

District Changes in Student Achievement and Local Practice under Georgia's District and School Flexibility Policy

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Appendix A. About the study

This appendix provides additional information about Georgia's flexibility policy as well as relevant research and the context of the current study.

Georgia's district and school flexibility policy

In 2007 state legislators passed an amendment to Georgia Code Title 20—the state's education law—allowing all school districts to seek Charter System status, a title designated by state policymakers, by entering a performance contract with the state. A Charter System is a district that receives all allowable waivers of state law and regulations—the same flexibilities that individual charter schools in the state have been granted since their inception in 2000. State legislators passed another amendment in 2008 that gave local school districts two additional options. Districts could become Strategic Waivers School Systems (SWSSs), allowing them to request specific waivers in exchange for agreeing to meet school academic performance targets and face the loss of governance over schools otherwise, or Title 20/No Waivers School Systems, districts with neither waivers nor stipulated accountability. Districts that chose to become SWSSs could apply for all waivers that Charter Systems automatically received; the waivers had to be connected to improving student outcomes. Between 2008 and 2014 only three of Georgia's 180 districts applied to become an SWSS, and 28 applied to become a Charter System. However, all districts were required to select an option by June 30, 2015. As a result, by the end of the 2016/17 school year, 178 districts—all but two—had adopted a performance contract, with 136 operating as an SWSS and 42 operating as a Charter System. To date, no SWSSs or Charter Systems have faced consequences for failing to meet performance targets. This is in part because performance targets have been revised due to changes in standardized assessments and changes to Georgia's College and Career Ready Performance Index.

The state classifies the waivers available to both SWSSs and Charter Systems into three categories: academic, human resources, and financial. Academic waivers include flexibility from laws related to educational programs, curriculum and instructional courses, the organization of schools, promotion and retention, graduation, and attendance. Human resources waivers include flexibility from laws related to class size, personnel, certification, and professional learning. Financial waivers include flexibility from laws related to expenditure control, program appropriations, facility requirements, and funding formulas. Specific waivers within these categories include waivers that allow school districts the flexibility to increase class size, revise graduation requirements, and spend less than 65 percent on direct classroom expenditures, among other options (table A1).

Districts applying to become SWSSs were required to request at least one of the “big four” waivers, which cover class size and reporting requirements, teacher certification requirements, salary schedule requirements, and direct classroom expenditure control (noninstructional and instructional categorical allotments). SWSSs also could request waivers from other state regulations, except those related to student health and safety. SWSSs requested far fewer waivers than the total number of waivers allowed. Across all SWSS performance contracts the state issued waivers from 122 regulations. On average, each SWSS requested 39 waivers, and more than 5,000 waivers in total were granted across the 136 SWSS districts. The fewest number of waivers an SWSS requested was 22, and the most was 66 (correspondence with the Georgia Department of Education, 2019).

Table A1. Examples of most commonly granted waivers from Georgia regulations

Waiver	Relevant regulation	Number of Strategic Waiver School Systems with waiver
Academic program flexibility		
High school graduation requirements	160-4-2-.48	136
Early intervention program for students at risk	§20-2-153	136
Remedial education program	§20-2-154	136
Program for English learner students	§20-2-156	133
Promotion and retention	§20-2-283	133
Competencies and core curriculum	§20-2-142	131
Alternative education program	§20-2-154.1	131
Comprehensive health and physical education program plan	160-4-2-.12	129
General and career education programs	20-2-151	129
Online learning	20-2-140.1	124
School climate management program	§20-2-155	114
Education program for gifted students	160-4-2-.38	112
Human resources flexibility		
Organization of schools; employment of school administrative managers	§20-2-290	136
Personnel required	160-5-1-.22	135
Class size and reporting requirements ^a	§20-2-182	135
Teacher certification requirements ^a	§20-2-108, §20-2-200	135
School day and year for students and employees	§20-2-151, §20-2-160(a), §20-2-168(c)	130
Salary schedule requirements ^a	§20-2-212	126
Financial flexibility		
Direct classroom expenditure control ^a	§20-2-171	136
Program weights to reflect funds for maintenance and operation of facilities	§20-2-183	135
Program weights to reflect funds for media specialists	§20-2-184	135
Program weights to reflect funds for salaries for assistant principals and secretaries	§20-2-185	135
Allocation of funds to pay beginning salaries of superintendents, secretaries, accountants, nurses, and certain other personnel	§20-2-186	135
Quality Basic Education funding formula	§20-2-161	130
Categorical allotment requirements (funding for direct instructional, media center, staff development costs) and budget reporting	§20-2-167, §20-2-183 to §20-2-186	127
Scheduling for instruction/program enrollment and appropriations	§20-2-160	126

a. “Big four” waiver. Districts applying to become Strategic Waiver School Systems were required to request at least one of the “big four” waivers. Source: Georgia Department of Education administrative records, 2019.

Relevant research and context of the current study

Early research on school and district changes in response to Georgia’s flexibility policy found that staffing and spending at the district level increased after performance contract adoption; increased funding from the state was somewhat offset by decreased funding at the local level (Kramer et al., 2017). To date, however, no research has studied how those staffing and spending changes are associated with changes to other practices or to student achievement in Georgia districts that converted to an SWSS or Charter System.

The results of this study also could inform similar policies in other states. Georgia’s flexibility policy provides local districts autonomy in the form of deregulation, or “autonomy from higher levels of government” and local control over decisionmaking (Finnigan, 2007, p. 505; Wohlstetter et al., 1995; Wohlstetter & Chau, 2004). Although Georgia’s system is unique among states in the extent of waivers granted, its application to all districts in the state, and the option to convert to a Charter System or SWSS (Kramer et al., 2017), other states, such as North Carolina and Texas, have undertaken efforts to increase public schools’ autonomy through flexibility. To date, little research is available on these types of policies to inform states interested in developing or improving similar policies or to help districts that participate in such policies implement waivers effectively. One of the few relevant studies currently available is Ladd and Zelli’s (2002) evaluation of North Carolina’s ABC’s program—a school-based accountability system that set expected growth standards and provided waivers from class size limits and teacher certification regulations as well as budgetary flexibility to help principals meet accountability targets. That study found that although the program led to many new practices aligned with state goals to increase student performance, it also might have encouraged high-quality teachers and principals to leave low-performing schools, which could increase inequality in the long term.

Research on the governance model employed by charter school networks, which tend to implement more flexible governance structures than traditional school districts, is more readily available and is highly relevant to the Georgia context, where the charter school model has long been seen as a means to deregulation and increased autonomy for districts (Bulkley, 2005). Both the SWSS model and the Charter System model emphasize local governance and offer increased flexibility in return for greater accountability—key features of the theory of action for charter schools. The growing popularity of the charter school governance model has generated many recent large-scale education policy studies examining the relationship between how public education is structured and student outcomes. However, the results vary substantially (Clark et al., 2015; Gleason et al., 2010). For example, a research synthesis of experimental effect estimates of charter school enrollment on student achievement in reading and math identified some positive effects in elementary grades, but they were not consistent across subjects, grade levels, or locations (Betts & Tang, 2014, 2019). Other studies experimentally examined the effects of specific charter networks and found more consistently positive effects on student achievement, especially for traditionally disadvantaged students (Abdulkadiroglu et al. 2009; Abdulkadiroglu et al. 2011; Angrist et al. 2011; Angrist et al., 2010; Angrist et al., 2016).

Given the mixed findings and limited information on whether and how districts and charter school organizations use flexibility to implement innovative practices, more research is needed to understand the conditions that facilitate implementation of waivers and new governance models, how waivers and new governance models encourage schools to implement new or innovative practices, and the relationship between those practices and student outcomes.

In addition to informing the Georgia Department of Education’s efforts to support districts in implementing the state’s district and school flexibility policy, this study also contributes to the wider body of knowledge on flexibility policies, new or innovative practices, and the relationships between them. Although this study is specific to Georgia’s policy, elements of the policy, the waivers available, or districts’ experiences implementing innovative practices may be informative for other contexts.

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Appendix B. Data and methods

This appendix provides further information about the study’s data sources, sample, missing data, and methods.

Data sources

Data for this study are from four sources: Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) administrative data, the U.S. Department of Education’s Common Core of Data, and survey and interview data collected by GaDOE and shared with the study team.

Table B1. Student-, school-, and district-level variables used in the study

Variables	Description	Source	
Student characteristics			
Gender	Coded as female or male	Georgia Department of Education	
Race/ethnicity	Coded as American Indian/Pacific Islander, Asian, Black, Hispanic, multiracial, or White		
Special education status	Whether a student had an individualized education program (IEP)		
English learner status	Whether a student was identified as an English learner student		
Migrant status	Whether a student is a migrant		
Grade level	Indicates the student’s grade level, from 3 to 12		
English language arts and math achievement	Student standardized assessment scores on grade 3–8 English language arts and math assessments and grade 9 English and grade 9–12 Algebra I end-of-course assessments for each year, grade, and subject available between 2005/06 and 2017/18		
School characteristics			
School type	Whether a school is a traditional public, public charter, magnet, special education, alternative, or other school	Georgia Department of Education	
School Title I status	Whether a school receives Title I funds as a school with a high-poverty population		
Other school-level descriptors	Percentage of all students in a school in each racial/ethnic category Percentage of all students in a school who receive free lunch Percentage of all students in a school who receive reduced-price lunch Percentage of all students in a school identified as English learner students Percentage of all students in a school who have an IEP		
District characteristics			
Strategic Waivers School System (SWSS) or Charter System	Coded as SWSS or Charter System		Georgia Department of Education
District size	Number of students enrolled in the district		
District urbanicity	Coded as urban, suburban, town, or rural	U.S. Department of Education’s Common Core of Data	
Performance contract adoption cohort	Coded as early (2008/09–2014/15), middle (2015/16), or late (2016/17) adopter	Georgia Department of Education	
Other district-level demographic characteristics	Percentage of all students in a district in each racial/ethnic category Percentage of all students in a district identified as English learner students Percentage of all students in a district who have an IEP Percentage of all students in a district who are migrants		
Districts’ prioritized innovations	Whether a district indicated that an innovation was among its top three priorities to implement		

Source: Administrative data from the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE), publicly available data on district urbanicity from the U.S. Department of Education’s Common Core of Data, and data from surveys of district leaders conducted by GaDOE, 2019.

GaDOE administrative data. The study team established a memorandum of understanding with GaDOE that allowed the study team to use state administrative data to conduct the study. GaDOE provided data on every district's status as a Strategic Waivers School System (SWSS), Charter System, or Title 20/No Waivers System, identifying the type of contractual flexibility agreement the district operated under and the year in which the performance contract began. GaDOE also provided data on student performance on state standardized exams and student demographic characteristics from 2006/07 to 2017/18 for the 178 districts that converted to an SWSS or Charter System. The study team aggregated student- and school-level data to the district level for each year for the following variables.

Grade level. The percentage of students within the district in each grade level.

Standardized English language arts and math achievement (grades 3–8). All Georgia students in grades 3–8 take an annual standardized end-of-grade assessment in the spring. The assessment that students took changed during the study period. The Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests were replaced by the Georgia Milestones Assessment beginning in the 2014/15 school year. To facilitate comparisons over time, the study team standardized students' English language arts and math scores, using statewide means and standard deviations for students separately by grade level and year, to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. This allowed examination of how students performed relative to all students in the state each year.

Standardized English and Algebra I achievement (grades 9–12). The study team used grade 9 literature and composition as the end-of-course assessment in English. Georgia administers multiple end-of-course assessments in math. The study team used the most commonly administered of these, the Algebra I end-of-course assessment. Beginning in the 2014/15 school year, Georgia replaced its End of Course Test program with the Georgia Milestones End-of-Course Assessments system. The end-of-course assessments are administered at the completion of the course, regardless of students' grade level, and serve as the final exam for the course. To facilitate comparisons over time, the study team standardized students' end-of-course assessment scores, using statewide means and standard deviations separately by grade level and year, to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.

School type. Percentages of schools in a district each year coded as traditional public, public charter, magnet, special education, alternative, and other. Charter systems usually contain a mix of charter and traditional schools.

Title I. Percentage of schools in a district each year that were eligible for Title I funding based on the concentration of students in poverty.

SWSS or Charter System. Districts were identified as having made an initial switch from a traditional district to either an SWSS or Charter System based on their first performance contract with the state. Four districts changed from an SWSS to a Charter System in 2016/17 or 2017/18. These districts are classified as an SWSS because their initial contract was as an SWSS.

Performance contract adoption cohort. The sample of 178 districts was categorized into three adoption cohort groups based on the year in which districts adopted a performance contract. The early adoption cohort group comprises the 3 SWSSs and 28 Charter Systems that adopted a performance contract between 2008/09 and 2014/15, before Georgia passed an amendment requiring all districts to choose a status. The middle adoption cohort group comprises the 57 SWSSs and 4 Charter Systems that adopted a performance contract in 2015/16, immediately following the waiver amendment. The late adoption cohort group includes the 76 SWSSs and 10 Charter Systems that adopted a performance contract in 2016/17, the last group of districts to do so.

Gender. The study team aggregated student-level data on gender to calculate the percentage of students in a district who were male.

Race/ethnicity. The study team aggregated student-level data on students' race/ethnicity to the district level to calculate the percentage of all students in a district who were in each racial/ethnic category.

Individualized education program. The study team aggregated student-level data on students' special education status to calculate the percentage of all students in a district who qualified for special education services and had an individualized education program.

English learner status. The study team aggregated student-level data on students' English learner status to calculate the percentage of all students in a district who were designated as English learner students.

Eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch. GaDOE policy prevents the sharing of whether individual students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Instead, the administrative data included a school-level measure of the percentage of all students in a school who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The study team used this school-level variable to calculate the districtwide percentage of students who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data. The study team obtained data on school districts' urbanicity (urban, suburban, town, or rural locale) from the publicly available Common Core of Data dataset for 2007/08.

Survey data. GaDOE collected data from district leaders using a survey developed and programmed into SurveyGizmo by the study team and shared the results with the study team for the purpose of conducting this study (see appendix D for the survey instrument). GaDOE sent emails to superintendents in all 178 SWSSs and Charter Systems inviting them to complete the online survey using SurveyGizmo. The email also asked the superintendents to invite other key district staff, including assistant or deputy superintendents, chief financial officers, school improvement administrators, and local governance coordinators, to complete the survey. The goal was to receive at least one response from all 178 districts. The study team received responses from 133 districts for a 75 percent district-level response rate. A total of 183 completed surveys were received, reflecting multiple responses from 28 districts (16 had two responses, 6 had three responses, 6 had four responses, and 1 had five responses). When multiple responses were received, the study team selected one response to represent the district, with responses prioritized in the following order: superintendent, assistant superintendent, district chief of staff, and deputy superintendent. It is not known how many administrators received a request from their superintendent to complete the survey, so the study team could not calculate individual-level response rates.

The key survey variables are the innovations that district leaders identified as their top, second, and third priorities after adopting a performance contract. District leaders were presented with a list of possible priority innovations and were asked to rank their top three priorities. The survey listed possible innovations in alphabetical order by type of innovation (with separate lists for academic, human resources, and financial innovations). The order of innovations on the survey has a .6 correlation with districts' rankings of their top priorities. This could suggest that the order of innovations on the survey influenced district leaders' rankings, but many of the innovations that GaDOE sensed districts most often prioritized were earlier in the alphabet (for example, alternate career pathways, alternative education programming, college and career academies, community-based learning, dual enrollment), and many of the innovations that GaDOE sensed districts have not prioritized were late in the alphabet (for example, school attendance, school counseling, school climate, student promotion, student retention, student placement, textbooks). Districts' priority innovations should be interpreted with this potential limitation in mind.

Interview data. GaDOE staff invited a subset of leaders who completed the survey to participate in a virtual interview using GoToMeeting software (see appendix E for the interview protocol). Using the analytic models estimating changes in student achievement after districts adopted a performance contract, the study team identified the top 15 percent of districts whose student achievement after adopting a performance contract most outperformed their student achievement before adopting a performance contract on each of the four state

standardized assessments included in the study: grade 3–8 English language arts, grade 3–8 math, grade 9 end-of-course assessment in English, and grade 9–12 end-of-course assessment in Algebra I.

From among the 15 percent of districts that most outperformed their expected achievement in the first year after adopting a performance contract, GaDOE emailed leaders from 18 districts to invite them to complete an interview. These 18 districts were purposively selected because they had completed the survey and represented a variety of sizes, urbanicity, district types (Charter System or SWSS), and geographic regions of the state. GaDOE staff scheduled and completed interviews with administrators in 10 districts, with support from the study team, for an interview response rate of 56 percent. There may be some response bias in the interviewed districts, but districts were not selected to be a representative sample. Instead, GaDOE was interested in interviewing leaders from districts that had experienced relatively large achievement growth after adopting a performance contract. The study team recorded all interviews and transcribed them using Rev.com.

Sample

The sample for the study included all 178 SWSSs and Charter Systems in Georgia. The sample for the analyses of district changes in student achievement after adopting a performance contract included students in grades 3–12 from 2007/08 to 2017/18 in the 178 districts (table B2). The sample for the analyses of the association between changes in student achievement and changes in district practices included students in grades 3–12 from 2007/08 to 2017/18 in the 133 districts for which a completed survey was received. The samples for the descriptive and qualitative analyses of district changes in practices included the 133 districts with completed surveys and the subsample of 10 districts with completed interviews.

Table B2. Number of students and districts included in analyses of changes in student achievement

Number of years before or after performance contract adoption	Grade 3–8 English language arts		Grade 3–8 math		Grade 9 English end-of-course assessment		Grade 9–12 Algebra I end-of-course assessment	
	Students	Districts	Students	Districts	Students	Districts	Students	Districts
–10	218,371	72	218,937	72	38,170	71	27,533	71
–9	504,392	146	505,326	146	85,371	143	69,596	144
–8	568,759	156	569,917	156	97,179	154	50,125	83
–7	576,356	159	577,495	159	96,179	157	47,218	84
–6	618,655	161	619,007	161	102,886	160	91,615	150
–5	626,204	167	625,215	167	106,279	166	100,088	162
–4	633,391	172	631,907	172	109,271	171	96,888	168
–3	646,625	173	644,998	173	112,958	173	101,251	167
–2	731,703	178	731,197	178	124,967	178	119,416	173
–1	742,350	178	741,880	178	126,641	178	96,508	162
0	752,816	178	744,446	178	127,429	178	79,163	146
1	757,735	178	747,177	178	127,213	177	94,839	153
2	534,705	106	527,931	106	90,696	106	75,764	95
3	239,705	32	236,653	32	41,906	32	39,282	30
4	178,851	22	177,284	22	31,002	22	28,614	21
5	174,733	19	173,471	19	29,749	19	28,812	17
6	136,168	17	135,897	17	22,732	17	20,769	16
7	124,049	11	118,061	11	21,205	11	17,188	10
8	115,187	6	107,216	6	19,800	6	15,213	6
9	93,932	5	85,484	5	16,234	5	10,550	5

Source: Administrative data from the Georgia Department of Education, 2006/07 to 2017/18.

Missing data

The study team received responses from 133 of the 178 SWSSs and Charter Systems in Georgia. To test whether the sample of SWSSs and Charter Systems with survey responses is representative of all SWSSs and Charter Systems, the study team compared the two samples on student demographic and district characteristics. To do so, the team calculated descriptive statistics for each key variable and subtracted the value for all districts from the value for the sample of survey respondents. The raw differences between groups were converted to effect sizes reported as standard deviations (effect sizes are reported separately for the elementary and high school samples in table B3). The two samples differed by .05 standard deviation or more on only a few variables: Districts that responded to the survey were less likely to be located in rural areas and more likely to be located in suburban areas, were more likely to be an SWSS than a Charter System, and were more likely to be part of the early adoption cohort group than the middle adoption cohort group compared with districts that did not respond to the survey (see table B3). The distribution across performance contract adoption years also varies somewhat. However, these variables do not correlate strongly with the prioritized innovations. It is possible that despite the similarity of the two samples on these variables, the samples may differ more in their survey responses.

Table B3. Respondents to the district survey are generally similar to the full population on observed characteristics

Variable	Elementary school grades			High school grades		
	All districts	Survey respondents	Effect size	All districts	Survey respondents	Effect size
<i>Test scores (student-level means standardized by grade and year)</i>						
Grade 3–8 English language arts	–0.02	–0.01	–0.01	na	na	na
Grade 3–8 math	–0.07	–0.07	–0.00	na	na	na
English end-of-course assessment	na	na	na	0.01	0.02	–0.01
Algebra I end-of-course assessment	na	na	na	0.00	–0.00	0.00
<i>Other covariates (proportions)</i>						
English learner student	0.09	0.09	0.00	0.07	0.07	0.00
American Indian/Pacific Islander	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Asian	0.04	0.04	0.00	0.04	0.04	0.00
Black	0.37	0.38	–0.03	0.39	0.39	0.00
Hispanic	0.13	0.13	0.00	0.12	0.12	0.00
Multiracial	0.03	0.03	0.00	0.03	0.03	0.00
White	0.43	0.42	0.02	0.43	0.42	0.02
Male	0.51	0.51	0.00	0.52	0.52	0.00
Individualized education program	0.11	0.11	0.00	0.10	0.11	–0.06
Migrant	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Charter waiver (district)	0.17	0.16	0.04	0.16	0.16	0.00
Strategic Waivers School System waiver (district)	0.82	0.84	–0.09	0.83	0.84	–0.04
Rural (district)	0.29	0.25	0.12	0.28	0.24	0.13
City (district)	0.17	0.17	0.00	0.16	0.16	0.00
Suburb (district)	0.46	0.50	–0.10	0.48	0.53	–0.12
Town (district)	0.08	0.08	0.00	0.08	0.07	0.09
Early adoption cohort group (district)	0.32	0.35	–0.08	0.34	0.37	–0.08

Variable	Elementary school grades			High school grades		
	All districts	Survey respondents	Effect size	All districts	Survey respondents	Effect size
Middle adoption cohort group (district)	0.39	0.35	0.10	0.38	0.34	0.11
Late adoption cohort group (district)	0.29	0.30	-0.03	0.29	0.29	0.00
<i>Performance contract adoption year</i>						
2008/09	0.03	0.02	0.25	0.03	0.02	0.25
2009/10	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.00
2010/11	0.03	0.03	0.00	0.03	0.03	0.00
2011/12	0.03	0.05	-0.32	0.03	0.05	-0.32
2012/13	0.01	0.02	-0.43	0.01	0.02	-0.43
2013/14	0.02	0.01	0.43	0.02	0.01	0.43
2014/15	0.06	0.05	0.12	0.06	0.05	0.12
2015/16	0.42	0.41	0.02	0.42	0.41	0.02
2016/17	0.40	0.42	-0.05	0.40	0.42	-0.05
Free or reduced-price lunch (school)	0.60	0.59	0.03	0.51	0.51	0.00
Free lunch (school)	0.52	0.52	0.00	0.45	0.44	0.02
Reduced-price lunch (school)	0.07	0.07	0.00	0.07	0.07	0.00
Number of student-by-year observations	9,021,221	7,750,957	na	1,889,747	1,690,390	na

na is not applicable.

Note: Test score variables were standardized by subtracting the mean and dividing by the standard deviation within each grade and year. Effect sizes were calculated by subtracting the two test score values, as test scores already were standardized. Effect sizes for other variables were calculated by converting to log odds ratios and using the Cox transformation to the standardized mean difference scale, following What Works Clearinghouse Version 4.1 procedures (What Works Clearinghouse, 2020).

Source: Authors' analysis of administrative data from the Georgia Department of Education and data from the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data.

Methods

Quantitative analyses. The study team conducted a generalized difference in differences analysis. The analytic models used to estimate overall mean change in achievement after performance contract adoption (research question 1) took the following form:

$$Y_{kt} = \beta_0 + \beta_{1k}Post_{kt} + \beta_2SY_t + \beta_3D_k + \beta_4G_{kt} + \beta_5Z_{kt} + z_{1k}Post_{kt} + e_{kt},$$

where Y_{kt} is the average standardized achievement outcome (standardized scaled achievement score in English language arts, math, grade 9 English, or Algebra I for district k at time t), $Post_{kt}$ is a binary indicator signifying that district k has access to an approved waiver at time t (that is, it is set to 1 for all years that correspond to a performance contract that made waivers available and 0 otherwise), SY_t is a vector of school-year indicators (from 2006/07 to 2017/18), D_k is a vector of district indicators, G_{kt} is a vector of aggregate grade indicators (that is, the percentage of students in a grade in a district in a year) that correspond to the student testing groups for outcome Y_{kt} , and Z_{kt} is a vector of time-varying district-level aggregates of student and school characteristics, including gender, race/ethnicity, individuated education program status, English learner status, eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch, and school type (that is, Title I status, alternative school, special education school, magnet school, charter school, or other school). The model allows β_{1k} to vary at the district level (that is, each district has its own estimate of relative change in achievement after performance contract adoption). The model has error term z_{1k} , which reflects district-level deviation in β_{1k} from the grand mean, β_1 , and e_{kt} , which is the residual error term. The focal parameters from this model are β_{1k} and the standard deviation of z_{1k} , τ_1 , which quantifies the

variability in changes in achievement after performance contract adoption. This approach is similar to the approach developed by Raudenbush and Bloom (2015) and Bloom et al. (2017) for studying variation in site-level program effects.

The study team used the estimates of τ_1 , along with the mean β_{1k} estimates, to compute the percentage of districts that expected to have true changes of .05 standard deviation or more using the a cumulative normal distribution, evaluated at .05: $1 - \Phi_{\beta_1, \tau_1}(.05)$. Similarly, τ_1 , along with the mean β_1 , also were used to construct 90 percent prediction intervals (for example, Borenstein et al., 2011; IntHout et al., 2016). Importantly, results presented in this report are rounded, but the analyses were based on all significant digits. This may result in minor differences in manual computations of some table results.

The model for research question 1 was expanded to examine the relationship between $Post_{kt}$ and district-level characteristics (research question 1) using:

$$Y_{kt} = \beta_0 + \beta_{1k}Post_{kt} + \beta_2SY_t + \beta_3D_k + \beta_4G_{kt} + \beta_5Z_{kt} + \beta_6W_kPost_{kt} + z_{1k}Post_{kt} + e_{kt},$$

where W_kPost_{kt} is a vector of interactions between $Post_{kt}$ and district-level characteristics. For research question 1, $Post_{kt}$ was interacted with urbanicity (urban, town, or rural), district type (SWSS or Charter System), and adoption cohort group (early, middle, or late).

For research question 3, W_kPost_{kt} was expanded to included interactions with select¹ priority innovations indicated by district leader responses to the survey. The main effects for W_k are unnecessary in this model because it includes district indicators, D_k .

When evaluating the results of the analyses, the study team defined meaningful differences in changes in achievement as differences that are statistically significant and .05 standard deviation or larger. The study team defined small differences in changes in achievement as those that are statistically significant and smaller than .05 standard deviation. Empirical benchmarks of annual student growth (Hill et al., 2008) translate .05 standard deviation to approximately 5 and 6 weeks' worth of total achievement gain (year over year) in grade 3–8 math and English language arts, respectively, assuming 36 weeks of learning time. In grades 9–12, .05 standard deviation translates to approximately 11 and 12 weeks' worth of total achievement gain in standardized math and English language arts.

¹ The priority innovations included in the analyses were identified by Georgia Department of Education staff as the most policy-relevant innovations to study from the much larger set of innovations included in the survey.

Table B4. Cohort and analysis structure for each performance contract adoption year

Cohort structure			Analysis structure				
Adoption cohort group	Cohort	Year of performance contract adoption	Change in achievement from pre- to post-adoption	Focal cohorts	Years included in pre-adoption time period	Comparison cohorts contributing pre-adoption data	Comparison cohorts contributing post-adoption data
Early (N = 31)	1	2008/09	Pre years–2009/10	1	2006/07–2008/09	2–9	na
	2	2009/10	Pre years–2010/11	1–2	2006/07–2009/10	3–9	1
	3	2010/11	Pre years–2011/12	1–3	2006/07–2010/11	4–9	1–2
	4	2011/12	Pre years–2012/13	1–4	2006/07–2011/12	5–9	1–3
	5	2012/13	Pre years–2013/14	1–5	2006/07–2012/13	6–9	1–4
	6	2013/14	Pre years–2014/15	1–6	2006/07–2013/14	7–9	1–5
	7	2014/15	Pre years–2015/16	1–7	2006/07–2014/15	8–9	1–6
Middle (N = 61)	8	2015/16	Pre years–2016/17	1–8	2006/07–2015/16	9	1–7
Late (N = 86)	9	2016/17	Pre years–2017/18	1–9	2009/10–2016/17	na	1–8

na is not applicable.

Note: Comparison cohorts listed contribute to analyses for focal cohorts other than their own.

Source: Authors' compilation based on information provided by the Georgia Department of Education.

Qualitative analyses. The study team coded the interview transcripts in NVivo using the coding scheme outlined in box B1.

Box B1. Coding scheme for interview data

I. Background

- A. Description of your role in the district
- B. How long have you been in this role?
- C. What was your job before moving into this current role?

II. Types of innovations implemented

A. Academic innovation

- 1. Alternative education programming
[FOR THIS AND EACH SUBSEQUENT INNOVATION]
 - a. New innovation
 - b. Expanding innovation
 - c. Reason for choosing this innovation
 - d. Waiver was needed
 - e. Waiver was NOT needed
- 2. Classes for specific populations (gifted, English learner)
- 3. College and career academy
- 4. Community-based, internship, or work-based learning programs
- 5. Course scheduling
- 6. Credit requirements and availability
- 7. Dual enrollment
- 8. Early identification and intervention system
- 9. Enrichment or other specialty programs
- 10. Graduation requirements
- 11. Personalized instruction according to each student's needs
- 12. Programs focused on improving college and career readiness
- 13. Programs focused on improving graduation rates
- 14. Summer programming
- 15. Formative assessments to guide instruction

B. Human resources innovations

- 1. Additional summer academic programs for students
- 2. Beginning salary for hiring
- 3. Certification requirements
- 4. Differentiated salary systems
- 5. Instructional delivery model to change class size
- 6. Number of school days, daily school hours, or school year
- 7. Staff-to-student ratio in the classroom
- 8. Professional learning
- 9. Removing teacher tenure
- 10. Teacher recruitment practices

C. Financial innovations

- 1. Instructional spending
- 2. Noninstructional categorical allotments for instructional expenses
- 3. Noninstructional spending
- 4. State, local, and federal funds in support of school improvement plans

III. Outcomes related to performance contract

A. Student outcomes impacts

[FOR THIS AND EACH SUBSEQUENT OUTCOME IMPACT]

- 1. Specific innovations contributed to outcomes
- 2. No specific innovation or outcome due to having a performance contract
- 3. Methods of evaluating outcomes

B. Staff outcomes impacts

- C. School administration practices and outcomes impacts
- D. Parental engagement practices impacts
- E. School climate outcomes impacts
- IV. Overall experience
 - A. Why the district chose SWSS or Charter System
 - 1. Didn't want a governing body
 - 2. Wanted a governing body
 - 3. Not enough knowledge about charter option
 - 4. Uncomfortable with charter language
 - 5. Previous success
 - 6. Unique population needs
 - B. Most beneficial aspect of performance contract
 - 1. Most beneficial aspect of governing council
 - C. Supports for implementing innovations
 - D. Challenges to implementing innovations
 - 1. Challenges to academics
 - 2. Challenges to human resources
 - 3. Challenges to finance
 - E. If SWSS, who decided to apply for the waivers?
 - F. Plans to expand

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Appendix C. Supporting analyses

This appendix details additional results and analyses that support the findings addressed in the study.

Table C1. Results from final models estimating district-level change in student achievement in Georgia, 2007/08–2017/18

Variable	Grades 3–8		Grades 9–12	
	Change in English language arts achievement	Change in math achievement	Change in English language arts achievement	Change in Algebra I achievement
Post-performance contract adoption (pre-performance contract adoption is reference group)	0.02 (0.01)	0.03 (0.01)*	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.02)
<i>District-level demographic characteristics of students and schools</i>				
Percentage male (female is reference group)	-0.01 (0.00)*	-0.01 (0.00)*	-0.01 (0.00)*	-0.01 (0.00)*
<i>Race/ethnicity (White is reference group)</i>				
Percentage of American Indian/Pacific Islander students	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Percentage of Asian students	0.01 (0.00)*	0.01 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)*	0.04 (0.00)*
Percentage of Black students	-0.00 (0.00)*	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.00)	-0.02 (0.00)
Percentage of Hispanic students	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)*	-0.01 (0.00)*	-0.01 (0.00)*
Percentage of multiracial students	0.01 (0.00)*	0.01 (0.00)*	-0.01 (0.00)*	-0.00 (0.00)
Percentage of students who ever had an individualized education program	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.00)*	-0.02 (0.00)*
Percentage of students ever designated as English learner students	-0.00 (0.00)*	-0.00 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Percentage of students ever eligible for free lunch	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)*	-0.00 (0.00)
Percentage of students ever eligible for reduced-price lunch	0.01 (0.00)*	0.01 (0.00)*	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
<i>Grade level (grades 3 and 9 are reference group)</i>				
Percentage of students in grade 4	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)		
Percentage of students in grade 5	0.00 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)		
Percentage of students in grade 6	0.00 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)		
Percentage of students in grade 7	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)		
Percentage of students in grade 8	0.00 (0.00)*	0.01 (0.00)*		
Percentage of students in grade 10			0.00 (0.00)*	0.01 (0.00)*
Percentage of students in grade 11			-0.00 (0.00)	0.01 (0.00)*
Percentage of students in grade 12			0.01 (0.00)*	0.01 (0.00)
<i>School type (traditional public is reference group)</i>				
Percentage of Title I schools	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Percentage of charter schools	-0.00 (0.00)*	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Percentage of alternative schools	0.00 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Percentage of special education schools	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Percentage of other schools	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	
Percentage of magnet schools	-0.00 (0.00)*	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	
Intercept	0.26 (0.18)	-0.15 (0.20)	0.57 (0.07)*	0.91 (0.12)*
Standard deviation of post-performance contract adoption effect	0.09 (0.01)*	0.08 (0.01)*	0.08 (0.01)*	0.12 (0.02)*
Number of districts	178	178	178	178
District-by-year observations	2,136	2,136	2,124	1,863

* Statistically significant at the .05 level or lower.

Note: Analysis also included district and school year fixed effects, not presented here.

Source: Authors' analysis of administrative and survey data from the Georgia Department of Education and data from the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data.

Table C2. Results from final models estimating district-level change in student achievement in Georgia and their relationship with district characteristics, 2007/08–2017/18

Variable	Grades 3–8		Grades 9–12	
	Change in English language arts achievement	Change in math achievement	Change in English achievement	Change in Algebra I achievement
Post–performance contract adoption (pre–performance contract adoption is reference group)	0.05 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)	0.03 (0.04)
<i>District-level demographic characteristics of students and schools</i>				
Percentage male (female is reference group)	–0.01 (0.00)*	–0.01 (0.00)*	–0.01 (0.00)*	–0.01 (0.00)*
<i>Race/ethnicity (White is reference group)</i>				
Percentage of American Indian/Pacific Islander students	–0.00 (0.01)	–0.01 (0.01)	–0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Percentage of Asian students	0.01 (0.00)*	0.01 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)	0.04 (0.00)*
Percentage of Black students	–0.00 (0.00)*	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.01 (0.00)*	–0.02 (0.00)*
Percentage of Hispanic students	0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)*	–0.01 (0.00)*	–0.01 (0.00)*
Percentage of multiracial students	0.01 (0.00)*	0.01 (0.00)*	–0.01 (0.00)*	–0.00 (0.00)
Percentage of students who ever had an individualized education program	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.01 (0.00)*	–0.02 (0.00)*
Percentage of students ever designated as English learner students	–0.00 (0.00)*	–0.00 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Percentage of students ever eligible for free lunch	–0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)*	–0.00 (0.00)
Percentage of students ever eligible for reduced-price lunch	0.01 (0.00)*	0.01 (0.00)*	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)
<i>Grade level (grades 3 and 9 are reference group)</i>				
Percentage of students in grade 4	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)		
Percentage of students in grade 5	0.00 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)		
Percentage of students in grade 6	0.00 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)		
Percentage of students in grade 7	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)		
Percentage of students in grade 8	0.00 (0.00)	0.01 (0.00)*		
Percentage of students in grade 10			0.00 (0.00)*	0.01 (0.00)*
Percentage of students in grade 11			–0.00 (0.00)	0.01 (0.00)*
Percentage of students in grade 12			0.01 (0.00)*	0.01 (0.00)
<i>School type (traditional public is reference group)</i>				
Percentage of Title I schools	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Percentage of charter schools	–0.00 (0.00)*	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Percentage of alternative schools	0.00 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Percentage of special education schools	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)	0.01 (0.00)
Percentage of other schools	–0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)
Percentage of magnet schools	–0.00 (0.00)*	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)
<i>District characteristics (interactions with post–performance contract adoption)</i>				
<i>Urbanicity (suburban is reference group)</i>				
City	–0.04 (0.03)	–0.03 (0.03)	–0.00 (0.03)	–0.14 (0.05)*
Rural	–0.03 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	–0.01 (0.02)	0.01 (0.04)
Town	–0.04 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)	–0.06 (0.03)*	–0.07 (0.05)
<i>Adoption cohort group (early [2005/06–2014/15] is reference group)</i>				
Middle (2015/16)	–0.01 (0.03)	–0.02 (0.03)	–0.05 (0.03)	–0.00 (0.05)
Late (2016/17)	0.01 (0.03)	–0.02 (0.03)	0.00 (0.03)	0.04 (0.06)

Variable	Grades 3–8		Grades 9–12	
	Change in English language arts achievement	Change in math achievement	Change in English achievement	Change in Algebra I achievement
Strategic Waivers School System (Charter System is reference group)	0.00 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	–0.05 (0.05)
Intercept	0.25 (0.18)	–0.15 (0.20)	0.57 (0.07)*	0.92 (0.12)*
Standard deviation of post–performance contract adoption effect	0.09 (0.01)*	0.08 (0.01)*	0.07 (0.01)*	0.11 (0.02)*
Number of districts	178	178	178	178
District-by-year observations	2,136	2,136	2,124	1,863

* Statistically significant at the .05 level.

Note: Analysis also included district and school year fixed effects, not presented here.

Source: Authors' analysis of administrative and survey data from the Georgia Department of Education and data from the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data.

Table C3. Results from final models estimating district-level change in student achievement in Georgia and their relationship with district characteristics and prioritized innovations under performance contracts, 2007/08–2017/18

Variable	Grades 3–8		Grades 9–12	
	Change in English language arts achievement	Change in math achievement	Change in English achievement	Change in Algebra I achievement
Post–performance contract adoption (pre–performance contract adoption is reference group)	0.03 (0.04)	0.03 (0.04)	–0.01 (0.04)	0.05 (0.07)
<i>District-level demographic characteristics of students and schools</i>				
Percentage male (female is reference group)	–0.01 (0.00)*	–0.01 (0.00)*	–0.01 (0.00)*	–0.01 (0.00)*
<i>Race/ethnicity (White is reference group)</i>				
Percentage of American Indian/Pacific Islander students	0.02 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	–0.02 (0.01)*	–0.01 (0.01)
Percentage of Asian students	0.01 (0.00)*	0.02 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)	0.04 (0.00)*
Percentage of Black students	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.01 (0.00)*	–0.02 (0.00)*
Percentage of Hispanic students	0.00 (0.00)*	–0.00 (0.00)*	–0.00 (0.00)*	–0.01 (0.00)*
Percentage of multiracial students	0.01 (0.00)*	0.02 (0.00)*	–0.01 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)
Percentage of students who ever had an individualized education program	0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.01 (0.00)*	–0.01 (0.00)*
Percentage of students ever designated as English learner students	–0.00 (0.00)*	–0.00 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Percentage of students ever eligible for free lunch	–0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)*	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)
Percentage of students ever eligible for reduced-price lunch	0.01 (0.00)*	0.01 (0.00)*	–0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
<i>Grade level (grades 3 and 9 are reference group)</i>				
Percentage of students in grade 4	0.01 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)		
Percentage of students in grade 5	0.01 (0.00)*	0.01 (0.00)*		
Percentage of students in grade 6	0.01 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)		
Percentage of students in grade 7	0.01 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)		
Percentage of students in grade 8	0.01 (0.00)*	0.01 (0.00)*		
Percentage of students in grade 10			0.00 (0.00)*	0.01 (0.00)*
Percentage of students in grade 11			–0.01 (0.00)	0.01 (0.00)*
Percentage of students in grade 12			0.02 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)

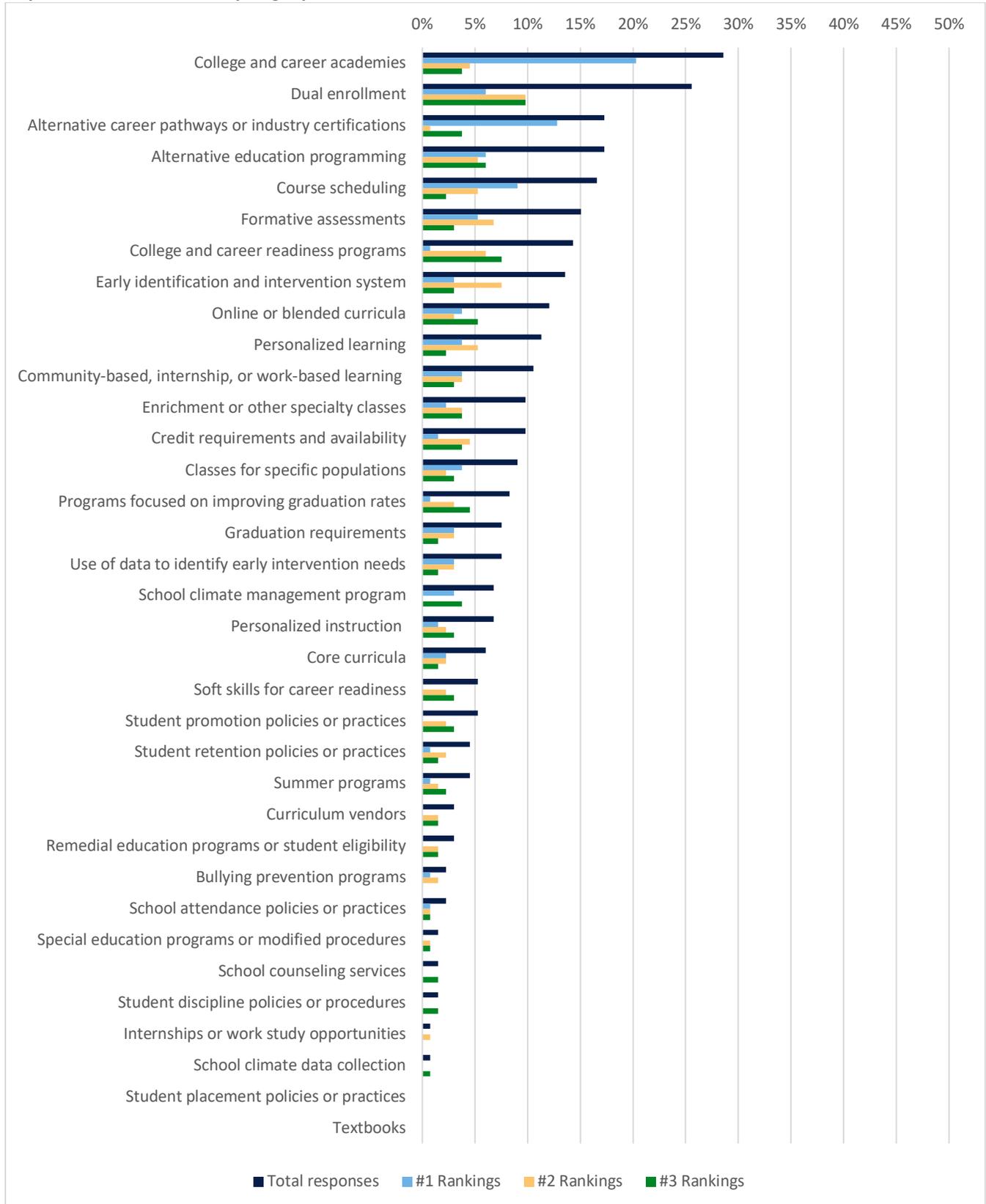
Variable	Grades 3–8		Grades 9–12	
	Change in English language arts achievement	Change in math achievement	Change in English achievement	Change in Algebra I achievement
<i>School type (traditional public is reference group)</i>				
Percentage of Title I schools	0.00 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)
Percentage of charter schools	–0.00 (0.00)*	–0.00 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Percentage of alternative schools	0.00 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Percentage of special education schools	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)*	0.00 (0.00)	0.01 (0.00)
Percentage of other schools	–0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)
Percentage of magnet schools	–0.00 (0.00)*	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)
<i>District characteristics (interactions with post–performance contract adoption)</i>				
<i>Urbanicity (suburban is reference group)</i>				
City	–0.01 (0.04)	0.00 (0.04)	0.05 (0.04)	–0.07 (0.07)
Rural	–0.02 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)	–0.01 (0.03)	0.02 (0.05)
Town	–0.02 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	–0.05 (0.03)	–0.04 (0.06)
<i>Adoption cohort group (early [2005/06–2014/15] is reference group, interactions with post–performance contract adoption)</i>				
Middle (2015/16)	0.01 (0.04)	–0.00 (0.04)	–0.02 (0.04)	–0.00 (0.06)
Late (2016/17)	0.03 (0.04)	–0.01 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)	–0.00 (0.07)
Strategic Waivers School System (Charter System is reference)	0.00 (0.03)	0.01 (0.04)	0.01 (0.03)	–0.02 (0.06)
<i>Academic innovations prioritized (interactions with post–performance contract adoption)</i>				
Alternative education programming	–0.03 (0.03)	–0.02 (0.03)	–0.07 (0.03)*	–0.03 (0.05)
College and career academy	0.00 (0.02)	–0.03 (0.03)	–0.03 (0.03)	–0.05 (0.04)
Personalized instruction	0.01 (0.04)	0.02 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)	0.08 (0.08)
School climate management	0.01 (0.18)	0.20 (0.20)	0.22 (0.22)	–0.12 (0.38)
<i>Human resources innovations prioritized (interactions with post–performance contract adoption)</i>				
Certification requirements	–0.02 (0.02)	–0.02 (0.02)	0.04 (0.03)	–0.01 (0.04)
Differentiated salary system	0.03 (0.03)	0.07 (0.03)*	0.04 (0.03)	0.06 (0.06)
Class size	0.01 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	–0.00 (0.02)	–0.01 (0.04)
Professional learning	–0.05 (0.03)	–0.02 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	0.02 (0.06)
<i>Financial innovations prioritized (interactions with post–performance contract adoption)</i>				
Instructional spending	0.01 (0.02)	–0.00 (0.03)	–0.00 (0.03)	–0.03 (0.04)
Noninstructional spending	0.02 (0.02)	0.00 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)	–0.02 (0.04)
Intercept	0.07 (0.21)	–0.45 (0.24)	0.56 (0.08)*	0.97 (0.13)*
Standard deviation of post–performance contract adoption effect	0.09 (0.01)*	0.08 (0.01)*	0.08 (0.01)*	0.11 (0.02)*
Number of districts	133	133	133	133
District-by-year observations	1,596	1,596	1,584	1,395

* Statistically significant at the .05 level.

Note: Analysis also included district and school year fixed effects, not presented here.

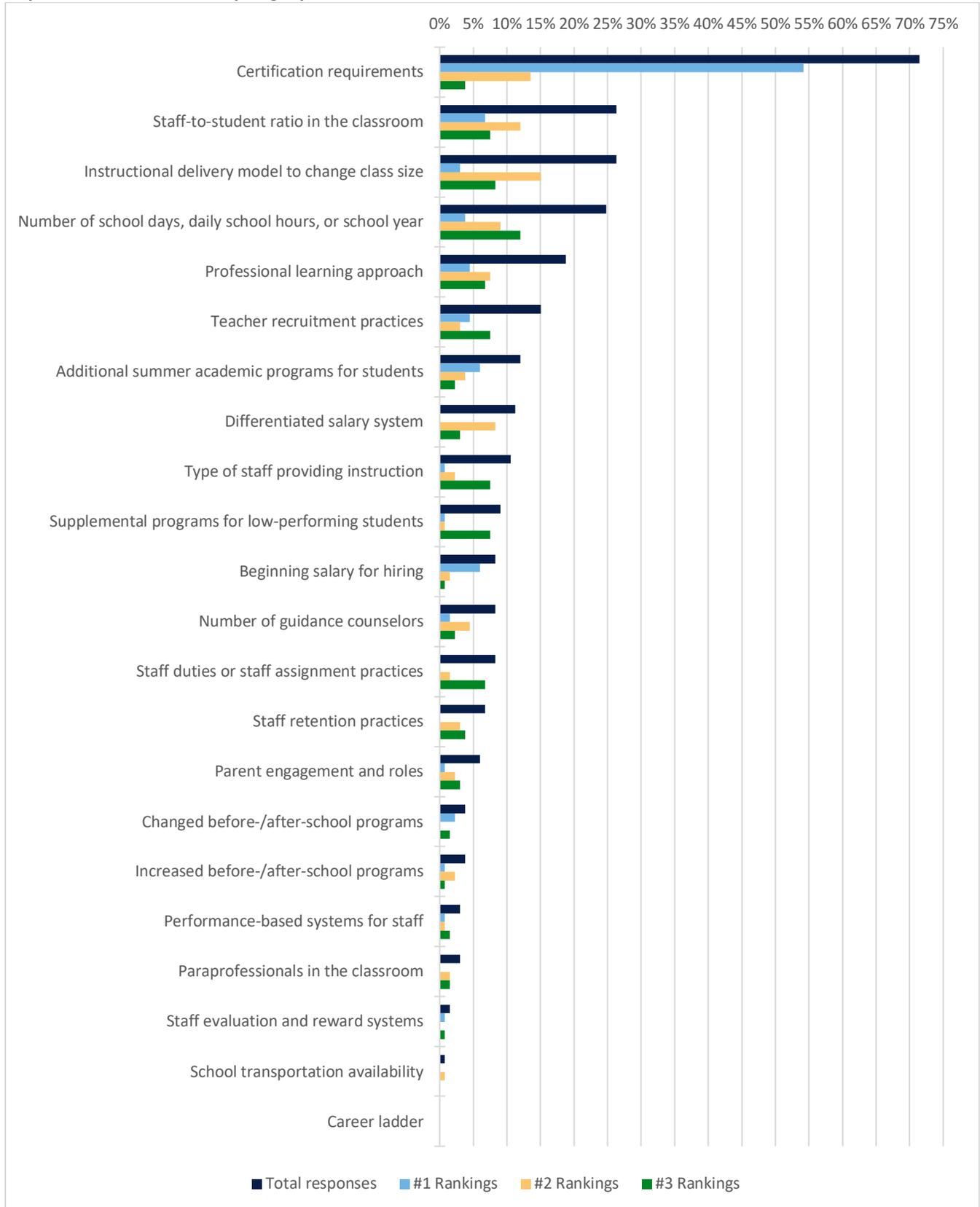
Source: Authors' analysis of administrative and survey data from the Georgia Department of Education and data from the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data.

Figure C1. Full list of innovative practices related to academic programs that Georgia districts prioritized for implementation after adopting a performance contract, 2019



Note: Sample includes 133 districts.
 Source: Authors' analysis using survey data from the Georgia Department of Education.

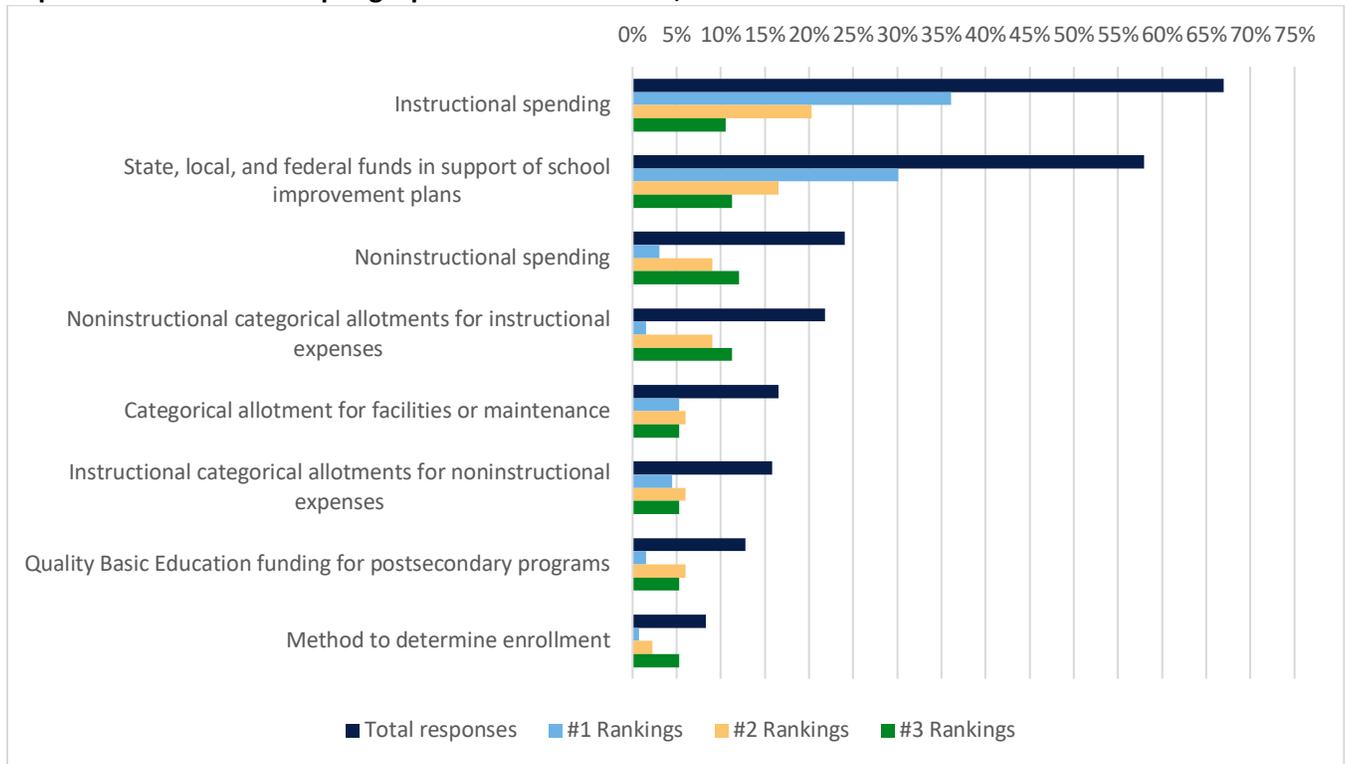
Figure C2. Full list of innovative practices related to human resources that Georgia districts prioritized for implementation after adopting a performance contract, 2019



Note: Sample includes 133 districts.

Source: Authors' analysis using survey data from the Georgia Department of Education.

Figure C3. Full list of innovative practices related to finances that Georgia districts prioritized for implementation after adopting a performance contract, 2019



Note: Sample includes 133 districts.

Source: Authors' analysis using survey data from the Georgia Department of Education.

Appendix D. Survey instrument

This appendix presents the survey instrument used to collect data from Georgia district leaders.

Thank you for volunteering to respond to this questionnaire. Your responses will provide insight on how Strategic Waiver School Systems (SWSS) or Charter Systems in Georgia use waiver flexibilities to implement innovative strategies. Your responses will be sent directly to the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southeast research team and will be used for program improvement purposes only. All responses that relate to or describe identifiable characteristics of individuals may only be used for statistical purposes and will be kept confidential. No identifiable information will be shared outside of the REL Southeast research team. This questionnaire should take no more than 20 minutes to complete.

Background information

Question 1. Please select your district.* *[Asterisks indicate a response was required.]*

Question 2. Please select your position in your district. (If you hold more than one position, please select your main role.)*

- Superintendent
- Assistant superintendent
- Chief financial officer/finance manager
- School improvement administrator
- Local governance coordinator
- Other—Write In (Required):

Question 3. Are you considering changing from a SWSS to a Charter System, or from a Charter System to a SWSS?*

- Yes
- No

Changes in practice

Please share about innovations your district has implemented or may be considering since the approval of your SWSS or Charter System contract.

For questions 4–6, please follow the steps included with each question.

Academic program flexibility

Question 4. Since approval of your contract, your district may have implemented innovations or may be considering innovations to initiate new academic programs, expand existing academic programs, and/or make other changes to academic programs.

Please read through this list and select the top three academic program innovations that your district has implemented or plans to implement.

If your district implemented other high priority innovations related to academic programs that are not listed below, you can list and describe them later in the questionnaire under question 8.

- Alternate career pathways and/or industry certifications
- Alternative education programming
- Bullying prevention program
- Classes for specific populations, such as gifted education and English learner

- College and career academy
- Community-based, internship, or work-based learning programs
- Core curricula
- Course scheduling
- Credit requirements and availability
- Curriculum vendors
- Dual enrollment
- Early identification and intervention system
- Enrichment or other specialty classes
- Formative assessments used to guide instruction
- Graduation requirements
- Internships or work study opportunities
- Online and/or blended curricula
- Personalized instruction according to each student's needs
- Personalized learning for students
- Programs focused on improving college and career readiness
- Programs focused on improving graduation rates
- Remedial education programming or student eligibility
- School attendance policies or practices
- School climate data collection
- School climate management program
- School counseling services
- Soft skills for career readiness
- Special education programming or modified IEP procedures
- Student discipline policies or procedures
- Student placement policies or practices
- Student promotion policies or practices
- Student retention policies or practices
- Summer programs
- Textbooks
- Use of data to identify early intervention needs

Question 4, Follow-up #1. In the table below, please indicate whether the innovations you ranked above were to add new academic programs, expand existing academic programs, and/or make other changes to academic programs.

	New	Expand existing	Other changes
First priority selected	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Second priority selected	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Third priority selected	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Question 4, Follow-up #2. In the table below, please indicate whether a waiver was or will be necessary for your district to implement each of your prioritized academic program innovations.

	Need waiver (Y/N)
First priority selected	
Second priority selected	
Third priority selected	

Human resources flexibility

Question 5. Since approval of your contract, your district may have implemented innovations or may be considering innovations to expand, restructure, and/or make other changes to human resources.

Please read through this list and select the top three human resource innovations that your district has implemented or plans to implement.

If your district implemented other high-priority innovations related to human resources that are not listed below, you can list and describe them later in the questionnaire under question 8.

- Additional summer academic programs for students
- Beginning salary for hiring
- Career ladder
- Certification requirements
- Changed the structure or content of before- and/or after-school programs
- Differentiated salary system
- Increased before- and/or after-school programs
- Instructional delivery model to change class size
- Number of guidance counselors
- Number of school days, daily school hours, or school year
- Paraprofessionals in classroom
- Parent engagement and roles
- Performance-based systems for staff
- Professional learning approach
- School transportation availability
- Staff duties or staff assignment practices
- Staff evaluation and reward systems
- Staff retention practices
- Staff-to-student ratio in classroom
- Supplemental programs for low-performing students
- Teacher recruitment practices
- Type of staff providing instruction

Question 5, Follow-up #1. In the table below, please indicate whether the innovations you ranked above were to expand human resources, restructure existing human resources, and/or make other changes to human resources.

	Expand	Restructure existing	Other changes
First priority selected	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Second priority selected	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Third priority selected	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Question 5, Follow-up #2. In the table below, please indicate whether a waiver was or will be necessary for your district to implement each of your prioritized human resource innovations.

	Need waiver (Y/N)
First priority selected	
Second priority selected	
Third priority selected	

Financial flexibility

Question 6. Your district may have implemented innovations or may be considering innovations to expand your current funding, restructure your financial allocations and/or practices, and/or make other changes related to finances.

Please read through this list and select the top three financial innovations that your district has implemented or plans to implement.

If your district implemented other high priority innovations related to finances that are not listed below, you can list and describe them later in the questionnaire under question 8.

- Categorical allotment for facilities or maintenance
- Instructional categorical allotments for noninstructional expenses
- Instructional spending
- Method to determine enrollment
- Noninstructional categorical allotments for instructional expenses
- Noninstructional spending
- Quality Basic Education funding for postsecondary programs
- State, local, and federal funds in support of school improvement plans

Question 6, Follow-up #1. In the table below, please indicate whether the innovations you ranked above were to expand funding, restructure existing financial allocations, and/or make other changes to financial resources.

	Expand	Restructure existing	Other changes
First priority selected	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Second priority selected	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Third priority selected	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Question 6, Follow-up #2. In the table below, please indicate whether a waiver was or will be necessary for your district to implement each of your prioritized financial innovations.

	Need waiver (Y/N)
First priority selected	
Second priority selected	
Third priority selected	

Additional innovations

Question 7. Since receiving approval of your SWSS or Charter System contract, has your district implemented, expanded, or changed in any way the use of the following innovations?*

	No change	Implemented	Expanded	Reduced	N/A
Local school councils	<input type="radio"/>				
School choice request procedures	<input type="radio"/>				

Question 8. Are there any other high-priority innovations related to academic programs, human resources, finances, or other flexibilities that your district implemented since becoming a SWSS or Charter System? If so, please list those innovations and in two to three sentences describe why they are a priority for your district.

Perceived impact

Thank you for indicating the innovations your district prioritized. In this section, you will have an opportunity to share how those innovations affected your district and/or schools.

Please think about *only* the innovations you identified while answering questions 4–6 (listed below for your reference) and question 8:

- Your district's innovations related to academic programs: *[insert innovations selected above]*
- Your district's innovations related to human resources: *[insert innovations selected above]*
- Your district's innovations related to finances: *[insert innovations selected above]*

Question 9. In your opinion, how have the following outcomes been affected by implementing the high-priority innovations you identified? For each outcome, choose one of the following: (1) improved substantially, (2) improved somewhat, (3) stayed the same, (4) worsened somewhat, (5) worsened substantially, (6) not relevant to our contract.

Then, please list which one or more of those innovations you attribute to making the most change for each outcome.*

Outcome	1	2	3	4	5	6	Innovation(s) affecting the most change
Student outcomes							
Academic achievement							
Attendance							
Grades							
Graduation rates							
Staff outcomes							
Teacher retention							
Principal retention							
Teachers' instructional practices							
Teachers' compensation							
Teachers' opportunities to advance in their teaching profession							
Teachers' opportunities to collaborate with colleagues at their school							
Teachers' opportunities for professional development							
Support for new teachers							
Time available for collaboration							
Principals' instructional leadership skills							
Support for new teachers							
Staff retention							
School budgets							
Ability to hire new teachers							
Maintenance of school buildings and facilities							
Parental engagement practices							
Parental engagement with their child's schooling							
Parental engagement with programs aimed at improving students' academic outcomes							
Parental engagement with developing school curricula							
Parental engagement with school policy decisions							
Parental engagement with planning career pathway for student							
Parental engagement with student supplemental services							
School climate outcomes							
Student behavior							
Perceptions of safety							
Relationships between teachers and students							
Relationships among teachers							
Relationships between school leaders and teachers							
Relationships between school leaders and their peers							

Question 10. Are the schools in your district implementing the innovations that you identified in questions 4–6 and question 8?*

- No, implementation of innovations is not yet happening at the school level.
- Yes, implementation of innovations is consistent across the schools in our district.

- Yes, implementation of innovations is different across the schools in our district.
- Other—Please explain:

Challenges

Question 11. To what extent is each of the following a challenge to your efforts to implement innovations to meet your performance contract goals?

	Not a challenge	Minor challenge	Moderate challenge	Major challenge
Staff turnover				
Staff recruitment				
Available funding				
Parent support				
Community support				
Lack of understanding of possible innovations				
Insufficient staff to implement innovations				
Changes to state policies or procedures				

Stakeholders

Question 12. Please select the three most influential stakeholders for the selection of innovations in your district and whether they had (1) a total influence, (2) a great deal of influence, or (3) a moderate amount of influence over the selection of innovations.*

- District administrators
- District staff (other than district administrators)
- District leaders in other districts (e.g., a cohort of district leaders)
- GaDOE staff
- State Board of Education
- School administrators in my district
- School staff (other than school administrators)
- School governance team
- School staff external to my district
- Parents
- Community members
- Local business community
- Institutions of higher education
- External organizations (e.g., the Charter System Foundation, EMO/CMO, Southeast Comprehensive Center)

Question 12, Follow-up: Please specify the external organization(s) if ranked.

Value

Question 13. What is the most beneficial aspect of your district's performance contract?*

- Having performance targets/goals to meet
- Refocusing on improving student outcomes
- Avoiding consequences
- Making stakeholder involvement transparent
- Facilitating continuous improvement
- Changing culture from one of compliance to innovation
- Other—Write In (Required):

Appendix E. Interview protocol

This appendix presents the interview protocol used to collect interview data from Georgia district leaders.

Introduction

Hello, my name is *[GaDOE researcher]*. *[If applicable:]* With me today is *[REL Southeast researcher's name]* from the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southeast, our partner on this study. Thanks again for taking the time to speak with us this *[morning/afternoon]*. We anticipate the interview will last approximately 90 minutes.

Before we start, do you have any questions about the background information on our study we sent you? As noted in that information, we're interviewing district administrators about implementing waivers. Be assured this study is not to assess you or how well waivers are being implemented in your district. It is to learn about your experiences to help evaluate the effectiveness of the entire waiver program, consider future changes, and provide guidance on best practices for waiver implementation.

We also sent you a consent form with more detailed information about this evaluation and your rights as a participant. As a reminder, your participation in this interview is completely voluntary and will not affect your employment. You may skip any question that you do not feel comfortable answering, and you may choose to leave the interview at any time. In order to participate, you will need to sign the first line of the consent form. Are you okay with this? Do you have any questions?

Be assured there are no right or wrong answers; we are seeking what you know to be facts, and we are also seeking your opinions, so please share with us to the best of your ability. We hope to have a lively and frank conversation. We would like to capture all of the information you share as accurately as possible, so will you permit us to audio-record the interview? If there is anything you would like to have off the record, please let us know, and we will not record it.

Please know that we will keep everything you tell us confidential. We will never use your name when we report our findings or repeat anything you say. Only our research team, who is responsible for analyzing the data and writing a report about our findings, and an external transcription company will have access to what you say.

Before we begin, do you have any questions?

Background questions

Let's begin with a brief introduction.

- Please share your name and a brief description of your role in the district.
- How long you have been in this role?
- What was your job before moving into your current role?

Decision making

GaDOE's motivation when they asked REL Southeast to conduct this study was to understand whether the Strategic Waiver Flexibility policy was a good policy decision statewide. In order to answer this question, we need to go back to the beginning of your district's implementation of the policy. For that reason, we want you to think about the initial transition your district made from traditional district to *[SWSS or Charter System]* when answering questions during this interview.

Our first interview section asks about your district's decisionmaking processes related to applying for *[SWSS or Charter System]* status in general *[and applying for specific waivers if SWSS]* when your district first made the transition.

- Why did your district decide to apply for *[SWSS or Charter System status]* in general?
 - Prompts for further information (if not answered above):
 - Who was involved in the decision-making process? Briefly describe the decision-making process.
 - Why did you choose to become a *[SWSS or Charter System]* rather than *[if SWSS above, then Charter System here or vice versa]*?

[If survey response indicates they plan to switch from a SWSS to Charter System or vice versa]: Why did you decide to change the district flexibility option?

[If SWSS]: Who made the decision to apply for your district’s waivers? What factors did they consider?

[If SWSS]: We would like to ask you a few general questions about your district waiver priorities when you first contracted to become an SWSS.

- What were the top two waivers that were a priority for your district when you first became an SWSS?
- Are those two waivers still the top two priority waivers for your district?
- If not, what are the top two waivers that are a priority for your district now?

Waiver/SWSS implementation

Let’s now focus on the approved waivers in your district’s initial *[SWSS or Charter System]* contract. Again, this section asks about your initial transition from a non-*[SWSS or Charter System]* to a *[SWSS or Charter System]*. Although your district may have changed its performance contract since first converting to a *[SWSS or Charter System]*, please think about your initial contract when answering the following questions.

- Has your district implemented all of the waivers in your initial contract?
- Which waiver did your district implement first? Why was that waiver implemented first?
- Are there any waivers your district requested that you will not be implementing? If so, for what reason?

Innovations related to academic programs

On the questionnaire, when asked about academic programs, you indicated that the district prioritized *[top two innovations]* upon receiving *[SWSS or Charter System]* status. I have a few questions about each of these innovations.

- How was *[the first priority innovation]* selected as a priority to implement in your district?
- Who were the key personnel in selecting this innovation to implement and how did they influence selection? (for example, district administrators, other district staff, GaDOE staff, school administrators in your district, parents, community members, groups or organizations external to your district)
- How did the district implement *[the first priority innovation]*?
- Who were/are key personnel in implementing *[the first priority innovation]*?
- How did the district communicate about this implementation of *[the first priority innovation]* with your schools?
- What supports were in place or were needed to implement *[the first priority innovation]*?
- What were barriers to implementation?
- Since implementing *[the first priority innovation]*, did your district modify this innovation or make additional decisions about this innovation?
- Which waiver was necessary for your district to implement *[the first priority innovation]*? If none, why not?

Now, let’s talk about the implementation of *[the second priority innovation related to academic programs]*.

- How was *[the second priority innovation]* selected as a priority to implement in your district?

- Who were the key personnel in selecting *[the second priority innovation]* to implement and how did they influence selection (for example, district administrators, other district staff, GaDOE staff, school administrators in your district, parents, community members, groups or organizations external to your district)?
- Please describe the activities/actions your district has taken to implement *[the second priority innovation]*.
- Who were/are key personnel in implementing *[the second priority innovation]*?
- How did the district communicate about this implementation of *[the second priority innovation]* with your schools?
- What supports were in place or were needed to implement *[the second priority innovation]*?
- What were barriers to implementation?
- Since implementing *[the second priority innovation]*, did your district modify this innovation or make additional decisions about this innovation?
- Which waiver was necessary for your district to implement *[the second priority innovation]*? If none, why not?

Innovations related to human resources

On the survey, when asked about human resources, you indicated that the district prioritized *[top two innovations]* upon receiving *[SWSS or Charter System]* status. I have a few questions about each of these innovations.

- How was *[the first priority innovation]* selected as a priority to implement in your district?
- Who were the key personnel in selecting *[the first priority innovation]* to implement and how did they influence selection? (for example, district administrators, other district staff, GaDOE staff, school administrators in your district, parents, community members, groups or organizations external to your district)
- How did the district implement *[the first priority innovation]*?
- Who were/are key personnel in implementing *[the first priority innovation]*?
- How did the district communicate about this implementation of *[the first priority innovation]* with your schools?
- What supports were in place or were needed to implement *[the first priority innovation]*?
- What were barriers to implementation?
- Since implementing *[the first priority innovation]*, did your district modify this innovation or make additional decisions about this innovation?
- Which waiver was necessary for your district to implement *[the first priority innovation]*? If none, why not?

Now, let's talk about the implementation of *[the second priority innovation related to academic programs]*.

- How was *[the second priority innovation]* selected as a priority to implement in your district?
- Who were the key personnel in selecting *[the second priority innovation]* to implement and how did they influence selection (for example, district administrators, other district staff, GaDOE staff, school administrators in your district, parents, community members, groups or organizations external to your district)?
- Describe the activities/actions your district has taken to implement *[the second priority innovation]*.
- Who were/are key personnel in implementing *[the second priority innovation]*?
- How did the district communicate about this implementation of *[the second priority innovation]* with your schools?
- What supports were in place or were needed to implement *[the second priority innovation]*?
- What were barriers to implementation?

- Since implementing *[the second priority innovation]*, did your district modify this innovation or make additional decisions about this innovation?
- Which waiver was necessary for your district to implement *[the second priority innovation]*? If none, why not?

Innovations related to finances

On the survey, when asked about finances, you indicated that the district prioritized *[top two innovations]* upon receiving *[SWSS or Charter System]* status. I have a few questions about each of these innovations.

- How was *[the first priority innovation]* selected as a priority to implement in your district?
- Who were the key personnel in selecting *[the first priority innovation]* to implement and how did they influence selection (for example, district administrators, other district staff, GaDOE staff, school administrators in your district, parents, community members, groups or organizations external to your district)?
- How did the district implement *[the first priority innovation]*?
- Who were/are key personnel in implementing *[the first priority innovation]*?
- How did the district communicate about this implementation of *[the first priority innovation]* with your schools?
- What supports were in place or were needed to implement *[the first priority innovation]*?
- What were barriers to implementation?
- Since implementing *[the first priority innovation]*, did your district modify this innovation or make additional decisions about this innovation?
- Which waiver was necessary for your district to implement *[the first priority innovation]*? If none, why not?

Now, let's talk about the implementation of *[the second priority innovation related to academic programs]*.

- How was *[the second priority innovation]* selected as a priority to implement in your district?
- Who were the key personnel in selecting *[the second priority innovation]* to implement and how did they influence selection (for example, district administrators, other district staff, GaDOE staff, school administrators in your district, parents, community members, groups or organizations external to your district)?
- Describe the activities/actions your district has taken to implement *[the second priority innovation]*.
- Who were/are key personnel in implementing *[the second priority innovation]*?
- How did the district communicate about this implementation of *[the second priority innovation]* with your schools?
- What supports were in place or were needed to implement *[the second priority innovation]*?
- What were barriers to implementation?
- Since implementing *[the second priority innovation]*, did your district modify this innovation or make additional decisions about this innovation?
- Which waiver was necessary for your district to implement *[the second priority innovation]*? If none, why not?

Other innovations

Did you implement any other high-priority innovations you would identify as being innovative compared to prior practices or to other districts in the state?

- Prompts: use of local school councils, school choice request procedures

Please describe, briefly, how each innovation was implemented (repeat questions about implementation for each innovation mentioned in response to this question—limit to two innovations).

Outcomes/changes

You've now described innovations you have begun implementing or have been implementing for a while. In the next set of questions, please continue to think about your initial performance contract. We will ask you to describe whether and how implementing the waivers we just discussed has led to any changes in your district and schools in several areas, such as student outcomes, staff outcomes, human resources and financial outcomes, parental engagement outcomes, and school climate outcomes.

- Of these kinds of outcomes (student outcomes, staff outcomes, school administration practices and outcomes, parental engagement outcomes, and school climate outcomes), which kinds of outcomes do you think have resulted because you've implemented waivers *as a whole*?

Now, I want to ask you about each of these types of outcomes you identified in more detail.

Student outcomes [if identified by respondent]:

- In what ways did student outcomes change in your district as a result of implementing waivers *as a whole*?
 - Prompts: academic achievement, attendance, graduation rates
- Now, please think about the specific innovations you described earlier. Are there particular innovations that, in your opinion, contributed most to the changes in outcomes we just discussed? If so, how did those innovations contribute to changes in outcomes? (*Prompt with changes they identified in response to the previous question.*)

Staff outcomes [if identified by respondent]:

- In what ways did staffing outcomes change as a result of implementing waivers *as a whole*?
 - Prompts: teachers' instructional practices, teacher compensation, teachers' opportunities to collaborate with colleagues at their school, teachers' opportunities for professional development and advancement, support for new teachers, principals' instructional leadership, principal and teacher retention
- Now, please think about the specific innovations you described earlier. Are there particular innovations that, in your opinion, contributed most to the changes in outcomes you just described? If yes, how did those innovations contribute to changes in outcomes? (*Prompt with changes they identified in response to the previous question.*)

School administration practices and outcomes [if identified by respondent]:

- In what ways have school administration practices and outcomes changed as a result of implementing waivers *as a whole*?
 - Prompts: school budgets, ability to hire new teachers, maintenance of school buildings and facilities
- Now, please think about the specific innovations you described earlier. Are there particular innovations that, in your opinion, contributed most to the changes in outcomes we just discussed? If so, how did those innovations contribute to changes in outcomes? (*Prompt with changes they identified in response to the previous question.*)

Parental engagement outcomes [if identified by respondent]:

- In what ways has parent engagement in your district changed as a result of implementing waivers *as a whole*?
 - Prompts: parent engagement with their child's schooling, parent engagement with programs aimed at improving students' academic outcomes, parent engagement with developing school curricula, parent

engagement with school policy decisions, parent engagement with planning career pathway for student, parent engagement with student supplemental services

- Now, please think about the specific innovations you described earlier. Are there particular innovations that, in your opinion, contributed most to the changes in outcomes we just discussed? If so, how did those innovations contribute to changes in outcomes? (*Prompt with changes they identified in response to the previous question.*)

School climate outcomes [if identified by respondent]:

- In what ways has school climate in your schools changed as a result of implementing waivers *as a whole*?
 - Prompts: student behavior, perceptions of safety, relationships between teachers and students, relationships among teachers, relationships between teachers and school leaders, relationships among school leaders and their peers
- Now, please think about the specific innovations you described earlier. Are there particular innovations that, in your opinion, contributed most to the changes in outcomes you just described? If yes, how did those innovations contribute to changes in outcomes? (*Prompt with changes they identified in response to the previous question.*)

Other changes

- Are there other outcomes that have changed in your district as a result of implementing waivers *as a whole*?
 - If so, please think about the specific innovations you implemented. Are there particular innovations that, in your opinion, contributed most to the changes in outcomes we just discussed? If so, how did those innovations contribute to changes in outcomes? (*Prompt with changes they identified in response to the previous question.*)
- To conclude our discussion of outcomes, what do you believe has contributed most to changes in outcomes as a whole?

Evaluating implementation outcomes

We know that evaluation of whether your district meets its performance targets is part of your performance contract. Beyond this evaluation, we are interested in understanding whether and how your district evaluates how innovations are being implemented and how the practices involved in implementation are related to outcomes of interest.

- Do you have any processes in place for evaluating how waiver implementation is linked to changes in outcomes?
 - If so, please describe the process(es).
 - If not, do you have plans to begin monitoring the implementation process and how implementation is linked to outcomes?

Future plans, supports, and challenges

In this final section, we want you to reflect about the entire concept of waivers as a whole, how waivers have worked for your district, and how you plan to move forward with waivers in the future.

- In thinking about implementing innovations as a result of becoming a [SWSS or Charter System], what state-, district-, or school-level supports have facilitated implementation of your performance contract?

- What state-, district-, or school-level challenges have you encountered in your efforts to implement innovations?
 - Prompts: staff turnover, available funding, parent support, community support, lack of understanding of possible innovations, limited time, insufficient staff, changes to state policies or procedures, external intervention
- Do you have plans to implement additional high-priority innovations or expand any current innovations you are implementing related to any of your waivers?
- If yes,
 - What is your anticipated timeline for implementation?
 - What outcomes do you anticipate as a result of these planned innovations?
 - How do you plan to monitor and evaluate implementation?
 - What supports and/or resources will help your [SWSS or Charter System] to implement these innovations?
 - What challenges pose a barrier to implementation?
- [If applicable—if the district has renewed their contract:] How was your district’s performance contract renewal affected by your initial implementation experiences?
- What does your district see as the most beneficial aspect of having a performance contract with the state?

Is there anything we haven’t discussed that you think I should know about your district’s performance contract and its implementation?