

Memorandum of Agreement
Between
The Georgia Department of Education
And
The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
Council on Accreditation and School Improvement

THIS AGREEMENT is between the Georgia Department of Education (Department) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI)

Section One: Partnership Overview and Goal

This Memorandum of Agreement (Agreement) describes a formal partnership between the Department and SACS CASI (The Partners). An analysis of the current SACS CASI and Department standards for public schools shows that a close alignment of standards' content and indicators exists. Using this standards' foundation and through discussions between the Department and SACS CASI, a mutual willingness to collaborate has been embraced.

The Partners shall work together to strengthen the quality and, simultaneously, reduce the duplication, of school improvement planning, external peer review, training activities, and related activities.

With this understanding, the goal of this partnership is to support Georgia's schools and districts in their efforts to improve student learning through the school improvement and accreditation processes.

Section Two: Governance

The Department, represented by the State Superintendent and/or her designee(s), and SACS CASI, represented by the State Director[s] and/or the designee of the SACS CASI CEO and Executive Director, shall continue to maintain a DOE/SACS CASI Work Team to oversee implementation of this Agreement.

Section Three: Partnership Responsibilities

The Department and SACS CASI shall build on their respective missions, roles, and areas of expertise to enhance the accreditation process for Georgia schools and districts.

Joint Announcement of Partnership

As soon as this memorandum of agreement is signed by the State Superintendent of Schools and the CEO of SACS CASI, a jointly-developed summary of its key components will be released through all appropriate media outlets within Georgia and across the region served by SACS CASI.

Agreement's Key Components

School Improvement Planning

- To assist schools and systems to strategically enhance their school improvement planning efforts, the DOE and SACS CASI encourage Georgia schools and systems to use a variety of resources including the *Georgia School Keys – Unlocking Excellence Through the Georgia School Standards*, the *Georgia Assessment of Performance on School Standards: Closing the Gap* (GAPSS Analysis), and DOE related tools such as the *School Improvement Fieldbook*, and the *Implementation Resource: Building Capacity Through Best Practices*, as well as the research-based school improvement process, *BreakThrough School Improvement*, and related SACS CASI tools, such as Practitioners' Guides, self-assessments and rubrics.

Learning Network of Georgia Districts

The Partners agree to use the SACS CASI district accreditation protocol to establish a learning network among and between districts approved to pursue this protocol. The DOE/SACS CASI Work Team will explore ways and create opportunities for said districts to share best practices, provide input regarding ways to further reduce duplication of effort at the school level, and systemically strengthen district leadership for quality improvement.

Training Reciprocity

- The Department will invite SACS CASI State Directors to attend Department sponsored school improvement training, including that related to the roll-out of standards for school performance, the DOE/SACS CASI process, and regional support team meetings.
- On an annual basis SACS CASI will provide assistance for up to three Department members of the Work Team to attend the SACS CASI Annual Conference on School Improvement.

External Review Team Reciprocity DOE/SACS CASI Process

- If a SACS accredited school is within one year of its regularly scheduled SACS CASI review and the school is required to undergo a mandatory Georgia Assessment of Performance on School Standards (GAPSS) Analysis, the school's preparation for the GAPSS Analysis will include completion of the SACS CASI Online Standards Assessment Report in addition to materials required by the GAPSS Analysis protocols. These materials will be reviewed and validated by the joint review team during the GAPSS Analysis visit and the results of the review will be addressed by the team in its recommendations. The GAPSS Analysis team will consist of a balanced representation of DOE and SACS CASI representatives.
- If a SACS accredited school voluntarily uses the Georgia School Keys and the Georgia Assessment of Performance on School Standards (GAPSS) Analysis process for self-assessment purposes in preparation for the SACS CASI review, the school's preparation for the SACS CASI Quality Assurance Review will include completion of the SACS CASI Online Standards Assessment Report in addition to materials required by the GAPSS Analysis protocols. These materials will be reviewed and validated by the joint review team during the GAPSS Analysis visit and the results of the review will be addressed by the team in its recommendations. The Review Team will consist of SACS CASI representatives and one or more DOE representatives or representatives approved by the DOE.
- See the attached process map for further explanation of the DOE/SACS CASI process.

Communication

- The State Superintendent of Schools will continue to include SACS CASI accreditation as an indicator of achievement for every accredited Georgia school and school system on the Office of Student Achievement's annual report card.
- The Partners agree that the DOE/SACS CASI Work Team will continue to explore collaboration with other school improvement providers, including but not limited to the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI), and the Georgia School Superintendent's Association (GSSA)

Training Institute. Representatives of additional organizations may be added to the Work Team with the approval of both Partners.

- A jointly-developed set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) will accompany information about the DOE/SACS CASI agreement when information is distributed to schools and school systems.

Section Four: Dispute Resolution

All major decisions regarding the partnership shall be reached through consensus whenever possible. If consensus cannot be reached, the Department and SACS CASI shall agree to work with an external, objective facilitator, who is chosen by agreement of the Partners, in order to resolve any differences.

Section Five: Implementation Schedule

This Agreement shall begin as of the date of last signature.

Section Six: Termination of Agreement

Either partner may terminate this Agreement thirty days after giving advance written notification, including an explanation of the reasons for wanting to sever the partnership. The Partner seeking the dissolution shall present its reasons to the other Partner, thereby providing an opportunity for redressing the key points of contention.

Section Eight: Fiscal Resources

The Department and SACS CASI are each responsible for their own costs in carrying out this Agreement, unless otherwise specified herein.

Section Nine: Choice of Law

The laws of the State of Georgia govern this Agreement.

Section Ten: Signatures

Kathy Cox
State Superintendent of Education
Georgia Department of Education

Dr. Mark A. Elgart
AdvanceED CEO and Executive Director
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
Council on Accreditation and School
Improvement

Date

Date

**Options for SACS Accredited Schools and Districts,
Per a Memorandum of Agreement between
The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS),
Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (CASI)
And the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE)**

Option for an Accredited School/District	Prepare Required Materials	Review Process Determined By	Team Composition	Implementation Timeline
1. SACS CASI Accreditation	SACS CASI	SACS CASI	All SACS representatives	Ongoing, per SACS schedule
2. Voluntary SACS CASI Accreditation using the Georgia School Keys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Georgia School Keys • SACS/CASI Online Standards Assessment Report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GAPSS Analysis Protocols • SACS Review Team • SACS CASI Online Standards Assessment Report <p>The approval of the State Director of SACS CASI and the GaDOE is required.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SACS CASI representatives • One or more DOE representatives or representatives approved by the DOE. 	Begin SY 08-09, per DOE schedule
3. Mandatory GAPSS Analysis: If a SACS accredited school is in the state's Needs Improvement (NI) category requiring a GAPSS Analysis, then there is a mandatory application of the Georgia School Keys and GAPSS Analysis process, with the option for SACS CASI Accreditation if the school is within one year of the date for its next required SACS CASI QAR visit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Georgia School Keys • SACS CASI Online Standards Assessment Report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GAPSS Analysis Protocols • SACS Review Team • SACS CASI Online Standards Assessment Report <p>The approval of the State Director of SACS CASI and the GaDOE is required.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balanced representation of DOE and SACS CASI representatives 	Begin SY 08/09, if school is within one year of its regularly scheduled SACS review.
4. District SACS CASI Accreditation	SACS CASI Online Standards Assessment Report for Districts	SACS CASI	All SACS representatives	Per SACS schedule