

# Federal Programs to Support School Improvement

## BACKGROUND

Beginning in 2015-2016, Georgia schools identified for support were in two categories following U.S. Department of Education definitions: Priority Schools (lowest 5%) and Focus Schools (large achievement gaps). Under Georgia's Plan, three categories of schools will exist: Comprehensive (lowest performing 5% of schools) and Targeted (schools with large achievement gaps or low graduation rates) federal designations, as well as Turnaround (schools that are a subset of Comprehensive schools that have shown chronic underperformance), a state developed designation [O.C.G.A. § 20-14-45].

The Georgia Department of Education has shifted away from school improvement being the sole priority of the School and District Effectiveness division to one that is shared across the Department, aligning our support in a more cohesive way.

## WHAT WAS THE MAKE-UP OF THIS WORKGROUP?

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) has been committed to a plan development process that is truly stakeholder driven. Each of Georgia's ESSA workgroups were made up of a cross-section of twenty individuals with five members representing different areas of GaDOE and fifteen members representing stakeholders. Each workgroup was chaired by a GaDOE leader and key stakeholder.

- *Chairs:* Deputy Superintendent of Federal Programs and Special Education, Georgia Department of Education; Executive Director of Metro RESA (Regional Educational Services Agency)
- *Representatives* for superintendents, curriculum and instruction, federal programs, district flexibility, and school and district effectiveness.  
*Organizations represented:* Communities in Schools, Family Connection Partnership, Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI), Student Support Team Association for Georgia Educators (SSTAGE), Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA), Georgia Department of Public Health and Regional Educational Services Agencies (RESAs)

GaDOE will keep these workgroups intact in order to provide on-going feedback on the implementation of Georgia's Plan.

## HOW WAS FEEDBACK FROM GEORGIANS GATHERED?

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) held eight feedback sessions across the state. These were opportunities for parents, students, educators,

## WHAT IS ESSA?

The *Every Student Succeeds Act*, commonly referred to as ESSA, earned bi-partisan approval in 2015.

States were freed from their *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) waiver agreements and given the responsibility to develop state plans to support education.

ESSA significantly scaled back the authority of the Secretary of Education and U.S. Department of Education. Though ESSA gave states additional authority and flexibility over their education system, wholesale flexibility was not granted and statutory requirements vary in specificity from issue-to-issue.

Georgia has sought out maximum flexibility while creating a cohesive and aligned plan that is responsive to stakeholder feedback and supports our vision of *offering a holistic education to each and every child in the state.*

To learn more about Georgia's plan development process visit:

[GaDOE.org/ESSA](http://GaDOE.org/ESSA)



## HOW WAS FEEDBACK FROM GEORGIANS GATHERED? (CONT.)

business and industry, and community members to share their thoughts and concerns. Feedback was compiled, analyzed, and summarized by a third party so participants could engage in candid conversations.

Feedback sessions were also held with each of the State School Superintendent's advisory councils, representing middle and high school students, parents, teachers, and district superintendents. Business and industry, as well as civil rights organizations, were also engaged.

GaDOE utilized social media, a dedicated ESSA email address for comments, as well as public surveys to gather feedback.

## WHAT DID GEORGIANS SAY?

Common themes that emerged around the work of Federal Programs to Support School Improvement were:

1. Engage communities in a meaningful way.
2. Plan for school improvement must be concise, clear and transparent.
3. Maximize the flexibility for federal funds as allowed under federal law to support school improvement.
4. Align improvement activities across the Georgia Department of Education.
5. Build capacity to share best practices across school districts.
6. Build sustainable leadership skills.
7. Implement structures to ensure equitable access to quality education for all students.

The full feedback summary report can be found at: [GaDOE.org/ESSAFeedback](https://GaDOE.org/ESSAFeedback).

This report was compiled through a third party evaluator.

Feedback themes, along with the response to each of those themes, are embedded within Georgia's State ESSA Plan.

## AREAS OF FOCUS

- Meaningful community engagement
- Aligned and cohesive approach to supporting all schools
- Streamlining requirements
- Leveraging federal funds around needs and goals
- Curating best practices
- Building capacity and sustainability
- Tiered system of supports

## OUR PROGRESS

- **Developing a common framework of improvement** to support districts and schools with a 'toolbox' of aligned processes, resources, tools, and supports
- **Implementing a tiered system of supports** that provide core supports to every school with more tailored, intensive supports provided to those with greater needs
- **Building capacity and sustainability** by engaging regional, district, and community level partners and aligning our efforts at the state-level
- **Ensuring flexibility of funds by empowering districts** to utilize funds more effectively, positioning funds around identified school improvement goals rather than programmatic requirements
- **Engaging communities and education stakeholders** to ensure feedback is a process rather than an event
- **Implementing a comprehensive needs assessment and improvement plans** for schools/districts to identify and address challenges in a strategic way

