



*Richard Woods, Georgia's School Superintendent
Educating Georgia's Future*

Op-Ed by Superintendent Richard Woods

My goal as State School Superintendent is to improve outcomes and expand options for Georgia's public K-12 students. That won't happen without strong communication, meaningful collaboration, and child-focused, classroom-centered policies.

We can only move education forward by working together. Partnerships between the Governor's office, State Board of Education, General Assembly, educators, parents, students and other stakeholders are crucial. Relationships need repairing – some relationships need starting – and I'm committed to the task.

As we work collaboratively, we must keep the focus on students, directly addressing the challenges they face. On the campaign trail, I heard from many whose students struggled with integrated math. Together with the Governor's office and State Board, we're set to allow schools to offer integrated or traditional math courses.

For many students, academic success has been eroded by a weak foundation of the fundamentals and a one-size-fits-all approach. I applaud the Governor's push to award math, science or foreign language credit for Computer Science courses, and will work to expand this concept. We should also offer a wide range of diploma seals, from Career Pathways to honors course completion.

Our students deserve the very best standards. Proposed revisions to the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards are a step in that direction, but public concerns remain. Georgia must retain the authority to make changes to the standards as necessary.

Science and social studies standards should be Georgia-owned and Georgia-grown. And the Department should establish K-5 Foundational Standards that ensure our students are on a firm footing for academic success. We must emphasize early detection of reading deficiencies, and professional development that equips teachers to meet those needs.

Students and teachers are suffering from an overemphasis on test scores, a burden we must aggressively seek ways to reduce. I'm calling on the General Assembly to explore ways to do just that, and will request a one-year moratorium on the use of test scores in the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI).

Every child deserves a great teacher, and we must make sure our measurements of teacher effectiveness are fair. Under the current tool, administrators are struggling with time demands and loads of paperwork. We have to find the balance between accountability and responsibility.

We also need to share our students' and teachers' successes. In the near future, I'll launch a public awareness campaign highlighting best practices in Georgia's schools. I'm committed to hearing what students, educators, parents and other stakeholders have to say.

Ultimately, our greatest constitutional responsibility is funding a quality education for every child. I applaud the Governor and General Assembly's commitment to this, demonstrated by 2014's sharp increase in education funding. I will work to ensure that as many dollars as possible flow into education – and that those funds directly support our students' success.

Georgians have a history of pulling together and finding the opportunities within our challenges. No opportunity is greater than the 1.7 million students and 100,000+ teachers in our classrooms. With a collaborative effort, real communication, and classroom-centered, child-focused policies, we can recognize their full potential.

Richard Woods, a 22-year public school educator and former small business owner, is Georgia's School Superintendent.