

Every Student Succeeds Act Feedback from Stakeholder Groups Across Georgia

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Authors:

Glenda Copeland, SECC Georgia State Liaison

Erin McCann, SECC Senior Researcher

Amy Potemski, AIR Researcher

SOUTHEAST
Comprehensive Center

at American Institutes for Research ■

440 Knox Abbott Drive, Suite 200

Cayce, South Carolina 29033

803-936-0750

southeast-cc.org

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Introduction

On August 18, 2016, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and State Superintendent of Education invited everyone in the state to attend one of eight public feedback sessions held across Georgia to learn about the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and offer feedback on the development of the state plan. ESSA is the replacement for the law known as No Child Left Behind. This new law allows greater decision-making flexibility to states and local schools and districts in meeting the needs of their students.

The feedback sessions were facilitated by EducationFirst, the Southeast Comprehensive Center (SECC), and the Southern Education Foundation. These groups collected information from the participants, analyzed the responses, and produced reports documenting each event. The resulting reports were provided to GaDOE to be used by the various writing teams who are constructing the state's ESSA plan. Feedback during this period also could be emailed to GaDOE at essa@doe.k12.ga.us.

Each of the eight sessions facilitated by EducationFirst were 2 hours in length and addressed topics that included Assessment, Accountability, Educator and Leader Development, Federal Programs to Support School Improvement, and Education of the Whole Child. The statewide sessions were as follows:

- August 24, 2016, Columbia County
- August 29, 2016, Habersham County
- September 14, 2016, Fulton County
- September 19, 2016, Muscogee County
- October 12, 2016, Laurens County
- October 17, 2016, Gordon County
- November 1, 2016, Dougherty County
- November 3, 2016, Chatham County

Between August 30 and October 11, 2016, SECC facilitated five sessions to solicit feedback from the members of Superintendent Richard Woods' Advisory Groups. The groups included the following:

Superintendents Advisory Council

The Superintendents Advisory Council is composed of local superintendents from all over Georgia. Each Regional Education Service Agency (RESA) is represented to ensure the voices from all areas of the state are heard. These council members have diverse backgrounds and experiences and represent rural, urban, and suburban school districts.

Student Advisory Councils

The Middle and High School Student Advisory Councils are made up of 108 middle and high school students from every corner of the state. These students meet with the State School

Superintendent several times throughout the school year to discuss the impact of state policies in the classroom. They serve as the Superintendent’s ambassadors to their respective schools and participate in service projects to benefit schools and students.

Teacher Advisory Council

The Teacher Advisory Council is composed of over 80 teachers from 30 elementary, 15 middle, and 30 high schools representing over 40 school districts across the state (rural, urban, and suburban), from first-year to veteran teachers. These teachers represent all content areas (social studies, English language arts, math, and science as well as fine arts, language, gifted and special education).

Parent Advisory Council

The Parent Advisory Council is a group of approximately 24 parents from across the state that provide input on new policies, projects, and materials that impact students and their families. Advisory Council members are particularly focused on how to increase parent and family engagement to ensure student academic success. Members serve as advisors and meet with the State School Superintendent several times throughout their two-year term.

The five 2-hour sessions focused on the same areas of concern as those facilitated by EducationFirst: Assessment, Accountability, Educator and Leader Development, Federal Programs to Support School Improvement, and Education of the Whole Child. The sessions were conducted with approximately 160 participants from the above groups. SECC facilitators collected the feedback from each session, analyzed the responses by topic area, and identified predominate common themes from each individual session.

On October 3, 2016, the Southern Education Foundation convened representatives from their member organizations to discuss Superintendent Woods’ request to provide ideas for improving education for Georgia students in the department’s ESSA plan. Organizations represented at the feedback session included WonderRoot, Urban League of Greater Atlanta, ACLU Georgia, United Way of Greater Atlanta, Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta, Georgia State University School of Public Health, 100 Black Men of America, Georgia State Conference of NAACP, The Opportunity Institute, Georgia Division of Family and Children’s Services, Parent to Parent of Georgia, Interfaith Children’s Movement, Georgia Appleseed, Sheltering Arms, Center for Pan-Asian Community Services, Gwinnett StoPP, and Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. Topic areas mirrored those of the sessions conducted by EducationFirst and SECC.

At each of the multiple feedback opportunities, participants were encouraged to engage in a two-way communication process with GaDOE in a partnership to ensure that every student is ready to “learn, live, and lead.” The summary documents from each of the regional sessions facilitated by EducationFirst and the superintendent’s advisory groups facilitated by SECC can be found in the Appendix of this report.

This summary report is organized in the following sections:

- Common Themes Across All Sessions
- Common Themes from Sessions Hosted by EducationFirst
- Common Themes from Sessions Hosted by the Southeast Comprehensive Center
- Common Themes from the Sessions Hosted by the Southern Education Foundation

Common Themes Across All Sessions

Accountability

1. The current accountability system is not accurate, is difficult for parents and others to understand, and the measures and scores do not necessarily correlate to what people are seeing at school.
2. The current accountability index has too many indicators and should be simplified to make more sense.
3. The current accountability index does not capture school growth and improvement well enough and the Georgia Department of Education should design new measures of true student growth to use for accountability.
4. The current accountability index should include more measures of school culture.
5. While growth is important, integrate other factors into the system to get a more holistic view of performance.
6. Stakeholders believe that multiple measures should be used to determine a school's success or failure. We need more than one definition of success and failure.

Assessment

1. Assessments should be used as a data point to help inform instruction, and not as a punitive measure for teachers or students, nor for other high-stakes purposes. Stakeholders want assessment to be more diagnostic with specific information about student performance tied to standards. Modifications need to be made for special needs children.
2. Testing is important, but currently there is too much focus on testing outcomes for students. Assessment pressure incentivizes schools to cut PE, music, art and other areas essential to educating the whole child. Children need time to explore, learn hands-on, produce, and create. Schools need funding to support that.
3. Need more local flexibility in decision-making regarding the use of assessments and the assessments that students take. Some suggestions included: reduce the length of state testing and break up tests into two or three sessions that provide more timely data.
4. Assessments need better questions that accurately reflect what students learn, should be age- and developmentally-appropriate, and there should be less bias in assessment items.
5. There are more effective ways to assess/show student learning than standardized assessments.
6. Stakeholders mentioned several concerns about the current assessments including lack of consistency, difficulty in using the data, not enough formative assessments and lack of timely feedback from assessments to drive differentiation, instruction, etc.
7. It is powerful what we report. Words like success and failure have implications, and how that is communicated in the public setting is important to think through.

Educator and Leader Development

1. Districts face significant barriers to ensuring that students have access to higher-level courses and highly effective and qualified teachers and leaders.
2. Districts should offer teachers and leaders more significant professional development to address effectiveness, including opportunities to collaborate with other educators. Teachers should have additional promotion and career path opportunities.
3. Attendees identified a wide range of qualifications as important for teachers and principals beyond a degree, including knowledge of content and teaching strategies. Stakeholders identified intangible qualities as the most important for effective teachers and leaders—passion, drive, empathy.
4. Funding and teacher pay were identified as the primary barriers to students having equal access to effective teachers and principals. Districts need to offer teachers and leaders more resources and incentives to work in the areas they are needed most. State education leaders should address salary caps and inequities and provide incentives for educators and leaders working in struggling schools.
5. School and district culture were also identified as significant barriers to attracting effective teachers.
6. Educators and leaders should have content knowledge, understand best practice and recent research, as well as have an opportunity to co-teach and be mentored and get leadership training. For example, teachers in the IN4 program need a lot more support than those coming in through a traditional pathway.

Federal Programs to Support School Improvement

1. Align federal program planning and requirements to what's already required through SACS, GA accreditation, flexibility waivers, SWSS and charters.
2. Reconsider/better understand how funds are distributed to provide resources where they are needed most. For example, investing in media specialists/centers would support school improvement as a whole. State needs to clarify that this funding is allowable through ESSA.
3. Stakeholders like the benefit of current flexible learning program and Title I parent involvement resources. One size fits all hasn't worked. Stakeholders like that schools can develop their own improvement plans.
4. The state should consider what interventions are most scalable to provide for the needs of all students and evaluate the use of funds to ensure that money is spent on programs/interventions with the best results.
5. Inconsistency in support for struggling schools (what the parameters are) makes it tough for schools to make a plan. Funding given during school improvement process and then taken away makes it difficult for schools to sustain improvement.
6. Stronger engagement with the community is important for school improvement.

Education of the Whole Child

1. Provide better social emotional learning support and programming for students, including more opportunities for student peer-to-peer mentoring, interventions that use technology efficiently and provide students with a better understanding of technology, and provide students with opportunities to explore through field trips, hands-on learning, project-based learning, and community connections.
2. Ensure basic student needs (e.g., health, shelter and safety) are met and provide the necessary mental, social, and physical support. Students should have access to mental health services and experts. Teachers and parents need mental health training and continuous support, not a one-time event.
3. Leverage community partnerships to increase the level of services in schools and educational opportunities for students.
4. Ensure that programs are designed to differentiate/be individualized for a variety of student needs.
5. Title IV was usual source of funding for whole child programs. Now with ESSA, they are looking at all Titles for funding programs.
6. Schools are so focused on testing, even counseling/interventionist roles become focused on academics, not mental health. Teachers and schools need resources to deal with behavior issues in a comprehensive way.

Common Themes from Sessions Hosted by EducationFirst

Accountability Common Themes

1. Figure out how to measure true student growth and use it for accountability.
2. Simplify the entire accountability system, including the CCRPI. It's not fair or clear.
3. While growth is important, integrate other factors into the system to get a more holistic view of performance.
4. Attendees do not think the current system accurately reflects their schools' performance.

Assessment Common Themes

1. Assessments should be primarily used to drive instruction, not for high-stakes purposes.
2. Use assessments that are age- and developmentally-appropriate.
3. Break up tests into two or three sessions that provide more timely data.
4. Reduce the length of state testing and use different ways to assess mastery.

Educator and Leader Development Common Themes

1. Attendees identified a wide range of qualifications as important for teachers and principals beyond a degree, including knowledge of content and teaching strategies.
2. Teachers should have additional promotion and career path opportunities.
3. Funding and teacher pay were identified as the primary barriers to students having equal access to effective teachers and principals.
4. Educators want to collaborate and see what other school systems are doing as part of their professional development.

Federal Programs to Support School Improvement Common Themes

1. One size fits all hasn't worked. Attendees like that schools can develop their own improvement plans.
2. Additional support personnel, such as counselors and special education instructors, are needed.
3. The community needs to get involved in school improvement.
4. Strong teacher and principal professional development should be a key part of improvement plans.

Education of the Whole Child Common Themes

1. Engage students earlier and create an academic plan that aligns with their passions and interests.
2. Provide more flexibility for course selection and graduation requirements to match the student.
3. Ensure basic student needs (e.g., health, shelter and safety) are met and provide the necessary mental, social, and physical support.
4. Leverage community partnerships to increase the level of services in schools and educational opportunities for students.

Common Themes from Sessions Hosted by the Southeast Comprehensive Center

Accountability

1. The current measures of accountability do not measure the right things—where schools are doing well and where they need to improve.
2. The current accountability index has too many indicators and should be simplified to make more sense.
3. The current accountability index does not capture school growth and improvement well enough.
4. The current accountability index should include more measures of school culture

Assessment

1. Assessments should be used as a data point to help inform instruction, and not as a punitive measure for teachers or students.
2. Testing is important, but currently there is too much focus on testing outcomes for students.
3. Need more local flexibility in decision-making regarding the use of assessments and the assessments that students take.
4. Assessments need better questions that accurately reflect what students learn, and there should be less bias in assessment items.
5. There are more effective ways to assess/show student learning than standardized assessments.

Educator and Leader Development

1. Districts face significant barriers to ensuring that students have access to higher-level courses and highly effective and qualified teachers and leaders.
2. Districts should offer teachers and leaders more significant professional development to address effectiveness.
3. Districts need to offer teachers and leaders more resources and incentives to work in the areas they are needed most.
4. More intangible qualities are identified as the most important for effective teachers and leaders—passion, drive, empathy.
5. School and district culture are significant barriers to attracting effective teachers.

Federal Programs to Support School Improvement

1. Reconsider/better understand how funds are distributed to provide resources where they are needed most.
2. Consider what interventions are most scalable to provide for the needs of all students.
3. Evaluate the use of funds to ensure that money is spent on programs/interventions with the best results.

4. Strive for stronger engagement with the community.

Education of the Whole Child

1. Provide better social emotional learning support and programming for students.
2. Ensure that programs are designed to differentiate/be individualized for a variety of student needs.
3. Provide more opportunities for student peer-to-peer mentoring.
4. Provide interventions that use technology efficiently and provide students with a better understanding of technology.
5. Provide students with more opportunities to gain real-world knowledge.

Common Themes from Sessions Hosted by the Southern Education Foundation

Accountability

1. We publish a lot of data but need to think through how it is used. There should be a way to identify what schools are doing well and where they need to improve as opposed to saying they are failing or succeeding.
2. We need to better define what we mean by college and career ready as well as how the information published can be used to help students. The notion of college and career, what does that mean? How can the information we publish be used more to help students and not the institution?
3. Assessment and accountability are forever linked. You cannot have one without the other.
4. School climate measures needs to separate attendance from discipline. It also should separate different types of suspensions, i.e., in-school versus out-of-school or across teams within the school.
5. The current accountability rating system is just a score. There also needs to be thoughtful interpretation of the score.
6. Provide a simple dashboard with an overview of information, and then allow the stakeholders to dig into more data if they wish.

Assessment

1. Make assessments more culturally appropriate, and allow for a variety of assessment types including portfolios.
2. Assessments should be used to help teachers, students, and schools and not used as punishment if certain benchmarks are not met.
3. Less is more. There does not have to be so much focus on testing when teachers are making sure students are ready for college and career.
4. Assessments need to be related to where the students are going such as to the next level, college and career. Currently, they are not as relevant, and therefore students do not take them as seriously as they should.
5. Less is more. What data can we collect that is useful and not impact the schools, school day as we are doing with assessment right now.
6. It is powerful what we report. Words like success and failure have implications, and how is that communicated in the public setting is important to think through.

Educator and Leader Development

1. Stakeholders discussed several barriers to providing all students with equal access to effective teachers and principals, including teacher assignments not based on strengths and weaknesses, lack of leadership support at the schools, need for more teacher leaders in schools, a lack of cultural understanding and community involvement, and a lack of funding and/or other resources to provide incentives to retain effective teachers.

2. Many districts face high teacher and leader turnover rates, especially as surrounding districts recruit effective teachers from struggling schools.
3. School climate needs to be a focus. Schools with a positive climate orient their teachers to the culture. One barrier to this, or something that could have an impact on this issue, is effective leadership. Leader, in this context, could include school boards and superintendents.
4. Teachers need to be able to engage and be given flexibility to meet their students' need.

Federal Programs to Support School Improvement

1. No feedback provided.

Education of the Whole Child

1. Schools need to be the community center and ensure that children have a system of care from prekindergarten through Grade 12.
2. Teachers and schools can't respond to all children's needs. Partnerships with health sectors and communities are needed to help children succeed. School nurses and other members of the community need to be part of the approach.
3. Social emotional learning should be emphasized and students with challenges (mental health issues) given more support. Also, children should be supported to pursue their passions and have help getting there.
4. Cultural competencies need to be developed to work with these students. Provide more multiculturalism training for teachers.
5. Framing the idea of professional development and support around understanding of brain development helps to distinguish what is appropriate. Staff need to understand children experiencing trauma due to poverty, too.
6. Stakeholders provided several suggestions for ways the community can help, including a focus on restorative practices, providing bilingual services for English language learners, improving transportation services for students, providing school-based health centers, and better educating the community about the importance of school climate.

Appendix

EducationFirst – Common Themes from Each Regional Session

Chatham County

Accountability Common Themes

1. Stakeholders were critical of the CCRPI, noting that it needs to be stabilized and consistent; it should measure things that educators can control and only measure what is essential.
2. Stakeholders do want information about student performance, participation rates, growth, and achievement.
3. The current accountability system is not accurate, is difficult for parents and others to understand, and scores do not necessarily correlate to what people are seeing at school.

Assessment Common Themes

1. We are assessing the cognitive aspect of the child. Need to monitor the mental health, citizenship, contributions to the learning community. Bring in assessments for social emotional learning.
2. Stakeholders want assessment to be more diagnostic with specific information about student performance tied to standards. Modifications need to be made for special needs children.

Educator and Leader Development Common Themes

1. Educators and leaders should have content knowledge, understand best practice and recent research, as well as have an opportunity to co-teach and be mentored and get leadership training.
2. Teachers in the IN4 program need a lot more support than those coming in through a traditional pathway.
3. State education leaders should address salary caps and inequities and provide incentives for educators and leaders working in struggling schools.

Federal Programs to Support School Improvement Common Themes

1. Inconsistency in support for struggling schools (what the parameters are) makes it tough for schools to make a plan.
2. Investing in media specialists/centers would support school improvement as a whole. State needs to clarify that this funding is allowable through ESSA.
3. Funding given during school improvement process and then taken away makes it difficult for schools to sustain improvement.

Education of the Whole Child Common Themes

1. Stakeholders want more technology but appropriate to student needs and the curriculum. Media specialists should be engaged to help students use technology to engage their passions and open up curiosity.
2. Students should have lots of opportunities to explore through field trips, hands-on learning, project-based learning, and community connections.
3. Students should have access to mental health services and experts.

Columbia County

Accountability

1. Figure out how to measure true student growth, and use it for accountability.
2. Simplify the CCRPI. It's not fair or clear.
3. While growth is important, include other factors in the system for a holistic view of performance.
4. Attendees do not think the current system accurately reflects their schools' performance.

Assessment

1. Use testing for formative purposes only.
2. Test students more aligned with the age and development.
3. Break up tests into two or three session that provide formative data.
4. Reduce the length of state testing, and use computers for elementary grades.
5. Test results are not timely and are not designed to support instruction.

Educator and Leader Development

1. Attendees identified a wide range of qualifications as important for teachers and principals beyond a degree.
2. Teacher should have additional promotion and career path opportunities.
3. Funding and teacher pay were identified as the primary barriers to students having equal access to effective teachers and principals.
4. Educators want to collaborate and see what other school systems are doing as part of their professional development.

Federal Programs to Support School Improvement

1. One size fits all hasn't worked. Attendees like that schools can develop their own improvement plans.
2. Additional support personnel, such as counselors and special education instructors, are needed.
3. The community needs to get involved in school improvement.

4. Strong teacher and principal professional development should be a key part of improvement plans.

Education of the Whole Child

1. Engage students earlier to develop their passions and interests.
2. Provide more flexibility for course selection and graduation requirements to match the student.
3. Have more mental health and other social services with quicker response/meeting times.

Dougherty County

Accountability Common Themes

1. Accountability measures need to focus more on student growth.
2. The current accountability system is convoluted and has too many elements that are hard to communicate and understand.
3. Stakeholders believe that multiple measures should be used to determine a school's success or failure. We need more than one definition of success and failure.

Assessment Common Themes

1. Stakeholders mentioned several concerns about the current assessments including lack of consistency, difficulty in using the data, not enough formative assessments, and lack of timely feedback from assessments to drive differentiation, instruction, etc.

Federal Programs to Support School Improvement Common Themes

1. Stakeholders like the benefit of current flexible learning program and Title I parent involvement resources.
2. Align federal program planning and requirements to what's already required through SACS, GA accreditation, flexibility waivers, SWSS and charters.

Education of the Whole Child Common Themes

1. Assessment pressure incentivizes schools to cut PE, music, art and other areas essential to educating the whole child. Children need time to explore, learn hands-on, produce and create. Schools need funding to support that.
2. Schools are so focused on testing, even counseling/interventionist roles become focused on academics not mental health. Teachers and schools need resources to deal with behavior issues in a comprehensive way.
3. Teachers and parents need mental health training and continuous support, not a one-time event.

Fulton County

Accountability Common Themes

1. Stakeholders are interested in their schools' ability to grow students and offer opportunities in other subject areas and outside of the school.
2. CCRPI is too complex, yet it still does not capture the full picture of a school. CCRPI should be streamlined, simplified, and focused on school improvement.
3. The state should rate schools based primarily on student growth but also include school climate measures and how well the schools prepare students for life after graduation.

Assessment Common Themes

1. Assessment results should be shared with school and district administrations in a timely fashion so that improvements can be made at the classroom, school, and district levels.
2. The amount of time devoted to assessment should be reduced, and the state should consider other changes to the structure of the assessments.
3. Parents want to know what their children have learned and areas they need to focus on.

Educator and Leader Development Common Themes

1. Stakeholders prioritized content knowledge, years of experience, leadership, and skills such as communications, problem solving, and cultural sensitivity as important qualifications for teachers and principals.
2. Barriers to equal access to effective teachers and principals include lack of training for teachers and principals, staffing issues, and external factors such as poverty, family context, health, language, or culture.

Federal Programs to Support School Improvement Common Themes

1. Stakeholders commented on the current use of funds. They want clear guidance around Title I funds in particular and clearer parameters and flexibility around use of funds in general.
2. Title I funds have helped to address student needs and increased student achievement and participation in schooling.
3. Stakeholders noted the importance of partnering with community organizations, the business community, and parents to support students academically, socially, and emotionally.

Education of the Whole Child Common Themes

1. All students should have access to all types of instruction, both rigorous academic instruction and electives, that speak to their passions and interests.
2. Health, arts, and technology should be fully integrated into the curriculum at all levels.
3. The system needs more resources for social workers/psychologists and other mental health care supports.

Gordon County

Accountability Common Themes

1. Stakeholders favored accountability measures that emphasize student growth and multiple measures. The accountability system should track school climate, college and career readiness, and equity indicators.
2. Most stakeholders did not feel that current rating system accurately reflects the performance of their schools. Problems include inconsistency in grading, too many measures, and not enough allowance for socioeconomic factors.
3. Recommendations for improvement include simplifying and streamlining the reporting and using multiple measures to create a rating.

Assessment Common Themes

1. Assessments should be formative and informational, reflecting students' ability and measuring growth. Assessments should be used to drive instruction and provide feedback to teachers, parents, and students.
2. Assessments should be developmentally appropriate with less testing for elementary students, flexible and varied formats. Students should be assessed at different times and in less time.
3. Stakeholders want assessments that measure problem-solving and critical skills through authentic and portfolio-based assessments. Assessments should measure college and career readiness and real-life skills.

Educator and Leader Development Common Themes

1. Stakeholders mentioned several qualifications they felt were important for teachers and principals including effective management and pedagogical skills, classroom experience, as well as knowledge about child development and the curriculum.
2. There are significant barriers to providing all students with access to effective teachers and leaders including socioeconomic factors, lack of effective training and support for teachers and administrators, teacher and administrator placement in rural and low-income areas, and cultural and language barriers.
3. Stakeholders mentioned several partnerships that are working for Gordon County and recommend continued attention to building partnerships, providing more flexibility for teacher certification, and continuing to improve professional development opportunities for teachers and principals.

Federal Programs to Support School Improvement Common Themes

1. Georgia has put into place several initiatives that stakeholders found helpful in continued school improvement such as Title I funding, instructional support for teachers and administrators, and whole school accountability measures.
2. To build capacity to sustain improvements, stakeholders suggested collaboration and communication among programs, continued attention to support systems in schools for

all professionals, guidance on whole-school reforms that work, and flexible funding that includes matched funding for mandates.

3. Stakeholders appreciated the opportunity to learn and ask questions and suggested that face-to-face feedback opportunities, especially in small regional groupings, should be continued through implementation of ESSA reforms. Timely feedback from all stakeholders before implementing various reforms is important.

Education of the Whole Child Common Themes

1. Schools and educators should make a concerted effort to provide students with opportunities to discover and engage in their passions and interests through electives, field trips, clubs, partnerships, and internship opportunities.
2. Educators should ensure that all students have access to resources including technology, after-school activities, field trips, mental health supports, and regular physical education.
3. Stakeholders recommended several strategies for encouraging whole-child education including more hands-on and student-driven learning experiences, attention to school climate and social/emotional learning, access to highly qualified teachers, and strong curriculums in all subject areas.

Habersham County

Accountability Common Themes

1. Stakeholders were most interested in knowing about school safety, student growth and achievement, teacher effectiveness and qualification, and school climate.
2. There are mixed opinions on the current rating system. Some believe it is too complicated and rigorous, while others believe it accurately represents some parts of school performance.
3. Stakeholders recommend a wide range of improvement for the system, primarily focused on making it simpler and less focused on CCRPI.

Assessment Common Themes

1. Assessments have many roles. They drive instruction, measure student progress and achievement, measure teacher effectiveness, and measure the quality of schools and districts.
2. More training is required for teachers on the expectations of assessments, how to use the results of state assessments to change instruction, and how assessments fit into the larger education system.
3. Increase the variety of question types and assessment methods on the state assessments, and give schools more flexibility in administration.
4. Parents are interested in clear, simple results that let them know their child's progress against expectations and against their peers.

Educator and Leader Development Common Themes

1. Stakeholders listed a wide range of qualifications as important, including passion for teaching and children, effective use of technology, and strong content and pedagogy knowledge.
2. Attendees noted teacher compensation, difficult workload, and out-of-school factors as the largest barriers for improvement. The profession needs to be more appealing.
3. Attendees listed several partnerships within the school and between the school and an external organization such as Woodrow Wilson, Piedmont Partnership, and higher education collaboratives.
4. Stakeholders emphasized classroom experience during preparation, strong induction, and individualized professional development (with opportunities for collaboration) as necessary for improvement.

Federal Programs to Support School Improvement Common Themes

1. One size fits all hasn't worked. Attendees like that schools can develop their own improvement plans.
2. Additional support personnel, such as counselors and special education instructors, are needed.
3. The community needs to get involved in school improvement.
4. Strong teacher and principal professional development should be a key part of improvement plans.

Education of the Whole Child Common Themes

1. Schools need to be community hubs for mental and physical health services.
2. Technology is a powerful tool to promote learning, but teachers need support to effectively engage students' passions with technology.
3. It's important to determine a student's interests and give teachers the flexibility to integrate those passions into instruction.
4. Students need vast experiences—life experiences and a wide range of content.
5. Include the physical along with social emotional and mental health aspects of the whole child.

Laurens County

Accountability Common Themes

1. The accountability data is difficult to understand in some cases. Stakeholders suggested simplifying the ratings or providing more help to parents and the public to understand the system.
2. Data collection can be daunting. Stakeholders asked for some way to simplify or streamline the process, perhaps through a checklist of tasks to help focus the work of data collection.
3. Stakeholders are not convinced that the rating system accurately reflects school performance. The system rates performance of some items that are out of the control of those being rated. Stakeholders don't think it's fair to be held accountable for things out of their control, such as attendance (parents and students).

Assessment Common Themes

1. There is stronger support for formative assessments that help teachers know where students are so they can adjust their instruction.
2. Stakeholders worry that not testing science and social studies sends a message that these subjects are not important.
3. Stakeholders are concerned that testing has become too political and is being used for political ends rather than to support students and teachers.

Educator and Leader Development Common Themes

1. Individual comments varied widely, and there were no dominant themes. Stakeholders mentioned a range of important qualifications for teachers and principals including content knowledge, instructional leadership, and a passion for teaching and kids. Poverty, funding, and equitable access present barriers to students' access to effective teachers and leaders.

Federal Programs to Support School Improvement Common Themes

1. Individual comments varied widely, and there were no dominant themes. Comments covered the following areas: leadership, training, and ongoing communication.

Education of the Whole Child Common Themes

1. Individual comments varied widely, and there were no dominant themes. Comments covered the following areas: fostering relationships with the public, providing students with opportunities to explore their interests, assessing student interests, providing mental health services, needing after-school programs, and needing colleges to set up satellite classes in remote counties.

Muscogee County

Accountability Common Themes

1. Accountability metrics are confusing for parents, and stakeholders wondered if there were too many metrics overall. They suggested that the state make an effort to simplify the reports and communicate the data more clearly.
2. Very few stakeholders felt the rating system accurately reflected school performance. They felt that the rating system does not take into account a wide array of variables that affect performance including curriculum changes, difficulties in tracking transient students, and external factors such as poverty and family situation.

Assessment Common Themes

1. Stakeholders felt that the role of assessment should be to measure student understanding, drive instruction, and determine quality of teaching and school. Assessments should provide individual feedback about each student and show student growth over time.
2. Computer tests raise some concern, particularly when applied to early grades that may not be familiar with them. Make sure the technology and infrastructure are in place and robust before testing.
3. Formative assessment approaches are attractive because they provide real-time feedback for students and teachers without the anxiety of high stakes summative testing.
4. Focus should be on learning—assessment should inform and not lead.

Educator and Leader Development Common Themes

1. Teachers and principals need strong content knowledge, pedagogical and leadership skills, and dispositions that generate flexibility, openness, and a passion for teaching and learning.
2. There are significant barriers to providing students with equal access to effective teachers and principals including economic and limited resources, communications, state oversight (or lack thereof), and systemic issues relating to teacher and student supports. These barriers have a strong effect on school culture and morale.
3. Partnerships have been an effective support for educator and leader development and should be expanded, particularly to teacher pre-service institutions and community organizations.

Federal Programs to Support School Improvement Common Themes

1. Invest in people, not things—leadership development and instructional support should be prioritized over programs.
2. Partnerships have helped support continued development and school improvement but need to be more widespread and accessible.

3. Create multiple avenues/options for two-way communication between state, district, school, and parents/students.

Education of the Whole Child Common Themes

1. Increase opportunities and funding for social emotional and physical activity for all students.
2. Generate opportunities to fuel students' interests and passions through electives, art, inquiry-based learning, and student-centered instruction.
3. There should be greater investment in mental health supports for students including more counselors, mental health screenings, family support, and early identification of student needs.
4. Increase teacher training, more flexibility with class scheduling, and increase pathway exploration in elementary school (or in grades before high school).

SECC – Common Themes from Each Advisory Group

Superintendent Group

Accountability

1. The data collected for the CCRPI does not accurately represent school quality and cannot be used to compare schools.
2. The data collected for the CCRPI includes too many indicators and should be simplified to make it more understandable.

Assessment

1. Minimize the importance of testing as a summative, punitive measure. Instead, use data as a formative measure to inform instruction.
2. Local leaders should have the ability to make decisions on the assessments offered and used to make decisions.

Educator and Leader Development

1. Need to ensure that all students have access to higher-level courses through innovative means. Use technology to strengthen the quality of instruction, especially in small, rural districts.
2. Need to figure out ways to help small, rural districts recruit highly qualified teachers and to incentivize applicants to work with the students who are most at-risk.

Federal Programs to Support School Improvement

1. Need to better understand how federal funds are and can be distributed across the state to free up flexible funding for districts and schools that are most in need.
2. Need more options for models of school improvement and to increase capacity through expansion of government, non-profit, private, and business partnerships with local education systems.

Education of the Whole Child

1. Provide emotional and intellectual support for students to build social skills in conjunction with academic skills.
2. Implement project-based learning within the community.

Teacher Group

Accountability

1. Current rating system does not accurately reflect performance at the school level. CCRPI focuses too much on assessment data and does not provide schools with opportunities to show true growth, struggle, and persistence.
2. Data collected is not reliable. Rating system should focus on other measures that are more important for understanding a school, such as education of the whole child, school culture and environment, parent involvement, extracurricular activities offered, school vision and mission, and leadership capabilities.

Assessment

1. Assessments are not measuring the right things. For teachers, assessments should be used to measure mastery, effectiveness of teaching, and provide data on areas for goal setting and instructional improvement. For students, assessments should be used to measure critical thinking skills and making connections to the real world.
2. The process by which assessments are administered should be improved. Some suggestions include timing of the assessment (i.e., not having them all on the same day), providing students with pretests, and allowing modifications for students with special needs (i.e., allowing verbal responses).
3. Assessments should not be used for high-stakes decision-making.

Educator and Leader Development

1. Schools and districts face significant barriers to ensuring that students have equal access to effective teachers and principals. To overcome these barriers, districts should consider incentives such as pay, more support and mentorship for teachers, providing teachers with a professional learning community, and revising the structure for preparation programs and student teaching.
2. Teachers place value on more intangible qualities to define effective teachers and leaders—centering around passion, drive, and empathy.

Federal Programs to Support School Improvement

1. To ensure continued improvement, teachers named several supports that have worked in their schools, such as bringing in business partnerships, performing needs assessments to identify areas for improvement, and providing more emotional and academic supports to students.
2. The state should consider ways to leverage available funds to help build capacity at the local level to sustain school improvements. For example, many teachers cited more funding for technology and the arts as well as providing districts the opportunity to form cross-district partnerships.

Education of the Whole Child

1. Focus less on testing and assessments and more on building relationships with teachers and their peers as well as fostering enrichment beyond the school day.
2. Provide students with more access to technology in the classroom, and leverage community partnerships to foster student connections between learning and real-world applications of knowledge.
3. Ensure that schools have all the necessary information about the student (i.e., IEP data) when they transfer.

Middle School Student Group

Accountability

1. Students could not answer the question on how their school's state report card reflects performance at their school. When asked to name the most important things for others to know about their school, students mostly focused on discipline and culture, resources and amenities, and academic needs.
2. Students offered varied suggestions on how to better measure school success and failures, focusing on methods that provide a global perspective on the school culture, such as surveys, examples of student work, measures of growth and progress, and school resources and amenities.

Assessment

1. Students named several types of assessments that are most useful to them, when receiving feedback on their learning, mostly focusing on tests that provide multiple data points, such as pre- and post-tests that show growth and improvement over time.
2. Students offered varied suggestions to improve statewide testing, including shortening the length of assessments, individualizing based on learning needs, and providing questions that make connections to real-world knowledge.
3. Students also offered suggestions for other ways to show their learning beyond state assessments, including art, projects, classroom tasks, and one-on-one interactions with teachers.

Educator and Leader Development

1. Students place value on more intangible qualities to define effective teachers and leaders—centering around passion, drive, and empathy.
2. Students do not have equal access to effective teachers and principals, and they should. Districts should consider incentives to improve this including providing better preparation for teachers, increasing teacher pay, and increasing principal involvement in the classroom.

Federal Programs to Support School Improvement

1. Provide students with more opportunities to engage in hands-on activities and community-based learning.
2. Provide students with more opportunities to use technology in the classroom.

Education of the Whole Child

1. Students offered varied responses when asked about what makes them excited to learn; however, many of the responses did focus on one of three main themes:
 - a. Using technology to learn
 - b. Engaging in learning with other students through hands-on projects
 - c. Making connections between learning and real-work applications of knowledge
2. Students would like to see more comprehensive services at their schools, including health services, instruction in social skills, more support for social emotional needs, and opportunities to engage with local businesses and the community.

High School Student Group

Accountability

1. A little over half of the students could not answer the question on how their school's state report card reflects performance at their school. When asked to name the most important things for others to know about their school, students focused on areas related to discipline and culture, resources and amenities, and academic needs.
2. Students offered varied suggestions on how to better measure school success and failures, focusing on methods that provide a global perspective on the school culture, such as surveys, examples of student work, measures of growth and progress, and school resources and amenities.

Assessment

1. Students named several types of assessments that are most useful to them when receiving feedback on their learning, mostly focusing on tests that ask more direct questions, provide opportunities for free response, and are individualized based on learning styles.
2. Students offered varied suggestions to improve statewide testing, including eliminating or reformatting end of course assessments, switching to paper assessments instead of electronic, and revising assessment questions to address what was learned versus what is supposed to be learned.
3. Students also offered suggestions for other ways to show their learning beyond state assessments, including art, projects, classroom tasks, and regular check-ins with teachers.

Educator and Leader Development

1. Students place value on more intangible qualities to define effective teachers and leaders—centering around passion, drive, and empathy.
2. Students do not have equal access to effective teachers and principals, and they should. Districts should consider incentives to improve this, including providing better preparation for teachers, increasing teacher pay, and increasing principal involvement in the classroom.

Federal Programs to Support School Improvement

1. Students provided insight into the types of learning that helps them best. Some examples include individualized instruction based on learning styles, use of technology, high-quality textbooks, and project-based learning.
2. Students offered several suggestions for ways in which the community can support their school improvement efforts, such as providing students with learning opportunities, volunteering at local schools, providing schools with sponsorships, and hosting career fairs for students.
3. The state should utilize multiple methods to collect useful feedback from stakeholders, including social media, surveys and focus groups, and more open communication.

Education of the Whole Child

1. Provide more programs that are designed to fit the unique needs of students.
2. Provide students with more opportunities for work-based learning that prepares them for the real world.
3. Provide students with more resources to address social and emotional needs.

Parent Group

Accountability

1. The current accountability index does not capture school growth and improvement well enough.
2. The current accountability index should include more measures of school culture.

Assessment

1. Assessments should provide more insight into what the students are actually learning and what areas they need to focus on to improve.
2. Schools and districts should revise the format by which assessments are administered and the timing of assessments in the school year.
3. Schools/districts should provide parents with a more user-friendly way to access data.

Educator and Leader Development

1. More intangible qualities are identified as the most important for effective teachers and leaders—passion, drive, empathy.
2. School and district culture were significant barriers to attracting effective teachers.
3. Districts need to offer teachers and leaders more resources and incentives to work in the areas they are needed most.

Federal Programs to Support School Improvement

1. Strive for stronger engagement with parents and the community to provide services for school improvement.
2. Provide more education to parents on career paths for students.
3. Provide more support to teachers in understanding the context and culture of students—homelessness and poverty, for example.

Education of the Whole Child

1. Provide better social emotional learning support and programming for students.
2. Ensure that programs are designed to differentiate for diversity/be individualized for a variety of student needs.
3. Provide interventions that use technology efficiently and provide students with a better understanding of technology.