

# ELECTION 2006:

## Candidates' Views on Education



### Co-sponsors of "Election 2006: Candidates' Views on Education"

- Georgia School Boards Association
- Georgia School Superintendents Association
- Communities in Schools
- Georgia Association of Curriculum and Instructional Supervisors
- Georgia Association of Educational Leaders
- Georgia Association of Educators
- Georgia Association of Elementary School Principals
- Georgia Association of Middle School Principals
- Georgia Association of Secondary School Principals

- Georgia Association of School Business Officials
- Georgia Association of School Psychologists
- Georgia Council of Administrators of Special Education
- Georgia League of Women Voters
- Georgia Library and Media Association
- Georgia Music Educators Association
- Georgia Parent Teacher Association
- Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education
- Georgia Retired Educators Association
- Georgia School Counselors Association
- Professional Association of Georgia Educators



# Election 2006: Candidates' Views on Education

Casting your vote is a privilege that you take seriously. Before you place your mark beside the candidates of your choice, you want to know how your prospective elected officials view certain issues that are important to you.

As members of a coalition of organizations devoted to strengthening the institution of public education, you will be able to read how these candidates view important educational issues so you can make an informed decision when you go to the polls to vote. This coalition is a powerful voice for public education in Georgia. We represent elected school board members, school superintendents, 3,000 school administrators, 330,000 PTA members, retired educators, more than 105,000 teachers, and countless others who support public education in Georgia.

We invited the candidates for governor, lieutenant governor, and superintendent of schools to answer the same six education-related questions. These questions were designed to give insight into the candidates' vision, philosophy on governance, and views on specific education issues.

All candidates were given a 300-word limit per question to complete their response. Their verbatim responses are provided. Because of space limitations, any text over the 300-word limit was deleted. The answers were not edited in any way other than being truncated when exceeding the word limit.

**Please remember to vote on  
Tuesday, November 7, 2006.**

## The Coalition:

- Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA)
- Georgia School Superintendents Association (GSSA)
- Communities in Schools (CIS)
- Georgia Association of Curriculum and Instructional Supervisors (GACIS)
- Georgia Association of Educational Leaders (GAEL)
- Georgia Association of Educators (GAE)
- Georgia Association of Elementary School Principals (GAESP)
- Georgia Association of Middle School Principals (GAMSP)
- Georgia Association of School Business Officials (GASBO)
- Georgia Association of Secondary School Principals (GASSP)
- Georgia Association of School Psychologists (GASP)
- Georgia Council of Administrators of Special Education (GCASE)
- Georgia League of Women Voters (GALWV)
- Georgia Library and Media Association (GLMA)
- Georgia Music Educators Association (GMEA)
- Georgia Parent Teacher Association (GaPTA)
- Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (GPPEE)
- Georgia Retired Educators Association (GREA)
- Georgia School Counselors Association (GSCA)
- Professional Association of Georgia Educators (PAGE)

# Candidates for Governor



Governor Sonny Perdue  
(Republican)



Lt. Governor Mark Taylor  
(Democrat)

## 1) If elected, what do you want your education legacy to be?

**Mr. Perdue's Response:** I want an education system that makes parents, students, and teachers proud. My top priority has been, and will continue to be, to fulfill my vision of a fully integrated education system in which our children begin their academic careers in a world class public school system, have the opportunity to continue on to our university or technical college system, and graduate prepared for the 21st century workforce.

**Mr. Taylor's Response:** I am committed to education, and we must continue to work to improve student achievement. My commitment has always been to reduce class sizes, increase teacher pay, and improve school safety. Smaller classes allow for more individual attention for every child, and laws in our code to reduce our student-teacher ratio have existed for years. Others may ignore them, but I have and will continue to support a constitutional amendment to let the people vote on smaller classes in grades K-3. I will make sure state funds are used to pay the cost of these lower class sizes.

As you know, schools across this state are suffering from education cuts that are topping more than \$1.25 billion. As Governor of Georgia one of my top priorities will be to stop these cuts that our children have been enduring since 2003. Georgia must live up to its responsibility to fund education no matter what.

Federal and state requirements that place a daily pressure on administrators can not be achieved without quality teachers. I fought to increase teacher salaries to the national average. In the last few years, teacher salaries and benefits have not kept pace, and our gains have been erased by the rising cost of healthcare. I will insure that our teachers receive pay increases every year, not just in election years, and health care costs remain affordable.

Finally, the HOPE Scholarship is something that I helped create and will always protect. Over the past 2 years HOPE benefits have been cut, and those who opposed HOPE from the very beginning will cut it again, if given the chance. That is not the way to

encourage the pursuit of higher education. As Governor, I will restore the cuts made to the HOPE Scholarship and it will never be cut again.

## **2) What do you perceive to be the three greatest challenges facing public education in Georgia? How would you address those challenges?**

### **Mr. Perdue's Response:**

Improving the graduation rate:

We need to make sure our children are prepared for the 21st century. It is critical for our students to complete high school, which is why I funded a High School Completion Coach for every high school in the state and funded a middle school remediation program, which ensures 6th-8th graders have the skills they need to be successful in high school. I plan to build on these critical initiatives to improve our graduation rate.

Recruiting and retaining high quality educators and school leadership:

I understand that working conditions contribute to teacher morale, productivity, and ultimately the retention of our most talented educators. I seek continual guidance from educators on how to improve their working conditions. I have taken action by reducing class sizes, passing classroom discipline legislation that is now suspending over 11,000 driver's licenses per year for students with bad behavior, and helping relieve the pressures of classroom supply costs by providing a \$100 Classroom Gift Card and \$250 tax deduction to classroom teachers.

By any measure you choose, Georgia teachers' compensation is competitive. We have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in the State Health Benefit Plan, including \$184 million to freeze health care premiums for all state employees. I pledged that I will keep Georgia teachers' salaries the highest in the Southeast. Georgia will remain a competitive and attractive place for educators to work.

Elevate the importance of education in our culture:

I will continue to use the influence of the Governor's office to ensure that Georgia places the highest value on a quality education. Ultimately, a quality education system is dependent on citizens who choose to take advantage of every educational opportunity.

### **Mr. Taylor's Response:**

#1.) Teacher Pay and Benefits. We need to do what we say we are going to do. This means delivering health-care benefits that we promise to our teachers and ensuring that they get salary increases that are not eaten away by rising health care costs.

#2.) Education Funding. Right now, schools across this state are suffering from education cuts that top more than \$1 billion. When your children get less money, school programs get cut and Georgians property taxes go up. That's unacceptable. It has to stop. And I will stop it. As Governor of Georgia, I will stop the annual cuts to our children. The state must live up to its responsibility to fund education.

#3.) Improving Working conditions. We have to make working conditions better for our educators. We need to reduce class size so that our teachers are focusing on educating our children, not doing work outside of the classroom like bus stop rotations and lunch room duty. We also need to absolutely ensure that safety comes first in the classroom. I was proud to sponsor the Student Code of Conduct bill and other legislation that provided more protections to our teachers and increased penalties for unruly students.

### **3) How would you describe what the partnership should be between the state and local school systems in funding education in Georgia?**

**Mr. Perdue's Response:** I have established the IE2 Commission (Investing in Educational Excellence) to take a fresh look at how we finance education in Georgia and to examine this very question of the "state and local partnership." I committed to improving public education in Georgia and doing what it takes to achieve excellence, but this takes a partnership with local systems who implement state education policies. The partnership must include the highest standards of excellence in achievement for the entire state, but it must also include listening and understanding how these standards can be achieved in local communities. The partnership requires both the state and local systems to place a high priority on getting the most out of every dollar we spend. It also requires that the state and local systems invest in practices that we know will raise student achievement.

**Mr. Taylor's Response:** I cannot be more resolute on this. The state has to own up to its end of the bargain when it comes to funding our children's schools. I am going to stop the annual QBE cuts to our children because I believe the state must live up to its responsibility to fund education. Right now, schools across this state are suffering from education cuts that top more than \$1.25 billion. When your children get less money, school programs get cut and Georgians' property taxes go up. In fact, over 100 counties have raised their property taxes, many of them to the mileage cap, just to fill the hole in funding. That's unacceptable and it has to stop, and I will stop it. As Governor of Georgia, I will stop the annual cuts to our children and stop sending unfunded mandates to the local systems.

### **4) Education policy decisions are made in a variety of places, including the following:**

- a) Governor**
- b) General Assembly**
- c) State Board of Education**
- d) Locally Elected Boards of Education**

**Give an example of one type of decision that would be made by each one of the above groups.**

**Mr. Perdue's Response:** I believe that vigilant leadership is necessary from all public officials. While state authorities, including the Governor, General Assembly and the State Board of Education, may focus on statewide issues and a broad direction for state education policy, each community has its own unique challenges and assets. When local systems are challenged, state authorities can offer graduated assistance and intervention to raise student achievement. But for the greater number of local systems that are seeing improvements in student achievement, it is critical that we allow them to make decisions that are necessary to continue their successes.

**Mr. Taylor's Response:** GOVERNOR- The Governor sets the priorities of state government. He is the first to present a budget and determine the revenue estimate. He can also propose legislation that is carried for him in the General Assembly. With his appointments to the state board of education, he can influence the work of the state Department of Education. Too many politicians claim that education will be a top priority, but only offer the funding during election years. I will commit that every year of my administration will put education funding and education excellence first.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY- Legislative changes like delaying or funding class size reduction, requiring how money is spent within a school, and implementing or removing tenure for teachers are all decisions made by the General Assembly. Unfortunately, many of these decisions made in the past four years do not reflect an understanding of the world that Georgia teachers and administrators operate. They have not listened to teachers and administrations when deciding policy and therefore do not know the consequences of their decisions. The result is unfunded mandates and an overall

reduction of local control. I won't allow this to happen in my administration.

**STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION-** The state board has been active in determining curriculum and testing decisions over the past years.

**LOCALLY ELECTED BOARDS OF EDUCATION-** The local school boards are the central location of education decisions, and I will always respect that fact. Recently, the decision to raise property taxes has been placed at the feet of local school boards. They are placed in an extremely difficult position because the Governor has not fully funded QBE and legislators have tied their hands with mandates. The funding hole is either filled with local funds or devastating cut-backs to services and staff occur - which hurts everyone.

**5) Do you support vouchers, including tuition tax credits, that is public money going to private schools? If yes, do you believe those private schools receiving public funds should be held to the same accountability standards as public schools?**

**Mr. Perdue's Response:** As Governor, I think it is irresponsible to take options off the table. That being said, I have a four year record of focusing on improving public education, and we are starting to see results. I foresee no reason to change course from policies that are clearly working.

**Mr. Taylor's Response:** No. Absolutely not. I am a firm believer in our public school system. In the past two years, I have been a strong opponent of the republican efforts to legalize vouchers. I cannot and will not support anything designed to take resources away from public schools.

#### **Additional Comments:**

**Mr. Perdue's Response:** In a second term, I am committed to improving the connectivity between our early learning, public schools, and university and technical college systems. Georgia cannot afford to have our children graduate unprepared for the 21st century workforce. My top two priorities, improving education and creating jobs go hand in hand. I look forward to future opportunities where we can work together on initiatives to improve education in Georgia and expand our economic potential.

**Mr. Taylor's Response:** Thank you for the opportunity to address you. This race for Governor presents an opportunity for education. I am sure you will hear a lot of words about commitment. I have always done what I'd say I would do. When I say education will come first, it will. I know the complexity of the system and the tension that the General Assembly creates with unfunded mandates that affect your school districts, the kids, the teachers and all of the taxpayers.

# Candidates for Lieutenant Governor



Senator Casey Cagle  
(Republican)



Jim Martin  
(Democrat)

## 1) If elected, what do you want your education legacy to be?

**Mr. Cagle's Response:** It would mean an enormous amount to me to be able to play a part in encouraging more kids to stay in school and finish their high school education. Our drop-out rate is far too high, and I believe expanding the career academy concept can be a useful tool for lowering it.

**Mr. Martin's Response:** We should insist on nothing less than excellence in public education for all children. Our goal should be to create an "education culture" in Georgia. To achieve this goal, we must reward demonstrated performance, give teachers and school systems the resources they need to succeed, and free successful schools and systems from burdensome state regulations. All of us – teachers, administrators, parents, the community, school boards, the state, and the federal government – must be accountable for ensuring high performance by all of our students and schools. Nothing in education can be accomplished without a collective effort, but I want it to be said that Jim Martin was a leader in reaching this goal.

In addition to the legislative goals described elsewhere in this response, I will push two specific initiatives to meet the most pressing needs of our students.

It is crucial for the well-being of our overall community to close the achievement gap among various groups of students, and this can be done through targeted intervention without reducing opportunities for other students.

To improve our graduation rate, we must also provide more alternatives for those students who are falling by the wayside simply because they do not fit into the traditional school setting. This means expanded opportunities in alternative settings, like the Performance Learning Centers, for those students who need and deserve a second chance.

The key is to strengthen the fabric of our educational system to meet the challenges that lie ahead, and I hope my legacy will be to aid in mobilizing the efforts needed to do this.

## 2) What do you perceive to be the three greatest challenges facing public education in Georgia? How would you address those challenges?

**Mr. Cagle's Response:** The greatest challenges facing Georgia schools are lowering the dropout rate, minimizing the regulatory burden on local school boards, and ensuring we have the funding to attract and retain the best teachers in the country. Currently, local school boards and teachers are restricted by a very high burden of state regulations stemming from QBE and other past laws. We need to reduce that burden so that local leaders can build educational programs around the individual child rather than attempting to apply one-size-fits-all state mandates.

**Mr. Martin's Response:** 1. We must adequately fund public education, reduce bureaucratic regulation, and ensure that limited education funds are spent wisely and targeted where the need is greatest. We must revise and update the Quality Basic Education (QBE) formula to reflect the actual cost of a basic education so that local systems can provide supplemental funds to do more for their students instead of covering deficits in state funding that should be available for every student in every school. At the same time, we must free schools and systems that are succeeding from burdensome regulations. With limited funds for education, it is imperative that we direct funds to those areas that have the greatest impact on a student's success in school, including Pre-K and targeted reductions in class size.

2. We must enhance the teaching profession by supporting teachers with salaries, benefits, training, and a meaningful career path so teachers are encouraged to stay in the classroom. It is imperative that we give teachers the support and resources they need to do their jobs effectively and grow as professionals. The best way to improve teacher quality is to institute a meaningful career path, based on demonstrated performance at each level. There would be greater responsibilities and compensation at each level and more support for new teachers.

3. We must continue to improve the curriculum, focus on discipline, and provide more alternatives for students, including second-chance schools. Georgia teachers must be adequately trained to teach the curriculum, and standardized tests must be aligned more closely with the curriculum. The state must also do more to ensure that students with discipline problems do not interfere with the achievement of other students. Additionally, the state must provide more alternatives for students facing difficulties, based on the individual needs of each student.

## 3) How would you describe what the partnership should be between the state and local school systems in funding education in Georgia?

**Mr. Cagle's Response:** I am a very big believer in local control of educational funding. I do not support changes to the funding system that would shift control back to bureaucrats in Atlanta. In fact, I have proposed allowing local systems the option of passing an ESPLOST for operations and maintenance that could be used to roll back property taxes if approved by local voters.

**Mr. Martin's Response:** Georgia's constitution requires the state to provide "an adequate education for the citizens." The legislature has enacted laws that define a program for an "adequate education" and provide for funding this program by the state and by local school systems.

However, the state is under-funding its own definition of a basic education by at least \$1 billion in FY 2007. The state must fulfill its responsibility in the state and local partnership so that local school systems are not forced to raise property taxes to cover the gaps in state funding.

Using a statewide sales tax to replace all property taxes for education is not the silver bullet. This approach would not provide adequate state funds for education, and it would undermine local control of our schools.

**4) Education policy decisions are made in a variety of places, including the following:**

- a) Governor**
- b) General Assembly**
- c) State Board of Education**
- d) Locally Elected Boards of Education**

**Give an example of one type of decision that would be made by each one of the above groups.**

**Mr. Cagle's Response:** I believe the Governor should work to enforce the educational statutes passed by the General Assembly. Those statutes should, in my view, set a minimum standard for performance but generally leave specific means for meeting those goals at the discretion of local systems. Locally elected boards should then adopt policies that fit the unique challenges of their systems and meet the overall standard set by the state.

**Mr. Martin's Response:** As Lieutenant Governor, I will work with the Governor, the General Assembly, the State Board of Education, and locally elected boards of education to ensure that we revise and update the QBE formula to provide adequate resources for our schools, that we support teachers with a meaningful career path, and that we continue to improve the curriculum. Each of the participants in this process has a critical role in achieving these goals:

- a) the Governor must submit a budget that adequately funds the actual cost of a basic education;
- b) the General Assembly must adjust the QBE formula to reflect the actual cost of a basic education, pass a budget that adequately funds public education, and create a meaningful career path for Georgia's teachers;
- c) the State Board of Education must continue to improve the curriculum and ensure that standardized tests provide an accurate measure of what our students are learning; and
- d) locally elected boards of education must work in partnership with the state to operate their schools in the most effective way, involve parents and the local community, and provide supplemental funding for their schools to succeed.

**5) Do you support vouchers, including tuition tax credits, that is public money going to private schools? If yes, do you believe those private schools receiving public funds should be held to the same accountability standards as public schools?**

**Mr. Cagle's Response:** I do not believe that vouchers are a workable policy alternative for Georgia. We need to focus on improving our public schools. I do, however, believe that private and home schooled students should be able to access taxpayer funded facilities such as gyms on an equal basis with public school students.

**Additional Comments:**

**Mr. Cagle's Response:** I am a proud graduate of Georgia's public schools and all three of my sons attend public schools as well. Education will be a top priority for me if elected, and I will continue to work to ensure that educators, parents, and students have the resources they need to succeed.

**Mr. Martin's Response:** No. I am adamantly opposed to vouchers and tuition tax credits, which would inevitably drain support from our public schools and increase racial and economic segregation.

I support charter schools, although they must have open admissions so that public funds are not used to fund schools that discriminate against students. At their best, charter schools serve a unique need or take advantage of a special opportunity. The International Charter School in Clarkston is a wonderful example. Charter schools are helpful because they encourage local initiative and are vehicles for innovation and parental involvement. Once approved by the local board of education, the charter school should be funded no less favorably than any other public school, but local boards must hold their charter schools strictly accountable for meeting the goals they commit to achieve.

**Mr. Martin's Response:** I am a proud product of public schools and so are my children. I know first-hand the value of public education.

The future of Georgia depends on how well we prepare our children for the world in which they live – not in some distant future, but today. What might have been good enough at one time will not suffice any longer.

The state is responsible for providing enough resources to accomplish this vital task. Money is not everything. There must be dedicated teachers, effective school leaders, active parents, and a supportive community. We have to work together and support each other.

That is why I believe so strongly that the basic role of the state is to develop and empower our teachers and school leaders and to provide the support local systems and schools must have to do their jobs.

The top-down approach that characterizes many of our laws and regulations and the tendency of the General Assembly to micro-manage education have led to the regimentation that is one of the greatest problems we face in education today. It is possible – and absolutely necessary – to have both accountability in setting expectations and local discretion in meeting these expectations.

# Candidates for State School Superintendent



State School Superintendent  
Kathy Cox  
(Republican)



Denise Majette  
(Democrat)

## 1) If elected, what do you want your education legacy to be?

**Ms. Cox's Response:** When I stepped into this office three and a half years ago, the Department of Education was in complete disarray, it was an organization that was not providing desperately needed basic services to local school systems. Before we could even begin addressing my agenda items, our team had to work day and night to alter the entire approach to doing business at the Department of Education. In just one term we have changed the Department of Education from a place where people were afraid to work, with over one hundred vacant positions, to a place where we receive more than one hundred applications for any new job we advertise. Our people are our strength in improving Georgia's schools, and they all believe in the mission we have set forth to accomplish as well as the team we have assembled to do it.

With the right pieces and processes in place, we have moved quickly to establish high expectations for all of Georgia's students through the creation of the Georgia Performance Standards, our new curriculum. With this new curriculum in the hands of our fantastic teachers, they now have the tools to fully prepare students for the challenges they face in a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. I am proud of what we have been able to accomplish in my first term, but I am even more excited for the progress that would be possible in a second term. We have already seen tests such as the ACT and SAT prove that our students are now achieving at record levels, and I know that with continued classroom support and additional teacher training we will see even more incredible results.

**Ms. Majette's Response:** My legacy has two parts: First, I want to be remembered for moving Georgia's children from "the cellar to stellar" by creating a first class, high quality educational environment in every Georgia school system.

Georgia's children are as smart, talented and capable of learning as other children in this country. All of our children, no matter where they live, deserve the opportunity to discover their talents, develop their skills and become all that God intended them to be. To this point, we have not had leadership with the experience and the will to make that happen. I possess those qualities and intend to use them as Georgia's next State School Superintendent.

My goal is to replace what I call the current "culture of complacency" with an "attitude of excellence." To accomplish the goal we must take three steps:

- (1) Prepare our children so they are ready to learn when they start school and keep them excited about learning through high school graduation and beyond.
- (2) Teach parents to be involved as partners in education with their children and teachers.
- (3) Give teachers the training, tools and freedom they need to teach.

The second part of my legacy will be educating Georgia's citizens about education policies and procedures at the local, state and national levels and elevating education issues above partisan politics.

Educating the public about public education and narrowing the partisan divide will be essential to maintain

the high standards of achievement in our schools. As the community gains more knowledge about the operations of our government and those operations become less politically charged, involvement and confidence will grow.

My experience as an educator, lawyer, judge, Member of Congress and community leader uniquely qualifies me to accomplish the stated goals.

## **2) What do you perceive to be the three greatest challenges facing public education in Georgia? How would you address those challenges?**

**Ms. Cox's Response:** In order to compete nationally, or even globally, our students must receive advanced math training, which they were not receiving until the development of the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS). For instance, the College Board recommends students complete a minimum of Algebra II or better prior to taking the SAT exam, and while 70% of Georgia's students were taking the SAT, only 30% had completed Algebra II. After full implementation of the new GPS, 100% of Georgia's students will graduate with Algebra II or better, and our state will be a national leader in math achievement.

Another significant challenge we face is the achievement gap, especially as it exists in our middle and high schools. My goal is for all of our students to lead the nation in improving student achievement, and to accomplish that the GPS have set high expectations for all students in Georgia. We must also continue to provide resources for the professional development work we do with our teachers, they must have every tool at their disposal to bring every student to standard. Closing the achievement gap also means giving significant control to local principals to set high standards for all their students and teachers, while at the same time continuing our master teacher program that places curriculum experts in every school. Lastly we must continue to improve our State accountability system so that we can track the progress of individual students or schools, and also continue the development of diagnostic and formative tests that will prove all students are achieving.

We also face a growth challenge in many of our school districts, so we must make it a priority to fund the construction of new facilities. We will accomplish this by convening a task force to address this critical need, while investigating changes to our capital outlay program so we can expedite construction of schools.

**Ms. Majette's Response:** The three greatest challenges are:

- (1) Teacher retention/shortages
- (2) High dropout/low high school graduation rate
- (3) Inequities in education funding

To resolve the teacher shortage crisis, offer incentives to attract and retain teachers, particularly in special education, science, math and ESL. Teachers with six consecutive years or more in full time classroom experience would earn a one-year paid sabbatical to pursue one of several designated activities or an approved independent course of study. Development of half-time teaching teams with full benefits would relieve some pressure on teachers while giving students a sense of continuity. Also, physical space and personal safety in schools must be enhanced.

To reduce high school dropout rates, offer a five-year high school graduation option, including internships, externships, cooperative learning, mentor/shadow teams and work-study programs for pay and/or course credits. Business, industry and corporate experiences related to academic classroom learning will foster student interest, promote skills development and provide additional time to mature while making career-related decisions in a structured, supportive environment.

Include day and evening technical, trade, vocational, reading, writing and practical skills classes for parents and students at elementary, middle and high school locations; provide centralized child care and transportation in rural areas. Teach music, art, gym and foreign language classes in all elementary schools.

To resolve inequities in statewide funding, wasteful, fraudulent and abusive spending must end. I would set new state and federal budget priorities after closely examining past spending and federal, state and local resources. We must provide adequate funding in rural areas immediately. Planning includes full funding for Head Start and IDEA.

Finally, create public/private partnership opportunities to reduce local tax burdens. “Name Your School” or “Buy a Brick or Book” initiatives, “mini-endowments” and group planned giving will help meet infrastructure and equipment needs.

### **3) How would you describe what the partnership should be between the state and local school systems in funding education in Georgia?**

**Ms. Cox’s Response:** There is no doubt that there needs to be a shared responsibility between the State and local school systems. This means that there is no true one size fits all solution to the funding question, and that we must tailor our funding formulas to appreciate the diverse challenges facing each school system. We must also remember that there are other sources of income for a local school system besides state funding, and we can encourage the exploration of local funding options that will raise revenue for schools from local sources. The development of a funding program that suits all of these needs is a very complex and difficult problem, but I believe Governor Perdue and I are already on the way to solving it.

We have convened the Investing in Educational Excellence Task Force by bringing educators and leaders from across the state together at the same table, where we research and discuss our funding options face to face. We are seeing some very innovative and promising ideas emerge from our talented local education leaders. We hope that this Task Force will provide the foundation for a comprehensive solution to the funding problem, and I am very excited to take part in the continued process.

**Ms. Majette’s Response:** The ideal state/local education funding partnership would be based on cooperation, collaboration and equitable sharing of resources to meet the varied needs of local systems across the state. The state would meet its funding obligations to the local systems and ensure federal funding requirements are met. The local systems would supplement those funds, determine how they are to be used and be good stewards of all funds received.

Currently, the state has an adversarial relationship with the local systems. A lack of visionary, skilled leadership combined with concessions to partisan politics has damaged the relationship. The state/local relationship has been eroded by the state’s unfunded and underfunded mandates imposed on the local systems. An unfair tax burden has been placed on local property owners. At the same time, our children are being deprived of the opportunity to receive a high quality public school education in their home communities.

As State School Superintendent I will use my skills and experience as an advocate, legislator, educator, mediator and administrator to create the ideal partnership. Working at the state, federal and local levels with the executive and legislative branches of government, we will obtain needed resources and coordinate their distribution at the local level.

### **4) Education policy decisions are made in a variety of places, including the following:**

- a) Governor**
- b) General Assembly**
- c) State Board of Education**
- d) Locally Elected Boards of Education**

**Give an example of one type of decision that would be made by each one of the above groups.**

**Ms. Cox’s Response:** I’d like to illustrate a recent challenge we have worked to solve across the state, and that is the high school dropout rate. In addressing this issue we were able to develop a creative solution as a statewide team, relying on the talent and insight of all levels of governance.

**Ms. Majette’s Response:** Governor: Setting the goal of making Georgia’s schools the best in the nation by 2020, including proposing legislation to protect public education from any budget cuts for ten years and enforcing full funding for QBE.

General Assembly: Passing legislation to protect pub-

For instance, the Governor, understanding the statewide nature of the problem, proposed a new program in the State budget which brought high school graduation coaches to every high school in the state. The Governor, in consultation with me as State School Superintendent, requested that the General Assembly approve \$20 million in funding for the program, and sent the proposal on to the Capitol.

The General Assembly brought the perspective of our many constituencies from across the state, and they debated the feasibility of the graduation coach program in the budget. After listening to local school systems and investigating the merits of the program, the Assembly saw fit to approve it and voted to fund graduation coaches in full.

The State Board of Education oversaw the work my office undertook to develop the specifics for the graduation coach program such as the job description, elements of the training program, and also accountability measures to evaluate the success of the program as it is implemented. They also approved a contract with “Communities in Schools” to collaborate with the Department and help provide the training for the new position.

The local School Boards then made the crucial decisions in hiring the right people to fill the position of the graduation coach. They essentially handle the day to day operations of the program such as monitoring progress, working collaboratively with the Department of Education to ensure proper training of the coaches, and contributing some share of their local revenues to support the program.

As in this case, many diverse agencies of government regularly collaborate effectively, each playing a unique role in any program’s success.

**5) Do you support vouchers, including tuition tax credits, that is public money going to private schools? If yes, do you believe those private schools receiving public funds should be held to the same accountability standards as public schools?**

**Ms. Cox’s Response:** I believe that parents need options when it comes to the education of their children, and I am open to creative solutions that provide additional school choices. That is why I have supported the choice provision in No Child Left Behind as well as the creation of magnet schools, charter schools, and alternative schools across our state. These programs provide locally designed choices for parents and students that are tailored to fit their communities,

lic school funding for ten years and achieving full state funding for Head Start over a five year period.

**State Board of Education:** Approval of adjustments to allow more flexibility for teachers as they implement and utilize the state curriculum.

**Locally Elected Boards of Education:** Determining dress codes for students; setting policy for school closing on “snow days” and other contingency planning.

**Ms. Majette’s Response:** No. I am opposed to vouchers and other means used to siphon public money away from public schools. Elected officials who support such efforts are shirking a primary responsibility of government, which is to educate all of its citizens.

while at the same time providing local school systems with the ability to address the unique needs of local families. I'd like to continue to offer parents choices within the public school arena and expand those programs where possible.

**Additional Comments:**

**Ms. Cox's Response:** Yes, I would just like to add that being the Superintendent of Schools is the best job a teacher could ever have!

**Ms. Majette's Response:** The daughter of a teacher, I am a public school graduate who earned degrees from Yale University and Duke University School of Law. I know education is the key to success. My children are graduates of Georgia public schools, now pursuing college degrees and their dreams. They have the tools they need to succeed.

My desire is to serve the children still in school and those yet to attend. They deserve the opportunity to live their dreams, too. Georgians deserve the best in public education. Working together, we can provide it for every child.

I humbly ask for your vote to become your next State School Superintendent. A vote for Denise Majette is a vote for our children and a vote for our future.

Thank you and God bless you.

**Questions Asked of Candidates:**

- 1) If elected, what do you want your education legacy to be?
- 2) What do you perceive to be the three greatest challenges facing public education in Georgia? How would you address those challenges?
- 3) How would you describe what the partnership should be between the state and local school systems in funding education in Georgia?
- 4) Education policy decisions are made in a variety of places, including the following:
  - a) Governor
  - b) General Assembly
  - c) State Board of Education
  - d) Locally Elected Boards of Education

Give an example of one type of decision that would be made by each one of the above groups.

- 5) Do you support vouchers, including tuition tax credits, that is public money going to private schools? If yes, do you believe those private schools receiving public funds should be held to the same accountability standards as public schools?
- 6) Do you have any additional comments?

