



**MANAGEMENT ANALYSIS & PLANNING, INC.**

**Governance, Leadership, and Pupil Performance  
In Warren County Schools**

**A Status Report**

**Submitted to the  
Warren County Board of Education**

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# **Governance, Leadership, and Pupil Performance In Warren County, Georgia Public Schools:**

## **A Status Report**

This report was commissioned by the Warren County School District. Its purpose is to provide county school officials and interested parties with an independent professional appraisal of selected facets of school district activity, specifically, (1) the governance outlook of school board members, (2) management and leadership understanding of the superintendent, and (3) academic performance of public school pupils.

This appraisal encompasses academic years 2000/2001 to 2007/2008. The report is based upon standardized data collected and made available publicly by Georgia state school officials, telephone interviews with Warren County school board members, and electronic and telephonic exchanges with the school superintendent.

The appraisal is principally retrospective. That is, it focuses on what has already taken place. However, when viewed through a different set of lenses, it can be taken as a base upon which future strategic actions could be initiated.

Finally, the report is not intended to be comprehensive. It appraises significant school district operational dimensions that were easily accessible within the time period available for this study. No claim is made that this is an exhaustive assessment of every important school district activity.

## Executive Summary

The appraisal suggest three principal conclusions:

*Warren County School board members, at least those seated in the fall of 2008 and who submitted to interviews for this study, are well informed regarding their statutory and public policy responsibilities, and are sufficiently knowledgeable concerning education policy matters to be able to provide productive guidance to school district actions.*

*The superintendent, in her tenure, has made numerous administrative changes to ensure effective, efficient, and safe school district operation. In addition, she is knowledgeable professionally regarding leadership strategies needed to propel the district even further toward higher levels of performance.*

*Student academic performance, while uneven, is nevertheless on an upward trajectory and is significantly ahead of other Georgia counties displaying comparable student social and economic characteristics.*

## Governance

Under ideal conditions, board members' collective decisions and interactive behavior set direction and tone for a school district. However, such positive influences depend crucially upon board members' understanding that their role is that of policy makers, not administrators. Sometimes the line between policy and operation is slender, but attention to details by which a board employs and supervises a chief executive and, thereafter, leaves operation to the latter is important. When a board repeatedly violates this line, oversteps its authority and attempts personally to manage a school district, conditions unravel quickly.

A set of ten multiple choice and open-ended questions was posed of Warren County elected board members, those sitting in December of 2008. (The questions appear in Appendix A.). These questions plumbed respondent understanding of governance roles, statutory authority and constitutionally protected rights such as freedom of speech.

Interview questions probed school board respondent's understanding of roles in a spectrum of issues ranging from budget planning, student discipline, facility construction and closure, personnel employment and supervision, to intergovernmental relations.

*School board member respondents, individually and collectively, answered these questions in a manner consistent with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) governance expectations for accredited school districts. Moreover, the board has adopted policies that, if implemented consistently, increase the likelihood of district and board continued compliance with SACS and public policy governance expectations.*

## Leadership

Research suggests three main functions of a superintendent: instructional, managerial, and political. The result of high performance of a superintendent along all three dimensions is increased student performance, efficient operations and good school/ community relations. This review of district documentation and interviews with school district personnel suggest that the current superintendent of Warren County Schools has worked to improve governance in all three areas.

Since 2002, the superintendent of Warren County schools has implemented operational changes for the effective operation of the district. Instructionally, since 2002, Warren County has:

- removed all non certified teachers; all teachers are now certified and highly qualified;
- implemented state-approved textbooks in all subjects and all grade levels;
- employed a counselor at the elementary school;
- procured active boards (i.e., "smart boards") in all classrooms for grades one through 12; and,

- developed a district wide professional learning program, whereby teachers can observe and work with other teachers to develop their instructional practice, thereby earning credit towards maintaining licensure.

None of these practices was in place in Warren County prior to 2002. A number of middle school teachers were actually long-term substitutes with high school diplomas, and teachers could earn continuing licensure credit only by participating in statewide workshops that reportedly did not address specific challenges faced by teachers in Warren County.

Additionally, the superintendent has spearheaded efforts to increase effective district operations. Specifically, Warren County has:

- successfully navigated the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) accreditation process for all schools as well as for the district as a whole;
- worked to improve the disciplinary hearing process at school across the district;
- striven to be named the first charter district in Georgia in August 2008; and,
- cooperated with the Georgia Leadership Institute to develop administrator certification for identified teachers, thereby creating a succession plan for district leadership. Other principals are being training in district-level operations such as budgeting in order to ensure that district knowledge is replicated across numerous employees.

The district is one of Georgia's first charter districts, and the district recently received a state Career Academies grant for \$3 million.

Finally, the Warren County School District has successfully forged intergovernmental agreements with Warren County. As a result of this partnership, Warren County's new football stadium was constructed without cost to the district.

## Pupil Performance

There are numerous indicators of student success and pupil performance. Overall, our analysis indicates that Warren County schools still face challenges in the area of performance. One of the difficulties in assessing student performance is the district's small size, which can create upward and downward jumps in standardized performance indicators over time.

However, Warren County seems to be improving, and performs well against district facing similar levels of student poverty. Of note is the fact that the district was named a Georgia Title I Distinguished School District in 2008. Although the district has not made adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, the district's elementary school has made AYP for seven consecutive years, and the middle school has made AYP for six consecutive years.

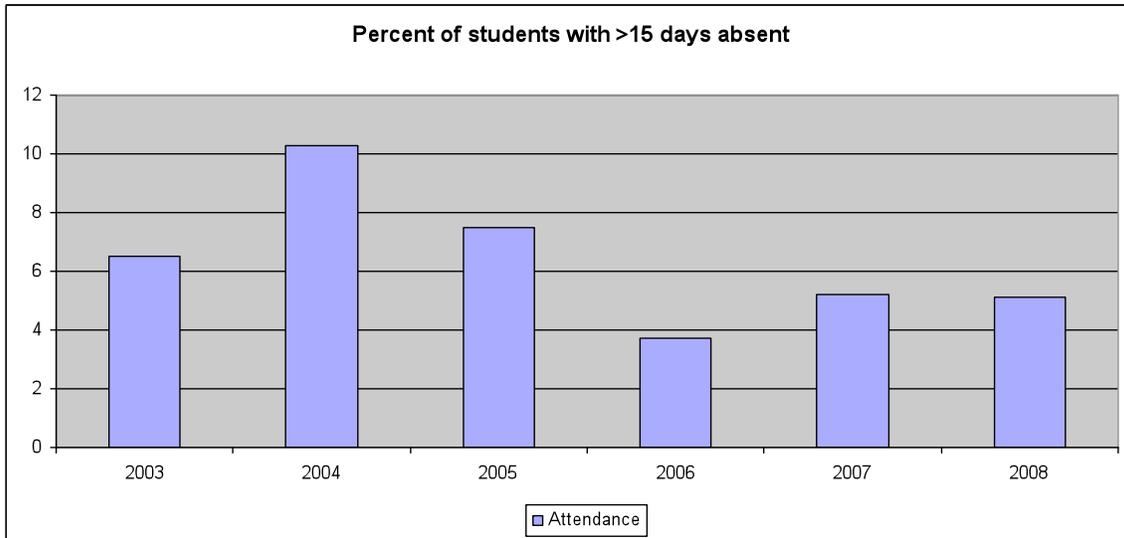
In addition, Standard and Poor has identified Warren County as an outperforming school district, meaning that the district produces academic outcomes at higher-than-expected levels. This finding confirms an in-state analysis conducted using Georgia school system data for the 2006 academic year, which finds that Warren County receives less-than-predicted funding from the state of Georgia and yet returns high-than-expected levels of student performance. This is outlined in Table 1, below.

	<b>Warren Co.</b>	<b>Georgia</b>	<b>Category</b>
Total SAT	783	942	Ineffective
Grad Rate	77%	70%	Efficient
CRCT Composite	69%	81%	Efficient
GHSMT Math	90%	91%	Efficient

Note: Ineffective districts receive less-than-expected funding and return lower-than-expected performance; efficient districts receive less-than-expected funding and return higher-than-expected performance.

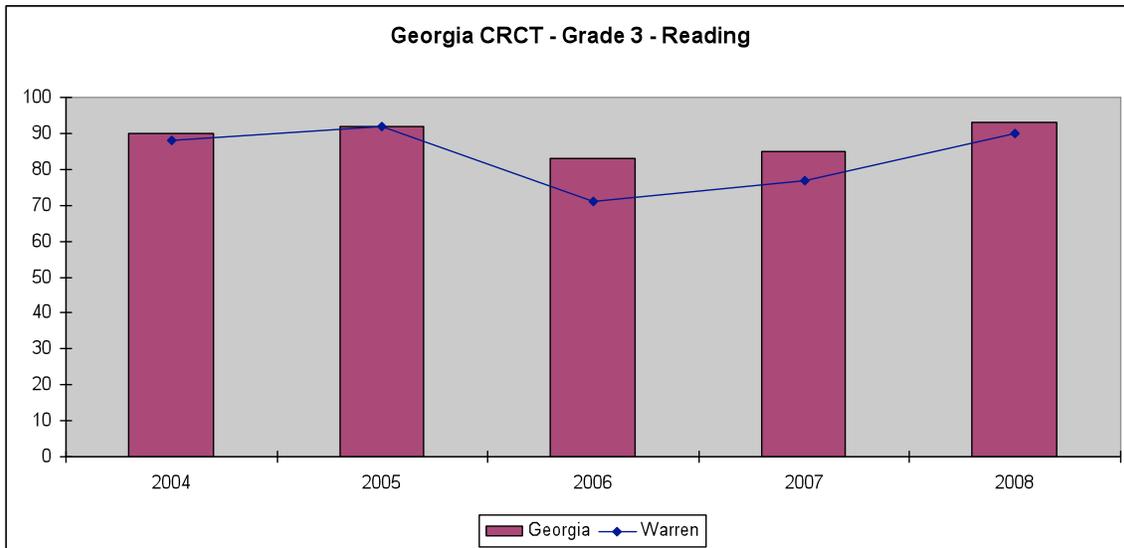
### *Attendance*

Attendance has improved in the district since 2004. As noted in the figure below, the percentage of students absent 15 or more days in the 2008 academic year is roughly half that of the 2004 academic year.

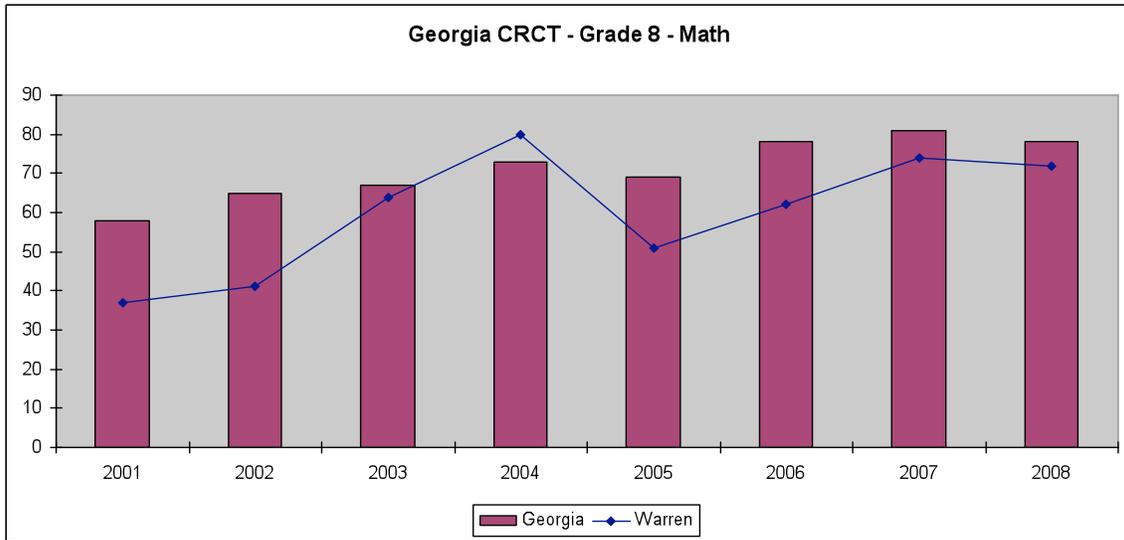


### Test Scores

Although Warren County's small population makes for large variation in test scores from year to year, Warren County students perform at high levels across numerous subjects of the Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency test (CRCT). Despite its consistent ranking in the top decile for percentage of students in poverty, Warren County 3<sup>rd</sup> graders perform near the state average on passing rates of the CRCT reading test.



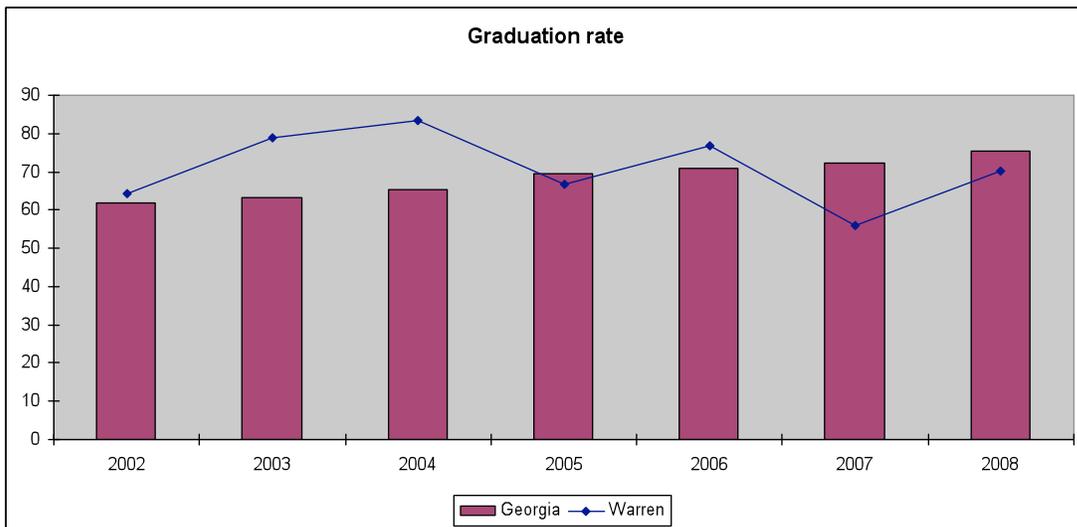
Similarly, although there is a significant decline between 2004 and 2005 when Georgia adopted new performance standards, Warren County 8<sup>th</sup> graders are closing the gap in performance on the CRCT mathematics test.



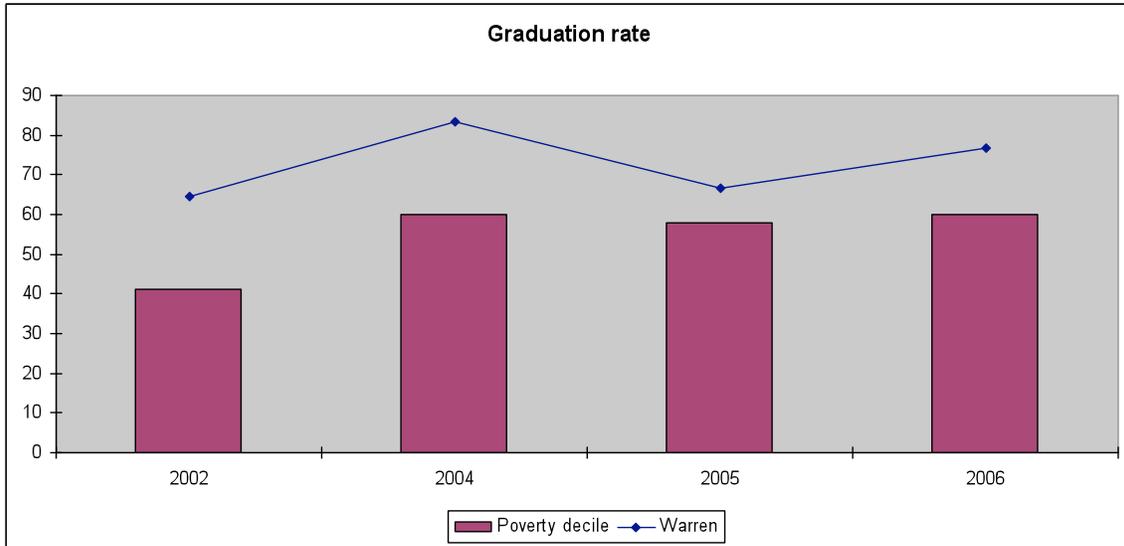
Similar analysis indicates that, when Warren County is compared to other Georgia districts with high percentages of students in poverty, the district performs above or near the top of this group on standardized tests.

### *Graduation Rates*

Since 2002, Warren County has produced graduation rates comparable to the state of Georgia and has far outperformed its peers in high poverty districts. The figure below illustrates graduation rates in Warren County over time contrasted with graduation rates for the state of Georgia. Although there are some dips between 2004 and 2005, and between 2006 and 2007, this figure indicates that for every year save one, Warren County graduation rates were roughly on par with statewide graduation rates.

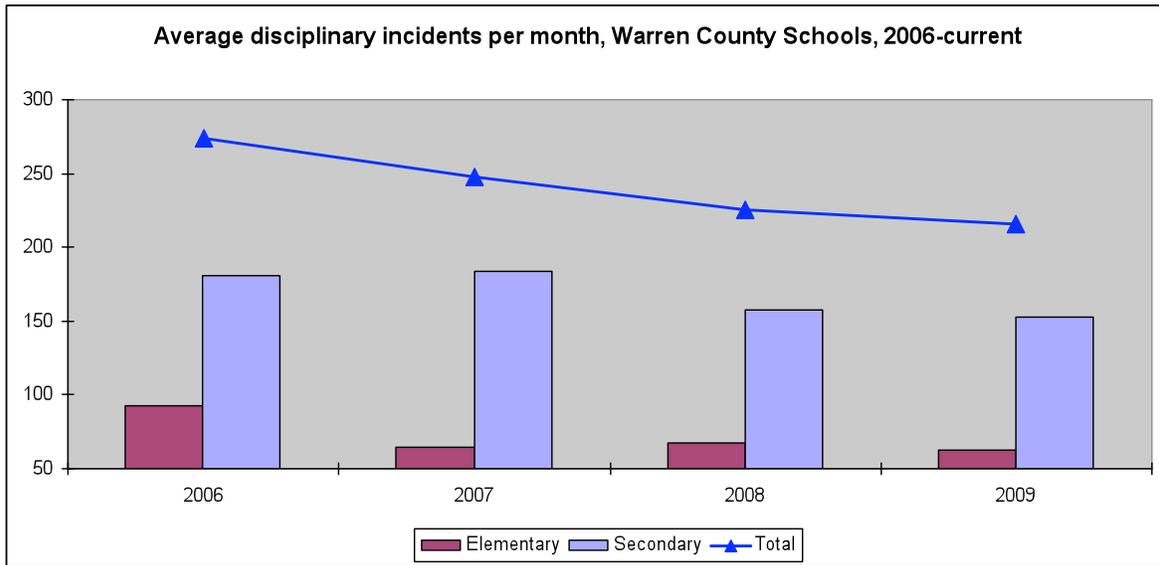


When compared with similar high-poverty districts, we can see Warren County far outperforms them. For each year in which comparable data is available, Warren County has higher graduation rates than the average high-poverty district.



## Discipline

Interviews with central office personnel indicate that discipline was a critical issue in Warren County in 2002. Community members reported that it was often difficult to tell when class changes occurred in the high school, since students seemed to be in the hallways constantly. A priority on discipline, while initially creating high disciplinary referral rates, has resulted in a steady decrease in disciplinary incidents in Warren County. The table below shows annual reported disciplinary incidents, averaged per month, in Warren County schools.<sup>1</sup> Data availability issues at the state level prevented the reporting for prior years.



<sup>1</sup> Incidents are reported in 25 categories: bullying, misbehavior, cell phone use, cheating on state tests, classroom disturbance, computer trespass, cutting class, destroying school property, disorderly conduct, disrespect, excessive referrals, fighting/threats, harassment/intimidation, horseplay, trespassing in off-limits areas, instigating conflict, larceny/theft, leaving class, refusing sports, petty theft, profanity, refusing ISS work, sexual harassment, threat/intimidation, and willful refusal.

## **Appendix A**

### **Data Sources**

Table 1 sources: State of Georgia School Report Card data; Houck, E.A. & He, J. (2008, October). "Examining school district efficiency in Georgia." Paper presented at Education in Georgia: First Annual State of the State Report, Atlanta, GA.

Attendance chart sources: State of Georgia School Report Card data

Georgia CRCT- Grade 3 - Reading chart sources: State of Georgia School Report Card data. Note: Data unavailable in 2001 and 2003.

Georgia CRCT- Grade 8 - Math chart sources: State of Georgia School Report Card data.

Graduation versus GA chart sources: State of Georgia School Report Card data.

Graduation versus Peers chart sources: State of Georgia School Report Card data; collected from the Consortium for Adequate School Funding in Georgia (CASFG) website: [www.casfg.org](http://www.casfg.org).

Average disciplinary incident per month chart sources: Source: Warren County Schools, State of Georgia data.

## Appendix B Survey Questions

### School Board Member Governance Understanding

Which of the following activities do you believe is (are) principally the responsibility of *elected school board members*, which are the principal responsibility of a *chief executive officer* (superintendent), and which might be considered a shared responsibility?

- A. Selecting and overseeing the performance of individual classroom teachers.
- B. Selecting and offering employment to individual school principals and other district administrative personnel.
- C. Hearing citizen and parent appeals from administrative decisions regarding matters such as pupil attendance, discipline, or expulsion.
- D. Acting upon administrative recommendations regarding testing programs, textbook selection, and school dress policies.
- E. Generating details of a proposed school budget (spending plan) for an upcoming fiscal year.
- F. Being the final arbiters of a site for a new school facility or the closing of a current facility.
- G. Representing the district to local officials such as a mayor or city council.
- H. Negotiating details of a vendor contract.
- I. Approving labor contracts.
- J. Deciding upon long-term district priorities.

Ultimate authority for the operation of the school district resides with which of the following?

- A. Federal officials
- B. School board
- C. State Legislature
- D. Governor
- E. Mayor or County Executive

Which of the following should be permitted to address the school board in a public meeting regarding education issues?

- A. Ku Klux Klan
- B. American Communist Party
- C. Parent Teacher Association
- D. Catholic, Protestant, Islamic, or Jewish affiliated organization
- E. Nazi Youth

Which of the above-listed groups might legally be denied permission to use a school facility for a public meeting?