

Georgia's Proposed Opportunity School District - Overview

Governor Nathan Deal is proposing that Georgia establish an Opportunity School District to provide a safety net for Georgia's children who are assigned to attend persistently failing schools. The parents of these students have very limited or no options for their students' education, and the economic health of the communities in which these schools are located suffers. Schools that are successful in preparing students for postsecondary opportunities and the work force are critical to the future of Georgia's children and the communities in which they live.

In the Governor's proposal, persistently failing schools are defined as those that earn an "F" rating on the Georgia Department of Education's accountability measure, the College and Career Performance Index (CCRPI), for three consecutive years. (The CCRPI includes measures of achievement, growth, and gap reduction.) Based on an analysis of the 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014 CCRPI scores, slightly more than 6%, or 139 - excluding alternative, non-traditional, and special purpose schools - of Georgia's 2184 schools would be eligible for the Opportunity School District (OSD). These schools, except for the two state charter schools, are located in 22 local school districts. In the future, the first year a school receives a CCRPI earns an "F" rating it would be considered on a warning track, and the second consecutive year the school receives earns an "F" rating would be considered a probationary year. During the warning and/or probationary years - or if not selected for intervention by the OSD, the district could apply to the State Board of Education for one-year waivers for the warned, probationary, or eligible school that would allow adequate flexibility for innovative programs to support improvement. During the probationary year, the OSD could begin public hearings and meetings with school stakeholders to discuss current improvement efforts underway in the school and the potential of future OSD intervention.

The Governor will appoint the OSD superintendent, to be confirmed by the Senate, and he or she will report directly to the Governor. The OSD will be an operational unit of the Office of Student Achievement. The OSD will have the same power and authority of a Georgia Local Education Agency (LEA).

The state proposes to intervene in no more than 20 OSD-eligible schools per year and in no more than 100 OSD-eligible schools at any given time. The determination of in which schools the state would intervene in any year would include a number of additional considerations such as the schools' performance on growth measures, any recent changes of leadership in the schools and/or districts, geographic clusters of qualifying schools, feeder patterns with multiple eligible schools, current turnaround efforts, availability of qualified partners, and community engagement and support. The school selection process would include a public hearing to allow for parent and community input, as well as meetings with the school principal, the district superintendent and board members, but the final selection would be up to the OSD superintendent. The final selection should be geographically diverse, including urban and rural schools.

An opportunity school will remain under the supervision of the OSD for a minimum of five consecutive years, or, for an OSD charter school, for the term of the initial charter. If, however, an opportunity school performs, for three consecutive years, above an F on the state accountability system, it will be removed from the OSD. For opportunity schools that have become OSD charter schools and then perform at a level above an F for three consecutive years, they will no longer be subject to the oversight of the OSD

but will remain under the authority of the State Charter Schools Commission and will operate according to the terms of their charter contracts.

After a school has demonstrated effective performance, the OSD will engage the school, the school community, and the school's district in a negotiation to determine the best transition plan for the school to exit the OSD. An OSD charter school that becomes a State Charter Commission School will work with the State Charter School Commission to both renew and continue an effective charter or, if ineffective as a charter, return to the governance of the OSD. If the successful OSD charter school does not wish to remain under the authorization of the SCSC for a second charter term after demonstrating effective performance, the SCSC will work with the OSD to coordinate the development of a transition plan back to the local school district.

The state interventions would be determined on a school by school basis and would include options for MOUs or contracts with local Boards of Education to require specific actions, direct management of schools, chartering, and, as a last resort, closure. Once a school is identified for inclusion in the OSD, the OSD superintendent will immediately begin assessing the capacity of each school in order to determine which reform model is most appropriate given each school's unique circumstances. Any OSD schools identified as potential OSD charter school candidates will immediately embark on a planning year period.

The OSD superintendent must implement a process for analysis of past improvement efforts and growth data, as well as for gaining community feedback and input to inform his or her decision regarding the most appropriate reform model for a given school. This process would include, but not be limited to, public hearings, interviews with school council members, school personnel, community business leaders, and other key community members and leaders.

The schools currently eligible for the OSD will likely change prior to any possible implementation. School year 2017-2018 would be the earliest year in which the state could implement any of these options.

Schools in the OSD would receive a per student share of all local, state, and federal funds coming into the school districts in which the schools are located. Currently 96% of the districts that have OSD-eligible schools spend at or above the state average of \$8,400 per student each year. 26% of these schools are located in districts that spend significantly greater amounts than the state average, more than one standard deviation more. While all of the schools currently identified as potentially eligible for the OSD have high rates of poverty among the student bodies, this level of per pupil funding actually directed to the school is anticipated to provide adequate funds for effective operation. In addition, the OSD superintendent would have available a defined fund to be utilized as appropriate for innovative and wrap-around service programs in the OSD schools.

In preparing for the launch of this initiative, Georgia has studied similar efforts in several other states, most notably Louisiana and Tennessee. In Louisiana, the Recovery School District (RSD) was implemented first in New Orleans in 2005, based on legislation passed in 2003. The percentage of students performing at or above grade level increased by 34 percentage points between 2005 and 2013, while the state average increase was only 9 percentage points during that time period. The percentage of failing schools in the RSD decreased from 65% in 2008 to 20% by 2013. The graduation rate increased by 19 percentage points in RSD schools. Tennessee began the Achievement School District program in 2011 and has seen improvements in grade 3-8 reading, math, and science. High schools saw double digit

score gains in algebra 1, English 1, and biology. Student and parent surveys yielded positive ratings for school culture and effectiveness.

In Georgia, schools that have earned “F” on the CCRPI for three consecutive years currently enroll 78,902 students. There is tremendous potential for positive impact on the educational experiences and in the lives of these students, some of whom are limited to attending failing schools for much or all of their K-12 careers. On the average, failing schools have a 2014 four-year cohort graduation rate of 55.7, compared to 79.3 for the borderline “C” schools. If each of the 23 failing high schools increased its four-year graduation rate to 79.3, an additional 1,238 students would have graduated from high school in 2014. Also on the average, 31.4% of third graders read on grade level in failing schools, compared to 56.8% of students in the borderline “C” schools. If each of the 89 failing elementary schools increased the percentage of third graders reading on grade level to 56.8%, an additional 1,813 students would have read on grade level in 2014.

Governor Deal sees the Opportunity School District as a strategy to fulfill the obligation of the state to provide hope for the families, students, and communities where schools have historically struggled. The Opportunity School District will provide the authority for the state to more effectively provide support and remove barriers to the students’ success.