



Georgia's Graduation Coach Program

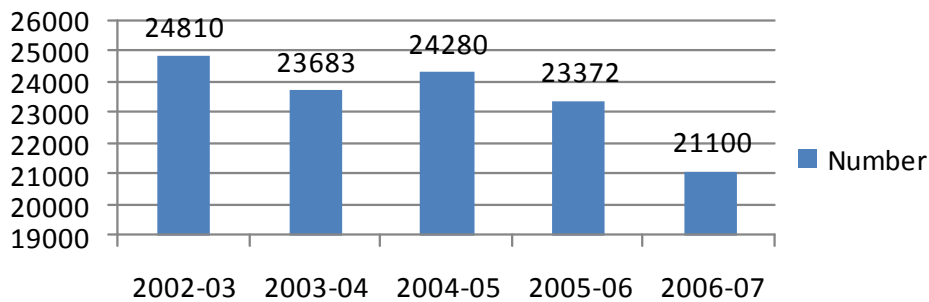
800+ Professionals Dedicated Solely to Ensuring Every Georgia Student Graduates from High School

Program Background

Governor Perdue recognized early on that the key to Georgia's continued economic growth and its citizens' individual prosperity was to increase the state's high school graduation rate.

His creative statewide approach to this issue included placement of a Graduation Coach in all Georgia high schools in the fall of 2006. Graduation Coaches were charged with a sole responsibility: to identify and serve students at-risk of dropping out of school. Coaches showed tremendous success during their first year:

Number of Grade 9-12 Dropouts in Georgia



Over 2200 fewer students dropped out of high school from the 2006 school year to the 2007 school year when the Graduation Coach program was initiated. At the same time, high school enrollment in Georgia rose by almost 10,000 students!

Keys to Program Success

Several factors were key to the success of Georgia's Graduation Coach program during the first year of implementation:

- School systems signed contracts in order to receive grant funding (\$40,000 per school), which stipulated that coaches could not be assigned any job responsibility other than acting as a Graduation Coach. Test administration, counseling, or teaching part-time were prohibited.
- The criterion to serve as a Graduation Coach were simple: Coaches must a) have 3 or more years of successful experience working with students; b) be eligible for any type of educator certification; and c) must be passionate about keeping students in school.
- Training for Graduation Coaches was offered at regular intervals and provided the tools that coaches needed to carry out their mission, such as career interest inventories, test bank items for tutoring, and identifying characteristics of at-risk students.

Doubling the Effort: Middle School Coaches

During the program's inaugural year, Governor Perdue asked Graduation Coaches what they needed to be more effective. Their answers were clear: a) more assistance with tutoring students, and b) provision of services to at-risk students *before* the 9th grade. Therefore, in the fall of 2007, Governor Perdue responded with **both** the initiation of a statewide online tutoring program and a Middle School Graduation Coach Program.

Middle School Graduation Coaches have been charged with preparing students for the critical transition from middle school to high school. They also expose students to career possibilities so that middle school students clearly identify how school is relevant to their future dreams and aspirations.

Local school systems were again eligible to receive grants of \$40,000 per school to hire a Middle School Graduation Coach. In exchange for the grant, schools agreed that the Coaches would be dedicated solely to providing coaching services.



Stacking the Odds: Community Coaches

Governor Perdue believes that increasing the state's high school graduation rate should not rest solely with K-12 schools. Therefore, at an annual meeting of business leaders, he challenged them to identify a Community Coach for every high school in Georgia. Georgia's business leaders quickly met the challenge and assigned a community leader to act as an external relations liaison for all high school Graduation Coaches.

Community Coaches, now paired with nearly 95% of high school Graduation Coaches, are charged to meet with Graduation Coaches to learn what resources are needed. They help procure mentors, tutors, on-the-job training sites, and funding for special projects. Georgia Power organized the recruitment and assignment of Community Coaches; Communities in Schools of Georgia coordinates efforts and communicates with Community Coaches.

Evidence of Effectiveness

Characteristics of Coaches:

- In 2006, 361 Graduation Coaches were placed in 356 high schools in Georgia.
- 65% of Coaches are teachers with an average of 16 years of experience.
- 25% of Coaches have a counseling background with an average of 9.6 years of experience.

Their Findings:

- In 2006, Graduation Coaches identified over 25,000 over-age 9th graders.
- They found 42,000 credit-deficient 10th-12th grade students who were not on track to graduate with their peers.
- Coaches worked with over 4,800 seniors who had been in school 5 years or more.
- They targeted 53,000 students who missed 15 or more days of school the previous year.

Their Interventions:

- Graduation Coaches created 23,507 individual graduation plans (i.e. Peach State Pathways Plans) for at-risk students.
- They pulled together over 1,000 graduation team meetings consisting of faculty and staff working as a team with individual students.
- They put into place 2,067 community mentors to work with students at their schools and identified another 2,201 community partners to provide support to the schools.
- Coaches offered multiple student interventions, including tutoring programs, credit recovery options, incentives, parent involvement, and career skills training.

Testimonials

Graduation Coaches have enthusiastically offered first-hand accounts of their experiences. Below are a few poignant examples:

- *"One senior with disabilities who was involved in tutoring, guided study, directed study, and [test] interventions passed all parts of the Graduation Test. He despised having to participate in the interventions and complained heavily. When he received his final test results, he screamed, jumped for joy, could not contain himself, and thanked everyone who made him toe the line."*
- *"I had a senior who was 20 years old, and everyday he would come in and tell me that he was going to quit school. By the end of each daily conversation, he would agree to remain in school. Well, that young man stuck it out and graduated. He is now enrolled at Sandersville Technical College majoring in welding."*
- *"All I can say is that graduation was an indescribable experience for me. I am not a high school teacher by trade, so I have never had the opportunity to participate in [a graduation ceremony] before (besides my own). The pride and sheer delight I felt watching my kids cross that stage was overwhelming. I feel so honored to be a part of their lives and even to be a tiny part of their happiness in graduating. All of the work and frustration was well worth it."*

For more information on the Graduation Coach Program, please see the Georgia Department of Education's website at http://gadoe.org/tww_school_improve.aspx?PageReq=TSSGraduationCoach. Resources include job descriptions, individual graduation plan templates, and best practices.