

SREB

Charter Schools in SREB States:

A Call for Accountability

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Southern
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A FOCUS REPORT IN THE *CHALLENGE TO LEAD* SERIES

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This report is part of the *Challenge to Lead* education goals series, directed by Sue Street. For more information, e-mail sue.street@sreb.org. *Goals for Education: Challenge to Lead* also is available on the SREB Web site at www.sreb.org. A full list of the goals, with publications describing SREB states' progress toward them, is printed on the inside back cover.

Charter Schools in SREB States: *A Call for Accountability*

How do you know if your state's schools are helping all students make progress?

- *School-by-school accountability systems are focused on results.*
- *Performance gaps in meeting state standards are closed school by school and for groups of students within each school.*

From the SREB *Challenge to Lead* Goals for Education

Charter schools are publicly funded elementary, middle grades or high schools that are exempt from many of the laws and regulations applicable to traditional public schools, such as required curricula, maximum class sizes or the minimum amount of instructional time required for particular subjects. Legislation authorizing charter schools in SREB states generally establishes the purposes of charter schools as stimulating educational innovation and improving student achievement. The legal and regulatory flexibility that defines charter schools provides them with the opportunity to apply new ideas and innovative approaches to education.

In exchange for increased flexibility, charter schools are expected to show measurable gains in student performance, usually through increases in test scores and other student assessments. Charter schools that do not show sufficient progress may not have their charters renewed. In extreme cases of mismanagement or poor performance, charter schools may be (and have been) shut down before their charters expire.

In 1993, Georgia became the first SREB state to authorize charter schools. Since then, 12 additional SREB states have passed laws permitting charter schools. By 2007, more than 950 charter schools were operating in SREB states, with enrollments approaching 350,000 students. The 13 SREB states that permit charter schools have pursued them to varying degrees. Several states have moved cautiously, either because their laws do not permit the rapid expansion of charter schools, or because school boards have not favored using local funds for charter schools. However, two SREB states — Texas and Florida — have moved aggressively. In the 2007-2008 school year, they had the second- and third-highest charter school enrollments, respectively, in the nation. (See table on next page.)

Policy-makers and education leaders want to know if charter school students are reaching high levels of achievement, whether charter schools are effective and efficient, and whether charter schools work equally well for all students. They recognize that some states still have few charter schools, even after the passage of charter school legislation, and that it takes time for charter schools (as for all new ventures) to reach their potential. Certainly by now, however, it's fair to ask, "How well do charter schools work? How successful are they?"

Charter Schools in SREB States, 2007-2008

	Number of Charter Schools	Student Enrollment	Charter School Students as Percentage of State Public School Enrollment	Year of Original Charter Law	Maximum Number of Charters Allowed
SREB states ¹	955	342,636	2.1%		
Arkansas	19	5,414	1.2	1995	24 start-up charter schools (no conversion charter school limit)
Delaware	16	7,223	5.8	1995	N/A
Florida	358	104,319	3.9	1996	N/A
Georgia	66	38,256	2.3	1993	N/A
Louisiana	51	21,695	3.2	1995	70 ²
Maryland	30	7,149	0.8	2003	N/A
Mississippi	1	375	0.1	1997	6
North Carolina	98	30,892	2.2	1996	100 statewide; 5 new schools per district per year
Oklahoma	14	5,141	0.8	1999	N/A ³
South Carolina	29	5,538	0.8	1996	N/A
Tennessee	12	2,634	0.3	2002	20 in Memphis, 4 in Shelby County, 26 elsewhere in the state
Texas	258	113,760	2.4	1995	215 start-up charter contracts ⁴
Virginia	3	240	0.0	1998	N/A

“N/A” indicates data not applicable. These states do not limit the total number of charter schools statewide.

¹ Alabama, Kentucky and West Virginia do not allow charter schools.

² The Recovery School District is exempt from the state cap on the number of charter schools.

³ Oklahoma only allows charter schools in districts with 5,000 or more students, located in counties with populations of 500,000 or more.

⁴ Start-up charter schools in Texas are approved by the state Board of Education; there were 199 such schools in 2007-2008. There is no cap on the number of conversion charter schools, which are locally approved. Also, more than one campus may be operated under one charter contract.

Sources: SREB state departments of education

Despite their growth, charter schools are still considered an innovation, and student performance results are limited. The U.S. Department of Education has provided results for charter school students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) since 2003; this information, however, represents only a small sample of charter schools nationwide — too small for state-to-state comparisons. Other research is available that, while limited in scale, provides answers to questions about the performance of charter school students in several SREB states with sizeable charter school enrollments. Furthermore, evidence is emerging on how state policies can affect the success of charter schools.

This report will help you and other policy-makers and education leaders answer three key questions:

- How does the achievement of charter school students compare with that of traditional public school students?
- Do statewide data systems in SREB states provide the information needed to assess charter school student performance?
- What state-level policies and practices result in effective charter schools?



QUESTION 1:

How does the achievement of charter school students compare with that of traditional public school students?

Because research on charter school student performance is limited, it is difficult to draw broad conclusions. Research nevertheless shows that charter school student performance varies widely from school to school. The variation in student performance is not surprising, given the diversity among charter schools and the student populations that they serve. In this sense, charter schools are similar to public schools. Charter schools sometimes become more successful at improving student performance after multiple years in operation. However, some students have difficulty transitioning from traditional public schools to charter schools, negatively affecting those students' academic achievement.

Many students who enter charter schools perform below grade-level expectations, but measuring the number of these students that charter schools are able to bring to grade level may not be the most accurate gauge of effectiveness. Comparing charter school student gains on state assessments with those of similar students in traditional public schools may be the best gauge overall, because it examines how much charter schools are able to improve student academic performance.

In 2005, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools commissioned a review of charter school achievement studies nationwide. An October 2007 update of the report concluded that the best method for assessing the performance of charter school students is to measure changes in individual student performance over time, as compared with changes in performance of similar students at traditional public schools. The goal of such comparisons is to determine if students receive an additional educational benefit from attending a charter school.

In the last four years, analyses examining these kinds of comparisons over time on state reading and mathematics assessments were completed in four of the six SREB states with the highest percentage of public school students enrolled in charter schools: Delaware, Florida, North Carolina and Texas. These four states accounted for nearly 75 percent of all students enrolled in charter schools in the SREB region in the 2007-2008 school year. The results are mixed.

From 2002 to 2006, results on state assessments in **Delaware** improved for elementary and middle grades charter school students. But results also improved for similar traditional school students, and at a faster rate. In addition, the difference appeared to widen over time. In contrast, charter high school student performance improved at a faster rate than the performance of students enrolled in traditional high

Defining Charter Contracts

A school's charter:

- is a contract for a set period of time between a sponsor and an authorizing agency.
- governs the creation and operations of a school.
- typically details the particular laws and regulations from which a school is exempt.
- specifies performance goals for student achievement and other school responsibilities.
- may allow a sponsor to operate multiple campuses under one contract.

A charter school can be:

- a “start-up,” a new school initially established as a charter school; or
- a “conversion,” an existing traditional school that converts to charter status.

schools. The racial and economic characteristics and academic performance of charter school students were similar to those in the statewide public school student population. However, researchers found that students at each charter school were more similar to one another in terms of racial, economic and academic characteristics than students at traditional public schools located in the same school district. In particular, charter high schools attracted students whose previous state assessment scores were higher than those of students enrolled in traditional high schools.

In **Florida**, charter elementary, middle grades and high school students made about the same performance gains on state assessments from 1998 to 2004 as those made by similar traditional school students. However, low-performing students who entered charter high schools improved their scores faster than low-performing students at traditional high schools. Although the charter school student population statewide was similar in terms of racial, economic and academic characteristics to that of traditional public schools, the average state assessment scores for students who entered charter schools were lower than the average scores of students at traditional schools.

Students enrolled in charter schools in **North Carolina** at all grade levels made smaller gains in performance from 1995 to 2002 than students enrolled in traditional public schools, regardless of how long they were enrolled in charter schools or the number of years each charter school operated. Charter schools in North Carolina had a higher percentage of black students (and a lower percentage of white and Hispanic students) than traditional public schools, and students typically entered charter schools with lower scores on state assessments than students who remained in traditional public schools. However, charter school students were more likely to have college-educated parents than were traditional school students.

Texas elementary and middle grades charter school students performed comparably, overall, to similar students enrolled in traditional schools from 2002 to 2004. However, students who attended elementary and middle grades charter schools serving a high percentage of students at risk of dropping out or not being promoted to the next grade — 70 percent or higher — had larger average performance gains than similar students in traditional schools. In contrast, charter high school students showed smaller performance gains than traditional high school students. Charter schools in Texas enrolled a higher percentage

of black, low-income and at-risk students than traditional public schools. Students enrolling in charter schools also tended to have lower-than-average scores on state assessments.

Understanding that charter school student achievement has thus far been uneven, there are two conclusions that policy-makers can draw from the available research:

■ **Students in older charter schools show greater gains.**

The number of years a charter school is in operation can be a factor in student performance. A study in Florida found that gains on state mathematics and reading assessments for students at start-up charter schools tended to be lower than those of traditional school students in the first few years of a school's operation. However, by the fourth year, improvement on math assessments by this group of students showed no meaningful difference. By the fifth year, improvement on state reading assessments by these students exceeded, on average, those of traditional school students.

Similarly, there is evidence that gains in student achievement on state assessments at elementary and middle grades charter schools in Texas were greater the longer those schools were in operation. In North Carolina, while charter students show smaller achievement gains than traditional school students, gains in scores increased at charter schools after their first year of operation.

The number of years a charter school is in operation can be a factor in student performance.

If charter schools require several years of continuous operation to successfully improve student achievement, policy-makers need to be realistic about how long it will take charter schools to reach their stride in improving student performance in their states. While charter schools may be able to help students increase their test scores faster than traditional public schools, they won't provide quick fixes for educational systems that need improvement.

■ **Students may initially struggle in charter schools.**

A student who transitions from a traditional school to a charter school may initially experience a drop in performance. Assessment gains for North Carolina charter school students tended to be the smallest in the first year after those students made the transition from traditional to charter schools. Texas elementary and middle grades charter school students made smaller gains on state assessments in their initial year of charter school enrollment. However, these students made larger gains than similar traditional school students after multiple years of continuous charter school enrollment.

You and other policy-makers need to ensure that charter schools are doing what they can to minimize the disruption caused to a student's education when that student enters a charter school. This may mean that better orientation programs for new charter school students are needed, or that charter schools need to focus more closely on the challenges faced by students who are adapting to the charter school environment.

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Despite these broad conclusions, multi-year data that track charter school student achievement and solid analyses based on this information remain limited. Although in some instances there is encouraging evidence about charter school student performance, much more research is needed.

QUESTION 2:

Do statewide data systems in SREB states provide the information needed to assess charter school student performance?

All 13 SREB states with charter schools have statewide data systems that collect the most basic information necessary to assess charter school student performance. But the statewide data systems of some SREB states are not as well developed as those in other states.

The federal *No Child Left Behind Act* requires states to test all public school students, including charter school students, in reading and mathematics through the early and middle grades, and once in high school. Test scores on these assessments are available for public school students each year. Statewide data systems ensure that these scores are captured and recorded, which in turn provides the basic data needed for analyses of charter school student performance.

The national Data Quality Campaign launched an effort to encourage states to develop statewide education data systems, identifying essential elements of high-quality state systems. State data systems with these elements can provide the information states need to assess the basic components of charter school student performance. Measurement of charter school student performance within states requires these data systems so researchers can track individual students from one year to the next and from one school to another. Currently, most SREB states have made a good start on their data systems, although some are only about halfway in putting the essential elements of a quality system in place. (For more information, visit www.dataqualitycampaign.org.)

Why are education data systems so important? Measuring the performance of charter school students requires comparisons of performance growth from year to year with similar traditional public school students. Researchers must depend on data systems to provide key student information so they can follow students as they move from school to school. By 2007, some key student information was available in the education data systems of all SREB states.

The elements identified as essential by the Data Quality Campaign, however, only represent a basic framework for student data systems. To determine how well charter schools are increasing student achievement levels, information beyond test scores is needed. For example, research indicates that continued enrollment in a charter school and moving to or from charter schools may have an impact on each student's performance. To account for those factors accurately, states need to be able to follow enrollment patterns of students across charter and traditional schools.

In addition, research based on charter school student performance on state assessments in mathematics and reading alone may not provide a complete view of student achievement. In reviewing charter school achievement studies, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools recommends research based on additional information such as student performance in other subjects, attendance rates, high school graduation rates and college-going rates. School-level analyses also are needed on topics such as schools' performance on accountability measures other than test scores, and on why some charter schools are so much more successful than others at increasing student achievement.

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■ **High-quality state data systems are needed as the basis for policy decisions.**

State leaders need to ensure that their data systems can gather the information they need to measure charter school student performance, so they can use the information to guide policy decisions.

Even though states have made progress in developing their statewide student data systems, many states do not have information for a sufficiently long period of time to allow for comprehensive analyses of charter school student performance. Also, some states may not report data for all students, particularly students enrolled at charter schools that do not include any grade levels subject to required statewide student assessments or that have such small enrollment levels that they are exempt from statewide data reporting requirements. As states build their data systems, policy-makers need to ensure that those systems are capable of gathering a broad enough range of information to answer questions such as:

- How rapidly is charter school student performance increasing compared with that of similar students at traditional schools?
- How well do charter school students perform on other measures, such as high school dropout and graduation rates, college enrollment rates, and achievement in subjects other than math and reading?
- Why do some charter schools have higher student achievement than others?
- How successfully do charter schools meet the accountability measures, other than test scores, stipulated in their charters, such as financial management, attendance rates or objective evaluations of classroom performance?
- Is there evidence as to how policies governing charter school creation affect the success of charter schools in improving student performance?

Without data systems that can gather this information, state leaders cannot answer critical questions about student performance that are essential to assessing charter school effectiveness.



QUESTION 3:

What state-level policies and practices result in effective charter schools?

While each individual charter school is responsible for the success of its students, researchers and policy-makers are turning their attention to how the policies governing the creation and oversight of charter schools can improve their effectiveness. An authorizing agency can, through its duties in approving charter applications and overseeing charter schools, promote the quality and accountability of charter schools.

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement has identified factors common to authorizing agencies that have promoted quality and success among charter schools they have approved. These factors include:

- a mission to provide quality educational options for students.
- encouraging innovation in multiple aspects of school operations.

- strong agency management.
- fostering community support and parental involvement.
- using appropriate measures of student performance.
- holding schools accountable for achieving performance goals while providing them with autonomy and flexibility to address challenges.

The National Association of Charter School Authorizers published the latest version of its *Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing* in 2007, identifying the core responsibilities of charter school authorizing agencies. The principles and standards reflect the common traits of high-quality authorizing agencies, including:

- maintaining a strong capacity for evaluating and approving quality charter applications.
- negotiating contracts with charter schools that clearly identify expected outcomes and means for measuring them.
- performing oversight and evaluation in a way that respects schools' autonomy.
- applying rigorous, merit-based criteria when making charter renewal decisions.

The factors of high-quality authorizing agencies identified by both of these organizations mirror several factors that the Office of Innovation and Improvement has identified as common to certain individual charter schools it has deemed as high-quality. These factors include:

- a school mission of improving education that guides all decisions and focuses on specific goals.
- innovation, experimentation, flexibility and creativity in all aspects of school operations.
- direct parental involvement.
- school-wide accountability for improved student performance.

While these factors are important and may provide valuable clues as to why some charter school students show greater improvement than others, state legislation cannot necessarily ensure that charter schools will incorporate them into daily operations. For this reason, laws and policies that govern the authorization process and authorizing agencies are key for ensuring charter school quality on a statewide level.

Authorizing agency: an entity that reviews and approves charter school applications. Authorizing agencies often are responsible for holding charter schools accountable to the terms of their charters. The most common types of authorizing agencies are local school districts and state departments of education. Other organizations that may serve as authorizing agencies include universities, nonprofit groups and independent state agencies that focus exclusively on charter school approval. (See appendix.)

Sponsor: an organization that provides board-level management, oversight and leadership for a charter school. A sponsor typically develops and submits the charter application and is responsible for guiding a charter school under its supervision toward the goals and outcomes delineated in the charter agreement. Sponsors may include local school districts, parents' groups, universities and educational management organizations. State laws identify who may serve as a charter school sponsor.

The nonpartisan education policy organization Education Sector cites charter school authorization as the critical link in establishing high-quality charter schools, pointing out that quality authorizing practices can help charter schools avoid problems after they open. Education Sector notes that more authorizing agencies are now statewide and focus exclusively on the authorization and evaluation of charter schools, which has in some cases meant shifting the authority from one entity, such as a state department of education, to another. Establishing a state-level authorizing agency also may mean that the state assumes an authorizing role that has been predominantly or exclusively performed by local school districts.

Local school boards are still the most common type of authorizing agency, but those boards have sometimes not been receptive to the creation of charter schools within their districts. Independent, state-level authorizing agencies are seen as an alternative for states that want to increase the number of charter schools. With their exclusive focus on charter schools, independent state-level agencies may have a greater capacity than local school boards to review charter applications and to perform oversight. However, because the authorizing function has largely been the responsibility of local school boards, the creation of such an agency can be controversial. Furthermore, without adequate resources and support, these state-level agencies may not be effective.

Florida, for example, once permitted only local school boards and, in certain cases, universities or community colleges, to authorize the creation of charter schools. The Legislature approved an authorizing agency at the state level by creating the **Florida Schools of Excellence Commission** in 2006. The commission is an independent organization with a focus on the development, authorization, support and monitoring of high-quality charter schools. Florida's commission also may sponsor or co-sponsor charter schools with local entities and is responsible for disseminating best practices to its charter schools and their sponsors.

Quality authorizing practices can help charter schools avoid problems after they open.

However, the creation of the commission has been controversial. A lawsuit has challenged the commission's authority to oversee local schools. In addition, some school districts have used a provision in Florida's charter school law that allows them to retain exclusive authority for authorizing charter schools within their district.

While the Georgia Department of Education has the authority to approve charter schools whose applications have been turned down by local school boards, the Legislature approved the creation of the **Georgia Charter Schools Commission** in 2008. As with Florida's commission, the Georgia commission is charged with developing and overseeing high-quality charter schools and with disseminating information about best practices. While local school districts still will be able to approve charter schools, state funds will "follow" a student if he or she leaves a local school district to attend a school approved by the commission. The commission is expected to begin operations in early 2009.

While state law cannot guarantee that individual charter schools will employ practices that have been associated with improved charter school student performance, Education Sector has identified elements of charter school laws that can promote statewide quality among charter schools. These include:

- One or more "professional" authorizing agencies that focus on the approval and oversight of charter schools and have enough resources to carry out that role.
- Authorizing agencies that are accountable for the performance and quality of the charter schools they oversee, so that poor-performing agencies either improve or cease authorizing.

- Charter school accountability measures that emphasize schools' responsibility for improved student performance, instead of paperwork and administrative requirements.
- Charter school oversight that does not place more burdensome reporting requirements on charter schools than those required of traditional public schools.
- Charter schools with substantial freedom from state regulations so that they can experiment and innovate.
- A funding mechanism that supports charter school costs, including start-up expenses and facilities.
- Requiring high-quality educational data from all charter schools.

The individual policy environment of a state can have an extensive impact on charter school laws and implementation. Policy-makers need to help their states establish charter school laws and policies that support authorizing agencies that promote quality among the charter schools they authorize. In turn, states must hold those authorizing agencies accountable for the success, or lack thereof, of the charter schools they have approved. In cases where an authorizing agency is not performing to standards, states and policy-makers must be willing to take the steps necessary to help that agency improve or consider shifting authorizing authority from one entity to another.

Greater understanding of best practices in charter school operations and statewide charter school policies can help policy-makers understand how charter schools might perform more effectively. Nevertheless, more insight is needed as to how policy and law ensure quality among charter schools.



What Can You and Your State Do to Ensure Charter School Quality?

Charter schools in several SREB states have progressed beyond the pilot phase. A few SREB states have moved even further, becoming national leaders in charter school creation. Yet, while charter schools show promise and even some measured success, more research and concrete evidence of student achievement trends are needed.

As a policy-maker and education leader, how can you ensure that charter school efforts in your state are improving education? You and other leaders can take five key steps:

1. **Foster research about the performance of charter school students, including whether student performance is improving from year to year and if it can be measured beyond math and reading test scores. State leaders need to ask if charter school students are succeeding at the same rate or better than other students.**
2. **Fully support and adequately fund the development and maintenance of statewide K-12 education data systems to track the performance of all students, including charter school students, so that researchers can monitor students as they transition into and out of charter schools.**
3. **Establish an authorizing process that produces accountable, high-quality charter schools. As it becomes more clear which policies and practices correspond to high-quality charter schools and**

authorizing agencies, states should ensure that authorizing agencies and the charter schools they approve reflect these standards and are accountable.

4. **Ensure that authorizing agencies perform consistent oversight of charter schools and hold the schools to the standards of student performance and competent management delineated in their charter agreements.**
5. **Provide charter schools with sufficient freedom from state regulations and evaluate them in a way that relies primarily on academic performance (instead of paperwork or administrative criteria) and that allows them the opportunity to maximize the potential for applying new ideas in education.**

Charter schools present an opportunity for innovation in education, but they should not be provided flexibility without being held accountable for educational results. They must be effective and help all students make progress in improving academic performance. Despite mixed results in charter school student performance, many charter schools are showing encouraging signs that effective state-level policies can help establish high-quality charter schools and hold them accountable for their performance.

Ultimately, states that choose to take on the opportunity — and challenge — of charter schools must ensure that charter schools serve one goal: helping to educate *all* of the students they enroll.

Charter School Authorizing Agencies in SREB States

Arkansas: Local school boards and the state Board of Education must approve charter applications.

Delaware: Applications may be approved either by local school boards or by the state Board of Education and the state secretary of education.

Florida: Local school boards or the Florida Schools of Excellence Commission may approve charter applications (except in districts that have been granted exclusive authority to authorize charter schools by the state Board of Education). Universities may grant charters for laboratory schools, and community colleges may grant charters for charter technical career centers.

Georgia: Both the state Board of Education and local school boards must approve charter applications. A sponsor whose start-up charter application is rejected may appeal to the state Board of Education for approval as a state-level charter school. Beginning in 2009, the Georgia Charter Schools Commission also will be permitted to approve charter applications, including applications that have been rejected by local school boards. The state Board of Education must approve applications from school districts that apply for conversion to charter status.

Louisiana: Local school boards or the state Board of Education may approve charter applications.

Maryland: County school boards may approve charter applications. For schools applying for charter status as a corrective action due to low student performance, if the county board does not render a decision within 30 days of receiving the application (or 45 days if an extension is granted), the state Board of Education may approve the application.

Mississippi: Local school boards and the state Board of Education must approve charter applications.

North Carolina: Local school boards, any University of North Carolina institution, or the state Board of Education may provide preliminary approval of charter applications. The state Board of Education must provide final approval of all charter applications.

Oklahoma: Local school boards or the boards of local technical schools in eligible school districts may approve charter applications.

South Carolina: Applications may be approved either by local school boards or, for start-up charter schools or renewals of conversion charter schools, by the statewide South Carolina Public School Charter District.

Tennessee: Local school boards may approve charter applications. Denied applications may be appealed to the state Board of Education, which may instruct the local school board to approve the application if the state board determines that denial of the application was not in the best interests of the students or community.

Texas: Local school boards may approve the conversion of a single school or an entire district to charter status. The state Board of Education may approve the creation of new charter schools.

Virginia: Local school boards may approve charter applications.

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The following reports may be found on the SREB Web site at www.sreb.org.

■ **Challenge to Lead Education Goals Series**

Ready to Start: Ensuring High-Quality Prekindergarten in SREB States

SREB states are national leaders in providing state-funded prekindergarten for 4-year-olds. This report reviews SREB states' progress in improving prekindergarten access and calls for a greater focus on quality, funding, teacher training and other actions to help all children get ready for school, including those in poverty or from low-income or English-as-a-second-language families.

Set for Success: Improving Reading and Mathematics Achievement in the Early Grades

This report documents the continued progress of SREB states in preparing early grades students for success in the middle grades — and beyond. It analyzes scores on state assessments and the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) and discusses what states are doing to improve early grades reading instruction, including the federally funded Reading First program. It also presents intervention policies in SREB states and effective ways to meet the needs of students not yet achieving at grade level.

Getting the Mission Right in the Middle Grades

This report documents SREB states' progress in getting middle grades students ready for high school. The analyses are based on scores and standards of state achievement tests and on results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The report also describes promising practices for preparing middle grades students for high school, based on technology applications that have been implemented in SREB states and on the work of SREB's *Making Middle Grades Work*.

Getting Serious About High School Graduation

This report documents that graduation rates are low — especially for minority students and males — and that rates have declined since the 1980s. Additionally, too few young adults who need them receive alternative credentials, such as the GED. The report explains how graduation rates are calculated and offers promising practices for increasing them by improving accountability systems, focusing on the ninth grade, reforming high schools and developing media campaigns to promote graduation.

Getting Students Ready for College and Careers

As a companion to *Getting Serious About High School Graduation*, this report asserts that SREB states need to ensure that all graduates are ready for further education and the workplace. It concludes that all students should take an essential core of courses traditionally prescribed only for college-bound students, including four years of mathematics including Algebra II. The report describes where SREB states stand on graduation requirements, college admission exams, achievement gaps and advanced course-taking, and it offers strategies to help states improve readiness rates and reduce the need for remediation in college.

Investing Wisely in Adult Learning is Key to State Prosperity

This report documents the benefits of providing more education for adults who did not complete high school and the urgency of increasing the number of high school dropouts who pursue further education. It focuses on three key indicators of progress: enrollments in Adult Basic Education, GED completion and enrollments of students who earned the GED credential in

postsecondary education. Some SREB states have made strides in developing policies and programs for adult learners, and the report profiles their efforts and results. The report offers some promising practices for addressing the adult learning challenge facing SREB states.

Creating College Opportunity for All: Prepared Students and Affordable Colleges

SREB's *Challenge to Lead* goals call on states to ensure that many more youth — particularly from minority groups and low-income families — prepare for, enroll in and graduate from college. This means that college must be affordable for these students. This report examines the current affordability gap and what steps could make college a possibility for more young people. It focuses on the need for state-funded financial assistance and ways that states can help prepare a new generation of residents for the future.

Focusing on Student Performance Through Accountability

SREB states face new challenges as they adapt to the requirements of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. This report reviews SREB states' progress in implementing their accountability systems and in improving student performance in all groups. The report documents that many states may not be improving performance at adequate rates to meet the legislation's 2014 deadline. It discusses Title 1 and non-Title 1 schools and includes state profiles of performance data for each state compared with *NCLB* targets.

Schools Need Good Leaders Now: State Progress in Creating a Learning-Centered School Leadership System

This report calls for states to designate school leadership as a visible state, district and school priority, focused on the principal's role in leading schools toward higher student performance. It describes the progress that states should make to ensure that they have the learning-centered school leaders they need to succeed in the 21st century.

Resolve and Resources to Get a Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom

Every student deserves qualified teachers, but states do not have enough qualified teachers for every subject in every school. This report documents SREB states' progress toward getting a qualified teacher in every classroom. It highlights the essential policies that SREB states should resolve to develop and to support with adequate resources.

Holding Colleges and Universities Accountable for Meeting State Needs

SREB's *Challenge to Lead* goals call for states to hold colleges and universities accountable for meeting state needs. This report looks at states' annual reports for higher education accountability and recommends that states develop public agendas for higher education. It also describes states' progress on key indicators: higher education graduation rates, faculty salaries, and science and research funding. SREB states have improved, but work remains to be done.

From Goals to Results: Improving Education System Accountability

SREB's *Challenge to Lead* for states to encourage early childhood programs, K-12 schools, community and technical colleges, two- and four-year colleges, universities and adult education to work together *as a system*. This includes helping students make smooth transitions to the next education level, building statewide education data systems and achieving real-dollar growth in state budgets for K-12 and higher education. The report includes recommendations and an action agenda, *From Goals to Results ... Making It Happen*.

Challenge to Lead Goals for Education

The reports listed below for each goal, and other reports on the goals, are found at www.sreb.org.

1. All children are ready for the first grade.
Ready to Start: Ensuring High-Quality Prekindergarten in SREB States
2. Achievement in the early grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.
Set for Success: Improving Reading and Mathematics Achievement in the Early Grades
3. Achievement in the middle grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.
Getting the Mission Right in the Middle Grades
4. All young adults have a high school diploma — or, if not, pass the GED tests.
Getting Serious About High School Graduation
5. All recent high school graduates have solid academic preparation and are ready for post-secondary education and a career.
Getting Students Ready for College and Careers
6. Adults who are not high school graduates participate in literacy and job-skills training and further education.
Investing Wisely in Adult Learning is Key to State Prosperity
7. The percentage of adults who earn postsecondary degrees or technical certificates exceeds national averages.
Creating College Opportunity for All: Prepared Students and Affordable Colleges
8. Every school has higher student performance and meets state academic standards for all students each year.
Focusing on Student Performance Through Accountability
9. Every school has leadership that results in improved student performance — and leadership begins with an effective school principal.
Schools Need Good Leaders Now: State Progress in Creating a Learning-Centered School Leadership System
10. Every student is taught by qualified teachers.
Resolve and Resources to Get a Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom
11. The quality of colleges and universities is regularly assessed and funding is targeted to quality, efficiency and state needs.
Holding Colleges and Universities Accountable for Meeting State Needs
12. The state places a high priority on an education system of schools, colleges and universities that is accountable.
From Goals to Results: Improving Education System Accountability

The Southern Regional Education Board has established these Goals for Education. They are built on the groundbreaking education goals SREB adopted in 1988 and on an ongoing effort to promote actions and measure progress. The goals raise further the sights of the 16 SREB states and challenge them to lead the nation.

