

## **The Next Generation School Project – The History**

The Next Generation School Project (The Project) had its beginning in July 1991 as a small group of educational, governmental, and business leaders determined to improve public education in Georgia through a grassroots effort. Guided by a Steering Committee and a core of advisors, The Project established a Design Team which was organized into ten ad hoc teams. Over 300 business, governmental, and educational leaders - including parents and teachers on each team - from communities and schools all over Georgia devoted the next year to research and to creating The Project. The Design Team formulated the Nine Criteria for establishing schools and school systems which focus on significant student learning, high expectations for each student and teacher, and a rigorous curriculum and appropriate instruction for all students. The Nine Criteria are:

- **Establish a Community Collaborative**
- **Emphasize World Class Performance and Achievement**
- **Personalize Instruction and Emphasize Continuous Progress**
- **Emphasize Vocational and Technical Skills**
- **Reorganize the Learning Environment**
- **Use Telecommunications and Computing Technology as Tools**
- **Attend to At-risk Children and Youth and Their Families**
- **Emphasize Program Evaluation and Continuous Improvement Processes**
- **Provide Continuous Staff Development**

Very early, numerous corporations, foundations, and institutions came forth to offer not only financial support but expertise, wisdom, and encouragement to the Project. From financial and logistical support to comprehensive training in total quality management concepts to expertise and skills of numerous individuals, they provided incalculable support for the Project.

### **Partnership with the Partnership**

In October 1992, The Project joined with the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, a collaborative effort of education, government, and private enterprise. Founded in 1992 and convened by the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, the Georgia Industrial Developers Association, and the Georgia Alliance for Public Education, the Partnership developed a set of 85 recommendations which urge state-level leaders and local communities to organize themselves to improve their educational systems and to include business and other public and private groups in the educational process. The Partnership through The Project assumed an "action agenda to get the Partnership recommendations and The Next Generation School Project designs into schools and school systems."

### **Implementing The Project**

In order for the Partnership to implement the action agenda, Governor Zell Miller recommended the 1993 General Assembly include \$2 million dollars in the FY 94 budget (\$1 million in the General Budget and \$1 million in Lottery Funds) for implementation of The Project. Approved by the General Assembly, these funds were leveraged with \$2 million from the private sector and were available through a grants process for school

systems to implement the Nine Criteria of The Project. Grantees were required to match funds on a 1:2 ratio - local funds to grant funds.

The first year, FY 94, 51 applications were received, and seven readers appointed by the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education and seven appointed by the Georgia Department of Education reviewed and evaluated the applications, and 17 grant sites received funding.

For FY 95, the Governor requested \$1 million in state funds - \$500,000 in lottery funds and \$500,000 in general funds - which were matched with \$1 million in private funds to implement The Project in the 11 grant sites.

As state funds waned, the Partnership and several Georgia businesses and foundations assumed the financial support for funding The Project over the next years.

Continuing with this style of improving student achievement, the Partnership began a new phase of The Project. Beginning with the 2002-2003 school year, the Partnership focused on increasing student achievement by expanding learning time for students, particularly those who are below grade level. The Partnership sought school systems that would extend learning time, through intersessions, before and after school tutoring, and Saturday school, and would provide increased student support through more focused partnering with businesses and the community. Five school districts were selected to be grant sites for three years to create models for other school systems in Georgia to emulate.

#### **Using Test Data to Improve Student Learning**

In 1996 in their efforts to increase student learning, grant sites determined that they needed assistance in analyzing and using student test data to design individual programs of work for students and to implement successful instructional strategies. Thus, the Steering Committee of The Project appointed the Using-Test-Data-To-Improve-Education Task Force, comprised of grant site educators including teachers and state experts in student assessment. The charge of the task force was to assist teachers, administrators, and other educational leaders in Georgia in using test data to:

- Analyze achievement levels for individual students
- Develop educational programs for individual students
- Design improvement strategies for groups of students, for schools, and for school systems

The resulting document was published and sent to each school district in Georgia. Additionally, the Partnership conducted numerous state and local workshops around Georgia to assist educators in the effective analyses of test data in order to increase student learning.

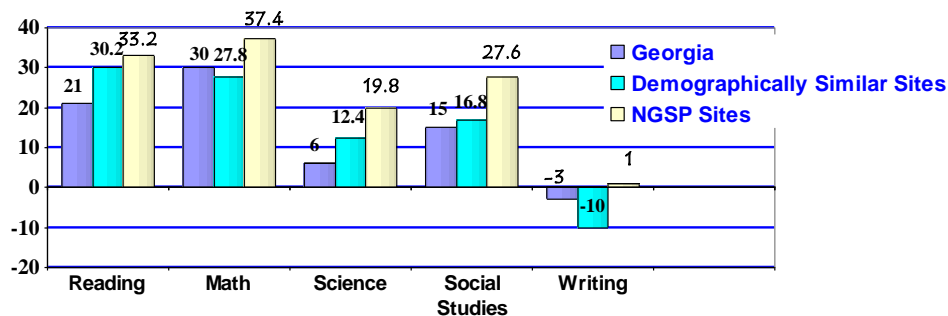
#### **The Success**

The Project had a measurable impact on education in Georgia. Researchers from the University of Georgia have served as external evaluators, working with grant sites to collect student achievement data, following students year after year and tracking their progress. In addition to The Project requirements, grant sites have selected additional areas of focus that were of concern to them, such as teacher qualifications, student

dropout rates, and graduation rates. Researchers gathered data on these initiatives, as well. The results were well documented. The evaluations show that students have made average to exceptional gains in all subject areas tested by the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS), a nationally normed achievement test used for national comparisons of student achievement. Grant sites demonstrated that 69% of their students have made average to exceptional student gains on the ITBS when the predicted national average is 54%. Grants sites also documented a lower percentage of students making below average scores - 31% of grant site students scored below average compared with the predicted national average of 46%.

The Project sites achieved higher gains on the tests for each of the six subject areas evaluated and depicted in the graph than the state or the contrast sites. The Project sites improved achievement rates the most on English/language arts on Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) in grades 4, 6, 8, and on the English/Language Arts Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT). Achievement rates on math tests ranked second in showing the most gains at the state level and for The Project sites, followed by reading for both groups. Even though at the state level the percentage of students passing the writing tests in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and on the GHSGT declined from 2001 to 2005, The Project sites increased pass rates on the two grade levels of writing tests by 1 percentage point.

Gains in Percentage Points of Students Meeting/Exceeding Standards or Passing All Subjects & Tests, CRCTs and GHSGTs



Overall, the percentage of students meeting/exceeding standards or passing increased 252 percentage points across all grades and subjects. On similar measures, the State gain was 104 percentage points.

Further, the test data indicated that student progress tended to increase the longer The Project activities continued. Indicators other than test scores, also, underscore the success, including improved student attendance, more parental involvement, reduced retention rates, increased reading level performance and on-grade-level performance after remediation, improved student attitudes, and decreased off-task behaviors and discipline referrals.

Since the beginning, the overarching goals of The Project were to promote student learning, to maintain high expectations for student success, and to provide a rigorous curriculum for each student. Nevertheless, these goals could not have been achieved so successfully without the support of parents and the community. Community

collaboratives, which bring together parents, educators, community, government, and business leaders, have been a hallmark of the school systems participating in The Project. Systems have involved their communities by including them in policy setting groups, using business and community mentors and volunteers, increasing communication, and extending the learning environment into the community. This has proven particularly important for systems emphasizing the development of vocational skills. Teachers are receiving industry experience that they can bring back to the classroom, students are having Youth Apprenticeship opportunities, and industries are providing information to school systems on workforce readiness.

In addition to documenting these successes, The Project has made a number of general observations about the grant sites over time:

- Strong community involvement and support have been keys to student success
- Setting high expectations and designing the evaluation system around those expectations have set the stage for moving to higher levels of achievement
- Data, particularly student achievement data, are used to drive decision-making
- Having the flexibility to use funds where they are most needed has been advantageous; it has allowed grant sites to leverage Next Generation School Project funds for maximum impact
- There is a direct relationship between student learning and school pride
- Poverty is not used by grant sites as an excuse for poor student performance

To document the activities of The Project, the successes, and the models created by grant sites, the Partnership published *The Next Generation School Project Replication Manual*. It tells the stories of the school systems that worked with the Partnership over the years to increase student learning. This manual was made available to each school district in Georgia. Additionally, many conferences and workshops were sponsored by the Partnership where Georgia educators and others could learn in person from The Project grant sites themselves.

## In Conclusion

The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education has worked for over 12 years to improve academic achievement in Georgia's public school systems through a variety of educational policy and reform measures. With the creation of The Project, the Partnership took one of its many steps to expand the quality of education that Georgia's students receive. Over its 12 years and leveraging \$31+ million in state, private, and local matching funds, The Project through the leadership of the Partnership succeeded in raising student achievement and creating models for other Georgia districts.



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