

“There is not just one solution. It will take a partnership of teachers, parents and administrators to improve student achievement. No one and no thing can accomplish this monumental task alone.”

“Treat all students equally, provide high-quality teaching, have high expectations and students will succeed.”

“In today’s world it is absolutely necessary for students to achieve at the highest level their ability allows, and then go beyond.”

# PRIMARY SOURCES: AMERICA’S TEACHERS ON AMERICA’S SCHOOLS

## GEORGIA

A PROJECT OF SCHOLASTIC AND THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

“Everyone should finish high school and move on to something higher. I think they all can.”

“Give them standardized tests, but not all the time, and their lives shouldn’t depend on it; and neither should ours.”

“Learning is a lifelong project and all students

are capable

being lifelong learners.”

“How do we prepare students for jobs that don’t yet exist?”

“When we expect our students to achieve, they meet our expectations. Nothing is more important to improving student achievement...in school and in life.”  
– *Elementary School Teacher in Georgia*

***Primary Sources: Georgia* is meant for use in conjunction with the complete *Primary Sources* report available at [www.scholastic.com/primarysources](http://www.scholastic.com/primarysources).**

# A NOTE FROM SCHOLASTIC AND THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

In March 2010, Scholastic and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation released the landmark study, *Primary Sources: America's Teachers on America's Schools*, placing the views of our nation's public school teachers at the center of the discussion on education reform.

More than 40,000 teachers participated in the survey – from every state and at every grade level – and the unprecedented size and scope of the study allows for the release of new, state-level data from Georgia. *Primary Sources: Georgia* is based on the responses of nearly 1,400 public school teachers across the state of Georgia who participated in the national survey.

We asked teachers about the state of American education, the challenges facing students and the variety of supports and tools that teachers need to tackle those challenges. They responded with powerful, nuanced opinions on a number of issues, from student and teacher performance, to classroom innovation and academic standards, to the importance of the school-to-home connection.

Similar to their peers nationwide, teachers from Georgia had important opinions about the critical issues in education at the national and state levels. Specifically, teachers in Georgia:

- View standards-based reform efforts more favorably than teachers nationwide—this includes greater support of common, clearer, more rigorous and fewer standards, as well as common assessments across states.
- Are more likely than the nation's teachers to view standardized testing as important in assessing both teacher performance and student academic achievement.
- Are slightly more likely than the nation's teachers to say pay for performance would make a positive impact on retention, and more likely to say it would make a positive impact on student achievement.
- Appear to use student performance data more often and for a wider variety of purposes than their peers nationwide.

It is important to note that *Primary Sources: Georgia* is a small subset of the data we collected on Georgia's teachers. Although we have selected the most statistically significant and state-relevant data for inclusion in this mini-report, we encourage you to look at the additional data on Georgia available in the appendices of the complete *Primary Sources* report.

While *Primary Sources: Georgia* reflects the wide range of voices and opinions of teachers across the state, one thing is constant: Teachers teach for the love of their students and the chance to make a difference in those young lives. Our goal should be to do all we can to support them in this endeavor.

Sincerely,



**Margery Mayer**

President, Scholastic Education, Scholastic Inc.



**Vicki L. Phillips**

Director of Education, College Ready, United States Program

# THE CHALLENGE

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## Georgia's Teachers Recognize the Challenges Facing Their Students

With a state graduation rate of 56%—nearly 13 points lower than the national average—teachers in Georgia are keenly aware of the limitations of a high school diploma and the disconnect between students' current levels of achievement and the levels at which they must perform to achieve success beyond high school.

Specifically, in Georgia:

- Teachers say that a high school diploma is not enough for today's students. Ninety-three percent of teachers in the state say that the most important goal of schools and teaching is to prepare students for success beyond high school (93% nationally).
- Nine out of 10 teachers say that not all their students could leave high school prepared to succeed in a 2- or 4-year college (91% nationally).
- Only 14% of teachers strongly agree that students enter their classroom prepared for on-grade-level work, with another 44% agreeing "somewhat" (16% and 44% nationally).
- Only 29% of teachers rate the academic achievement of students at their school as "Excellent" (28% nationally).
- Half (49%) of teachers agree that more than three quarters of the students currently in their classes could leave high school prepared to succeed in a 2-or-4-year college (46% nationally).

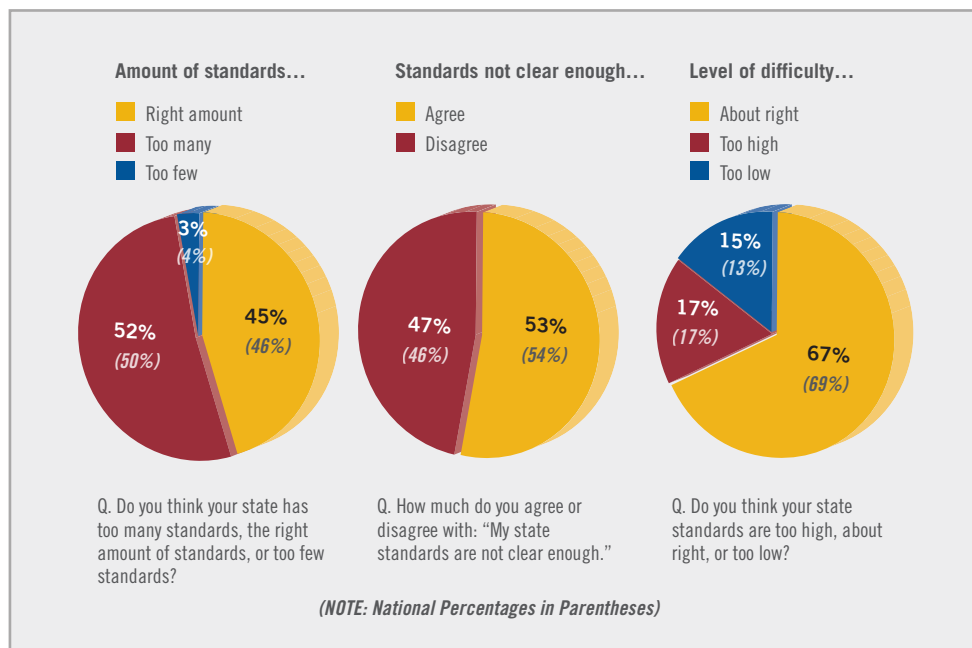
# STATE AND NATIONAL STANDARDS

## Georgia Teachers' Views on Current Georgia State Standards

Like their peers across the nation, teachers in Georgia recognize the role of academic standards in improving student achievement and preparedness. They are divided, however, in their opinions on the amount, clarity and rigor of their state standards:

- Teachers are split in their opinions on the amount of state academic standards, with just over half saying that Georgia has too many standards (52%) and just under half saying that the number of standards is “about right” (45%), (50% and 46% nationally, respectively).
- As with their peers nationwide, a very small number of teachers in Georgia (3%) believe that the state has too few standards (4% nationally).
- Georgia’s teachers align with teachers across the country on their opinions on clarity of their state standards, with nearly half saying standards are clear enough (47%) and slightly more than half saying they are not (53%).
- About seven in 10 teachers say the level of difficulty of their state standards is about right, which aligns with national data. The remaining three in 10 teachers are evenly split between thinking their state standards are too high and too low.

## Teachers' Views on Georgia State Standards



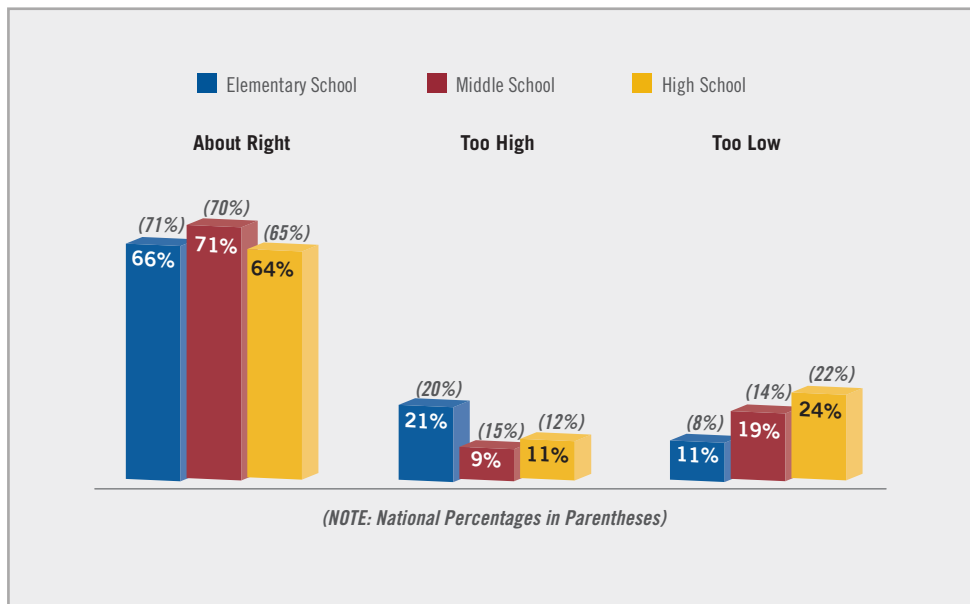
## Georgia Teachers' Views on Standards Shift as Students Progress in Grade Level

Georgia teachers' views on number and rigor of state standards vary significantly by grade(s) taught.

Elementary school teachers are somewhat more likely than middle and high school teachers to say there are too many state standards (55% vs. 46% and 47%, respectively).

While 64-71% of Georgia teachers across grade(s) taught say the degree of difficulty of state standards is about right, elementary school teachers are twice as likely as middle and high school teachers to say standards are too high, while high school teachers are just over twice as likely as elementary school teachers to think they are too low.

### Degree of Difficulty of Georgia State Standards, by School Level



## Georgia Teachers Support Clearer Standards, Common Across States

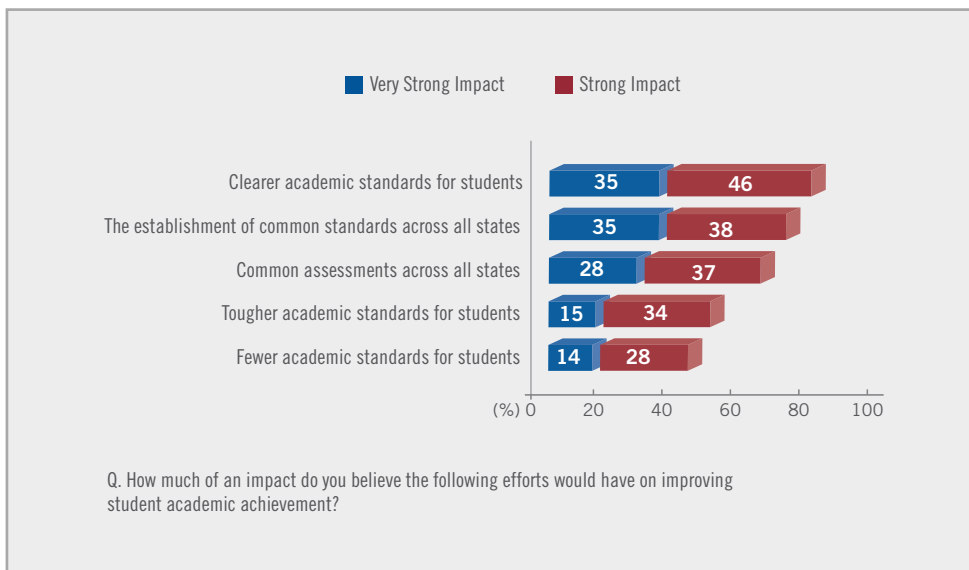
Georgia's teachers are stronger supporters of standards-based reform efforts than are their peers across the nation.

While their support for clearer, common standards is higher than support for efforts related to tougher and fewer standards, in all cases, Georgia's teachers support all standards-related reform efforts more than teachers at the nationwide level.

Specifically, the following percentages of teachers in Georgia and nationwide say the following measures would have a very strong/strong impact on improving student achievement:

- Clearer academic standards for students (81% in Georgia, 74% nationally)
- Establishing common standards across all states (73% in Georgia, 60% nationally)
- Common assessments across states (65% in Georgia, 52% nationally)
- Tougher academic standards for students (49% in Georgia, 45% nationally)
- Fewer academic standards for students (43% in Georgia, 34% nationally)

### Georgia Teachers' Views on the Impact Changes to Current Standards Would Have on Improving Academic Achievement

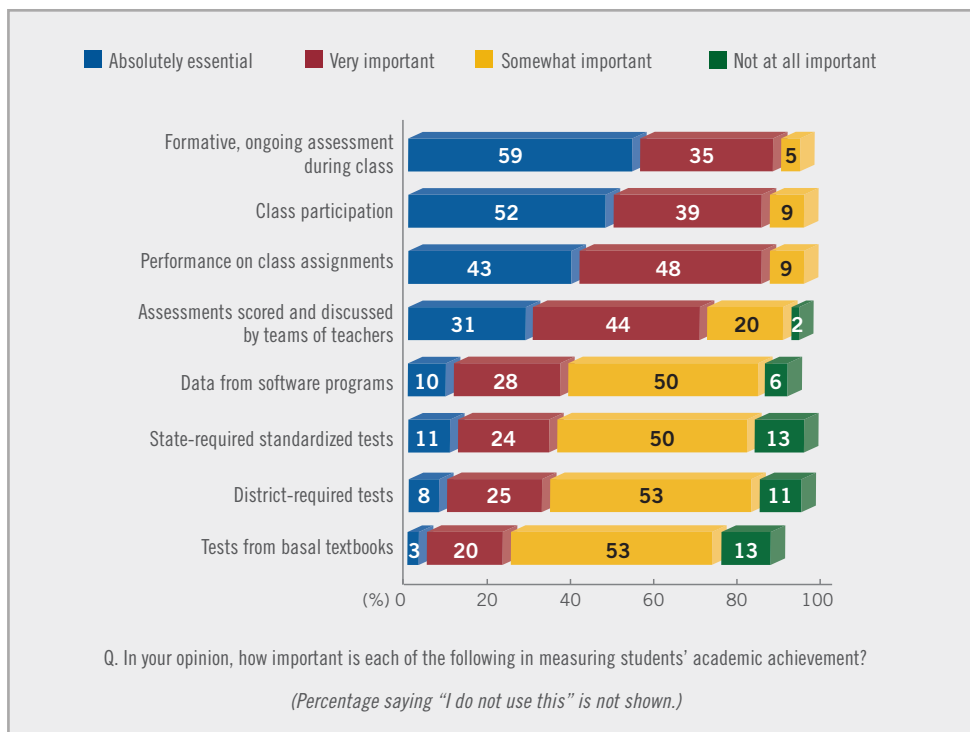


# EVALUATING STUDENT AND TEACHER PERFORMANCE

## Georgia Teachers' Views on Evaluating Student Performance

Georgia's teachers are similar to the nation's teachers in their firm belief that student assessment should be driven by in-classroom experiences, including formative ongoing assessments, class participation and performance on class assignments.

## Georgia Teachers' Views on Importance of Student Performance Measures



While there is a clear delineation between the top and bottom four ways that teachers believe children's achievement ought to be measured, Georgia's teachers are more likely to have faith in some of the lower ranked, data-centric measures of student achievement when compared to teachers nationwide.

Specifically, when the percentages of Georgia's teachers are compared to the percentages of total teachers nationwide, Georgia's teachers are more likely to say the following are very important or absolutely essential in measuring student achievement:



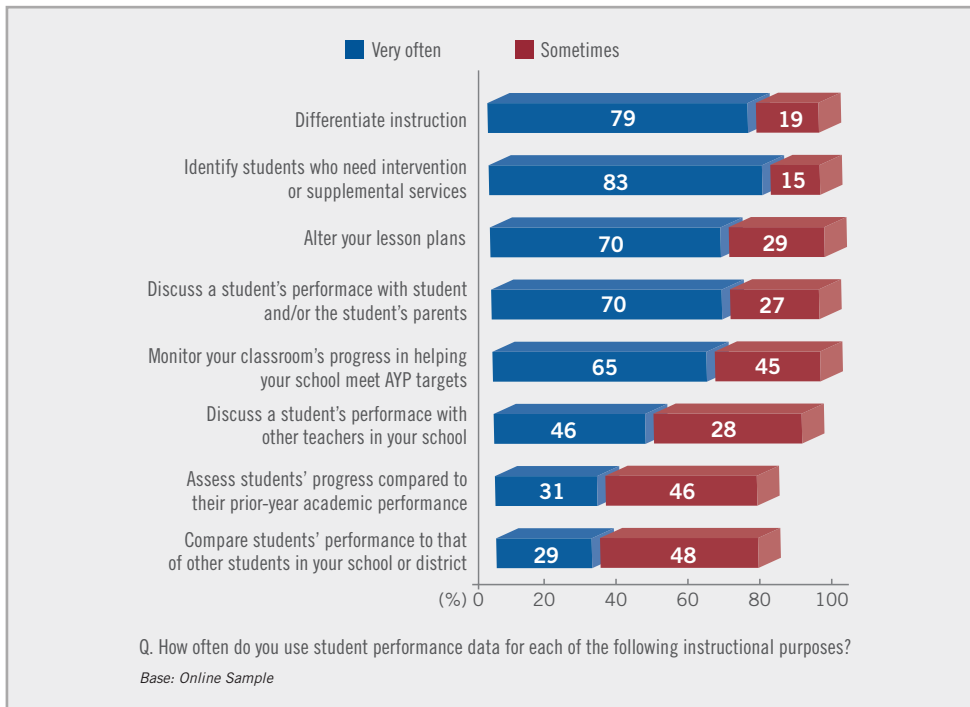
- Data from software programs (37% in Georgia, 29% nationally)
- State-required standardized tests (35% in Georgia, 26% nationally)

### Georgia’s Teachers’ Use of Student Performance Data

All teachers use student performance data to drive instruction, discuss student performance with parents, students and sometimes other teachers, and monitor student and classroom progress. Teachers in Georgia, however, are more likely than their peers nationwide to use student performance measures in several specific ways, including:

- Identifying students who need intervention or supplemental services (83% in Georgia, 75% nationally)
- Differentiating instruction (79% in Georgia, 71% nationally)
- Discussing a student’s performance with the student and/or the student’s parents (70% in Georgia, 64% nationally)
- Altering lesson plans (70% in Georgia, 64% nationally)
- Monitoring their classroom’s progress in helping their school meet AYP targets (65% in Georgia, 49% nationally)

### Georgia Teachers’ Frequency of Use of Student Performance Data



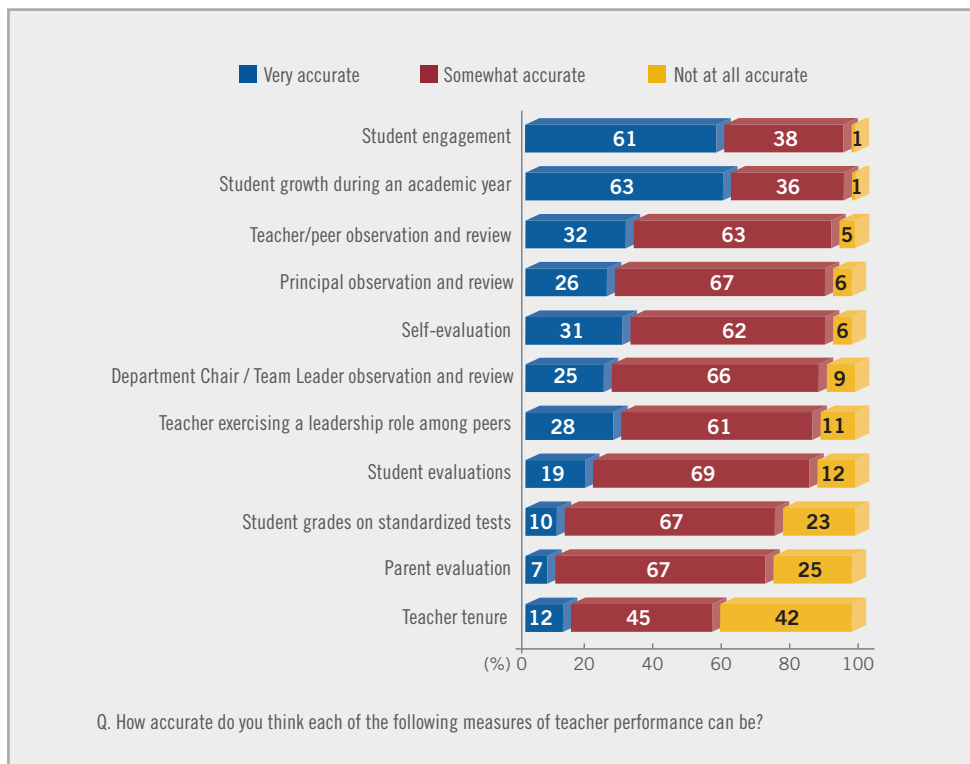
## Georgia Teachers' Views on Measuring Teacher Performance

In qualitative conversation, teachers stress a desire for their performance to be based on factors they can impact directly—like student growth and student engagement—and not on factors that fail to consider the realities of individual students in individual classrooms.

This is clearly borne out in *Primary Sources* data at both the national and Georgia levels. By far, teachers say that student growth over the course of an academic year and student engagement are the most accurate measures of teacher performance.

Interestingly, while few teachers nationally say student grades on standardized tests are “very accurate” measures of teacher performance, teachers in Georgia are more likely than their peers nationwide to say they are at least somewhat accurate (77% vs. 69%).

### Georgia Teachers' Views on the Degree of Accuracy of Measures of Teacher Performance



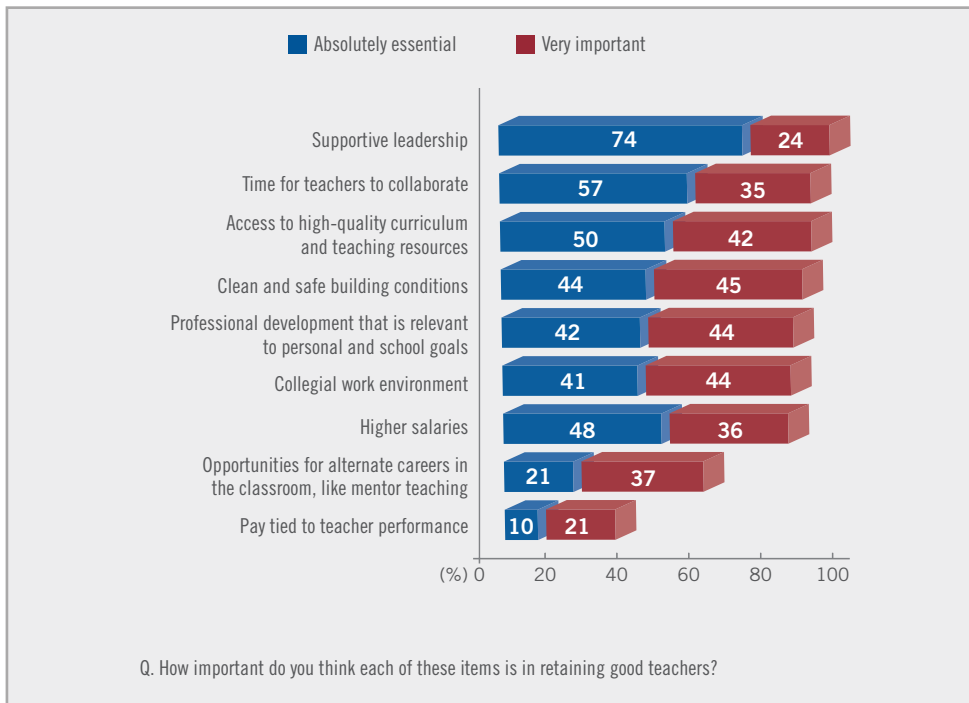
# TEACHER RETENTION

## Georgia Teachers' Views on Factors Impacting Teacher Retention

Teachers who participated in *Primary Sources* were asked to evaluate the importance of nine different factors in retaining good teachers. This information provided insight on the things teachers most value in their profession.

At the national level, the general trends put supportive leadership solidly in the top-ranked slot, followed by other, non-monetary measures like access to high quality curriculum and teaching resources and a collegial work environment. Higher salaries generally fall in the middle tier of importance while opportunities for alternate careers and pay for performance fall in the lowest tier.

## Georgia Teachers' Views on Factors Impacting Teacher Retention



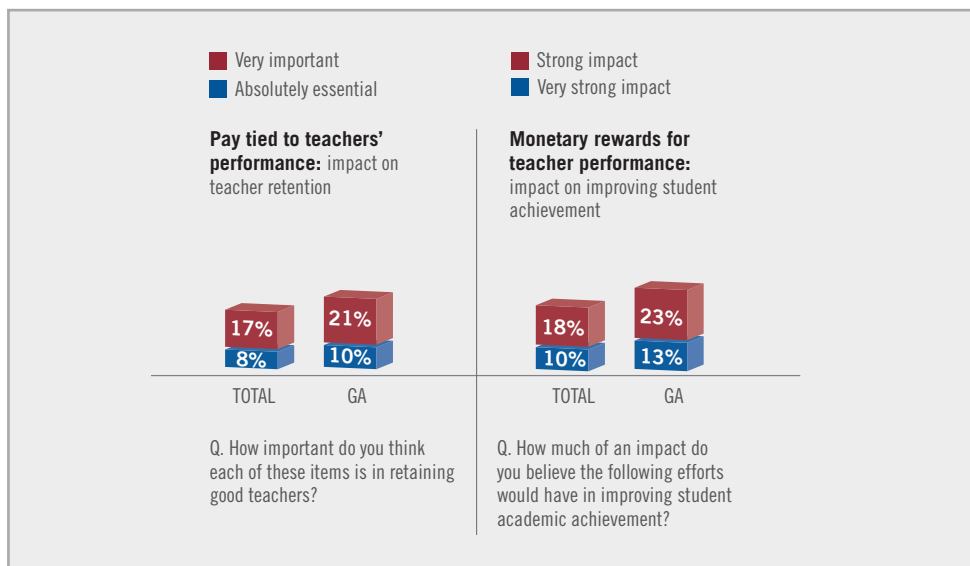
There were no significant differences setting Georgia's teachers apart from the national averages and trends on the issue of teacher retention.

## Georgia Teachers' Views on Monetary Compensation

Georgia's teachers seem to be more open to innovative compensation policies when compared to teachers nationwide:

- While pay tied to teacher performance ranks last on the list of what Georgia's teachers believe is important for retaining good teachers (as it does in nearly every state), Georgia's teachers are more likely to say that pay for performance is an absolutely essential or very important factor in retaining teachers (31% in Georgia, 26% nationally).
- Georgia's teachers are also significantly more likely to believe that monetary rewards for teacher performance would have a very strong/strong impact on improving student academic achievement (36% in Georgia, 28% nationally).

## Georgia Teachers' Views on Monetary Issues



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## **Methodology**

This report is based on the responses of the 1,375 teachers in Georgia who participated in the national survey for *Primary Sources: America's Teachers on America's Schools*. The data reflect a cross-section of Georgia's teachers across many teacher and school characteristics, including grade level(s) taught, years of teaching experience and community income.

The fieldwork for this survey was conducted in March through June of 2009 by phone (n=468) and online (n=907). For more details on the methodology of this study, please see the full *Primary Sources* report at: [www.scholastic.com/primarysources](http://www.scholastic.com/primarysources).

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“This job doesn't pay much but I always want to go to work”

“Teaching is not like any other job. It's a passion.”

“Standards are about equity and expectation.”

“Value should be placed on education. Every job, career, and occupation starts here.”

**PRIMARY SOURCES** is the beginning of an ongoing dialogue with America's Teachers.

We welcome your thoughts and opinions on the report at [www.scholastic.com/primarysources](http://www.scholastic.com/primarysources).

“If you're not tech-savvy, you can't compete in the global marketplace.”

“Role model the skills, believe in the students, and never give up.”

“If we are going to compete as a nation we should be learning as a nation.”

“We have a great system for getting them through the system. We don't have a great system to teach them to think outside the box.”