

— EIGHTH EDITION —

TOP TEN ISSUES TO WATCH IN 2012

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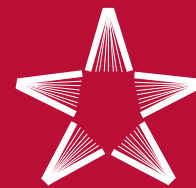
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GEORGIA PARTNERSHIP
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YEARS



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Y E A R S

January 2012

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

This edition was researched and written by Dana K. Rickman, PhD, Policy and Research Director
and Adrienne Goss, Research Assistant

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.

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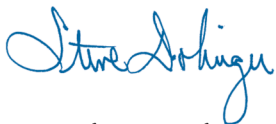
Introduction

Welcome to 2012. This is a very exciting year for the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education — it is our 20th Anniversary! We are proud to kick-off this commemorative year with the publication of the eighth edition of the *Top Ten Issues to Watch*. We at the Partnership will be observing our anniversary throughout the year and will be reflecting on the changes not only within our organization but within education. One accomplishment we are most proud of is this publication. In the eight years since we released the inaugural edition, 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.

Last year's edition introduced "Ten Indicators to Watch," which allows us to continually track Georgia's progress and compare our success to the nation as children move through the birth-to-work pipeline. This year's indicators (page 2) show that Georgia has gained on several important measures along that pipeline: 1) percentage of young children enrolled in early education programs, 2) eighth-grade mathematics performance, 3) percentage of students earning AP college credit in high school, 4) high school graduation, and 5) percentage of bachelor's degrees awarded.

As we move into 2012, the *Top Ten* examines current research, national trends and state policy developments that will impact the work of educators and influence child outcomes and indicators. In 2010, Georgia was selected as a winner of a Race to the Top (RT3) grant by the U.S. Department of Education. We did not highlight the RT3 as its own issue in this edition, as it permeates almost all other issues. Under RT3, the state is now focusing on adopting higher standards, building data systems, recruiting and rewarding effective teachers and principals, and turning around our lowest performing schools.

We believe that the data and commentary presented within this document will continue to guide conversations among policymakers, educators, and community and business leaders. Armed with reliable, comprehensive information and guided by a common vision for excellence, together we can build a plan for the continual improvement of Georgia's school systems well beyond the next 20 years.



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

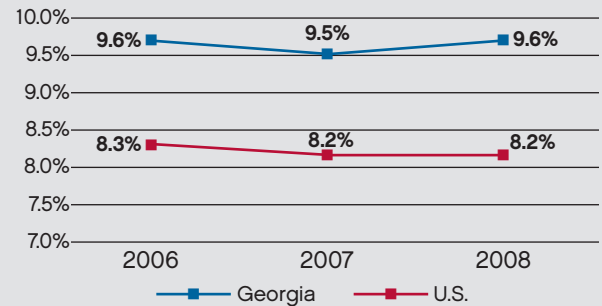
Top Ten Indicators to Watch: Where is Georgia Today?

How does Georgia fare in producing excellent results for our citizens from birth through work? What additional progress is necessary to move our state into the top 20 among all states and make Georgia a national leader?

This addition to the Top Ten Issues to Watch reveals where Georgia stands on ten critical indicators of child well-being, educational attainment, and workforce readiness. Shown in each graph is a comparison of trends in Georgia compared to national averages. These data represent outcomes, and to drive change in outcomes will require focused, collaborative work on each of the 10 issues discussed in this publication. The Georgia Partnership is committed to tracking these 10 indicators over time and advocating for policies and practices that will enable our state to emerge as a national education leader.

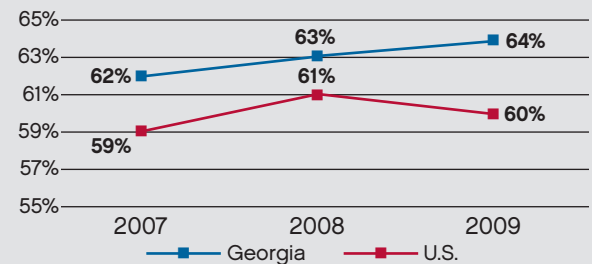
LOW-BIRTHWEIGHT BABIES, 2006-2008

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



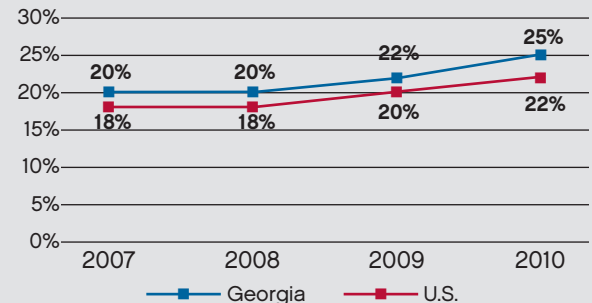
CHILDREN AGES 3 TO 5 ENROLLED IN EARLY EDUCATION, 2007-2009

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



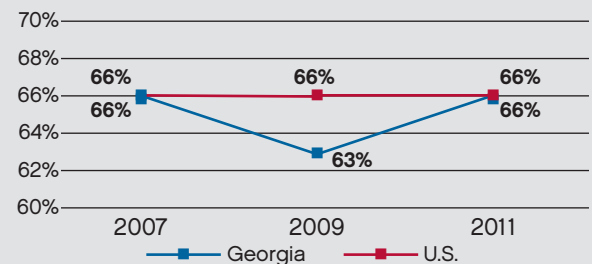
CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY, 2007-2010

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



FOURTH GRADE READING PERFORMANCE

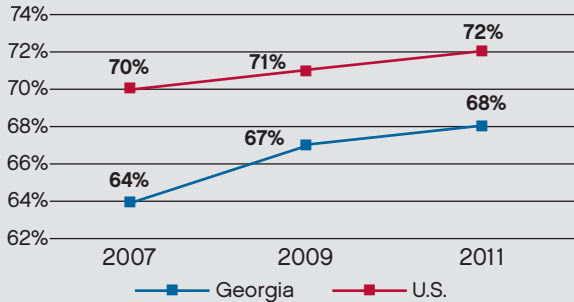
Source: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Education Progress



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

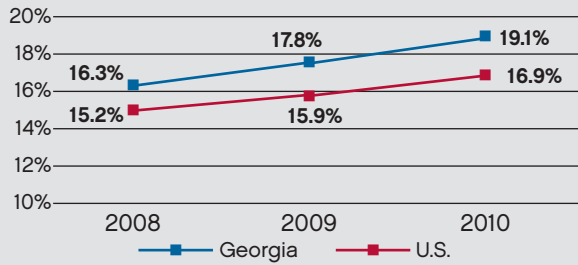
EIGHTH GRADE MATHEMATICS PERFORMANCE

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



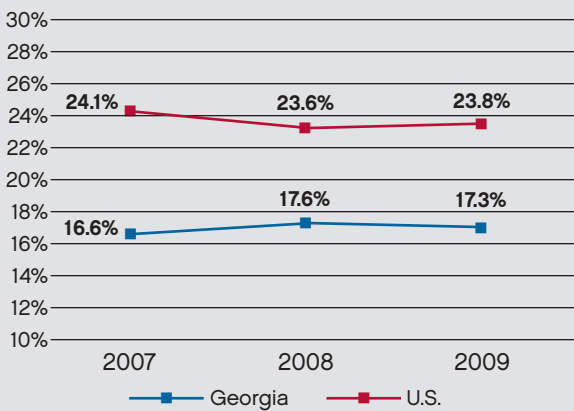
STUDENTS EARNING AP COLLEGE CREDIT IN HIGH SCHOOL

Source: The College Board, AP Report to the Nation 2011, 2010



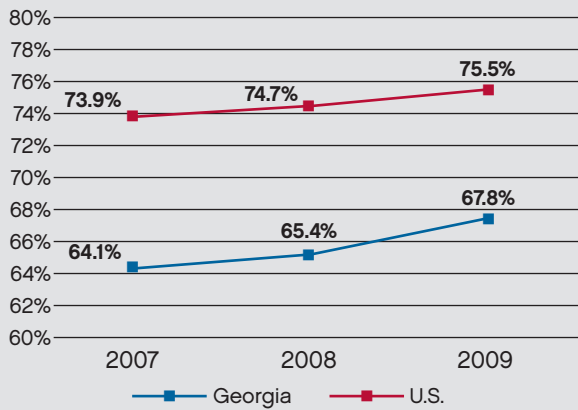
ASSOCIATE DEGREES AWARDED WITHIN THREE YEARS OF HIGH SCHOOL

Source: NCHEMS Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis



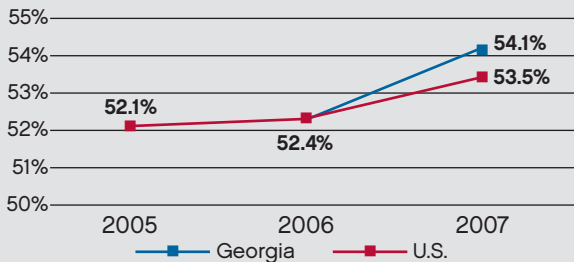
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE

Source: National Center for Education Statistics



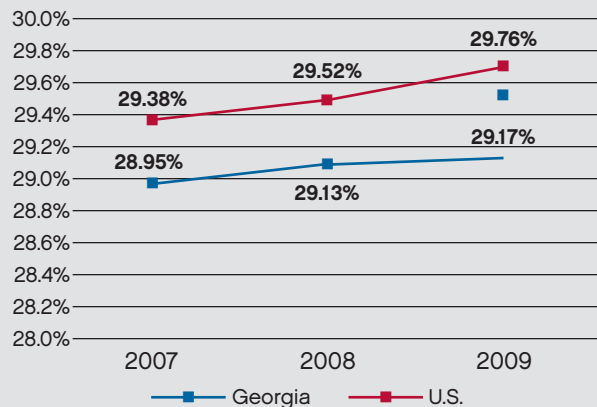
BACHELOR'S DEGREES AWARDED WITHIN SIX YEARS OF HIGH SCHOOL

Source: NCHEMS Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis



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

Source: NCHEMS Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis



ISSUE 1

How Good Are Our Schools? Georgia's New Performance Standards

Issue Overview

Where should I send my child to school? How do I know my child's school is the best it can be? These are age-old questions every parent asks. However, it's not only parents who are asking those questions. When industries and businesses look to relocate, they ask a variety of questions about potential sites: What is the traffic like? What's the local tax rate? And, more and more they are asking, how are the local schools?

For the past decade under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (currently known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB)), those questions about schools and districts could — to a certain extent — be answered through a standards-based accountability process. NCLB was designed to provide a standard by which schools could be evaluated. Were the schools meeting or maintaining adequate yearly progress (AYP), or were they labeled as “needs improvement,” and for how many years did they have that distinction?

However, the law was due to be reautho-

rized in 2007 and, as of fall 2011, is being debated in Congress. Meanwhile, the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. DOE) has moved forward with new reforms such as Race to the Top and the Investing in Innovation grants. These programs are arguably more advanced and reform minded than the requirements under NCLB. However, states struggle to implement them due to constraints placed on them by the now outdated NCLB.¹ For example, any school that does not make AYP faces an increasing set of sanctions. By 2014, all schools are required to have 100 percent proficiency; otherwise, they will be labeled as “failing” schools.

In light of the challenge of gaining bipartisan agreement to re-authorize the bill, the current strategy appears to be for U.S. DOE to generate waivers to incrementally change different parts of the bill. The first set of waivers applies applied directly to the AYP requirements specified by NCLB. However, in order to qualify for waivers, states must engage in “serious state-led efforts to close

achievement gaps, promote rigorous accountability, and ensure that all students are on track to graduate college- and career-ready.”²

Though the waivers are designed to set aside the AYP standards required by NCLB, they continue to require an accountability system for schools and districts. Eleven states (including Georgia) applied for the waiver by the November 15, 2011 deadline and 21 others have filed “intent to apply” notices for the waiver application deadline, in mid-February 2012.³

What's the Significance for Georgia?

As part of the waiver process, states must adopt college- and career-ready standards in at least language arts/reading and math. States must also develop and administer annual aligned assessments that measure student growth in at least grades 3–8 and at least one assessment in high school. To ensure that the standards are college and career ready, states must also provide parents and students information about the college-readiness rates of local schools, and districts must annually report to the public on college-going and college credit-accumulation rates for all students and student subgroups.⁴

Over the past few years, governors and the Chief State School Officers (CSSO) have developed and adopted rigorous academic content standards to prepare all students for success in college and careers. Additionally, states are working to develop the next generation of assessments aligned with these new standards.

In its waiver application, Georgia goes beyond AYP to report on the effectiveness of schools by developing a new College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). The

1 Institute for a Competitive Workforce. (2011, October 24). *Waivers: What's at stake*. Retrieved from U.S. Chamber of Commerce: <http://icwuschamber.com/newsletter-article/waivers-what%E2%80%99s-stake>

2 Ibid.

3 McNeil, M. *11 states meet early bird deadline for NCLB waivers*. October 13, 2011. Retrieved from Education Week: http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2011/11/11_states_meet_early_bird_dead.html

4 U.S. Department of Education. *Flexibility to Improve Student Achievement and Increase the Quality of Instruction*. 2011. Retrieved from www.ed.gov/sites/default/files/esea-flexibility-acc_o.doc. Not helpful? You can block www.ed.gov results when you're signed in to search.www.ed.gov

TABLE 1.1 CCRPI CATEGORIES

High School	Middle School/Elementary School
1. Graduation Rate	1. Content Mastery and Preparation for High School or Middle School
2. Student Attendance	2. Student Attendance
3. Post-High School Readiness	3. Supports and Intervention
4. Content Mastery	4. Career Exploration

CCRPI will measure the extent to which a school, district and the state are successfully making progress on a specific list of accountability measures.⁵ This measurement will then determine which schools are exceeding standards and which need additional support to improve.

Georgia's working definition of a college- and career-readiness is:

The level of achievement required in order for a student to enroll in two or four year colleges and universities and technical colleges without remediation, fully prepared for college level work or immediately enter the workforce, including the U.S. military, without the need for additional skills training.⁶

The basis for the CCRPI is the college- and

career-ready indicators for high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools, which are grouped into four categories, as outlined in Table 1.1.

Within each of the categories are a series of indicators that measure the effectiveness of a school. Table 1.2⁷ shows the detailed indicators of the high school categories.

Each of the categories will receive a summary score based on the indicators. To evaluate their effectiveness, each will be evaluated through the lens of three outcome areas:

1. Achievement
2. Progress
3. Achievement gap closure

Each of these scores will be combined to provide a school-wide Achievement Score,

TABLE 1.2 COLLEGE AND CAREER READY PERFORMANCE INDEX, HIGH SCHOOL MODEL GRADES 9-12

Graduation Rate
Cohort Graduation Rate (%)
Student Attendance
Percent of students completing 3 or more Pathway Courses
Percent of CTAE Pathway Completers earning a CTAE Industry-Recognized Credential
Percent of tested students earning a Work Ready Certificate on the ACT Work Keys Assessment
Percent of graduated students entering Technical College System of Georgia technical colleges and/or University System of Georgia 2 or 4 year colleges and universities NOT requiring remediation or support courses
Percent of students earning high school credits(s) for accelerated enrollment via Dual Enrollment, Joint Enrollment, Move On When Ready, Advance Placement or International Baccalaureate courses
Percent of graduates earning 2 or more high school credits in the same world language
Percent of AP exams receiving scores of 3 or higher and/or percent of IB exams receiving scores of 4 higher
Percent of tested graduates scoring a minimum of 22 on the ACT (out of 36)
Percent of tested graduates scoring a minimum of 1550 on the SAT (out of 2400)
Percent of students scoring at exceeds on the Georgia High School Writing Test
Content Mastery (End of Course Tests and Writing Assessment to be replaced by Common Core Assessments, 2014-15)
Percent of students scoring at meets or exceeds on the Ninth Grade Literature End of Course Test
Percent of students scoring at meets or exceeds on the American Literature End of Course Test
Percent of students scoring at meets or exceeds on the Mathematics I (GPS Algebra) End of Course Test
Percent of students scoring at meets or exceeds on the Mathematics II (GPS Geometry) End of Course Test
Percent of students scoring at meets or exceeds on the Physical Science End of Course Test
Percent of students scoring at meets or exceeds on the Biology End of Course Test
Percent of students scoring at meets or exceeds on the US History End of Course Test
Percent of students scoring at meets or exceeds on the Economics End of Course Test

⁵ Georgia Department of Education. NCLB/ Waiver Request Letter to United States Department of Education. September 20, 2011. Atlanta, Ga.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Georgia Department of Education. Drop-Out Prevention Summit, Atlanta. November 17, 2011.

Progress Score and Achievement Gap Closure Score (Table 1.3). The school-wide scores in the three areas will be weighted to produce the school's **Overall CCRPI Score**. Schools will have an opportunity to increase their Overall CCRPI score by earning bonus points based on a fourth area — Factors for Success indicators (Table 1.4). These indicators are voluntary for each school, but are considered significant

indicators for moving from adequate to excellent. Achieving these indicators can add up to three bonus points to a school's overall CCRPI score.

Finally, the CCRPI has two more ratings that do not factor into the Overall CCRPI score: the Financial Efficiency Rating and the School Climate Rating. The Financial Efficiency Rating will provide information about the impact of

instructional expenses on student achievement and CCRPI outcomes. The School Climate Rating will be reflective of the school's environment and behavioral indicators, based on survey responses. Both of these ratings will be reported as a star rating from one to five stars.

Action Steps for Georgia

Since NCLB and reporting on AYP, Georgia has developed and implemented a Student Information System that collects detailed progress data on every student enrolled in the Georgia public school system. This new data system, combined with the CCRPI, provides schools with an unprecedented opportunity for subsequent school improvement and planning. The individual indicators should allow a school and a system to pinpoint where they are in need of improvement and where they excel, allowing for greater efficiency in resources and targeted interventions. The use of these data, analyzed by performance indicators and measures of achievement, progress and closure of the achievement gap, will also allow schools and districts to demonstrate their progress on improving student outcomes and closing the achievement gap.

The baseline CCRPI calculations will be reported to schools and districts at the end of the 2011-2012 school year. Once fully functional, when a parent asks, "How good is my child's school?" the CCRPI will give them an overall score (96 percent!), and star ratings along financial and climate ratings. Parents will also be able to see exactly the areas where their school excels and the precise areas where it may need improvement.

The key for Georgia in implementing this new system is transparency and public awareness. Parents are accustomed to the old AYP report card on schools and districts. The state should invest some effort to cross-walk how this new system compares to the old AYP system, with special emphasis on highlighting the improvements in the CCRPI over AYP. While the overall score will be a number that may correlate to a grading system (92 percent, for example), the use of indicators, measures and categories may initially be confusing to the public at large. ■

TABLE 1.3 DETAILS OF EACH COMPONENT SCORE⁸

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

TABLE 1.4 FACTORS FOR SUCCESS⁹

High School	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. % of graduates completing three credits in the same world language 2. % of graduates taking the SAT or ACT 3. % of graduates earning credit in a physics course 4. % of students in grade nine earning four Carnegie Unit Credits in four core content areas 5. % of graduated students qualifying for the Zell Miller Scholarship as awarded through legislative guidelines managed by the Georgia Student Finance Commission
Middle School	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. % of students in grade eight scoring proficient/advanced on the 21st Century Skills Technology Assessment 2. % of students in grades six and seven with a fully documented <i>Fitnessgram</i> assessment 3. % of students in grade eight scoring at exceeds in science 4. % of students successfully completing three years of courses in the fine arts and/or one world language and/or career exploratory 5. % of students in grade eight scoring at exceeds in mathematics 6. % of students in grade eight scoring at exceeds in social studies 7. % of eighth-grade students earning at least one high school credit
Elementary School	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. % of students enrolled in world language courses 2. % of students enrolled in fine arts courses 3. % of students in grades one through five with documented data for the <i>Fitnessgram</i> assessment 4. % of students in grade five scoring at exceeds in science 5. % of students in grade three scoring at exceeds in mathematics 6. % of students in grade five scoring at exceeds in reading 7. % of students in grade five scoring at exceeds in social studies

8 Georgia Department of Education "Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Accountability" R3 Summit Presentation. October 24, 2011.

9 Georgia Department of Education. Drop-Out Prevention Summit, Atlanta. November 17, 2011.

ISSUE 2

Assessing Teachers: From Highly Qualified to Highly Effective

Issue Overview

How much should a good teacher get paid? Should good teachers get paid more than bad teachers? In other industries, pay scales that are blind to performance are uncommon, and salary increases based on merit are the norm. However, in the public education system the norm has been to pay teachers based on a formula that focuses on qualifications, namely years of service and type of degree and/or license held. This meant that most teachers have historically been treated more or less the same regardless of their success with helping students learn.

Historically, policy decisions have been focused almost exclusively on teacher qualifications. However, research over the past decade has confirmed the strong impact teachers have on student achievement. This has created a new generation of policy recommendations, all of which focus on the increasing effectiveness of teachers.¹⁰ As a result, recent education policy has been moving away from the demand for “qualified” teachers and towards an insistence on “effective” teachers.

While the accountability trend was codified by the federal No Child Left Behind Act, more recent initiatives have focused on transforming the teaching profession. In particular, the Race to the Top (RT3) program, established by the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. DOE) as a component of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, was established to incentivize states to implement a “comprehensive approach to education reform.”¹¹ Among its priorities, RT3 directly ties teacher compensation to a teacher evaluation system by requiring states to “design and implement rigorous, transparent, and fair evaluation systems for teachers and principals that differentiate effectiveness using multiple rating categories that take into account data on student growth...as a significant factor.”¹² The U.S. DOE goes on to describe how those evaluations should be used in a variety of personnel decisions, including professional development, compensation (including greater compensation for highly effective teachers and principals), tenure granting, and the removal of ineffective teachers.

The question is no longer about whether or not to pay effective teachers more than ineffective teachers; the implementation of Race to the Top seems to have settled that issue, at least for now. The critical issue now becomes if good, effective teachers are going to be paid more than ineffective teachers, then what defines an effective teacher? Once defined, how can states measure that effectiveness? And finally, do policies that financially reward effective teachers necessarily improve student outcomes?

What’s the Significance for Georgia?

This issue is central to Georgia because it is a recipient of RT3 funding. As a result, Georgia is in the process of trying to answer those questions through the creation of Georgia’s RT3 Great Teachers and Leaders plan. To answer the first question of what defines an effective teacher, Georgia is developing a common evaluation system that will allow consistency and comparability across districts, based on a common definition of teacher and leader effectiveness.¹³ The evaluation system will create a single Teacher Effectiveness Measure (TEM) that will be generated by the Teacher Keys Evaluation System.¹⁴

The Teacher Keys Evaluation System combines three primary components (See Figure 2.1):

- 1) Teacher Assessment on Performance Standards (TAPS), which combine the use of classroom observations, walkthroughs, and lesson plans and teacher portfolios, to provide teachers constructive feedback across a variety of domains such as planning, instructional delivery, assessment, learning environment, and professionalism and communication;

¹⁰ For a review of the research and policy implications see National Council on Teacher Quality. *State of the States: Trends and Early Lessons on Teacher Evaluations and Effectiveness Policies*. Washington, DC: National Council on Teacher Quality. 2011.

¹¹ Whiteman, R.S. “Revamping the Teacher Evaluation Process.” Education Policy Brief Vol. 9, Issue 4. Fall 2011.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Georgia Department of Education. “Great Teachers and Leaders.” Retrieved from <http://www.doek12.ga.us/RT3.aspx>

¹⁴ Other measures are being developed for principals and assistant principals called the Leader Effectiveness Measure (LEM), and the District Effectiveness Measures (DEM) for district leaders.

- 2) The Surveys of Instructional Practice, which will include student surveys that ask questions along the same five domains as the TAPS; and
- 3) Student Growth and Academic Achievement, which will take into account student growth/value-added models.

Georgia will use the TEM system to inform all personnel decisions: professional development, compensation, promotion, retention, recertification, and interventions and dismissals. Higher performing teachers will have higher earning potential. Under RT3, it is proposed that increases in the salary schedule will be tied to performance, and every five years teachers must achieve a required TEM threshold as part of the recertification process.¹⁵

To formalize career advancement, under RT3, the state is also implementing a new career ladder. Georgia is still in the early stages of developing its career ladder, but its purpose is to develop teacher capacity. Figure 2.2 illustrates a proposed Career Ladder Guidelines under the new system and articulates how the relationship between TEM scores and career pay and trajectory could be related.

The RT3 evaluation system will be piloted in more than 500 schools within the state's 26 RT3 school districts beginning in January 2012. The system will be rolled out to all schools in the RT3 districts for the 2012-2013 school year, with plans to expand up to 60 new districts a year after that.¹⁶

This is Georgia's third attempt at implementing a merit — or pay for performance — system. Georgia's first attempt was part of the Quality Basic Education Act of 1986, which included plans for the development of a career ladder that would have created new pathways for teachers to increase their pay. The highest rung of the ladder would have provided teachers approximately \$17,000 in additional pay, and the program would have cost between \$250 million and \$300 million per year at full implementation.¹⁷ The state convened a 33-member task force to recommend a design, and the State Board of Education approved a pilot program in 1988. However, a recession led the

state legislature to eliminate funding for it, and teachers dropped out of the planned pilot.

Georgia's second attempt came in 1991,

when newly elected Governor Zell Miller created another task force to develop a pay-for-performance program to reward high-

FIGURE 2.1 TEACHER KEYS EVALUATION SYSTEM

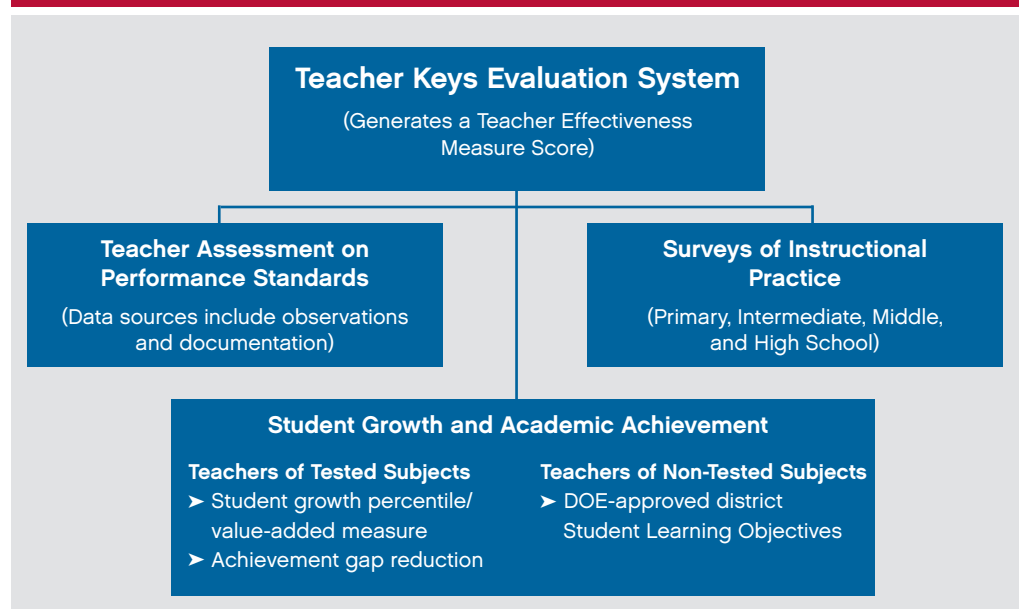
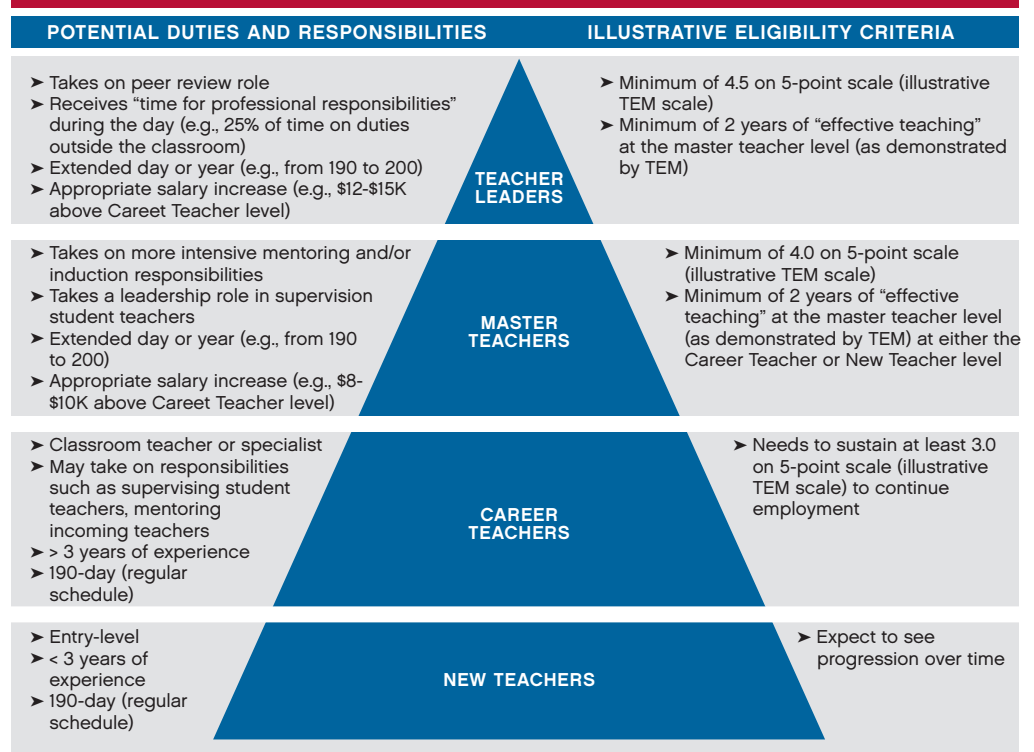


FIGURE 2.2 GEORGIA'S PROPOSED CAREER LADDER GUIDELINES



¹⁵ Georgia Department of Education. "Great Teachers and Leaders." Retrieved from <http://www.doek12.ga.us/RT3.aspx>.

¹⁶ Georgia Department of Education. "Teacher Keys Evaluation System and Leader Keys Evaluation System." Presented at Race to the Top Summit, October 24, 2011. Athens, GA.

¹⁷ Max, J. *School Based Performance Pay in Georgia*. Center for Educator Compensation Reform. 2008.

performing teachers. The task force recommended a school-based award plan, partly based on the difficulty of measuring and rewarding individual teachers at that time. Moreover, the two state teacher associations in Georgia — the Georgia Association of Educators and the Professional Association of Georgia Educators — promoted a pay plan that would have been based on school performance and would have provided districts flexibility in designing the plan. Associations representing superintendents, principals, and other administrators supported rewarding individuals and wanted a role in deciding which teachers received which rewards.¹⁸

The political realities and availability of reliable teacher assessment data led to the development of the two-pronged approach where: 1) schools received rewards for meeting their own performance measures, and then 2) teachers within each school would determine how the rewards were distributed. The program ended in 2003. At the program's peak, 10 percent of the schools in the state had received approval to participate in the program and 6 percent had earned an award.¹⁹

This program differed from the current TEM program in several important ways. The program was voluntary; schools had substantial flexibility to design their own performance objectives; and schools could determine their own method for distributing funds. Moreover, the incentives were considered one-time bonuses. Any amount received by an individual teacher was not factored into that teacher's base salary. Finally, the pay-for-performance system was designed to reward the school first. Any individual high performing teacher would not receive a bonus unless the entire school met its performance targets.

Unfortunately, a formal evaluation of the Pay for Performance Program was not conducted and the total number of schools that ultimately participated was too small to gauge state-level impact of the program. However, research has been conducted on other pay-for-performance models that show mixed effects. In the fall of 2010, results were

released from one of the first randomized studies of the effects of merit pay on student performance. Researchers from the National Center on Performance Incentives at Vanderbilt University examined the test scores of 300 middle school math teachers who agreed to participate in the Project on Incentives in Teaching (POINT).

The POINT study was intended to test the hypothesis that rewarding teachers for improved scores would cause scores to increase. It was up to the participating teachers to decide what, if anything, they needed to do to raise student performance: participate in more professional development, seek coaching, collaborate with other teachers, or simply reflect on their own teaching practices. Therefore, POINT was focused on the notion that a significant problem with the U.S. educational system was simply the absence of appropriate incentives. In theory, just correcting the incentive structure would, in and of itself, be an effective intervention that would improve student outcomes.

The results of the study disproved that hypothesis. The study found no overall effect on student achievement across the entire treatment group. The researchers did find a significant benefit for fifth-graders in years two and three of the study. Fifth-graders taught by teachers who earned bonuses showed gains in test scores. However, those effects did not carry into the sixth grade when students were tested a year later.²⁰ The study concludes that simply offering more money for better outcomes does not lead to improved student performance. However, they did stress this study examined the effects of a particular model of incentive pay, and went on to suggest a merit-system that combined incentives with professional development and coaching was worth investigating.

Since the POINT study, a number of evaluations have been undertaken of other types of pay for performance programs. However, none of them rise to the academic rigor of the POINT research. As shown in Table 2.1, some pay for performance models show very little

impact on student achievement, similar to the POINT study. However, others have demonstrated very specific positive impacts on math and reading proficiency, schools meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP), and teacher retention.²¹ Those with the greatest impacts focused on job-related professional development as part of the teacher assessment system.

Action Steps for Georgia

There are several critical steps for Georgia to help ensure the new teacher evaluation system leads to better student outcomes. First, research has shown that pay-for-performance, or merit systems that only use evaluation for salary decisions do not produce better outcomes for kids. The primary focus of a teacher evaluation system should be to help improve instruction and better design professional development activities to meet teacher needs. Georgia's new system does emphasize regular observations and data analysis to provide teachers with real-time feedback on their classroom practices, and school leaders can use what they observe to offer meaningful professional development targeted to specific teacher needs. This should help drive professional development, which in turn can drive student outcomes.

As the evaluation systems are rolled out, supporting policies should be put in place to ensure high-quality teacher evaluation data are used in decisions that matter most to teacher effectiveness, including what to do about persistently low-performing teachers. The current policies being developed under RT3 in Georgia are trying to address those issues.

Second, as the new evaluation system is finalized, we need to carefully examine the formula that leads to the TEM. For example, a certain percentage of the score will come from the classroom observational data and student and parent survey, the largest percentage will be from the student growth models — effectively tying teacher evaluations to student test scores. A study conducted by the Economic Policy Institute warns against relying too

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Springer, M. G., Ballou, D., Hamilton, L., Le, V.-N., Lockwood, J., McCaffrey, D. F., et al. *Teacher Pay for Performance: Experimental Evidence from the Project on Incentives in Teaching*. Vanderbilt University. National Center on Performance Incentives. 2010.

²¹ Education Commission of the States. *More on Pay-for-Performance: New Developments in the Field Provide Insight for Policy Makers*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States. October 2011.

TABLE 2.1 RESEARCH ON PAY-FOR-PERFORMANCE KEY OUTCOMES²²**1. Prince George's County's Financial Incentives and Rewards for Supervisors and Teachers (FIRST)**

Program: Provides educators with incentives of up to \$12,500 for: 1) working in hard-to-staff schools, 2) participating in professional development, and 3) engaging in leadership projects. Performance was measured by student test scores and classroom observations.

Results: Researchers found "little to no impact" on educator recruitment, retention, and student performance at participating schools.

2. New York City's School-Wide Performance Bonus Program (SPBP)

Program: Schools that met annual performance targets could get bonuses up to \$3,000 per full-time unionized teacher staff member, where a compensation committee would determine how the bonuses would be distributed.

Results: After three years, researchers found no positive effects on student achievement and the city has since suspended the program.

3. Study of Six Teacher Incentive Fund Sites: Louisiana, Arizona, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas.

Programs: Collectively, these programs all included job-embedded professional development collaborative teacher groups, significant principal involvement in the evaluation process, differentiated evaluation results for teachers, differentiated pay based on student achievement, and principal performance pay.

Results: Collectively, the school systems achieved the following:

- Academic growth greater than one year for many schools
- Increased teacher retention rates
- Increased percentages of schools meeting AYP goals
- Increased high school graduation rates
- Significant increases in math and reading proficiency
- Increases in teacher collaboration

heavily on student test scores — especially value-added models (VAM) — in any teacher evaluation formula.²³ While the report is in favor of teacher evaluation systems, it recommends that test scores should only be part of the overall formula and that relying on value-model scores for up to 50 percent or more of the formula could be problematic.

In summary, the study authors argue that VAM results have trouble accurately identifying more effective teachers from less. The

study found that across five large urban districts, among teachers who were ranking 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 the teacher's rating for the following year. Therefore, a teacher who appeared very effective in one year, may have dramatically different results the following year. The study

argues that much of the variation comes from the difference 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 lined up with the curriculum the teachers are teaching.²⁴

As designed, Georgia's evaluation system has a combination of factors that go into the final TEM formula. We need to be sure that our formula adequately allows for some of the concerns raised in relying too heavily on student growth models: primarily extra-curricular instructional activities and proper alignment of assessments to curriculum.

Third, adequate and sustained funding is critical to the systems success. In the late 1980s the state tried to implement a career ladder, which was abandoned due to budget cuts. Currently, dollars for the new TEM system are provided for with federal Race to the Top funds. However, this type of effort requires a significant commitment to evaluation, training, and monitoring in the years to come, especially as it expands state wide. Georgia should fold this system into a larger Georgia education agenda that commits funding for not only the initial training and roll out teacher evaluations, but a long-term sustainability as well.

Finally, a careful evaluation of the teacher evaluation system needs to be put in place. A shortcoming of the previous pay-for-performance system was that the effect on student outcomes was never studied. Critical to the success of this new model is an understanding of what sections are effective and which sections need to be altered. ■

²² Ibid. The research summary is provided by this report.

²³ 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.

²⁴ Ibid.

ISSUE 3

Implementation of Common Core

Issue Overview

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) brought accountability to the forefront of education policy. With it came states' efforts to develop curriculum and create assessments that would track students' progress. Each state was left to develop its own curriculum, assessments, and standards for academic proficiency, resulting in disparate content guidelines across individual states. Although NCLB helped identify strengths and weaknesses within states, there remained an inability to compare achievement across states. Moreover, as students transferred to new schools across state lines, they were likely to encounter a different set of expectations. In an effort to ensure all students were prepared to enter college and the workforce, and could compete nationally and globally, The National Governors Association for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) coordinated an effort to support states in the development of common standards in English language arts and mathematics. These standards would represent a nation-wide consensus on expectations for student knowledge and skills that should be

developed in grades K-12.

The Common Core State Standards initiative has five main priorities: equity, preparation, competition, clarity, and collaboration. Specifically, the Common Core standards create a national focus on the following:

- 1) A priority of equity, which represents a desire for students to be held to the same expectations no matter where they reside;
- 2) college- and career-readiness, with standards designed to ensure that all students are prepared to succeed in education and training after high school;
- 3) international benchmarks so that students can compete nationally and globally;
- 4) clarity for students, teachers and parents about what is expected; and
- 5) collaboration and sharing among states and districts.²⁵

To date, 45 states have adopted the Common Core standards, but most do not expect to fully implement the more complex changes associated with this adoption until 2013 or later. Some of these complex changes include changes in assessments, curriculum materials, teacher evaluation, and teacher certi-

fication policies.²⁶ Some support in the development of assessments will come through two consortia, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC). The federal Race to the Top (RT3) initiative offered competitive grants to the two consortia to develop assessments that align with the Common Core standards in English language arts and math. PARCC, which comprises 24 states, will receive \$186 million to develop assessments for students in grades 3 through high school. PARCC's assessments will be primarily computer-based and will incorporate some performance-based assessments. SBAC, which comprises 29 states, will receive \$176 million to develop a system of computer adaptive, online assessments.²⁷ Both consortia are also working on frameworks that will bridge the gap between the standards and the assessments. According to PARCC, their frameworks 1) provide support and guidance for the implementation of the Common Core; and 2) inform the design and development of their assessments.²⁸

What's the Significance for Georgia?

Georgia has declared its support of the Common Core from the onset. Former Governor Perdue was chosen by the NGA to co-chair the Common Core initiative.²⁹ Georgia's State Board of Education adopted the standards shortly after the release of the final draft in 2010. Georgia is also working as a member of PARCC to design common assessments. Professional development began in 2010-11 for administrators and in 2011-12 for teachers. Georgia anticipates implementing the Common Core in the fall of 2012 and giving common assessments by 2014-15.³⁰ In Georgia,

25 Georgia Department of Education. "The Common Core State Standards Initiative"(Presentation). October 2011.

26 Kober, N., & Rentner, D. S. "States' Progress and Challenges in Implementing Common Core State Standards." Center on Education Policy. January 2011.

27 U.S. Department of Education. "U.S. Secretary of Education Duncan Announces Winners of Competition to Improve Student Assessments." September 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov>; See also Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), <http://www.parcconline.org>

28 Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. "PARCC Content Frameworks." Retrieved from <http://www.parcconline.org>

29 Georgia Department of Education. "Common Core State Standards Initiative." June 2010. Retrieved from <http://public.doe.k12.ga.us>

the Common Core is known as the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS). The name creates a bridge between Georgia's current curriculum standards, known as the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS), and the new Common Core standards. According to the Georgia Department of Education, the Common Core incorporates much of the GPS, but expands on the GPS to better prepare students for the demands of college and careers. The CCGPS "represent a common sense next step" from the current GPS, suggesting that students and teachers should transition well with the revisions in the curriculum.³¹

Although supporters contend that the common standards will raise the bar for all students, some research suggests that portions of the common standards are lower than some states' existing standards. A recent study comparing the Common Core standards with current standards in 31 states found that there is considerable difference in the content of the Common Core and state standards. The study determined that, on average, the Common Core standards in math are more focused than states' standards, but they are not more focused in English language arts. Another finding in the study is that in grades 3-6 for math, the Common Core places less emphasis on advanced algebra and geometry than state standards do. The researchers conclude that although it is unclear if topics in the Common Core will be an improvement over all of the states' standards, a greater emphasis on higher order cognitive demand should result from adoption of the Common Core.³²

Another study compared the Common Core standards to standards in California and Massachusetts. The study reports that California and Massachusetts are regarded as having high standards already in math and English language arts. If the Common Core is meant to raise the bar for all students, then it should rise to the level of the standards already

existing in these states. The study reports, however, that the Common Core standards are actually lower than the standards in each of these states. They question just how ready students will be for college and careers by following the new Common Core.³³

Despite these criticisms of the new Common Core, 45 states, two territories, and the District of Columbia have adopted the standards. Although the Common Core is state-led, the federal government has encouraged the adoption of higher standards. For instance, states were awarded extra points on Race to the Top (RT3) grant applications for adopting the standards. Many states, including Georgia are currently seeking waivers from NCLB's 2014 deadline to have 100 percent of students meeting proficiency levels on state tests. Adoption of college- and career-ready standards is being tied to approval of these waivers in some states. Adoption of the Common Core would meet this criterion. The federal administration is clear, however, that states do not have to adopt the Common Core to apply for the waiver, as long as the state agrees to adopt high standards that prepare children for college and careers.

Action Steps for Georgia

Although Georgia will roll out the Common Core in the fall of 2012 for reading/language arts and math, there are a number of questions that still need to be addressed, particularly in the areas of funding, professional development, and adjustment to the new standards on the part of teachers and students. Currently, funding from the federal RT3 will likely give Georgia added support in overcoming the complex challenges associated with adoption.³⁴ This funding is only temporary, however, and the state will need to consider how it will cover the costs of this initiative over the long term. Experts warn that teachers will need professional development in the Common Core

because the standards are different than previous state standards.³⁵ To that end, professional development will continue to be a need for educators after RT3 funds expire, so the state should consider now how it will fund this need in the future.

Students' adjustment to the Common Core may also prove difficult. The Common Core will push students to read all content — not just English language arts — on a higher level. In 2011, one-third of Georgia's fourth graders were reading below the basic level according to the results of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP).³⁶ With so many students not reading on grade level, the change in the standards will likely result, at least initially, in a drop in school achievement. Georgia should be prepared for this as students adjust to the higher expectations, but this should not be a reason to lower the bar. Our focus should instead be on giving students the support that they need to meet these higher expectations. Also, with the new expectations and their impact on test scores, the standards should be clearly communicated to all stakeholders, including parents, community and business members, and local and state leaders.

With these changes in mind, Georgia should be careful with how it assesses students, and what consequences get tied to those assessments. Additionally, the state must be mindful with how it ties teacher effectiveness to student achievement. With every new program there is a learning curve, so we must give students and teachers the time and the resources to make the implementation of the Common Core successful for the entire state.

Finally, over the coming year, it will be important to watch how political tensions impact the implementation of the new standards. Proponents of the Common Core argue that these standards provide an opportunity to create a national curriculum that brings shared expectations, focus, efficiency,

30 Georgia Department of Education. "ELA and Mathematics Common Core GPS Timeline." August 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.gadoe.org>

31 Georgia Department of Education. "Common Core State Standards Initiative." June 2010. Retrieved from <http://public.doe.k12.ga.us>

32 Porter, A., McMaken, J., Hwang, J., & Yang R. "Common Core Standards: The New U.S. Intended Curriculum." *Educational Researcher* Vol. 40, Issue 3, 103-116. April 2011. Content analysis of math standards was conducted for 27 states, and content analysis for English/language arts and reading standards was conducted for 24 states.

33 Stotsky, S., & Wurman, Z. "Common Core's Standards Still Don't Make the Grade: Why Massachusetts and California Must Regain Control over Their Academic Destinies." July 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.pioneerinstitute.org>

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

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

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

and quality of assessments that are uniform for all children.³⁷ However, opponents of the Common Core have several issues with its national adoption.³⁸ First, many argue that education within the U.S. has historically been the responsibility of the individual school districts and the states and a national standard violates states' rights. Second, and relatedly, opponents criticize the link between RT3 and the CCSSO. For states to qualify to receive RT3, they must have embraced participating in a common set of standards. At that time, CCSSO had the only standards under development and states only had a very short time to review them and agree to their adoption. Finally, critics also argue that with states facing severe budget shortfalls and limited RT3 funding, the \$350 million provided to develop the aligned assessments will not cover the entire cost of overhauling state systems of accountability, which include the implementation of the new standards, professional development and curriculum restructuring. ■

³⁷ Porter, A., McMaken, J., Hwang, J., & Yang, R. "Common Core Standards: The New U.S. Intended Curriculum." *Educational Researcher* Vol. 40, Issue 3, pp. 103-116, April 2011.

³⁸ American Legislative Exchange Council. "Comprehensive Legislative Package Opposing the Common Core State Standards Initiative." 2011.

ISSUE 4

Challenges to Rural Schools

Issue Overview

On June 9, 2011 the White House Rural Council was established to address challenges in rural America and to build on the administration's rural economic strategy. The Council began its work by visiting more than 200 rural communities in 46 states — including Georgia — to investigate fostering economic development and improve quality of life in rural America. In his summary report of the findings, Secretary of Agriculture Thomas Vilsack, also chair of the White House Rural Council, wrote that education was the number one concern of rural residents. Rural citizens were primarily concerned with the overall quality of education in their communities. They also shared concerns about the need for vocational training and the costs of higher education.³⁹

While individual rural counties may have small populations, the overall number of students living in rural counties across America is significant, and growing. Enrollment in rural schools is increasing both in absolute terms and as a percentage of total students. Nationwide, between 2004 and 2009, rural school enrollments grew 11 percent, and the percentage of students living in rural counties increased from 22 percent to 24 percent.⁴⁰ Rural enrollment is also becoming more diverse. During that same time period, enrollment of students of color increased 31

percent. The highest-poverty rural schools are even more diverse. Among the rural districts in the top 10 percent of poverty, 59 percent of their students were students of color — 28 percent African-American, 23 percent Hispanic, and 8 percent Native American.⁴¹

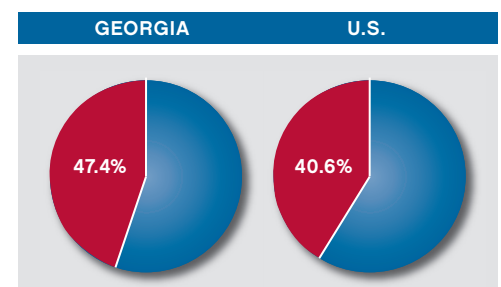
With nearly one-quarter of America's students in rural communities, attention must be drawn to the challenges they face. While individual rural districts may be large in terms of the amount of land they cover, rural areas by definition have small populations; therefore, they generally do not have a large and robust local tax base to support funding for education. It is also harder for rural districts to recruit and retain teachers, especially in high-need subjects such as physics or calculus, thereby limiting educational opportunities for students. Finally, for rural communities, the connection between high-quality education and economic development is a priority. Employment trends now require that workers have some form of higher education. Even the manufacturing and agriculture fields, which traditionally did not require any post-secondary training, are increasingly requiring education and training beyond a high school diploma. For these communities to attract business and maintain a vibrant economy, a quality educational system must be present.

What's the Significance for Georgia?

The significance in Georgia is found in the size of our rural population and the achievement gaps that exist. More than half-a-million children in Georgia attend rural public schools, approximately one-third (34 percent) of all students in the state. It is the nation's third largest rural population; only Texas and North Carolina have a higher absolute number of students in rural districts.⁴² The districts themselves are among the largest in the nation, with only 2 percent considered "small rural districts."⁴³

Not only does the state have a relatively large rural population, it is a diverse population as well. Over 30 percent are minority students and 6 percent are English Language Learners.⁴⁴ Both percentages are higher than the national average — 22 percent and 2 percent, respectively. In addition to having a diverse population, those living in rural districts have higher poverty rates than the national average — 47 percent in Georgia versus 41 percent in the U.S. overall (See Figure 4.1). Related to the effects of poverty are high mobility rates. According to an analysis of U.S. census data conducted by the Rural School and

FIGURE 4.1 PERCENTAGE OF RURAL STUDENTS IN POVERTY⁴⁶



39 Vilsack, T.J. White House Rural Council: Feedback from Rural America. Washington, D.C.: The White House. 2011.

40 Strange, M. "Rural Student Success Critical to National Goals" August 24, 2011. Retrieved from Education Week: www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/08/24/o1strange.h31.html.

41 Ibid.

42 Johnson, J., & Strange, M. *Why Rural Matters 2009: State and Regional Challenges and Opportunities*. Washington, D.C.: Rural School and Community Trust Policy Program. 2009.

43 Small rural districts are those districts with enrollment below the national median for rural districts (535).

44 Johnson, J., & Strange, M. *Why Rural Matters 2009: State and Regional Challenges and Opportunities*. Washington, D.C.: Rural School and Community Trust Policy Program. 2009.

TABLE 4.1 4TH GRADE NAEP READING SCORES % PROFICIENT, GEORGIA V. U.S.⁴⁷

	All Students	Suburban Students	Rural Students
Georgia	32%	39%	33%
U.S. Average	34%	39%	35%

Community Trust, 14 percent of students in rural schools changed residences within the previous 12 months.⁴⁵ This places Georgia 11th in the nation for residential mobility among rural students. Mobility is a measure of economic distress that can disrupt consistency in teaching and learning, which research has associated with lower academic achievement.

Such a large proportion of students enrolled in rural schools can create challenges for a state educational system and can lead to achievement gaps between rural and non-rural students. For example, an analysis of the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), often referred to as the “Nation’s Report Card,” shows that 32 percent of fourth graders performed at or above the proficient level on the reading test. When broken out by geographic category, 39 percent of suburban fourth graders scored proficient compared to 33 percent of rural students on the reading portion of the NAEP (See Table 4.1 for national comparisons).

The gaps persist past the fourth grade through high school. In 2009, Georgia had the third-lowest graduation rate for rural students in the nation — 56.2 percent.⁴⁸ This was far below the national average for rural students, 69.2 percent, and below the state’s overall graduation rate, 67.8 percent.⁴⁹

One of the reasons for the achievement gap is the lack of effective teachers in the classroom. Due to their remote locations and lower resources, many rural districts have difficulties attracting and retaining high-quality teachers. Georgia is taking steps to alleviate that barrier. Under the federal Race to the Top (RT3) grant, Georgia is working on implementing a program of equitable distribution of

effective teachers. The purpose of the program is to encourage effective teachers to teach in high-need schools by:

1. Providing achievement gap reduction bonuses for teachers in high-need schools that are successful in closing the gap between high-performing and low-performing subgroups; and
2. Providing signing bonuses for teachers who choose to move to rural high-need schools, contingent on meeting a high score on their own teacher evaluations.⁵⁰

To increase the pipeline of effective teachers in high-need schools and hard-to-staff-subject areas, Georgia is entering into partnerships with external organizations with proven records of recruiting and training effective teachers in shortage areas. One such partnership is with The New Teacher Project (TNTP). Through its Georgia Teaching Fellows Program (GTFFP), TNTP will recruit, select, train, and certify recent college graduates and mid-career professionals over a five-year period to teach full-time in high-need schools across Georgia. The program has begun a few pilot districts across the state. One such area is in the rural southwest region, including Dougherty, Meriwether and Muscogee County schools. The program aims to produce 30—55 new teachers annually to work in the area.⁵¹

Finally, under RT3, Georgia will establish a Grow Your Own Teacher competitive grant program for rural districts. This fund will enable districts to partner with local institutes of higher education to design, implement and evaluate their own individualized program model to meet specific local needs.

Action Steps for Georgia

With 47 percent of students enrolled in rural schools living in poverty, the connection between a quality education and economic development has never been sharper. The Georgia Department of Education (DOE) is in the process of developing and implementing new pathways to graduation that include 17 career clusters, which range from agriculture, to finance, to transportation (See Table 4.2 for a full list of career clusters). Local districts will be able to select which clusters they want to offer based on their economic development needs and student interests. These career clusters are designed to engage the students in subjects of interest and provide students an

TABLE 4.2 PROPOSED PATHWAY CAREER CLUSTERS⁵²

- **The Georgia DOE shall develop a curriculum for the following programs of study including, but not limited to:**
1. Agriculture, food, and natural resources
 2. Architecture and construction
 3. Arts, audio-video technology, and communications
 4. Business, management, and administration
 5. Education and training
 6. Finance
 7. Health science
 8. Hospitality and tourism
 9. Human services
 10. Information technology
 11. Law, public safety, and security
 12. Manufacturing
 13. Government and public administration
 14. Marketing, sales, and service
 15. Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
 16. Transportation, distribution, and logistics
 17. *Energy (Not required by state law but will be developed)*

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 *NAEP Data Explorer*. 2011. Retrieved from National Center for Education Statistics: <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/report.aspx>

48 Stillwell, R., Sable, J., & Plotts, C. *Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2008–09* (NCES 2011-312). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics. 2011. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>

49 The graduation rate calculated by the Center for Education Statistics is the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR). The AFGR is based on the number of graduates relative to the number of estimated first-time 9th-graders that would be eligible for graduation.

50 Georgia Department of Education. “Great Teachers and Leaders.” 2010. Retrieved from www.doe.k12.ga.us/RT3.aspx

51 Georgia Department of Education. *Georgia Teaching Fellows: The New Teacher Project, Scope of Services Detailed*. Atlanta: Georgia Department of Education. 2011.

52 Reichrath, M. R. “State of Education in Georgia.” State of Education in Georgia Conference. Athens: Georgia Department of Education. 2011.

opportunity of career awareness and exploration. Moreover, they provide some level of career preparation while the students are still in high school.

In terms of economic development, 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 force, which will help them attract more local business investment and economic development.

Georgia needs to keep a close eye on how students living in rural districts are progressing. The new Georgia College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) is a step in the right direction. Schools are held accountable for the number of career pathway classes students take, the percentage of students who graduate with a career ready certificate, and the percentage of students enrolled in dual enrollment programs, for example. The CCRPI also monitors achievement gaps and can be used as a tool for schools and districts to identify areas where improvements are needed.

However, with shrinking state and local budgets, meeting many of these new standards may be a challenge for rural districts that are already financially strapped. Community partnerships between the district and local businesses, non-profits and community leaders can help. Local districts can form public-private partnerships around college access, including raising money for scholarships for two- and four-year programs. Local districts can partner with other rural districts to share distance-learning expenses. They can also apply for

federal funding, such as the federal Investing in Innovation — or i3 — grants. The i3 program, established under the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and extended by Congress earlier this year as part of the fiscal 2011 budget, seeks to find innovative and promising education strategies that also have a good record of success. Awards for 2011 range from up to \$3 million for “development” grants to as much as \$25 million for the “scale-up” award. Also for the 2011 awards, priority is being given to proposals aimed at promoting science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education and increasing achievement and high school graduation rates in rural schools.

Instructional technology is necessary to engage students and raise the quality of learning in rural areas. In their report, *Transforming the Rural South*, the Tennessee State Collaborative on Reforming Education laid out a series of recommendations on how to utilize technology.

1. Investigate virtual school models that have proven successful at improving student achievement,
2. Provide professional development for teachers so they can effectively integrate online learning techniques into their lesson plans,
3. Align online resources with state standards so students in rural locations have access to materials that enrich instruction,
4. Engage the postsecondary community to provide online professional development on needed topics and content areas to teachers working in remote areas through distance learning and other technologies, and

5. Utilize distance-learning technology to ensure that all students have access to supplemental and advanced course work and teachers who can effectively deliver instruction.⁵³

Students in rural districts often lack access to rigorous, college-readiness classes due to low enrollments and lack of qualified teachers. Also, in early grades, schools often lack access to teachers who are specialists in areas such as early reading comprehension, math, and science. Compounding that problem, rural teachers often work in isolation; they may be the only teachers in their schools or districts that teach a particular grade or subject matter. Therefore, they can have weak professional learning communities and support. In recent years, technology has emerged that can help rural areas meet these needs. For instance, the Georgia Virtual School (GAVS) currently offers 22 different Advanced Placement courses to students, increasing access to college-readiness coursework for students in remote areas. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission, which oversees teacher certification, approves online professional development courses for teachers at several universities in the state. Yet there is still much work to be done to bring education in rural communities onto a level playing field with the rest of the state, and to bring the state onto a level playing field with the rest of the nation. With one-third of Georgia’s students attending school in rural areas, and many of them living in poverty, the future of Georgia is intricately connected to our ability to make long-term investments in rural education. ■

⁵³ State Collaborative on Reforming Education. *Transforming the Rural South: A Roadmap to Improving Rural Education*. Nashville: State Collaborative on Reforming Education. 2011.

ISSUE 5

The New Normal: Georgia's Education Financing

Issue Overview

One cannot read a newspaper or listen to the radio without hearing about the economy in crisis. The national credit rating has been downgraded, partly in response to the threat of defaulting on the national debt; the stock market has been highly volatile; state governments are in substantial debt; and there are highly public "Occupy" protests over the Wall Street bailouts.

To date, state education agencies have approached this economic crisis as a storm they can ride out through years of austerity cuts and reliance on an infusion of federal dollars. In 2009, 70 percent of the nation's school districts experienced budget decreases

by at least 5 percent. For 2010, two thirds (63 percent) of districts had their budgets reduced by at least 5 percent.⁵⁴ State budget shortfalls totaled more than \$100 billion in each of the fiscal years 2009, 2010 and 2011. These shortfalls are expected to continue into the foreseeable future.⁵⁵ However, there is a widespread perception that states can no longer continue to rely on cuts and wait for the economy to improve. Rather, these economic realities dictate a new normal for states and districts in how they approach public education funding. How can Georgia adjust its funding model to work within the current economic climate, and where does the state go from here?

What's the Significance for Georgia?

The national impact of the economic downturn that began in 2007 has been devastating to all state budgets. Since education typically comprises at least half a state's overall spending, K-12 budgets have been deeply cut in response to dwindling revenues. The state cuts have trickled down to reductions at the district level. Over a 12-month period beginning in September 2010, despite private sector job growth of 1.7 million, local governments reduced the number of teachers and education professionals by nearly 200,000 people.⁵⁶ This loss represents approximately two thirds of all local government jobs lost during this period. Georgia's experience is emblematic of this challenge. Georgia's 2012 budget includes \$6.96 billion in state funding for K-12 education, a reduction of \$1.2 billion since 2009 (see Table 5.2 for budget highlights). Like many states, Georgia had been relying on federal funding — the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) — to help fill funding gaps. However, ARRA funds expired in 2011, and the 2012 state budget does not replace them. While the state funding level is equivalent to 2011, the loss of ARRA funding combined with projected growth in student enrollment will cause state spending per pupil to fall to its lowest level in over a decade.

TABLE 5.1 ECONOMIC IMPACTS ON DISTRICTS⁵⁷

Districts are compensating by cutting jobs

- Nearly 300,000 educator jobs have been lost since 2008 and account for 54 percent of job losses in local government.
- Approximately 85 percent of districts with funding decreases cut jobs for teachers.
- Approximately 61 percent of districts anticipating budget cuts in 2011-2012 have plans to cut staff.

Funding cuts are hampering progress on school reforms

- 66 percent of districts with budget shortfalls in 2010-2011 are either slowing progress on planned reforms or postponing or stopping reform initiatives.
- More than half (54 percent) of districts with budget shortfalls in 2011-2012 expect to slow progress on reforms or postpone or stop initiatives.

TABLE 5.2 FY2012 BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS⁵⁸

- Total K-12 budget = \$6.96 billion
- Loss of American Recovery Act Funding (\$141 million)
- Quality Basic Education (QBE) program funding cut by \$1.1 billion

⁵⁴ Center on Education Policy. *Strained Schools Face Bleak Future*. Washington, D.C.: Center on Education Policy. 2011.

⁵⁵ Executive Office of the President. "Teacher Jobs at Risk." Washington, D.C.: The White House. 2011.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Center on Education Policy. *Strained Schools Face Bleak Future*. Washington, D.C.: Center on Education Policy. 2011.

⁵⁸ Georgia Department of Education. "Earning Sheets for FY 2012 and FY 2011." 2011. Retrieved from Quality Basic Education Reports: http://app.doe.k12.ga.us/ows-bin/owa/qbe_reports.public_menu?p_fy=2000

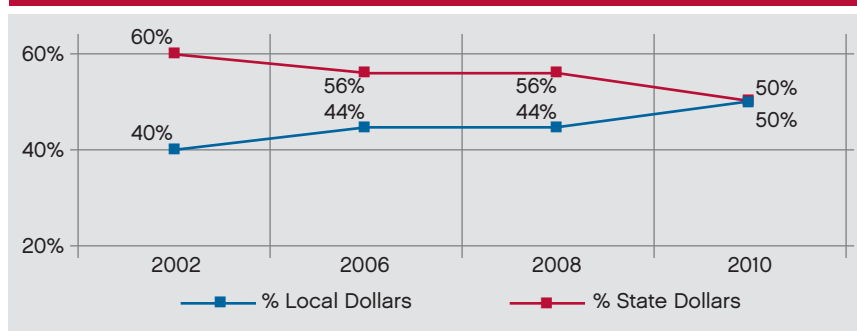
The state budget crisis has shifted the financial burden of public education to local districts. Before the recession hit, local school revenues were split, approximately 60 percent state funds and 40 percent local funds. By 2010, that distribution had shifted to a 50/50 split between state and local dollars.⁵⁹ (See Figure 5.1.)

Districts across the state have strived to make up the difference by trying to increase their own revenue streams through millage rate increases and Educational Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (ESPLOST) proposals. However, despite these efforts most districts are forced to cut teachers and staff — either through furlough days or layoffs — to make up the difference. Teacher furloughs began in the fall of 2009, when Governor Sonny Perdue asked teachers to take three furlough days during the 2009-2010 school year in order to save Georgia \$135 million. Most school systems reduced the number of teacher planning days, meaning teachers had less time to prepare for their incoming students. Even with the furlough days, many systems still had to cut staff due to decreased budgets. During 2008, local Georgia districts employed 118,604 teachers.⁶¹ During the 2010 school year, those same districts employed 115,727,⁶² a reduction of nearly 3,000 teachers (2.4 percent).

To accommodate the reduction in teaching staff, districts have chosen to increase class size, eliminate summer and after-school programs, discontinue instruction in subjects such as art and music, or reduce the number of days students attend school.

Increasing class size has been the most common approach employed by districts to reduce their budgets. This adjustment allows the district to reduce expenses by employing fewer teachers. During the 2009-2010 school year, 106 Georgia school districts received a waiver from the Georgia State Board of Education to permit larger classes. During the 2010-2011 school year, the State Board of

FIGURE 5.1 DISTRIBUTION OF DISTRICT REVENUE SOURCES⁶⁰



Education approved an additional 18 such requests.⁶³

However, many districts are not able to close their funding gaps by simply reducing the number of teachers in their schools. Georgia is also giving districts leeway to decrease the traditional 180-day calendar, as long as the students still receive the same amount of instructional time. According to data provided by the Georgia Department of Education, 18 school districts in Georgia received permission to reduce the number of school days students attend during the 2010-2011 school year. Of those, 13 districts have a school calendar of less than 160 days.

Even more drastically, seven of the state's school systems now only operate four days a week. Peach County led the trend in 2009 when it decided to hold classes Tuesday through Friday to account for a nearly \$800,000 budget shortfall. Peach County has estimated a savings of \$313,000 during the first year in transportation and utility costs.⁶⁴ Smaller and/or rural districts that do not have the local tax base to raise extra funds are particularly drawn to this option. For example, Elbert County was faced with declining revenue from both state and local tax dollars and had a \$4.8 million budget deficit. In response, they moved to a four-day week schedule in 2011, with students attending school Tuesdays through Fridays (although the

school board added one hour to each school day). In addition to the four-day schedule, the district cut 4 percent of its staff and added 10 unpaid furlough days to the school calendar.

The Education Commission of the States analyzed what savings are gained by moving to a four-day week.⁶⁵ The study determined the average district potentially could produce a maximum savings of 5.43 percent by moving to a four-day week. However, it was found that districts that actually moved to a four-day week experienced actual savings of only between 0.4 percent and 2.5 percent.

The Center for Education Policy did a review of the literature on the impact of the four-day school week in the four areas of finances, achievement, other student and teacher outcomes, and stakeholder satisfaction.⁶⁶ The authors found that despite more than 35 years of implementation, few studies have documented the impact of the four-day school week and those that have are not often peer-reviewed or scientifically-based; furthermore, few summaries of this literature provide any critical analysis of the results. However, focusing on the results that do exist, the review revealed generally positive trends. Districts generally did not save as much as they hoped, but there are reported savings in transportation, food costs and substitute teachers. The degree of additional cost reductions are dependent on the use of facilities

59 Georgia Department of Education. *Local, State, and Federal Revenue Report, FY 2010*. 2010. Retrieved from school system financial reports: http://app.doe.k12.ga.us/ows-bin/owa/fin_pack_revenue.display_proc.

60 Georgia Department of Education. *Local, State, and Federal Revenue Report, FY 2011*. Retrieved from school system financial reports: http://app.doe.k12.ga.us/ows-bin/owa/fin_pack_revenue.display_proc.

61 Governor's Office of Student Achievement. "Personnel and Fiscal Indicators." 2011. Retrieved from K-12 Public Schools Report Card: [http://reportcard2010.gaosa.org/\(S\(fx2nenrr2fmp45xxrnm245\)\)/k12/persfiscal.aspx?TestType=pers&ID](http://reportcard2010.gaosa.org/(S(fx2nenrr2fmp45xxrnm245))/k12/persfiscal.aspx?TestType=pers&ID).

62 Ibid.

63 Georgia Department of Education. "Summary of LEA Waiver Requests." 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.doe.k12.ga.us>.

64 Castillo, A. "Four-Day School Weeks Garner Interest in Midstate." *Macon Telegraph*, February 22, 2010.

65 Griffith, M. *What Savings Are Produced by Moving to a Four-Day Work Week?* Denver: Education Commission of the States. 2011.

66 Donis-Keller, C., & Silvermail, D. L. *Research Brief: A Review of the Evidence on the Four-Day School Week*. Portland, ME: Center for Education Policy, Applied Research and Evaluation. 2009.

during the off day and salaries for staff tied to the school calendar. The broadest conclusion that may be drawn from the limited research on the impact of the four-day week on student achievement is that it has no negative impact. There is some evidence that student and teacher absenteeism is lessened under a four-day week calendar and that there is greater opportunity for concentrated professional development.

The authors stressed that any savings, however, must be weighed against the effects of an increased length of the school day, childcare needs on the off day, and professional development needs to help teachers adapt to an alternative schedule. Research has not addressed these issues.

One might ask, if the savings are relatively small, why are districts considering it as an option? While the cost savings are not large, they still are savings. For example, in Duval County school district in Florida, moving to a four-day workweek saved only 0.7 percent. However, since Duval is a large district with a rather large operating budget, that resulted in a budget reduction of \$7 million. That amount could retain up to 70 teachers. When forced to choose between shortening the school week or letting 70 teachers go, district leaders felt the trade-off was justified.⁶⁷

Action Steps for Georgia

Like most states, in order to deal with the economic crisis, Georgia has focused on austerity cuts to ride out the economic storm. However, with economic recovery far off, districts and the state must undergo a fundamental shift in how they think about school funding: we need to adjust to the new normal of educational funding. The first step is to examine available revenues and look for the

most efficient and effective ways to move forward.

Simply raising local taxes is not going to make up for the budget shortfalls. Many counties are already maxing out their local millage rate. A second option for raising local funds is through ESPLOST proposals. ESPLOST dollars are a 1 percent sales tax that must be used for certain educational purposes within a district — for capital outlay projects or to eliminate school system debt. They must also be approved by a majority of qualified voters who reside within the limits of the local tax jurisdiction. Since 1997, ESPLOST initiatives by four large school systems in metro Atlanta (Atlanta Public Schools, City of Decatur, and DeKalb and Fulton counties) have generated approximately \$4 billion in revenue.⁶⁸ In November 2011, a number of districts statewide voted to enact ESPLOST. Before the election, there was concern that the electorate — tired of tax increases and showing a general distrust of government agencies responsibly spending tax dollars — would not vote to enact or renew ESPLOST for local districts. With their passage, local districts and their school boards must be transparent on how the ESPLOST dollars are being used in order to keep public support.

Even if districts can take advantage of increased tax dollars, the ESPLOST dollars cannot supplement operating costs. Therefore, many districts feel further cuts are necessary. In response, Georgia should continue to support innovative uses of technology, including blended learning models. Many virtual learning models require fewer staff to guide student learning than a traditional classroom. They also allow students in rural and/or poorer districts of the state access to classes that are otherwise unavailable.

Finally, the State Education Finance

Commission is examining the new economic realities of education funding. The Finance Commission has been charged with undertaking a comprehensive review of how schools are funded in Georgia. The 20-member commission is studying topics such as core student funding, funding equity, and state and local funding partnerships.⁶⁹ Interim recommendations were submitted in the fall of 2011. The recommendations include: 1) changes to the funding of school nurses to provide a greater level of state support, 2) financial support for professional learning associated with statewide strategic initiatives (i.e., implantation of Common Core), 3) changes to the Capital Outlay Program, 4) repeal of the 65-percent rule that requires systems to spend 65 percent of their budget on direct classroom expenditures,⁷⁰ and 5) shifting the reporting requirements related to home schooling reports to the Department of Education and away from the local districts.

The bulk of the Commission's work is still to come. Recommendations will be made around changing the Quality Basic Education (QBE) formula in 2012. The QBE was enacted in 1985 as an attempt to provide the basics of direct and indirect instructional costs to Georgia's public schools. It is the single largest expenditure within the education budget. The formula has only undergone minor changes in the 25 years since it was enacted. It does not take into account many of the changes in education over the past 20 years, such as the importance of technology in the classroom. Depending on the final recommendations of the Commission, it can set the standard for the new normal in education funding in the state by providing a new baseline of funding expectations from which the state and districts can grow. ■

67 Griffith, M. *What Savings Are Produced by Moving to a Four-Day Work Week?* Denver: Education Commission of the States. 2011.

68 Johnson, C. D. *An Overview of the Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (ESPLOST) Initiative for Four Metro Atlanta School Systems.* Atlanta: Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. 2011.

69 Georgia Department of Education. Retrieved from http://www.gadoe.org/fbo_financial.aspx?PageReq=FBOFinStudyComm

70 The 65-percent rule is being repealed in order to clarify and improve what is intended to be covered by "direct classroom expenditures." As written, "classroom expenditures 'does not currently include expenditures such as instructional support including media centers, teacher training, and student support such as nurses and guidance counselors.'" Title 20 Education, Georgia School Laws, 20-2-170.

ISSUE 6

Georgia's Pre-K Program: Quality and Quantity

Issue Overview

There is clearly no one silver bullet that can be applied to the public education system so that magically all our children are reading at grade level by the third grade and are well on their way to high school graduation and college and career success. Improving education takes a coordinated effort across many agencies, programs, parents, communities, businesses and the like. However, research now reveals that we do have something close to that silver bullet: a high-quality early learning system that prepares children to be successful in school.

By now, results from studies like the Perry Preschool Project, the Chicago Child Parent Centers, and the Abecedarian Project have documented the long-term impacts of high-quality programs: school success, higher achievement test scores, lower rates of grade retention, fewer referrals for special education services, and decreased likelihood of involvement in the juvenile or adult justice system.⁷¹

The benefits of a quality early learning program do not just lead to increased academic performance of the participants. A recent study of Tulsa's universal pre-K program found that

participants of the program were projected to have significantly higher salaries as adults than their peers who did not participate in the pre-K program.⁷² When considering future earnings alone, the study found a benefit-to-cost ratio of approximately 4:1. That number does not include the savings to the K-12 system in reduced special education and retention, or benefits to the criminal justice system with a reduced number of children entering their system — all proven benefits of participating in an early education program.

The federal government is also championing the importance of early learning. In 2011, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius joined business, law enforcement and military leaders to announce the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RT3-ELC), a \$500 million state-level competitive grant program to improve early learning and development. In their joint statement, the secretaries highlighted how investments in high-quality early learning programs help reduce crime, strengthen national security and boost competitiveness.⁷³ Moreover, in support of the growing emphasis on early learning, the

U.S. Department of Education has announced the creation of a new Office of Early Learning to oversee the Early Learning Challenge Grant.⁷⁴

Georgia was an applicant for the RT3-ELC grant but was not selected. The state was once considered a national leader in early learning and education, but a lack of resources has diminished our capacity to continue to lead. What must Georgia do to return to the forefront of early learning?

What's the Significance for Georgia?

For a state to gain the full benefits of an early learning program — both in terms of educational outcomes for children and financial savings for the state — there are two things that a state must do: 1) promote and sustain high-quality standards and 2) ensure all children have access to the program. In short, the state needs both quality and quantity.

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 learning for 4-year-olds. It became the nation's first universal preschool program for 4-year-olds 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.

While Georgia's program is a universal program, meaning there are no income requirements or limits on which children can participate, the total number of available slots has limited accessibility for all children. According to the 2010 State of Preschool Yearbook published by the National Institute for Early Education Research, 55 percent of

71 Vail, C. O., & Neuharth-Pritchett, S. “Realizing the Potential of Quality Early Care and Education: Longitudinal Benefits of Georgia's Pre-K Program.” 2011 State of Education in Georgia Conference. Athens, GA.

72 Bartik, T. J., Gormley, W., & Adelson, S. “Earnings Benefits of Tulsa's Pre-K Program for Different Income Groups.” Upjohn Institute Working Papers. Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. 2011.

73 U.S. Department of Education Press Office. “35 States, D.C., and Puerto Rico Submit Applications for Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge.” October 20, 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/35-states-dc-and-puerto-rico-submit-applications-race-top-early-learning-challen>.

74 Kelleher, M. “Education Department Announces New Early-Learning Office.” November 10, 2011. Retrieved from Education Week Blog: http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/early_years/2011/11/ed_announces_new_early_learning_office.html.

FIGURE 6.1 STATE SPENDING PER CHILD ENROLLED (2010 DOLLARS)⁷⁶



Georgia’s 4-year-old population was enrolled in the program, which is up 25 percent since 2002. While that is the fourth highest in the nation, it’s a relatively low percentage for a universal program. For example, Oklahoma also has a universal program and enrolls 70 percent of its 4-year-olds.⁷⁵

One factor limiting enrollment is funding. While Georgia has seen a steady increase in Pre-K enrollment since 2002, per-child funding

has decreased (See Figure 6.1). In 2010, Georgia spent an average of \$4,206 per child, compared to \$5,124 in 2002. That ranks Georgia 20th in the nation in terms of resources expended on pre-K.

Sole funding for the Pre-K program has been Georgia’s state-run lottery program. The lottery also funds the HOPE scholarship, which provides grants for high school graduates attending college. During the last three years

of economic recession, the state’s lottery resources have leveled off, restricting the growth of the Pre-K program. (See Table 6.1).

In addition to less overall lottery funds being available, the portion of those dollars that are allocated to Pre-K are also decreasing. Appropriations for the HOPE scholarship have rapidly expanded due to a combination of increased enrollment in the state’s colleges and universities by HOPE-eligible high school students and the rising cost of tuition and fees.⁷⁸ The percentage of lottery expenditures allocated to the Pre-K program has alarmingly dropped from 64 percent in 1994 to 32 percent in 2011.⁷⁹ (See Figure 6.2 for annual trends.)

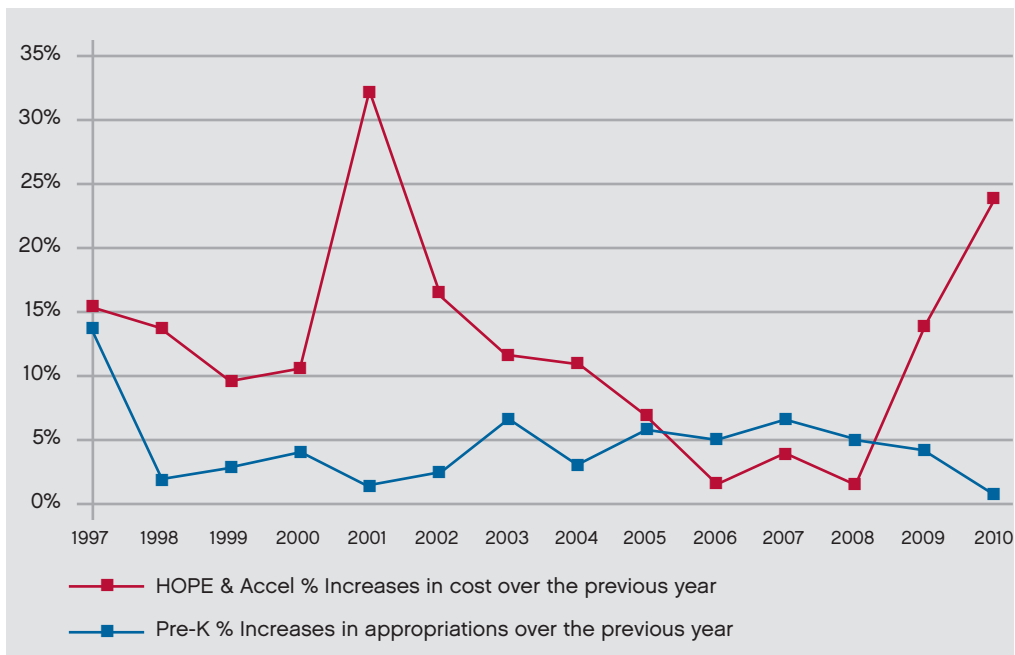
Despite the access challenges faced by Georgia, research focused on quality and child outcomes related to the Pre-K program has been generally positive, but there is room for improvement. A recent study conducted by the University of Georgia found that students participating in a Georgia Pre-K program

TABLE 6.1 GEORGIA LOTTERY AND PRE-K FUNDING⁷⁷

Projected FY 2011 Year-End Status
▶ Lottery Projected Deposits = \$883,878,000
▶ Projected FY 2012 Expenditures = \$1,127,652,261
▶ Shortfall = \$243,774,261
▶ Year-end reserve balance in unrestricted reserve = \$242,870,627

Projected FY 2012 Year-End Status
▶ Lottery Projected Deposits = \$883,878,000
▶ Projected FY 2012 Expenditures = \$1,200,773,804
▶ Shortfall = \$316,895,804
▶ Year-end reserve balance in unrestricted reserve = \$0

FIGURE 6.2 PRE-K AND HOPE % INCREASES IN COST OVER THE PREVIOUS YEAR⁸⁰



75 Ibid.
 76 Barnett, W. S., Epstein, D. J., Carolan, M. E., Fitzgerald, J., Ackerman, D. J., & Friedman, A. H. *The State of Preschool 2010: State Preschool Yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. 2010.
 77 Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students. "Georgia Lottery and Pre-K Funding"2011. Retrieved from GEEARS Resources: <http://www.geears.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/GALotteryPreK.pdf>
 78 The Southern Education Foundation. *The Promise of Georgia Pre-K: Building Life-Long Education, Current Budget Savings and Long-Term Economic Growth*. Atlanta: The Southern Education Foundation. 2011.
 79 Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students. "Georgia Lottery and Pre-K Funding"2011. Retrieved from GEEARS Resources: <http://www.geears.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/GALotteryPreK.pdf>
 80 Ibid.

consistently outperformed, through the ninth grade, their peers who did not attend Pre-K.⁸¹ Children who participated scored significantly higher on their academic assessments, were significantly less likely to be retained and were significantly less likely to be enrolled in a special education program.

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) publishes the State of Preschool Yearbook report annually, which profiles state-funded prekindergarten programs in the United States.⁸² Each year, the Yearbook compares each state program's standards against a checklist of 10 research-based quality standards that are likely to affect the program's capacity to support children's optimal learning and development. In 2010, Georgia met nine of the 10 quality standards, one of only 19 states to do so.

A 2009 study of Georgia's Pre-K program by researchers at the University of North Carolina's Child Development Institute found that our Pre-K program had many strengths that formed a strong foundation on which to improve.⁸³ Most classrooms were rated as providing a medium level of global quality and providing an environment that was very organized and supportive of children's emotional development. However, the quality of instructional support was generally low. The study found that even though most lead teachers had college degrees and reported participating in a variety of important trainings, their education did not translate into high-quality classroom practices. The study recommended more extensive and/or effective professional development, as well as on-site technical assistance to provide ongoing support to teachers.

In response to this research, Georgia's Bright From the Start: Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) is taking steps that are aimed at maintaining and improving quality and increasing statewide accessibility, especially among Georgia's low-income population. In October 2011, DECAL submitted

an application for the RT3-ELC grant competition to support the full development and implementation of their programs. The grant was designed to support states in their efforts to implement a high-quality plan that would impact school readiness and reduce the achievement gaps. There were 11 proposed project elements in the \$70 million proposal that focused on improving services for Georgia's high-needs population and promoting school readiness. One key project included in the proposal was the roll out of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS), which has been under development for the past six years. The TQRIS will rate licensed facilities and home childcare programs as good, very good or excellent. Facilities will earn bonuses based on their quality rating, and support will be provided to help centers move from one level to the next.

A second key project in the proposal was a complete revision of the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards, which would include professional development for teachers, curriculum alignment, marketing of the importance of the standards, and resource development. Moreover, in order to assure that children are entering kindergarten ready to learn, the proposal also included the development and implementation of a kindergarten readiness assessment.

Finally, the grant focused on increasing accessibility. Through the grant, child care subsidies could be increased to make high-quality centers, which are traditionally more costly, accessible to students with higher needs, such as low-income and disabled students.

In December 2011, winners of the Early Learning Challenge Grant were announced and Georgia was not selected. The state's chances at winning the grant had been considered low, primarily because the competition gave extra points to applicants that already had in place a child care rating system. Georgia's TQRIS has been under development for years and remains scheduled for implementation in 2012.

Action Steps for Georgia

In their conclusions, the North Carolina researchers who studied the quality of Georgia's Pre-K program lauded the hard work the state had done in moving toward a universal, voluntary program. They also noted that it is much easier to provide and maintain high-quality care in smaller, more targeted programs. While the researchers noted the current quality of the Georgia Pre-K program is good, significant improvements on a statewide level will require additional resources.⁸⁴ According to the study, the estimated per-child cost of providing a high-quality pre-k program is nearly twice the amount that was being allocated in Georgia at the time the study was conducted in 2009.

As previously stated, the sole funding for the Pre-K program is from the state lottery, which it must share with the HOPE scholarship. Due to the increased demand for HOPE dollars and flat lottery sales, Georgia was forced to cut \$54 million from the Pre-K budget for the 2011-2012 school year. These cuts resulted in:

- 1) Reducing the school year from 10 months to nine, yielding a 10 percent reduction in teacher pay;
- 2) Eliminating training and experience (T&E) supplemental pay for current certified teachers, which had been awarded for certain degrees or experience levels;
- 3) Eliminating 306 Pre-K classrooms statewide;
- 4) Increasing class sizes to allow for an extra 2,000 4-year-olds to attend Pre-K; and
- 5) Eliminating transition coaches who helped students prepare for kindergarten.

The full impacts of these cuts have yet to be realized, both in terms of outcomes for children and loss of funding sources aimed at program improvements. The immediate concern is the ability to maintain the high-quality teaching staff in Pre-K classrooms with the cut in teacher salaries and teachers no longer earning money for increased training and years experience — as they do in the K-12 system.

81 Vail, C. O., & Neuharth-Pritchett, S. "Realizing the Potential of Quality Early Care and Education: Longitudinal Benefits of Georgia's Pre-K Program." 2011 State of Education in Georgia Conference. Athens, GA.

82 Barnett, W. S., Epstein, D. J., Carolan, M. E., Fitzgerald, J., Ackerman, D. J., & Friedman, A. H. *The State of Preschool 2010: State Preschool Yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. 2010.

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

84 Ibid.

DECAL is still verifying teacher turnover data statewide. However, using anecdotal data reported in Fulton County, 57 of 77 Pre-K teachers quit between the last school year and the current one. Some left the system for other careers, while 47 moved into teaching jobs in kindergarten through fifth grade, where salaries are not tied to the Georgia lottery.⁸⁵ When interviewed about the budgetary changes in the Georgia Pre-K system, Steve Barnett, director of NIEER said, “Georgia’s reputation as an early childhood leader is tarnished...If the best teachers leave, quality will suffer and the benefits will be eroded.”⁸⁶ This comment perhaps foreshadowed Georgia losing the \$70 million RT3-ELC. Once a leader in early education, years of stagnant funding support and recent severe cuts have taken their toll. In announcing the winners of the grant, Secretary Duncan stated that the winners are “nine states that are leading the transformation of early learning for the nation.”⁸⁷

Despite the recent cuts, Georgia has a strong Pre-K program with strong results for the children who participate. Pre-K is the closest thing we have to a silver bullet in terms of improving educational outcomes for all children. Support for early education continues to grow within Georgia and across the nation.

However, the current funding formula relies on insufficient lottery dollars that must be shared with the HOPE scholarship. Despite the loss of potential federal funding, DECAL is moving forward with plans to implement elements of the grant focused on continuous quality improvements and access — including the TQRIS. Given this, Georgia leaders should investigate innovative strategies for funding Georgia Pre-K at levels that ensure accessibility for all children and high quality.

The raised visibility of the importance of early learning only re-emphasizes what early learning educators and researchers have known for some time: high-quality early learning is the building block for future student success. It must be noted that the emphasis is on high quality. The programs leading to sustained outcomes for children employ a minimum level of quality standards such as class sizes, specialized training for teachers, developmental screenings and support for struggling students, and comprehensive early learning standards aligned with K-12 standards. Transforming the educational system for our state starts with our youngest citizens. These young citizens will lead the way in strengthening our educational system and our economic competitiveness. ■

⁸⁵ Badertscher, N. “Slower Lottery Sales Hit Georgia’s Pre-K Program.” Atlanta Journal-Constitution, October 11, 2011.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷The White House. “White House Event on Early Learning.” December 16, 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/live/white-house-event-early-learning>

ISSUE 7

Choice: Where Do We Go from Here?

Issue Overview

In the last few years, the school choice debate has moved to the center of educational policy. Increasingly, as families grow more and more dissatisfied with their local public schools, they are demanding additional options for their children. Local and national policies have followed suit in support of these demands, from federal incentives to increase public choice options through charter school growth, to individual states increasing funding for private school options through vouchers and tax credits. The demand for other school choice options, such as magnet schools, open enrollment, virtual schools, and homeschooling have also continued to grow in response to families seeking the best education for their children.

What's the Significance for Georgia?

In Georgia, the demand for school choice has mirrored the national landscape. Consider the following:

- ▶ In May 2005, the Georgia Virtual School (GAVS) became the state's first official virtual

school. Enrollment has grown from 2,847 in the 2005-2006 school year to 12,814 during 2010-2011.⁸⁸

- ▶ In 2007, the state passed legislation for the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship (GSNS) program, which provides scholarships to children with disabilities to attend private schools. During the 2007-2008 school year, 899 students received scholarships. By the 2010-2011 school year, the number of scholarship recipients had grown to 2,550.⁸⁹
- ▶ In 2008, Georgia passed the Georgia Private School Tax Credit law, allowing private citizens and corporations to receive tax credits for donating to Georgia's Student Scholarship Organizations (SSOs). From 2008 to 2010, the number of participating SSOs has grown from less than 10 up to 32.⁹⁰ In 2011, the scholarship fund reached its \$50 million cap for the first time, as people are increasingly taking advantage of the tax credit.⁹¹
- ▶ In 2009, Georgia passed House Bill 251, the Public School Choice Framework, which gives parents the opportunity to transfer to any public school within the district as long

as space is available.

- ▶ Between 2000 to 2009, the number of Georgia children being homeschooled increased nearly 36 percent, from 28,898 to 39,233 students.⁹²

While the growth in popularity of these choice options has certainly increased, the demand for charter schools has outweighed them all. Georgia's first three charter schools opened in 1995. In the past five years, the number of students enrolled in charter schools in Georgia has more than tripled, from 16,836 in 2005 to 62,303 students in 2010. In spite of this rapid growth, the overall percentage of Georgia students enrolled in charters is only 4 percent.⁹³

Although the percentage of students enrolled is small, the number is not insignificant. Charter schools are growing annually, and the current move toward charter districts is likely to accelerate this growth. Georgia already has four county-level charter systems: Floyd, Putnam, Warren and White; and four city-level charter systems: Cartersville, Decatur, Gainesville and Marietta. An additional six charter systems recently received approval.⁹⁴ Fulton County, already boasting the greatest number of charter schools in the state, is considering the conversion of its school district to a charter system.

The research on charter schools so far has been mixed. A commonly cited study by Stanford University's Center for Educational Outcomes found that only 17 percent of charter schools in 15 states and the District of Columbia outperform traditional public schools and 37 percent perform worse.⁹⁵ A

88 Georgia Department of Education. (2011). "The History of Georgia Virtual Schools." 2011. Retrieved from Georgia Virtual Schools: <http://www.gavirtualschool.org/Portals/2/PDFs/History%20of%20GAVS.pdf>

89 Georgia Department of Education. *2007-2008 Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program (GSNS) Year End Report*. Atlanta. 2009; Georgia Department of Education. *2010-2011 Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program Preliminary Quick Facts Report*. Atlanta. 2010.

90 Suitts, S. *Georgia's Tax Credit Scholarships for Private Schools*. The Southern Education Foundation. 2011.

91 Dodd, D. "Tax Credit Scholarship Fund Hits \$50 Million Cap." Atlanta Journal-Constitution, November 13, 2011.

92 Georgia Department of Education. "Homeschool/Private School Enrollment Data." 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.doe.ga.us>

93 Georgia Department of Education. *2009-2010 Annual Report on Georgia's Charter Schools*. 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.doe.k12.ga.us>

94 According to the Georgia Department of Education, as of September 2011.

95 The Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO). *Multiple Choice: Charter School Performance in 16 States*. Stanford University. 2009.

recent study of schools that are part of Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) found that test scores in reading, math, science and social studies were stronger among students in these schools, but the results were not statistically significant.⁹⁶ In short, research has been mixed so far; some charter schools show promise and others do not.

The growth in charter schools in Georgia has met its share of controversy. In the spring of 2011, the Georgia Charter Schools Commission (GCSC) was deemed unconstitutional by the state's Supreme Court. Formed in 2008, the GCSC was an independent, state-level charter school authorizing entity. The GCSC was empowered to approve charter schools that had been rejected by a local board of education. Consequently, the local districts' funding could be redirected to the Commission-approved schools. Georgia's constitution allows for the creation of state special schools, such as those for deaf and blind students, but the Court did not maintain that Commission schools belonged in this category. Georgia's Supreme Court determined that local boards of education had the sole authority to create and maintain K-12 public schools and thereby ruled in favor of the school districts.

The Court's decision was a victory for local districts because they were able to retain the authority to create and maintain their schools. Also, the Commission could no longer divert their local funding to those charter schools that, in some cases, were serving children that did not reside in the local district. For many individual schools, however, the Court's decision was not met with celebration. Some of the schools that were approved by the Commission gained approval from their local districts and will continue to operate. Others have received temporary funding from Governor Nathan Deal to remain open for the 2011-2012 school year. But a few were unable to open their doors at all during the previous school year. All of the schools that were affected by this decision will need to either

seek approval to operate from their local districts or submit an application to the State Board of Education to become a state-chartered special school. By choosing the latter option, however, schools will be ineligible for local funding, which for many of these schools was slated to account for nearly half of their revenue.

Another school choice option that can have an impact on local school budgets is tax credit scholarships. Tax credit scholarship programs are a growing school choice option some states are exploring. As of May 2011, 10 scholarship tax credit programs existed in eight states.⁹⁷ In 2008, Georgia established the Georgia Private School Tax Credit Law. The law allows individuals and corporations to receive income tax credits for donations made to a Georgia Student Scholarship Organization (SSO). These scholarship programs allow individuals and corporations to allocate a portion of their owed state taxes to private nonprofit school tuition organizations that issue scholarships to K-12 students. The scholarship allows a student to choose among a list of approved private schools. The scholarship is used to pay tuition, fees and other related expenses. As a result, the state does not have to appropriate per-pupil education funding for those students that receive scholarships.⁹⁸

Tax credit programs provide an alternative to state-funded school voucher programs. Supporters of scholarship tax credits say they can save the state money because annual tuition at a private school provided by the scholarship is typically less than the per-pupil cost at public schools. This is shown through a nonpartisan analysis of the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program.⁹⁹ This study reported for every \$1 spent on the tax credit program, Florida taxpayers saved an estimated \$1.49. However, the report notes that the state's savings is dependent on a proper balance between the state's cap on the tax credit and the number of qualified students participating in the program. In other words, if the cap is too

high and not enough students participate, the lost tax revenue will be higher than the savings in education funding.

In Georgia, proponents of the tax credit law cite low academic achievement in Georgia's public schools as justification for supporting this school choice option. Critics, however, point to a host of problems with how Georgia is implementing the law. One problem, say critics, is the law diverts public funds to pay for private education — a particular issue when considering that approximately 70 percent of SSO-affiliated schools are religious in nature.¹⁰⁰

Concerns have also been raised over issues of fiscal and student accountability. From 2008 to 2010, a total of \$72.1 million has been diverted from Georgia's state revenues due to tax credits.¹⁰¹ Additionally, the 2011 revision to the law limits the amount of information that each SSO has to provide, raising questions about transparency. The Department of Revenue does not require any information from SSOs other than the total number and amount of tax credits approved, the total number and amount of contributions, a list of donors and the value of each donation and tax credit, and the total number and amount of scholarships awarded.¹⁰² Georgia GOAL (Greater Opportunities for Access to Learning), one of the largest SSOs in Georgia, is the only SSO in the state that has publicly reported specific statistical information about contributions, expenditures and grants to students and schools.

Georgia is currently the only state with a tax credit law that does not require reporting that tracks scholarship recipients.¹⁰³ With no information on the student receiving the scholarship, it is impossible to access the effectiveness of the program. As the Florida study demonstrates, the cost savings to the state comes from the state no longer allocating the per-pupil dollars to the public education system for children that transfer out of the public system to take advantage of the scholarships. This is an area where Georgia can learn

96 Fergeson, J. et al. *Charter-School Management Organizations: Diverse Strategies and Diverse Student Impacts*. Mathematica Policy Research & Center on Reinventing Public Education. 2011.

97 National Conference of State Legislatures. (2011). "Scholarship Tax Credits - Overview." 2011. Retrieved from NCSL - Issues & Research: <http://www.ncsl.org/?tabid=12950>

98 Ibid.

99 Florida Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability. *Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program*. 2008.

100 Suits, S. *Georgia's Tax Credit Scholarships for Private Schools*. The Southern Education Foundation. 2011.

101 Georgia Department of Revenue. Press Release, January 29, 2010.

102 Georgia House Bill 325.

103 Ash, K. "Experts Debate Cost Savings of Virtual Education." *Education Week*, March 2009.

from Florida in how the state implements and ensures accountability to the program. It has been argued that in Georgia, the tax credit has been more costly to the state because many of the students receiving the scholarship may not have transferred from a public school as the law requires. The Georgia law on private school tax credits stipulates that a student is eligible for a scholarship to a private school only if he or she “is a Georgia resident enrolled in a Georgia secondary or primary public school or eligible to enroll in a qualified kindergarten program or pre-kindergarten program.”¹⁰⁴ In August 2009 the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported that parents and students attending private schools were showing up at public schools “to fill out paperwork to enroll their kids in public schools solely to qualify” for the tax-funded scholarships.¹⁰⁵ The article was unable to document the extent of this problem; however, without accountability data, critics and proponents alike are unable to calculate the financial benefits or costs of these decisions.

In addition to financial accountability, an important question that has yet to be answered is, do the students who receive these scholarships benefit academically? Unlike public schools in the state, private schools are not required to adhere to testing mandates. The measures of progress in math and reading are self-reported to the Georgia Department of Education by the individual private schools.¹⁰⁶

A somewhat less controversial school choice option that is growing in favor is online learning. The Georgia Virtual School (GAVS), the state’s official online school, serves public, private and homeschooled students. Public school students enroll at no charge as long as the courses are taken as part of their state-reported school day. A limited amount of funding is available to private and homeschooled students as well. Students may enroll in summer school and credit recovery for a fee.

In addition to the state’s official online school, several other online learning options exist for Georgia’s students, each with varying

revenue streams. Some schools operate as part of the local school district and therefore receive state and some local funding. Others are private and generate revenue by charging tuition. Concerns over funding Georgia’s online charter school, Georgia Cyber Academy (GCA), were raised after the GCSC was found unconstitutional. GCA, originally approved by the GCSC and later approved as a State-Chartered Special School, was funded according to the state’s funding formula but was not given any local funding.

Researchers suggest that it is difficult to determine the exact cost to educate a student online.¹⁰⁷ Still, the decreased per-pupil funding for online learning may be warranted. A study of 20 virtual schools in 14 states found that the average cost to educate a child in a traditional “brick-and-mortar” school was more than twice the average cost to educate a student online.¹⁰⁸ Given that many states are still suffering from reduced K-12 spending, the use of online learning appears to reduce costs while expanding opportunities for students to take courses not offered in their schools, recover lost credits to graduate on time, or simply learn at a pace that is more suitable to them. Online learning — or blended learning opportunities — also encompasses a number of school choice options, offering courses to students in traditional public, charter and private schools; homeschooled students; and students across district and state lines.

Action Steps for Georgia

Georgia’s school choice options are often presented with a clear goal in mind: increase the academic achievement of students. Yet questions remain about the effectiveness of some of these models and the future of their funding.

The first issue to be addressed is transparency. One argument for tuition vouchers — either publically funded or funded through tax credits — is to help parents who cannot afford private education transfer their children from low-performing public schools to higher performing private schools. Georgia GOAL is the only SSO that has published information

about the household income of students awarded their SSO scholarships in 2009 and 2010. In general, students with lower incomes received the largest average amounts for scholarships in GOAL-affiliated schools and had the largest percentage of their private school tuition covered by tax funds. Georgia GOAL has recommended that participating schools provide need-based scholarships with tax credits; however, none have produced any data to analyze the extent to which they are doing so.

Without being able to track student outcomes, it is impossible to evaluate the program and the return on investment to the taxpayer. Any proponent of school choice, and specifically the tax credit scholarship program, should demand other SSOs follow the example of Georgia GOAL. To help assure accountability and ultimately the program’s success, SSOs should have the same accountability and transparency as any other entity that distributes tax dollars for a specific purpose.

The second issue is the funding and authorization of charter schools. The Georgia legislature will propose a constitutional amendment to allow the state to fund charter schools. This begs the question of who should have final say over local education decisions: the state or local districts. With *Race to the Top* and the new Common Core Georgia Performance Standards, the trend seems to be favoring the state as it moves to implement uniform policies. However, with funding for schools being split almost 50/50 between the state and local governments, local districts will not want to concede too much of the decision-making authority to the state.

Options, or choices, for all parents and their children are good. Choice is one of the cornerstones of our democracy and drives continuous quality improvements. However, the implementation and sustainability of those quality improvements within the educational system requires a system of fiduciary responsibility for taxpayer dollars and accountability to student achievement. The delicate balance of these two issues requires continued dialogue among our elected, business, and community leaders. ■

104 Georgia House Bill 325.

105 Badertscher, N., & Salzer, J. “Private School Tuition Loophole Exploited: Taxpayers Help Cover Private School Costs.” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, August 9, 2009.

106 Georgia Department of Education. “2010-2011 Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program Preliminary Quick Facts Report.” Atlanta. 2010.

107 Ash, K. “Experts Debate Cost Savings of Virtual Education.” *Education Week*, March 2009.

108 Ibid.

ISSUE 8

Economic Development Pipeline: The Role of Education

Issue Overview

Two years after the worst recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s, about 14 million Americans are still unemployed. In October 2011, nearly 45 percent (5.9 million) of those unemployed had been out of work for at least six months.¹⁰⁹ However, 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.¹¹⁰ U.S. manufacturers are failing to fill thousands of vacant jobs. Technology giant Siemens has more than 3,000 jobs open all over the country, many of which are in Georgia, more than half of which require science, technology, engineering and math-related skills.¹¹¹ A survey conducted in 2011 by ManpowerGroup reported that 52 percent of U.S. employers have difficulty filling critical positions within their organizations. Other companies report job vacancies that range

from six to 200, with some positions open for at least nine months.¹¹²

If many companies are having trouble filling open jobs, why are so many Americans unemployed? Many of the hard-to-fill positions are for middle-skill jobs — including skilled trades, Internet technology, engineers and machine operators. The persistence of open jobs in spite of an unemployment rate of approximately 9 percent suggests a skill-mismatch, or structural problem, rather than simply a downturn in the economy.

A breakdown of the unemployment rate shows that the high rate is being driven — in part — by lack of education and necessary skill training. Nationally, the unemployment rate is 14.6 percent for those without a high school diploma, compared to 8 percent for those with some college or an associate's degree, and 4.6 percent for those with a bachelor's degree or higher.¹¹³

In response to this apparent education and skills gap, on July 18, 2011, President Obama hosted an educational roundtable with key leaders in both the private and public sectors to discuss how the U.S. can ensure a competitive American workforce. In summarizing the meeting, the participants concluded that a continued focus on addressing the pressing needs of proper education was necessary.

A world-class education is the single most important factor in determining not just whether our kids can compete for the best jobs, but whether America can outcompete countries around the world. America's business leaders understand that when it comes to education, we need to up our game. That's why we are working together to put an outstanding education within reach of every child.¹¹⁴

What's the Significance for Georgia?

The nationwide unemployment rate for people with a bachelor's degree is less than half the rate for those with only a high school education. The same holds true in Georgia.

Within the United States, Georgia's degree attainment has historically ranked in the bottom 15 states.¹¹⁵ By 2020, it is projected that over 60 percent of jobs in Georgia will require some form of a college education. However, in Georgia only 42 percent of young adults have a college education: a professional certificate, associate's degree, or a bachelor's degree or higher.¹¹⁶

The higher education completion rate can be directly tied to Georgia's high school graduation rate and high number of dropouts. As

109 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. "Unemployment Rate at 9.0 Percent in October 2011." November 7, 2011. Retrieved http://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2011/ted_20111007.htm

110 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

111 Mutikani, L. "So Many U.S. Manufacturing Jobs, So Few Skilled Workers." October 13, 2011. Retrieved from Reuters: Business and Financial News: <http://www.reuters.com/assets/print?aid=USN1E79B23O20111013>

112 Ibid.

113 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. "Earnings & Unemployment for Full-Time Workers Age 25 & Older, Not Seasonally Adjusted." September 2011.

114 The White House Blog. "Staying Competitive Through Education: The President and American Business Leaders Announce New Commitments." July 18, 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/07/18/staying-competitive-through-education>

115 National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCEMS). "Education Attainment by Degree Level and Age Group." 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.highered.org>

116 University System of Georgia. *Georgia's Higher Education Completion Plan 2012*. November 2011. Retrieved from http://www.usg.edu/educational_access/college_completion/

TABLE 8.1 TRENDS IN GEORGIA HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE RATES AND HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS¹¹⁷

Year	High School Graduation Rate	Number of High School Non-Grads
2007	72%	28,883
2008	75%	27,248
2009	79%	23,567
2010	81%	21,803
2011	81%	21,844
Total		123,345

traditionally calculated, Georgia's graduation rate has been steadily climbing, and the number of students who did not graduate has been going down. (See table 8.1).

Moreover, new in 2011, Georgia has changed how the high school graduation rate is calculated to the federal four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate, or cohort rate. Previously, Georgia had used the "leaver rate" to calculate high school graduation. For 2011, the graduation rate based on this formula was 81 percent (Table 8.1). The leaver rate provided an *estimate* of the percentage of students who entered ninth grade and graduated four years later. The calculation of the cohort rate utilizes Georgia's new student information system that provides a unique identifier for each student. This now allows the state to track student movement from school to school. By changing to the cohort rate, the state will now have a more accurate count.

The new cohort rate has yet to be publically released, but it is estimated that it will show Georgia's graduation rate is significantly lower than the previously reported 81 percent, possibly by as much as 10 to 20 percentage points. However, this drop is similar to other states that are switching from an estimate to the actual count. It is also important to note that the overall percentage of high school graduates is improving over time. Consistently using the leaver rate calculation method, Georgia has seen its graduation rate increase

by 9 percentage points since 2007. That demonstrates real improvement. However, when the cohort rate is released, it will most likely show Georgia is woefully behind where it needs to be in terms of high school graduation.

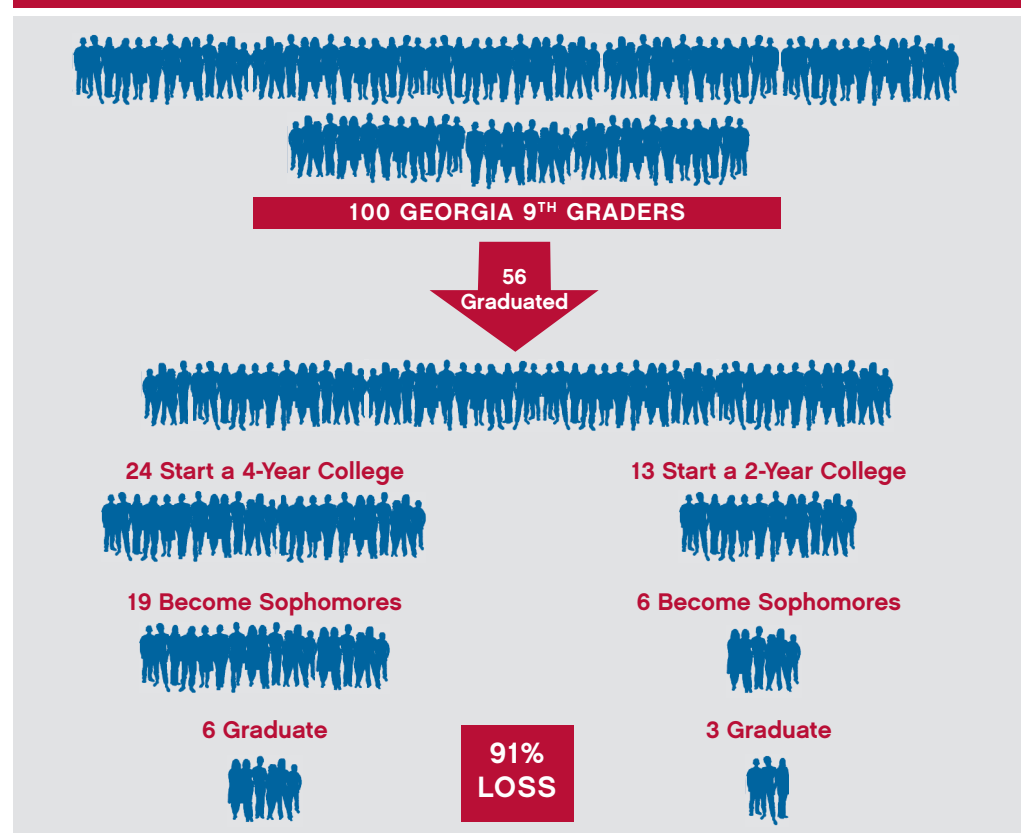
While the rates are moving in the right direction, over the past five years 123,345 students have dropped out of high school and are not ready for work or college. A study conducted by Georgia Southern University used current dollars to estimate the income foregone by not having a high school completion rate at least at the national average. Based on its estimates, the number of students not completing high school is costing Georgia approximately \$18 billion per year.¹¹⁸

This non-completion trend extends into institutes of higher learning as well. In a study conducted by the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), for every 100 students entering the 9th grade in any given year, approximately 56 will graduate high school. Of

those, 24 will go on to a four-year college with only six of those graduating. The numbers are worse for the two-year college system. Of the 56 students graduating high school, only 13 will enter a two-year institution with only three graduating. Following the pipeline of students from 9th grade through post-secondary degree completion shows a 91 percent loss (See figure 8.1).

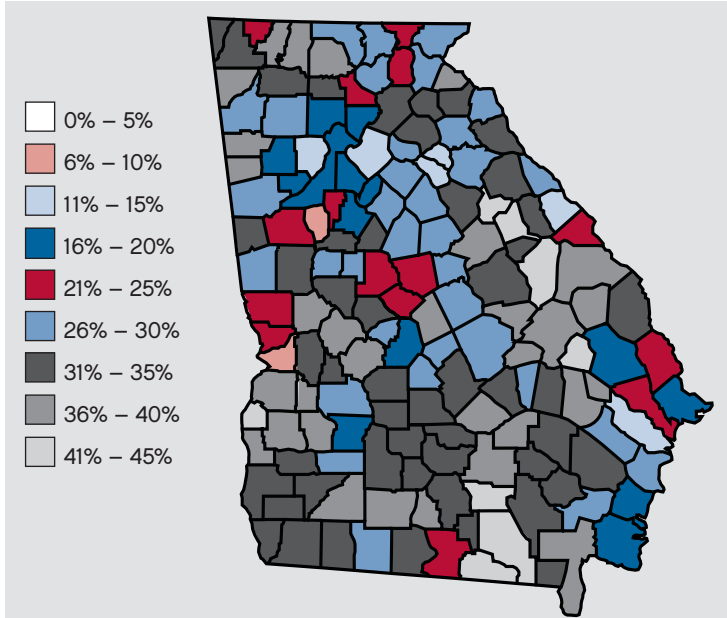
Added to that, the TCSG estimates there are 1.2–1.3 million adults over the age of 18 without a high school diploma or GED. Some counties in Georgia show more than one third of their adult population with less than a high school education (See Figure 8.2).

Georgia's level of higher education attainment is not expected to improve on its own. To improve the success of students receiving remedial education, Georgia applied for and was awarded a \$1 million grant from Complete College America. Georgia was one of only 10 states to receive this grant. This devel-

FIGURE 8.1 GRAPHIC DESCRIPTION OF 100 GEORGIA 9TH GRADERS

117 Governor's Office of Student Achievement. *State Report Cards*. N.d. Retrieved from <http://www.gaosa.org/>

118 Isley, P., & Hill, J. *Updated Economic Impact of High School Non-Completion in Georgia: 2005 Estimate*. Georgia Southern University. 2007.

FIGURE 8.2 ADULT BASIC AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

opment led to a focus on the importance of college completion and kick-started a broader statewide effort to implement innovation and reforms aimed at increasing certificate and degree attainment under Governor Deal's Complete College Georgia Initiative.

In support of the Governor's Complete College Georgia Initiative, in November 2011 the Board of Regents approved a draft plan of the Complete College Georgia Initiative that commits the University System of Georgia's (USG) 35 institutions to increase college completion as part of a joint agreement with the TCSG.^{119,120} The plan calls for cooperation between the USG and TCSG and lays the foundation in several areas. The first of these is to create new forms of collaboration and accountability between the educational systems. These collaborations are intended to 1) improve college readiness and access and 2) improve pathways toward a degree through a new articulation system.

The improvements in college readiness rely on strengthened collaborations among the USG, the TCSG, and the Georgia Department of Education (DOE) relating to strengthened

standards and assessments for college readiness and expanded programs to deliver college-level courses while students are still in high school. Georgia DOE is already developing a new College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). The CCRPI will measure the extent to which schools are successfully making progress on a specific list of accountability measures.¹²¹ The measures will be based on the level of achievement required in order for students to

enroll in two- or four-year colleges and universities and technical colleges without remediation, fully prepared for college-level work or to immediately enter the workforce, including the U.S. military, without the need for additional skills training.¹²²

Allowing students to gain college-level course credit while still in high school is also an important expansion of the K-12 pipeline called for in this plan. Credit-earning programs such as Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate, Dual Enrollment, Early College and Career Academies are being

put in place to improve college readiness for students and to potentially shorten the time to earn a degree or professional certificate once in college. To support the career academies, USG and TCSG will be working with other partners to create a certification process and support services for high school academies that expand career-focused dual enrollment and dual credit options.

In addition to these programs, the TCSG is beginning to develop a statewide articulation assessment that will be given in high school. Credit earned under these assessments will be "banked" until a student enrolls in a technical college.

Key to the success of the collaborations is the articulation agreement between the agencies. Articulation and transfer agreements allow students to move between institutions without losing credits and provide important paths for transitioning across and within the systems of higher education. USG already has a comprehensive guaranteed agreement for transfer of general education courses between its institutions. However, this type of agreement needs to be put in place between the USG and the TCSG. Currently, an articulation policy between the two systems has been developed and is scheduled for implementation in January 2012. As designed, the articulation policy aims to expand degree completion by avoiding duplication of coursework and providing a clear graduation path. (For key points of the policy, see Table 8.2).

TABLE 8.2 KEY POINTS OF ARTICULATION POLICY BETWEEN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF GEORGIA AND THE TECHNICAL COLLEGE SYSTEM OF GEORGIA¹²³

- ▶ Provides definitions of associate-level degrees and general Technical College System and University System responsibility for these types of program offerings
- ▶ Establishes conditions for consideration of proposed expansion of associate-level program offerings by each system
- ▶ Sets up processes for review of additional general education courses for guaranteed transfer between the two systems
- ▶ Establishes a joint-oversight coordinating council with representatives from both systems to ensure sustainability for the articulation agreement

119 University System of Georgia. *Georgia's Higher Education Completion Plan 2012*. November 2011. Retrieved from http://www.usg.edu/educational_access/college_completion/.

120 As of press time, the Technical College System of Georgia has not approved the plan, which is required before the plan is forwarded to the governor's office for final approval and implementation.

121 Georgia Department of Education. "NCLB/ Waiver Request." Letter to United States Department of Education and Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education. September 20, 2011.

122 Ibid.

123 University System of Georgia. *Georgia's Higher Education Completion Plan 2012*. November 2011. Retrieved from http://www.usg.edu/educational_access/college_completion/

A second area of the Complete College Georgia Plan is improved performance of the higher education system, which includes 1) transforming remediation, 2) shortening the time to degree and 3) restructuring delivery.¹²⁴

The USG's two-year colleges provide remediation to 59 percent of entering students, and its 14 state colleges provide remediation to 48 percent of entering students. All 25 institutions within the TCSG provide remediation for 26 percent of first-time entry students.¹²⁵ Remediation courses, though offered at the college level, do not count toward a degree or certificate program, but serve as an important support for students who would otherwise not be able to complete their college coursework. However, many times the remediation is not enough. Outcome evaluations show that at the University of Georgia, only 24 percent of students needing remediation eventually earn a bachelor's degree within six years. Only 7 percent of students in remedial programs in an associate's program at either a USG or TCSG institution complete their program within three years.¹²⁶

The current need for remediation emphasizes the importance of including preparation in K-12 as part of a comprehensive college completion plan. In order to reduce the amount of remediation needed once a student gets to college, the Complete College Georgia plan has laid out key recommendations that include engaging the K-12 system in aligning readiness expectations and identifying students, while still in high school, that may need extra attention to be successful in a postsecondary environment. (For points of the key recommendations, see Table 8.3).

By focusing on system collaboration, increasing the number of college- and career-ready students and streamlining the graduation process through an articulation

TABLE 8.3 PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRANSFORMING REMEDIATION¹²⁷

- ▶ Define college readiness and take appropriate actions in K-12 to ensure that graduates are college-ready
- ▶ Change assessment and placement policies and practices for students applying to college to clarify what constitutes readiness for success in the first year of college
- ▶ Develop alternative pathways for students who are significantly behind
- ▶ Restructure traditional remediation using customized pedagogical approaches

agreement, and improving on system efficiencies, the Complete College Georgia plan is designed to significantly increase the number of students who graduate from higher education institutions with a degree.

Action Steps for Georgia

Historically, earning a high school diploma would allow a person to participate in a blue-collar job with family-supporting wages. However, changes in technology and globalization make that no longer true. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2011 a person with a high school diploma had an average weekly salary of \$626, compared to \$1,137 for a person with a four-year degree.

As previously stated, by 2020 it is projected that over 60 percent of the jobs in Georgia will require some form of college education. However, currently only 42 percent of our young adult population has a college education, and 23 percent of the adult population has less than a high school diploma. Due to this gap, the state's current and future economic health is at stake. Without a properly educated workforce that can meet the needs of a growing economy, the state as a whole

may not only lose new employers and business creation, but may experience a loss of existing jobs as industries move to other states and countries with a better educated population. Specific counties with a large percentage of their population without at least a high school diploma or GED will find it extremely difficult to attract businesses and sustain a healthy economy.

Georgia has taken a bold step to address this gap through changes in the educational pipeline as addressed in the Complete College Georgia program. To continue the work in 2012, state and agency leaders must focus on collaboration between the K-12 and higher education systems. Engaging students while still in middle school or high school and being open and honest about college and career readiness will go a long way toward ensuring that those who graduate high school are ready for college and career. USG and TCSG have designed this effort as a living plan. The current plan is a framework for the agencies to organize their collaborations. It is expected that in 2012 we will see a bigger push on implementation and a continued focus to update the plan to incorporate new strategies. ■

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

ISSUE 9

Leadership and Ethics in Our Public Schools

Issue Overview

Cheating. Financial misconduct. Perjury. Scandal. There have always been cheaters in our society, but if one reads the paper, it does seem that typical America has lost its moral compass. Or at the very least, leaders are getting caught more regularly in very public ways. It seems like a month does not go by without news of a politician being caught up in a sex scandal or violating House and Senate ethics policies. Major league athletes are being called to testify before Congress for using performance-enhancing drugs, and the business world has seen its share of Dennis Kozlowskis and Bernie Madoffs. And sadly, more and more we have seen this culture of tarnished ethics invade our public school systems. These are the very systems that are charged with preparing our children not only to be successful in life, but to be prepared to lead our nation in the next generation.

With the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, more weight was placed nationwide on standardized test scores, and incentive schemes were created for teachers to do well, including rewards for teachers with high-scoring classrooms and punishment for teachers with low-scoring classrooms. Since the enactment of that legislation, there have been a number of cheating scandals in public schools, the most recent being the Atlanta

Public Schools' cheating scandal. Cheating scandals also have been uncovered in Colorado, Connecticut, Michigan, Florida, New York, Maryland, Pennsylvania and Texas. Cheating reportedly even occurred in Washington D.C. during the tenure of noted reform superintendent Michelle Rhee.¹²⁸

Arguments have been made that the incentive structure under NCLB led to an increase in questionable ethical behaviors on the part of school administrators and teachers. However, while a minority of individuals may be ethically challenged and tempted to cheat students for their own gain, a majority of people within the public school systems are committed to educating children to the best of their abilities. While it's still a relatively small number, more and more school systems seem to be experiencing levels of organized cheating that surpasses just a few individuals. This begs the question: Why would normally ethical people go along with ideas and plans they know to be wrong. Or put another way, what motivates the unethical acts of ordinarily decent people?

Perhaps one of the most fascinating studies conducted to investigate this moral question is known as the Milgram Experiment, after Stanley Milgram, the psychologist who created it. Subjects in his experiment were told that they were going to take part in exercises

designed to test other people's abilities to learn. They were seated at a mock "shock generator" with 30 switches marked from 15 volts ("slight shock") to 450 volts ("danger — severe shock"). Through a small glass window, they could see the "learner" in the adjoining room strapped to a chair with electrodes on his or her wrists. The subject was told he or she was to test the other person's ability to memorize lists of words, and to administer a "shock" when the learner made a mistake, increasing the intensity each time. As the intensity of the "shocks" grew and the learner pretended to cry out in more pain, eventually fainting, the experimenter told the subjects they had to continue administering the shocks. Astonishingly, although the subjects grew nervous and agitated, more than two thirds administered the highest level of shocks to the learners when ordered to do so by the experimenter. Milgram concluded that when people are ordered to do something by someone they view in authority, most will obey even when doing so violates their consciences.¹²⁹

This study indicates that the overall culture and expectations from leaders goes a long way towards setting an ethical climate. What role do district and school leaders play in establishing an ethical culture? How does that role trickle down and affect students?

What's the Significance for Georgia?

One way the influence of these district and school leaders can be felt is through the creation and maintenance of each organization's culture. Culture creates a set of informal expectations and values that shape how people think, feel and act in schools. Culture influences everything that happens on a school board, in a district and in a school. For instance, culture affects how board members communicate and conduct governance, how school and district staffs conduct themselves,

128 Hoober, S. "Scandal Unfolds as Cheating Discovered in Pennsylvania Schools." August 2011. Retrieved from Newstyp.com: <http://www.newstyp.com/9610-cheating-pennsylvania-schools/>
129 Velasquez, M., Andre, C., Shanks, T., & Meyer, M.J. "Conscience and Authority." *Issues in Ethics*. 1988.

leaders' willingness to change, school instructional practices and the emphasis given to student and faculty learning.¹³⁰ It is primarily up to school leaders — including boards of education, superintendents and principals — to help identify, shape and maintain a strong, positive, student-focused culture.

Local boards of education are responsible for hiring district superintendents, and they often work in tandem with superintendents to accomplish the district's goals. Moreover, local boards have a lot of influence, and their conduct goes a long way in establishing the ethical culture of a system. However, the inability of some boards to work harmoniously has impacted the reputation, if not the accreditation, of several school districts in the state. For instance, in 2003, a few years prior to Clayton County's loss of accreditation due to micromanagement and violating ethics and open meetings laws, the district was placed on probation. By the time the district lost its accreditation in 2008, there had been some changes in the board's membership. In light of this, Mark Elgart, president and CEO of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), the primary accrediting agency for Georgia's schools, said "some of the people changed but the culture [had] not, and that led to their loss of accreditation...the culture of how they conduct governance and leadership did not change and continued to erode the fabric of the system."¹³¹

In accordance with Georgia law, school superintendents are appointed by local boards of education and are thereby required to carry out the rules, regulations and instructions of the school board, including board policies. They are legally designated as the district's point of contact with the Georgia Department of Education and the State Superintendent of Schools and are responsible for the administration of the school system.

According to the Georgia School Boards Association's *Boardmanship Manual*, "Successful

school boards have one key thing in common. They have reached an understanding with their superintendents about how they will work together."¹³² The superintendent's success is connected to the working relationship he or she has with the board of education. The superintendent and the board must work as a team, with "trust, respect, shared values and knowledge, and each team member understanding his or her role" in order to ensure successful outcomes.¹³³

Unfortunately, the former superintendent of Atlanta Public Schools (APS), Dr. Beverly Hall, was recently accused of not exhibiting these qualities. As has been reported, a select number of teachers and principals in APS for years methodically altered answer sheets for students taking state tests. To an extent, these inflated test results helped boost struggling schools — and the district as a whole — into what appeared to be a spectacular urban success story. As a result of the dramatic increase in student test scores, Superintendent Hall was named the 2009 Superintendent of the Year and was the first school administrator to receive the Distinguished Public Service Award from the American Educational Research Association. Much of the blame for the scandal has been laid at the feet of Dr. Hall, who maintains she knew nothing of the alleged cheating. An investigative report conducted by the Governor's Office accuses the former superintendent and her top staff of having "created a culture of fear, intimidation, and retaliation" in which witnesses feared, with good reason, that they would face punishment for speaking up about the cheating. Teachers claim they were told that if they didn't meet certain testing targets, they would face penalties.¹³⁴

Dougherty County, a small low-income rural community that surrounds Albany was second only to Atlanta in the number of schools flagged for erasures on the 2009 CRCT.¹³⁵ Although the district's new superintendent

expected the system to be exonerated of the charges, at least 10 teachers have confessed to cheating.¹³⁶

In the public eye, principals are primarily responsible for the day-to-day administrative happenings in a school. Principals are also responsible for the development of the school's culture, which plays a large role in student, teacher and parent relations, and student academic outcomes.¹³⁷ Yet principals cannot do this alone. "In the strongest schools, leadership comes from many sources."¹³⁸ Teachers and parents help to shape a school's culture. As shown in Table 9.1, strong positive cultures are places with a shared sense of what is important, a shared ethos of caring and concern, and a shared commitment to helping students learn.

Unfortunately, in some schools and systems, the culture has become toxic and unproductive. These tend to be schools and systems where staffs are fragmented, the purpose of serving students has been lost to the goal of serving adults, and negative values are prominent. The results of toxic cultures have been seen over the past year with revelations of cheating on standardized tests throughout the country.

TABLE 9.1 SHARED ATTRIBUTES OF SCHOOLS WITH POSITIVE CULTURES¹³⁹

- Staff has shared sense of purpose.
- Underlying norms are of collegiality, continuous improvement and hard work.
- Traditions celebrate student accomplishment, teacher innovation and parental commitment.
- Success, joy and humor abound.

¹³⁰ Peterson, K. D., & Deal, T. E. "Realizing a Positive School Climate; How Leaders Influence the Culture of Schools." *Educational Leadership* Vol. 56, Issue 1, pp. 28-30. 1998.

¹³¹ Grillo, J. "Holding School Boards Accountable." *Georgia Trend*, June 2009.

¹³² Georgia School Boards Association. *Boardmanship Manual*. November 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.gsba.com>

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Samuels, C. A. (2011, July 8). "Report Details 'Culture of Cheating' in Atlanta Schools." July 8, 2011. Retrieved from Education Week: <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/07/13/36atlanta.h3o.html?qs=APS+cheating+scandal>

¹³⁵ Badertscher, N. "CRCT Investigators Shift Attention to Dougherty." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, July 16, 2011.

¹³⁶ Badertscher, N. "Dougherty Cheating Investigation Nets Confessions, Investigator Says." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, October 23, 2011.

¹³⁷ Payne, C. M. (2008). *So Much Reform, So Little Change: The Persistence of Failure in Urban Schools*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press. 2008.

¹³⁸ Peterson, K. D., & Deal, T. E. "How Leaders Influence the Culture of Schools." *Educational Leadership* Vol. 56, Issue 1. September 1998.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

Action Steps for Georgia

How can districts and schools go from a toxic culture to a positive one where student learning is placed at a premium? How can we learn from the mistakes of the past and move forward? One place to begin this process is to focus on the selection, training and support of our school board members, superintendents and school principals.

In November 2010, the State Board of Education adopted the Georgia Model Code of Ethics Policy and Model Conflict of Interest Policy for local boards of education. Many local boards already had such a policy in place. Those that did not adopted a code of ethics and conflict-of-interest policy that contain, at minimum, the provisions of the State Board's model. The Georgia Department of Education and the State Board of Education is now also requiring training in accordance with the governance standards adopted by the State Board.¹⁴⁰

Unlike members of local school boards, superintendents typically have education backgrounds. They are appointed by school boards, but they often rise through the ranks of serving first as teachers and then as principals. But the pool of potential superintendents is becoming more shallow, and turnover is high. According to the American Association of School Administrators, the mean tenure for superintendents is five to six years. Annually, the turnover rate is close to 20 percent.¹⁴¹ Attention needs to be paid to why this turnover rate is so high. Is it the pressure to

adhere to “no excuses” and produce high test scores under increasingly reduced budgets? Or are there other issues with the position that need to be addressed? We have an obligation to consider how this position is structured if we want to reduce the factors that may be contributing to the high rate of turnover and the number of ethical violations that we have seen manifest by some who have been in this position.

Like superintendents, principals in Georgia have high rates of turnover. Georgia principals average only 3.5 years in their schools. To combat this, Georgia's Race to the Top application included a strategy for principal induction designed to support and retain high-quality school leaders.¹⁴² The principal induction program requires the collaborative effort of multiple stakeholders and includes a focus on leadership expectations of school leaders and leadership and organizational structures.

In school systems, the leadership role is paramount. School districts have enormous power to support principals and teachers in driving instructional improvement. Research has shown that when district leaders effectively address specific responsibilities, they can, and do, have a profound positive impact on student achievement in their districts.¹⁴³ Positive leadership at the district level can translate to effective leadership at the school level as well. Empowering school-level leaders is one of the most important steps districts can take to support student learning. Leadership is

second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to student achievement.

The majority of individuals that work in the public school systems are honest and hardworking. They dedicate their professional lives to the education and well-being of children. However, if only one district or school struggles with positive leadership, that is one too many. All districts should take the opportunity to learn from the mistakes of others. When an opportunity to make people aware of the importance of ethics and the impacts of their decisions is foregone, people may revert to their pre-scandal, normal behavior. In order to promote district-wide, positive leadership, school boards, superintendents, principals, and staff must work together to create and maintain a culture of trust, respect and mutual support. As part of building a positive culture, districts must have the ethics conversations front and center. In a competitive environment, discussions must take place that define the rules for success. Districts must create opportunities to talk about what it means to be successful and what are the acceptable societal norms for achieving that success. Are those norms high test scores at any cost? Do those norms focus on what's best for educating children? What does it really mean to be a “successful leader”? To create an ethical environment and a culture of excellence, Aristotle tells us that consistency is needed. “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act but a habit.” ■

¹⁴⁰ Georgia Department of Education. “Local School Board Governance”(Presentation). January 21, 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.gadoe.org>

¹⁴¹ American Association of School Administrators. “Superintendent and District Data.” 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=740>

¹⁴² Georgia Department of Education. “Principal Induction Draft Guidelines” September 2011.

¹⁴³ 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.

ISSUE 10

Where's the Glue? Tying it All Together

Issue Overview

Georgia's public education system has made great strides over the past decade, and there is much for which to be proud. The release of the 2011 scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) — the Nation's Report Card — showed that over the past 11 years Georgia has cut in half the number of fourth graders who failed to meet the basic levels of math proficiency. Moreover, Georgia was one of only 16 states that made progress toward closing the achievement gap for fourth grade math students between white students and African-American students. The story is similar for eighth graders: the percentage of students who did not meet the basic levels of

math proficiency has been cut from a high of 48 percent in 2000 to 32 percent in 2011. Here, too, Georgia was a leader in closing the achievement gap. One of only 16 states to do so, Georgia closed the gap between lower and higher income students. Georgia students are also making gains in reading. These gains are less dramatic than in math because Georgia students have been performing close to the national average for years.

While these gains are impressive, the number of students succeeding in school and going onto college and careers is not nearly good enough, and there is still work to be done. Georgia has been working to implement new programs that will improve educational

outcomes for all students and has currently put in place more building blocks for the future. In 2010 the Georgia State Board of Education adopted the rigorous Common Core State Standards in English/language arts and math. Mastery of these standards will help ensure that students are prepared for success in college and the workplace. Georgia's state longitudinal data system contains all 10 core elements that the Data Quality Campaign deems essential.¹⁴⁴ High-quality data can be used to identify strengths and weaknesses in the system and to target resources and programs. To improve the success of college students receiving remedial education, Georgia applied for and was awarded a \$1 million grant from Complete College America. We were one of only 10 states to receive this grant. This development led to a focus on the importance of college completion and kick-started a broader statewide effort to implement innovation and reforms aimed at increasing certificate and degree attainment under Governor Deal's Complete College Georgia Initiative. Georgia was also one of only 12 states to win the U.S. Department of Education's Race to the Top competition in 2010. The state will receive up to \$400 million to implement reforms.

FIGURE 10.1 BIRTH-TO-WORK INSULATED EDUCATION PIPELINE¹⁴⁶



144 Institute for a Competitive Workforce. Education in Georgia: *The Good the Bad and the Ugly*. March 1, 2011. Retrieved from <http://icw.uschamber.com/publication/education-your-state-good-bad-and-ugly>

TABLE 10.1 ALLIANCE OF EDUCATION AGENCY HEADS MEMBERS¹⁴⁹

Commissioner	Department of Early Care and Learning
State School Superintendent	Georgia Department of Education
Executive Secretary	Georgia Professional Standards Commission
President	Georgia Student Finance Commission
Governor's Education Policy Advisor	Governor's Office
Executive Director	Governor's Office of Student Achievement
Commissioner	Technical College System of Georgia
Chancellor	University System of Georgia

With so much activity within the education system, one must ask: How do they all relate to each other? Do they? When thinking about how we describe our educational goals for the future, we should be able to answer the following questions: What do our educational goals look like? What's the glue that holds them together?

What's the Significance for Georgia?

We often talk about the birth-to-work pipeline. The pipeline is the path that children take from birth that, when successfully navigated, leads them to a successful career at the end. (See Figure 10.1.) As children move through the pipeline, they encounter different parts of the educational system and need different supports to keep them moving.

What is needed for successful completion of this journey is to tighten the links between pre-K and elementary school, middle school and high school, and high school and postsecondary institutions. Moreover, steps need to be taken not only to reduce the corrosion inside the pipe to increase the flow of students (e.g., increase the number of 9th graders who graduate in four years), but to insulate the education pipeline to eliminate leaks as well.

The outer layer of insulation should ensure young people have access to essential community services that allow them to successfully make their way through the pipeline — things like health care, transportation, housing and financial supports. The

inner layer of insulation includes family and peers, as well as the range of formal and informal organizations that connect youths and their families to critical resources and broker between systems, and employers who provide opportunities for young people to apply their learning, pursue their interests and build social capital.¹⁴⁵ Each stage and level of the pipeline is important, and knowing how they all support each other is key to articulating a unified education strategy for the state.

The pipeline works best when these levels of insulation can coordinate, and Georgia does have several entities working toward alignment and producing a unified vision of public education. The first is the Alliance of Education Agency Heads (AEAH), which is tasked with aligning, coordinating and strengthening Georgia's P-20 education system. The Alliance was convened as Georgia's P-20 Council in early 2006 with representatives from each of the state's education agencies. (For a complete list, see Table 10.1.) When convened, the AEAH was charged to “[c]ollaborate on policies and programs that prepare students for the opportunities and challenges of the 21st century.”¹⁴⁷ Supported by its collaborative work, AEAH has previously defined five priority goals to improve education in Georgia:

1. Increase the high school graduation rate, decrease the high school dropout rate and increase postsecondary enrollment and success;

2. Strengthen teacher recruitment, teacher retention and teacher quality;
3. Improve workforce-readiness skills;
4. Develop strong educational leaders, particularly at the building level; and
5. Improve the SAT/ACT scores of Georgia's students.¹⁴⁸

The AEAH is currently going through a strategic-planning process that will lead to new goals for the agency heads. In conjunction with these revisions, Governor Deal is working on establishing his strategic goals in education. In early 2012, AEAH members and the governor's staff will work together to align their goals and education agenda. Key components of the new goals for both the AEAH and Governor Deal's office will reflect the state's commitment to early education and grade-level reading, support of RT3 implementation, college- and career-ready programs and measures, and teacher and leader effectiveness.

Related to Governor Deal's focus on education priorities is the Georgia Competitiveness Initiative. At the request of the governor, the Georgia Chamber of Commerce facilitated listening sessions across the state that brought together state government and the business community to develop a long-term strategy for economic development, which includes areas such as the business climate, innovation, infrastructure, international growth and opportunity, and government efficiency and effectiveness. One area the Initiative is heavily focused on is education and workforce development and “[b]uilding a pipeline of qualified workers for the jobs of today and tomorrow.”¹⁵⁰ The Governor's Office is working to align the work of the Competitiveness Initiative with the education priorities underdevelopment.

Another entity working on creating a comprehensive and coherent vision for public education is The Vision for Public Education in Georgia — or Vision Project. Formed in 2009 by the Georgia School Boards Association and the Georgia School Superintendents Association (GSSA), this joint venture sought to create a

145 Yohalmen, N., Ravindranath, N., Pittman, K., & Evennou, D. *Insulating the Education Pipeline to Increase Postsecondary Success*. The Forum for Youth Investment. 2010.

146 Ibid.

147 Mast, A. “Georgia's Alliance of Education Agency Heads.” *Education Commission of the States 2009 National Forum on Education Policy*. Nashville, TN: Education Commission of the States. 2009.

148 Alliance of Education Agency Heads. “Alliance of Education Agency Heads Members.” 2010. Retrieved from American Youth Policy Forum:

<http://www.aypf.org/tripreports/2011/documents/Georgia's%20Alliance%20of%20Education%20Agency%20Heads%202011.pdf>

149 Ibid.

150 Georgia Competitiveness Initiative. “Education and Workforce Development.” 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.georgiacompetitiveness.org/education-workforce-development.php>

comprehensive and coherent vision for public education. The 30-member planning team is composed of 15 members of local boards of education and 15 school superintendents from across the state. The team worked for over two years engaging educational experts and visiting communities across the state to help them answer four crucial questions: 1) What is the purpose of public education? 2) What are its goals? 3) What is our vision for public education? 4) What is the value of public education?¹⁵¹

As a result of their research, the Vision Project promotes 45 recommendations that, when acted upon by state and local leaders, will lead to a public education system that provides equity and excellence for all of Georgia's children. The 45 recommendations are categorized into seven broad educational system components (Table 10.2) that roughly follow the birth-to-work pipeline. Within each of the seven components is a list of guiding principles and recommended immediate and long-range steps for communities and local and state agencies.

TABLE 10.2 SEVEN EDUCATIONAL COMPONENTS OF GEORGIA'S VISION PROJECT¹⁵²

1. Early Learning and Student Success
2. Teaching and Learning
3. Teaching and Learning Resources
4. Human and Organizational Capital
5. Governance, Leadership and Accountability
6. Culture, Climate and Organizational Efficacy
7. Financial Resources

As of November 2011, 110 school districts had adopted resolutions in support of the Vision Project.

Action Steps for Georgia

What is Georgia's education vision, and why do we need one? Efforts toward coordination and articulation of a shared vision like those undertaken by the Alliance of Education Agency Heads and the Georgia Vision Project

help to align projects, leverage resources and insulate the birth-to-work pipeline. The question then is not why do we need one, but how do we ensure long-term sustainability?

One option is to fully engage the business community in articulating and supporting the vision — or plan. The educational system is responsible for producing fully engaged citizens — both in terms of civic and economic activity. Fully engaged citizens contribute to the tax base and economic health of the state. In turn, a state with a healthy business and economic sector can afford to put more money into its school system. A single vision of our educational culture can create buy-in from those outside the education community and build trust and support for public education.

The glue that could solidify our continued improvements is a unified message and support from our government, business and education leaders. That message should emphasize staying the course on Race to the Top, supporting and improving our teachers and leaders, and providing necessary insulation to the pipeline. ■

¹⁵¹ Georgia School Boards Association and Georgia School Superintendents Association. *A Vision for Public Education: The Story of Equity and Excellence Achieved*. Lawrenceville, GA: Vision for Public Education, 2011.

¹⁵² Ibid.



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