



Supporting Secondary School Redesign

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FEDERAL UPDATE

Academic Competitiveness Grants and National SMART Grants

The U.S. Department of Education recently announced guidelines for current college students and high school seniors to apply for new Academic Competitiveness Grants and National SMART Grants for the 2006–07 academic year.

Students who completed rigorous programs of study in high school, as established by a state or local educational agency and recognized by the U.S. secretary of education, will be eligible for Academic Competitiveness Grants. The secretary of education will immediately recognize four options for eligibility:

- 1) Advanced or Honors diploma programs: According to research by the Department, 19 states currently offer such diplomas upon completion of recognized coursework.
- 2) State Scholars Initiative requirements: This program, supported by Congress, sets course requirements modeled after the National Commission on Excellence in Education recommendations. (See box below).
- 3) Course requirements similar to the State Scholars Initiative: This pro-

gram of study includes four years of English; three years of math, science, and social studies; and one year of a foreign language.

4) Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses and scores: Students who have taken two AP or IB courses and received passing scores on the exams for those courses will be considered eligible.

These guidelines will define rigorous secondary school programs of study for the 2006–07 and 2007–08 school years while long-term coursework guidelines are established. States that wish to identify alternative rigorous programs of study for 2006–07 must submit proposals to the department by June 1, 2006. To identify alternative programs for 2007–08, the deadline is November 1, 2006.

Congress passed the Academic Competitiveness Grants and National Science and Mathematics Access to Retain Talent (SMART) Grants as part of the Higher Education Reconciliation Act of 2005, signed by President Bush on Febru-

ary 8, 2006. These grant programs make available \$790 million in the 2006–07 academic year and \$4.5 billion over the next five years.

First-year students may receive up to \$750 and second-year students up to \$1,300 in Academic Competitiveness Grants if the student has successfully completed a rigorous secondary school program of study. Second-year recipients must also have attained at least a 3.0 grade point average in their first year of study.

To qualify for either program, students must also be eligible for federal Pell Grants, be United States citizens, and be full-time students enrolled in a two- or four-year degree-granting institution of higher education. In addition, for Academic Competitiveness Grants, a first-year student must not have been previously enrolled in a program of undergraduate education.

For more information, click [here](#).

State Scholar's Initiative

Eight new states have been chosen for participation in the State Scholars Initiative, a national business/education partnership effort designed to increase the number of students who take a rigorous curriculum in high school. The eight new states are Colorado, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Nebraska, North Carolina, Utah, Virginia, and West Virginia. These states join 14 previously-funded states: Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Washington.

Under the State Scholars Initiative, each state will receive up to \$300,000 during a two-year period to implement scholars programs in at least four school districts.

For more information on the State Scholars Initiative, see the program's [website](#).

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FEDERAL UPDATE

School Dropout Prevention Program

The U.S. Department of Education's (ED) School Dropout Prevention Program provides competitive grants to state education agencies and local school districts to implement research-based, sustainable, and coordinated school dropout prevention and reentry programs for students in grades 6-12. The grants support activities such as professional development, reduction in student-teacher ratios, counseling and mentoring for at-risk students, and the implementation of comprehensive high school reform models.

Minnesota and New Hampshire received the first dropout prevention grants from the ED in August 2005. Arizona and Texas recently received grants as well.

The **Arizona Department of Education** has partnered with the White Mountain Apache Tribe and the San Carlos Apache Tribe for the Arizona Native American Dropout Prevention Initiative. The initiative is a first time model of comprehensive community collaboration in partnership with schools and tribal governments to reduce dropout rates in Native American reservation communities. Dropout rates have been disproportionately higher in American Indian Communities as reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

The **Minnesota Department of Education** will collaborate with the Minnesota Departments of Human Services, Public Safety, and Employment and

Economic Development to decrease the dropout rate among minority and low-income students in participating districts. The project will accomplish five major goals: (1) develop a comprehensive dropout prevention model for implementation in seven high schools and their feeder middle schools, (2) develop individual student assessment and school environment assessment tools, (3) increase statewide and local coordination to address dropout prevention, (4) provide technical assistance for local educational agencies, and (5) increase the likelihood of continued implementation of successful dropout prevention components and sustainability of grant success beyond the funding period.

The **New Hampshire Department of Education** will collaborate with the University of New Hampshire's Institute on Disability, Alliance for Community Supports, Center for Effective Behavioral Interventions and Supports, New England College's Main Street Academix, and the Family Resource Connection. Under the umbrella of the state collaborative, Systems of Care and Education, the project will provide training and technical assistance to 10 participating schools. Project objectives and activities address four performance indicators: (1) reducing the state event dropout rate by 20 percent or more in the 3 years, (2) developing a strong system for reentering high school students such that 50 percent of those who reenter attain academic success and complete their secondary

education, (3) reducing the rates and severity of behavioral problems by establishing the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports model in participating schools, and (4) improving 10th grade math and reading/language arts scores among students in participating schools.

The **Texas Education Agency** will partner with Communities In Schools (CIS), a stay-in-school program offering comprehensive case management models; Texas's regional education service centers (ESCs); and Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS), a nationwide organization that builds caring and productive relationships between students and adults. Through a pilot program targeted toward high schools with dropout rates above the state average, the partnership will (1) expand required personal graduation plans for at-risk 9th grade students to include the comprehensive CIS case management and community-based model and the BBBS mentoring model, (2) increase partnerships between targeted high schools and outside organizations to leverage dropout prevention and reentry resources, and (3) build statewide capacity for implementing more comprehensive dropout intervention strategies by training ESC personnel in the CIS case management model and providing training to a regional ESC in a research-based dropout intervention strategy.

For more information, click [here](#).

RESOURCES & PUBLICATIONS

Breaking Ranks in the Middle,
National Association of Secondary
School Principals



The [report](#)—developed in collaboration with the Education Alliance at Brown University and a commission of middle level practitioners and experts—details nine cornerstone strategies and 30 specific recommendations for improving student achievement. It includes four full-length profiles and a number of school vignettes that put the report's recommendations into action. In addition to publication ordering information, NASSP's website includes free tools and resources.

Whatever It Takes: How Twelve Communities Are Reconnecting Out-of-School Youth, American Youth Policy Forum



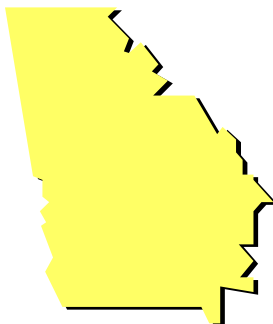
This [report](#) documents what educators, policymakers, and community leaders across the country are doing to reconnect out-of-school youth to the social and economic mainstream. It provides background on the high school dropout problem and describes in depth what 12 communities are doing to reconnect dropouts to education and employment training. It also includes descriptions of major national program models serving out-of-school youth.

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Georgia's Secondary School Redesign Efforts

Under the leadership of State Superintendent Kathy Cox, the Georgia Department of Education's (GaDOE) School Improvement Division staff spent almost a year planning and more recently implementing targeted secondary school redesign efforts. GaDOE is working on a broader long-term effort with local education leaders and key external partners to build a comprehensive set of tools, resources, and interventions that support secondary school student achievement in Georgia. The promising practices that emerge from GaDOE's efforts, and the state's ability to expand the use of these practices, are critical to ensuring the long-term success of Georgia's three-year action plan to develop more rigorous academic standards, align high school coursework and assessments to college- and work-ready standards, and create a transparent system of accountability.¹



Secondary Redesign Efforts

A combination of strategic policies, student supports, and instructional strategies lie at the heart of the state's activities to enhance the "five Rs of Secondary Redesign" in Georgia: Rigor, Relevance, Relationships, Readiness, and Reflection. These activities emerge from the state's efforts to leverage existing funding and at the same time maximize the opportunities permitted by short-term private grants.

Strengthening State Standards

American Diploma Project: Georgia is one of 22 states that compose the American Diploma Project Network. Involvement in this project has led to many discussions and strategic plans on how to raise graduation expectations and requirements while also improving graduation rates.

Supporting Successful Teaching and Learning

Graduation Specialists: The state is offering each high school in the state a grant to employ a full-time graduation specialist whose sole focus will be to improve high school graduation rates in individual schools.

Middle and High School Counselor Training: In partnership with the state's 16 Regional Education Service Agencies, GaDOE will host trainings across the state for all middle and high school counselors. The training will provide counselors with new knowledge and skills to implement research-based strategies that help keep students on track to graduate from high school. The training will take place in April and May 2006.

Supporting Student Achievement in Science: The state has identified 16 science implementation specialists to visit with select middle and high school teachers to address low student achievement in the sciences. The schools were identified through state test results and the science specialists are assisting local teachers by sharing and demonstrating research-based best practices on the teaching of science concepts.

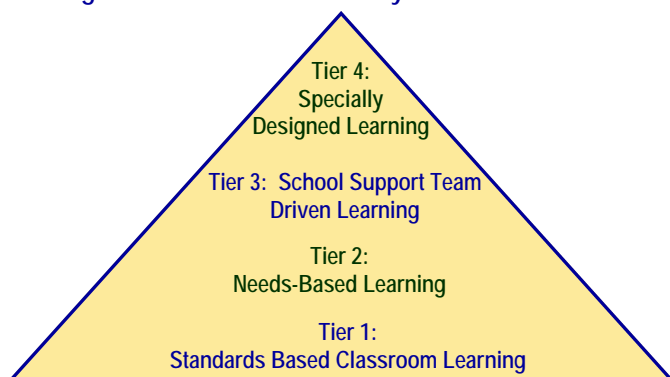
Expanding Opportunities for Student Learning

Advanced Placement State Grant Program: As part of Georgia's effort to ensure every high school offers at least two advanced placement (AP) courses, the state is using a portion of its Title II funds to give \$1,000 stipends to teachers for training in AP course instruction. The state recently alerted superintendents and principals, who were asked to identify one teacher in each of their respective high schools. Selected teachers must commit to completing the professional development course and teaching the content, and their respective principals and superintendents must commit to incorporating the AP course into their schedule in the upcoming school year.

GaDOE's Comprehensive Student Support Structure

The state work over the past two years has been to develop, introduce, and begin implementing the Georgia School Standards across K–12 grades. The state developed tools and resources to help schools implement these more rigorous standards. Now, the *Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions*²—a state-developed conceptual framework—will help to guide a common language among practitioners as they integrate tools and performance stan-

Georgia Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions



dards into their day-to-day support of academic achievement of all students. The four tiered layers of the student achievement pyramid of intervention are focused on standards-based classroom learning, needs-based learning, student support team-driven learning, and specially designed learning. With Georgia's prioritization on school improvement, state education agency officials are working to ensure that this framework aligns and guides the numerous secondary school redesign activities that make up the statewide secondary reform effort in Georgia.

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¹Georgia is one of 22 states that compose the American Diploma Project (ADP) Network. Georgia's three-year ADP action plan is available [online](#).

²See a complete description of the Georgia School Standards and the Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions [online](#).

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Pennsylvania's Project 720

Pennsylvania's key high school reform initiative, Project 720, refers to the number of days a student spends in high school from the beginning of ninth grade to the end of the senior year. The initiative's title is appropriate because the overarching goal of Project 720 is to ensure that at the end of those 720 days, every Pennsylvania student is well equipped to enter college and the high-skills workforce.



Project 720 began during the 2004–05 school year when the state allocated federal dollars to support pilot implementation and exploratory grants for 41 districts to tackle high school redesign using research-based strategies. The effort quickly began to generate interest across the state, even with Pennsylvania's strong tradition of local control, especially after its successful first year when Gov. Rendell dedicated \$4.3 million in state funds for an expansion of the project this school year. Over 150 districts applied for this year's round of Project 720 grants and the state awarded funding to a total of 67 districts, career institutes, and charter schools, which represent 75 participating high schools across the state.

Key Components

Project 720 consists of a comprehensive list of reform strategies that high schools must implement over a three-year timeframe. Grant funding lasts one year at a time, but funding continues over three years for each district as long as it makes progress in establishing the reforms. The reform requirements of Project 720 fall into four main strategies for improving high schools:

- ensuring that every student graduates ready for college and career
- redesigning school district policies and systems to improve the high school infrastructure and increase student achievement
- designing and implementing data-informed student advisory services
- providing multiple pathways to prepare students for postsecondary success

The first strategy is the focal point of Project 720. It requires school districts to implement a rigorous core curriculum for all students that includes four years of English and math and three years of science and social studies. Project 720 puts significant emphasis on ensuring all students are provided with a rigorous curriculum, including those who have been historically underserved. Diane Castelbuono, Pennsylvania's deputy secretary for elementary and secondary education, says, "It is no longer the case that students who are planning to enter the workforce right after high school need a less demanding curriculum than their college-bound peers. A key component of Project 720 is to ensure that all students, regardless of their postsecondary plans, are pro-

vided with a challenging curriculum that will enable them to meet the demands of our new global economy." The state

is using what it has learned from its work with Achieve's American Diploma Project Network, a coalition of states dedicated to improving high schools, to guide its core curriculum efforts. Pennsylvania has also won a grant through phase two of the National Governors Association's Honor States Grant Program to increase course rigor at six schools, all of which are Project

720 sites.

Amy Hodges Slamp, director of the state agency's Bureau of Teaching and Learning, and Parker Martin, chief of the state agency's Division of Middle and Secondary Education, stress that participating districts' main priority should be establishing the core curriculum requirements. That message seems to be taking hold because more schools report full or partial implementation of the Project 720 course requirements compared with most of the reform package's other action steps. The state reports that 44 Project 720 schools have fully implemented four years of college preparatory English. Twenty-five schools have fully implemented four years of math, including algebra I, II, and geometry. And over 1,000 more 9th grade students were enrolled in algebra in Project 720 schools this year compared with last year.

Project 720's second strategy includes measures that are intended to support student learning and understanding of rigorous coursework. For example, school districts need to replace large high schools with smaller learning communities and create staff development plans that provide teachers with the skills they need to implement evidence-based instructional strategies. Most Project 720 schools have partially implemented the action steps that constitute this strategy.

A large part of the third strategy focuses on rethinking the counselor's role so that it is an integral part of the participating schools' academic programs. According to the state, over 2,600 more students received personalized career and college counseling in Project 720 schools this year compared with last year. This strategy also requires districts to provide career planning opportunities for all students beginning in the ninth grade.

Finally, Project 720 schools must implement reforms that provide students with multiple pathways to postsecondary success such as forming partnerships with career technical centers and employers that enable students to pursue work-based learning and internships during school. The reform package also requires schools to enroll students in dual enrollment programs that allow them to earn college credit while still in high school; the schools are tasked with expanding the availability of such programs to at-risk youth

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and students who typically don't have the opportunity to participate. While 29 Project 720 schools have fully implemented efforts to expand dual enrollment to students who don't usually have the chance to participate, only 10 have fully implemented innovative dual enrollment approaches for at-risk youth.

State Agency Support

The Project 720 reform platform is ambitious because it requires school districts to implement varying strategies over just three years. To help districts meet that goal, the state agency provides them with technical assistance, posts resources on its website, and organizes meetings throughout the year. This summer, three regional meetings have been scheduled for Project 720 sites to discuss best practice and receive planning assistance in rolling out their reforms.

A cadre of state education agency employees and other experts in the field are also conducting site visits to gauge progress and determine where help is needed. Amy Hodges Slamp says that instead of any single reform strategy emerging as the biggest challenge for districts, lack of sufficient resources, such as time to meet with and train staff about the reform strategies, has been the biggest problem for sites so far.

The state also requires Project 720 schools to submit mid-year and end-of-year progress reports to measure the results of the reforms. The reports must include information such as graduation rates, the percent of students enrolled in the core curriculum, the percent of students who take the SAT and ACT and performance on those exams, the percent of students in dual enrollment, and the percent of students enrolling in postsecondary institutions. The state is supporting the data collection efforts and has revised its own data collection system. For the first time this fall, the state began collecting high school enrollment data by course and by grade.

The Umbrella of High School Redesign Efforts

Project 720 is the umbrella for all high school reform initiatives in the state and encapsulates the state's thinking about high school redesign. A high school reform committee of state agency employees meets every two weeks to ensure that all of the state's high school activities drive toward the same goals outlined in Project 720. For example, Project 720 sites are required to enroll students in dual enrollment programs. This school year, the state expanded those efforts and allocated \$5 million in state funding for dual enrollment programs across the state. The Project 720 sites are eligible to apply for additional funding to support their dual enrollment efforts, but the additional money allows non-Project 720 schools the opportunity to put in place this particular high school reform measure.

The state is also aligning Project 720 with its broader education initiatives. For example, the Project 720 guidelines are being incorporated into the school improvement work

done at high schools across the state. Also, the Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Board and the Department of Labor and Industry have created a Regional Career Education Partnership Program that seeks to support and build on the state's high school reform and career preparation strategies. The program requires local workforce investment boards, youth councils, and other local organizations to partner with local Project 720 schools to create work-based learning opportunities for students, redefine the role of career counselors, and reengage out-of-school youth in education and training programs.

What's Next

Gov. Rendell has asked for an additional \$4.3 million in state funding for Project 720 next year, which would expand the program by 30 school districts to put the total number of participating districts up around 100. Other high school redesign efforts are in the works. The governor has requested \$20 million for laptops for every desk in English, math, science, and history classrooms for 100 high schools this upcoming year. He's also asked for \$3 million to help districts improve their guidance counseling programs and an additional \$2 million for dual enrollment. Pennsylvania is also comparing its state assessment, the PSSA, with measures of college readiness such as the SAT in the hopes of using the eleventh grade reading and math assessments as college entrance and placement exams.

To learn more about Project 720 and Pennsylvania's other high school reform efforts, click [here](#).

Project 720 in Action: Two School Examples

The common response when you ask almost anyone in Pennsylvania about the results of Project 720 is that it's "too soon to tell" since this school year is the first official year of the reform. Many participating districts have devoted most of their efforts to planning and won't implement specific reforms until next year. And there doesn't seem to be any one reform area where most schools are making inroads and gaining traction. Instead, schools are taking on different reform elements of Project 720 based on their previous strengths and efforts. But the following two high schools show that early progress is being made under the initiative. Both schools received one of the state's pilot Project 720 grants for 2004–05 and are two of the 67 education providers to receive grants this year.

Lehigh Career & Technical Institute

Lehigh Career & Technical Institute enrolls approximately 2,400 10th–12th grade students from Lehigh County's nine school districts, which run the gamut from large urban districts like Allentown to much smaller rural districts.

LCTI currently enrolls students for a half day of classes focused on career and technical education in over 40 skills areas from commercial photography to carpentry.



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Project 720 in Action: Two School Examples

But beginning with the 2006-07 school year, LCTI will add an Academic Center that will allow students to attend the school for a full day and take both academic and technical courses.

As a Project 720 site that never before offered core academic courses, Lehigh Career & Technical Institute is particularly focused on developing a rigorous core curriculum that is aligned with school district and postsecondary expectations, and the school is making the most progress in this reform area. According to Sandra Himes, the school's assistant director of academic and special programs, that task has been especially challenging because LCTI's students receive their high school diplomas from their home districts. The school collaborated with its nine sending districts to establish a core curriculum that meets all of the districts' graduation requirements, as well as the requirements of Project 720. Once the core courses were agreed upon by all the districts, LCTI brought in teachers from those districts to ensure that all of Pennsylvania's academic standards were appropriately incorporated into the courses. The school also will require two mandatory support classes for its 10th graders that will focus on adolescent literacy and mathematical problem solving.

LCTI is hiring teachers for its Academic Center and creating summer professional development opportunities for both those new teachers and the school's current math and science teachers who will now be called on to instruct students according to the new core curriculum. The school is actively attending career fairs and hiring teachers from its sending school districts. The summer professional development will prepare all the teachers to instruct in LCTI's unique environment by addressing topics such as teaching English-language learners, incorporating literacy across the core content areas, teaching test-taking strategies for the state assessment, using hands-on learning strategies, and integrating career and technical education concepts into the core curriculum. While scheduling complications may prevent the school from allowing Academic Center teachers and Career and Technical teachers to team-teach courses to students, LCTI will try to facilitate integration through after-school workshops led by both Academic Center and Career and Technical teachers.

Sandra Himes says that the school is working with Carbon Lehigh Intermediate Unit, an educational service agency that is also a link between the state department of education and the school, to develop a data warehouse that will allow LCTI to track the performance of every single student and promote data-driven decision making. The data warehouse will allow the school to test the effectiveness of its Project 720 reforms as they are implemented.

For more information on LCTI, click [here](#).

Norristown Area High School

Norristown Area High School enrolls approximately 1,830 students and is the only high school in its district, which is

northwest of Philadelphia. The school has focused less on beefing up its core curriculum compared with LCTI because it has always offered core classes. However, the district has collaborated with the high school's college and career center to identify the colleges most of the school's students have attended and to coordinate discussions with those colleges to determine how well prepared NAHS students are when they arrive at college. The district is trying to find out, for example, whether large proportions of the school's students need to take developmental courses in college to bolster their knowledge and skills before taking regular college courses. The district is in the process of gathering and analyzing those data to determine whether they will need to adjust the school's curriculum and course offerings to better prepare students.



A bigger Project 720 reform priority for the school, and perhaps the area where it has made the greatest strides, is with its student advisory and family advocacy efforts. The district signed on to implement First Things First, a comprehensive school reform framework developed by the Institute for Research and Reform in Education, before Project 720 was in place. First Things First's secondary school model consists of three main parts: small learning communities, a family advocate system, and instructional improvement through alignment, rigor, and student engagement. When the district realized the goals and strategies of FTF align closely with those of Project 720, it applied for the Project 720 grant money and streamlined both efforts into a cohesive reform package. FTF is now Norristown Area High School's delivery system for meeting many of the goals and requirements of Project 720.

Beginning this school year, NAHS set aside a weekly Family Advocacy Period of 45 minutes for each building professional to meet with his or her assigned 15 to 17 multi-grade students. The school's guidance counselors helped write lesson plans for the period and trained the advocates. The period is devoted to conversations with students about planning for the future, understanding their school transcripts, and knowing their academic strengths and weaknesses and where they need to improve to reach their future goals. The school's original aim was for each family advocate to contact the home of each of their assigned students once a month. In actuality, the advocates contacted each student's home about once per quarter. Next year, the school will build on those efforts and conduct a family advocacy conference in which each advocate will meet with every student and his or her parents to discuss the student's schedule and course selections. The school also wants to enhance its college career counselor program and align it more closely with the family advocacy program.

For more information on NAHS, click [here](#).

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Advanced Placement (AP) Programs Expansion and Support: In addition to the statewide grants for teacher training and one additional AP course, 12 high schools will receive support through a National Governors Association (NGA) Grant to improve middle and high school vertical teaming/readiness programs as well as training on the process to identify underserved students with AP potential.

Georgia Virtual High School Opportunities:³ The state's virtual high school program began two years ago and makes it possible for students to take numerous required courses, as well as AP courses, online. This opportunity has been well used by small and large schools alike as well as rural, home-bound, home-schooled, and private school students. The NGA Honor States Program Grant is supporting program expansion efforts and professional development for teachers who instruct the online courses.

Student Achievement Roundtable: To ensure all state-led activities are coordinated, GaDOE established the Student Achievement Roundtable. The Roundtable is comprised of all state education agency staff involved in any direct (or indirect) support activities with these schools and their respective districts. Below is an overview of the various state-level supports that some or all of the targeted schools are receiving.

Targeted Efforts to Support Local School Success

As part of a statewide effort to develop successful practices in Georgia's secondary schools, the state selected four high schools and their respective feeder middle-level schools to receive additional targeted support. The schools currently represent four of Georgia's five school improvement regions and are diverse in student demographics, academic performance, and adequate yearly progress status. A high school and select feeder schools in the fifth region will be added next year. These schools will serve as centers of innovation for different successful best practice components of secondary redesign in Georgia.

GaDOE Secondary Leadership Facilitators: Both the high school and their feeder middle school receive the services of trained secondary leadership facilitators who spend one day a week at the middle school and another day at the high school. They are guiding the work within and between the two schools by helping the schools actualize more faculty involvement in and through the personalization of education for students through advisement and transitions concepts.

High School That Work and Making Middle Grades Work: Developed by the Southern Regional Education Board, these two research-based programs are the most prevalent secondary improvement models used in Georgia. A combination of 169 high schools and middle schools use various tenants of these research-based best practices program.

Successful Practices Network: Created by the International Center on Leadership in Education (ICLE), the network, in partnership with CCSSO, is engaged in a five-year initiative designed to bring effective practices to scale by gathering and sharing information on high schools that have been most successful at providing all students with a rigorous and relevant education.⁴ Five Georgia high schools are involved in this effort and receive targeted support from network staff. In addition, GaDOE staff meets with the five schools once monthly to monitor progress.

Graduation Counts Guide!: GaDOE is preparing to release its new publication to supplement its secondary school redesign efforts, the *Graduation Counts Guide!* The guide, to be distributed to every middle school and high school in the state, will highlight key strategies that facilitate strategic use of data to drive decision making, improving the school culture, and creating smooth transitions for students across the education pipeline as well as a design for developing effective advisement programs for all students.

Integrating Career and Technical Education and Secondary Redesign

Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE): GaDOE is overhauling the career, technical, and agricultural education (CTAE) curriculum as part of its role to support Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue's Strategic Industries Initiative and the Innovation Centers. The centers target six strategic cluster areas: aerospace, agribusiness, energy & environmental, healthcare & eldercare, life sciences, and logistics & transportation. GaDOE is collaborating with the Innovation Centers to identify common goals in which CTAE can assist the state with developing homegrown industries and preparing our students for high-skilled, technologically advanced careers.

Public Engagement—Informing the Implementation Process

Georgia has taken a critical step to informing the state's ongoing secondary school policy reform and implementation. GaDOE recently conducted focus groups across the state to hear the priorities identified by students, teachers, parents, and the community and is now in the process of delivering recommendations to the state board of education. Among the issues likely to be included are addressing the dropout issue, revisiting the state's compulsory student attendance age, personalizing student learning through individualizing the secondary school experience with strong transitions and advisement programs, accelerating learning for students who enter high school already behind, and instructional supports that help students achieve in a more academically rigorous environment.

For more information about Georgia's Secondary School Redesign efforts, click [here](#).

³For more information and complete course listings, visit [Georgia Virtual High School](#).

⁴To read more about ICLE's learning criteria and indicators of student success, click [here](#).

COORDINATING RESOURCES AND STRATEGIES: THE HS ALLIANCE'S NNCO

The National High School Alliance has convened a network of national constituent organizations to meet a growing need for the sharing of information and alignment of activities focused on state-level high school reforms. The need for such a network is critical since increasing numbers of states and organizations have emerged as key players in various high school redesign efforts. The six organizations that make up the newly created National Network of Constituent Organizations (NNCO) are funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to do work in the states participating in the Honor States Grant Program, an initiative being administered by the National Governors Association to raise high school graduation and college readiness rates. Those six organizations are the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Association of State Boards of Education, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the State Higher Education Executive Officers, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

The NNCO provides a forum for the member organizations to share what

they are learning through their initiatives in the Honor States and identify opportunities to leverage and coordinate their resources and strategies.

The NNCO will help CCSSO promote a useful exchange of information between leaders of the Honor States Program and state education agency staff. The network will provide the leaders of the Honor States Program with opportunities to inform chief state school officers and their staffs about the promising practices and progress of the honor states. Similarly, the chief state school officers and their agencies will have opportunities to inform the national leaders of the Honor States Program about their resources, strategies, and perspectives on systemic high school redesign. Furthermore, the NNCO will help CCSSO transfer knowledge and strategies from the honor states to all other states.

The HS Alliance will convene the NNCO four times a year and, following each of the national forums, will prepare a document summarizing key themes raised during participants' discussions and outlining next steps for the NNCO. Through the network, CCSSO and its members and constitu-

ents will have access to those documents as well as monthly e-mail updates that will feature the most current work in the Honor States, the NNCO, and information about the work of other national organizations in those states. The HS Alliance has also prepared and will continually update a table summarizing the major national initiatives from each constituent organization. The document and other resources are available on the [HS Alliance website](#) so that state education agency staff can identify opportunities to work collaboratively with other networks.

The National High School Alliance

The HS Alliance, established in 2002 and housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership, is a partnership of nearly 50 organizations that share a vision for fostering high academic achievement, closing the achievement gap, and promoting civic and personal growth among all youth in our high schools and communities. Most recently, the HS Alliance produced [A Call to Action: Transforming High School for All Youth](#), a framework of six core principles and recommended strategies for preparing all of our nation's youth for college, careers, and active civic participation.

RESOURCES & PUBLICATIONS

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Closing the Expectations Gap 2006: An Annual 50-State Progress Report on the Alignment of High School Policies with the Demands of College and Work, Achieve, Inc.



This [report](#) shares states' progress toward the goals of the National Education Summit on High Schools attended by chief state school officers, governors, and business leaders. Achieve's findings, taken from its December 2005 50-state survey, highlight states' progress in the key policy areas of aligning high school academic standards, course requirements, assessments, and data and accountability systems with postsecondary and workplace expectations.

Meeting Five Critical Challenges of High School Reform: Lessons from Research on Three Reform Models
by Janet Quint, MDRC

Dropout rates at American high schools remain stubbornly high, and too many high school students who *do* manage to graduate are not ready for college and work. Recent MDRC evaluations of three reform models—Career Academies, First Things First, and Talent Development—offer hope that comprehensive programs can improve low-performing high schools. This research synthesis for policymakers and practitioners offers practical lessons for creating personalized learning environments, helping struggling freshmen, improving instruction, preparing students for the world beyond high school, and sustaining change in overstressed high schools.

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