Georgia’s 180 school districts have chosen a form of system governance under The Increased Flexibility for Local School Systems Act, O.C.G.A. 20-2-80 et.seq. Every school district has chosen one of the following three governance models:

**Traditional (Status Quo) Systems:**
A school district that has chosen to remain a Traditional School system has to comply with all provisions of state education law (Title 20), all State Board of Education (SBOE) rules and regulations, and all Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) guidelines. The school district will not receive any waivers of any requirements from the SBOE. The only possible exception to this rule is that the district may be eligible for a “class size waiver,” to allow it to have classes larger than the state imposed maximum for any grade, but only if it can show “substantial hardship” brought on by extraordinary circumstances. Because operating without waivers would be so arduous, only two school districts in Georgia (Webster County and Buford City) have chosen to remain Traditional School Systems.

**Investing in Excellence in Education (IE²) (Strategic Waiver) Systems:**
A school district that has chosen to become an IE² District enters into a multi-year contract with the SBOE granting the district freedom from specified Title 20 provisions, SBOE rules, and GaDOE guidelines. The school district must have a strategic plan and a school improvement plan for each school within the district. As part of their improvement plans, IE² districts must request at least one of the “Big Four” waivers, which are class size, teacher certification, salary schedule, or expenditure control. As part of the IE² contract, the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) sets minimum targets for each school in the district for each year and monitors performance of each school. GOSA’s targets are focused on each school’s College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) score. One advantage of the IE² governance model is that while accountability is focused at the school level, the flexibility granted does not include a requirement for school level governance. This allows school districts that have schools with varying levels of administrative ability and community involvement to create performance goals and choose how much authority to grant each school to achieve those goals. If a school in an IE² district fails to meet the equivalent of three years of targeted improvement by the end of the five year contract, then the SBOE can take over governance of the school. See the list of 131 school districts that have chosen to become IE² Systems.

**Charter Systems:**
A school district that has chosen to become a Charter System executes a charter, or contract, with the SBOE granting it freedom from almost all provisions of Title 20, SBOE rules, and GaDOE guidelines. In exchange for this flexibility, the Charter System must meet district-wide achievement targets set in its contract and must establish local school governance teams (LSGTs) that share the district’s decision-making authority. By state law, the LSGTs have a school level share of authority in personnel decisions, financial decisions, curriculum and instruction, resource allocation, establishing and monitoring achievement of school improvement goals and school operations. The Charter System governance model offers the greatest autonomy to the school system. See the list of 47 school districts that have chosen to become Charter Systems.

For a more complete review of the differences in these governance models see GaDOE, IE², Charter and Status Quo School Systems: Nuts and Bolts Comparisons, Atlanta, 2014.

All school districts have indicated what type of system governance they will use. The districts are now in the process of developing their contracts with the state. At this time they are working in each school community to develop the school performance goals. This gives the districts the opportunity to adopt best practices and use the concepts developed in Community Schools. Learn more.
What can be done?

Get involved with your local public school and school system:
Find out what choice your local school system has made for its governance structure. Depending on the governance model that your local school system has chosen, there may be opportunities for you to get involved in your local school. Go to the website of your local school district to review the specifics of the district’s governance model contract or plan.

Charter System:
If your local school system has chosen to become a Charter System, your local school may need participants for its Local School Governance Team (LSGT). Find out if you can be involved in the school's LSGT. Members of the LSGTs are elected or appointed and serve as representatives of the local school community. The composition of the teams may vary by school and/or district, but the teams are generally composed of parents, school staff, and community members. By state law, LSGTs must provide input on the selection of the Principal; the final recommendation for the school budget; personnel decisions; curriculum and instructional materials; school operations relating to school improvement; and approval of the school improvement plan and oversight of its implementation. A charter system creates a shared-governance structure within the school and across the district between the superintendent and LSGTs. This provides community members a direct leadership role in local community schools.

Investing in Excellence in Education System (IE²):
If your local school system has chosen to become an IE² system, you should review the district’s strategic plan and the school improvement plan for your local school. Determine which of the Big Four waivers the school system has received and how the school improvement plan drives student performance. Is there a role for parent and community engagement in the plan? Can you be engaged in helping to determine what waivers are requested, what student performance goals are set, and what methods are used to achieve those goals? Can you assist your local school in meeting its performance goals?

Traditional Systems:
Given the fact that the district cannot receive waivers from the SBOE, is there a role for you in helping your local school achieve its performance goals? Does the school have an active PTA/PTSA/PTO that needs your help? Is there a local school council (LSC) that needs assistance? Local School Councils were created by the state legislature as part of the Georgia A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 and provide parent and community involvement in the planning for and operation of the public school each serves.