



Uneven Progress, Uncertain Future: The Policies & Performance of Higher Education in Georgia

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Introduction

Georgia's postsecondary education system is central in determining whether the state's workforce can meet upcoming economic demands. Georgia has made a concerted effort to increase workforce preparation and attract employers to the state (Perna & Finney, 2014), and its level of educational attainment has made modest improvements in the past six years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017a). However, its level of educational attainment remains well below what will be required to meet the economy's needs (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). The state has made progress in narrowing attainment gaps between African American and white Georgians, but large gaps between Hispanics and whites persist. The following themes help us understand how Georgia's state policies may influence postsecondary performance, and they provide a framework through which to view the opening sections of this report: (1) a strong emphasis on workforce development in education policymaking; (2) state public policies that reinforce racial and economic disparities in higher education; and (3) a lack of sustained state policy leadership that limits Georgia's ability to develop and sustain a policy agenda for higher education.

Recent changes to the state's primary financial aid program, the HOPE Scholarship Program, have increased inequities in educational opportunities. The state's innovative technical college system, along with Georgia State University's successful efforts to improve student retention, have received national attention. But the broader higher education landscape is marked by disparate outcomes and declining affordability. While Georgia has seen some incremental improvement in performance since the Great Recession, Georgia policymakers have made choices that have undermined the state's ability to be competitive in the 21st century by supporting major fiscal policy changes that are likely, over time, to increase educational gaps based on race and income. These gaps undermine the state's attempt to increase overall levels of educational attainment.

Given the complicated social, political, and historical context of Georgia—and in light of recent efforts at policy innovation—this report addresses how state policies have influenced postsecondary education performance over time, with a particular focus on changes in the last decade. By examining Georgia's context, postsecondary performance, and educational policies, this case study offers insights into the state's progress toward increasing levels of educational attainment for all its residents.

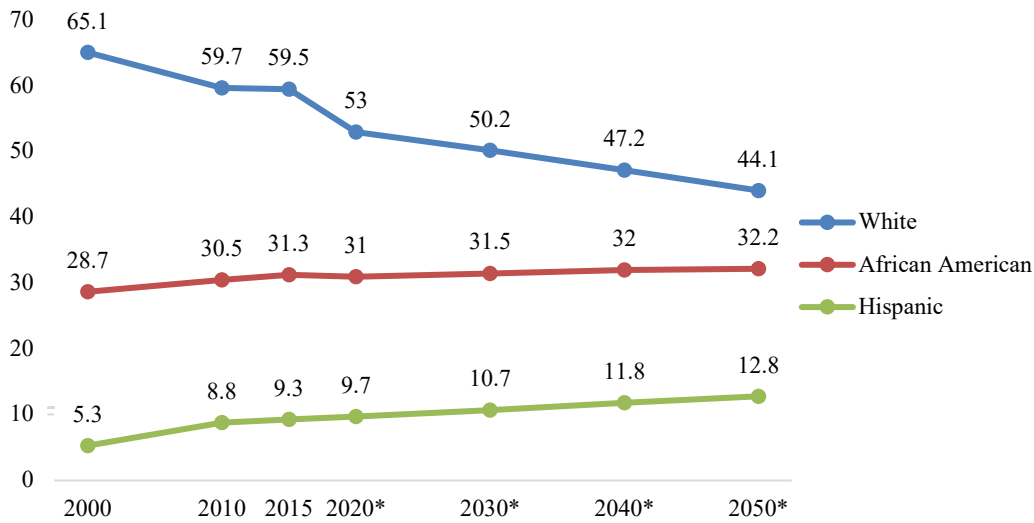
Section I: Georgia's State Context

State Population

Since 2000, Georgia's population has grown by over two million. In 2016, Georgia's population reached 10.3 million, surpassing North Carolina to become the eighth most populous state in the country and the third most populous among the sixteen member states of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016b). Georgia's population is projected to grow 23% faster than the projected growth of the nation between 2010 and 2050, increasing by approximately five million (Georgia Governor's Office of Planning and Budget [OPB], 2015; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). The greatest population growth since 2010 has occurred in the counties surrounding Georgia's largest metropolitan areas, including Atlanta, Savannah, Columbus, and Augusta (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016a).

Mirroring patterns across the country, Georgia's population is becoming increasingly racially and ethnically diverse (Frey, 2015). Between 2000 and 2015, the proportion of the population identifying as white declined from approximately 65% to 60%, while the proportions of the population identifying as African American or Asian increased by 2 percentage points to 31% and 4%, respectively (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, 2016b). In the same period, the proportion of the population identifying as Hispanic increased from 5% to 9% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, 2016b). Population projections for the state provided by the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) (2015), displayed in Figure 1, estimate that Georgia will become more diverse over the next three decades.

Figure 1: Racial Composition of Georgia: Trends and Projections (%)



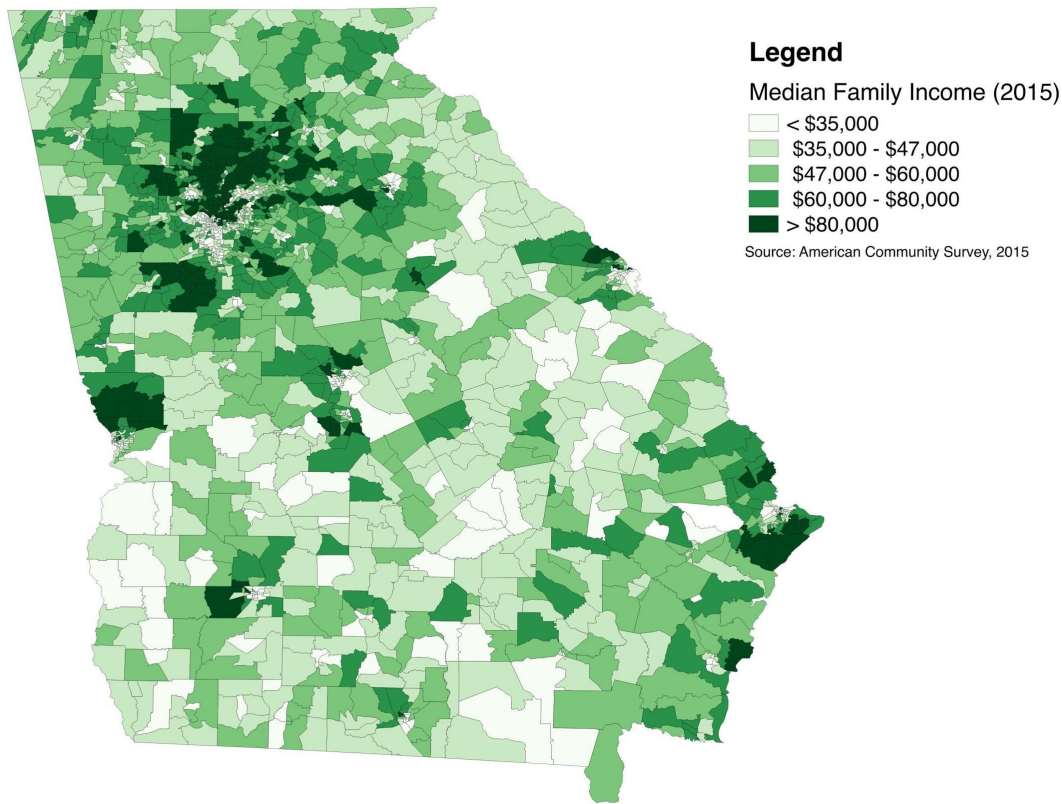
Sources: OPB (2015); U.S. Census Bureau (2016a)

OPB projections indicate that, by 2050, the proportion of white residents in Georgia will decline to 44%, while the African American population will remain steady at 32% and the proportion of Hispanic residents will grow to nearly 13% (OPB, 2015). Among the SREB states, Georgia has the third largest population of African American residents at over 3.15 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016a). Although Georgia's Hispanic population is growing as a proportion of the state total, four other SREB states have higher proportions of Hispanic residents than Georgia, and at 12.8% Georgia remains below the national average of 18% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016a).

Income & Poverty

Georgia's median family income (\$59,410) ranks fifth in the SREB region (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016a). Figure 2 shows median family income by census tract and demonstrates a clear relationship between family income and location. Median family incomes are higher in and around Georgia's major cities and are lower in many of Georgia's rural regions.

Figure 2: Median Family Income by Census Tract in Georgia, 2015



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2016a)

Georgia's poverty rate has remained constant at approximately 18% since 2010, and while it is similar to adjacent states, it is above the national average of 14% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016a). In 2015, Georgia had the fifth highest childhood poverty rate (26%) in the nation, equal to the rates in Kentucky, South Carolina, Tennessee, and the average poverty rate of SREB states (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016a).

Educational Attainment

Georgia's attainment rate² is one of the most important factors for understanding the larger context of Georgia's workforce preparation and education policies. As of 2016, 48% of Georgia residents held a high-quality

² Except where otherwise specified, we define educational attainment as having a high-quality credential, in accordance with Lumina Foundation's *A Stronger Nation* report (2018). This definition encompasses residents with workforce certificates, associate's degrees, bachelor's degrees, and graduate or professional degrees.

credential (including workforce certificates), compared to the goal of 60% attainment by 2025 that will be needed for most states to establish a competitive economy (Lumina Foundation, 2018). If Georgia sees no improvements to its attainment rate, the state will fall short by an estimated 670,000 credentialed workers in 2025 (IRHE, 2018).

Statewide educational attainment varies by race and ethnicity.³ Forty-two percent of white adults hold at least an associate's degree, compared to 32% of African American and 22% of Hispanic adults (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016a). These attainment rates are similar those of white, African American, and Hispanic adults both regionally (41% for whites, 27% for African Americans, 22% for Hispanics) and nationally (44% for whites, 28% for African Americans, 20% for Hispanics), and are a moderate improvement from Georgians' attainment rates in 2011 (38% whites, 28% African Americans, 18% Hispanics) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017a; SREB, 2015, p. 7). While attainment rates for each group have increased since 2011, gaps in attainment rates for racial and ethnic groups remain unchanged (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017a).

In addition to disparities by race and ethnicity, educational attainment in Georgia is also stratified by socioeconomic status, and the attainment gap based on household income is growing. The attainment rate for individuals whose households make \$75,000 or more have increased by nearly five percentage points in three years, from 45.1% in 2015 to 49.7% in 2017, which is nearly double the attainment rate for individuals in lower income quintiles. However, the attainment rate of individuals whose families make from \$50,000 to \$74,999 has fallen from 20.2% in 2015 to 19.1% in 2017. For families who make between \$35,000 and \$49,999, attainment the rate similarly declined from 13% to 11.9% between 2015 and 2017 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017b).

Overall attainment in Georgia is trending upward. Between 2011 and 2017, the proportion of adults in Georgia over the age of 25 who held an associate's degree or higher increased from 34.2% to 38.7% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017a). When attainment is defined to include high-quality workforce certificates, Georgia saw an increase from 46% in 2014 to 48% in 2016 (Lumina Foundation, 2018).

³ Due to data availability, we examine attainment disparities by race/ethnicity and income using U.S. Census data, defining attainment as associate's or higher.

Governance Structure

Understanding the limited influence of Georgia's legislative branch is critical to understanding the state's higher education policy landscape. The General Assembly's brief legislative calendar of 40 days⁴ limits the time devoted to addressing the state's challenges, including postsecondary education. The Governor proposes the state budget, and the General Assembly can then make amendments, but the General Assembly's amended budget may not exceed the Governor's revenue estimates (State of Georgia, 2014).

The University System of Georgia (USG) retains independence through constitutional autonomy. Even with its considerable independence, it is subject to influences by the funding and policy initiatives of the other branches of government and is governed by its Board of Regents, whose members are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Georgia State Senate (University System of Georgia [USG], n.d.-a). The Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) is a state agency reporting to the Governor. Unlike many other states, Georgia lacks a strong statewide body to conduct independent policy analysis and research and to advise the Governor and General Assembly on higher education policy for the state as a whole. As a result, all policies for higher education are negotiated with the Governor and the General Assembly by each system as well as the private institutions.

Both the State Senate and House of Representatives have higher education committees, which provide some oversight for USG, the technical colleges, and the state financial aid program for students. In addition to the aforementioned responsibilities, State Senate's nine-member Higher Education Committee has legislative oversight for the TCSG (Georgia State Senate, 2017); it is one of 28 legislative committees in the 2017-2018 session. In the House of Representatives, which can originate appropriation bills, the Higher Education Committee is one of 38 legislative committees and has 17 members (Georgia House of Representatives, 2017).

Depending on the type of institution (technical college or public college or university), each postsecondary public institution is governed either by the TCSG or USG Board of Regents. Within the USG, the 19 members of the Board of Regents are appointed by the Governor for terms lasting 7 years. Five members are appointed as at-large members, representing the state as a whole, and the remaining 14 members each come from

⁴ The salary for House and Senate legislators was \$17,341.68 in 2016 (Open Georgia, 2017).

one of Georgia’s congressional districts. The members’ terms are not synchronous, meaning that the current Governor cannot replace the entire board at one time. However, all 19 current members of the USG Board of Regents were either appointed or reappointed by the current Governor (Nathan Deal - R) or his immediate predecessor (Sonny Perdue - R) (USG, 2017b). The Regents appoint a system chancellor who serves as the chief executive officer of the Board and the chief administrative officer of the USG. The chancellor also serves on the Alliance of Education Agency Heads (AEAH), wherein the Governor’s office collaborates with education agency heads in the state to foster collaboration in postsecondary education (Perna & Finney, 2014; University System of Georgia [USG], 2009a). As a gubernatorial initiative, the AEAH and its particular role are not codified by law (O.C.G.A, TITLE 20).

The TCSG State Board is the governing body responsible for operations in the TCSG and setting policy for its 22 institutions and 85 campuses. Its 23 board members (nine appointed at-large, 14 from each of Georgia’s congressional districts) are appointed by the Governor for terms lasting five years and are intended to represent business, industry, or economic development sectors. The members elect a chairperson and vice-chairperson to serve two-year terms. The commissioner of the State Board, employed and dismissible by the Board, is responsible for the day-to-day operations of TCSG, board policies, and also serves on the Governor’s AEAH (TCSG, 2018; GOSA, n.d.-a).

Georgia’s Higher Education Institutions

Table 1 summarizes the 168 postsecondary institutions in Georgia by institutional type.

Table 1: Postsecondary Institutions by Type*

	Public	Private, not-for-profit	Private, for-profit	Total
< 2-year	0	2	32	34
2 year	24	5	25	54
4 or more years	30	33	17	80
Total	54	40	74	168

Source: U. S. Department of Education (2018).

*Note: IPEDS categorizes all TCSG institutions as “Public 2-year.”

The number of public institutions has dramatically decreased since 2009 due to consolidations in both the USG and TCSG. No campuses were closed during the mergers, but some campuses were consolidated under a single administration. Between 2009 and 2017, 20 public technical colleges merged into 10 technical colleges. The TCSG oversaw these consolidations (TCSG, 2014). Similarly, the Georgia Board of Regents began consolidating institutions in 2013. Nine USG institutions have been created through the consolidation of 18 previous USG institutions. These mergers within USG combined many variations of institutions, including merging a primarily two-year degree granting institution with a research university, and an HBCU with a non-HBCU institution (USG, n.d.-b).

Of the federally designated Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), Georgia is home to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs). MSIs are postsecondary institutions defined either by legislation or the percentage of minority student enrollment (Espino & Cheslock, 2008). In the Higher Education Act of 1965, HBCUs are defined as those accredited colleges or universities founded prior to 1964 for the sole purpose of educating African Americans (Li & Carroll, 2007). PBIs, in contrast, are categorized as non-HBCU African American-serving institutions. PBIs serve an undergraduate student population that is at least 40% African American, with at least 50% of total enrollment being low income and/or first generation (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). There are seven HBCUs in Georgia, three public and four private, and 10 PBIs.

Section II: Georgia's Higher Education Performance

Preparation for College & Career Readiness

Between 2001 and 2015, Georgia successfully increased its average high school graduation rate and narrowed the gap between its performance and the average high school graduation rate nationally. During this period, the high school graduation rate⁵ in Georgia increased from 67% to 79%. At 79% in 2015, Georgia's graduation rate was only four percentage points behind the national average graduation rate (83%), a considerable

⁵ Graduation rate as referenced here is the 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR). ACGR is the number of students who graduate in 4 years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for the graduating class.

improvement from the 12-point gap the state faced in 2011. Georgia's high-performing SREB counterparts perform more similarly to the national graduation rate, so while its progress between 2011 and 2015 is notable, Georgia can benefit from continued growth in the proportion of students who graduate from high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b).

Despite improvements in Georgia's average high school graduation rate, graduation rates vary widely based on students' racial and ethnic backgrounds. In 2015, Asian (88%) and white (83%) students graduated from high school at higher rates than their African American (75%) and Hispanic (72%) peers by substantial margins (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b). These patterns mirror the racial and ethnic disparities in postsecondary enrollment and completion rates, as well as working adults' educational attainment patterns, in the state.

Even with improving rates of high school completion, many students in Georgia are still unprepared for postsecondary study. Students' scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) eighth-grade math and reading tests have improved significantly since 2005, but similar to disparities in graduation rates, there are great disparities by race and ethnicity in overall scores in both subjects (SREB, 2016b). White eighth grade students' scores (291 in math, 273 in reading) were substantially higher than Hispanic (270 in math, 257 in reading) and African American (264 in math, 248 in reading) students' scores. Between 2005 and 2015, these gaps have only slightly decreased.

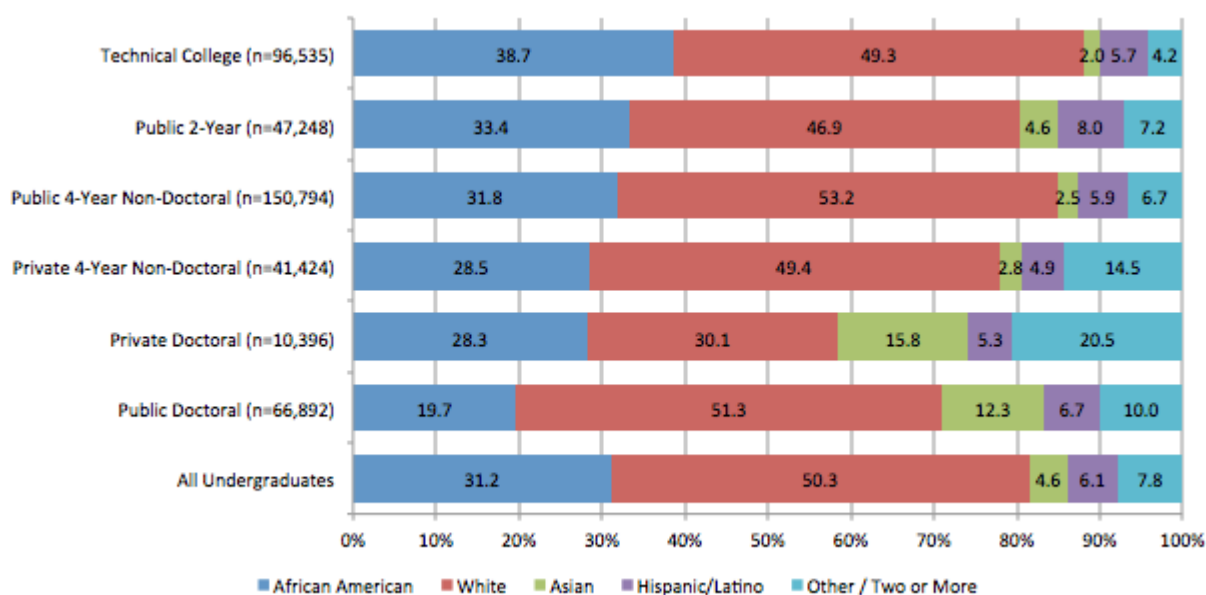
College Enrollment & Participation

Georgia performs well below national postsecondary education participation rates among 18-to-24-year-olds and is the lowest performing SREB state on this measure. However, this poor ranking belies some progress to improve college enrollment among young Georgians: in 2000, 27% of 18-to-24-year-olds were enrolled in postsecondary education, and in 2009, the postsecondary enrollment rate of this age group surpassed 30%. Most recently, in 2015, 31% of 18-to-24-year-olds in Georgia were enrolled at a postsecondary institution, ranking among the lowest in the nation. Over this same period, the postsecondary enrollment rate of working-age adults (25-to-49-years-old) who do not hold a bachelor's degree rose from 5% in 1991 to 5.8% in 2009, as compared to 7% nationally (NCHEMS, 2016). Given the low attainment rates among adults over age 25 in the state, increasing

the postsecondary enrollment of this population will be critical to reaching Georgia’s attainment goals (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016a).

Figure 3 depicts the breakdown of undergraduate students by racial and ethnic group and the postsecondary institution type where they are enrolled. Consistent with other postsecondary performance data analyzed by racial and ethnic groups, there are great disparities in where students enroll based on their racial and ethnic backgrounds. With the exception of private doctoral institutions, the proportion of white and African American students differs by at least 10 percentage points in every sector. Asian and Hispanic students occupy the smallest proportion of students in Georgia’s postsecondary institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

Figure 3: Percent Race / Ethnicity Makeup of Undergraduate Students by Institutional Sector in Georgia, Weighted by Enrollment



Source: U.S. Department of Education (2018)

At prominent and highly selective postsecondary institutions such as the University of Georgia, Georgia Tech, and Emory University, the proportion of African American students is low relative to the overall proportion of African Americans in the state population (31%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016a). In 2015, the percentage of African American students at these institutions was 7%, 6%, and 6%, respectively (U.S. Department of Education,

2018). A substantial proportion of African American students are enrolled at the USG's less-selective institutions, including three public comprehensive institutions designated as HBCUs in the USG system.

Not included in Figure 3 are private for-profit institutions in Georgia, which have experienced the highest growth in student enrollment in the past decade. Between 2006 and 2015, full time equivalent (FTE) enrollment rose by 113%, from 17,298 to 36,791 FTEs, peaking in 2014 at 40,564 FTEs. The demographic profile of students enrolling in this sector is noticeably different than the public and private not-for-profit sectors. In 2015, 74% of FTEs at private for-profit institutions were age 25 or older and 67% were awarded Pell grants. The largest proportion of students enrolled in this sector is African American students, who comprise the majority of enrollment (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

Family income is a crucial factor when examining student enrollment patterns. Economically disadvantaged high school graduates have considerably lower postsecondary enrollment rates than their non-disadvantaged peers. A recent study showed that 65% of economically disadvantaged high school graduates in Georgia's Class of 2012 enrolled in postsecondary institutions compared to 81% of their non-disadvantaged peers. Qualifying for Free-and-Reduced Lunch (FRL) is one indicator of economic disadvantage. The study demonstrated that these gaps have persisted over time such that high school seniors who receive FRL enroll in postsecondary institutions at consistently lower rates than non-FRL students. Similarly, there are considerable differences in these students' progress towards a credential once they enroll in a postsecondary institution, and FRL students are less likely to earn one year of college credit than their non-FRL peers (Wilkerson, 2015).

Progression & Completion

Georgia's retention and persistence rates for four-year public institutions, two-year public institutions, and technical colleges are similar to the SREB averages (SREB, 2018). Georgia's success in retention and persistence may be a result, in part, of its relatively low college participation rates. At the same time, Georgia's six-year graduation rate for public four-year institutions is 48th in the nation at 39.7% (NCHEMS, 2018). Since 2006, this rate has declined 10.0%, compared to a decline of 2.6% nationally over the same period. Georgia's three-year graduation rate for public two-year institutions, 26.2%, ranks 20th in the nation (NCHEMS, 2018). Georgia's six-

year graduation rate for private not-for-profit institutions is 58.8%, ranking 26th in the nation (NCHEMS, 2018).⁶

One of Georgia's strengths in postsecondary performance is the transfer of students from associate's to bachelor's degree programs. The state has the third highest rate in the nation, with nearly 75% of associate's graduates matriculating into four-year programs (Shapiro et al., 2015). The research team was unable to locate statewide data on the transfer of technical college students to associate's degree-granting institutions.

As indicated in Table 2, of the four-year institutions in Georgia with available data for both the percent of the student body receiving Federal Pell Grants and the six-year completion rate of Pell Grant recipients, only four institutions, including Georgia State University and Spelman College, both enrolled a majority of Pell Grant recipients among their student populations and graduated more than half of these students within six years (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a). Only one of these institutions (Georgia State University) is a public university.

Table 2: Four-Year Degree-Granting Institutional Performance on Pell Grant Recipient Access & Success*

	Low (<50%) Pell Population	High (>50%) Pell Population
High (>50%) Pell Completion	Agnes Scott College Berry College Emory University Georgia College and State University* Georgia Institute of Technology* Mercer University Oglethorpe University Shorter University University of Georgia*	Brenau University Georgia State University* Piedmont College Spelman College
Low (<50%) Pell Completion	Armstrong State University* Brewton-Parker College Columbus State University* Covenant College Georgia Southern University* Georgia Southwestern State University* Kennesaw State University* LaGrange College Southern Polytechnic State University* Thomas University University of West Georgia* Valdosta State University* Wesleyan College	Albany State University* American InterContinental University-Atlanta Clark Atlanta University Clayton State University* Fort Valley State University* Morehouse College Paine College Savannah State University* Toussaint University

Source: U.S. Department of Education (2018)

* = public institution

Data reflects 2016, the most recent year available.

⁶ Additional data on graduation rates was added on 11/12/18 to incorporate updated data and provide additional context.

Affordability

Reports on family income and comparisons to other states indicate that the lack of college affordability in Georgia puts its citizens at a disadvantage. The Institute for Research on Higher Education (IRHE) (2016) ranked Georgia 35th in the nation on college affordability, and 12th among the 16 SREB states. While public four-year postsecondary options grew less affordable during the 2008 recession and its aftermath, technical education became more affordable for Georgia's residents during the same period (IRHE, 2016). Amid fluctuations in family income between 2006 and 2014, tuition at Georgia's public four-year institutions increased by 93%—over four times the rate of inflation (SREB, 2016a). Meanwhile, many low-income students who might succeed in college are not eligible for Georgia's merit-based HOPE Scholarship.

Financial aid reduces the net cost of college, but aid has not kept up with tuition increases at Georgia's public institutions. Especially at two types of institutions that typically serve most low-income students, public two-year colleges and public four-year non-doctoral universities, enrollment demands steep costs from low-income families. For a family making \$30,000 or less in 2013, the average net price for one year of attendance at a Georgia public two-year institution was \$4,861—after all federal, state, and institutional aid was applied—which represents 27% of annual family income (IRHE, 2016). Meanwhile, for a family making \$110,000 or more in 2013, the average net price to attend a public two-year institution was \$10,000, or only 5% of annual family income. For the same low-income families with students attending a public four-year nondoctoral institution, the total educational cost was \$11,098 after applying all federal, state, and institutional aid, or 67% of their annual income; for families earning \$110,000 or more, the net cost was \$16,140, or 9% of their annual income.

Research Competitiveness

Georgia is committed to helping its major research institutions be nationally and internationally competitive. The state has been largely successful in achieving this goal at its flagship institutions, especially its three major research universities (Emory, Georgia Institute of Technology, the University of Georgia), all of which rank in the top 60 research universities in the nation (U.S. News & World Report, 2017). Total research and development (R&D) expenditures in Georgia colleges and universities have consistently risen, going from

\$926.7 million in 2000 to over \$2 billion in 2015 (National Science Foundation [NSF], 2016). In the SREB states, Georgia had the fifth largest total R&D expenditures (NSF, 2016). Between 2006 and 2015, per capita higher education R&D spending rose from \$0.14 to \$0.20, and the state remained fourth on this measure among SREB states, behind Maryland, North Carolina, and Delaware (NSF, 2016). Of Georgia's total R&D expenditures in 2015, public universities' expenditures were greatest (67% of funding), and private universities comprised the remaining 33% of expenditures.

Section III: What Can Explain Georgia's Higher Education Performance?

Georgia's current performance in higher education can be explained by the following themes that will be addressed in detail in subsequent sections: (1) a strong emphasis on workforce development in education policymaking; (2) state public policies that reinforce racial and economic disparities in higher education; and (3) a lack of sustained state policy leadership that limits Georgia's ability to develop and sustain a policy agenda for higher education.

Theme 1: Strong Emphasis on Workforce Development in Education Policymaking

Georgia's link between education and economic development policy is an integral part of the state's education systems. Georgia has long recognized that workforce development relies on strong certificate and degree output, and policies advancing this aim have persisted over time. The well-designed programs in the state's technical college system have made the college-to-workforce pipeline accessible for many Georgians, and a focus on research, with an eye toward economic development, has elevated the state's top universities.

Long-Standing Policies and Programs

Two well-regarded and long-standing programs in Georgia that directly bridge economic development and postsecondary education are the Georgia Quick Start program and the Georgia Research Alliance (GRA). Both remain important selling points for the state in their pitch to business leaders who are considering moving their operations to the state (system administrator, personal communication, April 10, 2017). The Quick Start program, managed by the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), provides customized workforce training to companies that are moving to the area, increasing capacity, or installing technology upgrades. The program, a

nationally known workforce training model, trained approximately 62,000 workers annually between 2013 and 2015 (TCSG, 2016b).

Established in 1990, the GRA is a consortium of eight research institutions that unifies state government officials and Georgia's top research universities through cross-campus research collaborations with the goal of increasing the federal research funding awarded to the state (Perna & Finney, 2016). Through these collaborations and by encouraging entrepreneurship, the GRA is key to both the state's recent scientific advances and enhancing the state's economic development. The Eminent Scholars program recruits scientists to Georgia's research institutions and invests in their work so they can attract private and federal research grants. Through two venture development initiatives, the GRA supports innovation in member institutions' labs, with the hope of institutions increasingly becoming central to the state economy. The GRA invests in these start-ups both with financial support and executive guidance. The GRA Venture Fund, through a public-private investment partnership, specifically provides funding for member institutions' most promising start-ups (GRA, n.d.).

The first members of the GRA in 1990 were Emory University, the University of Georgia, and Georgia Institute of Technology. Shortly afterward, Georgia State University, the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta, and Clark Atlanta University (an HBCU) were added to the collaboration (GRA, n.d.; Lambert, 2000). More recently, in 2014, Mercer University and the Morehouse School of Medicine were admitted (GRA, 2014). The addition of these two institutions was a notable change and occurred during a time when USG system administrators were concerned about a reduced legislative interest in this important research alliance. A leader of the GRA recently reported that the state has reduced funding to the GRA by \$40 million in both 2016 and 2017 (system administrator, personal communication, April 10, 2017).

With the success of the GRA and its member institutions over the last decades, there is likely increased pressure to allow more institutions to benefit from this powerful collaboration. Perna and Finney (2014) noted the success of GRA in growing the total "research dollars at the state's public and private research universities without over-expanding the research enterprise" (p. 211). If more institutions join the GRA without an increase in funding from the state, dividing already scarce funding across even more institutions would likely diminish the efficacy of the alliance.

Economic Initiatives Under Governor Deal

Georgia has well-established policies that link education and training with economic development, which have strengthened in the last decade under recent state leadership. Governor Deal has repeatedly emphasized that his goal is to help Georgia “become the number one state in the nation to do business” (Georgia Competitiveness Initiative, 2012). Throughout his tenure as Governor, he has directly connected Georgia’s economic health to its educational performance, encouraging business leaders to suggest reforms in both the K–12 system and postsecondary education. As a result, leaders of the USG and the TCSG have been included in the state’s major economic development planning, such as the Georgia Competitiveness Initiative (GCI).

A notable step in this statewide emphasis on workforce preparation was the creation of the GCI in 2011, in which industry leaders, state administrators, legislators, and educational leaders convened to discuss ways to increase Georgia’s economic competitiveness. The Initiative conducted a large state survey and held regional meetings so that each region’s unique context and concerns could be addressed; private businesses in each of Georgia’s 12 regions cited “education and workforce development” as one of the most pressing issues Georgia needed to concentrate on (GCI, 2012).

In 2014, Governor Deal revisited the subject through the High Demand Career Initiative (HDCI), the purpose of which was to outline a process to address the state’s needs for the next five to ten years (Office of the Governor, 2014). Through the HDCI, regional business leaders collaborated directly with the leadership of their local USG and TCSG institutions for long-term planning through regional forums. These sessions highlighted the business community’s concerns about the lack of “workers with basic educational skills, including reading, math, statistics, and writing,” which would require improvements in both the K–12 sector and in efforts to educate Georgia’s adult residents (Johnson, 2015). The Initiative is credited with initiating numerous policy changes, such as an increase in the award amounts provided by the HOPE Career Grant (formerly known as the Strategic Industries Workforce Development Grant; SIWDG), creating new career-specific initiatives in film and cyber security, and establishing the Georgia WorkSmart program.

WorkSmart, an apprenticeship program run by the TCSG, is designed to train workers for jobs in Georgia’s fastest growing industries (State of Georgia, 2016). The TCSG plays a major role in educating

Georgia's adult population, and it houses the state's Office of Adult Education, which provides GED, ESL, and other courses throughout the state. The Office of Adult Education also manages the majority of Georgia's share of federal funding from the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014, a joint federal–state program that supports individuals' searches for employment or the educational training they need to succeed in the labor market and helps employers hire workers with the training they need to be competitive in the global economy (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The state legislature also incentivized adult education by passing bills that provide tax incentives for companies to provide postsecondary training or GED courses for their employees (TCSG, 2015).

Georgia's Department of Education (GaDOE) also offers opportunities for students to receive specific workforce training earlier in their academic careers by connecting high schools with postsecondary institutions. In 2011, the General Assembly passed a bill to create the College & Career Academies, a collaboration between high schools, Georgia-based companies, and TCSG institutions to provide career-focused education within high schools (Georgia College and Career Academies, n.d.). In the same year, the state implemented the Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) program, which established career pathways for students in middle and high schools with the goal of guiding students into careers and postsecondary education that would allow Georgia to meet key industries' anticipated workforce needs (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.).

Georgia's clear coupling of economic and workforce development with public education shows the major role that industry can play in shaping state postsecondary education policies. These public–private collaborations aim to ensure that Georgia is not only increasing the educational attainment of its workforce but, more importantly, providing a pipeline of individuals to support the state's needs in their fastest-growing industries.

Theme 2: Public Policies for Increasing Educational Attainment Reinforce Racial & Economic Disadvantage

Georgia has made modest gains in college preparation—with more students graduating from high school and earning high scores on standardized tests in recent years—as well as in college enrollment, retention, and persistence. However, the state still performs well below the national average on all of these metrics and, since 2012, college affordability has declined for all students except for those enrolled in Georgia's technical colleges,

as has completion. Governor Deal's prioritization of K–12 education during his term may have contributed to the state's overall progress in college preparation in recent years, but the state lacks robust long-term policies for raising levels of educational attainment. We discuss each of these policies and trends below.

Declining State Fiscal Support for Postsecondary Education

As Governor Deal called for increased degree production to boost the state's educational attainment rate, Georgia's fiscal support for postsecondary education significantly decreased from levels of state support before the 2008 recession. By 2017, Georgia's total funding per FTE (net tuition revenue plus state appropriations) had rebounded to pre-recession levels; however, a greater share of institutions' total funding (37%) was from tuition revenue, compared to only 20% in 2008 (SHEEO, 2017). Among all states, Georgia has the 9th lowest net tuition revenue per FTE; however, Georgia is among 12 states with greater than a 50% increase in net tuition revenue since the recession (103%), which is well above the average net tuition increase nationally (37%). Georgia's higher education appropriations per FTE have decreased by 16% since the recession, compared to an average decrease of 11% nationally. As Georgia contributes a smaller proportion of its annual budget to postsecondary education (via state appropriations), the responsibility of paying for college has fallen increasingly on families; the gradual improvements in family income that Georgia has seen since 2011 have not kept pace with the increasing costs of education for students and families (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2015; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016a).

Georgia's support for higher education is high compared to its tax capacity, which is constrained by the low wealth of the state. From every \$1,000 in personal income, \$7.09 supports postsecondary education, which is above the national average of \$5.90 (SHEEO, 2015b). Similarly, Georgia ranks eighth in the nation for the proportion of tax revenues (7.7%) that support postsecondary education. Georgia's effective tax rate (5.6%) is the second lowest in the country, meaning that higher education is getting a relatively large slice of a relatively small pie. In 2018, the state passed HB918, a tax reduction in response to the recent federal tax reform (H.B. 918, 2018). This reform conformed Georgia taxes closely with federal taxes, resulting in doubling the standard deduction and lowering both corporate and personal tax rates. Given the lower wealth of its population, state

leaders may have missed an opportunity to invest funding for the future workforce and the citizens who currently do not benefit from programs such as the HOPE Scholarship.

These data points may complicate efforts to make Georgia the best state for business; while lower tax rates may draw businesses to Georgia, the state must find a way to pay for postsecondary education initiatives to train the workforce.

Merit-Based State Financial Aid Policies

Georgia ranks fourth nationally in the total amount of state aid it provides its in-state undergraduate students, awarding more than \$715 million dollars during the 2015–2016 academic year. While Georgia has committed a generous amount of support to in-state students for postsecondary education, almost no state aid (0.2% of all state aid) is awarded based on financial need, and nearly all aid programs have rigorous requirements to be or to remain eligible (NASSGAP, 2016). Georgia spends over \$358.5 million for HOPE Scholarships in its public colleges and universities, supporting nearly 110,100 students, and \$37.3 million in its private institutions, supporting 12,500 students. It spends an estimated \$38 million on the HOPE Grant Program for its technical colleges to support 15,375 students (GSFC, 2017a). Policymakers in Georgia have recently developed a blended need- and merit-based aid program—the REACH Scholarship. Providing \$1.8 million in funding, the REACH program may eventually make it possible for only 3,000 low-income students to attend a postsecondary institution. But unlike the HOPE Scholarship and Grant Programs, the REACH Program requires a private match. The vast majority of state aid in Georgia is still awarded solely based on academic merit.

HOPE & Zell Miller Scholarships. As the state’s preeminent aid program to ensure that students with the highest academic achievement stay in Georgia for college, the HOPE Scholarship awards Georgia’s top high school graduates with substantial financial assistance to cover some of the costs of tuition at in-state colleges and universities, including for-profit institutions. Since its creation in 1993, the HOPE Scholarship program has received a significant portion (55% in 2016–2017) of the state aid budget derived from lottery funds each year. Two of the eligible private institutions, DeVry University and American InterContinental University, are for-profit institutions (GSFC, 2017c). In the 2016–2017 academic year, nearly 28,000 students (8.2% of student population at HOPE-eligible postsecondary institutions) received the even more selective Zell Miller Scholarship,

with total awards amounting to \$172 million (GSFC, 2017a; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). In the same academic year, funding for the HOPE and Zell Miller programs consumed 70% of the available lottery funds for postsecondary education (OPB, 2016). The researchers of this study requested from the Georgia Student Finance Commission data on the average award amounts for each of Georgia's aid programs, including the HOPE Scholarship; this data was not granted.

Initially, the HOPE Scholarship covered the full cost of tuition and a book stipend for students who maintained a B- average throughout high school and enrolled in any Georgia university or associate's degree program at a technical school (Severson, 2011; Suggs, 2016). However, the demand for these scholarships outpaced the supply of funding over time, leading to policy revisions in 2011 that reduced the HOPE Scholarship's purchasing power and reduced the number of students eligible for the Scholarship. The 2011 changes were significant: the HOPE Scholarship was altered from its original premise, which provided clear messages and incentives to families, into a much more intricate mix of eligibility requirements and benefits. The state also reduced the amount of aid students received by awarding the scholarship on a per-credit-hour basis. Now, HOPE covers at most 70% to 80% of tuition, provides no support for the cost of textbooks, and limits students' eligibility to seven years after high school graduation (Levitson & Thurm, 2012; Severson, 2011; Suggs, 2016). In order to be eligible for the HOPE since 2011, high school students must graduate with a 3.0 GPA and complete four academic rigor courses (e.g., advanced math, advanced science, foreign language, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and Dual Enrollment courses). To remain eligible for the program while they are in college, students must have a cumulative 3.0 GPA by the spring term each year and cannot exceed 127 cumulative credit hours (GSFC, 2016c, 2016d). Students can only fall below the required GPA for the scholarships and grants one time. If they do so twice, they are ineligible for renewal (GSFC, 2017b). This policy may discourage students from taking the most challenging courses and may also encourage grade inflation, as few faculty want to be responsible for a student losing an opportunity for a scholarship or grant.

The Zell Miller Scholarship, created by Governor Deal in 2011, covers full tuition at Georgia postsecondary institutions for students who meet the HOPE eligibility requirements, earn a 3.7 GPA in high school, and score either a 26 or higher on the ACT or a 1200 or higher on the SAT. To maintain their eligibility

throughout their postsecondary degree program, students must maintain a 3.3 GPA (GSFC, 2016k). Given the demand for this program, starting with the Class of 2016, Zell Miller Scholars must also be the salutatorian or valedictorian of their class, further reducing the number of students eligible (GSFC, 2016l).

Table 3: Racial Distribution of HOPE and Zell Miller Scholarships Compared to USG Enrollment

	White	African-American	Hispanic	Asian	Other
Share of USG Enrollment	53.5%	30.2%	6.4%	5.2%	4.7%
Share of HOPE Scholars	64.0%	18.9%	6.7%	6.0%	4.4%
Share of Zell Miller Scholars	78.0%	4.6%	4.0%	9.7%	3.7%

Source: Suggs (2016).

As indicated in Table 3, there are also variations in the distribution of merit aid based on students' race and age. The racial disparity between enrollment patterns in USG and recipients of the HOPE and Zell Scholarships is greatest between white and African American students; overall, it is clear that the HOPE and Zell Scholarships are not serving a racially representative portion of the USG student population. Due to the restriction on how many years students can be eligible for the HOPE Scholarship (seven years after high school graduation), most HOPE and Zell Miller Scholars are under the age of 23. This limit is particularly detrimental for students pursuing associate's degrees; over 60% of students pursuing associate's degrees in 2013 were over the age of 24, yet 73% of HOPE Scholarship recipients and 95% of Zell Miller Grant recipients were younger than 23 years old (Suggs, 2016).

The state had a difficult choice to make when demand for the HOPE Scholarship began to outpace lottery revenue during the recession, but the state's leaders responded in a deliberate way that hurt low-income and minority students' chances for college during an economic moment in which these families needed college opportunity the most. Through the creation of the Zell Miller Scholarship and the weakening of the HOPE Scholarship, Georgia's leaders chose to distribute the scholarship funds more heavily based on merit rather than taking an opportunity to help low-income families. Those families who were least affected by the recession gained access to more resources, while those who were hardest hit missed out.

Given the demographics of the state and the gaps in attainment, a robust need-based program would be a logical next step for Georgia. The state has begun implementing some need-based aid, such as REACH, but there is not a single program that provides support to students solely based on their financial need. The 2016 GBPI report criticizes the HOPE scholarship for its increasingly rigorous eligibility requirements, the inequities between the program's beneficiaries, and its unsustainable funding model as lottery revenues prove to be very volatile over time (Suggs, 2016). Student assistance for technical colleges, however, is distributed more equitably, as we discuss below.

HOPE & Zell Miller Grants. The HOPE Grant serves a more representative proportion of the technical college population compared to the proportion of students the HOPE Scholarship serves in the USG, but the number of students served and the total funds allocated are significantly smaller. The HOPE and Zell Miller Grant programs were created to cover tuition at Georgia's technical colleges for eligible students earning workforce certificates. Students do not need to have a minimum GPA to initially be eligible; however, to maintain eligibility once they enroll at a technical college, they must maintain at least a 2.0 GPA (GSFC, 2016b, 2016k). Like the HOPE Scholarship, students can only lose eligibility for the grant only once. Before the 2011 program reform, the HOPE grant covered full tuition and mandatory fees and included a book stipend. However, declining lottery revenue led the state to increase the eligibility standards rather than appropriate additional aid. In 2011, the GPA requirement to remain eligible for the grant was increased to a 3.0 GPA, and the grant was reduced to cover only a portion (75%) of tuition at technical colleges. The GPA change was reversed in 2013 (back to 2.0) when enrollment in technical colleges dropped by nearly 25% and thousands of students lost their eligibility for the HOPE Grant program because their GPA was not high enough; however, the grant award amount has not been restored to full coverage for tuition (Suggs, 2016).

In contrast, the Zell Miller Grant covers full tuition at technical colleges for students who excel academically. This was created in 2014 as a result of declines in lottery funding at the same time the GSFC revised the HOPE Grant requirements in an effort to ration the available funds. To receive the grant, students enrolled in Georgia's technical colleges must earn a 3.5 GPA. In the first year, 10,806 students received this

grant; more recently, in the 2015–2016 academic year, 15,775 received the grants, with a total contribution of \$19,289,117 from the GSFC (GSFC, 2016a; Suggs, 2016).

A report from the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute (GBPI) demonstrated that the HOPE and Zell Miller Grants help the majority of technical college students afford their education; almost 75% of students enrolled in technical colleges receive the HOPE Grant. More importantly, 85% of Pell recipients are eligible for the grant, meaning the HOPE Grant outperforms the HOPE Scholarship in supporting lower-income students. The breakdown by race and ethnicity of which students receive the HOPE Grant nearly mirrors the racial and ethnic breakdown of the TCSG. Additionally, the aid is accessible to students of all ages, with 69% of students between the ages of 24 and 54 enrolled in technical colleges receiving the HOPE Grant, as well as 62% of students over 55 and 80% of students under the age of 23 (Suggs, 2016). While the grant still serves a larger proportion of traditional-age students, the HOPE Grant complements Georgia’s other efforts to increase the educational attainment rates of its adult population.

HOPE Career Grant (formerly known as the Strategic Industries Workforce Development Grant).

First funded in the fall of 2013, the Strategic Industries Workforce Development Grant (SIWDG), now called the HOPE Career Grant, covers the gap between total tuition for technical colleges and the portion of tuition covered by the HOPE Grant. Students are eligible for the grant if they qualify for the HOPE Grant and are enrolled in one of twelve industries identified as key to the state’s future economic growth (Suggs, 2016).

The HOPE Career Grant is fully funded by the Georgia lottery, similar to other HOPE aid programs. In its first academic year, 2014–2015, the grant supported 13,703 students with a total of \$8.9 million (GSFC, 2015). In its second year, the grant supported 14,813 students (16% of total TCSG enrollment) with a total of \$9.8 million, and for the current fiscal year the program received a 25% increase in funding for a total of \$12.2 million (GSFC, 2016a; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Although this is not a need-based aid program, it makes earning a technical degree affordable for students and focuses on degree production in the industries that will experience the most growth in Georgia. Given the large proportion of disadvantaged students within the TCSG, the HOPE Career Grant, in tandem with the HOPE Grant, is an important policy to address educational disparities in the state (state policy analyst, personal communication, March 24, 2017).

Need-Based State Financial Aid Policies

The majority of Georgia's student aid is awarded based on academic merit, and the state has recently ranked among the states that offer the least need-based aid (IRHE, 2016). However, the state has financial aid policies that support students primarily based on their financial need: Student Access Loans (SAL) and the Realizing Educational Achievement Can Happen (REACH) Scholarship. While both of these programs are designed to provide support to Georgia students with the greatest need, merit is also a consideration in these awards.

REACH Scholarship. Students who qualify for the federal free-and-reduced lunch program, show academic promise, and who have demonstrated good behavior and high academic achievement can be nominated by their school district to apply for the REACH Scholarship (GSFC, 2016h; Suggs, 2016). Preference is given to applicants who will be first-generation college students and who show the potential for academic success (i.e., could earn A and B grades). Students are provided with a mentor to meet with regularly throughout middle and high school, and if they maintain good behavior and attendance and earn a 2.5 GPA, they receive \$10,000 (\$2,500 each year for four years) upon high school graduation to use toward their college education at a HOPE-eligible postsecondary institution (GSFC, 2016h, 2016f). However, the program's reach is narrow: fewer than 1,000 students participated in REACH as of 2016 (REACH Georgia, 2017). While the state hopes to expand the REACH program to all school systems, regulations will still limit school systems to five or eight participating scholars. There are undoubtedly many districts where more than five or eight low-income students could benefit from the substantial financial support provided through this program.

Student Access Loans (SAL). In contrast to the REACH Scholarship, Student Access Loans (SAL) are not based on income but are awarded to students to cover the gap in the cost of attendance for students after all other aid (e.g., state, federal) is applied (GSFC, 2016i). Students can use these loans to cover the costs of any degree or certificate program at an in-state institution, including technical colleges; however, not all qualified students receive the loans they apply for each year. The GSFC gives preference to HOPE and Zell Miller Scholars for the loans, and all other applicants are randomly selected (GSFC, 2016i; Suggs, 2016). Students cannot borrow

more than \$3,000 per year (\$1,500 per semester) at TCSG institutions, or \$8,000 per year (\$4,000 per semester) at USG and private institutions (GSFC, 2016i).

The primary benefit of SAL is the 1% interest rate; however, the loan interest rates can increase to 6% or 8% if students fail to complete their programs on time. Students also have generous forgiveness options that could reduce portions of their loans within a specified number of years after graduation. Technical college graduates with a 3.5 GPA or higher can apply to have their loans forgiven entirely, and students who completed a degree at a four-year USG or in-state private institution can have portions of their loans forgiven for every year in public service or teaching STEM in a Georgia public school (GSFC, 2016i). The SAL program is the second largest state aid program run by the GSFC. It provided \$33.1 million in loans for its first award year, \$23 million for the second award year, and in the 2016–2017 award year, Governor Deal allocated \$27 million to the GSFC for this program (GSFC, 2015, 2016a; OPB, 2016). Between 2012 and 2015, 13,265 students received loans through the SAL program, and in the first award year, 3,900 students received loans (\$6,874 average loan amount) (Suggs, 2016). The SAL program is praised for covering the costs of attending a postsecondary institution in Georgia, which is particularly important for Georgia’s low-income students who qualify for the Hope and Zell Miller scholarship programs. However, because the funding is limited and given away on a lottery basis, the SAL program is no guarantee for a low-income family considering their postsecondary options.

Earlier this year, the legislature took a meaningful step towards offering families need-based aid for college, increasing the likelihood that it will take a greater leadership role in allocating state resources to students in the future. H.B. 787 passed in both chambers to provide low-income Georgians with a comprehensive need-based aid program for postsecondary study. According to the bill, “the commission shall establish a need-based financial aid program to provide grants to eligible students for postsecondary education at qualified institutions” (H.B. 787, 2018). While details are scant and this effort has not yet been funded through formal budget allocations, this bill provides the infrastructure the state leadership will need to implement a need-based program in the future. The Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC) may decide what range of income constitutes eligibility, what academic requirements will be placed on the student, whether the grant is first-dollar or last-

dollar, and how large the grants will be. The bill stipulates that students may use the funding to attend any USG institution.

The passage of H.B. 787 does not ensure that the funding will be available to families soon. In the 2019 legislative session, legislators must allocate resources to fund this new program. The bill's sponsors indicated that they did not intend for the program to be funded by the lottery (Lee, 2018). The bill's supporters must fight for their program to receive sufficient funding within a state culture that has historically elevated merit-criteria over need-criteria.

Other State Financial Aid Policies

Georgia offers some financial support for students who meet certain criteria as they pursue postsecondary degrees. Some of these programs show alignment with Georgia's attainment goals and other education priorities.

Move on When Ready (MOWR) Program. The Move on When Ready (MOWR) program allows students to pursue college credits and/or earn a technical certificate or associate's degree while also working toward their high school diploma (GSFC, 2016e). All Georgia high school students are eligible to participate in this program for \$50, the cost to apply to postsecondary institutions for their dual-enrollment programs. For students, transportation and books are covered by the MOWR program; the GaDOE pays a standard rate of tuition and a book fee for each participating student to USG and TCSG institutions (GSFC, 2016e). Between the first and the second year after the MOWR program was consolidated in 2015, the dual-credit enrollment at TCSG institutions increased by 42% (11,388 students to 16,175 high school students), and the TCSG expected dual-credit enrollment to increase by another 20% for the 2016–2017 academic year (TCSG, 2016c). Compared to the nearly \$620 million invested in all of the HOPE programs combined, the MOWR program will cost Georgia \$87.7 million in the 2018–2019 academic year (OPB, 2017). Thus, MOWR could be a relatively cost-effective way for Georgia to increase educational certificate and degree attainment.

Tuition Equalization Grant (TEG). The TEG, an aid package without merit-based eligibility, was designed to provide support to Georgia residents who attend in-state private, not-for-profit institutions in order to make these institutions more affordable for them. Students are awarded \$450 for each semester that they enroll at a private institution in Georgia, including summer, for a maximum award amount of \$1,350 each year (GSFC,

2016j). The average net price for students attending private four-year not-for-profit institutions in Georgia is well over \$20,000 (IRHE, 2016), demonstrating that these funds go only a short distance to make the state's private not-for-profit institutions affordable.

While the state has embraced a number of initiatives targeting postsecondary enrollment and degree completion, financial aid policies in Georgia are likely to undermine the state's attainment goals by neglecting to provide substantial financial aid to the students who need it most. Although online education, dual enrollment programs, and strategic grants can help lower the cost of education for underserved student populations, the fact remains that the largest state aid program, the HOPE Scholarship, is largely supporting middle- and upper-class students (Suggs, 2016). The HOPE Scholarship's strict eligibility requirements and the ease with which students can lose the scholarship diminish the opportunity that the program could otherwise give students. Meanwhile, the SAL program is limited in scope and increases interest rates if students do not graduate on time, even if the reasons for delayed graduation relate to family or are financial. The state's other need-based programs are ill-equipped to reach a sufficient share of Georgia's low-income population.

Statewide Programs Designed to Benefit Underserved Student Populations

If Georgia is to become preeminent in economic development through a competitive workforce and business sector, policymakers will need to increase attention to serving the very large population of low-income and minority youth in the state. The state's education leaders have acknowledged disparities in attainment rates and have identified eight underserved populations that Georgia's postsecondary education policies need to target: part-time students, adult learners (students 25 years or older), military students and veterans, first-generation college students, racial/ethnic minorities, low-income students (Pell-eligible), and students with disabilities (USG, 2016).

Georgia has initiated a number of small programs focused on increasing college completion among underserved populations. As part of their work with Complete College Georgia (CCG) starting in 2010, USG embraced the *15 to Finish* campaign, a national initiative to increase the number of students who earn their degrees on time (two years for an associate's degree, four years for a bachelor's degree) by encouraging full-time students enrolled in Georgia's public institutions to register for 15 credit hours each semester. Students taking 12

credits per semester are technically full-time students; however, they are not on track to graduate on time if they take only 12 credits per semester. If students take 15 credits a semester and complete their degrees on time, they will also avoid borrowing more money than necessary to earn their degree (CCG, n.d.-a). However, this initiative may not be accessible to students who work part-time; enrolling in 15 credit hours per semester could mean that students must work more hours to pay for college.

The Associate's Degree You Deserve program was created to increase Georgia's attainment rate by awarding associate's degrees to students enrolled at USG institutions who have already earned at least 60 credits between an associate's degree program and their transfer institution. Nearly 12,000 students system-wide are potentially eligible to receive an associate's degree through this program (CCG, n.d.-c). The Associate's Degree You Deserve program would especially benefit eligible adult learners who have left postsecondary education and part-time students who have earned the required amount of credits to be awarded an associate's degree.

At the institutional level, Georgia State University (GSU) has had notable success in educating underserved populations, employing many innovative strategies that target the needs of its diverse student population. For example, GSU's online academic dashboard closely monitors the academic progress of all its students, collecting data that can be used to anticipate and prevent academic difficulties among students who exhibit patterns typical of drop outs. These efforts have resulted in a remarkable 23% increase in completion rates between 2003 and 2015. GSU graduates more Hispanic, Asian, first-generation, and Pell students with bachelor's degrees than any other university in Georgia (GSU, 2016). However, according to the perceptions of one system official, Georgia State's model may not be scalable, as institutions with fewer resources will not be able to afford the cost of the academic dashboard and its administration (system official, personal communication, March 7, 2017).

At the system level, Complete College Georgia is particularly focused on increasing the attainment rates of working-age adults (USG system official, personal communication, March 3, 2017). More than one million working-age adults, or 22% of Georgia's adult population, have attended college but have not earned postsecondary credentials and degrees (GoBackMoveAhead, n.d.). In 2014, Governor Nathan Deal and former USG Chancellor Hank Huckaby announced the Go Back Move Ahead campaign, a joint initiative between TCSG

and USG, to encourage adult learners to return to postsecondary programs. To help adult students transition back into education programs with ease, the Go Back Move Ahead program offers academic advisors, flexible curricular pathways, and online learning.

Last, two online portals exist to help students earn and transfer credits from Georgia's postsecondary institutions more easily. The Georgia Transfer Articulation Cooperation Service (GATRACS), released in 2011, is a centralized online portal for transfer articulation. The website allows students to assess their transfer eligibility by evaluating previous coursework and to search for institutions that offer courses they need to complete their degree. The second portal, eCampus, developed in 2016, is USG's online education tool and features the modules eCore and eMajor. eCore provides core courses, all of which are required for degree programs within the USG and take either eight or 16 weeks to complete. Tuition for eCore in the 2016-2017 academic year was \$169 per credit hour. In the same academic year, 18,129 students participated in eCore courses. The average student that participates in eCore courses is 24 years old. White students comprise 57% of the student body, while African American (28%) and Hispanic students (6.5%) comprise considerably smaller proportions (USG, 2017c). A hallmark of the eCore program is the Student Engagement and Advancement Data System (SEADS) that allows USG to track which students may need intervention well before they would withdrawal. eCore courses had a 90% completion rate in the 2016-2017 academic year, which USG attributes to the intentional outreach efforts by eCore Support Services staff to ensure students stay on track and the support they need to stay enrolled in their online courses.

eMajor, targeted at adult learners, offers five bachelor's degrees online: business administration, criminal justice, cybersecurity, financial technology, and organizational leadership.⁷ These degrees complement Georgia's High Demand Career Initiative and are strategically aligned with Georgia's workforce needs. By reducing per-credit costs and providing free online textbooks, eMajor has reduced students' costs by \$5 million since 2013 (USG, 2016). Online students can also take advantage of the HOPE Scholarship and other financial aid programs. For technical college degrees, the TCSG employs online education through the Georgia Virtual Technical

⁷ This includes majors that have an online component.

Connection, which in 2015 enrolled 63,867, almost half of the 133,455 total students enrolled in the technical college system (TCSG, 2017).

Statewide Programs Designed to Benefit Georgia's African American Students

African Americans comprise approximately one third of the state population and approximately 28% of the USG's total student population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016a; USG, 2016). Because such a large share of Georgians are African American, increasing African Americans' educational attainment is imperative to fulfilling Georgia's educational attainment goals, particularly because African Americans currently earn postsecondary degrees at a lower rate than their white counterparts (SREB, 2015, p. 7).

A nationally recognized program for African American educational attainment, the African American Male Initiative (AAMI), is the first statewide initiative with a focus on increasing enrollment, retention, and attainment for African American males. The AAMI is present on 26 out of 29 of the USG's campuses. Since its inception in 2002, African American male enrollment in the USG has increased by 80%, from 17,068 students in fall 2002 to 31,461 in fall 2015. Despite increases in enrollment, however, African American male students' retention rate decreased by 1% and completion increased by only 6% (from 29% to 35%) during this 13-year period (USG, 2017a).

Raising the African American college completion rate is critical to improving the overall level of educational attainment in Georgia. There are very few four-year institutions in the state that have both a large African American student population and a high completion rate for African American students (Table 4). While UGA, Georgia Tech, and Emory all have high completion rates among their African American student population, African Americans comprise less than 8% of enrollment at each of these institutions. Meanwhile, African American completion rates exceed 50% at only two HBCUs (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

Table 4: Four-Year Degree-Granting Institutional Performance on African American Access and Success

	Low (<50%) African American Population	High (>50%) African American Population
High (>50%) African American Completion	Agnes Scott College Emory University Georgia College and State University* Georgia Institute of Technology* Georgia Southern University* Georgia State University* Mercer University University of Georgia*	Morehouse College [†] Spelman College [†]
Low (<50%) African American Completion	Armstrong State University* Berry College Brenau University Brewton-Parker College Columbus State University* Covenant College Georgia Southwestern State University* Kennesaw State University* LaGrange College Oglethorpe University Shorter University Southern Polytechnic State University* Thomas University Tocca Falls College University of West Georgia* Valdosta State University* Wesleyan College	Albany State University* [†] American InterContinental University Clark Atlanta University [†] Clayton State University* Fort Valley State University* [†] Paine College [†] Savannah State University* [†]

Source: U.S. Department of Education (2018)

* = public institution

† = HBCU

Aside from AAMI, there does not appear to be a cohesive statewide strategy for increasing educational attainment for African Americans in Georgia. One official cited as part of the problem a lack of understanding among state leaders of the importance of institutions that serve primarily minority students:

I don't think that there's a lot of folks who are in the higher ed. system office [with] much of an understanding . . . of HBCUs and then even Hispanic Serving Institutions and MSIs. They think of them as these 'boutique' kind of institutions—small, just a couple of them—not necessarily recognizing that over half of the students of color who are enrolled in public higher ed. are at MSIs. [In reality], if you're thinking about where public students of color are, they're typically concentrated at MSIs, and Georgia is no exception. But I don't think that that's common knowledge. So, if you're serious about increasing completion, access, whatever in higher ed., they've got to be

serious about those institutions. (personal communication, March 28, 2017)

Statewide Programs Designed to Benefit Georgia's Hispanic Students

Hispanic students comprised 7% of the total student population in the USG in fall 2015 (USG, 2016), although about 1 in 10 recent high school graduates in Georgia identify as Hispanic (WICHE, 2016). However, from 2011 to 2015, the Hispanic population within the USG increased by 39% (USG, 2016). In response to the rapid growth in Hispanic student enrollment, Complete College Georgia established the Latino College Completion Initiative in 2013. The Latino Completion Initiative has piloted “Promising Programs” at three USG institutions: the College of Coastal Georgia, Dalton State College, and Georgia Gwinnett College (USG, 2016). CCG designed these Promising Programs “to address the unique needs of Latinos at [each] respective institution” (USG, 2016). CCG officials in Georgia are still assessing the efficacy of the Promising Programs pilot, as it aims to expand these programs to all institutions in the USG (USG, 2016).

The largest representation of Hispanic students is at Georgia State, which has its own Latino Student Services and Outreach (LASSO) program, providing recruitment, mentoring, academic support services, leadership development, and other resources for the university’s Latino/Hispanic students (GSU, 2017). However, statewide policymaking concerning Hispanic students remains limited.

In a predominately merit-based system like Georgia’s, gap closure by race, ethnicity, and income remains elusive. More distressingly, the strict GPA requirements and minimal support for programs like REACH may be contributing to declining completion rates. Students who experience a bad semester academically may find themselves suddenly without funding. A sustained policy commitment is needed to raise attainment rates for all Georgians and to unify the patchwork programs targeting subsets of the population. As we discuss in the next section, we find little evidence of strategic planning and sustained state policy commitments outside of the technical college sector and workforce development.

Theme 3: Lack of a Sustained State Policy Commitment Limits Georgia's Ability to Significantly Increase Educational Attainment

After several years of significant policy changes and initiatives, Georgia still underperforms in many important areas of higher education performance. Much of this weakness may be attributed to underdeveloped policy infrastructure to guide policies to meet the educational needs of the state. When the Complete College Georgia (CCG) initiative launched in 2011, it was positioned as a unifying initiative that could leverage the collective strength of Georgia's education departments and policy forces; however, we find that CCG has not satisfied this crucial need for a guiding and comprehensive vision for higher education. In the CCG era, there have been some notable achievements made through increased collaboration, but policymakers have not fully engaged with business or educational leaders on the important issues of affordability and disparities in educational access. Meanwhile, insufficient attention to the full potential of evidence-based policymaking weakens the bridge between the announcement of exciting policies and the achievement of measurable success.

Promising Collaboration in the CCG Era

In 2011, with a modest \$1 million grant from the Complete College America Foundation and Lumina Foundation, Governor Deal launched Complete College Georgia (CCG), a policy initiative meant to address critical workforce needs and gaps in degree attainment. CCG's charge was to bring together key agencies and educational leaders to collaborate on how to improve access to and degree completion at Georgia's public postsecondary institutions. CCG primarily involves the USG and the TCSG, with further collaboration from the GaDOE, but does not involve private (for-profit and nonprofit) institutions. CCG aims to address several barriers in educational attainment by focusing on the following performance areas: college readiness, improving access and completion for underserved students, shortening time to degree, restructuring instructional delivery, and transforming remediation (CCG, 2011). Several state education officials reported regular meetings between the USG and the TCSG to develop shared attainment goals, though not all of these collaborations have formal structure under CCG (personal communication, March 3, 2017). Modest initiatives have emerged under CCG, but it is too early to know if the underlying policies will substantially drive increased attainment rates.

To shorten the time to degree, Georgia implemented statewide initiatives including the 15-to-Finish and the Guided Pathways to Success programs. Both programs are designed to help students navigate the path towards a degree through extensive advising, increased technology, and more coherent academic paths. Most recently, Complete College Georgia unveiled its Momentum Year Initiative, intended to create “a starting point that helps [college] students find their path, get on that path, and build velocity in the direction of their goals.” Building on research demonstrating academic improvements for first-year students carrying a full course load in a career-directed academic program, this initiative has provided grants to eight institutions to transform this research into institutional academic policies and programs (CCG, 2017).

At the system level, under the CCG plan, the USG, TCSG, and K–12 system have increased access and completion with additional pathways to a certificate and degree through dual enrollment, graduation, or transfer (CCG, n.d.-b). The number of high school students participating in the Move On When Ready (MOWR) program nearly doubled between 2012 and 2016, after state officials revised the state’s existing dual enrollment programs (USG, 2016). The USG and TCSG recently collaborated on policies to improve the transfer process between its institutions. Starting in 2012, students could transfer credits from an additional 17 general education courses from the TCSG into the core curriculum at USG institutions (USG, 2012). Today, students can transfer 28 general education courses from the TCSG to any university in the USG. Increasing the number of transferable credits creates a more efficient pathway for students enrolled in technical colleges to pursue an associate’s or bachelor’s degree without having to repeat coursework. The TCSG and USG have also changed their remedial education programs by consolidating their Learning Support programs with co-requisite courses. This change allows students to simultaneously enroll in credit-bearing courses and remedial coursework. Prior to this policy, students who needed remedial support were delayed in enrolling in classes that counted towards their degree. With this change, students may be more likely to complete their degree on time and may spend less money doing so. In combination, these reforms in transfer and remedial education policies may encourage more students at technical colleges to consider enrolling in a bachelor’s or associate’s degree program.

Complete College Georgia’s explicit commitment to underserved communities has led to promising developments and programs that push institutions to analyze how they can better serve disadvantaged students.

The Go Back Move Ahead program targets adult learners who wish to return to postsecondary education. The Hispanic/Latino Outreach and the African American Male Initiative both highlight systemic disparities and attempt to provide extra support for those communities that face large attainment gaps (USG, 2016). However, even with the goals established through CCG, the initiative lacks the broad political consensus that exists in other states, such as Tennessee in its *Drive to 55* initiative.

We attribute this lack of consensus partially to disconnected higher education governance structures. Several state bodies play a role in implementing postsecondary education policy, including the Governor's Office of Student Accountability (GOSA), the Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC), the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE), the USG, and the TCSG. In 2006, Governor Roy Barnes created the Alliance of Education Agency Heads (AEAH), which convened the heads of all education agencies for a P-20 education policy focus. The AEAH has remained active throughout Governor Deal's tenure. As part of CCG, the governor created the Complete College America Council in 2011, which also includes the leaders of all of Georgia's key education agencies as well as key business, community, and philanthropic leaders (CCG, 2011). Even with all of these agencies involved in educational decision making, no single entity is charged with improving educational attainment for the entire state. Governor Deal and Governor Perdue worked through the AEAH, but this group can easily be disbanded when a governor is elected with different priorities. The Georgia legislature has a very short session, and the independence of the USG makes sustained statewide cooperation and policymaking difficult in Georgia.

Underused Data and Evidence

With much discussion in Georgia higher education policy-making focused on improving student outcomes and institutional efficiency, it might be expected that Georgia would strive to center these conversations on data and evidence. While the infrastructure for a culture of data-based decision-making is largely present, the full potential to turn this data into informed policy remains under-utilized.

Efforts to improve data collection in Georgia higher education over the past 10 years have been part of broader accountability efforts. The most comprehensive effort to improve data collection was through multiple state agencies, including the GaDOE, GaDOL, GICA, USG, and TCSG, working together over the last decade to

create a statewide longitudinal data system. The SREB (2015) reported that Georgia was one of three SREB states that “have made leading efforts” in improving state accountability systems. Aided by additional funding from the state’s Race to the Top federal stimulus and CCG, in 2013 Georgia implemented this full system, called GA*AWARDS (Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, 2014). Managed by the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement (GOSA), it is a P–20 data system, following students’ individual performances as they move from pre-kindergarten through postsecondary education and into the workforce. At this time, the data is available publicly only in aggregate, although Georgia public institutions and independent researchers can apply for access to disaggregated data for research purposes (GOSA, n.d.-b).

Another development in institutional measurement is the mandate tied to Complete College Georgia, by which every USG institution must produce an annual “campus update” to demonstrate their progress in meeting the governor’s attainment goals. Each institution also reports on their “highest priority, highest impact work” that is unique to their institutional context (USG, 2016). The state initially gave leeway for institutions in their reporting style, so there was a lack of uniformity in reports and shared data points. Recently, the state changed the reporting style, requiring all institutions to report on their strategies for meeting institutional enrollment and graduation goals through a standardized template (system administrator, personal communication, April 6, 2017). Though these updates are not used in any public evaluations of institutional performance or in any funding formula, they may serve a purpose to create dialogue between institutions, share best practices, highlight statewide trends or problems, and annually align institutions to the shared goals of CCG (USG, 2016). Each TCSG institution must also report annually for CCG on similar metrics (TCSG, 2016a). But there is no evidence that for-profit institutions’ progress on CCG metrics drives state policy decision-making, even though students at these institutions receive state subsidies in the form of the HOPE scholarships and grants.

A limited amount of state data is available for public use; the majority is available only for internal use by the state. Several state agencies have developed digital tools from the GA*AWARDS data set, including the Georgia Report Cards, which measure performance in pre-kindergarten, K–12, universities, and technical colleges; the High School Graduate Outcomes dashboard, which displays outcomes for students who have completed high school; and the Learning and Earning report, which outlines earning potentials by degree and

institution for both USG and TCSG graduates (GOSA, 2016b). These tools help families, counselors, and students make informed decisions about school choice and give institutions the opportunity to compare themselves to others. While it is unclear how often these data are used to guide institutional and state policy, these tools mark an important step in making data available for broad public use. Currently, the complete GA*AWARDS data set is available only for researchers at certain institutions and the education agencies that facilitate the system.

Thus, the infrastructure necessary to create greater accountability in Georgia's higher education system exists. With the laudable development of GA*AWARDS, Georgia has the capacity to measure how the USG and TCSG are helping achieve state priorities. However, Georgia lacks clarity in how the state holds institutions accountable in their performance. Both the USG and TCSG internally monitor their institutions, but no formal measures exist that enforce standards in affordability, academic performance, diversity, or research productivity (system official, personal communication, March 24, 2017). Importantly, these data allow for in-depth analysis of how different groups are faring and how well the state is addressing disparities in attainment. Although this data source offers strong potential to produce reports that benchmark progress toward the state's goals, no such reports exist publicly (personal communication, March 24, 2017). Greater availability of performance data would allow the media, policy analysts, and other members of the public to enter the discussion about student outcomes and the state's policy choices.

In Georgia, institutions are funded using a two-decades-old formula based solely on enrollment, not on student outcomes (system official, personal communication, March 24, 2017). Multiple sources from the Governor's Office reported that Governor Deal led a push toward a system of performance-based funding (PBF) and convened a commission that created an implementation plan. In 2012, the commission made recommendations to the governor's office, but any implementation was placed on hold, and there has been no official re-engagement with the topic (personal communication, March 17, 2017). Officials shared that there were no recent conversations or plans to revisit the commission's recommendations; however, with recent legislative attention on the efficiency of the USG and TCSG, PBF may reemerge as an option to provide oversight and incentives for public institutions, similar to other postsecondary systems in the SREB (system official, personal communication, March 24, 2017).

Unexamined Evidence on Campus Consolidations

The campus consolidation initiative serves as a clear example of how concerted efforts to collect more evidence would help the state better understand if it has achieved its stated goals. A prominent system official at the USG was not aware of any plans to measure the effects of the campus consolidations, a major initiative affecting the majority of USG institutions (personal communication, April 6, 2017). According to several state officials, USG Board of Regents made the consolidation decisions, which were influenced by legislative and gubernatorial stances (personal communication, March 30, 2017). When asked how institutions affected by these consolidations were notified, one system official said, “you just get informed when you get informed by the Board” (personal communication, April 6, 2017). There were no public consultations with students, administrators, or faculty (system official, personal communication, March 30, 2017; April 6, 2017).

When announcing the consolidations in 2011, then-Chancellor Huckaby stated that these campus consolidations were intended to “enhance our ability to serve the people of Georgia at less cost,” but the USG did not establish target goals for savings (Gardner, 2017). In addition to the absence of specific goals, system officials noted the absence of a plan to evaluate the consolidations’ successes or failures (personal communication, April 6, 2017). The campus consolidations marked a bold action by the Board of Regents, as nearly every facet of university life is changed at both campuses in any consolidation. But little information is available on the cost savings as a result of the consolidations, one of the primary goals of the initiative. A state university provost noted that “there are costs that come along with a merger that are maybe not foreseen with great clarity” (Gardner, 2017).

The opacity of the campus consolidation process underscores two important themes in Georgia higher education policy-making. As previously stated, the lack of assessment hinders the opportunity to quantify the success of this initiative and learn from it for the future. With an assessment, the USG would know whether its approach to cost-saving in higher education paid off, and policymakers could be held accountable for their successes or failures. Additionally, this lack of assessment points to the absence of a broader strategy for lowering system costs and improving student outcomes, as such a strategy would have specified the intended targets. Promising evidence-based policies in Georgia, such as the Momentum Year Initiative, do exist, and Georgia

should be applauded for improving data capacity through both GA*AWARDS and CCG campus updates.

However, these systems will not be maximized without a comprehensive strategy to implement the data and show how it is being used to improve student outcomes and system performance.

Disconnected Policy Initiatives and Policymaking Structures

Complete College Georgia began important work by defining overarching goals for the state and establishing shared strategies across agencies to build progress toward these goals. However, efforts under the CCG title have not yet solved some of the state's most important areas of needed improvement, areas upon which increasing educational attainment rests. If they are to be resolved, issues of college affordability and access for all Georgians must be addressed by one statewide, comprehensive vision for postsecondary education. CCG has not brought together all of the necessary stakeholders who impact this state policy and the resulting performance.

Although CCG is praised as a statewide collaboration, it did not create a platform through which it can engage all of Georgia's postsecondary institutions. One official from the USG stated that the main collaboration exists only "between the TCSG, the USG, and to some extent the Georgia Department of Education; but our relationship between the three is kind of loose" (personal communication, March 3, 2017). Major stakeholders who could help advance CCG's goals—such as the General Assembly, which plays a major role in allocation of resources, and private institutions, which comprise two thirds of Georgia's postsecondary institutions—are not involved in this collaboration. This limits the CCG's ability to effectively drive change in Georgia. Similarly, CCG has not been successful in communicating its specific goals and purpose to stakeholders. While there is a strong awareness of CCG among state policy influencers and institutional leadership, most of the professionals interviewed were not able to easily recall a statewide attainment goal adopted by Georgia through CCG. This lack of communication can be contrasted with the well-publicized goals and public-private collaborations in other states, such as Tennessee's *Drive to 55* initiative. As one interviewee noted, "It's nothing like Tennessee . . . where there is such a concerted effort to promote it" (personal communication, April 11, 2017). When CCG was first established, Governor Deal and institutional leaders committed to an attainment goal in which 60% of adults, or approximately 225,000 additional graduates, attain a degree by the year 2020 (CCG, 2011). However, by 2016, this 60% goal was moved back to the year 2025 (USG, 2016).

Given that the CCG is Governor Deal's signature higher education initiative, the Governor and his office have been at the center of the plan since its inception. His leadership on the AEAH and the Complete College America Council and his influence on the USG and TCSG leadership have helped bolster the initiative. However, the 2018 gubernatorial election will determine Governor Deal's successor, and it is unknown whether the next governor will place equal emphasis on improving educational outcomes or see CCG as the appropriate platform to initiate higher education reform. Similarly, the AEAH is not guaranteed to remain effective in the future, as it holds no formal policy-making power.

There is little evidence that the General Assembly has been a strong vocal participant in the CCG initiative and related conversations. The legislature's primary relationship with higher education is through the power of the purse—how much funding is allocated to institutions, how much funding the Georgia Student Finance Commission receives to fund programs such as the HOPE Scholarship, and other fiscal matters (Georgia State Senate, n.d.). Any statewide plan for higher education reform must have the General Assembly fully involved in matters of performance, funding, and financial aid, even if it is limited by a short legislative session.

Student aid policies do not always work in alignment with broader statewide goals dictated in CCG, a possible consequence of the legislature's distance from CCG. A recent example of the division between decision-makers is the current conversation around providing state-funded, need-based financial aid. Although H.B. 787 represents the first step towards a comprehensive need-based aid system, it emerged not as the product of collaborative discussions but rather as the brainchild of a concerned state senator. In response to the idea of a statewide aid program based on students' need rather than merit, one official at the USG stated: "People around here believe strongly in merit aid, and no amount of research that I can put out showing the efficacy of need-based aid is going to change the fact that people believe in merit-based aid." This official added that the new USG Chancellor has spoken of affordability more broadly, as opposed to specifically supporting Georgia's neediest students (personal communication, March 30, 2017). In addition, the USG's policies prohibit Georgia's public postsecondary institutions from using state funds to provide aid (need- or merit-based) to students; instead student aid must originate from one of the existing state-aid programs, from the federal government, or from loans (Kolodner & Butrymowicz, 2017). USG institutions can use their endowments and private donations to provide

aid; however, not all institutions have the resources and capacity through a private donor base to provide significant support. In the 2013–2014 academic year, USG institutions were able to provide \$28.8 million dollars in aid to students, a figure overshadowed by the \$660 million in the unmet need of those same students (Kolodner & Butrymowicz, 2017). Findings from the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute suggest that Georgia will not see the increases in enrollment that it needs to meet its attainment goal unless lower-income families gain more assistance through student aid (Suggs, 2016). In 2011, changes to the HOPE Scholarship resulted in a decrease in purchasing power for eligible students, and ineligible students did not see alternatives emerge.

Some of Georgia’s financial aid policies do align with Complete College Georgia’s goals of increased attainment by addressing issues of affordability for underserved students. As described in an earlier section of this case study, numerous state aid policies, including the HOPE Grant, HOPE Career Grant, and Move On When Ready, create paths to affordable postsecondary credentials for more of Georgia residents. Furthermore, the REACH scholarship, although constrained in size, was explicitly designed to assist low-income students who may not have access to other merit-based aid. These financial aid policies were established through legislative action, demonstrating the General Assembly’s ability to tackle the affordability of postsecondary education in Georgia on a broader scale. Additional policies aimed to make college affordable will require the USG, TCSG, GSFC, governor, legislature, and private institutions to work together to ensure that state residents have affordable options.

Even with the alignment between CCG goals and Georgia’s public institutions, the USG has the constitutional autonomy to set its own priorities with each chancellor. Former USG Chancellor Hank Huckaby, whose tenure began in 2011, is remembered for his focus on increasing college completion rates. His term was also marked by the consolidation process and efforts to shape institution-level involvement in CCG. When Huckaby retired in 2016, he was replaced by Chancellor Steve Wrigley. Since the leadership change, several officials from the USG have mentioned a shift in the system’s priorities to an increased focus on efficiency and affordability (personal communication, March 3, 2017; March 30, 2017).

While the USG sets the tuition levels for its institutions and holds some influence over college finances in the state, it typically operates within the scope of expectations from the governor and legislature. Two officials

within the USG stated that for any initiative to be implemented within the USG, it must be palatable to the governor's office and the legislature (personal communication, March 30, 2017). For example, in response to legislative concern on college affordability, a policy analyst from a private research organization concluded, "I think the University System is aware that this is an issue for the legislature . . . last year, they actually froze tuition and fee increases. They have also taken steps to reduce fee increases in the future. So, they are very aware of the legislature's displeasure" (personal communication, March 17, 2017).

The current framework of collaboration under CCG and the state's governance structures is not designed to resolve these issues. Under a unifying vision for higher education, all of the various agencies and offices would be empowered to work together toward clear state attainment goals.

Conclusion

Georgia is at a crossroads. Its economy will need a more educated citizenry in the next few years; yet, with its current policies and recent small gains in educational attainment, it will fall short by an estimated 670,000 high-quality credentials by 2025 (IRHE, 2018). As the state grows even more diverse, it is imperative that its policies in education, accountability, and finance promote postsecondary opportunities for all of its residents and that the state's educational institutions align toward a unified goal.

In the recent years, Georgia has shown notable strength along a few measures. Its focus on workforce development remains a unique, key program for the state. With improvements in its high school graduation rate, Georgia nearly mirrors the national average. But gaps in attainment by race and ethnicity persist, and it is unclear whether college readiness has actually improved with the growth in this measure (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b). Its research universities are among the nation's strongest and are well-regulated by the state to ensure strategic allocation of resources (Perna & Finney, 2014). Last, Georgia ranks 3rd highest among the states in the transfer of associate's degree recipients to bachelor degree programs (Shapiro et al., 2015).

These distinctions are undermined by issues of affordability and students' college participation and completion rates, which highlight immediate issues Georgia lawmakers will need to address with state policies for its future:

- The state must place the reduction of opportunity gaps at the forefront of higher education policymaking. Reducing disparities in enrollment and completion is a necessity for the state's workforce, economy, and future. Georgia State University serves as a model for African American and Hispanic enrollment and completion—for Georgia and the nation—and the state should explore scaling its methods to all institutions for broader success.
- Georgia needs to explore policies to improve educational outcomes for low-income Georgians, who are increasingly unable to pursue postsecondary degrees, as college affordability continues to decline. Creating a framework for a robust state need-based aid program would help low-income students afford postsecondary degrees. H.B. 787, a recent legislative act, establishes a need-based aid framework. However, it outlines few details of how such a program would work, and its future relies on continued investment from lawmakers.
- Georgia has the data systems in place to advance stronger public policies for institutional and sector accountability. To promote the benefit of the state as a whole, accountability systems should measure whether institutional spending is in the interest of shared state goals, including if institutions in all sectors are serving underserved students. Overtime, this accountability needs to be transparent and public. Every institution in the state, regardless of the sector, must have a piece of the accountability agenda.
- Last, to ensure a strong pipeline of prepared workers for the economy, policy advances should focus on college readiness, including bringing Georgia's high school graduation rate on par with national averages, as well as promoting the college enrollment of young people and working-age adults alike.

For Georgia to begin to make progress in these areas, it will need a mechanism for sustained state policy leadership whose work extends beyond the term of governors and legislators. The Governor's Alliance of Education Agency Heads (AEA), a gubernatorial initiative, has played an important role in Georgia's education; however, this group does not establish policy or hold all sectors accountable to shared goals for increased attainment. Such a mechanism should borrow from the model set by Georgia's technical colleges system and include business leaders whose companies will directly benefit from a more educated population. A new

statewide body should be responsible for providing a clear statewide plan to increase attainment across all sectors and establish a direct partnership with the K–12 system to promote college readiness.

The coming years may signal a change for Georgia, not only in its leadership but also in its direction for higher education. We hope that Georgia will unify state higher education policy under strong, stable state policy leadership, while committing itself to a policy agenda that is bipartisan and resilient to changes in the governor's mansion. We expect that, if the state is to reach the attainment it needs, it will have to confront the growing college affordability problem. State leadership during the past fiscal crisis made it more difficult for the families that needed financial aid the most. Embracing this change will not only be a matter of expanding need-based aid—although this is a necessary step—but also will require a re-envisioning of what higher education in Georgia is and who it serves.

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