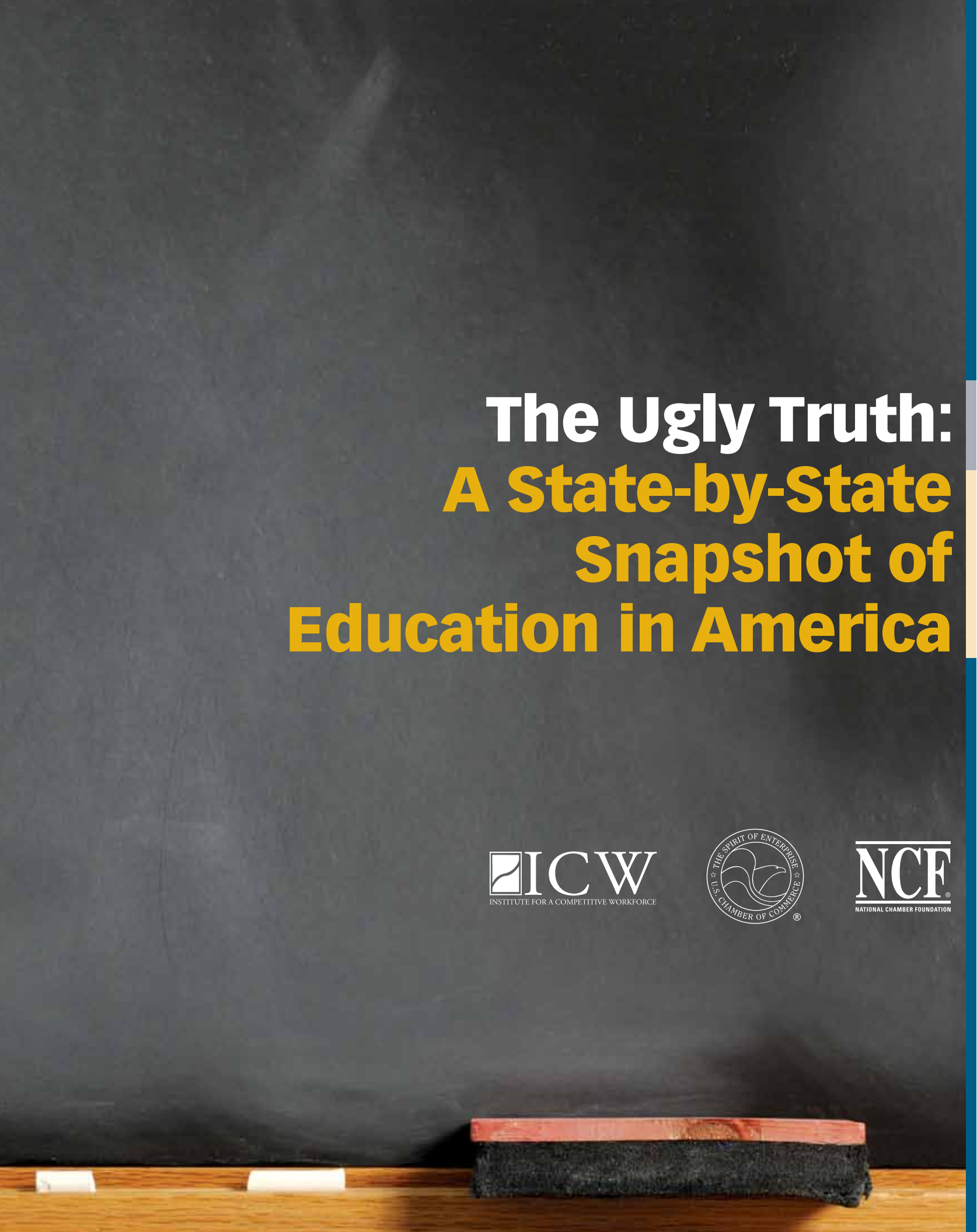

# The Ugly Truth: A State-by-State Snapshot of Education in America

ICW
INSTITUTE FOR A COMPETITIVE WORKFORCE

THE SPIRIT OF ENTERPRISE
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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The Institute for a Competitive Workforce (ICW) is the non-profit, non-partisan, 501(c)3 affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. ICW promotes the rigorous educational standards and effective job training systems needed to preserve the strength of America's greatest economic resource, its workforce.

Through its events, publications, and policy initiatives—and drawing upon the Chamber's extensive network of 3 million members—ICW connects the best minds in American business with the most innovative thinkers in American education, helping them work together to ensure the nation's continued prosperity.


The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is the world's largest business federation representing the interests of more than 3 million businesses of all sizes, sectors, and regions, as well as state and local chambers and industry associations.




The National Chamber Foundation (NCF), a non-profit affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, is dedicated to identifying and fostering public debate on emerging critical issues. We provide business and government leaders with insight and resources to address tomorrow's challenges.

# The Ugly Truth: A State-by-State Snapshot of Education in America

## Introduction

In March 2011, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Institute for a Competitive Workforce (ICW) and National Chamber Foundation (NCF) released fact sheets for every state and the District of Columbia comparing the state of K–12 public education across nine categories. The fact sheets give business leaders, parents, community leaders, policymakers, and other stakeholders a snapshot of the education landscape in each state—what's good, what's bad, and what's downright ugly. The fact sheets are meant to arm leaders with basic facts and spur them to learn more about what is really happening in their schools and statehouses with respect to K–12 public education. In other words, the fact sheets are meant to fuel change.

### The Indicators

The nine indicators comprising the fact sheets were selected to answer these questions:

- What type of education policy infrastructure have states created?
  - Indicators:
    - Standards
    - Data systems
    - Charter school laws
    - Teacher policies
- How well are students performing?
  - Indicators:
    - Student achievement
    - Graduation rate
    - Achievement gap
- What impact does the condition of public education have on each state?
  - Indicators:
    - Dropouts' effect on the economy
    - Return on investment

Using data compiled from expert sources, ICW and NCF assessed all states and assigned a "Good," "Bad," or "Ugly" rating in each of these areas. Additionally, the fact sheets noted which states won the U.S. Department of Education's 2010 Race to the Top competition, which provided funding for state reform initiatives. To learn more about our methodology, see page 11.

### Updates

In this publication, we have compiled all state fact sheets to provide an easy reference and to give context to each state's results. The fact sheets have been updated with additional National Assessment of Educational Progress results, information on the adoption of common academic standards in states, and newly released graduation rate data. Taken together, these state profiles paint a broad national portrait of K–12 public education—one that reveals just how much work lies ahead if we are to educate all students well and prepare them for success in work and life.

A brief analysis of state results in each category follows. It is important to emphasize that these state profiles are snapshots that reflect data captured at a point in time. They do not reflect the myriad changes taking place across the country, nor reform efforts under way. While it is beyond the scope of this project to document such activities and advances, we have chosen to highlight promising policy developments in a few leading states.

# Methodology

In developing the state fact sheets, we evaluated each state and the District of Columbia on nine broad categories, in addition to noting states that won funding under the U.S. Department of Education's Race to the Top competition. Below are the sources and methodology for each category; these descriptions have been updated to reflect new data and clarifications.

**Achievement Gaps:** For this category, we relied on National Assessment of Educational Progress state data from the National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences. For the purposes of this project, the largest gaps in each state between black and white and Hispanic and white students were identified. States with one or more achievement gaps between white and minority students of up to 15 points were categorized as "Bad," and those with a 15-point gap or greater were categorized as "Ugly." No state has yet been able to erase the gap between white and minority students and thereby earn a "Good" rating.

**Charter School Laws:** For this category, we relied on the work of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, which ranked the relative strength of each state's charter school laws. (See National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS), *Measuring Up to the Model: A Ranking of State Charter School Laws,* January 2011.) For the purposes of this project, states ranked among the top 20 states with the strongest charter school laws were categorized as "Good," states ranked below 20 were categorized as "Bad," and states without charter school laws (and thus not ranked by NAPCS) were categorized as "Ugly."

**Data Systems:** For this category, we relied on the work of the Data Quality Campaign (DQC), which annually evaluates the extent to which each state's longitudinal data system includes the 10 core elements that DQC deems essential. (See DQC, *State Analysis by Essential Element,* February 2011.) For the purposes of this project, states with eight or more of DQC's elements were categorized as "Good," those with only five to seven elements were categorized as "Bad," and those with fewer than five were categorized as "Ugly." DQC's annual survey now also examines progress on 10 "state actions" to drive the use of data in informing policies and practices to improve student and system performance; these actions will be key metrics in future ICW and NCF analysis.

**Dropouts' Effect on the Economy:** For this category, we relied on analysis from the Alliance for Excellent Education's "Education in the States" report card series. (See Alliance for Excellent Education, *State High School Report Cards,* October 2010.) The Alliance's analysis shows that all states' low graduation rates cost dropouts millions of dollars of potential lifetime earnings as well as significant economic losses to each state; therefore, all states were categorized as "Ugly."

**Graduation Rates:** For this category, we relied on 2007–08 state graduation rates from the national *Diplomas Count 2011* report. (See Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, *Diplomas Count 2011,* June 2011.) For the purposes of this project, all states whose *Diplomas Count*-reported graduation rate was 70–89% were categorized as "Bad," and those below 70% were categorized as "Ugly." No state was categorized as "Good," with a graduation rate of 90% or above. (Note: In our March 2011 release, we relied on 2006–07 data from *Diplomas Count 2010*.)

**Return on Investment:** For this category, we relied on the work of the Institute for a Competitive Workforce, which in 2007 produced a state-by-state education report card evaluating states' return on investment for education funding (and other criteria). (For a detailed explanation of methodology, see ICW, *Leaders and Laggards: A State-by-State Report Card on Educational Effectiveness,* February 2007.) For the

purposes of this project, states receiving an "A" or "B" from the *Leaders and Laggards* report for their return on investment were categorized as "Good," those receiving a "C" or "D" were categorized as "Bad," and those receiving an "F" were categorized as "Ugly."

**Standards:** For this category, we relied on the work of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank, which graded the quality and rigor of each state's English language arts (ELA) and math standards. (See Thomas B. Fordham Institute, *The State of State Standards—and the Common Core—in 2010,* July 2010.) For the purposes of this project, state standards receiving an "A" or "B" from Fordham were categorized as "Good," those receiving a "C" or "D" were categorized as "Bad," and those receiving an "F" were categorized as "Ugly." When a state's ELA and math standards grades fell into different categories, the grades were averaged to determine that state's overall category. Although the substantial work of implementing new standards is just beginning, states adopting the Common Core State Standards were categorized as "Good" based on Fordham's findings that the standards were superior or "too close to call" in comparison to most states' existing standards. (The Common Core standards received a B+ and A- for ELA and mathematics, respectively.)

**Student Achievement:** For this category, we relied on the work of the New America Foundation, which aggregates state and federal data from multiple sources, including NAEP and the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics. (See New America Foundation, *Federal Education Budget Project,* September 2010.) For the purposes of this project, states in which fewer than 60% of students are proficient on 2009 NAEP fourth- and eighth-grade reading and math exams were categorized as "Ugly," while those with proficiency levels of 60–85% and 85–100% would have been categorized as "Bad" and "Good," respectively. No states merited placement in the "Bad" or "Good" categories. (Reading scores, while previously a factor in states' ratings, were added to each state's fact sheet.)

**Teacher Policies:** For this category, we relied on the work of the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), which graded teacher policies in each state. (See NCTQ, *2009 State Teacher Policy Yearbook,* January 2010.) In addition, we relied on NCTQ's 2010 companion publication, which noted changes to a range of states' policies but did not change individual state grades from the 2009 report. We highlighted changes to states' evaluation, tenure, dismissal, and data policies. (For more information on all state teacher policy changes, see NCTQ, *2010 State Teacher Policy Yearbook: Blueprint for Change,* January 2011). For the purposes of this project, state teacher policies receiving an "A" or "B" from NCTQ were categorized as "Good," those receiving a "C" or "D" were categorized as "Bad," and those receiving an "F" were categorized as "Ugly." In addition, where applicable, we noted changes to state policies as reflected in the 2010 report.

***Errata***: In our March 2011 release, we incorrectly categorized West Virginia and Wyoming achievement gaps as "Ugly"; with gaps of less than 15 points, they have been reclassified as "Bad." The District of Columbia's achievement gaps were corrected from "more than a 50-point gap" to "more than a 55-point gap." Florida's achievement gaps were corrected from "more than a 25-point gap" to "more than a 20-point gap." Maine's achievement gaps were corrected from "nearly a 30-point gap" to "more than a 25-point gap." Utah's fact sheet was updated to include an achievement gap between Hispanic and white students in fourth-grade reading.


Day Is
New




# The Good

**Standards –** In 2010, Georgia's English language arts (ELA) and math standards received a B+ and A-, respectively, from the national Thomas B. Fordham Institute.[1] On July 8, 2010, the Georgia State Board of Education adopted the rigorous Common Core State Standards in ELA and math for grades K–12.[2] Mastery of these standards will help ensure that Georgia students are prepared for success in college and the workforce.

**Data System –** Georgia's state longitudinal data system contains all ten core elements that the Data Quality Campaign deems essential. Now, Georgia must work to maximize use of that data capacity in driving effective decision making to improve system and student performance.[3]

**Charter School Laws –** According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools' 2011 ranking of state charter school laws, Georgia's public charter school law is ranked 7th in the nation, with no arbitrary cap on the number of charters permitted to operate. The state allows new start-ups, public school conversions, and virtual schools. Georgia could improve its law by providing equitable access to capital funding and facilities, and providing clarity regarding the expansion and replication of high-quality charter schools through multi-school charter contracts and/or multi-charter contract boards arrangements. For the 2010-11 school year, Georgia has 50,000 students attending public charter schools, which provide needed educational options for families.[4]

**Winner of Race to the Top –** Georgia was one of 12 states to win the U.S. Department of Education's Race to the Top (RTTT) competition in 2010. The state is expected to receive up to $400 million to expand its Performance Learning Academies—small schools that provide returning dropouts personalized graduation coaches, career counseling, credit recovery, flexible class schedules, and work-study.[5]

# The Bad

**Teacher Policies –** In its *2009 State Teacher Policy Yearbook*, the National Council on Teacher Quality gave the state of Georgia an overall C- for state policies focused on teachers.[6]

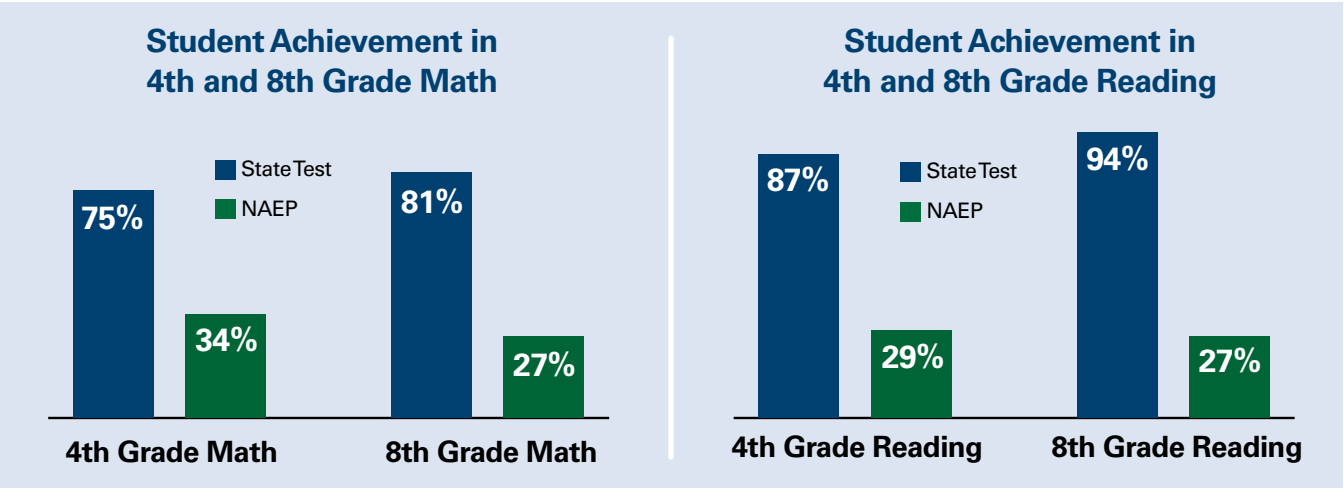
Specifically, the state received grades on its ability to perform in the following areas:

- Delivering well-prepared teachers: C-
- Expanding the pool of teachers: B-
- Identifying effective teachers: D+
- Retaining effective teachers: D
- Exiting ineffective teachers: C

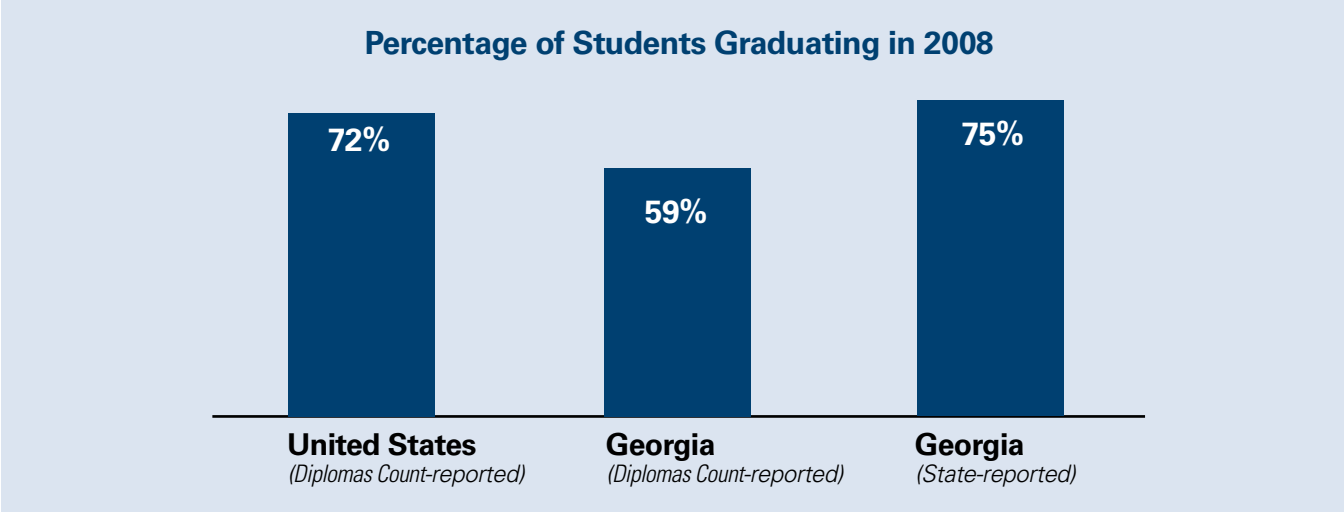
**Return on Investment –** Student achievement in Georgia is middling relative to state spending on education according to the 2007 national *Leaders and Laggards* report. Georgia received a C and ranked 31st among all states for its return on investment, which was measured by its students' performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—an independent measuring stick also known as the Nation's Report Card—relative to its per-pupil spending ($6,491, after controlling for student poverty, the percentage of students with special needs, and cost of living).[7]


# The Ugly

**Student Achievement –** Like many other states, Georgia paints a misleading picture of how well its students are performing. While the state reports proficiency rates of 75% or higher for 4th and 8th graders in math, NAEP reveals a 34% or lower proficiency rate for both grades.[8] Likewise, in reading, Georgia reports proficiency rates of 87% or higher for 4th and 8th graders, while NAEP reveals a 29% proficiency rate or lower in both grades.




**Graduation Rate –** Georgia reports a 75% graduation rate,[9] but the national *Diplomas Count* report calculates a rate of 59%.[10] Below is the percentage of students graduating in 2008 in Georgia as compared to the United States.




**Dropouts' Effect on the Economy –** The Alliance for Excellent Education estimates that the lost lifetime earnings in Georgia for the 2010 class of dropouts alone would total nearly $16 billion. If Georgia graduated all students ready for college, the state would save as much as $75.5 million a year in community college remediation costs and lost earnings. In addition, if the state increased its male high school graduation rate just 5%, Georgia's economy would see a combination of crime-related savings and additional revenue of about $276 million each year.[11] Significantly reducing dropouts each year would multiply these positive outcomes.

**Achievement Gap –** Not only is the state performing insufficiently overall, but some groups of students are faring even worse. There is close to a 25-point gap in scores between Georgia's black and white students on 4th and 8th grade math tests and 4th grade reading tests.[12] This is morally unacceptable and a significant threat to continued prosperity and economic competitiveness in Georgia and the nation.

## Endnotes


1 Thomas B. Fordham Institute, *The State of State Standards – and Common Core – in 2010*, July 2010.
2 National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers, *Common Core State Standard Initiative: Preparing America's Students for College and Career*, October 2010. (http://www.corestandards.org/in-the-states)
3 Data Quality Campaign, *2010-11 Survey Results*, 2011. (http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/survey/states)
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9 U.S. Department of Education, ED Data Express, State Graduation Rate, All Students: 2007-08 (http://eddataexpress.ed.gov/data-element-explorer.cfm). Accessed on February 9, 2011.
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12 U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009.