

## Georgia's ESSA State Plan Online Feedback Survey Results

November 2016

### Introduction

From October 20<sup>th</sup> to November 12<sup>th</sup>, the Georgia Department of Education made an online survey available in order to receive feedback for the state's ESSA working committees. At the survey's completion, 8,846 participants had completed it.. Participants ran the gamut of stakeholders around education. The respondent's role was optional, but over 40% of the surveys included this information. The table below shows the breakdown of role by number of surveys.

Role	Number of Surveys
Advocate	176
Business and Industry	42
Education Administration	198
Parent	650
Postsecondary Institution	50
Student	48
Teacher	831
Other	239

Participants also had the opportunity to indicate which school district they were involved with. Over 1,300 surveys answered this inquiry, and the results indicated surveys from 86% of every school district in the state. The number of surveys generally corresponded strongly to the population of each school district attendance zone.

On average, each question garnered 1,300 unique responses. The following is a summary of the results. The number of responses to the prompt is in brackets at the end of each question. The methods section concludes this report.

### Accountability

1. *As a stakeholder what are the most important things for you to know about your school?* [1,532]

- Over 350 responses (23%) included some mention of teachers, their qualifications, experience, and attitude toward the students. Overall achievement was referenced the second-most, while words associated with growth (e.g. progress) had only a slightly less number of mentions. The safety of the school was written about in 229 comments.

2. *Does the current rating system accurately reflect the performance of your school?* [1,570]

- Of the more than 1,500 responses, there were four "no" comments for every one "yes." About seven percent of the participants felt unsure or unprepared to answer definitively. Very few respondents gave explanations for their answer.

3. *How should a school's successes or failures be measured?* [1,543]

- Over 20% of the responses included a reference of student growth, easily the most common concept addressed. Additional measures such as fine arts, teacher retention, or availability of physical education courses were mentioned second-most. The fact that overall achievement was only mentioned explicitly in just over 200 responses could be more of a result of respondents thinking that the accountability measure would have to factor test scores than a real measure of importance. For instance, the fact that one respondent only wrote that they would like to know, “How decisions are being made” should not be read as the only information that they deem important towards measuring success.

## **Assessment**

### *1. What should the role of assessment be in Georgia’s schools? [1,559]*

- The responses to this prompt were wide-ranging. For instance, various respondents asserted that assessments should: “figure out the level of diversity,” “track student progress,” “direct resources,” “determine students ability to reason” among other lofty and/or disparate goals. Mentions of growth and progress were included in 350 responses, the most of any concept. Second most were references of guiding instruction, or informing interested stakeholders in the performance of the schools: parents, teachers, community, etc.

### *2. What can be done to improve statewide assessments for Georgia Public School students? [1,541]*

- Again, the responses to this prompt ran the whole gamut. If any dominant theme was given, it was the desire to reduce. One respondent wrote: “Shorter assessments, less pressure on test results, less emphasis on testing, less pressure on the teachers, students, and schools.” 295 responses explicitly requested either less testing, or to do away with them entirely. Conversely, a number of participants requested pre- and post-tests in order to better gauge the work of the students during the school year. Just fewer than 200 respondents suggested a tighter alignment with curriculum and standards. Over 100 people asked for a reduction in the stakes of testing (e.g. less pressure), not necessarily in the tests themselves.

### *3. What do you want to know about your child’s learning and progress in school and what kind of test do you think would appropriately measure that? [1,511]*

- The concept of content mastery (mentioned 94 times) for math (88 times), reading (71), science (17) and social studies (9) was the primary common mention. Progress was mentioned 216 times, but without any common trends as to what aspects of progress that people would like to know. As to the appropriate test, participants asked that tests were developmentally appropriate, nationally normed, and aligned to standards. The two most-mentioned tests were the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (written 55 times) and MAP (22 times). Interestingly, 266 respondents requested that the teachers be trusted to assess their students.

## **Educators and Leaders**

1. *What do you consider to be the most important qualifications for teachers and principals?* [1,334]

- For teachers, the most common qualification dealt with content knowledge, often evidenced by the teacher's college degree. Over a third of respondents mentioned some form of content knowledge in their response. The remaining responses centered on the instructors' attitudes towards students ("empathy," "care," "love," "compassion" towards students were mentioned 278 times) or towards the subject being taught. Principals, according to the survey, must have a set amount of classroom experience (mentioned 223 instances) ranging from 3 to 15 years.

2. *What do you consider to be the most significant barriers to all students having equal access to effective teachers and principals, and how do you think we can overcome those barriers?* [1,306]

- Respondents cited issues with resources as the most significant barrier. Nearly fifteen percent of answers claimed that the low pay of teachers specifically affects equal access, and another ten percent regarded the inequity of resources generally as the culprit. For instance, one respondent explained, "High poverty schools typically contain less experienced and less competent teachers and leaders." 169 surveys referenced the lack of parental support. Just over ten percent of the responses regarded issues with students (demographics, poverty, discipline) as significant barriers. Finally, 116 participants mentioned the teaching environment as being too inconsistent, regulatory, or filled with too much paperwork.

3. *What are some of the powerful partnerships you have seen for preparing, developing and advancing teachers and school leaders?* [1,104]

- The vast majority of survey respondents did not know of any partnerships. 169 surveys mentioned colleges and universities, often by name. Several respondents (159) suggested that teacher-to-teacher mentoring were the most powerful partnerships in the school. Local and international businesses were referenced in 46 surveys, while RESA's (38 answers) and GLISI (17) were also mentioned numerous times.

## **Federal Programs**

1. *What has worked well in schools to ensure continued improvement?* [906]

- The most common answer to this prompt centered on teaching. Respondents commented that interested parties needed to support teachers (mentioned 207 times), and allow them to teach (36 mentions). Many people believed this could happen via effective leadership (59 mentions) and/or professional development (26). Parent involvement was referenced in twelve percent of the answers.

2. *How can Georgia build local capacity to sustain improvements?* [836]

- The most common answer (31.8% of responses) focused on the need to include stakeholders more fully in the functioning of the school (e.g. parents and community). By way of an example, one participant wrote, "Support local involvement/control in the oversight of their systems. What is necessary for one school system to do may not even be on the radar and might be ultimately wasted in other areas. One size does not fit all. Support and encourage the diversity that we have." Just over twenty percent of surveys

mentioned funding in some regard, most often in regard to teacher pay.

*3. How can we continue to receive feedback from stakeholders—in addition to the superintendent’s advisory councils—after the ESSA planning period? [831]*

- Overwhelmingly the respondents asked that the current approach by the DOE around the ESSA plan be extended after its implementation. Participants asked that surveys be administered (365 mentions) and meetings be held (138) so that the state may listen (mentioned 44 times) to the people. 37 people remarked on the need to continue social media outreach as well.

## **Whole Child**

*1. How might children’s passions be engaged in and out of school, and how could technology scale these opportunities across the state? [1,326]*

- This question gained a wide variety of answers. The central theme of these responses was variety and engagement. Participants asked that schools invest in field trips and community engagement outside of the school (mentioned in 10 percent of responses). Students, according to this survey, need experiential learning that is hands-on (mentioned 110 times). Often this experience can be gained via electives (69 mentions). Computers and technology have this ability (52 mentions), but 12 surveys made a point to highlight that they do not have the ability to replace teachers. The positions on the use of technology were especially split. For example, one respondent wrote that the state needs to “forget technology” completely, while another stated that, “Technology can even the playing field for students in impoverished, rural areas that lack resources.”

*2. What does your community (and its schools) need to scale and make accessible comprehensive services, including mental health services, for any child who needs them? [1,273]*

- According to this survey, communities need to invest in human capital. Thirty-six percent of respondents specifically mentioned the needs for school counselors, psychologists, and/or social workers. Sixty-six surveys requested for increased teacher training as well. Over a quarter of the surveys claimed that schools needed increased parent and community ownership of the school.

*3. If you were to design a strategy with three main goals for “Educating the Whole Child,” what would those three goals be? [1,321]*

- The most common goals mentioned were 1) Content mastery (reading and math highlighted specifically), 2) Parent and community ownership and engagement, 3) Emphasis and/or acknowledgement of physical education, and 4) Attention towards socio-emotional learning. On average each goal was mentioned on ten percent of the answers.