

PERSPECTIVES ON GEORGIA'S HIGH SCHOOLS

A Report on the Regional Focus Groups on High School Redesign
and the Work of the High School Redesign Advisory Panel



BY WEST WIND EDUCATION POLICY, INC.
MARCH 2006

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The complete report, with appendices, can be accessed at
http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/tss_school_redesign.aspx

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The Georgia Department of Education funded the focus group project. The findings in this report do not necessarily represent the views of the Georgia Department of Education. Participants in the focus groups, the Georgia Department of Education, the Regional Education Service Agencies, and the High School Redesign Advisory Panel were not involved in reviewing the data from the focus groups, developing recommendations, or writing or reviewing this report prior to its release. The findings of this report do not necessarily represent the views of individual focus group participants or members of the Advisory Panel. Quotations cited in the report are not attributed to focus group participants by name, respecting commitments made to participants prior to their participation in the discussion and completion of comment forms.

The Georgia Department of Education and West Wind Education Policy thank the directors and staff of the Regional Educational Service Agencies for their invaluable assistance in organizing and facilitating the focus groups described in this report, particularly for selecting and inviting participants and providing facilities and onsite services. The Department and West Wind Education Policy thank the participants for their candid and thoughtful articulation of the issues and solutions before them. West Wind Education Policy further thanks the Georgia Department of Education for their support of the focus groups and for their willingness to serve as observers of the discussions rather than as active participants.

We hope this report will assist the School Improvement Division as they assess the condition of high schools and develop strategies for high school renewal in Georgia. It has been our pleasure to support this work.

ORIGINS OF THIS REPORT

Educators and the public in Georgia share a growing concern about the capabilities of the public education system going forward into the 21st century. Despite our best efforts, changing demographics, economic realities, and challenges to democracy put pressure on the system as a whole to improve. The good news is that much is being done to assess the current and future needs of students and to adjust or redesign our education systems accordingly. Over the past several years, the nationwide emphasis on early literacy and standards-based education reform opened the doors for improved student results. While many of these efforts are paying off in the early grades, improvements have not yet taken hold at the high school level nationwide or in Georgia. Rather than attempt to make incremental improvements to a system that is widely recognized as needing large-scale reform, the Georgia Department of Education has approached the challenge to improve student performance as an opportunity to redesign its high schools at the levels of both student and system outcomes. Initially, the Department endeavored to provide answers to three broad questions:

- How do we create a sense of urgency and action in the high schools across the state in a way that motivates redesign and leads to improved student achievement?
- How can the Georgia Department of Education align resources to affect high school improvement?
- How can the School Improvement Division collaborate across the Division and the Department as a whole to help align inter- and intra-agency work to improve high school?

With these questions in mind, the Georgia Department of Education directed substantial resources to support secondary school improvement. In late 2004, the Department created the position of Coordinator of High School Improvement. It also directed a majority of its federal Comprehensive School Reform grants to high schools and middle schools. With the Board of Regents, the Department launched *Education Go Get It* in February, 2005, which is a program to encourage Georgia's youth to embrace education in high school and beyond. Once these programs were in place, the Department began to plan the first steps toward its much larger goal of comprehensive high school evaluation and redesign.

In April 2005, the Department convened an Advisory Panel on High School Redesign, comprising leaders of statewide education associations, Department staff, and community partners. The Advisory Panel helped conceptualize the focus groups as forums for public engagement and information gathering. In August and September of 2005, the Georgia Department of Education

ORIGINS OF THIS REPORT

organized a series of high school redesign focus groups, hosted by the Regional Education Service Agencies, with the purpose of identifying core areas for focus in Georgia's effort to lead the nation in improving student achievement. The Department contracted West Wind Education Policy, Inc., an independent entity based in Iowa City, Iowa, and with no ties to the state of Georgia, to conduct the regional High School Redesign Focus Groups.

After collecting and analyzing focus group results, analysts at West Wind developed a series of recommendations based on those data. The Advisory Panel was again convened in December 2005 to review the findings and draft recommendations and again provide their input. The result is this report. It is hoped that the Department will use this resource as it develops a vision and state action plan for the redesign of high schools toward the goal of leading the nation in preparing high school students for education beyond high school and for their chosen fields of work.

HOW THE FOCUS GROUPS WORK

On August 29–September 2 and September 19–21, 2005, the Georgia Department of Education convened a series of eight focus groups throughout the state. Each focus group was conducted by an independent contractor, West Wind Education Policy, Inc., and included broad participation of stakeholders in Georgia’s high schools.

The Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs) hosted the High School Redesign Focus Groups. The sixteen RESAs joined together two and three at a time to provide facilities for the sessions and to invite a diverse set of stakeholders to participate in each focus group.

Two hundred fifty-five stakeholders participated in the focus groups. Participants represented a variety of stakeholder groups, including students, parents, teachers, administrators, higher education officers, elected officials, business and community leaders, representatives of the juvenile justice and social services systems, and DTAE/GED representatives. Urban, suburban, and rural schools were represented. The participants’ list is included in Appendix D. (The complete report, with appendices, can be accessed at http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/tss_school_redesign.aspx.) While by and large the focus groups showed great diversity by role, the overall sample was not representative of some of the stakeholders important to high schools in Georgia. Groups who were under-represented include minority stakeholders, underperforming students, and dropouts. Samples involving these stakeholders may have produced different results.

Each group engaged in conversations prompted by questions asked by the West Wind Education Policy facilitators. Questions elicited participants’ concerns, analyses, and priorities. The conversations revolved around participant expectations of Georgia’s high schools, what is and is not currently working in high school, ideas for constructive change, reflections on state priorities, and other issues pertinent to the state. Participants engaged in both large-group discussions and small-group discussions organized by like profession wherever possible.

Neutral, rather than leading, questions posed to each focus group were designed to elicit their priorities, analyses, and ideas¹.

- What is working in Georgia high schools?
- What is not working well in Georgia’s high schools?
- What are the expectations for Georgia’s high schools?
- How well are Georgia’s high schools meeting expectations?
- What examples, ideas, and potential challenges exist related to improving completion rates, improving average SAT scores, and improving transitions?

- Will reform within the system achieve desired results, or is a complete overhaul of high school required?
- Who was not part of the discussions and who should be?

In general, evaluative comments indicate that focus group participants felt the process elicited their input in key areas of concern and were confident their comments were captured. In addition, they indicated the goals of the focus groups were met. A summary of evaluation feedback is included in Appendix F. (The complete report, with appendices, can be accessed at http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/tss_school_redesign.aspx.)

The authors of this report analyzed participant feedback and prepared this report for the School Improvement Division within the Georgia Department of Education.

¹ The authors recognize the limitations of focus group methodology in that data represents a small sample for a short duration. As a result of this methodology, some themes may be introduced and developed, or may appear to have significance, because they are topical at the time of the focus group.

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF PRIORITY CONCERNS

A great many issues were mentioned and discussed by focus group participants, as evidenced in the participant comments below and in the appendices. A careful review of the types of issues focus group participants discussed, as well as the numbers of times participants commented on specific issues, provides a sense of the range of topics that matter to stakeholders. However, simply reviewing the frequency by which participants commented on issues does not provide an accurate representation of how important those issues are in comparison to other issues. Participants may spend a great deal of time debating issues on which there is disagreement in the group, but which are not major priorities overall. Similarly, participants may mention only once or twice an issue of high priority, but because there is agreement on the issue, it is not mentioned again.

The second section of this report presents all the comments shared by focus group participants, grouped into common themes and reported by the number of times comments were made under each section. This first section of the report provides a descriptive summary of the priority themes identified by focus group participants. At the end of each focus group session, participants were asked to identify common themes across the focus group discussions. Seven of the eight focus groups were asked to prioritize those themes. The top priorities are discussed in this section.

RESOURCES/FUNDING

Participants in every focus group identified resources and funding to be a key theme among their discussions. When participants cast their ballots for the most important topic facing high schools, resources and funding came out as the number-one priority concern.

Interestingly, however, no focus group spent much time discussing the issues related to resources and funding. It appeared that participants generally sensed consensus around the idea that the schools needed more funding and resources, so they did not spend much time hashing out the issues in the group. When they did discuss the question of funding, most of the focus groups expanded the definition to “resources,” which includes not just money, but also time, decision making flexibility, professional expertise and experience, data, evidence of successful practice, schedules, and partnerships.

“Lack of funding is a major concern. Schools are having to resort to placing drink machines in schools to increase funds to meet needs (which in turn is contributing to a problem of obesity in students).”

—HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER/PARENT, LENOX FOCUS GROUP

Some participants noted they have “great” new facilities and that that matters to students, educators, and the community. By and large, those with new facilities also recognized this is not the norm in Georgia, however, and that limited funding for everything from facilities to special programs to the carrying out of federal and state mandates is a widespread challenge. There was a general sense among the focus group sessions that questions surrounding funding impact all of the core educational issues such as teacher professional development, curriculum, testing, and partnerships.

EXPECTATIONS

Another key priority among the focus groups can be categorized as issues related to expectations. Every focus group agreed that higher expectations are needed for *all* students to ensure students graduate high school with options and a very real probability of meeting success no matter what they do after graduation. However, there was a great deal of ambivalence and in some cases outright disagreement about what that means, specifically related to the commonality of expectations. There was a strong sense among some participants that there must be common expectations of *all* students. Yet other participants expressed the concern that not all students are

The key lesson is that all focus groups acknowledged the important role of preparing students for careers, not just college, and for life in general.

bound for a four-year college, and that should be honored and respected by both the education system and the community at large. There was a specific concern that “high expectations for all” is being defined in Georgia as an expectation that all students will have the kinds of abstract analytical, language, and core subject area knowledge expected of students entering traditional four-year colleges—and this is

neither necessary nor appropriate. Defining what it means to be prepared to succeed in the workplace and in life in general is a key step called for by many of the focus group participants.

In general, focus groups agreed that schools are doing a decent job of preparing students for technical colleges and the workforce, but they admitted uncertainty about what it means to be prepared. When taken to the abstract level, there was consensus that high schools need to do a better job of helping instill in *all* students—even the college-bound—a work ethic, sense of responsibility, and well-rounded set of life and learning skills. When talking specifically about the courses of study that lead to a career and technical seal on the high school diploma, there was general agreement that the education system and community as a whole should better recog-

nize the academic learning that takes place in applied settings and that schools need to do a better job of infusing academic rigor into the career and technical courses. By doing this, schools can better ensure that students will have more options upon graduation and will be better prepared to succeed in the changing economy.

The key lesson is that all focus groups acknowledged the important role of preparing students for careers, not just college, and for life in general—and that the school system should more explicitly define what this means and address these expectations in their offerings.

STUDENT NEEDS

Another high priority area for focus group participants is attention to student needs. The discussion generally centered around the external barriers to learning that students encounter, such as challenges related to poverty, low expectations, drug abuse, teen pregnancy, race relations, and limited networks of support. Some focus group participants expressed concern that teachers are overwhelmed by these issues—for which they are not prepared professionally to address—on top of all the instructional issues they face—for which they do have a great deal of professional expertise to address. The important role, but limited

“It is hard to worry about school when you don’t know if you will have anything to eat tonight or a place to stay.”

—SOCIAL SERVICES STAFF, VIDALIA FOCUS GROUP

supply, of school social workers was a common comment among the focus groups. That is, while teachers can and should be expected to provide more focused academic supports and advisement to students, there was a concern that they also have to advise or support students on topics where they do not have expertise, such as the challenges they face in their homes and their communities. Schools need more support in helping students to face these kinds of non-academic barriers to learning.

To this end, there was commentary from participants on the importance of partnering and collaborating across sectors and with the community, so that schools can receive help in addressing these very real challenges that students face. Representatives of the juvenile justice and social services sectors, education professionals, and parents and community members all expressed appreciation for the collaboration that does occur, as well as a desire for increased collaboration across sectors. Again, this topical area is deeply connected to issues such as funding and resources, instructional strategies, and parent involvement.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

The interest in parent involvement was roundly shared among focus group participants and was selected as a key priority in many of the sessions. Three issues related to parent involvement were common across focus groups:

1 Parents are not involved in their teenagers' lives.

The natural progression of children into adulthood means that even the most involved parents play a significantly different role in their teenagers' lives than they did when their children were in elementary or even middle school. High school is the stage where children rapidly mature into adults, and parents are increasingly uncertain how and to what degree they can and should be involved in their children's lives. Some focus group participants spoke about the importance of understanding adolescent development, with this issue largely in mind. Schools and parents need to understand the research and recommendations about adolescent development, the appropriate roles of adults in nurturing the growth of adolescents into adults, and how this informs the process of engaging parents in the high school experience.

2 Parents are not well incorporated into the schools and learning process.

This issue cuts across all levels of the education system but is especially strongly felt at the high school level. Many parents, particularly those of children most at-risk, do not feel welcomed in the schools. The structures, regulations, cultures, and schedules of the high school often create barriers to parent involvement. Parents who themselves had bad high school experiences, or who dropped out of high school, are particularly unlikely to easily engage with their children's high schools. Focus group participants felt this is something that the school system should explicitly address. While many participants spoke about the need for parents themselves to take more responsibility for being involved in their children's lives, there was a sense of consensus that the schools also needed to take responsibility for being involved with the parents.

3 Parents are struggling themselves.

Focus group participants commented that often the students most at-risk are in families that could also be considered at risk. In some cases, this was presented as a reality that schools face and a challenge that they encounter when trying to overcome the external issues that students bring to their schooling experiences. Some focus group participants suggested that this can some-

times be used as an excuse for why schools cannot reach those children. Others suggested actions that schools could take to target resources to those parents and families. This was an area where collaboration between the schools and social service providers was commonly seen as a positive.

One of the most innovative ideas for improving graduation rates that came out of the focus groups is to target parents who did not graduate and help them to acquire their GEDs. One school specifically targeted parents of incoming freshman who had not graduated high school and encouraged them to have as a goal walking across the stage at their child's graduation to receive their own high school diploma. The belief is that as these parents begin to succeed themselves and see the value of a high school education, they will encourage their own children to complete high school.

“Parents need to be made to feel welcome.”

—PARENT, HOMER FOCUS GROUP

FAIR ACCOUNTING FOR SUCCESSSES AND CHALLENGES

Another key priority across focus groups is the need to account for school success, particularly in the face of challenges that schools face. The prevalence of standardized testing was a commonly cited concern but was also cited as a tool for improvement when used appropriately. Educators discussed the need for data to be consistent and for comparisons among and expectations of schools to account for the student populations served by the schools. When the focus group participants discussed SAT scores, every focus group articulated concern about how comparisons are made, particularly across states. There was an understanding that many more students in Georgia are encouraged to take the SAT, whether or not they have followed a college preparatory course of study in high school. Understanding that in other states only students bound for four-year colleges take the SAT, participants felt it inappropriate to make blanket comparisons across states on average SAT scores. Similar concerns were expressed about comparisons across public schools within Georgia, given the varying demographics and resources of the schools.

A detailed listing of priority themes is in Appendix A. (The complete report, with appendices, can be accessed at http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/tss_school_redesign.aspx.)

SUMMARIES OF FOCUS GROUP COMMENTS

This section provides a listing of key comments made across all eight sessions, grouped by analysts under common topical areas.

BEST THINGS

Question Asked

Think about the high school you are in, your child is in, you represent, is near you, etc. What is the best thing going on in that high school?

Commentary

As an ice breaker for the focus group sessions, participants were asked to identify the best things going on in their high schools. Participants were not asked to generalize the list of best things in all high schools in Georgia. The resulting list suggests key issues for which there are at least pockets of success across Georgia and provides a sampling of issues that matter to Georgia's high school stakeholders. Some issues noted under "Best Things" are also noted under those things that are "Not Working," which points to the variability of implementation of programs, processes, and priorities across Georgia's high schools and high school communities.

Two topics are worth special note. First, the role, supports, preparation, and expectations of and by high school teachers was a major theme for focus group participants. The focus on teachers showed up in responses to the best things going on in their high schools; the most common comments here relate to the quality and dedication of high school teachers and staff. The focus on teachers also showed up in response to things that are *not* working in Georgia's high schools; concerns about teacher preparation, attitudes, motivation, and expectations (both expectations of and by teachers) were significant themes in those discussions, as well.

Second, participants identified a great number of individual programs that are working well in their high schools. It would be fruitful to compare this to the fact that later in the focus group discussions when participants were asked about the level of change necessary to get Georgia's high schools to where they need to be, the general consensus was that the system needed more than just "tinkering." Indeed, in most focus group sessions there was a general consensus that the system needs a major overhaul. This may suggest that while there are some good things going on, by themselves, they are not leading to the kinds of high school outcomes that focus group participants expect. Reformers should explore the potential relationships between successful programs like those listed below and the overall change needed to achieve expectations.

Topics Sorted by Frequency

Participant comments in all focus groups were grouped by analysts into common topics. This table shows the topics and the frequency with which participants made comments related to each topic. The table was compiled using data from Appendix B, which includes topics and all participant comments. (The complete report, with appendices, can be accessed at http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/tss_school_redesign.aspx.)

BEST THINGS	
# OF RELATED COMMENTS	TOPICAL AREA
40	Role and Quality of Teachers/Staff
33	Specific Programs That Work
17	Career and Technical Education
17	Partnerships/Collaboration
12	Curriculum
10	Climate
9	Data, Testing, Standards
9	Leadership
9	Level of Expectation For Student Performance
6	Student-Teacher Relationship
6	Options for Students
6	Acceptance of Need to Change
6	Facilities and Resources
5	Parent Involvement
5	Better Student Outcomes
5	Sense of Common Purpose
3	Transitions
2	Structures/Schedules

NOT WORKING

Question Asked

What is not working in Georgia's high schools?

Commentary

Focus group participants identified areas that are not working well in Georgia high schools. Their comments have been sorted into student outcomes and system outcomes. By student outcomes, the comments generally noted the fact that the graduation rate overall is a problem and that students were in many cases not graduating with the desired level of knowledge, skills, habits, and dispositions. In terms of system outcomes, comments centered on the challenges faced by the system; areas where the system is not responding well to challenges; and specific policies, programs, roles, and relationships that need work.

Topics Sorted by Frequency

Participant comments were grouped by analysts into common topics. These tables show the topics and the frequency with which participants made comments related to each topic. The tables were compiled using data from Appendix B, which includes all participant comments. (The complete report, with appendices, can be accessed at http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/tss_school_redesign.aspx.)

NOT WORKING: STUDENT OUTCOMES

# OF RELATED COMMENTS	TOPICAL AREA
11	Dropouts
10	Overall Outcomes Not Good Enough Related to Preparation for College, Habits, Dispositions, and Life Skills
9	Not Adequately Prepared for Workforce
5	Achievement Gap

NOT WORKING: SYSTEM OUTCOMES

# OF RELATED COMMENTS	TOPICAL AREA
17	Use of Testing/Data
15	External Influences Impact Student Performance
11	Schools Expected to Do Too Much
10	Parents Not Involved
9	Teacher Attitude/Motivation
9	Need to Redefine Expectations
7	Challenges to Individualizing Education
7	Attendance
7	Funding/Resources
7	Schedule/Structures
6	Not Serving All Students
6	Discipline
5	Governance
4	Teacher Preparation
4	Transitions
3	Curriculum
3	Class Size
3	Special Needs
2	Motivation
2	Options
2	Dealing With Growth

EXPECTATIONS

Questions Asked

What do we want from all of our high schools? What do our students need to know and be able to do as high school graduates? What would make you proud of Georgia's high school graduates?

Commentary

Again, focus group participants held two types of expectations. First, they had expectations for students and student performance; second, they held expectations for the system. Focus group participants expect Georgia's students will be prepared in high school for much more than just academic success. Concerns about student habits, dispositions, and life skills dominated the conversations. These concerns included expecting students to learn to respect others and themselves, develop a strong work ethic, accept responsibility for their actions, perform community service, and behave as a good citizen. Second to that, participants were concerned that students develop the kinds of skills needed to enter and succeed in a productive career. Farther down the list were concerns for specific academic skills, many of which also were mentioned as workforce skills. Chief among these are communication and reading skills. Participants did call for increased rigor in high school coursework, greater preparation in mathematics and science, and attention to college readiness.

Participants were not as focused on expectations for what high schools will provide, but they did indicate that high schools should individualize instruction, define outcomes, provide options, and improve graduation rates.

Topics Sorted by Frequency

Participant comments were grouped by analysts into common topics. These tables show the topics and the frequency with which participants made comments related to each topic. The tables were compiled using data from Appendix B, which includes all participant comments. (The complete report, with appendices, can be accessed at http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/tss_school_redesign.aspx.)

EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT OUTCOMES

# OF RELATED COMMENTS	TOPICAL AREA
19	Habits, Dispositions, and Life Skills
14	Thinking/Learning Skills
12	Career Readiness
9	Communication Skills/English Language Arts
7	Options
7	Goals
6	Rigor
6	Mathematics/Science Skills
6	Community Service/Citizenship
5	College Readiness
3	Technology Skills
5	Topical Areas Mentioned Once

EXPECTATIONS FOR THE SYSTEM

# OF RELATED COMMENTS	TOPICAL AREA
4	Individualize
2	Define outcomes
2	Provide Options
2	Graduation Rate

HOW WELL ARE GEORGIA'S HIGH SCHOOLS MEETING YOUR EXPECTATIONS?

Questions asked

How well are our high schools and students meeting these expectations? Are our students graduating with the right level of knowledge and skills? In what areas do we need most improvement?

Commentary

In terms of whether Georgia's high schools were meeting their expectations for students and student performance, participants were concerned that high school graduates were not as prepared as they should be for college, work, and life, and in general. In terms of expectations for the system, participants shared a common expectation that Georgia's public high schools should serve *all* students, regardless of their background or previous experience. Participants felt the system should ensure teachers are prepared and have the support they need, principals and school leaders have the ability to lead their systems, and the system is aligned as much as possible to support students achieving success. Overall, again, participants did not feel the system was performing as well as it should be on these measures.

Topics Sorted by Frequency

Participant comments were grouped by analysts into common topics. These tables show the topics and the frequency with which participants made comments related to each topic. The tables were compiled using data from Appendix B, which includes all participant comments. (The complete report, with appendices, can be accessed at http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/tss_school_redesign.aspx.)

UNMET EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT OUTCOMES

# OF RELATED COMMENTS	TOPICAL AREA
14	Career Readiness
12	College Readiness
11	Habits, Dispositions, and Life Skills
6	Communication Skills/English Language Arts
5	Technology
3	Mathematics/Science
2	Evidence of Success Mixed

UNMET EXPECTATIONS FOR SYSTEM OUTCOMES

# OF RELATED COMMENTS	TOPICAL AREA
15	Doing Well For Some Students, But Not Serving ALL Students
9	Level of Expectations for Students; One Participant Indicated Expectations Are Higher
9	Teachers
8	Resources
6	Relevance and Student Motivation
3	Policy and Regulations
3	Need for Measurement, Clear Vision
2	External Influences on Learning; At-Risk Students
12	Topical Areas Mentioned Once

TINKERING VS. MAJOR OVERHAUL

Questions Asked

Some would say that what we have been talking about is just tinkering around the edges. Instead, research shows many people are looking for a major overhaul of America's high schools. Do you think we have been talking about important changes, a major overhaul, or just tinkering? Does Georgia need an overhaul of its high schools or is it best to tinker around the edges?

Commentary

By and large, focus group participants called for a major overhaul of the system. In all but one focus group session, the consensus was a call for major overhaul. In the focus group calling for step-wise change as opposed to a major overhaul, there was still a consensus that Georgia's high schools need to be fixed. The challenge is to figure out how much stress a system can endure in making large scale changes for students.

Topics Sorted by Frequency

Participant comments were grouped by analysts into common topics. The first table shows the topics and the frequency with which participants made comments related to each topic. The second table shows the actual participant comments. The tables were compiled using data from Appendix B, which includes all participant comments. (The complete report, with appendices, can be accessed at http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/tss_school_redesign.aspx.)

TINKERING VS. MAJOR OVERHAUL	
# OF RELATED COMMENTS	TOPICAL AREA
9	Major Overhaul
4	About the Right Amount of Change
3	Tinkering

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE CHANGE PROCESS

Looking at systems. Not looking at concept that needs to be changed because we're ruled by people who have never done our jobs

Look at front end (K-8) to make effective change, the whole system then changes

Do not impose new initiative and change every 5 years. Allow us to address present need of our students

Focus on professional learning opportunities.

Getting tougher to recruit high school teachers in content areas.

Rethink how we might use the day. More time during school year to work effectively through process. Improve the quality of personnel. Flexibility with school day and year.

Buy-in by Governor, Secretary of Education, and so on

Boards of education may be condoning mediocrity

Buy-in from parents needed to change culture; mindset of how teaching viewed

Greater accountability by student.

Start at bottom; grassroots. Teachers, students up to legislators, governor, etc.

Re-structure from elementary on up

Make sure there is follow-up

Go forward w/the ideas, take the hit and make the changes

Get federal government involved in change. Feds must be on same page if state and local redesign to work—Requires buy-in, ownership by all

WHAT'S MISSING FROM THE CONVERSATION

Questions Asked

What didn't we get on the table? What critical elements of the high school experience are missing from our conversation thus far?

Commentary

Focus group participants identified a number of topics that they did not bring up during the regular sessions or did not discuss to their satisfaction. Echoing the key priorities identified by focus group participants, student needs and resources and funding were at the top of the list. The importance of focusing on teacher needs was also highlighted.

Topics Sorted by Frequency

Participant comments were grouped by analysts into common topics. This table shows the topics and the frequency with which participants made comments related to each topic. The table was compiled using data from Appendix B, which includes all participant comments. (The complete report, with appendices, can be accessed at http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/tss_school_redesign.aspx.)

TOPICS REQUIRING FURTHER DISCUSSION

# OF RELATED COMMENTS	TOPICAL AREA
9	Student Needs
8	Funding/Resources
6	Teacher Needs
5	Politics and Governance
5	Structure/Schedule
3	Earlier Intervention; Elementary to Middle to High
3	Technology
3	Role of Sports and Extra Curriculars
12	Topical Areas Mentioned Once

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the comments, discussion, and priorities shared and identified by focus group participants, analysts at West Wind Education Policy developed Recommendations for Leadership and for State Policy that the Georgia Department of Education might consider implementing as part of its initiative to improve high school outcomes. An early draft of these State Policy recommendations was presented to the High School Redesign Advisory Panel for comments in December 2005. Recommendations here have been refined based on the Panel's ideas.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP

Having invested significant resources to support high school reform across the state, conducted a high school redesign conference with nationally-renowned presenters, and engaged local stakeholders in significant discussions about secondary school redesign, the Department is well-positioned to help Georgia lead the nation in improving student achievement. The following recommendations suggest ways the Department can utilize its leadership role to affect positive change in Georgia's secondary schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP

- **Seize the Opportunity to Call for Big Change**
- **Communicate a Clear Vision for High School**
- **Continue to Engage Stakeholders in Ongoing Refinement of High School Redesign Initiatives**

Seize the Opportunity to Call for Big Change

While they constitute a small sample of Georgia's population, focus group participants were consistent in their call for change. High schools are drawing national attention, and the general public is beginning to understand that structural changes in the economy will have a long lasting impact on our ability to compete globally—which will impact our ability to maintain our current standard of living, let alone improve it. There appears to be a window of opportunity in Georgia where the general public and the education profession alike may support major improvements to the system as we know it. The Georgia Department of Education and leaders in other positions and branches of government all are in position to keep educational improvements at the forefront of the state agenda. All of these leaders should use opportunities across the state to discuss the vision for change in Georgia's high schools, using the bully pulpit to encourage the undercurrent of sympathy for dramatic change.

Communicate a Clear Vision for High School

The Department must develop a communication plan for new performance standards for high school that recognizes the ambivalence among Georgia’s stakeholders about what should be expected of students; is clear about the Department’s expectations and the research base that supports these expectations; and employs explicit strategies to target messages to various stakeholder groups.

The state of Georgia has signed onto the American Diploma Project Network, whose vision is to increase standards to levels more in tune with what students will need to do after graduation to experience success.² The key lesson embodied in the American Diploma Project recommendations is that all students—whether headed to college or the workforce—should achieve to higher levels than those currently called for in Georgia’s graduation requirements. Specifically, the recommendations say that in order to have a chance at success in the 21st century, high school graduates will need to have mastered the key concepts and skills typically embodied in Algebra II and Geometry courses and attain a level of fluency in reading and writing that rivals a college preparatory curriculum. While there is general agreement among many state policy leaders and among participants in the Advisory Panel that this is an appropriate vision for Georgia, the focus group discussions suggest that a significant number of important stakeholders in Georgia are not likely to accept this position outright. Some focus group participants felt the articulation of common, high standards for all students is important, yet others felt that expecting similar levels of performance from students heading to college as students heading directly to the workplace after graduation is unrealistic and even harmful. Many focus group participants do not see college as the necessary path for all students. Many had not been exposed to the arguments that the skills colleges look for in graduates are the same skills employers look for. Few focus group participants had seen evidence of new approaches to high school that lead to the kinds of widespread student achievement articulated in the American Diploma Project recommendations. Furthermore, many were skeptical the system could reasonably expect higher performance from itself and its students, given that so many students are not making it to graduation under the current system.

That said, few focus group participants were willing to suggest that there should not be higher expectations for all students. They all were generally comfortable with more generic conversations centered on the idea that students need more mathematics, they need to read and write well, they need to understand and embody the work ethic expected of employers, and they need general life skills in order to thrive. It was the suggestion that these levels rival college-preparatory levels that caused some focus group participants to pause.

Given the ambivalence evidenced in the focus groups around appropriate expectations for high school graduates, the Department must take measures to communicate the rationale behind increases in these expectations. In communicating the reasons behind Georgia’s new standards, the Department should use language and examples that resonate with various groups of stakeholders. The Department must also provide clear documentation of the means by which the plan was determined in order to assure stakeholders that their voices are being heard. The issues are ripe in Georgia; if the Department can develop a plan for communicating the issues to its various publics, it will likely receive the necessary support for its efforts at high school redesign.

Continue to Engage Stakeholders in Ongoing Refinement of High School Redesign Initiatives

The kinds of high school reforms being called for across Georgia and the nation require major shifts in attitudes, expectations, and traditions related to high school, adolescence, teaching, and learning. The Georgia Department of Education must not only work to carefully communicate the need for reform and the rationale behind specific strategies, it must also engage a wide range of stakeholders in the ongoing review, refinement, and implementation of high school redesign initiatives. The Department should seek partners to help implement additional surveys, focus groups, advisory committees, and study groups to ensure grassroots engagement in and support for change. Distinct from a communication plan, an engagement plan requires the Department be open to shifts in priorities and strategies based on input from stakeholders, as well as be prepared to confront difficult conversations about expectations, performance, investments, and accountability. The Department has demonstrated this kind of openness and should continue to develop engagement strategies to encourage open dialog.

The kinds of high school reforms being called for across Georgia and the nation require major shifts in attitudes, expectations, and traditions related to high school, adolescence, teaching, and learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE POLICY

The Georgia Department of Education can do more than simply provide leadership in making the case for reform. The Department can also propose and implement state policies that send messages about what matters to leaders and their constituents; open pathways for systems to try new activities and designs; remove barriers in the way of innovation and reform; and provide

stop-gap measures until the system achieves a long-term vision. In developing a comprehensive plan for improving the state policy infrastructure for high school, the Georgia Department of Education should consider a number of key opportunities identified by focus group participants and the Advisory Panel.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE POLICY

- **Align Graduation Requirements with Expectations and Interventions**
- **Change Teacher Certification and Professional Cultures to Support Students at Key Transition Points**
- **Ensure State Policies Support Literacy Interventions for Students Far Below Grade-Level**
- **Increase the Compulsory Attendance Age**
- **Provide Resources to Support Change**
- **Promote Collaboration Across Sectors**
- **Support Innovation, Alignment, and Focused Interventions**

Align Graduation Requirements with Expectations and Interventions

The articulation of graduation requirements is one of the most significant statewide policies that Georgia can implement to change high school offerings and outcomes. Georgia is already on course to alter existing graduation requirements, with new rules being proposed for 2008–2009. Authors of these rules must strive to keep graduation requirements in alignment with the Georgia Performance Standards and the state’s vision of what students need to achieve in order to graduate with real opportunities for success. Open questions for Georgia’s leaders to address relate to whether the state should define a core curriculum, move toward a single diploma, and account for seat time versus outcome measures.

No matter how the state resolves these issues, state leaders should determine means by which to help more students acquire the skills necessary for graduation. One of the more innovative proposals put before the Advisory Panel was to provide a regular diploma to students who have both completed coursework for a GED and passed the Georgia High School Graduation Test. While this proposal may affect only a small number students, over time a change like this could significantly increase the number of young adults who receive a high school diploma and go on

to experience success. The Department should encourage innovative thinking such as this to develop interventions that support increasing Georgia’s graduation rates.

Change Teacher Certification and Professional Cultures to Support Students at Key Transition Points

Teachers matter a great deal to focus group participants. Consistently throughout the discussions, participants commented on the importance of teachers in the lives of their students, their capacity to do the hard new work, and their potential to serve children. High school teachers are well-positioned to help high schools focus more directly on the needs of each child, but the current expectations of Georgia’s high school teachers do not embody many of the hopes expressed by focus group participants.

In particular, the transition into high school is a challenging point in a student’s career and is the point where most students who drop out of school make that decision. One strategy for supporting students through these transitional points is an advisement program.³ When teachers are trained in advisement and have the time to work with students to identify goals and develop plans to achieve those goals, their students have been found to be more successful. To build the capacity of Georgia’s teachers to serve in advisement roles, individual schools can develop schedules that provide teachers time necessary for advisement. School districts can provide professional development to teachers so they may learn about effective advising practices. At the level of state policy, Georgia could require teachers to demonstrate proficiency in advisement as a requirement for certification. Embedding proficiency in advisement into teacher certification requirements would send a clear signal that teachers must serve in this role and that systems of teacher preparation and professional development must train teachers in advisement.

“They need a role model and someone who will support them and help them make decisions. You've got to teach them what they can do with their lives.”

—HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT, HOMER FOCUS GROUP

Participants also discussed the importance of changing the professional culture of the high school to one that encourages teaming, advisement, and professional learning communities. Participants felt Georgia’s high schools currently perpetuate a view of teaching and learning that is focused on specialized sub-disciplines and isolated teacher practice centered on delivering subject matter content and not working with the “whole child.” Instead, the culture of teaching and learning in high schools can be much more collaborative, cross-disciplinary, and focused on

individual student needs. Focus group participants suggested that even small incentives from the state-level, such as research grants or grants for focused professional development opportunities, would help to change the culture of teaching in Georgia’s high schools.

Through changes in state policy and a series of small incentives, the state of Georgia can impact teacher training, professional development, and expectations in ways that help students get through some of the most difficult transition points in their careers.

Ensure State Policies Support Literacy Interventions for Students Far Below Grade-Level

The challenge of serving high school students who are significantly below grade-level was discussed by focus group participants and the Advisory Panel alike. The Advisory Panel felt that policy makers should look at how current state and local policies impact the ability of schools to design focused interventions for these students. For example, “double-dosing” on reading courses for high school students below grade-level is a strategy that is showing promise across the country. However, students in Georgia who take remedial courses in high school find it hard to earn enough credits toward graduation, making it even more difficult for them to progress toward on-time graduation from high school. Georgia should investigate how double-dosing impacts credits toward graduation and where flexibility could be found in state policy to ensure students gain English credits toward graduation when working intensively on catching up on their reading skills.

Georgia should also investigate whether there is room in their accountability system to encourage shared responsibility for student progress between levels of the system. Better collaboration between elementary, middle, and high schools and between high school and post-secondary institutions will be needed to address the challenge of supporting students who are far below grade-level upon entry into high school. How this takes shape is largely undefined but is an area for special attention in Georgia.

Increase the Compulsory Attendance Age

Numerous focus group participants raised the issue of the legal age for dropping out of high

“Don’t give them the option of dropping out prior to 18.”

—JUVENILE JUSTICE STAFF, ROME FOCUS GROUP

school. Many felt that they system sends the wrong message by saying it is acceptable for a 16-year-old student to drop out of high school. Some participants said they knew of individual teachers, counselors, or school officials who would encourage troubled students to drop out once they reached the legal age. With

some frequency, participants sounded the call for raising the compulsory attendance age to 17 or

18 years of age. That call was received by most participants with little argument, though some participants felt communities would resist such a proposal. The state should consider what it would take to raise the compulsory attendance age and consider this as a strategy.

Provide Resources to Support Change

As noted in the descriptive analysis above, focus group participants were commonly concerned that funding is a critical issue for the schools. It will be difficult for any proposals for change to take hold if they are seen simply as “unfunded mandates” or other ways for the state to manipulate local school systems. Thus, the state will need to put some funding behind its proposals.

That said, it is clear that money is not the only concern on the minds of focus group participants, and that they were open to creativity in thinking about how to provide added resources. While participants gave examples of how just a little extra money can go a long way (such as in small grants to faculty engaging in research on effective high school practice), they also suggest that providing additional resources such as time, flexibility, information, and partnerships would also be seen as investments in the system. A package of proposals that provides a wide range of new resources to the schools may be accepted by stakeholders as real support.

Promote Collaboration across Sectors

The participation in the focus groups by professionals in Georgia’s social services, health, juvenile justice, and business and community sectors provided a strong sense of the need for partnerships to ensure all students are successful. There was a common call for schools to develop partnerships across these sectors. There was not a suggestion that this should be a statewide policy but rather that individual communities should strive to work with the mix of local partners that address their specific requirements and needs. Nonetheless, the Georgia Department of Education should consider how it might model and promote cross-sector collaboration in its secondary school redesign efforts.

“Children from poverty are underserved and teachers cannot *alone* meet their needs. Need support from numerous social service agencies.”

—HIGHER EDUCATION FACULTY/ADMIN, VIDALIA FOCUS GROUP

Support Innovation, Alignment, and Focused Interventions

Focus group participants felt that in addition to employing teachers in supporting students in their key transitions from middle to high school and from high school to college, the workforce, or life in general, numerous programmatic interventions also hold promise. Freshman

academies, system-wide advisement programs, improvements to the rigor of academic learning in career and technical education programs, and parent involvement programs are all approaches

“The colleges and post-secondary schools use a *wide* variety of entrance exams that don’t align with [the] high school curriculum in state wide testing.”

—HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL, ATLANTA FOCUS GROUP

that have both shown both promise and peril when implemented across the nation.

Furthermore, alignment of the K–12 system and the system of post-secondary education will go a long way toward ensuring that Georgia’s high schools are indeed preparing students to levels they need for success. There is already work underway in Georgia to align K–12 and postsecondary expectations, and the Department can

continue to provide its support to this work. The state can also provide stakeholders with research-based evidence about best practice and conditions that support success in the local interventions described above. Finally, the Department can provide incentives for innovation and the adoption of best practices in these fields.

The Georgia Department of Education has already exhibited leadership with regard to improving student outcomes across the state. The recommendations above are offered to help the Department as it continues to work to ensure that Georgia leads the nation in improving student performance.

² Based on research they conducted into what higher education and employers expect of entry-level students and workers, the American Diploma Project found that all students need to graduate high school with a set of common skills that are greater than the skills articulated in most states’ graduation requirements. *Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma that Counts*, American Diploma Project, 2004. This position is supported by numerous reports, including *Getting Students Ready for College and Careers*, Southern Regional Education Board, 2006; *Crisis at the Core: Preparing All Students for College and Work*. ACT Inc., 2004; and *Learning for the 21st Century*. Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2003.

³ See Alexson, R.G. and C.P. Kennitz. (2004). *Curriculum articulation and transitioning student success: Where are we going wrong and what lessons have we learned?* *Educational Research Quarterly*, 28(2): 19–29.; and *Getting Students Ready for College and Careers*, Southern Regional Education Board, 2006.

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APPENDICES TO
PERSPECTIVES ON GEORGIA'S HIGH SCHOOLS

A Report on the Regional Focus Groups on High School Redesign
and the Work of the High School Redesign Advisory Panel



BY WEST WIND EDUCATION POLICY, INC.
MARCH 2006

APPENDIX A: PRIORITY THEMES BY FOCUS GROUP LOCATION

Following is a listing of the summary themes and priorities identified in each individual focus group session. The first focus group convened was asked only to list summary themes, not to rank them by level of priority. The design of the focus group project was that improvements to the processes would be made as organizers reviewed each session. After the first focus group in Metro Atlanta, organizers determined that they should provide participants with a tool for indicating the level of priority they gave to each summary theme. To do this, each participant was given two votes, which they used to indicate the one or two themes they felt most important.

The tables that follow list the themes that focus group participants identified, along with the number of votes the themes received after each participant cast their two votes.

DEARING	
# OF VOTES RECEIVED	THEMES IDENTIFIED
13	Funding/Resources
10	Rigor in curriculum
8	Fairly, appropriately account for successes and challenges
7	Collaboration/Sharing responsibility for outcomes
6	Relevance in curriculum
5	Relationships
5	Persistence
4	Teacher assignments and incentives, readiness and support
4	Multiple measures of success
2	Attendance
2	Structure (time, schedules, calendars)
1	Redefine success

FORT VALLEY – MIDDLE GEORGIA

# OF VOTES RECEIVED	THEMES IDENTIFIED
8	Funding
7	Parent involvement
5	Commitment to long term results
5	Teacher attitudes/expectations/motivation/energy
4	Curriculum and instructional methods
3	Structures need to change
0	Use data to target/individualize
0	Academic Outcomes
0	Outcomes are academic and more...(ie, helping students be good people)
0	Student expectations for selves
0	Teacher professional dev
0	Involve students in decision making
0	Collaboration with ed system
0	Collaboration with other support and services
0	Individualizing/customizing instruction
0	Improve transitions/social and academic

GRIFFIN

# OF VOTES RECEIVED	THEMES IDENTIFIED
6	Academic preparation
3	Preparation for life
3	Parent involvement
2	Restructuring high school – time, place relationship
2	Increasing relevance
2	Resources
1	Expectations
1	Transitions
0	Teacher training
0	Cultural issues in high school and out
0	Individualizing high school for each child
0	Preparation for work

HOMER

# OF VOTES RECEIVED	THEMES IDENTIFIED
23	Preparing students to succeed for the future: work and college
18	Non-punitive alternates and supporting at-risk students
9	Resources/Funding
9	Make curriculum relevant
8	Parent involvement
2	Serving needs of "middle" students
2	How to serve all needs of every student (i.e. personal issues)
1	Developing student character
1	Differentiating instruction
1	Improve completion rates
1	Transitions: elementary/middle to high
1	Leadership – students/youth and educators/adults
0	Raising expectations
0	Improving teacher/students interaction
0	Ensuring high school is doing what it should
0	Testing

LENOX

# OF VOTES RECEIVED	THEMES IDENTIFIED
16	Higher Expectation for better outcomes.
11	Focus on student needs
9	Rethink – other measures. Testing – too much
6	Preparation for future (technological changes, etc.)
6	Defining outcomes/what high school should be
4	Resources
4	School dynamic/culture
3	Help educators meet all needs of students
3	Preparation for work
3	Teacher preparation and support
2	Time/Schedule
1	Partnerships/Collaboration
0	Teeth behind things we say matter
0	Academic preparation
0	Lifelong learning/critical and creative thinking
0	Options for students
0	Meeting community needs
0	Size

METRO

Note: The Metro focus group was not asked to prioritize their themes.

THEMES IDENTIFIED
Alignment/integration
Employability
Relevant curriculum
Options
Transitions
Partnerships
Parent engagement
Student engagement
Increase respectability of technical education
Transitions
Expectation
Addressing full range of student needs
Time and resources
Culture of school
Accountability

ROME

# OF VOTES RECEIVED	THEMES IDENTIFIED
17	Funding
15	Student/everyone's expectations/understanding of what it takes
8	Parent involvement
7	Earlier interventions
6	Understanding the political nature of this endeavor
6	Flexibility in time it takes to complete
4	Attendance
4	Student motivation
2	Commonality of expectation/integration of academics and vocational
1	Schedules
1	Transitions: middle to high and high school to beyond
1	Meeting needs of special education students
0	Discipline
0	Race and class
0	Collaboration between secondary and post-sec ed.

VIDALIA

# OF VOTES RECEIVED	THEMES IDENTIFIED
18	Resources/Funding
11	Parent awareness, involvement, education
7	Social barriers to learning
7	Needs of the broad array of students
6	Early intervention
5	Expectations of/ load on teachers
4	Instruction- teaching different students differently
3	Needs of rural high schools
2	Preparation for careers, knowledge of, options
2	Communication between state dep't and practitioners
2	Role/use of technology
1	School structures and rules/regs
1	Clarifying expectations
1	Discipline/ Character
1	Continuity of improvement goals and effort
0	Administration overload/lack of authority
0	Collaboration, biz & community
0	Data- reporting and use
0	Relevant, hands-on, real-world instruction
0	Testing
0	Teacher preparation

APPENDIX B: COMMENTS BY FREQUENCY

Following is a listing of all comments captured in large group discussions across all eight focus groups. Analysts grouped comments by common topics.

Best Things

Teachers/Staff

1. Focused teachers
2. Strong faculty
3. Well trained faculty
4. Highly qualified teachers
5. Quality teachers
6. High quality, caring teachers
7. Dedicated faculty
8. Dedicated teachers
9. Dedicated, strong teachers
 - Collaborative planning time
 - Student focus
 - Pyramid of intervention
10. Teachers who are concerned and work hard to improve learning
11. Teachers lead school – programs are steeped in teacher-led issues
12. Teachers taking responsibility/ ownerships for students outside their curriculum
13. Teachers take responsibility for own professional development
14. Teachers talking to each other
15. Teachers are talking to each other about academics and expectations
16. Teachers who collaborate w/ higher ed to prepare new teachers
17. Increase of professional learning groups
18. Focus on standards looking and learning and not just teaching
19. Staff development
20. Professional development resources
21. Collaboration among teachers
22. Cross dept/cross unit communication
23. Relationships/lines of communication esp. between students, counselors, teachers
24. Teachers willing to support instruction after school
25. Great set of teachers who care about all kids
26. Teachers see themselves as more than subcontractors. Truly care about students.
27. Faculty and staff willing to come in early and stay late – beyond call of duty
28. Teacher commitment
29. Passion for teaching and learning
30. Teachers who are willing to sit down with you
31. Teachers who are willing to give time after school
32. Personal commitment. Adults must remain students – continuous learning.
33. Good admin/teachers who care and work with students
34. Counselors who care
35. Counselors part of team are involved in using data state moving toward ASCA model
36. School councils: professional learning communities
37. Coaches and mentors
38. Skilled and compassionate leaders, administrators, faculty and students [NOTE: also listed in section on Leadership]
39. Role models. Respectable
40. Good job of managing stress, esp. around testing – esp. stress teachers feel and not imparting to students

Specific Programs

1. 9th grade academy
2. Extra curricular activities
3. I-Parent program
4. HSTW effective
5. CSR Grant (Reform and technology)
6. Advanced placement
7. Welding program - outstanding
8. Strong gifted program
9. Mediators – students to students – “TLC”
10. Support for students who have failed a course – credit recovery. “Second chance”
11. Credit recovery
12. Warm-ups and essential questions – reflection and end of the day ie, what you learned that day
13. Learning focused lesson plans
14. After school peer tutoring
15. Future achievers – Program/grant – Identify at-risk students and support with interventions, programs, role models
16. Local ROTC program; turnaround for troubled students
17. Strong extra-curricular activities
18. 9th grade academy
19. Collaborate w/ YMCA and other community groups. Ex. swimming for P.E. and YMCA
20. Leadership retreat for students – use students as leaders in school
21. Teacher cadet program – recruit teachers, students get college credit
22. Summer programs – step to college (prepare students in multiple ways for college)
23. ROTC reaches some students
24. After Prom – teaching kids how to be safe productive, healthy
25. Summer scholars (7th and 8th grade at-risk students)
26. Graduation Express – extra help for students who haven’t passed parts of grad. exam
27. Online access to student grades, etc.
28. Parent online info
29. Honors program
30. Students given incentive to attend
31. Strong regional focus. Alternative school gives options
32. Non-traditional high school
33. Different programs. Availability of programs

Career and Technical Education

1. Emerging partnership w/ businesses help students learn about job opportunities and requirements; 1st hand knowledge; Makes curriculum relevant, about real life
2. Dual programs. Good teachers / Working in health care program – 3 years
3. Technical high school approach
4. Matching course work with real life experience.
5. Educating my children and preparing them for college. Creative programs between high school, colleges and tech prep.
6. Tech prep is alive and well. Good articulation between high school and colleges and technical colleges
7. Multiple focus
8. Preparing students on community and career, not just college
9. Technical career program
10. Tech prep articulated credit
11. Doing better to train young people to think of school as basis for developing your life, career, not just college
12. Work program – students interact in career
13. Tech-prep and dual enrollment

14. Apprenticeship program students can teach, work in occupations
15. Willingness of high schools to work with tech college
16. Dual enrollment; health occupation
17. Real-world

Partnerships/Collaboration

1. School and local industry working together
2. Strong relationship between high school and colleges through tech prep
3. Collaboration w/ other entities
4. Social work program
5. Inter-agency approach to serving youth
6. Networking between faculty community members
7. School-community relationship
8. Partners in education – Business/Community
9. School-community relationships
10. Collaboration
11. Positive relationships/collaboration with juvenile justice, and others
12. Communication between school and parents and community [Also listed in section on Parent Involvement]
13. Support from the community
14. Good community support for program, other than athletics
15. Positive relationship with business and other agencies. Partnership
16. Lot of stakeholders give input. Collaboration especially secondary and post secondary
17. Business community involvement in school

Curriculum

1. Diversity in course offerings – from career tech, AP, etc.
2. Diverse curriculum
3. Differentiating instruction – especially regular ed teachers
4. Strong organized, diverse, curriculum
5. AP classes
6. Strong school and county curriculum coordination
7. More attention on what and how we teach
8. Process of refining high school curriculum
9. AP classes
10. Diverse curriculum
11. Sound curriculum
12. Consistent with our curriculum

Climate

1. Admin. & staff truly concerned about well being of students
2. System concerned about kids
3. Behavior, sense of self in community improved
4. Orderly environment: good discipline
5. Order – Students know what is expected; day to day routine
6. Safe atmosphere
7. Attendance laws/focus on attendance
8. Athletes required to do study hall
9. Safe, nurturing environment with high expectations for all students
10. Sense of belonging by students

Data, Testing, Standards

1. Using data to track school, students
2. Teachers/administrators more of how to use data to drive instruction
3. Focus on data – know strengths and weaknesses

4. Teachers using results as positive diagnostic – using results to individualize instruction
5. Focus on test scores
6. Test scores higher
7. Know more about what makes schools successful how to support students using data
8. Alignment of standards with pre- and post-testing
9. Increase of use of data to drive student improvement/achievement

Leadership

1. Supportive board of education
2. Top-down support
3. Admin interested in all students succeeding even if outside of school structure
4. Support to teachers from admin – i.e., professional development
5. Strong leadership and teachers
6. High school principal is instructional leader
7. Quality administrators
8. Skilled and compassionate leaders, administrators, faculty and students [NOTE: also listed in section on Teachers/Staff]
9. Extreme willingness on part of leadership to help students graduate and be successful

Level of Expectations for Student Performance

1. Climate – culmination of state/local- expectations have been increased, students know expectations and know we care
2. Administration is posting/communicating about standards – students know that the expectations are
3. Emphasis on every child can achieve, learn and be successful
4. High expectations for learning for every student
5. Raising the bar
6. Challenging student on critical thinking skills
7. Common, shared vision of student success [Also listed in section on Sense of Common Purpose]
8. Expectation students will be respectful, responsible young adults
9. Strive for excellence (academic and career prep)

Student-Teacher Relationships

1. Students care for teachers
2. Student-teacher rapport
3. Admin who know their students by name
4. Interaction between teachers and students
5. Interaction between students and teachers – teachers offer help, students ask
6. Relationships

Options

1. Opportunities regardless of plans after high school
2. All career goals
3. Options for students to design what want to do
4. Opportunities (i.e., apprenticeships)
5. Offerings/multiple options for students
6. Existence of non-traditional high schools

Acceptance of need to change

1. Schools are carrying out mandates of those in authority (fed, state, local) w/ limited and diminished resources
2. General acceptance that we have to do better
3. Schools recognize they have problems and trying to solve them

4. Embracing change and staying positive
5. Spirit of continuous improvement
6. Looking at high school for improvement/Focus

Facilities and Resources

1. New facilities
2. Great school facilities
3. Adequate physical plant and materials
4. Cooperative buying options for services and tools. Regional sharing of resources
5. Facilities that provide infrastructure and technologies. More than adequate. Sense of future possibilities.
6. Technology, technology integration

Parent Involvement

1. Parents who are informed and involved
2. Open communication between parents, teachers, principals, and staff
3. Parental involvement with emphasis on academics
4. Parent involvement
5. Communication between school and parents and community [Also listed in section on Partnerships]

Student Outcomes

1. Decrease drop out rate
2. Lower drop outs
3. College bound students do very well
4. More AP offering preparing for college
5. Eliminated all lower level courses and students are achieving

Sense of Common Purpose

1. Mission of school, Clearly defined
2. Purpose, beliefs and values are same for stakeholders
3. Sense of oneness – one goal
4. Common goal in the school
5. Common, shared vision of student success [Also listed in section on Level of Expectations for Student Performance]

Transitions

1. Possibility for seamless articulation between high school and post secondary
2. Transitions within building
3. Transition middle – high school

Structure/Schedules

1. Block scheduling
2. Smaller schools / schools-within-schools

Miscellaneous

Great students
Football season – brings the community together
Football team
Diversity – children know how to deal w/diversity
Seeing students as individuals
Relationships
Sense of ownership
Extra and co-curricular activities

Diversity among students and faculty
Ability to adapt to changing diversity
Different perspectives
Hone in on need of students
Make kids want to come to high school
Note being tied to Title 20 rules
Support system for students
Support system
Higher attendance

Not Working

Student Outcomes

Drop Outs

1. 42% of kids who start kindergarten don't graduate and many adults are not educated
2. In better shape than ever, but students who fail early and never recover
3. High drop out rate
4. Not graduating enough students
5. 50% "casualty rate" in our high schools. Need same concern about this as we have about casualty rate in Iraq. Focus on perceived casualties in school.
6. Drop out rate. Why are they dropping out and what interventions
7. Dropout age 16. Too easy to drop out and move forward (e.g., Complete GED)
8. Graduation rates; retention
9. Drop out shouldn't be allowed until age 18
10. Need to keep kids in school and out of juvenile justice system too many go on path toward prison – need early interventions
11. Statewide, need more help w/ drop out prevention

Overall Outcomes Not High Enough Related to Preparation for College, Habits, Dispositions, and Life Skills

1. Inadequate preparation for many kids planning to go to college
2. SAT scores need to go up
3. Too many HS grads requiring remediation at post-sec level
4. Even college prep kids are lacking in essential life skills
5. Lack of good study skills
6. Students are not retaining information
7. Not expected to carry learning beyond
8. Quality of outcomes not good enough
9. Students not reading well
10. Work on critical thinking skills

Not Adequately Prepared for Workforce

1. Focus on college prep. Need other paths for students who are not planning to go to college.
2. Preparation for workforce
3. Not strong enough emphasis on supporting students' transition to world of work, not just college
4. Emphasis on one size fits all for students. Not enough emphasis on alternative training v college bound training
5. Academic rigor of career tech not strong enough. mismatch between academic rigor for college prep and occupation.
6. Career tech pathway not rigorous enough

7. State assumes everyone will go to a 4 year college not right for everyone – especially because applied classes are important but not recognized on tests
8. HS science test doesn't acknowledge applied science teach prep kids are now getting different instruction (college-bound)
9. Career tech kids don't see carry over from academic classes – feel disengaged not enough collaboration. Don't know how to help

Achievement Gaps

1. Closing achievement gap
2. Lower achievement of minority students
3. Achievement gap wide between white and black students
4. Achievement gap also between poor and wealthy. Who advocates for poor?
5. Young men are not succeeding at rate they should at the high school level, gender issue

School/System Outcomes

Use of Testing/Data

1. Testing too much
2. Don't need grad test to tell us what we already know
3. Not too much testing not right testing; More formative, less evaluative
4. Rely too much on lagging indicators – rear view use leading indicators
5. End of course testing sets up students at lower end for failure
6. Understand data and measure apples to apples
7. Too much testing and not enough authentic assessment
8. Over testing assessment
9. Lack of availability of student performance data
10. Teaching test v critical thinking
11. Students feel sometimes teaching to test may miss other good content
12. Immense curriculum, but testing makes it rigid – hard to be flexible especially. tech prep and also honors – not always applicable but test
13. Fairness of testing from state, not see changes in tests based on evidence – imbalance in subject.
14. Drop out rate not accurate
15. Info out before all facts in
16. Tracking student movement
17. Transient student population

External Influences Lower Student Performance

1. Vocabulary and home impacts student learning
2. Sex education not working. Teen pregnancy.
3. Meth use
4. Poverty
5. Lack of resources to deal with the whole child
6. Ignorance of counselors for available programs for non-traditional student
7. Break up of the American family
8. Drug culture in high school
9. Dealing with students with special needs especially mental health
10. New teachers do not know how to teach poorer students. Make concerted effort to help teachers understand students
11. Huge population of very poor students. Producing middle class teachers to teach poor students
12. Kids with no adult support in their lives. Networks of support needed far beyond academics
13. Too many kids working 40 hrs/week
14. Race relations
15. Generational behaviors, kids do what parent did

Schools Asked To Do Too Much

1. Teachers have too much to do teacher/student ratio too high
2. Too much expectation on schools to deal with multiple issues – i.e., respect that schools should focus on instruction
3. Too much going on too many distractions; non instructional activities
4. Time constraints. Teacher need more time to operate curriculum
5. Paperwork and duties too much
6. School too small not enough teachers teaching classes students need.
7. School systems have a lot of responsibility but little authority (DFACS and other state structures)
8. HS Principals have to deal too much with wrong things
9. Teachers have to take on role of parents. Teachers need more support. Too involved in too many things
10. Admin so tied up w/ some of behavioral problems that don't have time to be instructional leaders
11. Teachers do not have enough time to do what they are held accountable for

Parents Not Involved

1. Get to parents who have not succeeded
2. Make schools open, welcoming to them
3. Can't use parents as excuse, must work with who we have
4. Parent responsibility.
5. Schools to reaching parents
6. Parents not comfortable
 - Some are intimidated
 - Some were not successful themselves
7. Lack of parental guidance
8. Parents not involved enough – some good support and great kids, but we lose them
9. Parent support
10. Need more parental involvement at high school – beyond athletics

Teacher Attitude/Motivation

1. Support 1st yr teachers and support veteran teachers. Teachers often not willing to change
2. Not making teachers feel good about what they are doing
3. Working conditions, respect for teachers and administrators too low
4. Limited reward structure or ways to motivate struggling students within current structure
5. Not enough rewards for students who are doing well
6. Some teacher reluctant to change; holding on to old ways
7. So rigid with what we have to teach that we forget human side of teaching
8. Some teachers act like they don't want to teach the students. Attitudes of teachers.
9. Stress on teachers to do everything deficit to teacher morale

Need to Redefine Expectations

1. We've been working hard – question is whether the measure we're working toward is right
2. Need paradigm shift our product needs to be reinvented what is. Something that draws students in.
3. Certain educators who work from mental model that not all students can achieve
4. We've lost some kids before they come to high school low expectations by students, teachers
5. Teaching for post education
6. Preparing beyond high school
7. Students can go to work for mills in this area and do okay – don't see a different future
8. Student and parent expectations of job opportunities not realistic in the economy
9. Tracking system not working

Individualizing Education

1. Need to vary instruction to meet varying styles and background skills/knowledge
2. Teaching styles don't serve all kids
3. Kinesthetic learning, etc.
4. Connecting lesson to what matter
5. Don't determine how kids learn (though, we do in adult ed)
6. Not doing good job in identifying students' strengths, weaknesses and set realistic goals
7. Common mold for all students. But important to know who is coming into our schools and how to serve them.

Attendance

1. Students aren't in school
2. Lack of attendance by teachers, students, parents.
3. Lack of resources and commitment to enforce attendance
4. Attendance
5. Get kids to want to come to school
6. Dealing with attendance
7. Attendance problems – what to do to motivate kids to come to school – meet their needs

Funding/Resources

1. Funding/Mandates – Disconnect
2. Funding limits what schools can do
3. Lack of adequate finding for ESL and special education
4. Under-funded and unfunded mandates both federal and state
5. Under-funded federal mandates
6. Doing many system and admin jobs with limited resources
7. Problems keeping up with rapid change in technology

Schedule/Structures

1. Maybe start school later
2. Guidelines/requirement out of date – time, units, etc.
3. Delivery of services, configurations – diversify schedules, time how get teachers together, etc.
4. Rigid organizational structure
5. Still have students not graduating schedule still locked into 180 days
6. Can have scheduling problems – gaps in between courses, i.e. mathematics in some block schedules
7. It's hard for teachers to communicate when don't have common planning time

Not Serving ALL Students

1. Help for lower achieving; support for high achieving. What do we have for middle level and quiet students.
2. Few options for curriculum. AP or regular only options at times often no honor course options
3. No middle
4. Not enough being done for slow learners - different from special needs
5. Not meeting needs of all students when grouped together (special ed, no special ed.)
6. Maybe we have not designed a system for all students

Discipline

1. Discipline. Safety
2. Control those students disruptive
3. Discipline lack of order and discipline
4. Fear of litigation around discipline
5. Discipline – courts sometimes get cases that are not appropriate. More can be handled at school level – and it takes parent involvement schools need ability and willingness to deal with at school
6. Internal discipline by students needs improvement

Governance

1. Profession being governed by non professionals
2. Zero tolerance policies take away administrators' ability to look at each case
3. NCLB – fed government imposition of standards
4. Flawed governance models
5. Loss of authority

Teacher Preparation

1. Teacher training for college. (special education)
2. Too many alternatively certified teachers
3. Highly qualified and competent teachers
4. Teacher training too heavy on content and not pedagogy

Transitions

1. 9th grade – transitions to high school. 12th grade – slack off; lack of rigor
2. To improve high schools must look at elementary and middle schools
3. Drop out begin early. Need support K-12
4. Transition from middle school to high school. More support to students

Curriculum

1. Curriculum. Mile wide/ 3inches deep
2. Total disconnect between time spent in school and learning
3. Curriculum not always relevant to student career goals

Class Size

1. Class sizes growing.
2. Need smaller class sizes
3. Class sizes are too large

Special Education/Special Needs

1. Special ed students need better services
2. Special ed kids are left out
3. Kids get lost in system esp. those with special needs

Motivation

1. Bored students don't do well in courses below their level no reaching higher and lower level learning
2. Must make high school more enjoyable

Options

1. Students don't have enough options
2. Lack of choices for non-traditional student

Dealing with Growth

1. Growth. Keeping up with fast-paced growth
2. Plant structure. Facilities to accommodate growth.

Miscellaneous

1. Policy alignment between state and local sometimes hinder
2. Inadequate accountability system for teachers, admin, parents, and students
3. HOPE scholarships.
4. Belief system vs. actions. Disconnect between what we say and what we do.
5. We don't ask kids enough about high school

6. Not involving all stake holders in process
7. Not sticking with strategies and programs changing all the time. Messes up students' schedules.
8. Students expect us to take care of all their needs
9. Families fight when their child doesn't pass, won't walk
10. High school diploma doesn't always indicate students have skills necessary of a high school graduate

Expectations

Expectations for what students will get out of their high school experiences

Habits, Dispositions, and Life Skills

1. Take personal responsibility
2. Accept responsibility
3. Students take responsibility for all this
4. Sense of responsibility to community
5. Community service
 - Compassion, interest in issue around them, give back to community
6. Students understand their value to the community they have something to contribute
7. Understand/appreciate changing demographics at least know how to manage self in negotiate that setting
8. Students need to look at each other – encourage/help each other
9. Work ethic
10. Get to work on time
11. Ethic of going beyond what is expected
12. Ethics, character building
13. Tolerance, flexibility
14. Respect of self and others
15. Respect others
16. Students willing/able to question status quo, not be satisfied with status quo
17. Highly motivated and disciplined
18. Positive attitude
19. Part of a community
20. Prepared to function in democratic society
21. Function as citizen in society
22. Management of all resources – time, stress, etc.
23. Good time management skills
24. See bigger picture
25. Willing to do whatever it takes to do best at their job
 - Initiative
 - Punctuality
 - Able to take care of themselves
26. Adaptability skills
27. Social skills
28. Make good/informed decisions as adults, no matter their field
29. “Educated”, not just trained for a job, this should be defined clearly
30. Students who have had positive experiences and will become parents who emulate

Thinking/Learning Skills

1. Critical thinking
2. Critical thinking skills
3. Critical thinking skills

4. Know how to use knowledge
5. Resourceful problem solvers
 - know how to find, use/apply knowledge
6. Effective problem solvers
7. Think creatively
8. Ability to think
9. Ability to continue to learn
10. Lifelong learning
11. Foundation – know how to learn
12. Students must be trainable – have basic level of skill
13. Motivation (students)
14. Access and understand info

Career Readiness

1. Business readiness
2. Job readiness – realistic goals w/education as a key
3. Skills to go to work
4. Be successful in the global economy, understand it
5. Mentor relationships in workplace
6. Employable
7. Prepared for world of work – everyone
8. Productive, working citizens
9. Elevate stature of technical choices and help prepare students in technical centers

Communication Skills/English Language Arts

1. Writing and communication skills
2. Writing skills specifically able to write good 8 -10 sentence paragraph
3. All kids reading – at least at 6th grade level (so many incarcerated at 2nd grade level reading)
4. Communication skills able to interact with others
5. Verbal communication, have self understood
6. Being able to read – comprehend
7. Listen, verbal and written communication skills
8. Effective communicators
9. Literacy, communications skills

Options

1. Students need to know there are options
2. Show children they have a choice – ensure that everyone believes all are valid/important choices and that education is strong no matter what
3. Opportunity to find out what else is out there – know opportunities beyond high school believe they have options
4. Options – be able to function within them, many doors open to them, able to function in multiple settings
5. Options – prepared for college and world (dual seal)
6. Adequate basic skills so they can choose their next steps
7. Able to do whatever they want

Goals

1. Students who have the capacity to reach goals they set for selves and with adult leadership
2. Students who know what they want to do – and how to get there
3. Know early in high school what it takes/what to do/have done the pre-requisites
4. Able to set specific goals for selves have direction
5. Students have goals before they graduate
6. Have a plan, goals, and prepared to achieve it
7. Way/solution to be successful

Rigor

1. No matter choice of college or work, education must be rigorous – high expectations, one set of standards
2. Higher level courses for all students
3. Rigorous paths – many of them not just college
4. Applied math not “dumbed down” (also listed under “Mathematics/Science”)
5. Greater rigor for tech prep programs
6. High level skills, esp. reading, math, computer

Mathematics/Science Skills

1. Emphasis math/science
2. Algebra I in 8th grade
3. Basic math skills, at least
4. Understand how to manage finances
5. Numeracy
6. Applied math not “dumbed down” (also listed under “Rigor”)

College Readiness

1. Students have tools needed to stay/succeed in college
2. Academically prepared
3. Study skills
4. Able to enter post-secondary prepared
5. Prepared for a 4-year college

Technology Skills

1. Use technology
2. Know technology
3. Use and understand technology

Miscellaneous

1. Transition – all students into workforce, post-secondary education, etc.
2. Compete locally with other students
3. Test well or place high on SAT and other assessments, w/high school diploma and GED

Expectations for What High Schools Will Provide

Individualize

1. Understand students as individuals
2. Schools must meet needs of all students
3. Understand multiple intelligences
4. Develop stronger partnerships

Define outcomes

1. Schools let students know what they expect
2. High school must know its goals, how define success

Provide Options

1. More than just a diploma, need to clarify paths to college, to work
2. Prepare every child to make a choice at 12th grade, not be locked into a track at 9th grade

Graduation Rate

1. 95% who start in 9th grade, graduate

2. Keeping kids in school

How Well Are We Meeting Your Expectations?

Expectations of Students/Student Performance

Career Readiness

1. Almost on any measure, failing: Don't vote, don't love knowledge, not prepared for career or college (as taxpayer and parent) (also included in sections on "College Readiness" and "Habits, Dispositions, and Life Skills")
2. Not meeting expectations: Of work ethic, timeliness, understanding culture of work – not motivated to read/do research
3. Employability – just enough for entry level – some not ready (how to dress, to be on time, to interview, etc.)
4. Positive – moving away from memorization to problem solving/critical thinking
5. Not all graduates are prepared for post-secondary
6. Schools need to know better what "employability" means – get business community involved in defining outcomes – partnerships be more responsive to biz needs to align with curriculum and align assessments. (Note: SCANS report did this – GA did one then, too – business has been consistent need similar outcomes.)
7. Not all students will go on to post-secondary education – need to know selves, enter workforce
8. Note – jobs for people w/lower skills dwindling in numbers
9. We currently view tech-prep as less than college-prep
10. Not enough of both – huge rift between tech prep and college prep
11. Not enough opportunities to expand knowledge/ opportunities for culture
12. High schools don't focus on work ethic; job and social skills one reason technical colleges have in curriculum
13. Technical colleges give a work ethic score, generally graduates don't do so well
14. Room for improvement in attendance – esp. related to work ethic (also listed in section on Habits, Dispositions, and Life Skills)

College Readiness

1. Almost on any measure, failing: Don't vote, don't love knowledge, not prepared for career or college (as taxpayer and parent) (also included in sections on "College Readiness" and "Career Readiness")
2. Average college-prep student; most take remedial course in post-secondary
3. Too many students not prepared to technical college requirements/expectations
4. Too many students need remediation
5. Teachers not working on basics, i.e. learning how to write for next level work
6. AP offerings excellent to student
7. Don't have study skills
8. Preparing for post-secondary: also involves time management, etc.
9. Too many end up in adult education because not passing college entrance exams – even graduates
10. 1/3 of students at local college need remediation don't know decimals, fractions, etc. (also listed in section on Mathematics/Science)
11. Look at retention rates for students who enter post-sec – not indicate success for majority
12. Not enough opportunities for all classes (i.e., Latin) lack of well roundedness

Habits, Dispositions, and Life Skills

1. Almost on any measure, failing: Don't vote, don't love knowledge, not prepared for career or college (as taxpayer and parent) (also included in sections on "Career Readiness" and "Habits, Dispositions, and Life Skills")
2. Some students can work harder than others

3. Too many decisions out of students hands- not preparing well for citizenship
4. Not enough students involved in community/ civic orgs
5. Discipline – lack of
6. Regarding respect – is it the school’s responsibility? Some not sure, others believe it is everyone’s responsibility
7. Room for improvement in attendance – esp. related to work ethic (also listed in section on Work Readiness)
8. Social issues like accountability, work ethic, character building, need partnerships we don’t have – schools alone won’t change society – need better partnerships
9. Not doing well re: helping student work in terms/groups/ with others
10. Do some cooperative learning activities, but fewer as students get older, does happen in extra-curricular
11. Students have rights, not responsibilities – anywhere “the monster” breaks down students revert to their rights

Communication Skills/English Language Arts

1. High school, even college, graduates cannot communicate in writing – too many going through motions
2. Too many high school students at elementary level in reading and writing
3. Don’t know at high school level how to teach reading to struggling students
4. Somewhere in middle especially with regard to writing, communication, applying academic knowledge – we do see this from graduates from other states
5. Need more work on English Language Arts
6. Writing (especially) and speaking skills lacking

Technology

1. Re: technology – students expect it
2. Challenge in rural areas, urbans more prepared equipped; Except, some rural counties are supporting technology in classroom
3. We’re learning to use technology, but not integrating it well
4. Technology on a shoe string budget difficult to give them what they need resource problems, can’t have technology class with out computers.
5. Not doing well on technology

Mathematics/Science

1. Science classes not doing well
2. Mathematics performance too low
3. 1/3 of students at local college need remediation don’t know decimals, fractions, etc. (also listed in section on College Readiness)

Evidence of success mixed

1. Many who leave high school with diploma are successful
2. Graduation rate spells doom

Expectations of the System

Doing Well For Some Students, But Not Serving ALL Students

1. Still missing some students
2. Not doing well with students who will drop out we usually know who they are
3. Students who drop out have things to say... many intelligent kids drop out... teachers didn’t help, bored, counseled to drop out, threatened
4. Marginal kids – marginalized or on verge of marginalization (especially race, ethnic, poverty, native language) not serving well

5. Doing well for some, not others
6. Meeting needs of some students
7. Easier to cater to motivated students and not to others who might be struggling
8. Need support and system for students who aren't doing as well
9. High achieving doing well, others need more
10. The ones anointed as learners are fine
11. Two tiered system
12. Not well re: drop-outs
13. Individual needs of students, can do better address differences
14. Meeting needs of more kids then ever before but want to meet 100%
15. All students getting opportunity to test

Level of Expectations for Students

1. Expectations are higher
2. Expectation for many of our kids too low
3. Parent mindset re: expectations
4. Not enough collaboration between elementary, middle, high school teachers – especially re: expectations
5. Need to start expectations earlier (pre-k, elementary, middle)
6. Expectations (and curriculum) need to be aligned for all students
7. Complacent – accept that some students won't achieve
8. Expectations for some kids too low
9. Schools sometimes label students a “a bad child”
 - Need to label behaviors, not children
10. Should have one diploma – not give excuse for complacency

Teachers

1. Highly qualified requirements regarding special education teachers needs clarification
2. Equity in distribution of teachers, etc.
3. Teacher mobility to “better schools”
4. Teacher shortage
5. Too much for teachers to do beyond instruction
6. Re: technology – getting better because getting teachers prepared
7. Some teachers work harder than others
8. Effort is there among teachers and principals – can't find vertical structures for teaming – not statewide
9. Are teachers teaching the subjects they are trained in?

Resources

1. Teachers have to work with too many students don't have time to nurture their souls, etc.
2. Need to update book collections not inviting, dusty. Elementary level with Reading First has done that. Need to do for all classes, media centers
3. Schools are providing extra help
4. With resources we have, doing reasonably well, but struggle still with graduation – not doing well
5. Funding formula doesn't adequately address equity
6. Time/calendars – challenge when do interventions, planning caught in rigid policies
7. Not enough school social workers could help more
8. Need better funding

Relevance and Student Motivation

1. Students are bored, alternative setting not interesting them
2. Some business education programs in high school address, but not hitting all students, too often students don't understand importance of these classes
3. Parents are key to motivation, parents integral parts of process
4. We need to find out what motivates students and design work for them that is engaging, project –based
5. Self motivated, high achievers not necessarily supported – potential

6. Makes sense for students who see how learning relates to jobs

Policy and Regulations

1. Misalignment of policy, funding, PSC requirements (certification)
2. Too much information that regulations are not consistently interpreted
3. So much for schools to do don't get to see things all the way thru to end

Need for Measurement, Clear Vision

1. Too many blanket statements about schools and teaching
2. Need to know better where we are, how we are doing
3. Doing better than before

External Influences on Learning; At-Risk Students

1. So many special needs, personal issues i.e., teenage parents
2. Not well – drugs are a problem

Miscellaneous

1. Trying, but not there yet
2. Mixed bag – need constant improvement
3. Concern may go back to a tracking system
4. Schools are becoming “labeled,” i.e. “the best”
5. Don't organize our structures by student needs
6. Lots of politics in the way
7. Grouping makes it hard
8. Students worried that no one knows them
 - over time, people talk down to students from smaller schools
9. Hope Scholarships excellent
10. Don't keep Hope Scholarships
11. Parents have important role
12. Doing well considering all we try to do

Tinkering vs. Major Overhaul

Major Overhaul

1. Seen a lot come and go. Cyclical need resources, time and flexibility to do what we need. Keep what works and get rid of what doesn't. Overhaul.
2. Overhaul. Need resources. Provide teachers with training staff development
3. Overhaul. Look at best practices. Create time for educators and students to work through process not a new program.
4. Total reform. Teachers cannot do one more thing. Replace it with priority.
5. Total redesign to meet needs of students today.
6. Radical change needed. But do not change every 3 yrs or so. Commit to change for longer than 3 yrs.
7. We've been tinkering long enough, radical change
8. Base overhaul change on research and not a political agenda
9. Overhaul
 - Redesigning roles of all stakeholders
 - Requires a lot of time, resources, depth, thinking to make work

About the right amount of change

1. 2 phases – enter by tinkering (necessary because of politics then more to major change); then not reform but transform

2. Not for complete overhaul. Some reforms good (GPS, testing, alt. Program). More than tinkering but not overhaul = Remodeling (Consensus of that focus group)
3. Need to take step toward major change but politics are in the way
4. Headed on right track with Kathy Cox. Use of data is helping

Tinkering

1. Tinkering around the edges about the right stuff
2. Employers expect the basics
3. Must talk and tinker but must have plan

Things to consider in the change process

1. Looking at systems. Not looking at concept that needs to be changed because we're ruled by people who have never done our jobs
2. Look at front end (K-8) to make effective change, the whole system then changes
3. Do not impose new initiative and change every 5 years. Allow us to address present need of our students
4. Focus on professional learning opportunities.
5. Getting tougher to recruit HS teachers in content areas.
6. Rethink how we might use the day. More time during school year to work effectively through process. Improve the quality of personnel. Flexibility with school day and year.
7. Buy in by Governor, Secretary of Education, and so on
8. Boards of education may be condoning mediocrity
9. Buy-in from parents needed to change culture; mindset of how teaching viewed
10. Greater accountability by student
11. Start at bottom; grassroots. Teachers, students up to legislators, governor, etc.
12. Re-structure from elementary on up
13. Make sure there is follow up
14. Go forward w/the ideas, take the hit and make the changes
15. Get federal government involved in change. Feds must be on same page if state and local redesign to work – Requires buy-in, ownership by all

What's Missing from the Conversation

Student Needs

1. Interventions that really respond to students' needs, especially those who drop out
2. Programs for at-risk students directly affects completion
3. Address breakdown in American family
4. Youth development
5. Students are working at jobs late and not able to concentrate
6. Needs of non-native speakers
7. Address multiple intelligences
8. Middle range students who fall through the cracks
9. Special education students' needs. Realistic standards must be set

Funding/Resources

1. \$/funding
2. As we increase rigor, need to increase support
3. Un/under-funded mandates
4. Funding mechanism
5. Resources spent on gifted v special education
6. \$ funding to implement ideas, extra programs
7. Funding

8. No overnight fix. More time. More commitment. Time to use data to make change.

Teacher Needs

1. Time built into year for more training for teachers
2. Make sure high school teachers have the professional development and skills to meet all needs using right tools in instructional methods
3. Teachers don't have time to be professionals (collaborate with each other, etc.)
4. Teacher preparation
5. Teacher pupil ratio/relationship to student success
6. What are we doing to grow more teachers and admin in Georgia

Politics and Governance

1. Politics
2. State school board should do what's right for the students and not hide behind politics. No more excuses and lip service.
3. Turf protection
4. Governance issues
5. Lack of criteria for school board membership

Structure/Schedule

1. Changing time/structure of how we operated
2. Common scheduling [illegible] state
3. Discussion of year round schools
4. Starting schools at same time. Common schedule
5. Flex scheduling for students

Earlier intervention; Elementary to middle to high

1. We've lost a lot of children before they come to high school. Look at supports earlier
2. Wish: More collaboration elementary – middle – high
3. Meaningful change in high school means change through K-12 and the whole system

Technology

1. Where does technology fit in process
2. Role of technology as tool and opportunity for students and support for tech in schools
3. Quality of technology resources

Role of Sports and Extra Curriculars

1. Too much emphasis on sports
2. Sports culture
3. Extra curricular activities

Miscellaneous

1. Comprehensive leadership development
2. Purpose of high school – define
3. Context – rural, suburban high school needs; Should be core but also contextualize
4. Are students willing to do what they need to get job they desire?
5. Job interview fair / Resumes, interview skills, etc.
6. Relevance to our world is the focus, not to student's world
7. Parental involvement
8. Resistance to change by parents, students, teachers for changing high school systems
9. Business model doesn't work for education
10. In large schools not enough space or opportunity to participate
11. Home schooling
12. AP/Honors

APPENDIX C: REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCIES

Georgia's 16 Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESA) hosted the Focus Groups on High School Redesign. The RESAs serve the state's school districts and assist the State Department of Education in promoting its initiatives. The agencies were established primarily for the purpose of sharing services designed to improve the effectiveness of the educational programs of member school systems and to provide direct instructional programs to selected public school students. In addition, RESAs inform systems of innovation and gather research on local and statewide programs.

Central Savannah River Area

Chattahoochee-Flint

Coastal Plains

First District

Griffin

Heart of Georgia

Metro

Middle Georgia

North Georgia

Northeast Georgia

Northwest Georgia

Oconee

Okefenokee

Pioneer

Southwest Georgia

West Georgia

APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Collectively, the Georgia High School Redesign Focus Groups attracted 255 participants. The largest showing was the group in Dearing on Wednesday, September 21, with 35 participants. The smallest showing was in Griffin on Tuesday, August 30, with 12 participants. (The focus group in Griffin took place the morning after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast. In a related weather system, a number of tornadoes touched down just outside of Griffin. The weather stood in the way of participation by a large number of stakeholders who were expected to attend the Griffin focus group session.)

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS BY LOCATION

Group Location	Number of Participants
Atlanta	29
Dearing	39
Fort Valley	18
Griffin	12
Homer	42
Lenox	39
Rome	50
Vidalia	26
TOTAL	255

Twenty-eight superintendents, eight central office staff, 27 principals, 23 teachers, 21 students, and 16 RESA staff members attended the groups. In addition, 20 participants identified themselves as higher education faculty or administration. Sixteen participants identified themselves as either a school social worker or social services staff, 13 participants identified themselves as parents, another 13 as juvenile justice staff, seven as business or industry representatives, and six as community members. (Some participants identified themselves as filling more than one stakeholder role. For example, some teachers are also parents). Forty-four participants did not identify themselves or chose “other” and did not elaborate.

Atlanta

Trina Boteler	Debbie Kachnic Parent	Don Remillard Superintendent
Judson Bridges High school teacher	James Kahrs High school principal, Higher ed faculty/ administrator	Chris Ritchie High school student
Rob Brown High school principal	Elaine (Cookie) Keene	Larry Roberts
Julian Carter, Jr. Community member	Christa Kirksey-Huggins Social services staff/School social worker	Anthony Smith
Kristen Douglas Higher ed Faculty/administrator	Jane Huntley	Dr. Tom Travis Higher ed Faculty/administrator
Frank Flowers Juvenile Justice staff	Elaine Lunsford	Pam Walker High school teacher
Pat Hannon Higher ed faculty/ administrator	Valerie McClendon Parent	Sharion Washington Juvenile Justice staff
Katie Hart Social Services staff	Jenny McDade Juvenile Justice staff	David Whitfield
Shirley Hicks	Janice McLeroy	Tonya Whitlock GED staff
Scott Johnson High school student	Dr. Barbara Pulliam Superintendent	

Dearing

Saketha Adams
GED staff

Michael Akes

Lillian Agel
Busines/Industry rep

Warnell Anthony
School social worker

Becky Barden
High school principal

M. Nanette Barnes
Central office staff

Richard Beal
RESA staff member

Carl Bethune
School social worker

Nancy Blount
School social worker

Princess Clarke
Other

Hayward Cordy
Superintendent

Linda Cowan

Susan Cross
GED staff

Thomas Deering
School social worker

Gloria Gabriel
RESA staff member

Christy Gardner
High school teacher

Hank Griffeth
School social worker

Sherie Hall
High school teacher

Blair Harshbarger
High school student

Donna Hinton
Superintendent

Molly Howard
High school principal

Linda Irwin-DeVitis
Higher education faculty/
administrator

Amber Johnson
School social worker

Ginny Kasper

David McGrath
Parent

Greg Minor
High school student

Judy Minor
GED staff GED teacher

Randy Smith
High school teacher

Patty Phillips

Felton Poole
Parent School social worker

Magen Roberts
High school student

Mike Rowland
High school principal

Patricia Saxon
RESA staff member

Debra Smalley
RESA staff member

Gene Trammell
Superintendent

Margaret Tutt Adams
Juvenile Justice staff

Frances Veal
Other

Michael Walker

Jim Willis
Superintendent

Fort Valley

Bob Beaver
Higher education
faculty/administrator

Victoria Bell
High school student

Stephanie Buford
Other School social worker

Phil Curtis
RESA staff member

Dianne Damron
Parent

Jerry Gray
High school principal, high
school teacher

Jacob Gresham

Amy Holloway
Higher education
faculty/administrator

Mike Mattingly
Superintendent

Richard McConkle
Superintendent

Dalton Oliver
Superintendent

LaToya Stocker
Higher education
faculty/administrator

Gail Swain
Central office staff

Russell Thomas III
Higher education
faculty/administrator.

Meredith Walker
RESA staff member

Lettie Watford
Higher education
faculty/administrator

Craig Wentworth
Higher education
faculty/administrator

Doris Wilkinson
Central office staff

Griffin *

Melinda Atha
Business/Industry
representative, parent

Rodney Bowler
High school principal

Amber Collins
High school student

Rita Collins
Parent

Gina Ficklen
Parent

Dr. Stephanie Gordy
RESA staff member

Y. Holmes
Higher education faculty/
administrator

Kathy Love
Higher education faculty/
administrator

Juanda Ponsell
Juvenile justice staff

Ashley Price
High school teacher

Janice Tarleton
GED staff, Adult literacy

Ronnie Williams
RESA staff member

* The focus group in Griffin took place the morning after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast and in a related weather system, a number of tornadoes touched down just outside of Griffin. The weather stood in the way of participation by a large number of stakeholders who were expected to attend the Griffin focus group session.

Homer

Sandy Addis
RESA staff member

Lynn Akeley-Alderman
Parent Juvenile Judge

Mitchell Barrett
School board member, Site
Director MEC

Trudy Beadley
Busines/Industry rep

Sandra Bennett
High school principal

Todd Bentley
Juvenile Justice staff

Beverly Brown

Douglas Brown

Rick Brown
High school principal

Tonya Cochran
High school student

Riess Cook

Paula Early-Adams
Other, school Social Worker

Lynn Elmore
Parent

Esmeralda Estrada

Chris Erwin
Superintendent

Melanie Getman
Parent

Ken Greene
Other school social worker

Jimmy Herring
High school teacher

Connie Hold
High school teacher

Carol Howard
Higher education faculty/
Administrator

Diana Kinard
Other school social worker

Richard Krise
RESA staff member

Samuel Light
Superintendent

Emily Martin
High school student

James McCoy
Superintendent

Wayne McIntosh
High school principal

Bob Michael
Higher education faculty/
administrator

Bryan Miller
High school student

Melinda Quinn
Community member

Laura Riffin

Janie Rodgers
Higher education faculty/
administrator

Karol Scarborough
High school teacher

Paul Shaw
Superintendent

David Shumake
Central office staff

Clifton Smith
Higher education faculty/
administrator

J. Mark Smith
Busines/Industry representative

Crystal Teasley
Juvenile Justice staff

Carroll Turner
Busines/Industry
representative, Parent

Amy Wheeler

Marcia Williams
RESA staff member

Mark Wilson
High school principal

Shelby Wood
GED staff

Lenox

Charles Bell High school principal	John Harper Superintendent	Reginald Phillips High school principal
Crystal Boone High school student	Jessica Hodge High school student	Fred Rayfield Superintendent
Michael Cantebery Juvenile Justice staff	Pam Jackson Superintendent	Roy Reeves
Harold Chambers	Bob Jones High school principal, parent	Anthony Smith High school principal
Mike Davis High school teacher, parent	Tara Jones High school teacher, parent	Jerry Smith GED staff
Frank Delaney High school principal	Linda Lawrence Central office staff	Staci Smallwood High school teacher
Earl Denham Busines/Industry representative	Beth Lewis Other	Janelle Taylor Social services staff
Brett Drawdy High school teacher	Joe Lewis Community member	Woody Thompson Other
Mike Duck High school principal	Lela McKellar High school student	Shawn Utley Higher education faculty/ administrator, parent, and community member
Renee Fletcher High school student	Jeri Michie GA DOE staff member	Amber Ware High school teacher
Charlie Gibson Other Tech Prep Coordinator	Mavis Miller Social services staff	Richard Wheeler Superintendent
Kechia Graves Central office staff	Whit Moorman Other school social worker	Mark Wilcox High school principal
Larry Green Superintendent	Mike Parker High school principal	
Bobby Griffin Superintendent		

Rome

David Avery	Linda Herman	Dinah Rowe Busines/Industry rep
Davena Baxter-Baggett Other school social worker	Al Hodge	Ruthy Sakini-Woody Social services staff, Central office staff
Dr. L. Ron Brooks, President Higher education faculty/ Administrator	Jared Ivey High school student	Don Schroeder
Roger Bryant Social Services staff, parent, and community member	Linda Kulik Other school social worker	Jane Scott Central office staff
Brad Butler Juvenile justice staff	Mima "Gina" Linder High school teacher	Lee Segars High school principal
William Clark	Ashley Little High school student	Alecia Segursky High school teacher
Melody Day Superintendent	Stanley McCain Superintendent	Lee Shiver Superintendent
Michael Davis Superintendent	Duane McManus High school principal	Shelly Smith
J. Tygar Evans High school principal	Gary Mealer High school principal	Trudy Sowar Superintendent
L.C. (Buster) Evans Superintendent	Bill Mitchell	Sue Spivey
Allen Fort High school principal	J. Moore Superintendent, community member	Stephen Stewart Other, Floyd County Administrative Intern
Theresa Fowler Parent, PTA officer	Dr. Whitney Myers Superintendent	Mandy Sturdivat High school teacher
Catherine Fricks Juvenile Justice staff	J. Randy Pierce Higher education faculty/ administrator	Dale Tuck High school teacher
Susan Goethe Central office staff/ Coordinator K-12 counselors	Charlotte Pipkin Superintendent	Mona Tucker RESA staff member
Larry Harmon RESA staff member	Chuck Pittman	Marty Turner High school principal
James Henson Middle school principal, Juvenile justice staff member	Alexander Rainey	Karen Vines Community member
	Caleb Rodgers High school student	Paige Welch High school teacher

Vidalia

Jeff Alligood
Juvenile justice staff

Stephen Ballard
High school student

Missy Bennett
Higher education faculty/
Administrator

Virginia Bennett
High school teacher

Flora Bryant
RESA staff member

Ron Bryant
RESA staff member

Jeff Cannon
Community member

Debbie Connell
Community member

Nicole Crabb
High school student

Timothy Deep
High school principal

John Dixon
High school student

Ronald Dixon
High school principal

Barry Dotson
Other postsecondary/college

Jeanette Goff
High school teacher

Shirley Hayes
Juvenile Justice staff, parent

John Kappes
Social services staff

Adam Kennedy
Juvenile justice staff

Lisa McGalliard
Parent

Ken Murphy
High school teacher

Jamie Patterson
High school student

C. Pittman
GED staff

Pamela Pittman
Social services staff

Lynn Rogers
RESA staff member

C. Scott
Higher education faculty/
administrator

Rae Spradley
Parent

Ann Toole
High school teacher

APPENDIX E: ADVISORY PANEL PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Eloise Barron, Director, Curriculum and Instructional Services

Mr. Stuart Bennett, Chief Deputy State School Superintendent

Dr. Gene Bottoms, Senior Vice-President, Southern Regional Education Board

Ms. Marlene Bryar, Director, Exceptional Students

Mr. Melton Callahan, Executive Director, Georgia Association of Secondary School Principals

Ms. Ann Cramer, Director, IBM Corporate Community Relations

Dr. Steve Dolinger, President, Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education

Mr. Herb Garrett, Executive Director, Georgia School Superintendent Association

Dr. Michael Hall, Deputy State School Superintendent, Information Technology

Mr. Martez Hill, Director, Policy

Ms. Wendy Hughes, Director, Teacher Quality

Mr. John Hulst, Director of Learner Support

Dr. Sharron Hunt, Director, Testing Division

Ms. Clara Keith, Director, Title I

Dr. Jan.Kettlewell, Associate Vice-Chancellor of Academic Affairs, University System of Georgia

Dr. Ida Love, Deputy State School Superintendent, Curriculum and Instruction

Ms. Julie Moore, Graduation Specialist

Ms. Deb Page, Director, Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement

Dr. Jim Puckett, Executive Director, Georgia Association of Educational Leaders

Dr. Martha Reichrath, Executive Director, Governor’s Office of Student Achievement

Ms. Charlotte Robinson, Educational Program Manager, AP/PSAT/SAT

Mr. Neil Shorthouse, President, Communities In Schools of Georgia, Inc.

Ms. Alice Smith, Program Manger, Reading and Middle Schools

Ms. Vivian Snyder, Educational Program Specialist

Ms. Trudy Sowar, Superintendent, Paulding County School Systems

Dr. Splinter, Executive Director, Georgia Association of Middle School Principals

Dr. Ralph Swearngin, Executive Director, Georgia High School Association

Dr. Jeanie Weathersby, Deputy State School Superintendent, Teacher and Student Support

Ms. Elizabeth Webb, Director, Innovative Academic Programs

APPENDIX F: EVALUATIVE DATA

These data were compiled from focus group participants' evaluation forms.

NUMBER OF EVALUATIONS RETURNED	
206	Total
25	Atlanta
35	Dearing
15	Fort Valley
12	Griffin
31	Homer
28	Lenox
31	Rome
29	Vidalia

General Characteristics – Processes used; chance to be heard; motivational aspects, on the scale 1=Poor; 3=Average; 5=Excellent

AVERAGE RATINGS	
4.42	Overall
4.47	Atlanta
4.31	Dearing
4.6	Fort Valley
4.51	Griffin
4.33	Homer
4.35	Lenox
4.29	Rome
4.70	Vidalia

Delivery – Agenda; mix of small and large discussions; amount of time; facilitation; customer service; meeting times, on the scale 1=Poor; 3=Average; 5=Excellent

AVERAGE RATINGS	
4.23	Overall
4.08	Atlanta
4.16	Dearing
4.48	Fort Valley
4.10	Griffin
3.79	Homer
3.69	Lenox
4.17	Rome
4.54	Vidalia

Materials – Usefulness; Quality; Quantity; Readability and Organization, on the scale 1=Poor; 3=Average; 5=Excellent

AVERAGE RATINGS	
4.40	Overall
4.21	Atlanta
4.24	Dearing
4.47	Fort Valley
4.48	Griffin
4.13	Homer
4.37	Lenox
4.34	Rome
4.47	Vidalia

Facilities and Logistics – Registration; facilities; sound quality; seating; view of participants, facilitators, screen, and flip charts, on the scale 1=Poor; 3=Average; 5=Excellent

AVERAGE RATINGS	
4.40	Overall
4.32	Atlanta
4.31	Dearing
4.52	Fort Valley
4.64	Griffin
4.12	Homer
4.65	Lenox
4.12	Rome
4.72	Vidalia

Met the Goals? – Goals: To articulate what is working in Georgia’s high schools; generate ideas for improvement; and identify challenges to improvement, on the scale 1=Poor; 3=Average; 5=Excellent

AVERAGE RATINGS	
4.00	Overall
3.79	Atlanta
3.77	Dearing
4.49	Fort Valley
4.47	Griffin
3.69	Homer
3.79	Lenox
4.10	Rome
4.44	Vidalia

Quotations:

- “I think D.O.E is committed to improvement of high schools.” (central office staff)
- “Yes I think my voice will be heard in Atlanta after 37 years.” (high school principal)
- “Overall, I really learned great ideas for improving and validation for my own work!” (high school principal)
- “Great job. Enjoyed the process. Enjoyed hearing about overall good and worries. Helps me as a parent get beyond just my own concerns” (parent)

Words of Improvement:

- “I think our voices will be heard. I am skeptical about what changes it may bring about.”
- “More time; we only "touched" on anything. A snap shot is not adequate for making decisions.”
- “More teachers involved, more students involved, needed to include high school dropouts and at-risk students, and policy makers also should be present.”
- “Possibly some intimidation to speak freely with D.O.E. and so many educators present.”

APPENDIX G: WHO IS MISSING FROM OUR CONVERSATION?

Focus group organizers invited a broad cross-section of participants to the sessions. While a great deal of diversity was present among the focus group participants, there were some stakeholder groups that were not well represented among the final attendees. As one way to gather data about the participants who needed to be included in future sessions, focus group participants were asked to identify the stakeholders *they* felt were either not present in their individual focus group or not present in sufficient numbers to ensure broad representation.

One repeated theme in the responses from focus group participants was the need for more student voices, and in particular for the voices of students who are not succeeding well in the current system. The question of racial diversity among focus group participants was not often raised, though the participants in the focus groups were overwhelmingly white. When organizing future focus group events, organizers should put an extra effort into ensuring the stakeholders identified as missing in these sessions have representation. The following table shows stakeholder groups identified by individual focus group participants.

STAKEHOLDERS MISSING FROM THE INDIVIDUAL FOCUS GROUPS
Other agencies need to be here – family supports, higher education, etc.
Greater student voice
Average students as well as great students. Also non completers.
Listen to more, broader, more diverse student voices
Missing struggling students here today
Listen to former students
High school principals and teachers
Need more high school faculty participation
School board membership – need their voice
Get commissioners and legislators in on the front end – they control the \$\$
Techies
Immigrant population
Teacher education programs
More parents in meeting/focus group, diverse students, business



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