

11TH EDITION

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# TOP TEN ISSUES TO WATCH IN 2015

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GEORGIA PARTNERSHIP  
FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION



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The Top Ten Issues to Watch is an annual publication of the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. Past editions are available on our website, [www.gpee.org](http://www.gpee.org)

### AUTHORSHIP

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### OUR MISSION

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



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



## GEORGIA PARTNERSHIP FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education passed its 20th birthday in 2012 on the run and hasn't looked back since. One thing is for sure, we aren't slowing down because there is so much work to do. The Partnership team is excited by and embraces the many public education challenges that are ahead. Many of you reading this 11th edition of the Top Ten Issues to Watch no doubt know our work well but to those who may not be as knowledgeable, we invite you to get to know us better.

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

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

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

Our **Education Policy Fellowship Program (EPFP)** since 2008 has been creating leaders who better understand the intricacies of the decision process and the impact of those decisions.

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

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

The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education's greatest strength is that it creates the conditions that stimulate critical change. Visit our web site at [www.gpee.org](http://www.gpee.org) or click on the QR code. For up-to-date news and information follow us on Twitter and Facebook and join our mailing list. We welcome your support and participation in our work. Our door is always open.



## Introduction

**Welcome to 2015 and the 11th edition of the Georgia Partnership's Top Ten Issues to Watch.** This year promises to be a time of self-reflection and change for education leaders in Georgia. Looking back, in its 2010 application for the Race to the Top (RT3) grant, Georgia had a clear vision for where it was going as a state and what it wanted to accomplish. The state was committed to transforming Georgia's public education system so that every student graduated from high school, was successful in college and/or their chosen career, and was competitive with their peers throughout the country and the world.

**To accomplish this vision, the state worked across several priority areas.** Adopting higher standards, building data systems, recruiting and rewarding effective teachers and principals, and turning around our lowest performing schools have all been central to RT3. Georgia has also been working across the entire education pipeline, beginning with early learning and ending with increasing the number of postsecondary graduates.

**Many of the issues in this edition of the Top Ten are results of that work, such as higher standards, new assessments, new governance structures, and increasing the quality of early learning experiences.** As in previous editions, the 11th edition highlights "Indicators for Success" which track Georgia's educational progress over time. Many of these indicators show that the reform strategies are showing positive gains. Grade level reading and math rates are improving, as are high school graduation rates and the percentage of students in Georgia earning college credit for AP exams while still in high school.

**However, now that RT3 is coming to an end, Georgia must look forward to what is next and continue moving forward.** Issues such as equity, charter schools, post-secondary completion, and funding will continue driving decisions as the state moves into the next phase of education reform.

**Due to the work on the RT3 grant, Georgia is well positioned to undertake new and innovative ways to improve educational outcomes for all our students from early learning through higher education.** The next step is for education leaders to recommit to the vision upheld over the past four years and articulate a strategic plan on how the recent systemic changes will be fully implemented and sustained.

**We believe that the 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 system that provides a solid foundation for Georgia's future economic growth.



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



Beth A. Shiroishi  
*President - AT&T Georgia*

## Indicators for Success: Where is Georgia Today?

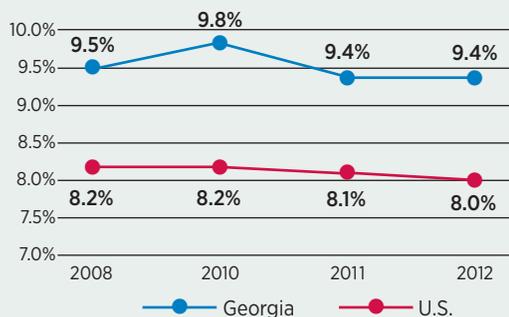
How does Georgia fare in producing excellent results for our citizens throughout the birth to work pipeline?

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

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

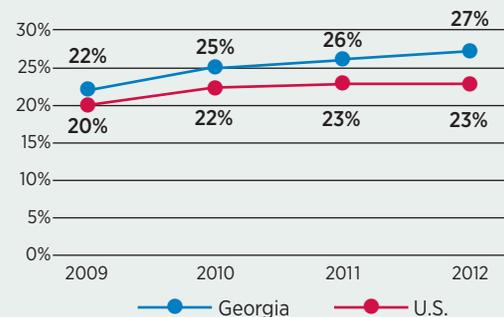
### LOW-BIRTHWEIGHT BABIES, 2008-2012

SOURCE: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. [datacenter.kidscount.org](http://datacenter.kidscount.org)



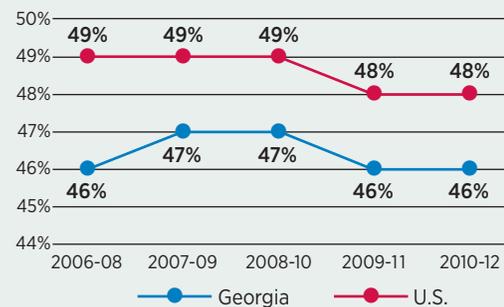
### CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY, 2009-2013

SOURCE: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. [datacenter.kidscount.org](http://datacenter.kidscount.org)



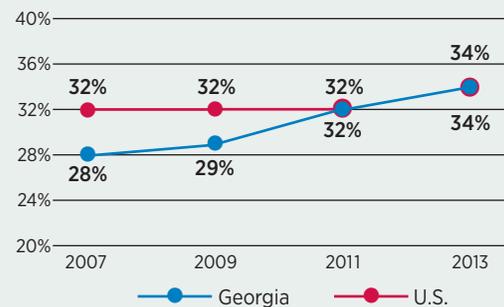
### CHILDREN AGES 3 TO 5 ATTENDING PRESCHOOL, 2006-2012

SOURCE: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. [datacenter.kidscount.org](http://datacenter.kidscount.org)



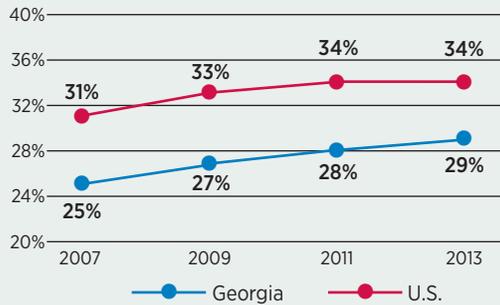
### FOURTH GRADE NAEP READING: AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT, 2007-2013

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



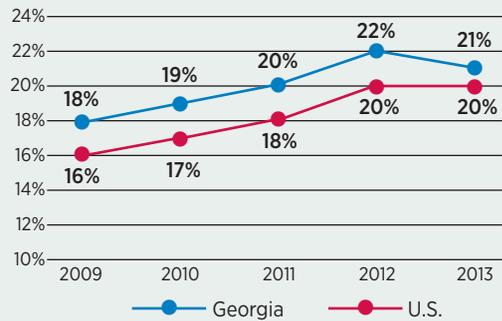
**EIGHTH GRADE NAEP MATHEMATICS:  
AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT, 2007-2013**

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



**STUDENT EARNING AP COLLEGE CREDIT IN  
HIGH SCHOOL, 2009-2013**

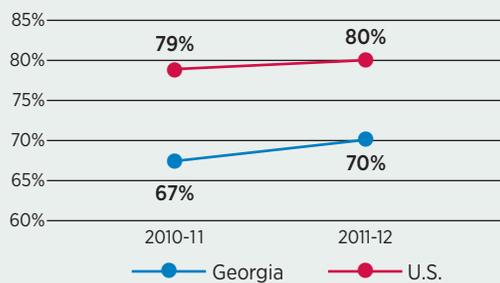
SOURCE: The College Board, AP Report to the Nation



**HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES\***

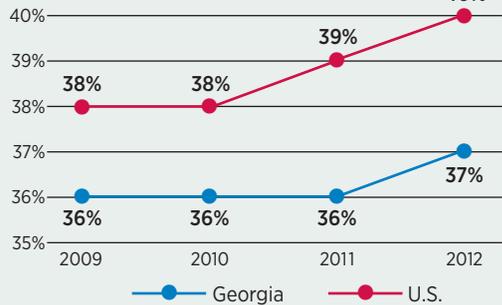
SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, Public Four-Year On-Time Graduation Rates: School Years 2010-2011 and 2011-12

\*Public high school 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate.



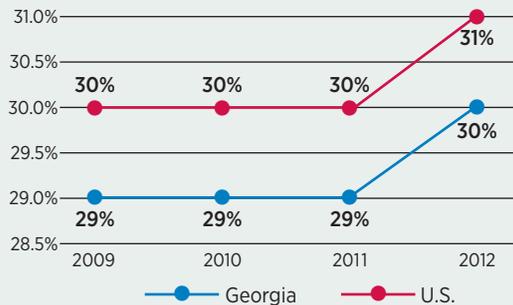
**ADULTS AGES 25 TO 64 WITH AN  
ASSOCIATES DEGREE OR HIGHER, 2009-2012**

Source: NCHEMS Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis



**ADULTS AGES 25 TO 64 WITH A BACHELOR'S  
DEGREE OR HIGHER, 2009-2012**

Source: NCHEMS Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis





## High Standards — The Value of a High School Diploma

### ISSUE OVERVIEW

College- and career-ready students. That phrase has worked its way into the lexicon of educators, legislators, economic developers, and almost anybody talking about how we should educate our students. But what does “college and career ready” mean, and why is it so important?

In 1973, 72 percent of jobs were classified as unskilled and available to individuals with a high school diploma or less.<sup>1</sup> Many of these jobs provided a family-supporting salary, and people with just a high school diploma had opportunities to work their way into the middle class. By 2007, that number had dropped to 41 percent, and it is predicted that only 30 percent of jobs will require a high school diploma or less by 2018.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, these jobs no longer pay wages that can support a family, and they can trap individuals in poverty.

In a survey of CEOs and college presidents on the success of high school graduates, 34 percent of employers declared the preparation of newly hired employees with only a high school diploma as “deficient.”<sup>3</sup> Of the employers surveyed, 49 percent noted that they anticipated requiring higher levels of education for most jobs, and another 60 percent indicated that more specific technical skills were going to be required over the next three to five years.<sup>4</sup>

To be ready to take on the responsibilities of adulthood, high school graduates must be successful beyond high school. However, data on Georgia high school graduates indicate many are not ready for that next step. Upon graduating high school, approximately 24 percent of Georgia students require remediation once they enter a two-year or four-year college. Only about half (48 percent) of students who enter a public college in Georgia eventually earn a degree.<sup>5</sup>

It is no longer good enough to just graduate from high school. Colleges and universities expect entering students to handle the rigor of freshmen courses. Employers expect employees to have critical-thinking and problem-solving skills to address industry needs. High school graduates now must be ready for those demands. What does Georgia need to do to ensure that students who graduate with a high school diploma are ready for those challenges? How do we know they are college and career ready?

1 Carnavale, A., Smith, N., & Strohl, J. *Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements through 2018*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University, Center on Education and the Workforce. 2010.

2 Ibid.

3 Achieve. *Georgia's College- and Career-Ready Commitment: The Economic Imperative*. Washington, DC: August: 2012.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

## **SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA**

Georgia has been focused on improving the quality of the state's high school graduates for years. One important step was to join the American Diploma Project (ADP) network of states. The ADP network brings governors, state education officials, postsecondary leaders, and business executives together to improve postsecondary preparation. Member states work to align high school standards, graduation requirements, and assessment and accountability systems with the demands of college and careers. To support this work, Georgia focused on four primary areas: standards, assessments, accountability, and graduation requirements.

### **Standards**

Implementing rigorous college- and career-ready standards that prepare students for success has been an integral aspect of education reform in Georgia for years. Former Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue helped lead the National Governors Association and Council for Chief State School Officers' coordinated effort to support states in developing internationally benchmarked English/language arts and mathematics standards. These standards became known as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

Georgia infused the CCSS into its existing standards, the Georgia Performance Standards, to add a level of rigor that increased critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. This resulted in the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS). The Georgia State Board of Education (SBOE) adopted the CCGPS in 2010 and districts implemented them at the start of the 2012 school year for all grades in English language arts and K-9 mathematics.

State and international standards inform the CCSS so that students are prepared to compete both nationally and globally. Many policymakers are in favor of these standards because they provide clear, consistent, rigorous expectations and they allow for accurate comparisons of progress and achievement across the country.<sup>6</sup> Since the standards' launch in Georgia, the two most common aligned practices reported by teachers across the state are that (1) teachers now ask students more questions and encourage students to develop answers independently, and (2) teachers are incorporating new curricular materials and instructional strategies into the classroom.<sup>7</sup>

### **Assessments**

When Georgia decided to improve its standards, it took on the responsibility of creating a corresponding assessment system for measuring student learning. The shift to the CCGPS represents a significant increase in the state's commitment to teach the development of higher order critical-thinking and reasoning skills. Georgia's prior assessment systems, in comparison, have focused on testing whether students know certain facts, typically through bubble-in, multiple-choice tests.

In 2014, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) introduced the Georgia Milestones Assessment System (Georgia Milestones), replacing both the old Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) in grades 3-8 and end-of-course (EOC) tests in grades 9-12. Aligned to the CCGPS, the Georgia Milestones will require more from students than previous assessments. For example, the new testing system will include open-ended questions to better gauge content mastery.<sup>8</sup> (For a further discussion of assessments, see Issue 2).

6 Common Core State Standards Initiative. Retrieved April 21, 2010 from <http://www.corestandards.org>.

7 Governor's Office of Student Achievement. *GaPSC/GOSA Teacher Survey on CCGPs Implementation: Preliminary Results from All Administrations* [Version 1.3]. Atlanta: September 4, 2014.

8 Georgia Department of Education. Georgia Announced New Testing System [Press release]. Atlanta. 2014.

To bring expectations more in line with college- and career-ready expectations, Georgia is also raising the cut-score — the number of items a student must get correct to be considered proficient. Previously, Georgia had been criticized for setting the cut-score too low. This would explain, for example, why approximately 90 percent of our students were deemed to be reading on grade level based on CRCT scores. However, when those same students took the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), only 34 percent were deemed at or above proficient. The NAEP proficient cut-scores were tied to college- and career-ready expectations. Therefore, student scores on the new Georgia Milestones are expected to be considerably lower than on the old CRCT.

### Accountability

Closely tied to assessments, state accountability systems can help states understand what percentage of their students are on the right track to graduate college and career ready and which students need additional supports to achieve that goal. Georgia relies on the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) for school and district accountability. The CCRPI is the state's new accountability measure that moves away from the old Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) single measure. Schools are now rated using an index score comprising multiple measures that include student achievement as well as progress measures on student growth, achievement gap closures, and efforts to prepare students for college and or a career. The CCRPI also measures the climate of a school and its financial effectiveness.

Within the CCRPI, high schools are not only held accountable for how students perform on achievement tests, but for measures of college and career readiness as well. Examples of high school CCRPI metrics related to success beyond high school include the following:<sup>9</sup>

- Percentage of graduates completing a Career, Technical, Agricultural Education (CTAE) pathway; an advanced academic pathway; a fine arts pathway; or a world language pathway within their program of study.
- Percentage of CTAE Pathway Completers earning a national industry-recognized credential, an International Baccalaureate (IB) Career-Related Certificate, or a passing score on a GaDOE-recognized end-of-pathway assessment.
- Percentage of graduates entering a Georgia public college or university not requiring remediation or learning support courses; or scoring at least 22 out of 36 on the composite ACT; or scoring at least 1550 out of 2400 on the combined SAT; or scoring 3 or higher on two or more AP exams; or scoring 4 or higher on two or more IB exams.
- Percentage of graduates earning high school credit(s) for accelerated enrollment via ACCEL, Dual HOPE Grant, Move On When Ready, Early College, Gateway to College, Advanced Placement courses, or International Baccalaureate courses.

### Graduation Requirements

While Georgia's high school graduation rates have been steadily increasing in recent years, the state still remains near the bottom of graduation rates nationwide. Based on 2012 rates (the most recent national data available), only three states, including the District of Columbia, had a four-year high school graduation rate equal to or worse than Georgia's.<sup>10</sup> However, just comparing the percentage of graduates does not reveal the entire story.

Georgia is one of only 20 states nationwide that have adopted graduation requirements consistent with the American Diploma Project's definition of college and career ready.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Georgia has gone above and beyond those standards and is one of the few states in the country that requires four years of both mathematics and science for graduation.

<sup>9</sup> Georgia Department of Education. *College and Career Ready Performance Index 2013 Scores*. November 2014. Retrieved from <http://ccrpi.gadoe.org/2013/ccrpi2013.aspx>

<sup>10</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. *Public High School Four-Year On-Time Graduation Rates: School Years 2010-11 and 2011-12* [Report No. NCES 2014-391]. Washington, DC: 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Achieve. *Closing the Expectations Gap: 2013 Annual Report on the Alignment of State K-12 Policies and Practices with the Demands of College and Careers*. Washington, DC: 2013.

## ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

Georgia is moving into a new era of education reform. The Race to the Top grant, which guided much of Georgia's education reform plan over the past four years, is ending. Newly reelected Governor Nathan Deal has announced that he will conduct a "top to bottom review of public education during his second term."<sup>12</sup> As part of this review, Governor Deal wants to examine the funding structure, charter and flexibility options for schools and districts, keeping good teachers in the classroom, and continuing to turn around failing schools.<sup>13</sup> Where this leaves higher standards for our high school graduates is unclear.

Changes to the CCGPS are already coming. Opposition to the CCGPS has increased since its adoption. Some argue that education has historically been the responsibility of the individual school districts and the states; therefore, these national standards violate states' rights. To address these concerns, on May 15, 2013, Governor Deal signed an executive order that "firmly asserts the state's sovereignty over educational standards."<sup>14</sup> The governor went on to say, "This executive order aims to send a clear and unambiguous message that, in Georgia, we will maintain local control over curriculum while working diligently to achieve high educational standards."<sup>15</sup>

As part of that control, Governor Deal asked the SBOE to formally review and evaluate the common core national guidelines and rate how they measure up against the previous Georgia Performance Standards. The review and evaluation process included several survey opportunities and legislative and SBOE listening sessions. Survey feedback was collected and analyzed by the University System of Georgia, who provided survey results and recommendations for revisions to the standards to the SBOE in September 2014. A working committee representing K-12 Georgia public school teachers, postsecondary staff, parents, and instructional leaders from across the state made revisions to the standards based on public feedback and recommendations from survey results for standards with less than 90 percent approval.<sup>16</sup> The review process led to slight modifications to the standards. Of the 455 original K-12 English/language arts standards submitted for SBOE approval, changes were recommended for 49. Many of these revisions were related to clarifications of the standards' language and terminology.<sup>17</sup>

For K-8 mathematics, of the 229 original CCGPS standards, 75 had recommended revisions. Again, these were primarily in the areas of language and terminology for purposes of clarity.<sup>18</sup> For high school mathematics, it was recommended that standards be adopted to reflect discrete math course sequencing. There has been a debate in Georgia between traditional discrete math (Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II course sequencing) and integrated math. Integrated math brings together many topics (algebra, geometry, and trigonometry) throughout each year of high school math as students progress through Math I, Math II, and so forth. The revisions to the math CCGPS standards will focus on a discrete approach, separating each subject.

Any changes in the standards will require commensurate changes to the Georgia Milestones assessments. These assessments will look different from those of the past. Over the next five years, testing will migrate to take place online rather than with pencil and paper, posing further bandwidth, infrastructure, and training challenges for the state. Georgia will also use Georgia Milestones' results more extensively than past assessments. Some items will allow Georgia student performance to be compared to that of national peers. The crucial difference between Georgia Milestones and past assessments is that, in addition to bubbling in answers like on past assessments, students will be challenged to generate their own responses. This higher level of rigor, combined with higher cut-scores (the number of correct responses needed to be considered proficient) will likely lead to a significant drop in the number of Georgia students who are meeting grade-level expectations, compared to the percentage on past assessments.

12 Yarbrough, D. "Everything on the Table, Public Education Reform, says Gov. Deal." *The Telegraph*. October 21, 2014.

13 Ibid.

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

15 Ibid.

16 Georgia Department of Education. *Proposed Revisions to Standards Grades K-12. November 11, 2014*. Retrieved from Georgia Department of Education - Eboards: <https://eboard.eboardsolutions.com/Meetings/Attachment.aspx?S=1262&AID=574119&MID=41256>

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

With the reelection of Governor Deal and the election of Richard Woods to the State Superintendent office, Georgia can expect to see potential changes in graduation requirements as well. As previously stated, Georgia has among the highest in the country, requiring four years of math, English, and science. Governor Deal has announced that he would like to see computer programming serve as one of the core course requirements for graduation, substituting for either one year of math or science, or potentially taking the place of one of the foreign language classes. According to Governor Deal, more than half of the state's projected job growth in the STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and math) requires computer programming skills.<sup>19</sup>

During his campaign, Richard Woods stated that he would like to see a journalism class be an optional substitute for an English class and accounting to be an optional substitute for a math class.<sup>20</sup>

What is the value of a high school diploma? If a high school graduate requires remediation to take a freshman-level English or math course in college, the value is too low. If employers do not feel those with just a high school diploma have the critical-thinking skills they need, the high school diploma does not represent passage to the next stages of life. It is no longer enough for students to say, "I've graduated from high school." Now, they must be able to say, "I'm ready for the next steps." The value of a high school diploma can be gauged by how true that statement is.

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19 Bluestein, G., & Davis, J. "Governor Pushes for More Emphasis on Computer Programming in Georgia." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. August 25, 2014.

20 Washington, W. "Deal, Woods Both Back Changes to State Graduation Requirements." *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. October 14, 2014.



## Assessments — How Much is Too Much?

### ISSUE OVERVIEW

Flu shots. Nobody *likes* to get a flu shot. Nobody overly enjoys the process and wakes up in the morning excited that today is the day for the flu shot. However, millions of people around the world seek out flu shots every year because they protect against illness, make us healthier in the long run, and potentially save lives. Assessments can be viewed similarly to flu shots. Most people do not enjoy the testing process. But, assessments do provide critical data that show students' academic strengths and weaknesses and give educators the information necessary to tailor teacher training and instruction to student needs. Standardized assessments in particular can guard against students receiving artificially inflated grades when they have not mastered the material, and they can help hold all students to the same learning expectations. They can also identify struggling students in early grades so teachers can provide the necessary supports. In that sense, they can be seen as lifesaving.

Many schools, districts, and states that have seen achievement levels rise in recent years attribute their success to higher expectations for students, as embodied in state tests, and the use of test results to improve classroom practices. However, while public support for higher standards is strong, there is increasing frustration with state testing practices and the high-stakes for both students and teachers that are attached to student performance. Coalitions are now forming against mandated tests, primarily those tied to high-stakes outcomes mandated by the state. Many parents believe there is now too much testing of their children in schools. Teachers and administrators feel the quality of the assessments is often not strong enough to base high-stakes decisions upon and that too much instructional time is focused on test preparation.

From Colorado to New York, opt-out efforts are emerging, with parents refusing to let their children take state-mandated tests. One of the largest boycotts was in Chicago during the spring 2014 state testing period. According to *Education Week*, up to 2,000 students in grades 3-8 opted out of state testing.<sup>21</sup> In New York, 550 principals signed a letter protesting the state's test. In August 2014, the Lee County School Board in Florida voted 3-2 to opt-out the entire district from the state-mandated tests due to concerns of too much testing — though that decision was subsequently reversed.<sup>22</sup>

With a national trend focused on high standards and accountability to those standards, how do states balance the need for actionable data about student learning and the sheer testing fatigue of students, parents, and teachers? In short, when it comes to assessments, how much is too much?

21 Reid, K.S. "Testing Skeptics Aim to Build Support for Opt-Out Strategy." *Education Week*. March 11, 2014.

22 Gewertz, C. "Florida District Reverses Decision to Opt Out of State Testing." *Education Week*. September 2, 2014.

## **SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA**

The Center for American Progress recently examined assessment practices in school systems across the country, including Georgia, to understand how much testing was taking place in K-12 schools. The research found that actual test administration took up only a small fraction of learning time, contrary to the theory that testing infringes upon a significant amount of classroom instructional time. While testing did occur frequently, students are spending, on average, 1.6 percent of instructional time or less taking tests.<sup>23</sup>

However, the study did find that depending on where they lived, students were tested as frequently as twice a month and on average once a month. The report found that students take as many as 20 standardized assessments per year and an average of 10 tests in grades 3–8.<sup>24</sup> These statistics lend credence to the argument that students and teachers are feeling overburdened by the sheer volume of assessments. So where are all these assessments coming from? The answer is a combination of state-mandated assessments (partly based in federal law) along with local district requirements.

### **State Level Assessments**

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001, commonly known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), increased states' focus on assessments with its requirement that states annually test students in reading and mathematics in grades 3–8 and once in high school. In addition to these federally required tests, some states — including Georgia — also required the use of end-of-course exams for certain subjects in grades 9–12.<sup>25</sup>

In Georgia, the state-required assessments are primarily the Georgia Milestones Assessment System (Georgia Milestones). The 2014–2015 school year is the first year Georgia Milestones is being administered throughout Georgia. These high-stakes assessments are implemented in grades 3 through 12 as end-of-grade (EOG) and end-of-course (EOC) assessments. EOG assessments in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies are administered in grades 3 through 8, replacing the old Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT). In grades 9–12, EOC assessments will be administered in eight courses: Ninth Grade Literature & Composition, American Literature & Composition, Coordinate Algebra, Analytic Geometry, Physical Science, Biology, US History, and Economics. The Georgia Milestones also consolidate reading, language arts, and writing into a single language measure aligned to the standards. (Prior to Georgia Milestones, additional writing assessments were administered to students in select grades).

In addition to the Georgia Milestones assessments, the state also requires additional assessments for federal compliance and special populations, i.e., English language learners and students with disabilities. See Table 2.1 for a complete list of assessments and descriptions.

In Georgia, the state-mandated tests not only monitor student learning progress, they are also used to evaluate teacher performance in the classroom and school leader performance. In addition to being able to distinguish between good teachers, great teachers, and ineffective ones, the teacher effectiveness system's primary purpose is to help improve instruction and to better design professional development activities to meet teacher needs. Student growth is a primary component of these new systems — 50 percent for teachers and a full 70 percent for school leaders.

The student growth measure is calculated using tested subjects, which are subjects taught by teachers that use an existing state standardized test — assessments that fall under the Georgia Milestones. However, only a small number of Georgia educators teach a tested subject. Approximately 70–75 percent of teachers teach a nontested subject — such as health, music, physical education, or foreign languages — for at least some portion of the day.<sup>26</sup>

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 McIntosh, S. *State High School Exit Exams: A Policy in Transition*. Washington, DC: Center on Education Policy, 2012.

26 Georgia Department of Education. *Student Learning Objectives*. 2014. Retrieved from [www.gadoe.org](http://www.gadoe.org).

To establish metrics of student growth for subjects that have no statewide test, the GaDOE approved the development of student learning objectives (SLOs). Local districts are responsible for developing these learning objectives for each class that falls into the “nontested subject” category. These learning objectives — or SLOs describe what students are expected to learn in a given academic year or semester course, as measured by a pre-assessment and post-assessment. These district-determined SLOs are course-specific, grade-level learning objectives that are measurable, focused on growth and student learning, and aligned to curriculum content standards.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, in addition to administration of the Georgia Milestones, districts are required by the state to conduct SLO assessments in all classes that do not fall under the Georgia Milestones system.

### District Level Assessments

In its study of the number of assessments being administered across several states, including Georgia, the Center for American Progress found that despite the perception that federally- and state-mandated testing is the cause of overtesting in schools, individual districts require more testing than states. Students across all grade spans take more district-mandated tests than required state assessments. High school students, for example, are tested twice as much on district exams.<sup>29</sup>

**TABLE 2.1 PRIMARY GEORGIA ASSESSMENTS<sup>27</sup>**

ASSESSMENT	DESCRIPTION
<b>Georgia Milestones Assessment System (Georgia Milestones)</b>	The Georgia Milestones is a comprehensive summative assessment program spanning grades 3 through high school. Georgia Milestones measures how well students have learned the knowledge and skills outlined in the state-adopted content standards in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Students in grades 3 through 8 will take an end-of-grade assessment in each content area, while high school students will take an end-of-course assessment for each of the eight courses designated by the State Board of Education.
<b>Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (GKIDS)</b>	The Georgia Quality Basic Education Act requires that all children enrolled in Georgia public school kindergarten programs be assessed for first-grade readiness. GKIDS became fully operational in the 2008-2009 school year and reflects more precise mathematics standards beginning in the 2010-2011 school year. The GKIDS is a year-long, performance-based assessment serving both a summative and formative role. The test is designed to provide feedback about student progress in four Georgia Performance Standards — aligned domains: English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies; and three additional domains: personal/social development, approaches to learning, and motor skills.
<b>National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)</b>	Commonly known as the “nation’s report card,” NAEP is a congressionally mandated project of the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics. The purpose of the national assessment is to gather information that will aid educators, legislators, and others in improving the education experience of youth in our country. Its primary goals are to measure the current status of the educational attainments of young Americans and to report changes and long-term trends in those attainments. NAEP is administered at least once every two years in reading and mathematics in grades 4, 8, and 12. The assessment is given to statistically representative samples of students from each state.
<b>ACCESS for English Language Learners (ELLs)</b>	ACCESS for ELLs is administered annually to all English language learners in Georgia. A standards-based, criterion-referenced English language proficiency test, ACCESS measures English language learners’ social and academic proficiency in English. It assesses social and instructional English as well as the language associated with language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies within the school context across the four language domains. ACCESS for ELLs meets the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 mandate requiring states to evaluate ELL students in grades K through 12 on their progress in learning to speak English.
<b>Georgia Alternative Assessment (GAA)</b>	The GAA is a portfolio of student work that enables the demonstration of achievement and progress relative to selected skills that are aligned to the Georgia curriculum for students with significant cognitive disabilities in four content areas: English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. Both the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, require states assess all students on their academic progress. The GAA meets those requirements for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

27 Georgia Department of Education. *Testing and Assessment*. November 7, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Assessment/Pages/default.aspx>

28 McIntosh, S. *State High School Exit Exams: A Policy in Transition*. Washington, DC: Center on Education Policy. 2012.

29 Lazarin, M. *Testing Overload in America’s Schools*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. 2014.

In 2013, the Foundation for Excellence in Education reviewed local assessment calendars of Florida school districts and found an average of 98 mandatory local tests in addition to the state requirements. The study found wide variation, however, with some districts requiring as few as eight additional tests and others as many as 198 additional tests.<sup>30</sup> The review also found that many of the disputed tests in Florida were not the ones required by state or federal agencies; instead, “a significant portion resulted from teacher, principal, and administration accountability concerns.”<sup>31</sup>

In Georgia, it is not generally known how many assessments each individual district is administering. But the increased focus on elevated rigor and accountability has opened the door for teachers and principals to turn to assessments to help drive instruction. GaDOE does offer resources and support to districts through available formative and benchmark assessments. Formative assessments are used to periodically gauge students’ knowledge while they are still learning the standards. Informal and formal formative assessments are used to provide the information necessary to adjust classroom strategies while teaching and learning are underway in the classroom. Georgia’s formative assessments were developed to reflect the rigor of the new standards so that both teachers and students have experience in understanding the higher expectations set for students before the EOC or EOG high-stakes assessment.

In addition to these formative assessments, benchmark assessments can be administered at the school or district level at the end of a semester, course, or nine-week period.<sup>32</sup> These low-stakes assessments are designed to provide information on students’ preparedness for higher stakes (end of grade or end of course) Georgia Milestones assessments. Although administration of benchmark assessments is more structured than for the formative assessments, benchmark assessments are not used in official models that determine teachers’ impact on student growth.<sup>33</sup>

GaDOE does not mandate use of any of the formative tests. These resources, in conjunction with one another, are meant to support educators on their path to improved instruction and student achievement.

### **ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA**

A crucial part of an accountability system, student assessments serve as the measure of whether or not students are learning what is being taught in the classroom. While classroom teachers have long used various types of assessments to provide evidence of student learning, assessments have become an increasingly critical component of state and national educational systems. Policymakers are relying more than ever on large-scale tests to make high-stakes decisions about students, teachers and schools. States are using assessments to measure the progress of students and schools and to hold teachers and administrators accountable for raising achievement. Assessments are increasingly tied to high-stakes decisions, not only about students’ grade promotion, but about teacher effectiveness as well.

This focus has led to a feeling of testing fatigue. And when tied to high-stakes accountability for students, teachers, and school districts, assessments can create an environment of stress and a feeling of testing just for the sake of testing — both of which can be counterproductive to student learning. To strike a proper balance between useful evaluation tools and accountability, many are calling for a review of how many tests are given and for what purpose.

30 Foundation for Excellence in Education. *Florida School Districts Take Action to Locally Achieve Fewer, Better Tests*. November 6, 2014. Retrieved from Excel in Ed – Newsroom: <http://excelined.org/news/florida-school-districts-take-action-locally-achieve-fewer-better-tests/>

31 Ibid.

32 Benchmark assessments are available for English language arts in grades 1–11; mathematics in grades 1–8; advanced mathematics courses including Coordinate Algebra, Analytic Geometry, and Advanced Algebra; US History; and Biology.

33 Georgia Department of Education. *Georgia’s Race to the Top Application* [Submitted January 19, 2010]. Atlanta. 2010.

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the Council of Great City Schools announced in October 2014 that they will review the array of state and district tests being administered in public schools. While affirming their commitment to annual testing, the two organizations will focus on how to eliminate redundant assessments and reduce overall test taking in public schools.<sup>34</sup>

Even federal policymakers have joined the chorus to reassess assessments. Members of the U.S. Congress have introduced bills to reduce the amount of federally mandated testing, and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan was quoted as saying testing “takes up too much time.” Both Duncan and President Barack Obama praised the CCSSO and Council of Great City Schools for their public commitment to fewer and higher quality tests.<sup>35</sup>

As it implements the new Georgia Milestones system statewide, Georgia should also take a critical look at its assessment system not only at the state level but at the district and school levels as well. As this is the first year of the Georgia Milestones, communication with schools, teachers, parents, and communities about the increased rigor associated with the new assessments and how best to use them is paramount.

The Georgia Milestones is designed to be aligned with college- and career-ready standards and is significantly more rigorous than the old CRCTs and EOC tests it is replacing. As a state, we can initially expect to see a significant reduction in the percentage of students deemed proficient — on track to being college and career ready upon graduation. It is important to know that this does not mean students know less than they did under the old assessment system. The educational system is asking more of them, and it will take time for both teachers and students to adjust to the new demands.

The state should also work with local districts to support fairer and more efficient testing practices, including when and how to use standardized assessments so that districts are not requiring duplicative or unnecessary assessments.<sup>36</sup> In support of the formative and benchmarks assessments, GaDOE has developed a formative assessment toolkit composed of instructional practice techniques, assessment bank items, and benchmark assessments to be used by teachers and school districts as resources.

To help districts and states evaluate their assessment systems, Achieve<sup>37</sup> has created the *Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts*. This inventory is a tool district leaders can use to take stock of their assessments and assessment strategy, and it allows them to do so from a student perspective. The tool supports a process by which districts evaluate the assessments students are taking to determine the minimum testing necessary to serve essential diagnostic, instructional, and accountability purposes. The tool also helps ensure that every district-mandated test is of high quality, is providing the information needed for specific school and district purposes, and is supported by structures and routines so that assessment results are actually used and action steps are taken that will help students.

Georgia is making great investments in ensuring all students are college and career ready when they graduate from high school. The state must have an effective and efficient assessment system that provides information on progress made toward this goal. If teachers do not know how well their students are mastering the material, they cannot adjust their teaching practices. Principals cannot target needed professional development for their teachers if content strengths and weaknesses are not identified. Finally, teachers and leaders are now being evaluated on measures of student growth based on these assessments. Assessments are now as important to the jobs of teachers and school leaders as they are to the future of our students.

Georgia must work to find the proper balance between an effective assessment system that supports its educational goals without overburdening students and teachers.

34 Council of Chief State School Officers and The Council of Great City Schools. Chief State School Officers and Urban School Leaders Announce Joint Effort to Improve Student Testing [Press release]. October 15, 2014. Retrieved from [http://ccsso.org/News\\_and\\_Events/Press\\_Releases/Chief\\_State\\_School\\_Officers\\_and\\_Urban\\_School\\_Leaders\\_Announce\\_Joint\\_Effort\\_to\\_Improve\\_Student\\_Testing.html](http://ccsso.org/News_and_Events/Press_Releases/Chief_State_School_Officers_and_Urban_School_Leaders_Announce_Joint_Effort_to_Improve_Student_Testing.html)

35 Heitini, L. “School Leaders to Trim Testing, But Keep Yearly Assessments.” *Education Week*, p. 2014. October 21, 2014.

36 Lizarin, M. *Testing Overload in America's Schools*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. 2014.

37 Achieve is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit education reform organization dedicated to working with states to raise academic standards and graduation requirements, improve assessments, and strengthen accountability.



## District Governance — Charter Systems, IE<sup>2</sup> or the Status Quo?

### ISSUE OVERVIEW

Title 20. It's a phrase that those of us within education sometimes hear and immediately think "government regulation." For those outside of education, Title 20 generally has no significant meaning. Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia is the shorthand phrase for the laws that govern education in the state, along with all the supporting rules and guidelines. Title 20 regulates broad areas of education such as the required qualifications for teachers, the number of school days, where and how state money must be spent, etc. It also governs more specific issues such as rules regulating eye protection devices, direction of traffic by school crossing guards, and the official definition of "multi-racial."

To receive state money, approximately 50 percent of their total budget,<sup>38</sup> districts must abide by Title 20. Most of these rules and regulations were implemented for a purpose, oftentimes having to do with improving efficiency or preventing mistakes. However, the sheer number and proliferation of the regulations have also created barriers that inhibit creativity, innovation and local solutions to issues that arise.

At the same time that districts are being told how to spend their money, the state has raised the bar in terms of expectations and accountability while simultaneously reducing education spending. In response to these changes and challenges, many local school boards were worried about perceived unfunded mandates from the state to increase student achievement and district accountability, while continuing to dictate how resources should be spent and allocated under Title 20.

This concern was coupled with the school choice movement in Georgia that argues for parental choice and local control. With many children seemingly trapped in low-performing schools, the choice movement has increased the pressure on state and local education leaders to govern school systems in ways that focus on student performance. The choice model also provides an array of educational options that meet the differing needs of an increasingly diverse student body.

In response to these pressures, in 2007, the Georgia General Assembly gave school districts the option to choose how they meet their students' needs by passing the Charter Systems Act. This act allowed entire school systems to be granted considerable autonomy (freed from many of the Title 20 regulations) in exchange for more accountability for results.

<sup>38</sup> Suggs, C. *The Schoolhouse Squeeze 2014*. Atlanta: Georgia Budget & Policy Institute. 2014.

As a result of this and subsequent legislation, all school districts now must select from the following three different management frameworks that provide varying levels of flexibility to the local systems in exchange for increased accountability:<sup>39</sup>

1. Continue as a status quo school system, continuing operating under Title 20 rules and forfeiting recently granted waivers ;
2. Become an Investing in Excellence in Education (IE<sup>2</sup>) system, entering into a performance contract with GaDOE in exchange for freedom from many Title 20 rules; or
3. Become a charter system (not to be confused with a charter school), allowing maximum flexibility from any Title 20 regulations in exchange for more rigorous performance targets.

Districts across Georgia are now grappling with this decision and deliberating which option would fit their students' performance, district goals, and district strategies to meet those goals. They must notify the GaDOE by June 2015 of their selection.<sup>40</sup> As districts move through 2015, these decisions could have profound impacts on district and school governance structures, which in turn, could strongly affect educators, students, and the community.

## SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

Based on a series of laws and regulations passed since 2007, all Georgia local school districts must select a district management framework by June 2015 that grants local districts various levels of flexibility and autonomy in exchange for increasing levels of accountability for student achievement: the greater the autonomy, the greater the focus on results. The three options are charter system, Investing in Excellence in Education (IE<sup>2</sup>), or status quo/traditional school system.

### Charter System

A charter system is not a group of charter schools, but rather a local school district that has an executed charter — or contract — with the Georgia State Board of Education (SBOE) that waives almost all Title 20, SBOE rules, and GaDOE guidelines. In exchange for these waivers, charter systems must meet district-wide achievement targets set by the contract in order to keep their charter status. The charter system option offers the highest level of autonomy to a school system.

The defining characteristic of a charter system is a shared-governance management model. Under this model, decisions related to people, time, and money (see Figure 3.1) are shared by the local board of education, the superintendent and local school governance teams.

School level governance means decision-making authority in personnel decisions, financial decisions, curriculum and instruction, resource allocation, establishing and monitoring the achievement of school improvement goals, and school operations.<sup>41</sup>

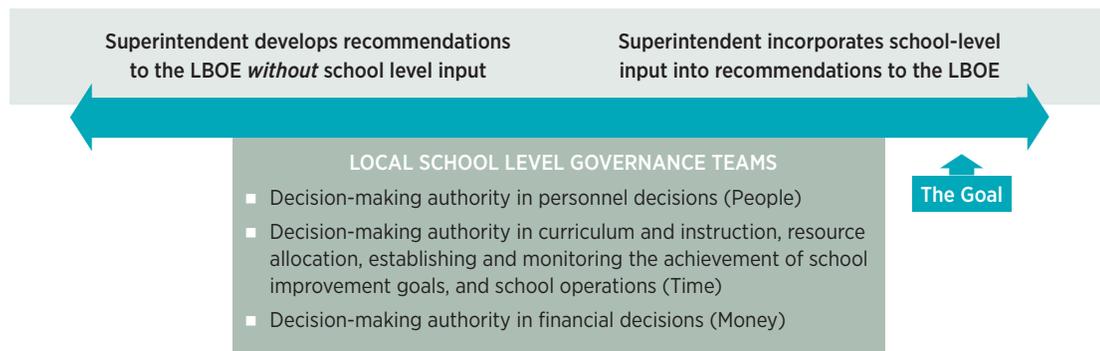
Members of the individual school governance teams are elected or appointed and serve as representatives of the local school community. While their composition may vary from school to school and district to district, these teams are generally composed of parents, school staff, and community members. They serve a leadership role in the management of a school within a charter system district by providing input on the strategic direction of the school, considering the best use of resources, and designing innovative practices that align with school needs.<sup>42</sup> This process essentially creates a shared-governance structure within the school and across the district between the superintendent and the local school governance teams.

39 Per O.C.G.A. §20-2-84.

40 The original deadline for notification was June 2013 but was subsequently adjusted to June 2015.

41 O.C.G.A. §20-2-2062 (12.1).

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

**FIGURE 3.1 SCHOOL-LEVEL GOVERNANCE DECISION-MAKING MODEL<sup>43</sup>**

Charter systems generally have high-performing governing bodies that are responsive to the needs of their students, as their charter is dependent on student achievement. Charter systems also allow many avenues for parent involvement in the decision-making process at the school level. Generally, for charter districts to be successful, a culture of collaboration across the district should be present. Management decisions rely on broad and varied input from a number of voices. For the 2014–2015 school year, there were 28 charter districts operating in Georgia.<sup>44</sup>

### Investing in Excellence in Education (IE<sup>2</sup>)

A second option for school districts is to become an IE<sup>2</sup> district. Created by House Bill 1209 (2008), local boards of education can enter into multi-year contracts with Georgia’s SBOE based on strategic plans aimed at increasing student achievement. Such plans must identify specific school-level student achievement goals that are in addition to current federal accountability requirements.

Unlike accountability for charter systems, which must meet district-level targets each year, accountability in IE<sup>2</sup> districts is focused at the school level and is measured by each school’s College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) score. Under the IE<sup>2</sup> contract, each school must annually increase its CCRPI score by 3 percent of the gap between the CCRPI baseline year (2015–2016) and 100 (see Figure 3.2 for an example).

High-performing schools, as defined by having an initial CCRPI score in the top quartile of the state, will be required to maintain or improve that level.

Each system must have a strategic plan and a school improvement plan outlined for each school within the district. As part of their improvement plans, systems must seek waivers for at least one of the following:<sup>45</sup>

- class size,
- expenditure control,
- teacher certification, or
- salary schedule.

**FIGURE 3.2 EXAMPLE OF SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY CALCULATIONS**

<p><b>Example: Assume a school’s baseline CCRPI without Challenge Points is 60.0</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Gap between baseline and 100: <math>100 - 60 = 40</math></li> <li>■ 3% of 40 = 1.2 points = annual increase from the baseline</li> <li>■ Five-year targets = 61.2, 62.4, 63.6, 64.8, 66.0</li> </ul>
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<sup>43</sup> Georgia Department of Education. *IE<sup>2</sup>, Charter, and Status Quo School Systems: A Nuts and Bolts Comparison*. Atlanta: 2014.

<sup>44</sup> The 28 districts with approved contracts are Banks County, Barrow County, Calhoun City Schools, Carrollton City Schools, Cartersville City Schools, City Schools of Decatur, Coffee County, Commerce City Schools, Dawson County, Dublin City Schools, Floyd County, Fulton County, Gainesville City Schools, Gilmer County, Glascock County, Gordon County, Haralson County, Hart County, Lumpkin County, Madison County, Marietta City Schools, Morgan County, Putnam County, Stephens County, Union County, Vidalia City Schools, Warren County and White County.

<sup>45</sup> O.C.G.A. §20-2-80 through §20-2-84.3.

Systems may also seek waivers from certain Title 20 rules and regulations such as human resource practices, local board governing practices, instructional time requirements, or summer remediation programs.<sup>46</sup> For the 2014–2015 school year, there were three IE<sup>2</sup> districts.<sup>47</sup>

### Status Quo/Traditional District Model

The third choice is the status quo or traditional district model. This is for districts that do not need or wish to request any waivers in exchange for increased accountability. There are no performance contracts or school targets; however, these districts must comply with all Title 20 rules and GaDOE guidelines.

This option would best be suited for wealthier districts that do not need waivers to achieve their goals within their budget and that feel classroom innovations can be attained without them. These districts should already have relatively high performing schools and wish to continue with what has been working for them.

The key assumption in this decision is that continuing without waivers does not create hardship for the district. However, once a district selects the traditional model approach, if unforeseen and subsequent circumstances arise that create hardships, then the SBOE may approve a waiver, primarily the class size waiver. The rules state that the SBOE may approve the class size waiver only in the “limited circumstances where educationally justified and where an act of God or other unforeseen event led to the precipitous rise in enrollment with that system.”<sup>48</sup> The SBOE is also “authorized to provide a blanket waiver or variance of the class size requirements...for all school systems in the State for a specified year in the event that a condition of financial exigency occurs.”<sup>49</sup>

### Comparing the Options

When deciding on a management framework, a district must understand the challenges it faces and which strategies are best to address them. Then, it must decide which operational approach best matches the district’s strategies. The key distinctions between the options are found in the level of flexibility granted and the preferred leadership approach: centralized or distributed.

Charter systems offer the greatest flexibility and autonomy. Aside from federal regulations and laws pertaining to health and safety, all other Title 20 requirements are waived. However, these systems are required to implement school-level governance teams and solicit community involvement. While engaging local governance teams, the use of charter systems requires a distributed leadership approach. Distributed leadership is most effective when

people at all levels engage in action, accepting leadership in their particular areas of expertise. It requires resources that support and enable collaborative environments tougher with a flexible approach to space, time and finance which occur as a result of diverse contextual settings in an intuition.<sup>50</sup>

IE<sup>2</sup> districts are required to have individual school improvement plans to drive student performance, and they must request a waiver in at least one area: class size, expenditure controls, certification, or salary schedule. IE<sup>2</sup> districts are held accountable for school-level performance increases. Charter systems are held accountable for goals set at the district level only. See Table 3.1 for a comparison.

46 O.C.G.A. §20-2-58 through §20-2-940.

47 Forsyth County, Gwinnett County, and Rabun County.

48 Georgia Department of Education. *IE<sup>2</sup>, Charter, and Status Quo School Systems: A Nuts and Bolts Comparison*. Atlanta: 2014.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

TABLE 3.1 COMPARING DISTRICT MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

	IE <sup>2</sup>	CHARTER SYSTEMS	STATUS QUO/TRADITIONAL
<b>Governance</b>	No change required, but a district MAY maximize school-level governance by granting local schools authority to determine how to reach goals.	School system must implement school-level governance and grant decision-making authority for issues related to personnel, finances, curriculum and instruction, establishing and monitoring school-level achievement goals, and operations.	No change required
<b>Flexibility</b>	School system seeks waivers as needed — but must do so in at least one of the following: class size, expenditure control, certification, or salary schedule.	School system provided broad flexibility.	Waivers only granted under cases of extraordinary circumstances, e.g. natural disaster, financial exigency.
<b>Accountability</b>	Individual schools must meet annual performance targets.	District level performance targets. No performance contract.	No performance contract.

### ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

Throughout the first six months of 2015, local school districts across Georgia will be deciding if they want to convert to a charter system, become an IE<sup>2</sup> district, or remain a traditional system. In addition to the 28 existing charter systems, 25 other districts have submitted letters of intent to GaDOE to convert to charter systems. Two districts have submitted letters of intent to convert to IE<sup>2</sup> districts. That leaves 122 of Georgia's 180 school districts to make a decision by June 2015.

Considerable resources are needed for districts to not only decide which management framework will work best for their local system, but to actually implement that framework. Districts must take the time to analyze their current functioning: Where are their strengths? Where are weaknesses? What are their challenges? Then districts must develop a strategic plan to meet those needs and ask themselves related questions: Are waivers required to implement the strategies? Which ones? What are best practices in this area? What are the expected results? In developing these plans, districts also need to reach out to teachers and school leaders, parents, and community members to gather input about the best approach for the school system and the community. Many local school districts lack the resources for this level of planning and self-reflection. The state's 16 Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESAs)<sup>51</sup> are providing support to districts. However, the RESA's are not currently funded for this specific type of assistance to districts.

Once the school system selects a management model, the resources necessary to implement that model become even more important. Fulton County was one of the first districts to convert to a charter system model. District leaders began their decision process in fall 2010 and worked throughout 2011 to collect feedback from the community and get approval of their plan through their local board of education. By fall 2012, they launched their first cohort of 20 schools to begin the conversion for the local school governance teams, which required training and the development of budgets and strategic plans. A year later, in fall 2013, the first cohort of schools was ready to develop their school-specific strategic plans and budgets. Throughout this time, central office staff worked to develop and refine resources to support the efforts taking place in the schools, and they began working in communities that were home to the second cohort of schools getting ready for the change. They developed a new knowledge management data system to provide research, best practices, and other extensive resources from across the country to help inform the strategic-planning processes.<sup>52</sup>

51 RESAs are state-supported agencies with the goal of helping their local school systems meet their educational needs through the sharing of services across school system lines. Numerous educational services can be offered more effectively and efficiently by pooling resources. All RESAs are required to provide services in research and planning, staff development, curriculum and instruction, assessment and evaluation, technology, health, and school improvement.

52 Fulton County Schools. *Fulton County Schools Charter System*. Atlanta. 2014.

Governance trends in Georgia are moving away from state-mandated centralization toward the decentralized approach that values local input and control. Considering the state's growing diversity, this trend will allow for greater innovation in the classroom and at the district level to support student needs. For example, districts with a high percentage of refugees or English language learners will need to prioritize resources differently than districts that are not as diverse. Some urban districts and those near military bases have a highly transient student population whose needs are different from those whose student enrollments are more stable. Free from the restrictions of Title 20, while still being held accountable for student outcomes, districts can address these issues as they arise.

In school systems, governance and leadership are paramount. School districts have enormous power to support principals and teachers in driving instructional improvement. Research has shown that when leaders effectively address specific responsibilities, they can — and do — have a profound, positive impact on student achievement in their districts.<sup>53</sup> Research has also shown that the form of governance (elected, appointed, centralized, diffuse, etc.) matters less than how these duties are carried out. Alternative governance models can allow for innovation and experimentation that increases student learning and engagement.

The proper implementation of these models is dependent on adequate resources to support the process. To take full advantage of this opportunity, districts will need a strategic-planning process that takes into account local budgetary considerations, community involvement, needs assessments, and the overall vision and expectations for students moving forward. Across Georgia's 180 local systems, some are well situated to take advantage of this opportunity. However, many poorer districts with a high percentage of low-income children may not have sufficient staff, training, or internal capacity required to consider the flexibility options being offered, or they may not be able to support the systemic changes necessary for implementation. GaDOE does offer some technical assistance for districts going through these changes — available on a first-come, first-served basis. But, the department does not have enough staff to cover all districts. Again, districts with a larger and stronger infrastructure will be able to move more quickly and take advantage of such support, potentially leading to an uneven statewide implementation of these policies. Georgia must take steps to ensure all districts are properly resourced and can take advantage of the opportunities these flexibility options offer.

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53 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.



## To Elect or Appoint? The Question Regarding the State School Superintendent

### ISSUE OVERVIEW

Governance is a complex issue for all states as various entities attempt to collaborate in the creation and oversight of education policy and rules. Governors, legislators, state boards of education, chief state school officers (also known as state school superintendents), and state education agencies constitute the education governance systems in most states.

Education governance structures differ from state to state and directly impact how education policy leaders interact. Generally speaking, these structures can be categorized into four models that take into account how state boards of education are composed and whether the chief state school officer is elected or appointed. See Figure 4.1. To make matters more complex, nine states plus the District of Columbia have governance structures that are modified or hybrid versions of these general models.<sup>54</sup>

Governors and legislators across the country are taking action to expand their authority over K-12 education under each model of governance. These actions reduce the governing power and influence of state and local school boards as well as state education agency heads.<sup>55</sup> One study of state education agencies found that most focus on ensuring compliance with laws rather than how to reform education to increase student achievement. Some of these leaders lack the statutory power necessary to make changes, and some believe that the culture in their agencies is stuck in outdated routines. Those who do wish to make any types of reform find themselves limited by rigid state rules and regulations.<sup>56</sup>

For most states, chief state school officers are responsible for the general supervision of the state's public education system. These individuals head the state education agency and direct activities of the agency's professional staff in regulating and supporting the state's public schools. Across the country, only 12 states — including Georgia — elect the chief state school officer. The governor or the state board of education appoints the officer in the rest of the states. See Figure 4.2.

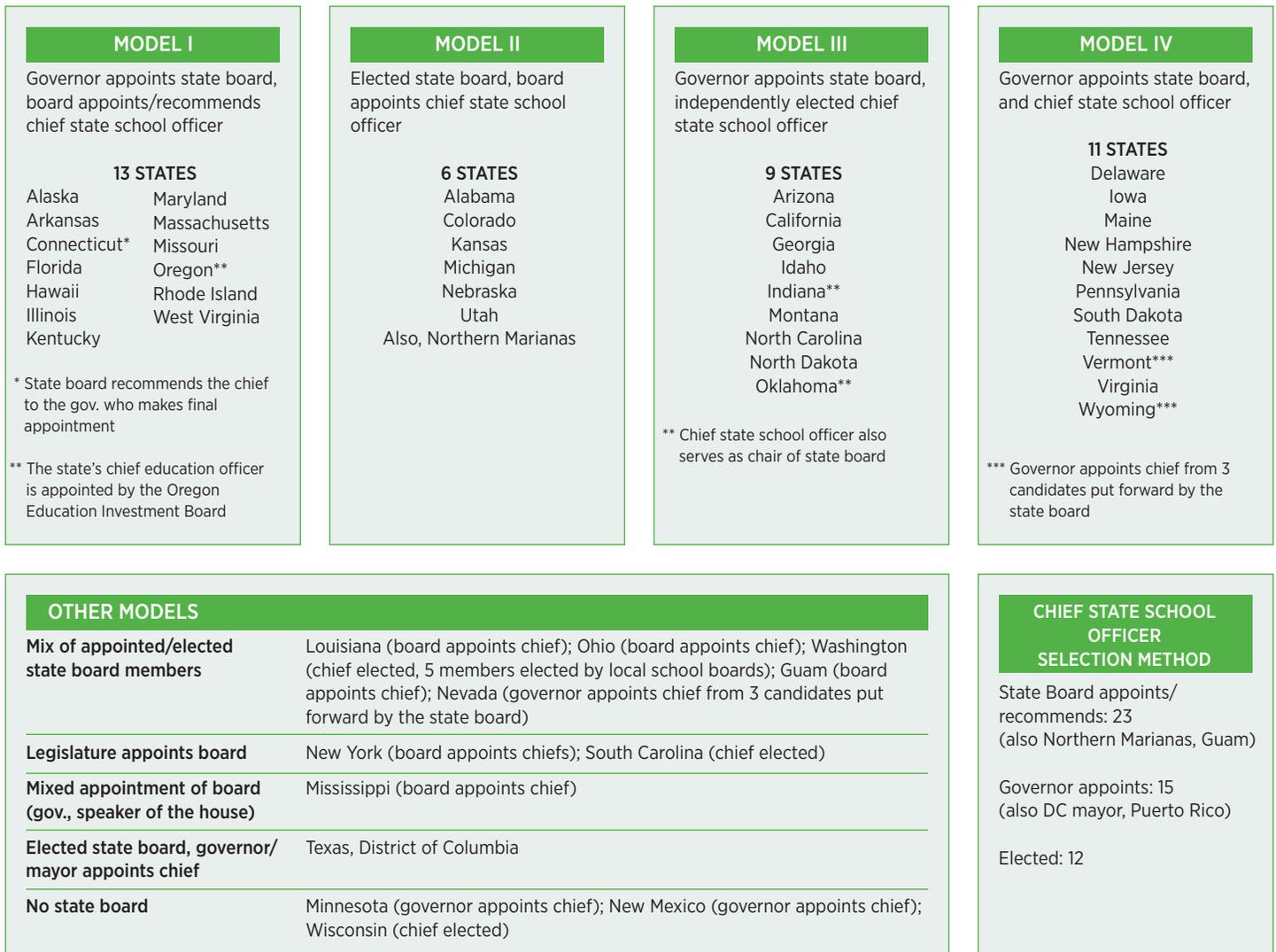
If this position is more and more simply responsible for implementing the policies of other elected officials (i.e. the governor, legislator, and/or State Board of Education), is it important for that position also to be elected? Do students realize better educational outcomes if education leaders are aligned in their vision or if all educational leaders are accountable to the electorate?

<sup>54</sup> Scudella, V. (2013). *State Education Governance Models*. Governance – State Boards/Chiefs/Agencies. Denver: Education Commission of the States. 2013.

<sup>55</sup> National Association of State Boards of Education. "State Board and Governor Relations." *Boardsmanship Review*. May 2011.

<sup>56</sup> Brown, C.G., Hess, F.M., Lautzenheiser, D.K., & Owen, I. *State Education Agencies as Agents of Change: What It Will Take for the States to Step Up on Education Reform*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. 2011.

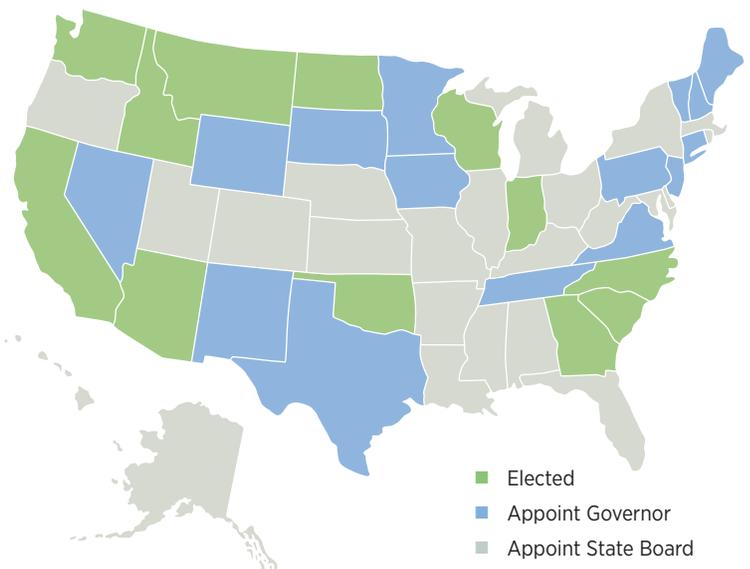
**FIGURE 4.1 2014 STATE EDUCATION GOVERNANCE MODELS<sup>57</sup>**



**SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA**

As previously stated, Georgia is one of nine states where the governor appoints the state board of education and there is an independently elected chief state school officer, known as the state superintendent. Georgia's governor, an elected official who serves a four-year term, appoints the members of the Georgia State Board of Education (SBOE) for seven-year terms. In turn, the SBOE provides leadership for the state system of public schools — the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE). The 14 appointed members represent their congressional districts and set all policies for GaDOE in line with federal and state law.

**FIGURE 4.2 CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS<sup>58</sup>**



57 National Association of State Boards of Education. *State Education Governance Models, 2014*. 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.nasbe.org/wp-content/uploads/Governance-Models-Chart-July-2014.pdf>

58 Jacobson, L. *State School Superintendents and the Messy Business of Politics*. 2014. Retrieved from Governing – The State and Localities: <http://www.governing.com/topics/politics/gov-state-school-superintendents-messy-business-politics.html>

The governor has the ability to create and influence policy that directly impacts education in Georgia not only through SBOE appointments but also through budget approval each year that allots education funding. The Georgia General Assembly is also involved in setting state policy, through both overall budget approval and by putting education policy into statute.

Like the governor, the state school superintendent is elected for a four-year term as defined by the Constitution of Georgia. The election coincides with the election of the governor. This position is primarily responsible for the operation of the GaDOE. The state school superintendent sets the agenda for the monthly state board meetings, but any action must be approved by a majority of the board. In addition, the state school superintendent does not have a vote or veto power. Although the state superintendent and GaDOE provide input into the annual budget, the final budget for GaDOE is proposed by the governor and approved by the state legislature.

In November 2014, Governor Nathan Deal was elected to a second term, and Richard Woods was elected for his first term as state school superintendent. Education in Georgia was forefront on the minds of the electorate. During the election season, Governor Deal and his Democratic challenger, Jason Carter, focused many of their debates around education funding. Governor Deal went further by expressing interest in not only revising how the state funds public schools but also proposing the creation of a statewide recovery school district for consistently low-performing schools that would ultimately increase the number of charter schools. He also wants lawmakers to study merit pay for teachers that would be calculated from student growth models based on Georgia's student assessment system.<sup>59</sup>

Meanwhile, Richard Woods ran on a platform of conducting an audit of GaDOE in search of wasteful spending, slowing down the new Georgia Milestones assessment system, and studying the common core standards used in Georgia for reading/language arts and mathematics. Woods opposed the 2012 ballot initiative to empower the state to approve charter schools, while Governor Deal supported the ballot.

Moving forward, voters who supported Richard Wood's policies and positions — many based on criticisms of state and federal initiatives like common core and Race to the Top — will likely find it difficult for their views to be enacted into policy. Other elected officials, such as the governor and state legislators, will have more governing power to determine the course of such issues.

## NEXT STEPS FOR GEORGIA

Moving forward, Georgia is likely to see legislation introduced in the General Assembly that will call for a constitutional amendment to change the office of the state school superintendent from an elected position to an appointed one.

Many argue that education is a local issue and that those who run our school systems should be directly accountable to the people. If parents are not getting the outcomes for their children they desire, then a more competent administrator can be voted into office. The vast majority of research comparing the outcomes of elected versus appointed officials has focused on municipal governments (i.e., mayors, city commissioners, etc.). However, one recent study examined existing prior research on elected versus appointed officials and added to it a detailed study of academic outcomes of students. The authors concluded that elected and appointed superintendents have equivalent impacts on student achievement, holding other factors constant. The authors also found that elected officials are no less or no more productive than appointed professionals, consistent with the view that both elected and appointed officials are ultimately most focused on student outcomes.<sup>60</sup>

59 Salzer, J., & Bluestein, G. "Gov. Deal to Tackle Education, Justice Reform in Second Term." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. November 8, 2014.

60 Partridge, M., & Sass, T.R. "The Productivity of Elected and Appointed Officials: The Case of School Superintendents." *Public Choice*, 149, 133-149. 2011.

Another argument for the election of a state school superintendent is to allow for checks and balances within the decision-making system. This elected position may bring another voice to the table in debating education policy who cannot be fired for expressing opinions that differ from others in power. However, research shows that the average tenure of a state superintendent is about three years, with very little difference between those who were elected or appointed.<sup>61</sup>

Another point of view is that an appointed state school superintendent can help facilitate coordinated leadership. The Vision Project, an undertaking by the Georgia School Boards Association and the Georgia School Superintendents Association, is a joint venture to create a comprehensive and coherent vision for public education in Georgia. The importance of governance, leadership, and accountability is one of their seven system components.<sup>62</sup> This guiding principle focuses on effective educational governance with a strategic vision, where leaders are accountable for their actions and for outcomes. One recommendation for creating a unified strategic vision for Georgia is to appoint the state school superintendent.<sup>63</sup>

The Vision Project argues that the election by partisan ballot of the state superintendent limits the candidate pool to those willing to disrupt their careers and devote considerable time to politics and campaigning. The position of state school superintendent should be a career choice, not a political office held for a period of time while either still engaging in a career beyond politics or planning for the next political move.<sup>64</sup>

The office of Georgia's state superintendent has become more of an implementer of policies rather than a driver of policy change, leading many to question the expense of continuing this as an elected office. State Representative Mike Dudgeon (R-Johns Creek) says this issue is about good governance. He has noted that Georgia currently elects four different entities or individuals that are all given some level of responsibility to determine how public education is handled in the state: local school boards, the General Assembly, the governor, and the state school superintendent.<sup>65</sup> With all these competing voices, policy alignment can be difficult.

Rep. Dudgeon is expected to introduce a constitutional amendment in the legislature during the 2015 session that would allow the state school superintendent to be appointed by the governor. At the same time, state legislators from each congressional district would elect a person from that district to serve on the SBOE. Currently, members of the State Transportation Board are elected in this manner. Doing so would align the job of the executive branch (implementing policy) with the governor and would align policy with the SBOE and the legislature. Dudgeon reasons that "the legislature is setting ultimate state policy anyway, so the board they're electing can implement the details of the policy they vote for."<sup>66</sup>

Strong governance is critical to improving outcomes for students. Georgia is not alone in grappling with the complexities of coordinating many governance entities in order to create the best learning opportunities for all students. Policymakers are charged with the difficult task of establishing the right balance of state and local control, flexibility and accountability, and autonomy and oversight for the state's public schools. Research tells us the mechanisms of governance are less important than a focus on a strong strategic vision that is implemented with fidelity and integrity while leaders are held accountable for their actions. As Georgia moves forward, the most important aspect is that all leaders — both elected and appointed — are able to work together to actualize and implement a strategic plan for education in Georgia that allows every student to succeed.

61 Statewide Afterschool Network. *Chief State School Officers*. 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.statewideafterschoolnetworks.net/content/chief-state-school-officers>

62 The other six system components were 1) early learning and student success, 2) teaching and learning, 3) teaching and learning resources, 4) human and organizational capital, 5) culture, climate, and organizational efficacy, and 6) financial resources.

63 In terms of good governance and leadership, the Vision Project also recommends changes such as nonpartisan elections for state school board members by congressional district, nonpartisan elections for all local school board members, and a comprehensive statewide accountability system based on clearly articulated education goals.

64 Georgia School Boards Association & Georgia School Superintendents Association. *A Vision for Public Education: Equity and Excellence*. Atlanta: 2010.

65 Crawford, T. "Is the Office of the State School Superintendent Necessary?" *The Blackshear Times*. November 19, 2014.

66 Ibid.



## Funding Reform — How Do We Divide the Pie?

### ISSUE OVERVIEW

The majority of the state's budget is dedicated to education. In 2014, Georgia invested \$9.7 billion in public education, close to 52 percent of the entire state budget. Of that, \$7.4 billion was for K-12 education.<sup>67</sup> In 2015, Georgia invested \$10.3 billion in public education, with K-12 spending accounting for \$7.9 billion.<sup>68</sup> What has Georgia received as a return on its investment?

While student outcomes have certainly improved over the past decade in Georgia, they are not yet nationally outstanding. High school graduation rates still rank near the bottom of national averages, though Georgia does have higher graduation standards than many states. Georgia students score around the national average on both reading and math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the nation's report card. To move its students into the top rung of educational outcomes nationwide, Georgia has embarked on an ambitious reform agenda focused on increased rigor in the classrooms and student, teacher, and district accountability. The state's reform policies have prioritized high-quality classroom teaching, instructional data systems, and school and district leadership. At the same time that Georgia has been raising the bar and setting policies to promote increased academic standards, it has not participated in a robust discussion about how much this costs or what resources are needed to support these high ambitions.

Currently, those discussions are happening across the nation. States are asking themselves two primary questions: 1) How much does a quality education cost? 2) Are we investing in the right things? In 2012, the national average for K-12 per pupil spending was \$10,608.<sup>69</sup> The states ranged from the low end of \$6,202 per student in Utah to the upper end of over \$19,000 per student in New York.<sup>70</sup> In 2012, Georgia spent an average of \$9,274 per student.<sup>71</sup>

Most people will argue that simply spending more money will not lead to better outcomes. A rudimentary comparison of 2013 NAEP outcomes for grade-level reading shows that the three states with the top scores do spend more per student than the national average. However, only two of the three bottom-scoring states spend below the national average, and one (the District of Columbia) has one of the highest per pupil expenditures in the nation. See Table 5.1.

67 Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. *Georgia Budget Primer 2014*. Atlanta: 2013.

68 Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. *Georgia Budget Primer 2015*. Atlanta: 2014.

69 US Census Bureau. *Public Elementary-Secondary Education Finance Data File, 2012*. Retrieved from Public School System Finances: <http://www.census.gov/govs/school/>

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

More than just levels of funding drive student outcomes. Issues related to student demographics, teacher training, levels of curricula rigor, and so forth all have a role to play. However, adequate levels of funding used in efficient ways is the key to addressing all of these issues.

**TABLE 5.1 2012 PER PUPIL SPENDING BY 4TH GRADE NAEP RANKINGS**

TOP 3 SCORING STATES		BOTTOM 3 SCORING STATES	
State	2012 Per Pupil Spending	State	2012 Per Pupil Spending
Massachusetts	\$14,142	Mississippi	\$8,164
Maryland	\$13,609	New Mexico	\$8,223
New Hampshire	\$13,593	District of Columbia	\$17,468

Upon winning reelection in November 2014, Governor Nathan Deal stated that examining, and probably changing, the funding formula for Georgia's K-12 schools will be a priority for his second term. However, with Georgia tax rates being held steady, it is unlikely there will be a discussion about how much to fund Georgia public schools. The discussion will most likely center on how to better distribute the amount of money currently being allocated — in short, what Georgia will buy for its nearly \$8 billion investment.

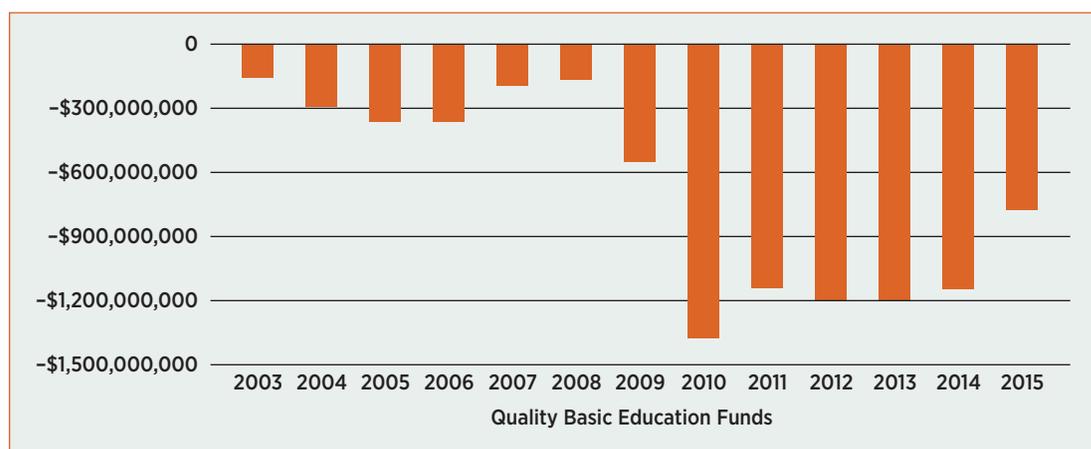
### SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

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

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

Since the first austerity cuts were imposed in 2002, the cumulative effects have been a total reduction in state education funding of more than \$8.3 billion.<sup>72</sup> See Figure 5.1.

**FIGURE 5.1 ANNUAL AUSTERITY CUTS<sup>73</sup>**



72 Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. *Georgia Budget Primer 2015*. Atlanta: 2014.

73 Ibid.

**TABLE 5.2 SPENDING GROWTH FY 2003 TO FY 2013 IN ABSOLUTE DOLLARS<sup>75</sup>**

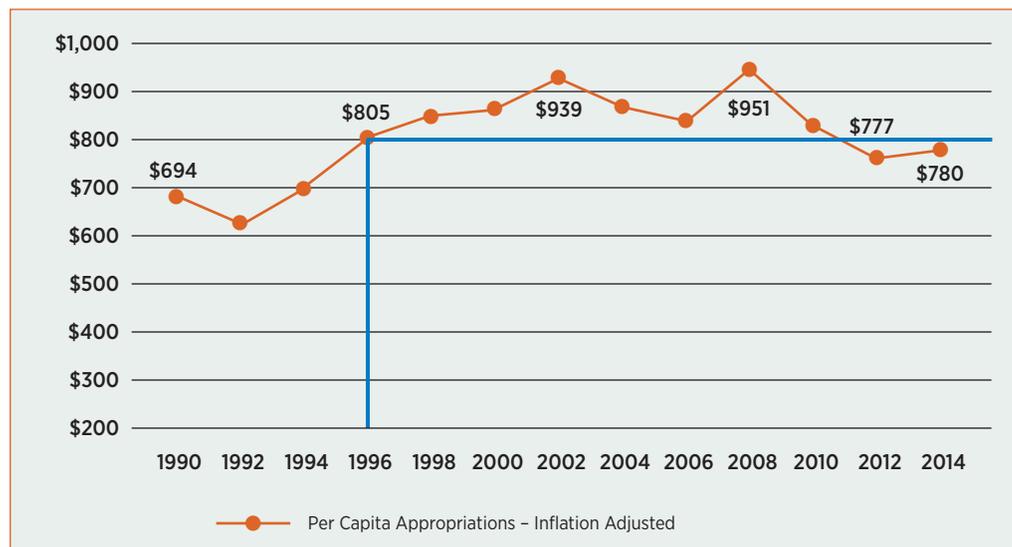
	\$ Growth	Share of Budget	Change in Share of Budget
PK-12 Education	27%	40.4%	0.8%
University System	4%	9.2%	-1.8%
Technical College System	14%	1.7%	-0.2%
Health Care	103%	20.5%	7.9%
Debt Service	2%	4.8%	-1.1%
Everything Else	1%	23.5%	-5.7%

The largest portions of the austerity cuts came as a result of the recession that began in 2008. Total state revenues were dramatically reduced beginning in 2008. Georgia leaders were committed to not raising taxes to deal with the economic impact. Instead, they looked for ways to cut state spending levels until the economy recovered. While reducing the overall amount of state expenditures, state leaders did what they could to protect K-12 education. As a percentage of the overall share of the budget, K-12 spending remained relatively constant between 2003 and 2013.<sup>74</sup> To account for enrollment growth during this period, the spending on education (Pre-

kindergarten and K-12 combined) increased by 27 percent in absolute dollars, second only to health care spending, which includes mandatory spending on Medicaid. See Table 5.2.

Despite the attempt to protect education, with state revenues declining, lawmakers had no choice but to cut the total amount of dollars available to spend on education. When education spending is adjusted for inflation, per capita spending on education has only recently recovered to 1997 funding levels (see Figure 5.2).<sup>76</sup> From the peak in 2008, real state fund expenditures have declined 16 percent. Returning to 2008 funding levels would require an additional \$1.5 billion in state funding.<sup>77</sup>

The state budget crisis shifted the financial burden of public education to local districts. Many districts strived to make up the difference by raising their own revenue streams through millage rate increases. The effects of state funding cuts became more apparent in the classroom when local school districts could no longer financially compensate for the decline in state dollars. Between 2008 and 2012, property values — the primary funding source for local schools — fell in 132 districts by an average of 17.3 percent. This reduction led to a corresponding decline in local revenues per student of 5.8 percent.<sup>79</sup>

**FIGURE 5.2 PER CAPITA INFLATION ADJUSTED EDUCATION FUNDING PRE-K - 12<sup>78</sup>**

74 Georgia Public Policy Foundation. *Analyzing Education Spending*. January 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.georgiapolicy.org/analyzing-education-spending/#cpK4c>

75 Ibid.

76 Bourdeaux, C. *A Briefing on Georgia's Budget FY14-FY15*. Atlanta: Center for State and Local Finance, Georgia State University. 2014.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.

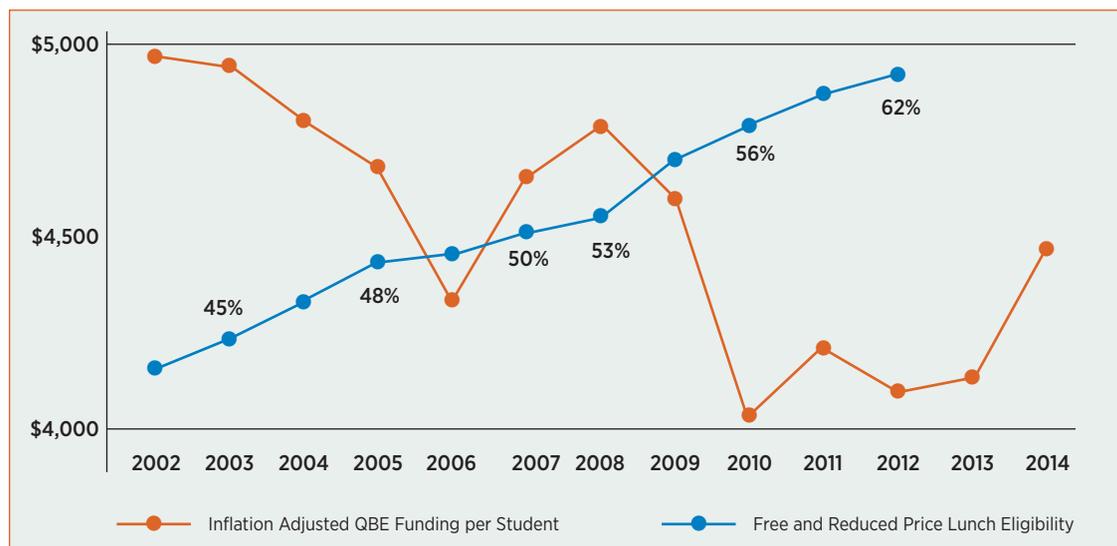
79 Ibid.

Since 2012, the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute has annually surveyed Georgia's 180 school districts on the impact of these funding cuts. During 2014, the 151 districts that responded represent 91 percent of the students enrolled in public schools. Key findings include the following adjustments districts are making for the current 2014–2015 school year:<sup>80</sup>

- **Fewer school days:** 49 districts (33 percent of respondents) reported having a school year shorter than the standard 180 days. Eight school districts have cut more than 20 days from the school year.
- **Larger class sizes and fewer teachers:** 127 districts (85 percent of respondents) reported increased average class sizes since 2009–2010 school year. This held true even in districts where student enrollment shrank or stayed the same. The number of classroom teachers in Georgia has decreased by more than 8,300 since the 2008–2009 school year, even as the number of students has increased.
- **Reduced art and music:** 66 districts (46 percent of respondents) have cut or eliminated art and music programs since 2009. Two-thirds of the districts have not restored them.
- **Instructional materials:** Nearly 80 percent of responding districts have delayed or stopped buying instructional materials: since 2009, including textbooks and computer software.
- **Increased local taxes:** 102 districts (72 percent of respondents) increased property taxes (millage rates) from 2009 to 2015. The average rate rose from 15.3 to 16.6 during this period.

The reduction in available resources came in tandem with an increase in the needs of students. Between 2003 and 2014, state spending per student fell an inflation-adjusted 9.3 percent while the number of children living in poverty increased nearly 20 percentage points (see Figure 5.3).<sup>81</sup> Students living in poverty frequently need extra supports from the school systems to meet high levels of academic achievement. Strategies such as longer school days and years, and smaller classrooms can help low-income students catch up with their more affluent peers. However, the districts with the highest percentages of low-income students tend to be the least resourced to offer these support programs.

**FIGURE 5.3** PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS LIVING IN POVERTY AND INFLATION ADJUSTED QBE FUNDING<sup>82</sup>



80 Suggs, C. *Cutting Class to Make Ends Meet 2014*. Atlanta: Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. 2014.

81 Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. *Georgia Budget Primer 2015*. Atlanta. 2014

82 Ibid.

As the state budget recovers from the recession, Georgia is beginning to invest more in education at the K-12 level. The FY2015 budget includes an additional \$314 million for public education. Governor Deal has stated that he would like to see districts use this increase to give teachers a pay raise, end furlough days, or expand the school calendar.<sup>83</sup> The FY2015 funding increase is helpful to districts. However, an austerity cut of \$747 million for 2015 remains.<sup>84</sup>

### **ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA**

Governor Nathan Deal has announced that he will conduct a “top to bottom review of public education” during his second term.<sup>85</sup> As part of this review, Governor Deal wants to examine the funding structure, charters, and flexibility options for schools and districts, while keeping good teachers in the classroom and continuing to turn around failing schools.<sup>86</sup> Examining and potentially making significant changes to how Georgia funds K-12 education is high on the Governor’s priority list.

The foundations for these reforms may come from a 2012 study conducted by the Georgia Chamber of Commerce. The chamber’s *Smarter Funding, Better Outcomes* initiative examined how to improve Georgia’s K-12 funding system. The initiative follows prior research by the Institute for a Competitive Workforce, which ranked Georgia 31st among all states for the return on its investment in education and 39th for school finance overall.

The Initiative examined Georgia’s K-12 budgetary spending across four main areas: equity, flexibility, efficiency and transparency. Georgia scored decently in equity, as funding amounts to districts generally rise in correlation with poverty rates.<sup>87</sup> The state does provide funding flexibility in allowing districts to become an Investing in Educational Excellence (IE<sup>2</sup>) or Charter System, both of which provide funding flexibility in exchange for student accountability. All districts must declare their intent to become an IE<sup>2</sup> or Charter System by June 2015. For a complete discussion of IE<sup>2</sup> and Charter Systems, see issue 3.

In terms of efficiency and effectiveness, the initiative report found that the state’s current funding formula is not designed to incentivize performance. Finally, the funding structure lacks transparency and is highly complex. The initiative made several broad recommendations designed to create a more efficient and transparent funding system. First, the report proposed that the QBE formula be revised so that the vast majority of funding is allocated through a student-based funding formula.<sup>88</sup>

Student-based funding formulas (sometimes called “weighted student formulas”) allocate funding based on a student’s characteristics instead of number of staff or program requirements. The amount of money given to a school is based on individual student needs, not enrollment. This means that students with more needs — such as those living in poverty, English language learners, those requiring special education, etc. — receive more resources. Funding follows students to whichever schools they attend.<sup>89</sup>

Second, the initiative report recommended that as much existing state education funding as possible be included in the student-based formula. The report estimates a total of 90 to 95 percent of state funding could be included in the student-based funding formula amount.<sup>90</sup>

Third, the report suggested building a data and reporting system that links funding, expenditures, and student outcomes. Taken together, these recommendations were intended to produce efficiencies within the K-12 system that would also drive improved student outcomes.<sup>91</sup>

83 Washington, W. “School Officials Happy to Get Some Financial Help, But They Say They Need More.” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. January 23, 2014.

84 Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. *Georgia Budget Primer 2015*. Atlanta. 2014.

85 Yarbrough, D. “Everything on the Table, Public Education Reform, Says Gov. Deal.” *The Telegraph*. October 21, 2014.

86 Ibid.

87 Hassel, B., Doyle, D., & Locke, G. *Smarter Funding, Better Outcomes*. Atlanta: Georgia Chamber of Commerce. 2012.

88 Ibid.

89 Roza, M., & Simburg, S. *Student-Based Allocation to Enable School Choice*. Seattle: Center on Reinventing Public Education. 2013.

90 Hassel, B., Doyle, D., & Locke, G. *Smarter Funding, Better Outcomes*. Atlanta: Georgia Chamber of Commerce. 2012.

91 Ibid.

Currently, the state of Georgia cannot track education expenditures to the school level. Across Georgia, in FY2013 districts spent anywhere from \$4,737 per FTE (full-time equivalent) to \$13,158 per FTE.<sup>92</sup> However, no data system can track which schools are targeting their resources at programs that produce higher outcomes for students and which are not as efficient with their resources. To properly understand how much it truly costs to adequately educate a student, Georgia must have a better accounting of where it is spending its money. By linking schools' financial data to the state's longitudinal data system, stakeholders could gain a better understanding of the relationship between expenditures and student outcomes.

Colorado recently passed a bill that will make it the first state in the nation to collect and publish state-level revenues and expenditures at the school level. The purpose of such a database is to help identify which schools are getting the biggest return on investment and where additional support is needed. With this type of data transparency, principals can share with each other best practices and compare expenditures with academic outcomes.

Georgia needs this ability. The Georgia Constitution includes language guaranteeing an adequate public education for all citizens. Yet determining whether the state actually provides adequate resources to schools is a dominant issue in school finance in Georgia as well as in states across the country. There are two major components to the policy debate over adequacy in education funding:

- What is an adequate education in terms of standards, teachers and curriculum?
- What is the appropriate funding level to provide that?

Georgia has put a stake in the ground on defining an adequate education by publically proclaiming "every student will graduate from high school, be successful in college and/or a career and be competitive with their peers throughout the United States and the world."<sup>93</sup> In order to accomplish this, Georgia has committed to increasing standards and accountability for students, teachers, and districts. What Georgia has not done is develop an understanding of the actual cost of this ambitious vision.

For years, state leaders have been criticized for making austerity cuts in education. One concern is that any funding reform in Georgia will simply be a recalculation of the funding formula to match current available resources in the state budget, thereby doing away with the need for austerity cuts altogether. This approach would circumvent the adequacy discussion.

If Georgia is committed to producing world-class students, the state should establish a data system that allows a serious study of current expenditures within schools that is linked to student outcomes. It should also take into account school and student characteristics, including demographics. It is possible that many schools are producing the results that would match Georgia's student outcome goals with current funding levels through flexibility and innovation. However, many schools and districts are not. Transparency in spending would help Georgia gain some understanding about what level of funding is truly adequate to achieve state educational outcome goals. Being able to identify best practices and efficient financial practices would go a long way toward informing any funding reforms being considered at the state level. Georgia has set high expectations for student educational outcomes, making this a policy priority. Serious discussions about how to financially support that policy priority are now in order.

92 Georgia Department of Education. *Expenditure Report: FY13 Financial Data Collection System*. Atlanta. 2014.

93 Georgia Department of Education. *Race to the Top: State of Georgia Scope of Work*. Atlanta. 2010.



## Early Learning — Challenge Accepted!

### ISSUE OVERVIEW

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 early learning programs: school success, higher achievement test scores, lower rates of grade retention, fewer referrals for special education services, and a decreased likelihood of involvement in the juvenile or adult justice system.<sup>94</sup>

The importance of early learning has galvanized coalitions of business, military, state and federal leaders to invest in programs that help prepare children for kindergarten. In 2011, US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and US 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) grant. In their joint statement, the secretaries highlighted how investments in high-quality early learning programs help reduce crime, strengthen national security, and boost competitiveness.<sup>95</sup> Since its formation, the RT3-ELC has held three rounds of competitive grant processes and awarded more than \$1 billion to 20 states — including Georgia — to help states align, coordinate, and improve the quality of existing early learning and development programs.

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 — it must do two things: 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 for its youngest citizens. The work being done at the state level, in part supported by the RT3-ELC, is aiming to achieve both of those goals.

### SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

Georgia has long had a commitment to early learning. It was the first state in the nation to establish a state-level department responsible for early learning — Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). DECAL administers Georgia's state-funded Pre-K Program, licenses child care centers and home-based child care, administers federal nutrition programs, and manages voluntary quality enhancement programs. Based on the strength of Georgia's Pre-K Program — a free early learning program for 4-year-olds available to all children, depending on space and availability — the state was viewed as a national leader in early learning.

<sup>94</sup> 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.

<sup>95</sup> US Department of Education Press Office. 35 States, D.C., and Puerto Rico Submit Applications for Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge [Press release]. 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>

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

In regard to Georgia's state-funded Pre-K Program, which serves 4-year-olds, the study found many strengths that formed a strong foundation on which to improve. Most classrooms were rated as delivering a medium level of global quality and providing an environment that was organized and supportive of children's emotional development. However, the quality of instructional support was generally low. The study found that even though most lead teachers had college degrees and reported participating in a variety of important trainings, their education had not yet translated into high-quality classroom practices. The findings recommended more extensive or effective professional development as well as on-site technical assistance to provide ongoing support to teachers.<sup>96</sup>

For the childcare centers that serve infants through 3-year-old children, findings from the study confirmed that almost all of the programs met or exceeded only the basic state licensing requirements for group size and child-adult ratios. Most program administrators reported using a curriculum in their program and child assessments to guide instruction. Most centers also reported providing a range of services and supports to the families they serve.<sup>97</sup>

However, in terms of quality, on average, center-based care across Georgia was of "low" to "medium" quality, and the quality of care for infants and toddlers was lower than the quality of care for preschoolers. Thirty-five percent of preschool classrooms (serving 2- and 3-year-olds) and 67 percent of infant/toddler classrooms were rated as having low quality. Children in these low-quality classrooms likely experience environments that are inadequate for their health and safety and that do not promote their cognitive and social-emotional development.<sup>98</sup>

These findings were a wake-up call for state leaders, and DECAL began taking steps to improve quality and increase statewide accessibility, especially among Georgia's low-income population. In 2011, Georgia included early education as a priority in the state's K-12 Race to the Top (RT3) grant application. Georgia's early learning outcomes project targeted Pre-K teachers with professional development related to teacher-child interactions. Georgia's Pre-K teachers were randomly selected and assigned to one of the professional development opportunities related to the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), a reliable and valid instrument used to assess teacher-child interactions, or to a control group. The project lasted three years, with a new cohort of teachers selected each year.

This early learning project created many opportunities for the state. First, the project was designed for sustainability and allowed the state to build capacity among Georgia Pre-K staff. All coaches and facilitators were Georgia Pre-K consultants, and RT3 activities were built into their workload. Thus, the knowledge gained influenced other activities, and because they were existing staff, they continue to work in the program. Second, the professional development models provided teachers with extended opportunities to improve their practice. One of the professional development models, My Teaching Partner, provided teachers with cycles of one-to-one coaching by a trained Georgia Pre-K coach. Each cycle focused on a specific CLASS dimension and involved review and feedback of videotaped lessons submitted by the teacher. The other professional development model, Making the Most of Classroom Interactions, entailed a professional learning community approach, whereby a group of teachers met with a team of two trained Georgia Pre-K facilitators for five days over five months.

96 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, NC: The University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute. 2009.

97 Maxwell, K.L., Early, D.M., Bryant, D., Kraus, S., Hume, K., & Crawford, G. *Georgia Study of Early Care and Education: Child Care Findings*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute. 2009.

98 Ibid.

Georgia also focused on the quality of early care in both early learning centers and home-based care for all children. DECAL developed and implemented Quality Rated, a tiered quality rating and improvement system. Quality Rated provides incentives and resources for early childhood programs to improve quality while working through several manageable steps, or levels. At the same time, the centers receive public recognition for their efforts as they achieve new levels of quality.

Quality Rated was launched in Georgia in January 2012. It uses one, two, and three stars to indicate programs that meet defined standards beyond Georgia's minimum licensing requirements. The program is voluntary for all childcare centers. Participating programs become eligible for free professional development, technical assistance, and financial incentive packages supported by foundations and businesses.<sup>99</sup>

In December 2013, Georgia was announced as a winner of an RT3-ELC grant, which is a state-level competitive grant program targeted at early learning and development. While the goals of the grant are to improve program quality and outcomes for all children, specifically Georgia must increase enrollment of children with high needs in high-quality early learning and development programs. The projects associated with the grant must also help close the achievement gap between children with high needs and their peers by supporting efforts to increase kindergarten readiness. Georgia will receive \$51.7 million over a four-year grant period to expand the five critical areas outlined in Table 6.1.

**TABLE 6.1 RACE TO THE TOP — EARLY LEARNING CHALLENGE GRANT<sup>100</sup>**

CRITICAL AREA	PROJECT LIST
<b>1. Building Successful State Systems</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop Early Education Empowerment Zones (E3Zs), where the state will align supports, activities, and services in four geographical areas with large numbers or high percentages of children with high needs and where the state will improve infrastructure for high-quality early learning programs</li> </ul>
<b>2. Increasing High-Quality Accountability Programs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Validate Quality Rated and expand research and data activities that will evaluate current and future efforts and support policy revisions</li> <li>Drastically increase program and parent participation in Quality Rated</li> </ul>
<b>3. Promoting Early Learning Outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand the comprehensive roll-out of the newly launched Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS)</li> <li>Expand Georgia's home visiting program, Great Start Georgia, by creating home visiting and family engagement hubs in 3-star child care centers in each E3Z</li> </ul>
<b>4. Developing a Great Early Childhood Education Workforce</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase articulation among institutions of higher learning to increase student success and persistence in achieving advanced credentials in early childhood education</li> <li>Expand scholarships and incentive programs to increase the number of early childhood educators moving along a knowledge and career pathway</li> </ul>
<b>5. Measuring Outcomes and Progress</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a Task Force for Comprehensive Assessment to identify a single set of common child assessments with professional development and policy guidelines</li> <li>Design and implement a formative assessment that will be conducted during the first six weeks of children's kindergarten experience so each student receives a measurement of kindergarten readiness that teachers can use to individualize instruction</li> <li>Expand the quality of data collected for children, programs, and educators by pooling additional, existing data feeds from participating state agencies to expand the Cross Agency Child Data System</li> </ul>

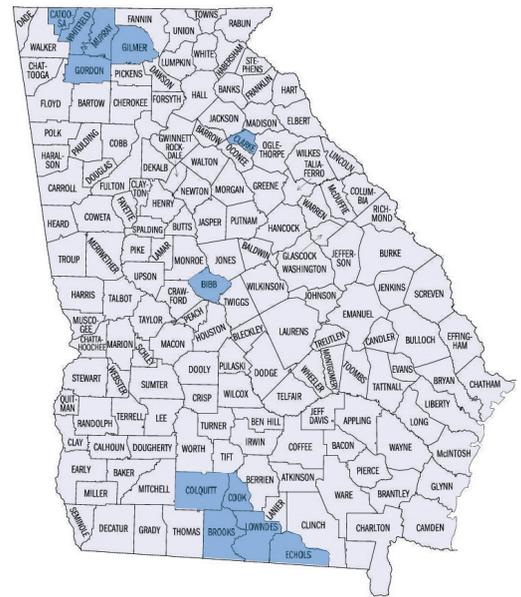
99 Bright From the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. Georgia's New "Quality Rated" Program Marks Another Milestone [Press release]. October 2012.  
 100 Bright From the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. (2014). *Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Grant*. 2014. Retrieved from <http://decals.ga.gov/BftS/EarlyLearningChallenge.aspx>

Ten different projects fall under the RT3-ELC. While DECAL is the lead agency and responsible for the management of the grant, it is also collaborating with other state agencies and departments as well as community, nonprofit, and business leaders.<sup>101</sup> Much of the work proposed in the grant expands programs already underway, such as increasing participation in the Quality Rated program and expanding the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) and home visiting programs. One central aspect of the grant is the creation of Early Education Empowerment Zones (E3Zs), a project that targets key geographic regions in Georgia. The state will devote substantial resources to developing infrastructure in these zones to strengthen their early childhood system and support children's development and learning.

Four E3Zs have been selected (see Figure 6.1). Clarke County, Bibb County, a North Cluster (Catoosa, Whitfield, Murray, Gordon and Gilmer counties) and a South Cluster (Colquitt, Cook, Brooks, Lowndes, and Echols counties) will each receive over \$1 million in targeted resources and will participate in research that will help the state identify sustainable and replicable implementation strategies that can be scaled statewide. Each E3Z is home to around 10,000 children under the age of 5.

DECAL used quantitative data like third-grade reading proficiency, poverty level, premature birth rates, and the percentage of licensed childcare capacity filled by children receiving subsidies gathered from the Department of Public Health, Department of Economic Development, and the Department of Education to initially identify 11 geographic regions of the state with challenging circumstances for children. A team of reviewers then conducted site visits to each of the potential zones to examine qualitative data focused on each community's capacity to pilot, refine, and model early education initiatives and partnerships. The E3Z initiative will be implemented over the three-year period of the RT3-ELC grant.<sup>102</sup>

**FIGURE 6.1 EARLY EDUCATION EMPOWERMENT ZONES (E3ZS)<sup>103</sup>**



## ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

Research has shown that investments made in early childhood education produce the greatest return in terms of human capital. High-quality early education yields a significant long-term investment through increased workforce productivity and reduced societal costs of welfare and crime. Every \$1 invested in high-quality early education can save up to \$7 down the road (see Figure 6.2).

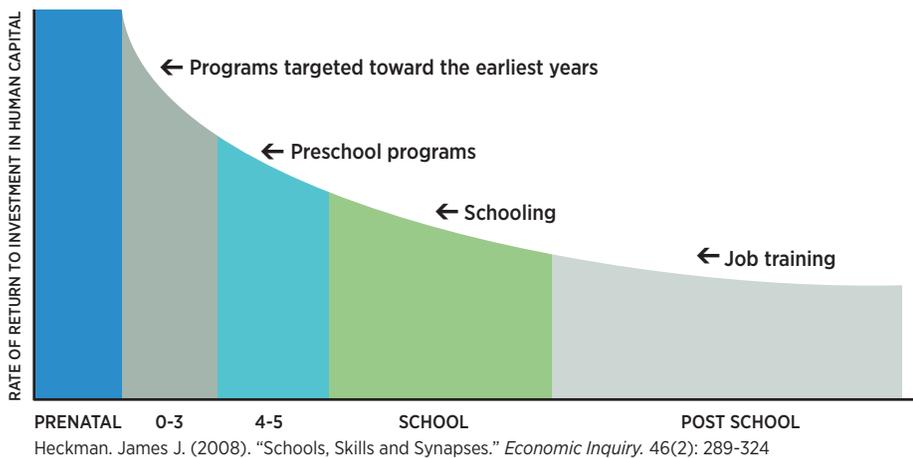
Since the evaluations of the quality of Georgia's early learning environment in 2009, the state has taken aggressive action to improve both quality and access to early learning programs, especially for children with the greatest needs. Under DECAL's leadership, the state has done the following:

1. Established the Quality Rated program;
2. Implemented the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards;
3. Provided resources for statewide family and community engagement grants;
4. Expanded center-based home visitation programs for family, friend and neighbor care for children being cared for in private homes;
5. Continued to increase the knowledge and competencies of educators who work in the early care industry; and
6. Developed a comprehensive assessment system for early learning.

<sup>101</sup> Other RT3-ELC participating agencies include the Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Public Broadcasting, the Technical College System of Georgia, the University System of Georgia, the Georgia Family Connection Partnership, the Department of Community Affairs, the Department of Economic Development, the Department of Public Health, the Department of Human Services, the Governor's Office for Children and Families, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, and the Professional Standards Commission.

<sup>102</sup> Bright From the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. Selection Process Completed for Early Education Empowerment Zones [Press release]. September 2014.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

**FIGURE 6.2 RETURNS TO A UNIT DOLLAR INVESTED**

All of these activities are reestablishing Georgia as a national leader in early learning. An independent evaluation of the Georgia Pre-K Program currently being conducted by the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is already showing the positive impacts of the Pre-K Program on students. When comparing kindergarten outcomes of students who attended Georgia's Pre-K Program and those who did not, the authors found the following:

Strong evidence that Georgia's Pre-K provides a beneficial experience for enhancing school readiness skills for all children — boys and girls, those from families of different income levels, and children with differing levels of English language proficiency. These results were found for most measures in the areas of language, literacy, math, and general knowledge, suggesting that participation in Georgia's Pre-K provides children with positive learning opportunities across a broad range of developmental domains.<sup>104</sup>

In addition, more than 430 early learning programs (licensed child care centers and family child care homes) have signed up to participate in Quality Rated. Those programs serve more than 5,000 high-need children, those that benefit the most from high-quality early learning. It is too soon to know the impact of the RT3-ELC grant. However, the grant has provided an infusion of resources for Georgia to take its quality and access reforms to the next level.

Despite this, challenges remain. The quality improvements occurring under Quality Rated are supported by business and philanthropic dollars. No state funding has been allocated for Quality Rated. Georgia will also have to develop a sustainability plan for the visionary programs being implemented under the RT3-ELC when that funding ends after the grant period. Georgia's Pre-K Program is funded by the lottery, proceeds of which must be shared with the HOPE Scholarship Program. Georgia leaders should continue to investigate innovative strategies for funding the program at levels that ensure high quality and accessibility for all children. This is especially true for programs aimed at its youngest citizens — infants through preschoolers — as the lottery funding is only specified for the Pre-K Program that serves 4-year-olds.

The importance of early learning has become increasingly visible in recent years, only reemphasizing what early learning educators and researchers have known for some time: high-quality early learning is the building block for future student success. Transforming the educational system of our state starts with our youngest citizens. These children will lead the way in strengthening our educational system and our economic competitiveness. Georgia has accepted the challenge to once again lead the nation in early learning. Early indications are that we can be successful. But long-term commitments of resources will be necessary to sustain that leadership role.

<sup>104</sup> Peisner-Feinberg, E.S., Schaaf, J.M., LaForett, D.R., Hildebrandt, L.M., & Sideris, J. *Effects of Georgia's Pre-K Program on Children's School Readiness Skills: Findings from the 2012-2013 Evaluation Study [Executive Summary]*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute. 2014.



## Postsecondary Success — The Key to Georgia's Workforce

### ISSUE OVERVIEW

Nine million Americans are out of work.<sup>105</sup> The US unemployment rate is still higher than pre-recession levels. Georgia's unemployment rate remains among the highest in the nation.<sup>106, 107</sup> Forecasts indicate that by 2020, the labor market will have opportunities and challenges:

- There will be 55 million job openings in the economy: 24 million openings from newly created jobs and 31 million openings due to baby boom retirements.
- 65 percent of all jobs will require post-secondary training beyond high school. Individuals who only possess a high school diploma will have fewer employment options.
- Occupations in healthcare, community services, and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) will grow the fastest but also will require high levels of post-secondary education.
- At its current production rate, by 2020, the United States will face a shortfall of 5 million workers with a postsecondary education.<sup>108</sup>

Additionally, U.S. manufacturing growth is back on the rise. After a 30-year decline in domestic manufacturing jobs, there has been modest growth in the past five years. Employers are struggling to find qualified applicants for these positions — a trend likely to continue through 2020.<sup>109</sup>

**FIGURE 7.1 THE HARDEST JOBS TO FILL NATIONALLY<sup>110</sup>**



As if finding a candidate with the credentials and education (hard skills) for work were not hard enough, once candidates are found, other deficits may become apparent. Some otherwise qualified candidates lack analytical skills, critical-thinking skills, creativity, and presentation skills (soft skills).<sup>111</sup>

105 Bureau of Labor Statistics. *October 2014 Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey*. Data extracted on November 18, 2014.

106 Georgia Department of Labor. *September 2014 Labor Market Information*. Retrieved from <http://www.dol.state.ga.us/>. Data extracted on November 18, 2014.

107 Bureau of Labor Statistics. *October 2014 Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey*. Data extracted on November 18, 2014.

108 Center on Education and the Workforce. *Recovery Job Growth and Education Requirements through 2020*. 2013. Retrieved from Georgetown Public Policy Institute.

109 Bureau of Labor Statistics. *ManpowerGoup2013 Talent Shortage Survey*. Washington, DC; Society for Human Resource Management. 2013.

110 Ibid.

111 Institute for a Competitive Workforce. *Help Wanted 2012 Addressing the Skills Gap*. Washington, DC: 2012.

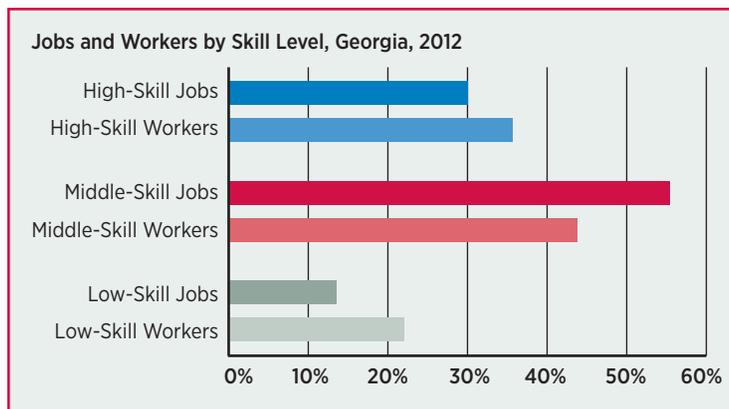
**FIGURE 7.2 NATIONAL ONGOING UNEMPLOYMENT<sup>112</sup>**

address workforce gaps.<sup>113</sup> Georgia is facing the same hurdles and must address these issues to increase its economic competitiveness.

### SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

#### Middle Skills Workers Wanted

Georgia employers, economic developers, and others face a shortage of technically skilled workers.<sup>114</sup> Like the nation, Georgia has a surplus of middle-skill jobs and not enough talented employees to fill them. These jobs require education beyond high school but not a four-year degree. Middle-skills jobs make up the largest part of the American and Georgian labor market. Demand for these jobs will remain strong into the next decade.<sup>115</sup>

**FIGURE 7.3 GEORGIA'S MIDDLE SKILLS GAP<sup>116</sup>**

clusters ranging from finance to manufacturing, to transportation logistics, to government administration. In 2012, Governor Nathan Deal signed into law a requirement that all districts offer career clusters to their students.

Career awareness activities begin for Georgia students in elementary school with exposure to all of the career clusters. Middle school students begin determining their work preferences through career aptitude tests and interest inventories in eighth grade. Once in high school, students are able to pick a career cluster to focus on as they move toward graduation. Each cluster contains several pathways of study that include national industry-recognized credentials that students can take. Students can have more than one pathway; create their own advanced academic, fine arts, or world language pathway; or completely change their pathway along their way to graduation. The Georgia school accountability measure, known as the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI), takes the percentage of students graduating with a completed pathway into consideration as a part of its calculation. This helps incentivize the promotion of career awareness in Georgia schools.

Employers nation-wide are trying to address the talent shortage. Nearly half of employers are training their existing employees and offering incentives for acquiring new skills. Fewer proportions of employers are building successive management plans, and only about two out of every 10 are using strategic partnerships with education institutions, helping design curriculum, and sponsoring courses and prospects to

Notably, throughout the economic downturn, STEM skills have remained in demand throughout Georgia (see Figure 7.4).

#### K-12 Strategies

At the K-12 level, Georgia has implemented a notable strategy to address workforce preparedness. The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) partnered with the Georgia Chamber of Commerce to vet career paths in Georgia schools to match the needs of Georgia industry members, local chambers of commerce, and employers.

The result of this work is 17 available career

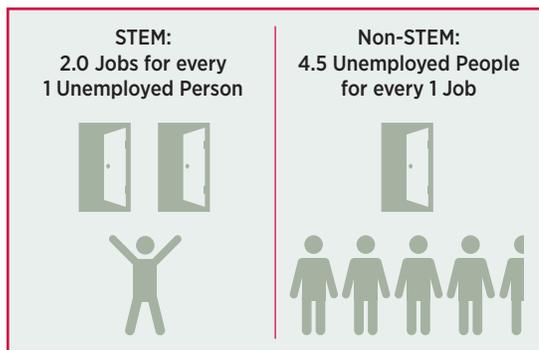
<sup>112</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics. *ManpowerGoup2013 Talent Shortage Survey*. Washington, DC: Society for Human Resource Management. 2013.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Georgia Chamber of Commerce. *Business Management and Administration: CTAE Survey Summary*. Athens: Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia. 2012.

<sup>115</sup> National Skills Coalition. *Georgia's Forgotten Middle: Analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment by State, May 2012 and American Community Survey Data*, 2012. Washington, DC. 2014.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

**FIGURE 7.4 STEM SKILLS IN DEMAND IN GEORGIA<sup>117</sup>****Post-Secondary Completion**

Given that a majority of new jobs will require postsecondary education, what students do after high school graduation is a critically important decision. In 2011, Governor Deal launched Complete College Georgia (CCG). CCG is a statewide initiative to improve college completion with a goal of producing 250,000 more postsecondary graduates than we are on course to produce by 2020. Since the initiative's launch, a focus on college completion at the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) and University System of Georgia (USG) has become more prominent throughout both systems.

- 1. Shortening time to degree:** Students who progress more slowly toward their degrees are more likely to drop out.<sup>118</sup> Acknowledging credits for prior knowledge that students bring with them through alternative settings (such as Advanced Placement tests and Prior Learning Assessments<sup>119</sup>) is another aspect of CCG. TCSG is also working on system-wide early alert technology to help each institution detect when a student is struggling in a class so that staff may provide support (tutoring, child care, etc.) before the end of the course.
- 2. Restructuring delivery:** Both systems are focused on innovation in technology and distance-learning, and are striving to provide clear course enrollment pathways and placements for new and returning students.<sup>120</sup>
- 3. Strengthening remedial courses:** Students requiring remediation have lower graduation rates than those who do not.<sup>121</sup> Both higher education systems are working to redesign remedial courses to improve the remedial graduation rate.

A natural evolution of this work has been “Go Back. Move Ahead,” announced by Governor Deal in July 2014. To reach the CCG’s goal for 2020, 60,000–90,000 graduates will have to be former students returning to campus. “Go Back. Move Ahead” is aimed at providing former students who have college credits the tools to come back and complete their higher education.<sup>122</sup>

As an additional part of CCG, USG manages the STEM Initiative, which helps address the demand for STEM workers in multiple institutions. STEM degree programs have a high rate of students transferring to non-STEM disciplines. Initial semesters of challenging study in foundational mathematics and science courses are one of the reasons for the high transfer rate. The STEM Initiative aims to improve completion rates in these courses.<sup>123</sup>

In 2014, Governor Deal created the High Demand Career Initiative to allow state partners involved in training Georgia’s future workforce to hear directly from the private sector about industry needs (i.e., degrees/majors, certificates, courses, skill sets, etc.). Sector-focused meetings highlighted growing industries within the state and included film, television, and interactive entertainment; information technology; defense; aerospace; healthcare; auto manufacturing; agriculture; logistics; and more — such as energy and financial services.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>117</sup> Change the Equation. *Vital Signs Georgia*. November 2012. Retrieved from Stem Georgia: <http://stemgeorgia.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/STEM-Vital-Signs2012.pdf>

<sup>118</sup> Complete College America. *Time is the Enemy*. 2011. Retrieved from [http://www.completecollege.org/docs/Time\\_Is\\_the\\_Enemy.pdf](http://www.completecollege.org/docs/Time_Is_the_Enemy.pdf)

<sup>119</sup> Prior Learning Assessments provide a pathway to enable primarily nontraditional students who have stopped short of a degree but who have acquired knowledge through other means (e.g., military or job-related experience) a chance to receive credit for that education.

<sup>120</sup> The University System of Georgia and Technical College System of Georgia. *Complete College Georgia: Georgia’s Higher Education Completion Plan 2012*. Atlanta: 2012.

<sup>121</sup> Complete College America. *Georgia, 2011 Data Sheet*. College Completion Data. Indianapolis: 2011.

<sup>122</sup> Williams, D. “State to College Dropouts: Please Come Back to School.” *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, p. 7A, August 1–7, 2014.

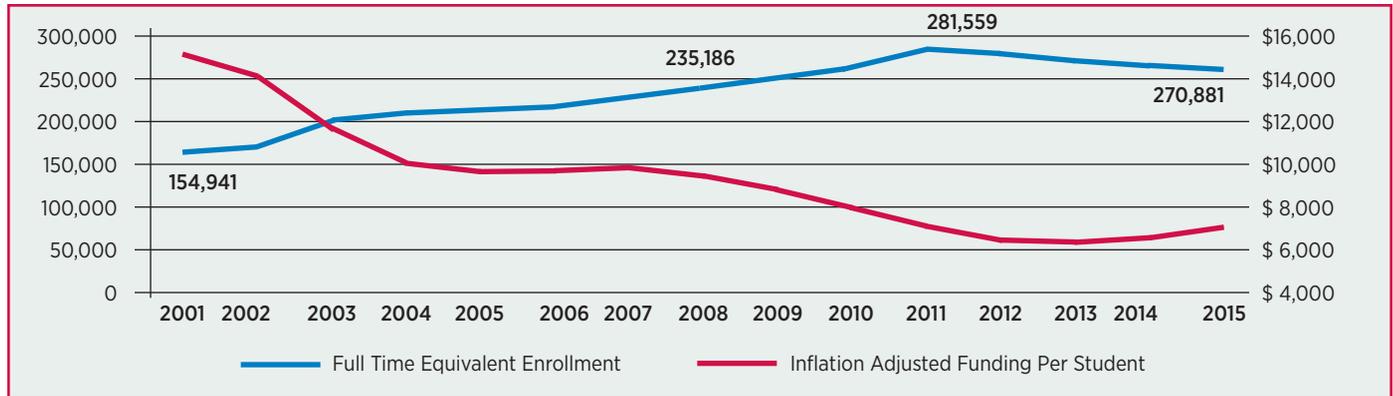
<sup>123</sup> The University System of Georgia and Technical College System of Georgia. *Complete College Georgia: Georgia’s Higher Education Completion Plan 2012*. Atlanta: 2012.

<sup>124</sup> Georgia Department of Economic Development. *High Demand Career Initiative, Preparing Georgia’s Future Workforce Now*. 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.georgia.org/competitive-advantages/workforce-division/programs-initiatives/high-demand-career-initiative-hdci/>

### Cost of Higher Education

Aside from these positive areas of leadership, public funding is another important aspect of postsecondary education in Georgia. Deep cuts in state funding have affected USG and TCSG. State funding per full-time equivalent student is \$7,158, 52 percent below what it was in 2001 in inflation-adjusted dollars.<sup>125</sup> The systems have responded by consolidating institutions, increasing class sizes, taking on part-time instructors, and offering fewer courses. Predictably, the cuts have resulted in significantly increased tuition rates in recent years.<sup>126,127</sup>

**FIGURE 7.5 ENROLLMENT AND FUNDING TRENDS FOR THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF GEORGIA, 2001-2015<sup>128</sup>**



Tuition and fees have increased as much as 89 percent at the Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) from fall 2008 to fall 2014. On average, tuition and fees increased 67 percent across USG, and TCSG tuition is up 65 percent for the same time span.<sup>129</sup> These cost increases are happening while family incomes are falling and state poverty rates are increasing. Median family income in Georgia is still lower than it was pre-recession, and more than 60 percent of students are low-income, as measured by participation in the federal Pell Grant program.<sup>130</sup>

Compounding decreased state funding and increased tuition costs, the state's HOPE Grant<sup>131</sup> and HOPE Scholarship<sup>132</sup> do not provide the level of financial support to students that they once did. In 2011, state funding for mandatory fees and books was eliminated, and tuition funding was reduced from full coverage. Requirements also became more restrictive: HOPE support for remedial courses was discontinued. To be eligible for the HOPE Scholarship, high school students graduating after May 2015 must have two advanced course credits.<sup>133</sup> For the HOPE Grant, the GPA required to be maintained while in college rose from 2.0 to 3.0. As a result, the number of full-time equivalent students within the TCSG plunged by nearly a quarter between 2011 and 2012. USG was also affected, but by a much smaller proportion.<sup>134</sup>

<sup>125</sup> Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. *Georgia Budget Primer 2015*. Atlanta: 2014.

<sup>126</sup> State funding for fiscal year 2015 (beginning July 2014) did slightly increase compared to the year prior, but most funding is directed to rising personnel retirement and health care expenses, with little addressing instruction cuts.

<sup>127</sup> Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. *Georgia Budget Primer 2015*. Atlanta: 2014.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. Primary source: Georgia 2001-2015 Fiscal Year Budgets; Board of Regents, University System of Georgia, fall semester enrollment reports; CPI Inflation Calculator, Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor.

<sup>129</sup> Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. *Georgia Budget Primer 2015*. Atlanta: 2014.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Georgia's HOPE Grant (a separate program from the HOPE Scholarship) is available to Georgia residents who are working toward a certificate or diploma (continuing education programs are not eligible) at an eligible college or university in Georgia. Eligible institutions are listed at [www.gacollege411.org](http://www.gacollege411.org).

<sup>132</sup> Georgia's HOPE Scholarship is available to Georgia residents who have demonstrated academic achievement. The scholarship provides money to assist students with their educational costs of attending a HOPE eligible postsecondary institution located in Georgia. Eligible institutions are listed at [www.gacollege411.org](http://www.gacollege411.org).

<sup>133</sup> Advanced credit requirements will continue to increase over the next three years. By 2017, graduating students must have four full approved advanced academic credits to be eligible.

<sup>134</sup> Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. *Georgia Budget Primer 2015*. July 2014. Primary source: Board of Regents, University System of Georgia. Committee of the Whole: Finance and Business Operations Agenda. September 11, 2013. [http://www.usg.edu/regents/documents/board\\_meetings/agenda\\_2013\\_09.pdf](http://www.usg.edu/regents/documents/board_meetings/agenda_2013_09.pdf)

**TABLE 7.6 TCSG ENROLLMENT AND HOPE RECIPIENTS (SCHOLARSHIP OR GRANT)<sup>135</sup>**

Year <sup>136</sup>	Total Enrollment	Percentage of Total Enrollment Receiving HOPE
2011	189,216	76.7%
2012	149,840	66.9%
2013	151,166	57.3%
2014	151,131	54.9%

Responding to the enrollment decrease, the General Assembly reversed the GPA requirement for the HOPE Grant back to 2.0 in 2013. As of 2014, TCSG enrollment seems to have leveled off, but it is still not back to what it was in 2011.

For school year 2014–2015, the HOPE Grant covers about 72 percent of tuition for full-time TCSG students. The HOPE Scholarship covers an average of 84 percent of tuition for full-time USG students. In recent years, the

General Assembly has allocated additional funding for the creation of Strategic Industries Workforce Development Grants and Zell Miller Grants to diminish costs for TCSG students.

School year 2013–2014 marked the launch of Strategic Industries Workforce Development Grants, which offer up to \$1,000 to students in areas of study with high job placement. When combined with HOPE Grants, these funds can cover tuition for eligible TCSG students.<sup>137</sup> Program funding increased by \$5 million this year, and funding areas have expanded, now including the following areas of study:

- Practical nursing,
- Commercial truck driving,
- Early childhood care and education,
- Computer technology,
- Diesel equipment technology,
- Health science, and
- Welding and joining technology.

The Zell Miller Grant is a new grant for TCSG students beginning in the 2014–2015 school year. It covers 100 percent of tuition for those who maintain a 3.5 grade point average. While promising, many may struggle to maintain the funding due to the high GPA requirement.<sup>138</sup>

## **ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA**

To increase college completion rates and produce a competitive workforce, Georgia is on the right path with some of its new initiatives.

- Career clusters
- Complete College Georgia (including the STEM Initiative and “Go Back. Move Ahead”)
- High Demand Career Initiative
- Strategic Industries Workforce Development Grants
- Zell Miller Grants

These are promising steps for promoting college completion. However, the cost of postsecondary education in Georgia has increased since 2008, while state funding for higher education — including funding and access to the HOPE Scholarship and HOPE Grant — has declined.

<sup>135</sup> Technical College System of Georgia. *TCSG Data Center* [Report # CR1686] (data from various sources). Atlanta: November 25, 2014.

<sup>136</sup> TCSG Enrollment is based on fiscal year terms instead of annual year to match the Georgia Student Finance Commission time period for 2012–2014.

<sup>137</sup> Suggs, C. *Overview: 2015 Fiscal Year Budget for Lottery-Funded Programs*. January 2014. Retrieved from Georgia Budget and Policy Institute: <http://gbpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Overview-2015-Fiscal-Year-Budget-for-Lottery-Funded-Programs.pdf>. Primary Source: Governor Nathan Deal, State of the State Address [Press release]. January 15, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.gov.georgia.gov/press-releases/2014-01-15/deal-deep-freeze-over-georgia-s-economy-warms>

<sup>138</sup> Suggs, C. *Overview: 2015 Fiscal Year Budget for Lottery-Funded Programs*. January 2014. Retrieved from Georgia Budget and Policy Institute: <http://gbpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Overview-2015-Fiscal-Year-Budget-for-Lottery-Funded-Programs.pdf>

Outcomes of Georgia's higher education institutions are becoming all the more important to their continued vitality. Currently, funding for USG and TCSG is calculated based on enrollment. However, both systems are moving to a performance funding model beginning in FY2016 (July 2015). Student performance, including the number of students who graduate and the number of students who meet benchmark indicators of progress, will determine funding levels for institutions. Funding levels for FY2015 (though very low per student when compared to the early 2000s) will serve as the baseline for the years ahead.

With strained financial resources, Georgia higher education institutions are focused on improving their efficiency and effectiveness at supporting students through graduation. As higher education institutions begin to implement new business-like policies, increased public/private partnerships are a natural fit.<sup>139</sup> Higher education is, after all, the end of the talent pipeline that prepares students for the workforce. Additionally, research shows that if college graduates have an internship or job that allows them to apply what they have learned in the classroom, they are more likely to become employees actively engaged in the workplace.<sup>140</sup>

At the same time, educators must realize that only about one out of every 10 business leaders strongly agree that current college graduates have the skills and competencies needed for success on the job.<sup>141</sup> Georgia has significantly improved the alignment of the K-12 school system with the needs of the business community through the career clusters program. In higher education, the Strategic Industries Workforce Development Grant is one strategy addressing workforce needs in the state, and the High Demand Career Initiative is an effort to be watched in the years ahead. Going a step further, the state must consider how to systemically enhance the career success of graduates from its institutions of higher education, no matter their field of study.

The majority of national job growth by 2020 will come from Baby Boom retirements. The goal of producing 250,000 more postsecondary graduates by 2020 is not only an education goal but an economic imperative. As Georgia moves forward, stakeholders must continually align public and private budgets and initiatives with a workforce development strategic plan to meet this goal. Our economy depends on it.

139 Suggs, C. *Overview: 2015 Fiscal Year Budget for Higher Education*. January 2014. Retrieved from Georgia Budget and Policy Institute: <http://gbpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Overview-2015-Higher-Ed.pdf>

140 Gallup. *2014 Gallup-Perdue Index Report*.

141 Gallup. *What America Needs to Know about Higher Education Redesign: The 2013 Lumina Study of the American Public's Opinion on Higher Education and the US Business Leaders Poll on Higher Education*. 2014.



## Charter Schools — New Challenges

### ISSUE OVERVIEW

Charter schools were developed to improve our nation's public schools and offer parents another public school option to meet their children's particular needs. Charter schools are public schools that operate under the terms of a charter, or contract, with an authorizer, such as the state or local boards of education. Charter schools receive flexibility from certain state and local rules in exchange for a higher degree of accountability for increasing student achievement.<sup>142</sup>

Since their inception more than 20 years ago, charter schools have played an ever-increasing role in education reform efforts across the United States. Charter school students now comprise more than four percent of the total public school population nationwide, a proportion that continues to grow every year.<sup>143</sup> During the 2013–2014 school year, charter schools served approximately 2.57 million students, a 100 percent increase since 2007.<sup>144</sup>

However, debate has continued over the value of charter schools, their quality compared to traditional schools, their role as an incubator for best practices of student learning, among other issues. The Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University has been studying these questions about charter schools across multiple states, including Georgia. In its most recent report, CREDO described several key findings concerning charter schools nationwide.<sup>145</sup>

- Compared to traditional public school counterparts, 25 percent of charter schools showed significantly stronger growth in reading scores/outcomes, 56 percent were not significantly different, and 19 percent showed less growth.
- In mathematics, compared to traditional public school counterparts, 29 percent of charters had stronger growth, 40 percent were not significantly different, and 31 percent showed less growth.
- Students living in poverty, African American students, and English language learners in charter schools posted significantly higher learning gains in both reading and math than their traditional school counterparts (see Table 8.1).

142 Georgia Department of Education. *General Frequently Asked Questions*. 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Charter-Schools/Pages/General-Frequently-Asked-Questions.aspx>

143 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. *Get the Facts*. 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.publiccharters.org/get-the-facts/>

144 Ibid.

145 Center for Research on Education Outcomes. *National Charter School Study*. Stanford, CA: 2013.

**TABLE 8.1 SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT CHARTER IMPACTS BY STUDENT GROUP<sup>146</sup>**

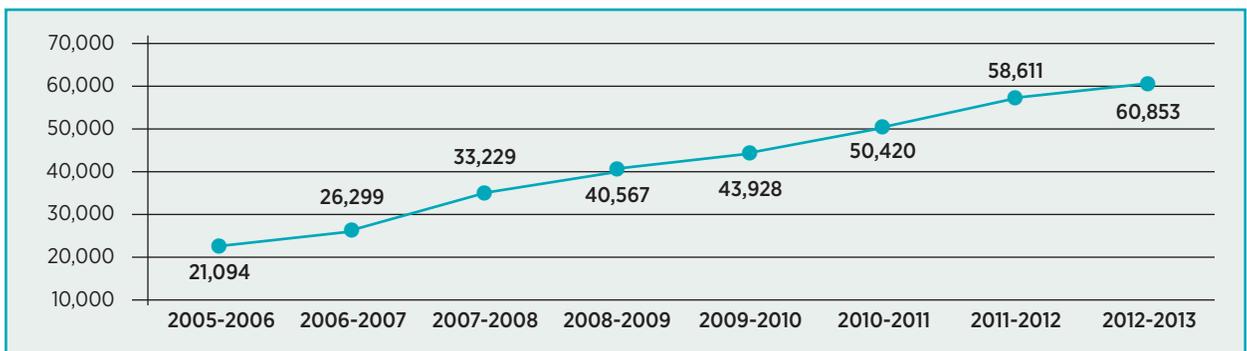
Student Group	Reading	Math
White	Negative	Negative
Black	Positive	Positive
Black Poverty	Positive	Positive
Black Non Poverty	Similar	Similar
Hispanic	Similar	Similar
Hispanic Poverty	Positive	Positive
Hispanic Non Poverty	Negative	Negative
Hispanic ELL	Positive	Positive
Hispanic Non ELL	Positive	Similar
Asian	Similar	Negative
Students in Poverty	Positive	Positive
English Language Learners (ELL)	Positive	Positive
Special Education	Similar	Positive

The question about charter schools is no longer a simple pro or con. Charters produce above-average outcomes for some subgroups, especially children in poverty and English language learners, and mixed outcomes for other subgroups. The questions have shifted: What can be done to get charters to produce outstanding outcomes for all children? Is the state improving or eventually closing low-performing charter schools?

## SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

### Charters in Georgia

Georgia has a robust charter community. In 2013–2014, more than 60,000 students were enrolled in a charter school. This annual trend shows an increase in charter school enrollment of approximately 5 percent a year (see Figure 8.1).<sup>147</sup>

**FIGURE 8.1 8-YEAR HISTORY OF GEORGIA CHARTER SCHOOL ENROLLMENT (EXCLUDING CHARTER SYSTEMS)<sup>148</sup>**

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Georgia Department of Education. *Chartering in Georgia: The Charter Schools Division Annual Report for 2012–2013*. Atlanta, 2013.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

### Types of Charters and Authorizers

Currently, Georgia has 110 charter schools. Of those, 80 are start-up charter schools, which are schools that did not exist prior to becoming a charter. Thirty are conversion charter schools, meaning they previously existed as traditional public schools and subsequently entered into charter contracts with the district or the state to gain additional flexibility in exchange for greater accountability. (Georgia also is home to what is termed “charter systems.” For clarity, this issue will not deal with charter systems, as they are different than charter schools. For more information on charter systems, see Issue 3.)

The majority of charter schools in Georgia are authorized by their local boards of education. An authorizer is the entity that has been granted the authority to create charter schools. Authorizers make decisions regarding the approval and renewal of charters, and they conduct ongoing oversight to evaluate performance, monitor compliance, and enforce the terms of the charter.<sup>149</sup>

Georgia also has the State Charter Schools Commission (SCSC), which is a state-level, independent charter school authorizing entity. The SCSC has the power to approve or deny petitions for state schools and renew, not renew, or terminate existing state charter school contracts. The SCSC primarily authorizes charter schools with a statewide attendance zone or charters that have been denied or not acted upon by the local school board.<sup>150</sup> For the 2013–2014 school year, the SCSC has authorized 15 charter school contracts.<sup>151</sup>

### Charters in Georgia

Charter schools can also serve communities with existing strong schools when local leaders want to create different educational opportunities, such as a specific academic focus or specialized services for students with particular needs. Several of Georgia’s charter schools serve high numbers of students who do not speak English as a first language, for example the International Community School in DeKalb County. Although originally designed to meet the needs of a large refugee population in DeKalb County, the school currently has a student population made up of about 50 percent English-proficient speakers whose parents enrolled them in order to participate in a multicultural, diverse school setting.

Charter schools can also serve communities with existing strong schools, when local leaders want to create different educational opportunities — such as a specific academic focus or specialized services for students with particular needs. Several of Georgia’s charter schools serve high numbers of students who do not speak English as a first language — such as the International Community School in DeKalb County. Originally designed to meet the needs of a large refugee population in DeKalb County, about 50 percent of the current student population comes from English-proficient speakers whose parents enrolled them in order to participate in a school setting that was multicultural and diverse.

College and Career Academies (CCAs) are Georgia’s largest segment of charter schools. These high school-level academies work closely with local businesses to meet the workforce needs of the community and build those needs into the curriculum offered at the school.

149 Georgia Department of Education. *General Frequently Asked Questions*. 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Charter-Schools/Pages/General-Frequently-Asked-Questions.aspx>

150 State Charter Schools Commission. *Petition Review Process*. Atlanta: . 2014.

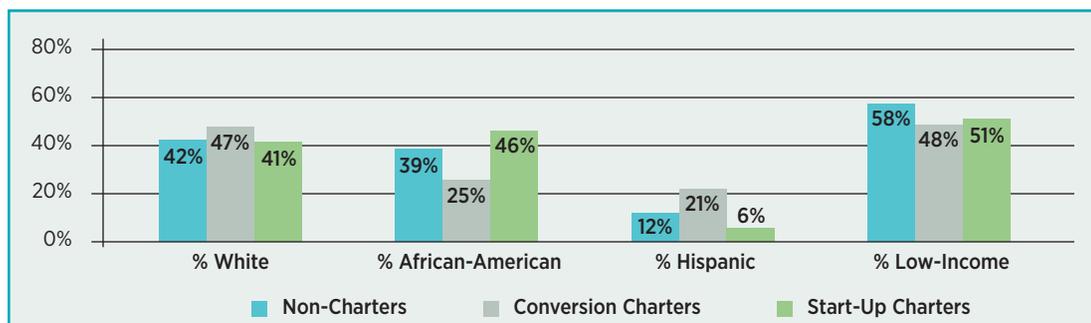
151 State Charter Schools Commission. (2014). *Approved Charter Contracts*. 2014. Retrieved from State Charter Contracts: <https://scsc.georgia.gov/approved-charter-contracts>

According to state law, a CCA is a “specialized charter school established by a partnership which demonstrates collaboration between business, industry, and community stakeholders to advance workforce development.”<sup>152</sup> There are 29 CCAs across the state, serving more than 38 school systems. When attending CCAs, students can earn college credit while still in high school. For example, students enrolled in the Decatur Career Academy, which offers dual enrollment at DeVry Advantage Academy and DeKalb Technical College, can graduate with a high school diploma and an associate’s degree in health IT.<sup>153</sup>

### Charter Outcomes in Georgia

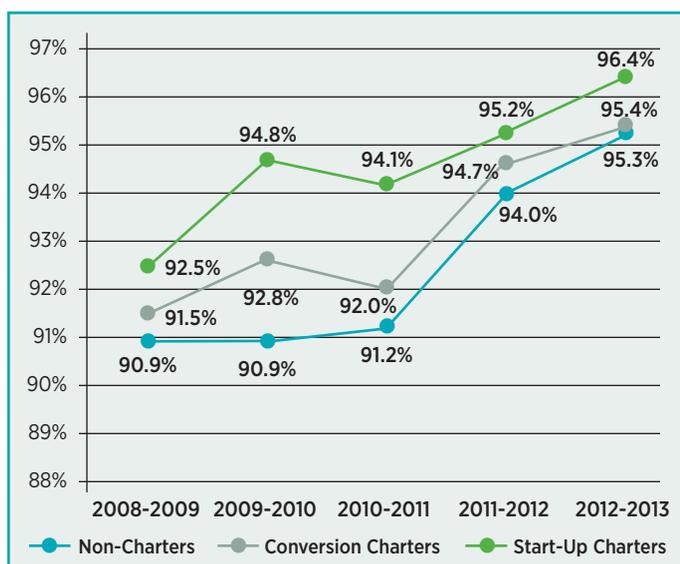
Research points to charters being highly effective for poor and minority students. In Georgia, conversion charters serve a higher percentage of white and Hispanic students and a lower percentage of African American students than noncharter schools. Moreover, charter schools (both conversion and start-up) in Georgia serve a lower percentage of low-income students relative to noncharters (see Figure 8.2).<sup>154</sup>

**FIGURE 8.2 2012-2013 STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS<sup>155</sup>**

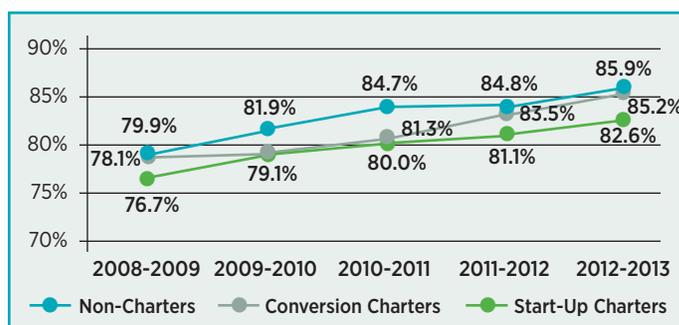


In terms of outcomes, reflecting national trends, students in both conversion and start-up charters performed slightly better on their end-of-grade reading assessments but not as well in math (see Figures 8.3 and 8.4).

**FIGURE 8.3 5-YEAR CRCT READING PERFORMANCE TREND (% MEETING/EXCEEDING)<sup>156</sup>**



**FIGURE 8.4 5-YEAR CRCT MATH PERFORMANCE TREND (% MEETING/EXCEEDING)<sup>157</sup>**



152 Johnson, L. “Career Academies Answer Local Job Skill Need.” *Atlanta Business Chronicle*. October 10, 2014.

153 Ibid.

154 Georgia Department of Education. (2013). *Chartering in Georgia: The Charter Schools Division Annual Report for 2012-2013*. Atlanta: 2013.

155 Ibid.

156 Ibid.

157 Ibid.

## Accountability

To increase the effectiveness of charters in Georgia, the GaDOE announced new accountability measures for charter schools opening in 2014 or later. To better serve students, measures of charter effectiveness will now include two new components: 1) the school's College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI)<sup>158</sup> and 2) a beating-the-odds measure.

For charter schools opening in 2014 or later, using Year 1 of the charter contract as a baseline, the CCRPI goals are as follows:<sup>159</sup>

- The charter school's CCRPI score must be equal to or better than both the state and local district in Year 2, and
- Better than both the State and local district in Years 3 through 3 of the contract.

Moreover, for a charter school opening in 2014 or later, during each year of its first five-year charter term, the school must “beat the odds” as determined by a formula measuring expected student growth. The beating the odds measure will take into account student demographics — including race and poverty — and other school based factors such as size, student-teacher ratio, locale type (city, town, rural), etc.<sup>160</sup>

A school will be considered “beating the odds” when it does as good as or better than other similar schools in Georgia. The key question for the renewal of charter status is whether a school is beating-the-odds, i.e. doing better than schools across the state serving similar students in similar situations measure. The comparison to local and state CCRPI averages will only become significant for those schools not beating the odds.<sup>161</sup>

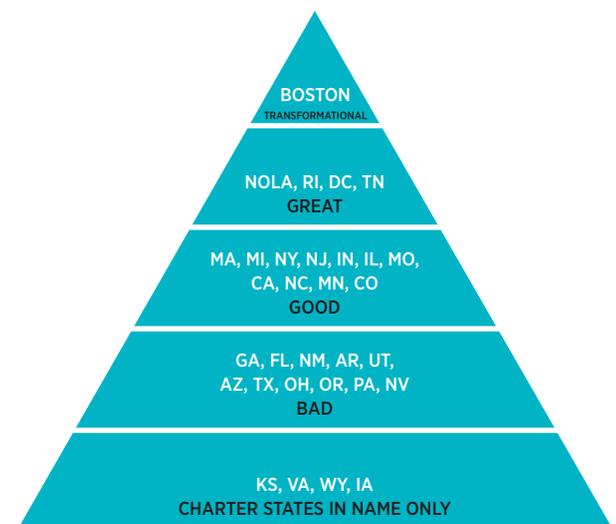
## ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

Georgia has built a good foundation for charter schools in the state. However, in order to fully capitalize on the benefits of charters, some changes need to be made. In one analysis of states' charter school quality conducted by the Fordham Institute, Georgia ranked as “bad” (see Figure 8.5).<sup>162</sup>

The states that fall into the “bad” category do so because of test-score gains as measured by CREDO. These states — including Georgia — earn this rating due to some combination of low-quality authorizers (unselective when approving charters, lacking oversight, unwilling to shut down low performers, etc.) and mediocre funding. Authorizer accountability and funding are areas where Georgia can focus and improve.

With the new CCRPI and beating-the-odds measures on charter schools, Georgia is raising the stakes on accountability for charter schools. Commensurate accountability for authorizers is needed as well. The State Charter School Commission (SCSC) underwent an evaluation by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) to understand their own value adds and focus on strengths and areas of improvement. Based on NACSA's *Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing*, this evaluation focuses on and is organized according to the following five areas:<sup>163</sup>

FIGURE 8.5 HIERARCHY OF CHARTER SCHOOL QUALITY



158 The CCRPI is a school improvement, accountability, and communication measure. It rates schools using an index score comprising multiple measures, including student achievement, progress measures of student growth, achievement gap closures, efforts to prepare students for college and/or career, school climate, and financial effectiveness.

159 Georgia Department of Education. *CCRPI and Beating the Odds: Charter School*. Atlanta: 2014.

160 Ibid.

161 Ibid.

162 Petrilli, M. “The Wise Wonks’ Heirarchy of Charter School Quality.” *Education Next*. June 6, 2014.

163 National Association of Charter School Authorizers. *NACSA Evaluation Report*. Chicago. 2014.

1. **Application decision-making** — Does the authorizer approve applications based on applicants' demonstrated preparation and capacity to open and operate a quality charter school?
2. **Performance management** — Does the authorizer have effective systems for establishing and monitoring school performance expectations and for holding schools accountable as necessary to protect student and public interests?
3. **Performance-based accountability** — Does the authorizer have rigorous, appropriate standards by which it holds schools accountable for results? Are decisions made with the intent to maintain high standards and protect the students' and the public's interests?
4. **Autonomy** — Do schools have the autonomy to which they are entitled?
5. **Organizational capacity** — To what extent do the organizational structure and systems support quality-authorizing practices and forward the authorizer's mission?

While the SCSC works to implement and formalize the recommendations, it is suggested that local school districts also evaluate their own performance in authorizing charters. Many local school board members do not have a clear vision of how to incorporate charter schools into the strategic plan of the district nor how to promote good charter schools, improve struggling ones, and shut down ineffective ones. Clear guidelines around authorizer roles and accountability could provide improvements across the entire charter sector.

The second area of improvement concerns how charter schools are funded. Charter schools that are authorized by their local school boards are funded much in the same way as traditional schools. They receive state and local money primarily based on the QBE (Quality Basic Education) calculation. (For a complete discussion of QBE and school funding, see Issue 5.) However, charter schools do not receive any state or local funding for facilities or other innovations such as longer school days or expanded learning time.

Charters authorized by the SCSC receive state funding based on the QBE formula; however, since they are not associated with a particular school district, no local funds go toward these schools. To compensate for the lack of local funds, the state provides these schools with a charter supplement equal to the average amount of local revenue of the five school districts with the lowest assessed valuation per student. A 2014 study estimated that charter schools in Georgia, on average, receive about 27 percent less total per student funding than traditional public schools.<sup>164</sup>

Another related area that Georgia must contend with is virtual charters. The SCSC currently authorizes three statewide virtual charter schools: Georgia Cyber Academy, Georgia Connections Academy, and Provost Academy. Between them, they enroll more than 16,000 students statewide. There is no charge to attend any of these schools, and state funding is the primary resource. There are many outstanding questions around these virtual schools, including how to best support them, levels of appropriate funding, and student outcomes. The SCSC is currently conducting a national virtual charter school impact study to increase its understanding of three issues:

1. What is the best way to provide services?
2. How are virtual charters performing generally?
3. Which virtual charters are producing better outcomes and why?

The results of the study are expected in 2015 and will inform how Georgia funds and supports virtual charter schools moving forward.

Finally, during his reelection, Governor Nathan Deal announced that he is interested in exploring the establishment of a statewide recovery district, similar to recovery districts in Louisiana and Tennessee. Generally speaking, a recovery district would allow the state to take over chronically struggling schools and turn them into state-run charter schools, freeing them from the requirements of local school boards. Governor Deal has stated that he is not currently tied to any specific model of how a recovery district would work in Georgia, but he does plan to ask lawmakers to study its feasibility.

The original vision for charter schools actually came from the president of the American Federation of Teachers, Albert Shanker. In a 1988 address, Mr. Shanker outlined an idea for a new kind of public school where teachers could experiment with fresh and innovative ways of reaching students. Mr. Shanker estimated that only one-fifth of American students were well served by traditional classrooms. In charter schools, teachers would be given the opportunity to draw upon their expertise to create high-performing educational laboratories from which the traditional public schools could learn.<sup>165</sup>

Charter schools have taken hold in Georgia and are here to stay. They provide opportunities for local school districts to better serve special populations, experiment with different learning designs, or focus on specific academic programs like STEM or the arts. Charters can be helpful in decisions pertaining to local economic development issues through the use of college and career academies. Local school boards should work hard to understand how charters could be incorporated into the district's strategic plan. To improve the overall quality of charters, Georgia should focus on areas of accountability (for both the schools and the authorizers) and have a strategic discussion about adequate funding levels.

Charter schools are not the silver bullet that will solve all of the educational problems Georgia faces. However, they can be used as a tool that, when applied properly, can demonstrate best practices in raising up struggling learners, building specific skills needed in industry, and engaging parents and the community in the education of Georgia's students.

165 Kahlenberg, R., & Potter, H. "The Original Charter School Vision." New York Times. August 30, 2014.



## Equity in Education — Access and Opportunity

### ISSUE OVERVIEW

No Child Left Behind. These strong words have driven education reform nationwide for over a decade. In fact, for nearly 50 years, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (NCLB's predecessor) has emphasized equal access to education for all children. While a sweeping majority of states have sought waivers from NCLB provisions, flexibility is not allowed without comprehensive plans to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve the quality of instruction.

Racial and ethnic minorities comprise almost half of children under the age of five in the United States. Birth and immigration trends among non-white groups point to continued growing diversity. The US Census Bureau projects that by 2018 non-whites will make up a majority of children. By 2030, they will comprise a majority of the American labor force. Given these shifts, paths to successful education for all are essential to the United States' future economic prosperity.<sup>166</sup> And yet, US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has stated that "it is clear that the United States has a great distance to go to meet our goal of providing opportunities for every student to succeed."<sup>167</sup>

In March 2014, the US Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights released the first comprehensive look at civil rights data from every public school in the United States in almost 15 years (since 2000). For the first time ever, state-, district-, and school-level information is now searchable and accessible to the public online at [www.crdc.ed.gov](http://www.crdc.ed.gov). The data measure whether all students have equal educational opportunity, and they provide important information to administrators enforcing federal civil rights laws.

Key findings from the civil rights database indicate that nationally, access to public preschool is not a reality for a great number of students (40 percent of districts do not offer preschool programs). Studies confirm, however, that early learning experiences for minority and low-income students are crucial in alleviating the achievement gap. Discipline disparities begin early, as black students are disproportionately suspended beginning from the preschool level up through 12th grade.<sup>168</sup>

<sup>166</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation. *Race for Results: Building a Path to Opportunity for All Children*. Baltimore. 2014.

<sup>167</sup> US Department of Education. *Expansive Survey of America's Public Schools Reveals Troubling Racial Disparities* [Press release]. March 21, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/expansive-survey-americas-public-schools-reveals-troubling-racial-disparities>

<sup>168</sup> US Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. *Civil Rights Data Collection*. March 2014. Retrieved from Data Snapshot: School Discipline Issue Brief No. 1: <http://ocrdata.ed.gov/Downloads/CRDC-School-Discipline-Snapshot.pdf>

College and career readiness measures in civil rights data reveal alarming national opportunity gaps among minority students.

- At a time when science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects are increasingly important to our nation's competitiveness, between 10 percent and 25 percent of schools lack more than one of the core math and science high school courses (such as Algebra I and II, geometry, biology, and chemistry). Only half of high schools offer calculus, and only 63 percent offer physics. Access to STEM courses is even poorer for black, Latino, American Indian, and Alaska Native students.<sup>169</sup>
- Black and Latino students miss out on gifted and talented education opportunities. They represent 40 percent of enrollment in schools offering gifted and talented programs but only 26 percent of the students enrolled in the programs.
- Advanced Placement (AP) courses allow students to learn college-level material while still in high school. If high school students successfully pass an AP exam, they may qualify for college credit. Black and Latino students comprise 37 percent of students in high schools but represent only 27 percent of students enrolled in at least one AP course. Only 18 percent of black and Latino students earn a qualifying score of three or higher on an AP exam.<sup>170</sup>

The civil rights database allows national leaders to strategize about how to address these opportunity gaps. Doing so shifts the focus from achievement deficits of student performance to the role of schools in promoting equity of access and treatment.

Other recent opportunity gap concerns rest with the distribution of the nation's best teachers. New teacher evaluation data from states launching updated teacher effectiveness measures confirm previous findings. In many places, poor children and minority students are less likely to have highly effective teachers in their classrooms than others.<sup>171</sup>

Overall, the data depict an opportunity gap among Americans — a lack of potentially life-transforming opportunities for children that strengthen and build a thriving middle class.<sup>172</sup>

## **SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA**

Like the nation, the composition of Georgia's population is changing. Non-white and low-income subgroups are rapidly increasing, far outpacing the growth rate of whites. Further, non-whites are overrepresented as a proportion of those living in poverty. Today in Georgia, only 60 percent of residents are strictly white (a 5 percent decrease since 2000).<sup>173</sup> Georgia public schools mirror the same trends, with only 44 percent of students being considered white (an 8 percent decrease over 10 years). Economically disadvantaged students and Hispanic students are among the fastest-growing demographic groups in Georgia. See Figure 9.1 and Table 9.1.

While a good deal of civil rights data as well as national summaries have been made publically accessible online, many state-level items are not currently available, as data collection undergoes verification. Additionally, publically available state-level data only include estimations up to 2009. Consequently, understanding how national trends in equity look in Georgia and other states is not possible, especially in areas of national concern: early learning, discipline, access to core STEM courses, enrollment in gifted and talented programs, AP course access, and access to effective teachers. However, a few alternative sources of Georgia data are available from which we can learn.

169 US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. *Civil Rights Data Collection*. March 2014. Retrieved from Data Snapshot: College and Career Readiness Issue Brief No. 3: <http://ocrdata.ed.gov/Downloads/CRDC-College-and-Career-Readiness-Snapshot.pdf>

170 Ibid.

171 DeMonte, J., & Hanna, R. *Looking at the Best Teachers and Who They Teach*. April 11, 2014. Retrieved from Center for American Progress: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/report/2014/04/11/87683/looking-at-the-best-teachers-and-who-they-teach/>

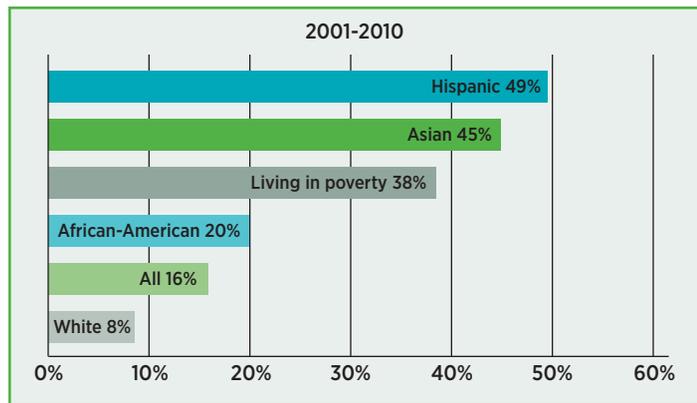
172 US Department of Education. *Expansive Survey of America's Public Schools Reveals Troubling Racial Disparities* [Press release]. March 21, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/expansive-survey-americas-public-schools-reveals-troubling-racial-disparities>

173 US Census Bureau. *American Fact Finder*. Washington DC. 2000 and 2010.

In early learning, Georgia has been a national leader in opening up eligibility for its public Pre-K Program, funded by the Georgia Lottery, to all 4-year-old students. Almost 60 percent of Georgia's 4-year-olds are enrolled in the program, and the state ranks eighth in the nation for access.<sup>176</sup> Enrollment includes 37 percent white students, 16 percent Hispanic students, 39 percent black students, and 53 percent low-income students. Some of the students not participating in Georgia Pre-K may be enrolled in other early learning programs. However, historically, low-income families and Hispanics are the least likely to enroll their children in early learning programs, which can negatively affect their preparedness for formal schooling.<sup>177</sup> In some areas, especially rural, low-income communities, the Georgia Pre-K Program is the only high-quality, no-cost option for early learning, making access for all even more critical. In 2012, an equivalent of 8 percent of the estimated 4-year-old population was on the Georgia Pre-K waitlist.<sup>178</sup> Even with surging demand, funding for the Pre-K Program has significantly decreased over the past decade. State spending has dropped from \$5,464 per child in 2003 to \$3599 in 2013.<sup>179</sup>

Moving up the pipeline, students of all backgrounds do not have equal access to challenging math and science courses. See Figure 9.2. Black students and American Indian/Alaskan Native students have the least access in Georgia.

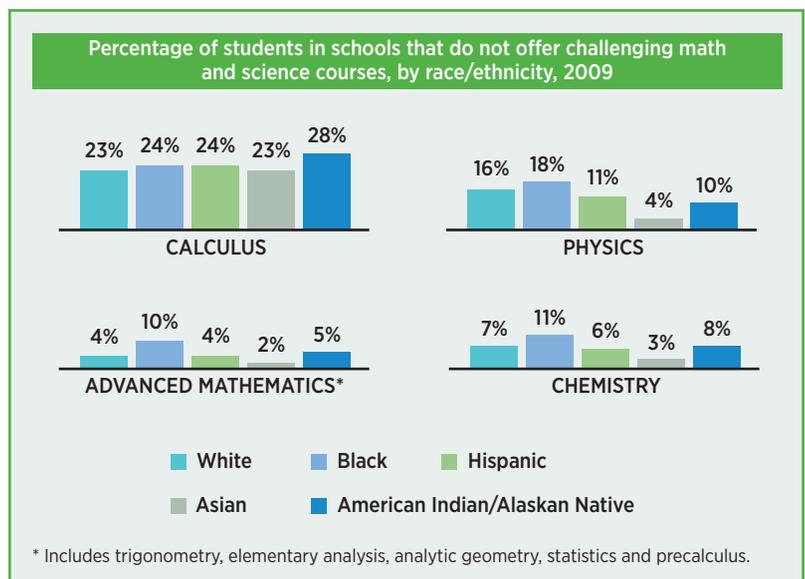
**FIGURE 9.1 GEORGIA POPULATION CHANGE PERCENTAGES<sup>174</sup>**



**TABLE 9.1 CHANGING GEORGIA SCHOOLS BY PERCENTAGE OF ENROLLMENT<sup>175</sup>**

	White	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Limited English Proficient	Low Income
2003	52%	2%	38%	6%	4%	45%
2013	44%	4%	37%	13%	7%	60%
% Change	-8%	2%	-1%	7%	3%	15%

**FIGURE 9.2 ACCESS TO STEM COURSES BY SUBGROUP<sup>180</sup>**



174 Ibid.

175 Governor's Office of Student Achievement. *Report Card*. Atlanta. 2003 and 2013.

176 National Institute for Early Education Research. *The State of Preschool 2013 Georgia*. 2013. Retrieved from The State of Preschool Yearbook: [http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/Georgia\\_2013.pdf](http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/Georgia_2013.pdf)

177 Child Trends Databank. *Early Childhood Program Enrollment*. August 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=early-childhood-program-enrollment#sthash.nxp4HhhM.dpuf>

178 Sidney, S., & Rauschenberg, S. *Georgia Pre-K: Investing in Georgia's Four-Year-Old Students*. April 25, 2013. Retrieved from The Governor's Office of Student Achievement: <http://gosa.georgia.gov/georgia-pre-k-investing-georgias-four-year-old-students>

179 National Institute for Early Education Research. *The State of Preschool 2013 Georgia*. 2013. Retrieved from The State of Preschool Yearbook: [http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/Georgia\\_2013.pdf](http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/Georgia_2013.pdf)

180 Change the Equation. *Vital Signs Georgia*. November 2013. Retrieved from Stem Georgia: <http://stemgeorgia.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/STEM-Vital-Signs2012.pdf>

In Georgia high schools, African American and low-income students also face equity gaps on AP tests, but improvements are being made. Georgia's African American students now rank third in the nation in the percentage of seniors succeeding on AP exams, and the number of low-income students enrolled in AP classes has increased more than tenfold in the last decade.<sup>181</sup> However, both groups are still significantly underrepresented in AP test participation and success.<sup>182</sup>

**TABLE 9.2 GEORGIA AP TEST EQUITY 2013**

	% of Graduating Class	% of AP Exam Takers	% of AP Exam Takers Scoring 3+ During High School
<b>African American</b>	35.6	25.9 (9.7)	13.3 (22.3)
Hispanic	8.3	8.5	8.6
White	50.7	51.9	62.4
American Indian/ Alaska Native	.2	.3	.3
Asian/Asian American/ Pacific Islander	4.4	8.6	11.6
<b>Low-Income</b>	57.4	31.7 (25.7)	22.9 (34.5)

\*An equity gap exists when the sub-group accounts for a smaller percentage of AP Exam Takers (e.g., second column) or successful AP Exam Takers (e.g. third column) than of the graduating class (e.g. first column). Subgroups with an equity gap are highlighted. The equity gap is in parentheses.

Finally, national civil rights data raise the issue of teacher quality in all grade levels among minority and low-income students. School year 2014–2015 is the first time all Georgia schools will implement the state's new teacher effectiveness measurement system. According to an analysis by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, teachers at schools with higher proportions of low-income students will likely receive lower scores in effectiveness. Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) officials are unsure if this is because their policy approach with the student growth model (which measures changes in student performance on standardized tests from one year to the next) puts teachers at low-income schools at a disadvantage, or if the state's lower-income students actually have less effective teachers. (Student growth scores from the most impoverished schools rarely rank within the top 10 percent of schools statewide.)<sup>183</sup> Either way, the department will have to respond to the US Department of Education's recently announced requirement that states develop plans demonstrating that public schools provide equal access to highly qualified teachers for poor and minority children by next June.<sup>184</sup>

### **ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA**

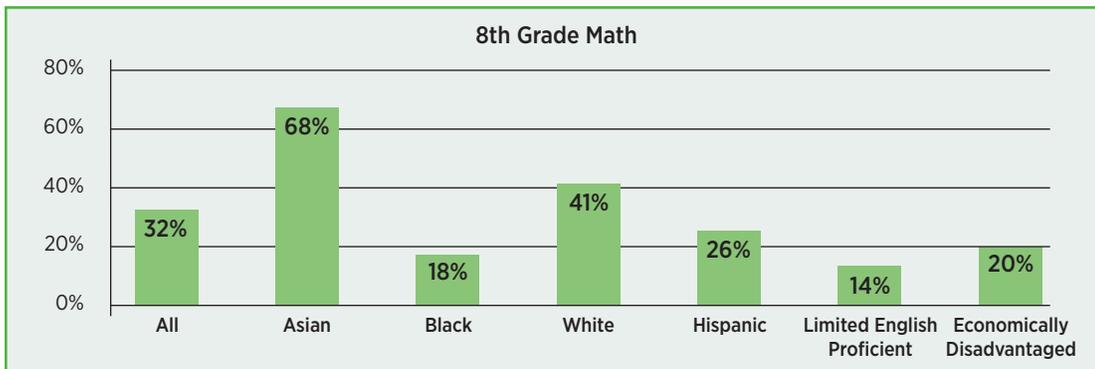
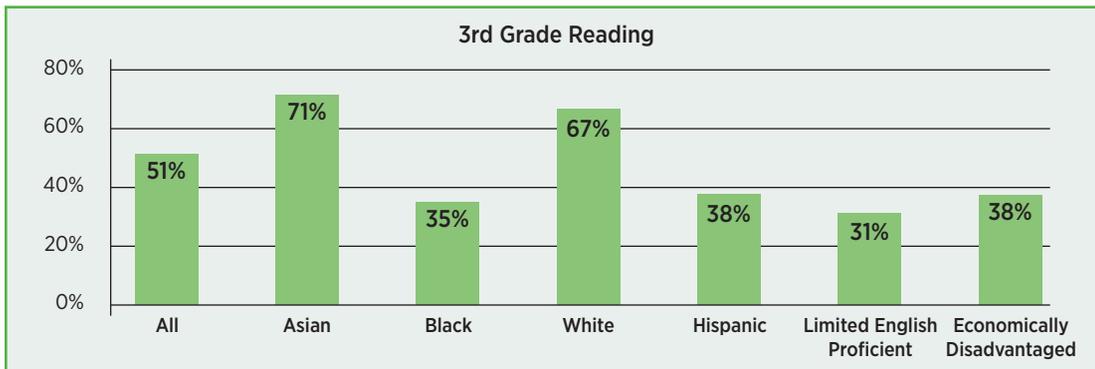
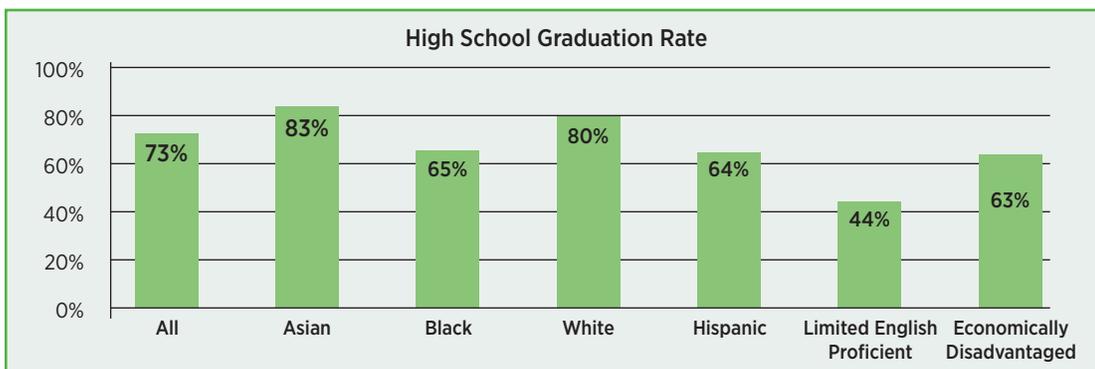
Inequitable access to quality educational settings is not without consequence. Certainly, inequitable access to educational opportunities is at least partly reflected in achievement gaps throughout the education pipeline. Figures 9.3 and 9.4 show comparisons of educational outcomes by race/ethnicity and poverty.

181 Georgia Department of Education. More Georgia Students Passing Advanced Placement Exams [Press release]. February 17, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid=152>

182 CollegeBoard. *Tenth Annual Report to the Nation*. New York, 2014.

183 Ernsthausen, J. "Teacher Ratings in Question." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, pp. A1, A20. November 9, 2014.

184 Rich, M. "U.S. to Focus on Equity in Assigning of Teachers." *New York Times*. November 10, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/11/us/obama-administration-puts-new-focus-on-equity-in-teacher-quality.html>

**FIGURE 9.3** PERCENTAGE WITH “EXCEEDING” SCORES ON THE CRCT BY SUBGROUP, 2013<sup>185</sup>**FIGURE 9.4** HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION BY SUBGROUP, 2014<sup>186</sup>

To address equity in education, as part of his 2015 budget request to Congress, President Obama proposed a new initiative. Race to the Top–Equity and Opportunity (RTT–Opportunity) grants would create incentives for states and school districts to drive comprehensive change in identifying and closing opportunity and achievement gaps. Grantees would enhance data systems to sharpen focus on disparities and invest in strong teachers and leaders in high-need schools.<sup>187</sup> Congress did not approve President Obama’s budget and has yet to pass an alternative. Whether RTT–Opportunity is approved or not, the onus is on Georgia legislators and leaders to ensure the availability of functional educational equity data for Georgia. The state’s new data system, known as the Georgia Academic and Workforce Analysis and Research Data System (GA AWARDS), may hold potential to centrally house and answer equity questions such as access to high-quality early learning, STEM course and AP course access, and the distribution of effective teachers, among others.

<sup>185</sup> Governor’s Office of Student Achievement. *Report Card*. Atlanta: 2013.

<sup>186</sup> Georgia Department of Education. Georgia’s High School Graduation Rate Increases Again [Press release]. October 30, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid=242>

<sup>187</sup> US Department of Education. Expansive Survey of America’s Public Schools Reveals Troubling Racial Disparities [Press release]. March 21, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/expansive-survey-americas-public-schools-reveals-troubling-racial-disparities>

Georgia can also leverage its existing strengths to close opportunity gaps.

- The state Pre-K Program gives Georgia an early learning advantage over other states. Enhancing access to the quality program is key to promoting equity. With almost 8 percent of Georgia 4-year-olds on a waiting list, alternative or increased funding to the Pre-K Program would benefit the state.
- At the high school level, the state has made notable strides in promoting access and success on AP tests to underrepresented populations. In fact, Georgia's equity gap for Hispanic students in AP exams is now a thing of the past. Continuing the charge, more work is needed to do the same for African American and low-income students.

Georgia is also making progress toward promoting STEM access. Through the College Board AP STEM Access program, 22 Georgia schools were able to begin offering new AP math and science courses to encourage underrepresented minority students to enroll in 2013. Georgia businesses are aware that the workforce is becoming increasingly diverse. As Georgia businesses prepare for these changes, it would be wise for these stakeholders to invest in equity-driven college- and career-readiness initiatives.<sup>188</sup>

REACH is an example of a private-public investment to promote equity in education. Launched in 2012, REACH is Georgia's first public-private needs-based scholarship program.<sup>189</sup> Beginning in seventh grade, REACH provides Georgia's low-income, academically promising students with the academic, social, and financial support needed to graduate from high school, access college, and achieve postsecondary success. This is accomplished through mentoring, academic coaching, and a financial scholarship upon high school graduation. AT&T provided seed funding for the pilot phase of the program. REACH is now in 23 school systems with more than 150 students participating, and it will continue to expand to school systems through a competitive application process. The Georgia Student Finance Commission administers the programs so that 100 percent of private donations support scholarships. More than 60 Georgia colleges have pledged to match or double-match REACH scholarships, and the General Assembly approved \$2 million to support scholarships for FY2015.

Regarding the distribution of quality teachers, going forward, the GaDOE must refine its teacher effectiveness measure and determine an equitable distribution of its most effective educators across schools and classrooms through incentives and effective support in high-poverty schools. Some have even suggested that the state make portions of federal funding to districts contingent on districts demonstrating compliance to equal access requirements.<sup>190</sup>

Across all educational equity issues, local school boards play a leading role. School board priorities can make a tangible difference in the academic opportunities for children through the control of learning-related resources. Some examples of board-controlled learning-related resources include principal and teacher assignment by experience and credentials, placement of new buildings, ongoing infrastructure refurbishment, technology enhancements, and the availability of AP or International Baccalaureate courses. Availability of these resources can heavily impact students' learning experiences but are often overlooked as equity-based decisions because they are decided by school boards one at a time. These local decisions, in addition to ones made more broadly at the state level, are important to monitor as strategies to identify and close opportunity gaps. And with Georgia's growing diversity, these gaps are quickly becoming impossible to ignore, primarily for our students, but even more fundamentally for the economic prosperity of our state.<sup>191</sup>

188 Georgia Department of Education. More Georgia Students Passing Advanced Placement Exams [Press release]. February 17, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid=152>

189 Realizing Educational Achievement Can Happen (REACH).

190 Rich, M. "U.S. to Focus on Equity in Assigning of Teachers." *New York Times*. November 10, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/11/us/obama-administration-puts-new-focus-on-equity-in-teacher-quality.html>

191 Appleseed. *How School Boards Can Erase the Opportunity Gap Between Poor and Middle-Class Children*. Washington, DC. 2011.



## Race to the Top — Now What?

### ISSUE OVERVIEW

When the state of Georgia applied for the Race to the Top Grant in 2010, it had a very clear vision for what it wanted to accomplish as a state. There were five priority areas that Georgia was already developing and implementing that would transform the educational system for students:<sup>192</sup>

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

During the same time that Georgia was working to implement reforms in its K-12 system, the state — along with the rest of the country — was grappling with the crippling economic recession that began in 2007–2008. In response to this economic turmoil, President Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). It was legislation that provided an unprecedented infusion of funds into the economy to stimulate recovery from the recession, support job creation, and invest in critical sectors such as education. Among other things, the ARRA established the \$4.35 billion Race to the Top (RT3) fund.<sup>193</sup> This fund was and continues to be the largest amount of discretionary funding for K-12 education reform in the history of the United States.<sup>194</sup>

State leaders in Georgia from the Governor’s Office, the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement (GOSA), the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE), and other education stakeholders submitted a winning application during the second phase of the competition in June of 2010. That year, Georgia was awarded \$400 million over four years to implement its detailed plan for public school improvement.

The Georgia Race to the Top grant was an ambitious proposal that allowed Georgia to accelerate its plans to reform the state’s educational system so that every child would graduate from high school prepared for the rigors of college or to embark on a career. To implement all the proposed reforms in the four years was already an ambitious goal. However, due to leadership changes at the beginning of the grant, the slow start to the implementation process translated into condensing four years of proposed work into two to three years. So the question remains: Did Georgia fulfill its vision?

<sup>192</sup> US Department of Education. *Georgia Report – Year 1: School Year 2010–2011*. Washington, DC: 2012.

<sup>193</sup> In addition to establishing the RT3 fund, ARRA provided federal aid to shore up state education budgets through increased resources for existing federal programs such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Title I services for low-income students,

<sup>194</sup> Duncan, A. “Education Reform’s Moon Shot.” *Washington Post*. July 24, 2009.

## SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

Georgia's RT3 application is based on the state's aforementioned five priority areas for improving education. To support this vision, Georgia grouped its RT3 plan into four areas: 1) adopting college and career standards and assessments 2) recruiting, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and leaders, 3) implementing a longitudinal data system that measures student growth and success, and 4) turning around the lowest-performing schools.

Moreover, there were additional components to Georgia's overall RT3 plan. First, Georgia committed to strengthening STEM instruction in schools. Second, to incentivize innovations in teaching and learning, Georgia established a \$19.4 million Innovation Fund. This fund was made available to participating school systems to launch innovative partnerships with higher education, education and nonprofit organizations, or businesses for the purpose of increasing student achievement.

### Adopting College and Career Standards and Assessments

Implementing rigorous college- and career-ready standards and assessments that prepare students for success is an integral aspect of education reform in all RT3 states. Throughout the grant period, Georgia adopted and implemented higher learning standards in English/language arts (ELA) and mathematics. The new Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS) for all grades in ELA and K-9 mathematics were implemented in 2012, and the CCGPS was implemented in mathematics in all grades in 2014.

Using RT3 funds, Georgia made available to educators online and in-person a significant amount of instructional materials and professional development resources on the CCGPS. As it began the transition to the CCGPS in 2011, before they were officially launched in classrooms, Georgia focused on introducing staff to the new standards. A blend of online interactions and in-person trainings were held to maximize accessibility. This combination model continued throughout grant implementation.

GaDOE has cited communicating with teachers to promote the meaningful use of resources as a consistent challenge, despite its outreach strategies.<sup>195</sup> To initiate communication with teachers, GaDOE, in part, relied on personnel such as district administrators and encouraged school representatives to invite classroom teachers and leaders to online and in-person events. The department also worked to distribute resource awareness-related RT3 materials at events. However, GaDOE has no mechanism for communicating directly with all teachers.<sup>196</sup>

Given the state department's challenge with communicating with classroom teachers, it is no surprise that a number of districts reported that one of their greatest challenges in implementation of the CCGPS has been parent communication. Although administrators and teachers are committed to the success of the standards, spotty and inconsistent information was given to parents about the change in standards across the state. Districts have requested more information from GaDOE for parents to provide statewide consistency in the reasoning behind the transition to CCGPS.<sup>197</sup>

Georgia also developed and began implementing a more rigorous assessment system aligned to the CCGPS — the Georgia Milestones, which replaced the previously used Criteria-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) in grades 3 through 8 and old end-of-course tests in high school. The 2014-2015 school year is the first year of Georgia Milestones implementation. Though RT3 has not supported the creation of Georgia Milestones directly, the grant allowed Georgia to develop a set of supportive resources to ease the assessment's launch.

195 US Department of Education. *Race to the Top: Georgia Report Year 4*. Washington, DC. 2014.

196 Georgia Department of Education. *Race to the Top Progress Update, December 2013 Monthly Call, Part B*. Atlanta: . 2014.

197 Ibid.

The Georgia Milestones assessment system has changed Georgia's assessment landscape. A formative assessment toolkit comprising instructional practice techniques, assessment bank items, and benchmark assessments was developed and lays a foundation for educators from which to prepare for the high-stakes end-of-grade (EOG) and end-of-course (EOC) tests that are part of the Georgia Milestones.

### **Recruiting, Rewarding and Retaining Effective Teachers and Leaders**

All RT3 states are implementing comprehensive systems of educator effectiveness by developing and adopting rigorous evaluation systems that take into account student growth. These systems are intended to be conducted at least annually and provide timely and constructive feedback to inform professional development, promotion, retention, and tenure decisions as well as, potentially, compensation.

In Georgia, these new systems are known as the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) for teachers and the corresponding Leader Keys Effectiveness System (LKES), designed for school leaders, primarily principals. In addition to being able to distinguish between good teachers, great teachers, and ineffective ones, the primary focus of the teacher effectiveness system is to help improve instruction and to better design professional development activities to meet teacher needs. As a result of this new system, teachers will be categorized as exemplary, proficient, needs development, or ineffective.

The goal was to develop a rigorous and transparent teacher and leader evaluation instrument that would help ensure an effective teacher in every classroom and an effective leader in every school. GaDOE developed both teacher and leader effectiveness systems – the TKES and LKES to meet this purpose. Half of the teacher's final effectiveness score is based on student growth, or how much the student learned during the instructional period. For school leaders, 70 percent of the final score comes from student growth within the school.

For teachers of tested subjects, student growth will be calculated based on the EOG or EOC Georgia Milestones assessments. For teachers in nontested subjects such as music, health, foreign languages, or physical education, their growth measures will be based on district-developed student learning objectives, or SLOs. These SLOs describe what students are expected to learn in a given academic year as measured by a pre-assessment and post-assessment. These district-determined SLOs are course-specific, grade-level learning objectives that are to be measurable, focused on growth and student learning, and aligned to curriculum content standards.<sup>198</sup>

These new effectiveness systems are being used statewide during the 2014–2015 school year. However, high-stakes decision-making based on their results will not occur for at least another year to allow for baseline data to be established.

Georgia also changed how it trains and licenses new teachers through increased rigor and accountability for teacher and leader preparation programs, primarily university-based teacher education programs. To offer more supports to classroom teachers, the state has made significant changes to teacher credentialing. Georgia's new teacher certification system requires student teachers to demonstrate proficiency before they can obtain a teaching certificate. The teacher certification system is tiered, meaning it will establish a pathway for teachers to advance within the profession while still remaining in the classroom and will provide a process for recognizing excellent teachers. Most of these rule changes will be implemented by the 2015–2016 school year.

### **Implementing the Longitudinal Data System**

Georgia committed to creating a statewide longitudinal data system that would help improve instruction and student outcomes. This data would be accessible to teachers, principals, and education leaders to improve instructional practices.

Georgia began developing the Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) in the mid-2000s. By providing a unique identifier for each student enrolled in pre-K-12, it is designed to improve instruction by delivering longitudinal student data and analysis to assist teachers in the differentiation of students (i.e., individualized instruction based on student skill level). The SLDS was already well under development when Georgia applied for the RT3 grant in 2010, and it serves as the basis for the subsequent data systems developed in Georgia.

One requirement of the RT3 grant was the development and implementation of an instructional improvement system (IIS) designed to enhance the state's ability to effectively manage, use, and analyze education data to support instruction. In Georgia, the IIS is called the Path to Personalized Learning. Through the addition of the IIS, RT3 funding allowed Georgia to build out the SLDS into a complete delivery system of personalized learning for students, teachers, and parents.

The SLDS is only a small portion of — and the foundation for — the Path to Personalized Learning now being implemented in Georgia. When fully operational, this system will combine online student assessments tools, professional development, teaching evaluations, metrics from the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI), and digital resources linked to the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards, delivering these data to the desktop of every teacher in Georgia.

The Path to Personalized Learning allows individually appropriate instructional improvement for both student learning and professional development. Teachers can identify teaching tools that are targeted at individual students' learning needs, including digital resources from both the state and local level. Parents also have access to the same online resources as teachers to help their children with specific content standards.

For teachers, the Path to Personalized Learning data system can be used to help measure their own effectiveness. Teachers and school leaders can also use it to target professional development needs based on teacher evaluations and student growth in the classroom over time.

### Turning Around the Lowest Performing Schools

All RT3 states are supporting local district reforms designed to turn around the lowest-performing schools. These schools must implement one of four intervention models.<sup>199</sup>

1. **Turnaround model:** Replace the principal and rehire no more than 50 percent of the staff and allow sufficient flexibility to fully implement a comprehensive approach to student improvement.
2. **Restart model:** Convert a school to a charter school.
3. **School closure:** Close the school and enroll the students who attended that school in other higher achieving schools.
4. **Transformation model:** Implement each of the following: a) replace the principal, b) institute comprehensive instructional reforms, c) increase learning time, and d) provide operational flexibility.<sup>200</sup>

Georgia selected 40 schools to participate in the state's turnaround efforts, which focused on improving schools performing in the bottom 5 percent on student achievement measures. All selected one of the four intervention models. All schools utilized school improvement specialists to support the use of data and target and implement programmatic changes. To date, 10 of these schools have been moved off the lowest-performing schools list.

199 US Department of Education. *Georgia Report – Year 1: School Year 2010–2011*. Washington, DC: . 2012.

200 The requirements under SIG 1003(g)/RT3 specify that the former principal must be replaced if the local education agency/school has selected either the turnaround or transformation model. There is flexibility if the principal has been in the role for two years or less AND was brought in as part of a previous reform.

### Other Areas of Focus

Georgia focused on STEM as a competitive preference priority.<sup>201</sup> For a majority of the STEM initiatives, the GaDOE partnered with the Georgia Institute of Technology's outreach center, the Center for Education Integrating Science, Mathematics, and Computing (CEISMC). CEISMC developed 12 online professional development courses for STEM educators and six educator instructional courses regarding classroom technology. CEISMC also developed advanced courses for high school students to access college-level calculus, chemistry, and engineering. These online classes are scheduled to be offered by spring 2015. Finally, CEISMC developed robotics and engineering design courses, including a professional development component for educators, and a middle school career, technical, and agricultural education course component.

Additionally, using RT3 funding, Georgia created a \$19.4 million Innovation Fund to award competitive grants to schools, districts, and partners. These grants are designed to determine best practices to influence future education policy efforts in (1) STEM education, (2) applied learning, and (3) teacher and leader recruitment and development. To date, Georgia has conducted three rounds of funding covering 23 projects.

## ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

### Sustainability

The RT3 grant was initially scheduled to end in September 2014. The state received a no-cost extension through June 2015, meaning Georgia has additional time though no additional funding to complete some of the grant projects. At the state level, extended projects are primarily related to implementing the new teacher and leader effectiveness systems and providing support to the districts.

Georgia now has until June 2015 to further refine the student growth model (in tested subjects), fully develop and implement student learning objectives (SLOs) (in nontested subjects), and continue to refine and validate the teacher and leader assessment instruments. The state will also continue to provide training on these items and collect feedback from educators on the new assessment systems being used for teachers and education leaders.<sup>202</sup>

The development and implementation of the SLOs has proven to be one of the more challenging tasks undertaken within the RT3 scope of work. In general, educators at all levels are supportive of the SLOs and the ability to have growth measures for nontested subjects. However, concern over their validity and reliability is widespread. Another concern is the ability to ensure comparability of rigor and standards across districts.<sup>203</sup>

One concern about sustainability is the continued funding of the work. Even with the RT3 no-cost extension through June 2015, the ongoing support work will need to be funded by a combination of state and local funds. Georgia's FY 2015 state budget includes a \$314 million increase in education spending,<sup>204</sup> some of which will go to support continuing the sustainability plan. Even with this increase, current allocations from the state budget shift the burden for sustained reform implementation from the state to the regional and district levels.

At the regional level, the Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs) will continue to support standards training and implementation through the use of math and ELA specialists. Local districts are being charged with continuing to focus on the implementation of standards, resource development for educators, and support for all schools, including low-performing and turnaround schools.<sup>205</sup>

201 States that emphasized STEM received a competitive preference on the scoring of their applications. If STEM was developed within the application, an additional 15 points (3 percent of the total) were added to the overall score.

202 Andrews, S.C. Race to the Top: Passing the Baton. *Summer GAEL*. 2014.

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

204 Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. *Cutting Class to Make Ends Meet 2014*. Atlanta. 2014.

205 Andrews, S.C. Race to the Top: Passing the Baton. *Summer GAEL*. 2014.

However, many local school districts are still struggling from a decade of austerity cuts coupled with declining local revenues. Over the past decade, Georgia has struggled to fully fund its education budget, resulting in over \$8.4 billion in austerity cuts since 2003, shifting even a larger burden of funding education to the local districts.<sup>206</sup> Moreover, between 2008 and 2013, property values — the basis for local school funding — declined in more than 90 percent of Georgia's school districts.

To date, the 26 RT3 districts have already implemented many of these reform strategies, supported by federal dollars from the RT3 grant. Even with the federal dollars, local implementation was difficult. Georgia is now rolling out many of these reforms statewide. The non-RT3 districts now face increased challenges as they move to implement reforms without comparable levels of federal support or time to adjust to policy changes. Achieving the same level of fidelity and consistency will be an issue for the majority of non-RT3 systems.

### What's Next?

Now that Georgia has gone through four years of intensive and extensive education reform, did the state fulfill its vision? It is clear from the reforms put in place that Georgia 1) has increased the focus on student growth to determine student effectiveness, as opposed to simply measuring overall achievement, 2) has utilized a standards-based approach to teaching and learning, 3) continues to use data to drive instruction and policy decisions, and 4) provides support for turnaround efforts among the lowest-achieving schools. Moving forward, Georgia seems committed to these priorities.

While many of the reforms are still being implemented and it will take multiple years for policy changes to result in sustained changes in student outcomes, there is reason to be optimistic that Georgia is on the right track to expect improved student outcomes. As the implementation of the CCGPS was the first of the reforms to be implemented in 2012, Georgia is expected to begin to see some results on student outcomes soon. As one of the early adopters of higher standards, Kentucky is beginning to see strong results just five years after implementation. Kentucky recently released new data showing that 62.3 percent of its students are now achieving at a college- and career-ready level, up from just 34 percent in 2010. However, before experiencing improved student achievement outcomes, Kentucky's percentage of students scoring "proficient" or better in reading and math dropped by about one-third for middle and elementary schools when its common core assessment rolled out. Similarly, as Georgia begins testing with the Georgia Milestones, scores will predictably drop, and a new baseline of scores from which to improve will be set.

Recent college- and career-ready indicators are revealing that Georgia is on the right track. Between 2011 and 2014, the high school graduation rate increased from 67.5 percent to 72.5 percent.<sup>207</sup> Some evidence also indicates that those graduating from high school will be better prepared for college or a career. An examination of SAT results over the past three years reveals that while overall scores remain flat, more students are taking the SAT with hopes of going onto a postsecondary institution. In addition, the number of students taking the ACT has dramatically increased, while the scores have remained steady. This is unusual. Traditionally, when more students take the college entrance exams, it is expected the state average will fall. This has not happened in Georgia on either test.

Due to the work on the RT3 grant over the past four years, Georgia is well-positioned to undertake new and innovative means of improving teaching and learning. However, these recent changes create a twofold challenge for the state moving forward. First, the systematic changes put in place under RT3 are not yet finished. In a 2013 piece, Rick Hess described implementation as the "missing half of school reform," as stakeholders, officials, and advocates tend to show less interest in implementing existing reforms than in tackling new initiatives.<sup>208</sup> As new ideas and initiatives come into fashion, existing efforts often are left only partially implemented and/or not supported in the classroom as resources are diverted to new projects.

206 Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. *Cutting Class to Make Ends Meet 2014*. Atlanta. 2014.

207 Governor's Office of Student Achievement. State Report Cards. Retrieved from [www.gosa.org](http://www.gosa.org)

208 Policy Innovators Network. *2014 PIE Network Implementation Case Study*. Minneapolis: Rick Hess. 2014.

Second, it is unclear how Georgia will continue to support the vision put in place over the past four years. RT3 provided a detailed roadmap to achieve the state's educational goals. After the grant ends, there is no unifying vision to guide Georgia in decision-making around education policy. Georgia must articulate how the recent systemic changes will be fully implemented, engrained, and sustained as well as how they will be incorporated into any new efforts or innovations.

To accomplish this, leadership is paramount. As the current set of reforms are being implemented, positive and effective leadership at both the state and local levels is needed to ensure that teachers and educators are being supported and provided adequate professional development and resources, student assessment and teacher effectiveness systems are being implemented with fidelity, data systems are being used to their fullest potential, and more. Taking the lessons learned over the past four years, Georgia leaders need to work together to come up with a new roadmap, or blueprint, to clearly identify where the state is now headed and how we will get there.





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