A Vision for Public Education

Equity and Excellence

Georgia School Boards Association • Georgia School Superintendents Association

Study Guide

Introduction

A Vision for Public Education: Equity and Excellence is the full report of a planning team convened through a joint venture between the Georgia School Boards Association and the Georgia School Superintendents Association. The report is the primary product of a two-year undertaking which involved a planning team composed of 15 local school superintendents and 15 local board of education members. Eleven facilitators and 30 college, university, and K-12 research associates provided ongoing support for the project. Nine community conversations were conducted over the state along with four student conversations to solicit the views of citizens and secondary school students about the current state of public education and their hopes for the future.

Purpose of the Study Guide

The purpose of the study guide is to provide assistance to individuals or groups who wish to pursue an organized and sequential study of the report. The guide is intended to direct readers through a series of activities focusing first on general concepts related to public education and then addressing the seven educational system components that provided the framework for the Vision Project. The guide should be particularly useful to leadership teams within school districts as they prepare for a strategic planning initiative, acquiring charter status, or pursuing other efforts to improve the educational experience for all students.

Format and Use of the Study Guide

The study guide is organized into eight units. Each unit lists a series of activities in which the study group may engage to reach consensus for transforming public education in their community. Each unit corresponds with a chapter in A Vision for Public Education: Equity and Excellence. Study groups should consider the following procedure as they examine the work of the Vision Project.

1) Select a facilitator to coordinate the work of the study group.
2) Prior to the beginning of the study, all members of the study group should read chapter 1 – Overview of the Vision Project.
3) The study group should study the units in the order in which they are listed in the study guide.
4) Prior to each session the members of the study group should read the entire chapter associated with the unit to be studied.
5) Assign individuals within the study group the responsibility of reviewing in depth one or more of the activities listed in a given unit and be prepared to lead the discussion for that activity with the assistance of the facilitator.
6) Set aside a sufficient amount of time for face-to-face engagement by the study group for each unit.
7) The study group should regularly consider the systemic implications for their school district as they study each of the educational system components and the elements within each component.
8) At the conclusion of the study conduct a session for the purpose of identifying the principles, key issues, and Vision Project recommendations that have relevance for the school or school district and initiate a process for creating the envisioned future for the organization. Prepare for this activity throughout the study.

Unit 1 – Questions Guiding the Vision Project

The first unit of study focuses on chapter 2 of the report which addresses four questions related to public education:

What is the purpose of public education?

What are the goals of public education?

What is our vision for public education?

What is the value of public education?

The study group should address each of these questions, review the planning team's answers to the questions, and seek consensus in each of the four areas.

Purpose of public education

The Vision Project concluded that the purpose of public education is "the preparation of high school graduates for college, career, and life." The purpose is stated on page 13 of the report.

Activities

1) Discuss the purpose statement contained in the report.

2) Examine each of the three terms "college," "career," and "life" for the purpose of developing an operational definition for each of the terms.

3) Establish a procedure for developing a purpose statement.

4) Develop a hypothetical purpose statement that reflects the thinking of the study group.

Goals of public education

The Vision Project adopted eight goals for public education. These goals are listed on page 14 of the report.

Activities

1) Discuss the goals as enumerated in the report.

2) Consider changes to the goals if deemed appropriate.

3) Determine the relative importance of each goal by assigning a value to each one (e.g., assign a percentage value to each goal).

4) Determine extent to which each goal is being emphasized at the present time. This may be done by determining the amount of time a specific school devotes to each goal over a specified time period.

5) Review the concept of goal distortion as described by Rothstein in Grading Education: Getting Accountability Right (chapter 3, pages 45-53).

6) Establish a procedure for the development of educational goals for a local school district (see Unit 2 activity 5 related to community conversations and surveys).

Vision for public education

The vision statement adopted by the Vision Project is recorded on page 15 of the report and was an effort to answer the questions of what we want public schools to look like in the future, what we hope they will become, and what we want to create.

Activities

1) Discuss the vision statement contained in the report.

2) Consider changes to the vision statement to improve clarity and/or intent.

3) Discuss the premises supporting the vision statement contained in the report (p. 16).

4) Develop a hypothetical vision statement which reflects the thinking of the study group.

Value of public education

The report discusses the value of public education on pages 16 and 17. The section asserts that all children have equal access to the public schools but all do not have access to a quality education.

Activities

1) Discuss the value that you believe is derived from having a system of public schools in the state.

2) Discuss what the effect would be on the state if there were no public schools. What alternatives might be established and what would the consequences be?

Unit 2 – Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy

The second unit of study focuses on chapter 8 of the report. The culture and climate of the community and of the schools themselves are important determinants of the extent to which the schools are able to provide a high quality educational experience for all students.

Activities

1) Review and discuss the guiding principles related to culture, climate, and organizational efficacy (page 115 of the report).

2) Review and discuss the key issues related to culture and climate (pages 115-118 of the report).

3) Discuss strategies for making schools inviting places (recommendation 8.1 - page 120 of the report).

4) Discuss strategies for establishing schools as community hubs (recommendation 8.2 – page 121 of the report).

5) Discuss the importance of determining stakeholder perceptions of the schools through community conversations, staff and student surveys, and other mechanisms (recommendation 8.3 – page 121 of the report).

6) Discuss ways in which innovation and responsible risk taking may be encouraged by the state and by local school districts (recommendation 8.4 – page 122 of the report).

7) Examine ways in which school and district cultures can be made more sensitive and responsive to cultural, racial, ethnic, and socio-economic make-up of the community served (recommendation 8.5 – page 122 of the report).

8) Discuss ways in which schools can develop safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments (recommendation 8.6 – page 123 of the report).

9) Discuss getting to know and being willing to truly listen to students (recommendation 8.7 – page 123 of the report) (See Marc Prensky's work, Teaching Digital Natives: Partnering for Real Learning).

Unit 3 – Early Learning and Student Success

The third unit of study focuses on chapter 3 of the report. The first five years of life are a critical developmental period. Responsibility for children's readiness lies with the adults who care for them and the systems that support them.

Activities

1) Review and discuss the guiding principles related to early learning (page 21 of the report).

2) Review and discuss the key issues related to early learning (pages 22-26 of the report).

3) Discuss the concept of early learning collaboratives, how they might be formed, and the value that may be derived from their creation (recommendation 3.1, pages 29-30 of the report).

4) Discuss strategies for creating local partnerships to provide support for young children and families in need (recommendation 3.2, page 30 of the report).

5) Discuss the possibility of providing an opportunity for all children birth to five years old to participate in full-year educational experiences that are designed to promote all aspects of a child's development (recommendation 3.4, page 31 of the report).

6) Discuss the pros and cons of instituting a pre-kindergarten through grade 3 integrated and non-graded education model for <u>all</u> children ages 4 through 8 (recommendation 3.5, page 31 of the report).

Unit 4 – Teaching and Learning

The fourth unit of study focuses on chapter 4 of the report. This unit examines the core business of the public education system. What we teach, what we expect students to learn, and how we assess the academic progress of students are our essential questions.

Activities

1) Review and discuss the guiding principles related to teaching and learning (page 38 of the report).

2) Review and discuss the key issues related to teaching and learning (pages 39-42 of the report).

3) Review and discuss current practices of promise related to curriculum, assessment, and instruction (pages 42-51 of the report).

   Curriculum
   - Common core standards (goals and objectives)
   - Curriculum defined at district level by teams of teachers
   - Vertical and horizontal curriculum alignment
   - Curriculum connected to life of student and society
   - Curriculum integrated across subject areas
   - Curriculum which supports problem solving and critical thinking

   Assessment
   - Formative assessment
   - Performance assessment
   - Balanced assessment system
   - Assessment literacy
   - Student involvement
   - Technology support

   Instruction
   - Collaboration and instructional design
   - Teacher development of high quality instructional units
   - Differentiated instruction
   - Project and problem-based learning
   - Technology integration

4) Discuss collaborative learning communities and expert coaching (recommendation 4.1, pages 51-52 of the report).

5) Discuss strategies for integrating technology in the classroom to support student learning and to facilitate assessment (recommendation 4.2, page 52 of the report).

6) Discuss the development of a challenging and dynamic curricula that addresses the local and state educational goals, that meets the diverse needs of students, and that supports higher order thinking (recommendation 4.3, pages 52-53 of the report).

7) Discuss the desired components of a comprehensive and balanced system of student assessments that is useful in guiding the work of teachers and students (recommendation 4.4, pages 53-54 of the report).

8) Discuss the need for teachers to understand and use differentiated strategies in the instruction and assessments of students (recommendation 4.5, page 54 of the report).

Unit 5 – Teaching and Learning Resources

The fifth unit of study focuses on chapter 5 of the report. This unit addresses the identification of appropriate educational delivery models, technology and other physical or virtual resources in the classroom, warehousing and use of data in decision making, and the connection of schools to the communities they serve.

Activities

1) Review and discuss the guiding principles related to teaching and learning resources (page 59 of the report).

2) Review and discuss the key issues related to teaching and learning resources (pages 59-65 of the report).

3) Discuss alternative models for the delivery of education services (recommendation 5.1, pages 73-74 of the report). Include some of the following topics in the discussion:

    - Blended (hybrid) delivery model and virtual school model
    - Modification of the school calendar
    - Implications of school system achieving "Investing in Educational Excellence (IE^2)" status
    - Implications of school system achieving "Charter System" status
    - "Move on when ready" basis for progression through school
    - Use of the Internet and Internet filtering
    - The use of traditional versus electronic textbooks
    - Graded versus non-graded schools
    - Other issues related to the delivery of educational experiences

4) Discuss the use of technology in the classroom and the professional learning required of teachers to be proficient (recommendation 5.2, pages 74-75 of the report).

5) Discuss the value of a comprehensive longitudinal data system. Include in the discussion the extent that educational decisions need to be data-driven (recommendation 5.3, pages 75-76 of the report).

6) Discuss the importance and feasibility of collaboration in determining the site for new schools and the co-location of community services (recommendation 5.4, page 76 of the report).

Unit 6 – Human and Organizational Capital

The sixth unit of study focuses on chapter 6 of the report. This unit addresses the preparation of teachers and leaders; recruitment, employment, and induction; performance evaluation and compensation of educators; and the organizational structures and processes to support student learning.

Activities

1) Review and discuss the guiding principles related to human and organizational capital (page 83 of the report).

2) Review and discuss the key issues related to human and organizational capital (pages 83-86 of the report).

3) Discuss the value and feasibility of creating a statewide initiative to identify and recruit talented candidates into teacher preparation programs (recommendation 6.1, page 91 of the report).

4) Discuss the quality of teacher and leader preparation programs and share ideas of ways to improve the programs to better prepare individuals for the teaching profession (recommendation 6.2, page 91 of the report).

5) Discuss recruitment, induction, and retention strategies currently in place in local school districts and ways in which each of these may be improved (recommendation 6.3, page 91 of the report).

6) Discuss possible alternatives to the current practice of using training and experience as the only factors in determining salaries for teachers and others (recommendation 6.4, page 92 of the report).

    - Comprehensive performance evaluation system
    - Assignment to hard-to-staff schools
    - Assignment to schools in sparsely populated areas
    - Teaching in critical shortage areas
    - Career ladder responsibilities
    - Other options

7) Discuss how schools and school districts can modify structures and processes to become high reliability organizations in which student academic failure is not acceptable (recommendation 6.5, page 92 of the report).

Unit 7 – Governance, Leadership, and Accountability

The seventh unit of study focuses on chapter 7 of the report. This unit includes the governance of public education, leadership, and accountability at the local and state levels.

Activities

1) Review and discuss the guiding principles related to governance, leadership, and accountability (page 96 of the report).

2) Review and discuss the key issues related to governance, leadership, and accountability (pages 97-101 of the report).

3) Discuss the proposed comprehensive review and revision of current state education statutes (recommendation 7.1, page 105 of the report).

4) Discuss the value and feasibility of changing the method of selecting the state school superintendent, the state board of education, and local boards of education (recommendations 7.2, 7.3, and 7.4, pages 106-107 of the report).

5) Discuss the value and feasibility of reducing the number of state agencies with authority over various functions of public education to increase effectiveness and efficiency of the educational delivery system (recommendation 7.5, pages 106-107 of the report).

6) Discuss the need to develop and implement strategies to ensure that every child has access to a high quality educational experience regardless of where they happen to live (recommendation 7.6, page 107 of the report).

7) Discuss leadership strategies that may be implemented in the local school district to ensure a high-reliability organization (recommendation 7.7, page 108 of the report).

8) Discuss the current accountability system imposed on schools through the No Child Left Behind Act and the value of changing what currently exists to a state and local accountability system designed to measure school districts' success in meeting all of the educational goals established at the state and local levels. Review the evaluation tool being developed for high schools by the Georgia Department of Education. In addition, discuss how local school districts might be evaluated to determine their performance (recommendations 7.8, 7.9, and 7.10, pages 108-109 of the report).

Unit 8 – Financial Resources

The eighth unit of study focuses on chapter 9 of the report. This unit examines the funding of public education and the tax structure to support public education.

Activities

1) Review and discuss the guiding principles related to financial resources (page 130 of the report).

2) Review and discuss the key issues related to financial resources (pages 130-142 of the report).

3) Discuss the recommendations of the Special Council on Tax Reform and Fairness for Georgians and their potential impact on the current tax system. Discuss any actions by the Georgia General Assembly in response to the recommendations (recommendation 9.1, pages 144-145 of the report).

4) Discuss the perceived need for a comprehensive data system and an evaluation system that use data to measure and improve effectiveness in meeting objectives for enhanced student learning (recommendation 9.2, page 145 of the report).

5) Discuss the value of a comprehensive process for developing local school district budgets that focus on strategies for maximizing student learning (recommendation 9.3, pages 145-146 of the report).

6) Discuss the value and feasibility of providing a high level of flexibility to the local school district in its decision-making authority in the expenditure of funds to enable all students to be successful in school. In addition, discuss methods for evaluating school and district success and appropriate positive state interventions when needed (recommendation 9.4, page 146 of the report).

7) Discuss the value and feasibility of implementing a stable mechanism for the financial support of early learning programs and services for children ages 0-5 (recommendation 9.5, page 147 of the report).

8) Discuss the need for a state-local partnership for providing financial support of public education that will ensure minimal disparity in local fiscal capacity among school districts in the implementation of Vision Project recommendations in all Georgia school districts (recommendation 9.6, pages 147-148 of the report).

9) Discuss the state's responsibility to provide an ongoing level of state financial support for public education which, when combined with local revenue, makes the attainment of the Vision for Public Education in Georgia a reality and ensures its sustainability (recommendation 9.7, page 148 of the report).

Conclusion

The Georgia School Boards Association and the Georgia School Superintendents Association are committed to the proposition that the forty-five recommendations developed over the year and a half of work by superintendents, local board of education members, facilitators, research associates, and those who participated in community and student conversations will not die a death of neglect on the shelves of those who possess a copy of A Vision for Public Education: Equity and Excellence.

This study guide provides one tool for those who are dedicated to the premise that the public schools in our state represent the best hope and opportunity for all children and youth to participate in a high-quality educational program that prepares them for college, career, and life. If your district or school forms a study group to examine the value of the Vision Project recommendations for your organization, we would like to hear from you and to support your effort. Please contact either the GSBA or GSSA offices to let us know that you plan to engage in the undertaking.

It is our sincere hope that every school district in our state will use the recommendations developed in the Vision Project to serve as a spring board to creating high-reliability organizations that embrace the premise that all children can be successful in school and can achieve at a high level.

Now is an appropriate time to engage in the important work of creating an educational system that focuses on the intellectual development of all students; that will prepare them to be contributing members of a democratic society; that will embrace world-class standards; and that will be enthusiastically supported by the citizens of our state.

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