

# School Leadership

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## QUICK DEFINITION

*Current research indicates that the quality of school leaders has a significant impact on student achievement. Leaders influence student learning by helping to promote a vision and goals and by ensuring that resources and processes are in place to enable teachers to teach well. As a result, educational leadership has emerged as a critical component of improving school performance.*

*School leaders may serve in one of many roles – as superintendents, principals, teacher leaders, and school board members. In each of these positions, leaders must be adept at managing school operations and processes as well as creating a school culture that is conducive to teaching and learning.<sup>1</sup>*

*As a policy issue, school leadership encompasses numerous critical subtopics: preparation and certification; recruitment and retention; compensation and professional growth; and leader quality.*

<sup>1</sup> Education Commission of the States, "Leadership," [www.ecs.org](http://www.ecs.org); Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, "Leadership," [www.edweek.org/rc/issues/leadership](http://www.edweek.org/rc/issues/leadership).

## KEY POLICY POINTS

- School leadership is a critical, but often overlooked, area of educational policy. Effective leadership sets the tone and conditions for schools to serve children well and facilitates their efforts to do so.
- Building an educational system that produces effective school leaders demands that policymakers address and align the entire continuum of school leadership policies: quality standards for leaders; recruitment efforts; mentoring, induction, and professional growth programs; and supportive working conditions.
- Improving school success requires a shift in the behavior of school leaders. The most effective school principals serve as instructional leaders (not mere business managers) and engage in “distributed leadership,” the sharing of leadership by multiple individuals at different levels of the school.
- At a time when most states are experiencing a serious shortage of candidates for both principal and superintendent positions, there is a dire need for states, universities, and districts to form partnerships for recruiting, preparing, and supporting a sufficient and high-quality pool of potential school leaders to meet current and projected district and school needs.
- In working to improve the supply and quality of school leaders, states have the most leverage and can exert the strongest influence in how principals are certified or licensed, prepared for practice, and provided additional training to improve their skills.<sup>2</sup>

## SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN GEORGIA

### I. OVERVIEW

Today, school leadership may be more important than at any other time in history. Demographic, social, and technological changes are producing new challenges for states, school districts, and schools working to strengthen educational systems and improve student success. Our schools desperately need leaders who understand the social, economic, and political forces that influence education, who

embrace new models of instructional leadership, and who are committed to the challenges of school leadership.<sup>3</sup>

Yet recent studies of school leadership policies and preparation suggest that states are not doing enough to ensure that leaders are trained to effectively lead positive educational change. A 2005 research report revealed that only two percent of the course content in university principal preparation programs addressed accountability in the context of school improvement. Additionally, two-thirds of recently surveyed principals confirmed that their leadership programs in graduate schools of education were “out of touch” with the skills they need to succeed on the job.<sup>4</sup>

In Georgia, policymakers have recognized the importance of strengthening school leadership preparation. The state has taken great strides over recent years to strengthen leadership preparation programs and build the supply of well-qualified school leaders.

### II. SCHOOL LEADER DEMOGRAPHICS IN GEORGIA

In fall 2007, a total of 8,901 administrative personnel were employed in Georgia’s PK-12 public school system. Included in this workforce group are the personnel who provide leadership and support services to both teachers and students. Specifically, this group is comprised of principals, assistant principals, superintendents, assistant superintendents, various program directors, and other administrative staff. While each of these administrative positions plays an important role in school success and student achievement, the majority of educational policies and research focus on the role of school principals and assistant principals. For this reason, this section concentrates primarily on those school leadership positions.

Student enrollment is the primary factor influencing the size of the school leader workforce. As student enrollment in Georgia’s public schools has increased in recent years, so has the state’s number of public school administrators. Over the past five

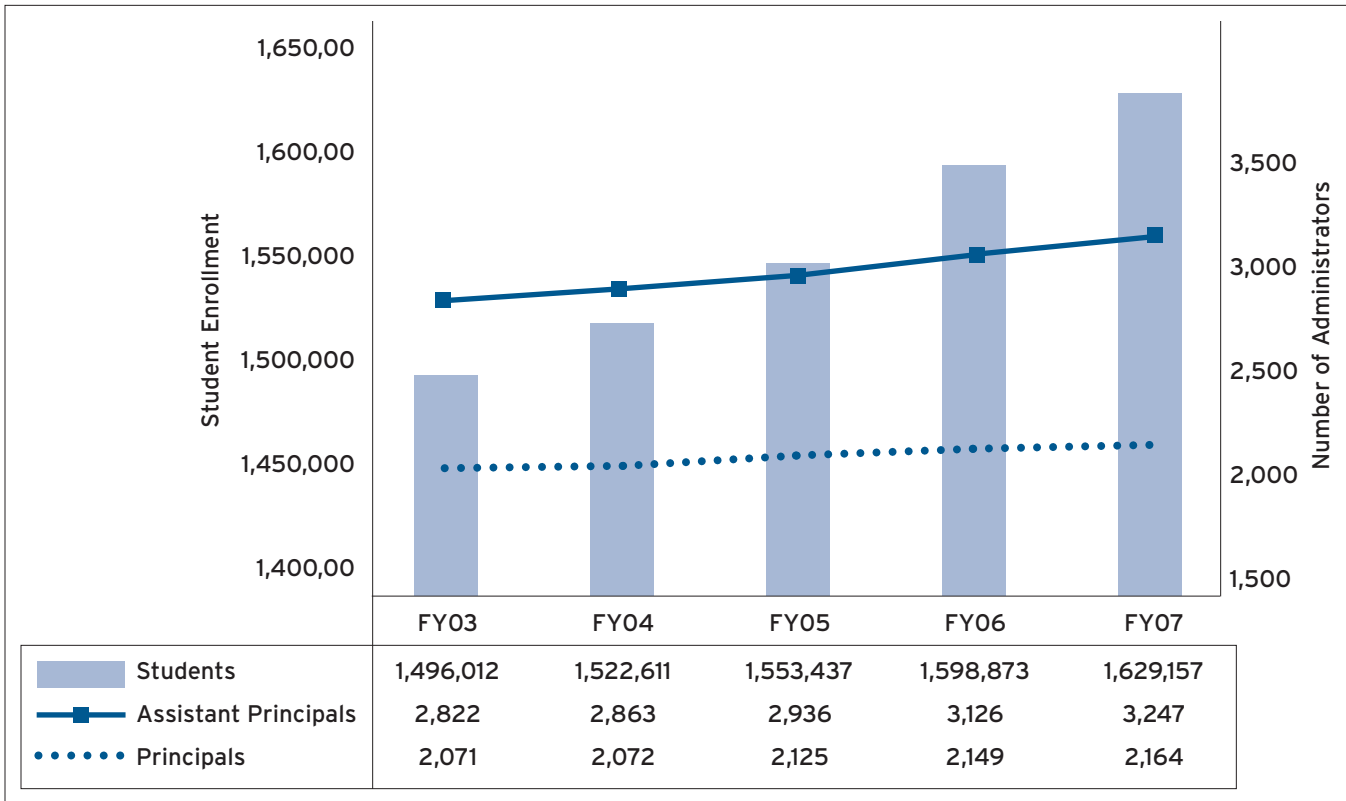
<sup>2</sup> NGA Center for Best Practices, “Issue Brief: Improving Teaching and Learning by Improving School Leadership,” September 12, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Education Commission of the States, “Leadership,” [www.ecs.org](http://www.ecs.org).

<sup>4</sup> National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, “School Leadership,” [www.nga.org](http://www.nga.org).

<sup>5</sup> Education Commission of the States, “Leadership: Preparation & Professional Development,” [www.ecs.org](http://www.ecs.org).

**Figure 6.1. Growth of Georgia's Public School Principal and Assistant Principal Workforce**



Source: Georgia Professional Standards Commission

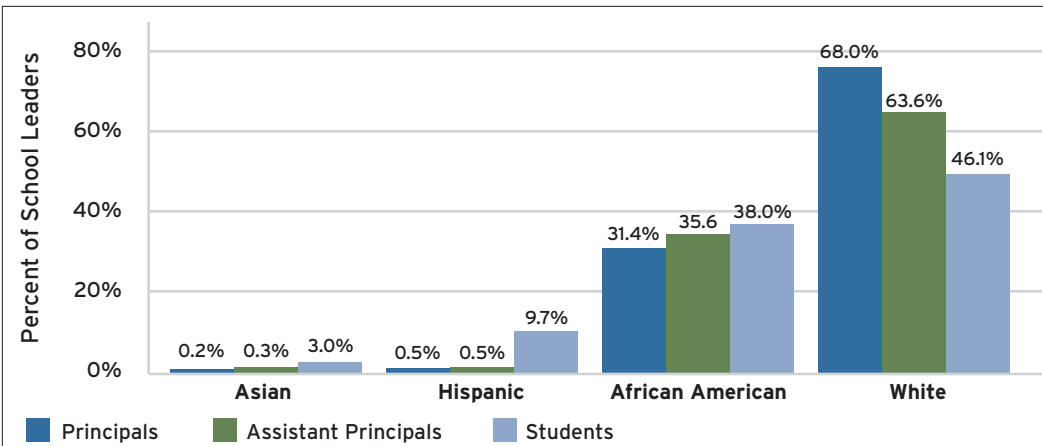
years, from FY03 to FY07, the number of principals and assistant principals in Georgia's public schools has increased by approximately 11 percent, as compared to a 9 percent increase in student enrollment. Figure 6.1 illustrates the growth in the number of Georgia's public school principals and assistant principals.

**Table 6.1. Age and Experience of Georgia's Public School Leaders, 2007**

	Mean Age	Mean Years of Experience
Principals	49.2	22.7
Assistant Principals	45.5	18.2

Source: Georgia Professional Standards Commission

**Figure 6.2. Georgia's Public School Leaders and Students by Race/Ethnicity, 2007**



Source: Georgia Professional Standards Commission and Governor's Office of Student Achievement; Note: Student categories do not add to 100. An additional 0.2% of students are classified as American Indian/Alaskan Native and 3.0% as Multiracial.

Minority representation in the school leader workforce does not reflect the demographics of Georgia's student enrollment. While the proportion of African-American school leaders has increased slightly in recent years, the majority of Georgia's principals and assistant principals continue to be white and female. Table 6.1 and Figure 6.2 show the most recent demographic data for our state's school leader workforce.

### III. SCHOOL LEADER PREPARATION AND CERTIFICATION

Over recent years, the demands on, and expectations for, school leaders have risen significantly. As state and federal accountability requirements have increased, schools are being held responsible in new ways for improving student achievement. These changes have focused attention on the preparation of school leaders. Many researchers and education practitioners have argued that the skills needed to be an effective school leader today have not been traditionally taught in preparation programs. To be effective leaders, principals and assistant principals need training in several essential areas: data analysis and decision-making, curriculum and assessment analysis, and instructional observation and feedback.<sup>5</sup>

Many states are in the process of redesigning school leader preparation programs to ensure that principals graduate equipped to lead improvements in teaching and learning. Georgia has made notable progress toward this goal over recent years. In 2007, a joint effort of the University System of Georgia's Board of Regents (BOR) and the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (PSC) resulted in the approval of new, more rigorous requirements for leader preparation programs.

Effective January 15, 2008, the new rule for educational leadership preparation and certification stems from a major redesign effort focused on how educational leaders in the state of Georgia are trained and licensed. In recognition of the impact that leaders have on school improvement and student achievement, the new initiative incorporates a number of components, including:

- New preparation program standards which include a performance-based, advanced degree requirement;
- A new state assessment for school leaders (the Georgia Assessment for the Certification of Educators(tm) [GACE(tm)]); and
- A new certificate structure which not only differentiates between building-level and system-level leadership duties but is directly connected to the specific job held by the educational leader.

These changes will affect educators who will obtain leadership certification in the future, those already holding Georgia Leadership certificates, those currently enrolled in leadership programs, and educators moving to Georgia with out-of-state leadership preparation and/or certificates.<sup>6</sup>

As part of this new initiative to improve school leader preparation, the University System of Georgia will require all 11 of the state's college and university graduate programs in K-12 school leadership to overhaul their curricula and strengthen standards. The new requirements will increase hands-on training for aspiring school leaders. Additionally, candidates seeking a degree in educational leadership will be required to earn an additional education specialist degree beyond the current requirement of a master's degree.

By requiring that school leaders earn their education specialist degree, Georgia will ensure that every new principal it certifies has taken part in field work including a one-on-one internship program. To fulfill that aspect of the new requirements, aspiring school leaders will be paired with a current veteran administrator who will provide the aspiring leader the opportunity to learn real life lessons about the role of a school leader. In addition, the changes will standardize what each college and university requires of its graduate students in the field of educational leadership so that all programs maintain a level of consistent rigor.<sup>7</sup>

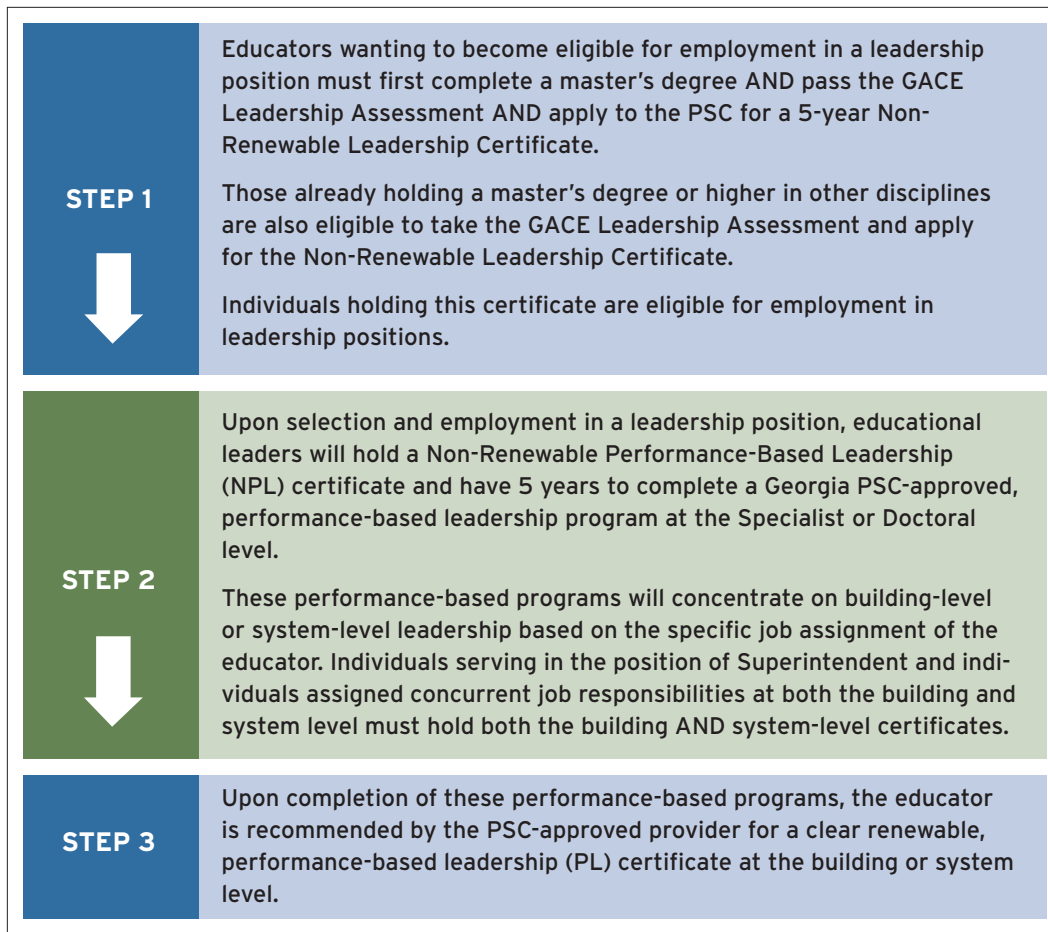
Figure 6.3 shows the general process for individuals prepared under Georgia's new school leadership design.

<sup>6</sup> Georgia Professional Standards Commission, "Rule 505-2-.300 Educational Leadership," [www.gapsc.com](http://www.gapsc.com).

<sup>7</sup> M. Hartney, "Georgia Strengthens Principal Preparation Programs," *Front and Center* (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Dec. 13 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Education Commission of the States, "Leadership: Recruitment and Retention," [www.ecs.org](http://www.ecs.org).

**Figure 6.3. An Overview of Georgia's New Educational Leadership Certification**



Source: Georgia Professional Standards Commission, "Rule 505-2-.300 Educational Leadership," [www.gapsc.com](http://www.gapsc.com).

Note: This certification route applies to individuals newly prepared in Georgia. Additional information regarding pre-existing leadership certificates and interstate reciprocity is available from the Georgia Professional Standards Commission.

#### **IV. SCHOOL LEADER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION**

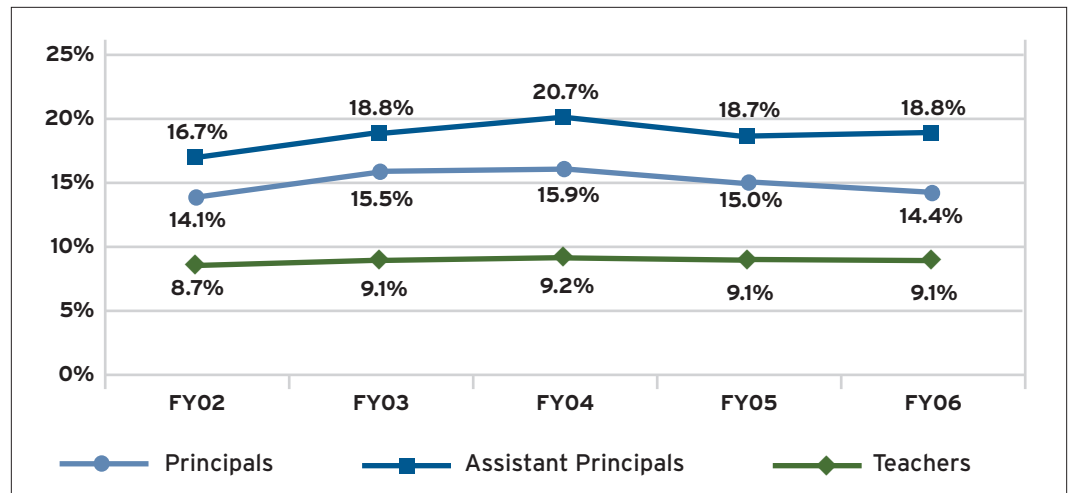
According to national research, most states are experiencing a critical shortage of candidates for both principal and superintendent positions. The shortage is due to high retirement rates of current school leaders coupled with several other factors. Principal positions require a great investment of time and energy, and with increasing accountability systems, school leaders are under intense pressure to raise student achievement. Furthermore, many educators argue that salaries for school leader positions are not sufficient to compensate for the additional stress and workloads of the job. In fact, demographic data reveal that, unlike the national teacher shortage, there is a ready supply of credentialed school and district administrators, but many

of these individuals are choosing not to use their licenses to move into leadership positions.<sup>8</sup>

In Georgia, attrition continues to be a critical factor in the demand for principals. Rates of attrition continue to be higher among administrative personnel than among Georgia's teachers, an issue that raises concerns about the need for policy efforts aimed at recruiting and retaining quality school leaders. Figure 6.4 shows the attrition rates for principals and assistant principals in comparison with those of teachers in Georgia's public schools. The high rates of attrition among assistant principals may be partially explained by the promotions of individuals from this group to the position of school principal.

<sup>9</sup> Georgia's Leadership Institute for School Improvement, "Rising Stars Collaboratives(tm) Program," [www.galeaders.org/site/risingstars](http://www.galeaders.org/site/risingstars).

**Figure 6.4. Attrition Rates of Public School Educator Workforce, FY02-FY06**



Source: Georgia Professional Standards Commission, *The Georgia Educator Workforce 2007*

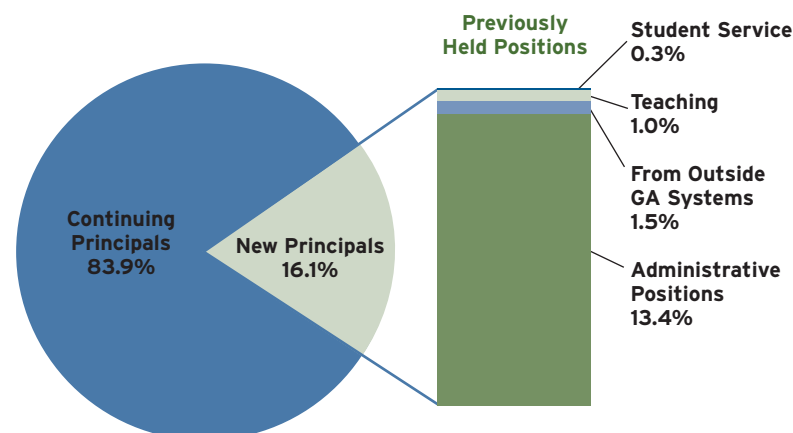
As school leaders leave their positions due to retirement, career changes, or other reasons, Georgia’s school systems must hire new principals and assistant principals to fill the needs of its schools. As with the teacher workforce, annual retention is the primary source of principals for Georgia public schools. Statewide in Georgia, new public school principals tend to come from within the school system. Only a small proportion of new principals (1.7 percent) are hired from outside the state. Likewise, a small proportion is hired from another school district in Georgia (3.1 percent) or from another RESA (1.0 percent). Figure 6.5 shows the sources of new principals in Georgia hired to meet workforce demands due to increased student enrollment, the opening of new schools, and principal attrition.

To meet the critical need for a supply of highly-qualified school leaders, Georgia has implemented a number of initiatives designed to recruit new principals and respond to the needs of hard-to-staff schools. Two such programs are Georgia’s High Performance Principals initiative and the Georgia’s Leadership Institute for School Improvement’s Rising Stars Collaboratives™ Program.

**High Performance Principals**

In 2006, the Georgia General Assembly passed Senate Bill 468 establishing the Georgia High Performance Principals grant to attract successful principals to schools in need of improvement. Under this legislation, which was championed by Governor Perdue, High Performance Principals from within and outside of the state are eligible to receive salary supplements of \$15,000 if they agree to transfer to middle and high schools classified as “Needs Improvement” schools. This supplement may continue for two additional years.

**Figure 6.5. Composition of Georgia’s Public School Principal Workforce, FY06**



Source: Georgia Professional Standards Commission, *The Georgia Educator Workforce 2006*.

Using the language of SB 468, the Georgia Department of Education worked with the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement to create a set of criteria that defines a High Performance Principal. The criteria for a High Performance Principal are shown in Table 6.2. In 2006, 127 principals in Georgia were named High Performance Principals, and in 2007, 110 principals earned this distinction. Two of these principals moved to a Needs Improvement school and received the

stipend during the 2006-07 school year. In the 2007-08 school year, one additional principal elected to move to a Needs Improvement school and is receiving the stipend.

In Georgia's FY2008 Amended State Budget, \$330,000 was cut from the High Performing Principals program, which raises questions about the effectiveness and future potential of this initiative.

**Table 6.2. Criteria for Georgia's High Performance Principal Designation**

- ▶ Candidate's school showed higher than expected scores on state Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) in four of five subjects assessed in elementary or middle school (Reading, English/Language Arts, Science, Mathematics and Social Studies).
- ▶ Candidate's school showed higher than expected scores on state Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHS GT) in three of four subjects assessed in high schools (English/Language Arts, Science, Mathematics and Social Studies).
- ▶ Candidate has been principal at the identified school for three consecutive years.
- ▶ Candidate was principal of a school that made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) the previous year and was not in Needs Improvement status for the current school year.
- ▶ Candidate met other necessary goals in regards to AYP, graduation rate, End of Course Test performance and a growth trend on SAT scores.

Source: Georgia Department of Education, [www.gadoe.org](http://www.gadoe.org).

### **Rising Stars Collaboratives™**

This leadership development program was initiated by Georgia's Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI) and is funded in part by the U.S. Department of Education and the Wallace Foundation. A performance-based approach to leadership development, the Rising Stars Collaboratives prepares teachers for school leadership roles and supports new and developing leaders during their transition to the principalship.

The Collaboratives consist of district(s) with similar needs, the Regional Education Service Agency (RESA), the local university leadership preparation program, a GLISI program director, and GLISI-trained leadership performance coaches. Together, they create custom-designed practice experiences and coursework for their aspiring leaders and/or assistant principals. The involvement of local school districts helps ensure that school systems have a pipeline of capable school leaders to sustain improvement and replace retiring leaders.

GLISI's Rising Stars model started as a pilot program with the North Georgia RESA in 2003 and began replication statewide in 2004. Since its inception through March 2008, Rising Stars has prepared 318 school leader candidates in ten Collaboratives<sup>9</sup>

### **V. SCHOOL LEADER COMPENSATION AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH**

#### **Compensation**

Among education policy analysts and practitioners, there is some concern that current salary schedules may not be adequately compensating for the roles, responsibilities, and time commitment of school leadership positions. As a result, some researchers and policymakers are beginning to explore innovative approaches to compensation for school and district leaders such as incentive pay, merit pay, performance pay, differentiated pay, and career ladders.<sup>10</sup>

As with public school teacher salaries, school leader salaries in Georgia are determined by a state salary schedule established by the Georgia Department

<sup>10</sup> Education Commission of the States, "Leadership: Compensation," [www.ecs.org](http://www.ecs.org).

of Education. However, local school boards can approve a higher level of compensation for their local school leaders.

Table 6.3 shows average salaries of school principals across the country for the 2006-07 school year. In the 2006-07 school year, the average public school administrator salary in Georgia was \$81,617, which was less than the national average.

**Table 6.3. Average Principal Salaries in the United States, 2006-07**

Position	Average Annual Salary
Elementary school principal	\$82,414
Middle school principal	\$87,866
High school principal	\$92,965

Source: W. Cooke and C. Licciardi, "Principals' Salaries 2006-07," *Principal* 86:5 (May/June 2007).

### Professional Growth

Professional development programs increase the knowledge and skills of school leaders to improve curriculum, instruction, and student achievement. High-quality, ongoing professional learning helps ensure that leaders maintain and refine their skills in instructional leadership and are equipped with the tools to help improve school and student success.

In 2003, the Georgia State Board of Education adopted new professional learning standards for all educators including school leaders. The new standards included a requirement for the establishment of "Learning Communities" within schools to support the professional learning of principals and their teachers. These communities were designed to embed professional development into the organizational structure of the school and tie learning activities directly to the school's improvement plan.

Several statewide organizations within Georgia provide support and professional learning opportunities for public school leaders. These include the Georgia School Superintendents Association (GSSA), the Georgia Association of Educational Leaders (GAEL), and Georgia's Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI).

### VI. SCHOOL LEADER QUALITY

Ensuring that public schools are under the guidance of effective school leaders is a critical step toward improving student achievement and our state's educational progress. To expedite this step, several states are focusing on policies to evaluate and improve the quality of leaders with respect to instructional skills.

Georgia boasts a significant initiative, Georgia's Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI), that is helping to strengthen school leader preparation, recruitment, retention, and quality. GLISI began operation in 2002 as a partnership devoted to the success of Georgia's educational leaders in meeting elevated expectations for student achievement and school performance. The partnership is comprised of the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia (USG), the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (GPPE), the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (PSC), the Georgia Department of Education (DOE), the office of the Governor, K-12 educators, and business leaders.

In order to provide school leaders in Georgia with effective, research-based education and support, GLISI also collaborates with the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), Georgia's Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs), school system professional development departments, higher education institutions, the Georgia School Superintendents Association (GSSA), the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA), and others who seek to develop and support school leaders.

The goal of this coordinated effort is to provide resources and leverage collaboration to increase the quality and amount of support provided to educational leaders. GLISI provides education and development for educational leaders and works to research, define, and institutionalize a leadership model based on best practices for the work of leadership of school improvement to drive changes in culture and behavior and sustain school improvement. Additionally, GLISI works to influence policy to establish new processes for leader recruitment, selection, preparation, development, and retention based on best practices that support school improvement. Table 6.4 provides an overview of GLISI's programs for leadership development.

## EMERGING POLICY CONCERNS FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

The growing focus on outcomes and improving achievement for all students demands that today’s public schools be equipped with exemplary principals. Yet school leadership only recently has begun to receive the attention it deserves as an education reform and policy issue.

Policymakers and practitioners must shift their thinking to consider the role of school principals as instructional leaders, not mere building and operations managers. Schools and districts need leaders who can drive improvements in curriculum, teaching, and learning. The most innovative and effective leader preparation programs are those that teach such skills in a performance-based context. However, there is still a dearth of such programs across the country.

Building a cohesive, learning-centered system of school leadership demands that attention be given to a number of important policy questions. To what extent, for example, is it necessary for principals and superintendents to have been classroom teachers? In general, what experience and qualities are essential for effective school leaders? Are there special skills and talents school administrators need to succeed in hard-to-staff and low-performing schools? Why isn’t the leadership role (principal or superintendent), as currently defined, attracting enough highly qualified leaders? How do these roles need to change? Investigating the answers to these questions could be foundational to the design and implementation of positive reforms.

**Table 6.4. Overview of Georgia’s Leadership Institute for School Improvement Leadership Development Programs**

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION
Base Camp and Leadership Summit Cohort Process	Intensive leader training and working sessions that launch a three-year engagement of a school district with GLISI. Designed to support district-wide improvement in student achievement, school culture, and organizational effectiveness.
Rising Stars Collaboratives(tm)	Prepare teachers for school leadership roles and support new and developing leaders during transition to the principalship. Collaboratives(tm) connect school districts with similar needs within Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs) to a university leadership preparation program.
Leadership Preparation Performance Coaching (LPPC)	Offers districts an opportunity to develop their own cadre of local performance coaches to work with aspiring and developing leaders. Coaches are trained to give feedback against clear criteria to support leader development.
Developing High-performing Leaders At All Levels (DHPLAAL)	A tool to manage and improve the performance of existing leaders and to develop new leaders. Designed for district teams, DHPLAAL can help districts develop a sustainable legacy of leadership.
Communities of Learning and Achievement (COLAs)	Allows GLISI districts to come together to share their best practices and network with each other and with higher education partners.
GLISI Performance-Based Modules (PBMs)	Designed to help Georgia districts, schools, and universities design leader development and performance improvement programs for teachers who are in preparation for leadership and incumbent leaders during induction and transition. PBMs guide work on the job, addressing topics that are critical in school leadership.

Source: Georgia’s Leadership Institute for School Improvement, [www.galeaders.org](http://www.galeaders.org).