



Media Contact:
Samantha Kennedy
Mass Insight Education & Research
857-315-5248
skennedy@massinsight.org

Mass insight

education & research

69 Canal Street
3rd Floor
Boston, MA 02114

massinsight.org

How ‘Big Bets’ are paying off in Georgia

Mass Insight’s review of Georgia’s Div. of School and District Effectiveness reveals shift that led to improved outcomes in underperforming schools.

March 6, 2020 – BOSTON – The Georgia Department of Education’s Division of School and District Effectiveness (SDE) has achieved measurable improvement after implementing its recent statewide strategy for 206 of its lowest performing schools, according to an in-depth assessment and report by Mass Insight Education & Research (Mi), a leading non-profit education consultancy.

“In Georgia, we’ve worked to provide high-quality supports for every school and district, to the benefit of every student,” State School Superintendent Richard Woods said. “Our entire agency is working together, all hands on deck, to leverage resources and expertise to support schools. Mass Insight’s review gives us confirmation that our school improvement strategy is working and producing positive results for Georgia students. I commend our school improvement team, led by Dr. Stephanie Johnson, on their work and look forward to continuing our efforts to provide the resources all schools need to succeed. And I thank our Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESAs), who are crucial partners in these efforts.”

The Mi analysis found largely positive perceptions among educators, reflecting a significant change following a shift in administrative and strategic approaches that emphasize more collaboration and planning between SDE and schools. Those new priorities – so called “big bets” by SDE leaders – include building the capacity of leadership to drive school improvement; increasing the effectiveness of school leadership teams in developing and advancing improvement plans; strengthening collaborative instructional planning; and focusing on improving equitable outcomes across Georgia’s districts. Mi’s report, presented to Georgia’s State Board of Education (SBE) and the product of a six-month review, examined school achievement metrics and gauged school principals’ and superintendents’ impressions of School and District Effectiveness (SDE) support efforts.

“We want to be confident that the service models we are using in our schools and districts are successful with improving outcomes for students. After two years of implementation under ESSA legislation, we thought it was important to conduct an external evaluation with Mass Insight and collect summative findings to measure the impact of our school and district effectiveness

strategies and learn how we can better maximize our time and resources,” said Dr. Stephanie Johnson, Deputy Superintendent, Georgia Department of Education. “Results from the evaluation will be utilized to make final, outcome-related decisions about whether specific supports currently provided will continue and whether aspects of program funding will be changed.”

Among Mi’s findings for identified TSI, CSI, and Promise schools:

- Schools are exiting their low-performing categories at a strong rate – Approximately 38% of all TSI, CSI, and Promise schools exited their respective 2018 identification status within one year of receiving SDE support. Specific exit data include:
 - 21 out of 22 schools (95.4%) exited the TSI list;
 - 26 out of 103 schools (25.2%) exited the CSI list; and
 - 32 out of 81 schools (39.5%) exited the Promise list.
- Composite school improvement and accountability metrics are improving, as measured by Georgia’s College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI).
- Graduation rates have increased in aggregate for the target schools.

Reacting to the report’s findings, Dr. Faya Paul, Director of the Division of School and District Effectiveness said, “The Georgia Department of Education School and District Effectiveness Team consistently ask and expect Georgia school districts to follow the Georgia School Continuous Improvement problem solving model. We will review our opportunities for growth and apply protocols and practices to close our gaps, improve our work, and help students to achieve.”

In probing the effectiveness of collaboration and teamwork between SDE and Georgia educators at TSI, CSI, and Promise schools, Mi research – which included focus groups and in-depth interviews with principals and over 270 survey responses – indicates a positive shift in the relationship:

- Approximately 87% of principals and 82% of superintendents/district contacts surveyed Totally or Strongly Agree that SDE support providers create a culture of tiered and differentiated/tailored support.
- Approximately 80% of principals and 82% of superintendents/district contacts surveyed Totally or Strongly Agree that SDE supports are aligned with school and district priorities.
- Approximately 78% of principals and 73% of superintendents/district contacts surveyed Totally or Strongly Agree that SDE supports are having a positive impact on school improvement efforts.

In its report to the SBE, Mass Insight recommended that Board members continue to invest in school improvement and champion SDE priorities, while identifying areas of opportunity to build on SDE’s success.

“The Division of School and District Effectiveness is a clear and impressive example of how policy changes and strong leadership can have a demonstrated impact with superintendents and principals and make a big difference for students. Although there’s more work to do, many other states can learn from the success in Georgia,” said Rob Jentsch, Mi’s Managing Director for School Improvement. Key drivers of Georgia’s success include:

- SES/school leader collaboration and focus on alignment of support

- Thoroughness of plan to support school improvement planning: process guides, GSAPS, GDRP, CNA process, STAP planning, etc.
- Focus on building school leaders' capacity to drive school improvement (which promotes sustainability of improvement efforts)
- Focus on learning from the field and constantly improving (which also helps to reduce compliance culture)
- Increased collaboration between SEA and other state/regional agencies (e.g., governor's office, regional service centers, etc.)

"Georgia's Big Bet strategy is leading the way in efforts to help schools improve and helping thousands of school children prepare for the future," said Dr. Susan F. Lusi, President and CEO of Mass Insight. "We are excited about their success to date, and look forward to seeing their continued progress in the future."

About Mass Insight Education & Research:

Founded in Boston in 1997, Mass Insight Education & Research is a national leader in accelerating student learning and shrinking achievement gaps. We help school systems develop and implement cost-effective school improvement solutions. Our field-tested approach starts with asking questions to understand context and conditions. Leveraging strengths, we build coherence, capacity, and networks to accelerate learning. Our performance improvement results are among the most promising in the field of public education today. For more information, visit www.massinsight.org.