



# STATE REPORT GEORGIA

## OVERALL APPROACH

**Equity:** How well does the state’s approach to school improvement include focused attention on supporting underserved students and closing the achievement gap? Does the state require LEAs to maintain an equity focus in their school improvement plans, activities and resource allocations?

Georgia has a strong approach to equity in its school improvement planning process. For each school- and district-level goal, the state requires articulation of supplemental supports for disadvantaged student groups. Most importantly, the district improvement plan is very clear and specific on the equity gap analyses that districts must perform, and requires districts to take action to address identified gaps.

The approach could be further strengthened by either connecting the Equity Action Plan to the subgroups listed in each goal or including in the Equity Action Plan associated costs and funding sources for the equity initiatives.

**Strengths:** How is the state thoughtfully leveraging ESSA’s flexibility to put in place the necessary policies and procedures that create an enabling environment for effective and sustained school improvement, and that consider state/local lessons learned from past efforts? What parts of the state’s turnaround strategy or guidance to LEAs were strongest or exemplary?

Georgia has done well in creating a flexible framework for local decision-making. The planning tools use the data elements in the comprehensive needs assessment to enable root cause analysis in the district planning tool, then ask districts to set goals and determine relevant activities based on the trends in the data and identified root causes. The comprehensive needs assessment is referenced throughout the planning process and is consistently driving questions about the connection of the school improvement tool to specific data elements and pages, providing clear alignment of the data to the proposed strategy.

In addition, Georgia’s approach to equity is solid as described above, and the state’s theory of action for continuous improvement and capacity building is also very clear and consistent throughout all of the state’s guidance to districts and schools.

Georgia’s support systems and resource repository for evidenced-based strategies provide an opportunity for all educators to learn best practices and find opportunities for increased student achievement that matches the needs of the population served.

## TURNAROUND COMPONENT OVERVIEW

Coherent and Aligned Vision for Improving Outcomes . . . . .	<b>Strong</b>
Strategic Use of Funding and Alignment of Resources . . . . .	<b>Needs Improvement</b>
Rigorous Review Process . . . . .	<b>Needs Improvement</b>
Continuous Improvement, Monitoring and Evaluation . . . . .	<b>Adequate</b>
Evidence-Based Interventions . . . . .	<b>Strong</b>
Capacity Building and Autonomy . . . . .	<b>Needs Improvement</b>
Engagement . . . . .	<b>Strong</b>
Sustainability . . . . .	<b>Weak</b>

**Improvements:** How can the state improve its turnaround efforts? What parts of the state’s strategy or guidance to LEAs were unclear? What risks and challenges might the state face with its current approach?

Georgia could improve its monitoring and evaluation efforts by focusing its monitoring on results rather than strictly on compliance. The current monitoring approach poses risks of continuing a business-as-usual compliance focus within districts. The state could also develop a statewide evaluation plan that includes building the capacity of districts to evaluate their own efforts and build an evidence base for the state.

The high quality planning tools that Georgia has developed could more closely align with the processes and systems in its ESSA plan, including more information about how comprehensive and turnaround schools will be included in these processes and explicit connection to ESSA’s long-term goals, interim targets, subgroup focus, and exit criteria.

More detail is needed to articulate role of the state. Without a defined action plan from the state, the districts and the schools will continue to view the state as compliance-focused instead of instructional improvement partners.

## TURNAROUND COMPONENTS

**Coherent and Aligned Vision for Improving Outcomes:** How well does the state articulate a coherent vision or theory of action that drives their school improvement efforts? Is this vision aligned with the state’s accountability system and goals for closing the achievement gap?

N/A      Weak      Needs Improvement      Adequate      **Strong**      Exemplary

Georgia has identified a theory of action rooted in five components of improvement: a coherent instructional system, effective leadership, professional capacity, family and community engagement, and a supportive learning environment. These five components are present throughout all of the state’s guidance documents and school improvement materials. The state has also articulated how districts and schools will take action across the five components through its improvement planning process.

Credit should be given for the state’s attempt to reduce duplication and repetitive information gathering. Georgia’s comprehensive needs assessment appears to be a single place where schools and districts may assess their needs across all students, groups, and programs, and will be reviewed by cross-program teams at the state.

The theory of action does not explicitly connect the rigorous implementation of these components to closing equity gaps, however the district improvement plan template does explicitly reference the district’s comprehensive needs assessment and asks each district to identify equity gaps based on those data. Equity gaps are addressed in state guidance documents, and districts must examine their equity gaps as they complete their plans, however the focus on equity could be strengthened by linking the actions the district will take in its school improvement plan with the equity strategies in its equity plan. As the district improvement plan template reads now, the equity plan and the district improvement plan are presented as two distinct plans.

It is also less clear how Georgia’s continuous improvement framework and comprehensive needs assessment tie to schools identified as targeted, comprehensive, or turnaround. There does not seem to be a prompt for identified schools to consider what they need to do in order to be exited from status, for example. There is no reference to the state’s long-term student outcomes goals required in ESSA anywhere in the planning documents.

**Strategic Use of Funding and Alignment of Resources:** Is the state allocating funding in a way that is strategic and maximizes resources? Are LEAs expected to prioritize improvement efforts that address the underlying performance issues?

N/A      Weak      **Needs Improvement**      Adequate      Strong      Exemplary

Each district in Georgia is expected to identify root causes of underperformance in setting its goals and is prompted to identify possible funding sources that will contribute to meeting each goal. This creates a reasonably clear link between local resources and local areas of need.

Georgia has not indicated, or there is very little detail, how resources will be prioritized at the state level. The state’s ESSA plan details out how all schools get improvement funding, but not how those funds are distributed or related to needs. Further, the plan outlines additional federal funding available to comprehensive and targeted schools. For comprehensive schools, the chart references funding is to be provided based on school improvement plan evidence-based action steps, but it is not clear what this means. Turnaround schools are to receive priority in available state and federal funding, but it is not clear how, how much, or from which sources.

The state does offer a Consolidation of Funds Initiative for certain districts to be able to consolidate federal, state, and local funds into specific Title I schools in order to be able to use those funds more flexibly. There is no indication as to the viability of this initiative, though some may argue that schools serving a predominantly low-income population already have this flexibility to some degree.

Given that Georgia is placing much of the responsibility on district and schools to effectively allocate resources, there does not appear to be an aspect of the planning process that asks districts and schools to prioritize overarching needs, goals, or action steps in order to gain clarity on where the focus should be.

**Rigorous Review Process:** Is the state applying rigorous criteria and review processes to ensure resources will be used to support effective school improvement efforts? Is the state prioritizing funding to LEAs who demonstrate the greatest need for school improvement funding (including LEAs with a high percentage of CSI and TSI schools) and the strongest commitment to school improvement?

N/A      Weak      **Needs Improvement**      Adequate      Strong      Exemplary

Georgia’s review criteria are clear, and but do not seem to address the quality of the plan elements as much as the presence of those elements. The state appears to use an iterative plan review process which features dialogue between the state and the districts, including coaching during the four-month planning period, which could be beneficial in the long run.

However, while coordinated, the review by the state seems to be more formulaic than rigorous. It does appear that there are likely to be resubmissions to refine the district or school plans, but it was not clear whether plans would be returned based on compliance oriented issues or the quality of the submission.

It does not appear that the state plans to distinguish funding allocations to districts based on level of need, and instead will distribute funds based on the numbers of students enrolled in a designated school. There does not appear to be a funding distribution process that recognizes a higher percentage of comprehensive or targeted support schools in district, nor does the funding process recognize strengths of school improvements efforts with an incentive plan for success.

**Continuous Improvement, Monitoring and Evaluation:** Does the state have a robust, data-driven process to monitor LEAs' implementation of the school improvement plans within their district? Did the state establish clear milestones to ensure improvement over time, and within four years?

N/A      Weak      Needs Improvement      **Adequate**      Strong      Exemplary

Georgia's overall monitoring plan is comprehensive, but it appears to be much more focused on compliance monitoring instead of monitoring for results and improvement. Georgia's school improvement process includes a focus on examining progress, which is promising, but it is not clear how the state is operationalizing that component through ongoing monitoring and evaluation at the state education agency. Again, responsibility for monitoring progress seems to be left largely to the local level.

Georgia has articulated a tiered approach to monitoring the implementation of school improvement plans, with state-level involvement increasing with severity of need. Within each tier, however, more detail could be added to more clearly describe to districts and schools what exactly the state will do to support them in their school improvement efforts.

There do not appear to be clear milestones for improvement in student outcomes in any planning document, despite being described in the Georgia's ESSA plan.

**Evidence-Based Interventions:** To what extent is the state mandating LEAs use evidence-based strategies in their improvement efforts? Does the state provide guidance and supports to LEAs to help them identify and implement the most effective strategies based upon their needs?

N/A      Weak      Needs Improvement      Adequate      **Strong**      Exemplary

Georgia's school improvement plan template includes clear requirements for evidence-based action steps aligned to each goal for improvement. In order to support districts and schools in implementing evidence-based strategies, the state holds and records weekly webinars to provide thought partnership and share resources among districts and schools and maintains a comprehensive library of resources for in order to make it easier for districts and schools to find evidence-based strategies that are appropriate for their context.

State guidance requires examination of strategies used and the data to support continued use or modification of the practice based on data and need. While Georgia does prompt districts to refer to their comprehensive needs assessment to determine equity gaps to be addressed, the state could do more to help districts and schools make evidence-informed decisions about interventions or how best to use the lists of evidence-based strategies that the state is providing.

**Capacity Building and Autonomy:** How well does the state articulate, delineate or set parameters around which interventions and responsibilities belong to the state, LEA and/or school? Does the state provide support or guidance to help LEAs identify and reduce barriers to school improvement? Does the state have a framework or process to support and monitor outside entities who partner with the state, LEAs or schools in school improvement efforts?

N/A      Weak      **Needs Improvement**      Adequate      Strong      Exemplary

Georgia clearly outlines the level of state responsibility for turnaround schools comprehensive and targeted schools, as well as the district and school responsibilities for these categories. Again, however, the detail is strongest as it pertains to the responsibilities at the local level, and not as well-defined for the state. The templates and tools require very specific delineation of who is responsible for each goal, action and strategy.

The level of detail and the breadth of the continuous improvement framework, comprehensive needs assessment, and district and school improvement plans is impressive, and if fully utilized by districts

and schools, should help them identify and address challenges and opportunities. While the state is providing support, perhaps more so guidance, to help districts identify and reduce barriers to improvement, there is concern that leaving decision-making to the local level will enable poor decision making and execution, particularly in Tiers 1 and 2.

There was no evidence that Georgia provides districts with frameworks or processes to evaluate and monitor third-party improvement partners. The state does emphasize its commitment to working with partners, but beyond some slides in a presentation, this strategy does not appear to be fully developed.

**Engagement:** Does the state require LEAs to engage with stakeholders such as parents and community members in the development and implementation of their school improvement plans? Does the state provide sufficient guidance and resources to LEAs to effectively do so, helping them foster local buy-in and promote sustainability?

N/A      Weak      Needs Improvement      Adequate      **Strong**      Exemplary

One of the five areas of focus in the state’s continuous improvement framework is around Family and Community Engagement. Georgia’s school and district improvement plans require descriptions of how the school and district engaged with the community, and specifically how the school and district sought advice from the community, beyond simply communicating information. This focus on advice is important and could lead to more authentic engagement.

Tools and reporting systems include ways of documenting individuals representing many different stakeholders in the process. However, the resources to support districts in continuous, ongoing engagement with their communities after initial planning and during implementation are either sparse or hard to find. Georgia would do well to consider how to encourage stakeholder involvement continuously, rather than whether it exists for the purpose of planning alone.

**Sustainability:** Does the state have a plan in place to review the school improvement efforts statewide and evaluate the impact and effectiveness? Does the state have a process in place to support LEAs and schools by enhancing their capacity to maintain their improvement efforts upon exiting identification and intervention?

N/A      **Weak**      Needs Improvement      Adequate      Strong      Exemplary

Evidence is limited, though Georgia’s school improvement theory of action includes examining progress as a key component. Each district’s comprehensive needs assessment will provide a local point of reference, however there does not appear to be a broader focus on continuous, statewide evaluation of the strategies and approaches that districts and schools take or on supporting districts in evaluating their own efforts.

The state appears to have the beginnings of a promising approach to supporting schools in maintaining progress through its tiered supports and interventions as well as its focus on district capacity building overall, but again, the state has not specifically addressed continuous and targeted support schools in its framework.

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