

Quick Definition

Governance refers to the various entities that are involved in establishing and maintaining public education in the state of Georgia. There are both elected and appointed individuals at the federal, state, regional, and local levels who govern education. The various levels of educational governance in Georgia are responsible for creating an environment that promotes the development of productive Georgians.

Relevance to Georgia

As in other states across the country, governance and policymaking in Georgia consists of a complex web of entities, decision makers, and levels of government. Georgia has seven state education agencies in addition to the Georgia General Assembly and local education agencies. Table 1 details the seven state education agencies in addition to the Georgia General Assembly and local education agencies.

Table 1 - Georgia Education Agencies and Leadership

	Head	Head		Governing Body
		Elected	Appointed	
Bright from the Start: Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL)	Commissioner		By Governor	Board of Early Care and Learning (Appointed by Gov)
Department of Technical and Adult Education (DTAE)	Commissioner	By the Board		State Board of Technical and Adult Education (Appointed by Gov)
Georgia General Assembly (House and Senate)	House Education Committee Chair; Senate Education Committee Chair		By House Speaker and Senate President	N/A
Georgia Student Finance Commission (SFC)	President		By Board	Georgia Student Finance Board of Commissioners (Appointed by Gov)
Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA)	Executive Director		By Governor	The Governor's Office
Local Education Agency (LEA)	Local Superintendent		By School Board	Local School Board (Elected)
Professional Standards Commission (PSC)	Executive Director		By Commissioners	PSC Commission (Appointed by Gov)
State Department of Education (DOE)	State Superintendent of Education	By the General Public		State Board of Education (Appointed by Gov)
University System of Georgia	Chancellor	By the Board		Board of Regents (Appointed by Gov)

The creation of education policy occurs formally by state legislators in the General Assembly. The state agencies are involved through the creation of rules and regulations by their agency boards. Local boards of education also craft policies governing their respective districts. These

policies must be in alignment with state and federal policies. Finally, advocates and citizens are involved by voting for their state and local representatives and by voicing their concerns to policymakers. All of these parties are intertwined in a process that results in the creation and implementation of education policy for the state. (See Georgia's Education Governance Framework.)

Governance at the State Level

At the state level, several individuals and agencies are involved in setting educational policies and governing various aspects of Georgia's public education system. These include the following:

- State Governor;
- State Superintendent of Schools;
- Alliance of Education Agency Heads (AEAH);
- Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia (BOR/USG);
- Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL);
- Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC);
- Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA);
- Professional Standards Commission (PSC);
- State Board of Education (SBOE) and Department of Education (GaDOE); and
- Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG).

The role of each individual or agency is described in detail below.

State Governor

Georgia's governor, an elected official who serves a four-year term, appoints all of the members of the State Board of Education. The governor has the ability to create and influence policy that directly impacts education in Georgia including budget approval each year that allots education funding.

State Superintendent of Schools

The state superintendent of schools is an elected position in the state of Georgia lasting for a term of four years as defined by the Constitution of Georgia. The election coincides with the election of the state governor. This person is the chief state school officer responsible for operation of the Department of Education and chief executive officer of the State Board of Education.

Alliance of Education Agency Heads (AEAH)

The Alliance of Education Agency Heads (AEAH) was initiated by Governor Sonny Perdue in 2006 as a means to create more collaborative, systematic work to strengthen the seamlessness and overall quality of education opportunities in the state. The governor appointed the State Superintendent of Schools, in her capacity as a state constitutional officer, to chair the Alliance, which is comprised of the heads of the state's seven education agencies. Specifically, the

Alliance includes the State Superintendent of Schools, President of the Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC), Chancellor of the University System of Georgia (USG), Commissioner of the Department of Technical and Adult Education (DTAE), Commissioner of the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), Executive Director of the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement (GOSA), and the Executive Director of the Professional Standards Commission (PSC). The Alliance and representatives from each of the state’s education Boards comprise the Joint Education Boards Liaison Committee. This committee works collectively to move the state of Georgia towards a common vision for education.

Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia (BOR/USG)

The governance, control, and management of the University System of Georgia and all institutions in the system are vested in the Board of Regents, which develops rules for the University System. Currently, the Board is comprised of 18 members appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Georgia Senate: one member for each congressional district and five at-large members. The Board elects a chancellor who serves as its chief executive officer and the chief administrative officer of the University System. The Board of Regents oversees 35 colleges and universities: four research universities, two regional universities, 13 state universities, eight state colleges, and eight two-year colleges.

Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL)

Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) is responsible for meeting the child care and early education needs of Georgia’s children and their families. DECAL oversees a wide range of programs focused primarily on young children (ages zero to five) and their families, including the Georgia pre-K program and the licensure and monitoring of all center-based and home-based child care facilities.

Technical College System of Georgia

The Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) is the state agency responsible for overseeing 26 technical colleges, the Adult Education program, and a host of economic and workforce development programs. The agency’s work is governed by policies set by the State Board of Technical and Adult Education. TCSG also manages the Quick Start employee training program for new and expanding industries and provides adult basic education and literacy programs. In addition, TCSG oversees the General Educational Development (GED) program in Georgia.

Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC)

The Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC) seeks to enable more high school graduates to continue their education by providing loans, grants, scholarships, and student services to students and parents of students. There are two other bodies that work in conjunction with the Student Finance Commission: the Georgia Higher Education Assistance Corporation (GHEAC) and the Georgia Student Finance Authority (GSFA). Although separate entities in state law, these three agencies share the same mission, board members, and executive leadership and work

jointly on integrating school financial aid services. The GSFC Board appoints the commission's president who also serves by law as the president of the GHEAC and GSFA.

The Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC) is the state agency that administers state and lottery funded scholarship and grant programs such as HOPE. GSFC is responsible for the administration of GACollege 411, an online resource to help students and their families select a college, apply for admission, and plan to finance higher education.

The Georgia Higher Education Assistance Corporation (GHEAC) administers federally guaranteed education loan programs that provide financial assistance to continue education after high school.

The Georgia Student Finance Authority (GSFA) is the public corporation designated by state statute to originate and service Federal Family Education Loan Program (FFELP) loans as well as state and lottery funded service cancelable loans.

Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA)

The Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) strives to increase student achievement and school completion through analysis and communication of statewide data. GOSA provides policy support to the governor and citizens of Georgia through: an education scoreboard that indicates the effectiveness of Georgia's pre-K through college education institutions; research initiatives; analysis and communication of education data; financial and performance audits of academic programs; and collaborative work with AEAH to improve education statewide.

Professional Standards Commission (PSC)

The Professional Standards Commission (PSC) has full responsibility for the certification, preparation, and conduct of certified, licensed, or permitted personnel employed in Georgia public schools. The Commission is also responsible for the development and administration of teacher certification testing. PSC handles the investigation, advisement, monitoring, and due process of cases associated with educator discipline.

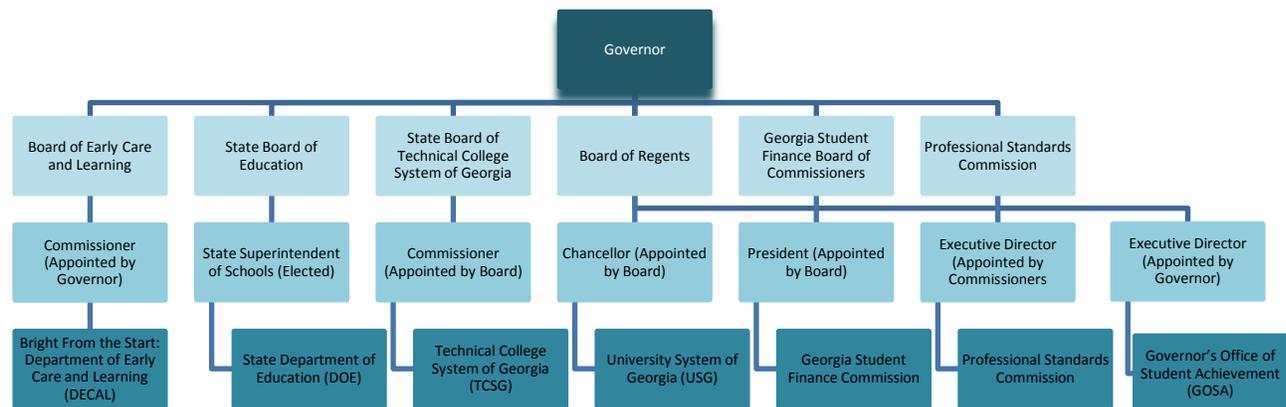
The Professional Standard Commission's governing board consists of 18 member including nine teachers, two higher education representatives, two local school board members, two superintendents, and three persons from the private sector.

State Board of Education (SBOE) and Department of Education (GaDOE)

The Georgia Board of Education provides leadership for the state system of public schools. Comprised of 13 members appointed by the governor to represent their congressional districts, the Board sets policies for the state's public school system.

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) oversees public education throughout the state. It ensures that laws and regulations pertaining to education are followed and that state and federal money appropriated for education is properly allocated to local school systems. GaDOE also provides education-related information to students, parents, teachers, educational staff, government officials, and the media.

Figure 1: Georgia’s Education Governance Structure



Governance at the Local Level

The Georgia Constitution defines the role and responsibility of local school systems and local boards of education. The Constitution grants authority to county and local boards of education to establish, maintain, and control public schools within their limits. Among the governing agencies that oversee local education systems are local boards of education, local school superintendents, local education agencies, and local school councils. Each of these agencies is described below.

Local Boards of Education

Each public school system in Georgia is under the management and control of a local board of education. The power and authority for the operation of schools are vested in the local boards of education, members of which are all elected by the local citizens. The local board of education must appoint a school superintendent to act as the executive officer of the board. The local boards of education approve the district rules and policies and help ensure that locally developed programs, courses, and activities are properly planned, implemented, monitored, and evaluated.

Local boards of education fund education programs using property taxes, a Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (for capital outlay projects), and/or grants and other funding services.

Local School Superintendents

Local school superintendents are appointed by their local school board. A school superintendent is the executive officer of the board and the chief administrator of the local system of education. The superintendent is responsible for implementing the policies of the local board and administering the various components of state and federal education programs and services.

Local Education Agencies (LEAs)

Local education agencies (LEAs), commonly referred to as school districts, implement the policies of the local board. LEAs also administer and manage state and federal funding and ensure compliance with requirements. This entity is often referred to as the superintendent's office, the county office, or the district office.

Local School Councils

Local School Councils are school-level advisory bodies that were created by law in Georgia to involve teachers, parents, and businesspersons in local school issues relating to student achievement. The role of school councils is advisory in nature, and while they can provide valuable input for local education leaders, the management and control of public schools remains the primary responsibility of local boards of education. Every public school in Georgia has a local school council consisting of a minimum of: four parents elected by the parents (two of whom must be business persons), two certified teachers elected by the teachers, two additional businesspersons, and the school principal.

National Perspective

Governance is a complex issue for all states as various entities attempt to collaborate in creation and oversight of education policy and rules. Governors, legislators, state boards of education, chief state school officers, and state education agencies comprise education governance systems in most states.¹

Governors and legislators across the country are taking action to expand their authority over K-12 education and thereby reduce the governing power and influence of state and local school boards. Revamping state boards is part of an overall movement among many states to consolidate education power, usually with the governor. Many times this is because the governor has philosophical differences with the board, the governor feels that the board is moving too slowly in creating change, the governor does not understand how boards of education operate to create policy, or the governor does not value or understand the importance of lay leadership.² With the exception of Minnesota and Wisconsin, every state in the nation has a state board of education. In 2011, state boards of education in at least 14 states experienced threats to their authority in public education. Although most of the proposed legislation to strip or change the power of state boards of education did not pass in 2011, Nevada, Oklahoma, and Oregon are a few of the states that underwent significant changes to their state board's governance structure and authority.³

Nevada's governor now has the right to hire and fire the state schools chief, a position that previously was accountable to the state board of education. Membership on the state board also changed from elected positions to a combination of elected and appointed positions.

Oklahoma's governor signed a bill into law that virtually strips all power from the state board of education and gives it to the state superintendent of public instruction. In Oklahoma, members of the board of education are appointed but the state superintendent is elected. A pending bill in the legislature will grant the governor the right to replace members of the board prior to the expiration of their six-year terms of service.⁴

Oregon's governor created a new Education Investment Board which will recommend budgets and policies for education in the state and expand focus from K-12 education alone to include pre-kindergarten and post-secondary education. This is a modification of the governor's original plan which was to eliminate Oregon's Board of Education and State Board of Higher Education. The governor will chair the new board and appoint the remaining 12 members.⁵

The influence of local boards has also been diminished due to increasing legislative mandates coming from both the federal and state levels. Most states have enacted policies that allow them to take over a school district, usually in response to a combination of inept administration, fiscal

¹ Education Commission of the States. "Governance: State Boards/Chiefs/Agencies." Retrieved December 22, 2011 from <http://www.ecs.org>.

² National Association of State Boards of Education. "State Board and Governor Relations." Boardmanship Review, May 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.nasbe.org>.

³ Cavanagh, S. "New Governors Squeezing State Ed. Boards' Authority." Education Week, July 2011.

⁴ "Fallin Signs Bill to Shift Power From Board of Education." Associated Press, April 2011.

⁵ Cooper, J. J. "Kitzhaber enacts birth-to-college education panel." Associated Press, June 2011.

mismanagement, corrupt governance, and academic problems within the local system. Many state policies provide a set of sanctions for such academic problems, with state takeover reserved as the ultimate penalty. Other state policies target a single troubled school district for an immediate state takeover.⁶

Strong governance is critical to improving outcomes for individual students and society at large. Georgia is not alone in grappling with the complexities of coordinating many governance entities in order to create the best learning opportunities for all Georgia's students. Policymakers are charged with the difficult task of establishing the right balance of state and local control, flexibility and accountability, and autonomy and oversight for the state's public schools.

⁶ Education Commission of the States. "Accountability – Sanctions, Takeovers." Retrieved April 27, 2010 from <http://www.ecs.org>.

Research Tells Us

Heads of state education agencies (e.g. state superintendents of schools, commissioners, etc.) have gone from being administrators in the background to key public figures in the education arena. Now that education agency leaders are in the spotlight, there is an increasing expectation that they will make significant changes. Yet the heads of education agencies face a number of challenges. A recent study of state education agencies found that most focus on ensuring compliance with laws and focus little on how to reform education to increase student achievement. Some of these leaders lack the imagination necessary to make changes and some believe that the culture in their agencies is stuck in outdated routines. Those who do wish to make any types of reform find themselves limited by rigid state rules and regulations.⁷

Some of these limitations make it difficult for agencies to recruit and retain qualified staff. Education agencies feel limited by what they can do with the staff that they have, and salaries for the employees in education agencies tend not to be comparable to what people can make in the private sector. The researchers of this study found that the heads of education agencies can and do make changes in spite of the obstacles, but the current political climate will likely require that they continue to work without any increases in federal financial support.⁸

⁷ Brown, C. G., Hess, F. M., Lautzenheiser, D. K., and Owen, I. “State Education Agencies as Agents of Change: What It Will Take for the States to Step Up On Education Reform.” Center for American Progress, July 2011.

⁸ Brown, C. G., Hess, F. M., Lautzenheiser, D. K., and Owen, I. “State Education Agencies as Agents of Change: What It Will Take for the States to Step Up On Education Reform.” Center for American Progress, July 2011.

For More Information

Bright from the Start: Department of Early Care and Learning – <http://dec.al.ga.gov>.

Georgia General Assembly – www.legis.state.ga.us.

Georgia School Boards Association – www.gsba.com.

Georgia Student Finance Commission – www.gsfc.org.

Governor’s Office of Student Achievement – www.gaosa.org.

Georgia Professional Standards Commission – www.gapsc.com.

Georgia Department of Education – www.doe.k12.ga.us.

Technical College System of Georgia – www.tcsq.org.

University System of Georgia – www.usg.edu.