

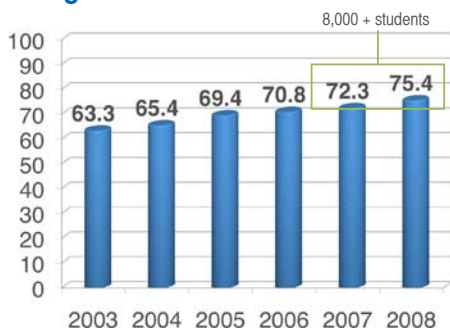
Georgia's Graduation Rate Increases

Rate reflects over 8,000 more students graduating than last year

GEORGIA'S GRADUATION RATE jumped this year to over 75 percent, the highest level ever. The state's final graduation rate for 2008 is 75.4 percent, an increase of more than three points from last year.

"Georgia continues to make great progress in getting more students to graduate on time with a meaningful diploma," said State Superintendent of Schools Kathy Cox. "In 2008, we had more than 83,000 students who graduated on time, which is 27,000 more than we had just five years ago. That's a testament to focus, collaboration and a lot of hard work by our teachers and students."

Georgia's Graduation Rate Increases



Graduation rate has increased 12.1% since 2003.

"The improvement in our graduation rate is happening across the board for all students in every subgroup," Superintendent Cox said. "We still have a lot of work to do, but we are making steady progress by focusing on what works for all students."

Strategic Focus on Improving Georgia's Graduation Rate

The Georgia Department of Education's **number one goal in its Strategic Plan** is to "increase the High School Graduation Rate, decrease the drop-out rate, and increase the post-secondary enrollment rate." In order to meet this goal and have our stu-

dents be more globally competitive, we must have higher graduation rate expectations.

Georgia was recently recognized by The Education Trust, a national education organization that promotes high expectations.

In its report, **Counting on Graduation** (page 5), the authors wrote that Georgia "now requires each school to meet a graduation-rate goal that increases each year, looking toward a goal of 100 percent graduation in 2014. Schools with rates that do not meet this goal cannot fall below a state-set floor and must have improved their rate by 10 percent from the previous year in order to meet their accountability targets."

With these more rigorous expectations and **new graduation rule requirements**, Georgia is focusing on increasing its graduation rate like never before.

Governor Sonny Perdue said: "The progress we have made in our graduation rate has been nothing short of remarkable. Rising from just barely over 60 percent in 2002 to now over 75 percent reflects the commitment of our teachers, students, parents and graduation coaches."

Graduation Rate Rises for All Students

All groups of students saw significant increases in their graduation rate in 2008.

Georgia's African-American students had a graduation rate of 69.2 percent, up nearly four points from 2007. The state's Hispanic students had a graduation rate of 65.5 percent, up more than five points from 2007.

And Georgia's economically-disadvantaged students raised their graduation rate four points to 67 percent.

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Resources

Online print materials
tinyurl.com/GaDOE-Print-Materials

Math webpage
www.GeorgiaMath.org

Graduation Requirements
tinyurl.com/Graduation-Requirements

GeorgiaStandards.org
www.georgiastandards.org

Online Assessment System
www.georgiaaoas.org

Georgia Virtual School
www.gavirtualschool.org

Media Matters
tinyurl.com/December-MediaMatters

December State Board of Education Snapshot

1. New Charter School Rule Reinitiated
2. Winter Administration Mathematics I End-of-Course Test Waiver
3. Georgia Performance Standards for Physical Education up for review
4. Statewide K12 Network Gives Schools More Bandwidth

For more detailed information:
tinyurl.com/State-Board-Meetings

Title I Distinguished Districts

Four Georgia School Districts have been recognized for closing the achievement gap.

EARLIER THIS MONTH, State Superintendent of Schools Kathy Cox named the 2008 Title I Distinguished Districts. These districts have significantly closed the achievement gap between students who are economically disadvantaged and those that are not, based on the results of state curriculum tests. Title I Districts have a significant number of economically-disadvantaged students and received federal "Title I" funds to assist in their education.

Each winning district will receive a \$50,000 award from federal funds.

2008 Title I Distinguished Districts

- Large District
Hall County
- Medium District
Gainesville City
- Small District
Mitchell County
- Very Small District
Evans County

To learn more about this and other Title I recognitions, go to <http://tinyurl.com/Title1Schools>.



Superintendent Cox teaches a group of students at Flowery Branch High School in Hall County, one of four Title I Distinguished Districts.

Georgia Educator Wins Germany's Highest Honor

Teacher sponsored a German-American Partnership Program Exchange

MS. MECHTHILD VOGT, a retired Fayette County High School German teacher, recently received one of the highest honors that the Federal Republic of Germany can bestow. Ms. Vogt was awarded the Cross of Merit, First Class, or Bundesverdienstkreuz, Erste Klasse by Dr. Lutz Goergens, Consul General of the Federal Republic of Germany in Atlanta.

"I appreciate and admire all that Ms. Vogt has accomplished during her thirty years of service," said State Superintendent of Schools Kathy Cox. "She has had a tremendous impact, not only on the teaching and learning of German in our state, but also on the development of trust and friendship between the German and American people."

For twenty of her thirty years at FCHS, Ms. Vogt sponsored a German-American Partnership Program Exchange with the Gesamtschule am Rosenberg, a high school located outside of

Frankfurt in Hofheim, Germany. Over 500 German students visited Fayette County, made friends with American students, and experienced American culture from the inside. And, during her summer vacation, Ms. Vogt and her late husband, Paul Grice,

took her students to Germany for three weeks for a similar experience with German culture.

In awarding the Cross of Merit, General Consul Dr. Goergens was clearly moved: "Ms. Vogt, there is more understanding and sympathy for Germany in the United States today as a result of your work. And there is more understanding and sympathy for the United States in Germany."

Summarizing her feelings as she finished her remarks, Ms. Vogt could look back on her career with great satisfaction: "If I have done my part to help with the understanding and with friendships between our peoples, then I feel that I have reached my most ambitious goal and that all my work was worth it."



Dr. Lutz Goergens congratulates Ms. Mechthild Vogt for being named the Cross of Merit, First Class recipient.

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GEORGIA

DEPARTMENT OF

EDUCATION

Kathy Cox, State Superintendent of Schools

For more information visit:
www.gadoe.org/SATPrepClass

Georgia Virtual School Meeting the Needs of All Students

Over 6,000 students have received high school credit since 2005



A total of 127 online courses are available to students through the Georgia Virtual School.

WHAT DOES A 5TH GRADER IN JASPER, a home schooler in Manchester and a senior in Folkston have in common? They have all taken online courses for high school credit from the Georgia Virtual School program.

Since the summer of 2005, students across the state have had the opportunity to take courses generally not available in their local school. The program now offers 22 Advanced Placement courses, as well as world language classes, such as Chinese, Japanese, German and Latin. A total of 127 GAVS courses are offered.

"In order for Georgia's students to be competitive in the 21st century, they must have the opportunity to take rigorous high school courses," said State Superintendent of Schools Kathy Cox. "Not all school districts are able to offer all classes, but the virtual school provides an on-line solution."

Over 6,000 students in more than 500 middle and high schools in Georgia have successfully earned credit by taking GAVS courses. As one Coweta County student said, "This Georgia Virtual course was academically challenging, and it also taught me the importance of managing my time well. This has been invaluable during my freshman year in college."

According to the United States Distance Learning Association, over 700,000 high school students are taking one or more courses online, and nearly 40 states have established state-wide or state-led virtual schools.

In the Georgia Virtual School program, highly-qualified teachers guide students through each course on a traditional semester timeframe. All courses are available on the Internet around the clock. When comparing test scores,

GAVS' students meet or exceed scores of traditional high school students on Georgia's End-of-Course Tests and the College Board's Advanced Placement exams.

Local schools may approve applications from any of their students who wish to take a course from Georgia Virtual School. The program is particularly valuable for Georgia students in special situations that prevent them from attending school on a traditional schedule, such as medical concerns, relocation or temporary residence out of state. Students are often able to graduate on time despite unique scheduling challenges. GAVS can also help students who relocate to Georgia the chance to catch-up on required classes they may have missed.

The Georgia Virtual School was created by law on May 4, 2005 and serves public, private, and home school students. Each course is aligned to the state's curriculum or College Board standards, in the case of Advanced Placement. These classes are offered on various schedules to meet the differing course and scheduling needs of local school districts.

To learn more about the options and opportunities provided by this Georgia Department of Education program, please visit

www.gavirtualschool.org



The University System of Georgia Offers educators or would-be educators online classes so they can obtain

Georgia ONmyLINE

Advanced Ed. degrees or certifications

MATs in Mathematics and Science

Many other degrees and endorsements

Go to www.GeorgiaONmyLINE.com for more information.



Letter from the Superintendent

Nearly one third of Georgia's schools are considered Title I Distinguished.

777.

This is the total number of **Title I Distinguished Schools** in the state of Georgia this year. That means there are 777 Title I Schools throughout the state that have made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for three or more consecutive years. Yes, even in a year when it was much harder to make AYP, nearly one third of Georgia's schools are considered Title I Distinguished. This is simply remarkable.

As a reminder, a Title I school is one that serves a significant population of economically disadvantaged students. For that reason, they receive federal "Title I" funding that helps fund the education of these students. Conventional Wisdom says that children living in poverty don't achieve at the same level as other students. But our Title I Distinguished Schools don't listen to the Conventional Wisdom -- and I'm glad they don't.

These 777 schools don't accept excuses from anyone. There are high standards

for students and high expectations for teachers. These schools are focused and determined -- and they are getting results.

Take Southside Middle School in Dougherty County. More than 90 percent of Southside's students are considered economically-disadvantaged, but nearly the same percentage of students passed the CRCT in Reading and English Language Arts. Or look at Banks Stephens Middle School in Monroe County. More than half the students are living in poverty, yet more than 93 percent of students met or exceeded standards on our more rigorous mathematics curriculum. I'm proud that we've nominated Southside and Banks Stephens Middle Schools as our 2009 National Title I Distinguished Schools. They are incredibly deserving.

But the truth is, I could pull just about any school out of our list of 777 Title I Distinguished Schools and find similar stories of success, determination and focus.

I'd encourage you to go to our website and find the names of our 777 Title I

Distinguished Schools. If one of these schools is in your neighborhood, please call the principal or write a note and simply say "way to go" and "keep up the great work."

These 777 schools are definitely helping us lead the nation in improving student achievement.

If you would like to see a full list of Title I Distinguished Schools, please visit

tinyurl.com/TitleDistinguishedSchools.

Wishing you a wonderful holiday season and a joyous new year!

Sincerely,

Kathy Cox

2008 Georgia Schools of Excellence

GREATEST GAINS

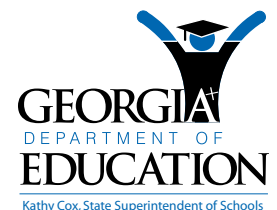
System, School (Congressional District)
 Camden Co., Mamie Lou Gross Elementary, (1st)
 Coweta Co., Northgate High (3rd, tie)
 Muscogee Co., Double Churches Elementary (3rd, tie)
 DeKalb Co., Druid Hills High (5th)
 Fulton Co., Manning Oaks Elementary (6th)
 Walton Co., Loganville Elementary (7th)
 Newton Co., Eastside High (8th, tie)
 Houston Co., Centerville Elementary (8th, tie)
 Forsyth Co., Otwell Middle (9th)
 Jackson Co., East Jackson Elementary (10th)
 Cobb Co., Kemp Elementary (11th, tie)
 Trion City, Trion High (11th, tie)

TOP 10%

System, School (Congressional District)
 Fayette Co., Huddleston Elementary (3rd, tie)
 Fayette, McIntosh High (3rd, tie)
 DeKalb Co., Browns Mill Elementary (4th)
 Dekalb Co., Kittredge Elementary (5th)
 Cobb Co., Timber Ridge Elementary (6th, tie)
 Cobb Co., Dickerson Middle (6th, tie)
 Cobb Co., Lassiter High (6th, tie)
 Forsyth Co., Sharon Elementary (7th, tie)
 Gwinnett Co., Brookwood High (7th, tie)
 Houston Co., Quail Run Elementary (8th)
 Forsyth Co., South Forsyth High (9th)
 Richmond Co., Davidson Magnet School (10th)
 Cobb Co., Harrison High (11th)
 Savannah-Chatham Co., Savannah Arts Academy (12th)

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Kathy Cox, State Superintendent of Schools