

# Georgia Graduation Coach Initiative



2007-2008 Report



*"We will lead the nation in  
improving student achievement."*



# Georgia Graduation Coach Initiative – 2007-2008 Report

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## Executive Summary

Is the graduation coach initiative working in Georgia? The state's graduation rate has increased from 72.3% in 2007 to 75.4% in 2008— a record high for Georgia. This 3.1% rate increase represents 8,277 additional graduates for the 2007-2008 school year. Additionally, the state's dropout rate decreased from 4.1% to 3.7%. Based on the 2007 Bureau of Statistics calculations, the additional 8,277 Georgia students who graduated during the 2007-08 school year have the potential to add more than \$75 million dollars in revenue per year to the state's economy.

Georgia's graduation coaches are leading the nation in implementing innovative strategies to support at-risk students. In 2007-2008, graduation coaches put into place more than 282,400 interventions and documented nearly 11 million contact hours of work with students. This number includes work with individual students, small and large groups of students, and whole-school populations.

Guided by a “whatever it takes” attitude, graduation coaches are relentless in their efforts to locate, connect with, and secure help from key stakeholders who can assist students in successfully navigating the road to graduation. As a result of programs graduation coaches developed, facilitated, and/or supported, thousands of Georgia students have recovered credit and graduated on time. The term “graduation coach” has come to represent a caring adult role model for thousands of students across the state of Georgia.

With a passion for student achievement and a belief that a targeted approach to helping students graduate would be successful, Governor Perdue began the Graduation Coach Program in Georgia high schools. The Governor also realized major changes were necessary if Georgia's students were to reach a 100% graduation rate by 2014 as mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). His vision was to provide a graduation coach to encourage, mentor, challenge, and coach students to academic success. Today, more than 800 graduation coaches serve Georgia middle and high schools, offering intervention services to support the personal and academic needs of nearly 100,000 at-risk Georgia students. Due in great part to Governor Sonny Perdue and State Superintendent of Schools Kathy Cox's dedication to increasing graduation rate, decreasing dropout rate, and preparing more Georgia students to leave high school ready for college and/or the workforce, the state has seen monumental growth in its graduation rate. The state saw an increase from 65.4% in 2004 to 75.4% in 2008. This translates to a net increase of nearly 18,400 more students who have successfully navigated the road to graduation.

In the final analysis, the graduation coach initiative is working. The first two years of Georgia's graduation coach program have proven successful, creating literally thousands of additional high school graduates. These new graduates will enroll in higher education and enter the world of work, contributing directly to Georgia's economy.

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## **Introduction**

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) administers a statewide graduation coach program to identify and provide early intervention services to students at risk of dropping out of school. The program was initiated in the 2006-2007 school year and supported the placement of a graduation coach in Georgia public high schools. The program was subsequently expanded in 2007-2008 to include graduation coaches in middle schools. This program supports GaDOE Strategic Goal One by providing school staff with information and tools to support work designed to improve the graduation rate and decrease the dropout rate.

As a reporting mechanism, the Graduation Coach Work Management System (WMS) was designed not only to improve the quality of data available to the state program office, but also to serve as a tool to enable graduation coaches to make data-driven decisions about which services to deliver and to whom. Data collected by the WMS highlights the services graduation coaches are providing to Georgia students statewide at various reporting intervals throughout the school year. Information reported is based on the most appropriate data collection interval for indicator and will provide more insights as future analyses consider differences in depth and breadth of services between and among schools in light of key indicators of student achievement, promotion, and matriculation.

## **Descriptive Statistical Information**

### ***Program History***

The close of school year 2007-2008 marked the completion of the second year of implementation for the Georgia Graduation Coach Initiative. In 2006-2007, the Georgia General Assembly appropriated grant funding for the purpose of hiring a full-time graduation coach in each Georgia high school to provide assistance regarding graduation. Specifically, graduation coaches were charged with identifying and ensuring that at-risk students receive the support and resources needed to achieve academic success and graduate from high school on time. In 2007-2008, grant funding was reappropriated to include the hiring of a full-time graduation coach in each Georgia middle school and in Georgia high schools with a graduation rate of less than 95%. In 2007-2008, 19 high schools achieved a graduation rate status of 95% or greater. For the 2008-2009 school year, that number increased to 21 high schools.

### ***Graduation Coach Certification and Experience***

For the 2007-2008 school year, 398 graduation coaches served Georgia high schools, 424 graduation coaches served Georgia middle schools, four graduation coaches served both Georgia middle and high schools, and two graduation coaches served Georgia schools with K-12 configurations.

All graduation coaches hired during the 2007-2008 school year were required to meet minimum state employment qualifications, including possession of a Professional Standards Commission (PSC) issued credential, a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited four-year institution, and at least three years of successful experience working with students. Table 1 reflects certification and experience levels of graduation coaches for the 2007-2008 school year.

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**Table 1. Graduation Coach Certification and Experience**

Highest Level of Certification	# of Coaches	% of Coaches	Average # of Years Working in Education
Teaching	329	40%	14.5
Service (e.g. counselors)	291	35%	17.6
Paraprofessional	108	13%	*
Leadership	58	7%	17.1
Other	42	5%	*
<b>Total</b>	<b>828</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>14.1</b>

*\*Years of experience are not reported.*

## ***State Support***

Since the program’s inception, the Georgia Department of Education’s School Improvement Services Secondary Redesign and Graduation Unit — in collaboration with Communities In Schools of Georgia (CIS) — has provided quality professional learning and ongoing support to graduation coaches throughout the state. This professional learning and support included large- and small-group training sessions, as well as one-on-one and group technical support. Additionally, an emphasis was placed on the coordination of efforts among graduation coaches, counselors, school administrators, school personnel, and community stakeholders to provide effective intervention services to at-risk students.

State-level graduation coach training sessions were held in July, September, and October of 2007. A final training was held in February 2008. Table 2 reflects the attendance of graduation coaches at these sessions.

**Table 2. Graduation Coach Training Attendee Count**

Training Session	# of Graduation Coach Attendees	# of School Counselor Attendees	# of Building Administrator and Central Office Staff Attendees
July 2007	413	149	134
September 2007*	110	4	24
October 2007	850	240	141
February 2008	743	171	71

*\*This session was required only for graduation coaches hired after the initial training.*

In addition to state-level graduation coach training sessions, the GaDOE coordinated and led small-group regional consortia meetings at each Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) to allow coaches to network regionally and share ideas, strategies, and problem solve. Graduation coaches were encouraged to attend three of the regional consortia meetings offered during the 2007-2008 school year at the RESA closest to their home school.

Throughout the 2007-2008 school year, the GaDOE and CIS worked in tandem to provide ongoing support to ensure that consistent and accurate information was provided regarding the program. School visits, telephone calls, email correspondences, and resource-sharing further supported the work of graduation coaches across the state. Additionally, the GaDOE and CIS collaborated to develop customized training options targeted toward the specific learning needs

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of graduation coaches. Three focus group sessions were held to identify frequently asked questions, deliver clear and consistent answers regarding graduation coach concerns, and assist in the planning and development of future training sessions.

### *Identification of At-Risk Students*

The graduation coach utilizes the components of a profile of characteristics of potential dropouts developed by the National Dropout Prevention Network (NDPN) to identify middle and high school students who are at risk of dropping out of high school. These characteristics include, but are not limited to, the following:

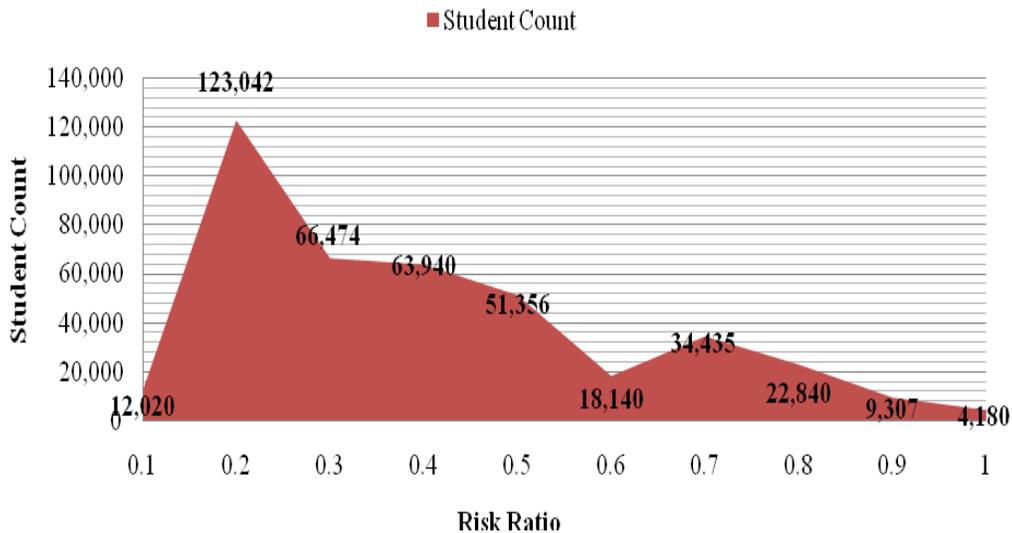
- History of school failure, retention, and/or overage for grade
  - credit deficiency
  - grade retention
- Low CRCT scores and/or academic achievement
  - CRCT – Reading
  - CRCT – English/Language Arts
  - CRCT – Mathematics
  - CRCT – Social Studies
  - CRCT – Science
  - Grade 5 Writing Test
  - Grade 8 Writing Test
- Failure of the GHSGT and/or EOCT
  - GHSGT – English/Language Arts
  - GHSGT – Mathematics
  - GHSGT – Social Studies
  - GHSGT – Science
  - GHSGT – Writing
  - EOCT – Algebra I
  - EOCT – Geometry
  - EOCT – US History
  - EOCT – Economics
  - EOCT – Biology
  - EOCT – Physical Science
  - EOCT – 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Literature
  - EOCT – American Literature
- Special education/disability
- Attendance problems/truancy
- Behavioral problems, history of suspensions, high-risk peer group
- Disengagement from school, low expectations, lack of extracurricular involvement
- Family status or risk factors (for example, economically disadvantaged, high mobility, non-native English speakers)
- Pregnancy
- Other social/personal factors

## ***Risk Ratio***

The risk ratio provides a consolidated measure representing the degree to which a student may be academically at risk of not graduating on time. The ratio considers the total number of academic factors (attendance, standardized test results, retentions, credit deficiency, etc.) for which a student has been identified as at risk in light of the total number of factors for which a student was evaluated. The ratio may be useful in prioritizing students for assistance or structured support based on the pervasiveness of need being demonstrated.

The criteria used to identify a student as at risk are combined to yield a metric (the risk ratio) that conveys the degree to which a student may be at risk of not graduating on time. The risk ratio ranges from 0 to 1, with 0 indicating a student not exhibiting any risk and a value of 1 indicating a student presenting risk on all factors considered. All students with a risk ratio value greater than zero are identified as at risk. Figure A details the number of students included on graduation coach caseloads by risk ratio. Note that while a large number of students were identified as at risk, the frequency distribution demonstrates that the risk ratio was effective in classifying students based on magnitude of risk. Graduation coaches reported using various cut scores (e.g. a risk ratio  $>.5$  or  $>.75$ ) to determine which caseload students would receive more intensive support.

**Figure A. Frequency Distribution of At-Risk Students by Risk Ratio**



## ***Graduation Coach Work Management System (WMS)***

During the 2007-2008 school year, the GaDOE introduced an online application to assist in the identification of students at risk of dropping out of school or otherwise not earning a high school diploma. Graduation coaches were provided with candidate rosters to assist in identifying students in their schools who were at risk. Each student in the school is listed in the candidate roster, and each student's risk ratio factor is shown.

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## Caseloads

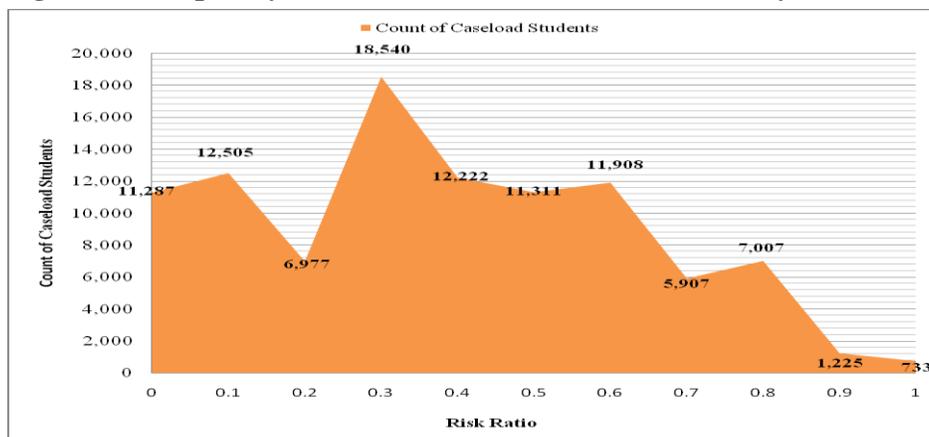
Caseload is the term given to students identified as at risk of dropping out of school and receiving support services from the graduation coach. Students are chosen for a graduation coach's caseload based on at-risk factors such as attendance/truancy, less than proficient scores on required standardized testing, grade retention, past academic failures, etc. The caseload is fluid in that any student may be at risk of not graduating from high school at any given time during his or her secondary school experience. Sometimes a family crisis or illness may cause a student to be at risk until the crisis or illness is resolved. That student is served as the need arises but is removed from the caseload when support is no longer needed. Caseloads will fluctuate throughout the year as students' needs are met or students move from one tier of service to another based on their circumstances.

The Graduation Coach Work Management System (WMS) Candidate Roster provides a list of every student in a given school according to his/her academic at-risk criteria. Graduation coaches use the WMS Candidate Roster in the following ways:

- Identification of students who may benefit most from planned interventions
- Identification of pervasive needs in their school's student population
- Prioritization of assistance to students based on magnitude of need
- Structuring of intervention levels based on co-occurrence of multiple risk-factors

Candidate rosters provide coaches with information about currently enrolled students who meet one or more academic at-risk criteria. A variety of data elements reflecting student achievement and enrollment status are collected each year by the Georgia Department of Education. The state-developed candidate rosters should not be interpreted as comprehensive in nature. Rather, they provide useful information to assist in identification of students who may benefit from the services provided through the Graduation Coach Program. Other considerations, including personal factors, should be used by graduation coaches to refine and/or expand the candidate roster. This information is useful in tailoring interventions, coordinating services, and prioritizing assistance when intervention resources are limited. Figure B reflects a distribution of graduation coach caseload students by risk ratio.

**Figure B. Frequency Distribution of Caseload Students by Risk Ratio**



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Table 3 reflects a comparison by grade level, count, and percent of at-risk versus not at-risk students in the state of Georgia for the 2007-08 school year.

**Table 3. Comparison of At-Risk vs. Not At-Risk Students by Grade, Count, and Percent**

Grade Level	At-Risk		Not At-Risk		Total	
	Count	(%)	Count	(%)	Count	(%)
Grade 6	37,061	33.4%	73,902	66.6%	110,963	100.0%
Grade 7	62,983	51.5%	59,344	48.5%	122,327	100.0%
Grade 8	65,732	48.2%	70,714	51.8%	136,446	100.0%
Grade 9	56,447	43.9%	72,214	56.1%	128,661	100.0%
Grade 10	68,582	54.2%	57,844	45.8%	126,426	100.0%
Grade 11	63,344	58.4%	45,201	41.6%	108,545	100.0%
Grade 12	51,585	54.9%	42,405	45.1%	93,990	100.0%
<b>All Students</b>	<b>405,734</b>	<b>49.0%</b>	<b>421,624</b>	<b>51.0%</b>	<b>827,358</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Numbers reflect reporting completed at the beginning of the year.

### *Caseload Comparisons*

Graduation coaches' caseloads were analyzed to determine the prevalence of students included on caseloads by certain characteristics. Table 4 details the percentage of Georgia students by academic at-risk indicator who were included on graduation coach caseloads for the 2007-2008 school year.

**Table 4. Graduation Coach Caseload Prevalence by Academic At-Risk Indicator**

At-Risk Criteria	Caseload
Attendance	32%
Credits	28%
Retention	21%
CRCT English/Language Arts	32%
CRCT Reading	34%
CRCT Mathematics	54%
CRCT Social Studies	35%
CRCT Science	67%
GHS GT English/Language Arts	10%
GHS GT Mathematics	21%
GHS GT Social Studies	34%
GHS GT Science	60%
GHS GT Composite	64%
EOCT Algebra	58%
EOCT Geometry	63%
EOCT US History	55%
EOCT Economics	77%
EOCT Biology	67%
EOCT 9 <sup>th</sup> Grade Literature and Composition	58%
EOCT American Literature and Composition	41%

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Table 5 details the composition of graduation coach caseloads for the 2007-2008 school year by grade level, race, and gender respectively.

**Table 5. Graduation Coach Caseload Composition by Grade Level, Race, and Gender**

Group	# of Group on Caseload	% of Group on Caseload
Grade 6	13,481	11%
Grade 7	16,195	13.2%
Grade 8	20,065	16.1%
Grade 9	11,978	8.1%
Grade 10	10,290	8.3%
Grade 11	12,692	12.1%
Grade 12	14,921	15.7%
American Indian/Alaskan	156	12.2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1,420	5.6%
Black	48,539	14.6%
Hispanic	9,863	14.7%
Multi-Racial	2,188	11.2%
White	37,456	9.5%
Female	43,739	10.5%
Male	55,883	13.1%
<b>All</b>	<b>99,622</b>	<b>11.8%</b>

Numbers reflect reporting completed at the middle of the year.

### *Service Sessions*

The Service Session component of the WMS is the data collection instrument designed to gather information on interventions provided to students by the graduation coach. The data collected provides information on both direct and indirect services. Direct services focus on a particular student or group of students; indirect services focus on professional learning, planning, and meetings that provide the foundation for direct work with students.

In 2007-2008, graduation coaches delivered more than 282,400 interventions on behalf of at-risk students. Table 6 details the service sessions reported by graduation coaches according to intervention type. General academic tutoring and mentoring represent the most common types of interventions utilized by graduation coaches.

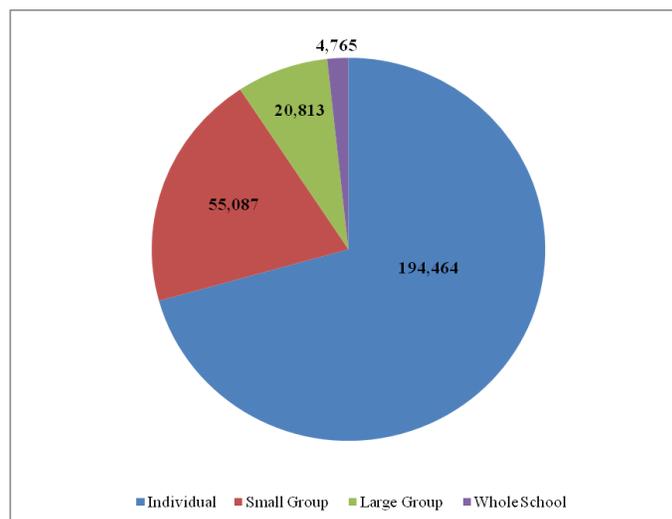
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**Table 6. Service Session Emphasis by Intervention Type**

Intervention Type	# of Interventions Documented	% of Interventions Delivered
Mentoring	110,155	21%
General Academic Tutoring	79,070	15%
Information Dissemination	43,219	8%
Life Skills Programming	33,805	6%
Credit Recovery Programs	32,078	6%
Attendance Interventions	32,004	6%
Career Skills/Planning	27,354	5%
Parent Involvement	26,659	5%
Remediation Programs - Basic Skills	24,704	5%
Graduation Test Tutoring/Preparation	21,481	4%
Anger/Conflict Management	20,342	4%
Planning for College	19,880	4%
Parent Updates	18,241	3%
Enrichment Programs	10,477	2%
Bridge Programs	9,057	2%
School-to-Work	8,873	2%
Service Learning/Community Service	4,637	1%
End of Course Test Tutoring	4,320	1%
Guest Speakers	4,052	1%
Teen Parent Programs	1,783	>1%

During the 2007-2008 school year, graduation coaches across the state reported 194,464 individual student service sessions, 55,087 small-group student service sessions, 20,813 large-group student service sessions, and 4,765 whole-group student service sessions. Figure C details the emphasis of service sessions by setting for the 2007-2008 school year. Almost 75% of the service sessions were delivered to individual at-risk students.

**Figure C. Service Session Emphasis by Setting**



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Table 7 details the number of service sessions reported by month and intervention type for the 2007-2008 school year. Peak session counts were recorded in January, February, and March, with most sessions focused on mentoring and general academic tutoring.

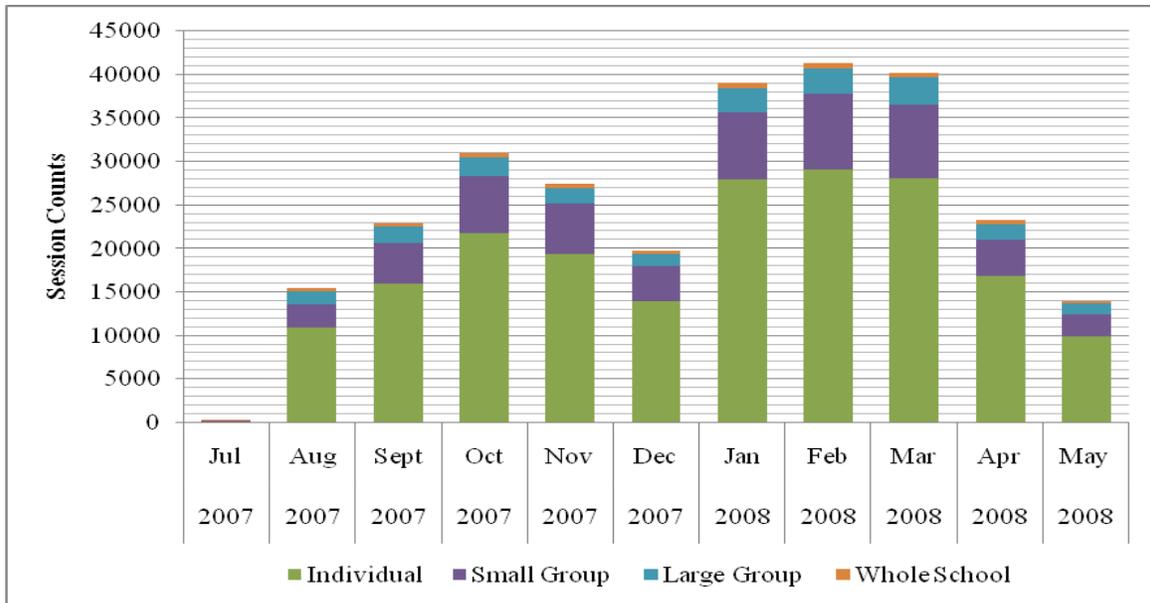
**Table 7. Session Counts by Month and Intervention Type**

<b>Intervention Type</b>	<b>July</b>	<b>Aug</b>	<b>Sept</b>	<b>Oct</b>	<b>Nov</b>	<b>Dec</b>	<b>Jan</b>	<b>Feb</b>	<b>Mar</b>	<b>Apr</b>	<b>May</b>	<b>Total</b>
General Academic Tutoring	76	3,781	6,690	9,668	8,351	6,137	11,177	11,779	11,811	6,447	3,153	<b>79,070</b>
Graduation Test Tutoring/Preparation	35	1,886	1,795	2,564	1,421	1,276	2,982	3,810	3,864	1,217	631	<b>21,481</b>
End of Course Test Tutoring	6	201	233	392	370	453	515	660	506	519	465	<b>4,320</b>
Credit Recovery Programs	74	2,305	2,241	3,008	2,492	2,125	6,253	4,817	4,216	2,680	1,858	<b>32,069</b>
Remediation Programs - Basic Skills	34	1,575	2,240	2,961	2,362	1,820	3,848	3,613	3,597	1,601	1,053	<b>24,704</b>
Mentoring	95	5,607	9,006	12,727	12,186	8,118	15,763	16,802	15,743	8,888	5,220	<b>110,155</b>
Life Skills Programming	26	1,910	3,637	4,756	3,676	2,390	4,425	4,956	4,338	2,266	1,425	<b>33,805</b>
Enrichment Programs	26	568	885	1,271	1,024	689	1,577	1,631	1,451	758	597	<b>10,477</b>
Anger/Conflict Management	22	1,121	1,833	2,299	2,282	1,573	2,756	3,087	2,908	1,598	863	<b>20,342</b>
Service Learning/Community Service	12	323	437	627	546	335	672	656	503	323	203	<b>4,637</b>
Career Skills/Planning	58	2,066	2,906	3,484	2,933	1,994	3,709	3,872	3,220	1,890	1,222	<b>27,354</b>
Planning for College	26	1,214	1,763	2,377	2,043	1,510	2,889	2,811	2,650	1,580	1,017	<b>19,880</b>
School-to-Work	24	600	877	1,035	851	602	1,250	1,288	1,148	658	540	<b>8,873</b>
Bridge Programs	48	516	637	738	627	550	1,323	1,376	1,518	910	814	<b>9,057</b>
Parent Involvement	58	1,684	2,363	3,038	2,805	2,031	3,544	3,906	3,646	2,061	1,523	<b>26,659</b>
Parent Updates	41	958	1,414	2,275	1,848	1,305	2,440	2,779	2,602	1,433	1,146	<b>18,241</b>
Teen Parent Programs	5	153	169	240	199	128	257	273	180	130	49	<b>1,783</b>
Information Dissemination	91	2,551	3,085	4,312	4,040	2,882	5,983	6,431	6,536	4,409	2,899	<b>43,219</b>
Guest Speakers	12	160	304	512	490	291	520	621	554	344	244	<b>4,052</b>
Attendance Interventions	36	980	1,552	2,236	3,377	2,728	5,343	5,688	5,341	3,115	1,608	<b>32,004</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>805</b>	<b>30,159</b>	<b>44,067</b>	<b>60,520</b>	<b>53,923</b>	<b>38,937</b>	<b>77,226</b>	<b>80,856</b>	<b>76,332</b>	<b>42,827</b>	<b>26,530</b>	<b>532,182</b>

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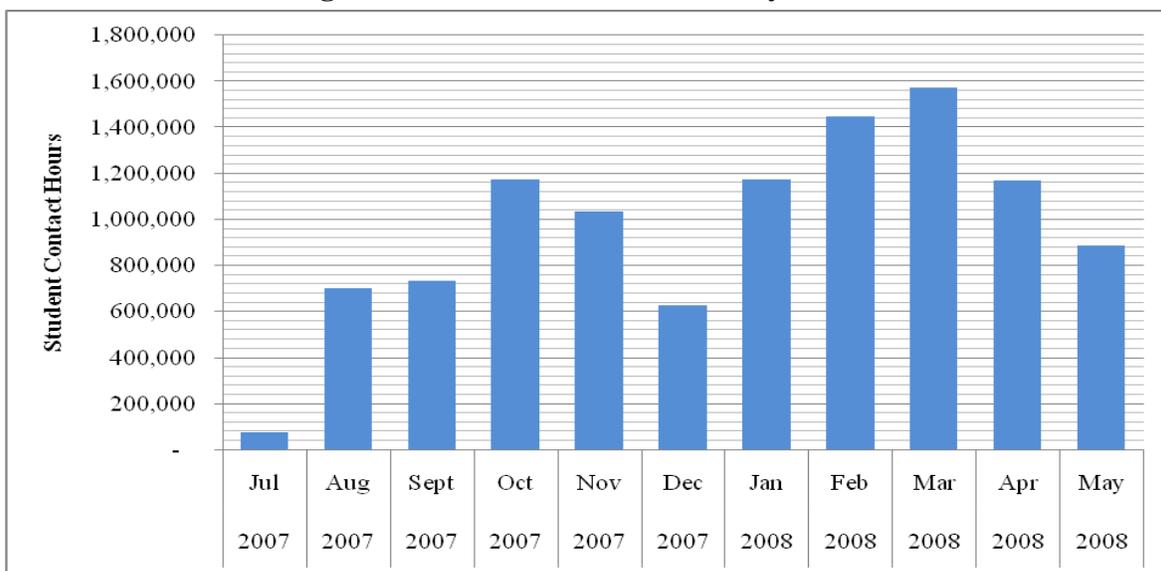
Figure D details the number of service sessions reported by month and setting for the 2007-2008 school year. Peak session counts were recorded in January, February, and March, with the greatest emphasis on services delivered in individual settings for every month recorded.

**Figure D. Session Counts by Month and Setting**



During the 2007-2008 school year, graduation coaches across the state of Georgia reported nearly 11 million student contact hours. Figure E details the student contact hours reported by graduation coaches by month for the 2007-2008 school year. Contact hours are high for October and November for the first semester and peak in February and March as students near graduation.

**Figure E. Student Contact Hours by Month**



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Figure F details the student contact hours reported by graduation coaches by month and setting for the 2007-2008 school year and reveals the number of students served according to various setting types. Note that while Figures C and D reveal that most service sessions delivered during the 2007-2008 school year were conducted on an individual student basis, Chart F reflects overall student impact. For example, whole school interventions, while fewer in number than individual or small group sessions, impacted more students.

**Figure F. Student Contact Hours by Month and Setting**

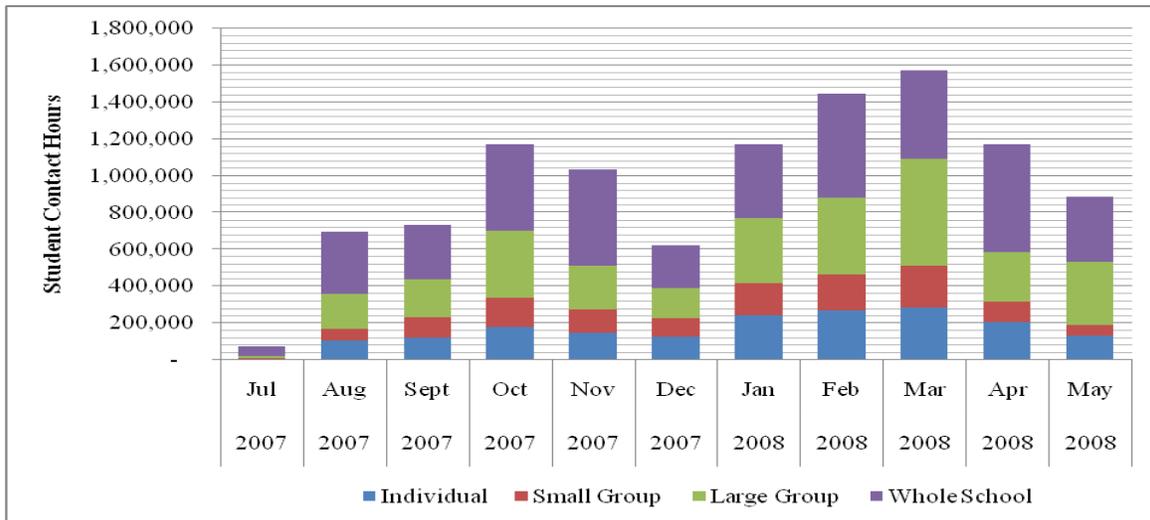
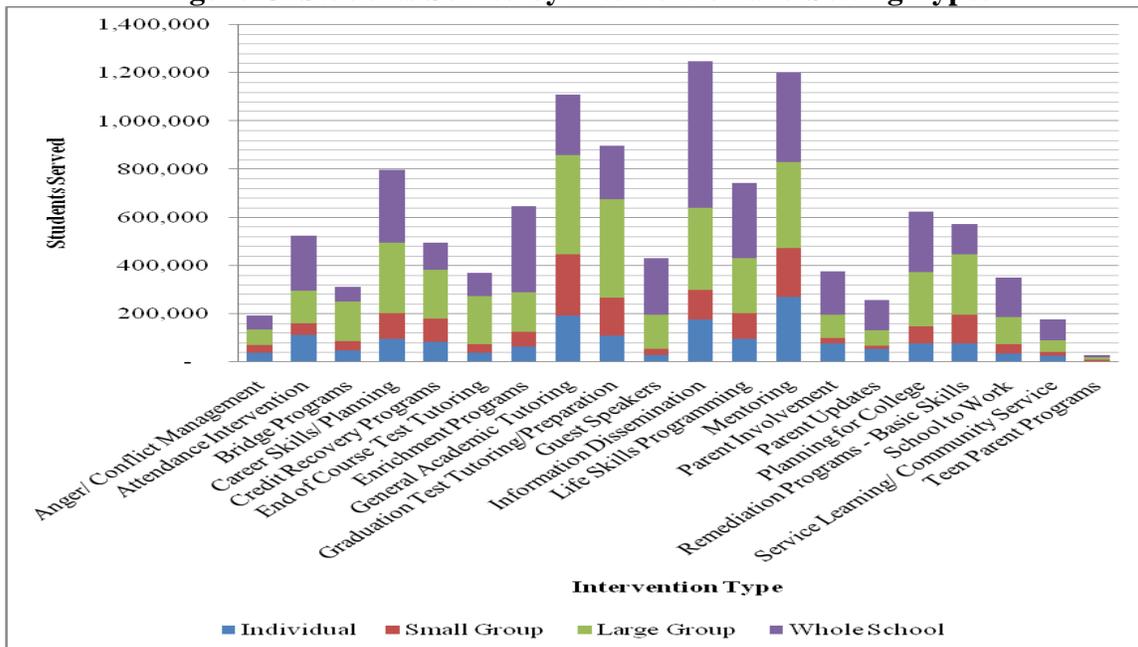


Figure G details the students served by intervention and setting types for the 2007-2008 school year.

**Figure G. Students Served by Intervention and Setting Types**



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## Self-Reported/Qualitative Data

*Methodology.* Two standards were used to arrive at conclusions based on qualitative data: a) the *preponderance of evidence*, and b) *the relative strength of the evidence*. A number of data sources — including interviews, focus groups, feedback from regional consortia and statewide trainings, quarterly surveys, and individual correspondence with coaches — were employed in the collection of qualitative data. The approach to analysis and reporting was to organize the results according to data source, combine data from all sources, and arrange the results from strongest to weakest in an effort to draw effective conclusions. The following statements reflect commonly reported patterns of emphasis with respect to the work of the graduation coach.

### *Tutoring*

Tutoring, and arranging for tutoring, is a large part of the work of graduation coaches. Students who are at risk of not graduating may be credit deficient, may not have passed required tests, may experience general academic difficulty in completing present classes, or may experience challenges in any combination of these areas. Tutoring, therefore, takes several forms in order to assist students with these risk factors. Credit recovery, test review/preparation classes, and general academic tutoring are all used by graduation coaches to assist students in their schools.

*Credit Recovery.* Using credit recovery, graduation coaches assist students in reclaiming credit for a course previously failed. By completing previously unfinished work, students can earn course completion and grade assignment without having to repeat an entire course. The percentage of graduation coaches who utilized credit recovery increased by 15% from the beginning to the close of the 2007-2008 school year.

*The success story I would like to share is one of a student named Marcus. Marcus is a student who struggled the past two quarters in completing required courses. After one of our Graduation Team meetings, it was suggested by one of the counselors that Marcus utilize Plato Credit Recovery to recover his failed classes. Marcus was informed that he needed to have his parents sign a contract and agree to the stipulations set forth. On the following day, Marcus's mother came to my office, and we discussed his plan for graduation. Marcus's mother explained the family difficulties with which Marcus had been dealing over the last few years because of his parents' divorce and changing roles in his life. She reported that Marcus was very upset about their relationship and had been rebellious. I assured Marcus's mother that I would encourage Marcus and ensure that he attended Plato Credit Recovery everyday from 3:30 to 5:30 and Saturday from 9:00 to 12:00. Marcus complained during his credit recovery process, but he made it and is scheduled to graduate in May 2008. His mother called and said, "Thank you for supporting my son."*

*Janice LeBlanc*

*Douglass HS, Atlanta Public Schools*

*Georgia Virtual School (GAVS).* The GAVS Credit Recovery Program provided many districts with what was needed to institute credit recovery for their students in 17 high school courses. In some districts, the GAVS Credit Recovery Program was used by coaches as a stand-alone credit recovery program in their schools; in other districts, the GAVS program was one of a number of credit recovery options used by coaches. The GAVS Credit Recovery Program has opened up options for students who need to recover previously failed courses. The challenge with the GAVS Credit Recovery Program is that at-risk students are rarely able to work on a computer-

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based program at home. Opportunities to complete the GAVS Credit Recovery courses were often provided for these students in a school-based setting along with other tutoring and remediation programs.

*GHSGT, EOCT, and Georgia CRCT.* Demonstrating proficiency on assessments of all kinds is traditionally difficult for students who are academically at risk of not graduating from high school. The five-part Georgia High School Graduation and Writing Tests (GHSGT and GHSWT), eight End-of-Course Tests (EOCTs), and the Georgia Eighth Grade CRCT are stumbling blocks for many at-risk high school and middle school students. Remediation for these high-stakes tests is offered throughout the school year. Coaches strive to increase the pass rate of first-time test takers and remediate students who must retake the test throughout the school year or in summer sessions. On program surveys, graduation coaches shared a variety of inventive and creative strategies to prepare students for test success.

*In the fall of 2007, we had more than 80 seniors who had not passed a section or sections of the GHSGT. In February, we had decreased that number to 38 fourth-year seniors, most of whom were on track with credits but who had yet to pass the GHSGT. Twenty-two passed, and we went from more than 80 at-risk to 16. To accomplish this feat, we increased our collaboration in the planning stages, intensified instructional efforts, utilized SMARTboards and PowerPoint presentations, conducted three Saturday Crunch sessions, and set up peer-tutoring partners with the Beta Club. We are planning now for the summer administration, and we will continue our efforts for those 16!*

*Topy Gurley  
Haralson County HS, Haralson County Schools*

*General Academic Tutoring.* In addition to tutoring for high-stakes tests, graduation coaches facilitate general academic tutoring to assist students in classes in which they are currently experiencing difficulty. Academic tutoring may be delivered by classroom teachers, graduation coaches, peer tutors, college students, and other outside tutors in individual- or small-group settings. Computer modules on topics within the curriculum are also used for general academic tutoring. Ninety-three (93%) to ninety-seven (97%) percent of coaches reported employing general academic tutoring as one of the most frequently used strategies in their programs.

*Extra Help Opportunities.* Tutoring and credit recovery programs are offered at various times in different school districts. In some districts and communities, securing transportation for programs outside of regular school hours is a challenge. At-risk students must often take care of younger siblings or relatives so that parents can go to work. For these students, coming to school early or staying after school in the afternoon is impossible. School districts, therefore, have been creative in finding time during the school day to offer tutoring and credit recovery options. Extra help programs are being offered in middle and high schools across the state before school, after school, during lunch, as part of an enrichment period, in the evening, and as part of Saturday School programs.

### ***Mentoring***

Frequently, students who have risk factors that may predict their lack of success for high school completion need consistent adult role models for school and life success. Graduation coaches have found many ways to provide strong adult role models for students. In some schools,

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successful existing programs utilize members of the outside community to provide positive role modeling and tutoring for at-risk students. Other schools have no existing programs, and coaches report that these programs can be difficult to establish because of district concerns for the safety of students. Schools often establish “caring adult in the building” types of programs that utilize school personnel (teachers, administrators, and others) to meet with students more personally and create a sense of belonging that many high-risk students do not experience in school.

*A female student had struggled all year with school, family, and peers. One day she came into my office and said, "I don't have time to argue with Mom anymore, and she doesn't have time to argue with me. I need to get my education!" This student doesn't know it today, but she passed the CRCT! I know that a caring tutor and other caring adults in the building refused to give up on this young woman and gave her strength to grow.*

*Rebecca Root  
Renfroe MS, City Schools of Decatur*

*Personal Attention and Encouragement.* A great deal of a graduation coach’s work involves mentoring caseload students (and sometimes other at-risk students in the building) by giving students personal attention and encouragement. Graduation coaches often report their role with students is that of a mentor, an encourager, and/or someone whom the students want to emulate. One strategy graduation coaches report for mentoring students is frequent daily interactions with students in the hallway, the cafeteria, the bus stop, and at student-focused events such as athletic events and concerts. Students and graduation coaches report their belief that this strategy is one of the most effective for developing personal value and efficacy in students for which limitations in these areas directly impact their school success.

*I worked with a senior this year who gave birth to a 2.5 pound baby in November. She went into seizures and almost lost her life. After returning to school in January, she missed 17 days other than the one month and Christmas vacation allotted for homebound. She would miss crucial tests, assignments, and the senior project. She wouldn't ask for makeup work and brought in no excuses. I began to have her stay after school and would take her home. She accumulated 28 after-school hours, which allowed her to make up enough assignments to pass two key classes for graduation. (This student had already passed her EOCT tests and all GHSGTs.) She was not allowed to march with her class in the graduation ceremony, but I picked her up during two days of post-planning to make-up her tests. She passed her classes. Now our school has a 100% graduation status because of the teachers', the student's, and the graduation coach's efforts (like pulling teeth). We had 75 students who marched plus one. No student was left behind in this class because the state created the help button with the Graduation Coach Program. This young woman will receive her diploma and will be the first in her family.*

*Belverlyn Hill  
Schley M/HS, Schley County Schools*

### ***Monitoring of Student Progress/Performance***

Graduation coaches reported in their survey responses and in conversations with their support staff that the strategy they used most frequently was their individual work with students to keep them focused academically. The 2007-2008 WMS did not have categories that accurately captured this critical part of the graduation coaches’ work. On quarterly surveys, graduation coaches reported using “academic interventions” with the most frequency (78% - 81%). Coaches’ session entries indicate that they engaged in more than 194,000 individual meetings with students. Many of these individual sessions with students were for the purpose of

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monitoring performance and progress. Meetings with teachers and classroom visits were also discussed by coaches in trainings, communications with support staff, RESA consortia meetings, and focus groups as another powerful strategy that was not easily reported by the categories provided on the WMS. The WMS for the 2008-2009 school year was updated in response to coaches' suggestions and feedback and will have several new categories that allow coaches to report accurately these important aspects of the mission given them and the work they do to support students toward the ultimate goal of high school graduation.

### ***Communication***

Based on their program survey responses, graduation coaches clearly valued their communication with parents, teachers, support staff, administrators, and community partners. Communication with parents, teachers, and support staff provided graduation coaches with information about students on their caseloads or who may need to be on their caseloads. Ongoing meetings with teachers allowed graduation coaches to keep up with the progress of students and provide a variety of assistive strategies as needed. Coaches communicated with parents most frequently by telephone, but other strategies such as personalized, small-group parent meetings and home visits were also reported by coaches. These strategies created support among parents who reported limited hope for their child's eventual graduation. Eighty-five percent (85%) of coaches reported using "parental involvement" often or some of the time throughout the school year on their quarterly surveys.

*A student I started working with last year, who was a junior, graduated early at the end of first semester. This young lady was referred to me by a teacher because she was telling other students in class she was dropping out and going to get her GED because she got a DUI and her mother had threatened to put her out of the house. I began to work with the student, and she started to turn things around for herself. While monitoring and working with her, I discovered she could possibly graduate at the end of first semester her senior year. I verified it with the counselor, and then I informed the young lady. She was excited and started working toward that goal, which included coursework and passing the science portion of the graduation test. She was enrolled in the science study skills class first semester and received additional help and remediation. The retest was given in September, and she passed. She completed high school at the end of first semester and is working with plans to start at a two-year college this summer. She and her mother have a great relationship now, and they started spending more time together. This young lady is a true success story. The strategies I used were mentoring, life skills, tutoring, career/college planning, and parent involvement.*

*Simikia Wright*

*Appling County HS, Appling County Schools*

### ***Time Management/Organization***

In an effort to maximize the use of the graduation coach's time and provide more accountability, many graduation coaches have instituted the use of a daily or weekly schedule that is posted for students, teachers, and administrators. Graduation coaches find a daily schedule allows for a smooth, consistent flow of events during the school day. Each coach sets aside time for individual, small-group, and large-group meetings that will have the least interruption to the academic schedule. Students know that by making appointments, the time spent with the graduation coach is protected from interruptions. Teachers and administrators have a clearer understanding of the graduation coach role in school improvement.

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### ***Attendance Issues***

For an overwhelming number of middle school graduation coaches, attendance is the number one priority. Middle school graduation coaches are usually at the forefront of identifying students at risk for attendance and monitoring their attendance early in the school year. Middle school graduation coaches use data to identify trends in student absences and find creative ways to encourage students to attend school. Using the data, graduation coaches investigate the various reasons why a student is absent, including student apathy, parent apathy, chronic illness, discipline issues, and even school phobia. Many graduation coaches have developed general school programs, plans to address specific student needs, and types of reward programs to use as incentives to increase attendance. Middle school graduation coaches work in cooperation with the school's attendance officer to ensure accurate daily attendance records are kept and open lines of communication are used to establish effective attendance rules and protocols. High school graduation coaches investigate absences based on the same reasons as middle school coaches; however, they are also responsible for targeting students who may leave during the school day without permission.

All graduation coaches must consider the impact discipline issues have on a student's presence in the classroom. Often discipline issues, including time in an administrator's office or in In-School or Out-of-School Suspension, serve as the underlying reason that a student is absent from class. Such discipline-related absences can be especially detrimental if a student and teacher have not resolved a given problem and an uncomfortable situation in the classroom continues to exist. The graduation coach, along with others, may intervene to ease this situation.

### ***Peer Involvement***

Graduation coaches primarily utilize two types of peer involvement to reach students: peer tutoring and peer mentoring. In peer tutoring, academically-advanced students meet with students who are academically at risk to help with specific academic deficiencies. In peer mentoring, older, more mature students assist younger students who need assistance adjusting to the school culture. Transition programs are especially effective when paired with peer mentoring. For example, rising ninth-grade students benefit greatly when high school students visit the middle school to give them a preview of things to expect at the high school.

### ***Behavior/Discipline***

Although graduation coaches are not encouraged to be actively involved in the area of discipline or have a role in discipline counseling, they are strongly urged to be aware of any discipline issues students on their caseloads may have and serve those students accordingly. Graduation coaches are proactive with their caseloads and use data to research their students' discipline history to assist in preventing potential problems. Graduation coaches work to schedule caseload students with caring teachers, assign certain classes at certain periods, offer reward systems for good behavior, work with administrators, create counseling sessions as needed (individually or small group), communicate with parents, and maintain appropriate contact with students to monitor discipline and behavior-related student issues. The graduation coach's open door policy serves to assist students in resolving emotionally-charged situations. These situations may be precipitated by a poor grade, teacher comment, home issues, or other areas that may affect a

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student's attitude and behavior, all of which may have a negative impact on a student's grades. Many graduation coaches have created alternative ways to discipline a student while satisfying a teacher's need for support and not usurping the authority of the administration. These alternative methods are taken to the Graduation Team, School Leadership Team, teachers, and administrators for their feedback before they are implemented; they are then reviewed on an ongoing basis to determine their effectiveness.

Many students with a history of discipline problems have made great progress in correcting and controlling their behavior due to meeting regularly with the graduation coach, creating positive relationships in class and school, and having many avenues of communication to which to take their problems with hope of finding a quick solution that benefits all involved. Graduation coaches have opportunities to explain the student responsibilities in monitoring, controlling, and maintaining a positive behavior to deal with problems so disciplinary actions can be avoided.

### *Community Resources*

The availability of community coaches and outside speakers varies greatly from county to county. Communities In Schools has identified community coaches in most counties across the state, and Family Connection provides support in most areas. Additionally, graduation coaches have worked to develop community partnerships to offer resources and job-shadowing opportunities for at-risk students.

### *Transition Programs*

Transition programs are important as students move from building to building or grade to grade where different teachers, different administrators, different rules, and a different culture exists in which a student must adjust to have a positive school experience. Middle school and high school graduation coaches work together with administrators, teachers, and counselors to develop and maintain a functional transition program between high schools and feeder middle schools and between middle schools and feeder elementary schools. For schools with existing programs, the high school graduation coach works with the middle school graduation coach in January to identify upcoming ninth graders and develop programs to assist students in making the transition to high school a smooth process. The middle school coach works with the elementary school counselor, administrator, and lead teachers to develop a transition program for rising sixth graders. These transition programs include regular meetings to talk about high school, scheduling at-risk students in appropriate classes, meetings for students with their future teachers, meetings with the administration at the receiving school, meetings with parents, tours of the school, setting up mentoring programs for both teacher and peer mentoring, discussion of various extracurricular activities, clubs, or sports in which students may become involved, and discussion of any other pertinent information at-risk students need.

While at-risk students are targeted for extra services as needed, they also are required to participate in a full-scale transition program geared to all students – such as open house, registration, school tours, etc. – to allow them to be a part of the whole-school transition process. Many at-risk students have parents who dropped out or had poor experiences in school; thus, home support may not be sufficient to motivate these students to succeed. If a school does not

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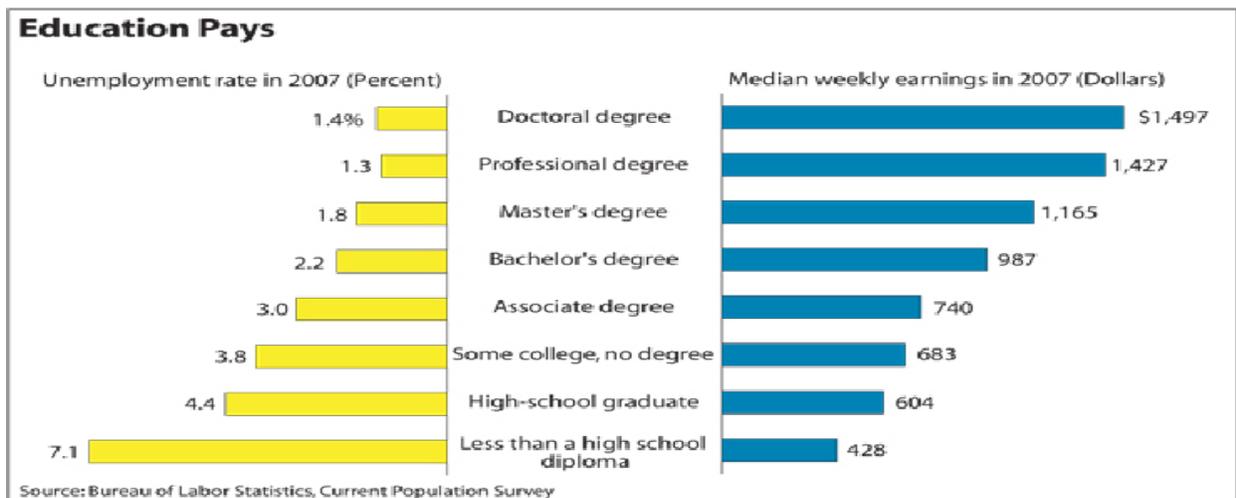
have a transition program and the high school or middle school does not plan to develop one, graduation coaches in these middle and high schools are encouraged to work together to create a transition program for the students on their caseloads. This process is similar to a schoolwide transition plan, only scaled down, to address the specific needs of the at-risk group.

### Impact Evaluation

#### *Economic Impact*

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey, the median weekly earnings for a high school non-completer is \$428.00, which reflects a weekly earning of \$178.00 less than that of a high school graduate, \$559.00 less than that of an individual earning a bachelor's degree, and \$999.00 less than that of an individual earning a professional degree (Bureau, 2007). Figure H reflects the 2007 comparison of educational level to weekly earnings in U.S. dollars.

**Figure H. 2007 Comparison of Educational Level to Weekly Earnings**



*\*Data are 2007 annual averages for persons age 25 and over. Earnings are for full-time wage and salary workers.*

During the 2007-2008 school year, 8,277 more Georgia students graduated from high school than in 2006-2007. Many of those students graduated because of the significant help they received from Georgia's graduation coaches. Based on the 2007 Bureau of Statistics figures, these 8,277 graduates have the potential to add to the state economy, on average, more than 75 million dollars in taxable revenue per year. Furthermore, the likelihood of those students becoming involved with the penal system has been greatly reduced. Currently, more than 86% of the prison population in Georgia dropped out of high school (Georgia Department of Corrections, 2008). The current cost to taxpayers is over \$16,000 per inmate per year (Georgia Department of Corrections, 2007).

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## ***Academic Impact – GHSGT***

Due to inconsistencies in data derived from original sources, the methodology for determining students' Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT) results at the beginning of the 2007-2008 school year was different from that used to determine students' end-of-year status. Although a more accurate system has now been designed and instituted for future data analyses, the 2007-2008 GHSGT results are not comparable and do not allow for accurate analyses at this time.

## ***Attendance***

Analyses of beginning- and end-of-year student attendance status included the following data points.

- 53,015 graduation coach caseload-served students who were *not* identified as at risk for attendance during the 2006-2007 school year remained identified as *not* at risk for attendance at the close of the 2007-2008 school year.
- 13,723 graduation coach caseload-served students who *were* identified as at risk for having less than 92% attendance were no longer at risk by the end of the 2007-2008 school year because they attended at least 92% of days enrolled.
- 20,161 caseload-served students who *were* identified as at risk for having less than 92% attendance *were* still at risk at the end of the 2007-2008 school year because they attended fewer than 92% of days enrolled.
- 14,080 caseload-served students who *were not* identified as at-risk for attendance in 2006-2007 *were* identified as at risk at the end of the 2007-2008 school year because they attended fewer than 92% of days enrolled.

## ***Credit Deficiency***

Analyses of the beginning- and end-of-year credit deficiency status, as gathered from school districts, included the following data points.

- Of the 50,048 grade 9-12 caseload students served:
  - 414 caseload students were identified as not at risk due to credit deficiency at the beginning of the 2007-2008 school year and were still identified as not at risk at the end of the 2007-2008.
  - 185 caseload students were identified as at risk for being credit deficient and off track to graduate within four years at the end of 2006-2007 were no longer at risk by the end of 2007-2008.
  - 13,897 caseload students who were identified as at risk for being credit deficient and off track to graduate within four years at the end of the 2006-2007 school year were still at risk at the end of the 2007-2008 school year because, while they could have made progress, they were not on track to graduate in four years due to credit deficiency.

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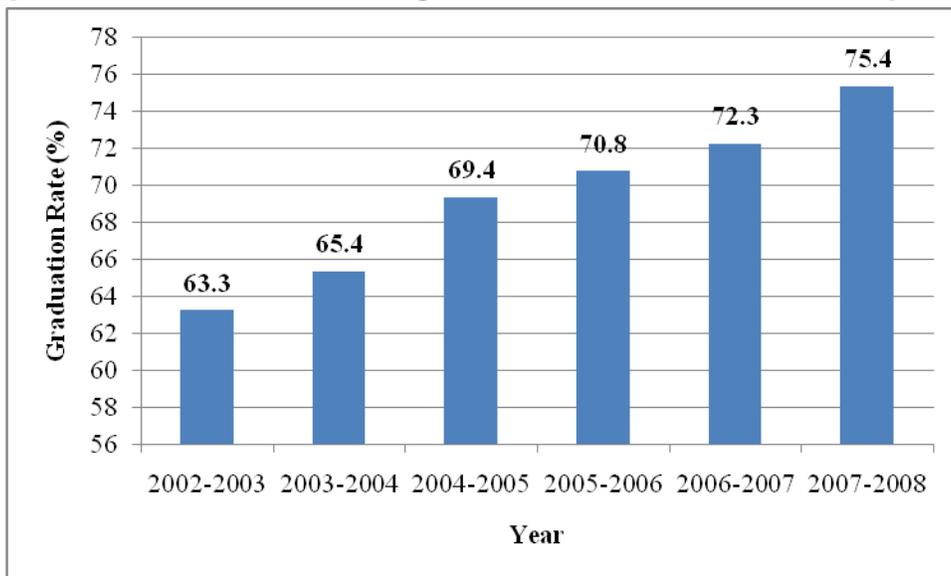
- 35,552 caseload students who were not identified as at risk for being credit deficient and off track to graduate within four years at the end of the 2006-2007 school year were at risk at the end of 2007-2008 school year because they were not on track to graduate in four years due credit deficiency. All ninth grade students begin the on track.

Credit deficiency is a measure provided to the GaDOE by the 181 school districts in Georgia and can only be calculated for grades 9-12. All students enter ninth grade on track for graduation. Graduation coaches report multiple credit recovery options and strategies being successfully used with their caseload students. These successes, however, do not always reflect in the credit deficient status of students due to variations in districts' grade level promotion/graduation credit requirements. Additionally, many severely at-risk students require multiple years of service to display progress.

### ***Graduation Rate***

For the 2007-2008 school year, 78.26% (13,156) of seniors served by graduation coaches completed high school. Since 2002-2003, Georgia's graduation rate has shown steady growth. From 2006-2007 to 2007-2008, a 3.1% increase in graduation rate was accomplished. As a result of this increase, 8,277 additional Georgia students graduated from high school. Figure I details the growth trend in Georgia's graduation rate from 2002-2003 to 2007-2008.

**Figure I. Growth Trend in Georgia's Graduation Rate 2002 Through 2008**

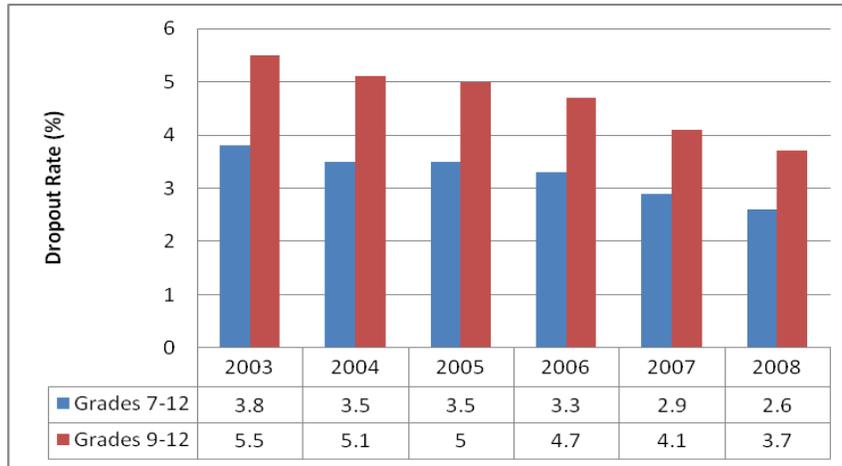


### ***Dropout Rate***

While Georgia's Graduation Coach Initiative serves students in Grades 6-12, dropout rates for previous years have been reported for two different grade spans, grades 7-12 and grades 9-12. Figure J reflects a five-year trend reduction in the percent of students dropping out of school.

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**Figure J. Georgia Statewide Dropout Rates by Year and Reported Grade Span**



Because graduation coaches were allocated to most high schools and middle schools in the state, establishing the success of the program by comparing schools with a graduation coach to schools without a graduation coach is not possible. With this in mind, another approach is to consider whether the available data are *inconsistent with an assumption of program effectiveness*. For example, if the program were effective in preventing dropouts, one would expect to find a low proportion of dropout students having received services offered by the program. Specifically, one would expect to find few dropout students on coaches' caseloads (i.e. the group of students that coaches provided more direct services). Table 8 confirms this expectation, providing information about the number and percentage of dropout students in 2008 that were reported on coaches' caseload rosters.

**Table 8. Evaluated Dropout Students (FY2008)**

	Number	Percentage
<b>Caseload Student</b>	4,576	21.7%
<b>Non-Caseload Student</b>	16,513	78.3%

The data in Table 8 are consistent with an assumption of program effectiveness; the finding that only a small number of dropout students were the focus of coaches' most intensive efforts (i.e. those directed toward caseload students) is consistent with an assumption of program effectiveness.

A large majority of dropout students, however, were not identified on coaches' caseloads. One possible explanation for why so many dropout students were not included on coaches' caseloads is that these dropout students were enrolled in schools where the demand for assistance exceeded graduation coach caseload capacity. As shown in Table 9 below, the vast majority of dropout students were enrolled in high schools. Consistent with this finding, an average of 120 students were identified as at risk in middle schools as compared to an average of 489 students identified

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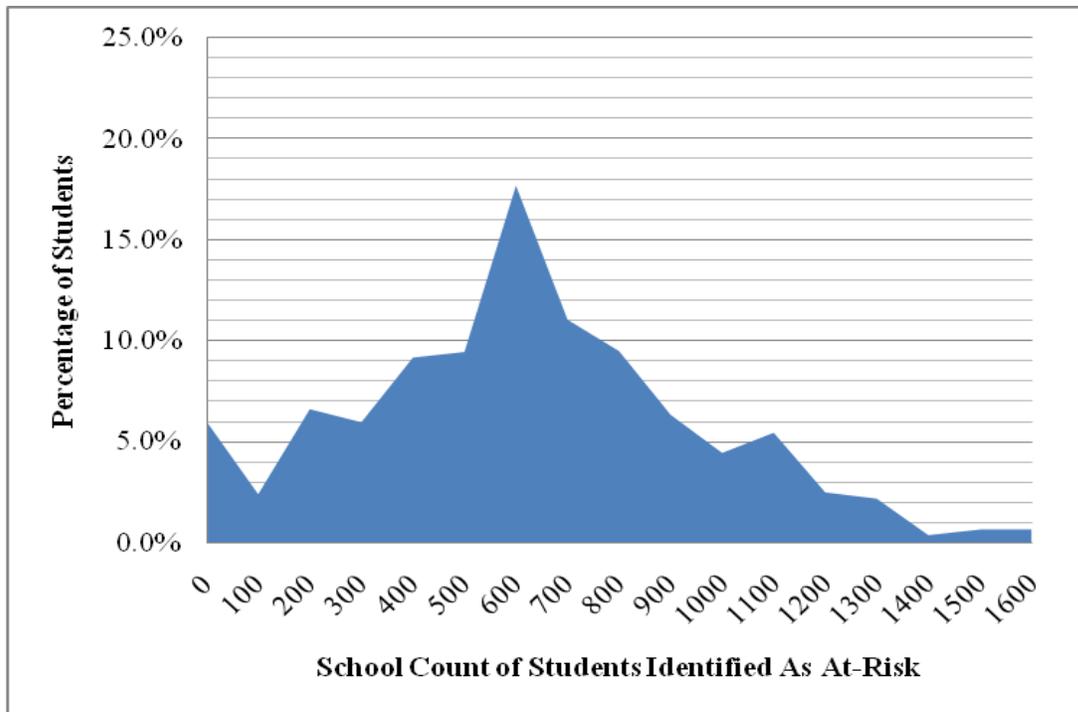
as at risk in high schools. Despite this disproportion, however, both high school and middle school coaches possessed – on average – the same size caseloads (approximately 120-140 students). A shortfall, therefore, existed in high schools where demand far exceeded capacity.

**Table 9. Count of Dropouts by Grade Level**

Grade Level	Number of Dropouts
Grade 6	369
Grade 7	638
Grade 8	1,122
Grade 9	6,125
Grade 10	5,419
Grade 11	4,415
Grade 12	3,001

Figure K expands on the difference between middle school and high school graduation coach caseloads. Nearly 92% of students who ultimately dropped out of school in 2008 who had been identified as at risk but were not included on a coach’s caseload were enrolled in schools where the total count of at-risk students was greater than 150. In other words, almost 92% of the dropouts who were known to be at risk but were not directly targeted by graduation coaches were enrolled in schools where the number of at-risk students exceeded the capacity of a single coach.

**Figure K. Distribution of At-Risk, Non-Caseload Dropout Students by Size of School Identified as Potentially At-Risk**



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