choice but to adopt the Common Core. However, legal reviews¹⁹ have clearly shown that as Georgia makes adjustments to the CCGPS to meet its needs, the state is in no danger of losing its Race to the Top funding or its NCLB waiver. Thus far, the four states that did not adopt the Common Core have not lost any federal money. Moreover, Virginia did not adopt the Common Core, but it received a NCLB waiver on the strength of its own college and career ready standards.²⁰

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 May 15, 2013 Executive Order. Retrieved from <http://gov.georgia.gov/sites/governor.ga.gov/files/document/05.15.13.01.pdf>

17 Ibid.

18 Georgia Public Policy Foundation. *Background Analysis of the Common Core State Standards as They Relate to Georgia*. Atlanta: Author. 2013.

19 Legal reviews were conducted by the Atlanta firm Robbins, Ross, Alloy, Belinfante, and Littlefield. The results of the reviews were detailed in the Georgia Public Policy Foundation report. Georgia Public Policy Foundation. *Background Analysis of the Common Core State Standards as They Relate to Georgia*. Atlanta: Author. 2013.

20 Ibid.



The discussions around the Common Core in Georgia have moved from primarily education circles into the political realm. The Governor and State Superintendent – both Republicans – have expressed their support for the CCGPS and stated that Georgia retains the flexibility to customize the standards to meet the state’s specific needs. However, the Georgia G.O.P. passed a resolution in the summer of 2013 in opposition to the Common Core, and there are Tea Party challenges in the governor’s race in 2014. Moreover, the current State Superintendent is challenging the Governor in the Republican primary. Consequently, education and the Common Core are expected to be frequently discussed during the campaigns.

Two separate bills concerning the CCGPS were filed in the General Assembly in 2013 and will be considered again in 2014. The legislation calls for a range of options, from pulling Georgia out of the Common Core completely to simply putting into Georgia code the process by which new standards will be reviewed and adopted.

Georgia educators are in their second year of implementing the CCGPS, and both the state and local districts are moving forward with professional development, resource creation and implementation. Georgia has also begun to realign its teacher training programs to match the level of rigor required to teach to the new standards, which involve more critical thinking and

higher order reasoning skills. New teacher evaluations and student assessments are also being developed to reflect the higher standards demanded by the CCGPS. Nationally, the SAT, AP tests and the ACT are all being aligned to these college entrance exams to the Common Core standards. Therefore, students who have not been taught to the college and career ready standards provided by the Common Core will be at a disadvantage.

To compete in a global economy, states are moving forward with higher, more rigorous standards and are asking more from their students, teachers, and educational leaders. From the beginning, Georgia has been recognized as a leader in this effort. The state should continue to lead by insisting on college and career ready standards for all students. This includes a deliberate and careful examination of the current CCGPS to ensure they meet such a high goal, currently being undertaken by the SBOE. This does not mean backing away from the CCGPS, but strengthening them – if necessary – to meet the needs of Georgia and its students.

College and career ready standard are a must-do for our state, its economy, and the future of our students. Georgia should not go back to the days when 90 percent of our students were told they were proficient, yet when compared to their peers in other states, only one-quarter of them were on track to be ready for college or embark on a career when they graduated from high school.



ISSUE 2: The Next Generation of Student Assessments – A road map

ISSUE OVERVIEW

College and career ready. International competitiveness. Economic growth. These phrases have become central to education reforms across the nation as states embark on ambitious plans to have all students college and career ready when they graduate from high school.

In support of this trend, the U.S. Department of Education provided waivers to states around key elements of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act, which was labeling more and more schools as “failing” and frustrating school improvement efforts. As part of the waiver process, states had to – among other things – develop and implement college and career ready standards and assessments. These elements were also required by states that received the Race to the Top (RT3) grant in 2010. As a result, over the next few years, a majority of states are implementing the Common Core standards in math and English/language arts (ELA). To correspond with the new standards, these states also must adopt new assessment systems aimed at measuring whether students are learning the material specified by the new standards.

The state assessment systems under NCLB primarily focused on testing whether students knew certain facts. On average, these assessments were multiple-choice tests that required students to color a bubble on a scantron form. The shift to the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS) requires students to engage in higher order critical thinking and reasoning skills. New assessments are needed to gauge the extent to which students are achieving these goals. If designed properly, there are five elements that these new assessments can provide that the old assessments were missing:

1. Examining higher order thinking skills;
2. Providing “high-fidelity” evaluation of those skills, such as researching and presenting arguments;
3. Being internationally benchmarked to align content and measurement practices with those used in other leading states and nations;
4. Containing “instructionally sensitive” items that reflect how well teachers are teaching and give them useful guidance on how to improve; and,
5. Being valid, reliable and fair as well as assessable to all learners.²¹

As states implement more rigorous curricula to support higher learning standards, these new assessments must be able to inform teachers, parents and others about whether students are mastering the new materials, need additional supports and/or will indeed be college and career ready upon graduation.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA?

In July 2010, Georgia adopted the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS) for mathematics and ELA. These standards provided an additional level of rigor and alignment to college and career readiness to the state’s existing Georgia Performance Standards (GPS). For a complete discussion of the CCGPS, see Issue 1.

To assess student mastery of the new CCGPS, Georgia was initially a member of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) consortia,

which has been charged with developing assessments for the Common Core that all PARCC member states will use. However, in July 2013, Georgia withdrew from the consortium primarily due to the costs. Administrating the PARCC tests would more than double the amount of money the state currently spends on assessments.²² Another objection to the PARCC assessments was the amount of time students would spend completing the test – up to 10 hours of testing time. Finally, the state felt that adopting PARCC would limit the ability to make adjustments or changes to the CCGPS as deemed necessary. As standards adjust, the test would no longer appropriately align.²³

²¹ Darling-Hammond, L., Herman, J., Pellegrino, J. et al. *Criteria for High-Quality Assessment*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education. 2013.

²² Downey, M. “Georgia School Chief Explains Common Core Test Retreat.” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. July 26, 2013.

²³ Ibid.



Now that Georgia is no longer participating in PARCC, it is moving forward with developing a new Georgia Assessment Program to measure student achievement. Previously, the state has relied on a compilation of the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) for grades 3 through 8 and End of Course Tests (EOCT) for grades 9 through 12, in addition to other assessments such as the writing tests. These individual tests were designed for different purposes and measured different things. The goal of the new Georgia Assessment Program is to design single, comprehensive systems that will reliably:

- measure student outcomes,
- identify students failing to achieve content mastery,
- provide teachers with actionable information for improving student learning, and
- assist school systems in identifying strengths and shortcomings of their educational programs.²⁴

This new assessment system will be designed to significantly increase the expectations of student learning and will include a variety of item types – such as short answer and open-ended questions – to allow students to demonstrate knowledge and skills. Georgia has been working since 2011 to develop assessment items aligned to the CCGPS, all of which have increased rigor. To help augment the pool of items, Georgia is still considering partnering with other states, such as Florida, Oklahoma and/or Kentucky to share test items. The state is scheduled to decide about cross-state partnerships during the 2013-2014 school year.

Meanwhile, Georgia is moving forward with replacing the CRCT for grades 3 through 8. For the 2012 and 2013 school years the CRCT was and will be administered in all subjects with content adjustments for math and ELA aligned with the CCGPS. However, new assessments will be administered in the spring of 2015. These tests will look similar to the PARCC-designed assessments, with many more open-ended questions, a higher level of rigor and a higher cut score, which is the score a student must receive to be considered “on grade level.” The EOCTs will be similar to the current EOCT tests but with increased rigor and cut scores.

As the state moves forward in designing the new assessment system, there are several key elements to the plan:

1. Collapse reading, language arts, and writing into a single measure to align to the new standards;

2. Use norm-referenced items to allow for a national comparison;
3. Share items with other states;
4. Align expectations with other measures, such as the NAEP, ACT and SAT, to understand how Georgia students are doing compared to their national peers; and
5. Involve the University System of Georgia and the Technical College System of Georgia in the development to ensure the assessments measure college and career readiness.²⁵

Finally, the new assessment system will include both formative and summative assessments. Formative assessments are used by teachers to gather feedback about how well their students are learning the materials, which helps inform ongoing instruction. These are considered low-stakes assessments that are for students and teachers. Summative assessments are used to measure the level of proficiency that has been obtained at the end of an instructional unit by comparing it to a standard or benchmark. These tests, like the CRCT and EOCT, are traditionally used in high-stakes accountability and decision-making.

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

With the new assessments due for implementation in spring 2015, Georgia is on a tight timeline to design, field test and implement its new assessment system. According to the transition plan, by the end of 2013, the state will have decided on cross-state partnerships, finalized the conceptual design of the assessment system and written a request for proposals (RFP) for a testing vendor. Throughout 2014, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) will be field-testing CCGPS testing items, continuing work on new item development and developing validity and reliability measures and metrics related to the new assessments. They will also be focusing on setting the new proficiency standards and implementing new testing contracts, among other things.²⁶

This is a tremendous amount of work over a relatively short period of time. These challenges are compounded by other factors and considerations. First, a significant increase in funding is necessary. While Georgia was not willing, or able, to support the costs of the PARCC assessments, reliance on our current funding levels is not feasible. The first problem is that Georgia’s existing testing contracts are based on 2006 costs. Even if the

²⁴ Georgia Department of Education. *Georgia Student Assessment Program: Transition Plan for High Quality College and Career Ready Assessments*. Atlanta: Author. 2013.

²⁵ Fincher, M. *State Board of Education Retreat – Assessment Update*. Atlanta: Georgia Department of Education. 2013.

²⁶ Georgia Department of Education. *Georgia Student Assessment Program: Transition Plan for High Quality College and Career Ready Assessments*. Atlanta: Author. 2013.



state renewed the existing contracts and made no test changes at all, the price would increase. Add to that, since 2008, both state and federal funding for assessments has decreased by \$3.8 million dollars.²⁷ While the estimated costs of the PARCC assessment is approximately \$29 per student, it is not that much higher than the national average of \$27 per student. Georgia has historically spent approximately \$14 per student.²⁸ Just as the CCGPS is asking more of our teachers and students, the state is asking more of its assessments. Assessments are no longer just being used to determine if a child, teacher, school or district is “failing.” The purpose of these assessments is to provide clear and consistent information about how students are doing through a combination of formative and summative assessments. These assessments must have the sensitivity to not only gather information on student learning outcomes but also provide instructional feedback to the teacher and guide teacher and leader professional development. The development and implementation of such a system will cost more than the state’s current assessment budget.

A second challenge is communicating to school personnel, parents, communities and others the impact of increased rigor and higher cut scores. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests are administered every two years nationwide. This assessment is not only considered the nation’s report card, it is also benchmarked against college and career ready standards. In 2013, only 34 percent of Georgia fourth graders scored proficient in reading, and only 29 percent of eighth graders were considered proficient in math. These percentages are significantly lower than the approximately 90 percent of fourth graders currently

meeting state proficiency standards in reading and more than 85 percent of eighth graders meeting state standards in math.

The new assessment will be aligned with external tests like the NAEP and contain similar levels of rigor and minimum scores to be considered proficient. As a state, we can initially expect to see a significant reduction in the percentage of children deemed proficient – on track to being college and career ready upon graduation. It is important to note that this does not mean students know less than they did. The educational system is asking more of them, and it will take time for both teachers and students to adjust to the new demands.

Georgia is making great investments in ensuring all students are college and career ready when they graduate from high school. Reforms such as the CCGPS, increased rigor in teacher training, the implementation of career pathways and the new teacher and leader evaluation systems are all designed to meet this singular goal. The state must have an effective and efficient assessment system to provide information on our progress toward this goal. If teachers do not know how well their students are mastering the material, they cannot adjust their teaching practices. Principals cannot target needed professional development for their teachers if content strengths and weaknesses are not identified. Finally, teachers and leaders are now being evaluated on measures of student growth. These assessments must accurately measure how much a student learned in a given year to support the validity of these new systems. The new assessments could be as important to the jobs of teachers and school leaders as they are to the future of our students.

²⁷ Fincher, M. *State Board of Education Retreat – Assessment Update*. Atlanta: Georgia Department of Education. 2013.

²⁸ Chingos, M. M. *Standardized Testing and the Common Core State Standards: You Get What You Pay For?* Washington, DC: Brown Center on Education Policy at Brookings. 2013.



ISSUE 3: Teacher Preparation Programs – A new beginning

ISSUE OVERVIEW

Concerns regarding the quality of our educator workforce have long been understood as the most critical component affecting student achievement. A wealth of research has focused on the issues of teacher quality and teacher supply, drawing attention to the critical need to address these areas of education policy.²⁹

The National Center for Teacher Quality conducted a study of more than 1,100 colleges and universities that prepare elementary and secondary teachers. The study found the following:

- In countries where students outperform the United States, teacher prep schools recruit candidates from the top third of the college-going population, while one-quarter of U.S. programs restrict admissions to only the top half of the college-going population.
- A large majority of programs (71 percent) are not providing elementary teacher candidates with research-based training in reading instruction methods that could reduce the current rate of reading failure (currently 30 percent) to less than 10 percent of the student population.
- In mathematics training of elementary teacher candidates, only 19 percent of programs demonstrate teacher expectations similar to practices of higher performing nations such as Singapore or South Korea.
- Almost all programs (93 percent) fail to ensure a high-quality student teaching experience in which candidates are assigned only to highly skilled teachers and must receive frequent concrete feedback.
- Only 23 percent of rated programs are doing enough to provide teacher candidates with concrete classroom management strategies to improve classroom behavior problems.
- Only 11 percent of elementary programs and 47 percent of secondary programs are providing adequate content preparation for teachers in the subjects they will teach.³⁰

Many states, including Georgia, are now re-evaluating and reworking their teacher preparation programs. Our students need effective, high-quality teachers, and Georgia is beginning to move more quickly toward that goal. The state is poised to enact new policies and programs that will not only strengthen our supply of new teachers but support more focused and rigorous professional development for teachers already in the field.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA?

In response to the more rigorous demands on educators brought about by increased standards and accountability, the Council for Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) headed a task force called the Task Force on Educator Preparation and Entry into the Profession that also included members of the National Governor's Association (NGA) and the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE). This task force released a report, *Our Responsibility, Our Promise*, that provided specific recommendations on teacher and principal preparation and entry into professional roles.³¹ To

implement the recommendations, seven states³² including Georgia were selected to participate in a pilot program intended to carry out the reform recommendations. The report made 10 detailed recommendations in three primary policy areas: licensure; program approval; and data collection, analysis and reporting.

Traditionally, state licensure programs set minimum qualifications for educators before they are allowed to practice in a classroom or school. The CCSSO report, however, requires that licensure assessments ensure a certain standard of educator quality and are based on indicators correlated with readiness to enter a classroom

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

30 National Center for Teacher Quality. *Findings from the Teacher Prep Review*. 2013. Retrieved from www.nctq.org/teacherPrep/findings

31 CCSSO Task Force on Educator Preparation and Entry into the Profession. *Our Responsibility, Our Promise: Transforming Educator Preparation and Entry into the Profession*. Washington, DC: Author. 2013.

32 The seven participating states are Connecticut, Georgia, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts and Washington.



or a school.³³ Program approval is an evaluation process that determines if a preparation program seeking educator preparation authorization meets state standards. Finally, the success of these reforms depends in large part on a state's ability to collect and report data for different purposes in ways that are meaningful to multiple stakeholders over time. An ideal data reporting system provides relevant information to support continuous improvements in educator preparation programs and to inform licensure and program approval reform.³⁴

Georgia is aggressively addressing all 10 recommended changes to its teacher preparation programs. A state task force comprising members of the Professional Standards Commission, the University System of Georgia, and the Georgia Department of Education is working on how to implement each of the recommendations. Three areas will require drastic changes: 1) a new multi-tiered licensure system, 2) changes in professional learning for current teachers and 3) program accountability.

The new tiered certification system will require student teachers to demonstrate proficiency before they can obtain a teaching certificate. The system will also establish a pathway for teachers to advance within the profession while still remaining in the classroom and will allow the recognition of excellent teachers. Finally, the system will be linked to the new statewide teacher evaluation system (TKES) for certificate renewal. (For a complete discussion of the TKES, see Issue 4).

To strengthen induction and to provide a professional development pathway, the new system consists of four levels of licensures and five different certifications.

- 1. Pre-Service** – This first level is for teaching candidates from a university or alternative certification program. The content knowledge exam and a subject-specific performance assessment will be more rigorous, and students must complete an ethics assessment and background check prior to their field experiences in P-12 schools.
- 2. Induction** – For new teachers, the induction certificate lasts for three years, during which time the teacher must be rated proficient or exemplary on two out of three of their TKES assessments. Professional learning and skills in need of additional support will be identified by the TKES assessments.
- 3. Professional** – The professional certificate is a five-year renewable license. To renew, a teacher must

show a proficient or exemplary TKES rating for four out of five years. Like the induction certificate, professional learning will be identified by the TKES assessment.

For those with a professional certificate who wish to further their careers while staying in the classroom, there is an additional certificate level with two different options from which teachers can select.

4. Advanced Professional – This certificate is designed to recognize classroom excellence in student achievement and requires five years of experience. During those five years, teachers must have at least one TKES rating of exemplary and no ratings below proficient. Such teachers must also have an advanced degree in their certification field or in Curriculum Instruction or Instructional Technology, or be National Board Certified.

5. Lead Professional – This certificate is for teachers that positively impact other teachers and adults. Like the advanced professional, this certificate requires at least five years of experience, at least one TKES rating of exemplary and no ratings below proficient. Teachers also must either be certified in Teacher Leadership or have an advanced degree in their certification field, Curriculum and Instruction, or Instructional Technology AND a Teacher Leadership Endorsement, a Coaching Endorsement or a Teacher Support Specialist Endorsement. A teacher must also demonstrate through a rigorous performance assessment the ability to work with his or her colleagues in ways that improve student learning.

The Professional Standards Commission plans to initiate the new rules for tiered certification in the spring of 2014. The earliest changes for certification will come in July 2014, when current Clear Renewable certificates will be converted to Professional Certificates. Other certification changes will follow, but that timeline is still being finalized.

A second major change concerns the role of professional learning. Traditionally in Georgia, teachers needed 10 hours of professional learning units to keep their license current. There were no specific requirements on the focus of those units. The Commission will make recommendations by the summer of 2014 that will move away from a specified seat time (number of required hours) and will focus more on where a teacher

33 CCSSO Task Force on Educator Preparation and Entry into the Profession. *Our Responsibility, Our Promise: Transforming Educator Preparation and Entry into the Profession*. Washington, DC: Author. 2013.

34 Ibid.



demonstrates strengths and weaknesses on their TKES. Every five years, when a teacher is up for certification renewal, he or she must demonstrate improvement in his or her weakness areas as identified by the TKES. Guided by targeted professional learning, this recommendation shifts the licensure renewal process to a performance-based definition of tenure. Teachers must demonstrate continual professional development.

The final major change will be in teacher preparation program accountability. Programs that train teachers and leaders – either traditional university-based programs or alternative certification program – will all be assessed by a Preparation Program Effectiveness Measure (PPEM), with one measure for teacher preparation and another for leader preparation. The teacher-PPEM will comprise the following:

- The performance of program graduates once they are in the field based on the TKES assessments, 50 percent;
- The results of the content knowledge and subject-specific performance assessments of current students, 30 percent;
- The success of induction based on the percentage of program graduates who move from the induction certificate to the professional certificate, 10 percent; and,
- Multiple measures of performance such as retention within the profession; timely completion rates; the yield rate, which is the percentage of students who gain employment in the specific field they were trained in; and surveys of employers and program completers, 10 percent.

The leader-PPEM is very similar, with half the score based on leaders' Leader Keys Effectiveness System (LKES) assessment score. It is important to note that 70 percent of a LKES assessment score is based on student growth within the school. The leader programs will need to focus on how a principal can build capacity within a school, work with teacher leaders and prioritize the instructional development of the entire staff.

Based on their PPEMs, programs will be rated exemplary, effective, at-risk or low-performing. Programs that are rated low-performing will get two years of support from the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) and/or peers from exemplary performing programs to improve their ratings. If its programs receive a low-performing rating for a third year, it will likely be closed. Effective and exemplary programs will receive a streamlined renewal process.

Much like the tiered certification process, the rule changes for the PPEMS are scheduled to be finalized in the spring of 2014. The first PPEM scores will be effective for the 2015-2016 academic year.

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

The Professional Standards Commission's task force recommendations shift teacher training, induction and certification programs toward results in the classroom. For example, there are two primary goals of the new induction certificate that are results-focused. First, the purpose of the improved content knowledge exams and addition of the subject-specific performance assessment is to better determine a candidate's readiness to teach. This should allow Georgia to be more selective about who enters the profession. Second, the purpose of the Induction Certificate is to provide a structure highlighting the support novice teachers need. The responsibility for strengthening induction support for new teachers rests with school systems. Education program providers are expected to offer additional support via partnerships and professional learning. Currently, only Race to the Top (RT3) districts are required to implement induction programs, according to guidance developed by the Georgia Department of Education and the Georgia Professional Standards Commission. If quality induction programs are to be implemented across the state, other districts will need to adhere to this guidance and be provided with additional resources.

The required partnership between teacher preparation programs and local school districts is essential to the success of these reforms. Teacher candidates must have a lot of time with quality experts in the field. Moreover, the student-teaching experience needs to span the entire year so they can be exposed to everything from pre-planning through the end of school to understand all aspects of the profession. There has been some push-back from local school districts about partnering with teacher training programs. Due to their own pressures from increased accountability based on student growth, some districts are reluctant to take on student teachers or only utilize them in non-core subjects.

One model that has shown great success is the co-teaching model developed at St. Cloud State University Academy for Co-Teaching and Collaboration in Minnesota. Co-teaching is defined as "two teachers working together with groups of students and sharing the planning, organization, delivery and assessment of instruction and physical space."³⁵ Under this model, an

35 St. Cloud State University, The Academy for Co-Teaching and Collaboration. "What is Co-Teaching?" 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.stcloudstate.edu/soe/coteaching/default.asp>



experienced teacher is paired with a teaching candidate, which allows both adults to share responsibilities in the classroom. Data from an evaluation of the program show that students in co-taught classrooms scored approximately 20 percentage points higher on their state reading tests compared to students who were not co-taught. There was an approximate 10 percentage point increase in math scores. Currently, the co-teaching model is being implemented in Georgia by Armstrong Atlantic State University and Savannah–Chatham County Public Schools.

Finally, Georgia is also exploring new ways to strengthen the number of teachers in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) throughout the state. The Woodrow Wilson Georgia Teaching Fellowship program is just being established. This fellowship program will work with five universities and school districts to 1) recruit high-ability individuals with an undergraduate degree in math or science to prepare them to teach those subjects in high-need schools for a minimum of three years and 2) to transform the teacher education programs that prepare science and math teachers at participating universities, with the goal of creating models for the state and the nation.

Specifically, program Fellows will participate in a one-year (12–15 months) master’s degree program in teacher education and receive a stipend of \$30,000. Upon graduation, Fellows will be placed in local school systems, where they will receive “double mentoring” throughout their three-year commitment. They will receive a mentor from the school where they are placed as well as a mentor from their university program. Research has demonstrated that double mentoring reduces professional drop-out by one third and helps move new teachers along the induction track.³⁶

Georgia is on a mission: increase the number of students graduating from high school who are deemed college and career ready. To accomplish this mission, Georgia has implemented new college and career ready standards. The state is redesigning its system of assessing student progress to reflect the increased rigor. And finally, to ensure teachers are delivering the new material effectively, the teacher evaluation system has been updated as well. Higher standards. Increased rigor. A comprehensive teacher evaluation system. The majority of teachers in the profession today were trained in programs that did not prepare them for these increased challenges. Teacher training programs must adjust to these new challenges to supply the profession with a pipeline of teachers and school leaders who rise to these new standards.

³⁶ For a full description of the Teaching Fellow Program, please see: <http://www.wvteachingfellowship.org/>



ISSUE 4: Accountability – Measuring teacher and leader effectiveness

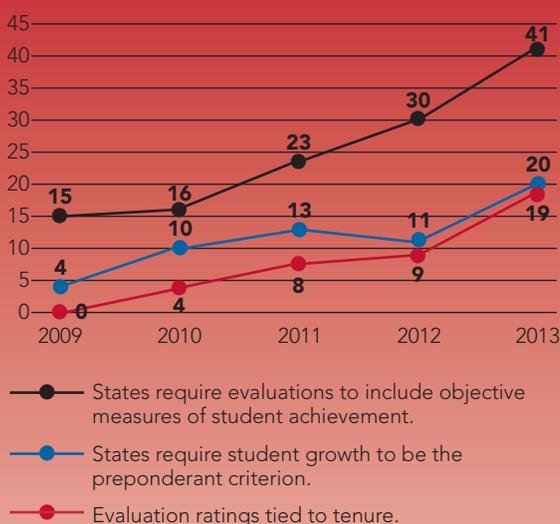
ISSUE OVERVIEW

Every parent wants his or her child to be taught by a great teacher. Parents intuitively understand what an entire body of academic research tells us: a child’s education depends to a large extent on the quality of his or her teacher. And parents know who those teachers are. They call the school before the year begins to make sure their child gets put in a certain class.

Within the school itself, it seems clear who the outstanding teachers are, which teachers need extra help and which are just biding their time until retirement. If casually asked, most principals could probably list their top five teachers without having to think too hard about it. Despite this common knowledge that everybody knows a good teacher when they see one, states and districts have not had good teacher evaluation systems that could measure the difference between excellent and poor teachers, much less highlight areas of weaknesses or strengths or provide professional feedback.³⁷ Those who were involved in measuring teacher effectiveness had trouble defining what an effective teacher was, and once defined how to measure that effectiveness.

In 2009, a study called *The Widget Effect* was published that reviewed teacher evaluation practices in 12 diverse districts across four states. The Widget Effect found that more than 99 percent of teachers evaluated in districts that used a satisfactory or unsatisfactory evaluation system received a positive – satisfactory – rating.³⁸ In districts with three or more categories, 94 percent of teachers still earned one of the top two ratings, and less than one percent was rated “unsatisfactory.” Finally, even in schools not making adequate yearly progress (AYP) – the so-called failing schools – 90 percent of the tenured teachers received the highest rating of satisfactory. The study found that over a three-year period, only 10 percent of failing schools issued at least one unsatisfactory rating on a tenured teacher.³⁹

FIGURE 4.1: Teacher Effectiveness: State Policy Trends 2009–2013⁴¹



A recent study of all 50 states by the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) found that historically states have had very little input into how teachers have been evaluated.⁴⁰ However, since 2009, there has been a dramatic shift in teacher evaluation systems, primarily due to the federal Race to the Top competition and the conditions required by the U.S. Department of Education for states pursuing waivers to the No Child Left Behind law. This widespread adoption has led to more rigorous, complex and data-driven teacher evaluation systems. See figure 4.1 for expansions in state evaluation policies.

Georgia has been a leader in developing and implementing a new teacher evaluation system. This new system, known as the Teacher Effectiveness System, along with the corresponding Leader Effectiveness System, is one of Georgia’s primary accomplishments under the Race to the Top grant. In addition to being able to distinguish among good teachers, great teachers and ineffective ones, the primary focus of the teacher effectiveness system is to help improve instruction and to better design professional development activities to meet teacher needs.

37 Doherty, K., & Jacobs, S. *State of the States 2013, Connect the Dots: Using Evaluations of Teacher Effectiveness to Inform Policy and Practice*. Washington, DC: National Council on Teacher Quality. 2013.

38 Weisberg, D., Sexton, S., Mulhern, J., & Keeling, D. *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness*. New York: The New Teacher Project. 2009.

39 Ibid.

40 Doherty, K., & Jacobs, S. *State of the States 2013, Connect the Dots: Using Evaluations of Teacher Effectiveness to Inform Policy and Practice*. Washington, DC: National Council on Teacher Quality. 2013.

41 Ibid.



WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA?

Nearly all states are now developing comprehensive systems of education effectiveness by developing and adopting rigorous teacher and leader evaluation systems that take into account student growth. These systems are intended to be conducted at least annually and provide timely and constructive feedback to inform professional development; promotion, retention and tenure decisions; and, potentially, compensation.⁴²

In Georgia, the goal was to develop a rigorous and transparent teacher and leader evaluation instrument that would help ensure an effective teacher in every classroom and an effective leader in every school. In the spring of 2012, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) piloted the new Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) and Leader Keys Effectiveness System (LKES). More than 3,500 teachers from over 550 schools participated in the pilot program. During the 2013 legislative session, House Bill 244 was passed, requiring all Georgia public schools to develop and use an evaluation system. GaDOE developed TKES and LKES to meet this purpose. Currently, the state is on schedule for statewide implementation of the new systems for the 2014-2015 school year.

For all teachers, the TKES generates a teacher effectiveness measure (TEM) consisting of two primary components:

1. Assessments based on performance standards including observations and documentation of teachers that are informed by surveys of instructional practice in grades 3–12, and

2. Student growth and academic achievement.

The final TEM will comprise the teacher assessment and performance standards (50 percent) and the student growth and academic achievement measures (50 percent). The surveys of instructional practice are used to inform the teacher assessment standards. They are not weighed separately in calculating the TEM, but are used as an additional source of data for teacher assessment performance standards. The resulting TEM score will categorize teachers as exemplary, proficient, needs development or ineffective.

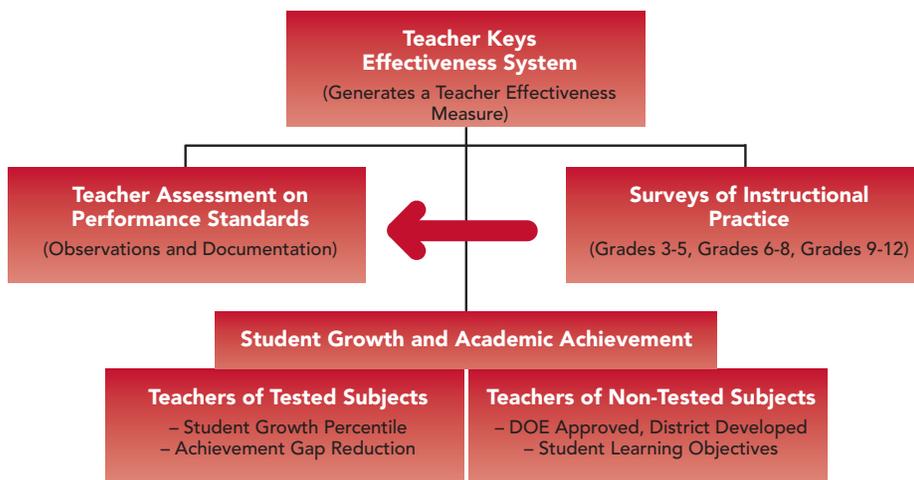
In the second area of student growth, the evaluation of teachers in tested subjects will be based on a value-added model that takes into account student growth. For teachers of tested subjects, the existing state standardized test will be used: the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) for students in grades 3 through 8, and the end-of-course tests (EOCT) for grades 9 through 12.

For teachers in non-tested subjects, their growth measures will be based on student learning objectives (SLOs), which are being developed by individual districts. The SLOs describe what students are expected to learn in a given academic year as measured by a pre-assessment and post-assessment. These district-determined SLOs are course specific, grade level learning objectives that are measureable, focused on growth and student learning, and aligned to curriculum content standards.⁴⁴

To assist districts in developing their SLOs, the GaDOE has set up an item bank from which districts can draw.

It contains more than 1,900 items developed by Georgia teachers.⁴⁵ Currently, there are 126 non-tested courses for which SLO supports have been created. Additionally, the GaDOE provides a secure site for districts to share developed SLOs and supporting assessments. These resources provide support to districts as they develop their SLO statements and create appropriate pre- and post-assessments to measure student growth. Currently,

FIGURE 4.2: Teacher Keys Effectiveness System⁴³



⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Georgia Department of Education. *Teacher Keys Effectiveness System Handbook*. Atlanta: Office of School Improvement, Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Division. 2013.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Georgia Department of Education. *Georgia Board of Education Annual Report: Teacher Keys and Leader Keys Effectiveness Systems*. Atlanta: Author. 2013.



there are resources available for 92 percent of the state’s teachers, including growth measures for districts to utilize.⁴⁶

With the development of the SLOs at the district level, there has been some concern that the state cannot assure comparability of rigor and standards across districts. While all assessments are to be developed locally or regionally, the GaDOE has developed specific tools and resources including an approval process to help ensure compatibility of rigor, alignment and validity among items on a given assessment.⁴⁷

In addition to a new teacher effectiveness system, Georgia has also developed and implemented a leader effectiveness system – the LKES. Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to student achievement. Research has found that leadership disparities explain almost a quarter of the difference in student performance across schools.⁴⁸ Empowering school-level leaders is one of the most important steps districts can take to support student learning.⁴⁹

The LKES comprises two components: the Leader Assessments on Performance Standards and student growth and academic achievement, including achievement gap reduction. The system also includes school climate surveys and data on student attendance and the retention of effective teachers. Figure 4.3 shows the components of the LKES.

Much like the teacher effectiveness measure, the total leader effectiveness measure (LEM) will be a combination of the leader assessment on performance (30 percent) and the student growth and academic achievement (70 percent) measures.

The goal of both the TKES and LKES is to help educators grow professionally, thereby contributing to student learning. Each of these effectiveness systems is designed to provide teachers and leaders with meaningful feedback and to support continuous growth and development.

Finally, there are plans to incorporate both the school TEM and LEM scores into the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). The CCRPI is Georgia’s new accountability system that measures the extent to which a school, district and the state are successfully making progress on a specific list of accountability and performance measures. Once the effectiveness systems are implemented statewide, each school will have its average TEM score displayed on the CCRPI report card.

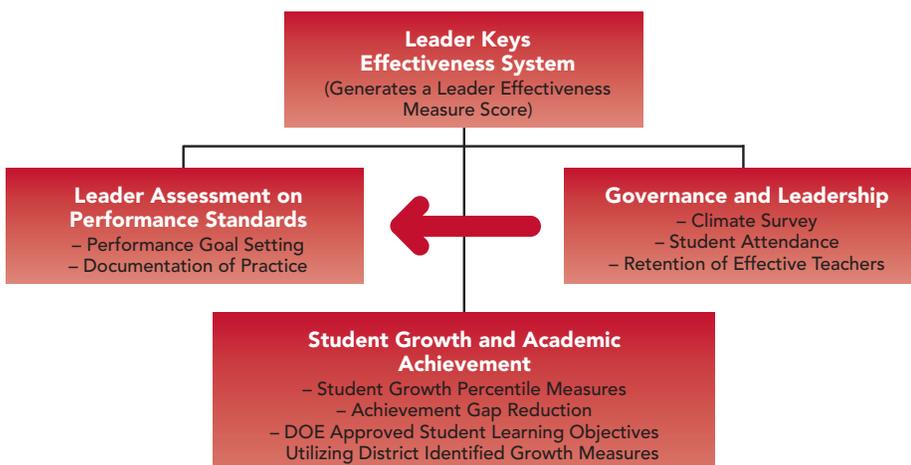
ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

Passed in the spring of 2013 and signed by the Governor, Georgia House Bill 244 codified the creation, implementation and use of the teacher and leader effectiveness system. The law states that all school districts and charter schools will implement the new system no later than the 2014-2015 school year. It also states that

the system will use multiple measures but will prioritize growth in student achievement.⁵¹ As previously stated, for teachers, student growth will make up 50 percent of their total score, and it will account for 70 percent of a leader’s effectiveness rating.

HB 244 also codifies the extent to which the TKES and LKES will be used in personnel decisions. Local school systems are to use these effectiveness systems as the basis for decisions regarding retention,

Figure 4.3: Leader Keys Effectiveness System⁵⁰



46 Ibid.
 47 Georgia Department of Education. *Teacher Keys Effectiveness System Handbook*. Atlanta: Office of School Improvement, Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Division. 2013.
 48 Snyder, J. *A Preliminary Progress Report on Turning Around the Lowest-Performing Schools*. March 29, 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/blog/2012/03/a-preliminary-progress-report-on-turning-around-the-lowest-performing-schools/>
 49 Waters, J. T., & Marzano, R. J. *School District Leadership that Works: The Effect of Superintendent Leadership on Student Achievement*. Denver: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning. 2006.
 50 Georgia Department of Education. *Leader Keys Effectiveness System Handbook*. Atlanta: Office of School Improvement, Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Division. 2013.
 51 HB 244 – as passed by House and Senate. 2013.



promotion, compensation, dismissals and other staffing issues, including transfers, placement and preferences in reduction in force.⁵² Moreover, an individual who receives any combination of two unsatisfactory, ineffective, or needs development performance measures within a five-year period will be unable to renew his or her professional certificate.⁵³ It is important to note that the legislation also states that the goal of the effectiveness systems is to provide “high quality, job embedded, and ongoing mentoring, support, and professional development for teachers, principals, and assistant principals.”⁵⁴

High-quality evaluation – or effectiveness – systems can discriminate between the impact teachers and leaders have in their schools and classrooms. However, the design of the systems – especially the extent to which student growth is weighted – is very important. While most research indicates that student growth should be a component in any effectiveness system, a sizeable portion argues against relying too heavily on student test scores. For example, a study conducted by the Economic Policy Institute shows support for teacher evaluation systems; it recommends that test scores should only be part of the overall formula. Relying on growth scores for up to 50 percent or more of the formula could be problematic.⁵⁵

The authors argue that results based on growth models have trouble accurately identifying more effective teachers from less effective. The study found that across five large urban districts, among teachers who were ranked in the top 20 percent of effectiveness in the first year, fewer than one-third were in the top group the next year. The study found that teacher effectiveness ratings in one year could only predict from 4 percent to 16 percent of the teachers’ rating for the following year. Therefore, a teacher who appeared very effective in one year could have dramatically different results the following year. The study argues that much of the variation comes from differences in the characteristics of students assigned to that teacher from year to year, other influences on student learning outside the classroom and tests that are poorly aligned with the curriculum the teachers are teaching.⁵⁶

The implementation of the new systems face other challenges as well. While the GaDOE has provided

resources for local districts, the development and implementation of the SLOs presents a large challenge. The GaDOE has provided test banks, resource libraries and administration guidance to districts. But, considering the number of teachers and courses covered by SLOs, developing and implementing valid and reliable measures with realistic – yet rigorous – growth projections across all those domains is daunting. This is especially important considering that personnel decisions will be based on the implementation of these measures.

The overall capacity of Georgia to implement the new systems is also a challenge. The GaDOE has requested a no-cost extension of the Race to the Top grant, which would allow for additional personnel to train and support school districts. To ensure fidelity of training and implementation, the GaDOE has increased the number of statewide trainers and has established collaborative partnerships with the Regional Education Service Agencies (RESA).

The development and implementation of these new systems has been supported by Georgia’s Race to the Top funds. Even with the no-cost extension, those funds will expire by September 2015. In response, the state is working on developing a sustainability plan to continue to support the implementation moving forward.

Georgia is leading the way in this relatively new policy area of teacher and leader evaluation/ effectiveness systems. The ability to differentiate between levels of effectiveness is a good thing, and Georgia should continue to move in that direction. At the same time, the state must remain flexible enough to take advantage of what it continues to learn about how best to assess teacher performance. Currently, using multiple measures to assess performance is the gold standard, which is reflected in the design of Georgia’s systems. However, questions still remain over the proper balance of observation, teacher portfolios and student growth models. Finally, while these systems can be used to weed out ineffective teachers, it should be remembered that the primary purpose of these policies is to improve the practice of every teacher in every classroom so that all students have the opportunity to reach their highest potential.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Barker, E. L., Barton, P. E., Darling-Hammond, L., Haertel, E., Ladd, H. F., Linn, R. L. et al. *Problems with the Use of Student Test Scores to Evaluate Teachers* [EPI briefing paper]. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute. 2010.

56 Ibid.



ISSUE 5: School Climate – It matters, a lot

ISSUE OVERVIEW

Do your children like to go to school? Are they eager to see their friends each day? Do they want to tell their teachers about how a weekend camping trip reminded them of a science lesson? In short, are your children engaged learners who view being in school as a positive experience? The answers to these questions depend largely on what researchers and education professionals term “school climate.”

According to the National School Climate Council, school climate is

based on patterns of people’s experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures.⁵⁷

School climate is how students, school personnel and parents experience school life. In recent decades, research has shown that a positive and sustained school climate is predictive of positive child and youth social and emotional development, risk prevention and health promotion, student learning and academic achievement, increased graduation rates, and good teacher retention rates.⁵⁸ Children in schools with positive school climates have lower absenteeism, are more engaged and show a greater motivation for learning. In short, in terms of overall student achievement, school climate matters. It matters a lot.

The research on school climate is so compelling that school reform efforts now recognize school climate as a leading indicator of student achievement. Efforts across the nation are under way to better understand these factors and to determine how to measure them and how to improve upon them. When issues are addressed that affect school climate such as discipline policies, mental health concerns, juvenile justice reforms and bullying prevention and intervention, educators are seeing a dramatic impact on student engagement and, consequently, student performance.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA?

There are four essential areas that impact school climate:

- 1. Safety** – both physical and emotional safety
- 2. Relationships** – respect for diversity, school engagement and social supports for adult and student learning
- 3. Teaching and learning** – support for learning and professional relationships
- 4. Institutional environment** – the physical surroundings⁵⁹

Each of these areas is interconnected, and they build upon each other. The most basic aspect of climate, of course, is safety. Students in schools where they do not feel physically or emotionally safe are more likely to experience violence, punitive disciplinary actions, absenteeism and reduced academic achievement. Schools that are unsafe usually have fewer opportunities for

positive student-to-student and student-to-teacher relationships built on trust and respect. Teachers are unable to focus on teaching and learning because more of their time is spent on classroom management, and the institutional environment becomes more akin to a prison than an inviting environment for learning and exploration. Schools that do not have a positive culture have increased discipline problems, out-of-school suspensions and absenteeism of both students and teachers.

The Georgia Appleseed Center for Law and Justice reviewed and assessed seven years of student discipline data collected by districts and compiled by the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE). The resulting study reported that roughly 8 percent of students were suspended at least once, which accounted for more than 1.8 million days of lost instructional time.⁶⁰ The authors noted that the use of out-of-school suspension (OSS) varied widely across districts. Some almost never used

57 Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Guffey, S., & Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. *A Review of School Climate Research*. August 1, 2013. Retrieved from Review of Educational Research, American Educational Research Association: <http://rer.sagepub.com>.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

60 Georgia Appleseed Center for Law and Justice. *Effective Student Discipline: Keeping Kids in Class*. 2011. Retrieved from <http://gaappleseed.org/keepingkidsinclass>



OSS, but others imposed OSS on more than 20 percent of their students per year. Some individual schools used OSS on up to 40 percent of their student populations annually.⁶¹

Impact of School Climate in Georgia

To understand the elements of school climate and its impact on student outcomes, the GaDOE commissioned a study with the Center for School Safety, School Climate and Classroom Management at Georgia State University.⁶² The study found that neither teacher nor student demographics significantly impacted school climate. For example, schools with large portions of poor children and/or inner-city schools were no more or less likely to have a positive school climate than affluent schools in the suburbs based on those characteristics alone.

The study did find that school climate was primarily determined by the personal interactions of the teachers and leaders in the school – meaning that impacting the climate of a school was within the control of that school. Outside factors (i.e., location or student demographics) did not have a significant bearing on the climate inside the school building.

The study also found dramatic impacts on student outcomes, and the researchers determined climate to be a leading indicator of achievement. Positive school climate had a significant impact on academic outcomes, showing positive gains across all subjects. The effect was especially pronounced in mathematics, affecting the percentage of students scoring proficient on the Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) or End of Course Tests (EOCT) in mathematics.⁶³

Climate also showed a significant impact on student behavioral outcomes. A 1 percent increase in school climate was estimated to decrease discipline actions per pupil by 1.35 percent and decreased suspension days per pupil. Moreover, a 1 percent increase in school climate increased average daily attendance by 1.6 percent.

The impact of daily attendance cannot be underestimated. The connection between attendance and academic achievement is astounding. As shown in Table 5.1, the likelihood of not graduating from high school increases exponentially as a student misses more days of school. A 9th grader who misses 15 days or more of school is more than 50 percentage points less likely to graduate than a student who only misses five days or less.

TABLE 5.1: Georgia 9th Grade Students' Absences and Four-Year Graduation Rate⁶⁴

| Days Absent | Graduation Rate |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| 0 days | 80.52% |
| 1 to 5 days | 82.24% |
| 6 to 10 days | 72.68% |
| 11 to 14 days | 61.27% |
| 15 or more days | 30.73% |

Attendance also affects the total number of crimes per youth within a county. A 1 percent decrease in the number of school days attended predicts a 1.25 percent increase in the total number of juvenile-based crimes. Conversely, a 5 percent increase in student attendance leads to a similar reduction in juvenile crime.

Measure of School Climate

Given the importance of school climate on student outcomes, the GaDOE has developed the School Climate Rating as part of the new College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). The CCRPI is Georgia's new accountability system that measures the extent to which a school, district and the state are successfully making progress on a specific list of accountability and performance measures.

The School Climate Rating, which will reflect the school's environment and behavioral indicators, will be reported as a star rating from 1 to 5. The rating will include measures from surveys of students and teachers about how they experience the school. (See Table 5.2 for sample questions.) The rating will also take into account student discipline data, safe and substance free learning environment data, and both student and staff attendance rates. (See Table 5.3 for details.)

TABLE 5.2: Sample Questions Assessing School Climate on Student Climate Survey

- My school has high standards for achievement.
- I feel successful at school.
- My school sets clear rules for behavior.
- Teachers treat me with respect.
- The behaviors in the classroom allow the teacher to teach so I can learn.
- Students are frequently recognized for their good behavior.
- School is a place where I feel safe.
- I get along with other students and adults.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Kramer, D. *Impact of School Climate on Academic and Behavioral Outcomes*. Atlanta: Georgia Department of Education, 2013.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.



TABLE 5.3: Other Star Rating Components

| | |
|---|---|
| Weighted Suspension Rate | <p>Maximum value for each student</p> <p>Any in-school suspension = .5 points</p> <p>1-2 out-of-school suspensions= 1 point</p> <p>3-4 out-of-school suspensions = 3 points</p> <p>5 or more out-of-school suspensions = 5 points</p> <p>Alternative school assignment = 6 points</p> <p>Expulsion = 7 points</p> <p>Scores will total 0–100</p> |
| Safe and Substance Free Learning Environment | <p>Indicators</p> <p>% of discipline incidents not violent or dangerous in nature (data)</p> <p>% of students not abusing drugs or illegal substances (survey)</p> <p>% of incidents drug or alcohol related (data)</p> <p>% of students not experiencing harassment or bullying (survey)</p> <p>% of incidents not related to bullying or harassment (data)</p> <p>Scores will total 0–100</p> |
| School Attendance | <p>Average daily attendance rate of students</p> <p>Average daily attendance rate of teachers</p> <p>Average daily attendance rate of administrators</p> <p>Average daily attendance rate of staff</p> |

Taken together, the four components – surveys, suspension rates, safe and substance free learning environment rating, and attendance rating – will result in a 1 to 5 star rating on the CCRPI. However, this is an independent rating and is not factored into the overall CCRPI score. (See Figure 5.1.)

Implementation of the new accountability system, along with its focus on school climate, represents a change in

the state’s philosophy on progress monitoring and how to support schools. The CCRPI signals to schools and districts the importance of school climate and its impact on students as a leading indicator of achievement. It also provides feedback to schools on their strengths, where they need to provide focused professional development, and what aspects of their schools may be hindering student achievement.

FIGURE 5.1: CCRPI

College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI)
CCRPI Scoring Sheet: High School

District: Central School District
 School: George Washington High School

Overall CCRPI Score

83.4

| Achievement Score | Progress Score | Achievement Gap Closure Score | Exceeding the Bar Score | Financial Efficiency Rating | School Climate Rating |
|-------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 57.5 | 11.8 | 10.1 | 4 | ★★★★☆☆ | ★★★★☆☆ |



ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

The research conducted by the GaDOE and Georgia State University on school climate is important across several dimensions. First, it highlights that school demographics and neighborhood location are NOT the primary determining factors of the culture within the school. The state’s changing demographics – primarily the increase in low-income students – cannot and should not be understood as an impediment to maintaining a positive school climate that is outside the school’s control. Second, the study identifies factors within the school and district’s control that can improve school culture – primarily related to the motivation and personal actions of teachers and school leaders.

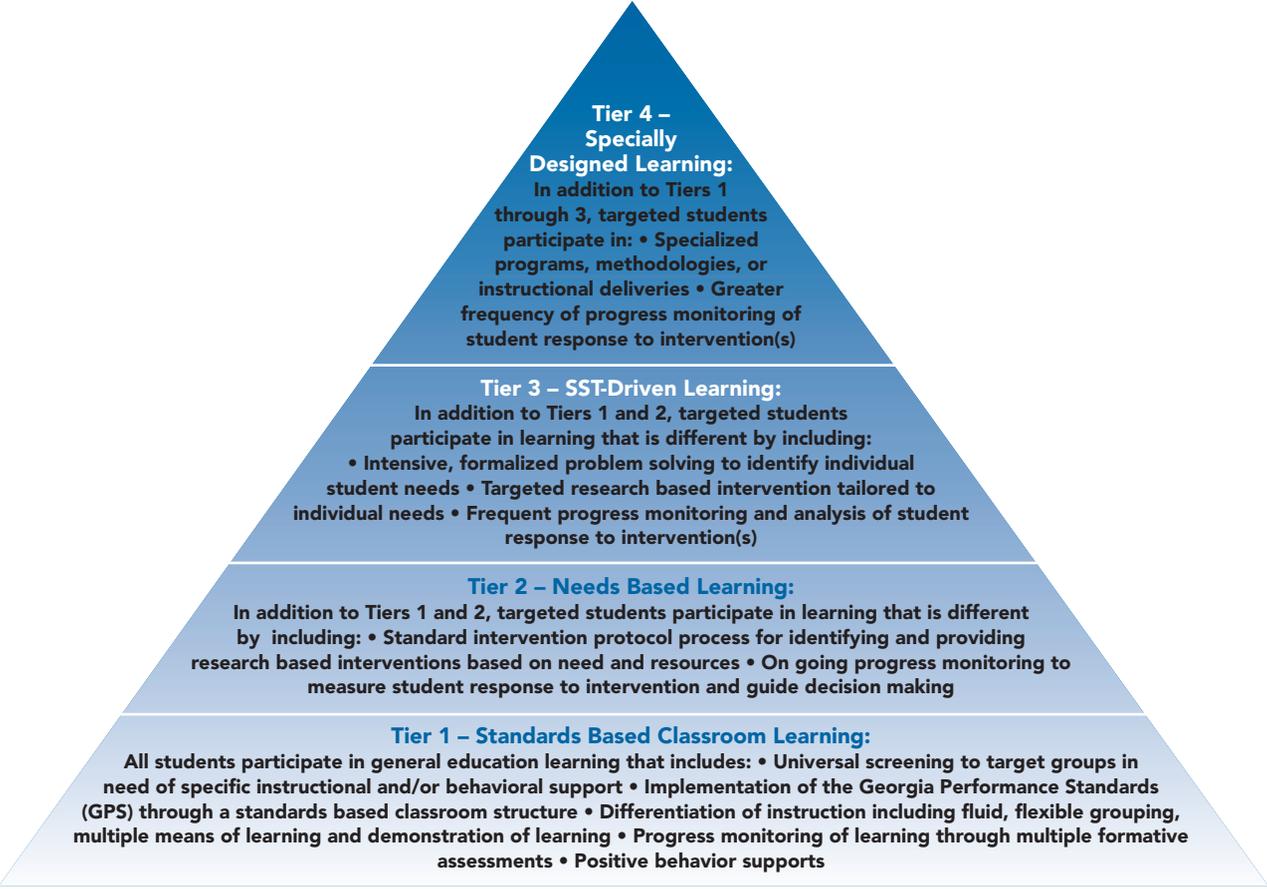
One key issue for Georgia is how to translate this policy focus – school climate and culture – into effective practice that leads to improved student outcomes. To accomplish this, Georgia has adopted the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework

to proactively address school-wide climate, safety and discipline. This framework aims to prevent inappropriate behavior through teaching and reinforcing appropriate behaviors. PBIS is not a single curriculum, intervention, program or practice. Instead, it is a process that offers a range of interventions (based on a four-tiered intervention model) that are systematically applied to students based on their demonstrated level of need.⁶⁵ (See Figure 5.2 and Table 5.4.)

To implement PBIS statewide, the GaDOE PBIS team formed a State Leadership Team and developed a strategic plan for PBIS implementation across the state. The mission of the team is to:

Provide leadership and support, in collaboration with other state entities, to Georgia’s local education agencies (LEA) in developing and maintaining outcome based positive and preventative discipline systems through the implementation of PBIS.⁶⁸

FIGURE 5.2: Georgia Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions: Academic and Behavioral Supports⁶⁶



⁶⁵ Georgia Department of Education. Addressing Climate, Safety and Discipline in Georgia Schools. Atlanta: Author. 2013.
⁶⁶ Ibid.



Table 5.4: Levels of PBIS School-Wide Interventions⁶⁷

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Tier 1 | All students, in all settings, are provided with standards-based instruction, universal screening, progress monitoring and direct behavioral instruction to prevent the development of academic and/or behavior problems. Tier I support should meet the needs of at least 80% of students in a given school. |
| Tier 2 | Systems of support are designed to provide additional interventions for students who have access to Tier 1 supports but are not responding to them. Approximately 10–15% of the students within a given school may need Tier 2 supports. |
| Tier 3 | The most intensive/individualized support system is provided for students who exhibit patterns of severe or extreme problem behavior. The student’s needs are discussed at a structured meeting of the Student Support Team (SST), which oversees the intervention process. Almost 5% of students within a school will require this type of support. |
| Tier 4 | If a student does not respond to intensive/individualized support, the SST makes a referral for consideration of placement of the student in an appropriate Tier 4 program (i.e., Special Education, English to Speakers of Other Languages [ESOL], Gifted, or other program). |

The vision of this team is to have at least 50 percent of school districts implementing PBIS within five years. The statewide roll-out plan includes five goals:⁶⁹

1. Increase awareness and visibility of PBIS,
2. Develop a state infrastructure to lead and support implementation,
3. Increase training and coaching capacity at all tiers on the PBIS continuum,
4. Identify sustainable funding sources for state and local implementation, and
5. Develop a comprehensive evaluation system.

The success of this model includes the participation of a number of stakeholder groups across the state. Individuals on the State Leadership Team represent not only the GaDOE, but the State Board of Education, the Department of Early Care and Learning, the governor’s office, colleges and universities, state child-serving agencies such as the Department of Juvenile Justice and the Department of Behavioral Health, parents, professional educator associations, advocacy organizations and foundations.⁷⁰ Implementation requires district-level planning, school team training and technical assistance. To build capacity and to support the PBIS process, ongoing coaching and evaluation of data for district coordinators will be needed. Representatives from all these interest groups must ensure sustained implementation on a broad scale.

The state plan is already off to a good start. Since 2008, the GaDOE PBIS team has trained more than 350 Georgia schools and programs, and the plan is showing positive results. For example, Lee County has implemented PBIS in all district schools. As a result of district-wide implementation, the county has seen positive outcomes:

- A 35 percent reduction in average office discipline referrals (ODRs) per day system-wide,
- A 24 percent reduction in out-of-school suspension days system-wide, and
- A 58 percent reduction in total discipline incidents that resulted in ODRs system-wide.⁷¹

Lee County is just one example of the results districts and schools are seeing. As Georgia moves to turn around its lowest performing schools and improve the educational attainment of all of its students, investment strategies that improve a school’s climate – such as PBIS – are important tools for success. For Georgia’s other reform strategies aimed at improving education to take hold and succeed, students must be engaged and excited about going to school. School climate is the foundation of a successful school and positive educational outcomes for all of our students.

⁶⁷ Ibid.
⁶⁸ Georgia Department of Education. *Implementation & Supports (PBIS): A State Implementation Plan for Georgia Schools – Draft*. Atlanta: Author. 2013.
⁶⁹ Ibid.
⁷⁰ Ibid.
⁷¹ Georgia Department of Education. *Addressing Climate, Safety and Discipline in Georgia Schools*. Atlanta: Author. 2013.

ISSUE 6: Early Learning – Closing the achievement gap

ISSUE OVERVIEW

For the first time in America's history, racial and ethnic minorities now make up almost half of children under the age of five (49.9 percent). Based on current growth rates, non-white children will comprise more than half the under-five population within a year. Fueled by immigration and high rates of birth, particularly among Hispanics, racial and ethnic minorities are now growing more rapidly in numbers than whites. The U.S. Census also projects that in five years minorities will make up more than half of all children under the age of 18.⁷²

The under-five population is not only becoming more diverse, it is becoming increasingly poor. From 2000 to 2010, the overall child poverty rate rose from 20 percent to 22 percent. Among children under the age of five, however, 26 percent were living below the poverty line by 2010.⁷³ And minority children are significantly more likely to fall into this category. While only 13 percent of white children live below the poverty line, 39 percent of African American children and 34 percent of Hispanic children live below the poverty line.⁷⁴

This growth in the number of poor minority children has serious implications, not only for the children themselves, but for the educational system and the country. A decade ago, a landmark study found that by age three, children from wealthy families heard 30 million more words than their peers from low-income families.⁷⁵ Other studies have found that children of lower income can be as much as two years behind on language development when they enter kindergarten.⁷⁶ Recent research has found the gap begins even earlier: by 18 months of age, toddlers from disadvantaged families are already several months behind more advantaged children in language proficiency.⁷⁷

Research has also shown that quality early learning programs can help close these achievement gaps. President Obama has laid out a comprehensive early learning agenda for investing in and strengthening early childhood education. His Preschool for All initiative aims to improve quality and expand access to preschool for low- and moderate-income 4-year olds.⁷⁸ Moreover, Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA), Congressman Georgia Miller (D-CA) and Congressman Richard Hanna (R-NY) just introduced the Strong Start for America's Children Act, which would expand access to high-quality early learning programs for children under five.

Now more than ever, the American public is embracing the importance of high-quality early learning. Georgia has been a national leader in early learning through the Georgia Pre-K program. As the nation turns its attention to this important issue, Georgia is poised to lead again in the effort to close the achievement gap.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA?

Low-income children and children of color are much less likely to reach cognitive developmental milestones. Research has shown that if children are not reading on grade level and meeting their developmental milestones by the end of third grade, they are significantly less likely to graduate from high school. That is a problem for a state like Georgia where approximately 55 percent of

children under age eight live below 200 percent of the poverty line. According to a report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, by the third grade, black children in Georgia are five times less likely to meet state standards in reading, and Hispanic children are four times less likely to meet state reading standards, compared to white children. The cognitive gaps for low-income children and minority children are even larger when measured against national test standards.⁷⁹

72 Yen, H. "Whites Becoming the Minority among U.S. Population Under Five." June 13, 2013. Retrieved from TPM News: <http://talkingpointsmemo.com/news/whites-becoming-the-minority-among-u-s-population-under-five>

73 National Center for Children in Poverty. "Percentage of Children in Low-Income and Poor Families by Age." 2011. Retrieved from Basic Facts about Low-Income Children Under 18: <http://www.nccp.org/publications/images/BF01811-fig5.png>

74 National Center for Children in Poverty. "Percentage of Children in Low-Income and Poor Families by Race/ Ethnicity." 2011. Retrieved from Basic Facts about Low-Income Children Under 18: <http://www.nccp.org/publications/images/BF01811-fig7.png>

75 Hart, B., & Risley, T. R. "The Early Catastrophe: The 30 Million Word Gap by Age 3." *American Educator*. Spring 2003.

76 Carey, B. "Language Gap between Rich and Poor Children Begins in Infancy." *Stanford Report*. September 25, 2013.

77 Ibid.

78 The White House. *Education – Knowledge and Skills for the Jobs of the Future*. 2013. Retrieved from The White House, President Barack Obama: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/early-childhood>

79 The Annie E. Casey Foundation. *The First Eight Years: Giving Kids a Foundation for a Lifetime of Success*. Baltimore: Author. 2013.



Georgia, however, has already stepped up its investment in quality early learning to help prepare students for a successful transition into kindergarten – the first step to reading on grade level by third grade.

Since the inception of the Georgia Pre-K program as a pilot program for “at-risk” children in 1992, Georgia has led the nation in providing quality early learning for 4-year olds. It became the nation’s first universal preschool program for this age group in 1995, extending access to all children regardless of income. In the 2009-2010 program year, Georgia celebrated its one-millionth child participating in the Pre-K program.

Approximately 60 percent of Georgia’s 4-year olds are enrolled in the Georgia Pre-K program. That puts the state sixth in the nation for enrollment.⁸⁰ Of those enrolled, approximately 55 percent⁸¹ are considered low-income, the population that benefits the most from high-quality early learning programs.

In 2011, Georgia Bright from the Start: Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), the government agency that administers the Pre-K program, commissioned an independent evaluation of the program. The evaluation assessed enrolled children across multiple domains including language, literacy, math, general knowledge and behavioral skills.⁸²

The first year findings of the study are overwhelming positive. The children enrolled in Pre-K showed gains across all domains, and those gains were made at a higher rate than would be expected for normal developmental growth. Moreover, children who were Spanish-speaking dual language learners showed growth in both English and Spanish, although their growth was greater in English. Finally, students with different characteristics (i.e., gender, income, etc.) generally showed similar gains.⁸³

Georgia is not only focusing on the quality of its Pre-K program but on other early learning programs that serve children ages 0–3. One key initiative is Quality Rated, a tiered quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). A QRIS provides incentives and resources for early childhood programs to improve quality while working through several manageable steps, or levels. At the same time, the centers receive public recognition for their achieved quality efforts.

Quality Rated was launched in Georgia in January 2012. It uses one, two and three stars to indicate programs that meet defined program standards beyond Georgia’s minimum licensing requirements. The program is voluntary for all childcare centers. Participating programs become eligible for free professional development, technical assistance and financial incentive packages supported by foundations and businesses.⁸⁴

Georgia continues to invest in high-quality early options for its youngest learners. DECAL was recently awarded a Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant (RTT-ELC), which was a state-level competitive grant targeted at early learning and development. According to the grant request for proposals (RFP), states must address the following five key areas of reform in their applications:⁸⁵

- **Establishing Successful State Systems** by building on the state’s existing strengths, moving forward the state’s early learning and development agenda and carefully coordinating programs across agencies to ensure consistency and sustainability beyond the grant;
- **Defining High-Quality, Accountable Programs** by creating a common tiered quality rating and improvement system that is used across the state to evaluate and improve program performance and to inform families about program quality;
- **Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children** to develop common standards within the state and assessments that measure child outcomes, address behavioral and health needs, as well as inform, engage and support families;
- **Supporting a Great Early Childhood Education Workforce** by providing professional development, career advancement opportunities, appropriate compensation and a common set of standards for workforce knowledge and competencies; and
- **Measuring Outcomes and Progress** so that data can be used to inform early learning instruction and services and to assess whether children are entering kindergarten ready to succeed in elementary school.

While 16 states applied for the grant, only six were selected. Georgia will receive \$51 million over four years. The grant will be used to expand access to high-quality child care for low-income families, increase

80 National Institute for Early Education Research. “The State of the Preschool, 2012.” *The State Preschool Yearbook*. New Brunswick: Author. 2012.

81 Data provided by the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning.

82 Peisner-Feinberg, E., Schaaf, J., & LaForett, D. *Children’s Growth and Classroom Experiences in Georgia’s Pre-K Program, Executive Summary*. Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina. 2013.

83 Ibid.

84 Bright From the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. “Georgia’s New ‘Quality Rated’ Program Marks Another Milestone” [Press release]. October 2012.

85 U.S. Department of Education. “16 States and DC Submit Applications for Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge” [Press release]. October 18, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/16-states-and-dc-submit-applications-race-to-top-early-learning-challenge>

training for early childhood teachers and expand resources in areas of the state where test scores and other indicators show the greatest need. Another priority is expected to be a kindergarten entry assessment that will enable educators to more quickly size-up the development levels of entering students.

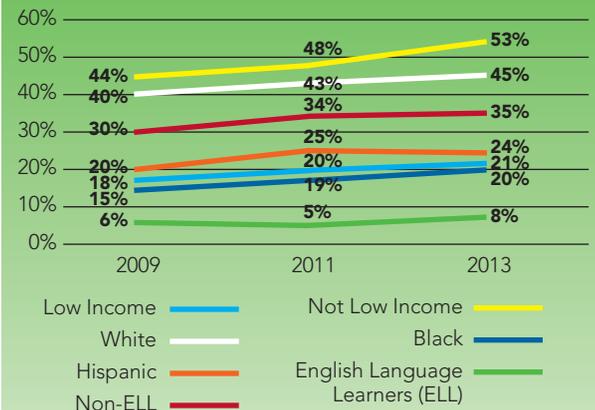
Beginning in 2006, DECAL implemented the Georgia Pre-K Child Assessment Program, based on the Work Sampling System.⁸⁶ The system is used to document students' progress, individualize instruction and provide parents with two progress reports during the year. These assessments help facilitate coordination between Pre-K teachers and kindergarten teachers.⁸⁷ However, because approximately 40 percent of 4-year olds are not enrolled in the Pre-K program, many kindergarten teachers receive new students each fall without any information about their kindergarten readiness. A kindergarten readiness assessment is needed to allow kindergarten teachers to quickly assess incoming students and begin individualized instruction as soon as possible. Now that Georgia has received the RTT-ELC, it can begin developing a kindergarten readiness assessment to address these issues.

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

Like all other states, Georgia has an achievement gap among students from different economic and race/ethnicity backgrounds. On the 2013 fourth-grade National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) – often called the nation's "report card" – in Georgia only 21 percent of low-income fourth-graders were reading at proficient levels, compared to over half (53 percent) of their more affluent peers.⁸⁸ While the percentage of students testing proficient has increased over the years, less than one-quarter of students of color were reading at a proficient level in the fourth grade in 2013 compared to 45 percent of white students (see Figure 6.1).⁸⁹

As our population shifts toward becoming a minority-majority state – and the K-12 system already is there – the education system must adjust to the needs of our changing demographics. The fastest growing segments of the school-aged population in Georgia are low-income children and children of color. Concerted efforts must be made to reduce the overall achievement gaps for these populations. Starting at the beginning of the educational pipeline, high-quality early learning has never been more important.

FIGURE 6.1: Percentage of Students Testing Proficient on the NAEP, by Economic Status and Race/Ethnicity.⁹⁰



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

In addition, schools must be able to respond to the increasing diversity of their students, especially the rise in non-English speakers. This means an increase in bilingual teachers of English language learners (ELL) and professional development for all teachers and school leaders around the differing needs of a varied population. In 2009, Georgia started the bilingual preschool program, which offers several dual language programs throughout the state.⁹¹

Georgia has already demonstrated its commitment to early learning by prioritizing programs proven to benefit children. The state has also embarked on a statewide campaign to improve grade-level reading by the third grade, ensuring all students 'learn to read, so they can 'read to learn.' Historically, Georgia has been viewed as a leader in early learning based on the strength of the Georgia Pre-K program. Now, as the national focus turns to early learning, Georgia must continue in this role by leading the way in investing in and promoting early learning from birth through kindergarten readiness and beyond.

⁸⁶ National Institute for Early Education Research. "The State of the Preschool, 2012." *The State Preschool Yearbook*. New Brunswick: Author. 2012.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ National Center for Educational Statistics. "NAEP Data Explorer." 2013. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/dataset.aspx>.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ National Institute for Early Education Research. "The State of the Preschool, 2012." *The State Preschool Yearbook*. New Brunswick: Author. 2012.



ISSUE 7: Work Ready Students – The goal

ISSUE OVERVIEW

Nearly five years after the worst recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s, about 11 million Americans are still unemployed. In October 2013, nearly 37 percent (4.1 million) of those unemployed had been out of work for at least six months.⁹² Economist Prakash Loungani of the International Monetary Fund has estimated that 23 percent of the unemployed are out of work due to skill-job mismatches.⁹³

To examine this need, in the spring of 2012, the Institute for a Competitive Workforce brought together top business leaders from across the nation. They all agreed that as a nation, there is a significant gap between the skills that employers need and what is being supplied in the workforce. This need is particularly pronounced in the areas of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) – including high-tech manufacturing and information technology – and trade workers. There is also an acute shortage of welders, machinists, maintenance workers and qualified professionals in the allied healthcare fields.⁹⁴ Employers are not only seeing gaps in hard skills – the appropriate education and technical skills to qualify for an open position – but in soft skills as well. Employers argue that many individuals lack necessary abilities related to creative thinking, presentation, planning, collaboration, and communication.⁹⁵

This trend is evident in Georgia as well. In 2012, the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, in conjunction with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia, conducted a survey of employers, economic developers and others about the State of Georgia's workforce. The results echoed the national conversation: respondents reported a shortage of technically skilled workers and a nearly uniform observation that today's high school graduates are lacking in soft skills. Issues such as workplace honesty and accountability, time management and effective communication and writing skills were listed at the top of required general employability skills.⁹⁶ To support its growing economy, Georgia must be able to match the skills needed by its industries to the skills of the workforce it is producing.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA?

On the supply side of workforce development, Georgia struggles to produce enough high school graduates who are college and career ready. The state's overall high school graduation rate – while having improved significantly in recent years – is still too low, averaging 71.5 percent in 2013. Research has shown that successful high schools employ the three R's: rigor, relevance and relationships. While their strategies may vary, the most successful schools address all of these areas.⁹⁷

In terms of rigor, research shows that curriculum rigor is one of the top indicators of whether students will graduate from high school and earn a college degree. The U.S. Department of Education found that the level

of course rigor could overcome some barriers to success such as low parental education levels or poverty in predicting whether a student will earn a post secondary degree.⁹⁸

Research also shows that relevant learning opportunities that are linked with a student's vision of the future impacts graduation rates. These learning opportunities connect subject areas with personal experiences and interests as well as career opportunities and adult work.⁹⁹ Finally, this body of research shows that students perform better and remain engaged with their studies when they are in schools where they have a meaningful relationship with their teachers. These adults can help them meet high standards and make college and career decisions as well as keeping them engaged in the learning process.¹⁰⁰

92 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. "The Employment Situation." 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm>

93 Hess, F. *Overhaul Career and Technical Education*. July 18, 2011. Retrieved from McKinsey & Company: What Matters: http://whatmatters.mckinseydigital.com/job_creation/overhaul-career-and-technical-education

94 The Institute for a Competitive Workforce. "Help Wanted: Key Themes from Regional Roundtables." In *Help Wanted 2012: Addressing the Skills Gap*. Washington, DC: U.S. Chamber of Commerce. 2012.

95 Ibid.

96 Georgia Chamber of Commerce. *Business Management and Administration: CTAE Survey Summary*. Athens: Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia. 2012.

97 Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. *85/10 Commonalities Report: Successful High School*. Atlanta: Author. 2010.

98 National Conference on State Legislators. *Improving High School through Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships*. 2013. Retrieved from National Conference on State Legislators: www.ncls.org/research/education

99 Ibid.



Georgia has chosen to combine all three R's into the career pathway initiative. Georgia's career clusters allow students to choose an area of interest in high school from 17 different career clusters, ranging from banking to manufacturing to transportation (Figure 7.1). There are also three additional pathways available in world languages, fine arts and advanced academics. The aim of the program is to show students the relevance of what they are learning in the classroom, whether they want to attend a two-year college, a four-year university or go straight into the world of work.

FIGURE 7.1: Georgia's Career Clusters

- Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources
- Law, Public Safety, Corrections & Security
- Human Services
- Finance
- Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)
- Marketing
- Business Management & Administration
- Hospitality & Tourism
- Arts, Audio Video Technology and Communications
- Energy
- Education & Training
- Manufacturing
- Transportation, Distribution & Logistics
- Architecture & Construction
- Information Technology
- Government & Public Administration
- Advanced Academics, Fine Arts and World Languages Pathways

While still in elementary school, students are exposed to career awareness activities that allow them to explore the wide variety of occupations that are available to them. During this time, they begin to understand how their own interests might align to a future job. In middle school, students participate in career exploration. This provides a deeper dive into helping students align their own interests with real-world employment through activities such as career interest inventories. Upon entering high school, students select a career cluster and pathway that interests them the most. They are never locked into any particular pathway and are free to switch pathways as they move through high school.

By participating in the career pathways, students are challenged with relevant course work that applies to their daily life and interests. They also develop relationships with teachers and staff who are excited about their

chosen fields of study. All pathway course content is rigorous. Regardless of the chosen cluster or pathway, all students must fulfill the basic graduation requirements based on the state's college and career ready performance standards, including four years of high school-level mathematics. The specific course content of the clusters was developed to high standards in consultation with business and industry across the state.

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) partnered with the Georgia Chamber of Commerce and surveyed thousands of industry members, local chambers of commerce and Georgia employers on the most critical skills needed within their industries. These results were vetted by curriculum experts within each of the career clusters, who provided input into the development of the curricula. Also, embedded throughout all cluster courses is an emphasis on soft skills.

The career clusters not only help keep students engaged in high school, they also support the economic development of local communities. In 2012, Governor Nathan Deal signed House Bill 186, which required all districts to offer career clusters to their students. Local districts are able to select which clusters they want to offer based on their economic development needs and student interests. By taking classes related to a career while still in high school, students graduate on a pathway to post secondary education in a career of their choice. Meanwhile, communities are growing their own work forces, which will help them attract more local business investment and economic development.

As part of the career pathway initiative, the GaDOE has partnered with several businesses to allow students, while still in high school, to gain real-world work experiences through internships and job training programs. Part of this effort is the Georgia Global Workforce Initiative, which is a partnership between the state, the nonprofit Georgia Foundation for Public Education and international businesses with a presence in Georgia.

The first pilot program of this initiative is with Siemens, an electronics and engineering company that has more than 370,000 employees in 190 countries. Siemens has many offices and facilities in the Metro-Atlanta area and Savannah. A pilot project is currently being implemented between Siemens and South Forsyth High School: students enrolled in the manufacturing pathway are instructed by teachers trained at Siemens' Drive Technologies Division plant in Alpharetta using materials donated by the company worth more than \$500,000.

The course curriculum was developed in consultation with supervisors from Siemens, and instructors spent two weeks at the plant becoming familiar with the manufacturing components used. During the school year,

industry experts will spend time in the classroom, and students will go on tours of the plant. After completing the basic introductory courses, students will be able to sign up for summer internships. The goal is to eventually turn the interns into full-time hires after graduation. This pilot program also contains a foreign-language component. Since Siemens is a German company, students will learn the German language and study German culture. The GaDOE and the Foundation hope to expand this initiative across the state and bring other international companies with operations in Georgia into the program.

Another cooperative program showing excellent results is 12 for Life, which is a cooperative program supported by the Southwire Company. Southwire is a leading manufacturer of wire and cable used in the distribution of electricity. The 12 for Life program is a partnership with Carroll County Schools that provides students with classroom instruction, on-the-job training, key work/life skills, mentoring and employment opportunities.¹⁰¹

Participants in the program go to school for a portion of the day and then go to Southwire for the rest of the day working in four-hour shifts. While at Southwire, students learn job skills as well as life skills through supporting strategies such as exam preparation, graduation coaching, interview skills and so forth. During their four-hour shifts, students are paid above minimum wage. They can receive pay increases by demonstrating work-ready skills such as timeliness, reliability and accuracy.¹⁰²

The program targets students who are at high risk for dropping out of high school, and it has already shown positive results. Since its inception in 2007, more than 635 students have received their high school diploma, far above the original target of 175.¹⁰³

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

Fifty years ago, a large portion of jobs were classified as unskilled and attainable by people with a high school diploma or less. Today, only one fifth of jobs are considered unskilled. While the demand for higher skilled workers has increased, our schools have not kept pace with the demand.¹⁰⁴ Educational systems, both the K-12 pipeline and higher education, are not producing the skilled workers that employers need. The result is that while the unemployment rate is still relatively high, employers cannot find the skilled workers they need.

This becomes especially important in light of the changing demographics of Georgia's population. Over the past decade, Georgia has experienced the same population shifts as the rest of the country. Since 2000, the state has added more than 1.6 million people, with the growth concentrated in non-white and low-income populations. (See Figure 7.2 for a breakout of these trends.)

FIGURE 7.2: Demographic Shifts in Georgia 2000–2010¹⁰⁵

| | 2000 | 2010 |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Total Population | 8,186,453 | 9,815,210 |
| % White | 65% | 63% |
| % Black | 29% | 31% |
| % Hispanic | 5% | 9% |
| % Asian | 2% | 3% |
| % Children in Poverty | 17% | 27% |

Changes in the student population of Georgia's public schools reflect the changing demographics across the state. An examination of the overall number of children enrolled in the K-12 system shows there has been a decrease in white students as a percentage of total students enrolled and a corresponding increase in the percentage of Hispanic students enrolled (3 percentage points for each). In total, white students comprise approximately 44 percent of the total student population enrolled in the K-12 system. The overall percentage of children eligible for free and reduced price lunch – a proxy measure for low-income – has been steadily rising and now averages close to 60 percent.

Georgia needs to focus on preparing students for the jobs of tomorrow. Technical and highly skilled workers are in demand, especially in the STEM fields. By 2018, the number of STEM jobs in Georgia will rise by 17 percent, an increase of 200,000 new jobs.¹⁰⁶ Minorities are traditionally underrepresented in these fields. Concerted efforts must be made to not only reduce the overall achievement gaps for minority and low-income students, but those students must also become more engaged in the technology and professional fields.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ 12 For Life. "Welcome to 12 for Life." 2013. Retrieved from www.12forlife.com

¹⁰² 12 For Life. "A Day in the Life of a Student." 2013. Retrieved from www.12forlife.com

¹⁰³ 12 For Life. "Our Results." 2013. Retrieved from www.12forlife.com

¹⁰⁴ Achieve. "How Well Is Georgia Preparing All Students for College, Careers, and Life?" 2012.

¹⁰⁵ U.S. Census Bureau. "State and County Quick Facts." 2000/2010. Retrieved from U.S. Census Bureau: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/>

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.



The Siemens pilot and Southwire partnership are only two examples of businesses partnering with local schools to grow their own workforces and help strengthen the education pipeline. Based on the career pathways model, these types of sector strategies are being implemented across the nation. Statistical evidence has shown these types of programs increase employment opportunities for workers and increase wages once a person is hired.¹⁰⁷ Properly defined, sector strategies are partnerships of employers within one industry that work with government, education, training, economic development, labor and community organizations to focus on the workforce needs of an industry within a regional labor market. These strategies can address current and emerging skill gaps and better align state programs and resources serving employers and workers.¹⁰⁸

Business and industry involvement in the development of the curricula for the career pathways goes a long way to establishing these sector strategies. The pathways offer rigorous content while providing relevancy for student learning and opportunities for meaningful relationships between students and instructional adults. Together, these three R's – rigor, relevance and relationships – can help improve the state's graduation rate while meeting the needs of our state employers. Throughout Georgia, there are pockets of excellence in implementing such partnerships. However, more needs to be done to replicate successful partnership models so that all students and all communities can take advantage of these opportunities.

107 Woolsey, L., & Simon, M. *State Sector Strategies Coming of Age: Implications for State Workforce Policy Makers*. Washington, DC: National Governors Association. 2013.

108 Ibid.



ISSUE 8: Barriers to Higher Education Completion – Clearing the hurdles

ISSUE OVERVIEW

In 2010, more than half of all Georgians worked in either sales and office support or blue-collar occupations; however, the projected growth by 2020 in these occupations remains below average.¹⁰⁹ As the state moves out of the recession, these jobs, especially the low-skilled blue-collar jobs, are not forecasted to rebound to pre-recession levels. In contrast, occupations that require some training beyond a high school diploma such as those in the healthcare industry, which make up only 6.5 percent of the current workforce, are expected to grow by nearly 30 percent during that same time period.

To compensate for the decline in low-skilled, blue-collar jobs, Georgia has invested in an economic development plan based on a diversified economy that includes trade and transportation, a growing high-tech sector and natural resources. Due partially to this combination, Georgia is predicted to add 1.5 million new jobs by 2020.¹¹⁰ Of those new jobs, nearly 60 percent will require an education beyond the high school level. The skill level of Georgia's workforce does not meet the growing needs of a successful economic development plan.

Many young students already recognize the need for postsecondary training. The college enrollment rate among recent high school graduates is 72 percent, which is higher than in many other states.¹¹¹ However, a significant proportion of these students will not finish the programs they begin at these institutions. In 2012, only 28.5 percent of students who enrolled in bachelor degree programs within the University System of Georgia (USG) graduated in four years,¹¹² and 59 percent graduated within six years.¹¹³ Around 30 percent of students who enroll in a two-year public college graduate with a degree within three years.¹¹⁴ Higher education access and completion is one of the most important economic development issues facing Georgia.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA?

Postsecondary education and training has become a necessity for all young Georgians. However, as previously stated, large percentages that enter postsecondary institutions do not complete their degrees. There are multiple reasons for low completion rates, but primary among them are financial hardships and students being ill-prepared for college-level work.

Since the recession of 2008, the cost, including tuition, of obtaining a postsecondary degree has increased during a time when state investment and the availability of financial aid have declined. Of great concern is that

Georgia's investment in higher education has not kept pace with the enrollment growth. Over the past decade, the USG has seen an 80 percent enrollment growth, but state per-student funding has declined by 57 percent.¹¹⁵ (See Figure 8.1.) Moreover, since 2008, state funding for the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) has dropped by more than 27 percent when adjusted for inflation.¹¹⁶

These decreases in state funding have resulted in an increase in student tuition and fees. For example, since 2008, tuition and fees at the University of Georgia have risen 70 percent, while tuition and fees at Columbus State University have increased a full 80 percent over the

109 Carnevale, A. P., & Smith, N. "A Decade Behind: Breaking Out of the Low-Skill Trap in the Southern Economy." Washington, DC: Georgetown University, Center on Education and the Workforce. 2012.

110 Ibid.

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

112 University System of Georgia. *Graduation Rate Report: Bachelor's Degree Four-Year Rates, Fall 2008 Cohort*. Academic Data Mart and Student Information Reporting System. Atlanta: Author. 2013.

113 University System of Georgia. *Graduation Rate Report: Bachelor's Degree Six-Year Rates, Fall 2006 Cohort*. Academic Data Mart and Student Information Reporting System, Atlanta: Author. 2013.

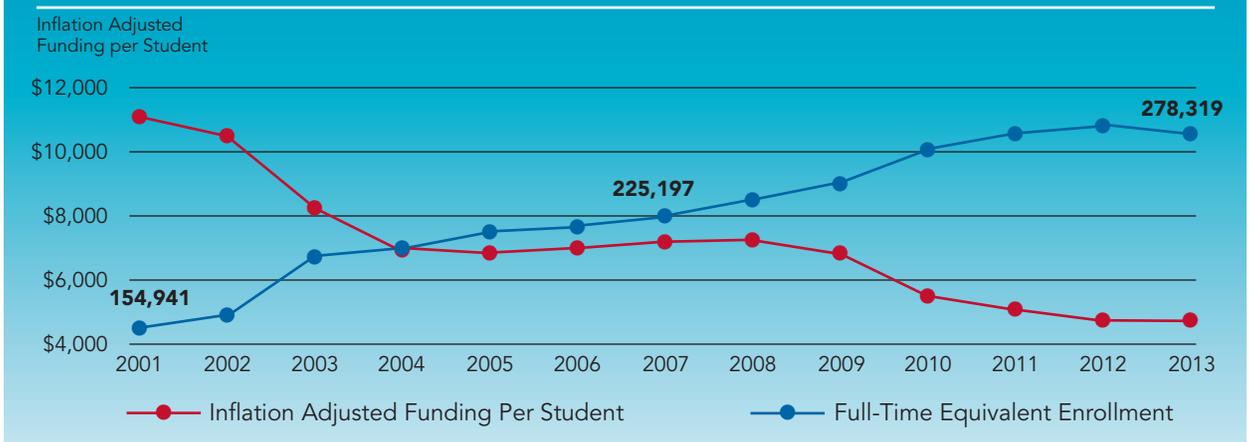
114 NCHEMS Information Center. *Graduation Rates: Three Year Rates for Associate Students*. 2013. Retrieved from NCHEMS Information Center – How is your state doing?: www.higheredinfo.org

115 Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. *Georgia Budget Primer, 2014*. Atlanta: Author. 2013.

116 Ibid.



FIGURE 8.1: University System Funding Per Student, 2001–2013¹¹⁷



past five years.¹¹⁸ Between 2011 and 2012, tuition and fees at TCSG schools have increased 7 percent, compared to the national average increase of only 3 percent.¹¹⁹

While student tuition and fees are increasing, access to financial aid is decreasing. Georgia’s primary financial aid mechanisms are the lottery-funded HOPE Scholarship and HOPE Grant, which have been reduced by more than 25 percent (nearly \$200 million) since fiscal year 2011 (Figure 8.2).

In 2011, state lawmakers significantly changed HOPE as costs outpaced revenues.

- Award amounts were reduced to cover only a portion of tuition. Currently, HOPE covers approximately 83 percent of tuition for USG students and 76 percent of TCSG student tuition.

- Funding for mandatory fees and books was eliminated.
- Starting in 2015, students will be required to take a minimum number of advanced placement courses in high school to earn a HOPE Scholarship.

The impact of these changes has been dramatic, especially within TCSG. Since those changes, more than 11,000 students have lost the HOPE Grant, more than half of whom did not return by the fall 2013 semester.¹²¹

TCSG saw enrollment rates rise by almost 30 percent between 2008 and 2010.¹²² However, the system has seen three straight years of declining enrollment since 2010, corresponding to a decline in the number of graduates. In 2013, TCSG graduated approximately 28,000 students, compared to more than 35,000 students in 2011.¹²³

FIGURE 8.2: HOPE Awards 2011 and 2014¹²⁰

| | 2011 | 2014 | Change \$ |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| HOPE Grant | \$220,407,829 | \$96,793,442 | \$(123,614,387) |
| HOPE Private School Scholarship | \$54,663,937 | \$47,617,925 | \$(7,046,012) |
| HOPE Public School Scholarship | \$493,461,474 | \$424,345,076 | \$(69,116,398) |
| Total | \$768,533,240 | \$568,756,443 | \$(199,776,797) |

Financial hardship is not the only reason students fail to complete a postsecondary degree. Many students are not prepared for the rigor of college-level work. In 2011, more than 37 percent of all students entering a two-year college required remediation.¹²⁴ Depending on the institution, that percentage was as high as 50 percent. At four-year institutions, approximately 20 percent of the entering freshmen required remediation.¹²⁵ This has a tremendous

117 Board of Regents, University System of Georgia. Fall semester enrollment reports. 2013.

118 Ibid.

119 Southern Regional Educational Board. *SREB Fact Book*. Atlanta: Author. 2013.

120 Georgia 2011 and 2014 fiscal year budgets, signed by the Governor.

121 Shearer, L. "About Half Students Who Lost HOPE Grants Did Not Return." *Athens Banner-Herald*. October 27, 2013.

122 Technical College System of Georgia. "Technical College System of Georgia Fast Facts and College Directoy 2011-2012." 2011. Retrieved from <https://tcsgeu/>

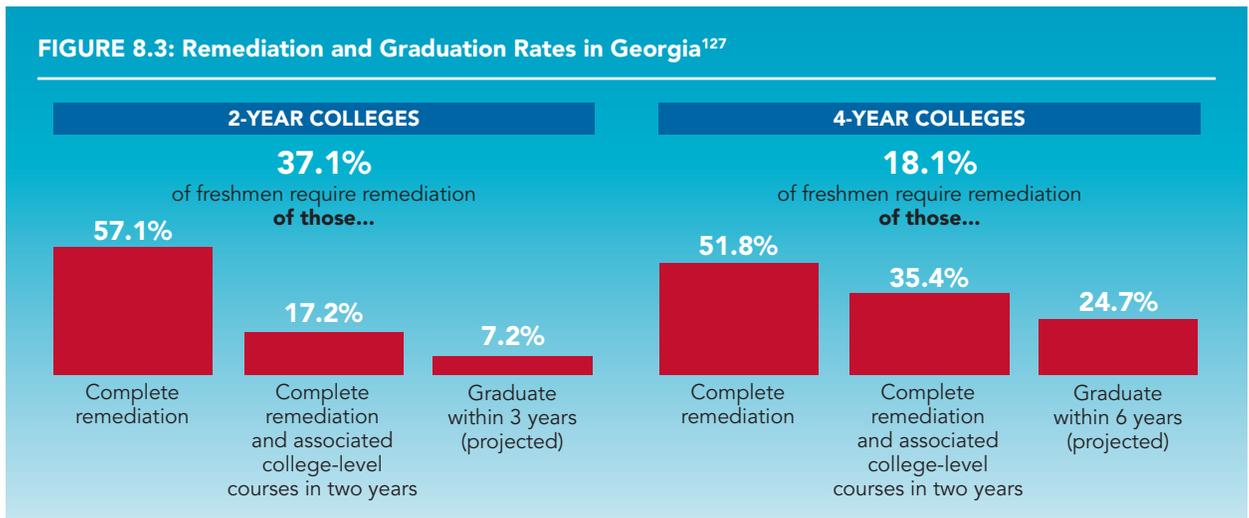
123 Shearer, L. "About Half Students Who Lost HOPE Grants Did Not Return." *Athens Banner-Herald*. October 27, 2013.

124 Complete College America. "Georgia, 2011 Data Sheet." *College Completion Data*. 2011.

125 Ibid.



FIGURE 8.3: Remediation and Graduation Rates in Georgia¹²⁷



impact on graduation rates. If a student needs remediation upon entering a four-year institution, their chances of graduating within six years drops to 24 percent (Figure 8.3).¹²⁶

Georgia has an additional a problem beyond its current students being ill-prepared for college and/or career. Approximately 20 percent of the population over the age of 18 does not have a high school diploma. In some counties, more than one third of the adult population has less than a high school education.¹²⁸ To get to the state’s goal of 60 percent of the adult population having a degree beyond high school, Georgia must reach out to these adults and re-engage them in the educational system.

In recent years, the growth in non-traditional students (i.e., students who have been out of the educational system for more than five years) can be seen at both the USG and TCSG. Between fiscal year 2008 and fiscal year 2011, the number of students enrolling in the TCSG over the age of 40 increased by 42 percent.¹²⁹ During that same time, the number of non-traditional students enrolling in the USG increased 16 percent.¹³⁰

In addition to serving more students from the adult, non-traditional population, the TCSG targets adult learners through education programs that enable them to study for and earn a General Education Diploma (GED). During fiscal year 2011, more than 82,000 Georgia adult learners took part in TCSG GED instruction and testing, English as a Second Language programs, or Adult Basic and Secondary Education programs. Over the past 12 years, the TCSG has

awarded more than 225,000 GED diplomas.¹³¹ These GED graduates can now transition to a college education and join the growing number of non-traditional students Georgia institutions are being asked to serve.

In 2011, Governor Nathan Deal launched Complete College Georgia (CCG) to address these very issues. It is a statewide initiative that has brought together the USG and the TCSG to increase the higher education graduation rate through increased participation from traditional populations as well as engaging the wider pool of non-traditional populations. It is part of a larger effort, Complete College America, which seeks to improve postsecondary completion rates nationally.

The first step in the plan is to increase the college readiness of students graduating from high school and entering the postsecondary system. The CCG plan calls for collaboration with the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) to increase standards and assessments for students in the K-12 system. The most visible is the adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards. The GaDOE has also developed a new accountability system – the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). To support both of these, the GaDOE has developed a new K-16 data system. It is also expanding opportunities for high school students to earn college credits, facilitating their transition to and success in postsecondary institutions.

To build upon the work happening in K-12, under the CCG plan, the USG and TCSG are working together to develop strategies aimed at improving completion rates.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ U.S. Census Bureau. "Georgia." September 18, 2012. Retrieved from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/13000.html>

¹²⁹ Technical College System of Georgia. "Technical College System of Georgia Fast Facts and College Directory 2011-2012." 2011. Retrieved from <https://tcsgeu.edu/>

¹³⁰ Office of Research and Policy Analysis. *Semester Enrollment Report Fall 2012 and Fall 2008*. Atlanta: Board of Regents, University System of Georgia. 2012/ 2008.

¹³¹ Technical College System of Georgia. "Technical College System of Georgia Fast Facts and College Directory 2011-2012." 2011. Retrieved from <https://tcsgeu.edu/>



Three key focus areas are 1) strengthening remedial courses, 2) shortening time to degree and 3) restructuring delivery.

Students who enter without adequate preparation are required to enroll in remedial courses that do not count toward a certification or degree program. As previously illustrated, students who require remediation have lower graduation rates than those who do not.¹³²

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

- modularize remedial courses,
- create alternative paths for students who are significantly behind,
- develop options for students to work at their own pace, and
- integrate supports and mentoring to teach success skills.¹³³

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

Students who progress slowly toward a degree are more likely to drop out.¹³⁴ One approach to helping students move expeditiously toward program completion is facilitating transfers through articulation agreements and providing timely information about transfer options. A second strategy is to allow students to earn credit for knowledge they have gained in other settings such as dual enrollment courses while still in high school, Advanced Placement (AP) credit, and the administration of Prior Learning Assessments (PLA). The PLAs will provide a pathway to enable millions of primarily non-traditional students who have stopped short of a degree but who have acquired knowledge through other means (e.g., military or job-related experience) a chance to complete their education.¹³⁵

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

1. Building and sustaining effective teaching,
2. Exploring and expanding the use of effective technology models,
3. Offering distance education,
4. Engaging in adult and military outreach, and
5. Supporting science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) initiatives.¹³⁶

The TCSG is focusing on two areas of restructuring: accelerating success and providing clearer pathways for completion. These changes should create faster, more structured pathways to the completion of a degree or certificate.¹³⁷

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

A strong educational system is a necessary component to support the state's economic visions. One factor that must be considered is the changing demographic make-up of Georgia. The population that K-12 schools educate is increasingly made up of children of color and those of Hispanic origin. However, this shift has yet to be realized in our higher education system. For example, in 2011, students of color made up 56 percent of the K-12 student population.¹³⁸ Yet, they accounted for 46 percent of those enrolled in an institution of higher education and only 35 percent of college graduates in 2011.¹³⁹

This higher education completion gap between student groups will have increasingly more serious economic consequences for both the individual and for overall economic competitiveness. For years, minorities have been underrepresented in professions such as science, medicine and engineering,¹⁴⁰ the exact professions predicted to be the basis of Georgia's growing workforce. With the non-minority population shrinking and the entry-level workforce increasingly made up of minorities, Georgia could face serious shortages in critical professions.

State leaders have recognized the importance of educational attainment as they set ambitious goals for Georgia's students. The CCG program calls for a significant increase in the number of students with higher education credentials over the next seven or eight years. However, years of budget cuts have made the attainment of such an ambitious goal harder to achieve.

132 Complete College America. "Georgia, 2011 Data Sheet." *College Completion Data*. 2011.

133 The University System of Georgia & the Technical College System of Georgia. *Complete College Georgia: Georgia's Higher Education Completion Plan 2012*. 2012.

134 Complete College America. "Time is the Enemy." 2011. Retrieved from http://www.completecollege.org/docs/Time_Is_the_Enemy_Summary.pdf

135 The University System of Georgia & the Technical College System of Georgia. *Complete College Georgia: Georgia's Higher Education Completion Plan 2012*. 2012.

136 Ibid.

137 Ibid.

138 Governor's Office of Student Achievement. 2011 Report Card. 2011.

139 Complete College America. "Georgia: 2011 Data Sheet." *College Completion Data*. 2011.

140 Crouch, R. *The United States of Education: The Changing Demographics of the United States and their Schools*. Center for Public Education. 2012.



Georgia needs a better understanding of how such funding reductions, while seemingly necessary to balance the state budget, may actually threaten our long-term economic development plans.

The USG and TCSG have taken steps to meet these increased needs despite the reduction in state support. Georgia participates in the Lumina Foundation's Strategy Lab network, which provides valuable opportunities to share, identify and pursue policy solutions that have been shown to significantly increase efficiency, effectiveness and overall productivity of higher education.

One of these solutions is performance funding, which is being implemented in Georgia in 2015. Georgia will begin to move away from financial and funding policies that are based exclusively on student enrollment. This outcomes-based funding model will reward schools as they meet retention and graduation goals, not as their enrollment increases. This will allow a portion of each

institution's base funding to go toward ensuring enrolled students complete their degrees in a timely manner. This increased focus on time to degree completion should promote efficiencies to move high-achieving students through the higher education systems faster and free up resources to focus on struggling or remedial students.

In this political and budgetary environment, there may be significant challenges in taking the policies and practices outlined in the CCG plan as well as other efforts to bolster the quality of public education across the P-16 continuum to scale. However, as a state, our economic viability is contingent upon being able to fill the 820,000 job vacancies that will be available in the coming years. To meet this goal, it is important that Georgia continues to move its focus to include every student. Georgia cannot afford to let students slip through the cracks of the higher education system due to financial stressors or remediation. Our economy, our communities, and our workforce depend on the steady supply of individuals with a postsecondary diploma.



ISSUE 9: Governance Strategies – Keys to success

ISSUE OVERVIEW

Just a cursory search of education reporting by the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reveals a disturbing trend among the leaders of our schools. Sample headlines read: “Accreditation at Risk for Atlanta Public Schools – Lawsuit Also Filed,” “Tensions on Cherokee School Board Lead to SACS Complaint by Marlow,” “Deal Suspends Six of Nine DeKalb School Board Members” and “Bloody Friday at North Atlanta High – APS Kicks Out Old Leaders, Announces New Ones Without Explanation.” From interventions by the governor in local school boards, to school board members misbehaving, to district and school leaders feuding, such incidents are causing the public to show a growing distrust of our school leaders and of the current governance structure. Generally defined, governance is “the process by which formal institutions and actors wield power and make decisions that influence the conditions under which people live in a society.”¹⁴¹

Governance in education is a complex issue for all states as various entities attempt to collaborate in creating and overseeing education policy and rules. Governors, legislators, state boards of education, chief state school officers and state education agencies make up education governance systems in most states.¹⁴² These state-level actors also interact with entities at the local level including school boards, districts, superintendents and, more frequently, groups outside of government through grants or contract relationships. An example of the latter is when an education management organization runs a charter school or a large public school system in a large district.¹⁴³

Depending on the state, some or all of these state-level offices are either elected or appointed. At the local level, there are debates about mayoral control over local boards. A recent meta-analysis of student outcome data showed that education governance does make a difference in student outcomes. However, the type of governance structure was less important (i.e., elected vs. appointed leaders) than the leaders’ role in supporting effective practices in the schools and classrooms.¹⁴⁴

Strong governance is critical to improving outcomes for individual students and society at large. However, communities and parents are beginning to question the current governance structure and its ability to support local schools. Many are now seeking to either reform from within or escape completely those traditional structures and set up alternative governing bodies that appear more responsive to the needs of students, parents and local communities.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA?

Educational governance strategies have always ranged between two extremes. The first is centralization (either at the state or federal level) wherein the central government authority makes most of the consequential decisions about funding, standards and so forth. The second is the most decentralized approach in which parents can shop for schools in a market-based system.¹⁴⁵ The bulk of reality and most governance reform structures fall somewhere in between. In Georgia, the trend is moving more toward local control, district

flexibility and parental choice and participation in the governing models of their children’s school systems. The growing dissatisfaction with how governance is being carried out in Georgia by parents and community members has led to an increase in the demand for alternative structures, primarily represented by various charter models.

One option of school governance is that of a charter system. The Georgia Charter Systems Act, signed in 2007, allows entire school systems to convert to charter status. A charter system is not a group of charter

141 Manna, P., & McGuinn, P. *Education Governance for the Twenty-First Century: Overcoming the Structural Barriers to School Reform*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution. 2013.

142 Education Commission of the States. “Governance: State Boards/Chiefs/Agencies.” Retrieved from <http://www.ecs.org>

143 Manna, P., & McGuinn, P. *Education Governance for the Twenty-First Century: Overcoming the Structural Barriers to School Reform*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution. 2013.

144 Mintrom, M., & Walley, R. “Education Governance in Comparative Perspective.” In P. Manna, & P. McGuinn, *Education Governance for the Twenty-First Century* (pp. 252–274). Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution. 2013.

145 McGuinn, P., & Manna, P. *Education Governance in America: Who Leads When Everyone Is in Charge?* In P. Manna, & P. McGuinn, *Education Governance for the Twenty-First Century* (pp. 252–274). Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution. 2013.



schools; rather, the district has a charter, or contract, with the state to increase student achievement. The charter systems have increased flexibility to operate beyond state mandates and make adjustments in staffing, teaching methods and management in exchange for higher accountability. Charter systems are required to have significant focus on parent and community involvement and maximize school-level governance. During the 2013-2014 school year in Georgia, there were 19 charter systems encompassing 107 individual schools.^{146,147}

One aspect that allows the maximization of local involvement in charter systems is the creation of School Governance Councils (SGC). Members of these councils are elected or appointed and serve as representatives of the school community. SGCs typically comprised of parents, school staff and community members. They serve a leadership role in the management of a school within a charter system district by providing input on the strategic direction of the school, considering the best use of resources and designing innovative practices that align with school needs.¹⁴⁸ This process creates a shared governance structure within each school between school leadership and the SGC.

Charter systems generally have high-performing governing bodies that are responsive to the needs of their students, as their charter is dependent on student achievement. The charter systems also allow many avenues for parent involvement in the decision-making process at the school level. If a system is not a charter system, another option that parents and communities have to influence the governing structure of their schools is to become a charter cluster.

A 2010 law allows local boards of education to act on petitions to create a charter cluster if approved by 60 percent of faculty and parents within the qualifying schools.¹⁴⁹ Under this law, a high school cluster – including a high school and all of its feeder middle and elementary schools – can receive a single charter from their local board of education to operate as an autonomous unit within a school district. The charter contract is between the high school cluster, the district, and the State Board of Education (SBOE). The cluster receives cluster-level autonomy and waivers from some state and local regulations, similar to those that regular

charter schools receive in exchange for accountability of student results.¹⁵⁰ Decision making about resources, staffing, strategic planning and so forth can be done at the cluster level. School clusters can align curriculum, focus areas (STEM, performing arts, International Baccalaureate, etc.), and professional development of their teachers into a seamless transition for students as they move from elementary school through high school within that cluster.

The first test of this law was in DeKalb County. In early 2013, Governor Nathan Deal took the unusual step of suspending six of nine DeKalb County School Board members. At the time, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) had placed DeKalb County Schools on probation, and the district was in danger of losing its accreditation due, in part, to board members prioritizing the interest of their own election districts above those of the system as a whole.¹⁵¹ In response to the suspensions and the overall transition period of DeKalb County Schools, the seven school communities that make up the Druid Hills High School Cluster created a charter cluster petition to present before the DeKalb County School Board.

Proponents of the charter cluster argued the application was a collaborative plan designed by community members, teachers and parents that prioritized all students through choice enrollment pathways, empowered teachers and staff, and had meaningful opportunities for parental involvement. Specifically, principals would be allowed to hire and fire staff and determine the appropriate use and allocation of resources. Teachers would lead decisions around curriculum, instruction, assessment and discipline based on their students' individual needs.¹⁵²

Opponents of the charter cluster contended that special interest groups and business leaders, not educators, were spearheading the charter cluster effort. They argued teachers did not have enough time to fully digest the charter application and understand the ramifications of the decision. The charter application itself contained more than 200 requests and rationales for waivers from standard district procedures, many of which were not made available until three weeks before the petition vote. Moreover, more than 80 percent of the students that attend the cluster schools are students of

146 The 19 districts with approved contracts are Banks County, Barrow County, Calhoun City Schools, Cartersville City Schools, City Schools of Decatur, Coffee County, Dawson County, Dublin City Schools, Floyd County, Fulton County, Gainesville City Schools, Gordon County, Haralson County, Madison County, Marietta City Schools, Morgan County, Putnam County, Warren County and White County.

147 Charter systems are but one governance structure available to local schools districts. For a full discussion of alternative governance models including IE2 and status quo models, see Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. "Top Ten Issues to Watch – Issue 9, Flexibility and Choice." Atlanta: Author. 2013.

148 Fulton County Schools. *School Governance Council Candidate Guide*. Atlanta: Author. 2013.

149 SB 467 (2010).

150 Georgia Department of Education. *Charter System Flexibility and Charter Schools in Georgia: Overview and Comparison*. Atlanta: Author. 2013.

151 Tagami, T. "Rejection of Charter School Proposal Reflects DeKalb Divisions." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. November 12, 2013.

152 Ibid.



color, but the Druid Hills Charter Cluster organizing board contained only a few persons of color, raising concerns that the interests of minority children would not be well represented.¹⁵³

In the end, the DeKalb County School Board voted five to four to reject the cluster petition. Overall, the DeKalb Schools staff came out strongly against the cluster, arguing it would divert too many resources from other students in the district.¹⁵⁴

In spite of these other charter options, none has been more popular than individual charter schools as an alternative governance structure to deliver education. During the 2011-2012 school year, more than 130,000 Georgia public school students were enrolled in either a conversion, start-up, or system charter school.¹⁵⁵

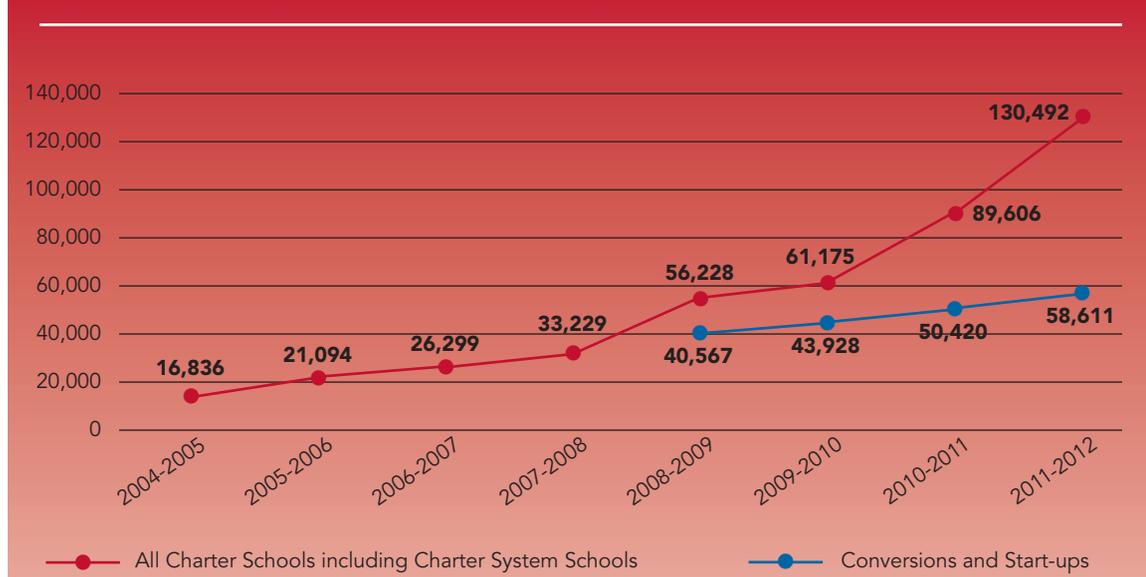
Nationally, charter school students represented 4.2 percent of all public school students in the 2011-2012 school year. Georgia charter school students represented 7.7 percent of the state's public school population. Over the past three years, charter school enrollment has more than doubled, from 61,175 to more than 130,000 students. Much of that enrollment is concentrated in the charter systems; however, student enrollment in charter schools continues to increase by an average of 16 percent over the previous year.¹⁵⁶

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

Governance trends in Georgia are moving away from centralization toward a more decentralized approach. Considering the state's growing diversity, this trend could be viewed as positive or negative. The debate around the Druid Hills Charter Cluster exemplifies this. DeKalb is Georgia's third-largest district with close to 100,000 students. Whites are in the minority and tend to be concentrated in schools in the northern part of the district. The district, a destination for international refugees, is also home to immigrants from across the globe who speak a multitude of different languages. The northern part of the district also tends to be home to more affluent families, while the rest of the district contains a high percentage of minority and low-income students.¹⁵⁸

The five-to-four vote in DeKalb County denying the charter cluster broke down mostly along geographic and racial lines. Most of the support for the defeated position came from board members in the northern part of the district. All five votes against the petition were cast by black school board members who represented the southern part of the county. They feared that the creation of the charter cluster would divert much-needed funds from the poorer part of the county to support a separate system outside the control of the district.¹⁵⁹ Conversely, proponents asserted that the

FIGURE 9.1: Charter School Student Enrollment Growth¹⁵⁷



153 Downey, M. "Druid Hills Charter Cluster: Dig Deep and It's a Sieve of Loopholes That Will Exclude and Harm Kids." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. October 18, 2013.

154 Downey, M. "DeKalb Board Votes Down Druid Hills Charter Cluster." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. November 11, 2013.

155 Georgia Department of Education. *Charter System Flexibility and Charter Schools in Georgia: Overview and Comparison*. Atlanta: Author. 2013.

156 Ibid.

157 Georgia Department of Education. *Chartering in Georgia: 2011-2012, The Charter Schools Division Annual Report*. Atlanta: Author. 2012.

158 Tagami, T. "Rejection of Charter School Proposal Reflects DeKalb Divisions." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. November 12, 2013.

159 Ibid.



creation of these types of charter clusters could help a diverse school district more effectively meet the needs of students because different neighborhood schools could tailor their offerings to specific needs (i.e., more AP courses, dual language courses, after-school enrichment, etc.).

Georgia can expect to see more separation movements within the school systems. Some DeKalb citizens have advocated for a constitutional amendment that would allow new cities to create their own school systems, and there is some talk of annexing the Druid Hills cluster into neighboring Atlanta City.¹⁶⁰ The current charter cluster law does not include an appeals process if denied local board approval. It is likely that legislation will be introduced into the General Assembly that would allow for such a process, similar to the appeals process afforded to regular charter school applications.

Another issue in governance related to local control is that of elected versus appointed officials. The formation of the DeKalb Charter Cluster was related, in part, to Governor Deal's removal of six of nine school board members. Under Georgia's School Board Suspension Statute (§ 20-2-73), which the state legislature passed in 2010, when an accredited school system "is placed on the level of accreditation immediately preceding loss of accreditation for school board governance related reasons," the SBOE must consider whether to recommend to the governor that he suspend members of the local board of education. Following several hearings on the matter, the state board recommended the suspension of six of the DeKalb board's nine members. Three members of the local board were not included because they were elected after SACS put the district on probation. The Governor then appointed six new members of the DeKalb School Board to serve out the remaining terms.

The DeKalb County School Board Chairman at the time filed a lawsuit in federal court alleging that the legislation giving the Governor power to remove elected officials violated both the U.S. and Georgia constitutions. Generally speaking, opponents of the 2010 law argued that it usurped voters' rights by giving the governor the power to suspend and replace locally elected school board members. It also allowed a decision on accreditation by a private group, SACS, to set in motion that removal process.¹⁶¹

In November 2013, the Georgia Supreme Court ruled the law constitutional. The justices noted that the state constitution "makes public education not only the business of local jurisdictions, but the state as a whole. ... (T)he state has a substantial interest in ensuring that those local boards function competently and in a manner that does not imperil the education or the prospects of the students enrolled in the school systems."¹⁶² So while there is a trend towards ensuring local control and accountability, the state does retain the right to step-in.

Georgia will continue to debate issues related to local control and elected vs. appointed officials. Related, a proposal that would presumably bring citizens more in control would be the election of district superintendents. Currently, superintendents are appointed by local boards of education. A few Georgia lawmakers are currently trying to build support for a constitutional amendment that would allow local school districts to elect their superintendents.¹⁶³ They argue that an elected superintendent would be more responsive to public needs. This legislation faces considerable hurdles. Opponents argue this would allow politics to negatively impact instructional programs. Since school taxes are the largest local tax most voters pay, an elected superintendent would face pressure to cut or minimize costs. In addition, superintendents might focus on elections instead of what is best for the students. There are also a few practical considerations. To run for elected office, the person must live in the district, preventing regional and national searches for new hires. Some very small districts in Georgia may not have anyone qualified to run for the job.¹⁶⁴

In school systems, governance and leadership are paramount. School districts have enormous power to support principals and teachers in driving instructional improvement. Research has shown that when leaders effectively address specific responsibilities, they can, and do, have a profound, positive impact on student achievement in their districts.¹⁶⁵ Research has also shown that the form of governance (elected, appointed, centralized, diffuse, etc.) matters less than how these duties are carried out. A Brookings Institution report describes four common components of effective governance.¹⁶⁶

160 Ibid.

161 Badertscher, N. "Court Upholds Law Used to Remove School Board Members." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. November 25, 2013

162 Ibid.

163 Jones, W. "Georgia Lawmaker Pushes for Elected Local Superintendents." Retrieved from Online Athens, *Athens Banner-Herald*. November 17, 2013.

164 Ibid.

165 Waters, J. T., & Marzano, R. J. *School District Leadership that Works: The Effect of Superintendent Leadership on Student Achievement*. Denver: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning. 2006.

166 Manna, P., & McGuinn, P. *Education Governance for the Twenty-First Century: Overcoming the Structural Barriers to School Reform*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution. 2013.



1. Good governance requires a clear division of authority and responsibility. Governance must provide accountability and oversight that establishes expectations, provides clear procedures and approaches to conducting business, and uses data to monitor performance.
2. A well-ordered strategy must be developed. Boards must have a clear theory of change.
3. Good governance is characterized by patience and focus. Meaningful improvement takes time; therefore, a strategy for sustained focus and careful implementation of any improvement plan is necessary.
4. Good governance must engage civic leadership and overcome narrow constituencies who find their interests threatened. Boards must find ways to win active support from the business community and keep it involved.

Parents and communities are tired of headlines about failed leadership and individuals who put their own needs above those of the students. Regardless of the form, principles of effective governance must be practiced at all levels of our educational system. Alternative governance models can allow for innovation and experimentation that increases student learning and engagement. However, the benefits of these options must be made available to all students and must not be allowed to benefit the few at the cost of the many. Efforts must be made to better understand which governance options are producing the best outcomes for children and which are the most likely to produce the components necessary for effective leadership. Fundamentally, more effort must be made to recruit high-quality candidates to run for office and then to elect those into office who understand the complicated interplay of governance and leadership.



ISSUE 10: Puzzle Pieces – Putting it all together

ISSUE OVERVIEW

Have you ever tried to drink water from a garden hose turned on high? You know you are thirsty. You know you need the water and that it will cure what ails you. However, trying to cure your thirst by drinking from a hose never feels like the most efficient way to solve the problem of thirst. When not properly controlled or directed, hoses tend to spray water all over, wasting more on the ground than goes in the target.

The same can be said of education reforms. Many educators in Georgia right now are feeling like they are trying to drink from a hose that has been turned on high due to the sheer bulk of reforms that are currently being developed and implemented. In an attempt to raise student achievement, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) has introduced a host of new programs with accompanying acronyms: CCGPS, CCRPI, TKES, LKES, TEMs, LDS and SLOs, just to name a few. Changes are being made to standards, student and staff assessment and evaluation systems, teacher preparation programs, school and district accountability measures and a host of other instructional practices designed to keep pace with 21st century classrooms such as the use of technology, focus on STEM, and online learning and professional development.

The first nine of the *Top Ten Issues to Watch in 2014* detail different – yet interrelated – education reforms being implemented throughout the state. For these efforts to be successful, it is vital that educators, parents, and business, community and government leaders understand how they all fit together. They are not random acts but related initiatives that can be leveraged together to support students and educators in raising the achievement outcomes of all students in Georgia.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA?

Understanding how all the new policies, programs and practices interconnect is like putting a puzzle together. The outside edges of the puzzle always help define the size and shape of the picture being created. The defining edges of what is happening in Georgia can be described by four questions:

1. What do we teach?
2. How do we know students are learning?
3. Are teachers effectively delivering the instruction?
4. Who makes sure all that happens?

What Do We Teach?

The foundation of all educational systems is what gets taught in the classroom. This is a question of standards and curriculum. Georgia is currently in the second year of implementing the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS) in English/language arts (ELA) and mathematics. When adopting the CCGPS, it was felt the previous Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) were an excellent foundation for Georgia students. The CCGPS incorporates much of the GPS and takes them a step further in aligning content with

college and career readiness by providing increased rigor and integrating higher order thinking and reasoning skills. Second, adopting the CCGPS allows for a meaningful comparison of Georgia students' achievement with that of students in other states. Since Georgia students will be competing with students from all over the world, the state needs to be sure they are providing students the tools needed to be competitive.¹⁶⁷ For a complete discussion of the CCGPS, see Issue 1.

In addition to the new standards, curricula are changing as well. One curriculum shift within the state has been an increased focus on the STEM fields: science, technology, engineering and math. GaDOE is supporting STEM-certified schools throughout the state and has developed a series of online classes available through the Georgia Virtual School (GAVS) for both educators and students. GAVS offers professional development for teachers teaching STEM courses such as Middle School Statistics, a Technology Toolkit and Pre-Calculus. Through a partnership with the Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech), students can enroll in online courses such as Environmental Physics, Materials Chemistry, Engineering Calculus, and Mathematics of Industry and Government.¹⁶⁸

167 Georgia Department of Education. "CCGPS- FAQs." January 2013. Retrieved from <http://public.doe.k12.ga.us>

168 Andrews, S. *Race to the Top: Are We There Yet?* Atlanta: Georgia Department of Education. 2013.



New curricula are also being developed around Georgia's Career Clusters and Career Pathways. Implemented in high schools across the state, the clusters and pathways allow students to choose an area of interest in high school from the 17 different career clusters, ranging from banking to manufacturing to transportation. There are also three additional pathways available in world languages, fine arts and advanced academics. The aim of the program is to show students the relevance of what they are learning in the classroom, whether they want to attend a two-year college, a four-year university or go straight into the world of work. For a complete discussion of the career clusters/pathways, see Issue 7.

Are Students Learning?

Once it is established what students should learn, the next question is whether they are actually learning it. Assessments of student learning inform teachers, parents and others of whether students are mastering the material. With the new standards in place, Georgia is in the process of developing a new Georgia Assessment Program to measure student achievement. Previously, the state has relied on a compilation of the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) for grades 3 through 8 and End of Course Tests (EOCT) for grades 9 through 12, in addition to other assessments such as writing tests.¹⁶⁹ For a complete discussion of assessments, see Issue 2.

In addition to traditional end-of-year tests, teachers are being trained to administer formative assessments throughout the school year. These low-stakes assessments allow teachers to gather feedback about how well their students are learning the material, which they can use to inform their instruction. This way, teachers do not have to wait until the end of the year to see if their students learned the material.

What is being taught and what students are learning are connected through Georgia's new longitudinal data system (LDS). The LDS contains educational information about the students, including student attendance, grades, mobility, assessment outcomes, etc. It also provides digital resources for both students and teachers. For teachers, it provides professional development resources to strengthen instruction, and for students, the LDS contains remediation and enrichment resources.¹⁷⁰

Are Teachers Effectively Delivering Instruction?

Related to whether students are learning the material is how effectively it is being delivered in the classroom. With the increased standards and focus on student assessments, teaching has changed. The instructional delivery must be aligned to standards, and students must be engaged in problem solving.¹⁷¹ Georgia has developed the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) to ensure every classroom has an effective teacher. The TKES generates a Teacher Effectiveness Measure (TEM) based on a combination of classroom observations, surveys and student growth measures in academic achievement. For a full discussion of the new teacher effectiveness system, see Issue 4.

The goal of the TKES is to help educators grow professionally, thereby contributing to student learning. Each of these effectiveness systems is designed to provide teachers and leaders with meaningful feedback and to support continuous growth and development. This evaluation system will have implications for how teachers working in the public school system are trained and promoted.

A Georgia task force is developing new standards for teacher certifications that will involve a multi-tiered licensure system, changes in professional learning for current teachers and accountability for teacher preparation programs. For a complete discussion of these changes, see Issue 3. The TKES system will inform what professional development will be required for teachers for licensure renewal and which certificates teachers will be able to receive.

Finally, programs that train teachers, either university based or non-traditional, will be held accountable for the performance of their program graduates once they are in the field. One component of the program ratings will be based on TKES assessments.

Who Makes Sure All This Happens?

Standards are being implemented and supporting curriculum is being developed. Students and teachers are being evaluated to ensure the material is being delivered in a high-quality manner and the students are learning it. Who makes sure all of this is being done? The school leader.

¹⁶⁹ Georgia Department of Education. *Georgia Student Assessment Program: Transition Plan for High Quality College and Career Ready Assessments*. Atlanta: Author. 2013.

¹⁷⁰ Andrews, S. (2013). *Race to the Top: Are We There Yet?* Atlanta: Georgia Department of Education.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

The school leader is also responsible for the development of the school's climate. Studies have shown that school climate is primarily determined by the personal interactions of the teachers and leaders in the school.¹⁷² Measures of school climate are included in the Leader Keys Effectiveness System (LKES) as well as school-level outcomes on the new College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). For more information on school climate, see Issue 5.

Like teachers, school leaders have their own new effectiveness system – the LKES. The LKES is a set of eight standards that principals must meet. It also includes climate information, student attendance data and the ability to retain effective teachers as identified by the TKES. Finally, the LKES is determined, in part, by student academic growth, measured by student assessments.

Where Can We See These Results?

Students are learning the material. High-quality teachers are being trained and retained in the classrooms. School leaders are making sure all is functioning well and that students and educators are supported through the LDS. Where can we see the results? The new CCRPI. The CCRPI is the state's new accountability measure that moves away from the old Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) single measure. Schools are now rated using an index score comprising multiple measures that include student achievement as well as progress measures on student growth, achievement gap closures and efforts to prepare students for college and/ or a career. The CCRPI also measures the climate of a school and its financial effectiveness.

Supported by information provided in the LDS, the CCRPI provides schools with an unprecedented opportunity for subsequent school improvement and planning. The individual indicators should allow a school and a system to pinpoint where they are in need of improvement and where they excel, allowing for greater efficiency in resources and targeted interventions. The use of this data – analyzed by performance indicators and measures of achievement, progress, and closure of achievement gaps – will also allow schools and districts to demonstrate their progress toward improving student outcomes and closing the achievement gap.

In fact, in November 2013, the GaDOE made slight changes to the calculation of the CCRPI score. The new formula, being implemented for the 2013 scores, gives more weight to students' academic progress and less weight to standardized and end-of-course tests. The new formula also gives more weight to four-year gradu-

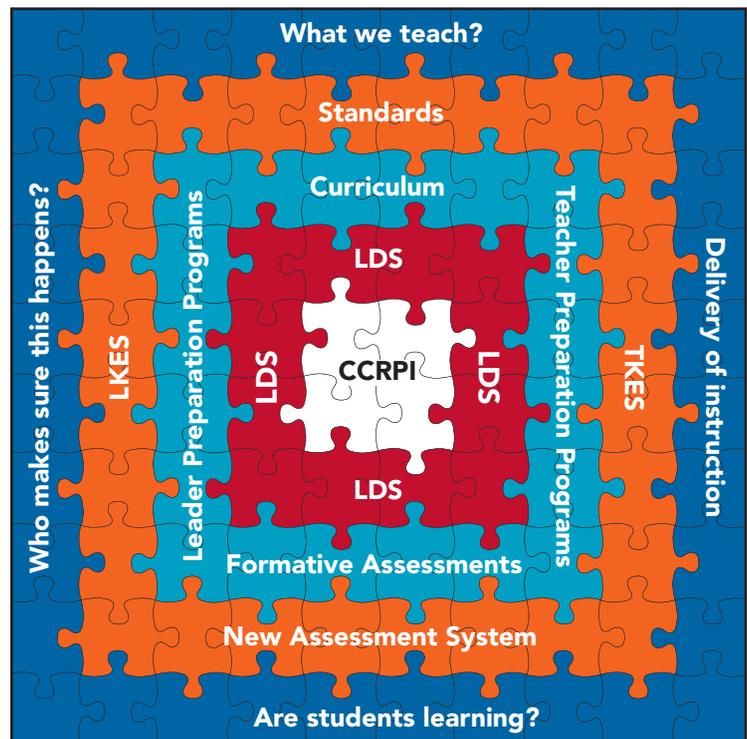
ation rates. Most significantly, the formula will become the main factor in determining whether a charter school remains open. A charter school must have a CCRPI score that exceeds the state average and the average for the district in which the charter school is located. Also, the charter school will need an index score higher than schools – both charters and traditional public schools – with a similar academic and demographic profile.

The charter school will have to outperform those schools in each of its first four years of operation. All charter schools approved from this point forward will have to meet the new index standards in order to renew their charters. Existing charter schools will go under the new rules starting in the 2014-2015 academic year.

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

As Figure 10.1 shows, Georgia has a coordinated plan to increase student achievement and ensure more students graduate from high school ready for college or to begin a career. This plan combines increased standards and rigor with increased accountability and a reliance on high-quality educators in every classroom, school and district. However, this plan is being implemented at a time when the K-12 student population is growing increasingly poor.

FIGURE 10.1: Pieces of the Educational Reform Puzzle



172 Kramer, D. *Impact of School Climate on Academic and Behavioral Outcomes*. Atlanta: Georgia Department of Education. 2013.



More than 1 million children from low-income families were enrolled in Georgia public schools during fiscal year 2013 – 60 percent of the enrolled population.¹⁷³ This number has grown substantially. In 2002, 45 percent of the population was considered low-income. Over the past decade, 70 districts saw at least a 15-percent increase in the number of low-income students in their schools, and 11 experienced at least a 25-percent increase.¹⁷⁴ At a time when more rigor is being introduced, schools are experiencing an increase in the number of students that are more likely to need additional help with reading, math and other subjects. Increasing the standards requires a commensurate increase in support services to assist struggling students.

Unfortunately, these additional resources are not coming. During the same time period that the number of low-income children in public schools increased from 45 percent to 60 percent, state funding per student declined by an average of 15.3 percent. The statewide austerity cut for fiscal year 2014 is \$1 billion, equating to approximately \$633 per student. The cumulative statewide austerity cuts from 2003 through 2014 are \$7.6 billion.¹⁷⁵

This decline in state funding has been magnified at the local level by a decline in local districts' ability to compensate for the shortfall. Between 2008 and 2012, property values—the primary funding source for local schools—fell in 132 districts by an average of 17.3 percent. This reduction led to a corresponding decline in local revenues per student of 5.8 percent.¹⁷⁶

As a result, local schools have begun to cut into their core structures. According to a survey conducted by the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute, 71 percent of districts have reduced their school calendar to fewer than 180 days. Over 95 percent have increased class size, reflecting a loss of more than 8,900 teachers since 2009. Nearly 40 percent of districts have scaled back on enrichment or remedial programs, and close to 70 percent have cut instructional support staff. Many of these support staff were instructional leaders, social workers, counselors, psychologists, and so forth who supported struggling students and those who live in poverty.¹⁷⁷

Properly coordinated, the water from the hose can be controlled and delivered with accuracy to the places it needs to go without wasting it on the ground or in the air. Much in the same way, these coordinated reform efforts can be delivered to the schools in a way that targets their needs and supports implementation. Educators do not have to feel like they are trying to drink from a wild hose. However, the spraying hose that many educators fear is in danger of becoming just a trickle if funding and supports are not put in place as these reforms are being implemented. Districts with more resources are better able to deliver these reforms to their students and support their educators. However, districts with a high percentage of low-income children are struggling to keep pace with the demands being placed upon them, thereby creating an uneven statewide implementation of these policies.

As these puzzle pieces are being implemented in the school systems, the question of leadership becomes paramount. Local district leaders, local boards of education and superintendents have enormous power to support principals and teachers in driving instructional improvement. Research has shown that when district leaders effectively address specific responsibilities, they can, and do, have a profound, positive impact on student achievement in their districts.¹⁷⁸ As these reforms are being implemented, positive and competent leadership at the district level is needed to ensure teachers are being supported, the TKES and LKES are being implemented with fidelity, the LDS is being used to its fullest potential and more. Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to student achievement. And, of course, district leaders must be able manage this process while dealing with tight budgetary constraints.

Georgia has done a good job in identifying areas of education reform that will lead to increased student outcomes and high school graduates who are ready for college or to embark on a career. Increased rigor and teacher quality are the right foci to produce these changes. However, the same educators are struggling under the increasing burden of being asked to “do more with less” with a population of students whose needs are outpacing resources available to help them. By not addressing these issues, Georgia is in danger of not realizing the potential gains this completed puzzle can deliver.

173 Georgia Department of Education. “Free & Reduced Price Lunch Eligibility, October 2012 (FY 2013).” Atlanta: Author. 2013.

174 Suggs, C. *The Schoolhouse Squeeze*. Atlanta: Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. 2013.

175 Ibid.

176 Ibid.

177 Ibid.

178 Waters, J. T., & Marzano, R. J. *School District Leadership that Works: The Effect of Superintendent Leadership on Student Achievement*. Denver: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning. 2006.



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