

COMMONALITIES OF GEORGIA'S SUCCESSFUL MIDDLE SCHOOLS

ANALYSES OF GEORGIA MIDDLE SCHOOLS, IMPROVED MIDDLE SCHOOLS,
AND FEEDER MIDDLE SCHOOLS TO GEORGIA'S 85/10 HIGH SCHOOLS

Research commissioned by Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education



GEORGIA PARTNERSHIP
FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

RESEARCH BY



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COMMONALITIES OF GEORGIA'S SUCCESSFUL MIDDLE SCHOOLS

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INTRODUCTION

Legitimate concerns abound that public school students in the United States have fallen behind their international counterparts. Our increasing difficulties in preventing high school dropouts and in producing a skilled, competitive workforce threaten to undermine America's advantage in the global economy. Although Georgia's graduation rate has increased year after year, far too many students drop out of school ill prepared for the workforce. Leaving school prior to graduation is an evolving process that begins much earlier than high school. The causes are varied, but the lifetime effects are predictable – less income, higher unemployment, less health care, higher mortality rates, and higher teen pregnancy rates. Communities experience reduced tax revenue, less economic growth, higher criminal justice costs, and increased costs for public services.¹

Georgia has extensive school improvement efforts underway, from working with low performing schools in continuous improvement efforts to implementing a new standards-based curriculum to adopting more rigorous course requirements for graduation. However, the problem remains, and thousands of students drop out of school each year. Georgia's graduation rate must be a focus of stakeholders who are interested in the state's future.²

**“We
create an
academic
map for
each
student.”**

In 2009, the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (Refer to Appendix A) commissioned research³ on successful high schools, the purpose of which was to compare and analyze the characteristics, practices, conditions, and programs of the schools. The criteria were that the schools:

1. Had a graduation rate of at least 85 percent in 2008
2. Increased the graduation rate by at least 10 percentage points over five years, 2004 – 2008
3. Sustained the 85 percent graduation rate and the 10 percent improvement through 2009

Note: In this study these schools are referred to as “85/10 High Schools.”

There is a body of evidence that indicates “the seeds that produce high school failure are sown in grades 5-8.”⁴ Studies have found that nearly 40 percent of eventual high school dropouts could be identified in the sixth grade and 75 percent by the ninth grade.⁵ Since the dropout process begins much earlier than students' high school careers, what role do middle schools have? Georgia has many successful middle schools with varying demographics. Do these schools have commonalities? How did they improve? Could other Georgia middle schools benefit from their strategies? Can state and local educational leaders learn from the analyses of these schools? Certainly, we believe the answers to the last two questions are “Yes.”

Successful middle schools were identified based on predetermined criteria. Data are compared and contrasted, and analyses are documented and reported for use by Georgia educational leaders, school systems, and/or practitioners. Results of this study will be communicated to the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education audiences and other organizations.

This study includes:

1. Methodology of the Research
2. The Most Important Strategies Used by Successful Middle Schools
3. The Most Important Strategies Used in Identified Areas by Successful Middle Schools
4. Commonalities Among Georgia's Successful Middle Schools
5. Recommendations

¹ Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, *The Economics of Education*, 2008; Alliance for Excellent Education, *Economic Benefits of Reducing High School Drop Out Rates in America's Fifty Largest Cities*, November 18, 2009; Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, *Achieving Excellence in Secondary Education: Georgia's Unfinished Business*, 2009.

² Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, *The Economics of Education*, 2008.

³ Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. *Commonalities of Georgia's 85/10 High Schools*, 2010.

⁴ Yucke, C. P. *Mayhem in the Middle: How Middle Schools Have Failed America and How to Make Them Work*, Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2006.


⁵ American Youth Policy Forum, *Forum Brief: Improving the Transition from Middle Grades to High Schools: The Role of Early Warning Indicators*, 2008.

METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

Advocacy and reform efforts have addressed the beginning and the end of the academic pipeline while focusing less on the educational practices impacting students in the grades between elementary and high school. Yet, without strengthening the academic experience delivered in our middle schools, our best efforts to improve education and high school graduation rates will carry us only so far. The middle grades are critical times in students' academic careers, as success in these grades is a strong predictor of success in high school and beyond.⁶ Strategies to improve achievement in the middle grades and support seamless transitions at each level of the public school system must be part of a comprehensive plan to strengthen the performance of students in Georgia and the rest of the nation.

STUDY BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Building upon a past project focused on high achieving high schools,⁷ this research study by the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education extends the focus to the middle grades in order to broaden the body of research and increase our understanding of the qualities of successful middle schools. Through intensive study of a sampling of successful public middle schools throughout Georgia, this study will answer the research question: **What characteristics, practices, programs, and conditions are common among successful middle schools?** The findings of this study will be shared with educators, policymakers, and community leaders so that successful practices may be replicated, as appropriate, in other middle schools throughout the state.



**“We work
on work
ethics.”**

The purpose of this research is to compare and analyze the characteristics, practices, programs, and conditions of successful Georgia middle schools. The methodology:

1. The researcher worked with school improvement leaders and others to establish the criteria to be applied to schools to determine which schools would be included in this research.
2. The three sets of criteria were selected and are described below
3. The researcher worked with the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (OSA) to obtain data on each school.
4. Initially, 16 schools met the criteria.
5. The researcher contacted several agencies and other entities and asked for assistance in identifying experts in the field of school improvement for the 2009 research *Commonalities of Georgia's 85/10 High Schools*. Additional experts, particularly in the middle school concept, were identified and added to the list. A few individuals were deleted for various reasons.
6. The identified experts were contacted and asked to formulate the questions to be asked of the middle schools identified. Refer to Appendix B for those contacted and the letter to them regarding the study. Not all submitted questions.
7. Questions were received and organized into a meaningful, manageable format. (Refer to Appendix C for a list of the questions submitted.) The questions were open-ended, and the responders were allowed to comment without prompts.
8. The researcher contacted each of the 16 schools that met the criteria. The researcher made an appointment for a telephone interview and asked a school leader, preferably the principal, to participate. Others could be included at the discretion of the principal.
9. Four schools declined to participate. Thus, 12 schools were a part of this research. (Refer to Appendix D for list of schools and contact information).
10. The interviews were conducted between January – March 2011. Forty-three individuals participated in the interviews, including the principal of each school. The same questions were asked of each participant, and responses were recorded. The range of the duration of the telephone interviews was 35 to 75 minutes with a total of 11.5 hours.

⁶ Williams, T., Kirst, M., Haertel, E., et al. *Gaining Ground in the Middle Grades: Why Some Schools Do Better*. Mountain View, CA: EdSource, 2010.

⁷ Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. *Commonalities of Georgia's 85/10 High Schools*, 2010.

11. All responses from the 12 schools that met all criteria were organized into categories very similar to the categories used in the questions.
12. Responses were analyzed.
13. Results are reported.

EXPERTS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THIS STUDY

The experts and a body of literature were the sources of the questions to be asked of the identified middle schools. Agencies and other entities, as identified by the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, interested in improving middle grades education and, thus, the graduation rate were contacted and asked to nominate state and national experts in the field of school improvement and middle grades education. The list is found in Appendix B.

Those identified experts who submitted questions were representatives of:

1. National Governors Association
2. National Dropout Prevention Center
3. National Middle School Association
4. Lighthouse Schools to Watch
5. Education Commission of the States
6. National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform
7. Georgia Middle School Association
8. Georgia Association of Middle School Principals
9. Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement
10. Numerous Georgia Colleges and Universities
11. Georgia Department of Education
12. Local School Systems
13. Southern Regional Education Board
14. Governor's Office of Work Force Development
15. Others

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Data on the schools' Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) scores and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status were obtained from OSA.

***"We work hard
to ensure
success beyond
the classroom."***

Additionally, this study reports the relative importance of conditions, programs, practices, and characteristics as determined by those interviewed. All middle schools were implementing many improvement strategies. However, they were asked to indicate their most important strategies.

Due to the scope of this research, the sample was small: four middle schools in each of three categories. Generalizations may not be made with statistical significance.

In the middle schools, administrators, themselves, were interviewed, sometimes with others. Many were reluctant to focus on their leadership skills.

CRCT scores and Adequate Yearly Progress status were the data used to identify the schools in this study. Schools of Distinction ratings, Georgia School of Excellence ratings, and other designations of schools were not considered.

Georgia Performance Standards in mathematics, reading, and English/language arts were phased in during 2006-2007 – 2008-2009 school years as were the CRCT assessments.

THE SAMPLE OF MIDDLE SCHOOLS

In selecting the sample of middle schools for this research, the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education looked at three categories of schools: consistently high-performing middle schools, rapidly-improving middle schools, and middle schools that feed into high-performing high schools. This three-category selection was purposefully chosen to allow the research team to study the commonalities and differences in practices among middle schools that have shown success by different measures and that serve a variety of student populations.

High Performing Middle Schools

To obtain a sample of the consistently highest performing middle schools in Georgia, three years of school-level achievement data were analyzed. The researchers examined all Georgia middle schools' sixth, seventh, and eighth grade pass rates (percentage of students meeting and exceeding standards) on the mathematics, reading, and English/language arts CRCT for the years 2007, 2008, and 2009. To identify the highest performers, schools meeting the following score thresholds were identified: a pass rate of 90 percent or higher on the mathematics and a pass rate of 95 percent or higher on English/language arts and reading. Fourteen middle schools met these score thresholds for the three subjects, all grade levels (six, seven, and eight), and all years (2007-09). From this group, magnet schools were eliminated, for enrollment in these schools does not allow for a valid comparison with non-magnet schools. Finally, in order to select a manageable number of schools given the scope of this research study, if more than one school from the same district appeared in the list of high performers, only the top performers based on the CRCT pass rates detailed above were included.

“Our science fair includes sixth, seventh and eighth graders.”

Note: In this study these schools are referred to as “High Performing Middle Schools.”

Improved Middle Schools

The identification of the most Improved Middle Schools followed a similar procedure to that of High Performing Middle Schools. The researchers examined all Georgia middle schools' sixth, seventh, and eighth grade pass rates (percentage of students meeting and exceeding standards) on mathematics and reading CRCT for the years 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009. Each school's gains in scores over the three-year time period were calculated. Then, a list was generated of those schools in the top 15 percent of all middle schools as ranked by their rates of improvement on the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade CRCT scores in mathematics and reading. Finally, in order to select a manageable number of schools given the scope of this study, a final set of schools that appeared on the most-improved lists for at least two grade levels *and* made Adequate Yearly Progress in 2009 was identified.

Note: In this study these schools are referred to as “Improved Middle Schools.”

Feeder Middle Schools Into 85/10 High Schools

The identification of this group of middle schools was based on a 2009 research⁸ conducted by the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education that analyzed a set of high schools that had a graduation rate of at least 85 percent, increased their graduation rates by at least 10 percentage points over five years, 2004 – 2008, and sustained the improvements in 2009. Because research has shown that the seeds for high school success are sown often in the middle grades, the researchers chose to include here middle schools that feed into the 85/10 high schools. To increase validity of the study, the schools included in the sample were those that were the only middle schools feeding into the identified high schools. CRCT scores in 2007, 2008, and 2009 for sixth, seventh, and eighth grades in mathematics and reading were used as additional criteria.

Note: In this study these schools are referred to as “Feeder Middle Schools.”

⁸ *Commonalities of Georgia's 85/10 High Schools*, www.gpee.org.

Using the methodology described, the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education identified 16 middle schools, of which four declined to participate.

Note: The 12 remaining middle schools are referred to as a group as “Successful Middle Schools.”

Middle Schools That Meet the Criteria

The 12 middle schools identified for this research are listed in Table I.

Table I: Research Sample of Successful Middle Schools

School Name	School System
Group A – High Performing Middle Schools	
Alton C. Crews Middle School	Gwinnett County
Fulton Science Academy	Fulton County
Rising Starr Middle School	Fayette County
Riverwatch Middle School	Forsyth County
Group B – Improved Middle Schools	
Forest Park Middle School	Clayton County
Morrow Middle School	Clayton County
Risley Early College Academy	Glynn County
Lindley Middle School ⁹	Cobb County
Group C – Feeder Middle Schools	
Union County Middle School	Union County
Washington-Wilkes Middle School	Wilkes County
Lumpkin County Middle School	Lumpkin County
Loganville Middle School	Walton County

The 2007, 2008, and 2009 CRCT scores in mathematics, reading, and English/language arts for grades six, seven, and eight for the High Performing Middle Schools are provided in Table II.

⁹ Lindley Middle School has an independent sixth grade academy which began in the 2008-2009 school year.

Table II: High Performing Middle Schools - 2007, 2008, 2009 Percent Scoring in Meets Standards Range and Exceeds Standards Range on CRCT in Mathematics, Reading, and English/Language Arts in Grades Six, Seven, and Eight and State Data¹⁰

Sixth Grade

School System	School Name	2007	2007	2007	2008	2008	2008	2009	2009	2009
		Math	Read	ELA	Math	Read	ELA	Math	Read	ELA
Gwinnett County	Alton C. Crews Middle School	94	99	98	96	100	98	94	97	98
Fulton County	Fulton Science Academy	90	100	99	91	99	97	96	99	99
Fayette County	Rising Starr Middle School	94	98	97	95	98	98	95	98	97
Forsyth County	Riverwatch Middle School	98	99	100	95	99	100	98	100	99
State of Georgia		65	89	86	69	91	87	75	90	91

Seventh Grade

School System	School Name	2007	2007	2007	2008	2008	2008	2009	2009	2009
		Math	Read	ELA	Math	Read	ELA	Math	Read	ELA
Gwinnett County	Alton C. Crews Middle School	95	98	99	94	97	98	99	98	99
Fulton County	Fulton Science Academy	97	98	99	98	99	99	97	99	97
Fayette County	Rising Starr Middle School	93	98	98	94	98	98	96	98	98
Forsyth County	Riverwatch Middle School	97	99	100	98	100	99	99	100	100
State of Georgia		74	85	89	80	88	90	84	89	89

Eighth Grade

School System	School Name	2007	2007	2007	2008	2008	2008	2009	2009	2009
		Math	Read	ELA	Math	Read	ELA	Math	Read	ELA
Gwinnett County	Alton C. Crews Middle School	97	97	98	95	99	98	96	99	99
Fulton County	Fulton Science Academy	95	99	98	98	100	99	99	100	98
Fayette County	Rising Starr Middle School	98	100	99	95	98	97	93	99	98
Forsyth County	Riverwatch Middle School	97	100	99	100	100	100	98	100	99
State of Georgia		81	89	88	78	94	90	80	96	92

¹⁰ Source: 2008-2009 Report Card, Governor's Office of Student Achievement, www.gaosa.org.

The mathematics and reading scores for grades six, seven, and eight for 2007, 2008, and 2009 for the Improved Middle Schools are provided in Table III.

Table III: Improved Middle Schools - 2007, 2008, 2009 Percent Scoring in Meets Standards Range and Exceeds Standards Range on CRCT in Mathematics and Reading in Grades Six, Seven, and Eight and State Data¹¹

Sixth Grade

School System	School	2007	2007	2008	2008	2009	2009
		Math	Read	Math	Read	Math	Read
Clayton County	Forest Park Middle School	43	82	68	91	74	90
Clayton County	Morrow Middle School	50	80	66	89	81	87
Glynn County	Risley Early College Academy	49	76	55	80	70	81
Cobb County	Lindley Middle School ¹²	47	81	54	86	n/a	n/a
State of Georgia		65	89	69	91	75	90

Seventh Grade

School System	School	2007	2007	2008	2008	2009	2009
		Math	Read	Math	Read	Math	Read
Clayton County	Forest Park Middle School	55	68	81	85	89	89
Clayton County	Morrow Middle School	58	73	68	78	86	85
Glynn County	Risley Early College Academy	56	68	70	78	81	81
Cobb County	Lindley Middle School	51	73	63	83	72	87
State of Georgia		74	85	80	88	84	89

Eighth Grade

School System	School	2007	2007	2008	2008	2009	2009
		Math	Read	Math	Read	Math	Read
Clayton County	Forest Park Middle School	72	80	58	86	80	97
Clayton County	Morrow Middle School	71	79	60	90	68	93
Glynn County	Risley Early College Academy	72	75	67	84	74	91
Cobb County	Lindley Middle School	69	80	59	87	67	96
State of Georgia		81	89	78	94	80	96

The AYP status for 2007, 2008 and 2009 for each of the Improved Middle Schools is provided in Table IV.

¹¹ Source: 2008-2009 Report Card, except where otherwise noted. Governor's Office of Student Achievement, www.gaosa.org.

¹² Lindley Middle School has an independent sixth grade academy which began in the 2008-2009 school year. Source: 2007-2008 Report Card, Governor's Office of Student Achievement, www.gaosa.org.

Table IV: Improved Middle Schools AYP Status¹³

School System	School	2007	2008	2009
Clayton County	Forest Park Middle School	No	Yes	Yes
Clayton County	Morrow Middle School	No	Yes	Yes
Glynn County	Risley Early College Academy	No	No	Yes
Cobb County	Lindley Middle School	No	Yes	Yes

¹³ Source: Governor's Office of Student Achievement, www.gaosa.org.

The mathematics and reading scores for grades six, seven, and eight for the Feeder Middle School are provided in Table V.

Table V: Feeder Middle Schools to 85/10 High Schools - 2007, 2008, 2009 Percent Scoring in Meets Standards Range and Exceeds Standards Range on CRCT in Mathematics and Reading in Grades Six, Seven, and Eight and State Data¹⁴

Sixth Grade

School System	School	2007	2007	2008	2008	2009	2009
		Math	Read	Math	Read	Math	Read
Union County	Union County Middle School	89	97	89	96	90	93
Wilkes County	Washington-Wilkes Middle School	66	86	81	89	81	85
Lumpkin County	Lumpkin County Middle School	74	91	75	91	82	91
Walton County	Loganville Middle School	70	91	82	91	88	93
State of Georgia		65	89	69	91	75	90

Seventh Grade

School System	School	2007	2007	2008	2008	2009	2009
		Math	Read	Math	Read	Math	Read
Union County	Union County Middle School	77	90	81	93	83	90
Wilkes County	Washington-Wilkes Middle School	65	84	84	87	83	90
Lumpkin County	Lumpkin County Middle School	70	85	81	91	90	94
Walton County	Loganville Middle School	82	88	83	91	93	93
State of Georgia		74	85	80	88	84	89

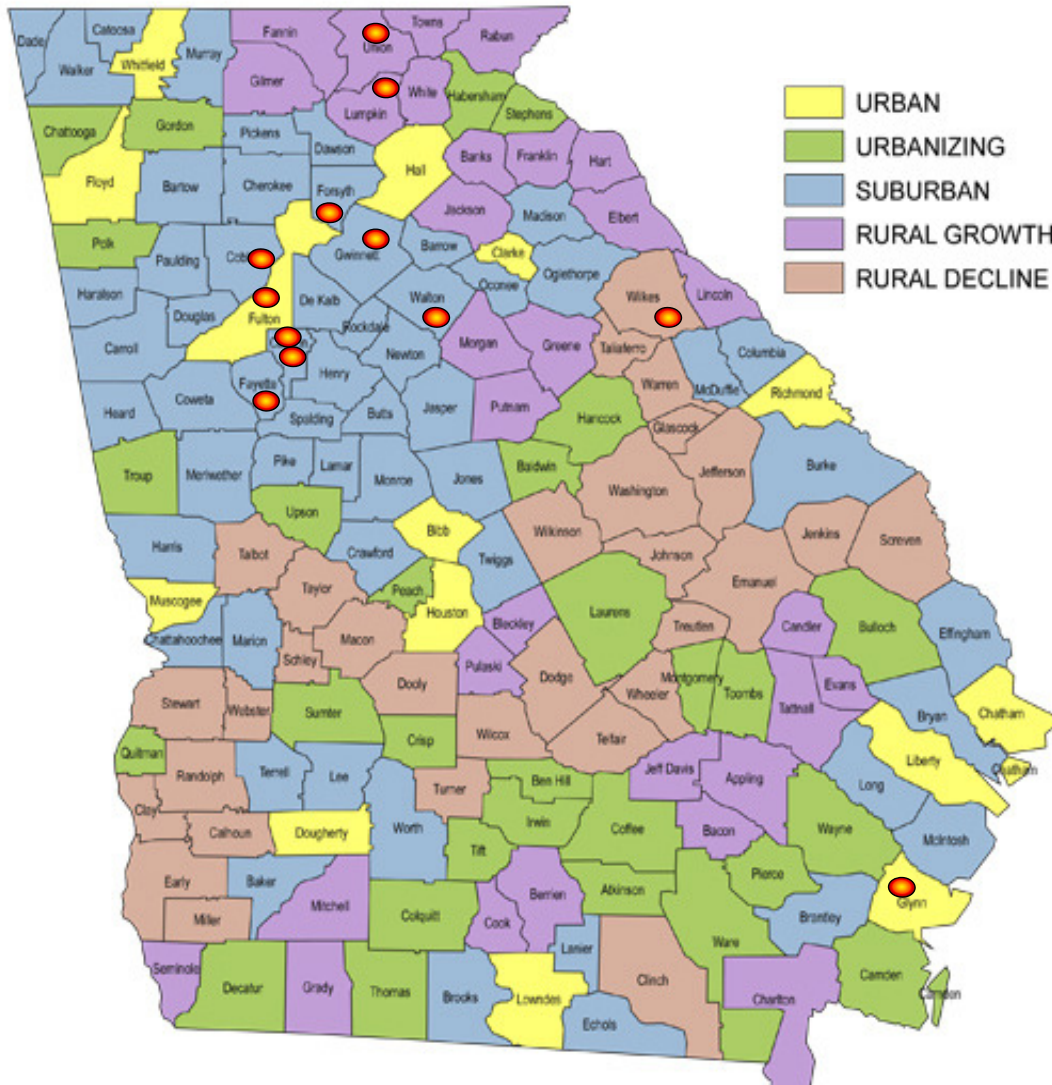
Eighth Grade

School System	School	2007	2007	2008	2008	2009	2009
		Math	Read	Math	Read	Math	Read
Union County	Union County Middle School	91	95	81	95	88	99
Wilkes County	Washington-Wilkes Middle School	85	89	83	93	81	94
Lumpkin County	Lumpkin County Middle School	88	93	71	91	80	96
Walton County	Loganville Middle School	89	92	84	96	85	98
State of Georgia		81	89	78	94	80	96

¹⁴ Source: 2009-2010 Report Card, Governor's Office of Student Achievement, www.gaosa.org.

Enrollment in the Successful Middle Schools ranged from 217 to 1,277 students. The principals' tenure at their respective school averaged 5.6 years. Geographically, 11 schools are in the northern third of Georgia and one in the southern third. Two of the schools are in urban areas, seven in suburban areas, two in rural growth areas, and one in a rural decline area. Refer to Exhibit I for location and county population classifications for each of the middle schools.

Exhibit I: Location of Successful Middle Schools with Population Classifications¹⁵



The Successful Middle Schools are:

Alton C. Crews Middle School (Gwinnett)
 Forest Park Middle School (Clayton County)
 Fulton Science Academy (Fulton County)
 Lindley Middle School (Cobb County)
 Loganville Middle School (Walton County)
 Lumpkin County Middle School (Lumpkin County)

Morrow Middle School (Clayton County)
 Rising Starr Middle School (Fayette County)
 Risley Early College Academy (Glynn County)
 Riverwatch Middle School (Forsyth County)
 Union County Middle School (Union County)
 Washington-Wilkes Middle School (Wilkes County)

¹⁵ Source of Map: College of Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Georgia. <http://www.fcs.uga.edu/hace/gafacts/map.html>

Commonalities of Georgia's Successful Middle Schools

The 2009 - 2010 enrollment and demographics of each middle school are provided in Table VI.

Table VI: 2009 - 2010 Enrollment and Demographic Data¹⁶ by Percent in Successful Middle Schools and State Data¹⁷

School System/ State of Georgia	School Name	Enrollment	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White	Multiracial	Students with Disabilities	Limited English Proficient	Economically Disadvantaged
High Performing Middle Schools										
Gwinnett County	Alton C. Crews Middle School	1,277	16	19	8	52	5	10	2	21
Fulton County	Fulton Science Academy	503	18	12	5	60	5	8	1	5
Fayette County	Rising Starr Middle School	1,097	3	7	6	77	5	8	2	9
Forsyth County	Riverwatch Middle School	1,098	12	2	6	76	3	9	1	6
Improved Middle Schools										
Clayton County	Forest Park Middle School	653	4	51	39	4	2	16	13	93
Clayton County	Morrow Middle School	689	15	61	15	4	4	12	7	84
Glynn County	Risley Early College Academy	217	0	80	8	7	4	3	1	82
Cobb County	Lindley Middle School	848	1	65	30	5	0	13	12	83
Feeder Middle Schools										
Union County	Union County Middle School	606	0	0	4	94	0	15	1	59
Wilkes County	Washington-Wilkes Middle School	385	1	54	5	41	0	9	2	73
Lumpkin County	Lumpkin County Middle School	912	0	2	0	97	1	12	2	55
Walton County	Loganville Middle School	1,092	0	13	5	78	3	10	1	37
State of Georgia		N/A	3	37	11	45	3	10	6	56

¹⁶ No students in the Native American/Alaskan Native category nor Migrant category were reported as enrolled in the Successful Middle Schools. Thus, these data are not included in the table.

¹⁷ Source: Governor's Office of Student Achievement, www.gaosa.org.

Commonalities of Georgia's Successful Middle Schools

The 2009-2010 range of student demographics of the Successful Middle Schools is summarized in Table VII.

Table VII: Range of 2009-2010 Demographic¹⁸ Percentages of Successful Middle Schools

Student Demographics	Range of Percentages for Successful Middle Schools
Asian	0 --16
Black	0 - 80
Hispanic	0 - 30
White	4 – 97
Multiracial	0 – 5
Students with Disabilities	3 – 16
Limited English Proficient	1 – 13
Economically Disadvantaged	5 – 93

¹⁸Source: Governor's Office of Student Achievement, www.gaosa.org. No students in the Native American/Alaskan Native category nor Migrant category were reported as enrolled in the Successful Middle Schools. Thus, these data are not included in the table.

THE MOST IMPORTANT STRATEGIES USED BY SUCCESSFUL MIDDLE SCHOOLS

When asked, what are absolutely the most important strategies that your school used to obtain your success, the individuals interviewed responded with a variety of answers. They are organized in the three categories of schools – High Performing Middle Schools, Improved Middle Schools, and Feeder Middle Schools. Each of the 12 schools is discussed.

HIGH PERFORMING MIDDLE SCHOOLS

The goal of one school is for all students to be successful in high school. They assess their attainment by measuring how well their students perform in the ninth grade. Parents expect their students to be challenged and successful. Sixth grade teachers work with elementary school fifth grade teachers to ensure that each student is placed in classrooms where he/she will be successful. In professional learning teams, the faculty recently completed a two-year study on creating engaging lessons.

An international festival, co-sponsored by community organizations and attracting more than 10,000 people, is an example of the importance the school puts on student, parent, and community involvement. More than half of the students in this school are involved in more than 40 clubs and competitive teams. On Mondays and Tuesdays certain class periods are shortened in order to provide time during the school day for remediation and enrichment.

“We absolutely transfer academic content to the real world.”

The philosophy of one school is: every adult in the school either teaches students or supports those who do. The community and parents of students in the school have high expectations for student learning. Teachers focus on standards-based grading – grades reflect student knowledge and not their misbehavior nor poor attendance. Teachers work collaboratively to create common assessments and to compare student responses and grades given. Connections classes are exemplary and provide a variety of options, and the school manages its own radio station which has a broadcast range of five miles.

Utilization of data is a key emphasis of one school. Teachers dive into standards and determine how to assess each student's level of knowledge. Writing is expected in each content area course. Teachers focus on struggling students, constantly reviewing their progress. Teachers collect evidence that reflect the instructional strategies that are successful and those that are not. They share this in team meetings. Teachers stress rigor and preparing students academically for high school. The principal has high expectations for teachers, stressing collaboration on teaching standards and assessing student learning.

IMPROVED MIDDLE SCHOOLS

One school uses common assessments to identify students' strengths and weaknesses and modify instruction based on the data. Teachers know the progress of each student and remediate when needed. All content areas incorporate literacy strategies and critical thinking skills. This school involves parents in several ways, offering English classes, Saturday school on various topics, such as English classes for Hispanic parents, and parent conferences in the community. Teachers go into neighborhoods during preplanning to meet parents and students. During a summer retreat, teachers and administrators analyze all data and determine the focus of their professional learning, grade by grade.

“We offer parent workshops on GAclege411.”

In another school, teachers create a “map” for each child, which serves as an academic prescription on which parents, the student, and teachers work. Teachers connect academics to events happening in the world. Students are encouraged to be successful beyond the classroom, tutoring other students and serving the community in various ways. The faculty focuses on vertical alignment, each grade knowing what is expected of students in the other grades. Ninth grade teachers are included, as well.

One school was designated as a “Needs Improvement” school for six years. New administrators changed the culture to one of high expectations for academics and behavior. Now, the school has earned AYP for the past three years. Every nine weeks, teachers get a snapshot of each student’s progress in meeting standards, which is discussed with individual students. Based on performance, teachers adjust the curriculum and instructional strategies. Each Tuesday and Thursday the school has at least 200 students in after school clubs and activities.

Teachers in another school use a common set of assessment points to track individual student progress. Veteran teachers work with less experienced ones to focus on elements within standards and how best to teach them in-depth. Students are given the opportunity to talk about the level of their learning and where it should be. A cadre of teacher leaders guides the work of the school.

FEEDER MIDDLE SCHOOLS TO 85/10 HIGH SCHOOLS

In one school, students actively participate in their learning, focusing on how they score on all assessments and determining with teachers how to improve. Advantageously, this middle school is on the same campus as the high school. Thus, students can access high school courses when they are academically ready to do so. Additionally, middle and high school teachers work collaboratively to ensure a smooth transition from eighth grade to ninth grade. Teachers frequently discuss how learning certain standards relates to students’ futures.

Another school focuses on charting the progress of each student using the results of benchmark and common assessments. Students and teachers talk about the progress and set goals. Additionally, students analyze assessments to determine how well the test evaluates the standards they were taught. Transition task forces plan transition activities for students who move from fifth to sixth grade and from eighth to ninth grade. Moving into the sixth grade is eased with a sixth grade academy which has its own classrooms, cafeteria, and media center.

Nineteen teachers in another school have certificates with reading endorsements, and they focus on moving more students into the “exceeds standards” range on the CRCT. The learning styles of all students are analyzed and used by teachers to plan instruction. On alternate Fridays, students have a club period. For struggling students, remediation is based on assessment of the students’ knowledge of the standards. Many teachers meet with students before and after school for additional instruction.

“Our PDCA cycle is engrained in everything we do.”

One school implemented a 30-minute daily “Double Achievement” period used by struggling students for remediation and for enhancement for successful students. This class is individualized, and each teacher has a needs assessment sheet on each student that indicates strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, each student has a written transition plan – from fifth to sixth grade and from eighth to ninth grade. Students remain with the same advisors for their middle school careers. The school has a data-driven, 40-day action plan that is monitored and updated frequently.

MOST IMPORTANT STRATEGIES IN IDENTIFIED AREAS BY SUCCESSFUL MIDDLE SCHOOLS

After consulting with state and national leaders and gathering items from the identified experts in school improvement and the middle school concept (Refer to Appendix B), the questions created are provided in Appendix C. The responses are organized in the following categories:

1. General Questions
2. Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction
3. Organization and Structure
4. School Culture
5. Programs and Interventions
6. Students
7. Family Involvement
8. Business and Community Involvement
9. Professional Learning
10. Leadership
11. Continuous Improvement
12. Policies and Procedures

CURRICULUM

Overwhelmingly, the Successful Middle Schools' major focus is applying learning to the world outside of school and emphasizing postsecondary education and careers. One-third specifically mentioned GAcollege411 (Refer to Appendix E) as one tool they use. At least three-fourths of the schools noted that their success is due, in part, to increasing rigor in core courses, offering higher level courses, and/or raising expectations for student learning. Several indicated that they "jumped" on the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) and Common Core Curriculum standards well before the mandated implementation dates.

"We have Tech-y Tuesdays - to teach teachers about the importance of technology in instruction."

Comparisons

The Feeder Middle Schools use GAcollege411 much more than the others, and the Improved Middle Schools emphasize careers and postsecondary education more, by offering job fairs, career days, and career inventories. Some have their students set career goals. Additionally, the Improved Middle Schools mentioned increasing the number of higher-level courses more than the others.

ASSESSMENT¹⁹

All schools employ a multitude of assessment instruments including benchmark and common assessments in addition to the state-mandated tests. They use assessment results to plan curriculum and instruction. They seek evidence and artifacts of standards mastery and use results to plan for re-teaching specific standards when needed. Many use teacher collaboration in creating common assessments and analyzing results. Almost all schools mentioned that they analyze CRCT scores to plan for the subsequent school year, many disaggregating data to the domain and element levels. One-third of the schools provide comprehensive feedback to students.

Comparisons

High Performing Middle Schools and Improved Middle Schools stress common assessments more than the Feeder Middle Schools, and the High Performing Middle Schools disaggregate CRCT results at the domain levels more than the other schools.

¹⁹ See more about assessment in the Continuous Improvement section of this study.

INSTRUCTION

“We have nine week snapshots on specific standards.”

For almost all schools, the focus is on mastery of standards. All schools employ a variety of instructional methods, most mentioning differentiated instruction. Additionally, they have a faculty focus on what students have learned instead of what teachers have taught, and many schools emphasize moving students from the “meeting standards” range of scores on the CRCT into the “exceeding standards” range of scores.

Additionally, many teachers emphasize small flexible grouping of students, and use teaching tools, such as graphic organizers and content word walls. Several schools spotlight writing assignments to not only further students' writing skills, but to increase content knowledge in the core subjects.

Several noted that they changed the grading philosophy of the schools. For example, some schools assign grades for the knowledge students demonstrate rather than behavior, attendance, or completion of homework. In at least one school, students cannot opt out and take a zero for missed school work, i.e. re-takes and re-dos are expected of all students.

Several noted that administrators use focus walks (Refer to Appendix F) as a tool to ensure appropriate instructional strategies are used by teachers. Many use the Georgia Analysis of Performance on School Standards (GAPSS) Classroom Instruction Observation Form. (See Appendix G)

Comparisons

There are no obvious differences in how each category of middle schools implemented instructional strategies.

TRANSITIONS OF STUDENTS

Elementary School to Middle School Transitions

All schools use the standard strategies that most middle schools use, such as tours of the middle school, and meetings with parents, to ease the transition from elementary grades. One school reported introducing students to the middle school building using a scavenger hunt. All schools mentioned the importance of getting parents involved in their child's middle school years prior to enrollment in the sixth grade. In others, sixth graders go into fifth grade classrooms to talk about what students can expect. In one school the band goes into the elementary school to play for the students.

More than half indicate that vertical teaming across schools is beneficial in helping students adjust to sixth grade, especially at-risk students. In some schools, counselors and/or teachers meet to discuss specific students and their needs. At least two schools offer summer camp for rising sixth graders.

Comparisons

High Performing Middle Schools emphasize vertical teaming more than the other middle schools.

Middle School to High School Transitions

Much more emphasis is given to the transition into ninth grade than into sixth grade in the middle schools in this study. All schools noted that eighth grade students visit the high school campus and provide parent information sessions. As with middle schools, high schools stress the importance of family involvement, especially, in planning students' high school careers.

As with the fifth grade to sixth grade transition, most schools use vertical teaming to streamline the process. For example, in more than half of the schools, eighth grade teachers, counselors, and/or administrators meet with ninth grade teachers, counselors, and/or administrators to plan for specific students' academic and other needs. At least one-third of the schools have structured transition plans created by teams of educators.

“We have a cadre of teacher leaders who help guide the work of the school.”

Some middle schools have summer activities for rising ninth graders, such as Freshman Boot Camp. Several emphasize the importance of involving students in extracurricular and co-curricular activities as methods of connecting the students to high school.

Comparisons

There are no obvious differences in the way each category of middle schools approaches the transition of students from middle school to high school.

STRUCTURE OF LEARNING TIME AND PHYSICAL SPACE

The middle schools in this study created additional instructional time for students, using the time either in remediation or enrichment based on the needs of the students. Students who are at-risk of not passing subjects are provided additional instruction in subjects in which they are having difficulty.

Most schools build time into the school day for remediation, and half include additional days of instruction, such as Saturday School and intersessions, in their school calendars for students who need intense remediation. Several offer before and after school remediation, but noted that it is difficult for students to participate if they are bus-riders.

There are no distinct patterns of how the school day is structured for learning. About one-fourth of the schools structure learning time in blocks of 70-100 minutes with some rotating certain blocks on alternate days. Others employ a six or seven period day for instruction. Several have some form of advisement²⁰ built into the school day or week. One school has part of one period earmarked for co-curricular activities on alternate Fridays, which helps connect students to an area of interest, thus, providing another connection to the school.

“We have over 200 students in after school activities – they don't want to go home.”

One-third of the schools structure the sixth grade at least somewhat differently from the other grades, with some devoting certain wings of the school to these students. In one school, the eighth grade is physically connected to the ninth grade wing of the high school. In others, the seventh and/or eighth grades are structured more like high school than middle school. Almost all schools have three- and four-teacher teams. Some have cross-team teaching for certain subjects, mainly science and social studies.

Connections Classes

Only a few schools mentioned connection classes as important in achieving the middle schools' success. Most were mentioned as assisting students to find interests and keeping them attracted to school. Some provide remediation during connections time.

Comparisons

There are no obvious differences in the structure of learning time and physical space in each category of middle schools.

²⁰ See more about advisement in the Programs and Interventions section.

CULTURE OF THE SCHOOLS

“Every week, we monitor the progress of struggling students and counsel them. We have fewer students in RTI because of this.”

Most schools mentioned a focus on academics with high expectations for students and faculty as a part of the culture of the school. Foremost, the schools are about student learning. The other most important part of the schools' cultures is an atmosphere of kindness, compassion, and orderliness with a sense of family. Several mentioned that the use of data to make decisions is engrained into the culture of the school.

In at least half of the schools, engaging students in school extracurricular and co-curricular activities is important for keeping students enrolled. Another important element of the culture indicated by three-fourths of the schools is the personal interaction of individual students with at least one caring, concerned adult.

One fourth indicated that their schools have a data-driven culture, where decisions are based on a multitude of test data and other information. Data rooms and walls are common, and conversations center on determining the knowledge and skills students have and have not mastered and using that information to plan instruction.

Comparisons

There are no obvious differences in the cultures of each category of middle schools.

IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL DROPOUTS

A variety of factors are used by the middle schools to identify potential dropouts. For example, the CRCT and other test scores, class grades, teacher recommendations, truancy, and difficult home situations were mentioned. (Refer to Appendix H for the Worksheet of Common Risk Factors). Many indicated that they use the at-risk designation of elementary schools as a guide for rising sixth graders.

Only one school has a formal identification method using a point system it created. Several schools stated that they did not have a very reliable method to identify potential dropouts and would like a more structured process.

Comparisons

There are no obvious differences in how each category of middle schools identifies potential dropouts.

PROGRAMS AND INTERVENTIONS

Remediation

Remediation of students who have not mastered standards is by far the intervention used most by these middle schools. At least three-fourths of the schools have built time into the instructional day for remediation. All used small group and individual student tutoring before, during, and after school. At least one-third indicated that teachers keep actual charts on individual student progress.

Guidance Counseling Program

Counselors conduct the standard strategies used by most middle school counselors. More than half indicated that counselors are involved with struggling students, assisting teachers in creating and

implementing Response to Intervention (RTI) plans, and using the Pyramid of Interventions (Refer to Appendix I) as a guide.

Advisement Program

All schools emphasize the importance of the advisement program in planning for the students' futures and connecting students with school. Almost all use the advisement time as a tool to link learning to the world outside of school and to future careers, and many use the time to remediate at-risk students and to enrich the learning of others.

The structures of the advisement programs vary greatly from school to school. Some schools devote time each day to advisement, ranging from 20 minutes per day to an hour. In others, the advisor rotates with the students so the students have one person advising them for three years. Only one school indicated that its advisement program is informal.

Mentoring Program

One-fourth of the schools indicated that mentors are instrumental in their schools' success. The mentors may be community members, teachers in the school, or older, more successful students.

Social Supports

In addition to academic support, the mentoring, advisement and counseling programs also provide students with the social supports they need as they traverse the difficulties of moving into the teenage years and struggle with other personal issues.

Comparisons

There are no obvious differences in how each category of schools implemented programs and interventions.

ENGAGING STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Almost all schools indicated that personal interaction of faculty with students is key in keeping students engaged in school. More than half emphasize the importance of clubs and extracurricular activities.

All schools indicated that parent support and involvement is very important to the success of the student. All schools meet with parents individually and in large and small groups for transition into the sixth grade and in planning the students' middle school careers.

Most plan specific activities for students and their families, realizing that most of the students' younger siblings will be in their school eventually.

Additionally, all schools reported that frequent and meaningful communication with families is especially important to student success. Most indicated that parental involvement is not at the level they would like, that it is a constant issue with some parents, and that they spend a great deal of time encouraging parents to become involved with their children's education.

“We care deeply about our students. It is not all about academics.”

Comparisons

The Improved Middle Schools and the Feeder Middle Schools report more family activities than the High Performing Middle Schools.

BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

“Our math teachers use iPads and hand-held responders.”

Most schools did not indicate that business and community involvement are instrumental in their success. All schools receive donations from certain segments of the community, such as business partners and civic clubs.

A few indicated they have mentors, tutors, faith community members, and other volunteers in the schools from time to time. One school invites community organizations to participate in a community day with booths where students and their families can learn about the organizations. Another did the same for businesses and industries in the community.

Three schools encourage students to get involved in service to the community.

Many schools indicated there was much room for improvement in this area.

Comparisons

There are no obvious differences in how each category of schools involves business and the community.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Rather than professional learning provided one or more times a year on related or unrelated topics, professional learning for most of these schools is frequent and site-based and planned with specific faculty needs in mind. The professional learning is woven into the school day and year with a focus on instruction and student learning. Most schools use teachers and others in the school or district to deliver professional learning rather than employ state or national experts.

Many schools have a multi-year focus on a particular area of need. For example, one school focuses on assessing student learning and using the results to improve teaching and learning. Teachers learned to design specific test items that measure the actual cognitive levels of students on a particular standard. The analyses are used then to plan for re-teaching students who have not mastered the standard and for improving instruction in subsequent years. Others have an extended focus on literacy skills and professional learning communities. Several schools urge all teachers to add gifted and/or reading endorsement to their certificates.

Most schools conduct needs assessments with faculty to determine specific themes and to plan for subsequent years of professional learning. Professional learning topics noted are:

- Using college and career mathematics
- Analyzing CRCT scores at the domain level
- Identifying evidence and artifacts of learning in student work samples
- Infusing rigor into subject area content
- Establishing curriculum teams
- Using technology in instruction
- Implementing a model classroom
- Using curriculum maps
- Using instructional tools, such as graphic organizers
- Applying instructional best practices

“Our benchmarks are posted in our hallways.”

None of the schools indicated that they monitor professional learning application.

Comparisons

There are no obvious differences in how each category of schools approaches professional learning.

LEADERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP TEAMS

All schools in this study use some version of a shared leadership model to involve others in important decisions. Most indicate a leadership style that is collegial, open to ideas, honest, transparent, inclusive, and comfortable accompanied with high expectations for educator performance. Most leaders use teams of teachers and others to solve particular problems and research certain topics. They work with teacher leaders to set the tone of the school.

All leadership teams are comprised of individuals who represent certain segments of the school, such as grade-level, connection, and content-area teachers and others educators, such as counselors and special education and English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers. Leaders in these schools use leadership teams as two-way communication vehicles with others in the school and in other ways, such as long range decision making, day-to-day management of the school, analyses of data, and development of the school improvement plan.

“We added 20 minutes of instruction each day just by changing our class schedules.”

Comparisons

There are no obvious differences in the leadership styles and leadership teams of each category.

MISSION, GOALS AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANS

The schools report that their faculties have a shared mission, which generally focuses on student learning. They indicate that leaders work to keep the staff focused on that mission.

Most schools use teams – and some include parents and students - to develop goals and a school improvement plan, which is updated, in most cases, yearly, and, in some cases, more frequently. Several require grade-level and subject-area goals yearly with frequent analyses of progress. Some require individual teachers to set goals for their students' learning, while others expect each teacher to set CRCT goals for each student in each subject. One school has an action plan with updates every 40 days.

Comparisons

There are no obvious differences in the mission, goals, and school improvement planning processes in each of the categories.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Without exception, the schools in this study focus on data to support continuous improvement efforts. They use multiple data sources to measure success and use the analyses to adjust the curriculum and instruction provided in the classrooms. They identify weaknesses and design strategies to eliminate them. The focus on mission, school improvement plans, and continuous improvement efforts provides a steady course, and, as one indicated, they are not tempted to “jump on” every bandwagon and school improvement idea that comes along.

Teaming is used extensively. The schools employ the standard middle school teaming concepts as well as vertical teaming, across-grades and across-schools and include teachers, counselors, social workers, and/or administrators. These teams collaborate in a variety of ways to analyze data, to determine how the analyses will be used to impact student learning, and to measure success.

Specific formal continuous improvement models used by the schools are Backward Design and Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA). Several mentioned the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI)

model and GAPSS for analyses as ways to structure their continuous improvement efforts. A few schools mentioned that data rooms are central to their continuous improvement processes.

Comparisons

The Improved Middle Schools cited data rooms, tracking individual student progress, and vertical teaming as more important than the High Performing Middle Schools and Feeder Middle Schools.

CHALLENGES

Most of the challenges mentioned by the schools are tied directly to the economic woes of the school district, state and nation and result in:

- The elimination of staff they deem instrumental to their success
- An increase in class sizes
- The strain of furloughs

Some schools indicated that the large percentage of economically disadvantaged, transient, and special education students is an issue. Two schools mentioned complacency of faculty, lack of parental support, and/or student population growth as factors, as well.

Additional challenges noted are:

- Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO) increases
- Meeting or exceeding AYP
- Pressure for all students to meet and exceed standards
- Amount of paperwork
- Micromanagement from central office
- Growth in student diversity
- Accountability regardless of constraints
- Unwillingness of some individuals to change
- Lack of understanding of the middle school concept

***“Our career day
is for all our
students – not
only eighth
graders.”***

SUMMARY

In summary, each of the Successful Middle Schools indicated the importance of and, to varying degrees, emphasized each of the following:

1. A rigorous curriculum focused on high expectations, career preparedness, and postsecondary readiness
2. Student assessment with emphasis on the mastery of standards
3. Effective classroom instruction using a variety of strategies
4. Effective use of advisement, counseling, and RTI for remediation
5. Meaningful collaboration among teachers
6. Programs and interventions which focus on remediation
7. Implementation of continuous improvement processes, concentrating on teaming and using data to make decisions
8. A respectful, open, and caring school culture
9. Effective transitions particularly from eighth grade to ninth grade
10. Expert teachers and effective leaders
11. Professional learning focused on student learning
12. Involvement of and communication with parents
13. Connection classes to find student interests and attract them to schools

***“We visit in
the homes of
at least 50
students
each year.”***

COMMONALITIES AMONG GEORGIA'S SUCCESSFUL MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Telephone interviews with the Successful Middle Schools were conducted in random order depending on the times selected by the schools. The same questions were asked regardless of the category of each school. No patterns or commonalities were obvious during the interview period. Once the analyses phase began, however, the commonalities of strategies these schools deemed important to their successes emerged. These reflect to a high degree the emphases given by the experts who participated in crafting questions for this study.²¹ The results of the analyses are strikingly similar across all three categories of middle schools. A few exceptions will be noted below.

“We have fifth to sixth and eighth to ninth grade task forces.”

COMMONALITIES

1. The cultures of the schools are quite similar – the focus is on student learning with high expectations for student success in an atmosphere of meaningful collaboration. The emphasis on mission, goals, school improvement plans is apparent. Continuous improvement processes and tools and data analyses are exercised through team collaboration. These schools took teaming seriously as a mechanism for meaningful collaboration.
2. One of the strongest commonalities is the concentration on applied learning, postsecondary readiness, and career preparedness. The schools view these three as one entity.
3. Rigor, high expectations for student performance, and enrichment are quite evident in the interviews.
4. Assessments and assessment results are viewed as tools to guide planning the curriculum to be taught and re-taught and for the delivery of instruction. The analyses of results occur through vertical and horizontal collaboration. Mastery of standards is the focal point of instruction.
5. Remediation for students on standards not mastered is a strong commonality with RTI and the Pyramid of Intervention used frequently as the structure for remediation.
6. The structure of learning time varies among these schools. No commonalities emerged, except the allocation of time for remediation during the school day. The structure of the middle school teams vary somewhat, but not to the extent as the structure of learning time.
7. School leaders are very collaborative in their approach, stressing an expert faculty with the autonomy and support to lead their classrooms. Leaders know the curriculum and understand effective instruction. They are not shy in setting, communicating, and holding students and faculty accountable for elevated expectations.
8. Professional learning is strongly emphasized in these schools. Mostly, it is focused and is planned and conducted in the schools by administrators and teacher leaders. Planning is based on data analyses, and strategies are embedded in the instructional day. Multi-year in-depth study of selected topics occurs in several schools.
9. Identification of potential dropouts is not an emphasis of these schools, and very little structure for doing so is apparent. Advisement, counseling, and RTI are the programs and interventions indicated for remediation and identification of potential dropouts.
10. Strategies to engage students in their learning are an emphasis.
11. Most schools indicated that community involvement is not as important as other factors in the success of these schools.
12. Family involvement is important, but most school leaders are not pleased with the level of involvement and stated they have much work to do in this area.
13. The significance of transition from elementary to middle school is not as strong as the transition from middle to high school. The schools stressed vertical planning with high school faculties for the transition of students from middle to high school.

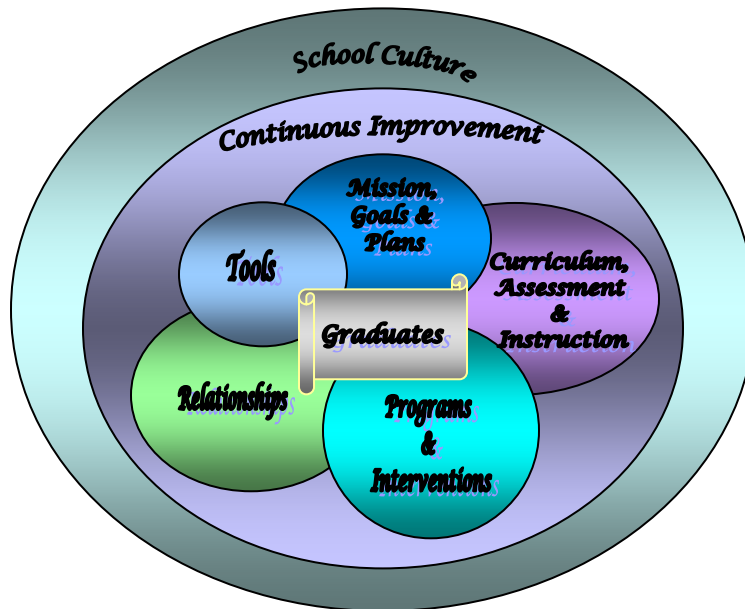
²¹ For additional information, refer to the section, Methodology of the Research.

14. Very few pointed to their connections classes as instrumental to their success. Most indicated they are important in aiding students to find their interests and keeping them attracted to school.

INTERDEPENDENCE OF COMMONALITIES

The interdependence of the commonalities was evident. For example, professional learning is a tool that is used in continuous improvement processes to create authentic assessments and analyze artifacts and evidence that students have mastered the standards. Planning curriculum and instruction is based on these analyses. Refer to Exhibit II for a conceptualization of the commonalities which are discussed below.

Exhibit II: Interdependence of Commonalities Identified as Important to Successful Middle Schools



School Culture

Each school was proud of its culture and pointed to its impact on student learning. Engrained in the cultures are high expectations for both adults and students. A focus on student learning and an emphasis on applied learning, postsecondary readiness, and career preparedness were prominent. These schools stressed the importance of an open, respectful, caring environment and close personal relationships among adults and students.

Continuous Improvement

In all schools, the culture embraced some if not most of the concepts of continuous improvement. All but a few used continuous improvement processes extensively. The schools that indicated they did not have formal processes in place had implemented many of the components of continuous improvement, especially using data to make decisions. Horizontal and vertical teaming across grades and schools were particularly strong in these schools. Leaders underscored collaboration among teacher teams as vehicles to improve student learning.

Mission, Goals, and School Improvement Plans

The missions, goals, and school improvement plans focused mainly on high expectations for student learning and educator performance. For most of the schools, the improvement plans were the guiding documents, and all were created by the entire faculty or teams of educators. All schools indicated data were used by the teams in the development and implementation of the goals and school improvement plans. Many schools developed and shared goals, mostly CRCT scores, for and with individual students.

***“Our students are
in charge of their
learning.”***

Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction

Standards mastery, by far, was a major focus of the schools. The faculty knew the curriculum in-depth and was adept at instructing students with a clear focus on mastery. Rigor was mentioned by most schools as a major factor of their success. Almost all schools noted that they worked hard to apply standards to the world outside of school, and they did not leave postsecondary readiness and career preparedness to the high schools.

Assessment of student learning was a central theme of these schools, and they used the data in designing instruction focused on standards mastery. Benchmark assessments and common assessments were viewed by these schools as important tools. They also provided consistency of curriculum and instruction from teacher to teacher of the same course, thus increasing the quality of teaching, especially for less experienced teachers.

Another commonality in these schools' success was frequent, focused, and strategic collaboration among faculty members. Horizontal and vertical teaming within and across schools were practical ways to work on instruction and student assessment. Administrators were viewed as effective instructional leaders.

Programs and Interventions

Remediation on standards not mastered was one of the strongest commonalities found. These schools used numerous approaches, both during and outside the school day, to ensure each student mastered the requisite curriculum standards necessary to move to the next level of learning.

The advisement and counseling programs were used as vehicles to ensure each student was progressing educationally, and many were used to address the physical and social needs of students. Those students who were not on track were targeted for remediation. These programs also were instrumental in establishing personal relationships among students and faculty.

The schools recognized the importance of the transition of students from one grade level to the next and from one school to the next. They viewed transition from middle to high school as more important than the transition from elementary to middle school.

Relationships

A school is a dynamic, social community of its own. Each school emphasized genuine, caring personal relationships among students, faculty, and administrators.

The schools had strong, effective instructional leaders who established a caring culture which nurtured personal relationships while holding students and faculty accountable for student learning. The leaders used teams of faculty members and others extensively to plan for instruction, make decisions, and solve problems.

Most schools mentioned business involvement as an important source of contributions to the school. Many indicated they needed to do a better job of incorporating meaningful two-way community, business, and school engagement. Community and business connections to the schools were the weakest commonality found.

Tools

Teachers and administrators worked together to create and use tools, such as balanced scorecards, common assessments, instructional time, and professional learning, to ensure student learning. These schools used data and continuous improvement processes extensively.

Each school concentrated on increasing the amount of student-learning time and how best to use time to impact student achievement. Increasing the actual instructional time during the school day was important, and each of the schools created ways to increase the amount of time for student learning beyond the regular school day, instructing students before school, after school, on Saturdays, and during intersessions.

Professional learning was another tool these schools used to advantage, and teams of educators planned the professional learning based on identified needs. Clearly, student learning was the absolute focal point of the professional learning. Some schools used learning communities as the structure of their professional learning.

COMMONALITIES OF SUCCESSFUL MIDDLE SCHOOLS COMPARED TO THOSE OF 85/10 HIGH SCHOOLS

The commonalities found in the middle schools that are similar to those of the 85/10 High Schools are:

1. School Climate
2. Mission, Goals and School Improvement Plans
3. Continuous Improvement Processes and Tools
4. Rigor and High Expectations
5. Standards Mastery
6. Effective Remediation of Students Who Have Not Mastered Standards
7. Effective Supports for Students Who Are Having Problems Other than Academics
8. Effective Instructional Leaders and Other Educators
9. Effective and Focused Professional Learning

A few differences are noted. Surprisingly, the middle schools indicated that they emphasize applied learning, career readiness, and postsecondary preparedness as important more than the 85/10 high schools. Not unexpected is the reliance on teaming since one main component of the middle school concept is team planning and teaching. The schools in this study expressed strong, genuine, effective collaboration within teams much more so than the high schools. Successful transitions from middle to high school are perceived as more essential to the high schools than to the middle schools. The schools emphasize the engagement of students in their learning more than the high schools and use RTI and the Pyramid of Intervention more than the high schools.

“A lot of teachers want to teach here – it’s not hard for us to find good teachers.”

COMMONALITIES BASED ON POPULATION CLASSIFICATION OF COUNTIES AND STUDENT ENROLLMENT

An analysis of the responses of the three categories of schools based on the counties' population classification, such as rural, urban, and suburban, indicated no stronger commonalities than those among all schools. Similarly, analyses of schools' responses based on student enrollment indicated comparable commonalities as those of all schools. Thus, neither the size of the schools' enrollment nor the population classification of the counties in which the schools are located resulted in differences in commonalities among the 12 middle schools. See Table VIII for the population classifications of the schools' counties and school enrollment and Exhibit I for locations of schools and county population classifications.

Table VIII: Population Classification of Counties and Enrollment (2010) of Successful Middle Schools

School System/ State of Georgia	School Name	Population Classification of Counties ²²				Enrollment (2010) ²³		
		Urban	Sub- urban	Rural Growth	Rural Decline	Less than 1000 Students	1000 – 2000 Students	More than 2000 Students
High Performing Middle Schools								
Gwinnett County	Alton C. Crews Middle School		√				√	
Fulton County	Fulton Science Academy	√				√		
Fayette County	Rising Starr Middle School		√				√	
Forsyth County	Riverwatch Middle School		√				√	
Improved Middle Schools								
Clayton County	Forest Park Middle School		√			√		
Clayton County	Morrow Middle School		√			√		
Glynn County	Risley Early College Academy	√				√		
Cobb County	Lindley Middle School		√			√		
Feeder Middle Schools								
Union County	Union County Middle School			√		√		
Wilkes County	Washington-Wilkes Middle School				√	√		
Lumpkin County	Lumpkin County Middle School			√		√		
Walton County	Loganville Middle School		√				√	
Total		2	7	2	1	8	4	0

²² Source: College of Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Georgia. <http://www.fcs.uga.edu/hace/gafacts/map.html>.

²³ Source: Governor's Office of Student Achievement, www.gaosa.org.

RECOMMENDATIONS²⁴

The Successful Middle Schools in this research are commended for their uncompromising endeavors to educate all students to high levels. Nevertheless, obstacles remain, and the schools acknowledge they have additional work to do to prepare students for high school.

I. IDENTIFY POTENTIAL DROPOUTS

“Realistically, to increase the graduation rate, Georgia must confront the issues that lead students to leave school prior to graduation. These issues must be addressed comprehensively, directly, and strategically. However, in order to do this, it is essential for educators and other decision-makers to have accurate, reliable data on which to base their actions. The Alliance for Excellent Education²⁵ and the Data Quality Campaign²⁶ recommend that states create high quality longitudinal data systems for schools. The National Governors Association calls for the creation of ‘... early warning data systems to help schools accurately identify individual students likely to drop out.’²⁷ Also, research by Achieve²⁸ and the National Dropout Prevention Center²⁹ call for locale-specific data systems to predict precisely which students will drop out of school.”³⁰

“Research³¹ indicates checklists of global sets of risk factors are inefficient and unreliable as predictors of individual students who are unlikely to graduate from high school.³² Research calls for the development of an effective and efficient early warning system which will help educators predict the specific students who will drop out of school. Because there are variations in student populations from community to community and school to school, educators need a system that will develop profiles of Georgia students at the school and system levels who are likely to drop out.”³³

We have a data-driven, 40-day action plan that is monitored and updated frequently.

Georgia is well down the road in developing its longitudinal data system including unique student identifiers, which will allow for a more accurate accounting of students throughout the state. It is recommended Georgia include in the longitudinal data system the capacity for its schools and school systems to conduct cohort-based, longitudinal studies, the results of which can be used to create locale-specific early warning systems that predict which students in a certain school or school system will leave school prior to graduation. Achieve research³⁴ and National Dropout Center research³⁵

²⁴ Several of these recommendations also appear in *Increasing the Graduation Rate, Phase I, Data Needed and Available to Make Quality Decisions*, www.gpee.org.

²⁵ Alliance for Excellent Education, http://www.all4ed.org/about_the_solution/data_for_improvement_of_ed.

²⁶ Data Quality Campaign, *Creating Longitudinal Data Systems – Lessons Learned by Leading States*, October 2006, www.dataqualitycampaign.org.

²⁷ Princiotta, D. and Ryan, R. *Achieving Graduation for All: A Governor's Guide to Dropout Prevention and Recovery*, National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2009, p. 23.

²⁸ Jerald, C. D. *Identifying Potential Dropouts: Key Lessons for Building an Early Warning Data System*, Achieve and Jobs for the Future, Carnegie Corp., 2006.

²⁹ Wells, S. Bechard, S. and Hamby, J. *How to Identify At-Risk Students. A Series of Solutions and Strategies*. National Dropout Prevention Center, July 1989.

³⁰ Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, *Commonalities of Georgia's 85/10 High School*. www.gpee.org, 2010.

³¹ Data Quality Campaign. *Creating a Longitudinal Data System: Using Data to Improve Student Achievement*, 2006, www.dataqualitycampaign.org, and Wells, S. Bechard, S. and Hamby, J. *How to Identify At-Risk Students. A Series of Solutions and Strategies*. National Dropout Prevention Center, July 1989.

³² Allensworth, E. and Easton, J.Q. *The On-Track Indicator as a Predictor of High School Graduation*. Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2005. Gerald, Craig D. *Identifying Potential Dropouts: Key Lessons for Building an Early Warning Data System*. Achieve and Jobs for the Future. Carnegie Corp., 2006; Wells, S. Bechard, S. and Hamby, J. *How to Identify At-Risk Students. A Series of Solutions and Strategies*. National Dropout Prevention Center, July 1989. U.S. Department of Education, 1998. *Do We Know Whom to Serve? Issues in Using Risk Factors to Identify Dropouts*. School Dropout Demonstration Assistance Program Evaluation. http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/site/c.kjJXJ5MPlwE/b.2637903/k.A3BA/Keeping_kids_in_school_What_research_says_about_preventing_dropouts.htm.

³³ Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, *Commonalities of Georgia's 85/10 High Schools*, www.gpee.org, 2010.

³⁴ Jerald, C. D. *Identifying Potential Dropouts: Key Lessons for Building an Early Warning Data System*, Achieve and Jobs for the Future, Carnegie Corp., 2006.

“Piloted in math classes and after they take tests, our students evaluate how well the tests measure their knowledge of the standards taught.”

chronicle two methods to develop a locale-specific data system to predict which specific students will drop out and how this can be done in a “very short time and require relatively few resources.”³⁶ The Data Quality Campaign has developed estimates for building specific components of the system. For a detailed discussion, refer to *Creating Longitudinal Data Systems – Lessons Learned by Leading States*.³⁷

According to the Data Quality Campaign, “The 10 State Actions to Ensure Effective Data Use, along with the 10 Essential Elements, provide a roadmap to state policymakers to create a culture in which quality data are not only collected but also used to increase student achievement. To leverage current investments and ensure data are used, states must act to ensure that data can be linked across education systems, are accessible to stakeholders, and those stakeholders have the capacity to use data to improve student achievement.”³⁸

The Data Quality Campaign rates Georgia as one of very few states to have all of the following 10 essential elements,³⁹ with a total of 59 sub-elements, that are essential to creating a longitudinal data system:

1. A unique statewide student identifier
2. Student-level enrollment and demographic and program participation information
3. The ability to match individual students' test records from year to year to measure academic growth
4. Information on untested students
5. A teacher identifier system with the ability to match teachers to students
6. Student-level transcript information, including information on courses completed and grades earned
7. Student-level college readiness test scores
8. Student-level graduation and dropout data
9. The ability to match student records among all agencies, P–16
10. A state data audit system assessing data quality, validity, and reliability

The Data Quality Campaign rates Georgia as having taken all 10 of the state actions with the exception of numbers five, nine and 10.⁴⁰

1. Link data systems
2. Create stable, sustained support
3. Develop governance structures
4. Build state data repositories
5. Implement systems to provide timely access to information
6. Create progress reports using individual student data to improve student performance
7. Create reports using longitudinal statistics to guide system-wide improvement efforts
8. Develop a P-20/workforce research agenda
9. Promote educator professional development and credentialing
10. Promote strategies to raise awareness of available data

“Textbooks are a thing of the past!”

³⁵ Wells, S. Bechard, S. and Hamby, J. *How to Identify At-Risk Students. A Series of Solutions and Strategies. National Dropout Prevention Center, July 1989.*

³⁶ Jerald, C. D. *Identifying Potential Dropouts: Key Lessons for Building an Early Warning Data System*, Achieve and Jobs for the Future, Carnegie Corp, 2006, p. 19.

³⁷ Data Quality Campaign, *Creating Longitudinal Data Systems – Lessons Learned by Leading States*, October 2006, www.dataqualitycampaign.org.

³⁸ Data Quality Campaign, www.dataqualitycampaign.org/build/actions/, 2011.

³⁹ Data Quality Campaign, www.dataqualitycampaign.org/build/elements/, 2011.

⁴⁰ Data Quality Campaign, www.dataqualitycampaign.org/build/actions/, 2011.

Refer to Appendix J for details regarding State Education Agency Actions to Create a State Longitudinal Data System.

In 2009, the Georgia Department of Education was awarded an \$8.9 million grant to improve its statewide educational data system from the Institute of Educational Sciences, a division of the U.S. Department of Education. Refer to Appendix K for more information on the grant.⁴¹

II. EVALUATE THE FIDELITY OF PROGRAMS AND INTERVENTIONS

Many of the programs and interventions mentioned by the middle schools are implemented in varying ways and in varying degrees in these and other schools across Georgia. The schools have little data on the fidelity of implementation of the programs and interventions they use.

“What is fidelity of implementation? Assuming the programs or intervention are research-based, fidelity of implementation⁴² is the degree to which practitioners:

1. Implement the interventions or programs as prescribed by those who designed and evaluated them
2. Avoid implementing factors that are not prescribed by those who designed and evaluated the intervention or program
3. Have and use the professional learning and skills prescribed as necessary by the designers to implement the intervention or program successfully.”⁴³

“Why is fidelity so important? It is critical to achieving the same results that were achieved during the design and testing of the research-based program or intervention. The quality or lack of quality of implementation will impact program effectiveness and, thus, the data gathered on the program or intervention. Additionally, educators need to determine the flexibility they have in implementing the specific program or intervention locally without negating its effectiveness.”⁴⁴

It is recommended that the fidelity of implementation of programs and interventions used by the Successful Middle Schools be compared to the research base on which they depend and to evaluate the implementation of similar programs and interventions used by a group of demographically similar middle schools to determine if there are significant differences.

“In evaluating the programs and interventions identified in this report, researchers should

1. Consider the research on which programs or interventions are based. Have the programs or interventions been proven to be valid and reliable?
2. If yes, look to the research for implementation criteria established for the programs or interventions.
3. Identify and quantify the criteria that would significantly impact the success of the programs or interventions.
4. Locate such programs and interventions in Georgia and test for fidelity of implementation.
5. For those that have fidelity, collect and analyze data of program and intervention effectiveness.
6. Report the effectiveness of the program or intervention and the criteria necessary for effective implementation.”⁴⁵

⁴¹ Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, *Commonalities of Georgia's 85/10 High Schools*, 2010, p. 57.

⁴² Stumbo, C. West Wind Education Policy, Inc. Interview, February 19, 2007. West Wind Education Policy, *Producing Results in the Middle Grades*, October 2006. Kurki, Anja, Aladjem, Dan, Carter, Kevin, *Implementation: Measuring and Explaining the Fidelity of CSR Implementation*, Paper prepared for American Educational Research Association, April 2005. National Research Center on Learning Disabilities, *Fidelity of Implementation*, http://www.nrcld.org/RTI_Practices/fidelity.shtml. North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, *Fidelity of Implementation*, <http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/speced/personnel/fidelity.shtm>. Mills, S. Tillman, R. *A Tool for Analyzing Implementation Fidelity of an Integrated Learning System*, Educational Technology Research and Development, 2000.

⁴³ Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, *Commonalities of Georgia's 85/10 High Schools*, 2010, p. 59.

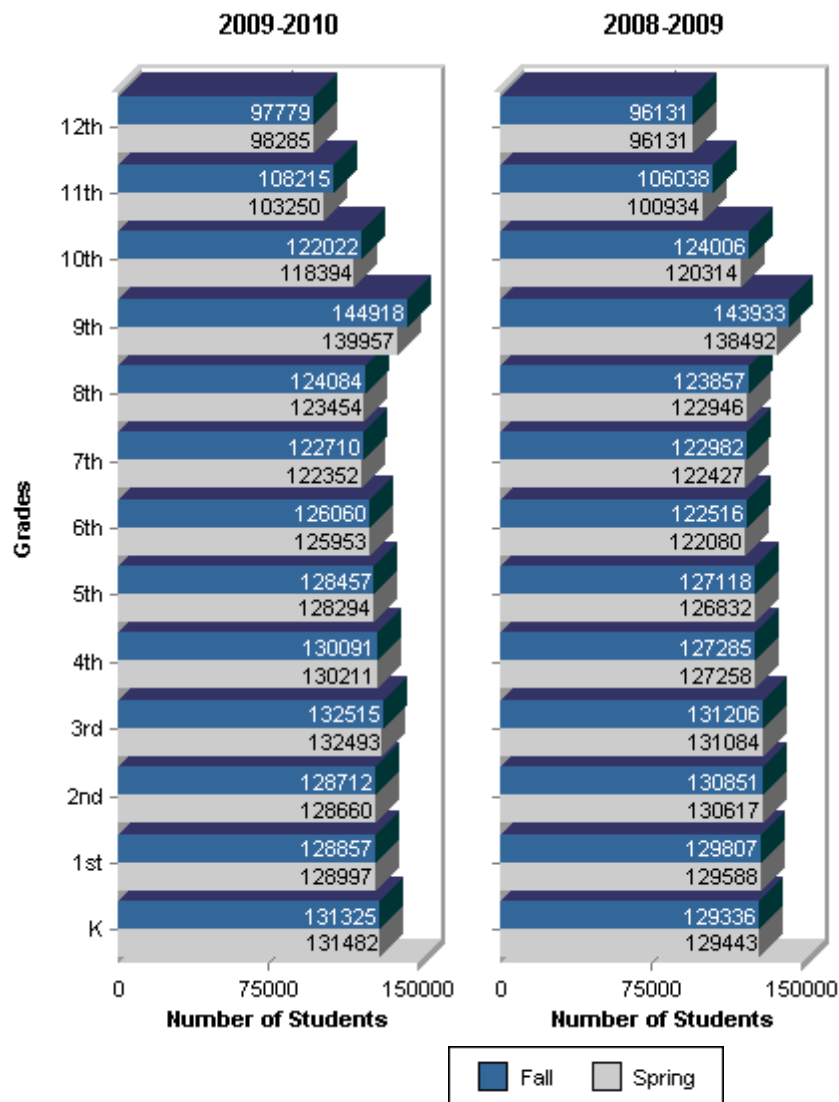
⁴⁴ Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, *Commonalities of Georgia's 85/10 High Schools*, 2010, p. 59.

⁴⁵ Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, *Commonalities of Georgia's 85/10 High Schools*, 2010, p. 59.

III. ANALYZE THE NINTH GRADE “BULGE”

All 85/10 High Schools researched by the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education “indicated the ninth grade is a crucial year for students, especially for those who are struggling academically.”⁴⁶ Most middle school students experience an abrupt change when they enter the ninth grade. Often, the structure, size, rigor, and level of expectation are overwhelming to rising ninth graders. Many are retained because they fail to earn the number of credits necessary to move into the tenth grade. Refer to Exhibit III for a depiction of the ninth grade bulge in Georgia for the school years 2007-2008, 2008-2009, and 2009-2010.

Exhibit III: Fall and Spring Enrollments for Three Academic Years, 2007–2008 through 2009–2010⁴⁷



⁴⁶ Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, *Commonalities of Georgia's 85/10 High Schools*, 2010, p. 60.

⁴⁷ Source: Governor's Office of Student Achievement, [http://reportcard2009.gaosa.org/\(S\(hyjkjdnzdkbnsz45asedrdr\)\)k12/demographics.aspx?ID=ALL:ALL&TestKey=EnR&TestType=demographics](http://reportcard2009.gaosa.org/(S(hyjkjdnzdkbnsz45asedrdr))k12/demographics.aspx?ID=ALL:ALL&TestKey=EnR&TestType=demographics).

It is recommended that analyses of the ninth grade retention rates of the middle schools in this study be compared to the ninth grade retention rates of a group of demographically similar middle schools to determine if the schools in this study have reduced the ninth grade bulge and, if so, how.

“On days we give out report cards, our students go back to the first block at the end of the day and discuss with their advisor what’s working and what’s not.”

IV. CREATE RESEARCH-BASED STRATEGIES FOR TRANSITIONS OF STUDENTS

Research⁴⁸ indicates that a successful student transition from one school level to the next is important to a student’s success. It is recommended that the state and local school systems create research-based strategies for schools to use to ease the stress of student transitions.

V. EVALUATE THE SUCCESS RATE OF SIXTH GRADERS

It is recommended that the state and local school systems consider the analyses of the success rates of sixth graders and such analyses be used to improve the effectiveness of elementary and middle schools.

VI. ANALYZE SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS WHICH IMPACT THE GRADUATION RATE

Research⁴⁹ indicates the following are school factors and characteristics that positively impact the graduation rate:

1. Rigorous, relevant, focused curriculum
2. Positive attitudes, perceptions, and expectations of teachers and students
3. Supportive teachers
4. Strong personal relationships among students and between students and faculty
5. Small enrollment

School characteristics particularly impact low-achieving, economically disadvantaged students.⁵⁰

“Our sixth grade academy has its own cafeteria, gym, media center. This helps rising fifth graders to adjust to middle school”

It is recommended that the school characteristics identified in the middle schools in this study be analyzed and compared to those of a group of demographically similar middle schools to determine if there are significant differences.

VII. COLLECT DATA FROM EXIT INTERVIEWS WITH SCHOOL DROPOUTS

It is recommended that Georgia consider structuring a more formal process to interview students who have decided to drop out. Additional specific data which would assist state and local decision-makers and practitioners should be collected at the state and local levels, analyzed, and reported.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Bottoms, G. *Summer Transitions: Summer Strategies for Successful Transitions from Middle to High School*, The National Summer Learning Association, 2010.

⁴⁹ Jerald, C. D. *Identifying Potential Dropouts: Key Lessons for Building an Early Warning Data System*. Achieve and Jobs for the Future. Carnegie Corp., 2006; Georgia Department of Education, *Graduation Counts! Readiness to Results in Grades 6-12*, June 2006, http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/tss_school_redesign.aspx. Steinberg, Adria, Johnson, Cassius, Pennington, Hilary, *Addressing America’s Dropout Challenge – State Efforts to Boost Graduation Rates Require Federal Support*, Center for American Progress and Jobs for the Future, November 2006.

⁵⁰ Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, *Commonalities of Georgia’s 85/10 High Schools*, 2010, p. 61.

⁵¹ Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, *Commonalities of Georgia’s 85/10 High Schools*, 2010, p. 62.

VIII. ENSURE THE ACCURACY AND CONSISTENCY OF CODING DROPOUTS IN THE STUDENT INFORMATION SYSTEM

For all students who leave school prior to graduation, a code must be entered in the student information system indicating why they exited. Several experts who participated in forming questions for the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education's research⁵² on successful high schools had reservations about the validity of Georgia's graduation rates. According to these experts, Georgia has several issues, including the actual calculation of the graduation rate, the accuracy of the data used to calculate the dropout rate on which the graduation rate is dependent, and the incomplete student information system.⁵³

“Our sixth grade academy has its own cafeteria, gym, media center.”

Refer to Appendix L for Georgia's Definitions and Calculations of Graduation Rate and Dropout Rate and Definitions of High School Completers and Graduates. Georgia is scheduled to change its method of calculating its graduation rate for the 2011-2012 school year. Refer to Appendix L for the new calculation formula and a comparison of it to the current formula.

It is recommended that schools, school systems, and the state ensure that the coding of dropouts in the student information system is accurate and consistent across Georgia.

IX. INCORPORATE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

It is recommended that the Georgia Department of Education, local school systems, and schools consider incorporating the results of this study and the results of the 85/10 research⁵⁴ in professional learning opportunities for educators, as appropriate. The impact on adult behaviors and student learning should be evaluated.

X. CONTINUE RESEARCH

Researchers should continue to add to this body of work. Undoubtedly, additional studies could be designed that would provide decision-makers and practitioners additional information on effective middle schools.

⁵² Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, *Commonalities of Georgia's 85/10 High Schools*, 2010.

⁵³ Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, *Commonalities of Georgia's 85/10 High Schools*, 2010.

⁵⁴ Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, *Commonalities of Georgia's 85/10 High Schools*, 2010.

CONCLUSION

The middle schools in this research have caring cultures focused on student learning and apply it to the world outside of school, career preparedness, and postsecondary readiness. These schools embrace continuous improvement practices and focus on the mission and goals of the school, particularly through vertical and horizontal collaboration. High expectations for students and faculty are evident, and there is a single-minded focus on a rigorous curriculum and mastery of curriculum standards by each student.

Students who have not mastered the standards are provided remediation. Students are assessed to determine the level of the mastery of standards. Teachers are knowledgeable about the curriculum and employ a variety of effective instructional strategies. Administrators are collaborative and are viewed as instructional leaders. Teachers and leaders work together to create and use tools, including professional learning, to ensure rigor and effective instruction in each classroom. The amount and structure of learning time are used creatively. These schools use data and continuous improvement processes in their shared decision-making structure to tackle and resolve barriers to student learning.

The successful middle schools in this research share uncompromising focus on educating all students at high levels. Nevertheless, the schools acknowledge they have additional work to do to prepare students. The Georgia Partnership recommends the next steps for future study so that all public middle schools in Georgia offer academic excellence:

1. Identify potential dropouts more effectively
2. Evaluate the fidelity of programs and interventions
3. Analyze the ninth grade bulge of students
4. Create research-based strategies for transitions of students from one level to the next
5. Evaluate the success rate of sixth graders
6. Analyze school characteristics which impact the graduation rate
7. Collect data from exit interviews with school dropouts
8. Ensure the accuracy and consistency of coding dropouts in the students' information system
9. Incorporate findings into professional learning
10. Continue research

To read the full report that focuses on high schools, *Commonalities of Georgia's 85/10 High Schools*, visit www.gpee.org. The *Commonalities of Georgia's Successful Middle Schools* report further aligns with the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education's purpose of providing systemic, replicable recommendations for change so that all students achieve academic excellence.

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Appendix A
Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education

Appendix A

Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education

The mission of the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education is to inform and influence Georgia leaders through research and non-partisan advocacy to impact education policies and practices for the improvement of student achievement.

Founded in 1992 by the Georgia Chamber of Commerce and the Georgia Economic Developers Association, the Partnership consists of business, education, community, and government leaders who share a vision of improved education. Working to be Georgia's foremost change agent in education, the non-profit, non-partisan, independent organization takes lead roles in efforts to shape policy and reform education.

It consistently advocates a reform framework based on:

1. High educational standards for all schools
2. Monitoring progress toward achieving standards
3. Accountability for all components of the public education system

The Partnership recognizes that the way to ensure success at the state level is to research issues and influence policy while encouraging communities to design their own school improvement strategies at the local level. The Partnership is committed to ensuring the future prosperity of our state by giving every Georgian new options and opportunities to succeed.

Appendix B
List of Experts Contacted to Request Questions to Include in the
Middle School Research and Letter to Experts

Appendix B

List of Experts Contacted to Request Questions to Include in the Middle School Research

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Commonalities of Georgia's Successful Middle Schools

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Letter to Panel of Experts



October 20, 2010

Jay Smink
Executive Director
National Dropout Prevention Center
Clemson University
209 Martin Street
Clemson, SC 29631

Dear Jay:

Thank you for participating in the research we conducted last year...

OR

Last year, the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education conducted research ...

... on high achieving high schools that had a graduation rate of at least 85 percent in 2008 and increased the graduation rate by at least 10 percentage points over five years, 2004 – 2008, and sustained the improvements in 2009 (referred to as 85/10 high schools). As an extension of the research, the Partnership has identified 16 middle schools that are:

- ◆ High performing
- ◆ Most improved, or
- ◆ Feeder schools to the 85/10 high schools.

You have been identified as a leader in school improvement, and we request your assistance in creating a set of questions to ask leaders of these middle schools. What questions should we ask?

To formulate your questions, you may consider structuring your thoughts around the following:

- ◆ Curriculum, Assessment & Instruction
- ◆ Planning and Organization
- ◆ School Culture
- ◆ Programs & Interventions
- ◆ Student, Family and Community Involvement & Support
- ◆ Professional Learning
- ◆ Leadership
- ◆ Continuous Improvement Processes

Please prepare the attached form and return it to Dr. Donna O'Neal via email to doneal@mindspring.com or fax to (912) 201-1938 by Monday, November 8, 2010.

In advance, thank you for participating in this research. Certainly, if you so request, we will provide you with the results. We value and appreciate your involvement.

Sincerely,

Steve

Dr. Steve Dolinger
President

Response Form Questions for Effective Middle Schools

Name _____

Organization _____

Telephone _____

Email _____

What questions should be asked of Georgia middle schools effective middle schools/

To formulate your questions, you may want to structure your thoughts around the following:

- ◆ Curriculum, Assessment & Instruction
- ◆ Planning and Organization
- ◆ School Culture
- ◆ Programs & Interventions
- ◆ Student, Family and Community Involvement & Support
- ◆ Professional Learning
- ◆ Leadership
- ◆ Continuous Improvement Processes

Please list your questions below and return to Donna O'Neal via Email to doneal@mindspring.com or Fax (912) 201-1938 Monday, November 8, 2010.

Thank you.

QUESTIONS

[You may include as many as you wish.]

1.

2.

3.

4 +.

Additionally, if there are other questions that you would ask the various categories of schools, please indicate:

High performing middle schools?

Most improved middle schools?

Feeder middle schools to the 85/10 high schools?

Appendix C
Questions for Successful Middle Schools

Appendix C Questions for Successful Middle Schools

NOTE: The following questions were asked of the successful middle schools.

Questions

Begin Time _____

End Time _____

School _____

Date _____

Individuals in Interview (names and titles):

Grade Levels?

How long have you been principal of the school?

=====

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Congratulations on your success.

1. Your school has been identified as a high performing middle school,
OR
2. Your school has been identified as one that has significantly improved over the last three years,
OR
3. Your school is a feeder school to a high school that was a found to have improved the graduation rate significantly over a relatively short period of time.

Describe your school's success over the past three+ years.

Overall, what are the most important strategies your school used to be so successful?

CURRICULUM, ASSESSMENT & INSTRUCTION

Curriculum

1. Other than the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS), has your curriculum changed over the past few years. If so, how?
2. Is the curriculum challenging to all students? If so, describe.
3. Does your curriculum emphasize career and postsecondary relevance?

Assessment

1. What assessment strategies have the greatest impact on preparing students for high school?

Instruction

1. What instructional practices have the greatest impact on preparing students for high school?
2. What instructional strategies do your teachers use the most?

ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE

Transitions

1. What do you do to ease the transition from elementary school to middle school?
2. What do you do ease the transition from middle school to high school?

Structure of Schools

1. How is school time structured? How does this impact student preparation for high school?
2. How are your teams structured?
3. Are any of your grade levels structured differently than the other grades in your school?

SCHOOL CULTURE

1. Describe your school's culture.
2. Did any significant school culture changes occur in the past four to five years? If so, describe.

PROGRAMS AND INTERVENTIONS

1. Describe your guidance program and advisement program.
2. Do you identify potential dropouts? If so, what criteria do you use?
3. What programs and/or interventions do you use to prepare these students for high school?
4. What interventions do you have in place for students who are struggling academically? Struggling with reading?
5. Do you have a graduation coach? If so, what is his/her role in the school?

STUDENTS

1. Do your teachers engage students in their learning? If so, how?
2. Do all of your students have a one-on-one relationship with at least one adult at the school?

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

1. What do you do to engage families in their child's learning?

BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

1. Do you have businesses and the community involved in the school? If so, how?
2. Do you see any benefits to your school from the involvement of the community? If so, what?

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

1. What is the focus of your professional learning opportunities? How are topics chosen?
2. Is the impact of professional learning monitored?

LEADERSHIP

1. Describe the leadership styles of your school's leaders.
2. Does your school include teachers and others in the decision-making process? If so, how?
3. Do you have a Leadership Team? If so, what is its primary purpose/role?

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

1. What are the mission and goals of your school? Describe how these were established. When was the last time these were reviewed and revised? Are these communicated to students, parents, and teachers? If so, how?
2. Do you use continuous improvement processes, such as Plan-Do-Check-Act or Balanced Scorecard? If so, please describe. Does their use contribute to your school's success? If so, how?
3. Are there challenges to sustaining your success?

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

1. Has the state or district provided any flexibility regarding people, money, time, or organizational structure? If so, how?
2. Do your attendance policies or procedures impact students' grades?
3. Do you have academic penalties for discipline infractions?

GENERAL

1. How have budget cuts impacted your school?
2. What kind of support do you receive from the district office?
3. Has your school undergone re-districting recently?
4. Were there any major changes in your demographics recently?
5. What, if anything, do you do to lower absentee rates?
6. Do you conduct exit interviews with students who are dropping out of your school? If so, what process do you use? How do you use the information?
7. What challenges - structural, financial, or otherwise - do you face?
8. Does the school offer financial rewards to students?
9. Are you a Light House School to Watch?
10. Are you involved in NMSA, GMSA, National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform, Other?

Appendix D
List of Successful Middle Schools and Contact Information
and Letter to Principals

Appendix D List of Successful Middle Schools and Contact Information

	School & School System	Principal & School Contact Information	Superintendent & Contact Information
High Performance Middle Schools	Alton Crews Middle School Gwinnett County	Dr. Vince Botta 770-982-6940 (phone) Vince_Botta@gwinnett.k12.ga.us 1000 Old Snellville Highway Lawrenceville, GA 30044	Alvin Wilbanks (678) 301-6010 (phone) awilbanks@gwinnett.k12.ga.us 437 Old Peachtree Rd NW Suwanee, GA 30024
	Fulton Science Academy Fulton County	Mr. Kenan Sener (770) 753- 4141 ext: 108 ksener@fultonscience.org 1675 Hembree Rd. Alpharetta GA 30009	Cindy Loe 404-763-6890 loec@fultonschools.org 786 Cleveland Ave. SW Atlanta, GA 30315
	Rising Starr Middle School Fayette County	Ms. Len Patton 770.486.2721 patton.len@fcboe.org 183 Panther Path Fayetteville GA 30215	Fred M. Oliver (Acting Superintendent) 770-460-3535 210 Stonewall Avenue Fayetteville, GA 30214
	Riverwatch Middle School Forsyth County	Ms. Kathy Carpenter 678-455-7311 ext. 300111 kcarpenter@forsyth.k12.ga.us 610 James Burgess Road Suwanee, GA 30024	Dr. L.C. (Buster) Evans 770-887-2461 ext. 202133 lcevans@forsyth.k12.ga.us 1120 Dahlonega Highway Cumming, GA 30040
Improved Middle Schools	Forest Park Middle School Clayton County	Ms. Jammie Miller-Brown (404) 362-3840 jvmiller@clayton.k12.ga.us 930 Finley Dr Forest Park, GA	Dr. Edmond T. Heatley 770-473-2700 eheatley@clayton.k12.ga.us 1058 Fifth Ave Jonesboro, GA 30236
	Morrow Middle School Clayton County	Mr. Greg Curry, Principal (770) 210-4001 gcurry@clayton.k12.ga.us 5934 Trammell Road Morrow, GA 30260	Dr. Edmond T. Heatley 770-473-2700 eheatley@clayton.k12.ga.us 1058 Fifth Ave Jonesboro, GA 30236
	Risley Early College Academy Glynn County	Ms. Senetra S. Haywood 912-262-3415 shaywood@glynn.k12.ga.us 3885 Altama Avenue Brunswick, GA 31520	Howard Mann 912-267-4100 hmann@glynn.k12.ga.us 1313 Egmont Street Brunswick, GA 31520
	Lindley Middle School Cobb County	Mrs. Sandra Ervin 770-819-2496 sandra.ervin@cobbk12.org 50 Veterans Memorial Highway Mableton, GA 30126	Fred Sanderson 770-426-3453 fred.sanderson@cobbk12.org 514 Glover Street Marietta, Ga. 30060

Commonalities of Georgia's Successful Middle Schools

<p>Union County Middle School Union County Schools</p>	<p>Mr. Donnie Kelley dkelley@ucschools.org 706-745-2483 367 Wellborn Street Blairsville, Georgia 30512</p>	<p>Dr. Lewis McAfee 706-745-2322 lmcafee@ucschools.org 10 Hughes St. Blairsville, GA 30512</p>
<p>Washington-Wilkes Middle School Wilkes County Schools</p>	<p>Mr. Bill Pendrey (706) 678-7132 pendreyb@wilkes.k12.ga.us 1180 Tignall Rd Washington, GA 30673-2401</p>	<p>Dr. Rosemary W. Caddell 706-678-2718 caddellr@wilkes.k12.ga.us 313A North Alexander Ave, Washington, GA 30673</p>
<p>Lumpkin County Middle School Lumpkin County Schools</p>	<p>Mr. Rick Conner 706-864-6189 rconner@lumpkin.k12.ga.us 44 School Drive Dahlonega, GA 30533</p>	<p>Dewey Moyer 706.864.3611 dmoyer@lumpkin.k12.ga.us 56 Indian Drive Dahlonega, GA 30533</p>
<p>Loganville Middle School Walton County Schools</p>	<p>Dr. Russell Brock russell.brock@walton.k12.ga.us 678-684-2960 152 Clark McCullers Rd. Loganville, GA 30052</p>	<p>Gary Hobbs (770) 266-4520 ghobbs@walton.k12.ga.us 200 Double Springs Church Rd Monroe, GA 30656</p>

Appendix E
GCollege411

Appendix E **GACollege411⁵⁵**

GACollege411 is a resource freely available on the Web designed to help Georgia high school students and others who are interested in attending college explore careers, prepare for college and learn about financial aid opportunities. Resources include tools for matching students to careers; detailed information on specific careers; SAT, ACT, and Graduate Record Exam (GRE) test preparation; tools for comparing Georgia colleges and universities; online forms for loan applications, Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and Hope Scholarship/Tuition Equalization Grant; and tools for financial planning. Users can create a personal account that allows them to manage all their college and career information and can share their information with school counselors.

GACollege411 is a collaboration of the Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC), the University System of Georgia, the Technical College System of Georgia, the Foundation for Independent Colleges, the Department of Education, the School Counselors Association, the Office of Treasury and Fiscal Services, Georgia Public Broadcasting, the Professional Standards Commission, and the Georgia Public Library Service.

Middle School Student Resources

- Middle School Students And BRIDGE⁵⁶
- Discover A Career Path That's Right For You
- Plan Your Courses
- Explore Careers
- Start Your College Plan Now
- Consider Goals For Your Future
- Learn More About What's Here

Educator Resources

- Explore GACollege411 Pace Using Demos and Tutorials
- Learn More About What's Here
- View Recorded Webinars, PowerPoint Presentations from Conferences and Training Sessions
- Incorporating GACollege411 into Your School
- Presentations, Teachers as Advisors (TAA) Activities, Videos and More
- HOPE GPA/Transcript Exchange Information
- Transcript Exchange Document Library
- Manage Your HOPE Eligible Students/Accel Program
- Scholar Tracking and Reporting System (STARS)
- Quick Reference Guides for the Professional Center

Georgia Student Finance Commission

Georgia Student Finance Commission administers the GACollege411 website and is responsible for the administration of the HOPE Program and other state and lottery funded financial aid programs.

⁵⁵ Source: www.gacollege411.org.

⁵⁶ Source: www.gacollege411.org. BRIDGE (Building Resourceful Individuals to Develop Georgia's Economy) Law (HB400) was signed by Governor Perdue on May 20, 2010.

**Appendix F
Focus Walks**

Appendix F Focus Walks

Focus Walks provide a systematic process for schools to monitor, review, and discuss curricular, instructional, or assessment initiative implementations. The process is not intended to be used for evaluation of teachers. It is intended to give a framework to support teachers in the ongoing improvement of student achievement. iPods may be used as part of the focus walk process by district administrators, school level administrators, and academic coaches. Focus walks allow teachers to see other teachers teach.

A small group of staff members go into a classroom for approximately five minutes and make notes on the targeted strategy or practice. The visit is followed by a short debriefing session in the corridor. This sequence is repeated three or four more times, and then a slightly longer debriefing session is held where the group can talk about all the classrooms. Principals strategically select teachers and targeted practices to enhance their ability to cascade practices throughout the school. All teachers new to the school should be included in a focus walk within the first month of school, and all teachers should participate in at least one focus walk during the school year. Department or grade level chairs should visit all members of their department.⁵⁷

See Standards-Based Classroom Observation Checklist.

⁵⁷ Source: Fannin County Schools, *Performance Leadership Handbook*, 2010-11.

STANDARDS-BASED CLASSROOM OBSERVATION CHECKLIST⁵⁸

Teacher: _____ Observer: _____

Standards are posted and accessible to students.			
Standards are written in student-friendly language.			
Students can verbalize what standards/element(s) that they are working on.			
Students can explain how their work meets the standard/element(s).			
Standards are referenced throughout instruction.			
Authentic student work is posted and includes:			
• Standards/Elements			
• Performance Task			
• Rubric			
• Meaningful standards-based commentary			
Standards-based bulletin boards include exemplars.			
Differentiation is evidenced in displayed student work.			
Teacher acts as a facilitator.			
Performance tasks require higher-order thinking.			
Desks are arranged to promote student-to-student discussions.			
Room arrangement provides areas where students can work independently and/or in groups.			
Overall Comments:			

Date: _____

Begin Time: _____ End Time: _____

⁵⁸ Educational Leadership Internship, <http://terrisdudley.pbworks.com/w/contact-owner>.

Appendix G
GAPSS CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION OBSERVATION FORM

School Name: _____

Grade: _____

Subject: _____

Date: _____

Time In: _____

Time Out: _____

Beginning _____

Middle _____ End _____

Instruction Strand		Observed	Examples
C 1.1	Lesson/units are clearly aligned with GPS/QCC.		Units of study and/or lesson plans are available and show clear alignment to the standards.
I 1.3	Learning goals are aligned with GPS/QCC and are communicated by the instructor.		Units of study, lesson plans, and/or commentary are clearly aligned to GPS/QCC. Standards, essential questions, etc. are explicit and referenced often during instruction.
	Students apply learning goals in performance tasks aligned to the standards.		Performance tasks, culminating performance tasks, student work, portfolios, rubrics, and/or graphic organizers, etc. are clearly aligned to the GPS/QCC.
I 2.1	Sequencing of the instructional period is predictable and logical.		Instruction begins by activating prior knowledge, including experienced-based activities, followed by spiraling and scaffolded tasks that move students toward conceptual understanding and independent use of what they are learning, and ends by summarizing learning.
	The lesson begins with a clearly defined opening to strengthen learning.		Instruction explicitly states learning goals and makes connections to prior knowledge, subject areas, and/or student experiences, incorporates modeling or demonstration, and/or assesses student understanding (such as questioning, informal written assessments, charting) etc.
	Instruction has a defined work period.		The work period provides opportunities to practice, review, and apply new knowledge and receive feedback (for example: independent practice, guided practice, small group, conferencing, hands-on learning, problem solving).
	Instruction ends with a summary activity that reinforces the learning.		The lesson closing summarizes the learning goal(s), clarifies concepts, and addresses misconceptions. Students may share their work that relates to the learning goal(s).
	Content specific vocabulary is developed.		The instructor provides rich information about new vocabulary words and how the new words function. New vocabulary is presented and reinforced in the context of the standards being taught. Students are provided opportunities to use the new words in their writing, reading, and conversations.
I 2.2	Higher order thinking skills and processes are utilized in instruction.		Instructor's questioning techniques require students to compare, classify, analyze different perspectives, induce, investigate, problem solve, inquire, research, make decisions, etc.
	Higher order thinking skills and processes are evident in student work.		All students are engaged in tasks that require comparison, classification, analysis of perspectives, induction, investigation, problem solving, inquiry, research, decision making, etc.
I 2.3	Instruction is differentiated to meet student readiness levels, learning profiles, and interests.		The standards are the expectation for learning for all students, but within a class period instruction is paced and presented differently with the use of varying materials, resources, and tasks. (Instruction may be differentiated through content, process, product, and/or learning environment.)
I 2.4	Instruction and tasks reinforce students' understanding of the purpose for what they are learning and its connection to the world beyond the		Instruction is explicitly made relevant to students. For example, classroom instruction is differentiated to reflect student interests, leads to the creation of products that are useful in real-world problem solving, emphasizes inter-disciplinary connections, leads to authentic assessments, and/or further reveals real-world problems and their potential solutions. (I-2.4: Operational Descriptor F: Relevance

I 2.5	The classroom instructor implements grouping strategies.		The instructor uses flexible grouping and sub-grouping of students related to readiness levels, interests, and learning style preferences.
----------	--	--	--

Instruction Strand		Observed	Examples
I 2.7	The use of technology is integrated effectively into instruction.		Teacher effectively uses technology to provide real-world, relevant application, to enhance students' research skills and to differentiate instruction to maximize student learning. Technology is used to enhance student learning of the grade/content standards. (e.g. Interactive boards, computers, digital cameras, projection systems, calculators, probeware, software, interactive games, voting
	Students effectively use technology during the class period.		Students use technology to research, create documents and/or projects, and to demonstrate a greater understanding of the learning goals. (e.g. PowerPoint, webpages, etc.)

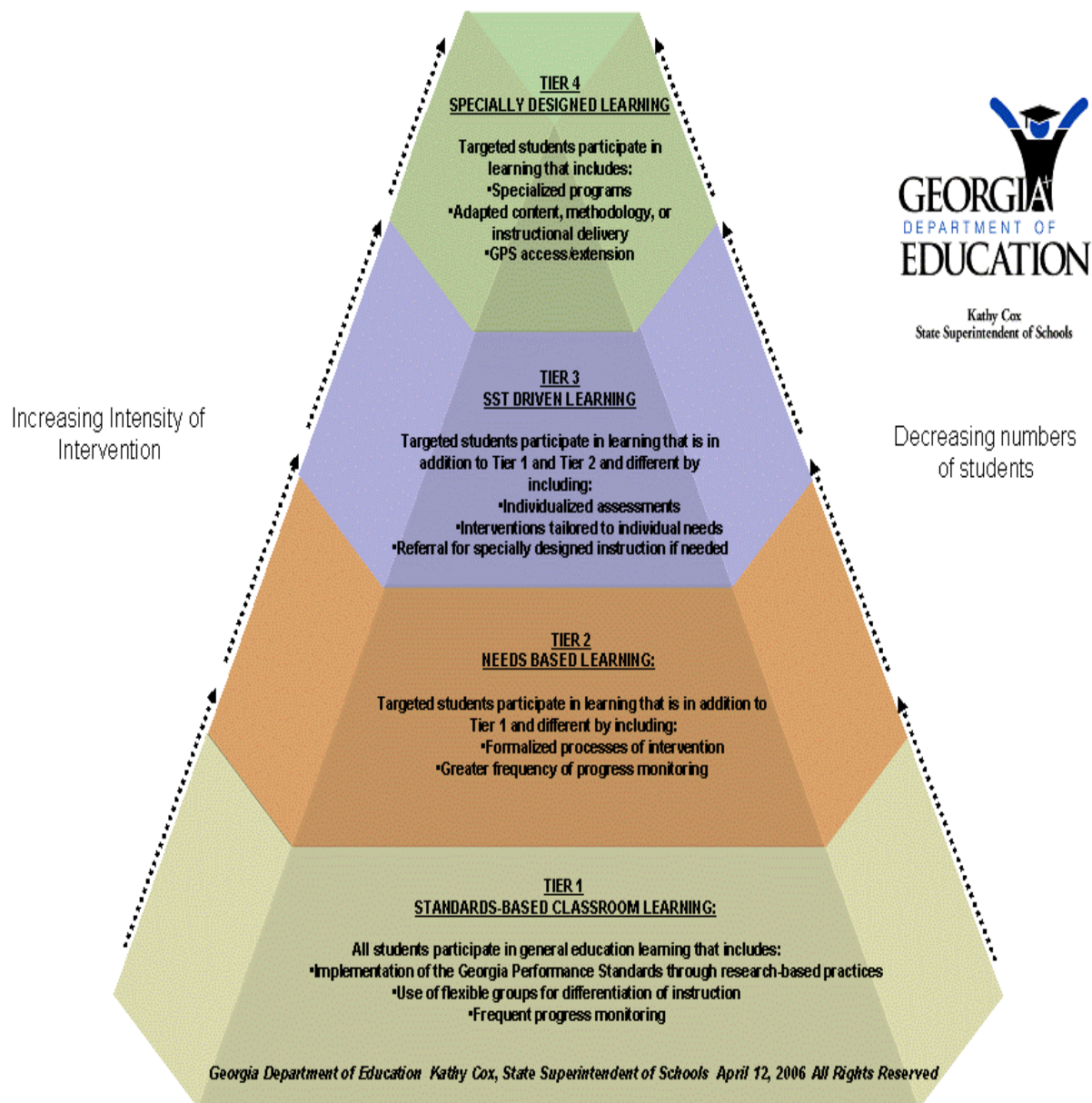
I 3.3	Students demonstrate personal efficacy and responsibility.		Students evaluate their own work aligned to the standards, elements, benchmark work, anchor papers or rubrics and are provided the opportunity to revise their work. Students are on task and may use resources available in the room (content maps, rubrics, computers, posted exemplary work, etc.)
Assessment Strand		Observed	Examples
A 2.2	Formative assessments are utilized during instruction to provide immediate evidence of		The teacher is monitoring for student understanding throughout the instructional period, conferencing with students, asking questions, and/or engaging students in KWLs, 3-2-1 activities, quick write, ticket out the door, etc. The formative
	Written commentary is aligned to the GPS standard(s) and elements or QCC content		Commentary uses the language of the standard providing specific feedback by describing the quality of the student work when compared to the desired learning goals. Commentary goes beyond "good job", "great work", etc.
Planning and Organization Strand		Observed	Examples
PO 3.2	Materials and resources are effectively allocated.		Student support materials and resources are easily accessible to students (classroom library, technology, etc.). Materials and resources to support content area lessons are visible. Human resources (co-teachers, paraprofessionals, instructional specialists) are effectively utilized to maximize instruction for all.
PO 4.1	Classroom management is conducive to student learning.		Expectations for behavior are evident (rules posted, behavior consistently monitored and addressed when necessary). Classroom practices and procedures are understood and followed.
PO 4.3	Instruction is provided in a safe and orderly environment.		The classroom is clean and conducive to learning.
PO 4.2	Instructional time is maximized.		Classroom instruction has no or minimal interruptions.
	The teacher maximizes instructional time.		Instruction begins and ends on time. Student transitions during instruction are smooth with no loss of instructional time. The teacher is monitoring student learning and actively engaged with students.
School Culture Strand		Observed	Examples
SC 1.1	The culture of the classroom reflects a risk-free learning environment.		Students feel comfortable sharing their work and receiving feedback from the teacher and other students regarding their work, students ask clarifying questions, etc.

Appendix H
WORKSHEET OF COMMON RISK FACTORS

Appendix I
Georgia Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions

Appendix I⁶¹

GEORGIA STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT PYRAMID OF INTERVENTIONS



The Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions graphic illustrates layers of instructional efforts that can be provided to students based on their individual needs. Additionally, Georgia educators have a common focus and a common language regarding instructional practices and interventions. The Pyramid of Interventions provides a process for monitoring student progress and providing layers of more and more intensive interventions in order for students to be successful academically.

⁶¹ Source: Georgia Department of Education, <http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/DMGetDocument.aspx>.

Appendix J
State Education Agency Actions
To Create a State Longitudinal Data System

Appendix J

State Education Agency Actions⁶² To Create a State Longitudinal Data System

The Data Quality Campaign recommends the following specific state education agency actions associated with the following 10 elements necessary to create a state longitudinal data system. The State is moving toward these essential elements through the work of the Georgia DOE, OSA, and the Alliance of Education Agency Heads.

1. A Unique Statewide Student Identifier

- The State assigns each student a unique statewide student identifier that can be used to match records accurately across databases and years.
- The State develops procedures to ensure that two identifiers of the same type are not assigned to the same student (e.g., when the student moves, she/he keeps the same identifier) and that two students are not assigned the same identifier.
- The State assigns an identifier that will follow each student from kindergarten (or prekindergarten when applicable) through 12th grade as he or she moves across campuses or districts and leaves and re-enters the State's public education system.

2. Student-Level Enrollment, Demographic and Program Participation Information

- The State collects information at least, annually on each student's:
 - Campus of enrollment
 - Grade level
 - Gender
 - Ethnicity
 - Socioeconomic status
 - English language learner status
 - Participation in bilingual or English as a Second Language program
 - Special education status
 - Migrant status
 - Title I status
 - Gifted and talented status
- At least one enrollment data collection takes place in the fall.
- At least one data collection for each of these items occurs at a different time from when the State tests are administered.
- The information is stored permanently in a State database. (If the information is used to populate the test database and then discarded, the State loses track of enrollment over time.)

The State collects student attendance data either daily or over a small period of time (e.g., over a six- or nine-week period) that includes at a minimum campus of attendance, number of days absent, and number of days present.

3. The Ability To Match an Individual Student's Test Records from Year to Year To Measure Academic Growth

- The State updates its student test database with demographic and program participation information collected earlier in the school year rather than updating it at the time of the test administration. (This assumes a student identifier is available to connect the two databases.)
- The State collects and permanently stores information on each student's test score in each subject for year to year comparisons. The information may be disaggregated by skill or skill area for each student (e.g., reading comprehension, ability to identify the main idea).
- The State makes the data available and/or uses the statewide database to conduct research and program evaluation activities (e.g., the measurement of year to year student academic growth).

⁶² Source: Data Quality Campaign, *Creating a Longitudinal Data System: Using Data to Improve Student Achievement*, 2006, www.dataqualitycampaign.org. p 15-16.

- At the beginning of the year, the State makes available to each teacher student test score information on State assessments that can be broken out by specific skill areas within each subject for each of the teacher's students.

4. Information on Untested Students

- The state maintains a record for each untested student in a tested grade, including information on why the student was not tested.
- The state matches information on untested students to demographic, program participation, and attendance information.
- The State conducts analyses of patterns among untested students across campuses and districts.

5. A Teacher Identifier System with the Ability To Match Teachers to Students

- The State assigns each teacher a unique statewide identifier that can be used to match records accurately across databases and years.
- The State develops procedures to ensure that two identifiers of the same type are not assigned to the same teacher and that two teachers are not assigned the same identifier.
- The State collects information on each teacher's college major, graduate school degrees by degree type and subject, types of certification or credentials, certification exam scores, salary, and experience.
- The State collects data from each school district that match each teacher to the students taught in each of the teacher's classes, by teacher and student identifier.

6. Student-Level Transcript Information, Including Information on Courses Completed and Grades Earned

- The State adopts or develops and maintains an ongoing electronic course classification system (including standard course numbers, titles, and descriptions).
- The State collects individual course completion records for all courses taken in middle and high school. These include:
 - Courses taken during the regular fall or spring semesters
 - Courses taken in summer school
 - Courses taken in middle school for high school credit (e.g., Algebra I)
 - Courses taken at local colleges for dual credit
 - Credits transferred from private high schools or home school
 - Credit received for distance learning
- The State also collects the grade the student earned in each course and the student's overall grade point average.
- Individual student records in the course completion database can be connected to the same students' records in the enrollment, demographic, program participation, and test databases.

7. Student-Level College Readiness Test Scores

- The State acquires and permanently stores student-level results by individual assessment for each of the following: Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT), Scholastic Aptitude Tests II (SAT II), American College Tests (ACT), AP tests, and International Baccalaureate (IB) scores.
- The State is able to connect the student-level test data mentioned above to the enrollment, demographic, program participation, and test databases.

8. Student-Level Graduation and Dropout Data

- The State collects and stores graduation and dropout data at the student level.
- The State collects and stores student-level graduation data by diploma type.
- For students in grades 7–12 who were enrolled in one year, not enrolled the next year and did not graduate, the State collects information from local school districts on where each departing student went. The evidence on departing students can be used to determine whether students graduated, dropped out, transferred to another school, district or State, earned a General Education Diploma (GED), or are missing (they cannot be located, and no evidence exists on where they went).

- The State makes every effort to track reported dropouts back to other schools in the State via the enrollment test, and/or attendance databases.
- The State has standards for the types of evidence that may be used to determine where departing students went.
- The State has standards for the percentage of departing students that school districts should be able to locate.
- The State applies consequences to school districts that do a poor job of accounting for missing students (e.g., lower accountability rating).

9. The Ability To Match Student Records Between P–12 and Postsecondary Systems

- The State works with the postsecondary system to match student-level records among all institutions of the State's P–12 and public higher education systems.
- The postsecondary information to be matched includes, but is not limited to, student records on:
 - Enrollment
 - Course completion
 - Graduation
 - Degrees and certificates received
 - Performance on mandated State tests administered by the postsecondary system

10. A State Data Audit System Assessing Data Quality, Validity, and Reliability

- The State develops a clear set of data standards and definitions that apply to all data received by the State education agency.
- The State provides training on these data standards to local school district personnel.
- The State performs statistical checks on data submitted by school districts.
- The State has criteria established for determining when data submitted by school districts are likely to be in error.
- The State has a system for investigating the accuracy of data that are flagged by the statistical checks.
- The State has a system for occasionally spot-checking the accuracy of data in cases that are not flagged by statistical checks.
- The State has a system of selecting districts for on-site audits and performs on-site audits in the selected districts.
- The State imposes consequences on school districts that do a poor job of collecting and submitting accurate and complete information.

Appendix K
Georgia Receives \$8.9 Million Grant to Improve
Education Data System

Appendix K Georgia Receives \$8.9 Million Grant to Improve Education Data System⁶³

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April 7, 2009 -- Georgia has been awarded an \$8.9 million grant by the federal government to improve its statewide educational data system.

Georgia was one of 27 states that received a 2009 Statewide Longitudinal Data System Grant from the Institute of Educational Sciences, a division of the U.S. Department of Education.

"This grant will allow the state, our schools and school systems to use data more efficiently and effectively to guide policy and instruction," said State Superintendent of Schools Kathy Cox. "We have already made tremendous progress in this area, but this grant will allow us to go the next level."

Georgia will use the grant money over the next four years to improve data exchanges between the state and local districts as well as other areas of education, such as pre-K and higher education. The State Board of Education has identified the improvement of statewide data tools and resources as one of its key initiatives in its strategic plan.

The Statewide Longitudinal Data System Grants were created to enhance the ability of States to efficiently and accurately manage, analyze, and use education data, including individual student records. The data systems developed with funds from these grants should help states, districts, schools, and teachers make data-driven decisions to improve student learning, as well as facilitate research to increase student achievement and close achievement gaps.

MORE INFORMATION:

- Learn more about the Statewide Longitudinal Data System Project:
<http://nces.ed.gov/Programs/SLDS/index.asp>

- Learn more about Georgia's plan for using the LDS funds:
<http://nces.ed.gov/Programs/SLDS/state.asp?stateabbr=GA>

- GaDOE/State Board of Education Strategic Plan, Goal 6:
<http://www.gadoe.org/strategicPlan.aspx?&PageReq=Goal&GoalID=6>

⁶³ Source: www.doe.k12.ga.us.

Appendix L
Definitions and Calculations Of Graduation Rate and Dropout Rate
and Definitions of High School Completers and Graduates

Appendix L

Definitions & Calculations Of Graduation Rate and Dropout Rate And Definitions of High School Completers and Graduates

State of Georgia Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook⁶⁴ Revised for 2003-04

7.1 What is the State definition for the public high school graduation rate?

Georgia will define and calculate graduation rates as the percentage of students who graduate in the standard number of years (4 years for a 9-12 school) from a Georgia public high school with a regular diploma (not including a GED or certificate not fully aligned with the state's academic standards and not including Special Education diplomas). Students receiving GEDs are counted as dropouts and are included in the denominator for calculating graduation rates. (In the past, Georgia calculated a Completion rate similar to that of the NCLB graduation rate except that certificates of attendance were included. This previous definition of completion rate will be replaced with graduation rate in compliance with NCLB.) In doing so, the "standard" number of high school years for students with disabilities will be determined by each student's IEP team, even if such number exceeds the "standard" number of years for non-disabled students.

State of Georgia Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook⁶⁵ Revised for 2004-05

7.1 What is the State definition for the public high school graduation rate?

Georgia will define and calculate graduation rates as the percentage of students who graduate in the standard number of years (4 years and a summer for a 9-12 school) from a Georgia public high school with a regular diploma (not including a GED or certificate not fully aligned with the state's academic standards and not including Special Education diplomas). This process will not delay AYP determinations made before the beginning of each school year.

Students receiving GEDs are counted as dropouts and are included in the denominator for calculating graduation rates. (In the past, Georgia calculated a completion rate similar to that of the NCLB graduation rate except that certificates of attendance and Special Education Diplomas were included. This previous definition of completion rate has been replaced with graduation rate in compliance with NCLB.) In doing so, the "standard" number of high school years for students with disabilities will be determined by each student's IEP team, even if such number exceeds the "standard" number of years for non-disabled students.

State of Georgia Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook⁶⁶ Revised April 15, 2009

7.1 What is the State definition for the public high school graduation rate?

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⁶⁴ Source: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/education/nclb/map/ayppan/ga.pdf>.

⁶⁵ Source: <http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/DMGetDocument.aspx/Approved%202004-2005%20Georgia%20Accountability%20Workbook.pdf?p=4BE1EECF99CD364EA5554055463F1FBB77B0B70FECF5942E12E123FE4810FFF53501CAA8CB828385C0A436AEDB931D5&Type=D>.

⁶⁶ Source: <http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/DMGetDocument.aspx/2009%20Accountability%20Workbook.pdf?p=6CC6799F8C1371F6ECD739CD7CC9519A1DFC37976CE89F5ADCCEA3F261F72BE3&Type=D>.

Georgia Report Card Overview (Selected Sections) Definitions & Calculations Of Graduation Rate And Dropout Rate And Definitions Of High School Completers And Graduates⁶⁷

How is the graduation rate calculated?⁶⁸

To comply with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), Georgia has defined a graduate as a student who leaves high school with a Regular Diploma (this does not include Certificates of Attendance or Special Education Diplomas) in the standard time (i.e., four years). In prior years, Georgia has reported a completion rate that allowed the inclusion of students receiving a Certificate of Attendance or a Special Education Diploma. Because of the NCLB timeline for reporting information, graduation rate is calculated by using information in the relevant Student Records.

The actual graduation rate calculation is a proxy calculation; in other words, the lack of unique statewide student identifiers does not allow for tracking of individual students across the four high school years. The graduation rate reflects the percentage of students who entered ninth grade in a given year and were in the graduating class four years later. The 2007-2008 K-12 Report Card provides the 2006, 2007, and the 2008 graduation rates. A brief description of how the graduation rate for 2008 is calculated follows:

1. Sum of the 9th-grade dropouts in 2004-2005, the 10th-grade dropouts in 2005-2006, the 11th-grade dropouts in 2006-2007 and the 12th-grade dropouts in 2007-2008 for a four-year total of dropouts.
2. Divide the number of students receiving regular diplomas by the four-year total of dropouts plus the sum of students receiving Special Education Diplomas plus the number of students receiving Certificates of Attendance plus the number of students receiving regular diplomas. The number of students displayed on the graphs represents an approximation to the students in the ninth-grade in 2004-2005 who should have graduated in 2008 and is the denominator in this step.
3. Change the result in step 2 from a decimal to a percentage (example: 0.83 equals 83%).

Graduation Rate Formula:

$$\text{Graduation Rate} = \frac{\text{\# of students who graduate with regular diplomas}}{\text{\# of dropouts in 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th grades from appropriate years} + \text{graduates} + \text{other completers}}$$

How is the dropout rate calculated?

To comply with the No Child Left Behind Act's (NCLB) timeline for reporting information to the public, the process for identifying dropouts had to be adjusted to rely solely on the Student Record collection. The National Center for Education Statistics requires that states report a 7-12 grade dropout rate and a 9-12 grade dropout rate. Students are reported as dropouts if they leave school for one of the following reasons: Marriage, Expelled, Financial Hardship/Job, Incarcerated/Under Jurisdiction of Juvenile or Criminal Justice Authority, Low Grades/School Failure, Military, Adult Education/Postsecondary, Pregnant/Parent, Removed for Lack of Attendance, Serious Illness/Accident, and Unknown. The dropout rate calculation is the number of students with a withdrawal code corresponding to a dropout divided by

⁶⁷ Source: Governor's Office of Student Achievement website: <http://gaosa.org/reportinfo.aspx#acct>

⁶⁸ For additional information, refer to *WHO'S COUNTED? WHO'S COUNTING?*: New Alliance Report Examines Graduation Rate Reporting, Addresses Public Confusion, Presents Policy Solutions, Straight A's: Public Policy and Progress. 6, (14), July 10, 2006 http://www.all4ed.org/publication_material/straight_as/straight_public_education_policy_and_progress_6_14.

the number of students that attended the school. The number of students that attended the school is based on any student reported in the Student Record and excludes no-shows.

In response to the nationwide focus on high schools and its mission to increase school completion, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) has made a reporting policy change. Beginning with the 2005 Report Card, GOSA began reporting two dropout rates for those schools with grade configurations covering both 7-12 and 9-12 grade spans. In the past, such schools had either a 7-12 dropout rate or a 9-12 dropout rate depending upon the school's grade configuration. GOSA has recalculated both rates for 2004 and 2005 in order to provide stakeholders a trend line. System and state level reports will continue to show both a 7-12 dropout rate and a 9-12 dropout rate.

What is meant by high school completers, graduates, and exit credentials?

Completers are those students who exit from high school with some credential. Some exit with regular diplomas and others exit with either a Special Education Diploma or a Certificate of Attendance.

Graduates are a special group of completers. Graduates are students who have met course and assessment criteria. Graduates have completed a high-school program of study with a minimum of 22 units and have passed the four subject areas (English, mathematics, science, and social studies) of the Georgia High School Graduation Test and the Georgia High School Writing Test. Graduates may earn one of several kinds of endorsements:

- ◆ **Diplomas with Both College Prep and Vocational Endorsements.** Is earned by students who have met the criteria of both the college preparatory program and vocational education program and who have passed the assessment requirements. Formal seals of endorsements for both programs are affixed to the high school diplomas for these students.
- ◆ **Diplomas with College Prep Endorsements.** Is earned by students who completed a program of study of 22 units in a college-preparatory program and who have passed the assessment requirements. A formal seal of endorsement is affixed to the high school diplomas for these students.
- ◆ **Diplomas with Vocational Endorsements.** Is earned by students who completed a program of study of 22 units of which four must be in vocational education and who have passed the assessment requirements. A formal seal of endorsement is affixed to the high school diplomas for these students.

Other Completers include those students who exit high school with either a **Special Education Diploma** or a **Certificate of Attendance**.

- ◆ **Special Education Diplomas.** Is earned by students with disabilities assigned to a special education program who have not met the state assessment requirements or who have not completed all of the requirements for a high school diploma, but who have nevertheless completed their Individualized Education Program (IEP) and graduated in 2007. The diplomas identify graduates as Students with Disabilities.
- ◆ **Certificates of Attendance.** Is earned by students who met all requirements for attendance and units but did not meet the standardized assessment criteria for a diploma. These students are awarded the Certificate of Attendance in place of the high school diploma. After leaving high school, students receiving the Certificates of Attendance are provided opportunities to retake the required assessments and, if they pass, are awarded the appropriate diploma.

Georgia Department of Education⁶⁹ Leaver/Proxy Rate vs. Cohort Rate

Leaver/Proxy Rate Calculation for AYP 2003-2011

This rate does not track cohorts of students. Therefore, the year a student enters the 9th grade is not considered when calculating the graduation rate. The Leaver/Proxy Rate formula is as follows:

$$\frac{\text{\# of regular diplomas}}{\text{\# of regular diplomas + \# of special ed. diplomas + \# of certificates of attendance + 9th grade dropouts (2008) + 10th grade dropouts (2009) + 11th grade dropouts (2010) + 12th grade dropouts (2011)}}$$

Dropout Withdrawal Codes:

- B - Marriage
- E - Expelled
- F - Financial Hardship/Job
- I - Incarcerated
- L - Low Grades
- M - Military
- O - Adult Education
- P - Pregnant
- R - Removed for Lack of Attendance
- S - Serious Illness/Accident
- U - Unknown

1. Active students are not pulled into the calculation.
2. Students who graduate with a regular diploma impact the calculation during the school year in which they graduate.

Cohort Rate Calculation for Report Card 2011 and AYP 2012

This rate does track a cohort of students. Students who entered 9th grade for the first time during the 2007-2008 (2008) school year make up the cohort.

of cohort students earning a regular diploma
1st time 9th graders in 2008 plus students who transfer in who belong to this cohort minus students who transfer out, emigrate or die during 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011 school years.

Dropout Withdrawal Codes:

- B - Marriage
- E - Expelled
- F - Financial Hardship/Job
- I - Incarcerated
- L - Low Grades
- M - Military
- O - Adult Education
- P - Pregnant
- R - Removed for Lack of Attendance
- S - Serious Illness/Accident
- U - Unknown

1. Students who take longer than 4 years and a summer to graduate will not count in the numerator.
2. Students who belong to the cohort and dropout remain in the denominator.
3. Students who were coded as a dropout and are found to have subsequently enrolled will be re-coded as transfers.
4. Students who were coded as a transfer but cannot be found throughout the state will be re-coded as a dropout.

⁶⁹ Source: Georgia Department of Education, www.doe.k12.ga.us.

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