



2021 Direct Certification Memo

Governor's Office of Student Achievement

Nov. 2, 2021

Direct certification (DC) is used to measure poverty levels of students in Georgia.¹ Directly certified students include students living in a family unit receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) food stamp benefits, students living in a family unit receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits, and students identified as homeless, unaccompanied youth, foster or migrant. The DC rate for each district and school is calculated by dividing the number of directly certified students by the total school enrollment from the October Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) count. The analysis below includes a summary of 2021 DC rates for Georgia school districts and schools.

District Direct Certification Summary Statistics & Analysis

In general, the DC rates for school districts show a slight increase from 2020 to 2021, with the mean rate increasing by 3.6 percentage points.² As shown in Table 1 below, the lowest DC rate for a district increased by 1.1 percentage points, and the highest DC rate for a district increased by 3.1 percentage points. The average difference between 2020 and 2021 DC rates for each district is 3.6 percentage points, with the greatest increase being Talbot County (11.7) and the greatest decrease being Baker County (-1.4). Out of all 180 districts, 71 (39.4%) have a 2021 DC rate that is within three percentage points of the previous year.

Table 1: District Direct Certification Summary Statistics

	MEAN %	MEDIAN %	MIN %	MAX %
2020	37.4	37.4	5.0	81.0
2021	41.0	42.6	6.1	84.1
Difference	3.6	5.2	1.1	3.1

As shown in Figure 1 below, the distribution of district DC rates for 2020 and 2021 shows a change, with more districts reporting higher DC rates. The number of districts in the lowest four categories, with rates up to 40.0%, decreased, while the number of districts with DC rates from 40.0% to 80.0% increased. The most common district DC rate in both years is between 40.1% and 50.0%. In both years, the only rate above 80.0% is Clay County. Table 2 below displays the top and bottom five districts for direct certification in 2021. Three of the bottom five districts are city districts. Notably, city districts have a mean DC rate of 32.7%, compared to a mean rate of 42.1% for county districts.

¹ GOSA used eligibility for free/reduced price lunch (FRL) as a measure of student poverty through 2015. Schools that qualify for the National School Lunch Program's Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) may provide FRL for all students and are no longer required to collect FRL parent or guardian applications reporting family income. Due to this provision, GOSA no longer considers FRL to be an accurate measure of student poverty.

² Although State Charter Schools are considered individual school districts, they are excluded from the district analysis due to their small size compared to traditional school districts. State schools and Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) schools are also excluded due to their small populations and lack of comparability to traditional school districts. These schools are included in the school-level analysis below.

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Figure 1: Frequency of District Direct Certification Rates, 2020 and 2021

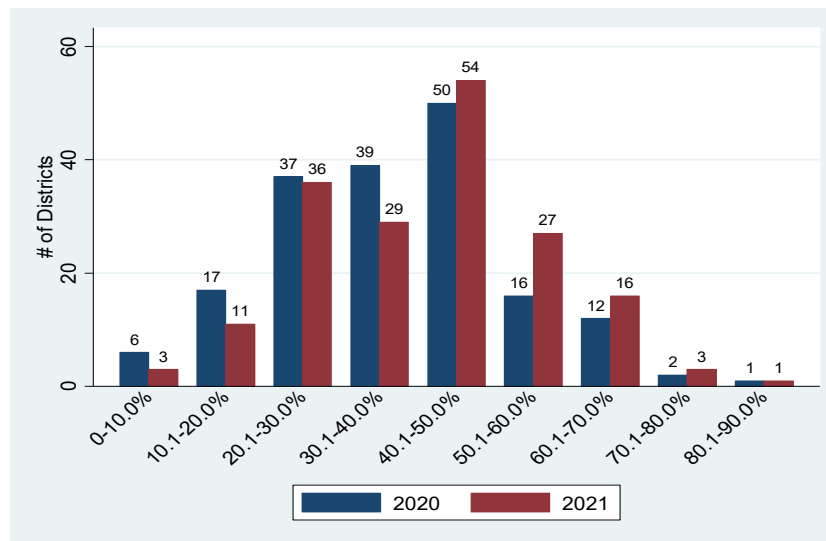


Table 2: Highest and Lowest Direct Certification Districts in FY2021

Five Highest Districts	DC %	Five Lowest Districts	DC %
Clay County	84.1	Forsyth County	6.1
Terrell County	75.0	Oconee County	7.8
Randolph County	74.5	City Schools of Decatur	8.1
Talbot County	70.9	Chickamauga City	10.5
Sumter County	69.8	Jefferson City	12.3

The five districts with the highest DC rates are all located in southwest Georgia. Figure 2 below, mapping 2021 district DC rates, shows there is a concentration of districts with high rates in that region of the state. Of the 20 districts with average DC rates above 60%, 15 of the districts are in Southwest Georgia. Districts concentrated in the North Metro area above Atlanta experienced an increase in average DC rates from the 2019-2020 to the 2020-2021 school year. Across the state, 34 districts moved into a higher average DC bracket (ex: 20%-40% DC to 40%-60% DC) from the 2019-2020 to the 2020-2021 school year.³

The 12 districts with the highest DC rates also all have student populations that are over 78% Black, indicating a link between regional and racial trends in DC rates.⁴ The 26 districts with the highest DC rates all have student populations that are over 50% Black. Conversely, the six districts with the lowest DC rates all have student populations that are over 52% White. All but two of the 15 districts with the lowest DC rates have student populations that are over 50% White.

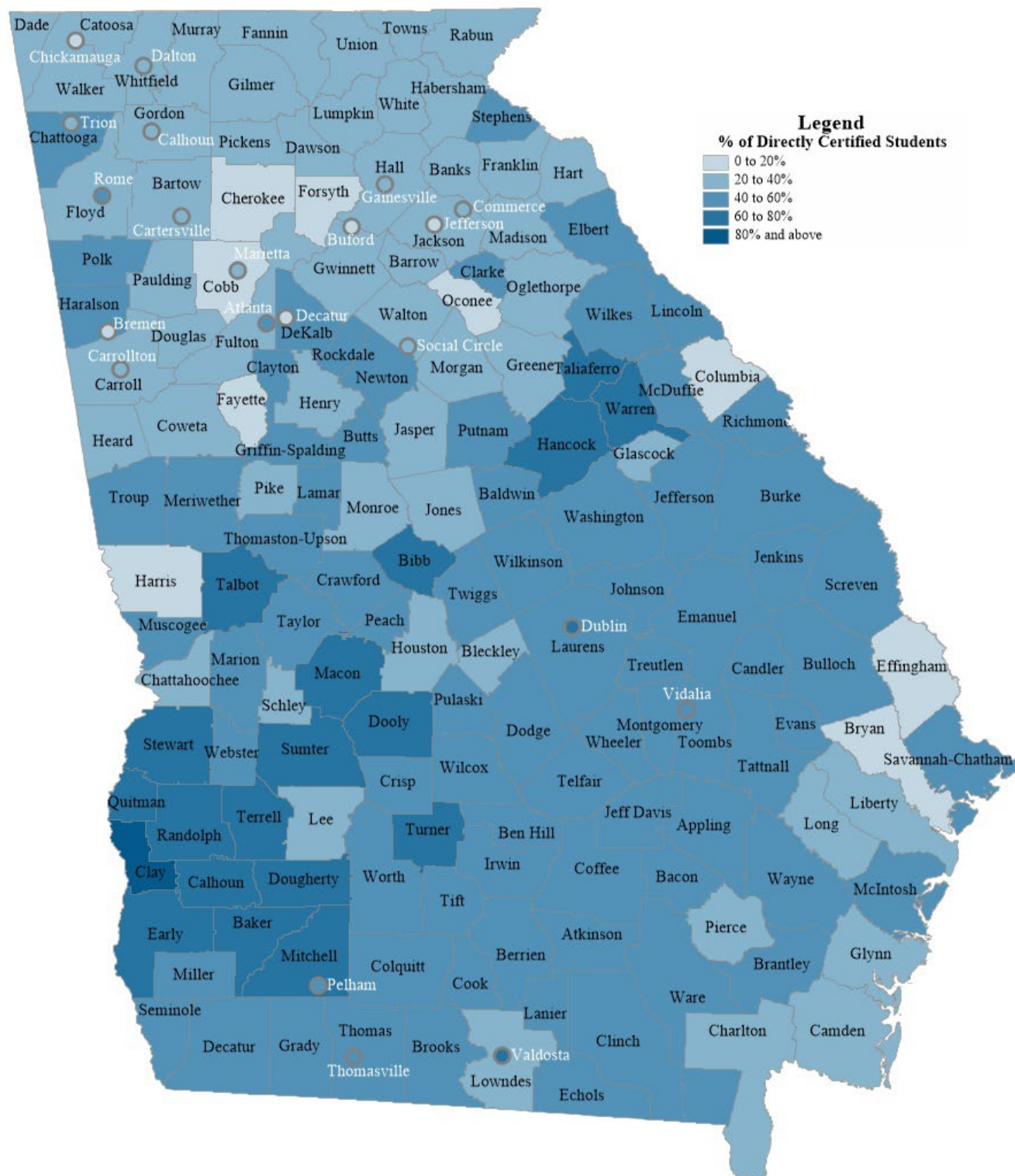
³ To compare average DC rates by district between school years, consult the [FY20 DC memo](#).

⁴ The 2020-2021 “FTE Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Gender Programs” data was used for demographic analysis. This dataset is available from Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) [downloadable data](#) and includes FTE enrollment counts for districts and schools disaggregated by race/ethnicity and gender.



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Figure 2: Map of 2021 District Direct Certification Rates⁵



⁵ City districts are labeled in white, while county districts are labeled in black.

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Similar to the trends in district DC rates, there is also a slight increase in the school DC rate from 2020 to 2021, with the mean rate increasing by 4.3 percentage points. As shown in Table 3 below, the lowest DC rate for a school decreased by -0.3 percentage points, while the highest DC rate for a school remained at 100%. The average difference between 2020 and 2021 for each school is 4.3 percentage points, with the greatest increase being DeKalb Regional Youth Detention Center (41.7) and the greatest decrease being Wilkes County Regional Detention Center (-60.7), both Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) facilities. At the school level, residential treatment centers (RTCs), DJJ facilities, and non-traditional⁶ schooling facilities made up most of the top 10 decreases and half of the top 10 increases from 2020 to 2021. These facilities typically have relatively small student populations and high rates of student mobility, which provides a possible explanation for the volatility in their data. Of the 2,284 schools with data available for both years, 1,414 (61.9%) have a 2021 direct certification percentage that is within three percentage points of the previous year.

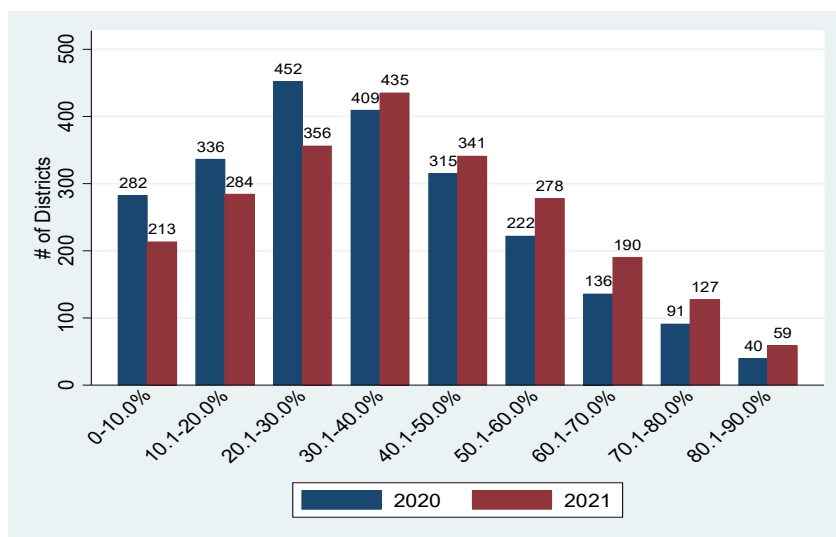
Table 3: School Direct Certification Summary Statistics

	MEAN %	MEDIAN %	MIN %	MAX %
2020	34.3	31.6	0.3	100.0
2021	38.6	36.9	0.0	100.0
Difference	4.3	5.3	-0.3	0.0

Note. Out of 2,296 observations in 2020 and 2,302 observations in 2021, 2,284 matched.

As shown in Figure 3 below, the distribution of school DC rates for 2020 and 2021 shows a change, with more schools reporting higher DC rates. The number of schools in the highest six categories, with rates over 30.0%, increased.

Figure 3: Frequency of School Direct Certification Rates, 2020 and 2021



⁶ GOSA defines non-traditional schools as schools that exist for the distinct purpose of serving students who have unique instructional needs that are not adequately addressed in a traditional classroom setting.

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Table 4 below shows average DC rates for schools by demographic composition. The compositions shown are for schools that have greater than 50% of the displayed racial/ethnic populations of students. The count of schools that serve such populations of students are indicated in Table 4. Schools with student populations that included more than 50% Black students reported the highest average DC rate (55.8%) in the 2020-2021 school year. Schools with student populations that included more than 50% White or Asian reported the lowest average DC rates (27.7% and 33.1%, respectively).

Table 4: Average DC Rates by Racial Concentrations of Students

Student Race/Ethnicity	Average DC %	Count of Schools
>50% White	27.7%	968
>50% Black	55.8%	871
>50% Hispanic	42.0 %	202
>50% Asian	33.1%	87

Tables 5 and 6 below show the schools with the lowest and highest DC rates, respectively. All but 2 of the 10 schools with the lowest DC rates are in the Metro Atlanta area. The 54 schools with the lowest DC rates have student populations that are over 50% White and Asian. Nine of the 10 schools with the highest DC rates are all RTCs, and every school with a 100.0% DC rate is an RTC. The mean DC rate for RTCs is 86.0%, compared to the overall mean rate of 38.6.

Table 5: Ten Lowest Direct Certification Schools in FY2021

School	District	DC %
Elbert Shaw Regional Youth Detention Center	Department of Juvenile Justice	0.0
Eagle's Landing Academy	Mitchell County	0.0
Timber Ridge Elementary School	Cobb County	0.8
Mount Bethel Elementary School	Cobb County	0.9
Austin Elementary School	DeKalb County	0.9
Sweet Apple Elementary School	Fulton County	1.0
Tritt Elementary School	Cobb County	1.2
South Forsyth High School	Forsyth County	1.3
Vanderlyn Elementary School	DeKalb County	1.4
Walton High School	Cobb County	1.4

Table 6: Ten Highest Direct Certification Schools in FY2021

School	District	DC %
Bradfield Center – Ault Academy	Troup County	100.0
Devereux Ackerman Academy	Cobb County	100.0
George W. Hartmann Center	Marietta City	100.0
Georgia Center	Taylor County	100.0
Harpst Academy	Polk County	100.0
Hillside Conant School	Atlanta Public Schools	100.0
Lighthouse Care Center of Augusta	Richmond County	100.0
Morningstar Treatment Services, Inc. Youth Estate	Glynn County	100.0
Price Academy	Bibb County	95.2
Thomasville Heights Elementary School	Atlanta Public Schools	94.2



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Table 7 below shows the 10 schools with the highest DC rates excluding RTCs and DJJs. Of the schools in Table 7, all have 100.0% Black student populations. The 123 schools with the highest DC rates and available data have student populations that are over 75.0% Black, with 93 of those schools having a 100.0% Black student population.

Table 7: Ten Highest Direct Certification Schools, Excluding RTCs and DJJs, in FY2021

School	District	DC %
Thomasville Heights Elementary School	Atlanta Public Schools	94.2
Dunbar Elementary School	Atlanta Public Schools	94.0
Jenkins-White Elementary School	Richmond County	93.4
Ingram/Pye Elementary School	Bibb County	92.0
Alice Coachman Elementary School	Dougherty County	91.7
F. L. Stanton Elementary School	Atlanta Public Schools	91.5
Gadsden Elementary School	Savannah-Chatham County	90.4
Morningside Elementary School	Dougherty County	90.4
Boyd Elementary School	Atlanta Public Schools	90.2
Bruce Elementary School	Bibb County	90.0