



Levers for change: Southeast Region state initiatives to improve high schools



Institute of Education Sciences
U.S. Department of Education



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Summary

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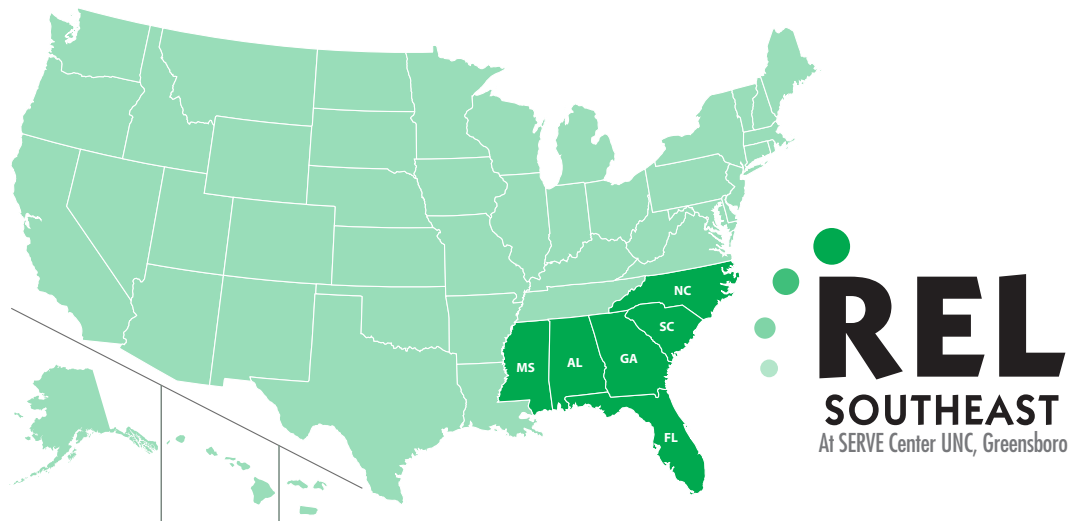
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Summary

Levers for change: Southeast Region state initiatives to improve high schools

This descriptive report aims to stimulate discussion about high school reform among Southeast Region states. The report groups recent state activities in high school reform into six “levers for change.” To encourage critical reflection, the report places the reform discussion in the context of an evidence-based decisionmaking process and provides sample research on reform activities.

This descriptive report examines the strategies of the six Southeast Region states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina) to improve high school graduation rates and student achievement and to increase the number of students leaving high school with the skills and knowledge necessary for the twenty-first century. For ease of discussion, these state-level strategies are organized into six themes or “levers for change:”

1. *Standards and assessments.* States are working to align standards and assessments with expectations for post-secondary education and with twenty-first century skills.
2. *Course requirements.* States are revising their graduation requirements to include courses required for college and

mandatory course sequences that make a stronger connection to work readiness.

3. *Student support and access to courses.* States are working to increase students’ access to both the courses and the support they need through strategies such as virtual schools, support for Advanced Placement courses, and mandated remediation.
4. *Model schools and practices.* States are supporting efforts on a continuum, from creating new model high schools, such as Early College High Schools, to redesigning existing schools, to implementing specific practices such as career academies.
5. *Local capacity-building.* States are building the capacity of local schools and districts to support reform by providing direct professional development or providing coaches or technical assistance teams at schools.
6. *Partnerships and public involvement.* States are establishing partnerships to support high school reform. State leaders are using their visibility to increase attention to high schools.

Deciding which strategies within each lever have the highest potential for accomplishing

the desired results is a challenge. Engaging states in a systematic examination of strategies can help states make wise decisions about what policies and interventions can best improve student learning in their state. Thus this report provides information that can help states engage in such a systematic process. The list of strategies described under each lever can give policymakers ideas about approaches to consider. But the authors do not mean to endorse every strategy or approach currently being used by states. Instead, policymakers should examine the research literature to discover what studies have found about a strategy's implementation issues and its

effectiveness in improving student outcomes. Based on the research, policymakers will want to consider the appropriateness of using a specific strategy to improve student outcomes. This report introduces examples of the key research for each lever.

After choosing a strategy, policymakers should monitor implementation of the strategy and evaluate its outcomes. The report concludes with three examples of ways states are currently evaluating strategies in three different levers.

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