



# Teacher Advisory Committee Report

Feedback from Teachers on Education Reform Commission  
Recommendations

State Representative Amy Carter  
Chair

October 24, 2016

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Education Reform Commission Recommendations**

**Final Report Submitted to  
Governor Nathan Deal**

**State Representative Amy Carter, Chair**

**October 24, 2016**

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## Background Information

In January 2015, Governor Nathan Deal appointed 34 members to the Education Reform Commission (ERC) for the purpose of developing recommendations to reshape and revolutionize Georgia's education system. The Commission was charged with addressing reform in five areas:

**Funding** with an emphasis on transforming Georgia's outdated K-12 funding formula;

**Teacher Recruitment, Retention and Compensation** focusing on revolutionizing the way that Georgia recruits, retains, and compensates K-12 educators;

Expanding, improving, and promoting quality **Early Childhood Education**;

Developing a **Move on When Ready** structure allowing students to progress and learn at their unique paces in grades K-12; and

**Expanding Educational Opportunities and School Choice** by exploring innovative strategies that increase K-12 options for Georgia families.

In December 2016 the Commission presented Governor Deal with a final report complete with 42 recommendations. After receiving the recommendations, Governor Deal insisted that teachers who are current practitioners in Georgia's schools have an opportunity to review the recommendations and provide feedback to him in the areas of teacher recruitment and retention, teacher compensation, and Move on When Ready.

## Selection of Teacher Advisory Committee Members

To ensure a representative sample of Georgia teachers from all areas of the state, nominations were solicited from directors of the Regional Education Services Agencies (RESAs), from superintendents, from legislators, and from other educational leaders across the state. The Governor's Office selected 90 teachers from these nominations – 30 teachers from Central and South Georgia; 30 teachers from the Metro Atlanta area; and 30 teachers from North Georgia. The teachers had professional experience ranging from 2 years to more than 30 years. Every grade level and core subject area was represented. Teachers specializing in career technical agricultural education, English language learners, students with disabilities, and teachers of the fine arts were included.

## Schedule of Meetings

In May 2016 all 90 teachers were invited to participate in a conference call with Governor Deal. He communicated to the group the specific areas from the ERC recommendations he would like for them to review and on which he was asking their input. The teachers convened over the next four months in regional cohort meetings where they worked to develop the feedback provided in this report. After each face-to-face meeting, a follow-up webinar was held to clarify the input and to ensure that the meeting summary reflected the consensus of the group. A final conference call with Governor Deal was held in early October 2016 for the purpose of thanking the teachers for their feedback and assuring them that their input would be carefully considered as he developed his 2017 education reform agenda.

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## **Teacher Advisory Committee Members**

**State Representative Amy Carter, Chair**

**Susan Andrews, Staff**

### **South/Central Cohort**

**Kelly Berry  
Shaw Braddy  
Scott Cooper  
Deanna Fanning  
Jamaal Hunter  
Jillian Mansfield  
Meagan Odom  
Melia Scott  
Kathy Thurman  
Teresa Williams**

**Stacey Brown  
Brian Butler  
Eric Crouch  
Merritt Fields  
Allison Konter  
Marc McKeever  
Jessica Price  
Kirk Shook  
Suraya Walker  
Jeffrey Wilbanks**

**Stacy Brown  
Dava Coleman  
Leslie Elkins  
Bynikini Frazier  
Luther Lucas  
Amy Nimmer  
Leslie Roland  
Tara Thompson  
Janet White  
Tammy Wood**

### **North Georgia Cohort**

**Dawn Bishop  
Marco Burgueno  
Matthew Dahkle  
Amy Gleaton  
Dianne Hardy  
Chantel Lewis  
Rebecca Nevertral  
Marc Pedersen  
Sarah West**

**Alice Brewer Brown  
Tamera Cash  
Kate Deboard  
Emily Gordon  
Kim James  
Allison Martin  
Rebekah Nichols  
Tiffany Thompson  
Karen Zayance**

**Melissa Brown  
April Cummings  
Kimberlee Fulbright  
Brian Hall  
Marla Lear  
Candie Moore  
Maria Norris  
Kelli Waldrop**

### **Metro Cohort**

**Donna Baker  
Casey Bethel  
Kelly Cadmen  
Christy Collier  
Nick Crowder  
Laura Eckman  
Melisa Jeffers  
Alexandra Mitchell  
Cassie Quesenberry  
Cindy Apley Rose  
Jennifer Ulbrich  
Kimberly Fossett-Yoder**

**Madison Baker  
Tewanna Brown  
Jina Chapman  
Ebonne Craft  
Alicia Darian  
Matthew Graham  
Lilly McFalls  
Cheryl Nicholls  
Cheryl Rankins  
Debra Russell  
Shenise White**

**Marva Bell  
Kelly Bryson  
Tamie Clark  
Amy Crisp  
Kristen Deuschle  
Jordan Hartgens  
Ronald Miller  
Eric Poythress  
Mike Reilly  
Lane Tyus  
Nathalie Williams**

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## Executive Summary

Ninety teachers from across Georgia were asked to review the recommendations of the Education Reform Commission in the areas of teacher recruitment and retention, teacher compensation, and Move on When Ready. The teachers engaged in intense discussions about each of these areas of recommendation and, although Georgia is a diverse state, the input provided by the teachers from North Georgia, South Georgia, and from the Metro Atlanta area were surprisingly consistent in both nature and scope.

**Recruitment:** It was noted that Georgia teachers have a captive audience of young people who can be influenced to consider a career in education if teachers share with them that the joys of the profession far outweigh the challenges of service. Having current educators be positive voices both within schools and within communities was seen as the critical first step in growing the next generation of teachers. In addition to this type of internal campaign at the district level, there is teacher support for an authentic external media campaign at the state level which allows glimpses into the real world of education, shared in the voices of real teachers.

**Retention:** Members of the advisory committee agreed on the importance of providing a year-long student internship for pre-service teachers, allowing them to experience the duties involved with both beginning and ending a school year, recognizing that such an internship might present a hardship for those entering education from another career or while working full-time and thus not be practical in all cases. They also agreed that intense mentoring for induction-level teachers is an important and necessary strategy to retain those early career teachers. Ensuring the best fit between mentors and induction level teachers was noted as key to success. Having mentors who are exemplary early or mid-career teachers provides new teachers with support that allows them to learn from those who have most recently experienced the stressors, challenges, and rewards of being a new teacher.

The group emphasized the importance of positive administrative support in retaining teachers. Teachers communicated that this support is currently being undermined by the lack of statewide inter-rater reliability on the Teacher Assessment on Performance Standards (TAPS) portion of Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES). Additional training for evaluators was suggested as a way to improve the inter-rater reliability of TAPS.

Teachers strongly agreed that the inconsistency among, and the lack of quality of, current assessments, used to determine growth as required by TKES, is a negative factor for teacher retention. To increase teacher confidence in the validity and reliability of the growth measures, they requested that the state develop pre- and post-tests for each subject, to be administered within the school year or semester that the course is taught. Teachers want and expect TKES to be a tool to identify strengths and weaknesses, inform professional development, encourage and reward excellence, and identify those teachers who are not positively affecting student achievement. However, the concerns about the lack of fidelity and consistency in the implementation of TAPS, and the lack of consistent, high quality assessments for the growth portion of TKES, cause teachers to question an administrator's ability to accurately assess their effectiveness.

The overwhelming consensus of the group was that teacher effectiveness is enhanced by the preservation of teacher planning time and instructional time. Both planning time and instructional time are often interrupted for professional development and administrative meetings that, while acknowledged as important, diminish teacher time to prepare for and provide effective instruction. Noting that there are times when this cannot be avoided, teachers suggested that districts designate specific amounts of time during each week for teacher planning that would be protected and would not be used for other duties.

Reinstituting a state provision for service-cancellable loans for teachers received positive feedback, and teachers noted the strength of this recommendation as a recruitment tool and retention tool. Understanding limited resources, teachers supported the cancellation of loans for teachers in high-risk schools as a positive first step.

The teachers were not opposed to the State paying for successful completion of GACE/edTPA, but communicated that the number of exams for which an individual receives reimbursement should be limited.

**Teacher Compensation:** The advisory group strongly agreed that teacher participation in the development of new compensation models will be critical. Teachers continue to support the use of years of experience and degrees as components of compensation models, but they are also supportive of compensation based on effectiveness and the performance of additional duties. It was noted that, if new compensation models use effectiveness as a major component, they would be more successfully implemented when consistent, high-quality statewide pre- and post-assessments are in place and data is collected to ensure the validity and reliability of growth measures. The potential to earn higher salaries earlier in a teacher's career was also supported and seen as a positive for recruitment and retention.

Teacher consensus was that the current defined-benefit retirement system is a positive retention factor and that it should be protected. The group shared apprehension about a study of the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) of Georgia, fearing that a study may have unintended consequences. If a study of TRS is conducted, the purpose, method, and cost should be transparent to the public. Teachers did not support spending large sums of money on a study of this nature, preferring that those dollars be used for improving schools.

**Move on When Ready:** Members of the advisory committee supported the idea of allowing students to move ahead based on mastery of standards rather than on age and/or grade. The first step in this initiative would be the development of formative assessments to determine student readiness to move forward in elementary language arts and math. The teachers were very clear that, prior to the implementation of a competency-based model at the elementary level, specific structures, policies, and professional development must also be developed and be in place. Teachers cautioned that students' social/emotional readiness to move ahead, as well as academic readiness, must be considered as this is implemented. Consistent, statewide definitions of competency should be developed and there should be an understanding that the decision to allow a student to move ahead is made by course or subject area, not by grade. The implementation of competency-based education would require flexible assessment times and flexible scheduling within schools. The group cautioned about moving in this direction too quickly and suggested piloting the model in several districts or schools in preparation for statewide implementation.

Teachers were supportive of strengthening and increasing pathways that allow students to receive both a high school diploma and a "Job Ready" designation. To accomplish this, teachers agreed that it was possible and positive to increase the number of high school students earning postsecondary credentials and degrees.

The ninety teachers who comprised the Teacher Advisory Committee were passionate and positive about public education and the students they serve. They brought forward-thinking attitudes and sincere desires to engage in this discussion on how to improve academic outcomes for Georgia's students. The following report describes in greater detail the feedback the teachers provided on the recommendations of the Education Reform Commission.

## **Teacher Recruitment and Retention**

**ERS Recommendation: Provide grants to support districts in developing strong teacher induction programs. Charter systems and strategic system contracts should include a description of how the district will provide support for induction-level teachers.**

- Teachers agreed on the importance of mentoring teachers to increase retention rates and indicated that the induction process may last longer than one year, possibly up to three years. The group agreed, however, that the induction process should be individualized and may be shortened for individuals ready to “move on.”
- Districts could ensure support for new teachers by including a designated amount of intentional time on district-level calendars for the sole purpose of mentoring.
- Teachers emphasized that ensuring an appropriate fit between induction level teachers and mentors is critical. One suggestion was to use a tiered approach to assigning mentors. This approach would include assigning exemplary early and mid-career teachers to induction level teachers and assigning exemplary veteran teachers to mid-career teachers who need mentoring support. Having a tiered approach would provide teachers with mentors who may have more recently experienced the stressors, challenges, and successes with which they are dealing.
- The teacher advisory group supported additional compensation for the mentoring teacher but noted that funds should also be budgeted for any necessary professional development of both the new teacher and the mentor. If districts are not able to financially compensate mentor teachers, the advisory group suggested that other compensation methods, such as reducing a teacher’s student load while he/she is providing support to other teachers, should be considered.

**ERS Recommendation: Establish and maintain the preservation of teacher planning time as a top priority of the education community.**

- Teachers agreed that planning time is vital, affects student achievement, and should be protected. Calling teacher planning time and instructional time “holy,” one teacher seemed to speak for the group when he stated that planning time should be focused and instructional time must be protected.
- Acknowledging that there are valuable administrative meetings and professional development sessions that must take place, and that, in most cases, some planning time will need to be used for such purposes, the group suggested that districts commit to protecting a defined portion of the planning time each week solely for instructional planning. For example, teachers could be assured that 90 minutes of planning time each

week would not be disturbed by meetings or training so that teachers could depend on having specific amounts of time during the school week to plan effectively.

- Teachers suggested the focus of pre-planning should be changed to allow time for teachers to better prepare for the critical beginning of the school year without excessive meetings.
- Noting that preserving planning time is the function of local Boards of Education, superintendents, and principals, it was suggested that the State could assist districts by providing scheduling templates to encourage best practices.

**ERS Recommendation: Encourage the General Assembly and the State Board of Education to implement guidelines promoting the best and most respectful use of teacher instruction time.**

- The advisory group determined that preserving teacher planning time, as stated in the previous recommendation, and promoting the “best and most respectful use of teacher instructional time,” as stated in this recommendation, are linked and that both are critical in retaining teachers.
- The group also stated that the time used for state and district mandated testing should not be thought of as instructional time, and that teachers need uninterrupted instructional time for effective teaching.
- Teachers stressed the importance of having adequate time to fully implement new initiatives and collect data on their results prior to a decision being made to abandon the initiative. The group also agreed that keeping more stable standards and curricula adoption cycles would be a positive move.

**ERS Recommendation: Modify the implementation of the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) to allow fewer required classroom observations for effective teachers after a baseline of effectiveness has been established.**

- Teachers discussed the issue of teacher evaluation relative to the retention of teachers. The group was positive about allowing flexibility in the number of observations in the TKES process; it was noted that mandating the number of teacher observations in the teacher evaluation process removes the flexibility of local administrators. Having a large number of evaluations to conduct, in addition to other responsibilities such as testing administration and student discipline, takes away the ability of the administrators to focus on teachers needing the most support and reduces their opportunities to provide meaningful feedback to all teachers. Teachers stated that it is not necessary for proficient teachers to have six observations as the original TKES required.



- The advisory group emphasized the importance of additional training for administrators on the implementation of the TAPS portion of TKES. Teachers expressed concern over the current inconsistency and low level of the inter-rater reliability among administrators rating TAPS. There was frustration over receiving “vague and generic” feedback on observations, which was not helpful for improvement, and it was noted that teachers have sometimes been told the administrators are discouraged from giving teachers a highest rating of “4,” even if the administrator can justify that rating. Others related being told that administrators must actually hear specific terms such as “differentiation” used during the observation in order to give teachers credit for demonstrating certain standards. Some reported having observations on the day before holidays, and several shared experiences of a teacher not having any observations throughout the school year only to have several observations close together at the end of the year. The group noted that frustration leads to lack of retention and many teachers feel that the current level of administrative understanding about the evaluation system, and the resulting inconsistencies and manipulations, create a “game you can’t win.”
- As teachers continued the conversation on evaluation, they confirmed that the idea of basing teacher effectiveness on growth is appropriate. There was broad consensus that student growth, not achievement or goal attainment, should be a part of teacher evaluations. It was noted, however, that many districts do not have the staff or resources to develop effective Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) or other growth measures at the district level. Several teachers commented that the pre- and post-tests being used in their respective districts are poorly-made tests and that districts set their own testing windows for administering the tests. Having this flexibility in determining the testing window results in some districts waiting several weeks into the school year to give pre-tests, while others give them in the first week of school. Teachers in districts which delay the administration of the pre-tests find themselves delaying instruction of some standards until after the pre-test, therefore wasting precious instructional time at the beginning of the year.
- It was stated that the current testing requirements are an obstacle to retaining teachers. The inconsistency among the current methods of assessment for student growth was rated as a rapidly growing source of teacher dissatisfaction. The teachers strongly agreed that consistent statewide growth measures, with significant state support in development and administration, would improve the process and that the pre-tests should inform instruction and result in increased student achievement. The group preferred that state-developed pre- and post-tests be provided for each subject and course. These tests should not be overly complicated or lengthy, but they should provide valid and reliable measures that would be consistent across all teachers statewide teaching any particular subject. With state developed pre- and post-tests, teachers would have more confidence that consistent growth measures are being used among colleagues across the state.

- The high school teachers expressed concern that the reports they currently receive on end-of-course test results do not provide them with information that can be used to improve instruction and/or to remediate students. In prior years, the reports provided valuable information for the teacher and the student, but the new reports are not seen as a helpful instructional tool. Even though high school teachers were the first to bring this issue to the table, elementary and middle grades teachers were also adamant that they should receive detailed diagnostic information from the pre-tests to inform instructional practices, differentiate learning, and individualize instruction. This same assessment, or a parallel version, should be the post-test to determine student growth for TKES.
- Teachers expressed concern about using prior year Milestones tests as a pre-test measure for evaluation purposes when the subject matter is not the same (for instance, using life science as the pre-test for the following year's earth science). They do not have confidence that the measures are comparable.
- Several teachers discussed that, if the SLO affects the effectiveness ratings of teachers, students should also be held accountable for the results of the assessments. Currently, many students either do not take the tests or do not take the tests seriously. This invalidates the use of the test to determine teacher effectiveness in the opinion of the advisory group.

The teachers want and expect TKES to be a tool to improve teacher performance and want administrators to fairly apply the standards to all teachers to identify strengths and weaknesses, inform professional development, encourage and reward excellence, and identify those teachers who are not positively affecting student achievement. The advisory members expressed concern that it is not being implemented as designed in many districts.

**Recommendation: Develop and implement a statewide media campaign to promote the positive aspects of teaching as a profession.**

- The group consensus was favorable toward a district and state media campaign to promote teaching as a profession. Teachers agreed that a campaign to promote the positive aspects of teaching would be a good retention and recruitment tool, but they strongly emphasized that there should be an internal campaign at the district level, led by teachers, prior to a statewide campaign. Teachers must communicate positively about the importance of their own profession and about their work in their own communities. The group insisted that teachers need to tell their own story more effectively and allow their local communities to know the great things happening in local public schools. The positive message about the profession should “come from within” and should communicate that the challenges of service are far outweighed by the intrinsic joy created while working with students and seeing them succeed. There was also support for a state media campaign highlighting teachers from across the state if handled appropriately and designed to reflect the voices of real teachers.

- The teachers were concerned about the amount of money that might be spent on a formal media campaign and stated that the money would be used more wisely if spent on instruction. To keep costs down, it was suggested that a district media campaign could be a student project, developed through media coursework. The district and state campaigns should target the type of media that young people use, such as social media, and not be limited to television commercials and other traditional media.
- Teachers were emphatic that any campaign attempted should be authentic. As one teacher emphatically stated, it should use “our voices, our faces,” to positively show the real work that real teachers do.
- The advisory group also supported the expanded implementation and increased availability of the CTAE pathway *Teaching as a Profession* being taught in middle and high schools throughout the state. These courses were seen as a positive way for districts to recruit and grow their own teachers.

**ERS Recommendation: Implement a study of the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) of Georgia to measure system health and ensure long-term program vitality.**

- Teacher consensus was that the current defined-benefit retirement system is a positive retention factor and that it should be protected. Several members of the group do not oppose the study of the long-term strength and viability of the current teacher retirement system as stated in this recommendation, but teachers were clear that transparency in conducting a study would be a necessary element. It would be imperative that communication about the specific purpose and methodology of the study be made clear, as well as the cost. There was some degree of apprehension over any type of study, fearing that there might be unintended consequences and negative changes to the current system. All of the teachers opposed spending large sums of money on a study of this nature, preferring that those dollars be used to improve instruction.
- The advisory group stated that being able to contribute to a 401(k) plan, in addition to the current defined benefit plan, would be an attractive benefit and is currently available in some, but not all, districts.

**ERS Recommendation: Investigate the benefit of reinstituting the service cancellable loan program for students graduating from a University System of Georgia teacher education program. Designate the teaching profession as a High Demand Workforce Initiative in Georgia.**

- The group supported reinstituting a state provision for service-cancellable loans. Providing service cancellable loans would be an effective recruitment tool as well as a

retention incentive. Although many in the group supported service cancellable loans for teachers who teach in high-need, high-risk or rural Georgia areas, it was also stated by some that all teaching positions deserve loan forgiveness and that structures should be developed to forgive an amount per year for five years to keep teachers in Georgia. The group noted that it is difficult to repay student loans on current beginning teacher salaries regardless of where or what one teaches.

**ERS Recommendation: Reimburse the costs of the required GACE exams and edTPA of those pre-service teachers who have enrolled in University System of Georgia teacher preparation programs and who have signed a contract to teach in a Georgia school.**

- The teachers were not opposed to the State paying for GACE and/or edTPA, but they communicated that the number of exams for which an individual receives reimbursement should be limited, perhaps to one, and that the state should pay for only those assessments successfully passed.

**ERS Recommendation: Examine the benefits of replacing a single semester student teaching model with one that promotes a full year of clinical practice for teacher candidates without adding semesters to the established degree timeline.**

- Teachers support the implementation of year-long internships for pre-service teachers, thereby increasing retention of new teachers. They agreed that this should include providing additional compensation for teachers who supervise the interns. A successful program, recommended as a model by the group, is the professional development model used by the University of Georgia. This model uses a cohort approach which provides opportunities for interns to work with specific grade levels and subject areas for long periods of time to maximize the learning and experience in a particular area.
- Concern was shared that a year-long internship would present hardships for individuals who were coming into teaching from another career or individuals who needed to work to support themselves and their families while attending school full-time. To address this concern, the group invoked the Move on When Ready concept for student interns, stating that perhaps a full year internship was not necessary for every pre-service teacher. It was suggested that universities develop criteria that would indicate when an intern was ready to graduate or move on to other coursework. In situations where a year-long internship is not a feasible option, universities should consider an “August Experience” to allow pre-service teachers to experience the beginning of the school year as well as the in-service activities that occur at the end of the school year.
- Another suggested model that would increase retention of induction-level teachers was to allow the first year of teaching to be a paid apprenticeship, one in which the teacher co-teaches and/or is supported by a mentor teacher full time. This would alleviate the

financial and other hardships of a year-long student internship while providing strong mentoring and support for first year teachers.

## Teacher Compensation

### **ERS Recommendation: Develop guidance to assist districts in developing strategic compensation models for teachers.**

- There was a high level of consensus that every district should identify a group of teachers to offer advice on the development and implementation of new compensation models.
- Teachers agreed that the ability to earn higher salaries earlier in a teacher's career would be an effective recruitment and retention tool. Stating that the first five years are often "burnout years," the teachers suggested increasing the beginning salary to retain teachers as they become more confident in their ability to teach.
- In support of developing that confidence, professional development, especially in the first five years, should have a positive connotation and not be seen by administrators or teachers as punishment, but rather as a positive for professional growth.
- Allowing current teachers to choose whether or not to participate in any new compensation system developed by a district would be a positive step in gaining the support of teachers for new models.
- Again, the inconsistency statewide of current assessments used to determine teacher growth within the evaluation system led to spirited conversation about the use of growth measures to determine effectiveness relative to compensation. The teachers expressed concern about their use to influence compensation until the growth measures are consistent across the state. Teachers stated that they prefer their growth to be measured by consistent, statewide pre- and post-tests specific to the subject matter and given within the same school year. The advisory group also was not in favor of using school-wide ELA/Math assessments or Lexile measures to evaluate teacher effectiveness and/or impact the compensation of teachers of subjects other than ELA/Math. The points were made again that the state should test smarter, use tests that also provide instructional tools, increase consistency, and focus on growth within a course.
- The teachers suggested other components that districts should consider including when developing new compensation systems. These included:
  - a. Teacher experience without a ceiling of 20 years as in the current pay scale (Pharmacy and nursing professions were referenced as careers which use years of experience and degree in determining compensation. However, if districts determine to use years of experience as a component of compensation, the advisory group preferred that districts should only pay for validated, successful years of experience as determined by the evaluation of teachers.);
  - b. Advanced degrees and endorsements only if these align with the current teaching assignment and provide a tangible benefit to students;
  - c. Effectiveness once inter-rater reliability and assessments used to determine student growth are stable and consistent statewide;
  - d. Responsibilities as department chair/grade level chair/team leader;
  - e. Leading Response to Intervention (RTI), Student Support Teams (SST), 504 committees, etc.;
  - f. Mentoring induction-phase teachers and supervising student interns;

- g. Accepting extended day duties;
  - h. Redelivering professional development within the school or district;
  - i. Serving on school improvement and leadership teams;
  - j. Teaching in high-needs, hard-to-staff schools;
  - k. Attending required meetings and events outside of contract hours; and
  - l. Serving on evaluation teams.
- The advisory group suggested that new compensation models be piloted in some districts, and/or within each district, prior to full implementation to allow districts to show side-by-side comparisons of salaries in each model.

## **Move on When Ready**

**ERS Recommendation: Develop and implement multiple formative assessments in literacy and numeracy for students in grades K-3, which would serve the function of Student Learning Objectives in those grades, and extend these assessments to grades 4 and 5 numerical fluency once K-3 is in place.**

- The advisory members agreed that it is important to have high-quality state-developed formative assessments. The assessments should be used for several purposes: formative assessment, to determine when students have mastered specific competencies, and as an indicator of student growth for teacher and leader evaluation purposes.

**ERS Recommendation: Begin the transition to a competency-based education system.**

- Teachers were intrigued by the idea of competency-based learning but were quick to point out the many processes and structures that would be needed for successful implementation. These included the following:
  - a. Researching the effectiveness of “move on when ready” with younger students;
  - b. Acknowledging that academic maturity is not the only factor to consider in moving students ahead, and that emotional maturity must also be considered;
  - c. Understanding that the ability of students to pass a competency exam is not always an indicator that students have mastered the necessary developmental skills to allow them to understand more complex standards at the next level;
  - d. Providing in-depth teacher training on the concepts and teaching strategies to support effective competency-based education;
  - e. Defining competency for each level and sub-level of the curriculum;
  - f. Vertically aligning the curriculum to ensure that students not encounter gaps in learning as they move from level to level;
  - g. Developing state-wide common assessments and cut scores to ensure a consistent measurement of the definition of competency across the state (All assessments should contain application items, as well as knowledge items, and could be performance tasks with standardized rubrics, as well as more traditional multiple choice or other types of assessments.);
  - h. Making assessments readily available and quickly scored (Electronic testing would expedite this process; therefore, it would be imperative to have sufficient information technology support in the schools. Adequate bandwidth access and hardware for districts would be necessary to provide for electronic testing, as well as to support blended instruction.);
  - i. Developing processes for students to “move back” if they fail to progress after being moved ahead;
  - j. Funding additional staff, such as data specialists, who could enter data and help monitor and track individual student progress;
  - k. Implementing standards-based grading to better communicate student progress to parents; and
  - l. Developing strategies to effectively communicate with parents.



- Participants in the advisory group stated that teachers are currently expected to differentiate instruction for the students in their classes, and, if this is done well, there would be small numbers of elementary students who need to be physically removed from their current settings. The use of differentiated instruction would also be strengthened by the recommendations supported by the advisory group for additional professional learning and protected, defined teacher planning time.
- Teachers expressed concern about moving too quickly to a competency-based system and advised that all components be developed, in-depth professional learning be completed, and quality assessments developed prior to implementation. They strongly suggested that, prior to state-wide implementation of competency-based education, school and/or district pilot programs should be established to determine the most successful implementation models for K-8. Teachers also suggested initially piloting competency-based education models in English/Language Arts and mathematics.

**ERS Recommendation: Develop a pathway that allows students to receive both a high school diploma and a “Job Ready” designation in a high-demand field.**

- Teachers support increasing the number of pathways that allow students to receive both a high school diploma and a “job ready” certificate. Districts should work closely with local industries to determine the skills needed for specific jobs and focus on those pathways first.
- Members of the group suggested that STEM teachers be added to the state-designated list of high demand career fields.

**ERS Recommendation: Increase opportunity for advancement or remediation of students through flexible Georgia Milestones testing windows available throughout the calendar school year, preferably every nine weeks.**

- Teachers expressed concern about administering Milestones throughout the year without the structures in place to move students to the next level/grade/content area. Until the appropriate structures to support effective competency-based education are in place, the consensus of the group was that this would not be productive.

**ERS Recommendation: Increase the number of high school students earning postsecondary credentials and degrees by providing effective professional development for both high school and postsecondary teachers.**

- The advisory group strongly supported students being able to earn postsecondary credentials and degrees while in high school.

