



GEORGIA PARTNERSHIP
FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

Status Report:

Georgia's Education and Workforce Development Initiatives

August 2008

“The concepts of workforce development and education must be woven together. A highly skilled workforce must be educated and trained; it does not happen by chance. To compete in the global economy Georgia must have a highly skilled workforce.”

*~Governor's Office of Workforce Development:
Strategic Plan for the Development of Georgia's Workforce (2007)*

Status Report: Georgia's Education and Workforce Development Initiatives

Introduction:

This report was produced in response to an inquiry from the leadership of the Georgia Chamber of Commerce regarding the progress made in recent years to improve Georgia's public education system and strengthen the preparation of our workforce. It was researched and written by Susan Walker, Director of Policy and Research.



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Our Mission

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

Education is Economics: Linking Student Achievement with Business Development

The social and economic viability of a community strongly correlates with the quality of its educational system. Solid academic preparation that ensures students graduate from high school college- and work-ready is increasingly important in building our nation's human capital. Producing an educated workforce allows states and localities to compete for business investment projects that will bring high-skill, high-wage jobs to the area. A high-performing education system helps ensure that a region's citizenry will be equipped with the skills needed to sustain a robust economy.

An education system that does not perform well—one that is plagued by low student achievement and high dropout rates—can have devastating effects on individuals, communities, and local businesses. Individuals who fail to complete high school will face reduced earning potential, unemployment, and limited opportunities to pursue certain job and educational opportunities. As the aggregate number of high school non-graduates rises, communities bear the costs of reduced revenue to local businesses, increased costs to support unemployed and underemployed citizens, increased costs for health care for the poor, and the need to import college and technical school graduates to fill the needs of the local workforce.

Education is economics. Businesses in Georgia need educated employees who can achieve job proficiency quickly in order to meet the demands of an increasingly competitive global economy. Securing Georgia's future economy depends on strengthening our educational pipeline. By scaling up efforts to improve student achievement and increase the college- and work-readiness of our youth, Georgia can build its human capital and improve its social and economic health. Research has shown that the most effective reform efforts must address four critical elements of a child's educational experience:

1. Early life experiences that positively impact a child's future school success.

Research has proven that children must be cognitively ready for school when they begin kindergarten. Those children who enter school not yet ready to learn will be more likely to repeat grades, require special education services, or drop out of school. Studies have also clearly shown the positive long-term impacts of early learning: individuals who participate in a high-quality prekindergarten program experience higher lifetime earnings, greater rates of homeownership, and less dependence on social services.

2. Academic proficiency in every grade as the foundation for high school completion.

Educational studies have repeatedly shown that students must master literacy skills by the 3rd grade. Students who are not reading on grade level by the end of 3rd grade are much less likely to graduate from high school. Additionally, children must have solid numeracy skills by 8th grade, a critical point in math education. Children who are not calculating geometry and algebra on grade level by the end of 8th grade are less likely to be successful in post-secondary education.

3. Quality teachers who inspire learning gains for all students.

Good teaching matters. Among all school-related factors, classroom instruction has the largest impact on what students learn at school. Teachers have the unique opportunity to shape a student's educational experience and bring about significant gains in student achievement.

4. High school graduation that signifies college- and work-readiness.

Individuals with a high school diploma, and increasingly, a bachelor's degree, are much more likely to have a lasting, positive impact on our communities and local economies. Students must not only earn their high school diplomas, but graduate prepared to enter the workforce or enroll in a postsecondary school.

**Georgia's Work in Progress:
Recent Actions to Improve Education and Workforce Development**

Recognizing the vital link between a highly educated workforce and sustainable economic growth, the state of Georgia has worked arduously to improve access to quality education for citizens across the state, to boost student achievement, and to emerge as a national leader in educational excellence. The efforts of state leaders over recent decades have enabled Georgia to join the national discourse as a leader in innovation and to share a long list of best practices in secondary educational reform. Georgia's progress in educational improvement has garnered attention across the country. Our state's development and implementation of P-16 initiatives have made Georgia "a national leader in reforms associated with coordinating and connecting the entire educational experience for students, from preschool to and including four years of college...Georgia is at the forefront of these kinds of reforms."¹

The work in our state has followed research-based national best practices and has been the result of collaborations among early learning, K-12, postsecondary, and business leaders. Leaders throughout Georgia have stepped boldly forward to commit resources and plan interventions that will reduce high school dropouts and increase the numbers of students graduating from high school prepared to succeed in college and in the workforce. Detailed below are several of the state's recent actions that are having positive impacts on improving education and workforce development.

Actions toward collaboration and common goals for public education

- In 2006, Governor Perdue founded **The Alliance of Education Agency Heads**. The group is a collaboration among the state's seven education agencies: the Georgia Department of Education, the Georgia Student Finance Commission, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia, the Department of Early Care and Learning, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, the Georgia Professional Standards Commission, and the Technical College System of Georgia.

¹ Venezia, A., P. Callan, M. Kirst, and M. Usdan. *The Governance Divide: The Case Study for Georgia*. The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. 2006.

The heads of the seven education agencies work collaboratively to strengthen the seamlessness and overall quality of education opportunities in our state. Included in their work goals are:

1. Increase high school graduation rate, decrease high school drop-out rate, and increase post-secondary enrollment rate;
 2. Strengthen teacher quality, recruitment, and retention;
 3. Improve workforce readiness skills;
 4. Develop strong education leaders, particularly at the building level; and
 5. Improve the SAT/ACT scores of Georgia students.
- In 1995, **Georgia's Board of Regents** adopted a preschool through college (P-16) department to formally recognize the interlocking nature of the public schools and the University System of Georgia. The work of the **P-16 Department** is guided by two objectives: to promote high school graduation, college readiness, college transition, and college success; and to promote continuous improvement in Georgia's teacher, leader, and counselor preparation, transition, development, and success.
 - Founded in 1990 by the Georgia Chamber of Commerce and the Georgia Economic Developers Association, the **Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education** 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 organization takes lead roles in efforts to shape policy and reform education.

Actions toward a rigorous curriculum for all students

- In 2004, the Department of Education issued the **Georgia Performance Standards (GPS)**, a new comprehensive curriculum that now drives instruction and assessment and provides guidelines for teachers, students, and test makers. The new curriculum is more rigorous and aims to strengthen the education of our students. Implementation of the new standards began in 2004; the entire curriculum will be phased in by the 2007-08 school year.
- Recognizing the increasing demands for a highly-skilled workforce, in 2007 the **Georgia Department of Education** proposed changes to the high school graduation rule. The new graduation requirements, which take effect for high school freshmen in the 2008-09 school year, ensure that all students take four years of math, science, and English courses.

Actions toward expanding learning opportunities for Georgia's students

- Established in May 2005, the **Georgia Virtual School** was a direct response to shortages of mathematics and science teachers in rural areas of Georgia. The Virtual School serves public, private, and home school students and has expanded its course offerings to over 78 unique core curriculum, Advanced Placement, and elective courses, each meeting GPS or College Board standards.
- **Early College**, a model that blends high school and the first two years of college, is an innovative effort to educate young people in the last years of high school and support

their first years of post-secondary education. In Georgia's five Early Colleges, students earn a high school diploma and have the potential to also earn an Associate's Degree or two years of college credit towards a Bachelor's Degree.

Actions toward increasing the number of work-ready and college-ready high school graduates

- The **Graduation Coach initiative**, adopted by Governor Perdue in 2006, allows each of Georgia's middle and high schools to employ a graduation coach. The coach's primary responsibility is to identify at-risk students and help them succeed in school by keeping them on track academically before they consider dropping out. The coaches identify, recruit, and engage parents and concerned adults, organizations, and government agencies to serve in a variety of ancillary roles.
- The **Community Coach program** was created in 2007 as a result of Governor Perdue's challenge to Georgia's business community to support education in the state. Business leaders across the state volunteer to partner with High School Graduation Coaches to provide a connection between the school and the local business community. The Community Coach assists the Graduation Coach by enlisting community support, recruiting volunteers, sharing ideas, providing real world experience to students, and serving as a community-based advisor.
- **Career academies** are opening across the state as the Department of Education works closely with the Technical College System of Georgia to build relevant educational options for our state's students. In 2007, seven school systems received grant money as part of the Georgia Career Academies Project. The funds will be used to establish new career academies and to expand existing academies.²
- Launched in 2006, the **Georgia Work Ready initiative** is a two-fold workforce development program designed to help keep Georgia businesses competitive. It assures employers that workers have the skills necessary to staff existing businesses and to master the innovative technologies that new jobs will require tomorrow. The Georgia Work Ready Certificate guarantees these qualities from individuals, and the Georgia Work Ready Community designation shows the successful commitment of entire communities to these goals.

Results Thus Far: Georgia's Forward Movements

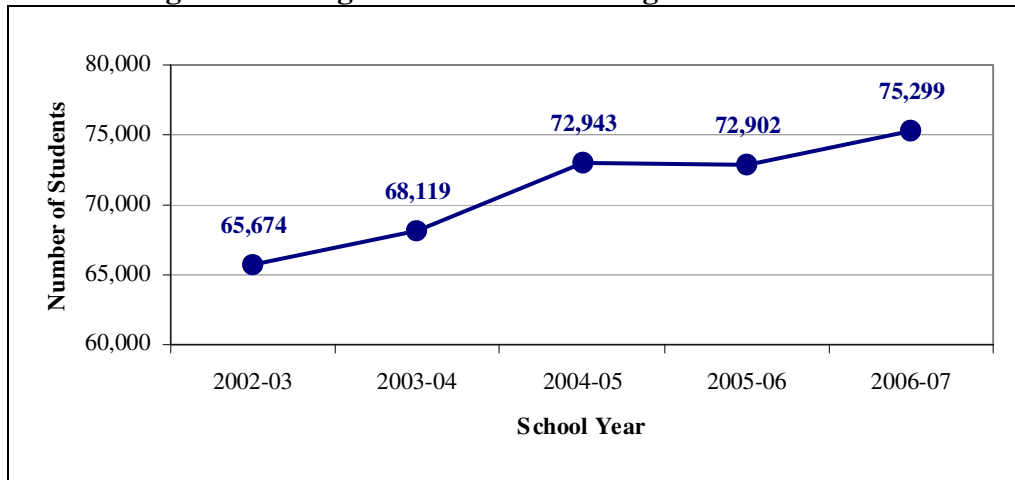
Data show that Georgia is making progress in strengthening each of the four critical elements of our education system. Our state has moved forward with improvements in public education and increases in our numbers of high school graduates who are ready to succeed in college or the workplace. Presented below are brief statistical snapshots that reveal our state's advancements in recent years on some of these key educational indicators.

² Recipients of the 2007 Career Academies Project grants were: Walton County, Atlanta Public Schools, Fulton County, Glynn County, Floyd County, Effingham County, and Thomas County.

Progress toward improving early life experiences for Georgia’s children

In 1993, Georgia piloted a targeted prekindergarten program for 750 at-risk four-year-olds with funds from the state education budget. In 1995, the program was opened to all children whose parents wanted them to participate, and Georgia became the first state in the country to offer universal prekindergarten. The program has seen annual enrollment increases almost every year since its inception (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Georgia’s Public Prekindergarten Enrollment



Source: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning

According to data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s *2008 KIDS COUNT Data Book*, which profiles the well-being of America’s children, Georgia ranks 40th in the nation for the overall well-being of children. While this ranking suggests that Georgia has room for continued improvement, trend data show that our state has made progress in improving child well-being over recent years, climbing from a ranking of 44th in 2004 (see figure 2).

Figure 2. Child Well-Being in Georgia

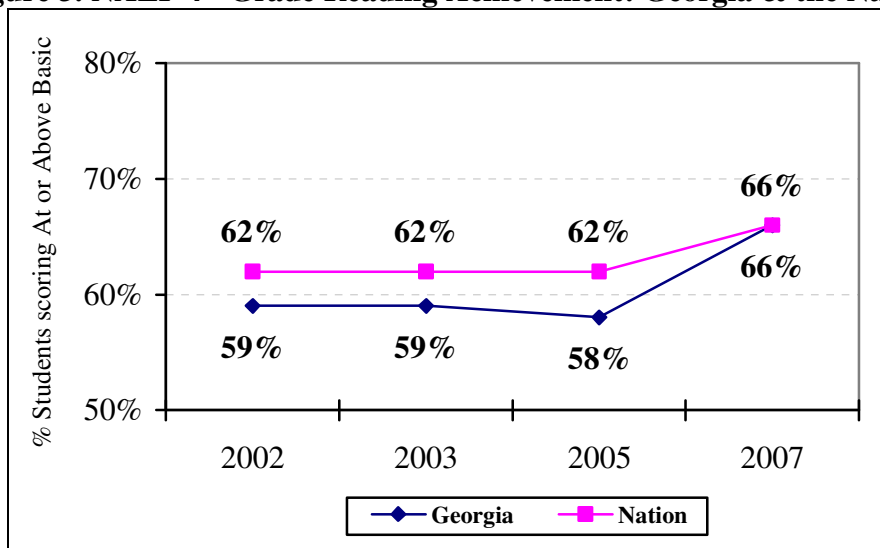
Year	Georgia’s Rank Among 50 States for Overall Child Well-Being
2004	44 th
2005	39 th
2006	44 th
2007	41 st
2008	40 th

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation KIDS COUNT Data Center

Progress toward academic achievement in every grade of Georgia's public schools

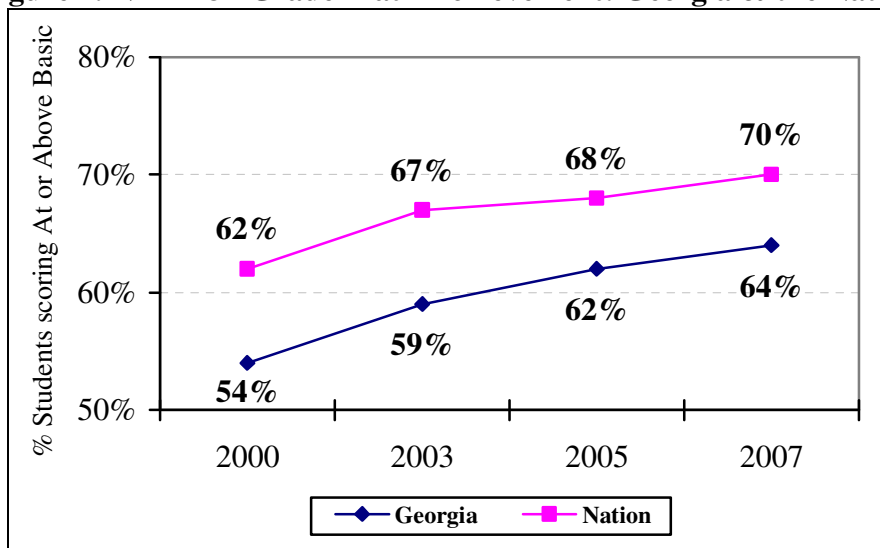
The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as “the Nation’s Report Card,” is the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what students in the United States know and can do in various subject areas. Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, NAEP is the only measure of student achievement in the United States that allows for comparison of the performance of students in any state with the performance of students across the nation. The assessment is administered once every two years in reading and mathematics in grades 4, 8, and 12. Though Georgia’s performance still lags the national average, Georgia’s students have made progress over recent years, scoring at all-time highs in math and reading in 2007 (see figures 3 & 4).

Figure 3. NAEP 4th Grade Reading Achievement: Georgia & the Nation



Source: U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics

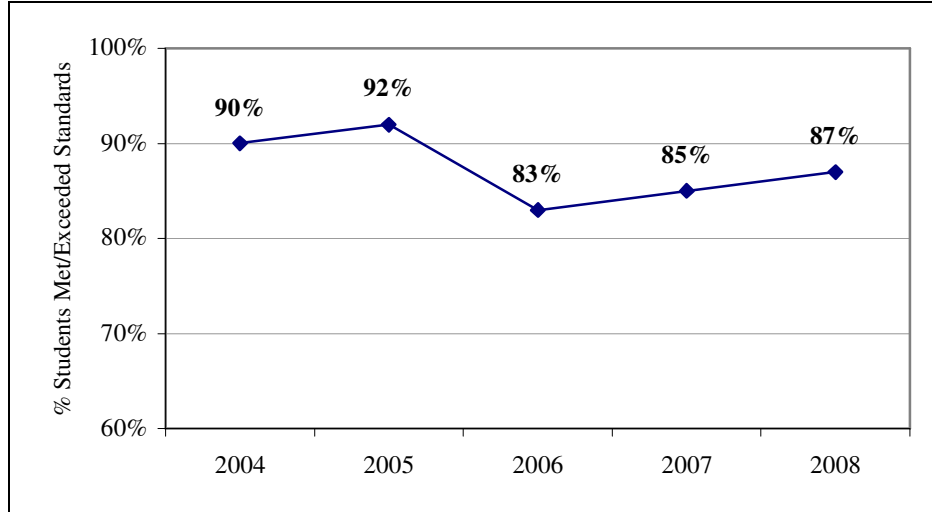
Figure 4. NAEP 8th Grade Math Achievement: Georgia & the Nation



Source: U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics

Each spring, the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCTs) are administered to students in reading, English/language arts, and mathematics in grades 1-8, and in science and social studies in grades 3-8. Scores below a specified level of performance on the CRCT indicate that a student does not meet the standard in that subject area. Students performing at this level may need additional instructional support. An evaluation of Georgia's CRCT scores shows that the state has made progress over recent years in critical grades and subject areas (see figures 5 & 6).

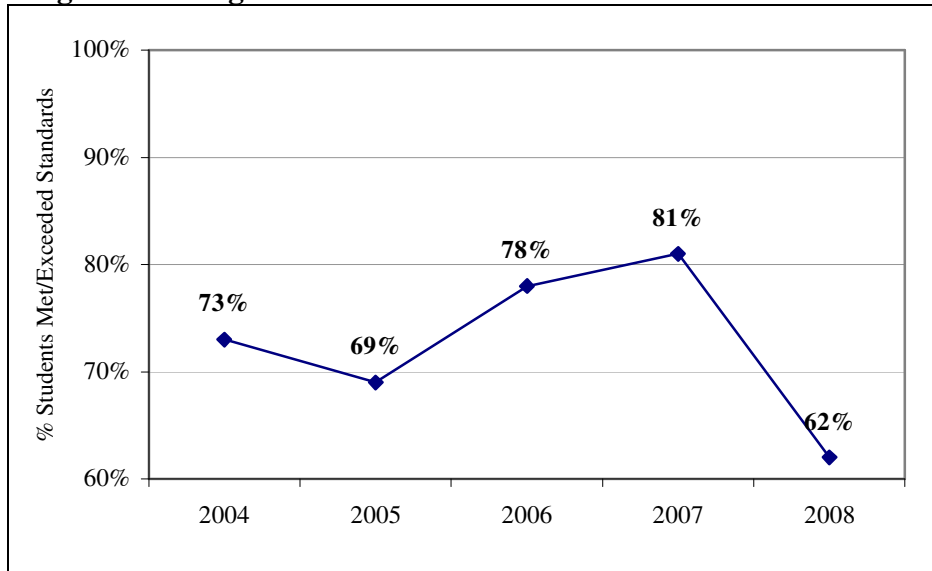
Figure 5. Georgia's Student Achievement: CRCT 3rd Grade Reading



Source: Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement

Note: Dip in student scores from 2005 to 2006 is attributable to the new, more rigorous reading curriculum, which was tested for the first time in 2006.

Figure 6. Georgia's Student Achievement: CRCT 8th Grade Math



Source: Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement

Note: Dip in student scores from 2007 to 2008 is attributable to the new, more rigorous mathematics curriculum, which was tested for the first time in 2008.

Progress toward improving teacher quality in Georgia

Georgia has several initiatives underway to help improve teacher quality throughout the state. These include Georgia’s Committee on Quality Teaching (CQT), Georgia’s Framework for Teaching, and the Teacher Quality Project, which receives funding from the Georgia Chamber of Commerce.

Additionally, the federal No Child Left Behind Act mandates that all students in every classroom must be taught by teachers who are “highly qualified” in their academic subject area. Georgia has made strides in decreasing the percentage of core academic classes not taught by highly qualified teachers (see figure 7).

Figure 7. Teacher Quality in Georgia’s Public Schools

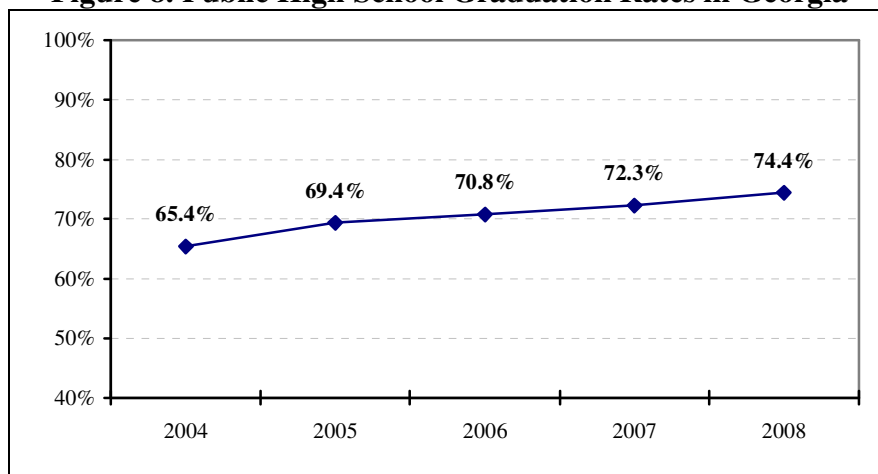
School Year	Core Classes <u>Not Taught</u> by Highly Qualified Teachers in Georgia
2005-2006	5.2%
2006-2007	3.8%

Source: Georgia Governor’s Office of Student Achievement

Progress toward increasing Georgia’s number of college- and work-ready high school graduates

In 2008, Georgia’s preliminary public high school graduation rate was 74.4 percent, continuing a trend of annual increases in this critical indicator (see figure 8).³ As would be expected, alongside the increase in graduation rates has been a slight annual decrease in high school dropout rates.

Figure 8. Public High School Graduation Rates in Georgia



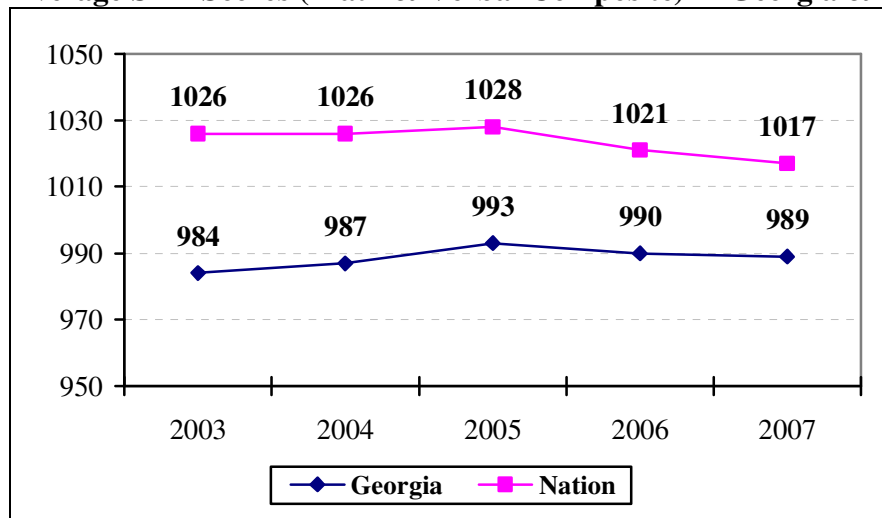
Source: Georgia Governor’s Office of Student Achievement and Georgia Department of Education

Note: Graduation rate for 2008 is preliminary and *does not* reflect summer graduates.

³ The 2008 graduation rate is preliminary and does not reflect summer graduates. The final graduation rate will be calculated when summer graduates are added.

Because the SAT is designed to measure an individual student’s level of achievement, the College Board (which administers the SAT program) discourages educators from using aggregate scores as the single measure to rank or rate teachers, educational institutions, districts, or states. Nonetheless, the SAT is widely used as a benchmark for gauging student attainment among states. Over the past five years, Georgia’s average SAT score (verbal and math composite) has increased by 5 points. While this score change seems slight, the national average SAT score (verbal and math composite) actually decreased by 9 points during this same time period (see figure 9). So while Georgia’s SAT scores have not yet exceeded the national average, our state is making slow but steady progress.

Figure 9. Average SAT Scores (Math & Verbal Composite) in Georgia & the Nation



Source: Georgia Governor’s Office of Student Achievement and College Board

In the two years since its inception, the Georgia Work Ready initiative has made a remarkable impact on individuals and communities throughout the state. Designed for individuals, the Work Ready Certificate allows workers to take a free job assessment and then become eligible to receive a certificate indicating their skill and knowledge levels to potential employers. The WorkKeys assessment system is used to determine an individual’s skill level. Assessments are conducted through Georgia's System of Technical Colleges and two Board of Regents colleges with technical divisions. To date, over 18,000 Georgians have earned Work Ready Certificates (see figure 10).

Figure 10. Work Ready Certificates in Georgia (as of July 2008)

Individuals Assessed	27,215
Total Certificates Earned	18,168
Platinum	198
Gold	3,819
Silver	9,475
Bronze	4,676

Source: Georgia Governor’s Office of Workforce Development

The Certified Work Ready Community initiative enables communities to demonstrate that they have the talented workforce needed to fill current and future jobs. The certification also shows a community's commitment to education and to improving high school graduation rates, important factors for driving businesses to an area. Community leaders and those in the education, business and industry sectors all can come together to help their communities achieve the Certified Work Ready Community Designation. As of July 2008, 107 counties in Georgia are committed to becoming Certified Work Ready Communities.

Conclusion: The Need for Sustained Action

Georgia has taken steps to ensure that our future high school graduates leave school with a solid educational foundation and are prepared for whatever path they choose to follow. The work in our state has followed research-based national best practices and has been the result of collaborations among early learning, K-12, postsecondary, and business leaders. Georgia can take pride in knowing that the concentrated, collaborative efforts in recent years are beginning to pay off, as evidenced by the data and facts presented in this report.

However, Georgia's work is far from complete. The magnitude of this issue cannot be understated. Improving education, increasing student success, and building a stronger workforce remain areas for critical action in Georgia. Education practitioners, community leaders, business executives, and policymakers must work harder to identify and support the most effective education reforms that will ultimately increase the work-ready skills of our youth. Not only does Georgia owe all of its young adults the promise of an excellent education, but also we owe our state the capacity to excel in the knowledge economy and to boost our national and global competitiveness.



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