

# Standards, Assessments, and Accountability

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## QUICK DEFINITION

*A standard is something established by authority as a rule for the measure of quantity, weight, extent, value or quality. An educational standard defines the broad expectations for an area of knowledge in a given domain and may include an expectation of the degree to which a student expresses his or her understanding of that knowledge.<sup>1</sup>*

**EXAMPLE OF A STANDARD FOR 5TH GRADE MATHEMATICS IN GEORGIA:** By the end of 5th grade, students will be able to compute area and volume of simple geometric figures and measure capacity.

*Various types of assessments are used to measure the progress students make in meeting academic standards. Assessments can take many forms – from norm-referenced tests that compare each student's performance to that of others to standards-based assessments that compare each student's performance to academic standards. Assessments can range from mostly multiple-choice items to short-answer questions or longer performance tasks engaging students in real-world problems.<sup>2</sup> When coupled with other key indicators (e.g., graduation rates and attendance), assessments form the basis of state accountability systems.*

**EXAMPLE OF AN ASSESSMENT IN GEORGIA:** The Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) in Mathematics is administered to 5th graders in order to provide a standardized measure of student learning.

*Continued*

<sup>1</sup> Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) Glossary, [www.doe.k12.ga.us](http://www.doe.k12.ga.us).

<sup>2</sup> Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) Glossary, [www.doe.k12.ga.us](http://www.doe.k12.ga.us).

*Accountability means holding key individuals and groups – including schools, districts, educators, and students – responsible for student achievement through the systematic collection, analysis, use, and reporting of valid and reliable information. Applying consequences for results – such as incentives, rewards and/or sanctions – also are included as part of an accountability system. With such a system, students can be motivated to learn better, teachers to teach better, and schools to be more effective.<sup>3</sup>*

*Setting rigorous academic standards (standards), measuring student progress against those standards (assessments), and holding students and educators accountable for meeting them (accountability) are the essential components of the standards-based reform movement.*

#### **KEY POLICY POINTS**

- Standards are seen by many as the foundation upon which excellence and equity can be built into the nation’s public education system.
- Standards alone will not yield gains in student achievement. Standards have the potential to be an engine of change and improvement, but only if states redesign other system components – curriculum, assessment, accountability, teacher education and professional development, and resource allocation – around them.<sup>4</sup>
- States that have focused on aligning various components of their education system with standards have shown improvement in student achievement and school quality.<sup>5</sup>
- Assessment policies are not without controversy. Implemented well, statewide assessments can raise expectations and help guarantee that all students are held to the same high standards. But testing programs run the risk of narrowing student learning to what is tested which may be only a sample of what students should know.<sup>6</sup>

➤ Policymakers must try to maximize assessment quality and utility while creating an efficient and cost-effective assessment system.<sup>7</sup>

➤ Accountability systems are highly complex and involve a range of interconnected design and technical issues from test reliability and validity, to incentives and interventions, to how data are collected, analyzed and reported. States must balance their own statewide accountability systems with the increased federal accountability mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act.

➤ When designing and reforming accountability systems, policymakers must determine, among other things, whose performance should be judged, the level of performance expected, relevant measures of performance, what constitutes satisfactory progress toward established goals, and what rewards and consequences will be imposed for superior or inadequate performance.<sup>8</sup>

## **STANDARDS, ASSESSMENTS, AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN GEORGIA**

### **I. NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT OVERVIEW**

Since the 2001 introduction of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, rarely has a conversation among educators and policymakers occurred without mention of Adequate Yearly Progress, standardized tests, Highly Qualified Teachers, or proficiency standards. While many states had their own accountability systems in place long before the implementation of NCLB, the federal act brightened the spotlight on public education, created a common educational language, raised awareness of achievement gaps among student subgroups, and boldly raised the performance bar for students in all states by setting a goal of 100 percent proficiency in core subjects by 2014.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was signed into law by President Bush on January 8, 2002, as a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary

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

<sup>4</sup> Education Commission of the States, “Standards,” [www.ecs.org](http://www.ecs.org).

<sup>5</sup> Education Commission of the States, “Standards,” [www.ecs.org](http://www.ecs.org).

<sup>6</sup> Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, “Assessment,” [www.edweek.org/rc/issues/assessment](http://www.edweek.org/rc/issues/assessment).

<sup>7</sup> Education Commission of the States, “Assessment,” [www.ecs.org](http://www.ecs.org).

<sup>8</sup> Education Commission of the States, “Accountability,” [www.ecs.org](http://www.ecs.org).

Education Act (ESEA), the central federal law in pre-collegiate education. The ESEA was first enacted in 1965 and last reauthorized in 1994. As the newest incarnation of the ESEA, the No Child Left Behind Act has expanded the federal role in education and become a focal point of educational policy. Coming at a time of wide public concern about the state of education, the legislation sets in place requirements that reach into every public school in America. It takes particular aim at improving the educational lot of disadvantaged students.<sup>9</sup>

At the core of NCLB are several measures designed to improve student achievement and increase statewide accountability for educational excellence. As illustrated in Table 7.1, key components of the legislation include:

- Annual testing of reading and math proficiency for students in grades three to eight and testing of students' science ability at least once in elementary, middle, and high school;
- Mandated academic progress which requires that all students meet the "proficient" level on state tests by the 2013-14 school year;
- Adequate Yearly Progress targets for individual schools which measure performance for schools' overall student populations and for certain demographic subgroups;
- Public school choice for children who attend public schools that have not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two or more consecutive years (and have thus been designated as Needs Improvement); and
- Highly qualified teachers in all core content areas, a designation that generally means a teacher is certified and has demonstrated proficiency in his or her subject matter.

When NCLB became law in 2002, it was implemented as a five-year plan, with funding set to expire on September 30, 2007. Early in 2007, conversation about the law's reauthorization began, with lawmakers and education policy experts weighing in on the changes necessary to improve

**Table 7.1. An Overview of the Major Provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act**

KEY CATEGORIES OF NCLB	WHAT NCLB MANDATES
Standards and Assessments	States are required to adopt state-defined standards, develop assessments, and identify schools in need of improvement.
Data Collection	States and schools are required to collect data on achievement of different groups of students by poverty, race, limited-English proficiency, and disability status. States are required to publicly report achievement data disaggregated by student group.
Testing	Beginning in 2005-06, testing is required each year for grades 3-8 and once in grades 10-12.
Accountability	Every state and school district is responsible for ensuring that students meet the state standard for proficiency within 12 years. Schools must use disaggregated data to ensure that all groups of students are making adequate progress.
Consequences	States, districts, and schools are required to focus additional attention and resources on schools needing improvement. In these schools, parents have options to transfer their children to higher performing schools or to receive supplemental education services at school expense.
Teacher Quality	States are required to define a qualified teacher and to ensure that low-income and minority students are not taught disproportionately by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers. States were given until 2005-06 to ensure that teachers meet state standards.

Source: The Education Trust, *Myths versus Realities-Answers to Common Questions about the New No Child Left Behind Act*, 2001.

the NCLB Act. However, as debates over the landmark legislation continue in Congress, prospects are fading that the law will be reauthorized before President Bush leaves office. Meanwhile, because of a clause included in the bill's original language, the current law has been automatically renewed for the 2008 fiscal year.

<sup>9</sup> Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, "No Child Left Behind," [www.edweek.org/rc/issues/no-child-left-behind](http://www.edweek.org/rc/issues/no-child-left-behind).

## NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND IN GEORGIA

NCLB requires all states to establish state academic standards and a state testing system that meet federal requirements. Georgia received final approval of its state accountability plan from the U.S. Department of Education on May 19, 2003, and revisions to the plan were approved by the federal government on June 7, 2004.<sup>10</sup>

Under the federal law, each state is responsible for defining what constitutes Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in increasing student achievement toward the goal of all students reaching proficient levels on state assessments by 2014. States must set the same goals for all schools and students. In Georgia, schools must meet three criteria in order to meet AYP each year. These criteria are shown in Table 7.2.

## II. STANDARDS IN GEORGIA

### OVERVIEW

Of all the education reforms that have emerged over the past 15 years, none has been more powerful and enduring than the push to establish challenging academic standards for students. Today, the standards-based approach constitutes the primary reform strategy of most states and districts. They are relying on standards, among other things, to improve efficiency, generate challenging curricula, create greater system coherence, and serve as the basis for new ways of measuring and attaching consequences to the performance of students, teachers, and schools.<sup>11</sup>

While the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* is largely cited as the catalyst for the modern day standards-based reform movement, a renewed focus on the

**Table 7.2. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Criteria for Georgia Schools**

CRITERION	DESCRIPTION
95% Participation	Each school, as a whole, and all student groups with at least 40 members must have a participation rate of 95% or above on selected state assessments in Reading/English Language Arts and Mathematics.
Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs)	Each school, as a whole, and each student group meeting the minimum group size must meet or exceed the State's Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO) regarding the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on state assessments in Reading/English Language Arts and Mathematics. For AMO, the minimum group size is 40 or 10% of the students enrolled in AYP grades, whichever is greater (with a 75 student cap). States must raise the proficiency level in gradual increments each year to reach the goal of 100 percent proficiency for all students by 2014.
Second Indicator	Each school must meet the standard or show progress on a Second Indicator. For Second Indicator, the minimum group size is 40 or 10% of the students enrolled in AYP grades, whichever is greater (with a 75 student cap). Second Indicators can include graduation rates, attendance rates, or other standardized assessment scores.

Source: Georgia Department of Education, "Answers to Frequently Asked Questions about AYP," [www.doe.k12.ga.us](http://www.doe.k12.ga.us).

<sup>10</sup> Georgia Department of Education, "About the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001," [www.doe.k12.ga.us](http://www.doe.k12.ga.us).

<sup>11</sup> Education Commission of the States, "Standards," [www.ecs.org](http://www.ecs.org).

preparedness of America’s public school students for life after high school and their ability to compete in a global economy has underscored the importance of having rigorous academic standards for all students. Standards are central to realizing the aims of America’s public schools as a core element of the country’s economic future by delineating what students are expected to know and be able to do. As such, they are the foundational component of education reform.

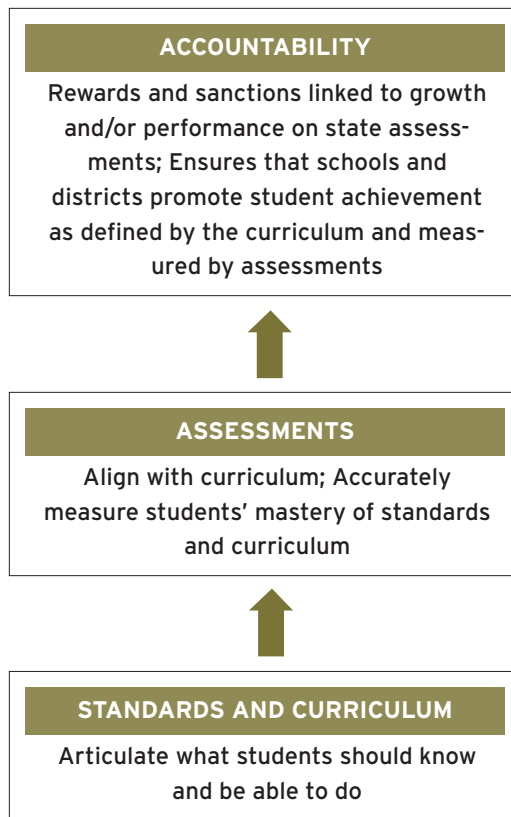
In the 1990s, almost all states established statewide content standard documents that set out the statewide goals for what students should know and be able to do in core academic subjects in K-12 education.<sup>12</sup> Today, every state has academic standards that articulate the core knowledge and skills students should learn from kindergarten through grade 12. These standards play an important role in states’ education systems. They guide the development of curriculum and instruction; they provide the foundational framework for student assessments; and they serve as the basis of accountability systems that reward and sanction schools according to their academic performance.<sup>13</sup> Figure 7.1 illustrates the theory of standards-based education.

**Educational Standards and Curriculum in Georgia**

As required by the state’s Quality Basic Education Act of 1985, Georgia must maintain a curriculum that specifies what students are expected to know in each subject and grade. Additionally, the state’s standardized tests must be aligned with that curriculum. The state’s curriculum is a guideline for instruction that helps teachers, students, and parents know what topics must be covered and mastered for a particular course. The curriculum establishes the minimum standards, and does not prohibit systems, schools, or teachers from adding material to it. Some systems may have curricula of their own, but they must include everything that the state requires.

The 1985 law led to the creation of the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC), Georgia’s statewide public school curriculum. Yet in January 2002, a Phi Delta Kappa audit concluded that the QCC not

**Figure 7.1. Standards-based Reform: Aligning Standards, Assessments, and Accountability**



Source: A+ Education Foundation, “Accountability, Assessments and Standards,” Alabama Education Policy Primer: A Guide to Understanding K-12 Schools.

only lacked depth and could not be covered in a reasonable amount of time, but did not even meet national standards. The finding of the audit was that it would take twenty-three years-not twelve-to cover the topics included at anywhere near the level of depth necessary for meaningful student learning to occur. Shallow standards forced Georgia’s teachers to guess what they should teach and hope that what they were teaching was the content that would be tested. The state had not provided a usable and effective curriculum to guide instruction, which some policy experts contended was one reason for the poor performance of Georgia’s students on statewide and national tests.

**Georgia Performance Standards**

Based primarily on the results of the curriculum audit, the State Board of Education and State Superintendent Kathy Cox embarked upon the task of completely overhauling Georgia’s curricula

<sup>12</sup> Council of Chief State School Officers, *Key State Education Policies on PK-12 Education: 2006*, (Washington, D.C., 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Achieve, Inc., *Closing the Expectations Gap 2008* (Washington, D.C., 2008).

framework. The new Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) were developed over many months of work by teacher teams, state and national experts, and consultants considering national standards from high-performing states and nations. This extensive overhaul requires a phased-implementation timeline: the GPS are being rolled out over a seven-year period. Implementation began in the 2004-05 school year and will be completed in 2011-12.

The revised and strengthened curriculum will drive both instruction and assessment in Georgia's schools, providing guidelines for teachers, students, and test makers. The Georgia Performance Standards go into much greater depth than the content standards used in the previous curriculum. Each GPS incorporates the content standard, which simply tells the teacher what a student is expected to know and master, and expands upon it by providing three additional items: suggested tasks, sample student work, and teacher commentary on that work. The state's assessment program will now be aligned with the GPS. Additionally, teachers receive professional learning opportunities related to the implementation of the GPS as the curriculum phase-in occurs.<sup>14</sup>

### **Georgia's New Graduation Requirements**

In 2004, a series of national reports were issued revealing a sizeable gap between the standards students are required to meet to earn a high school diploma and the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in their college and career pursuits after high school. Referred to as the "expectations gap," this issue began driving conversations and action by national and state leaders to increase the rigor of high school education.

In conjunction with national policy trends toward higher academic expectations and the implementation of the new Georgia Performance Standards, Georgia's State Board of Education passed a new set of graduation requirements in September 2007. The new curriculum and the new graduation requirements will ensure that students graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in college and the workplace. Beginning with ninth-graders who enroll in

high school during the 2008-09 school year, students will be required to take additional math and science courses in order to earn their high school diplomas. Table 7.3 presents the changes to Georgia's high school graduation requirements.

In addition to changes in the course requirements, Georgia's new graduation rule also altered the state's high school diploma system. The previous "tiered" diploma system has been eliminated. Before the implementation of the new rule, students could earn one of four diplomas, each with different requirements: College Preparatory, College Preparatory with Distinction, Technology/Career, and Technology/Career with Distinction. The new rule has established one common set of requirements for all students, yet allows for various options to meet those requirements including advanced courses such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and post-secondary options and career-oriented courses offered under the Career, Technical and Agricultural Education (CTAE) program division.

### **Aligning Georgia's Standards to College- and Work-readiness**

In 2005, Georgia joined with other states in the American Diploma Project (ADP) coordinated by the national organization Achieve, Inc. The project includes representatives of the Governors Office, the Georgia Department of Education (DOE), the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), the University System of Georgia (USG), the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (GPEE), and leaders from the K-12, college, business, and civic communities. Currently, Georgia is one of 32 states participating in the American Diploma Project network.

The purpose of the American Diploma Project is to raise expectations and achievement in our high schools so that all students graduate with the knowledge and skill they need to be successful in college and the workplace. This will be accomplished by raising the rigor of the high school standards, assessments, and curriculum and by better aligning these expectations with the demands of post-secondary education and work.

<sup>14</sup> Source: Georgia Department of Education, "Curriculum Frequently Asked Questions," [www.doe.k12.ga.us](http://www.doe.k12.ga.us). For more information about the Georgia Performance Standards, visit [www.georgiastandards.org](http://www.georgiastandards.org).

**Table 7.3. Academic Requirements for Georgia High School Diploma**

	CURRENT RULE	NEW RULE
	Applies to students who enrolled in the 9th grade prior to the 2008-09 school year.	Applies to students enrolling in the 9th grade for the first time in the 2008-09 school year.
Diploma Type	4 tiers, each with different requirements: College Preparatory (CP); College Preparatory w/ Distinction (CP+); Technology/Career (TC); Technology/Career with Distinction (TC+)	1 high school diploma (a common set of requirements for all students)
English/Language Arts	4	4
Mathematics	4 (CP; CP+); 3 (TC; TC+)	4
Science	3	4
Social Studies	3	3
Health/Physical Education	1	1
Foreign Language/ CTAE/Fine Arts	1-3 (depending on tier)	3*
Additional Electives	5-6 (depending on tier)	4
Total Credits	22 (CP; TC); 24 (CP+; TC+)	23

\* Students planning to enter or transfer into a University System of Georgia institution must take two units of the same foreign language.  
Source: Georgia Department of Education, "Georgia Graduation Rule Revision," [www.doe.k12.ga.us](http://www.doe.k12.ga.us).

In Georgia, the collaborative work of educational agencies around the goals of ADP has already resulted in notable successes. The following actions have been completed as part of Georgia's work:

- Identification from within the Georgia Performance Standards of the level of performance necessary in mathematics and English to be both college- and work-ready. These standards have the support of the USG and TCSG English and mathematics faculties and the business community (through the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education).

- Development of a new High School Graduation Rule that indicates a new core curriculum required for high school graduation (approved by State Board of Education) and new college admission requirements based on this same set of courses (approved by the Board of Regents).

- Identification of accountability measures (agreed upon by the Department of Education, the Technical College System of Georgia, the University System of Georgia, and the Office of Student Achievement) for: high school graduation, with virtually all students both college- and work-ready; student transition from high school to college; and college success.

In addition, Georgia is working toward additional alignment of high school education with college and career readiness. The following actions are currently underway:

- One or more College and Work Readiness Test(s) is under development collaboratively by the Department of Education, the Technical College System of Georgia, and the University System.

► Data marts (or bridges) are under development to connect selected variables across the K-12 and post-secondary data systems including extending the use of the unique K-12 student identifier system to the post-secondary level and tracking student progress from high school through college.

### III. ASSESSMENTS IN GEORGIA OVERVIEW

A crucial part of an accountability system, student assessments serve as the measure of whether or not students are learning the curriculum. While various types of assessments have long been used by classroom teachers to provide evidence of student learning, they have become an increasingly critical component of state and national educational systems. Policymakers are relying more than ever on large-scale tests to make high-stakes decisions about students and schools. States are using assess-

ments to motivate students and schools and to hold teachers and administrators accountable for raising achievement. Assessments are increasingly tied to high-stakes decisions about students' grade promotion and graduation. Throughout the country, parents, reporters, and educational stakeholders are scrutinizing test scores as indicators of the quality of our educational system.<sup>15</sup>

The federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 increased states' focus on assessments with its requirement that states annually test students in reading and mathematics in grades 3-8 and once in high school, beginning no later than the 2005-06 school year. The law requires that states use tests aligned with their academic-content standards either by building assessments specifically designed to reflect those standards or by modifying commercially produced, off-the-shelf tests.<sup>16</sup>

**Table 7.4. Definitions of Commonly-Used Forms of Assessments**

CRITERION VS. NORM-REFERENCED TESTS	
<p><b>CRITERION-REFERENCED TESTS (CRT)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► Designed to measure how well students acquire, learn, and accomplish the knowledge and skills set forth in a specific curriculum or unit of instruction.</li> <li>► Student's performance is interpreted by comparing it with a pre-specified standard or specific content and/or skills.</li> </ul> <p><b>EXAMPLES:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT)</li> <li>• Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT)</li> <li>• National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)</li> </ul>	<p><b>NORM-REFERENCED TESTS (NRT)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► Designed to measure a student's score against the scores of a group of people who have already taken the same exam, called the "norming group."</li> <li>► Student's performance is interpreted in relation to a state, regional, or national population of other students.</li> </ul> <p><b>EXAMPLES:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)</li> <li>• IQ Tests</li> </ul>
ALIGNED VS. OFF-THE-SHELF TESTS	
<p><b>ALIGNED TESTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► Tests designed within a state so that test items reinforce the state curriculum.</li> </ul>	<p><b>OFF-THE-SHELF TESTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► Commercially developed tests that have not been modified to reflect state content standards.</li> </ul>

Source: A+ Education Foundation, "Accountability, Assessments and Standards," *Alabama Education Policy Primer: A Guide to Understanding K-12 Schools*; Georgia Department of Education Office of Standards, Instruction and Assessment, [www.gadoe.org](http://www.gadoe.org).

<sup>15</sup> Nancy Kober, "What Tests Can and Cannot Tell Us," *Test Talk for Leaders* (Center on Education Policy, October 2002).

<sup>16</sup> From EdWeek Research Center, "Assessment," [www.edweek.org/rc/issues/assessment](http://www.edweek.org/rc/issues/assessment).

The logic behind such assessment systems, one of the centerpieces of the push for standards-based school improvement, has been to find a more accurate way to measure both student and school progress as well as to establish measures against which to hold schools accountable for results. According to Education Week's *Quality Counts* series of reports, all 50 states and the District of Columbia now have some statewide test in place. These assessments may take one of many forms: criterion-referenced, norm-referenced, aligned, or off-the-shelf. Table 7.4 provides an explanation of the various types of assessments.

### GEORGIA'S ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

Statewide assessments for Georgia's public school students are administered and managed by the State Department of Education. The purposes of the Georgia Student Assessment Program are to measure student achievement of the state-mandated curriculum, to identify students failing to achieve mastery of content, to provide teachers with diagnostic information, and to assist school systems in identifying strengths and weaknesses in order to establish priorities in planning educational programs. Georgia's assessment program includes: customized criterion-referenced tests at the elementary, middle, and high school levels; the National Assessment of Educational Progress in grades 4, 8 and 12; and a norm-referenced test at grades 3, 5, and 8.

In Georgia, mandatory state assessments include:

- Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT);
- End-of-Course Tests (EOCT);
- Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHS GT);
- Georgia Alternative Assessment (GAA); and
- Georgia Writing Assessments.

Additional assessments administered to Georgia's students include:

- Georgia Kindergarten Assessment Program - Revised (GKAP-R);
- National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP);
- Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS);

- ACCESS for English Language Learners; and
- Lexile Framework for Reading.

Table 7.5 provides an overview of Georgia's primary student assessments. Table 7.6 provides succinct information about the state's additional student assessments.

As detailed in the above *Standards* section, the new Georgia Performance Standards provide a deeper and richer curriculum for Georgia students and are being phased in to replace QCC. Because the CRCT, EOCT, and GHS GT are curriculum-based assessments, the tests are being redeveloped to reflect GPS in accordance with the phase-in plan for the new curriculum. The transition plan for the new GPS includes one year of training for school districts and a second year for full implementation of the GPS in the classroom. It is during this second year that the newly aligned assessments will be administered to students.

### IV. ACCOUNTABILITY IN GEORGIA OVERVIEW

The standards-based educational reform movement has allowed accountability systems to become performance-based. Once academic content standards are defined, and school and student progress measured against them, performance can be measured and evaluated. As a result, state leaders are closer to having a better picture of student, school, and system performance as well as the ability to change and improve the way education policy and practice decisions are made.

Performance-based accountability systems are, however, highly complex and involve a range of interconnected design and technical issues from test reliability and validity, to incentives and interventions, to how data are collected, analyzed and reported. Policymakers must determine, among other things, whose performance should be judged, the level of performance expected, relevant measures of performance, what constitutes satisfactory progress toward established goals and what rewards and consequences will be imposed for superior or inadequate performance. Furthermore, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) has signif-

**Table 7.5. Georgia's Primary State-Level Assessments**

ASSESSMENT	HISTORY	DESCRIPTION	GRADE LEVEL AND SUBJECT AREA	OUTCOME/ CONSEQUENCE	USED FOR AYP DETERMINATION
CRCT (Criterion Referenced Competency Tests)	Mandated by Georgia law as amended by the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000.	Measures how well students acquire the skills and knowledge described in the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) and the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC). Used to diagnose individual student strengths and weaknesses as related to the instruction of the GPS/QCC, and to gauge the quality of education throughout Georgia.	1-2 Reading English/Language Arts Mathematics  3-8 Reading English/Language Arts Mathematics Science Social Studies	CRCT results impact student retention at some levels. Student performance on 3rd grade reading and 5th and 8th grades mathematics determines grade-level promotion.	Yes
EOCT (End of Course Tests)	Mandated by the A+ Educational Reform Act of 2000.	Assesses specific content knowledge and skills related to core academic courses. Provides diagnostic information to help students identify strengths and areas of need in learning, therefore improving performance in all high school courses and on other assessments, such as the GHSGT. Provides data to evaluate the effectiveness of classroom instruction at the school and system levels.	9-12* Mathematics: Algebra I Geometry Social Studies: US History Economics Science: Biology Physical Science English/Language Arts: 9th grade Lit/Comp American Lit/Comp	* Any student enrolled in and/or receiving credit for an EOCT course, regardless of grade level, is required to take the EOCT upon completion of that course. A student's EOCT score is averaged in as 15% of the final course grade.	No
GHSGT (Georgia High School Graduation Test)	Mandated by 1991 Georgia law.	Measures mastery of the knowledge and skills that educators agree constitute a comprehensive high school education. Ensures that students who earn a Georgia diploma meet performance standards established for graduation.	11-12 English/Language Arts Mathematics Science Social Studies	All students seeking a high school diploma must pass the GHSGT in four content areas in addition to the Writing Assessment.	Yes (an enhanced version of the assessment)
GAA (Georgia Alternative Assessment)	Redesigned to meet mandates of NCLB and IDEA.	Based on alternate achievement standards, allowing for the unique learning characteristics of students with significant cognitive disabilities. Consists of a portfolio of student work showing achievement and progress students have made in knowledge and skills aligned to the state's curriculum.	K-2 English/Language Arts Mathematics  3-8, 11 English/Language Arts Mathematics Science Social Studies	Students with significant cognitive disabilities must earn a proficient score on the high school (11th grade) GAA to receive a high school diploma.	Yes
Writing Assessments (11th grade assessment is the Georgia High School Writing Test)	Required by Georgia law.	Performance-based assessment of a student's writing skills. Provides diagnostic feedback to teachers, students, and parents about individual performance.	3, 5, 8, and 11	Various writing genres at different grade levels including narrative, informational, persuasive, and response to literature.	No

Source: Georgia Department of Education Office of Standards, Instruction and Assessment, [www.gadoe.org](http://www.gadoe.org).

**Table 7.6. Overview of Additional Georgia Assessments**

ASSESSMENT	DESCRIPTION
<p>Georgia Kindergarten Assessment Program – Revised (GKAP-R)/ Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (GKIDS)</p>	<p>The Georgia Quality Basic Education Act (QBE) requires that all children enrolled in Georgia public school kindergarten programs be assessed for first-grade readiness.</p> <p>The GKAP-R provides cumulative evidence of a student’s readiness for first grade. Thirty-two Georgia kindergarten standards are measured using performance-based assessment activities. Students are assessed in the domain areas of literacy, mathematics, and social/emotional development in a variety of one-on-one, small group, and large group instructional settings throughout the kindergarten year.</p> <p>A new kindergarten assessment, Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (GKIDS) is currently being field tested during the 2007-2008 school year. GKIDS will be fully operational in the 2008-2009 school year.</p>
<p>National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)</p>	<p>Commonly known as the “Nation’s Report Card,” NAEP is a congressionally mandated project of the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).</p> <p>The purpose of the national assessment is to gather information that will aid educators, legislators, and others in improving the education experience of youth in our country. Its primary goals are to measure the current status of the educational attainments of young Americans and to report changes and long-term trends in those attainments.</p> <p>NAEP is administered at least once every two years in reading and mathematics in grades 4, 8, and 12. The assessment is given to statistically representative samples of students from each state.</p>
<p>Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS)</p>	<p>Georgia law mandates that a nationally norm-referenced test be administered annually to students in grades 3, 5, and 8. The law mandates that such testing include reading, mathematics, science, and social studies. The purpose of the norm-referenced test is to obtain information about how the performance of Georgia’s students compares with that of students in a national sample. The Georgia Department of Education provides the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills to meet this requirement.</p>
<p>ACCESS for English Language Learners (ELLs)</p>	<p>ACCESS for ELLs is administered annually to all English language learners in Georgia. A standards-based, criterion-referenced English language proficiency test, ACCESS measures English language learners’ social and academic proficiency in English. It assesses social and instructional English as well as the language associated with language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. ACCESS for ELLs meets the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 mandate requiring states to evaluate ELL students in grades K through 12 on their progress in learning to speak English.</p>
<p>Lexile Framework for Reading</p>	<p>As part of the Georgia Department of Education’s mission to develop good readers, Lexile measures were linked to scores on the Reading Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) and the Language Arts Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT).</p> <p>A Lexile is a standard score that matches a student’s reading ability with difficulty of text material. More than a test score, a Lexile measure is a tool to assist students, their parents, and teachers in selecting material that matches their students’ current reading comprehension level.</p>

Source: Georgia Department of Education Office of Standards, Instruction and Assessment, [www.gadoe.org](http://www.gadoe.org).

icant implications for state accountability systems in terms of student testing, reporting requirements, and increasing interventions in persistently low-performing schools.<sup>17</sup>

With the increased accountability mandated by NCLB, all states are now moving toward statewide systems to meet the goal of all students achieving proficiency by the 2012-13 school year. Most states had their own accountability systems in place before the passage of No Child Left Behind; the federal law required that states either enhance or redevelop their existent systems. Today all states have accountability systems that meet the requirements of NCLB for reporting school and district Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) determinations. Some states have integrated AYP determinations with their own state accountability index or rating from state policy, while others have a separate state index or rating.

The development of a statewide system, whether solely to meet NCLB requirements or as an integration of federal with state policies, requires intense work on the part of educational policy-makers. Planning and development must address numerous dimensions – policies, assessment measures, data systems, consensus on indicators, definition of adequate yearly progress, reporting design, rewards, sanctions, federal requirements, and plans for assistance to schools in need of improvement.<sup>18</sup>

Because of the increased federal requirements, state accountability systems have common elements – assessments, standards, performance reporting and, in most cases, consequences of performance. But states have found different ways to define what it means for schools to succeed, what indicators to include in their definition of success, and what the consequences will be. These variations reflect differences in state demographics, political culture, educational governance structures and policies, and educational performance.<sup>19</sup>

### **Georgia's Statewide Accountability System Single Statewide Accountability System (SSAS)**

The Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement (OSA) and the Georgia Department of Education (DOE) developed a comprehensive single statewide accountability system, which includes awards and consequences for schools and districts, as required by No Child Left Behind and state law. This system, Georgia's Single Statewide Accountability System (SSAS), was adopted and implemented in 2005. The purpose of Georgia's SSAS includes, but is not limited to, providing valid, reliable accountability determinations at the school, district, and state levels that can help promote continuous improvement in raising student achievement and closing achievement gaps. The SSAS integrates both federal and state requirements dealing with educational accountability and makes the resulting rewards and consequences virtually identical for all Georgia schools, both Title I and non-Title I.

#### **SSAS: School and District Accountability Profiles**

Georgia's SSAS includes an Accountability Profile for every public school and local educational agency (district) in the state. The Accountability Profile is composed of (1) an absolute performance determination based on Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP); (2) a Performance Index based on annual growth in academic achievement as measured by statewide assessments; and (3) Performance Highlights which provide recognition for schools and districts based on academic-related indicators. The district Profile consists of only two of these components: AYP and Performance Highlights.

The components of the Accountability Profile are included in the State Report Card which is prepared and distributed annually by the Office of Student Achievement. See Table 7.7 for an overview of the Accountability Profile.

#### **SSAS: School and District Awards Structure**

The Single Statewide Accountability System (SSAS) provides an Awards Structure for all Georgia public schools to recognize those schools

<sup>17</sup> Education Commission of the States, "Accountability," [www.ecs.org](http://www.ecs.org).

<sup>18</sup> Council of Chief State School Officers, "Accountability Systems," [www.ccsso.org/Projects/Accountability\\_Systems](http://www.ccsso.org/Projects/Accountability_Systems).

<sup>19</sup> Consortium for Policy Research in Education, "Assessment and Accountability Across the 50 States," May 2001.

**Table 7.7. Georgia School and District Accountability Profiles**

COMPONENT	1. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) <i>(Determinations at state, district, and school levels)</i>	2. Performance Index <i>(Calculated for schools only)</i>	3. Performance Highlights <i>(Reported for districts and schools)</i>
OUTCOME	Met AYP or Did Not Meet AYP	Greatest Gain in Percentage of Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards or Highest Percentage of Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards	Each School and School District's Best Performance Indicators Descriptors
DESCRIPTORS	AYP is based on: • 95% assessment participation; • Assessment results in reading, English/language arts, and math; • Second indicator	Recognizes schools with the greatest gains and schools with the highest percentage of students meeting/exceeding standards. • Utilizes scores from all CRCT subjects in grades 1-8. • Utilizes scores from 4 GHSGT subjects (English, math, science, social studies) from grade 11 first time test takers.	Showcases outstanding achievement of a school or district by listing the academic measurements/indicators for which a school or district met or exceeded 80%.

Source: Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement and Georgia Department of Education, "Guidance for the Implementation of Georgia's Single Statewide Accountability System," [www.gadoe.org](http://www.gadoe.org).

that demonstrate progress or success in achieving the education goals of the state. Award-winning schools are identified by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement according to data-based indicators of student achievement and progress. Georgia's awards structure recognizes schools for both substantial yearly progress and continued academic excellence. Thus, award-winning schools are honored in one or both categories:

- Greatest Gain in Percentage of Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards; and
- Highest Percentage of Students Meeting and Exceeding Standards.

To receive a state award, schools must meet rigorous criteria which are based on the results of the most recent two years of Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) and/or the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT). Criteria

are based on Full Academic Year (FAY) students. Both the CRCT and the GHSGT classify achievement in terms of the percent of students who a) do not meet standards, b) meet standards, and c) exceed standards. Tables 7.8 and 7.9 provide an overview of Georgia's school award structure.

**SSAS: School and District Consequences**

In accordance with state and federal law, schools and districts that fail to meet certain accountability requirements are subject to consequences and must develop plans to help improve student achievement. Schools and districts receive consequences based on their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) determination. The Accountability Profile, along with guidance from the Georgia Department of Education, dictates the nature and degree of the required improvement plans (i.e., school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring). In accordance with the No Child Behind Act, the Department of Education provides a system of

**Table 7.8. Greatest Gain Award Minimum Requirements**

CRITERIA:	PLATINUM SCHOOLS	GOLD SCHOOLS	SILVER SCHOOLS	BRONZE SCHOOLS
AYP Status:	AYP for 3 consecutive years	AYP for 2 consecutive years	AYP for 2 consecutive years	No Needs Improvement status
Exceeds Standards:	> 35% of students exceed standards	> 30% of students exceed standards	> 25% of students exceed standards	> 20% of students exceed standards
Meets + Exceeds Gain:	98th percentile of greatest gains	97th percentile of greatest gains	96th percentile of greatest gains	95th percentile of greatest gains

Source: Georgia Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, “Single Statewide Accountability System,” [www.gaosa.org](http://www.gaosa.org).

**Table 7.9. Highest Percentage Minimum Requirement**

CRITERIA:	PLATINUM SCHOOLS	GOLD SCHOOLS	SILVER SCHOOLS	BRONZE SCHOOLS
AYP Status:	AYP for 3 consecutive years	AYP for 2 consecutive years	AYP for 2 consecutive years	No Needs Improvement status
Exceeds Standards:	> 35% of students exceed standards	> 30% of students exceed standards	> 25% of students exceed standards	> 20% of students exceed standards
Meets + Exceeds Gain:	98% or more meet or exceed standards	97% or more meet or exceed standards	96% or more meet or exceed standards	95% or more meet or exceed standards

Source: Georgia Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, “Single Statewide Accountability System,” [www.gaosa.org](http://www.gaosa.org).

**Table 7.10. Identification of Needs Improvement (NI) Schools and Districts**

SCHOOLS	DISTRICTS (LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES: LEAs)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ A school shall be identified as in Needs Improvement status if the school has not made AYP in the same subject for two consecutive years.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ An LEA shall be identified as in Needs Improvement status if the LEA has not made AYP in the same subject for two consecutive years at both elementary/ middle school and the high school levels.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ A school shall be removed from Needs Improvement status if the school has made AYP for two consecutive years.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ An LEA shall be removed from Needs Improvement status if the LEA has made AYP for two consecutive years.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Escalation in levels of Needs Improvement status shall be based on the school’s failure to make AYP in the same subject for two or more consecutive years.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Escalation in levels of Needs Improvement status shall be based on the district’s failure to make AYP in the same subject for two or more consecutive years.</li> </ul>

Source: Georgia Department of Education Office of Standards, Instruction and Assessment, Accountability Division, [www.gadoe.org](http://www.gadoe.org).

intensive and sustained support for those schools and districts identified as Needs Improvement, a designation that stems from AYP status. Table 7.10 presents a description of the Needs Improvement designation.

Under NCLB, public schools and districts that do not meet AYP in the first year face no consequences. However, the school and/or district face escalating consequences if they fail to meet AYP for consecutive years. Table 7.11 provides an overview of these consequences.

### **Data Analysis and Public Reporting in Georgia**

As the standards-based reform movement brought a greater focus on accountability, most states and many school districts developed report cards or other types of documents to communicate information about student performance and program effectiveness to parents, policy makers, and other stakeholders. Much of this work has been driven by state accountability initiatives, yet with the 2001 passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, federal accountability and reporting have been reinforced and expanded in several ways:

- A number of specific indicators have been added to the data sets that must be reported at the school, district, and state levels;
- Disaggregated (subgroup) performance indicators must now be analyzed for accountability purposes;
- Specific school-level accountability consequences are mandated for a school that fails to meet its improvement targets;
- State education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) must produce their accountability reports for each school year by the beginning of the next subsequent school year; and
- Reports must be both physically and linguistically accessible to a broad range of stakeholders.<sup>20</sup>

In Georgia, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) provides accountability for all of Georgia's education agencies from pre-kindergarten through postsecondary levels. As part of this mission, GOSA presents its annual report on Georgia's public education agencies. This Report Card contains test results as well as other informa-

tion relevant to schools and their performance toward the goals of student achievement and school completion and is compliant with both state and NCLB federal laws with respect to Report Card reporting requirements. The Report Card includes school, system, and state level reports organized into seven major sections: Accountability, Georgia Tests, National Tests, Indicators, Student and School Demographics, Personnel and Fiscal, and Comparisons. GOSA also provides a detailed overview and explanation of the data included in the Report Cards.

In addition to publishing annual Report Cards, GOSA also works in partnership with the Georgia Department of Education (DOE) to produce the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Reports, as much of the necessary data is collected by the DOE. These annual reports provide detailed information about the performance of schools and districts on the indicators that determine AYP status.

**Annual Report Cards**  
(State, District, and School-level)  
are accessible from the Governor's Office  
of Student Achievement's website:  
[www.gaosa.org](http://www.gaosa.org)

**AYP Reports**  
(State, District, and School-level)  
are accessible from the Georgia  
Department of Education's website:  
[www.gadoe.org](http://www.gadoe.org)  
(or  
<http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/ayp2007.aspx>)

<sup>20</sup> Ellen Forte Fast, A Guide to Effective Accountability Reporting, (Council of Chief State School Officers, December 2002).

**Table 7.11. Consequences for Needs Improvement Schools and Districts (as mandated by state and federal law)**

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT STATUS (NI)	SCHOOL-LEVEL CONSEQUENCES/ INTERVENTIONS	DISTRICT-LEVEL CONSEQUENCES/ INTERVENTIONS
Did Not Make AYP Year 1	No Consequences	No Consequences
NI 1	School Choice; Develop School Improvement Plan	Develop LEA Improvement Plan
NI 2	School Choice; Supplemental Services; Implement School Improvement Plan	Implement LEA Improvement Plan
NI 3	School Choice; Supplemental Services; Continue School Improvement Plan; Develop/Implement School Corrective Action Plan	Develop/Implement School Corrective Action Plan Develop and implement LEA Corrective Action Plan for a minimum of a two-year period. (The Corrective Action Plan is integrated with the LEA Improvement Plan.)
NI 4	School Choice; Supplemental Services; Implement School Corrective Action Plan; Plan for Restructuring	Continue to implement LEA Corrective Action Plan.  (Guidance is under development regarding consequences/interventions for LEAs beyond NI 3.)
NI 5	School Choice; Supplemental Services; Continue School Corrective Action; Implement School Restructuring Plan	
NI 6	School Choice; Supplemental Services; Implement School Restructuring Plan; GDOE School Performance Review and Needs Assessment; Develop Improvement Contract	
NI 7	School Choice; Supplemental Services; Implement Improvement Contract; Contract-Monitored School Year 1	
NI 8	School Choice; Supplemental Services; Contract-Monitored School Year 2; Update Improvement Contract; GDOE System Performance Review and Needs Assessment; Develop Management Contract	
NI 9	School Choice; Supplemental Services; Implement Management Contract; Contract-Managed School Year 1	
NI 10	School Choice; Supplemental Services; Contract-Managed School Year 2; Update Management Contract	

Source: Georgia Department of Education Office of Standards, Instruction and Assessment, Accountability Division, [www.gadoe.org](http://www.gadoe.org).

## **EMERGING POLICY CONCERNS FOR STANDARDS, ASSESSMENTS, AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

The move toward standards-based education has been largely supported by policymakers, practitioners, and educational stakeholders. As standards are being translated into tests and results used to hold schools accountable, some experts have raised concerns about whether standards are too high or too low. Setting standards at the appropriate level to ensure students leave school prepared for their futures is a challenge. Policymakers have the difficult task of establishing standards that are realistic and attainable; otherwise, educators, students, and parents may not take the standards seriously.

While public support for higher standards is strong, there is increasing frustration with state testing practices and the high-stakes attached to student performance on tests. Some parents, teachers, and other critics worry that schools may be spending too much instructional time preparing for tests. Critics also question the “high stakes” many states attach to tests. State assessments are being used not only to hold schools accountable for results, but also, increasingly, to determine whether students should advance to the next grade, attend summer school, or earn a high school diploma.

With disaggregated data at the national and state-levels showing disparities in the performance of different student populations, many critics have raised concerns regarding the fairness of standardized assessments. While African-Americans and students from most other minority groups have shown both relative and absolute gains in standardized-test scores over the past several decades, they still score lower than white students as a group. Some educators believe that many standardized tests are culturally biased, drawing primarily upon the experiences of middle-class white students.

Despite continuing debate, solid reasons for testing remain. With public schools under major pressure to show results, testing may be helping to raise the expectations for schools, especially for the lowest-performing ones. Many schools, districts, and states that have seen achievement levels rise in recent years attribute their success to higher expectations for students, as embodied in state tests, and the use of test results to improve classroom practice. Tests can provide data that show what students are lacking and give educators the information necessary to tailor classes to student needs.

While accountability systems are generally seen as the foundation for encouraging continuous improvement in education, they are not without controversy. Debate over the political efficacy of the federal No Child Left Behind Act has raged since the bill was passed in 2001. Some educators and policymakers have questioned the feasibility and fairness of NCLB’s goals and time frames. Other critics have suggested that, because of its requirement to evaluate school progress on the basis of demographic subgroups, the law may disproportionately penalize schools with diverse student populations. Further, NCLB opponents have frequently characterized the law as an underfunded mandate, arguing that states do not receive adequate funding to carry out the law’s requirements.<sup>21</sup>

Education experts have also raised concerns about the implementation of accountability systems, arguing that a “capacity gap” exists in states, districts, and schools. Low-performing schools are the least capable of turning themselves around. Meanwhile, states may not have the resources to intervene in every school whose performance is not up to par.

<sup>21</sup> Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, “No Child Left Behind,” [www.edweek.org/rc/issues/no-child-left-behind](http://www.edweek.org/rc/issues/no-child-left-behind).