January 12, 2010

Dear Georgia Educators,

First, I would like to thank you for your commitment to your profession. The past 18 months have been a challenging time for all of us, and your hard work and dedication through adversity shows your deep commitment to Georgia's students.

When I recently asked for feedback from our dedicated teachers and school leaders to help us form our state’s Race to the Top plan, over 20,000 of you responded. Race to the Top, as most of you know, is an unprecedented competitive federal grant opportunity for states who wish to improve student achievement by implementing plans in four specific areas—the most important of which is developing, compensating and retaining great teachers and leaders. Building on the responses we received to this survey, I will propose legislation this year that truly rewards excellence in education.

I strongly believe that Georgia needs a compensation system that identifies, motivates, rewards and retains effective teachers and principals, and those of you that responded to the survey agree. In fact, 81% of respondents believe that a common, statewide teacher evaluation tool will ensure that teachers across school districts have clear expectations regarding performance. I couldn’t agree with you more. I am proposing legislation that will require the State Board of Education to adopt a common evaluation tool to be used in school districts across the state. This will ensure that teachers across Georgia are evaluated in a fair, comparable manner.

Of the 20,000 teachers and leaders from which we heard, 80% believe that teachers should be evaluated on both observation of planning and instruction and the degree to which they help students grow academically. You spoke, and we listened. Our legislation will calculate the effectiveness of teachers based on both quantitative and qualitative measures. Compensation will then be based upon a teacher’s overall effectiveness with 50% of that being the academic progress of an individual teacher’s students.

Many of you said increases in salary should be driven by teacher effectiveness. This legislation will enhance the current salary structure in Georgia by adding a performance-based compensation system for all new teachers and any existing teachers who choose this option. The existing salary schedule will remain in place for those teachers who would prefer it.

These enhancements to the statewide compensation system will not take effect until 2014. In the meantime, the 22 school systems partnering with the state in the Race to the Top application will help to develop and vet a reliable compensation system focused on student learning. This period will allow ample time to receive even more educator input from those of you working hard in Georgia schools every day. Your contribution will be invaluable to us as we move forward.

Attached to this email you will find additional information that will hopefully answer your initial questions. Teachers have been heavily involved in developing Georgia’s Race to the Top plan, and I look forward to your participation as we continue to improve student achievement and prepare our students to take on the challenges of the 21st Century.

Sincerely,

Governor Sonny Perdue