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doi: <https://doi.org/10.57709/8764357>

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## ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, IDENTIFICATION OF EXEMPLARY TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS AS PART OF GEORGIA'S VISION FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION, by KIMBERLY A. MCDERMON, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education and Human Development, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

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IDENTIFICATION OF EXEMPLARY TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS AS PART OF  
GEORGIA'S VISION FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

by

KIMBERLY MCDERMON

Under the Direction of James Kahrs

ABSTRACT

**Background:** Improving instruction and rewarding educators for student learning creates a paradigm shift in evaluating a teacher's contribution to individual learners. Systemic performance and teacher performance are now receiving more attention than ever before in history, as they are considered foundational for student performance. Policy makers are concerned about teacher quality and want a non-subjective measure that compares teachers based on student achievement results. Superintendents and school boards are joining forces to produce frameworks that are designed to guide school districts through strategic planning. *The Vision for Public Education, Equity and Excellence* in Georgia is one example. **Purpose:** The primary focus of this dissertation is to examine *A Vision for Public Education, Equity and Excellence*, a state-wide project to improve public education in Georgia. The aim of the project is to influence school board policy in seven areas, early learning and student success, teaching and learning, teaching and learning

resources, human and organizational capital, governance, leadership, and accountability. **Research Methods:** A case study provides how individual school boards are implementing the Georgia Vision Project's recommendations, particularly teacher evaluation. The districts chosen for this study met the criteria of implementing the Vision Project with fidelity and were deemed to be addressing teacher evaluation with commitment. An instrumental case study design allowed for an in-depth look at the Vision Project's effect on two districts. **Findings:** Findings reveal how two school districts in Georgia actively used the recommendations from the Vision for Public Education to strengthen strategic planning in multiple areas. Results show how exemplary teachers, building leaders, and district leaders are aligning efforts to improve the educational experience for students. This dissertation describes common themes in student data uses, teacher evaluation, and clarity of communication to benefit student achievement. **Conclusion:** The results suggest the Vision Project recommendations overlapped showing the complexity of school organizations. Each district used the recommendations differently however, clarity, communication and a focus on students emerged as commonalities. Hopes and fears concerning teacher evaluation arose as teachers discussed current policy requiring student test data be incorporated into teacher evaluations.

**INDEX WORDS:** Georgia vision project, Teacher keys effectiveness system, Education policy, Institutional theory

IDENTIFICATION OF EXEMPLARY TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS AS PART OF  
GEORGIA'S VISION FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

by

KIMBERLY MCDERMON

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Educational Leadership

in

Educational Policy Studies

in

the College of Education and Human Development

Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA

2016



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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my dad, David H. Upchurch, Sr. He stressed the value of education and pushed all of us to learn as much as we could from all those around us. He often told us we had two ears and one mouth and to use them in the same proportions. A man of few words, he let his hard work speak for itself as he definitely listened more than he talked. I was watching dad, and strive every day to live up to your expectations and examples.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

During this three year journey I received support and encouragement from so many individuals. A big thank you goes to my committee chair, Dr. James Kahrs, as he made sure I stayed on track and calmed me when I would feel overwhelmed. Dr. Yinying Wang and Dr. Sid Camp guided my research from an idea to a completed study as part of my dissertation committee, thank you. In addition, Dr. Monica Batiste and Janie Gibson, my sister, spent countless hours proofreading and listening to me talk about my research, thank you.

I would also like to thank the teachers, principals, and school district leaders who took part in this study for sharing their time and honest answers. I learned much from listening to you. To my boys, Rob and Charles, thank you for allowing me the time to pursue my goal of attaining this degree. Finally, thanks to Dr. Jami Berry as she always took a phone call and provided clarity during my journey.

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# **IDENTIFICATION OF EXEMPLARY TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS AS PART OF GEORGIA'S VISION FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION**

## **Introduction**

We all had teachers who influenced us in some way. This recognition is evident in the collective social consciousness: even today as a means of security, a person can use their favorite teacher as the answer to protect personal data. This assumes that good teachers are memorable. Daley and Kim (2010) found that individual teachers are the most important school related factor in student achievement gains. The quality of teaching in our public schools is being discussed around dining room tables, at the water cooler, and in the news on a weekly basis. Improving student achievement is a newsworthy topic of discussion. The press assesses and reports comparison scores by states, school, and teacher. School report card rankings drive discussion on blogs, posts, and other social media sites.

The importance of public education plays out in the previously mentioned venues as well as in Washington D.C. through policy revisions and in private philanthropist organizations by means of competitive grants. The question on the minds of stakeholders is simple, "How do we ensure that teachers are teaching, students are learning, and how do we know it's working?" This literature review looks at past influences on teacher evaluation processes and discusses current changes to teacher evaluation. The influences include information on federal policy mandates, value-added measurement, and the effect of student achievement data on teacher evaluation.

Many researchers focus on teacher behaviors and evaluation tools to measure the effectiveness due to the understanding that teachers matter (Stronge, 2010; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Jacob, 2012). Georgia's new teacher evaluation tool went into effect for the 2014-2015

school year. The Georgia Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) tool will focus on two parts: a Value Added Measure (VAM) based on student growth percentiles and an observation section based on ten performance standards ("GaPSC," 2013). Additionally, VAMs determine whether a teacher's students made greater gains on standardized tests than statistical models would have predicted. The observation component looks at the teacher's practice demonstrated by the totality of the evidence over a school year. Prior to the statewide implementation, TKES completed a three-year pilot program in twenty-six districts (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.). President Obama's educational initiative, Race to the Top (RTTT), was the initial phase in the development of the revised teacher and leader evaluation system in Georgia.

### **Guiding Questions**

The primary purpose of this study is to evaluate the implementation of the Vision Project recommendations in Georgia's schools. The evaluation takes place in eleven districts ranging from small to large, urban to rural, with varying economic status. Central questions for evaluation are addressed as follows:

1. How have the internal contexts coupled with the implementation of the Vision Project impacted learning and leadership in your school?
2. What are the features of the Vision Project that have specifically impacted learning in your school?
3. How has the implementation of the Vision Project helped build capacity of self and others in your school?

The study also examines two districts who have committed to improving teaching and teachers in order to positively impact student learning were selected for deeper research with a secondary focus. One additional central question for these districts follows:

4. How do teachers and principals describe the impact of teacher evaluation instruments?

## **Literature Review**

### **Search Criteria**

In order to provide a balanced analysis, I used key word searches centered on four topics, Value Added Measures (VAM), teacher observation, teacher evaluation and common uses of evaluation. The recent rise in value-added models is used for a variety of reasons. Legislators have employed the new evaluation system to determine tenure, retention, class assignments, and pay for performance. EBSCO served as the primary research database for peer reviewed articles and the reference lists included in the articles provided additional sources. Several books and policy papers supplied complimentary information.

Educational leadership publications such as the *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation* and *Educational Leadership* provided over one thousand articles. While these are not peer reviewed articles, the high instance of articles shows the level of interest in the topic. Additionally, the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) had multiple books on the subject as well. Research journals highlighting leadership, personnel and finance supplied current peer reviewed articles on the subjects. Researchers such as James Stronge and Charlotte Danielson have written for ASCD and are referenced in this literature review. In 2009, Stronge consulted with the state of Georgia in the development of the TKES tool. This review of literature includes information on teacher evaluation tools from a business, federal policy, and educational researcher's perspective while giving a brief history of teacher evalua-



tion. Additionally, selected states incorporated new teacher effectiveness measures are included in the literature review. The main emphasis is on the state of Georgia and the journey to improve student achievement.

### **Business Influence on a New System**

The United States Federal Government heard business leaders loud and clear concerning improving education. A joint study conducted by The Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, and the Society for Human Resource Management looked at the readiness of new entrants to the workforce (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). They found that students who were graduating from high school were ill prepared for college or career. Business and educational institutions wondered “What is the key to ensuring students are prepared for life after their K-12 education?” Research shows that individual teachers are the most important school related factor in student achievement gains (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013, McCaffery, Korte, Lockwood, & Hamilton, 2003, Rockoff, Jacob, Kane, & Staiger, 2011, Stronge, 2007). This question is essential for school systems since businesses are holding public education accountable for preparing students to work in their environment. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that youth between the ages of 16 and 24 who graduated from high school between January and October of 2014 entered the workforce at a rate of 37.9 percent for those also entering college as full time students and at a rate of 72.7 percent for those not attending college (2015). Businesses hiring these students expect them to be ready to work.

The cooperative study also reports that students are entering the workforce with deficiency in Writing in English, Mathematics, and Reading Comprehension. Three-quarters (75.6 percent) of employer respondents said that K-12 schools should be responsible for providing the

necessary basic knowledge and applied skills for their new entrants (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). Additionally, respondents rated high school graduates 45.6 percent of the time as adequate to perform needed tasks. Today, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills are essential for all students, not just a few. In past economies, Americans lived in a world with an assembly-line mentality. Top managers handled thinking, problem solving, decision making, and communicating for their organizations (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). In contrast, members of competitive organizations have greater responsibility to plan collaboratively including front line workers (Kay, 2010). The problem seems to be an educational system that has not kept up with the needs of students in preparing them for a new world of jobs with a needed new skill set.

### **History of Teacher Evaluation**

In order to understand where teacher evaluation is going, it is important to understand its roots. Marzano, Frontier and Livingston (2011) stated that clergy controlled schools beginning in the mid-1700s and their control lasted through the mid-1800s. Clergy provided guidance to and supervision of teachers. In the mid-1800s, large urban schools with a more intricate structure began to surface. A need for more expert teachers soon followed and clergy did not have the knowledge base to evaluate teachers. This lasted until right before World War II. At this time two opposing views formed. John Dewey and Fredrick Taylor led the way to rethink schools. Dewey believed in a student-centered focus. Taylor thought a scientific view, which resembled a factory, in which one best way to perform a task was more efficient. Cubberley and Thorndike supported Taylor's theories and measurement soon followed (Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011).

After World War II there was a shift in public perception; the teacher as an individual began dominating the literature. This is evident in the 1946 issue of Educational Leadership in

which several articles focused on the teacher as a person and the process in which to supervise these individuals. During this time, teachers' unions came into play as well as an increase in men joining the profession (Tyack, 1974). Clinical supervision spread through the early 1960s and 70s. Clinical supervision included pre- and post-meetings with an observation in between. An analysis followed the post conference; the goal was to improve instruction. Danielson's *Framework for Teaching*, became popular in the 1990s and is widely used today. By 1983, 26 states required teacher evaluations in some form (Wuhs & Manatt, 1983). Finally, the first decade of the 21st century witnessed heavy criticisms of current evaluation practices calling for major changes in tenure and compensation (Marzano et al., 2011).

Currently, teachers and principals receive monetary gains for years of experience, licensing credentials, and advanced degrees with little evidence of how this affects student achievement (Jacob, 2012). The research focusing on the need to move away from the current model and to value-added measures (VAM) is not new to school systems. Beginning in the late 1990's, studies using value-added methods provided evidence of substantial variation in teachers' contributions to student learning (e.g., Sanders and Rivers, 1996; Wright, Horn, and Sanders, 1997; Webster, Mendro, Orsak, and Weerasinghe, 1998; Rowan, Correnti, and Miller, 2002).

### **Race to the Top (RTTT)**

President Obama's educational initiative, Race to the Top (RTTT), was the initial step in the process for Georgia in revamping the teacher and leader evaluation system. It was also the beginning for many other states as they competed for federal dollars to improve teacher and principal evaluation tools. Thirty-five states, the District of Columbia and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico submitted applications in hopes of winning one of the first grants. Delaware and Tennessee received the first grants and served as models for other states. Both states presented

hard line plans to improve teacher and principal evaluation, use data to drive instructional decisions, and turn around low performing schools ("U.S. DOE," 2010). New state laws and policies supported Delaware and Tennessee reform efforts and played a part in their win.

The principle upon which Race to the Top (RTTT) is founded calls for teacher effectiveness to be determined from a combination of measures using both students' growth indicators and observation-based assessments (Stronge et al., 2011). Teacher and principal evaluation prior to RTTT did not take into consideration the impact on student learning or student growth from year to year. Value Added Measures (VAM), in theory, brings non-subjective information into the evaluation process. The evaluation process needs to reflect a rigorous and fair means for assessing performance as it influences student achievement.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation published a policy and practice brief in January 2013 analyzing three dimensions of teacher evaluation. The first question examined was "Can measures of effective teaching identify teachers who better help students learn?" In summary, the research indicated that as long as random assignments were made, student achievement outcomes were predictable. The research confirmed that, as a group, teachers previously identified as more effective caused students to learn more (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013).

Georgia's TKES incorporates all three of the Gates' recommendations as it aligns Georgia's evaluation system with current research. The Teacher Assessment on Performance Standards (TAPS) makes up 50 percent of the overall evaluation and is qualitative in nature. Student surveys are evident in four of the ten standards used in the classroom observations. The other 50 percent is quantitative data based on Student Performance Gains (SPG). Tennessee, Colorado, and New Jersey, also included some of the Gates Foundation recommendations while incorporating additional research. The Gates Foundation has conducted research in Georgia, Tennessee

and Colorado with New Jersey being the only state absent from data collection in the Gates research (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013). In order to give specific examples, these four states are the included for comparisons.

Tennessee Value Added Assessment System (TVAAS) created by Dr. William Sanders, Professor at University of Tennessee, Knoxville, divides teacher and leader assessment into two categories. A teacher observation instrument that incorporates 19 standards and objectives as it consists of 50 percent of a teacher's or principal's evaluation. The other 50 percent consists of quantitative student data. There is a student survey portion; however, it is unclear as to how surveys fit in the evaluation process (Tennessee Department of Education, n.d.).

In the 2013-14 school year, the Tennessee State Board of Education approved surveys accounting for five percent of the qualitative component of the overall level of effectiveness. During the spring of 2013, more than 192,000 students in 323 schools across 17 districts in the state took the Tripod student perception survey. These surveys provided feedback to more than 10,000 teachers. The spring 2013 pilot administration included students in grades kindergarten through grade twelve (Tennessee Department of Education, n.d.). Tennessee is currently using the Tripod Survey. The Tripod Survey developed by Harvard researcher Ronald Ferguson has eleven years of administration but was primarily designed to assist in professional learning and research. The Measures for Effective Teaching (MET) study found Tripod predictive of achievement gains (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012).

Colorado also equally divides observations and student achievement. Half of the evaluation is based on five Quality Standards that measure professional practice: content knowledge, establish classroom environment, facilitate learning, reflect on practice and demonstrate leadership. Student surveys influence the professional practice standard. The sixth Quality Standard,

student growth, accounts for the other half of the evaluation. The standard includes multiple measures of student growth or student learning over time, not a single assessment (Colorado Department of Education, n.d.).

The five standards are used to measure a teacher's practice using a rubric including twenty-seven elements breaking down the five standards into smaller chunks. These elements combine to include a total possible score of five hundred forty points. The scores include an individual teacher rating on the standards combined with the student performance rating which also has a possible score of five hundred forty. The two scores are simply combined for a final numeric score with a top possible value of one thousand eighty points. The overall score is then translated onto the four point scale ranging from highly effective at the top to ineffective at the bottom. Conversely, Colorado developed its own student survey unlike Tennessee which chose a commercially available option. The student feedback informs practice as an artifact of learning on the five performance standards but does not carry individual weight (Colorado Department of Education, n.d.).

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) based the teacher observation and standards on Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching. To determine overall educator effectiveness, the Rhode Island Model includes three evaluation criteria: Professional Practice, Professional Foundations, and Student Learning. The three components are combined to gain one overall teacher effectiveness score. Three observations annually are required for the Professional Practice portion. The Teacher Professional Foundations Rubric includes eight components that align with the Rhode Island Professional Teaching Standards, the Rhode Island Educational Leadership Standards, and the Rhode Island Code of Professional Responsibility. Student learning is measured in two ways: Student Learning Objectives and the Rhode Island

Growth Model (RIGM) (Rhode Island Department of Education, n.d.). The weight of each are not published on the RIDE website. There was no information relating to student surveys.

The Teacher Professional Practice Rubric represents the Rhode Island Model's definition of effective teaching. Adapted from Domains 2 and 3 of the 2011 version of Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching, the Teacher Professional Practice rubric consists of eight components organized into two domains: Classroom Environment and Instruction. Teachers' roles extend beyond delivering instruction and managing the classroom environment. The Rhode Island Model recognizes the additional contributions teachers make to school communities through the Teacher Professional Foundations Rubric including eight ways teachers could contribute to the larger school community. Student learning in the Rhode Island system uses VAM along with a growth model utilizing Student Learning Objectives. Professional Practice and Professional Foundations combine to create one score on a four point scale. Student Learning makes up the remaining fifty percent of the teacher's overall evaluation. The two scores are coalesced using a rubric generating a final measure (Rhode Island Department of Education, n.d.).

All four states use a combination of an observation tool and a VAM to determine a teacher's overall effectiveness. The terminology is different, yet all four are using a 50 / 50 split between teacher observation tools and VAM data collection. Another common theme found on all four state websites is constant change to the measurement tool during their pilot years. In this era of accountability, educational leaders must focus on growth-based, evidence-supported, results-driven evaluation systems that identify, support, and help sustain effective teachers and principals (Stronge, 2013).

Georgia, Tennessee, Colorado, and Rhode Island conducted multiyear pilots prior to finalizing a new teacher evaluation or effectiveness tool. Tennessee, Rhode Island and Colorado reduced the number of observations originally proposed during the pilots as a result of stakeholder feedback. Georgia is piloting a reduced observation model in 2015. Currently Georgia, Tennessee and Colorado continue to use student surveys as an artifact to inform teacher practice. This is a revision from the pilots which called for an individual weight for survey results on the assessment. All four use a combination of Student Learning Objectives (SLO) and standardized testing (VAM) making up fifty percent of a teachers' evaluation. A four point scale separates the top and bottom of the ratings. As previously mentioned, states that use a four point scale still have the majority of teachers in the top two tiers (Weisberg et al., 2009).

### **Policy Effects on Teacher Evaluation**

I think by far the most important bill in our whole code is that for the diffusion of knowledge among the people. No other sure foundation can be devised for the preservation of freedom, and happiness.

- Jefferson, Letter to George Wyatt, 1786.

Even though the founders of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights left education responsibilities up to the states, the value they placed on education goes without question. Today, the federal government plays an increasingly large role in education. The role of the federal government in educational policy elicits debate in multiple venues. While the constitution does not specifically mention education, the federal government authorizes billions of dollars to support education. Jack Jennings (2011) reported during fiscal year 2010, the federal education budget hit \$32 billion dollars in formula grants for public education. Formula grants use the number of students in categories, poor students for example, in determining how



much money a state receives. Title I and Individuals with Disabilities Act are the two biggest recipients of the formula grants (<http://www.ed.gov/>).

These formula based grants began with the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (Thomas & Brady, 2005). During President Obama's administration, shifts to competitive grants led to Race to the Top (RTTT) and the Teacher's Incentive Fund. ESEA and its numerous reauthorizations including No Child Left Behind, the report- *A Nation at Risk* and RTTT influences our current environment in educational policy. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is the newest federal policy signed by President Obama in December 2015. It is unclear how this will be enacted by the states as it does not go into effect until August 2016. Each of these educational policies plays a role today .

In 1965, President Johnson signed into law the first education legislation that included federal dollars for education. Forte (2010) states President Johnson's concern for leveling educational opportunities for poor children led to the first accountability measures. States had autonomy to use one set of achievement test for schools receiving funds and another for other schools. The basic concept of the original ESEA received wide acceptance at the time. However, the National Education Association (NEA) criticized the use of federal dollars for private schools (Thomas & Brady, 2005). To address the critics beginning to surface, the authors included a provision stating the federal government could not "exercise any direction, supervision, or control over the curriculum, program of instruction, administration, or personnel, or over the selection of any instructional materials in any educational institution or school system" (Public Law 89-10, Section 604).

The 1980s began with a new president, Ronald Reagan, and a new focus on reducing the role of the federal government in domestic policy. In 1981, the Education Consolidation and

Improvement Act passed reducing the amount of funds received through Title I and changed the name to Chapter 1 in an effort to rebrand the program. Simultaneously, the Reagan administration began highlighting the need for higher expectations for students which brought into question the ability of the American Public School System to meet the needs of students and society (Thomas & Brady, 2005). Then in 1983, the report, “*A Nation at Risk*” propelled education to the forefront of debate and conversation.

*A Nation at Risk* continues to influence policy 30 years after its original introduction. A report ordered by President Jimmy Carter three years prior to *A Nation at Risk* and prepared by the National Science Foundation and the Department of Education stated schools lacked rigor in mathematics and science. Johannigmeier (2010) concluded the well-organized marketing campaign of *A Nation at Risk* and criticism of public education over the previous 40 years allowed the general public to easily accept the argument that our public schools were not delivering an education that allowed America to stay relevant. State legislatures soon began passing policy to address the issues. By 1987, 41 states passed increased high school graduation requirements and 29 states passed some sort of teacher credentialing exam (Thomas & Brady, 2005). The next reauthorization of ESEA, better known as No Child Left Behind, was the next major event in educational policy.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB), enacted in January 2002 during President George H. W. Bush’s presidency, aimed to close the achievement gap between students. NCLB required annual testing and the reporting of test results in the form of subgroups. These subgroups included African American, Hispanic, special education, English language learners and low economic students. Thomas and Brady (2005) stated the implementation of these subgroups brought attention to students that had previously been overlooked. NCLB included requirements for

accountability for test results, research-based education programs, increased parental options, highly qualified status for teachers and expanded local control and flexibility (<http://www.ed.gov/>; Pepper, 2010). Pepper (2010) stated the accountability of NCLB came with little to no support to school districts to assemble capacity for the transformation. Academic targets in reading and math established proficiency of the standards based on a student's performance on an exam. This review of performance completed on an annual basis known as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

State waivers to the AYP provision began in 2011 allowing districts to no longer be held by this requirement. However under NCLB, academic standards varied from state to state making comparisons difficult. Schuster (2012) focused on the additional requirements for Title I schools in NCLB. The most notable being the highly qualified teacher requirement. Researchers understand the importance of a quality teacher in every classroom (Danielson, 2010; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; McCaffery et al., 2003; Stronge, 2010). The disconnect exists where legislation dictates the meaning of quality teaching with little to no research. Highly qualified status included in the NCLB reauthorization is one example.

Highly qualified status for teachers is defined as those holding a bachelor's degree, full state certification, and proof they know each subject they teach (<http://www.ed.gov/>). It is the third criterion that greatly varies by state ("Evaluating Teachers," 2007). Jacob (2012) found that advanced degrees, scores on certification exams and years of experience had no effect on student achievement. Although the NCLB requirement did bring attention to teacher quality, researchers disagree the stated requirements made a teacher "highly qualified" (Jacob, 2012; Alicas, 2005; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Von Frank, 2011). Schuster (2012) posits the debate rises to the level of national importance. School officials and policy makers are concerned with teacher

quality. Michelle Rhee, Founder and CEO of Students First, and the documentary *Waiting for Superman*, turned highly qualified into a debate on highly effective. In a 2010 poll conducted by Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup, respondents indicated improving teacher quality is their most important priority (Bushaw & Lopez, 2010).

If certification exams, years of experience, and degree level does not guarantee a teacher is highly qualified, then how do school districts, business leaders, and parents know if a teacher is good? As a result of Congress failing to reauthorize ESEA in 2011, President Obama's administration championed a new way to implement educational policies. Competitive grants, Race to the Top and the Teachers Incentive Fund, changed the landscape on how to gain federal dollars. Congress appropriated approximately \$5.05 billion for RTTT between 2009 and 2012 ("ies report," 2014). Major reforms to teacher evaluations are a direct result of the competitive grants generated by RTTT funds (Baker, Oluwole, & Green, 2013). RTTT required states to address five areas in the revamping of teacher evaluation ("ies report," 2014):

1. Student achievement growth measures must be clear
2. Fair, transparent, and rigorous evaluation system for teachers
3. Use multiple rating system that includes student growth and in which includes teacher participation
4. Evaluations must be annual, provide feedback for improvement, and include student data
5. Evaluations are used to inform staff decisions regarding tenure, compensation, promotion, certification, and dismissal

From a policy perspective, RTTT addressed the need for an updated policy for educational reform. Baker et al. (2013) concluded the components, observation and test scores, states use to address teacher evaluation creates a false sense of accountability. In addition, overly regulatory practices and strict mandates are likely to open states and school districts to

litigation. Value Added Measures (VAM), discussed in detail later in this review, used in the new evaluations, lacks dependability. Schochet and Chang (2010) reported an error rate for VAMs of 25 percent using three years of student growth data and 35 percent with one year of data. Considering there is a one in four chance or more of making a mistake in rating a teacher, the policy is not ready for use in high stakes employment decisions. A study of Nevada's Criterion-Referenced Test in math and reading showed a failure to meet the stability standards suggesting that the student scores are not ready to be used in high stake decisions (Lash, Makkonen, Tran, & Huang, 2016).

President Obama's blueprint for the reauthorization of ESEA addresses the "highly qualified" teacher status; however, it does not address some of the concerns raised about RTTT required use of VAM. Jennings (2011) provides further insight into the rewrite of ESEA and believes it will address teacher evaluation and pay, accountability measures, and common standards. Additionally, the use of competitive grants will increase as well. Moreover, Democrats and Republicans agree a reauthorization is long overdue. Democratic committee members unanimously opposed H.R. 5, Student Success Act, sponsored by Republican John Kline. H.R. 5 passed in the House of Representatives in July 2013 (Education and the Workforce Committee, n.d.).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) ultimately gained bi-partisan support sponsored by Senator Lamar Alexander, R- Tennessee, and Senator Patty Murray, D- Washington ("ESSA", 2016). ESSA is the newest law of the land governing education and becomes law on August 1, 2016. According to the Education and the Workforce Committee (2016), the law reduces the federal government's role and restores local control of schools to the states. Additionally, ESSA

repeals adequate yearly progress and gives individual states the power to design accountability measures for its schools.

In addressing teacher quality, ESSA ends federal mandates on teacher evaluation while providing resources to states and school districts to develop teacher supports such as professional learning opportunities, induction services for new teachers and opportunities to recruit new educators into the profession ("ESSA," 2016). One of the biggest changes revolves around “highly qualified status” which required in field certification for teachers. ESSA only requires teachers to hold certification in the state where they teach. Teacher-evaluation policies are set in law or regulation in some 42 states and the District of Columbia, according to the National Council on Teacher Quality (2015), which means most states would need to rewrite legislation or regulations to implement ESSA.

There is a movement in states with the support of local school boards to promote public education outside of state or federal policy. French (1998) documents Massachusetts’ efforts to create a vision for students during the formation of the Massachusetts Common Core of Learning. These grass root efforts are popping up in different states and outlines the state’s vision for public education. One such effort found in Georgia is the Georgia Vision Project. The Georgia School Board Association and the Georgia School Superintendents Association joined forces to articulate a vision for Georgia schools. According to their website, 108 of the 180 Georgia districts have officially decided to support this effort (Vision for Public Education, n.d.). Connecticut, Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas are in the beginning stages of building a vision for their state.

These grass root efforts incorporate flexibility, autonomy, and vision that all schools need to blossom (French, 1998). In order for this type of reform to be successful, stakeholders in local

school districts must be active participants. Ravitch (2014) encourages all who care about children to get involved. She continues stating, “The purpose of education is not to race to higher test scores, but to prepare children for the duties and responsibilities of citizenship” (p.164). This statement brings the current debate on policies full circle back to the founding fathers and the original intent of public schools. President George Washington stated, “There is nothing which can better deserve our patronage than the promotion of science and literature.” Given that “Knowledge is in every country the surest basis of public happiness” (<http://www.rasmussen.edu>).

### **Value Added Measures**

Race to the Top and Teacher Incentive Fund grant programs address the need to hold teachers and principals accountable for student outcomes. Both grants require moving away from what Alicia (2005) describes as the traditional practice being teacher-centered in that it uses ratings about traits and behavioral patterns of the teacher, rather than those about the students. According to Milanowski (2011), “The need to find teaching practice measures with more rigor to compliment value added for use in performance pay systems, for tenure decisions, and to identify professional development needs has led many US states and school districts to look for a better evaluation model” (p.4).

By definition, VAM strategies use a complex set of statistical structures, which attempt to isolate the school and teacher effect on student learning. Amrein-Beardsley and Collins (2012) posit, “In theory, VAMs allow for richer analyses of test score data because groups of students are simply followed to assess their learning trajectories from the time they enter a classroom to the time they leave” (p.3). Student Growth Percentiles (SGP) measure this year-to-year growth. VAM uses the SGP (adjusted to account for differences among students) and identifies groups of

teachers who, by virtue of their instruction, are helping students learn more (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013). Jacob (2012) states the potential value could help school leaders in making decisions on hiring, retention, and teacher assignment as they can now compare the teacher effective ratings on learning.

Teacher effectiveness research in recent years revolves around models that incorporate VAMs into teacher and principal evaluation. These models commonly referred to as Value-Added Models (VAM) generate much debate. Much of the debate revolves around making decisions that impact teachers and schools based on research techniques that produce inconsistent results (McCaffery et al., 2003). Linking teachers to test scores sounds reasonable, however, some studies show that the reliability and difficulty of tests vary and in some subject areas, tests are not available.

Another serious drawback to VAMs revolves around the complexity of the algorithms making them inaccessible to non-statisticians, including teachers, school administrators, and policymakers (Everson, Feinauer, & Sudweeks, 2013). Alicias (2005) refers to the magic called shrinkage estimation when referring to the algorithm used by Dr. William Sanders who developed the Tennessee Value Added Assessment System. A Texas teacher, Andrew Dewey, along with the Houston Federation of Teachers filed suit in federal court based on VAM formulas not being public knowledge and being “incomprehensible” to the average person (*Houston Federation of Teachers, Local 2415, Daniel Santos, Paloma Garner, Ivan Castillo, Andy Dewey, Joyce Helfman, Myla Van Duyn and Araceli Ramos vs. Houston Independent School District*). Gaining stakeholder buy-in to a model that seems a mathematical mystery poses multiple issues. Problems arise when high stakes decisions like termination, retention and bonus pay are based on hard to understand scores.



The VAM currently makes up 50 percent of teacher evaluations in states using this approach. In a 50 state review of policy, states are mandating through legislation that employment decisions consider a teacher's evaluation (Thomsen, 2014). Three states have attempted to eliminate tenure, Florida, Kansas, and North Carolina. Sixteen states require performance evaluations be used in employment decisions like layoffs and tenure (Thomsen, 2014). Seven states have laws requiring teachers who receive negative evaluations be stripped of tenure and returned to probationary status. Ten other states explicitly prohibit using tenure or seniority when making lay off decisions. Prior to 2012, only five states had such laws (Thomsen, 2014). The stakes are becoming higher for teachers as a change in society thinking is shifting to a results based ideology. While the previously mentioned changes have occurred, the understanding that teachers matter has remained constant.

Research shows that individual teachers are the most important school related factor in student achievement gains (McCaffery et al., 2003; Stronge, 2010; Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haetel, & Rothstein, 2012). Daley and Kim (2010) report the variances between teachers are not predictive using customary methods. Jacobs (2012) concurs, stating that years of experience, degree level, and scores on state licensing exams play little to no role in raising a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom. These factors have businesses, the public and policy-makers demanding a better approach to teacher and principal evaluation. This includes a fair and systematic observation tool that aligns with evidence of student learning. How to measure this accountability while considering outside factors has the experts weighing in on both sides.

Outside factors play a part in student test scores. Researchers argue that you cannot separate student and teacher attributes from their scores. Kupermintz (2003) believes environmental factors such as "personal propensities and resources (both cognitive and noncognitive), physical

and mental maturation, home environment, cultural heritage, institutional and informal community resources” impacts learning as much as the teacher or school (p. 289). Environmental factors are perhaps the most concerning for teachers. Teachers, for example, often worry that a student’s inadequate breakfast or poor sleep the night before the exam will affect performance and, therefore, the teacher’s evaluation (Everson et al., 2013).

Then there are the unintended consequences that influence the school culture. One major problem is that VAMs directly compare teachers with each other, pitting them against each other, especially when these comparisons influence retention and promotion decisions (Everson et al., 2013). Danielson (2010) suggests that the professional learning that happens between teachers could be hindered if they are competing with each other for rankings.

Before moving on to the positive attributes of VAM, we must discuss a four-letter word that will surely affect any teacher evaluation system, *time*. Zatynski (2012) concluded most states that have implemented a VAM pair it with teacher observation tools and student surveys. For principals, already among the busiest of professionals, time is the greatest obstacle in making teacher evaluations as useful as they need to be. The time to provide quality feedback requires evaluators add more to an already full plate. One principal perhaps said it best, “People by day, paper by night. I try to live by that, but man, it can make for some long nights” (Zatynski, 2012, p. 24). Danielson (2012) agrees feedback influences teaching; however, most administrators lack proper training for meaningful conversations about instruction.

However, no argument to VAM negates the fact that teacher evaluations are taking center stage in the debate for improving public education. Lawmakers and the public in general are seeking ways to improve performance. VAMs provide the opportunity for objective evaluation. Alicias (2005) posits at the end of a teaching period, for example a school year, VAM attempt to

measure the extra learning above the expected level of achievement that could be attributed to the effective teaching provided by the teacher. This objective data piece is missing from the current system.

The popularity of Value Added Measures has many educational experts weighing in on the topic. Stronge (2011) states the purpose of the research is to develop a carefully worked-out mathematical model that detects teachers who truly are helping students learn more than expected. The power of a Value Added Model led Thum and Bryk (1997) to affirm that “from a purely technical perspective, the arguments seem very clear: Anything other than a value-added-based approach is simply not defensible” (p. 103). This is just the tip of the iceberg with leading researchers looking at how to measure good teaching.

Several VAM approaches provide ways to take into account student characteristics, prior knowledge, classroom characteristics, and the effect students have on each other. Multilevel models hold substantial promise as a tool for helping determine teacher effectiveness (Stronge et al., 2011). Daley and Kim (2010) conducted extensive research on a commercially available tool, TAP: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement. They found strong correlation between student achievement and the other components of the program. They concluded that a well-designed system could be objective, rigorous, differentiated, multidimensional, linked to student learning and supportive of teacher improvement.

The debate continues on Value Added Models to assess teacher and leader effectiveness. The two camps disagree on how to measure a teacher’s impact on student learning and a principal’s impact on a school. However, the need for such a measure is not in debate. Researchers agree that teachers and principals are the key to improving student learning (Zatynski, 2012; Winters, 2011; Wiener & Lundy, 2014; Silva Mangiante, 2010). They also agree that the majori-

ty of past measurements did not effectively give enough data to determine the effectiveness of educators. The VAM is one attempt to make evaluation objective and evidenced-based (Alicias, 2005). The time is rapidly approaching that employment decisions, based on new systems will affect educators.

Ultimately, the goal is to improve student learning. Few would argue that an important purpose of education, for example, includes preparation of informed citizens who are able to participate effectively in a democratic society (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). Grego (2011) suggests producing productive members of society is the objective of education which prepares today's youth for a life worth living. With student assessments increasing, institutions must find a way to ensure that students can demonstrate what they know so students can fulfill their dreams and teachers are not punished for student performance that may or may not be valid.

### **Effective Teachers' Measures and Characteristics**

With all the discussion over VAMs, the demand for a better system for identifying what characteristics we are looking for in those who are or could be exemplary teachers has increased. Observational evaluations can yield a deeper understanding of teacher effectiveness outcomes based on what a teacher does in the classroom in increased student learning (Silva Mangiante, 2010). Danielson's *Framework for Teaching* is one tool that divides teaching into observable standards and is used by many states.

The *Framework* was informed, in part, by a constructivist learning theory and by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (Danielson, 2010). Mielke and Frontier (2012) found that it was not enough to simply put the *Framework* rubrics in place. Teachers and principals had to be actively involved and empowered as leaders to make marked improvement in

teacher practice and ultimately student achievement. Mielke and Frontier (2012) suggest that good teaching can be learned through professional learning and reflective practice.

Getzels and Jackson (1963) began studying teacher characteristics and reviewing the literature of the time in an effort to pinpoint what makes a good teacher. In the 90s, other instruments were developed to try to measure good teaching. The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) and the five-factor model (Big Five) both attempted to predict job performance. The original MMPI was developed in 1943 by Starke R. Hathaway, PhD, and J. C. McKinley, MD and was copyrighted by the University of Minnesota (Groth-Marnat, 2009). Dr. Yossef Ben-Porath, from Kent State University, and Dr. Auke Tellegen, from the University of Minnesota developed the most recent version of the MMPI-2 Restructured Form (MMPI-2-RF). Barrick and Mount (1991) found the MMPI was widely criticized while the Big Five has two elements, conscientiousness and extraversion, that are linked to higher job performance.

Warren Norman (1963) replicated the original work done by Ernest Tubbs and Raymond Christal in 1961 producing the Big Five Factors we know today. Lewis Goldberg and Naomi Takemoto-Chock (Groth-Marnat, 2009) updated the work in 1980. The Big Five has two elements, conscientiousness and extroversion, that are linked to higher job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Through this work and others, commercially available tools have been developed attempting to identify talented teacher candidates for hire.

Two of these commercial products used as part of the application process for some districts are the Haberman Prescreener developed by Dr. Martin Haberman and TeacherInsight Assessment (Gallup TIA) developed by the Gallup Organization. Over 2,000 school districts use one of these commercially marketed instruments (Delli, 2001). Both use a series of questions designed to assess attributes believed to contribute to good teaching (Rockoff et al., 2011). Ac-

According to Rockoff et al., (2011) there is little evidence on the power of these instruments alone to predict a candidate will, in fact, be a good teacher. In a related article, Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2006) suggest that pairing one of these commercial products with traditional credentials has the potential to improve a teaching workforce.

Schumacher, Grigsby, and Vesey (2011) in a recent study contended that questions focusing on four areas, classroom management and organization, organizing instruction, implementing instruction, and monitoring student progress can influence a teacher workforce. Stronge (2007) agrees that teachers who manage time and materials prior to engaging with students maximize learning. Additionally, he indicated that organization of the classroom includes such areas as room arrangement, discipline, and creating routines. These both parallel Schumacher's findings. Grove (2009) agreed that merging teacher selection practices and research regarding qualities of effective teachers can help to ensure that effective teachers are hired.

Districts also need to look at their Value Proposition in order to retain effective teachers. Each district must evaluate the reason they have open positions in the first place. Once effective teachers are hired what can be done to retain them? Shields and Lewis (2012) conducted a study funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation researching this topic. They asserted that it takes more than intrinsic characteristics to retain effective teachers. Teachers need to be motivated by the opportunity to improve impact and enrich the lives of children; however, this will not sustain a teacher workforce. If you want to hire effective teachers, the next step is to keep them working with your students.

### **Measures of Effective Teaching Project (MET, 2013)**

The Measures of Effective Teaching (MET, 2013) project set out in 2010 to uncover if a set of statistical measures could identify effective teaching fairly and reliably. The MET project

is a research partnership between 3,000 teacher volunteers and dozens of independent research teams. The project's goal is to build and test measures of effective teaching to find out how evaluation methods could best be used to tell teachers more about the skills that make them most effective and to help districts identify and develop great teaching (MET, 2013). The results generated three areas of study: classroom observation, student surveys, and student performance gains. MET (2013) also suggested that more than one evaluator conduct classroom observations during one school year. Multiple measures also produce more consistent ratings than student achievement measures alone. The study found estimates of teachers' effectiveness are more stable from year to year when they combine classroom observations, student surveys, and measures of student achievement gains than when they are based solely on the latter (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013). The Gates Foundation expanded on the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project. The study found that a tool weighing student performance gains of 33 percent – 50 percent provided the most stable results.

### **Georgia Teacher Effectiveness System (TKES)**

TKES has completed a three-year pilot program in 26 districts. Each year changes were made before statewide implementation in the 2014 school year. RTTT required an objective element in evaluation tools which is why TKES has the VAM portion (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.). Student growth measures (VAM) using state approved content test results from the prior year, meets the objectivity criteria. The observation portion expands on traditional practice to understand teacher performance.

TKES has two components when measuring the effectiveness of a teacher. A VAM measure (quantitative) based on Student Performance Goal (SPG) and an observation section (qualitative) based on ten performance standards, Teacher Assessment on Performance Standards

(TAPS) (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.). The combination of the two scores creates a Teacher Effectiveness Measure (TEM) score. The evidence collection tools and scoring rubrics associated with different measures then serve to define expectations, justify scores, and create the opportunity to “diagnose” and target areas where professional growth is desired (Goe, Biggers, & Croft, 2012).

The teacher effectiveness research in recent years revolves around including VAM models into teacher and principal evaluations. These models generate much debate. McCaffrey, Kortez, Lockwood, and Hamilton said the existing research base on VAM suggests that more work is needed before the techniques can be used to support important decisions about teachers or schools (McCaffery et al., 2003). Linking teachers to test scores sounds reasonable, however, some studies show that the reliability and difficulty of tests vary (Alicias, 2005; Jacob, 2012; McCaffery et al., 2003; Stronge et al., 2011). Test validity is in question. Schochet and Chang (2010) reported an error rate of 25 percent when using three years of student growth data and 35 percent with one year of data.

American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the National Academy of Education warn that VAMs do not work as advertised (Ballou & Springer, 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2015; Jiang, Sparte, & Luppescu, 2015). Collins and Amrein-Breadsley (2014) posits weak state tests, proper student linkage to teachers, and lack of a plan for formative data used on growth models pose serious problems for the use of test results in evaluating teachers. Furthermore, there is no research to date demonstrating teachers or administrators possess the knowledge to use VAM data in instructionally meaningful ways. The final concern is one of error rates. Schochet and Chiang (2010) report error rates may be as high as 25 percent erroneously identifying teachers for special treatment both positive and negative.



Georgia uses TKES to make decisions regarding teacher and leader preparation, recruitment, selection, compensation, and professional development (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.). As the Georgia system evolves, more research is needed before decisions are considered valid and used with confidence to improve student learning through teacher evaluations. By comparing the quality of instruction through the TAPS portion and the outcome of student assessment in the student achievement portion, Georgia is in a position to make a significant impact on the success of children in school, college, and career.

### **Conclusion**

The opinions of the experts are conflicting concerning improving student achievement with some stating VAM creates the non-subjective measure needed to improve schools (Thum and Bryk, 1997; Amrein-Beardsley and Collins, 2012; Alicias, 2005; Milanowski, 2011) and others stating schooling is too complex to place weight on test scores (Kupermintz, 2003; Ever-son et al., 2013; Danielson, 2010; Zatyński, 2012; ). However, they are focused on teachers and principals. This indicates an understanding that “teachers matter” and “principals matter.” Those who are solidly in the VAM camp believe highly effective teaching can be measured through student test scores. McCaffery (2012) examined multiple VAM models in his research and concluded that great promise lies within VAM; however, more work needs to be completed before important decisions about teacher effectiveness can be determined using any VAM models (McCaffery et al., 2003). Marzano (2012) agreed, “Teacher evaluation systems have not accurately measured teacher quality and have not aided in developing a highly skilled workforce.” (p. 16).

Some policymakers are pushing what they consider an objective teacher effectiveness system, which would include a VAM model. ESSA reduces the federal footprint and gives these

decisions back to the individual states. With a change to the federal education law and the removal of student achievement expectations as was previously in NCLB, it is unclear if VAMs will be included into state law rewrites in future legislation. The research to date is encouraging; however, the experts cited here are not ready to place all confidence in the VAM models.

Jacob (2012) examined multiple research studies focused on traditional qualifications. She found no correlation in higher student learning with teachers who had advanced degrees, higher scores on certification exams, or multiple years of experience (Jacob, 2012). Winters (2011) showed the shortcomings of the current system that relies on credentials and longevity and spells out a series of reforms based on results achieved in the classroom (Winters, 2011). This decades-old fallacy fosters an environment in which teachers cease to be understood as individual professionals, but rather as interchangeable parts (Weisburg et al., 2009). How we identify future teachers who will make a difference with students matters.

With increased policies and grant opportunities coming from the federal government and private funding, finding a system that can be fair in judging teacher performance is essential. The evaluation tools continue to evolve as teachers and principals describe the impact of the tools on their practice and how it is impacting student achievement. With this information, adjustments in current teaching practice can align more to student achievement gains.

In conclusion, the most important school-related contributing factor to student achievement is the quality of teaching (Stronge, Munoz, & Prather, 2011). This statement bears repeating often. Policymakers, business leaders, and society as a whole are demanding a better way to evaluate teachers and principals. The impact affects businesses as they hire high school graduates and affects graduates as they enter college or the work force. Traditional approaches

to teacher effectiveness have focused heavily on input and process variables with little consideration of student learning (Stronge et al., 2011).

VAM provides an objective tool using SPGs to determine the value a teacher is adding to each student. Although not a perfect tool, high quality testing does measure part of the learning process, and good teaching should predict higher scores (Everson et al., 2013) TKES incorporates SPG into its toolbox. This is new for Georgia and accounts for 50 percent in the TKES system. The remaining 50 percent includes student surveys, also new to Georgia, and a revamped observation tool.

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## **IDENTIFICATION OF EXEMPLARY TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS AS PART OF GEORGIA'S VISION FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION**

### **Introduction**

The Georgia Vision Project for Public Education (GVP) is a joint effort of the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA) and the Georgia School Superintendents Association (GSSA). The two associations were formed through the creation of a 30 member team consisting of 15 from each of the previously mentioned groups. The group represented 25 percent of all students enrolled in Georgia public schools. Together, they engaged in writing a vision for Georgia in an effort to, “provide all children an equitable and excellent education that prepares them for college, career, and life” (“GVP,” 2014, p. 2). The recent increase in public distrust towards public education brought these leaders together to look at ways to transition Georgia schools from a state of policy compliance to one of innovation and creativity. GVP is a grass roots effort developed by leaders with the desire to address concerns, set visions and provide a positive view of public education in Georgia (“GVP,” 2014).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Institutional theory serves as the framework to discover how teachers and leaders describe the impact of the Georgia Vision for Public Education and teacher evaluation instruments. Institutional theory provides context to explain how outside pressures, mandates, and policies are received and processed by organizations (Penuel et al., 2010). Additionally, institutional theory expounds on social structures and the processes by which structures, including schemas, rules, norms, and routines, become established as authoritative procedures for social behavior (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In schools, institutional theory translates into deciphering federal and state laws and rules for example a state developed teacher evaluation instrument became law in Geor-

gia law O.C.G.A. § 20-2-210 . All of this challenges school leaders to examine the constraints to change and make decisions on how to implement sometimes ambiguous rules.

As more constraints are handed down, the more schools become homogenous regardless of location or student need. Hanson (2001) states when faced with similar constraints fewer degrees of freedom separate organizations and they become more similar than different. Additionally, he explains through institutional theory, schools and those who work in them often change when there is a shock to the system. For example, a new teacher evaluation instrument is mandate by the state. Penuel explains that additional accountability, standardized testing, and new teacher evaluation instruments have changed the social structure and outside pressure for schools and teachers (Penuel, et al., 2010). Georgia Vision Project (GVP) provides guidance to school districts with recommendations for meeting this change in state and federal mandates.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative case study design. Yin (2014) states a case study design should be chosen when one of four conditions exist, (a) questions are primarily “how” and “why,” (b) manipulation of those in the study is beyond the researcher’s control, (c) contextual conditions may be relevant to the phenomenon under study, or (d) boundaries are unclear between the phenomenon and context. The majority of proposed questions for this study fall into the “how” category, therefore, a qualitative design was chosen. Districts chosen for this study met the criteria of implementing the Vision Project with fidelity and were deemed by project leaders to be addressing the identification of exemplary teachers through the implementation of the new teacher evaluation instrument.

An instrumental multiple case study design allowed for an in-depth look at the Vision Project’s effect on the students of Georgia. Stake and Boozer defined instrumental case study as

using the case as an instrument to gain understanding beyond the broader questions (Creswell, 2012; Stake, 1995). Boozer posits, “A researcher conducting an instrumental case study may plan multiple case studies in an effort to gain a broader understanding of the phenomenon of interest” (Boozer, 2015, p. 2). This study will look into how the selected districts have used the recommendations outlined in the Vision Project. The primary focus of this study will look broadly at the effects of the Vision Project while the secondary focus will pay particular attention to how it has affected teaching and learning.

A general inductive approach provides the guidelines this study will use to identify the commonalities and contradictions across the two cases (Thomas, 2006). The researchers confirmed general inductive approach allows the theory to emerge from data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Thomas, 2006). The researcher intends to study teachers in a school setting; thus, the actions of teachers can lead to the discovery of how to implement a new teacher evaluation process with trustworthiness (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013; Marshall, 2013). Previous research confirms that a meaningful teacher evaluation process should improve good instruction, and student learning should be a primary focus (Colby, Bradshaw, & Joyner, 2002). Jacobs (2012) posits, teachers are the most important determinate of student success and how they instruct students will last well beyond the year a child spends with any given teacher.

A general inductive approach allowed research findings to emerge without restraints that are required by some more structured theories. Thomas (2006, p. 238) explained “the inductive approach allows a goal free evaluation whereby the evaluators wish to describe the actual program effects, not just planned effects”. By designing questions around leadership, learning, and context, the impact of the Georgia Vision Project and teacher evaluation can be explored.



Georgia Vision Project implementation districts were determined by utilizing the Vision Project Executive Director as an informant with regard to which districts were implementing the project with fidelity (J. Berry, personal communication, October 18, 2014). Implementing with fidelity was defined by tying one or more recommendations of the Georgia Vision Project to the district's strategic plan or other operational documents. The governing team of GVP realized that schools are complex microcosms with many facets to address ("GSBA," 2009; "GVP," 2014). The project encompasses seven themes addressing the roles of students, teachers, and leaders (Appendix C). Incorporated in the seven themes are 45 recommendations to improve Georgia schools. The recommendations provide more detail about each theme and serve as a roadmap so each school district can implement with fidelity. In 2014, Georgia had 180 school districts and 108 local school boards voted to implement the recommendations of the project ("GVP," 2014). The primary purpose of this study is to evaluate the implementation of the Vision Project recommendations in Georgia's schools. The evaluation takes place in eleven districts ranging from small to large, urban to rural, with varying economic status. Central questions for evaluation are addressed as follows:

1. How have the internal contexts coupled with the implementation of the Vision Project impacted learning and leadership in your school?
2. What are the features of the Vision Project that have specifically impacted learning in your school?
3. How has the implementation of the Vision Project helped build capacity of self and others in your school?

The study also examined two districts that committed to improving teaching in order to positively impact student learning were selected for deeper research with a secondary focus. An additional central question for these districts follows:

4. How do teachers and principals describe the impact of the teacher evaluation instruments on student achievement?

The secondary focus for this study is to allow teachers and principals to describe any impact teacher evaluation had on student achievement. Georgia developed the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) with the intent to identify good teaching practices. This initiative began with Georgia winning a federal competitive grant, Race to the Top (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.). Twenty-six districts piloted TKES over a three-year period with all Georgia districts implementing the new system in the 2014-2015 school year. The twenty six schools did not begin the full statewide adoption until the 2014-2015 school year. One aspect of the evaluation system is the Student Growth Percentiles (SGP). The SGP's are designed to measure student achievement from one teacher to the next was incorporated into teacher evaluation for the first time through TKES. The evaluation also includes an observation section that went from three areas of practice to ten areas that included a detailed rubric for teachers to follow (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.). The subsequent section of the methodology examines how has the additional evaluation requirements affected teaching and teachers in two school districts in Georgia?

### **Data Collection**

The districts were selected because they met the criteria of implementing the Georgia Vision Project and teacher evaluation with fidelity. Qualitative data was collected from two districts in Georgia. The participants consisted of district and building leaders as well as teachers who were

rated at the exemplary level in the 2014-2015 school year. The data was in the form of one on one interview with each participant and artifacts collected from district's web pages, the state's department of education and additional items as discussed in the methods section.

### **District One**

District One is a small district with approximately 13,000 students enrolled in 2013-2014 school year. District one is a majority minority district with the majority of students claiming African-American as their ethnicity. Hispanic is the next highest while White students are the lowest ethnic group. Free and reduced lunch rates vary by school and range from a low of 10 percent to a high of 95 percent (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.). The district overall has seen an increase in student achievement as reported through state testing results (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.). The selected district employs over 1,000 teachers with average experience of 12 years. The district houses three high schools, four middle schools, and 14 elementary schools. The operating budget for the 2014-2015 school year was in the 120 million dollar range ("District 1 BOE," 2014).

### **District Two**

District Two is a medium sized district with approximately 27,000 students enrolled in the 2013-2014 school year. The district has smaller sized subgroup demographics with less than 50 percent of the students in each category (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.). In district two, White students are the largest demographic group. African American students' make up the next largest subgroup while Hispanic students are the smallest subgroup reported (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.). The districts free and reduced lunch rate exceeds 50 percent. Overall, the district would be considered high performing due to 5th and 8th grade students scoring above the state average overall in reading and math (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.).

The district employs over 2,000 teachers in 38 schools, six high schools, eight middle schools, 23 elementary schools and one alternative education school. The operating budget for the 2014-2015 school year is slightly less than 300 million dollars ("District 2 BOE," 2014).

Yin (2014) and Stake (1995) suggested that placing boundaries on a case can prevent an explosion from occurring creating a topic that is too broad. Groups of exemplary teachers in the selected sites employed during the 2014-2015 school year met the boundary criteria for the study. Through stratified purposeful sampling, which illustrates characteristics of particular subgroups (Creswell, 2012), the identification of six elementary credentialed observers who rated teachers at the exemplary level as measured by the district's teacher evaluation instrument is the first step. Teachers who received the ratings will be identified through district data systems to pair with each administrator. These pairs provide a sample of a teacher subgroup that shows the characteristics of exemplary teachers. An email was sent inviting those who met the criteria to become involved with the study. The first three pairs who responded were chosen to participate. The next three were held as alternates in case someone decided to discontinue with the study.

A minimum of six interviews were conducted in each district. An interview with school leaders and/or teachers included in the data collection process continued until saturation was achieved. Finally, interview data was triangulated with document analysis. Documents included but were not limited to strategic plan documents, individual school and system websites, teacher artifacts, and teacher evaluation documents as appropriate.

Data collection included one interview with the system's leader or designee who was knowledgeable about the Vision Project's implementation in each selected district. Togneri and Anderson (2003) defined a school leader as one who can spear head change through ambitious

goals and create supportive conditions that support teachers and help students succeed. The selected district leader could be the superintendent or other central office designee who coordinated each districts' execution of the Vision Project's themes and recommendations. The interview was for a minimum of 1 hour discussing the central questions and sub-questions..

### **Data Analysis**

Each interview was systematically coded using the procedures outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998). A three tiered coding system allowed for logic paradigm development or a visual picture of the theory to be generated. Baxter and Jack (2008) state the three primary basic types of coding are open, axial, and selective. Open coding at the beginning of the data analysis phase allowed events to be given conceptual labels that later were grouped into categories. Open coding provided a vehicle for the researcher to break through subjectivity and potential bias (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Axial coding was the next phase of coding. In this phase, the analyst examined hypothetical relationships against data collected to refine category schemes. The researcher compared and contrasted one unit of data with the next. In the final phase of data analysis, selective coding, a core category or theme became the central phenomenon of the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The use of all three coding phases were used to construct a description and write about the themes relating to the impact of the Vision Project and the secondary focus of teacher evaluation impact on student achievement for each district separately. Dedoose (Ardoin, Clark, & Kelsey, 2012), a qualitative data coding application, was used to facilitate the process and management of textual data and of coding themes. Using this software allowed for increasingly narrowed code lists, scaling down to a final set of codes, or themes, with the most significant themes discussed in the findings and discussion section. A descriptive case analysis was written for each

district. Findings are presented for each individual district separately. A compare and contrast of the literature, District One and District Two is compiled in the discussion section.

Data triangulation was employed to ensure credibility and accuracy for each participant for each case. Each participant was provided a transcript of his or her responses with an opportunity to add, delete or further explain information. An audit trail kept throughout the study explained how each decision was made. Reference to literature and findings by other authors that confirm the inquirer's interpretations were used to strengthen confirmability of the study. Each process in the study is reported in detail allowing an external researcher to repeat the inquiry and achieve similar results thereby increasing dependability. A confirmability audit will be conducted at the same time as the dependability audit and the auditor asks if the data and interpretations made by the inquirer are supported by material in the audit trail, are internally coherent, and represent by more than the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

### **Findings**

The findings are organized to include the seven recommendations presented by the Vision for Public Education in Georgia (GVP) and how each district is using the recommendations. The research questions guided the development of the interview questions which led to the discovery of how each district used the recommendations. The research questions and the recommendations are documented in Table 1. Findings reveal how two school districts in Georgia actively used the recommendations from the Vision for Public Education to strengthen strategic planning in multiple areas. Results show how exemplary teachers, building leaders, and district leaders are aligning efforts to improve the educational experience for students.

## **District One**

In District One, it is important to note some key characteristics. The leadership at the district level has been consistent for the last seven years. The superintendent and the board of education remain in place allowing a stable vision and strategic plan to evolve. As noted on the district's web page over half the school board has been in place since the final stages of the Vision for Public Education in Georgia (GVP). The District leader interviewed stated,

“The Vision Project really framed in my mind what’s the work schools are to be doing. It didn’t give it a blueprint and then say this is how you do it, but it gave you sort of – here is the framework of the job to be working from and so for me, we’d already started it along those lines.”

He continued the thought by adding,

“It really has to start and be part of people’s thinking and strategic planning and how do we incorporate that and so I was very vocal about that as it can be really important. You know, for us some of those things have changed. I think we’ve moved to a different level than some districts, but I think there are some districts that really need to gravitate to this.”

Strategic planning along the seven recommendations of the GVP exemplifies how District One implements at all levels of the organization. The GVP Recommendations can be found in Appendix C.

Table 1

*Research Questions Intersecting with Vision Project Recommendations*

	<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Georgia Vision Project Recommendations</b>	<b>Supporting Quotes</b>
<b>Focus on Leadership</b>	RQ1- How have the internal contexts coupled with the implementation of the Vision Project impacted learning and leadership in your school?	Governance and Leadership  Teaching and Learning	Vision Project really framed in my mind, what's the work schools are to be doing.  I hope that the lawmakers will look at vision project. I don't know how much they have.  It is totally professional development and gives our leaders the skills they need to go out into the classroom which is a huge change.
<b>Focus on Learning</b>	RQ-2- What are the features of the Vision Project that have specifically impacted learning in your school?	Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy  Teaching and Learning Resources  Financial Resources  Early Learning and Student Success	Teachers set professional learning goals which tied to our school improvement plan which is tied to our strategic plans, which are tied to the Vision Project.  Early learning folks, in fact on our website you see the vision tab. We did a prototype using the Vision Recommendations.
<b>Focus on Context</b>	RQ-3- How has the implementation of the Vision Project helped build capacity of self and others in your school?	Human and Organizational Capital	Personally improving my teaching, setting the goals that are meaningful for me, looking at previous years and doing some self-reflection, The reflection piece is really good.
	4. How do teachers and principals describe the impact of teacher evaluation instruments?	General	If you're working with children and differentiating instruction and assessing what they know, you will never have anything to worry about. I don't care what evaluation system we use, you will be fine.



**Governance, Leadership and Accountability.** The analysis of the interview transcripts led to three levels of governance, leadership and accountability for this recommendation, district level, school level, and classroom level. Two of the levels focused on strategic planning and leadership development in order to move forward, district and school. For example, one building level leader described the mindset, “we’ve looked at our goals for the district and we have tried to align them to the standards that we’re looking for in a classroom”. In a similar vein, the district leader stressed, “Professional development gives our leaders the skills they need to go out to the classroom and be that lead learner. That is a big change.”

At the classroom level, the concentration of responses revolved around accountability which led to autonomy for teachers. The evaluation instrument provides an avenue for school leaders to be more involved at the classroom level. One teacher offered this insight, “the evaluation and looking at our school processes and classroom processes helped to lay out roles and responsibilities very clearly.” She added, “Once administrators know what is going on in your classroom, they give a lot of autonomy to us if we’re I guess trustworthy which is what I teach my students”. The autonomy and trust to work with students is summed up with this teacher comment,

“I do love freedom and I think it helps with your evaluators are saying yes we need to evaluate all this but I also respect your reason for when I pop in and you aren’t saying exactly what the teacher in the next room was saying because it’s not scripted and I do hear that sometimes from other teachers too”.

District One aligned with this recommendation through developing and implementing an accountability system that is circular in nature. The district and school level leadership designed a system for distributing expectations and a series of goals that penetrates to the classroom level.

The classroom teacher then is given the support to deliver instruction. This recommendation closely ties to the Teaching and Learning recommendation as seen in several of the participant comments.

**Teaching and Learning.** In this recommendation, the GVP (2010) begins each descriptor with “in order to provide an environment where students learn best” (p.1). Creating this type of environment requires some simple but real commitments. The District One leader summed it up, “if you’re teaching, someone has to be learning”. He continued, “We’re all about instructional practice and we have a lot of monitoring tools”. A couple of key themes emerged from the data and analysis, effective teaching practice and productive feedback. Administrators and teachers mentioned the importance of effective teaching practice and then monitoring progress for both teachers and students.

A District One teacher who received exemplary ratings described her personal journey with sharing effective practices,

With the encouragement of my administration, I feel like I have become more of a teacher leader and I take that on and make myself do it. I used to hate presenting things; but now I kind of like it. I want to present at the faculty meeting. They keep saying you have great things to share. And I kind of do, I’m kind of starting to see that as my administration says you have value in teaching others what you do because what you’re doing is providing students with quality instruction in this area. But as a teacher leader, you’re not quite sharing yet; you’re not putting yourself out there to collaborate with other teachers. They need you to share.

Other teachers shared a similar journey, a different teacher, serving as a teacher and task force chair talked about her role in supporting other teachers,

The structures help me personally improve my teaching, setting the goals at the beginning of the year and making them meaningful for me, looking at previous years in the areas that I felt like I struggled and doing some self-evaluations, self-reflection, I think we're getting that reflection piece in, which is really good. But it starts with students, looking at the students and the student data to lead my instructional decisions and making decisions based on what students need and what's best for students.

In my role as a task force chair, I felt like I needed to be pretty versed in the ways in which we would be evaluated so that if teachers came to me and said, "What would this look like? What would this be like in a classroom?" I would be able to at least know where to go to find that answer for them or to be able to help them talk through and think through what that might look like in their classroom. In that capacity, I felt like I needed to at least take some ownership of that.

These two examples of teachers collaborating with others to improve effective teaching with the focus on students are repeated throughout the interviews conducted in this district. Effective teaching practice and progress monitoring interlink in the lived experiences for these educators. All seven participants in this district described the importance of effective teaching and progress monitoring. They credited both of these habits with building a performance culture where students are valued and teachers have the freedom to make instructional decisions for their students.

**Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy.** One major theme emerged from the analysis of the interviews as it pertains to this recommendation. The idea of organizational change being purposeful and the need for effective leadership to facilitate that change appeared multiple times in the comments collected from participants. Much of this change revolved around a new teacher evaluation system the district was implementing as a result of Georgia's

participation in Race to the Top. Teachers and leaders echoed much of the same notions when discussing the impact of the new evaluation instrument. From the district leader perspective was the idea that,

The most important part of what teachers do is still a performance art right there in front of the classroom and if you want to know if they're doing a good job you still need to see them in class at a really high rate.

This statement indicates the value this district places on teacher practice as being more than a behavioral checklist.

Building leaders made similar remarks to the district leader and took it a step farther. For example when discussing the change and the workload produced because of the new teacher evaluation instrument, one building leader stated, "I believe this is largely art with a little bit of science. The motivation of individuals and moving them forward from where they are to where we want them to be is a people job not a widget job". Adding to that impression, a different building leader indicated, "Although the work has tripled, I feel like the value that's come from the process has been helpful in the long run". Dealing with the change and the impact a new evaluation tool could have, these building leaders saw the change as purposeful and an avenue to improve teacher practice. The building leaders provided clarity prior, during and after the change occurred as illustrated by this comment from the third building leader interviewed,

We gave more clarity on what these practices are for teaching and I think that it ties into how we provide professional learning for teachers. The different things that we focus on and also give us more opportunities to get feedback to teachers. They're looking for ways that they can improve their instruction and so I've just noticed more of an open dia-

logue between principals and teachers about instruction and now it doesn't seem so scary and authoritative. It's more of a natural conversation.

Teacher also commented on the level of clarity provided by the district and by evaluators.

For teachers, climate, culture and organization efficacy came down to a collegial environment. Environments conducive to supporting excellent teachers with very few boundaries while providing authentic feedback with clarity. One teacher summed up this idea, "to be an exemplary teacher or an excellent teacher, you're still a product of your environment". Teachers overall agreed that a healthy balance of flexibility and clarity provides teachers with personal and school related goals that ultimately improved practice. They also reported a feeling of uneasiness with the change in evaluation instruments in the beginning; however, one teacher stated, "It makes us a little uncomfortable sometimes. It's okay to be uncomfortable". She continued, "Does evaluation take a toll on the teachers? Yeah, it does, but we have to have it. We have to have it. There's no other way." This statement was made in the context of ensuring all teachers are providing for students the instruction and care they need to grow.

**Teaching and Learning Resources.** District One applies principles from this recommendation in three major areas, community involvement, student information technology, and collaborative planning models. The District One Leader discussed in detail the resources utilized for teaching and learning,

New focus areas for us are collaborative planning models using our new high performance commitments; to invade digital learning environments, and look at Response to Intervention students, that bottom 25 percent quartile. We've developed tools which track learning, where it's tracking in real time progress monitoring, a lot of where proficiency is based on practice and we've developed the digital tools that track learning.

The analysis of the interview transcripts confirms two of these goals as emergent themes, collaborative planning and digital learning tools. The third theme, community involvement, was found in the transcripts from the district leader as well as in the documents collected from the schools websites utilized during the investigation.

While teaching and learning resources was not discussed as pervasively as other recommendations, the evidence does show that these resources affect the daily lives of teachers. As one teacher explained, “I look at the students and the student data to lead my instructional decisions”. Only one teacher had suggestions for slowing the digital flow as she felt it negatively affects the students, “If whatever they’re reading is longer than a Tweet, they lose interest. Books are part of the way we go back toward longer periods of concentration, longer periods of analyzing information and that leads them to better analytical thinking”. She continued by clarifying,

Kids need a textbook. If you’ve got a science book, you can take that thing anywhere. No one’s going to steal and take it to the pawnshop. It’s reliable. We are 100 percent one-to-one student technology. A 12-year-old doesn’t have the life experience to gauge reliable information on the Internet.

While the invasion of digital learning tools are more designed around student achievement monitoring the impact of being a 100 percent one to one student technology district for student access does have one teacher concerned.

Community involvement is the third emergent theme for District One. The district leader confirmed the partnership of the community with the school district by saying,

I think what we’ve done is we’ve built a lot of trust and we stopped blaming each other, so all of our nonprofits – we do a lot of work, with neighborhood leaders, programs, we’ve done a lot of things where we said we can’t afford to blame each other and we

have to work together and I think that has been incredible. The chamber has an education committee. They recognize our star teachers. They have a director. We have 400 mentors that have come out of the chamber. We have the business sector that has 300 jobs for our kids and they do a Partnership Program. The university, we have experienced professors in our schools. We're on our third year. Our goal is to bring all kids to the university for an educational field trip put on by any department. Last year, we had close to 10,000.

The webpages examined during the course of this study showed multiple initiatives for community involvement for each individual school as well as district level efforts.

**Human and Organizational Capital.** Human and Organizational Capital are defined separately in the Vision for Public Education in Georgia. Human capital refers to the people who work directly with students in the schools or in support of those who work directly with students and to the knowledge and skills used by those people in their work (GVP, 2010). Whereas, organizational capital refers to the structures and processes of schools and school districts within which the teachers, leaders, and support personnel work (GVP, 2010). The delineation of the two allowed for both to be examined separately.

In terms of overall belief about human capital, the most pervasive idea noted by participants involves the effect of exemplary teachers. This theme emerged in the data, as it became apparent in successive coding rounds that all teachers' comments on human capital begin with the awareness that individual teachers have the greatest impact on student learning. When describing the characteristics of exemplary teachers, creativity, passion, and flexibility were the most common attributes discussed. One teacher's comment here is representative of the way that

most teachers talked about exemplary teachers, “Really good teachers are open-minded. They’re flexible. They believe in kids, first and foremost. They’re creative themselves”.

The positive nature of the discussion of exemplary teachers continued when they began discussing the process for evaluating all teachers. Teacher evaluation is an organizational structure that has undergone transformation in the past two years. As a result of Georgia winning a competitive grant under Race to the Top grant process, District One implemented the new evaluation process. From the district leader perspective, “It is about creating a performance culture”. Building level evaluators agreed with the district leader’s perspective. One evaluator stated,

If used, the way that it was intended, I think that it will provide more useful information to professionals that will help them be more confident in their roles, to help them exhibit more mastery, to help them self-assess so that they are aware when they have strengths and weaknesses.

A different evaluator detailed the benefits of open communication with teachers,

We provide clarity on what these practices are for teaching. I think that it ties into how we provide professional learning for teachers and the different things that we focus on. Also, it gives us more opportunities to get feedback to teachers as they are looking for ways that they can improve their instruction. So, I’ve just noticed more of an open dialogue between principals and teachers about instruction. This allows the process to be less scary and authoritative. It’s more of a natural conversation.

The teachers in this study described the evaluation instrument as a process for improvement. For instance one teacher described it as an everyday way of conducting her classroom,



If they're truly used to help teachers improve their craft and I am working in a school where there's this openness and honesty. I feel like the faculty will have a willingness to learn and trust that it's not a competitive, punitive environment. In this environment feedback as a way of communication is welcome.

The conversation became less positive when the topic of adding a student growth measure or a Value Added Model (VAM) to evaluations.

VAMs are not yet included on the teacher evaluation, as the state has requested and been granted a waiver from this requirement under Race to the Top. Most teachers had some knowledge of the concept but one building level evaluator told the story, "VAM increases teacher stress because there's this – it's out there. This accountability measure but they haven't really seen how it's going to impact them yet since it hasn't really been implemented with data." Another building leader stated, "It just makes people worry when they don't really need to be worried." It is this fear of the unknown that became a recurring theme when discussing VAMs.

Fear as a theme emerged in the data, as it became apparent in successive coding rounds that teachers feared what they stated they did not understand. For example, when discussing VAMs one teacher stated, "it becomes overly competitive and in a lot of ways, it decreases the value of teachers". She continued, "Employment decisions and decisions that we make in the classroom that are going to affect maybe this evaluation should begin with students. Ideally, teaching students and keeping your job equals the same thing."

**Financial Resources and Early Learning and Student Success.** These two recommendations are being combined due to the low number of responses coded to them. Early Learning and Student Success was an area that District One is currently working toward and as they found it to be missing from their strategic plan. The district webpage provides information concerning

Early Learning and Student Success and adds the alignment to the GVP recommendations beginning in the 2015-2016 school year. District One is utilizing resources for improving data systems and for early learning programs as outlined in the Financial Resources recommendation. Due to the limited time of implementation in these two areas, there was not enough data to report any findings.

**Summary.** District One was chosen for the GVP as a high fidelity district. Thus, the research shows that participants have a sophisticated understanding of the district and school strategic plans which align closely to the GVP. Human and Organizational Capital appeared most frequently due to the implementation of a new state developed teacher evaluation instrument. Many of the themes hung together in an interrelated or coherent manner. For example, Teaching and Learning and Human and Organizational Capital recommendations were coded together in 19 instances. More often than not, recommendations overlapped suggesting a relationship between the recommendations that is multidirectional. District leaders, building leaders, and teachers clearly communicated that the overarching focus of the district is to align strategic plans to benefit students.

## **District Two**

In District Two, key characteristics to note include a relatively new superintendent, named in 2014, but had been part of the district in another capacity since 2008. Over half the school board is relatively new, elected in 2013 or later. The superintendent and the board of education provide the district with a written vision and strategic plan to guide the work of the schools. As noted on the district's web page over half the school board was elected to serve after the Vision for Public Education in Georgia (GVP) was in place. The district does have a strate-

gic plan dated 2015. While GVP is not mentioned specifically, the District leader interviewed stated,

We took our strategic plan and we looked at the Vision Project and all the components of it and we looked for alignment. We looked for the areas where there was already alignment and we looked at the areas where there was not an alignment, so that we could go back in our system improvement plan and write in strategies or pieces into our plan to align with the Vision Project. We were onboard from the beginning. We went to the meetings that they had around the state before it was released. We just got excited because it was already aligning up with what we were trying to do in our systems so it worked great for us.

Strategic planning along the seven recommendations of the GVP demonstrates how District Two implements the GVP recommendations.

**Governance and Leadership.** One of the guiding principles for this recommendation is the idea that effective educational governance requires a strategic vision where accountability for personal actions and outcomes are valued (GVP, 2010). In the analysis of the transcripts, District Two developed a strategic vision, mission and plan that encompassed existing practice penetrating the district from the boardroom to the classroom. For example, one building level leader described the mindset,

It always falls into our school improvement. If the teachers are implementing the things that are in there, they're going to be able to be successful. Engagement is always a big deal for us because we feel like the more the students are engaged, the better that they're learning. I think it does go hand in hand. Our school improvement plan is to improve everything across the board and we always show the teachers how they go hand in hand.

Similar comments can be found from teachers, “It really didn’t change my daily practice because I felt like I was already doing most of those things. I think if anything it validated what I was doing.”

For the portion of the strategic plan which discusses accountability for personal actions and outcomes, the district implemented a new evaluation system per Georgia law O.C.G.A. § 20-2-210. District Two used this as a starting point for measurement of accountability; however, the implementation filtered from the district leadership as evident from this leader’s perspective, “it’s a living document, our system plan and our school’s strategic plan is also a living document, so they are changing all the time.” Teachers concur as this teacher describes her experience,

Overall, I enjoy the evaluation system. I like to know what my evaluators see or what they don’t see. I know where I can improve. I just enjoy the overall feedback from it and it’s so explicit in each area.”

This recommendation was aligned to the work the school district had in place and was then enhanced by the implementation of the teacher evaluation system developed by the state. As several of the participants commented, the practice at the classroom level did not change significantly and validated in many ways the strategic plan at the district, school and classroom levels.

**Teaching and Learning.** The participants in this study described teaching and learning as an integrated part of their daily lives. Just as in the GVP descriptor, District Two actors acknowledged a desire to impact student learning in a positive way. Creating an environment focused on student success is the stated goal in the district’s strategic plan and continues to the classroom level. The District Two leader extended this simple idea, “We worked really hard in our system and made sure that everything we do ultimately impacts what’s going on in the classroom.” The analysis of the interviews revealed two major themes within the Teaching and

Learning recommendation. Providing effective teacher feedback on performance and effective student assessments that measure student growth dominated the discussion.

Effective feedback on performance assessment as part of the new teacher evaluation process was seen as an improvement over prior instruments. Evaluators and teachers reported better communication of expectations. One teacher included this impression of feedback in her comments, “Being able to sit down and have a conversation with someone and say here is what I see and then having dialogue about it has helped us move forward.” In a parallel nature, a building level evaluator considered effective feedback to be an integral part of improving the overall quality of teaching as compared to past systems, stating, “I think it will improve the profession. The old system set this bar so low. Whereas with the TKES evaluation system requires more, I think it will improve the teacher performance.”

Student measures of academic growth were the second theme that emerged from the data. A component of this recommendation states, “ensure teachers use varied measures to determine what students know and can do” (GVP, 2010). All seven participants in this district described the importance of using assessment data to base instruction that meets the needs of students. One building level leader described the importance of understanding assessment uses, “Assessment strategies is how did we measure what the students are doing; and assessment uses is now that we have that information, what are we doing about it.” At the classroom level, one teacher connected assessment and collaboration as common practice by describing a recent event,

Two weeks ago we met to look at our math assessments and we were looking at a summative assessment, a unit test. We were talking about the gaps in learning. We talked about really doing some responding and intervening quickly by dividing up our kids. We developed smaller assessments to use along the way to see their progress.

As a result of District Two's strategic plan, assessment uses has reached all three levels of schooling discussed here. The commitment to providing quality feedback coupled with varied assessment strategies; this district demonstrates a culture of continuous improvement for staff and students.

**Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy.** In considering, culture, climate and organizational efficacy, the analysis of the interview transcripts led to one major theme, open communication to include all stakeholders providing an environment rich in respect and encouragement. Like all school districts in Georgia, District Two implemented a new teacher evaluation system. Most of the comments collected from the teacher perspective revolve around the respect they received from district and building leaders. For example one teacher summed up her experience,

It fits with our overall strategic plan for achievement because the new system evaluates us on- are we meeting those standards, are we using best practices, how to implement best practices and where we can grow in meeting our students' growth needs. Feedback plays a huge role in the process from the evaluator on how you can improve.

Teachers continued to mention trusting the leadership in the district due to the open communication that took place prior to implementation. A different teacher described her experience, "it's about the relationship that you're building with them. The trust... I mean to me that is the biggest thing".

District and building leaders discussed the effort to be transparent in all aspects of planning to include the teacher evaluation system. The district leader provided this insight,

We worked really hard in our system and made sure that everything we do ultimately impacts what's going on in the classroom. We do a lot of professional learning, the first

thing we do is build the administrators in the schools and the system, build their capacity. So as we begin working with the teachers and sharing with them the best practices that we expect to see in their classrooms, there is a correlation.

This statement indicates the value this district places on open communication and making connections that benefit students.

In these examples of open communication at all levels in the organization, the focus on ensuring all stakeholders have information in order to contribute effectively to student success is apparent. District Two did not stop with internal communication, in this example the district leader described the effort to ensure external contributors had knowledge of the how and why aligning to the GVP was important for the district,

When the Vision Project first came out, we looked at it line by line. We shared it with our school board, along with our superintendent. We made it part of a couple of our school board meetings, work sessions and open meetings for the public, to share information, to share the purpose behind the project and what we were doing in our system to align with the components of the Vision Project.

All seven participants in this district described the importance of open communication to build trust and relationships throughout the district.

**Teaching and Learning Resources.** The analysis of the interview transcripts confirms assessment uses as an emergent theme for this recommendation. While teaching and learning resources was not discussed as pervasively as other recommendations, the evidence does show assessment collection and uses as a daily activity for teachers. As one teacher explained,

Just last night I sat and looked at... I do pretest and post-test for older units and I went back to my pretest and looked at what kids missed and I looked at their posttest so see

what questions they got correct, what was the difference. So I was looking for a couple of things, was there growth from the pretest to the post-test and what kinds of questions were kids still missing. As here is the scenario I need to focus on and make sure that I'm getting to those kids in my classroom.

The teachers in District Two have embraced the use of data as seen in the prior example. The data collection and uses is a daily process as this teacher states,

Teaching that's a part of my every day. I'm always evaluating my students, gathering data to make sure that I'm meeting their needs exactly where they need to be met especially in my job because I deal with struggling readers, so I have to know. I mean I have to know. I have to have that data to help me. I mean I do that informally, formally but it's an ongoing process that guides my teaching.

These two illustrations represent many of the same kinds of statements teachers used when describing assessment use. But how do teachers feel about the focus on assessment use to drive instruction, this teacher summed it up well, "So you're very aware of every standard. It just holds you more accountable. It makes you stop and really ask yourself, am I doing everything I can to help achievement be where it needs to be." District Two is making the use of assessments a priority and it is impacting at the classroom level as evident from the scenarios shared above. Professional learning opportunities provided by the district enabled teachers and building level leaders develop a comfort level with assessment and the value they bring to student achievement.

**Human and Organizational Capital.** A complex theme developed from the analysis of the transcripts that directly links to this recommendation. Teacher evaluation emerged as the dominant theme with exemplary teachers as a subtheme. The new evaluation system in Georgia effects all teachers and evaluators. The interviews revealed positive and negative impressions



from the participants during the interview process. Much of the discussion revolved around retention of teachers rated at the exemplary level. The positive and negative impressions are discussed separately to provide clarity to the discussion.

As part of the new evaluation system in Georgia, a student achievement portion combines with an observation portion to complete a teachers overall evaluation measure. Evaluators and teachers had similar comments from the observation portion beginning with this thought from a teacher, “our district evaluation system is very thorough and provides tons of feedback. You can be involved in the process, which is a change from the past.” From the building leader viewpoint, “I think it will improve the profession a little bit. The old system set the bar so low. Whereas with the new evaluation system, I think it will improve teacher performance.” From these two examples overall improvement is seen as a positive.

Another positive related to the evaluation process is the ability to give those teachers who are impacting the profession a higher rating than the expect level of proficient. A shared view from building leaders is the idea they have the exemplary rating to let those teachers know the extra effort is noticed,

For that small group of teacher leaders – and it’s a small group – I love that there is something that I can do, that I can say thank you for what you do. Thank you for being a great teacher. Thank you for being a teacher leader on top of that. Here is a little extra something. I would carry that as a sense of pride as a teacher.

While building level leaders share this sentiment, the teachers interviewed have a less positive view.

The teachers in this study described the evaluation instrument differently. One teacher revealed, “I don’t want somebody to know that I’ve gotten exemplary. I don’t want them to feel

bad about... well I didn't get exemplary, what is she doing? Which that's a good thing too, we can learn from each other but it's stressful." It is this notion of stress that occurred frequently in the analysis of the transcripts. Teachers and evaluators discussed openly their fear of losing exemplary teachers due to the stress created by the new evaluation system. In order to convey the high feelings around this fear a series of quotes follows to magnify the concerns:

- I think that's part of education that seems really hard is there's so many people wanting to be in control and just as a classroom teacher I have no control. I mean I feel very powerless.
- In a lot of ways this evaluation system is going to push teachers away who are exemplary.
- I know I've taught my standards, I've made it engaging but if they don't want to learn ultimately I can't make them.
- I think it's making teachers more conscientious but at the same time making them stressed.
- I just can't wrap my head around the infinite number of variables that exist in a classroom and it boils down to a numerical score.

It became apparent in successive coding rounds that teachers and building level leaders felt fear and stress are areas needing attention. It is important to note here that the new teacher evaluation system is a state initiative not a district one. Annual performance evaluation is addressed in Georgia law O.C.G.A. § 20-2-210. The rule states that local school systems must adopt, by no later than the 2014-2015 school year, a teacher evaluation instrument that incorporates the latest version of the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES).

**Financial Resources, Early Learning and Student Success.** These two recommendations are being combined due to the low number of responses coded to them. The district leader discussed future plans to address early learning,

Ages zero to eight, or before they enter school, there are a lot of things that you can do to help those learners before they actually become one of your school learners. What are we doing in our system, and if this is the expectation of the state, what can we do in our local system to have a positive impact on the zero to four, if you will, before pre-K, to be in alignment with that.

As this is part of the continuous improvement progress and not yet implemented, no other data was found to support this recommendation. There was no mention of the Financial Resources recommendation found in the analysis of the interview transcripts.

**Summary.** District Two was identified as a district which had implemented the GVP with high fidelity. Human and Organizational Capital and Culture, Climate and Organizational Efficacy occurred the most frequently in the analysis of the transcripts. These recommendations overlapped suggesting participants perceived a strong relationship for these recommendations. In addition, Human and Organizational Capital overlapped with many of the other recommendations suggesting that the participants in this study felt the impact of this recommendation more than the others. With the new teacher evaluation system being part of this and the impact that participants shared, the correlation is not surprising. District leaders, building leaders, and teachers clearly communicated that the overarching focus of the district is to enhance the learning of students. A compare and contrast follows in the discussion section.

## Discussion

### Summary of Findings

The Vision of Public Education in Georgia (GVP) provides school districts and school boards with a roadmap to assist in planning for the education of the children entrusted to them. The GVP aims to bring school districts together to address concerns for Georgia's children, set initiatives and provide a positive view of public education in Georgia (GVP, 2014). As the District Two Leader stated, "any time you can take the different arrows and align them in the same direction. That's a positive." During the course of this study, both districts discussed using the seven recommendations as a quality check of current practices and as a way to strategically plan for school improvement. It was evident from the interviews; each district had used the GVP to guide school improvement efforts. The District One leader stated, "If we own education, it really has to start and be part of people's thinking and strategic planning. I think the Vision Project will really help guide and move us to some consistency across the State of Georgia."

Both district leaders interviewed clearly articulated the importance the GVP played in helping them strategically align school improvement efforts. Communicating the improvement plan to parents, community members, and business leaders is one of the indicators for the Culture, Climate and Organizational Efficacy recommendation. A cooperative study conducted by Casner-Lotto and Barrington (2006) noted businesses are holding public schools accountable for preparing students to work in their environments. By partnering with community groups, both districts are creating buy-in for their schools. As the District One Leader framed it,

I think what we've done is build a lot of trust and we stopped blaming each other, so all of our nonprofits – we do a lot of work, with neighborhood leaders and the chamber of commerce. We've done a lot of things where we said we can't afford to blame each other

and we have to work together and I think that has been incredible.

It is this level of commitment from the entire community that enables school districts to level the playing field for all students and provide a quality education that embraces culture, race, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. Teachers and building leaders need this support as they work to help each student achieve.

Teachers and building leaders in both districts described how they implemented district strategic plans in their daily work. Utilizing professional learning, goal setting, and student data systems, all participants discussed the importance of providing tools that enabled teachers to truly know how their students are progressing and how as a team they could hold each other accountable. This is similar to the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET, 2013) results that recommended professional learning, carefully looking at student achievement, and meaningful feedback to set goals for improvement. All three of these activities are described in the indicators connected to the Teaching and Learning recommendation. Teaching and Learning co-occurred with the Human and Organizational Capital recommendation which directly connects to teacher evaluation (Appendix C).

### **Hopes and Fears of Teacher Evaluation**

Teacher evaluation generated passionate conversation in both districts. A building leader summed up the hopes and fears for participants, “ideally, keeping their job and teaching children would be the same thing.” As Zatynski (2012) noted concerns over teacher quality have swelled, teacher evaluation has emerged as a crucial tool for principals and other administrators to improve instructor performance. Creating an evaluation tool that can be fair and reliable divides educators and politicians. Politicians want a measure that enables them to say to their constituents, all the teachers in my district are effectively teaching children and here is how I know.

Educators want a tool that understands that children are not widgets and are unique in their learning and background. It is how to take the many variables students and teachers possess into consideration that divides the two groups. Both agree that having a quality teacher in every classroom is important, how to measure the effectiveness of that teacher is the divide.

In line with the Danielson (2010) and Stronge (2010) view of the importance of having a highly qualified teacher in every classroom, both districts discussed in depth the value a quality teaching workforce plays on student outcomes. As you can see in Appendix D, Human and Organizational Capital along with Exemplary Teaching was coded most frequently as this recommendation references teachers and teaching. Research shows that individual teachers are the most important school related factor in student achievement gains (McCaffery et al., 2003; Stronge, 2010; Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haetel, & Rothstein, 2012). Silva Mangiante (2010) and Danielson (2010) view teacher evaluations as being classroom based with a focus on environment and instruction. The addition of a student achievement component to a teacher evaluation measure divides the two groups.

Lawmakers describe the need for a teacher evaluation measure that brings non-subjective information into the evaluation process. Teacher and principal evaluations prior to Race to the Top (RTTT) did not take into consideration the impact on student learning or student growth from year to year. In theory, Value Added Measures (VAM) brings non-subjective data to the process. However, Schochet and Chang (2010) reported a VAM error rate of 25 percent when using three years of student growth data and 35 percent with one year of data. Considering there is a one in four chance or more of making a mistake in rating a teacher more consideration is needed before the VAM can be considered reliable enough for use. Moreover, teachers who are average could be erroneously identified for special treatment both positive and negative. Partici-

pants in both districts described the high level of stress a teacher evaluation tool which includes a student achievement requirement causes even exemplary teachers. One teacher described her anxiety which others echoed, “I think what’s going to happen is you’re going to push your better teachers into other professions. I have told my administrator there’s a lot of things I can do where I’m not going to be tied to scores.”

### **Implications for Further Research**

One area for further research includes an investigation of the implementation of the Vision Project in only one system in order to comprehensively drill down across all seven project recommendations (Appendix C). Additionally, a study could investigate three school systems as opposed to only two in order to allow for triangulation across school systems as well as across data types collected. Researchers could look into the success or depth of replication of state initiatives such as the Vision for Public Education in Georgia. Several other states have grass root efforts in place as well, Texas and Massachusetts for example. A research project that looks specifically at student achievement results in the different states with these initiatives could provide models for others to follow. A meta-analysis of the Georgia Vision Project districts is another area for future research.

### **Implications for Educational Policy**

Since a new federal law, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), will take affect August 1, 2016 many states will need to write new legislation to clarify how the state is moving forward with educational policy. Many states wrote into law the percentages that student achievement would carry in a teacher’s evaluation. Rigid policy currently have teachers worried about covering material in order to prepare students for state mandated testing. These policies are under

scrutiny as lawmakers feel push back from teacher groups. Research into state policy changes for teacher evaluation is needed.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### *Appendix A.1*

The following questions provide the framework for teachers and leaders to describe the impact the Vision Project and teacher performance had on student achievement:

#### **Descriptor**

1. What do you think about your districts evaluation system? What has been your role, if any, in the teacher evaluation process?

➤ *Probe for ties to Vision Project – Human and Organizational Capital*

#### **Focus on Leadership**

2. How does teacher evaluation fit into the strategic plan for your district as it relates to improving teacher practice and student achievement?

➤ *What role does feedback play in the process?*

➤ *Probe for ties to district's strategic plan and/or Vision project*

#### **Focus on Learning**

3. Describe how the Value Added Model (VAM) has impacted the evaluation process.

➤ *What impact has the VAM component had on your personal evaluation?*

➤ *What is the process for looking at student achievement data that impacts a teacher's score on the evaluation instrument?*

#### **Focus on Context**

4. What do you see as the impact of switching from a 2-point performance scale to a 4-point performance scale?

➤ *4 pt. vs. old system Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory*

- *Probe for impact of measuring teacher quality on student learning- Vision Project- Human and Organizational Capital Strand*
5. How will teacher evaluation effect the overall profession of teaching from your perspective?
  6. How has your district's evaluation tool impacted your daily practice?
    - *Probe- everyday activities that contribute to excellence in teaching*
    - *Probe- overall effect on teacher workforce*

### **Closing Question**

7. Are there any other ideas that you would like to share that have not been covered?

### *Appendix A.2*

The following questions provide the framework for the system level designee interviews:

#### **Descriptor**

1. What do you think about the Vision Project? What has been your role, if any, in the adoption or implementation of the Vision Project strands in your districts strategic plan?
2. What is the background of this district?
  - variations: What is the story of this district? What is the district's history?
  - clarification: What is the history? How far back?
  - probe for a rich and detailed discussion; emphasis on teacher evaluation
  - probe other (teacher evaluation, teacher improvement, teacher practice relating to student achievement)

#### **Focus of Leadership**

1. How have you developed leadership in your district?
  - probe for ways the Vision Project has impacted this development
2. What short-term/long-term goals have you set to build capacity in your district?

- probe for ways the Vision Project recommendations have been integrated into these goals
3. How does the external and internal structures of your district (parent, community, policy state/federal, political and system/central office stakeholders) influence leadership practices and processes?
- probe what works/ what's missing

### **Focus of Learning**

4. How has the Vision Project influenced the learning environment in your district?
- probe for specific examples of the contribution related to one or more of the Vision Project strands (asterisked strands connect to individual research focus)
    - Early Learning
    - Teaching and Learning
    - Human and Organizational Capital\*
    - Governance, Leadership, and Accountability
    - Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy
    - Financial Resources
5. What long-term goals (or strategic plan) have you set for your district, and how are these tied to the Vision Project?
- probe for teacher development

### **Focus on Context**

6. How do the internal structures of your district impact teacher practice?
- probe what works/ what's missing



7. How do the external structures of your district (parent, community, policy, political and system/central office stakeholders) impact teacher practice and ultimately student achievement?
- probe what works/ what's missing
  - probe for specific examples of how the Vision Project has impacted learning

**Closing Question**

8. Are there any other ideas that you would like to share that have not been covered?

## Appendix B

August 28, 2015

Subject: Invitation to participate in the research project titled: Identification of Exemplary Teacher Characteristics as Part of Georgia's Vision for Public Education

Dear Participant,

I am conducting interviews as part of a research study to increase our understanding of the characteristics of exemplary teachers and their effect on student learning. As an identified exemplary teacher, you are in an ideal position to give us valuable firsthand information from your own perspective. The interview will take no more than 1 hour and is very informal. We are simply trying to capture your thoughts and perspectives. Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Each interview will be coded to ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and write up of findings. There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to our research and findings could lead to greater public understanding of the characteristics of exemplary teachers and their effect on student learning. If you are willing to participate please respond to this email and I will contact you once selection of all participants are confirmed. Below is the consent form for your review. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

Kind Regards

Kim McDermon, Student Primary Investigator

Georgia State University

## Appendix C

### Georgia Vision Project

#### Recommendations

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#### **2.0 GENERAL**

##### 2.1

Promote public education as the cornerstone of American democracy by publicizing student and school successes through all available media.

#### **3.0 EARLY LEARNING & STUDENT SUCCESS**

##### 3.1

Create, in each county of the state, an early learning partnership that includes all public and private human service organizations.

##### 3.2

Create public-private partnerships in local communities between local businesses and educational and human services organizations for the purpose of supporting early childhood initiatives that address healthy child/family development and economic benefits to the community.

##### 3.3

Adopt a statewide awareness and engagement initiative to ensure that high-quality early childhood education is a top priority for the state.

##### 3.4

Provide opportunities for all children from birth to five-years-old to participate in high quality learning experiences that are designed to promote all aspects of a child's development, whether provided by families in the home or through a licensed public or private program.

##### 3.5

Align developmental and academic standards for all children from age birth through 8 years old to provide a continuity of learning experiences and personal growth.

3.6.

Ensure adequate financial support for the implementation of quality programs for all young children.

#### **4.0 TEACHING & LEARNING**

4.1

In order to provide an environment where students learn best, ensure that teacher's work and plan together, learn and share effective teaching practices, and are provided support for their on-going learning.

4.2

In order to provide an environment where students learn best, ensure that teachers use a variety of technologies to teach and measure what students know and can do.

4.3

In order to provide an environment where students learn best, ensure that teachers teach challenging and problem-solving lessons that are flexible enough to meet the interests and needs of individual students.

4.4

In order to provide an environment where students learn best, ensure that teachers use varied measures to determine what students know and can do.

#### **5.0 TEACHING & LEARNING RESOURCES**

5.1:

Evaluate and utilize the most effective instructional models and learning supports (i.e. digital, blended, competency, virtual, etc.) implemented by school districts.

5.2:

Ensure full integration of current technology and training into the class-

room. 5.3

Continue to develop and maintain a comprehensive data system for monitoring student progress (Pre-K–12) and making decisions to improve educational practice.

5.4

Develop partnerships with business, industries, public agencies and the community to promote shared use of services and facilities.

## **6.0 HUMAN & ORGANIZATIONAL CAPITAL**

6.1

Identify and recruit the most talented candidates into teacher preparation programs. 6.2

Continuously evaluate the effectiveness of teacher and leader preparation programs.

6.3

Collaborate with the Georgia Professional Standards Commission, the Georgia Department of Education and other credentialing agencies to provide comprehensive strategies to find, grow and keep the most talented educators.

6.4

Evaluate the effectiveness and viability of the pilot teacher and leader compensation programs.

6.5

Organize personnel, distribute leadership and implement processes that maximize student learning.

## **7.0 GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP & ACCOUNTABILITY**

7.1

Develop and implement at the local school district level an accountability system based on local district educational goals that are aligned with state educational goals and state accountability system, and which include clearly defined measures of school district, school and student success.

### 7.2

Pursue all local and state options to provide for the equitable, effective and efficient delivery of instruction to all students in Georgia regardless of where they reside.

### 7.3

Change and streamline the process by which local school districts obtain flexibility from state mandates so it is based on school and district performance expectations outlined in the district's strategic improvement plan and takes into account the needs, resources, and characteristics of the local community.

### 7.4.

Establish and maintain high performance organizations through development of local school district governance and leadership teams.

### 7.5

Streamline and align the agencies with jurisdiction over components of the education enterprise and to whom local school districts of the state must answer.

### 7.6

Change the method of selection of the state superintendent of schools.

### 7.7

Change the method of selection of members to the state board of education to non-partisan election of one member from each congressional district for a term of office of even-numbered years by persons in each congressional district qualified to vote for members of the General Assembly.

### 7.8

Change the method of selection of members of local boards of education from a choice between partisan and non-partisan elections to non-partisan elections only.

## **8.0 CULTURE, CLIMATE & ORGANIZATIONAL EFFICACY**

### 8.1

Develop safe, orderly, supportive learning environments built on respect and encouragement where all individuals believe they can make a positive difference.

### 8.2

Make each school and school system an inviting place to be for students, parents, staff and the larger community.

8.3

Establish each school as the center or hub of the community in which it exists.

8.4

Determine stakeholder perceptions of schools and school districts.

8.5

Develop a culture and climate that foster innovation and responsible risk-taking.

8.6  
Develop school and district cultures that are sensitive and responsive to the cultural, racial, ethnic and socio-economic make-up of the communities they serve.

8.7

Get to know and be willing to truly listen to the students in our schools.

## **9.0 FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

9.1

Expand both the scope and duration of the work of the Special Council on Tax Reform and Fairness for Georgians for the purpose of comprehensively reviewing the state tax structure and identifying ways that it can be strengthened.

9.2

Identify in both state and local budgets for public education sufficient fiscal resources for implementing both a comprehensive data system and an evaluation system that uses data to measure and improve effectiveness in meeting objectives for enhanced student learning.

9.3

Initiate an ongoing process at the local school district level for systematically evaluating all expenditures to enable the development and adoption of budgets that are focused on district strategies for maximizing student learning.

9.4

Provide a high level of flexibility to local school districts in decision-making authority about the most effective strategies for the expenditure of funds to enable all students to be successful in school, coupled with appropriate methods for evaluating school and district

success and for implementing positive state interventions where they are found to be needed.

9.5

Implement a cohesive and stable mechanism for the financial support of early learning programs and services for children ages 0 to 5 at a level that prepares all of Georgia's youngest citizens for success in their subsequent school years.

9.6

Provide the most optimal partnership between the state and local school districts in sharing the responsibility for financial support of public education, while ensuring that disparity in local fiscal capacity does not impede the implementation of Vision Project recommendations in all Georgia districts.

9.7

Provide an ongoing level of state financial support for public education which, when combined with local revenue available to boards of education, makes the attainment of our Vision for Public Education in Georgia a reality and ensures its sustainability.

For more information, visit [gavisionproject.org](http://gavisionproject.org)



## Appendix D

Co-Occurrence Chart

	Culture, Climate and Organizational Efficacy	Early Learning and Student Success	Exemplary Teacher	Financial Resources	Governance, Leadership and Accountability	Great Quotes	Human and Organizational Capital	Teaching and Learning	Teaching and Learning Resources	Totals
Culture, Climate and Organizational Efficacy			11		11	6	24	13		65
Early Learning and Student Success									1	1
Exemplary Teacher	11				2	4	24	17		58
Financial Resources							1			1
Governance, Leadership and Accountability	11		2			2	7	8		30
Great Quotes	6		4		2		6	7	1	26
Human and Organizational Capital	24		24	1	7	6		28	1	91
Teaching and Learning	13		17		8	7	28		6	79
Teaching and Learning Resources		1				1	1	6		9
Totals	65	1	58	1	30	26	91	79	9	