

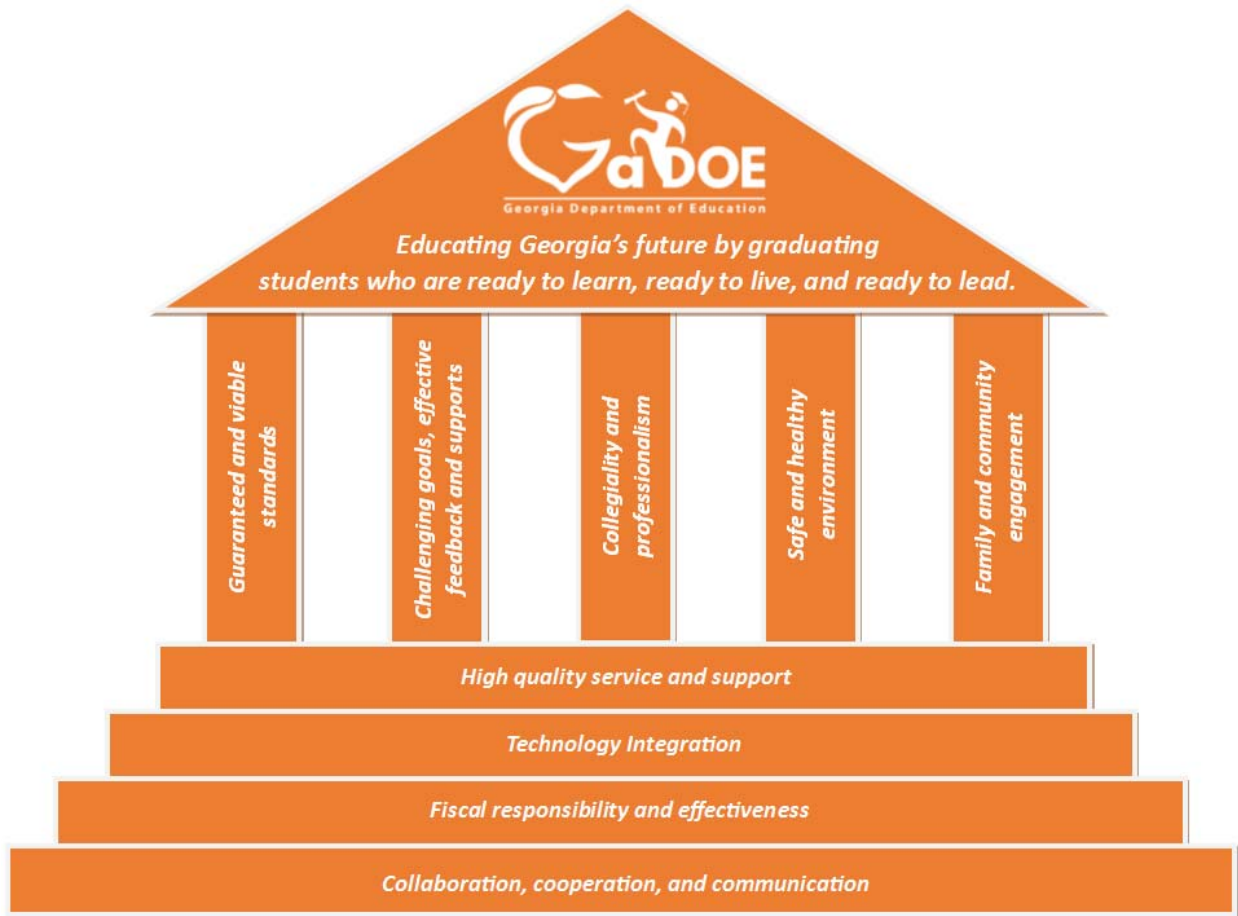
*Richard Woods, Georgia's School Superintendent*

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# Mission

Offering a Holistic Education for Each and Every Child in the State

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# Vision

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***Educating Georgia's future*** by graduating students who are ready to learn, ready to live, and ready to lead.

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Georgia is poised to become a national educational leader in pursuing and implementing child-focused and classroom-centered policies.

For decades, the term *educational readiness* has focused narrowly on academic readiness alone. *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) and the reforms that followed prompted states and schools to largely focus on math and English Language Arts (ELA) academic content. Pushback in response to this overly restrictive focus, coupled with a state waiver process from NCLB, led to the inclusion of other core content areas like science and social studies as part of the academic focus. However, teachers do not simply cover content. They teach students.

Although federal legislation has proven to be a catalyst for education reform throughout the nation, the rights and roles of students and teachers have been overshadowed by rapid implementation of new systems and mandates. In short, the federal role has restricted Georgia's flexibility and authority in the area of public education and, thus, limited educators' ability to respond to local student needs. With an increase in collaboration at the state level and a push for greater flexibility at the federal level, the Georgia Department of Education engages educators, school leaders, and other stakeholders to ensure that students in Georgia's public schools graduate ready to learn, ready to live, and ready to lead.

## **Ready to Learn**

In contrast with NCLB's one-size-fits-all mantra, which assumed every child would go to a four-year college, Georgia has spearheaded efforts to provide multiple avenues for success via traditional colleges and universities, technical schools, apprenticeship programs, and military service. With flexibility and trust given to educational professionals, they can personalize learning by setting challenging goals as well as providing feedback and supports so each child can reach his or her fullest potential. By leveraging technology, using resources effectively and efficiently, ensuring positive school climate, implementing standards that focus on essential knowledge and concepts, promoting deep learning, affording teachers enough time to remediate or enrich instruction, and providing high quality service and support to Georgia's school leaders and teachers, our state can ensure that every child is *ready to learn*.

## **Ready to Live**

Georgia has the opportunity to expand the definition of readiness to include a more holistic approach to public education – one that provides fine arts opportunities, ensures safe and healthy learning environments, prioritizes relevant coursework, and allows stakeholders to become fully engaged. Education is about life. A high-quality education should provide learning opportunities, tools, and

knowledge necessary for students to experience a high quality of life as they become adults. A strong foundation of the fundamentals in the early grades, coupled with a system that identifies and cultivates the strengths and passions of students in the later grades, is key to ensuring that every child graduates *ready to live*.

### **Ready to Lead**

Whether in the business and professional world, the community, or a religious organization, life affords many opportunities to play a leadership role by serving others. True leadership encompasses attributes to which everyone should aspire. Leaders think critically, communicate and collaborate with others, display professionalism, act ethically, hold oneself accountable, and develop and carry out a compelling vision. Creating an education system that fosters soft skills, civic awareness, learning by doing, teamwork, innovative thinking, and real world relevance and application will ensure that every child emulates those attributes and is *ready to lead*.

The pursuit of a high-quality public education for every child is a responsibility – and an opportunity – we all share. It requires the collaborative work of state agencies, post-secondary institutions, nonprofit organizations, and civic groups. Together, this shared vision ensures a high standard of educational quality across the state of Georgia while giving rural, suburban, and urban communities the flexibility to meet their individual local needs.

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# Foundations

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This strategic plan rests on core foundations that support on-going improvements. The foundations listed here enable successful implementation of our strategic goals. These foundations are promoted and celebrated throughout all Divisions.

## **High-quality Service and Support**

The main function of the Georgia Department of Education is to provide service and support to districts, school leaders, and teachers. Moving forward, we place a greater emphasis on the quality of resources, professional learning opportunities, and service over the quantity. A focus on streamlining processes and requirements placed on local school districts ensures more cohesion of state policy.

## **Technology Integration**

Our students deserve a 21<sup>st</sup> century education that equips them with the tools, knowledge, and talents to thrive in the modern society. Providing needed technological tools, infrastructure, and resources can increase the effectiveness of teachers and school leaders as well as the engagement of parents and students. Expanding the use of technology throughout the state enables the personalization of our education system.

## **Fiscal Responsibility and Effectiveness**

The role of the Georgia Department of Education is to balance flexibility for school districts with accountability to taxpayers who support those districts. State-level responsibilities for local school districts must be streamlined, and mechanisms must be in place, to ensure greater transparency for local citizens. At the Department level, greater collaboration and cooperation among divisions as well as partnerships with other state agencies, nonprofit organizations, civic groups, and business and industry must be adopted in order to maximize fiscal effectiveness.

## **Collaboration, Cooperation, and Communication**

The Georgia Department of Education is committed to championing child-focused, classroom-centered policies – and that’s impossible to do without maintaining close, collaborative contact with the people who feel the impact of those policies. Our focus is to develop strong relationships with state agencies, post-secondary institutions, nonprofit organizations, civic groups, business and industry, and policymakers. Georgia’s students and teachers are served best when we are responsive to their educational needs. Internally, structures and processes will continue to be developed and implemented to encourage greater collaboration and coordination among the Department’s various divisions.

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# Strategic Goals

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The Georgia Department of Education has a talented and dedicated staff who are committed to ensuring each and every child in our state is afforded a high-quality and holistic public education.

In our renewed efforts, we turn our focus to several strategic goals:

## **Guaranteed and viable standards**

1. Revise/develop and implement viable academic standards that engage learners with essential knowledge, skills, and enduring concepts
2. Increase the percentage of K-5 students with a strong knowledge of foundational skills and concepts
3. Increase the percentage of high school graduates who are college and/or career ready

## **Challenging goals, effective feedback and supports**

4. Increase personalized learning by setting challenging goals, providing effective feedback and supports
5. Expand educational opportunities in order to maximize student engagement, meet a variety of student interests, and ensure the relevance of learning

## **Collegiality and professionalism**

6. Increase district, leader, and teacher effectiveness through high quality service and support

## **Safe and healthy environments**

7. Increase the number of schools with a safe, healthy, and positive learning climate

## **Community and Family Engagement**

8. Increase effective communication and encourage stakeholder engagement