Local Governments and School Systems
Partnering for Better Communities

2015
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We would like to thank the following organizations for their help with our study
Association County Commissioners of Georgia
Georgia City-County Management Association
Georgia Municipal Association
Georgia Municipal Clerks and Finance Officers Association
Georgia School Boards Association
Georgia School Superintendents Association
University of Georgia College of Education

And the following for serving as examples of collaboration
Candler County School District
Cherokee County Juvenile Court
Cherokee County School District
Clayton County Juvenile Court
Clayton County School District
Clayton County System of Care
Hart County Charter System
City of Hartwell
City of Metter
Newton County Fire Department
Newton County Leadership Collaboration and The Center
Newton County School System
Truancy Intervention Project
University of Georgia Archway Partnership

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The University of Georgia
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In 2013, UGA’s Public Service and Outreach (PSO) programs identified improving school board governance around the state as a top priority for action. As Georgia continues to compete with other states for high-paying jobs, an educated, skilled workforce is critical to our state’s future. Well-governed and successful K-12 systems are essential to developing a qualified workforce.

UGA’s outreach programs hosted the first-ever School Board Governance Symposium in October 2013. Thirty-four school districts from around the state participated in the symposium, where leading education panelists from Georgia and across the United States discussed issues surrounding school board governance and the connection to high-performing school systems.

Building on the success of the symposium, the Carl Vinson Institute of Government, in collaboration with the Archway Partnership and UGA’s School of Public and International Affairs, embarked on a study in 2014 to explore the potential for collaboration among Georgia school systems and local governments.

Sponsored by the Office of the Vice President for Public Service and Outreach, this study explores the premise that greater collaboration between local governments and school systems in Georgia can lead to more efficient service delivery and improved educational outcomes for the communities involved. UGA researchers examined the current status of local government and school system collaboration in Georgia as well as issues that may foster or hinder collaboration. Six case studies in three policy arenas demonstrate that in some counties and cities in Georgia, officials in local government and school districts are coming together to make a difference in their communities.

We hope that through this research Georgia leaders can overcome some of the legal, structural, and systemic hurdles that hinder collaboration, allowing them to create opportunities to improve their own organizations and communities through new partnerships and new approaches to leadership. High-functioning school systems that provide students with a quality education help communities achieve sustainable economic growth and contribute to the overall vitality of a community.

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Collaboration among local public multi- and single-purpose governments is widespread and offers several potential benefits: improved service coordination, increased efficiency and effectiveness, and greater trust. While a large body of research examines collaboration among multipurpose local governments, few studies have focused on collaboration between local governments and school systems, which likely could achieve similar benefits as other governmental partnerships. This study explores the current status of local government and school system collaboration in Georgia, focusing on issues that might foster or hinder success. Six case studies of collaboration efforts in Georgia communities covering three policy areas provide insight into the ingredients necessary for success. Researchers at the University of Georgia’s Carl Vinson Institute of Government designed this study to help public leaders create opportunities to improve their own organizations and communities through new partnerships.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study uses a variety of research methodologies to examine collaboration among school districts and local governments: a review of the practitioner and academic literature on local government collaboration, a review of relevant Georgia laws, a survey of school system and local government officials, semi-structured interviews with key informants, and six case studies in three policy areas of varied but successful collaborations in Georgia. The review of Georgia laws on the authority and administration of school systems and local governments provides a foundation for understanding how the legal structure both promotes and hinders collaboration. The surveys of school system and local government officials reveal their support for collaboration, hindrances to it, communication practices, and collaboration priorities. The interviews with individuals extremely knowledgeable about school systems and local government focused on issues that make collaboration more challenging as well as those policy areas where it would be the most beneficial and easiest or most difficult to achieve.

Finally, the six case studies of successful collaboration efforts were chosen based on areas deemed highly innovative or most needed by survey respondents and key informants.

**COLLABORATION IN GEORGIA**

Results from the UGA-developed survey of school system and local government officials shows high support for collaboration that varies by jurisdiction. Nearly 90 percent (89.4%) of school system officials answered that collaboration with their
local government(s) was either extremely or very important. Although local government officials were a bit less positive, 75 percent still replied that collaboration with their school system was either extremely or very important, and less than 4 percent indicated that it was totally unimportant.

The collaboration that is occurring in the state is predominantly in four areas: emergency management and preparation, school public safety, recreational and sports programs, and sharing school facilities for nonrecreational activities. Due to the critical importance of emergency management and school public safety, both school and local government officials are highly motivated to ensure successful program implementation even if the collaboration takes considerable resources and/or is difficult. In contrast, collaborating with recreation programs and sharing school facilities require little cost to either party and can be accomplished relatively easily.

The survey also asked respondents their opinions about what hinders collaboration and the degree to which leaders in school systems and local governments communicate with one another. Respondents from both groups gave the same top three reasons for not collaborating: different missions, financial constraints, and not being a leadership priority of the other organization. These responses are all the more striking because of the low levels of formal and informal communication between the two groups. Of all respondents, only 20 percent said that they formally meet with their counterparts more than once a year, 21 percent do so annually, and nearly half (46%) rarely or never convene. Informal communication was somewhat more frequent, which makes sense when considering that particularly in rural communities many of these officials likely belong to similar social groups and see each other at community events. Approximately 39

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**Literature Background**

Prior research on collaboration among local governments has generally found that three key elements are necessary for a successful collaboration:

1. **Motivation and Mutuality**
   People and organizations need to see potential gains from collaboration.

2. **Communication and Credibility**
   Collaboration requires open and honest communication, trust, and respect among participants.

3. **Leadership**
   Someone must initiate and manage the collaboration in order to sustain it.

Although these three characteristics do not guarantee a successful collaboration, the research shows that partnerships that do succeed feature all three.
percent of officials informally meet more than once a year, 14 percent annually, but 31 percent still rarely or never informally meet. The link between communication and barriers to collaboration is important. Without communication, officials may presume other leaders are not interested in collaboration. Thus, simply meeting regularly would be an important first step toward discovering mutual interests and eventually establishing partnerships.

Georgia law does little to encourage collaboration between local governments and school districts. The groups have sufficient authority to perform legislated duties and fulfill their respective missions. Their mutual independence encompasses all facets of governance from distinct missions to having their own elected governing bodies, policy and rulemaking authority, revenue and budgeting authority, executive authority, and even judicial authority. Since the state legal environment does not promote collaboration, motivation must come from a mutual belief that working together will result in a better outcome than working alone.

CASE STUDIES

Six case studies examine three policy areas in which both school systems and local governments have strong overlapping interests and thus some motivation and opportunity to collaborate: land use planning and school siting, vocational education for fire service, and juvenile justice. The wide scope of these policy arenas underscores the possibilities for other types of collaboration.

School Siting and Land Use Planning

School siting and land use planning was cited during the semi-structured informant interviews and survey responses as one of the most difficult but needed areas for collaboration. Schools and local governments each have sole authority in their area of interest; yet, their decisions can have a tremendous impact on the other organization. For example, when a school system builds a new school in a rural area, the county may need to widen the road in front of the school, extend sewer lines, and expand its public safety infrastructure. Likewise, local governments approving subdivisions or economic development projects can dramatically increase student enrollment without the concomitant increase in property tax revenue on which schools so heavily rely.

In Newton County, the county, cities, school system, local water and sewer authority, and chamber of commerce joined together in 2005 to establish the Leadership Collaborative. Initially established to jointly develop a countywide land use plan, the Collaborative has evolved to also address other critical community-wide issues such as taxation and infrastructure development. Collaborative members meet regularly in a neutral space with a facilitator to discuss these difficult issues. Over time, the meetings
have resulted in greater trust and respect among members.

In conjunction with the land use plan, the Newton County School System (NCSS) developed a school siting plan so that everyone would know where current and future schools would be located. When the NCSS needed to build a new elementary school, it used the siting plan as a guide. Because available and appropriate land was difficult to find, the local development authority sold land to the NCSS. The city and the water and sewer authority also worked with the school system to acquire easements and utility lines. This level of cooperation likely would not have happened without the relationships and trust that had been built through the Leadership Collaborative.

In the rural Southeast Georgia city of Metter, officials have a history of regularly communicating with Candler County School District (CCSD) board members and the school superintendent. Thus, when the CCSD decided to relocate the county’s only elementary and middle schools from inside the city to the unincorporated area, the school superintendent knew he needed to work with city officials to prevent the buildings from becoming vacant. First, the superintendent commissioned a study that included a public input component to examine possible reuse options for the buildings. The best use for the elementary school was repurposing it as a new city police precinct and Georgia Bureau of Investigation Drug Task Force Office facility, which was successfully accomplished. However, deciding on the future of the expansive middle school was more difficult. Because Candler County is a University of Georgia Archway Partnership community, school and local government officials met regularly and talked about the future of the middle school. Their Archway Professional served as a neutral facilitator, helping the officials work through their concerns and move the decision-making process forward. Ultimately, the

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**Georgia Facts**

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Note: 8 consolidated governments are counted as both cities and counties.

**Georgia has**

- **21** independent city school districts in addition to the **159** county school districts

**$18.75 BILLION**

Total city and county spending in 2012

**$13.05 BILLION**

Total K–12 education expenditures 2013–14 school year
city decided to take ownership of both schools, and the middle school is being used for a Head Start program and Boys & Girls Club.

Because these two cases studies concern complex and often contentious issues of land use and school siting, the following lessons learned can be particularly helpful for similar types of collaborations.

• Communicate early and often to move the collaborative process forward.

• Use a neutral space or facilitator to create a positive atmosphere and allow voices to be equally heard.

• Unbiased data can help decision makers by ensuring all partners have similar reference points for difficult decisions as well as reducing confusion and misunderstanding.

• Get public input when collaborations will have a direct and significant impact on the community.

Fire Service Vocational Education

Fire service is a core function of local government that can be a challenge to provide. Communities throughout Georgia rely on career or volunteer firefighters, or a combination of the two. Recruiting and retaining volunteers is becoming more difficult as more people commute to work outside their home county or have less free time due to dual-income households. Cities and counties with career departments must spend considerable money training new firefighters. If these new recruits decide to transfer to another department or leave the service, the government’s resources have been wasted.

To overcome these issues, two Georgia communities, Newton County and the City of Hartwell, are working with their local school systems to offer vocational education classes in fire service for high school students. These programs are now possible because of the course flexibility allowed through the state’s college and career academy structure. The fire departments in both governments are mixed (career and volunteer), although Newton relies more heavily on career fire fighters and Hartwell on volunteers. Newton County’s partnership with the Newton College and Career Academy (NCCA) to offer a firefighter program for students began at the start of the 2013–2014 school year. The program has evolved since, currently including two year-long courses for juniors and seniors. The classes are taught by Newton County Fire Service staff at the career academy. Hartwell and the Hart County College and Career Academy (HCCCA) plan to begin their program in fall 2015. The HCCCA will offer one class, which will be taught by the city’s firefighters at the Hartwell fire station.
The local governments’ goal with these programs is to encourage students to join their respective fire departments. The courses also allow the departments to assess the interest and potential of the students to serve. The school systems see these programs as an opportunity to engage students and encourage attendance while providing them new career opportunities. Additional benefits to these collaborations are their relatively low cost as the classes are taught by fire personnel and ease in administration because they involve only one government department and one school in a school system.

Long before the fire vocational programs were created, local government and school officials in both communities made communication between the two organizations a priority. Through the Newton County Leadership Collaborative (discussed above), local leaders created a culture that helped make the fire program possible. Likewise, several years ago Hartwell’s leaders realized that promoting the city also meant supporting the school system. In 2008 Hart County, its cities, and its school system were selected as a University of Georgia Archway Community, which has helped foster this collaborative outlook.

Two primary lessons learned from these cases speak not just to these specific vocational fire programs but also to the larger culture of collaboration that has been created in these communities. First, collaboration begets collaboration, and second, leaders must have a common vision. Other lessons from these case studies include the importance of being creative, such as seeing students as potential firefighters; thinking long term; being open to change; respecting the expertise and needs of partners; and appreciating the knowledge gaps that may exist among partners when establishing each member’s contribution and expectations for the collaboration.

Juvenile Justice / Truancy Panels

In recent years, juvenile justice programming and implementation have evolved from the proverbial “throw away the key” approach to trying to address the underlying familial and youth behavioral issues that result in delinquency. Truancy panels are a prime example of this new direction. With truancy panels, schools bring together parents or guardians, school officials, and relevant social service agencies to try to determine why a student is habitually truant and to get him or her back in school. Schools and communities care about truancy because of the strong relationship between attendance and success in school, graduation, and even criminal behavior. Although several communities around Georgia have tried truancy panels, two in particular, Cherokee County and Clayton County, were cited during the key informant interviews as leaders in this effort.

The truancy panels in Cherokee and Clayton function similarly. After more informal school interventions to reduce truancy (i.e., letters and phone calls home, meetings with the student’s parent(s) or guardians) have proven ineffectual, then a truancy panel is
held. At this meeting, the student’s parents/guardians have the opportunity to explain why their child is habitually truant and panel members seek to help the family by providing referrals for family counseling, utility assistance, public housing, and so forth. At the conclusion of the panel, participants sign a contract that confirms each person’s responsibilities. For the child and parent, this always includes attending class, and failure to do so will result in the child/parent being sent to court. The panels have proven effective at reaching the most habitually truant children and are far less traumatizing then being sent to juvenile court. Furthermore, the programs are cost-effective as they only require staff time.

Beyond the many ideas for improving the functioning of the truancy panels themselves, these case studies demonstrate the importance of constantly communicating and having strong leadership to initiate and sustain the collaboration. These panels are long-term collaborations that require time and energy, such as ensuring that the right mix of organizations participates in the panels and that the individuals who represent the organizations are a good fit.

These cases also show that the communities involved have acknowledged that juvenile delinquency is more than a school or court problem and that multiple local and state agencies need to be engaged. The consequences of not addressing truancy, such as a high dropout rate, affect the entire community and thus should be a concern to all local government officials.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

While some insights from these case studies are specific to the policies involved, even more can be learned when all the collaborations are considered holistically. In general, the case studies confirm earlier research about the components needed for a successful collaboration. More importantly though, the case studies demonstrate that collaboration can be a useful governing tool to help school systems and local governments solve critical governance issues for their communities.

**There is no “ideal” situation for collaboration.**

The case studies include a diverse mix of environments and situations, demonstrating that successful collaboration is really about recognizing that a partnership could lead to better outcomes. A willingness to work together is far more important than searching for the right external conditions.

**Communication is key.**

In the case studies, effective communication was regularly cited as a key factor to the success of the collaboration. In fact, the only problems with the collaborations mentioned were related to lapses in communication. Furthermore, through open communication, trust among the collaborations’ members grew.
Cultivate respect and trust.
Interviewees in the case studies repeatedly discussed their respect for the collaboration itself and its objectives as well as for other members of the collaboration. They respected the other partners’ work and the mission of their organizations, their partners’ expertise and contributions to the collaboration, and the integrity of others as individuals.

Collaboration needs a leader.
In all of the case studies, a leader initiated the collaboration. Furthermore, a leader managed each partnership. In a couple of cases, the person who initiated the partnership transferred its management to another individual or organization. Doing so can sometimes help maintain a collaboration because the time and skill set required for starting a partnership differ from that needed to maintain one. The cases also show that leadership can come from all levels of an organization—from frontline professional to department director to school superintendent.

A neutral facilitator and space can be helpful.
When collaborations involve greater risk, either politically or financially, having a neutral space in which to meet can open dialog and reduce perceptions of inequality. A facilitator can ensure all voices are heard and can keep communication focused on moving the collaboration forward.

Allow the collaboration to evolve.
As conditions change, so too should a collaboration. If the status quo prevents partners from achieving their goals, then amending the collaboration is critical for it to move forward. In the case studies, some changes were deemed important and reasonable by the local governments and school systems, which allowed the partnership to progress productively.

Motivation is multifaceted.
The motivations of collaboration members in the case studies extended beyond bettering their own organizations (which is motivation enough!) but also included simply helping their communities. The interviewees demonstrated a sense of “public spiritedness” that reflects the true meaning of public service.

School system–local government collaboration offers opportunities to address complex problems, improve program effectiveness, and simply reduce costs. As the six case studies demonstrate, the potential for collaboration exists across the state. It is up to Georgia’s local and educational leaders to communicate with each other to find those areas with overlapping interests and then apply the lessons learned here to create successful partnerships.

NOTES
1. School board members, superintendents, county commissioners, city council members, city and county managers, and city clerks.
2. For school systems, judicial authority is more limited to personnel actions and student disciplinary proceedings.
Collaboration can be a good thing. That is the premise of this study, which examines collaboration between Georgia school systems and local governments. Reasons for collaboration include increased efficiency and better outcomes in areas where both partners have responsibility and/or could benefit. Research looking at public sector collaboration has found three key components to successful collaboration: motivation, communication, and leadership. Though opportunities exist for such collaboration across the state, it does not occur regularly or very frequently except in a few specific policy areas. However, some Georgia communities defy that norm. This study examines six such communities in three important policy areas. These case studies confirm that motivation, communication, and leadership are essential to successful collaborations, and they provide additional useful lessons for communities that want to begin their own efforts.

REPORT FORMAT
This report aims to increase knowledge and appreciation for collaboration opportunities between local governments and school systems in Georgia. The report is divided into three main sections.

• The first section provides background on the status of collaboration between local governments and school systems. It begins by reviewing the literature on collaboration, focusing on the conditions that foster successful collaboration efforts. It then presents findings from companion 2014 surveys of local government and school system officials in Georgia developed by the University of Georgia’s Carl Vinson Institute of Government and School of Public Administration and International Affairs regarding collaboration activities and perceptions. Finally, this section briefly examines the legal authority and responsibilities of Georgia cities, counties, and school districts that can drive or hinder collaboration.

• The second section introduces case studies of three policy areas in which schools and local governments have successfully collaborated in Georgia: siting new schools and land use planning, promoting fire service through vocational education, and juvenile justice and truancy panels. Within each area, the report highlights two governments that are making inroads into solving a public policy problem or reaching a goal. Each case study describes the problem being addressed, how the local government and school district are working together, and lessons learned for other communities considering adopting similar programs.
- The final section of the report synthesizes all of the lessons learned from the various case studies. The cases reinforce many of the ideas addressed in the literature, most importantly that collaboration can be successfully achieved. Finally, this section considers additional administrative and policy areas where collaboration is underutilized but could potentially improve outcomes for local governments and school systems.

**METHODOLOGY**

This project utilizes three common research methodologies: review of academic and practitioner literature and pertinent Georgia statutes, quantitative analysis through surveys, and qualitative research via in-depth interviews. Combined, the methods allow for a comprehensive understanding of school system–local government collaboration in Georgia and offer insight into how to encourage it.

The research took place in two phases: a preliminary stage to understand priorities for consolidation, followed by analysis of current collaboration efforts. In the first phase, Carl Vinson Institute of Government faculty conducted semi-structured interviews with several public policy experts representing school systems and local governments to learn the conditions discouraging collaboration, policy and program areas where collaboration is most needed, and examples of successful collaboration. Faculty also reviewed the literature on public sector collaboration. Unfortunately, little academic literature exists on US school–local government collaboration, and the practitioner-oriented literature is rather meager and ad hoc. Therefore, this study cites the more prevalent literature on collaboration between multipurpose local governments. Because school systems and local governments are both public sector organizations, the findings are still applicable.

To learn more about the practice of collaboration throughout the state, faculty from the Institute of Government and UGA’s School of Public and International Affairs developed two surveys: one for local government officials and the other for school district officials. The web-based surveys were sent to Georgia county commissioners, city council members, city and county managers, city clerks, school board members, and school superintendents. The surveys asked a variety of questions such as ranking the importance of collaboration; reasons for not collaborating; areas where collaboration is already occurring, is most important, or would be easiest to achieve; and how often the governing body or senior administrators meet with their school/local government counterparts. The appendix contains copies of the two surveys.

A large number of officials from local governments and school districts responded to their respective surveys. These responses came from across the state, including both very urban (e.g., City of Atlanta, Clayton County School District) and rural (e.g., City of Hahira, Quitman County School District) communities. For the local government survey, 294 respondents answered at least one question, representing 182 cities or counties, with an additional 51 respondents not providing their jurisdiction. A total of 133 people responded to the school survey, representing 96 school districts. Because each survey was sent to both elected and appointed officials from a single organization, multiple responses from some governments or school districts were received.
Location of Respondents to the Local Government and School System Surveys

School System
Local Government
The responses from the semi-structured interviews and the surveys informed the public policy areas examined in this report. For these areas, Institute faculty found examples of best practice in collaboration, often through the interviews. Literature and legal reviews on these specific policy areas helped to elucidate why collaboration could help improve policy outcomes. Faculty then interviewed key stakeholders in the communities involved to get details about the programs, lessons learned, and how the collaboration could be improved. Relevant documents and websites were reviewed as well.

PRIOR RESEARCH ON COLLABORATION

Collaboration is a process of mutual exchange and shared decision making among independent decision makers (Agranoff 2007). It can be viewed as occurring on a spectrum with the simplest level being communication, then progressing toward cooperation, and finally to full collaboration. Full collaboration involves the “linking or sharing of information, resources, activities, and capabilities by organizations that could not be achieved by the organizations separately” (Bryson et al. 2009, p. 78). However, collaboration is only a means to an end and should be viewed as a governing tool to improve policy or programmatic outcomes.

Creating Successful Collaborations

A collaborative process does not guarantee success. Rather, the right conditions and processes must be in place to achieve it (Thomson and Perry 2006). Three key facets must exist for a successful collaboration:

1. **Motivation and Mutuality**: People and organizations need to see a potential gain from collaboration (Thomson and Perry 2006; Logsdon 1991).

2. **Communication and Credibility**: Collaboration requires open communication, trust, and respect among participants (Gray 2000).

3. **Leadership**: Leadership to initiate and govern the collaboration is needed to sustain it (Huxham and Vangen 2000).

**Motivation and Mutuality**

All action begins with motivation. A go-it-alone attitude is pervasive among public sector organizations, because it is often easier and there are few incentives to collaborate. With sufficient resources to meet responsibilities and serve constituents, public officials often find it unnecessary to exert the additional effort required for collaboration (Alter and Hage 2003). Yet, as funds become scarcer and expectations of constituents and other stakeholders rise, so too does the push for new governing and service delivery models. Local governments and school districts face increasing pressure to improve operational efficiencies by using resources more effectively, and collaboration can be one means of...
doing so. A straightforward example of maximizing the benefit of a public asset is schools making their facilities available for community programs during nonschool hours.

There is also a growing awareness that complex problems may require collaborative arrangements for better solutions. According to the most recent International City/County Managers (ICMA) survey on intergovernmental arrangements (O’Leary and Gerard 2013), three of the five most common reasons for choosing to engage in such a partnership are improving outcomes, improving the problem-solving process, and building relationships and credibility. Collaboration is particularly useful when policy problems overlap organizational responsibilities or an action by one organization impacts another. For example, juvenile delinquency is generally recognized to be a complex social problem that requires input from a variety of public organizations to effectively mitigate, including schools, mental health providers, public health workers, and juvenile courts. Likewise, siting schools is legally the sole purview of school districts, yet in practice, building a new school often affects counties or cities in terms of road and utilities improvements and the availability of public safety personnel. When school districts go it alone with this critical responsibility, they can lower the overall public benefit by dramatically increasing costs for other public organizations. In contrast, a robust working relationship between school districts and local governments can ease the financial burden imposed on other service providers. Similarly, collaboration can mitigate the impact of local governments’ zoning and economic development decisions on school districts.

Also from the ICMA survey, the remaining top two reasons for collaboration concern external parties either implicitly or explicitly mandating it. Other research has shown that parties cannot or do not self-organize into collaborative ar-

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**Georgia Facts**

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Note: 8 consolidated governments are being counted as both cities and counties.
Source: Georgia Department of Community Affairs

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**Georgia has**

- **21** independent city school districts and
- **159** county school districts

Source: Georgia County Guide 2013

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**$18.8 BILLION**

Total city and county spending in 2012

Source: US Census Fact Finder

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**$13.0 BILLION**

Total K–12 education expenditures 2013–14 school year

Source: US Census Fact Finder
arrangements without assistance from an outside party to provide structure or institutional support such as rules or laws (Bardach 1998). Conversely, a lack of such external pressure will decrease the drive to collaborate. Historically, the state of Georgia has neither implicitly nor explicitly mandated collaboration, with only a handful of exceptions such as for truancy protocol committees and law enforcement and crime detection.

**Communication and Credibility**

Public organizations must be willing to communicate with others about common or overlapping needs in order to initiate and sustain collaboration. Good communication is a willingness to share information concerning joint responsibilities such as expectations of partners, available resources, and even external pressures that might affect the success of the collaboration (Mattessich and Monsey 1992). Furthermore, honest and open communication can help build trust among partners. Leaders play a key role in facilitating collaboration through effective communication.

Successful and repeated collaboration, as in an ongoing program, relies on parties having a reputation of credibility that induces trust and a willingness to share responsibility. A sustaining collaboration is built on trust and respect. Each member needs to believe that the other partners are doing what is necessary for its and the group’s goals to be ultimately met, whether it be sharing information, contributing resources, or promoting rather than hindering progress. For example, an organization that regularly blocks action or appears to be serving only its own ends will lose the respect and trust of other members. Likewise, an organization with a reputation for not pulling its weight will not easily find future collaboration partners (Bardach 1998).

**Leadership**

Collaboration requires leadership to create a vision for what joint action can accomplish (Clift et al. 1995). A quality leader serves as the linchpin to a successful collaboration by articulating the motivation for it and communicating shared information. A 2010 study found that leaders make the biggest impact in three ways (Huxham and Vangen 2000):

1. Managing power and keeping the agenda focused on joint action
2. Representing and mobilizing member organizations toward joint action
3. Building trust

These responsibilities are important for both creating and sustaining a collaboration. Managing power and keeping an agenda focused includes setting expectations for the partnership, such as requiring all members to participate regularly or ensuring that promised resources are forthcoming. In the case studies in this report, some leaders also manage group membership to ensure the collaboration continues successfully. Leadership can change over time as long as the new person or organization continues to fulfill the necessary responsibilities. In fact, collaborations may require different kinds of leadership over time. Persons effective at initiating a collaboration may not do as well with managing members and sustaining action.
COLLABORATION IN GEORGIA: SURVEY RESULTS

Collaboration between school systems and their respective local governments in Georgia is valued and occurring, but to varying degrees. Figure 1 shows that 75 percent of respondents to the local government survey indicated that collaboration with the school district was either extremely or very important, while less than 4 percent answered that collaboration was either very unimportant or not important at all. School system leaders felt more strongly about collaborating with their local governments: 89 percent responded that it was either extremely or very important. Furthermore, of the responses, 80 percent of the identified governments are currently collaborating with their school district in at least one area.9 From the school system respondents, the level of collaboration is even higher: approximately 96 percent indicated at least one type of collaboration.10 A handful of policy or program areas were popular candidates for partnerships: emergency management and preparedness, school public safety, recreational and sports programs, and sharing school facilities for nonrecreational activities. Of those areas, two are related to safety (emergency management, public safety) and thus have a high motivation factor, while recreation programs and facility sharing are relatively easy ways to collaborate due to the low cost and lack of sacrifice required from either party.
To ascertain what may be hindering collaboration between school districts and local governments, the survey asked respondents to indicate their top three obstacles. Both local government and school district officials cited the same top three reasons for not collaborating: financial constraints, different missions, and not being a leadership priority of the other organization (see Figure 2). The last two obstacles both show a perceived lack of motivation to partner. Financial constraints relate to the legal barriers placed on local governments and school districts regarding how they each can use money (i.e., the gratuities clause for local governments and constitutional prohibitions for schools), which can hamper collaboration efforts.

Communication is a critical component of collaboration, and responses from the surveys show it occurs relatively infrequently between the elected and top appointed officials of school districts and local governments. Responses from both groups suggest a dearth of formal and informal communication. Figure 3 shows that of the school system and local government respondents, only 20 percent said they meet formally with their counterparts more than once a year, 21 percent do so annually, 10 percent on an as-needed/as-requested basis, and nearly half (46%) rarely or never formally convene. An additional 2 percent meet occasionally.
Informal meetings occur more often, perhaps because officials in small communities know and see one another in the community. Approximately 39 percent (38.6%) of officials informally meet more than once a year, 14 percent annually, just 5 percent meet occasionally or periodically, and 31 percent rarely or never informally meet (see Figure 4). Nine percent get together informally on an as-needed or as-requested basis. Collaboration is not likely to thrive when leaders of school systems and local governments do not communicate. A first step toward encouraging collaboration is for top officials to regularly interact. Through ongoing discussions, members of both groups may learn about opportunities for collaboration.

The responses to the survey questions about interest in collaboration, barriers to collaboration, and levels of communication show a common phenomenon in intergovernmental relations. Miscommunication or a lack of communication can often lead to misunderstandings about intent as well as lost opportunities. Survey responses appear to reflect this problem, which fortunately can be easily resolved. Regular communication demonstrates an interest in collaboration and can dispel perceptions that the groups do not have overlapping interests. Although their activities differ, school districts and local governments both serve the public: Local governments appreciate the importance of successful schools, and school districts want their communities to thrive.
LEGAL INDEPENDENCE

The lack of collaboration between school systems and local governments ultimately stems from their tradition of strong local authority and legal independence. Cities and counties have home rule authority, and school systems operate under separate constitutional and statutory authority (Krane et al. 2001). Their independence is multifaceted, encompassing distinct missions, governing authority, taxing and revenue-generating authority, and executive authority over their respective jurisdictions. Table 1 shows the various ways in which school districts and local governments have independent legal authority. School districts and local governments can successfully coexist without any direct input from one another.

Purpose

The state constitution and statutes define and distinguish what local governments\textsuperscript{14} and schools and school systems\textsuperscript{15} can and cannot do. These mandates create a framework that either encourages or discourages collaboration. Local governments are creations of the state, and because Georgia is a “Dillon’s Rule” state, its local governments may only take actions that state law expressly gives them permission to do or are necessarily implied from those expressed powers (Grubiak and Pridgen 2010; Moore 2012). These powers collectively serve as the purpose of the local government and include providing

Figure 4. Frequency of informal communication.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig4}
\caption{Frequency of informal communication.}
\end{figure}
services like planning and zoning, street maintenance, law enforcement, fire protection, and so forth. Likewise, the state constitution has clearly defined the authority of school districts through their governing body—school boards—to establish policies that prescribe how school administrators, district employees, and students function in the school environment.

Governing Bodies

The governing bodies of both local governments and school districts have the power to enforce and enact their authority. These governing bodies are independently elected\(^16\) and thus, unlike appointed boards, are not beholden to another local body.

School boards, county commissions, and city councils each have the power to enact policies (ordinances) that govern their jurisdiction, reflecting the priorities and values of their organization.\(^17\) These policies can be created without the input of other local jurisdictions unless specifically prescribed by state law, such as with comprehensive planning or cities and counties determining the distribution of local option sales taxes (LOST). Because Georgia law provides so few instances requiring coordination over policy development, school districts and local governments can determine their respective courses without regard to each other.

Revenue and Budgeting Authority

State law gives both school districts\(^18\) and local governments\(^19\) the power to independently collect local tax revenue and to budget for expenditures. For school districts, revenue raising authority is limited to property taxes and, if approved by local referendum, a sales tax to fund capital projects. Local governments have a wider array of revenue raising options because they receive less funding from the state. This taxing independence extends to when a school district or county places their respective local sales tax referendums on the ballot and setting property tax millage rates. Local governments have more discretion over deciding the allocation of resources than do school districts because of the latter’s restrictions associated with federal
and state educational grants and appropriations. However, neither school districts nor local governments must obtain budget approval from the other. Their financial independence nearly always means that local governments and school districts are not required to communicate about even such basic financial issues as coordinating when sales tax referendums will be placed on the ballot, even though doing so might reduce political opposition.²⁰

**Executive Authority**

Again, the Georgia constitution and state law enables school districts and cities and counties to manage their organizations without the assistance of the other. For local governments, this power is granted through home rule, with the charter clarifying which position within a government has executive authority, whether it be a manager, commission chair, or mayor. For school districts, the daily management resides with the superintendent; however, the school board appoints the superintendent,²¹ similar to the manager or administrator form of government. School boards, county commissions, and city councils all have legal authority to approve personnel decisions, acquire and dispose of property, enter into contracts, borrow money, and approve an annual budget.²² An environment that allows organizations to administer daily activities without input from other groups encourages them to act as silos.

**Judicial Authority**

Judicial matters are another area of potential collaboration, particularly in regard to juvenile courts, which research has shown can benefit from strong partnerships. Ultimately, juvenile violations of state law, even truancy, fall under the purview of a county court (juvenile court). However, in other matters, Georgia law gives school districts the
The Georgia School Boards Association’s eLaw offers a few examples.

- A board must conduct a hearing when the superintendent seeks to terminate the employment of an employee who has a contract for a definite term or when the superintendent has not recommended the rehiring of a “tenured” employee and that employee has demanded a hearing under the Fair Dismissal Act.

- The board may be required, under certain circumstances, to convene a hearing to determine if the superintendent’s decision with regard to other employment issues was based on an illegal reason.

- The board also serves as an appellate tribunal when students appeal the results of student disciplinary tribunal proceedings, but in these situations the board only reviews the record created by the disciplinary tribunal to determine the sufficiency of the evidence.

- Finally, the board serves as a tribunal to hear and determine “any matter of local controversy in reference to the construction or administration of the school law.”

**Other Legal Issues**

Except for a handful of isolated instances, Georgia law does not directly mandate collaboration between school districts and local governments. In fact, very few requirements exist for even basic cooperation. Since the Georgia legislature has historically not mandated collaboration either explicitly or implicitly between these two entities, collaboration between these organizations has been locally initiated.

The state constitution and enacted law can, in fact, discourage collaboration. The state constitution prohibits school systems from spending any funds that are not directly related to “the support and maintenance of public schools, public vocational-technical schools, public education, and activities necessary or incidental thereto.” This provision even prevents schools from helping to pay for infrastructure improvements deemed necessary from school construction. Likewise, the constitution’s gratuities clause prohibits cities and counties from granting “any donation or gratuity or ... forgiving any debt or obligation owing to the public.” Although, the state constitution includes an exception allowing counties and cities to make purely charitable donations, the authority to do so must be specifically authorized by the General Assembly (Moore 2012). The constitution further states that in order to be valid, local governments must possess the underlying authority to provide the services or facilities they seek to offer jointly with other governments. In other words, a local government must have legal authority over a service in order to provide it. Since local governments do not have any power regarding school policy or operations, they cannot directly assist in providing services for schools.
CONCLUSION

The legal environment of Georgia’s school districts and local governments, while not prohibiting collaboration, does little to encourage it. These groups have distinct missions, independently elected governing bodies, and the authority to raise and spend money for their operations. According to national survey research, two of the most common reasons why local governments collaborate are explicit and implicit encouragement from external parties. Since Georgia school districts and local governments lack these motivations, collaboration must be driven by local officials’ desire to improve organizational performance. Yet, the research also shows that motivation is not enough for collaboration to succeed. The process needs strong leadership, open communication, and trust and respect among members. The collaboration case studies discussed in the next section demonstrate these qualities.

This interdependence of outcomes can serve as a strong motivator for collaboration. Whether a collaboration ultimately comes to fruition depends on whether an organization with legal authority over an issue or program is willing to share power and to trust that partners will reciprocate with power sharing when independence and dependence are reversed. Finally, to succeed, both school systems and local governments must take the three facets of collaboration discussed earlier seriously—communication, credibility, and leadership.
perennial source of discontent between school districts and local governments concerns new school siting and planning and zoning decisions, because each group has complete authority within its own area yet its decisions can have serious fiscal and organizational impacts on the other party. The one-on-one interviews and survey responses revealed that collaboration is often lacking in this area despite being strongly needed. Challenging this norm, two Georgia communities have been working to address the complex and often contentious issues associated with school siting and land use by regularly communicating, using data to inform decision makers, and thinking holistically about community needs. In the first such community, Newton County, collaboration between the local governments and school district is part of a larger comprehensive land use program. The second such collaboration involves the City of Metter and the Candler County School District, who have worked together to transfer ownership of vacated schools.

BACKGROUND

The case studies for Newton County/the Newton County School System (NCSS) and the City of Metter/the Candler County School District (CCSD) differ significantly in terms of the land use issue addressed and the type of community, which makes the common reasons for successful collaboration all the more significant.

In the early 2000s, Newton County experienced a dramatic increase in residential development, changing the character of the county from primarily rural to a bedroom community of Atlanta. With growth came the need for additional schools. Yet, interaction between the school system and the local governments followed the pattern typical throughout Georgia: each acted independently with little direct communication or joint planning. One outcome of this culture was Alcovy High School, which opened in 2006 (site selection took place a couple of years earlier). Because the school would be on a septic system, the district needed a large lot that was also affordable, and it selected an area in a rural part of the county. Locating the school in this area has resulted in higher transportation costs for the district, greater traffic congestion in the area, and longer commute times for students. The school’s location demonstrated for community leaders the importance of communication and joint planning.

Metter (population 4,130) is the county seat of Candler County, a small rural county in Southeast Georgia.33 As is common in such a community, the schools serve as a focal
point for community involvement. Likewise, city and school district leaders communicate regularly, especially since three of the four schools were originally located inside Metter’s municipal footprint. However, interaction had long involved simply sharing information and was not collaborative or strategic in nature.

In March 2010, Candler County Schools began discussing a five-year facility plan. The plan was approved in June of that year and projected the need for a new pre-kindergarten–fifth grade facility and a sixth–eighth grade facility to replace aging buildings, some of which were built in the 1950s. The following year, the school board informed the city that it had decided to co-locate the new facilities with Metter High School, which sits approximately three miles outside the city limits and was built in 1999. The problem then became what to do with the soon-to-be-vacant schools.

NEED FOR COLLABORATION

Both school district and local government officials agreed that collaboration in the areas of school siting and land use would be beneficial, particularly when the other party has the decision-making authority. For both groups, their independence from the other over land use is nearly complete, making collaboration a purely voluntary exercise. Even in regard to zoning, school districts are exempt from city and county regulatory authority.

In the case of siting schools, districts must consider a myriad of issues such as state approval for the site, proximity to other schools, and of course, land cost. To address these concerns, districts must often buy land for new schools in less developed areas because they are less expensive. However, a more rural location can have a significant financial effect on local governments. For example, a county may have to widen a road or build turning lanes due to increased traffic levels around the new school, or the government may need to extend utilities to the school site. Public safety considerations may arise as well. Beyond additional sheriff or police patrols, the county may need to add a fire station to ensure the school is adequately served. At a more fundamental level, school location can drive residential growth patterns. New residential development often occurs near a new school because families want to be close to it; however, this process may conflict with the county’s comprehensive plan.

Other economic and cultural difficulties can arise when a school district closes a school located in an urban area and builds a new one elsewhere. A school district may choose to close a school rather than refurbish it for a variety of legitimate reasons, including high renovation costs, wanting to consolidate or co-locate schools, and so forth. However, vacant schools can have negative consequences as well. Schools provide vibrancy to a neighborhood by creating a sense of community and generating traffic as children and parents go to and from the school, helping local businesses, both of which decrease when a school closes. Problems are exacerbated when school buildings are left vacant, sometimes resulting in blight. Yet local governments lack the authority to address the problem as they can with private property (i.e., issue citations, seize the property, demolition). Furthermore, as long as the school district retains ownership of a vacant property, it cannot be put to new use either by another government or by a private owner who would pay property taxes.
Likewise, planning, zoning, and economic development decisions of local governments have significant revenue and service impacts for schools. Since property taxes are a school district’s only local operating revenue source, any decision that affects property values affects its ability to raise revenue. Furthermore, local governments’ decisions regarding residential property development can create challenges for school districts, particularly when the property taxes gained from a development are insufficient to pay for the additional children that will live in the new housing units. For districts already at their maximum 20 mil tax levy, officials must find cost savings within existing services. Even when a new development is not directly related to housing, communication between local government and school district officials is important. Significant economic development projects are a benefit for the entire community; however, such projects often result in population growth. School districts need to plan for this growth just like the local government. By being informed of new development projects, school districts can ensure that their facility plans are as appropriate as possible.

THE NEWTON COUNTY COLLABORATIVE

The site selection of Alcovy High School set the stage for a new philosophy in Newton County. To better control Newton County’s future and identity, the county government, the five municipalities, the Newton County School System, the chamber of commerce, and the Newton County Water & Sewerage Authority joined together in 2005 to create the Leadership Collaborative. Through the Collaborative, elected and appointed officials from all member organizations regularly meet to discuss how to create a better community through three working committees: development, communication, and finance. The Collaborative meets in a neutral space called the Center for Community Preservation and Planning, which was initially funded in 2002 through a local foundation, with ongoing revenue earned through a project-based service agreement, space rentals, grants, and donations. The center provides technical and administrative support for the Collaborative.

Through the Collaborative, members learn about and discuss often contentious but critical issues such as taxation, infrastructure development, and community planning. From staff and expert consultants, members have learned about key issues affecting schools and local governments such as the amount of tax revenue generated from different types of development. Having a common source of information allows for improved understanding among members, particularly when it comes to the school district’s concerns about the net financial impact of new development.

With the help of center staff, the Collaborative created the 2050 Plan, a new comprehensive plan developed over several years to guide future development. The plan calls for creating “compact communities,” with 88 percent of the population on 38 percent of the land. The remaining parts of the county would continue to be for rural/agricultural use or for conservation. Using the 2050 Plan as a guide, staff and consultants drafted an initial set of baseline countywide ordinances that have been presented to the public. Although the 2050 Plan received unified support from Collaborative members, residents have raised questions about the best way to implement it through the proposed regulations. After receiving much public input, the draft regulations are on hold.
As part of this planning process, the NCSS cooperatively developed a site plan for all current and future schools that complements the 2050 Plan. Relatively recently, the NCSS’s commitment to the site plan was put to the test. The school system needed to close one of its elementary schools and build a larger one, Flint Hill, and it used the site plan as a guide for where to build it. However, the district had difficulty finding an appropriate, affordable location. To overcome this problem, the county’s industrial development authority sold some of its land within the limits of the City of Covington and the compact community zone to NCSS. The school system worked with the City of Covington and the water and sewer authority to acquire easements and extend utility lines. The county is now working with the Georgia Department of Transportation on rights-of-way to improve road access. This level of cooperation among all the parties as well as the school district’s dedication to finding a site location inside the compact community zone would likely not have happened prior to the Collaborative.

During the Collaborative’s meetings, members can freely (but courteously) disagree because they have developed a culture of respect and trust acquired through regular communication in a neutral space. Likewise, there is a high level of information sharing that did not exist prior to the Collaborative. Through monthly committee and annual organization-wide meetings, members learn about each other’s operating budgets, development plans, capital improvement schedules, and respective local options sales tax proposals. For example, the school district is now kept informed of new developments and zoning changes. Through the Collaborative, member organizations are even working to develop agreed upon criteria for annually evaluating capital projects to ensure alignment between the NCSS and the county, on whose infrastructure the NCSS relies. Likewise, NCSS officials talk with their local government counterparts about what
will be included in upcoming education local option sales tax (ELOST) referendums. The communication has also resulted in changing attitudes. Community leaders work together rather than blaming or criticizing each other in public.

“In many instances, information sharing and accommodation are more informal yet also helpful. “Simply knowing who to call” has been a big improvement, according to School Superintendent Samantha Fuhrey. She offered a simple but meaningful example with the county’s public works department. Immediately prior to the first day of school in 2014, Fuhrey saw major construction equipment alongside a road in front of one of the schools. It looked like the county was about to undertake road construction on the first day of school.

This could have been a traffic congestion disaster, since nearly every parent drives his or her child to school on the first day. All Ms. Fuhrey had to do was make one phone call to the county, and the public works department delayed the construction one day. Crisis averted. Prior to the Collaborative, Ms. Fuhrey would not even have known who to call.

Even though the countywide baseline ordinances have not yet been approved by the county commission, the Collaborative has helped create a culture of communication and openness among leaders in Newton County. Since the inception of the Leadership Collaborative, less than a quarter of the community’s elected leadership who attended the first meeting in 2005 are still in office, yet the organization remains strong because new members learn about its importance and can see its benefits (Miller and Lee 2012). The NCSS strongly supports the 2050 Plan’s goals and the Collaborative. In fact, Superintendent Fuhrey believes that the NCSS will stay committed to its new school site plan because the district supports keeping schools near population centers in order to promote walkable communities, reduce the impacts of new schools on local governments, and grow school-community relationships.

CITY OF METTER AND CANDLER COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

Soon after deciding to relocate its elementary and middle schools, the Candler County School Board commissioned a study from Georgia Southern University’s Bureau of Business Research and Economic Development (BBRED) to help the members determine optimal uses for the two schools that would be vacated in 2014 (Halaby and McKay 2013). This act alone was a huge step toward a successful collaboration because it showed the school board’s commitment to supporting the city and its residents. The BBRED study included extensive surveying of both community leadership and the public. The final report, which was completed in March 2013, offered a variety of options for the buildings’ reuse, listing the benefits, limitations, and cost of each. According to School Superintendent Tom Bigwood, the study was helpful because it was unbiased.
and, as it came from a neutral third party, had high credibility with the community. From the outset, the stated goal of the Candler County School District (CCSD) was to reuse the buildings in a positive way for the community.

The results of the study indicated strong support for converting the former Metter Elementary School (MES) facility into a combined police department and Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) Drug Task Force facility. The building that housed the Metter Police Department was aging and cramped, and the GBI was looking to relocate to a regionally central spot with easy interstate highway access. Additionally, MES was located in a socioeconomically challenged area, so it was believed the relocation could help deter crime in the neighborhood. Neighborhood leaders welcomed increased police presence and were encouraged that the building would not become an abandoned eyesore. With public support, identified tenants, and specific ideas about how to repurpose the space, the reuse of the MES facility was an easy sell to city leaders. The building transfer took place in 2014 at no cost to the City of Metter.

The Metter Intermediate and Middle School (MIS/MMS) facility presented a greater challenge. This complex is located in a middle-class neighborhood made up of single family homes, limiting to some degree the kinds of uses that would be deemed acceptable by residents. For example, major commercial or industrial development would be incongruous with the neighborhood. The property is also adjacent to the Candler County Recreation Department facilities. The BBRED study suggested several options for the multibuilding complex, including converting the detached gymnasium into a church or a Boys & Girls Club facility, or selling it to an unnamed private owner. With no clear tenant, the fate of the facility as a whole was in limbo.
In fall 2013, Candler County became the University of Georgia’s newest Archway Partnership community. As part of the partnership, community leaders, including those from the county, cities, and school district, come together through an executive committee. The executive committee meets monthly in order to direct the community’s goals and priorities for Archway and oversee their implementation. The executive committee meetings served as a “safe place” for all of the decision makers to come together regularly and discuss their plans for the future, their wish lists, and their fiscal challenges. The Candler County commissioners expressed an interest in owning the detached gymnasium, with plans for expanded recreation programs. The idea that the Boys & Girls Club of Candler County would relocate there was beginning to take shape, and Head Start Early Intervention was seeking a new home as well.

As a result of conversations around the Archway table, representatives from CCSD, the city, the county, and local nonprofits began to revisit their ideas and to plan strategically for repurposing the MIS/MMS site. Eventually, the City of Metter agreed to take ownership of the school buildings because the government wanted to control their future use. The Candler County Recreation Department accepted the gymnasium, weight room, and athletic fields, which complemented their adjacent facilities. The property transfers occurred at no cost to either government. Currently, the school buildings are occupied by the Boys & Girls Club of Candler County and Head Start. However, because the former schools facility is so large, much vacant space remains. During Archway meetings, participants are still discussing what could occupy that space. In fact, at the most recent executive committee retreat, members discussed consolidating nonprofit services and creating a one-stop shop for social service outreach.
Archway not only serves as a sounding board, but also brings resources for solutions to potential issues with the MIS/MMS site. As a result of discussions and visioning sessions in Archway work group meetings, Metter is currently considering pursuing a $500,000 Community Development Block Grant for renovations to the Boys & Girls Club/HeadStart complex, and UGA College of Environment and Design students have assisted the county recreation department with designs to size the newly acquired athletic fields for youth play.

In their interviews, both Metter City Manager Joseph Mosley and Superintendent Bigwood discussed the ease of the planning process for school reuse. Both officials agree that had Archway been in place when discussions on school relocation were in their infancy, there would have been more open and collaborative communication with greater focus on the long-term benefits of the facilities’ reuse and less focus on budget constraints and other minutiae. Additionally, both men see value in the discussions that, however belated, were made possible because community leaders meet frequently in a nonconfrontational format that offers neutral, facilitated conversation when needed.

**REASONS FOR SUCCESS AND LESSONS LEARNED**

School siting decisions can be contentious because of their impact on local governments. However, NCSS and CCSD realized that this does not have to be the case and chose to work with their local governments to ensure a positive outcome for all parties rather than making decisions unilaterally.

**Communicate – A Lot**

All of the interviewees stressed the importance of early and open communication to keep the decision-making process moving forward. Officials must be able to express their concerns and seek solutions with partners. Collaboration members also emphasized informal communication: They could simply “pick up the phone” if a problem arose, such as when Superintendent Fuhrey asked the county to delay road construction slated for the first day of school. When informal communication can help solve smaller problems, the bigger issues remain the focus of the collaboration.

**Create a Neutral Space**

When a collaboration is working to address a contentious issue, having a facilitator and/or neutral space can be very helpful. A facilitator can help to ensure dialog moves the
collaboration forward rather than becoming sidetracked. This was particularly true for participants in Metter. A facilitator may only be needed occasionally, such as when a difficult decision has to be made. In those instances, it may be helpful to hire a consultant to manage the meeting. Likewise, a neutral space can help create a positive atmosphere for a collaboration. A neutral physical location removes the appearance that one organization has more authority or leads the collaboration, instead stressing the equality of all members. A neutral space has been very important for the Leadership Collaborative and is strongly supported by members of its Communication Committee.

**Data Can Help Decision Making**

Both collaborations have relied heavily on data, whether it be the BBRED study for the Candler County School District or Leadership Collaborative staff and consultants in Newton County providing information about growth impacts to members. Unbiased information can reduce confusion and misunderstandings and provides a foundation from which collaboration partners can draw ideas. In sum, participants can be on the proverbial “same page” with a common set of information. Data can help partners better understand the current situation, as occurred with the Newton County Collaborative, or find solutions to a problem, as was the case with the BBRED study. Although data collection takes time and often money, if the situation that led to the collaboration is complex and significant potential for misunderstanding exists, this investment would likely be worthwhile.

**Get Public Input**

As all local public officials know, programs or projects that will significantly affect the community need citizen input. In both Newton and Candler counties, participants sought out public opinion to ensure that the directions taken by the collaborations matched residents’ desires and expectations. Through the BBRED study, the Candler County School District learned how residents felt about the various reuse alternatives. Although not directly related to the NCSS’s school siting plan, the Newton County Leadership Collaborative has historically encouraged public input. In its latest effort, the Collaborative sought extensive public input through a series of meetings over the proposed baseline county zoning ordinances.
The typical partners for high schools offering career, technical, and agricultural education (e.g., career academies) are technical colleges and businesses, not local governments. Yet, several school districts across the state have developed programs of study aimed at promoting local government service such as law enforcement and/or fire service. Although fire service has been less frequently adopted than other programs, it offers an interesting opportunity to increase interest in career or volunteer firefighting by young adults. This section discusses two schools that have or are about to offer classes in fire service—Hart County High School and Newton College and Career Academy—and their local government partners. These cases demonstrate that promoting fire service through schools offers a wonderful opportunity for students to learn about a career in a critical government service and for fire departments to potentially increase the number of local firefighters.

BACKGROUND

The Hartwell and Newton County cases differ in regard to fire service needs, but their approach of going through their local high schools is the same. The City of Hartwell Fire Department is a combination department that relies heavily on a large volunteer contingent (20 volunteers, with only nine career firefighters). Because Hartwell is a small city (pop. 4,489) located in a rural county, it will continue to rely on volunteers into the foreseeable future. Finding volunteers is a challenge because the county’s population is aging and many male residents would have trouble meeting the physical and agility requirements for firefighting. This issue is compounded by relatively younger residents often working outside the county and not being available to respond to calls during the daytime.

In contrast, Newton County over the last two decades has evolved from being predominately rural to an area with growing suburbanization and residential lots. The county recently passed the 100,000 population threshold and therefore no longer qualifies for state firefighting assistance, such as with investigations. As in Hartwell, volunteer availability during the workweek has become more limited. Historically, many county volunteers were farmers, and because they worked from home, they could go out if called during the day. With fewer farmers and more volunteers going to a workplace, often outside of the county, their ability to make daytimes calls has declined. As a result of these demographic changes, the Newton County Fire Department predominately
hires career firefighters and only supports two volunteer departments. Though the types of firefighters Hartwell and Newton County need differ, both communities want local recruits as a way to encourage service continuity.

The local high schools provide an excellent opportunity for successful collaboration with the fire departments because the school districts want to give their students access to interesting classes that provide avenues to meaningful employment or community service. For both schools, their designations as charter schools help make fire services programs possible. The Newton College and Career Academy originated as a charter school, and Hart County School District recently voted to become a charter system. These designations offer the schools greater flexibility with course structure, such as the number of students in a class, class times and length, and course instructors.

**NEED FOR COLLABORATION**

The demand for firefighters, particularly volunteers, is not limited to the counties in this case study but rather is a challenge across the state. Currently, of the state’s 615 fire departments, 414 are strictly volunteer and an additional 66 are combination departments (including the two discussed here). An additional 130 departments have only career firefighters, and the remaining five are fire academies. Of the 32,907 firefighters in the state, 13,410 are career.

Though demand for volunteer firefighters is high, supply is running short in the state and nationally. Both recruitment and retention are problems faced by many communities. At the national level, the number of volunteers has declined 13 percent since 1984 (National Volunteer Fire Council 2014), and the average tenure for a volunteer is just four years per department (see Buckman et al. 2004). Common issues often affecting recruitment and retention include:

- Increased demand for emergency calls and the specialized training those calls require
- Volunteers using their positions as stepping stones to career employment in a fire department
- Difficulty balancing career and family demands, particularly for two-income families. This issue is often given as a reason for the shortage of new volunteers into fire service.
- Providing benefits to protect the livelihood of a volunteer and his or her family in the event of an injury or death while the volunteer is on duty. In Georgia, all career and volunteer firefighters have access to a supplemental pension benefit that is based on “pension creditable service.” However, each local government determines any disability benefits available for its firefighters.

Likewise, retention of career firefighters is a problem for governments that have not fully recovered from the 2007–2009 Great Recession and have not kept salaries competitive. This has been the case for Newton County. Turnover is especially problematic
for career positions, not only because of the management and organizational disruption but because of the training costs involved. A newly hired firefighter in Newton County undertakes 560 hours of paid basic training at a cost of $8,000 plus equipment, which is an additional $3,500. This cost excludes the time of the department’s staff who instruct the firefighters, typically three to six people. Newton County Fire Services Chief Kevin O’Brien estimates that the department invests approximately $18,000–$20,000 for a single new firefighter. When this person leaves because he or she realizes a fire career is not a good fit or transfers to another community, the department’s investment is wasted. Chief O’Brien estimates the county has spent approximately $1 million training staff over the last five years, primarily on people who are no longer with the department.

NEWTON COLLEGE AND CAREER ACADEMY–NEWTON COUNTY FIRE SERVICE COLLABORATION

During a tour of the Newton College and Career Academy (NCCA) a couple of years ago, Fire Chief Kevin O’Brien began discussing with the then principal James Woodard the possibility of creating a fire services program at the school. The fire services program, now in its second year, is considered quite successful by both the school district and the fire department. Each party went into the collaboration with different goals. For the fire department, it was twofold: support the community and develop a quality local applicant pool. Through the program, the fire department would have time to properly assess students’ work ethic and ensure that their values align with those of the department. Not infrequently, recruits are not fully prepared for the work and lifestyle that a career in fire service entails. Through the NCCA, students learn extensively about the profession and can make more educated decisions about whether to pursue fire service...
as a career. From the school district’s point of view, administrators consider three factors when adding a program: interest from students, industry need for employees not just now but over the next five to 10 years, and physical space to accommodate it. In the case of the fire services program, all three were readily met.

This is NCCA’s first local government partnership and also one of its most interactive. Cyndie Taylor-Ridling, Newton County’s fire safety education and public outreach director, teaches the courses and is a certified fire instructor. Her responsibilities encompass those of a typical certified teacher, including course development, grading, and even contacting parents of truant students and attending students’ Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings. As part of the agreement, the school does not pay for Taylor-Ridling’s time. This level of industry interaction is relatively unusual: A more common scenario is for an instructor from the school or technical college partner to teach the class, with students getting direct exposure to the industry through field trips, internships, and career fairs. Woodard believes that having a firefighter as the instructor is excellent way of providing real-world engagement for students, and Taylor-Ridling’s courses are as close to on-the-job training as it gets.

Newton County’s goal through the NCCA collaboration is to prepare students for a career in fire service. In fact, students who do well in the program should be prepared to take the written portions of the Fire Fighter 1 and Fire Fighter 2 exams after graduation. The NCCA fire service program is designed so that graduating students, all of whom should be 18 or nearly so, can take a position as a Newton County Fire Services volunteer. Once in the position, the student will train in the handful of areas he or she was unable to as a student, such as with live fire, and then take the certification test while the course material is still fresh for the students. The students can serve as volunteers until a career position opens. Based on Taylor-Ridling’s interaction with the students, the fire department will know which ones would make the best candidates and will hire them. Though the students will still need formal training, the department can feel more secure that the hire will succeed and stay with the county.

The NCCA fire service program consists of two yearlong courses. The first course is open to juniors and the second to seniors who have completed the first course. The courses are rigorous from both an academic and practitioner standpoint, even using The Essentials of Firefighting text book, which is used for training career firefighters across the country. In addition to their academic requirements, students receive extensive hands-on experience through the class. The students regularly wear their turnout suits and work with fire equipment through the three simulators that the department and school built. The students become certified in CPR and first aid through the courses as well. County fire specialists work with the students in specific areas, and Taylor-Ridling even schedules a fire truck to come to the school so students can practice working on it. Finally, students take field trips to public safety offices such as a fire station and an E-911 center.

Second-year students are encouraged to participate in the fire department’s Explorers program as well. The Fire Explorers is a national program that introduces young people
(ages 14–20) to fire service through hands-on experiences. Many departments across
the state have this program, including the City of Covington Fire Department. The
county’s program had become dormant, so Taylor-Ridling revived it in order to dovetail
with the NCCA class. Through the Explorer’s program, the students can take “ride
alongs,” which cannot occur through the NCCA class for liability reasons. Additionally,
students are assigned a firefighter mentor who answers questions about the fire service
and watches over the student while on a call. Explorer members pay dues and have
fundraisers to participate in regional competitions.

Taylor-Ridling believes students participating the NCCA program are more
marketable, even if they do not pursue a career in fire service. Their knowledge
about public safety and demonstrated interest in community service make them
a high-quality job candidate or college applicant. In fact, a 2013–2014 program
alumnus has already been hired by a nearby fire department. Beyond the technical
knowledge, Taylor-Ridling notes that the program has helped students grow on a
personal level, particularly females, who have shown increased confidence after
participating. The courses are reaching
young women who would not typically be exposed to or think about a fire service career.
Potentially increasing the number of female job applicants has been an unintended but
noteworthy benefit of the program.

As partners, the Newton County Fire Service and NCCA each financially contribute
to the program. The fire department has donated the time of the instructor and guest
firefighters to teach the classes, surplus equipment such as the turnout suits, building
materials, and staff time to construct the simulators as well as purchasing the instructor’s
textbook. The school provides the facility, has also donated staff time and materials to
build the simulators, provides a small budget for supplies, and purchases the students’
texts and workbooks.

Another critical component to the success of the collaboration has been the ability of the
fire department and NCCA to agreeably amend the program so it better fits the needs
of both partners. After the first year, Taylor-Ridling believed substantial changes to the
program were needed, including going from a single course to two in order to better
match the students’ pace of learning and substantially decrease the class size. Respecting
Taylor-Ridling’s expertise and the fire department’s goals, former principal Woodard let
her take the lead in designing and amending the courses and program structure. The class-
eses were also relocated to a much larger space, the basement, rather than having a smaller
room upstairs, because students needed more room for their activities.
Some nonteaching responsibilities have been more time-consuming than Taylor-Ridling initially anticipated. Although she has extensive experience with adult learners, Taylor-Ridling was not familiar with the nonclassroom responsibilities of a typical secondary teacher, such as calling parents of truant children, working on IEPs, and so forth. For the fire department to fully understand what its contribution would entail, these issues likely should have been discussed early on. The oversight was probably because school personnel took knowing about these responsibilities for granted. Organizations become so familiar with their own policies that they can forget that others outside the organization do not possess this knowledge. For communities considering adopting a fire vocational education class, this issue should be addressed. If fire personnel do not feel comfortable calling parents or working on IEPs, perhaps the school could assign a school staff person to take on these responsibilities.

Overall, all the stakeholders in the Newton County Fire Service–NCCA collaboration are pleased with and remain excited about the fire services program. They see the potential benefits to students and the fire department. Tim Schmitt, who recently joined the school district as coordinator of career, technical, and agricultural education (CTAE) programming, has been impressed by the countywide focus on partnerships: “All parties … county, schools, the chamber of commerce, they think about each other’s needs. It’s part of the culture.”

**HART COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL AND CITY OF HARTWELL FIRE DEPARTMENT**

The City of Hartwell and Hart County Schools have a solid tradition of working together. Elected officials on the city council and board of education (BOE) interact in a variety of ways, both formally and informally. The city and school system have also worked closely as partners within the Hart County Archway Partnership for more than six years, with monthly meetings to discuss common community needs and opportunities, get to know one another, and pull together to address needs. City council and BOE members informally connect and converse by participating in the same civic clubs, attending services in the same places of worship, and even living down the street from one another. This contact has resulted in respect and congeniality among the leaders and, more importantly, a community-wide interest in school success. The mayor and city council have been strong advocates of the development of the Hart County College and Career Academy (HCCCA), including writing letters of support and participating in planning.

This collaborative outlook extends to municipal and school system employees, who work together on policy development and daily activities. School system and city administrators coordinate their respective special local option sales tax (SPLOST) projects, and employees in the city’s public works and school system maintenance departments lend each other equipment and expertise. Off-duty Hartwell Police Department employees spend time at schools as resource officers, building relationships with youth.
Working together, the City of Hartwell and Hart County Schools tackled the need for local volunteer firefighters.

This tradition of partnership provided the foundation for collaboration between the City of Hartwell Fire Department and HCCCA to develop a firefighter career pathway for high school students. During the multiyear planning process for the HCCCA, school system administrators and community members toured college and career academies across Georgia. When the group visited the Newton College and Career Academy (NCCA), Hart County High School Principal Kevin Gaines learned about their fire services program and remembered an article he had read in the Hartwell Sun about the need for local volunteer firefighters. Subsequently, he began talking with city officials about adopting a fire vocational program for Hart County that could help address the city’s need for volunteers.

Gaines views fire service as a potential pathway that can engage students in learning so that they stay in school and graduate. Offering an opportunity for hands-on learning for students whose learning style may be better suited to a real-world setting rather than a classroom is an important goal. Full-time Hartwell Fire Chief Terry Vickery sees the partnership as a way to help develop a pipeline for new and younger volunteers. Although 18 is the minimum age required by the state for firefighter certification, Chief Vickery feels the program will give students insight into whether firefighting is a career they might want to pursue. In a rural retirement community like Hartwell, the ability to recruit committed volunteers who can meet the physical requirements and have what City Manager David Aldrich describes as the “right mindset to run into a burning building, instead of away” is critical to providing fire services. Chief Vickery notes that they look for motivated and educated volunteers who are willing to give a lot of time. These qualities can be assessed by working with students through the career academy to ensure a good fit with the fire department.
The positive financial impact to the city from developing new volunteer firefighters rather than hiring additional career ones is significant. According to Aldrich, it costs Hartwell approximately $40,000 per year in salary and benefits to put a full-time firefighter on a truck, and utilizing dedicated volunteers to support the fire department makes an estimated $400,000 difference to the city’s personnel budget. Quality volunteers are also a key component of the city’s impressive Class 2 ISO Public Protection Classification (PPC) rating, which lowers homeowners’ insurance rates in the area and is unusual for such a small community.

Resource sharing and flexibility are both essential aspects of this partnership. Hart County School System is a charter system, which allows it flexibility to work with the fire department to determine class scheduling and seat time for students. The city will provide existing equipment and instructors for classes, which will take place twice a week for approximately 90 minutes, keeping expenses minimal. Since the fire department has 11 certified fire academy instructors and two training officers, one of whom is full-time, it has the staffing flexibility to avoid scheduling constraints over class times.

School administrators will observe the instructors and maintain responsibility for students, but a full-time school staff member will not be required. Gaines notes that the low cost to both the school system and the fire department and the lack of minimum class size requirements in the charter system will allow the program to start small and grow to meet student interest. Thanks to the fire department’s convenient location just three blocks from the high school and an existing fire tower one block away, transportation costs will also be minimal, although Gaines expects participation will likely favor older students who can drive.

Principal Gaines and Chief Vickery plan to build the program by initially offering a basic firefighting course to gauge and develop student interest. The Georgia Department of Education’s college and career clusters/pathways include a Fire & Emergency Services/ Firefighting career pathway and plan of study that will align with the program. Gaines and Vickery are working together to identify certified fire services instructors to teach the course, and they will ensure that the curriculum for the program meets Georgia Professional Standards in accordance with the school system’s charter. They are also in discussions with Athens Technical College to explore the possibility for students to receive dual enrollment credit. Gaines expects the fire class to begin during the fall semester of 2015.

A benefit of collaborative programs like this one is that they are replicable in a variety of community and school system contexts. Superintendent Jerry Bell has already talked...
with other superintendents across the state about the program. He predicts that career pathway programs like theirs could help spur conversations in other communities and school systems that will encourage future partnerships. Bell believes that as college and career academies continue to develop across Georgia, opportunities for public service career pathway programs including fire, police, and medical responders will grow to meet community needs. They can be adapted for both high schools with college and career academies or those with career, technical, and agricultural education (CTAE) programs. He is already thinking ahead to potentially provide firefighting pathway students the opportunity to train in medical response, which will expose them to additional career options. The common need for these vital public service professions in communities across Georgia could also draw students regionally from neighboring communities and school systems for instruction.

City of Hartwell and Hart County Schools administrators agree that solid leadership and a big-picture focus on developing schools as building blocks for a strong community are essential. In the words of David Aldrich, city manager, “It’s important to avoid tunnel vision and remember how vital education is to our community. The city is trying to help recruit industry, and workforce is key, so the mindset of our community needs to be on the importance of supporting education.” Superintendent Bell echoes Aldrich regarding the criticality of developing a shared vision based on common needs such as education. “We have the need and desire to improve the quality of education in this community, and we want this program to provide positive experiences for both our kids and for the city,” he says. “You need good leadership that can put aside individual agendas and egos and agree to work together to do what is right for our community and for our students.”

College and career academies can help expand opportunities for public service in areas such as fire, police, and medical responders.
REASONS FOR SUCCESS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Be Creative
The fire chiefs in Hartwell and Newton recognized that they had a need—recruiting quality firefighters—and they were creative in finding a solution: They are developing their own. The chiefs have shown openness to risk and experimentation because they could see that the current situation (Newton) or trend (Hartwell) was costly. In Newton, the problem was ongoing recruitment and training costs. In Hartwell, the chief saw that if new volunteers were not forthcoming, the department would need to hire more career firefighters.

Collaboration Begets Collaboration
Both communities have created a culture of collaboration. In Hart, it developed through the University of Georgia’s Archway Partnership and high levels of informal contact among community leaders. In Newton, it developed through their long-standing program known as the Leadership Collaborative (see the school siting case study for more information). While creating this culture takes time, resources, and commitment from leadership, the result is an outlook that collaboration can be used in a variety of ways to solve difficult problems. Furthermore, leaders like Chief O’Brien and Principal Gaines cited wanting to help their communities as a major reason for collaborating. Having a collaboration culture can help foster an awareness of needs beyond one’s own organization.

Leaders with a Common Vision
Leaders in the City of Hartwell and Hart County School District have a common vision: create great schools to improve the community’s overall economy by offering employers a quality workforce. Both organizations understand the importance of supporting the other in order to achieve their common goals. Collaboration in areas like a fire academy then becomes a natural consequence because they are thinking about the other. Likewise, Newton County has created a common community vision through its growth plan, called the “2050 Plan.” Though the plan does not directly address fire or other public services, it was through the plan’s development and Leadership Collaborative that school district leaders began working with and communicating regularly with the county and municipal leaders, which, in turn, laid the foundation for a culture of collaboration.

Small Investment for Big Returns
Both governments are investing staff time to teach students with the expectation that their initial commitment will result in substantial benefits later on. Patience can often be an important factor with collaboration. By thinking long-term, there may be more opportunities for collaboration than people may initially realize. Neither Newton nor Hartwell were worried about having a huge number of volunteers immediately, recognizing that 1) helping students and 2) eventually having quality volunteers down the road will make the programs worth it.
Openness to Changing and Evolving the Collaboration

The Newton fire services program needed substantial revision after its first year. If the school had been unwilling to adjust the program, Taylor-Ridling would have been unable to teach the students all the necessary information, which may have hampered the department’s ability to reach its collaboration objectives. It is important to remember that if a collaboration is not working for one partner, then it is not working at all. Likewise, Gaines and Chief Vickery have both expressed a level of flexibility with the HCCCA program and will continue to work through an arrangement that meets both the high school’s and the fire department’s needs.

Respect the Expertise and Needs of Each Partner

Former principal James Woodard of NCCA respected the expertise and needs of the Newton County Fire Department and let the department take the lead in class design. This kind of respect is critical to effective collaboration. HCCCA and Hartwell are in the process of developing their class’s specific components. As in Newton, HCCCA Principal Gaines is letting Chief Vickery take the lead in creating a quality course that meets the fire department’s needs and will provide a valuable experience for students.

Be Aware of What Your Partner Should Know but May Not

Because of the historical silos between school systems and local governments, there are likely to be large gaps in knowledge about each other. In the case of Newton, it was the out-of-class responsibilities associated with teaching. When beginning a collaboration, partners will likely need to spend time simply educating each other so everyone can make fully informed decisions about what they will be contributing and can expect. This example further demonstrates the importance of clear and open channels of communication among collaboration partners.
Recognizing the critical importance of ensuring that children learn in a safe environment, many Georgia school districts and local governments already collaborate in the area of juvenile public safety. In the UGA-developed surveys of Georgia’s local government and school district officials, public safety and emergency preparedness were the two most frequently indicated areas of collaboration. Public safety collaboration between a police or sheriff’s department and a school is typically limited to agreements for school resource officers. Yet, some communities have adopted innovative approaches to juvenile public safety that focus more on addressing the root causes of student misbehavior. This section focuses on two communities, Cherokee County and Clayton County, that have developed successful collaborative approaches between county government and the school district to address truant behavior of children. In addition, this section examines a nonprofit organization in Fulton County, the Truancy Intervention Project, which serves as the focal point for the county’s truancy reduction program.

These cases have all adopted what is generically referred to as truancy panels (also called truancy arbitration programs) that bring together students, the student’s parents or guardians, school representatives and social workers, social service agencies, and the juvenile court to resolve the underlying issues and obstacles that have led to a student’s truancy. The core philosophy is that key stakeholders working together to resolve problems in a nonpunitive environment can reduce truancy without the high social, emotional, and financial costs associated with the traditional legal system. Schools do not have the capacity to provide the social services often needed in cases of chronic truancy, which is why including representatives from social service agencies is so important. Likewise, having the juvenile court involved provides a strong incentive for the parents to act. Historically, these stakeholders have acted in silos, but by working together, all of the organizations can bring their resources together for more effective outcomes.

Truancy panels are not new to Georgia, and several communities around the state have adopted them over the years; however, implementation of such programs has met with varying degrees of success. During the semi-structured interviews, experts named Cherokee and Clayton communities as truly collaborative approaches between the school districts and their respective juvenile courts, representing best practices in the field. Their stories provide helpful insights into how to create a panel or improve an existing
one. The cases offer interesting contrasts as well. Clayton County is highly urbanized, with a high concentration of low-income families, and its truancy panel was started by Steve Teske, chief judge of the county’s juvenile court. In contrast, Cherokee County is suburban and relatively affluent, and its panel was started by the school district’s senior social worker, Perry Marshall.

**BACKGROUND: EVOLUTION OF JUVENILE JUSTICE IN GEORGIA**

Starting in the 1980s and into the 1990s, schools and juvenile justice moved to a stricter and more punitive approach toward unruly youth or delinquent behavior referred to as “zero tolerance.” The result was a large influx of children into juvenile courts, juveniles receiving tougher sentences, and less focus on rehabilitation and treatment for juveniles. However, data have shown that zero tolerance has not been effective because this approach does not address the underlying causes of juvenile misbehavior. This policy may have, in fact, exacerbated juvenile crime. Youth sentenced to detention centers are far more likely to recommit crimes than incarcerated adults. Half of all incarcerated Georgia juvenile defenders will re-offend within three years, but only one in three adult prisoners will do so during the same time frame (Swift 2013). Furthermore, this approach has been very expensive. It costs the state approximately $90,000 a year to hold a child in a detention center.

Based on these realities, the state of Georgia is reforming its juvenile justice programming and laws to focus more on treatment and is addressing the trauma and family issues that typically cause delinquent behavior. This approach is seen as most appropriate for low-level juvenile offenses, i.e., actions that are not illegal for adults such as truancy, running away from home, curfew violations, or disruptive behavior. Many of these youth are not criminals as much as immature and in need of counseling and family therapy.

Signed into law in May 2013 and effective January 1, 2014, HB 242 reorganized and substantially reformed Georgia’s juvenile code. The new law was the culmination of detailed analyses of the state’s juvenile justice system, input from a variety of stakeholders, and research on evidence-based best practice for juvenile detention and treatment. For low-level offenses, the law created a new designation and approach for intervention, Children in Need of Services (CHINS), which replaced the term “unruly child.” The new law requires a more holistic service-oriented approach for children at risk of delinquency as well as for children and youth who have committed acts that would be crimes if they were adults. The ultimate goal of the legislation is to improve outcomes for the child and his or her family while saving taxpayer dollars by dramatically reducing the number of youth in detention centers. All of the individuals interviewed for this case study were optimistic about the new juvenile code and its CHINS provisions, and they supported the legislation’s orientation toward services and treatment of troubled youth.

Among the many parts of Article 5 of the new legislation, which focuses on CHINS, the law clarifies that in CHINS cases:
• Youth should receive services in the least restrictive environment possible.

• If a school files a complaint against a child, it must demonstrate that it has attempted to address the issue at the school level first, including addressing any disabilities or suspected disabilities that may be contributing to the child’s behavior.

• The law requires a juvenile court to review the youth’s disposition after three months, and then at least every six months after that until the order of disposition expires.

Requiring that schools must first address any suspected disabilities is an important provision in the code. Several interviewees said that some truant or unruly children have undiagnosed behavioral or learning disabilities and would strongly benefit from the school developing an Individual Education Program (IEP) for the child. Because of the severe fiscal stress schools have experienced in recent years, they often do not have the resources to provide services that may be called for under an IEP. As a result, less extreme cases can go undiagnosed.

In terms of process, once a CHINS complaint has been filed against a child, the intake officer convenes a mandatory multidisciplinary conference that includes the child, child’s parent or guardian, Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS), and “any other agency or public institution having legal responsibility or discretionary authority to supply services to the family” (Erskine and Smith 2014). During the conference, a written child-centered treatment agreement is developed that all parties agree to follow. The plan includes a description of all expected actions to be taken and services needed, and it identifies the DFCS worker assigned responsibility for ensuring the plan is implemented.

Some counties are hiring CHINS coordinators to facilitate the conferences and serve as a central point of information for all available county resources for the child. This position is similar to the role of the Georgia Family Connections organizations established over the last 20 years but is focused on children. Counties that cannot afford a CHINS coordinator may want to consider working with their local Family Connections organization. The CHINS conference protocol generally replicates the panels that were established by the Cherokee County School District and Clayton County Juvenile Court many years earlier. As counties begin to implement the new CHINS legislation, they may want to consider the lessons learned by these two organizations. Likewise, developing school-based truancy panels could alleviate juvenile court caseloads for CHINS cases as well.

NEED FOR COLLABORATION

Compared to other juvenile justice problems, is truancy a big deal? The data say yes. Obviously, truant students are not learning. A 2011 Georgia Department of Education study found that only 52.3 percent of eighth-grade students who missed 11 to 14 days of school, whether excused or not, graduated four years later; of those who missed no
days in eighth grade, 78.7 percent graduated on time (Hodson and McManus 2012). By simply increasing student attendance five days over a school year, 10,000 more students statewide would have passed their reading tests and more than 30,000 would have passed their math exams (Hodson and McManus 2012). National studies have also demonstrated the link between school attendance and test scores. A 2000 study found that students who attended class 95 percent of the time were twice as likely to pass state competency tests as those who attended class only 85 percent of the time (Peek 2009). Other research has found that for sixth graders, missing just 10 percent of the school year (two or three days a month) is strongly linked to academic course failure and eventually dropping out of high school.64

Truancy reduction can help improve a whole host of critical social, criminal, and economic issues for a community. At a minimum, a high school diploma is needed for a decent job, and attending school is a precursor to graduating. If local governments want to encourage economic growth in their communities, they need to ensure that their populations have the education and skills to perform the work, which means students need to graduate from high school. Therefore, local governments have an interest beyond juvenile and criminal justice to support truancy reduction programs — economic development. Perhaps most importantly, helping youth graduate from high school is a first step to removing the generational poverty and associated social ills that plague many poor areas across the state. As former juvenile judge Tom Rawlings stated in an interview with Institute of Government faculty, “Juvenile justice is not just about the ‘school to prison pipeline.’ It’s much bigger, it’s about school to failure in life overall.”

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Truancy Has Consequences

Research has found strong correlations between truancy and delinquent or criminal behavior.

Nationally

65–90% of daytime burglaries are caused by truant students

(Hodson and McManus 2012)

Elementary students with chronic truancy can exhibit serious delinquent behavior by age 12

(Loeber and Farrington 2000)

7/10 Georgia Department of Corrections inmates lack a high school diploma or GED

(Office of the Governor 2014)

Truancy can impact a local government’s goals of economic growth and developing a qualified workforce.
Looking for ways to address chronic truancy, Cherokee County School District Social Worker Perry Marshall helped launch the first truancy panel in 1998.

**CHEROKEE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT — TRUANCY PANELS**

The Cherokee County School District (CCSD) was one of the early implementers of truancy panels, holding its first panel in January 1998. Perry Marshall, a school district social worker, was looking for ways to reduce chronic truancy and began investigating what other counties were doing. His research led him to support adopting truancy panels. He brought together key stakeholders to talk about implementing truancy panels and received an overwhelmingly positive response. Chief Superior Court Judge Jackson Harris (then a juvenile court judge) offered space in the county justice center to hold the panels and make the process more official.

According to interviewees, panel participants truly view the panels as a resource for parents. Prior to inviting the family into the panel, the social worker gives the panelists a brief history of the child, including any history of DFCS referrals, issues with public health, and so forth, which gives members a better idea of the situation before speaking with the parents. Then parents and the student are invited into the room and introduced to the participants, and the process is explained to them. The social worker stresses that the panel’s purpose is to prevent court action and that the panelists are there to help the family overcome roadblocks that have resulted in truancy, whether they be a short-term crisis or a longer-term problem. According to Marshall, once parents trust the panel members, they feel more open and “come clean” about what is going on at home. Sometimes the issues are relatively simple: The parents might need basic advice about rules and boundaries, such as limits on video games and bedtimes, and the truancy panel serves as a wake-up call. In other instances, the conversation can reveal more troubling issues that need attention: Perhaps there are problems of domestic violence, utilities
that have been turned off due lack of payment, even homelessness. Often child or family counseling is deemed necessary. The panel plays a critical role in bringing together resources for the family, such as helping to start counseling or giving referrals to find housing or help with utilities.

Once the family’s story is heard, the panelists discuss options to help alleviate the family’s difficulties and decide on an action plan. The plan is put into writing, clarifying each participant’s responsibilities, including the parent(s) and the child. Then everyone signs the agreement. The social worker, with the help of the school representative, provides follow-up to ensure the plan is being implemented, such as the child and/or parents are attending counseling, and that the child is going to school. According to the interviewees, sometimes the parents are actually glad to attend the panel and have help navigating the social service system.

The panels are the final step in the school district’s truancy protocol before sending the child or parent to court for failure to attend classes. The social worker makes several efforts to get the child back in school before calling the parents and child into a truancy panel. The school district’s protocol includes sending letters to the parents after seven unexcused absences and, if notifications are unsuccessful, establishing an attendance plan between the family and the school district. The school social workers typically want to see if their informal plan works before moving to a truancy panel. If these options fail, then the parents and child or children (if siblings are also truant) are called to a truancy panel.

Since the inception of the truancy panels, the school district has hired an additional social worker, David McFerrin. Currently, each social worker holds a monthly truancy panel. Combined, the two panels serve about 40 families over the course of a school year. There is no set number of truancies that must occur before a student is called to a panel. The number of absences can be relatively low, seven or eight. If the truancies occur early in the school year and it was a problem the year before, the social worker may send the child to a truancy panel to halt the bad behavior before it becomes a pattern again. Likewise, the district prefers to send elementary school children to the truancy panel. For young children, truancy is a family issue, not a case of the child becoming disenchanted with school and cutting class. When the truancy is the result of family problems, the resources of the panel can be most helpful. The school district also wants to curb truancy early in the child’s academic career before it creates a negative habit and leads to larger problems, such as the child falling seriously behind in school.

Failure to attend the truancy panel will result in the filing of a petition to the juvenile court. Nearly always, the fear of going to juvenile court results in parents agreeing to attend the truancy panel. If the parents do not show up or do not meet the agreement, those families go immediately to juvenile court on a CHINS complaint. Judge John Sumner, the current presiding juvenile judge for the county, tries these cases quickly in order to start the process moving. For students whose attendance does not improve after a panel, documentation from it can be used in court proceedings.
Although Marshall and McFerrin’s panels are administered very similarly, they have slightly different memberships. Both have a social worker leading the process, with the student’s school principal and school counselor attending, along with representatives from DFCS, the health department, and the mental health department and members of the county’s juvenile court program or the CHINS coordinator. When Judge Sumner was appointed to the bench, he added a court representative to the panel, a change that Marshall believes has been incredibly important. The court representative adds a level of authority to the process and can be helpful to the family in getting appointments for services, such as the CHINS coordinator making a call to a behavioral health organization on the parent’s behalf. The CHINS coordinator is also valuable because she knows about all the social services available in the county and can direct parents to them. For those communities without a CHINS coordinator, Marshall and McFerrin strongly recommend that a truancy panel have a person who can fill this role, such as a representative from the local Family Connection Organization.

Truancy panel membership has changed over the years. Likewise, having a second panel has also resulted in slight variation in membership based on a recognition of what was needed and worked best. For example the sheriff department’s DARE officer was one of the original panel members. When the DARE program ended, Marshall decided to cease including a law enforcement presence on the panel. The DARE officer was unique in that he regularly worked with children; however, Marshall felt that a typical officer might not be as comfortable in this facilitative role and that parents might be less likely to share their stories if law enforcement were present.

Even though truancy is not an extreme problem in Cherokee County, school system personnel believe that every child in the district should receive an education and they try to reach out to all students. School Superintendent Frank Petruzielo and the school system’s social workers spoke highly of Judge Sumner, Judge Harris, and all of the county’s judges. They strongly emphasized the support the county courts have given, not only to the truancy panels over the years but also to the school system in general. The school personnel believe that the Cherokee County judges are vested in the school system and want it to succeed.

Due to a lack of staff time, the school district does not have consistent data on the rates of truancy reduction for students who have gone through the process. For the data that are available, the results have been very positive. For example, in the initial panel’s first four years of existence, 89 percent of active students showed attendance improvement after the first year and 81 percent showed no regression in attendance since appearing before the panel. Later evaluations also indicated continued improvement in attendance overall. In looking at individual students, there was variation in panel effectiveness. Many responded extremely well to the experience, with several having zero absences thereafter, yet a handful of students seem to have been unaffected by the experience. This finding is to be expected. For a myriad of reasons, no juvenile justice program will successfully reach 100 percent of students, but when an overwhelming majority do change their behavior, then the process should be considered successful.
The collaboration between the school district and the juvenile court extends well beyond truancy panels. For example, Judge Sumner has successfully worked with the school system’s resource officers to reduce the number of students being sent to the court for minor offenses. Judge Sumner believed that too many students were being sent to him for problems that were not serious enough crimes to require going to court. He worked with the district’s resource officers to develop a new protocol for determining when a student should be sent to the court, and the results have been very positive. The number of school-based delinquency petitions has dropped substantially.

Superintendent Petruzielo considers his partnership with the juvenile court system to be one of his most successful. He attributes the productive relationship to the initial leadership of Judge Harris and the continued dedication of Judge Sumner, who not only values this partnership but has also worked to improve it. Likewise, Judge Sumner believes the court and the school district continue to work well together despite occasional differences, because there exists mutual respect for the important role each plays in helping youth and an acknowledgement that each is sincerely trying to do what is right even when faced with many competing concerns. There also appears to be sincere respect on a personal level among the stakeholders involved.

**CLAYTON COUNTY JUVENILE COURT QUAD-CST**

Recognizing that too many children were being sent to court, Judge Steve Teske from Clayton County’s Juvenile Court wanted to find a solution. To develop a plan, he brought together representatives from social services agencies, law enforcement, the county district attorney’s office, the defense bar, the state Department of Juvenile Justice, social service providers, and the school system to determine how to improve

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**Characteristics of Effective Truancy Panel Collaborations**

Judge Sumner, Superintendent Petruzielo, and CCSD social workers Perry Marshall and David McFerrin discussed why the truancy panels and the relationship between the juvenile court and the school district have been so effective:

- Leadership support for the truancy panel and collaboration in general
- Commitment to the process, particularly by the school system and the juvenile court. The court and the school want to work together and avoid silos.
- Management of the process to ensure that all panel members are committed
- Respect for all the panel participants and what each member brings to the table
- Recognition that a little conflict is all right, particularly in the beginning as trust is being established. Trust takes time to develop among the panel members, especially as each sorts out what he or she can legally share about the child and his or her family.
- General recognition that collaboration is simply a smarter way to use resources and achieve better outcomes
the outcomes for students who enter the juvenile justice system due to school-related issues. The result was a new collaborative process among key stakeholders that would work with families to get at the root of a child’s behavioral problem. Judge Teske refers to it as a “multi-integrated system” approach. One of the key components of the process is that it stops stakeholders from operating in silos. According to Judge Teske, schools need to collaborate with government and service providers because they all have an important overlapping goal—serving children.

Today, before the juvenile court in Clayton will accept an “unruly child” or truancy petition from the school district, a conference is held that includes the child; the parent or guardian; the school social worker; representatives from the school, juvenile court, and social service agencies (i.e., DCFS, Board of Mental Health and Board of Health); and a neutral facilitator. The team is called the Clayton County Collaborative Child Study Team, or Quad-CST, and follows a process very similar to the one described earlier for the Cherokee County Truancy Panels, with the team meeting and developing a treatment plan for the youth. Due to the large case load, Quad-CST hearings are held twice a week with staff from the social service agencies specifically committed to the panels. For example, two professionals from DFCS are dedicated to working on the Quad-CST. The Quad-CST assesses on average 300–400 cases per year, resulting in a substantial reduction in the number of truancy and other status offender filings in court. For example, the school district has experienced a 98 percent decline in truancy filings since 2004 and a 74 percent decline in ungovernable filings (i.e., beyond the control of one’s parents). Since this collaborative system has been instituted, student attendance rates have increased by 2.5 percent, representing a total of 1,350 students with improved attendance. Again, the goal is to hear the families’ stories in order to provide assistance; therefore, making the parents/guardians feel comfortable is vital.

At the beginning of the day, there is a half-hour briefing with all of the families. There, the parents/guardians learn 1) about the Quad-CST process, 2) that the panel’s goal is to find solutions to problems, not to punish, and 3) who will be attending the conference. The parents and child are then called into the panel for their individual meeting. If called for in the treatment plan, families are connected to private providers, and according to Judge Teske, the county has been very effective at leveraging Medicaid to provide children a variety of services such as counseling. The school social worker monitors each student’s progress to ensure the Quad-CST agreement is being met. Only if the Quad-CST case plan has not been effective in changing the child’s behavior will a CHINS case be formally processed through the court.

The juvenile court and Quad-CST have always included elementary age children for truancy or other “unruly” child petitions. Although young children, due to their age, are
After implementing new discipline protocols, Judge Steven Teske saw school referrals to Clayton County Juvenile Court drop significantly.

deeded incompetent to go before the court, Judge Teske can call in the parents under Chapter 11 of Title 15 of the Georgia Code, which says custodians are responsible for the physical, emotional, social, educational, and moral upbringing of children.

Judge Teske’s collaborative relationship with the Clayton County School District extends beyond the Quad-CST. Starting in the late 1990s, the number of school-based offenses being referred to juvenile court rose dramatically—from 46 incidents in 1995 to more than 1,200 in 2003, with 90 percent of these cases being misdemeanors.66 Believing this was not the most effective policy, Judge Teske brought together educators, police, social service workers, parents, and students to develop a new set of discipline protocols for the school system. The new protocols concerned four types of misdemeanors: fights, disorderly conduct, disruption, and failure to follow school police instructions. The protocols also use a stepped approach to discipline, starting with warnings for first offenders, workshops for repeat offenders, and court as a last resort. After implementation of the new protocols, school referrals to the juvenile court fell by more than 70 percent from 2003 to 2010, and commitments to the Department of Juvenile Justice decreased nearly 41 percent from 2002 to 2014. School resource officers and administrators focus on understanding why the students misbehave and what can be done to eliminate or mitigate those causes, which requires more involvement of school social workers and school counselors. There have been other benefits including significant reductions of more serious crimes such as weapons incidents (down 70%), crimes against people (down 42%), and crimes against property (down 43%). According to the interviewees, relationships between the students and school resource officers have also improved considerably, and the atmosphere at the schools is generally better.
The Quad-CST has evolved into a larger umbrella system called the Clayton County System of Care (CCSC). The CCSC is an independent nonprofit organization overseen by a board of directors and located in the county’s juvenile justice center. According to Judge Teske, the ultimate goal of the CCSC is to overcome the underlying causes of juvenile misconduct and crime, those conditions created by generational poverty and neglect. CCSC houses the following programs, each of which focuses on different aspects of juvenile behavior and treatment.

- Quad-CST
- Finding Alternatives for Safety and Treatment (FAST): a panel for juveniles already in detention that looks for alternatives that would allow them to be released pending court hearings
- Second Chance Court for juveniles facing 12 to 60 months in youth prison: a program that provides juveniles an opportunity to avoid incarceration through intensive supervision, participation in treatment programs, and weekly court check-ins
- School Referral Reduction Program, which consists of the misdemeanor discipline protocols discussed earlier
- Other life-skill development programs like Tips 4 Teens and the Young CEO Institute

The CCSC has a very small staff: one full-time administrator, one full-time services monitor, and a part-time community outreach assistant. Funding comes from a variety of nonprofit grants and donations as well as small state and local government appropriations.

The overwhelming success of all of Clayton County’s collaborative juvenile justice programs is demonstrated by improved grades, higher graduation rates, and fewer overall juvenile crimes. For chronically disruptive students, there has been an 80 percent improvement in behavior, and math, reading, and science scores have risen by as much as 24 percent. In 2004, the graduation rate was only 58 percent but climbed to 82 percent for the 2009–2010 school year. That rate was 10 points higher than the state graduation rate average, a particularly impressive number considering that all Clayton County schools qualify as Title I schools. Likewise, county juvenile arrests have decreased by 62 percent since 2003. In Judge Teske’s words, “How goes graduation, so goes crime.”

Judges from rural parts of the state have expressed interest in adopting a program similar to the Quad-CST for their communities. Unfortunately, one significant obstacle is the dearth of mental health providers for juveniles. Judge Teske recommends that rural counties join together to provide a regional program. The regional group could apply for state grants under the new CHINS statute and should result in a sufficient caseload to encourage providers to begin serving the area. This kind of regional system would also likely need the support of county commissioners and managers to help facilitate providers coming to a community.
According to Judge Teske, the Quad-CST and other CCSC programs are so successful because of several important attributes, not the least of which is his excellent working relationship with Clayton County Public School Superintendent Luvenia Jackson. This relationship is marked by respect and open communication. Judge Teske feels he can call Superintendent Jackson at any time and talk about a student, such as whether he or she needs an IEP, and he feels confident that Superintendent Jackson will follow through. The Clayton County case clearly shows that there has been strong, dedicated, long-term leadership by Judge Teske to these programs. Furthermore, his energy and commitment have become institutionalized to make it sustainable over time. In other words, these collaborative programs have an administrative structure through the CCSC that promises to promote sustainability beyond the tenure of its champion, Judge Teske.

THE TRUANCY INTERVENTION PROJECT

The Truancy Intervention Project (TIP) is a nonprofit organization that works in partnership with the Fulton County Juvenile Justice Court to reduce truancy. The TIP approach is similar to that used in Clayton and Cherokee counties, with a panel of professionals working with students and their parents or guardian to resolve the issues causing the child to be truant. TIP is similar to the two other cases in other ways as well. Like Clayton’s Quad-CST, TIP uses a neutral facilitator in the meetings to reduce parent and child anxiety and to ensure the panel is productive. As with Cherokee and Clayton, TIP has been effective in reducing truancy in Fulton County, with an 82 percent success rate since its inception in 1992.

One key component of TIP is a child advocate. This person has typically been an attorney providing services pro bono. The history of using an attorney as advocate originates with the truancy process having been more court-centered. It was felt that a child needed an advocate who could represent him or her in court. As the process has moved away from legal action toward a more treatment-based approach, having an attorney has become less critical. The volunteer advocates serve as role models and problem solvers, staying with the student’s case until it is resolved, which can take up to six months. As problem solvers, the volunteers may work with parents to help navigate insurance or Medicaid by making phone calls, or they simply may spend some time with the children, such as visiting during school lunchtime. The primary purpose of this continued participation is to ensure that the conditions that have caused the truancy are improving. Typical time commitments for volunteers are relatively modest, only about 25 hours per case. Several counties around the state have adopted TIP, representing urban, rural, and suburban areas. This diversity demonstrates the program’s adaptability to a wide array of community demographics.

REASONS FOR SUCCESS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Research has shown that successful truancy reduction programs share common characteristics, including collaboration among key stakeholders, family involvement, tiered interventions, a continuum of services to meet the varied needs of students and families, attendance policies that are understood by all, monitoring and follow-up of youth,
tracking individual youth to make needed adjustments, and tracking the effectiveness of
the impact of the program (Gonzales and Mullins 2004). The truancy panels discussed
here have these common characteristics.

**Panels Require Motivated Leadership**
The Cherokee and Clayton cases support the literature stressing the importance
of leadership to initiate and sustain a collaborative program. In Cherokee, Perry
Marshall, the school social worker, drives the program with important support from
Judges Harris and Sumner, while in Clayton, Judge Teske is the driving force behind
the program. The distinctions are important because it shows that either a school or a
county can initiate a truancy panel and that leadership can come from different levels
in an organization. Moreover, in Clayton’s case, Judge Teske has been able to transfer
daily oversight of the program to a new leader, the executive director of the Clayton
County System of Care. Judge Teske continues to be very involved in the program
but does not need to engage in everyday oversight and management because of the
strong support from participating organizations, particularly CCSD and the adopted
administrative systems.

**Communication Sustains Collaboration**
The panels all have high levels of communication among participants, particularly
between the school district and the juvenile judge, but also among other participants like
the parents and social welfare agencies. Communication is both written and oral and
occurs regularly. Furthermore, communication with the parents continues until the case
is resolved.

**Programs Are Cost Effective**
From a cost-benefit perspective, the programs in Clayton and Cherokee are inexpensive
relative to the long-term gains from children attending school and graduating. In Cher-
okee County, the biggest cost associated with the truancy panels is staff time. Likewise
for Clayton County, the Clayton County System of Care and Quad-CST programs rely
heavily on foundation grants and other sponsors with relatively few direct outlays by the
county other than staff time of members. The TIP program costs are associated with
managing child advocates/mentors and hiring a facilitator.

**Truancy and Graduation Are Community-wide Issues**
Local governments typically view juvenile justice as being divorced from everyday
administration and policy because of the strong state involvement in court administra-
tion. However, the success of truancy panels and CHINS implementation can have a
profound effect on the community and therefore should concern local governments.
Truancy panels are one means of keeping youth in school and ultimately having them
graduate. Local governments can directly support court–school interventions by funding
a CHINS coordinator, working to increase access to service providers that help youth,
and promoting rehabilitative juvenile justice programs.
Tips for Effective Truancy Panels

The interviewees made several recommendations for establishing, improving, and sustaining an effective truancy panel.

- **Build your panel around the key issues causing truancy.** Consider whether potential panel members represent the issues faced by children attending the panel. For example, if homelessness is a serious problem in your community, then a representative from the housing authority may be appropriate.

- **Limit the number of panelists.** A large panel can be intimidating for parents and cause them not to share their stories, which is the most important part of the process. Too many participants can also inhibit dialog among all the participants. Balance the need for variety in panel members with the need to keep the panel size manageable.

- **Determine whether law enforcement representation is inappropriate.** As one interviewee said, having a person with a gun at the table does not encourage parents to talk. A parent before a truancy panel may have had negative experiences with law enforcement\(^1\) and might view the presence of an officer as a threat rather than as someone there to help. Although law enforcement can provide important context, such as a history of domestic violence, the social worker can access this information and include it in the child’s history.

- **Encourage consistency in panel membership.** Generally, an agency will assign a person to regularly attend the panels. Because members need to understand how the panels work, consistency promotes positive group dynamics such as trust.

- **Do not be afraid to make changes to panel membership if it is not working.** Panel members need to be open, talkative, nonjudgmental, and energized to be effective. Withdrawn or quiet panel members, even with excellent expertise, can inhibit conversation. The panel facilitator should contact the department and ask for a different representative if someone is not a good fit. In sum, personalities matter.

- **Consider using a neutral facilitator.** Both Clayton County and TIP use a neutral facilitator to encourage dialog and keep the process on track. Other affordable options may be available, such as working with a nonprofit organization, hiring a local consultant, or using a local government employee trained in facilitation.

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\(^1\) Either because of personal interactions or that of a close friend or family member.
Consider Mentoring

Another opportunity to increase collaboration between the local government and the schools would be a mentoring/advocacy program for at-risk youth. The TIPS program in Fulton County has a long-standing advocacy component, with attorneys providing pro bono services. A truancy panel program could incorporate a similar type of mentoring program but one that includes others community members, such as local business leaders, government employees, or participants in local civic organizations. Through this kind of program, citizens could become more involved with the school system and realize that everyone has a vested interest in student success.

Collaborate to Reduce Petitions

In addition to partnering with truancy panels, the Clayton and Cherokee juvenile courts have also led important collaborations on school district discipline protocols to reduce the number of students being sent to juvenile court. Petitions to the juvenile court should be used as a last resort because detention can easily lead to many long-term negative consequences for the child. These protocols were successful for two key reasons: (1) Stakeholders from a variety of disciplines were included during their development, which allowed for a more comprehensive approach to discipline, and (2) the school systems were open to collaboration and reform.

In sum, Cherokee and Clayton counties demonstrate that even in one of the most difficult and important of local policy public policy arenas—public safety and education—collaborative approaches appear to offer a pathway to successful problem resolution and improved outcomes.
This study began with the premise that greater collaboration between local governments and school systems in Georgia can lead to more efficient service delivery and improved outcomes for the communities involved. The six case studies across three policy areas reviewed in this report demonstrate that some counties and cities in Georgia are doing just that—through strong leadership and communication as well as a commitment to collaboration, officials in local government and school districts are working together to make a difference in their communities.

While some insights from these cases are specific to the policies involved, even more can be learned when all the collaborations are considered holistically. Several common elements exist across these cases, despite the diversity in community size, issues addressed, and collaboration processes used. The success of these partnerships is also striking because they occurred in a legal environment that does not encourage collaboration between school districts and local governments but that instead allows the two to successfully perform independently. Finally, the research findings support earlier work examining critical elements to successful collaborations as well.

LESSONS LEARNED

There is no “ideal” situation for collaboration.

Regardless of the situation, all six communities highlighted in this report are making their partnerships work. These cases demonstrate the diverse array of possible relationships between local governments and school districts:

- Collaboration in both urban and rural communities
- Collaborations with a long tenure such as with Clayton and Cherokee counties’ truancy panels and a short tenure such as with the City of Metter and Candler County School District’s school reuse efforts
- Collaborations with many partners, such as the Newton County Leadership Collaborative and the truancy panels, and those with just two partners such as the fire service vocational education programs
- Collaborations to solve an immediate issue such as schools being vacated in Metter and collaborations that seek to prevent a future problem such as finding a potential source of volunteer firefighters in Hartwell
• Collaborations with high levels of complexity such as creating a school siting plan in Newton County or addressing juvenile delinquency, and ones where agreements could be reached relatively easily such as with the fire service vocational education programs.

Rather than giving excuses about why a collaboration will not work for a given situation, consider how a collaboration can help. No problem is too simple or too complex for a collaboration. The situation serves as the motivating factor for coming together, but other factors like communication, respect, and leadership ultimately determine whether a partnership is successful.

When considering how to resolve an issue, think about how other organizations affect and are affected by the issue. What resources and tools do other public organizations have that complement what you can provide? These groups are potential partners for a collaboration.

**Communication is key.**

In every case study, open communication was a key factor in the success of the collaboration. Furthermore, when one of these collaborations experienced difficulties, it was due to a lack of effective communication. Communication is essential through all phases of the collaboration, and the more honest the dialog, the better. Some of the collaborations also appear to have achieved a level of informality that has allowed partners to “simply pick up the phone” when an issue arises or one member has a question. Regular meetings and communication also demonstrate commitment to the collaboration, because members are willing to devote their time, which is always in limited supply, to make the process work.

In some of the cases, the community had a history of communication. School district and local government leaders in Metter and Hartwell, small cities in rural communities, were able to informally communicate because they saw each other around town. Regular formal meetings that occurred through the Archway Partnership significantly bolstered this communication. Likewise, the Newton County School District officials regularly meet with their local government counterparts through the Leadership Collaborative. Regular communication fosters collaboration because the exchange of information allows the leaders to recognize shared goals and concerns. Regular communication also helps build trust because the parties know one another, reducing the risk of a collaboration failing.

**Cultivate respect and trust.**

Interviewees from the case studies repeatedly talked about the respect and trust they had in their collaboration partners. No one complained that partners were not meeting their promised obligations, which is a core component of building and maintaining credibility. Only one interviewee implied that his or her organization was contributing more than its fair share. But even then, the organization had volunteered to contribute more and the commitment to the collaboration remained strong.
Respect was also shown by trusting each member’s expertise, such as with Firefighter Taylor-Ridling and Fire Chief Vickery’s ability to develop and implement quality fire courses for high school students. In many instances, interviewees specifically discussed the respect they had for others involved in the collaborations, citing honesty, integrity, and commitment. For example, Judge Sumner from Cherokee County believes his county’s truancy panel success comes largely from the mutual respect panel members have for the important role each plays and the belief that everyone works in the best interest of the children.

**Collaboration needs a leader.**

The literature on collaboration makes it clear that a strong leader is necessary for a successful collaboration, a point supported by the cases presented in this study. In each, an individual had an idea and the initiative to start a collaboration. In many instances, that person continues to be the leader, but in others, leadership responsibilities have been transferred to another person or organization. For example, Judge Teske initiated and led the Clayton County truancy panel collaboration for many years, but its management has been assigned to a local nonprofit organization (while still physically located in the juvenile justice building). Judge Teske remains heavily involved with the program and maintains a strong relationship with Superintendent Jackson, but the change has allowed him more time to work with governments across the country to improve their juvenile justice programs. Likewise, Fire Chief O’Brien initially spearheaded the fire education program in Newton County but asked Ms. Taylor-Ridling to develop and teach the classes. She also works daily with career academy administrators. Furthermore, the case studies demonstrate that leaders can come from all levels of an organization—from school superintendent to department head to frontline professional. Leadership is not about where one resides in an organization but rather the qualities a person has to motivate, organize, and build trust among members.

**A neutral facilitator and space can be helpful.**

For collaborations that may be inherently contentious or involve significant risk, having a neutral space and/or facilitator can be extremely helpful. Several of the case studies apply this model for their work: The Clayton and Fulton County truancy programs use neutral facilitators, and an Archway professional served as neutral facilitator for school reuse decisions in Metter. The facilitators can help ensure that all participants’ voices are heard and that progress toward a decision continues.

The Newton Leadership Collaborative is held in a community space and is managed by its own staff. Simply having neutral ground can improve the atmosphere of a collaboration meeting because it reduces perceptions of inequality or that one organization is in charge. Also, with the Leadership Collaborative, meetings use neutral facilitators like center staff or a representative from the local chamber of commerce. Having a facilitator has proved extremely helpful when discussing difficult issues such as zoning ordinances and infrastructure development.
Allow the collaboration to evolve.

Situations change; thus, to remain effective, ongoing collaborations must have the capacity to evolve. Examples from the cases include the Cherokee County School District changing the truancy panel participants and the Newton County Fire Department revamping the design of its fire service courses. In both instances, collaboration leaders spoke with their partners and addressed the issues. Avoiding a concern will only result in increased dissatisfaction, which could cause the partnership to collapse.

In collaborations with senior elected or appointed officials, participants will rotate regularly since many will leave their organization. Such is the case with Newton County’s Leadership Collaborative. Less than 25 percent of the officials who attended the Leadership Collaborative’s inaugural meeting are still part of it today. New participants can bring new energy and ideas to the group, which often outweighs the time it takes to educate them about the collaboration’s benefits and process. It also brings greater stability to the collaboration because it exists beyond one set of people.

Motivation is multifaceted.

By creating independent entities, Georgia law does not encourage collaboration between local governments and school districts. Therefore, the primary reason the school districts and local governments highlighted in this report chose to create collaborative relationships was to improve their own programs or operations. This viewpoint is both logical and valid. However, participants in the case studies also demonstrated a sense of public spiritedness. Interviewees across the case studies emphasized that one of their reasons for collaborating was to help the community as whole. School district officials appreciate how their schools affect the communities in which they reside. Likewise, government officials care about improving the educational experiences for children. Public service extends beyond one’s own organization, and the case studies demonstrate that perspective.
Collaboration opportunities abound. This study uncovered the following ways to improve efficiency through collaboration over administrative services:

- **Grounds and Building Maintenance**: Personnel skills and equipment are nearly identical. The main issues would surround scheduling and cost sharing.

- **Vehicle Maintenance**: Personnel skills and equipment are nearly identical. The main issues would involve scheduling, cost sharing, and capability to service large vehicles like buses.

- **Information Technology (IT) Support and/or Records Management**: As records management moves to a cloud-based format, staff can work remotely and serve multiple organizations. Smaller governments could share personnel costs of highly skilled IT staff.

- **Fuel Purchases**: Although schools systems participate in Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs), purchasing fuel may not be an offered service. Savings can be made through volume fuel purchasing.

Excellent potential for collaboration between Georgia’s school systems and local governments exists; yet, it remains an underutilized governing tool in many communities because of a lack of willingness and communication. One easy first step to improving collaboration is for elected and appointed officials to regularly share information, whether formally or informally, about what is happening within their organizations. This interaction can spur ideas about opportunities for collaboration while garnering trust in others that the effort put into a collaboration would not be wasted.
Endnotes

1. For this study, local government only refers to general purpose local governments, i.e., cities and counties.

2. Phil Hartley from Harben, Hartley, & Hawkins, LLP on July 10, 2014; Sis Henry representing the Georgia School Boards Association on July 11, 2014; Ross King representing the Association County Commissioners of Georgia on June 27, 2014; Lamar Norton from the Georgia Municipal Association on July 24, 2014; Jack Parish representing the University of Georgia, College of Education on June 23, 2014; Jim Puckett representing the Georgia School Boards Association on July 11, 2014; Brian Wallace representing the Georgia Municipal Association on July 24, 2014; and John Zauner representing the Georgia School Superintendents Association on July 25, 2014. The interviews were conducted via telephone and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes each.

3. One important exception relates to school facility siting and the importance of collaboration with “smart growth” policies.

4. The wording of the local government official and the school official surveys differed slightly, but the meaning of the questions was the same.

5. The following Institute research partners distributed the appropriate survey to their membership: Association County Commissioners of Georgia, Georgia City Clerks Association, Georgia City/County Managers Association, Georgia Municipal Association, and the Georgia School Boards Association.

6. The school district survey required respondents to provide their district. These figures are current as of January 30, 2013.


8. See Hearn v. Board of Education.

9. Six respondents indicated at least one collaboration but did not provide the names of their jurisdictions. An additional 46 respondents did not indicate any kind of collaboration and did not include their jurisdictions. In several instances, multiple people responded from a single government. Those governments are counted once.

10. In several instances, multiple responses came from a single school district. Those governments are counted once.

11. 11.2% of all respondents did not answer whether they met formally with members of the opposite group, and 11.5% of respondents did not answer whether they met informally with members of the opposite group. Additionally, a handful of responses fall into the category “other,” such as “don’t know” or “randomly.”

12. Respondents indicated that leaders of their jurisdiction meet formally with the leaders of their counterpart (local government or school district) either weekly, monthly, or quarterly, or they indicated a specific number of times other than those listed in the survey that was more than annually (e.g., biannually).

13. Respondents indicated that leaders of their jurisdiction meet informally with the leaders of their counterpart (local government or school district) either weekly, monthly, or quarterly.
This figure also includes four respondents who stated that leaders regularly or often meet with their counterparts and one who said that leaders informally meet two to three times a year.

14. For example, Ga. Const. Art. IX, § 2, ¶1(a); Title 36 of the Georgia Code; Municipal Home Rule Act of 1965.


20. In a handful of instances, a city council sets the school millage rate for an independent school system.


27. O.C.G.A. § 20-2-1160.

28. In contrast, the state legislature requires substantial collaboration between cities and counties such as through the distribution of local option sales taxes, service delivery agreements, comprehensive planning, etc.


33. Metter’s population is based on the 2010 US Census. Candler County’s 2013 estimated population was 10,937. US Census Bureau.

35. Information for this case comes from interviews with Michael Barr, Newton County School District on July 3, 2014; Abagail Coggin, Newton County School Board member, on August 21, 2014; and Samantha Fuhey, Newton County school superintendent, on August 21, 2014 as well as a review of the NCCA and Newton County Fire Department's websites.

36. Compact Community Zones in the 2050 plan are aligned with the Newton County Water and Sewerage Authority service territory as approved by the state of Georgia.

37. Information for this case comes from interviews with Tom Bigwood, Candler County school superintendent, interviewed on December 8, 2014; Bubba Longgrear, Candler County assistant superintendent, interviewed on December 8, 2014; Joseph Mosley, city manager of Metter, Georgia, interviewed on November 24, 2014; and Billy Trapnell, mayor of the City of Metter, interviewed on November 24, 2014, as well as a review of relevant written documents that are cited separately.


39. Often the law enforcement classes are taught by faculty from the school’s technical college partner rather than staff from a local police department or sheriff’s office.

40. US Census Bureau, 2013 population estimate for the City of Hartwell. Hart County had an estimated 2013 population of 25,446.

41. Career academies are typical high schools in that students meet all state requirements for graduation, and they offer all the traditional academic courses such as English, math, and social studies. Career programs are often three-year-long courses taken consecutively, beginning in the sophomore year, and are taken as electives. Though the goal of a career academy is to train students for the workforce, some students engage in a program of study simply because they have a strong interest in the area, such as the culinary arts, and continue on to a four-year college.

42. O.C.G.A. § 20-2-84 requires Georgia school systems to designate whether they will remain a traditional system, become an IE2 system, or become a charter system. Each designation has its benefits and limitations. For charter systems, perceived benefits are greater flexibility and the potential for additional state funding.


44. This total number of firefighters is somewhat inflated because career firefighters often also volunteer for departments where they live if that department uses volunteers.

45. Interview with David Wall, Georgia Public Safety Training Center. Phone Interview on October 2, 2014.

46. The pension fund managed by the Georgia Fire Fighters’ Pension Fund. See www.gfpf.org.

47. Data about Newton County Fire Services training costs come from email correspondence with Chief Kevin O’Brien, November 3, 2014.

48. Information for this case study comes from interviews with Cydnie Taylor-Ridling, Newton County Fire Service, on October 29, 2014; Tim Schmitt, Newton County School District, on...
November 3, 2014; Chad Walker, Newton County College and Career Academy, on November 3, 2014; and James Woodard, Morgan County School District, on November 3, 2014 as well as email correspondence with Kevin O’Brien, Newton County Fire Service, dated November 3, 2014.

49. Mandated education plans for children diagnosed with a disability under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

50. A few subject areas for certification are not covered in the school courses, such as hazardous materials.

51. The simulators include roof, confined rescue, and hose bed.

52. Students not participating in the NCCA fire service program but who want to participate in the Fire Explorers program can join the one operated by the City of Covington.

53. Information for this case study comes from a group interview with David Aldrich, city manager for the City of Hartwell; Kevin Gaines, principal of Hartwell High School; and Jerry Bell, superintendent of the Hart County School District on December 3, 2014 as well as an interview with Fire Chief Terry Vickery on December 11, 2014.

54. See the following link for a career pathway sample plan of study: http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/CTAE/Documents/POS-LPSCS-Firefighting.pdf.

55. This finding refers to respondents, and multiple responses came from a single school district or local government.

56. These panels differ from the truancy protocol committees required under HB 1190 (2004). Under this law, school districts were mandated to establish truancy protocol committees composed of a variety of stakeholders including school representatives, law enforcement, social services, and the courts with the goal of reducing truancy. The committees established protocols for schools informing parents or guardians of a child's truant behavior as well as consequences and penalties for truancy.

57. In addition to cited written documentation, information for this section comes from interviews with Perry Marshall on October 8, 2014; David McFerrin on October 8, 2014; Jessica Pennington on October 15, 2014; Tom Rawlings on September 3, 2014; John Sumner on September 30, 2014; and Steve Teske on October 16, 2014.


59. Mandated education programs for children diagnosed with a disability under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

60. Local Family Connection Collaboratives are independent and establish their own priorities.

61. The Truancy Intervention Project, www.truancyproject.org

62. For this case study, interviews were conducted with school social worker Perry Marshall on October 8, 2014; school social worker David McFerrin on October 8, 2014; and Judge John Sumner on September 30, 2014. Additional information for this case study comes from email
correspondence with School Superintendent Frank Petruzielo dated October 16, 2014. In addition, several written documents about the truancy panel as well as the Cherokee County website were reviewed.

63. The school district serves more than 40,000 students with average attendance rates of 97% for elementary, middle, and high school. Statewide averages in 2013 were 96.7 for elementary school, 96.3 for middle school, and 95 percent for high school. See the Georgia Department of Education website, www.gadoe.org.

64. Several students moved out of the county, and a few others chose home schooling or dropped out of school. Transience is a problem for at-risk children.

65. For this case study, information comes from an interview with Steve Teske conducted on October 16, 2014. Additionally, several written documents about the program were reviewed as well as the Clayton County System of Care website.


68. Examples include the following counties: Chatham, Clarke, Glascock, Gwinnett, Houston, Jasper, and Muscogee.
References


Appendix

School District – Local Government Survey
Collaborative Governance: Special Purpose

Public service collaboration has been defined as “facilitating and operating in multi-organizational arrangements to solve problems that cannot be solved, or solved easily, by single organizations.” Collaboration is a popular topic and can be useful but clearly not all public services are best delivered through collaborative arrangements.

In this survey we’re seeking your expertise to learn to what extent intergovernmental collaboration is useful throughout the state of Georgia at the school district level.

In your opinion, how important is intergovernmental collaboration generally to the success of your school district?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extremely Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Neither Important nor Unimportant</th>
<th>Very Unimportant</th>
<th>Not at all Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A. What percentage of your services are delivered solely by your organization, “in house”?
B. What percentage of your services are delivered/shared through intergovernmental agreements?
C. What percentage of your services are delivered/shared through private, non-governmental organizations like for-profits and nonprofits?

For example, if half of your services are delivered in house and a quarter are shared with neighboring districts, and a quarter are contracted to a nonprofit, say 50, 25, 25, respectively. Your best guess is fine; totals should equal 100.

A. % services that are solely in-house
B. % services that are intergovernmental
C. % services that are private-for/nonprofit

Total

Do you feel pressure to collaborate? For each potential source of pressure, please indicate how much or how little.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pressure to AVOID collaboration</th>
<th>No pressure either way</th>
<th>Pressure TO collaborate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Citizens/constituents
- My elected body
- Local gov’ts and/or other school districts
The rest of the questions in this survey ask you to specifically think about collaborations with local governments (cities/counties) in your area/jurisdiction.

In your opinion, how important is collaboration with your area local government(s) to the success of your school district?

- Extremely Important
- Very Important
- Neither Important nor Unimportant
- Very Unimportant
- Not at all Important

In your opinion, what are the top reasons that make collaborations with local government(s) difficult?

- Different constituents
- Financial constraints
- Different missions
- Not a leadership priority of the local government(s)
- Legal constraints (non-financial)
- Not a leadership priority of my organization
- Time constraints
- Other
For each column check the areas for collaboration. In other words, in your opinion what are the areas where collaboration between your schools and local government(s) are most most needed; areas where collaboration will be easiest to achieve and the areas where you are already collaborating with local government(s).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Already Collaborating (select all that apply)</th>
<th>Easiest to Achieve (top 5)</th>
<th>Most Needed (top 5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land use/zoning: lot size, approved use, multi-family vs. single family</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood nutrition and/or obesity programs</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Works: establishing capital improvement spending priorities (road expansion, street light installation, utilities, new fire stations, etc. in relation to school location)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Energy Efficiency and “green” building improvements</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emergency management and preparedness: natural disasters</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Works: scheduling capital maintenance (fill potholes, fix street lights, etc. in relation to school location)</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administrative service: sharing of support staff, office equipment, office space</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recreation and sports programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information technology and/or records management support</td>
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<tr>
<td>School siting, land purchases for new schools</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shared facilities: using school facilities for non-recreation related community programs and meeting</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Safety: resource officers, guns/violence, drugs, truancy, juvenile delinquency</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purchasing: joint purchasing, contracts for shared services, etc.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human services: county health department and WIC services</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>☐</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

How frequently do the leaders of local government (city/county) meet with your school/district leadership formally?

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Quarterly
- Yearly
- Never
- Other

How frequently do the leaders of local government (city/county) meet with your school/district leadership informally?

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Quarterly
- Yearly
- Never
- Other
Are you an elected official?

- Yes
- No

Please select your school district.

Is there anything about collaboration with local government(s) that we have not asked, but that you would like to share?
School District – Local Government Survey
Collaborative Governance: **General Purpose**

Public service collaboration has been defined as "facilitating and operating in multi-organizational arrangements to solve problems that cannot be solved, or solved easily, by single organizations." Collaboration is a popular topic and can be useful but clearly not all public services are best delivered through collaborative arrangements.

In this survey we’re seeking your expertise to learn to what extent intergovernmental collaboration is useful throughout the state of Georgia at the local level.

In your opinion, how important is intergovernmental collaboration generally to the success of your local government?

- Extremely Important
- Very Important
- Neither Important nor Unimportant
- Very Unimportant
- Not at all Important

A. What percentage of your services are delivered solely by your organization, “in house”?
B. What percentage of your services are delivered/shared through intergovernmental agreements?
C. What percentage of your services are delivered/shared through private, non-governmental organizations like for-profits and nonprofits?

For example, if half of your services are delivered in house and a quarter are shared with neighboring local governments, and a quarter are contracted to a nonprofit, say 50, 25, 25, respectively. Your best guess is fine; totals should equal 100.

A. % services that are solely in-house
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**Total**

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<td>4</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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- **Citizens/constituents**
- **My elected body**
- **Other local gov'ts**
- **State gov't**
School District – Local Government Survey | Collaborative Governance: General Purpose  Continued

The rest of the questions in this survey ask you to specifically think about collaborations with school districts in your area/jurisdiction.

In your opinion, how important is collaboration with your area school district(s) to the success of your local government?

- Extremely Important
- Very Important
- Neither Important nor Unimportant
- Very Unimportant
- Not at all Important

In your opinion, what are the top reasons that make collaborations with school districts difficult?

- Drag no more than 3 reasons, in order, from left to this box

Items
- Not a leadership priority of school district
- Not a leadership priority of my organization
- Legal constraints (non financial)
- Financial constraints
- Time constraints
- Different constituents
- Different missions
- Other
For each column check the areas for collaboration. In other words, in your opinion what are the areas where collaboration between your government and schools are most most needed; areas where collaboration will be easiest to achieve and the areas where you are already collaborating with schools.

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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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</table>

How frequently do members of the school board or the school superintendent formally meet with officials from your organization (city/county)?

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Quarterly
- Yearly
- Never
- Other

How frequently do members of the school board or the school superintendent informally meet with officials from your organization (city/county)?

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Quarterly
- Yearly
- Never
- Other
What is your government/district name? Please include your county name as well.

Are you an elected official?

Yes [ ]

No [ ]

Is there anything about collaboration with schools that we have not asked, but that you would like to share?


About the Authors

Paula Sanford, Ph.D., is a faculty member with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government, a Public Service and Outreach unit at the University of Georgia. She specializes in public budgeting and finance, but her technical assistance and applied research spans a variety of local government issues such as organizational reviews, consolidation, and public retirement reform.

Robert K. Christensen, Ph.D., is an associate professor in UGA’s School of Public and International Affairs. He studies public and nonprofit organizations and personnel—including courts and judges—to advance public service research, education, and practice.

Ilka McConnell, Ph.D., is a faculty member in Hart County with the Archway Partnership, a UGA Public Service and Outreach unit. She works together with community partners to address critical economic and community needs.

Betsy McGriff, M.B.A., serves as the Archway Professional in Candler County. She forms partnerships with members throughout the community to address critical economic and community development needs.
UGA Public Service and Outreach programs have contributed to Georgia’s well-being for more than 85 years. By helping develop leaders, create jobs, and address public challenges, the work of Public Service and Outreach helps strengthen communities throughout the state.

The University of Georgia’s Carl Vinson Institute of Government has been helping government entities become more efficient, effective, and responsive for more than 85 years. Through training and development, customized assistance, application of technology, and studies relevant to operations and decision making, we have the expertise to meet the needs of government at all levels throughout Georgia. The Carl Vinson Institute of Government is an approved provider of school board governance training by the State Board of Education.

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