

What actions the Department of Education has taken during the last two years (2014-2015 and 2015-2016) to reverse the downward spiral of failure?

Expanding Support to Opportunity-eligible Schools

When I took office in January 2014, the OSD/Amendment 1 debate was in the early stages of discussion. With a pending political resolution on this matter some two years into the future, the fact remained that we had schools underperforming within our state. I immediately turned my focus on the structure, organization, resources, and priorities of the Department. I found that the Department lacked vision, a mission, and was not working from a strategic plan that focused on what would help students, teachers, leaders, parents, and schools. I charged my staff with providing support to all OSD-eligible schools. At that time, 57 OSD-eligible schools were not even on the Priority or Focus school lists – meaning 57 schools had not been receiving support from the Department.

The Achievement Gap that Exists in Our Districts and Schools

In the past, our state’s educational efforts have largely focused on setting high expectations for districts, schools, and students and developing accountability models to ensure they meet those expectations. This culture has been rooted in compliance – checking boxes, monitoring, and counting. For many districts and schools, there exists a gap between the high expectations that have been laid out and those accountability models. This ‘achievement’ gap is what is keeping our schools from meeting their full potential. Our highest performing districts and schools have bridged this gap with a strong system of supports; however, many of our districts and schools do not have the capacity, skill set, or stability to lay this foundation of supports. Under my direction, the culture of the Department has begun the shift from one rooted in compliance to one focused on closing the achievement gap through a service and supports model strategic plan with a powerful focus on pinpointing what impacts schools and interferes with academic success.

Providing Service and Support

The Department has repositioned staff and resources in creating tools that will provide quality support to districts and schools, based on a thorough assessment of the achievement gap:

- **L4 Literacy Plan** – This plan provides a comprehensive approach to improving literacy outcomes for kids because we learned that many of our students cannot read proficiently by the third grade. Based on the academic success of the Striving Reader schools, this plan focuses on how to scale up and sustain these best practices and supports across the state.
- **Consolidated Funds Pilot** – Starting work with our second cohort of districts, this strategy affords district maximum flexibility that is allowable by state and federal law to utilize federal funds on proven effective practices that will ensure that schools will improve academic outcomes.
- **Counselor Companion** – A powerful tool for counselors to enhance their support of students and provide information to parents. This tool ensures that students are taking

coursework that aligns with their interests and strengths, keeps them on track to graduation, and provides post-secondary planning features for students and parents.

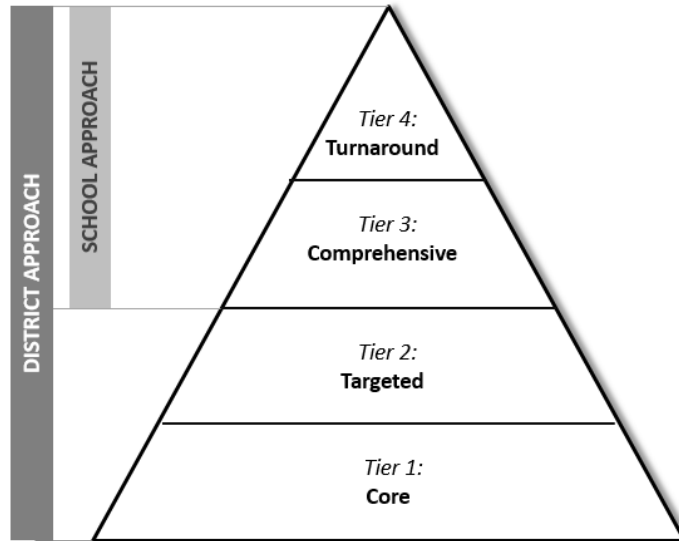
- **Career Coach Pilot** – Working with Rockdale County, the Department is piloting a program that provides career-focused support for middle and high school students because students with a career focus have a high graduation rate.
- **Teacher Resource Link (TRL) Redesign** – The Department worked with elementary school teachers to redesign the interface of our online library of resources making it easier for teachers to find high-quality, standards-aligned resources. Our Curriculum and Instruction division is adding K-5 ELA and Math resources to the TRL with additional divisions adding K-5 focused content in the months ahead.
- **Teacher’s Essentials Toolkit** – This tool will show beginning teachers or those new to a grade level or content area how resources, such as teacher guidance documents, testing blueprints, professional learning modules, etc., fit together to form a high-quality instructional program.
- **Data Visualization Project** – The Department is working with five districts to develop tools to help them visualize their data so they can layer multiple pieces together to identify problems, develop strategies, and evaluate results. An emphasis is being placed on data literacy, which helps districts use data to help teachers be more effective and to pinpoint the needs of students, as well as to determine what teacher methods are the most successful.
- **Personalized Professional Learning** – The Department is reexamining how we are delivering professional learning. We know one-size-fits-all doesn’t work for our students and it doesn’t work for our teachers or leaders either. We’re developing ways to deliver professional learning in a more effective, customized, and sustainable way.
- **Grades 1 and 2 Literacy/Numeracy Assessments** – The Department has worked with partners and stakeholders to develop an integrated assessment that can be used to improve instruction. Not only will it show parents, students, and teachers where their students are academically, it will also provide interactive, skill building activities to increase teacher effectiveness.

A Tiered Approach to Supporting Schools

It has been common practice for districts and schools to receive support from the Department only after they have been placed on an underperforming list. This reactive approach limits our shared responsibility and does not prevent issues before they happen. Under my direction, the Department is finalizing a tiered system of supports for *all* schools.

Tier 1 includes core supports (resources, tools, guidance, etc.) that the Department will provide to every school. Tiers 2 and 3 will complement the federal definitions of targeted and comprehensive schools. Tier 4 will be designated for turnaround schools. As schools are placed on different tiers, they will be given more intensive and tailored interventions and supports. As we define these tiers, we will be asking the legislature for additional funds and will be repositioning staff and funding within the Department. This is a comprehensive and proactive approach that has never been done by the Department or any entity within our state. It will stop the “downward spiral of failure.” Though HB 338 proposes to create additional positions and resources to serve turnaround schools,

it is imperative to intervene long before schools begin to underperform and are labeled as failing. The four Tiers are illustrated below.



<i>Status Quo Model – Compliance & Consequence</i>	<i>A New Approach – Service & Solutions</i>
Reactive. Schools are only served once they are identified and placed onto a list. Doesn't prevent additional schools from becoming chronically failing.	Proactive. All schools are served with a system of tiered supports and services with Tier 1 'Core' supports provided to all schools and more intensive, tailored supports given to schools at higher tiers.

The tiered approach will also include a monitoring status, recognizing schools that are on an upward trajectory of achievement but haven't yet met the criteria to exit. Once schools have a plan in place and can demonstrate progress, the Department will monitor the implementation of those plans. Even though these schools are on the Chronically Failing list, they are moving in an upward trajectory. In fact, on the current Chronically Failing list, 23 schools we've directly served have a CCRPI of less than 60 but have an upward trajectory on CCRPI. This feature will ensure that interventions that are showing promise are given the opportunity to progress, instead of an approach that switches interventions based on a checklist or unproven formula.

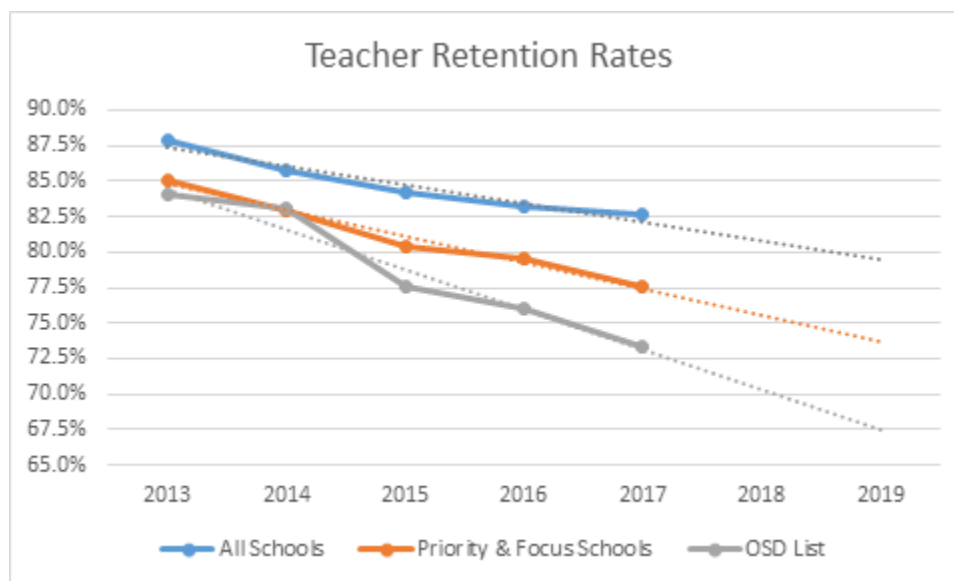
<i>Status Quo Model – Compliance & Consequence</i>	<i>A New Approach – Service & Solutions</i>
All or nothing approach. Schools are either on a list or not and there is no recognition for schools that are making progress	Recognizing progress. Schools that are on a list but are making progress are given a monitoring status. The Department will support the existing model and not mandate a different intervention unless or until progress slows.

Focusing on Solutions

To truly customize and target our support for underperforming schools, we must engage stakeholders. In that spirit, I will be inviting stakeholders from all invested groups – members of the education, business, and faith communities, as well as families – to participate in a “Solutions Summit” to have candid conversations about underperforming schools and develop a framework where all parties, including the Department, have an essential role. This event is scheduled for May. We are partnering with the Georgia Partnership for Education Excellence to organize the summit. A former member of the State Board of Education and a turnaround principal from Atlanta Public Schools (APS) are chairing the event. I feel this collaborative effort that is focused on candid conversations and commitments is critical to the success of any education reform effort.

Building the Capacity of Leaders, Teachers, and Communities

With identified schools having a lower teacher retention rate than all schools, building capacity to address this problem is key. Providing schools with a common needs assessment, interacting with schools in a cohesive way through a common framework, and delivering Tier 1 supports ensures a strong foundation for leaders to address the needs of teachers and frees them up to focus on layering supports that meet the individual needs of their students. Experience has shown us that the churn of leaders and teachers at these schools has led to a rebuild or restart of Tier 1 supports. Then leaders and teachers can layer additional supports to address the individual needs of schools and students – efforts that many leaders and teachers of these schools are not typically able to fully focus on or realize. Research shows that teacher retention rates are linked to school climate. Through the expansion of our Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, schools are identifying and addressing factors that enhance school climate so that teachers and students feel engaged, connected, and supported. The following chart illustrates Georgia’s growing problem with teacher retention.



Growing Leaders

Leadership is another critical element of addressing the issue of underperformance. Recently, I met with the Chancellor of the University System of Georgia to discuss teacher and leader preparation. I am committed to ensuring that our incoming teachers and leaders are acclimated and aware of tools, resources, and systems provided by the Department to support efforts in our schools. Not only do I think this will help increase retention rates, but I also believe it will empower these professionals. Through our work with Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), there are ongoing discussions around establishing leadership academies and/or a leadership corps that can work directly with leaders of our lowest-performing schools.

Our teacher and leader evaluation systems focus disproportionately on compliance. The Department is building teacher-specific and leader-specific evaluation components so teachers and leaders understand the elements necessary to be effective. These are structured to identify and clarify how teachers and leaders can improve.

Often when discussing leadership, the scope is narrowed to principals or superintendents, but there are leaders that need to be identified and supported at all levels. There are teacher, parent, student, and community leaders that need to be brought into and engaged with our leadership efforts. For example, as part of the new science standards rollout, the Department has formed a Science Ambassadors program that has identified master science teachers to deliver professional learning and be the point person for districts and schools. These ambassadors receive support from the Department, but also are given the flexibility to address specific areas of need. The group then shares those tools and resources among all ambassadors. This transforms the delivery of science to students while at the same time recognizing teachers as leaders.

The Department will continue its efforts to seek out partnerships with professional organizations and school districts to create personalized professional learning for current and prospective leaders so that districts and schools have a strong pipeline of talent.

A Common Needs Assessment that Aligns Efforts and Resources around Common Goals

Before I came to the Department, school districts had to complete a separate needs assessment for each federal program. This process was structured around compliance and a checklist before school districts could have access to federal funds. I immediately asked staff to study how to link federal funds around school improvement goals by consolidating the needs assessment. Consequently, the Department developed a Comprehensive Needs Assessment that is aligned to the school improvement framework which helps school districts thoroughly analyze data, identify root causes of underperformance, prioritize needs oriented around the development of strategies, and implement a relevant and rigorous problem-solving process.

This tool will link to schools' improvement plans, which are also organized around the common framework, and fit in with the Consolidated Funds Pilot, which will allow schools more flexibility on how to leverage and use federal funds.

<i>Status Quo Model – Compliance & Consequence</i>	<i>A New Approach – Service & Solutions</i>
--	---

<p>Fragmented. Programs/initiatives interacted with districts and schools in a disjointed way. Districts completed different plans in order to receive different pots of federal funds. Focus was on how to get the funds instead of how the funds can support their work.</p>	<p>Cohesive. Using a common framework, programs/initiatives interact with districts and schools in an aligned and cohesive way. Districts complete one Comprehensive Needs Assessment that aligns federal funds to support common improvement goals.</p>
---	---

A Common Framework of Improvement

In the past, the work of improving schools rested primarily on one division within the Department. There was very little if any cross-division cooperation and interaction. Now, divisions across the Department are working together to support schools. The “whole” Department approach allows the expertise in various divisions to work together to benefit schools and school districts. The Department developed and adopted a common framework for supporting schools called *Georgia’s Systems for Continuous Improvement*.

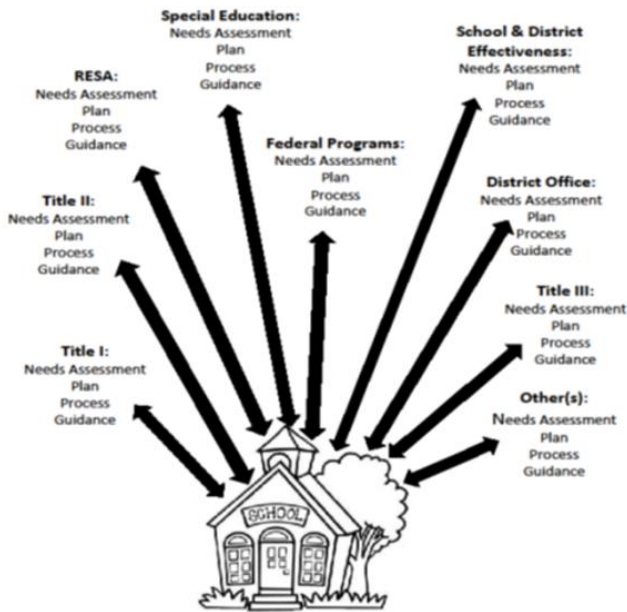
The “Who” of the framework is the *Whole Child*, which is the center of the work. The “What” of the framework is comprised of five systems focused on *Instruction, Professionalism, Learning Environment, Leadership, and Community Engagement*. The “How” of the framework is the continuous improvement/problem solving process: *Identify Needs, Select Interventions, Plan, Implement, and Examine Progress*. The Department uses the following graphic to illustrate and communicate with teachers, leaders, parents and other stakeholders how the continuous improvement model focuses on the whole child. This models also helps the employees of the Department focus on those components that improve the conditions for learning.



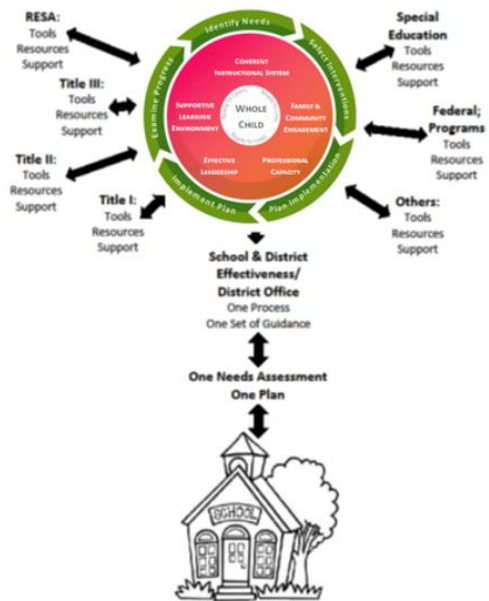
The Department will align programs, initiatives, tools, and resources across the divisions around this framework to keep the focus of the Department on the components that support the whole child. Additionally, this framework provides school districts and schools with a toolkit of effective practices and supports.

Cohesion and Alignment: Supporting Schools in a Unified, Focused Way

Moving from This Approach



Moving to This Approach



Before I came to the Department, school districts and schools interacted with Department divisions based on a disconnected and isolated method that discouraged supportive interaction. The burden of support and compliance rested with local school leaders because the Department was organized and operated not as a partner with school districts, but as a passive compliance monitor. Under my directives, the Department is aligning major programs/initiatives throughout all divisions around the common framework to interact and support districts and schools in a focused, cohesive way that utilizes and encourages innovative approaches to teaching, leading, and learning.

Engaging Other State Agencies

Just as the Department has placed a priority on supporting schools with the greatest needs, other state agencies must prioritize serving the communities in which these schools are located. External factors impact the challenges and opportunities that exist within a school, such as poverty, lack of physical health services like dental care, lack of mental health services, etc. The Department has actively engaged other state agencies in the process of finalizing agreements to provide additional student supports such as career coaches, school nurses, school social workers, and therapeutic services. I am fully committed to further pursuing these partnerships. I will asking state agencies to partner with the Department and prioritize existing state programs, initiatives, and services in these communities.

Engaging Communities

Engaged leadership is essential, both in our underperforming schools and school districts as well as at the Department. Several of the state’s underperforming schools are located in underserved communities. To break this cycle, we must engage both schools and communities in a meaningful way. The Department is organizing a series of “Community Conversations” across the state in the communities where underperforming schools are located. This will be an opportunity to invite the community in, share our resources and our data, and have conversations to chart root causes and create solutions to address school performance – all with the common goal of supporting our children.

<i>Status Quo Model – Compliance & Consequence</i>	<i>A New Approach – Service & Solutions</i>
<p>Top-Down. Formulaic and unilateral approach to turning around schools. Interactions limited between the state and those at the district/school level. According to USED commissioned research, top-down turnaround models “had no impact on student achievement” (Mathematica, 2016).</p>	<p>Community-based. Collective and tailored approach to supporting schools. Community members are invited in to have candid conversations about the challenges and opportunities of their schools. Partners are engaged to provide services in a strategic way to address external factors impacting student achievement.</p>

What schools did you work with and what measurable results did you achieve?

Schools We Serve

The Department receives federal funds to support schools that are identified as either Priority or Focus schools by federal criteria. This is different than the *60 or below for more than three years* state criterion that has been used to label chronically underperforming schools. The charge for supporting Priority schools is to raise Achievement Scores – one component of the CCRPI – and the charge for supporting Focus schools is Closing the Gap – a smaller component of the CCRPI. The benchmarks of success set by the federal government are different than those used to determine the schools on the chronically failing list. Because of this misalignment, the Department has worked with 18, or 37.5%, of the additional 48 schools that came on the list from 2014-15 to 2015-2016.

The Growing Number of Chronically Underperforming Schools

There are several factors to consider to describe the increase of chronically failing schools. The dip in Georgia’s CCRPI average did not occur because of test scores but was largely due to schools not receiving points for meeting state performance targets (targets from No Child Left Behind) seen by many as unrealistic. Based on the chronically failing criteria, these schools had already been underperforming for two years prior so it was very likely that they would be formally identified as chronically failing. See the table below.

Table 1: Chronically Failing Schools Directly Served by DOE

# Chronically Failing	Directly Served by DOE	Not Directly Served by DOE
153	70	83

If given the additional resources and capacity, the comprehensive approach that I’ve outlined above will allow the Department to effectively serve schools before they are labeled. Of the 153 chronically failing schools on the list, the Department directly serves less than half, only because of our limited resources.

Altogether, including Focus, Priority, and SIG schools, the Department directly serves 242 schools. Of the total 242 Priority and Focus schools directly served by the Department, 179 schools either have not been on the Chronically Failing list, were removed from the Chronically Failing list, or beat the odds. Twenty-four schools have a CCRPI of below 60 but have an upward trajectory on CCRPI. The reminder 39 schools, or 16% of the total schools, showed no or not significant improvement on the CCRPI. Overall, of the most current evaluation shows that 203 schools, or 84%, of the schools the Department has directly worked with were either not on the chronically failing list in the first place, came off the chronically failing list, beat the odds based on the most recent calculation, or have a CCRPI of below 60 but have an upward trajectory. Please see the attached list of schools with detailed notations. This data shows that how I restructured the Department to consolidate divisions, mobilize existing resources, more systematically assess the needs of these schools, and support the schools with a more focused effort is working.

*Table 2: Performance of schools served directly by the Georgia Department of Education
[see attachment for more details]*

Schools either not on the Chronically Failing list in the first place, removed from the list, or beating the odds	Schools below 60 but on upward CCRPI trajectory	Schools with No CCRPI Improvement/No Significant CCRPI Improvement	Total Priority and Focus directly served by the Georgia Department of Education
179	24	39	242

Our Success

According to last year’s Chronically Failing list, of the 79 Priority schools that my staff serves directly, only 21 appeared on the chronically failing list. Of the 163 Focus schools that are served by us and RESAs, only 49 appear on the chronically failing list. The remaining 57 were only on the Chronically Failing list. My staff offers these 57 schools limited supports, but we don’t directly serve them at this time due to misalignment with federal criteria and lack of capacity due to budgetary constraints.

Of the most current chronically failing list, 25 schools are priority and 51 are focus schools. That means nearly half of the total schools on the list have not been directly served by the Department.

*Table 3: 2016 Chronically Failing List
[see attachment for more details]*

Schools not directly served by the Department	Schools directly served that have ‘beaten the odds’	Schools directly served below 60 but on upward CCRPI trajectory	Schools directly served but had no CCRPI improvement	Total schools on the 2017 Chronically Failing List (CFL); 25 schools are Priority and 51 schools are Focus
77	13	23	40	153

Of the 48 ‘new’ schools on the Chronically Failing list, DOE worked directly with 18 of them (37%). Of the 18, six of them were either beating the odds or saw a CCRPI of below 60 but have an upward trajectory on CCRPI.

How many employees were involved?

Transforming Our Division, Transforming Our Agency

Our School and District Effectiveness (SDE) division, whose primary responsibility is to support identified schools, has undergone a major transformation. Shortly after taking office, the division was reorganized to provide a regional approach to push more support to districts and schools. With a focus on leadership, all Effectiveness Specialists now have an educational leadership background and undergo specialized leadership training – in the past, veteran teachers primarily served in these roles. It is a challenge filling these positions as the salary is \$70-\$80K per year, which makes finding the highest caliber leaders at this range very difficult. The division is also taking a district approach by working closely with the local administrators. We know from research and experience that turning schools around cannot be done without effective leadership and understanding that the local superintendent and district office must be more hands-on and must focus district resources and support in areas of need.

While administrative and professional learning staff are part of the Department’s SDE division, approximately 52 staff members provide direct support to 242 federally identified schools -- not including the 77 opportunity-only schools for 2016. With these numbers, our staff members are only able to be in underperforming schools 1-2 days per week. If all schools were to be supported that would mean almost five schools assigned to each Department staff member in comparison to the one turnaround coach assignment per 1-2 schools proposed in HB 338. I strongly feel the

Department could produce even greater progress for identified schools if funds were allocated so our SDE division could have the same capacity as is outlined in HB 338.

<i>Status Quo Model –Compliance & Consequence</i>	<i>A New Approach – Service & Solutions</i>
Sole Responsibility. Turning around schools was the sole task of GaDOE’s School Improvement area. Responsibility fell at the school level with many schools lacking the capacity and struggling to address external factors that impact student outcomes.	Shared Responsibility. Turning schools around is a priority for the entire agency – divisions are working together to support school improvement. Communities are engaged in a meaningful way with all parties having ‘skin in the game’.

What legislative actions you support to improve public education and what legislation has been initiated to address these concerns?

HB 338

Attached is a letter that was sent to the members of the House Education Committee where I outline recommendations to improve the bill. *I will reiterate my primary concern is in regards to the reporting structure of the Chief Turnaround Officer (CTO) position.* As I outlined in the attached feedback that was previously shared, the State Board already approves or denies personnel decisions based on my recommendations and I have even invited State Board members to participate in the interview process, though I am not statutorily required to do so. For operational and logistical reasons, and most importantly to respect the will of the voters for the elected State Superintendent in concert with the appointed Board to spearhead this work, the CTO position should be a direct report to the State Superintendent. From the framework that I have outlined, it is critical that the CTO be fully integrated within the Department and not a standalone entity. It can be assured that if the CTO reported to the State Superintendent we would all work with the State Board. For our efforts to improve schools to be successful we must all work together. Since taking office, I have worked hard to break down operational silos within the Department and I work closely with the State Board. An operational silo that is codified in law would undercut those efforts.

Performance Contracts Over Letter Grades

All but two of our districts have a performance contract with the state. These contractual agreements between the local boards, superintendents, and the State Board contain mutually agreed upon goals that are ambitious but attainable. During this process, the State Board had active discussions with each district, specific to student achievement and underperforming schools in the district, and approved of the plans districts presented to address these concerns.

I would point out that under our current model it is possible for a school to be labeled as chronically failing but meet the goals of their contract, if the school is showing a trajectory of improvement. I would also note that there is already a plan for interventions and consequences for schools not meeting their performance goals. See the following chart for more details.

Table 4: Consequences for Schools Not Meeting Their Performance Contract Goals

After 1 or 2 years of failure	After 3 years of failure	After 3 years of failure in 5 five years
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submissions of a remedial action (school improvement) plan to the local BOE for approval and district monitoring. • Change of leadership and personnel by local BOE. • Reconstruction of entire school personnel by local BOE. • Implementation of required individual student achievement plans and implementation of specific programs for improvement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local district applies direct school management support and intensive teacher development support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversion to charter school status. • Operation transferred to another successful school system. • Operation transferred to a private non-profit or for-profit entity. • Other options for loss of governance could be imposed by the SBOE.

These interventions have not yet been used because most of our schools have had a performance contract in place for less than a year. I support alignment to the performance contracts over using the raw CCRPI score or letter grade to identify schools as chronically failing. The 100-point scale and letter grades are not federal requirements, and it is my hope that state policy can be changed in order to reflect the flexibility given to us at the federal level, but this would require state legislation.

Ongoing Challenges: Conflicting Accountability Models & Definitions of Poor Performance

Over the years, Georgia has adopted several accountability measures and schools are required to meet different – and often conflicting – targets across all models be considered successful. For example, the recently released *Beating the Odds* calculation from GOSA shows that 27 of the chronically failing schools are beating the odds when it comes to student achievement. Numerous schools that the Department has directly supported have beaten the odds.

Table 5: Different Accountability Models for Schools

Metric	Designations
CCRPI	A-F 100 point scale
Performance Contracts	Strategic Waiver Charter Systems
Federal Designations	Priority Schools Focus Schools

Also, the *60 or below for three years* definition of failure was not in existence prior to the concept of the Opportunity School District, now the Chronically Failing list. Since our improvement efforts are largely funded by federal dollars, the Department had been using the federal criteria around Priority and Focus school designations to identify schools that need support and improvement.

Structural challenges with our state’s main accountability metric exist. A UGA analysis (see: tinyurl.com/welshstudy) of Georgia’s accountability system (CCRPI) versus those of the top performing NAEP states and other southern states found that Georgia’s system is too “harsh” and “stringent” because Georgia’s schools have to earn a larger percentage of available points in order to succeed compared to Florida and Louisiana schools. I agree with the points raised by the UGA analysis and have continued to state them publicly.

If we are going to enact drastic interventions in these chronically failing schools, then it is imperative that these schools are correctly identified. Given the results of the UGA study and misalignment of our state’s various accountability models, I feel refinements are necessary and I look forward to partnering with policymakers to address these issues.

Addressing the Elementary Issues

The large number of elementary schools on the chronically underperforming list is due to five factors: (1) a need to focus on literacy and numeracy skills -- our comprehensive L4 literacy plan to address these issues has been shared in detail with the House and Senate Education Committees, (2) a need to improve leadership and teaching in the schools, (3) a need to provide support services for the students, (4) elementary schools having fewer number of indicators on the CCRPI – meaning fewer ways to demonstrate success, and (5) student achievement is weighed more than progress – even though several states weigh progress more to capture the different levels at which students enter elementary school. I have publicly expressed my desire for state law to be changed to allow for this refinement to the CCRPI.

<i>Status Quo Model –Compliance & Consequence</i>	<i>A New Approach – Service & Solutions</i>
Unquestioned Accountability. CCRPI seen as an accurate reflection of a school’s performance.	Responsible Approach to Accountability. A comparative study of Georgia’s CCRPI shows that it is harsher than top performing states and Georgia schools have to earn a greater percentage of points in order to succeed compared to schools in Florida and Louisiana (tinyurl.com/welshstudy).

Also, our proposed grades 1 and 2 literacy and numeracy assessment tool (keenville.gadoe.org) will not only provide teachers with formative data throughout the year, but will also include interactive activities for students to build or sharpen these critical foundational skills.

Budget Requests

The Georgia Department of Education has been very creative in utilizing existing staff and resources to address the critical issue of underperforming schools. The Department has honored the directive from the Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) over the past two years to keep the budget flat and make no additional budget requests. The numbers show that we’ve had success in improving schools but have been held back from a capacity issue due to budgetary constraints. Though HB 338’s language calls for additional staff and capacity, I am concerned there hasn’t been a real discussion around appropriating additional funding to accompany the requirements in the bill or for augmenting the work of the Department. I am confident that if the additional capacity outlined in HB 338 were to be a part of the Department then we would begin moving more schools off the chronically failing list.

Closing

- The current definition of chronically failing is one that did not exist before the OSD debate. This state-level definition did not align to federal criteria for underperformance.
- Federally, the Department is required to serve Focus, Priority, and SIG designated schools. In the 2014-2015 school year, 57 schools were opportunity-only, meaning they weren’t federally designated to receive support. The number of opportunity-only schools not served directly by the Department has increased to 77. Although the Department was proactive in providing support to these schools, that support was very limited as a result of capacity issues due to budgetary restraints.
- With the schools the Department has worked with directly, we have shown success. Of the total 242 Priority and Focus schools directly served by the Department, 179 schools either have not been on the Chronically Failing list, were removed from the Chronically Failing list, or beat the odds. Twenty-four schools have a CCRPI of below 60 but have an upward trajectory on CCRPI. The remaining 39 schools, or 16% of the total schools, showed no improvement or no significant improvement on the CCRPI.

- Of the schools on the most current chronically failing list, 25 schools are priority and 51 are focus schools. That means nearly half of the total schools on the list have not been directly served by the Department.
- The ‘achievement’ gap of service and supports is what is keeping most of our schools from succeeding. The Department is working earnestly to fill the gap.
- The Department has developed and defined a comprehensive, cohesive, and aligned approach to supporting schools that is proactive and addresses the root causes of low performance in a manner that demonstrates a shared responsibility at the state and local level.
- The Department has shifted its approach from a status quo model rooted in compliance and consequences to a new model based on service and solutions.
- The Department is engaging communities and state agencies in a meaningful way to identify and utilize resources and building the capacity of leaders, teachers, and communities is critical.
- The Department has created a common framework for improvement and a Common Needs Assessment so districts can identify and organize their efforts around improvement goals and our tools, resources, initiatives, and programs are aligned at the state level to support district and school improvement goals.
- Capacity due to budgetary constraints is what is holding back The Department’s success and ability to fully implement the framework outlined. Because of their workload, our current staff are only able to be in schools 1-2 per week.
- A set of consequences already exists within the performance contracts (agreements made by all but two districts).

Recommendations and Requests

- Refinements must be made to the CCRPI. An independent study called into question the use of a letter grade system and 100 point scale. It also brought to light some of the structural issues with the metric calling it “harsh” and “stringent” compared to neighboring and top performing states.
- Clearly define “failing school.” I recommend a definition where a ‘failing school’ is one that is federally designated AND has not beat the odds AND has not met their performance contracts AND score a 60 or below on CCRPI for 3 years. I feel this definition aligns the competing accountability metrics that we currently have and ensures our turnaround efforts are focused on schools with the greatest needs.
- Funding for the Department’s L4 Literacy Plan.
- Continual support of the Department’s grades 1 and 2 literacy/numeracy assessment concept.
- Funding for Leadership Academies or a Leadership Corps.
- Articulated college credit awarded for students who earn industry credentials in their high school coursework.

- Additional coursework flexibility in diploma requirements for Juniors and Seniors. This has already been done with Computer Science and Hall County’s Math/ELA flexibility, and these concepts need to continue to expand.
- Expand the Department’s capacity to work with schools to improve the conditions for learning by improving school climate.

In conclusion, I believe this report thoroughly answers the questions posed and demonstrates that the Department can and will continue to address the issue of underperforming schools within our state. Much has changed and improved since taking office in 2014. There is still much to be done. Yet, it can only be done by working through a collaborative, comprehensive approach and not one that creates new bureaucracies in isolation, fragments operational effectiveness, and relies on failed status quo initiatives.

Attachments

- HB 338 Feedback
- HB 338 Letter to House Education Committee members
- UGA Welsh Study
- Georgia Department of Education Strategic Plan
- Georgia Department of Education L4 Literacy Plan