Digital Learning Task Force

**Final Recommendations from Governor Nathan Deal's
Digital Learning Task Force**

December 17, 2013

This page intentionally left blank.

Table of Contents

Letter to Governor Nathan Deal

December 17, 2013

The Honorable Nathan Deal
Governor of Georgia
206 Washington Street
Suite 203, State Capitol
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

Dear Governor Deal,

Over the past two decades, technology has played an increasing role in our educational system, as it has in all aspects of our lives. Despite this proliferation of technology, most modern classrooms still are structured the same way as classrooms over a century ago. Most students progress through grades at the same rate, regardless of the pace that they can master the instructional standards. Furthermore, many students and parents still lack sufficient course choices and learning resources, despite their widespread availability through the Internet. At the same time, Georgia businesses depend on the educational system to provide graduates who are college and career ready, and an increasing number of jobs require advanced skills.

Digital learning has the potential to leverage technology to transform our educational system by providing students, parents, and educators more flexibility over the time, place, path, and pace of learning. In other words, it individualizes each student's educational experience and shifts the teacher's role from being the source of information to being a guide alongside students.

To maximize the impact of digital learning, Georgia needs a cohesive, aligned strategy for implementation across the state. As we have learned through experience, simply integrating technology into classrooms is not likely to increase student outcomes. Over the last year, the Digital Learning Task Force, formed by Executive Order, has been working to develop such a framework.

In November 2012, the task force first met to examine the current state of digital learning in Georgia and develop guiding questions to direct the development of recommendations. Over the next year, we met eight times and formed three working groups to develop recommendations in line with these questions. The meetings included presentations from national, state, and district digital learning experts as well as tours of locations in the state having success implementing digital learning. Also, as requested in the Executive Order, we examined the experiences of other states and school districts. The enclosed report represents the culmination of that work. It includes recommendations that focus on three key areas: Infrastructure, Digital Content and Courses, and Blended and Competency-Based Learning.

As members of the task force, we thank you for the opportunity to explore this important issue and provide recommendations that will serve as a blueprint for the future of digital learning in Georgia. In the coming months, we look forward to providing any support necessary to bring these recommendations to reality.

Respectfully submitted,

The Digital Learning Task Force

Task Force Members

Dr. Jody Barrow
Superintendent
Fayette County Public Schools

Sen. Butch Miller
State Senator
R-Gainesville

Dr. Buster Evans
Superintendent
Forsyth County Schools

Ed Morrison
Grants Specialist
Barrow County Schools

Timothy Gage
Senior Vice President of Government &
Regulatory Affairs
Comcast Cable

Gerard Petty
Teacher
Stockbridge High School, Henry County
Georgia Virtual School

Rep. Mark Hamilton
State Representative
R-Cumming

Helen Rice
Vice Chair
State Board of Education

Dave Howland
Founding Principal
KIPP Atlanta Collegiate

Teya Ryan
President & Executive Director
Georgia Public Broadcasting

Dr. Alan Long
Principal
Jefferson County High School

Bob Swiggum
Chief Information Officer
Georgia Department of Education

Kami B. Luigs
Director of Citizenship
GE Energy Management

Levette Williams
Associate Superintendent of Technology Services
Georgia Department of Education

Ex-Officio Working Group Members

Rep. Mike Dudgeon
State Representative
R-Johns Creek

Barbara Hampton
Chair
State Board of Education

Support Staff

Erin Hames
Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy
Office of the Governor

Martha Ann Todd
Executive Director
Governor's Office of Student Achievement

Kristin Bernhard
Education Policy Advisor
Office of the Governor

Sam Rauschenberg
Deputy Director
Governor's Office of Student Achievement

The task force is also grateful to the following interns and fellows for their support during the task force: Neil Bitting, Joshua Delaney, Abigail Lloyd, Rachna Puthottu, and William Ruffin.

Task Force Charge

The Executive Order calls for the task force to do the following:

– Provide recommendations to prepare the state to effectively improve the educational achievement and attainment of students through the creation of robust digital learning environments, which may include the transition to digital textbooks and the effective use of wireless mobile devices.

– Provide recommendations and support the state's position in research and development related to and arising out of the integration of wireless technology into K-12 classrooms, including an examination of the experiences of other states and schools districts.

Appendix A includes the Executive Order, and Appendix B lists task force meetings with hyperlinks to meeting agendas and presentations.

Recommendations

The following twelve recommendations are the culmination of the task force's work over the last year. The recommendations are organized into the following three categories:

- Infrastructure
- Digital Content and Courses
- Blended and Competency-Based Learning

Together, these recommendations provide a comprehensive, integrated strategy for the future of digital learning in Georgia. All recommendations, adopted over time, will optimize implementation.

Appendix C includes information on working group assignments for each of the categories.

I. Infrastructure

Recommendation 1: Increase statewide broadband capacity to schools, ensuring that Georgia's schools are able to utilize 21st century technology in classrooms.

The state must develop a short- and long-term broadband expansion plan that becomes a permanent part of the state strategic plan.

- The broadband expansion plan should include stakeholders in public sectors outside education to increase buy-in and usage. These sectors include, but are not limited to, public safety, economic development, healthcare, and communications.

- Georgia's plan should produce infrastructure to support bandwidth capacity within schools that will sustain personalized learning, educational video services and access to digital learning tools throughout the school and in the classroom. Bandwidth capacity will likely be a growing need in Georgia, and the connections deployed should be scalable over time.

- While there is ongoing national debate regarding current and future educational broadband capacity needs, Georgia should consider the State Education Technology Directors Association's 2012 Broadband Imperative Report as a target. These specifications state that Georgia needs to following capacity:

  o By 2014-15, schools should have 100 megabits per second (Mbps) per 1,000 students/staff on an Internet Service Provider (ISP) and 1 gigabits per second (Gbps) per 1,000 students/staff for an internal district/school network (WAN).

  o By 2017-18, schools should have 1 Gbps per 1,000 students/staff on an Internet Service Provider (ISP) and 10 Gbps per 1,000 students/staff for an internal district/school network (WAN).

- To accomplish this goal, the state should leverage existing broadband infrastructure, including the University System of Georgia's PeachNet, and invest additional funds to lay fiber where needed. When determining where to expand broadband infrastructure, the state should take into consideration current capacity and needs across the state as well as the private sector's ability to provide equivalent or superior connectivity. The state's investment should not duplicate existing infrastructure as long as it allows schools to meet the minimum connectivity requirements detailed as a part of this plan.

- The state's plan should encourage private sector investments and relationships to ensure that private sector providers have an incentive for further build-out of broadband infrastructure in Georgia's communities.

- Once infrastructure is in place, the state should pursue an open bidding process for broadband service provision, ensuring that all service providers have an equal opportunity to serve schools. Local educational agencies (LEAs) should maximize federal E-Rate funds, and the state should provide additional state funds necessary to procure the needed bandwidth. To this end, as Georgia develops its plan, it should

remain cognizant of the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) efforts to modernize the E-rate program.

– The strategic plan should include an estimate of savings and increased efficiencies for the state as a result of this expansion.

– The state should plan to evaluate progress toward meeting the goals laid out in the plan and the cost effectiveness of expenditures, including the extent to which private sector investment and broadband expansion has been encouraged.

Recommendation 2: Increase districts' ability to expand wireless connectivity and device availability within schools, allowing them to fully leverage increased broadband capacity.

In considering the broadband needs for schools, Georgia should recognize that the ultimate objective is delivery of bandwidth to the classroom, allowing students and teachers to take advantage of digital learning tools. Georgia should work to ensure that schools have access to the network infrastructure required to deliver the necessary bandwidth to the classroom.

– The state should continue funding the $7 million annual competitive grants for districts to improve technology implementation. In line with the State Education Finance Study Commission's recommendation, the FY2014 budget included funds for this purpose. The commission recommended this investment to continue for two additional years. LEAs with winning applications must have clear technology plans that are aligned with the district strategy and have the largest potential impact.

– The state should increase flexibility within the capital outlay category of the Quality Basic Education (QBE) funding formula to allow districts to spend funds on technology infrastructure. This increased flexibility will provide LEAs with more local control over capital outlay funds, allowing them to meet the specific needs of schools. This recommendation can be accomplished in one of two ways:

    o Broaden the definition of capital outlay in O.C.G.A. § 20-2-260 to include technology infrastructure among allowable expenses.

    o O.C.G.A. § 20-2-260 allows the State Board of Education (SBOE) to determine what expenses can be considered "educational facilities." As such, the SBOE could amend its rule governing capital outlay (160-5-4-.04) to broaden the definition of capital outlay to include technology infrastructure, allowing LEAs to include technology infrastructure upgrades as part of facilities plans.

– If more funding is available in the FY2015 budget, the state could increase the full-time equivalent (FTE) allotment for classroom technology. The FY2014 budget shifted $16.15 per FTE transfer from central administration operations into classroom technology, in line with recommendations from the State Education Finance Study Commission. Increased funding in FY2015 would allow districts to invest in wireless connectivity or devices.

- LEAs, municipalities, and local economic development authorities should apply for grants to expand connectivity. Where possible, the state should support LEA efforts to apply for these grants.

- LEAs should pursue multiple options to increase device availability in schools, including through school purchases, donation programs, and "Bring Your Own Device" (BYOD) programs. It should be noted that device availability does not require continual broadband connectivity because devices can be loaded with content for offline use.

> **Recommendation 3:** Increase availability of wireless connectivity in communities, allowing students to access learning resources outside of school.

- Encourage small businesses to offer free public wireless connectivity, or "Wifi Zones," to Georgia students, as Forsyth County Public Schools has done with its Free Wifi Directory.

- Broaden the home connectivity of low-income families by increasing publicity for broadband adoption options through local Internet providers that provide discounted high-speed connectivity and Internet-ready computers.

II. Digital Content and Courses

Recommendation 4: Support the transition to and acquisition of digital resources at the state, system, school and classroom level.

- Ensure that state policies to support the acquisition of digital textbooks move beyond mere digitized text and towards more interactive and personalized digital resources.

- Identify and support highly motivated schools and districts to become exemplars of digital learning through competitive grants and a scalable process with progressive, statewide goals for implementation over a set time period.

- Incentivize and recognize teachers, through competitive grants, to produce and share exemplary digital resources to populate the Georgia Department of Education's (GaDOE) Teacher Resource Link, which is housed in the Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS).

- Where possible, leverage economies of scale to purchase digital resources at the state level that can be made available to LEAs and charter schools.

- Explore collaborations with other states to share high-quality, open education resources to populate the GaDOE's Teacher Resource Link.

- Consider utilizing a portion of state professional learning dollars to focus on professional development for teachers on the effective utilization of digital learning resources.

Recommendation 5: Remove barriers to online learning.

- Examine the existing funding streams for online courses to encourage students, parents, and schools to broaden and strengthen learning options.

- Streamline credit options to ensure that the state clearinghouse maximizes access to postsecondary education.

Recommendation 6: Develop a broad-based communication strategy around the importance and effective use of digital learning.

- Share information about the resources already available at the state level and best practices in digital learning.

- Include audiences in sectors outside of education to increase buy-in and usage. These sectors should include, at minimum, educators in all school settings, students, parents, the business community, and the broader community of education stakeholders.

- Emphasize the potential for effective incorporation of digital learning to achieve and leverage cost savings.

III. Blended and Competency-Based Learning

Recommendation 7: Provide blended and competency-based learning opportunities, so that PK-12 and postsecondary students are able to broaden, accelerate, or otherwise pace their learning appropriately and ensure mastery before progressing.

- Define competency-based learning as *applied learning to mastery* that may be demonstrated in multiple formats, with multiple opportunities, and through multiple pathways where students advance based on the demonstration of such mastery.

- Define blended learning as a combination of online delivery of content and instruction with face-to-face instruction where the student has some control over time, place, pathway, or pace of learning.

Recommendation 8: Invest in assessments that drive higher expectations for demonstrated proficiency in academic content, application, analysis, and evaluation on summative and formative assessments at both the state and local levels. Plan to provide adequate funding to support the development and subsequent administration of these assessments.

- Clearly define the standards and content by setting consistent, specific expectations for student work and engagement, which are acceptable as evidence that a student's performance demonstrates the required level of competency in a course.

- Clearly define consistent expectations for demonstration of appropriate business-required skills by Georgia students.

Recommendation 9: Review and align into a single document, policy, or law all dual enrollment and competency-based options already available in Georgia, so the options are more easily understood by students and parents.

- Include all options for dual or joint enrollment, Move On When Ready, summer ACCEL pilot courses, testing out of certain courses, blended learning courses, digital courses, credit recovery, credit repair, end-of-pathway assessments of competency for certification, and Georgia's Work Keys assessments for certification.

Recommendation 10: Design a funding mechanism that provides flexibility to foster blended and competency-based learning while balancing the operational needs of districts.

– Consider how existing parameters and requirements in state policy and procedure may adversely impact blended and competency-based learning as well as course choice in Georgia. Revisit and refine the related laws or policies in the state to maximize opportunities for dual credit, blended, and competency-based learning.

Recommendation 11: Find ways to incentivize the blended learning and competency-based courses, programs, and opportunities that expand and extend learning opportunities for students. Use the Innovation Fund, housed at the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA), to support pilots and identify scalable models.

– Select pilots to support through the Innovation Fund that:
  o Build partnerships and digital networks of innovation, moving toward equitable access for students statewide,
  o Build on or expand successful innovative programs utilizing digital, blended or competency-based learning, and
  o Provide an opportunity to test new ideas for implementing digital, blended and competency-based learning that can be expanded if successful.

– Provide districts and schools with necessary flexibility to pursue a competency-based model.

– Leverage GOSA's capabilities, through its 501(c)3, to serve as a fiscal agent for programs, allowing Georgia's innovative programs to become more competitive for large national and private grants in digital and competency-based learning.

– Seek the support of the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA) and the Georgia School Superintendents Association (GSSA) in promoting Innovation Fund opportunities where there is alignment between the task force recommendations and the GSBA/GSSA Visioning Project recommendations.

– Explore partnerships with nonprofit organizations specializing in blended learning to perform a broad needs assessment for blending learning that engages all stakeholders in K-12 education that will lead to a customized plan for expanding blended learning in Georgia.

Recommendation 12: To promote 21st century learning, schools and districts must consider how traditional classroom structures and furniture inhibit teachers from the differentiation needed for effective blended learning. Everything in a learning space should have purposeful thought that promotes learning.

  – As districts replace classroom structures over time, leaders should purchase more versatile furniture that is conducive to blended learning.

Appendix A: Executive Order

THE STATE OF GEORGIA

EXECUTIVE ORDER

BY THE GOVERNOR:

WHEREAS:	The State of Georgia intends to be a leader in education innovation; and
WHEREAS:	Technology has changed the way we work and live; and
WHEREAS:	Students need to develop 21st century skills to make them globally competitive and technically literate to succeed in the innovation economy; and
WHEREAS:	Ubiquitous technology has been successfully implemented by other states to raise the achievement level of students and improve workforce skills; and
WHEREAS:	The State of Georgia must attract businesses to help maintain its vibrant economy; and
WHEREAS:	Businesses depend upon the education system to produce candidates that are college and career ready; and
WHEREAS:	Technology must be an increasing part of our education system to ensure college and career ready students; and
WHEREAS:	American education has not yet embraced the power of technology to customize education and give students the ability to gain knowledge anywhere and at anytime.
	NOW, THEREFORE, PURSUANT TO THE AUTHORITY VESTED IN ME AS GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF GEORGIA, IT IS HEREBY
ORDERED:	That a Digital Learning Task Force is hereby created to make recommendations to prepare the state to effectively improve the educational achievement and attainment of students through the creation of robust digital learning environments, which may include

the transition to digital textbooks and the effective use of wireless mobile devices.

IT IS FURTHER

ORDERED: That this task force will further provide recommendations and support the state's position in research and development related to and arising out of the integration of wireless technology into K-12 classrooms, including an examination of the experiences of other states and school districts.

IT IS FURTHER

ORDERED: That the task force shall include ten members, to be named by the Governor, which will include two school district superintendents, a building-level school leader, a teacher, a district level content specialist, a state level data specialist, a member of the State House of Representatives, a member of the State Senate, and two business leaders who depend on a technologically literate workforce to grow; the State School Superintendent or his designee will serve as an ex-officio member of the task force.

IT IS FURTHER

ORDERED: That the Governor's Office of Student Achievement will be the administrative entity for the Digital Learning Task Force.

This _27TH_ day of April, 2012.

_____
GOVERNOR

Appendix B: Meeting Agendas and Resources

Overview of Digital Learning Context in Georgia
Georgia State Capitol, Room 107, Atlanta
Tuesday, November 20, 2012
9:00 am – 12:00 pm
Agenda
Presentation: Overview of Digital Learning in Georgia

Digital Learning in Other States
Smokey Road Middle School, Newnan
Thursday, December 13, 2012
1:00 pm – 4:00 pm
Agenda
Presentation: Digital Learning in Other States

Digital Content & GaDOE Resources
Georgia Tech Research Institute, Atlanta
Tuesday, February 5, 2013
1:00 pm – 4:00 pm
Agenda
LEA Access to Integrated GaDOE Systems Chart
Georgia's Path to Personalized Learning Diagram

Providing Access to Course Providers & Measuring Quality
GaDOE Center for Classroom Innovation, Atlanta
Tuesday, April 2, 2013
12:00 pm – 4:00 pm
Agenda
Presentation on Louisiana's Course Choice Program

Competency-Based Learning
Professional Development Center, Barrow County Schools, Winder
Thursday, June 6, 2013
11:00 am – 4:00 pm
Agenda
Presentation on Competency-Based Learning & Blended Learning (Michael Horn)

Teacher Certification, Professional Development, & Teacher Preparation Programs
Kennesaw State University, KSU Center
Tuesday, August 6, 2013
1:00 pm – 4:00 pm
Agenda
Presentation on Teacher Preparation for Digital Learning (Dr. Angela Coleman)

Working Group Presentations: Infrastructure
Cisco Systems, Atlanta Office
Friday, October 11, 2013
10:00 am – 2:00 pm
Agenda

Working Group Presentation: Digital Content/Courses and Competency-Based/Blended Learning
LaFayette Educational Center, Fayette County Schools, Fayetteville
Tuesday, October 22, 2013
12:00 pm – 4:00 pm
Agenda

This meeting information is also available at the following link:
http://gosa.georgia.gov/meeting-schedule

Appendix C: Working Group Information

The task force split into three working groups during the August 6, 2013 meeting. These groups met in person and by conference call as needed before proposing recommendations to the full task force in October 2013.

Working Group 1: Digital Content and Courses
Members
Gerard Petty (chair), Rep. Mark Hamilton, Dr. Alan Long, Teya Ryan, Levette Williams

Staff
Kristin Bernhard

Working Group 2: Blended and Competency-Based Learning
Members
Helen Rice (chair), Dr. Jody Barrow, Dave Howland, Kami Luigs, Ed Morrison

Staff
Martha Ann Todd

Working Group 3: Infrastructure
Members
Dr. Buster Evans (chair), Bob Swiggum, Tim Gage, Sen. Butch Miller

Ex-Officio Members
Barbara Hampton, Rep. Mike Dudgeon

Staff
Sam Rauschenberg

Further Information

Further information on the task force, including digital learning resources and highlights from schools around the state, is available on the Governor's Office of Student Achievement's website: http://gosa.georgia.gov/digital-learning-task-force.

For any questions related to the task force's work, please contact Sam Rauschenberg at srauschenberg@georgia.gov or 404-463-3219

This page intentionally left blank.