

Georgia's Tough Choices or Tough Times Working Group
Outline of Recommendations
April, 2009

In the Summer of 2008, Governor Sonny Perdue formed the *Tough Choices or Tough Times* working group and charged those members with a specific task: use the *Tough Choices or Tough Times* report of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce as a framework to examine structural elements of Georgia's education system and develop short and long-term recommendations to prepare for the Georgia of 2023.

Therefore, Georgia's *Tough Choices or Tough Times* working group intends to submit the following recommendations to Governor Sonny Perdue for his consideration. There are a number of recommendations which, if adopted, will require the formation of implementation task forces. Such task forces would take direction from Governor Perdue in terms of what needs to be done and would outline how to accomplish those particular goals.

A. Move on when Ready

Having high expectations for students, engaging students in a college or career pathway of personal interest, and giving students an early introduction to college level work will produce better student achievement results, higher graduation rates¹, and most importantly, help prepare Georgia students to be competitive in the global economy. Also, as *Tough Choices or Tough Times* points out, there will be significant long run cost savings from keeping students engaged at their level of mastery, allowing them to move-on when ready rather than waste time and resources on school work that is not productive².

To optimize students' achievement, we envision:

- ❖ Georgia high school students will have an educational structure that will enable them to "move on when ready", and they will be encouraged to do so. The number of students who will be "ready" by the 11th grade will increase over time as other educational improvements are implemented.
- ❖ When students are "ready" they will have three options for completing high school and starting post-secondary work. The options include: 1) taking a rigorous curriculum of Advanced Placement courses and/or an International Baccalaureate program to earn credits towards college; 2) dually enroll in high school and college; or 3) leaving high school and moving on to a post-secondary institution.

¹ "Measures that Matter. Making College and Career Readiness the Mission for High Schools: A Guide for State Policymakers." Achieve, Inc., September 2008, p.13, Pre-publication draft.

² National Center on Education and the Economy. *Tough Choices or Tough Times: The Report of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce*. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 57-58.

- ❖ “Ready” to move on will be defined as not needing remediation in the next phase of the student’s academic career and/or needing to utilize a different academic setting to move forward in their studies.
- ❖ Even with continuous educational improvements, there will still be rare cases where high school students fail to demonstrate readiness by grade 11. Georgia will explore additional policy initiatives to prepare students for workforce opportunities.

To achieve this vision we recommend the following actions:

Short-term

- a. Adopt a statewide definition of “ready” as no remediation needed for college or work entry and prohibit students from moving on until they are “ready.” This will further the work already well underway by the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE), the University System of Georgia (USG), and the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), which aligns high school graduation requirements with college entry and placement, thereby reducing the need for remediation upon entering college. This will also reduce the need for remediation of skills upon entering the workforce as studies have shown that the skills needed for today’s workforce and college entry are similar.^{3, 4}
- b. Identify an appropriate assessment or method to determine students’ readiness to move on to the next level of education.
- c. Ensure that all students in Georgia have access to all three options listed above, either through on-site enrollment opportunities or virtual enrollment opportunities.
- d. Either (a) create a comprehensive community college system by merging the technical colleges and two-year colleges so there is a seamless entry point for all students, or, if the two systems are to maintain their separate identities, (b) create and enforce pathways for student transfer between institutions and systems by forming comprehensive articulation agreements that clearly establish procedures governing the transfer of credits from one institution or system to another and (c) ensure that all duplication of teaching and administrative resources between TCSG and USG institutions has been removed.
- e. Determine an appropriate funding mechanism for dual enrollment that allows the funding to follow the students and incentivizes the sending institution to promote the effort.

³ Achieve, Inc. *Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma That Counts*. (Achieve, Inc., 2004), http://www.achieve.org/files/ADPreport_7.pdf

⁴ ACT, Inc. *Ready for College and Ready for Work: Same or Different?* (ACT, Inc., 2006), <http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/ReadinessBrief.pdf>

- f. Explore public/private partnerships to fund several demonstration sites around the state to determine practical implications of allowing all students the three options described above. The sites should ideally include cooperating secondary schools as well as TCSG and USG institutions. The objective would be to use the implementation lessons learned and outcome data to then implement this proposal statewide.

B. Recruiting and Retaining World Class Teachers

Teacher quality is the most important determinant of student achievement.⁵ In Georgia we must therefore find ways to attract and retain high performance teachers in adequate numbers and in the right subject areas. These ways must include virtual access to the best teachers, wherever they reside.

To accomplish this, we envision a system in which:

- ❖ The brightest and most passionate students as well as top-of-their-field professionals choose education as a career.
- ❖ School leaders are adept at creating the right culture to attract quality teachers and foster optimal levels of student achievement.
- ❖ P-12 education is seen as a professional career option in a manner similar to higher education, law, and medicine.

To achieve these objectives we recommend:

- a. Secondary school teachers should first be prepared in a core subject area (e.g. biology, history). Pedagogy skills can then be taught by traditional Colleges of Education, technical colleges, or private providers. The Professional Standards Commission would develop criteria for accrediting such providers with a bias towards ensuring the curriculum is concise, targeted, and relevant. Generally, more competition should be introduced at all levels among providers of teacher training and the success of program graduates in raising student achievement should be tracked.⁶
- b. Continuing to encourage and support the PSC's current work to make alternative routes to teaching more accessible, including establishing and/or expanding already successful programs such as Teach for America and Troops to Teachers.⁷

⁵ Amy Wilkins, Written Testimony for the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, quoted in *The Education Trust* (The Education Trust, 2007), <http://www2.edtrust.org/EdTrust/Press+Room/Wilkins+HELP+Testimony.htm>

⁶ J.J. Arias and Ben Scafidi, "When Does Teacher Licensure Make Sense?" *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis and Policy* (accepted for publication, 2007), 3.

⁷ For more information on these programs, please see: <http://www.teachforamerica.org/about/regions/atlanta.htm> and <http://www.tttga.net/>

- c. Establishing a value-added evaluation system that measures a teacher's impact on students' academic achievement. While instructional techniques and other factors are important to the success of the teacher, the ultimate outcome measure is whether the students learned. The value-added model of assessing student learning looks at the academic growth of multiple cohorts of students assigned to each teacher, adjusting for the prior trajectory of each child. Unlike the traditional teacher evaluation system that uses teacher credentials as a proxy for teacher quality, value-added assessment quantifies a teacher's impact on student performance. Along those lines, principal and local school superintendent evaluations should also focus on student achievement. Rather than continuing an incentive-based system for coaxing student achievement results, we must hold each other accountable for our main mission.
- d. Creating additional opportunities for teacher leaders, such as coaching colleagues, developing and delivering professional development programs, leading school improvement initiatives, and analyzing assessment data for instructional purposes. These instructional leaders demonstrate the knowledge and ability to improve student achievement, yet they seek additional leadership training and responsibilities to use in a classroom setting rather than becoming school administrators.
- e. Restructuring the teacher compensation system by:
 - i. Encouraging and supporting the Alliance's proposal for differentiated pay for qualified math and science teachers.
 - ii. Revamping the existing teacher salary schedule so that 1) performance in increasing student achievement is rewarded, 2) increased salary for higher degrees is relegated solely to relevant subject area(s) for that teacher, and 3) incentives are introduced to encourage the best and brightest students to enter teaching.
 - iii. Changing the Teachers Retirement System (TRS) to offer a defined benefit plan to retain teachers who are already vested in TRS and a portable defined contribution plan to attract new teachers through an employer matching contribution.
- f. Endorsing the recommendations of the HR1103 Joint Study Committee on Teacher Training and Certification.

C. Development of students' analytical and creative problem-solving skills

***Tough Choices or Tough Times* makes the case that the primary competitive advantage for the U.S. in the flat, global labor market will be if our workers at all skill levels have superior analytical and problem-solving capabilities.⁸ To illustrate this point, at a recent keynote address to state-level education leaders, Intel Chairman Craig Barrett noted that 90 percent of**

⁸ National Center on Education and the Economy. *Touch Choices or Tough Times: The Report of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce*. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 31.

Intel's December revenues come from products that were not yet developed in January of that same year. Therefore, 90 percent of Intel's annual revenue is based on imagination and creativity.⁹ We would be gravely mistaken to assume that Intel is an anomaly among corporations.¹⁰

Therefore, we offer the following vision for teaching and learning in Georgia:

- ❖ Beginning in Pre-Kindergarten, there will be continuous and consistent efforts to teach literacy and numeracy so that students not only memorize information, but learn how to interpret and synthesize on their own.
- ❖ Teachers will view themselves as “thinking coaches” or “learning facilitators” whereby creativity, conceptualization, and engagement of teacher and student will be the primary standard of quality teaching.
- ❖ Teachers will be highly skilled in content and utilizing technology to transfer knowledge. While this may include the use of instructional tools such as “smart boards”, it will more importantly include the use of technology to add and integrate additional information resources into the students’ learning.
- ❖ Recognizing that a global economy means greater interaction between cultures and diverse language skills are increasingly vital to success, all students will be fluent in a second language when they leave Georgia’s public schooling system.
- ❖ All public school students will have the opportunity to develop creative capacity through a multitude of options including, but not limited to, the visual arts, music, writing, theatre, leadership, and tactical skills.
- ❖ Georgia’s students will be known worldwide as educated and motivated.

To achieve this objective we recommend:

- a. Supporting, encouraging, and accelerating the efforts of the Georgia Department of Education to implement and refine a rigorous curriculum in Georgia schools that emphasizes problem solving and critical thinking skills.
- b. Reforming the state’s accountability system and testing system so that a) assessment response items require problem-solving and critical thinking skills, and b) there is vertical alignment between all P-12 assessments.
- c. Engaging in a full review of instructional best practices that yield stronger problem solving and critical thinking skills, and developing a mechanism to disseminate those practices to be used by teachers throughout Georgia.

⁹ Craig Barrett. Keynote Address at Achieve Inc.’s Annual American Diploma Project Leadership Meeting. (Washington, D.C.: September 11, 2008).

¹⁰ Tony Wagner. *The Global Achievement Gap: Why Even Our Best Schools Don't Teach the New Survival Skills Our Children Need--And What We Can Do About It*. (New York: NY: Basic Books, 2008).