

15TH EDITION

Top Ten Issues to Watch in 2019



GEORGIA PARTNERSHIP
FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- ii Indicators for Success – Where is Georgia Today
- 1 ISSUE 1: New Leadership – Changes at the Capitol
- 7 ISSUE 2: Early Learning – Quality Early Care and Its Economic Impact
- 15 ISSUE 3: Teaching – Elevating the Profession...Now!
- 24 ISSUE 4: School Safety – Much More than Metal Detectors
- 32 ISSUE 5: Funding: Is Fully Funding QBE Enough?
- 39 ISSUE 6: Assessments: Testing the Waters
- 46 ISSUE 7: ESAs/Vouchers –Taking a Hard Look at What’s Next
- 52 ISSUE 8: Summer Start Date – More than Meets the Eye
- 59 ISSUE 9: Dual Enrollment – Growth and Sustainability
- 66 ISSUE 10: Post-Secondary – Costs, Other Barriers Impede Success

JANUARY 2019

The Top Ten Issues to Watch is an annual publication of the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. Past editions are available on our website, www.gpee.org.

OUR MISSION

Inform and influence Georgia leaders through research and non-partisan advocacy to impact education policies and practices for the improvement of student achievement.



The Georgia Partnership continues its mission of working tirelessly to improve student achievement in our state. We enter 2019 with many opportunities to grow and make lasting impact. The pages that follow will detail many of the current education challenges facing us all.

So, what exactly does the Georgia Partnership do? Nonpartisan research is a hallmark of our work. We are always searching for the best way to make Georgia's public education system better, unencumbered by political influences, and to ensure it provides equal opportunity for every student throughout the birth to work pipeline. We often inform government leaders across Georgia on key public education policy issues and make recommendations for developing a policy agenda that will move education and workforce development in Georgia forward.

In 2018, the Partnership built on much of the work we began in 2017. With our 5th edition of the *Economics of Education* report hot off the press, we "hit the road" to kick off a series of Regional Summits across the state that focused on Improving the Education and Workforce Pipeline in Georgia. These forums engaged community leaders in thinking about how to leverage new region-specific data, new analyses, and new strategies for strengthening their workforce pipeline. We also continued to advance our newly developed education framework, *EdQuest Georgia*, by forming the EdQuest Georgia Coalition. This cross-sector collection of education stakeholders is committed to leveraging the EdQuest Georgia policy framework to move public education and equity forward in Georgia.

We kick off every year with our annual **Media Symposium** in early January, just ahead of the legislative session. This event convenes education reporters and editors from around the state for a day-long look at the key issues facing legislators as they start their new term. It is during the Symposium that we release the newest edition of the *Top Ten* report to the public.

For over 25 years, we've been committed to spotlighting key education topics through our **Critical Issues Forums**. For example, in 2018, we heard from State School Superintendent candidates on their vision for public education in Georgia, as well as from Georgia's Chief Turnaround Officer and educators across the state who are leading school turnaround efforts. The Forums are always free and open to all.

Our **Education Policy Fellowship Program** (EPFP) is especially important to our core work. In 2018, we graduated our 10th class of fellows, increasing our total alumni to over 200 fellows and expanding Georgia's education policy expertise by graduating Georgians from a variety of fields – government, education, business, civic – who better understand the complexities of education policies and the critical need to make the right decisions first. Take a look and consider applying for the Class of 2020.

This brief review only scratches the surface. The door is always open to those who want to learn more about our work and to those who want to partner with us to make Georgia's public education system a national leader. We encourage you to join our mailing list and follow us on Twitter and Facebook.

The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education's greatest strength is that it creates and nurtures the conditions that stimulate critical change. We welcome your support and participation in our work. Georgia's children need you.



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to 2019 and the 15th Edition of the Georgia Partnership's Top Ten Issues to Watch. This is an exciting time in Georgia as new leaders are emerging across the state. In November 2018, Georgia voters elected a new governor whose responsibilities include setting the direction for a state education policy agenda and having a hand in appointing new leaders to help implement his plan. Georgia will also see new leadership in the General Assembly, from a new Lt. Governor to new House and Senate education committee chairs. These new leaders face many challenges and opportunities to build upon the successes of the previous administration. But where should they start?

First, our new leaders must make education a priority. Never before has the role of public schools as the great equalizer for all Americans been more apparent than now. With more than one quarter of our state's residents now living below the poverty line, a statistic that makes Georgia the ninth most impoverished state in the nation, Georgia's children are facing increasingly difficult challenges. Of our 159 counties, 51 have more than a quarter of their population living in poverty. These communities generally lack equitable access to high quality schools, health care, community supports, and the economic opportunities that accompany them.

Second, our new leaders must build upon with what is working in our public schools today. Too often education reforms change with the political winds, as new leaders enter office ready to put their own mark on policy agendas. But ensuring excellent educational opportunities for all of Georgia's children should not be a goal that swings on a political pendulum. While there are certainly opportunities to improve in our public schools, there are also great successes in our state's recent past upon which to build. Georgia's children and families need to see a lasting commitment to existing policies such as high standards, early learning opportunities, and strengthening career pathways.

Lastly, our new leaders must ensure that the policymaking process is open, transparent, and truly inclusive of all stakeholders. Education impacts every single resident, community, and business in this state. By encouraging constituents to be engaged in the democratic process and by seeking input and listening to the concerns of teachers, parents, students, and businesses, our new leaders will better serve the citizens who elected them and depend on them to carry our state forward during these challenging times.

Throughout 2019, Georgia will be considering reform strategies, policies, and programs to strengthen education and provide all its children with equitable access to a high-quality education. The investments our state makes now in quality education programs that carry our youth from birth to work will foretell Georgia's future place among its peers.

The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education invites all Georgians – from state leaders to individual parents – to join us in our continuing resolution to ensure every child has access to a high-quality education, which allows them to pursue their dreams.



Dr. Stephen D. Dolinger, *President, Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education*

INDICATORS FOR SUCCESS: WHERE IS GEORGIA TODAY?

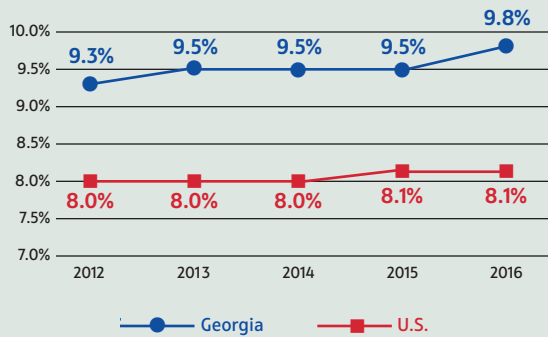
How does Georgia fare in producing excellent results for our citizens throughout the birth to work pipeline?

What additional progress is necessary to move our state above the national average and into the top tier of states to make Georgia a national leader?

These *Indicators for Success* reveal where Georgia stands on critical indicators of child well-being, educational attainment, and workforce readiness. Shown in each graph is a comparison of trends in Georgia relative to national averages. These data represent outcomes related to student achievement and success. Changes in these outcomes will require focused, collaborative work on each of the issues discussed in this publication. The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education is committed to tracking these indicators over time and advocating for policies and practices that will enable our state to emerge as a national education leader.

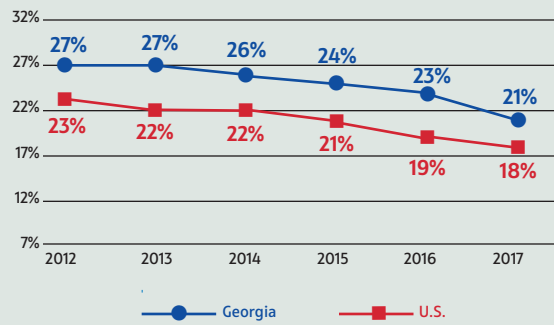
LOW-BIRTHWEIGHT BABIES, 2012-2016

SOURCE: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. datacenter.kidscount.org



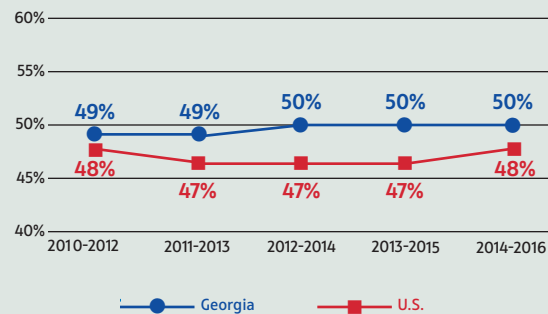
CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY, 2013-2017

SOURCE: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. datacenter.kidscount.org



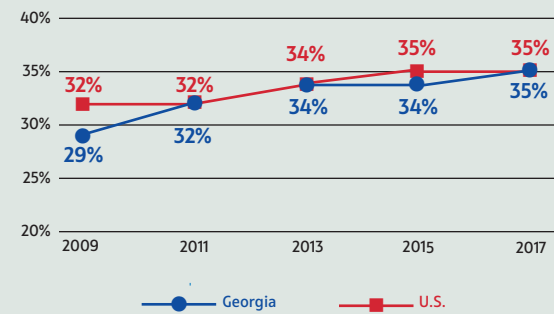
CHILDREN AGES 3 TO 4 ATTENDING PRESCHOOL, 2010-2016

SOURCE: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. datacenter.kidscount.org



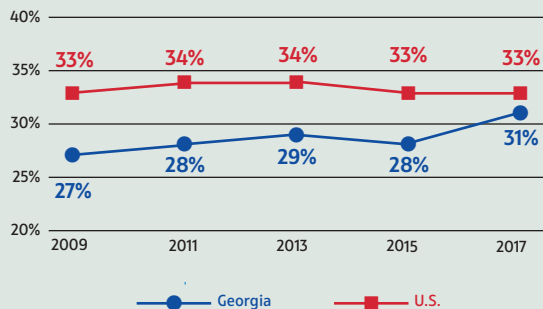
FOURTH GRADE NAEP READING: AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT, 2009-2017

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Education Progress



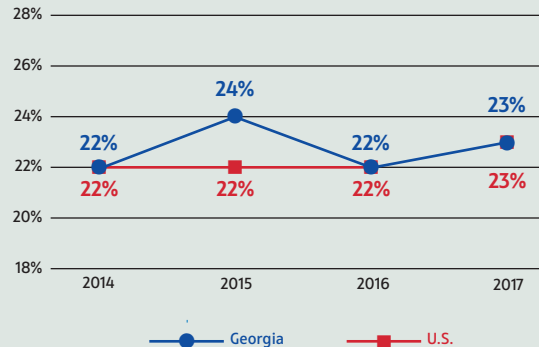
EIGHTH GRADE NAEP MATHEMATICS: AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT, 2009-2017

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Education Progress



PERCENTAGE OF GRADUATING CLASS EARNING 3 OR HIGHER ON AN AP EXAM, 2014-2017

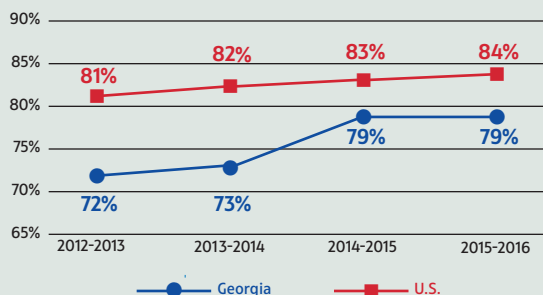
SOURCE: Georgia Department of Education



HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES*

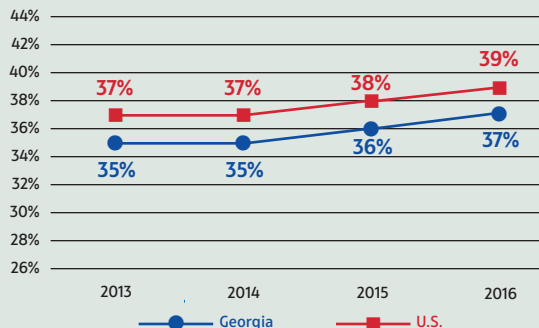
SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, Public Four-Year On-Time Graduation Rates: School Years 2012-2013, 2013-2014, 2014-2015, 2015-2016

*Public high school 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate.



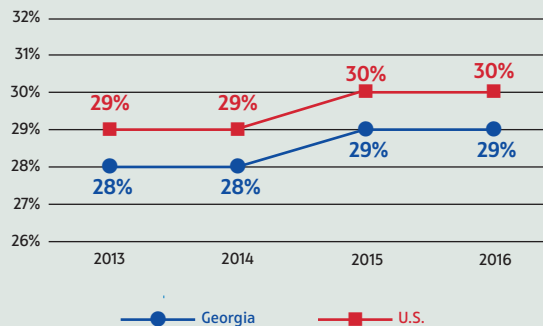
ADULTS OVER AGE 25 WITH AN ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE OR HIGHER, 2013-2016

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder American Community Survey 2012-2016 (Georgia/United States)



ADULTS OVER AGE 25 WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER, 2013-2016

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder American Community Survey 2012-2016 (Georgia/United States)





NEW LEADERSHIP – CHANGES AT THE CAPITOL

Issue Overview

No Georgia resident could steer clear of the 2018 midterm elections. On the national stage, political pundits kept their eyes on Georgia as the hotly contested governor's race spurred them to speculate on many questions: Would a blue wave overtake Georgia? Would the conservative base that delivered Georgia to President Trump hold? Who will suburban women vote for? Georgia's own commentators and politicos carefully tracked every development in the tension-filled races for governor, lieutenant governor, state superintendent, and many other state and local offices.

In the end, Republican Brian Kemp won the closest governor's race in Georgia since 1966, as well as the most expensive race in the state's history. In an election that set records for voter turnout, he defeated Democrat Stacey Abrams by roughly 55,000 votes.¹

Moreover, Republicans maintained their majority in both houses of the General Assembly, though they did lose some ground to Democrats. Republicans will thus be in control of both the House and Senate education committees; however, both committees will have new chairs for the 2019 legislative session. Republican Richard Woods also won his reelection bid for state school superintendent.

Analysis of the election results reveals a growing divide between rural Georgia and its suburban counties, primarily around the metropolitan Atlanta area. Both Kemp and Abrams received more votes than any previous gubernatorial candidate in Georgia. Brian Kemp focused his campaign almost exclusively on rural Georgia. While Stacey Abrams campaigned statewide, the majority of her support ultimately came from metro Atlanta. Political pundits argue that the political divide between metro Atlanta and rural Georgia is widening.² However, it is important to note that the population of rural Georgia is steadily shrinking, while most of the state's population growth is concentrated in the metro Atlanta area.

As this publication goes to press, the newly elected governor is assembling transition teams, identifying advisors, and preparing to take the helm of Georgia in 2019. What will these new leaders mean for our state? What have our new leaders promised to do in office, and what will it mean for our public education system?

¹ Bluestein, G. 2018, November 17. Now as Governor-Elect, Kemp Points to Georgia's Future. Retrieved from *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: politics.myajc.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/now-governor-elect-kemp-points-georgia-future/LAUMopeRIda2i4Ur9MML9I/.

² Bluestein, 2018, Now as Governor-Elect.

Significance for Georgia

In the fall of 2018, 17 new governors were elected across the country, including in Georgia. Historically speaking, no one person has more influence on state education policy than the governor. He or she sets a legislative agenda. In states like Georgia, the governor often appoints various agency heads who will interpret and implement policy. In the budget process, the governor typically submits the first draft of the budget and then has final say on the version that has been approved by the legislature. The governor can champion broad policies or specific legislation and has veto power over any bill that is passed by the legislature.³ Now, even more than in the past, governors have a strong voice in K-12 education, due in part to the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, which devolved a significant portion of education policy to the states, and US Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos' efforts to shrink the US Department of Education.

That is especially true in Georgia, as the governor plays a powerful and critical role in the governance of public education. Table 1.1 provides information about the state's new governor, Brian Kemp. Georgia's governance structure affords a substantial amount of authority to the governor, who holds appointment powers over multiple education agencies. As the new head of state, Kemp has the power to:

- appoint members of the State Board of Education,
- appoint the commissioner of the Department of Early Care and Learning,
- appoint members of the State Board of Technical and Adult Education (who then appoint the commissioner of the Technical College System of Georgia),
- appoint the executive director of the Office of Student Achievement,
- appoint the members of and the executive secretary of the Professional Standards Commission, and
- appoint the members of the Board of Regents (who then select the chancellor of the University System of Georgia).

How the new governor uses his powers and the extent to which he makes education a priority for his office are yet to be seen. Throughout most of the gubernatorial campaign, both candidates were relatively silent about education. On his campaign website, Brian Kemp's platform included support for the following:⁴

Table 1.1. FAST FACTS ABOUT BRIAN KEMP, GEORGIA'S 82ND GOVERNOR

- Raised in Athens, Georgia
- Graduated from the University of Georgia
- Served in the State Senate, 2002-2006
- Served as Secretary of State, State of Georgia, 2010-2018
- Has worked as a home builder and developer

1. Expanding school choice, including support for charter schools and the Student Scholarship Organization (SSO) tax credit, and piloting an education savings account for military families;
2. Improving local control through local school boards and stakeholders and empowering teachers; and
3. Strengthening rural education through virtual learning, working with nonprofits to provide afterschool programs, and bringing high speed Internet to all parts of the state.

³ Wieder, B. 2016. *State Education Policy*. Retrieved from Education Writers Association: www.ewa.org/reporter-guide/state-education-policy.

⁴ See kempforgovernor.com/posts/news/it%E2%80%99s-time-put-students-first.

Near the end of the campaign, he provided more details about his policy platform for early learning and K-12 education.

1. **Improve literacy through early learning** – Kemp has pledged to continue the focus on childhood literacy that was a hallmark of Governor and First Lady Deal’s platform. He supports continuing the incentive program that provides increased Childcare and Parents Services (CAPS) funding for qualified facilities and the goal of having all early learning centers that are eligible to receive CAPS funding be Quality Rated by the end of 2020. (For more information see Issue 2 – Early-Learning – Quality Early Care and Its Economic Impact.) He will also establish a statewide literacy coordinator to oversee the numerous childhood and adult literacy programs that are operating across Georgia. Finally, he has pledged to create a Literacy Council comprising lawmakers, subject matter experts, educators, parents, and private-sector leaders to drive progress, synchronize efforts, and track key metrics for public utilization.

2. **Increase school safety** – Kemp has announced a \$90 million school safety plan to keep students safe. The plan has three elements:
 - Creating a school counselor program, modeled after former Governor Sonny Perdue’s graduation coach program. This plan will provide a support counselor in every high school tasked with assisting and guiding students who are battling mental health issues, opioid abuse, violence in the home, bullying, or suicide. In addition, the counselors would work to improve graduation rates by connecting students and families with available academic resources and services.
 - Providing each of Georgia’s 2,292 public schools with a one-time allotment of \$30,000 to use as they see fit for school security. For example, funds could be used for personnel, such as a school police officer; capital expenditures, such as cameras or metal detectors; or operational expenses, such as data analytics.
 - Creating a school safety division within the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE). When this edition went to press, little detail had been provided about the specifics of this division, but Kemp and his transition team had started conversations with State School Superintendent Richard Woods.

3. **Increased pay for teachers** – Candidate Brian Kemp proposed giving Georgia public-school teachers a permanent \$5,000 annual pay raise if he were elected governor. He views this “as a crucial step to help the state retain more educators.”⁵

4. **Fully fund public education** – Candidate Brian Kemp also pledged to fully fund public education by stating, “As governor, I will build on Nathan Deal’s legacy and fully fund public school education. We must invest in our future today and ensure that all students have access to a quality education, no matter their zip code.”⁶

A hallmark of Kemp’s campaign and gubernatorial platform was a focus on rural Georgia. He has developed a comprehensive plan for “A New Day in Rural Georgia” that empowers the private sector to offer high-speed Internet, supports the agriculture industry, and improves access to quality health care and high-paying jobs through economic development and investments. These types of strategies can

5 Bluestein, G. 2018, September 25. *Kemp Proposes a \$600 Million Annual Plan to Boost Teacher Pay*. Retrieved from *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: politics.myajc.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/kemp-proposes-600-million-annual-plan-boost-teacher-pay/FBUJTyBsxtOrWEOAJuykK/.

6 Kemp: Governor. (2018). *Kemp Vows to Fully Fund Public Education, Abrams Will Only Fund Her Political Ambition*. Retrieved from www.kempfor-governor.com/posts/press/kemp-vows-fully-fund-public-education-abrams-will-only-fund-her-political-ambition.

only help strengthen local school systems, which, in turn, will support the economic activities of the region through increased high school graduation rates and the successful post-secondary completion of rural residents.

As governor, Kemp has the authority to appoint the commissioner of the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL).⁷ As previously stated, he has already expressed support for the early learning policies established under Governor Deal; therefore, Georgia will most likely see a continued focus on expanding access to high-quality early learning. The governor also has the power to appoint members of the State Board of Technical and Adult Education (who then appoint the commissioner of the Technical College System of Georgia) and to appoint the members of the Board of Regents (who then select the chancellor of the University System of Georgia). In regard to higher education, Kemp's platform proposes the creation of an education savings account (ESA) program with a pilot for military families. While ESAs primarily allow parents to apply their child's funding to private K-12 services, dollars can also be applied to post-secondary tuition and fees in many states. As of the writing of this document, the Kemp transition team has yet to offer additional higher education proposals.

The Georgia governor also has the authority to appoint members to the State Board of Education. However, the state school superintendent, who oversees GaDOE, is an elected position. Superintendent Richard Woods was reelected for a second four-year term in 2018. As an incumbent, Woods ran on his record in the job, highlighting a shifting focus away from high-stakes testing to the whole child and building opportunities for all children. He also focused on the importance of local control and the department's supporting role for local school districts as opposed to its traditional compliance role. Specifically, during his reelection campaign, Woods highlighted the importance of

- increased teacher salaries along with increased respect and the professionalization of the field,
- increased supports for student psychological and emotional health,
- increased supports for low-income students,
- expanded wraparound services and community engagement,
- expanded online education programs, especially for rural and low-income students, and
- a streamlined state-level testing regime.

With Woods continuing his tenure at GaDOE and Kemp continuing the focus on early learning established under Governor Deal, Georgia should see some consistency in early learning and K-12 policy. Issues of funding and school choice, especially where vouchers and ESAs are concerned, are likely to see increased attention. The future of higher education policy is less clear as stakeholders wait to see how the newly elected governor addresses issues of access and completion to post-secondary education.

Action Steps

In early 2018, an *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* survey of Georgia voters found that education was the "single most important issue facing Georgia today," followed by health care and the economy/jobs. In November 2018, Georgia voters elected a new governor, Brian Kemp, whose responsibilities include setting the direction for a state education policy agenda and having a hand in appointing new leaders to help implement his plan.

⁷ DECAL is responsible for meeting the child care and early education needs of Georgia's children and their families. It administers the nationally recognized Georgia's Pre-K Program, licenses child care centers and home-based child care, administers Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program and federal nutrition programs, and manages Quality Rated, Georgia's community-powered child care rating system. The department also houses the Head Start State Collaboration Office, distributes federal funding to enhance the quality and availability of child care, and works collaboratively with Georgia child care resource and referral agencies and organizations throughout the state to enhance early care and education. See decals.ga.gov/BftS/About.aspx.

Moving forward into 2019, Georgia not only has a new governor but also has new chairs of both education committees in the House and Senate. The leaders of both legislative chambers can have tremendous influence. They decide which legislators will sit on which committees (including education and higher education) and whether bills approved by that committee will be voted on by the entire chamber.

The chair of the House Education Committee, Representative Brooks Coleman, did not seek reelection after the 2018 legislative session. The chair of the Senate's Education and Youth Committee, Senator Lindsey Tippins (R-Marietta), resigned his chairmanship over how a particular bill was handled in the Senate near the end of the 2018 legislative session. Although his committee amended a bill to require higher performance from state-authorized charter schools in exchange for more funding, the full Senate rejected these recommendations.

The resignation of the chairmanship is significant and leaves open many questions for the 2019 legislative session and the overall direction of education policy headed by Republicans in the Georgia Senate. Senator Tippins has a good reputation as a businessman and is a former member of the Cobb County Board of Education. He understands issues of funding and accountability. In explaining why he resigned, Tippins said, "I didn't see a fruitful future if the vast majority of the (Republican) caucus is different than you on a critical issue."⁸

What the education priorities are for this yet-to-be-identified leadership remain to be seen. It is likely we will see more legislation around vouchers, student scholarship organizations, and education savings accounts. (For more information about these choice-related options, see Issue 7: ESAs and Vouchers).

5

So where does all this leave the future of education policy in Georgia? The answer is still to be determined. Despite the gains made by the previous administration, of which there were many, more work is needed to make Georgia a top-performing state where all children have the same access to a high-quality education. The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education's commitment to achieving this outcome spawned a two-year research project that identified the common policies of high-performing states, countries, and school systems. We then created a framework to ensure that the same policies that enable and accelerate strong public education nationally and globally are in place in Georgia. This framework, called EdQuest Georgia, is built on seven core policy areas that, when integrated together, drive education improvements. The framework comprises seven core areas:⁹

1. Early foundations
2. Quality teachers
3. Quality leaders
4. Strong instructional systems
5. Supportive learning environments
6. Clear post-secondary pathways
7. Equitable and adequate funding

⁸ Downey, M. 2018, April 3. Cobb Senator Resigns Ed Committee Chairmanship Over Increased Charter School Funds [Web log post]. Retrieved from Get-Schooled Blog, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: www.myajc.com/blog/get-schooled/cobb-senator-resigns-committee-chairmanship-over-increased-charter-school-funds/EZRp4snjXcR2z8y6B3baXJ/.

⁹ See EdQuestga.org.

Much of Governor Kemp's platform fits within one of these core areas. His focus on early literacy and his support for early learning are critical for both early foundations and strong instructional systems. His proposals for school safety and ideas about partnering with local nonprofits in rural communities to provide afterschool services enhance supportive learning environments. And his proposal to raise teacher pay to help professionalize the field is an important strategy for ensuring quality teachers. (For more on teacher professionalization, see Issue 3.)

What remains to be seen is specifically how these policies will be funded. Kemp has said his plan to limit state spending and review tax credits and other programs would free up more state dollars for education spending. At the time of the writing of this document, no details have been provided about which or how many programs and tax credits would have to be eliminated to cover the current proposals. It is also too early to know how programs will be identified and what criteria will be used to determine elimination. Also missing are articulated strategies to support school and district leaders or supports for clear post-secondary pathways for success.

EdQuest Georgia provides an overview of Georgia's education system and illustrates how the parts of the system fit together and reinforce one another, like gears in an engine. If one gear is stuck, the engine will not perform. Georgia needs a strong state policy framework to ensure that each of the seven core areas is working in concert to empower local leaders to make decisions that best support their students. Local districts that are sustained by strong families, employ quality teachers and leaders, provide supportive learning environments to their students, are engaged with advanced instructional systems that provide clear pathways to post-secondary success, and have equitable access to resources are significantly more likely to be able to innovate, customize, and meet the needs of their students.

A clear vision for public education empowers state and local leaders as well as parents and students to make decisions that best support the educational needs of all of the state's citizens. Georgians deserve as much and must demand that the most pressing education issues in the state be top priority for our leaders.



EARLY LEARNING: QUALITY EARLY CARE AND ITS ECONOMIC IMPACT

Issue Overview

Now more than ever, the American public has embraced the importance of high-quality early learning. Over the past decade, there has been a growing understanding of brain development in infants and toddlers, and an increased focus and evaluation of the positive social and educational outcomes of early learning programs.

Beyond the short- and long-term outcomes directly related to young children participating in these programs, high-quality early learning and child care contributes directly to the economic health of Georgia. The early care and education industry in Georgia generates \$4.7 billion in economic activity and provides more than 67,000 jobs statewide annually. Further, working parents who are supported by child care across Georgia generate another \$24 billion in annual earnings. In other words, when parents have quality early care and learning options, they will work, earn, and spend, all of which generates another \$374 million in federal tax revenue and \$162 million in state and local revenue.¹⁰

But what happens to these earnings if parents do not have access to stable child care options? A recently released report, *Opportunities Lost: How Child Care Challenges Affect Georgia's Workforce & Economy*, asked that question. The Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS) and the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce surveyed 400 parents with children under the age of five and asked them how child care has impacted their ability to find and maintain steady employment. The poll found that over the previous year, one out of every four parents reported that they or someone in their family had to quit a job, not accept a job, or greatly change their job because of problems with child care.¹¹

While these types of employment-related decisions and outcomes impact individual workers and their families, they also have a direct economic impact on Georgia's bottom line. The annual loss to the state economy is estimated at \$1.75 billion, with subsequent lost tax revenue of \$105 million. Currently, Georgia can proudly tout itself as "the number 1 place to do business"; however, if they aim to maintain that status and successfully attract and keep business and industry, Georgia leaders must ensure that the workforce has access to quality child care and early learning.

¹⁰ Georgia State University, Andrew Young School of Policy Studies; Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning; and University of Georgia, Carl Vinson Institute of Government. 2016, June. *The Economic Impact of the Early Care Industry in Georgia*. Retrieved from dec.al.ga.gov/BftS/ResearchEconomicImpact.aspx.

¹¹ Goldberg, H., T. Cairl, and T.J. Cunningham. 2018, October. *Opportunities Lost: How Child Care Challenges Affect Georgia's Workforce and the Economy*. Retrieved from GEEARS, Publications: gears.org/wp-content/uploads/Opportunities-Lost-Report-FINAL.pdf.

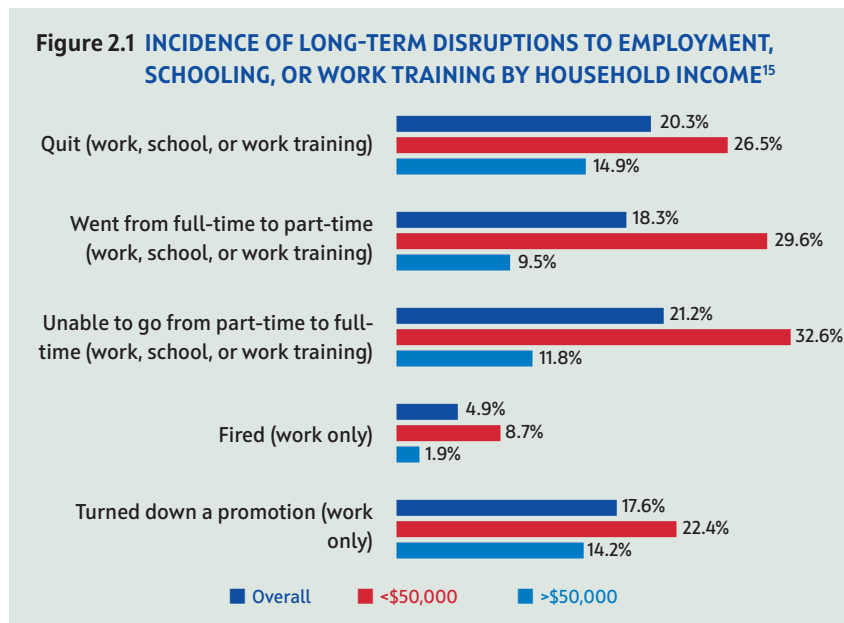
Significance for Georgia

In 2017, 66% of children under age six had all available parents (either both parents or their only parent) engaged in the labor force.¹² This means a majority of parents across Georgia need reliable child care to maintain employment and earn a living. Without it, parents may miss work, turn down promotions, or leave their jobs altogether due to child care challenges. These challenges also affect parents enrolled in school or job training programs. Employee absences and turnover impacts the bottom line for business and reduces participation in higher education and work training programs, which dilutes the workforce pipeline for future employers.¹³

The statewide survey conducted by GEEARS and the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce found that among Georgia parents with children under age five,¹⁴

- More than 1 in 5 indicated they have quit a job, school, or work training program due to child care issues.
- Approximately 1 in 20 reported having been fired because of missing work due to challenges related to child care.
- More than 1 in 6 reported having turned down a promotion at work because of issues with child care.

Parents across all income categories expressed disruptions in employment due to this issue. However, these impacts were more acute in lower income families and more rural parts of the state. For example, nearly 27% of parents with a household income lower than \$50,000 reported quitting work or school due to child care issues, compared to nearly 15% of households earning more than \$50,000 (see Figure 2.1).



¹² See Kids Count Data Center, datacenter.kidscount.org/.

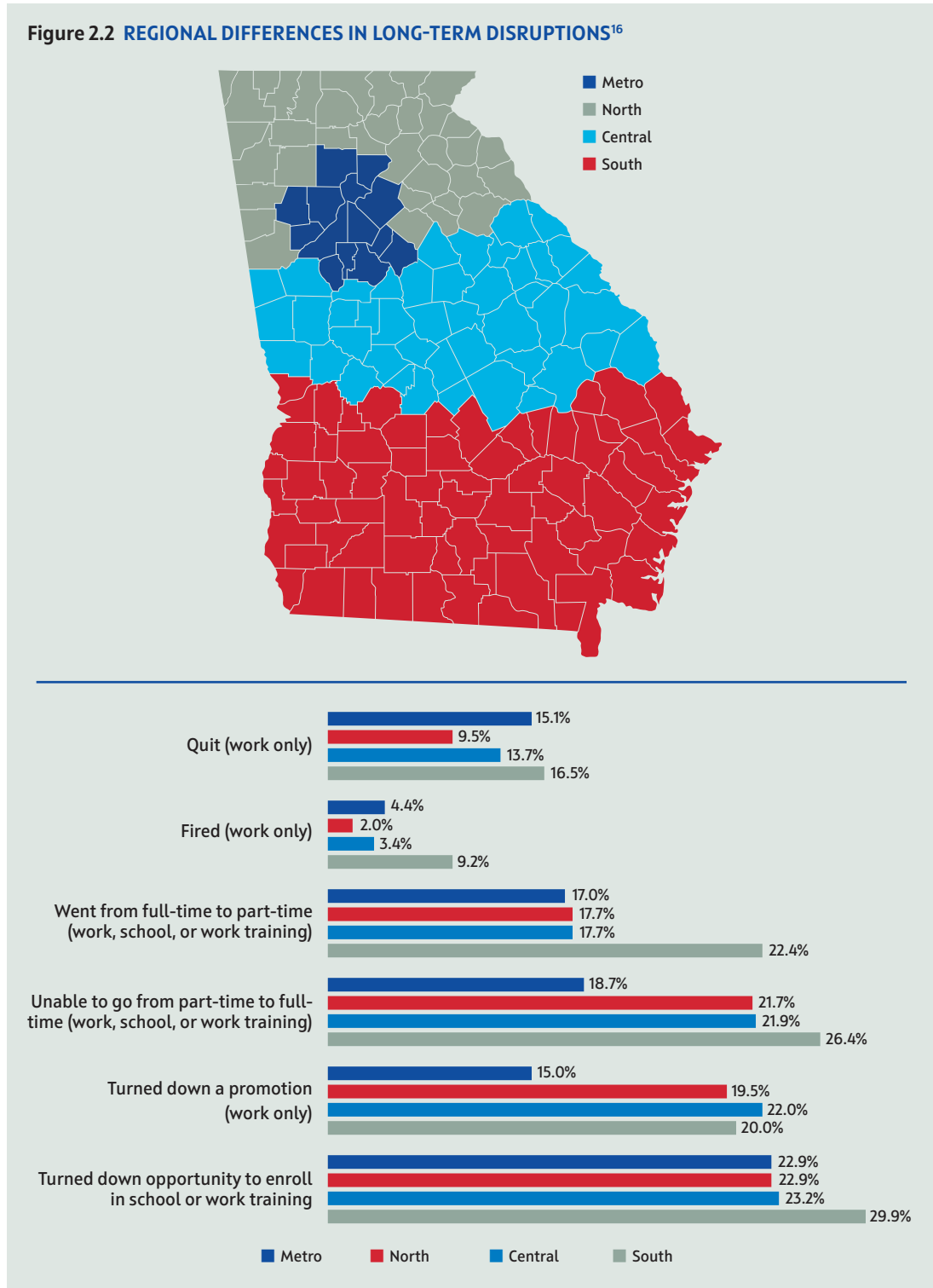
¹³ Goldberg et al., 2018.

¹⁴ Goldberg et al., 2018.

¹⁵ Goldberg et al., 2018.

Moreover, parents in the southern, mostly rural part of Georgia see more work-related instability compared to parents in other parts of the state, as shown in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN LONG-TERM DISRUPTIONS¹⁶



¹⁶ Goldberg et al., 2018.

Much of this instability is caused by child care deserts. A child care desert is any census tract with more than 50 children under age five that contains either no child care providers or so few options that there are more than three times as many children as licensed child care slots.¹⁷

Overall in Georgia, 45% of all residents live in a child care desert. The availability of child care is especially low in the rural portions of the state; 61% of rural residents live in areas without enough licensed providers. Research finds that child care deserts are associated with fewer mothers in the workforce. In Georgia, the maternal labor force participation rate in child care deserts is 1.6 percentage points lower than it is in neighborhoods with adequate licensed child care.¹⁸

Access rates also vary by income levels. While 39% of above-average income households live in a child care desert, a rather large percentage overall, nearly half (49%) of households with below-average incomes, live in child care deserts.¹⁹

Even in areas where quality care is available, low-income families have a hard time paying for it. These families are more strained by these costs than those that are better off financially. While families in the middle-income and upper-income range spend an average of less than 7% of family income on child care, a low-income family in Georgia spends nearly 40% of their budget on these services. On average, center-based child care annual costs for children in Georgia range from \$3,500 for a school-aged child to over \$7,000 for an infant, which is only \$200 less than the average annual cost of in-state college tuition.²⁰

Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) is Georgia's child care subsidy program, now called CAPS scholarships. The program is funded through the federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) and administered by the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). CAPS has three primary aims:

- to provide access to high-quality and affordable early learning environments for low-income families,
- to support DECAL's efforts to increase positive school readiness outcomes, and
- to assist families in achieving and maintaining self-sufficiency by providing financial supports for child care.

The CAPS program currently serves approximately 50,000 children (ages zero to four and school-aged) each week.^{21,22}

17 Malik, R., & Hamm, K. 2017, August. *Georgia: Interactive Report*. Retrieved from Mapping America's Child Care Deserts: childcaredeserts.org/?state=GA.

18 Malik and Hamm, 2017.

19 Malik and Hamm, 2017.

20 Johnson, M. 2015, March. *Child Care Assistance: Georgia's Opportunity to Bolster Working Families, Economy*. Atlanta, GA: Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. Retrieved from gbpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Child-Care-Report-2015.pdf.

21 GEEARS. 2017. *Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Fact Sheet*. Retrieved from GEEARS: Publications and Presentations: geears.org/wp-content/uploads/CAPS-Fact-Sheet.pdf.

22 Effective in 2018, income eligibility requirements for CAPS scholarships for new families require that the maximum income limit at annual redetermination be 85% of the state median income (\$60,060 for a family of four). Income-eligible families must also be identified as part of a priority group. Priority groups include TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) applicants and recipients; children in the custody of the Division of Family & Children Services or in Child Protective Services; minor parents in school; grandparents raising grandchildren; children with disabilities; children in Georgia's Pre-K Program requiring extended care; families who lack fixed, regular, and adequate housing; or victims of a natural disaster. In 2018, families within the very low-income priority group was expanded to 100% of the federal poverty guidelines. This means that families with income at or below the poverty guidelines (\$25,100 for a family of four) meet priority status for CAPS if other eligibility requirements are met. Finally, most parents are required to be engaged in a state-approved activity for an average of 24 hours per week (employment, education, or, for members of qualifying priority groups, job search). See caps.dec.ga.gov/en/EligibilityRequirements.

The reauthorization of the CCDF federal block grant that passed in 2014 brought about significant changes to the implementation of the CAPS program in Georgia. To continue to receive these funds, in 2018 DECAL submitted Georgia's state plan for how the funds will be used. The plan prioritizes helping low-income, working families pay for child care and enhancing the quality of available child care in Georgia.²³

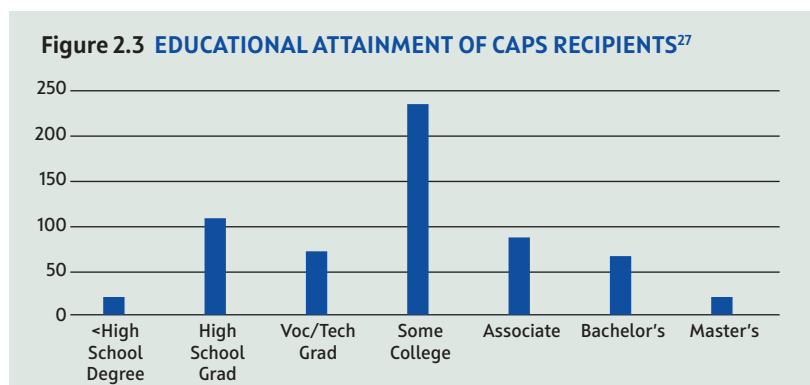
While the state plan addresses a wide variety of initiatives to meet the needs of Georgia families, of note is the focus on increasing access to high-quality early learning for low-income families. To help ensure equal access to child care for low-income children, the state plan includes the following:²⁴

- New funding models that offer grants to providers to serve a certain number of child care subsidy-eligible children. In exchange for agreeing to meet higher standards of quality, these programs receive additional funds and support.
- Continuation of the CAPS tiered bonus percentages of 5%, 10%, and 25% for one-, two-, and three-star Quality Rated providers, respectively.²⁵

A notable policy shift that significantly affected how DECAL views its role in supporting families was a change in required state-approved activities for families to qualify for CAPS. To be eligible, a parent (or parent authority) must meet the state-approved activity requirements at the time of application. In Georgia, the activity requirement for parents over age 21 is 24 hours per week engaged in employment or education or a combination of the two. Previously, courses taken within the Technical College System of Georgia (TSCS) did not meet the activity requirement for CAPs participation. Beginning in 2018, that was changed and the new policy reads as follows:

Each credit hour (or hour of on-line or in-person coursework) for GED, vocational training, and associate degree programs equates to two hours of state-approved activity to account for study time. For example, six credit hours of education equates to 12 hours of state-approved activity.²⁶

Two critical data points led to this change. First, a vast majority of the parents of the 50,000 children who received CAPS had some college experience but no degree (see Figure 2.3). These parents would benefit significantly from TCSG programs designed to engage adult learners and provide them efficient pathways to certifications and associate's degrees to help them on their career path.



²³ For details about Georgia's CCDF plan, see dec.al.ga.gov/BfTS/CCDFPlan.aspx.

²⁴ Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. 2018. *Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) State Plan for Georgia FY 2019-2021*. Retrieved from dec.al.ga.gov/documents/attachments/CCDFExecSummary.pdf

²⁵ Quality Rated is Georgia's system to determine, improve, and communicate the quality of programs that provide child care. Quality Rated assigns one, two, or three stars to early education and school-age care programs that meet or exceed the minimum state requirements. By participating in Georgia's voluntary Quality Rated program, child care providers make a commitment to work continuously to improve the quality of care they provide to children and families. See qualityrated.org/.

²⁶ Bernhard, K., and M. Todd. 2018. *TwoGen Georgia: Parents and Children Thriving Together*. Presentation to the Alliance of Education Agency Heads.

²⁷ Bernhard and Todd, 2018.

Second, in 2015–2016, 27% of all students enrolled in the TCSG were females with dependents.²⁸ National research shows that student parents with access to campus child care have triple the on-time graduation rate of parents without such access. Moreover, offering child care supports through the campus increases community college graduation of single parents by 20 percentage points, a 253% increase.²⁹

The GEEARS/Metro Atlanta Chamber survey of parents also found that disruptions in child care impacted parents' post-secondary and workforce training programs.³⁰

- Nearly a quarter of surveyed parents reported turning down an opportunity to enroll in school or participate in a work training program.
- Overall, 7% reported having been dropped from a roster at school or at a work training program:
 - 15.0% of those currently attending school
 - 30.9% of those currently enrolled in a work training program
- Among those currently enrolled, 46.2% had missed school in the past six months, and 68.8% had missed work training.

The TCSG is the home of Georgia's technical colleges, adult literacy programs, and a host of economic and workforce development programs. The TCSG's mission is to "provide technical, academic, and adult education and training focused on a well-educated, globally competitive workforce in Georgia."³¹ It is a critical resource for Georgians to obtain entry-level work certifications, begin their post-secondary credential journey, and start on a pathway to economic self-sufficiency. With so many TCSG students also being parents themselves, a critical element of their success is safe and stable child care for their children.

DECAL developed the rule change in the CAPS program in partnership with the TCSG. By allowing TCSG credit hours to count as a required activity, both institutions are able to support their target populations simultaneously, a true two-generation approach. See Sidebar – DECAL Two-Gen Innovation Grants. This partnership allows parents currently enrolled in TCSG programs to connect with child care and family supports. At the same time, it connects parents of young children in the child care system with workforce training and expanded post-secondary education options.

DECAL TWO-GEN INNOVATION GRANTS (TGIG)³²

In 2016, Georgia was selected as one of five states to receive the Parents and Children Thriving Together (PACTT) grant from the National Governors Association and the Center for Law and Social Policy. With this grant, Georgia is advancing a two-generation (two-gen) approach to support children from low-income families with high-quality early learning, while supporting their families in attaining the education, training, and, ultimately, the jobs that lead to economic self-sufficiency.

In 2018, Two-Gen Innovation Grants (TGIG) were awarded to Clarke, Bibb, and Clayton counties, all areas that had existing partnerships involving community agencies focused on two-gen strategies. During the implementation year, each county was tasked with expanding those relationships as well as exploring the option to include other agencies that would assist with the growth of the two-gen work within their community.

At the end of 2018, DECAL, in partnership with the University System of Georgia and the TCSG, made available two new funding opportunities—a capacity-building grant and an implementation grant—to pilot or expand community strategies that connect the early learning, post-secondary, and workforce systems at the local level. Communities were asked to implement two-gen strategies that will impact both children's ability to access high-quality early learning and their parents' ability to obtain jobs that provide family-supporting wages that foster greater economic security.

28 Bernhard and Todd, 2018.

29 Gault, B., J. Milli, and L. Reichlin Cruse. 2018, June 6. *Investing in Single Mothers' Higher Education: Costs and Benefits to Individuals, Families, and Society*. Retrieved from Institute for Women's Policy Research: iwpr.org/publications/investing-single-mothers-higher-ed/.

30 Goldberg et al., 2018.

31 See tcsgeu.edu/about-tcsg/.

32 Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. 2018. 2019 Two-Gen Innovation Grants (TGIG) Community Proposal. Retrieved from [decals.ga.gov/documents/attachments/2019TGIG\(Expansion\).pdf](http://decals.ga.gov/documents/attachments/2019TGIG(Expansion).pdf).

In addition to the rule change, the first level of collaboration between DECAL and the TCSG was a joint training between CAPS staff members and front-line workers in the TCSG, including student-parent navigators, special population coordinators, and others in similar positions. This training not only allowed each program to understand the offerings of the other, it also began to create trusting relationships among the program staff, which has helped facilitate referrals and cross-agency collaboration.³³ The partnership with TCSG is not the only two-generation work DECAL is engaging. See the sidebar for more information about how DECAL is supporting two-generation work.

Action Steps for Georgia

It is a statistic that we all know well: By 2020, 60% of jobs in Georgia will require some form of post-secondary education, ranging from a certificate to a university degree.³⁴ Georgia has set a goal to increase the number of post-secondary graduates by 250,000 by the year 2025. Meanwhile, economic opportunities are on the rise in Georgia as the economy is expanding. Employer job postings have grown over 150% since 2010, outpacing the national growth rate.³⁵ Despite this increase in the number of jobs available, many potential workers are unemployed or underemployed. These factors indicate that Georgia is experiencing a talent gap, meaning there is a mismatch between the degrees and skills needed by employers and the degrees and skills held by the population.

At the same time, child care issues impact a significant number of the employees who are currently engaged in the workforce. Moreover, these same challenges impact the pipeline of new graduates by creating barriers to post-secondary completions. As previously stated, challenges associated with child care cost Georgia's economy nearly \$2 billion annually.³⁶

The GEEARS/Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce survey and report recommends that Georgia invest in solutions that allow more parents to access consistent, high-quality, and affordable child care. The report also highlights the role employers can play in implementing family-friendly policies and retention strategies, such as helping employees secure child care, providing on-site child care options, or offering flexible scheduling. Finally, both public and private investments are needed to implement a two-generation approach that supports children and their parents who are either engaged in the workforce or enrolled in post-secondary or work training programs. See the sidebar "Two-Generation Support Strategies" for more information.

Best practice research from EdQuest Georgia shows that countries and states with policies that support parents' access to work and economic advancement opportunities have better student outcomes. The combination of the reforms to the CAPS program and the two-gen work currently being undertaken are good places to start. However, many Georgia families, across all income levels, are still facing barriers to steady employment due to child care instability. New state leaders in Georgia need to set forth a strong policy agenda that expands access to early learning for all families, especially those living in poverty who are trying to navigate a pathway to prosperity. This requires advocating for sufficient funding for the child care subsidy program, onsite child care at businesses and post-secondary campuses, and other programs that meet the needs of young children and their families.

³³ Bernhard and Todd, 2018.

³⁴ Carnevale, A., N. Smith, and J. Strohl. 2013. *Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements through 2020*. Georgia State Report. Washington, DC: Center on Education and the Workforce.

³⁵ Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce. 2016. *Georgia: Your Talent Your Future, Educators and Policy Makers Report*. Atlanta: Metro Atlanta Chamber.

³⁶ Goldberg et al., 2018.

TWO-GENERATION SUPPORT STRATEGIES³⁷

Boost Child Care Initiative: Two-Generation Scholarships and Advocacy

Quality Care for Children (QCC) provides low-income college student parents with child care scholarships, which are paid directly to the child care program, through its *Boost: Making College Possible* program. QCC is implementing this program in partnership with four Georgia universities: Clayton State, Columbus State, Savannah State, and Georgia Southern–Armstrong Campus, Savannah. Current data indicate that 62% of parents who participated in Boost graduated on time, viewed by program administrators as a remarkable accomplishment in light of national data that suggest only 33% of single student-parents complete their degree after six years.

Flexible and On-Site Child Care Options

In 2018, Piedmont Athens Regional Hospital, with support from private donors as well as DECAL and Georgia Department of Community Affairs, opened the doors to its Child Development Center. The center, located on the hospital campus, is an important resource to hospital staff and the surrounding community. The hospital offers a variable schedule that works well with hospital employees who generally engage in shift work, overnight, and/or weekend hours.

Investment in early learning is an economic development strategy. As previously stated, 66% of young children in Georgia their parents engaged in the workforce. For Georgia's economy to continue to grow, families with young children must be considered a priority.

³⁷ Goldberg et al., 2018.



TEACHING: ELEVATING THE PROFESSION...NOW!

Issue Overview

Work, occupations, and professions has been a subject of study for decades, and researchers have developed what is known as the professional model, a series of organizational and occupational characteristics associated with professions and professionals. This model allows one to distinguish professions and professionals from other kinds of work and workers. The criteria include rigorous training and licensing requirements, positive working conditions, an active professional organization or association, substantial workplace authority, relatively high compensation, and high prestige. From this viewpoint, occupations can be assessed according to the degree to which they do or do not exhibit the characteristics of the professional model.³⁸

In 2015, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) surveyed more than 53,000 educators across the state to understand teacher job satisfaction and reasons for wanting to leave the profession. Georgia, like states across the country, suffers from teacher shortages across the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields, special education, and bilingual/English language learner education. This shortage is driven by a combination of a decrease in enrollments in teacher education programs and teacher attrition. In fact, the bulk of the demand for teachers is caused by attrition, teachers leaving the classroom. Most teachers who leave the profession before retirement list “dissatisfaction with teaching conditions” as their primary reason.³⁹

The GaDOE survey found that teachers reported feeling devalued and constantly under pressure. Two out of three teacher respondents stated that they are unlikely or very unlikely to recommend teaching as a profession to a student about to graduate high school.⁴⁰

Educating children requires specialized knowledge and skills and deserves the same status and standing as other traditional professions. For a state to attract and maintain a highly qualified, effective teaching pool, educators need to feel they are valued for their expertise. How does Georgia professionalize teaching to inspire a shared spirit of high standards and public service—a sense of professionalism—among both those inside and outside of education?

38 Ingersoll, R., and E. Merrill. 2011. The Status of Teaching as a Profession. In J. Ballantine and J. Spade (eds.), *Schools and Society: A Sociological Approach to Education* (pp. 185-189). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

39 Sutchter, L., L. Darling-Hammond, and D. Carver-Thomas. 2016. *A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortages in the US: Research Brief*. Washington, DC: Learning Policy Institute.

40 Owens, S.J. 2015. *Georgia's Teachers Dropout Crisis: A Look at Why Nearly Half of Georgia Public-School Teachers Are Leaving the Profession*. Atlanta: Georgia Department of Education.

Significance for Georgia

2018 became known as “the year of the teacher strike.”⁴¹ Beginning in West Virginia and spreading to other states like Oklahoma, Arizona, Kentucky, and North Carolina, teachers walked out of the classroom demanding better pay and, in some cases, general increases in school funding. Georgia has not seen its teachers rising up in this way, primarily due to increased attention and debates on school funding issues over the past several years. In 2018, under the leadership of Governor Nathan Deal, the Georgia legislature increased overall school funding and finally did away with years-long austerity cuts to the K-12 funding formula.

However, that does not mean Georgia does not have issues that need to be addressed to ensure high-quality teachers are recruited and retained in classrooms across the state. A feeling remains that educators are not valued at the same level as other highly regarded professions, impacting both retention and recruitment.

Wages

Professionals typically are well compensated and receive relatively high salary and benefit levels throughout their careers. The assumption is that, given the lengthy training and the complexity of the knowledge and skills required, relatively high levels of compensation are necessary to recruit and retain capable and motivated individuals.⁴²

In Georgia, the average teacher salary was \$55,532 in 2017, which was 23rd in the nation for teacher pay, slightly less than the national average of \$59,660.⁴³ In the current state salary structure (fiscal year (FY) 2019), the base salary of \$34,092 is set, and teachers receive step increases based on their number of years of experience in the classroom and education level. Under this structure, only years of teaching experience and education level are used to determine annual salaries.

Georgia has attempted to reform how teachers are compensated. Most recently, in 2015 Governor Nathan Deal appointed the Education Reform Commission (ERC) to develop recommendations to reshape Georgia’s education system across multiple areas: funding, early education, Move On When Ready, expanding educational opportunities and school choice, and teacher recruitment, retention, and compensation. In its final recommendations regarding salary structure, the ERC proposed developing guidance to assist individual districts in designing and administering their own compensation models for teachers that would, at a minimum, account for teacher effectiveness.⁴⁴

While that specific recommendation has not been implemented, some local school systems are currently experimenting with alternative compensation models based on district need and teacher performance. See the sidebar “Gwinnett County Performance-Based Pay Model” for more details. These districts have waived the standard state salary model, which is driven only by years of experience and education level. Georgia’s tiered-certification system allows for a career ladder for classroom teachers, but those differing levels of certification have not been tied to teacher pay in the state salary model. As these are relatively new experiments, results on the success of these programs have yet to be determined.

41 Hess, R. 2018, October 23. Sketching a Workable Way Forward on Teacher Pay [Web log post]. Retrieved from *Education Week*: blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rick_hess_straight_up/2018/10/sketching_a_workable_way_forward_on_teacher_pay.htm.

42 Ingersoll and Merrill, 2011.

43 National Education Association. 2018, April. *Rankings of the States 2017 and Estimates of School Stastics 2018*. Retrieved from www.nea.org/assets/docs/180413-Rankings_And_Estimates_Report_2018.pdf.

44 Education Reform Commission. 2015. *Final Recommendations to Governor Nathan Deal*. Atlanta: Office of the Governor.

GWINNETT COUNTY PERFORMANCE-BASED PAY MODEL⁴⁵

In the fall of 2015, Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) began a three-year process to implement a flexible compensation system that incorporated educator performance into its pay model rather than solely years of service. The new Performance-Based Compensation System for Teachers will compensate individual teachers who meet expectations on their performance evaluations and will reward top performers with additional financial awards.

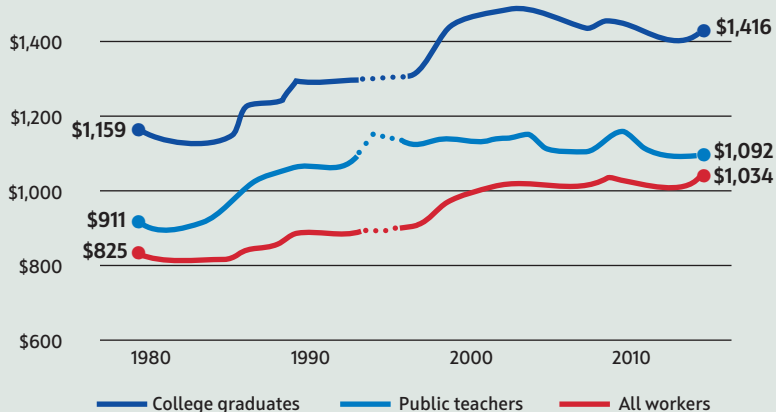
In August 2017, GCPS transitioned all teachers and certified staff compensated on the district's teacher salary schedule to a Performance-Based Salary Schedule. This salary schedule acknowledges performance – not time on the job – as the impetus for movement on the salary schedule. Under the Performance-Based Salary Schedule, a teacher advances one "performance step" for the next contract year upon achieving a rating of "Proficient" or higher on his or her annual teacher assessment. Employees earning a rating of "Needs Development" or "Ineffective" will not move a performance step but will remain on their current step for the next contract year.

In addition to salaries, how teachers are compensated compared to other professions is also a measure of how "professionalized" the field of education is viewed by both those inside and outside of the field. In terms of a professional salary, teachers earn less money, on average, than their private-sector counterparts. In 2016, Georgia teacher wages were 72% of other similarly educated private-sector employees. The national average is 75% of similarly educated private-sector workers.⁴⁶

Not only do teachers earn less money than their professional counterparts, teacher salaries in real dollars have been declining over time. After adjusting for inflation, the average US teacher earned approximately \$30 less a week in 2017 than in 2000. In Georgia, teachers earned 7.14% less in 2017 than in 2000, the 10th largest decline in the nation.⁴⁷

With this overall decline, the gap between educators and private-sector employees has been increasing. While teachers are earning \$30 less a week, pay for graduates in other professions has increased approximately \$124 per week over that same time (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 AVERAGE WEEKLY WAGES OF PUBLIC-SCHOOL TEACHERS, OTHER COLLEGE GRADUATES, AND ALL WORKERS, 1979–2015^{48,49}



As the best and brightest in Georgia are considering career choices, the knowledge that overall wages are not only declining in real dollars but that educators also face a growing wage gap compared to other professional fields can have a significant impact on whether they decide to pursue education as a career.

⁴⁵ Gwinnett County Public Schools. *Revising the Compensation System for GCPS Employees*. Retrieved from publish.gwinnett.k12.ga.us/gcps/home/public/employment/content/compensation/revise-compensation.

⁴⁶ Maciag, M. 2018, April 30. *Where Teacher Salaries Most Lag Behind Private Sector*. Retrieved from [Governing, The States and Localities: www.governing.com/topics/education/gov-teacher-salaries-private-sector-pay.html](http://governing.com/topics/education/gov-teacher-salaries-private-sector-pay.html).

⁴⁷ Allegretto, S.A., and L. Mishel. 2016, August. *The Teacher Pay Gap Is Wider Than Ever: Teacher Pay Continues to Fall Further Behind Pay of Comparable Workers*. Retrieved from Economic Policy Institute: www.epi.org/files/pdf/110964.pdf.

⁴⁸ Allegretto and Mishel, 2016, August.

⁴⁹ Note that "college graduates" excludes public-school teachers, and "all workers" encompasses everyone, including public-school teachers and college graduates.

Benefits

Of course, salary is only a portion of total compensation provided to educators. They also receive traditional benefits such as access to health insurance and retirement, which is a significant component of educator compensation and tool for recruitment and retention of educators. Georgia's Teachers Retirement System (TRS) is a statewide defined benefit plan that provides lifetime monthly benefits for retirees. A defined benefit plan is a guaranteed annual pension based on factors such as retirement age, years of service, and salary.⁵⁰

Under the current system, all members of the TRS contribute 6% of their earnable compensation through payroll deductions. Additionally, as of FY 2019, employers contribute 20.9% of a member's earnable compensation. These rates are set by the Georgia legislature and are subject to adjustment.

These contributions are repaid through monthly payments once normal retirement age is reached and employment terminated. Participants reach normal retirement after

- Completion of 30 years of service at any age
- Completion of 10 years of service at age 60 or older.

Monthly benefits are calculated through a formula that considers years of service, the two-year final average salary, and a 2% multiplier.⁵¹ See Table 3.1 for benefit details.

Table 3.1 GEORGIA TRS FACTS AND FIGURES⁵²

FY 2018 STATISTICS	RETIREES WITH 25+ YEARS OF SERVICE
28 Median age of new members K-12 teaching	30.5 Average years of service
36 Median age of all new members	59.5 Average age at retirement
\$4.7 Billion benefits paid	\$2,331 Average monthly benefit for new retirees
7,321 Retirements processed	\$3,169 Average monthly benefit for all retirees

Recently, there has been concern over the sustainability of the TRS. Over the past two years, the Georgia legislature had to authorize nearly \$600 million (\$223 million in 2017 and \$361 million in 2018) to ensure the financial security of the system.

The Great Recession set the system back significantly, as it counts on a certain rate of return on investments. Even with strong stock performances over the past few years, the TRS has not fully recovered from those losses. Moreover, the number of teachers and employees contributing to the fund had dropped by about 15,000 at one point because jobs were eliminated or positions went unfilled. While some of those teaching and state jobs have since returned, fewer active workers are now paying into the fund than in 2009. Meanwhile, more retirees are drawing from the fund as baby boomers begin to retire. The combination of these factors had put considerable stress on the system.⁵³

50 Teachers Retirement System of Georgia. 2018, July 10. Teachers Retirement: Policy, Sustainability, & Maximizing the System for Supporting Education in Georgia. Retrieved from Georgia Association of Educational Leaders: www.gael.org/uploads/conference_presentation/1531921085-a50b97b9d05ecd0a8/TRS_presentation.pdf.

51 Teachers Retirement System of Georgia, 2018, July 10. Teachers Retirement.

52 Teachers Retirement System of Georgia, 2018, July 10. Teachers Retirement.

53 Salzer, J. 2018, March 5. Ga Lawmakers Say Teacher Pensions Need Fixing, Just Not Now. Retrieved from *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: politics.myajc.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/lawmakers-say-teacher-pensions-need-fixing-just-not-now/wUEq3TmyEOXSfoB1TlpmDL/.

TRS administrators contend that the system is now stable and getting stronger. Employer contributions are expected to be 20.9% for FY 2019 and to rise again to 21.14% in FY 2020. However, based on rate of return projections, the expected contributions will be reduced to 16.93% by 2024.⁵⁴ This analysis indicates that the TRS is strengthening its position and recovering from the financial crisis of the past few years.

However, views about the long-term financial viability of the current TRS structure differ. The Georgia Public Policy Foundation (GPPF), together with the Pension Integrity Project at the Reason Foundation, concludes that the Georgia TRS has several shortcomings that could further degrade its long-run solvency, primarily the assumptions about future rates of return on investments.⁵⁵

The TRS is funded through a combination of employee and employer contributions and investment earnings. Current projections are based on an assumed rate of return of investments of 7.5%. Actual returns were 12.5% in FY 2017 and 8.94% in FY 2018.⁵⁶ The GPPF study is concerned that the 7.5% return is unrealistic and worries that actual returns over the next 10 to 20 years will be lower. In GPPF's calculations, a 6.5% rate of return would raise employer contributions to 22% by FY 2040, and a 5.5% average would push them as high as 27%. This increased burden on local school systems would require them to shift money away from teacher salaries, classroom supplies, and other vital expenditures.⁵⁷

In terms of current solvency, pension experts prefer a pension liability coverage at 80% or higher, meaning the system can pay out 80% of what it owes. For 2018, Georgia's funded ratio was 79%,⁵⁸ which puts the TRS in a stronger position than systems in many other similarly sized states. A Pew Charitable Trusts study found the US average to be 66% and ranked the strength of Georgia's TRS among the top 20 in the nation.⁵⁹

Others argue that, irrespective of financial solvency, the structure of a defined benefit (DB) system like the TRS no longer serves the needs of today's educator force. Historically in education, the rationale for using a DB program was that teachers would accept comparatively lower salaries in exchange for generous retirement benefits. This requires them to stay in education, in the same state, for many years. And because pension benefits are not usually portable across state lines, teachers typically incur large mobility costs if they do not remain in a system for their entire career. Nationally, the average experience of a teacher who leaves the profession is 15 years, and fewer than one in four stays more than 20 years. Under a DB program, many teachers will never see a "benefit."⁶⁰

In Georgia, members become vested after 10 years and are eligible to retire at 60 years old with at least 10 years of service credit or at any age once they achieve 30 years of service. A 2015 study conducted by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission found that 13% of Georgia's newly hired teachers left after their first year. After five years, 44% of those newly hired in 2010 were no longer teaching.⁶¹ Thus, a significant portion of the teacher workforce will never benefit from a system they were required to pay into since their first day on the job.

54 Teachers Retirement System of Georgia, 2018, July 10. Teachers Retirement.

55 Sidorova, J., A. Niraula, K. Wingfield, and L. Gilroy. 2018, September. *Georgia's Teachers Retirement System: Historic Solvency Analysis and Prospects for the Future*. Retrieved from Georgia Public Policy Foundation: www.georgiapolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/IATRSUpdated09272018_no_markup.pdf.

56 Teachers Retirement System of Georgia, 2018, July 10. Teachers Retirement.

57 Sidorova et al., 2018.

58 Teachers Retirement System of Georgia, 2018, July 10. Teachers Retirement.

59 The Pew Charitable Trusts. 2018, April 12. *The State Pension Funding Gap: 2016*. Retrieved from PEW, Issue Briefs: www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2018/04/the-state-pension-funding-gap-2016.

60 Lueken, M.F. 2017, January. *(No) Money in the Bank: Which Retirement Systems Penalize New Teachers?* Retrieved from Thomas B. Fordham Institute: edexcellence.net/publications/no-money-in-the-bank.

61 Henson, K., C. Stephens, T. Hall, and C. McCampbell, C. 2015. *The 2015 Georgia Public P-12 Teacher Workforce: A Status Report*. Atlanta: Georgia Professional Standards Commission.

Alternatively, six states offer 401(k)-style defined contribution (DC) plans. Under a DC plan, a teacher's benefit is equal to her or his own contributions, the contributions of her or his employer, and investment earnings on both. DC plans are portable, and the accrued amount can be taken with the teachers if they chose to teach in another state or leave the profession altogether. Nine states offer hybrid plans, which combine a DB and DC component. These plans tend to become fully portable after approximately 10 years.⁶²

Professional Pathways

Lower than average wages, coupled with a narrow career ladder, are further barriers to retaining effective teachers and hinder a sense of professionalism. Historically, teachers have had few opportunities to advance their careers without leaving the classroom. This can result in educator burnout, stress, and dissatisfaction, especially among mid-career teachers.

To address this issue, Georgia has implemented career ladders that allow teachers to stay in the classroom, advance their careers, and support teacher leadership. The teacher certification system is tiered, consisting of four levels of licensure and five different certifications. This system establishes a pathway for teachers to advance within the profession while remaining in the classroom and provides a process for recognizing excellent teachers.⁶³

Part of that career ladder is to formalize teacher leadership in the classroom. Research has shown that engaging teachers as leaders can promote a culture of collective responsibility and shared accountability for school improvement in our most struggling schools.⁶⁴ Within their education programs, nine colleges and universities across the state offer an advanced degree program in teacher leadership,⁶⁵ and Georgia is the only state that has a specific certification related to teacher leadership. In addition to the full-field leader certificate, Georgia also offers endorsements in specific areas to recognize additional expertise, such as the Teacher Leader Endorsement and the Coaching Endorsement.

Finally, either the Teacher Leader certification or endorsements can be used to upgrade a teaching certificate to a Lead Professional certificate. The Lead Professional certificate is for teachers who positively impact other teachers and adults.

Schools and districts can benefit by encouraging high-performing teachers to apply for and maintain a Lead Professional certification, as these teachers serve important roles in improving the teaching and learning in their schools. Lead Professional-certified teachers are equipped to coach and mentor new teachers and those who are striving to improve their practice.

As previously mentioned, some local school systems are currently experimenting with alternative compensation models based on district need and teacher performance or differing certification levels as described above. However, the current state salary scale still only accounts for years of experience and education level.

62 Lueken, 2017, January.

63 For a complete description, see Georgia Professional Standards Commission. 2014, October 30. *Understanding the 2014 Educator Certification Rule Changes*. Retrieved from www.gapsc.com/Commission/policies_guidelines/Downloads/2014EducatorCertificationRuleChanges.pdf, and Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. 2014. Issue 3, Teacher Preparation Programs. In *Top Ten Issues to Watch 2014*. Retrieved from www.gpee.org/fileadmin/files/PDFs/GPEE_Top_Ten_2014_Final.pdf.

64 GLISI. 2015, October. *Cultivating Teacher Leadership: Where Do Principals Begin?* Retrieved from glisi.org/resources/cultivating-teacher-leadership-glisi-research-brief/.

65 The following institutions have an approved program in Teacher Leadership: Augusta University, Clayton State University, Columbus State University, Georgia College and State University, Kennesaw State University, LaGrange College, Mercer University, Thomas University, and Valdosta State University. See www.gapsc.com/EducatorPreparation/ApprovedPrograms/EducationApprovedPrograms.aspx.

Action Steps for Georgia

The EdQuest Georgia research tells us that high-performing states and education systems have designed their processes to ensure high-quality teaching throughout by focusing on attracting talented students committed to the profession. Those students are subjected to rigorous preparation and induction systems and provided work environments and career pathways that support teacher learning and professional development. Each of these supports a commitment to professionalize teaching as an occupation.⁶⁶

Internationally, high-performing countries create an abundant supply of highly qualified teachers through the following strategies:⁶⁷

- Recruiting teachers from the top ranks of high school graduating classes, most in the top third to top quarter
- Having highly selective teaching training programs with admission rates ranging from 10% to 15%
- Developing rigorous requirements for subject mastery
- Requiring at least one year of supervised teaching (either during a teacher preparation program or during their first year of teaching) by serving as an apprentice to a Master Teacher
- Requiring research methods to be taught in teacher preparation programs that enable teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of their own work in implementing and improving curriculum, instruction, and assessment
- Setting beginning compensation at about the same level as beginning engineers
- Providing aggressive career ladders that include increased compensation, responsibility, authority, and autonomy
- Focusing on professional development and professional learning

LESSONS FROM HIGH-PERFORMING SYSTEMS: REFORMS IN SHANGHAI EMPHASIZE PROFESSIONALIZATION

1. The teacher career ladder is designed such that as teachers move toward the top, they are expected to lead teams of teachers doing serious instructional development work in the schools, researching the effects of their development projects on student achievement, and writing research papers on those projects that get reviewed in university-run, refereed journals.

2. Teachers in Shanghai are treated like real professionals in high-status fields and are given the tools, the career opportunities, the compensation, the recognition, and the status that come with a professionally structured occupation.

3. Creating a fully professional role for teachers in the Shanghai system was at the very heart of the strategy that Shanghai used to create one of the world's most successful education systems.

The recommendations put forth by Governor Deal's Education Reform Commission support many of these strategies currently being utilized by other high-performing systems. The subcommittee on teacher recruitment, retention, and compensation proposed a series of recommendations across those priority areas, including the following:⁶⁸

- Compensating teachers for increased responsibilities, such as mentoring
- Requiring a full year of preservice training
- Increased funding to provide competitive wages

⁶⁶ Darling-Hammond, L., D. Burns, C. Campbell, A. Lin Goodwin, K. Hammerness, E-L Low, A. McIntyre, M. Sato, and K. Zeichner. 2017. *Empowered Educators: How High Performing Systems Shape Teaching Quality Around the World*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

⁶⁷ Center on International Benchmarking. 2016. *9 Building Blocks for a World-Class Education System*. Washington, DC: National Center on Education and the Economy.

⁶⁸ For details on all 12 recommendations, see gov.georgia.gov/sites/gov.georgia.gov/files/related_files/document/FinalGovERCReport_121415.pdf.

Governor Deal also appointed a 90-member teacher advisory committee (TAC) to review the ERC's final recommendations and provide feedback in the two areas of teacher recruitment, retention, and compensation and Move On When Ready. The TAC analyzed all recommendations concerning teaching and Move On When Ready and provided additional thoughts on recruitment, retention, and compensation.⁶⁹

The TAC agreed with and supported several recommendations related to the professionalization of the field. A top priority was to maintain and preserve teacher planning time. This priority was linked to the recommendation to encourage state guidelines around the best and most respectful use of teacher instructional time. Both were viewed as essential to retaining teachers. While planning and instructional time are critical to promote student learning, protecting this time also signals a level of respect for the profession and the expertise of the teachers.

Members of the TAC were also eager to participate in the development and implementation of new compensation models. Teachers agreed that the ability to earn higher salaries earlier in a teacher's career would be an effective recruitment and retention tool. Stating that the first five years are often "burnout years," the teachers suggested increasing the beginning salary to retain teachers as they become more confident in their ability to teach. The TAC members also emphasized that allowing current teachers to choose whether to participate in any new compensation system developed by a district would be a positive step in gaining teacher support for new models.

As part of a total compensation and incentives package, both the ERC and TAC recommended reinstating service cancellable loans for students graduating from a University System of Georgia teacher education program. This was viewed as a vital recruitment tool for the profession.

Finally, the ERC recommended a study of Georgia's TRS to measure its long-term vitality. Teacher consensus was that the current defined-benefit retirement system is a positive retention factor that should be protected. The advisory group stated that being able to contribute to a 401(k) plan, in addition to the current DB plan, would be an attractive benefit and is currently available in some, but not all, districts.⁷⁰

As previously stated, there is some debate about the long-term viability and appeal of the current TRS. The GPPF study, which highlights concerns with the system's long-term viability, acknowledges that "operationally, TRS is a strong system that provides a valuable service to its members – but there are factors outside of its control that suggest it would be prudent for the TRS board and Georgia Legislature to consider a slate of improvements to improve solvency, help the pension system better manage risk and, ultimately, ensure that the state can deliver the promised retirement benefits to teachers."⁷¹ GPPF recommends adjusting assumptions of fund growth and consider alternative plan designs, such as a defined benefit plan or hybrid plan, to mitigate the risk of increasing pension debt.

Given the current stability of the TRS, there seems to be little appetite to make any substantial changes. However, in 2018 the Senate Budget Office did task the Georgia Department of Audits with studying impacts of reforming the system, assessing 401(k) plans and competitiveness, and evaluating potential reforms that would retain the competitive hiring benefit of having a defined benefit plan. As of the publication of this document, that study has not been completed.

69 Teacher Advisory Committee Report. 2016. Feedback from Teachers on Education Reform Commission Recommendations: Final Report Submitted to Governor Nathan Deal. Atlanta: Office of the Governor.

70 Teacher Advisory Committee Report, 2016.

71 Sidorova et al., 2018.

One immediate adjustment that would help support the TRS and address the teacher shortage across the state would be to allow retired educators to return to work full time while drawing retirement. Currently, retired TRS employees can only work in a TRS position part time (up to 83 hours per month as of June 2018) without jeopardizing their TRS monthly benefit. Allowing retired teachers back into the classroom, while still drawing their retirement, would decrease certified educator vacancies and add an estimated \$60 million a year back into the TRS.⁷²

An urgent opportunity for Georgia found in the EdQuest research is to recognize teachers as professionals. Professionalization includes how the profession is viewed, compensated, and mentored and supported for ongoing professional learning. Attracting and retaining talented professionals in the field means compensating and supporting that talent like professionals. In most cases, this will require additional revenue. To be clear, new revenue should not subsidize outdated pay systems that fail to create avenues for personal and professional growth or continue to overpay poor teachers. However, Georgia needs to develop a quality teaching and leadership plan, coupled with a schedule of investments in teaching professionals, that include (1) a total compensation structure, (2) tiered certification/career ladders, and (3) meaningful professional development. The result will help Georgia achieve the goal of a highly qualified, professional educator in every classroom.

72 Estimates provided by the TRS.



SCHOOL SAFETY: MUCH MORE THAN METAL DETECTORS

Issue Overview

We have all seen the headlines:

- Bullying preceded fatal shooting of Butler High student, officials say – *The Charlotte Observer*, October 29, 2018
- Police: North Las Vegas school shooting victim was a student – AP, September 3, 2018
- Child in critical condition, suspect sought following shooting outside Denver school – *Denver Post*, August 28, 2018
- In Texas school shooting, 10 dead, 10 hurt and many unsurprised – *New York Times*, May 18, 2018
- 16-year-old victim of Maryland school shooting dies, sheriff's office says – *Baltimore Sun*, March 23, 2018
- 17 killed in a mass shooting at a high school in Parkland, FL – NBC News, February 14, 2018.

These headlines are terrifying to students, educators, parents, and communities. They reignite polarizing debates about gun rights and school safety. They lead to demands that schools “do something now” to keep students safe. School, district, and state leaders are desperate to respond. State lawmakers across the country have proposed a total of 266 bills or resolutions on school safety since the Parkland shootings in February 2018, and 31 have passed, including two in Georgia.⁷³ Of the 31 passed bills, 12 provide new funding for physical safety measures and school police.

The debates about how to respond to school shootings specifically can overshadow a broader discussion of school safety more generally. School shootings, like those in Parkland, Florida, are still statistically rare, especially when compared to the safety issues schools deal with daily, such as bullying, fights, and theft. For certain, the physical security of a school building is important. However, “hardening schools” by installing visible security measures like metal detectors, armed guards, and police officers can have adverse effects. Studies have found that, undertaken in isolation as an approach to increase school safety, such measures can change students’ perception of school and actually make them feel less safe.⁷⁴

A comprehensive framework for school safety includes the physical safety of the building and also addresses issues of school climate, discipline, and the behavioral health of students and faculty. As schools and districts in Georgia address the issue of school safety, it is important to understand the full spectrum of safety issues. A genuinely safe school views efforts to improve school climate, safety, and learning not as separate endeavors but instead designs, funds, and implements a comprehensive school-wide approach.

⁷³ Blad, E. 2018, November 13. Schools Are Spending Millions on Safety. How Will They Know It's Working? Retrieved from *Education Week*: www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2018/11/14/schools-are-spending-millions-on-safety-how.html; National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL). 2018, August 13. School Safety Legislation. Retrieved from www.ncsl.org/research/education/school-safety.aspx.

⁷⁴ Blad, 2018; NCSL, 2018.

Significance for Georgia

In addressing school safety, schools and districts must properly understand the root causes and consequences of school violence and its impact on overall school safety. Extreme instances of violence, such as the school shootings that dominate the headlines, are not carried out in isolation but often are the result of other factors related to school safety. A wide variety of issues such as firearms, adult and student sexual misconduct, substance abuse, gangs, bullying, approaches to discipline, and the social-emotional health of both students and faculty all play a role in school safety. Each could be a facilitating or tempering factor in an ultimately extreme instance of violence.⁷⁵

School Climate

Across the country, and in Georgia, schools are focusing on improving school climate to reduce student discipline problems and increase school safety. A positive school climate is a significant contributor to improved student outcomes, including test scores, attendance, grade promotion, and graduation rates. A positive school climate is

*the product of a school's attention to fostering safety; promoting a supportive academic, disciplinary, and physical environment; and encouraging and maintaining respectful, trusting, and caring relationships throughout the school community no matter the setting—from pre-K/elementary school to higher education.*⁷⁶

KEY COMPONENTS OF SCHOOL CLIMATE⁷⁸

SAFETY: The physical and emotional safety of students and the rules and procedures in place to ensure student safety.

RELATIONSHIPS: Social support from staff and between and among students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING: A positive and professional student-staff relationship.

INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT: The physical environment of the school/ facility is welcoming, clean, well-kept and safe.

Research indicates that positive school climate is critical to overall school safety. A RAND Corporation study found that “school climate is the only school characteristic that consistently correlated with school violence.”⁷⁷ For more details, see the sidebar titled “Key Components of School Climate.”

The good news is that Georgia has already invested in prioritizing positive school climates through the School Climate Star Rating system and the implementation of PBIS (Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports). The School Climate Star Rating, published on the individual school report cards, is a combination

of student and parent perceptions, student data on discipline, safe and substance-free learning environment, and attendance. Schools receive one to five stars, depending on a number of factors. Schools with a School Climate Rating of five score an average of 26 points higher on the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI), Georgia’s school accountability system, compared to those with a one-star rating (see Figure 4.1).⁷⁹

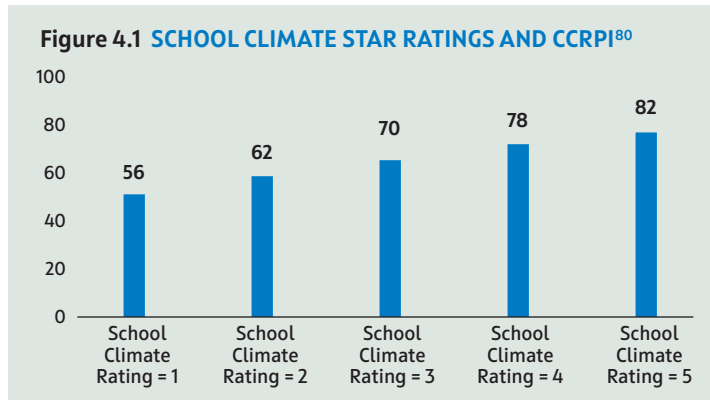
75 Carlton, M.P., P. Wyrick, N. Frederique, and B. Lopez. 2017. *States' Roles in Keeping School Safe: Opportunities and Challenges for State School Safety Centers and Other Actors*. Washington, DC: Comprehensive School Safety Initiative, National Institute of Justice.

76 National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments. 2018. *School Climate*. Retrieved from safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/safe-and-healthy-students/school-climate.

77 McGiboney, G. 2018, June 8. *Ga Board of Education: School Safety in Georgia*. Retrieved from Georgia Senate School Safety Study Committee: www.gasenatek12safety.com/committee-documents.

78 McGiboney, 2018, June 8, Ga Board of Education.

79 Georgia Department of Education. 2016. *Educating Georgia's Future 2016*. Atlanta: GaDOE.



Simply highlighting a school's climate is not enough to foster change, however. Implementing PBIS across the state is a valuable tool to create a positive environment that promotes learning. PBIS is an evidence-based, data-driven framework that has been proven to reduce disciplinary incidents, increase a school's sense of safety, and support academic outcomes. Beginning in 80 schools across Georgia in 2009, by 2017 PBIS was being implemented in more than 1,000 schools in 93 districts across the state. Georgia is among the top five states nationwide in the number of schools trained in school-wide PBIS. Since implementing PBIS, Georgia has achieved the following:⁸¹

- More than a 1600% increase in the number of schools participating in PBIS between 2009 and 2018
- More than 670,000 students enrolled in PBIS schools in 2017, an increase of 400,000 since 2015
- A 34% reduction in out-of-school suspensions
- A 14-percentage-point increase in high school graduation rates between 2011 (67%) and 2017 (81%)

A key component of a positive school climate is safety, both physical safety and emotional safety. Emotionally safe learning environments can be achieved by making social and emotional learning (SEL) an essential part of education. SEL is a process through which students acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve goals, feel and show empathy, maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. The SEL framework identifies five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Schools and districts that implement a SEL framework integrate these competencies into their instruction with reading, math, history, and other core subjects.⁸²

The outcomes related to implementing an SEL framework are dramatic. The promotion of these skills has been shown to have long-term life outcomes such as a reduction in the use of public housing, lower public assistance receipt, less involvement with the criminal justice system, and less use of mental health services. Finally, studies have shown that the SEL framework has a cost-benefit ratio of 11:1, meaning that for every \$1 invested in SEL, there is an \$11 return on investment.⁸³

Georgia has been working to embed SEL competencies across all state standards. For example, both ELA and art include a standard that speaks to "developing a personal voice," which relates to self-awareness. Another example is an emphasis on "problem-solving," which runs through nearly every subject, especially mathematics and the sciences. The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) also promotes SEL through several significant initiatives. One example is Literacy for Learning, Living, and Leading in Georgia, the state's competitive Striving Readers grant.

80 McGiboney, 2018, October 31. Schools Safety. Retrieved from GSSA 2018 Fall Bootstrap Conference Presentations: www.gssaweb.org/portfolio/gssa-2018-fall-bootstrap-conference-presentations.

81 McGiboney, 2018, June 8, Ga Board of Education.

82 CASEL. 2016. What Is SEL. Retrieved from www.casel.org/what-is-sel/.

83 CASEL. 2016. *SEL Impact*. Retrieved November 14, 2016, from CASEL: www.casel.org/impact/

*95% of this \$61.5 million grant is subawarded to district partnerships. Included in the grant are professional development options tied to social and emotional learning, especially as it relates to engagement for learning.*⁸⁴

Strong SEL competencies support the mental health of the student body. Social and emotional well-being leads to mental wellness and the development of soft social skills that are part of being a productive member of a community. Conversely, students' unmet mental health needs can be a significant obstacle to academic achievement and career and social/ emotional development, and they can compromise school safety.⁸⁵

Mental Health America's 2015 report on the condition of mental health care in the United States indicated that 8% of Georgia's children have a serious emotional disorder—that is 91,000 children.⁸⁶ The report further estimated that more than 85,000 children in Georgia have a mental health need for which they are not receiving support or treatment. Research on children's mental health shows the extent of the problem.⁸⁷

- Of school-age children who receive any mental health services, 70% to 80% receive them at school.
- 70% of youth in state and local juvenile justice systems have a mental illness.
- Suicide is the third-leading cause of death in youth ages 10–24, and 90% of those who die by suicide had an underlying mental illness.

GaDOE helps support many resources to address the mental health of students, including PBIS.⁸⁸ Individual school districts are also tackling the issues of social-emotional learning, student mental health, and school safety. For example, Forsyth County has brought together a collaborative team consisting of representatives from the district human resources, safety, student support services, teaching and learning, and technology departments to work with schools and the community to increase academic achievement and implement SEL in all classrooms. This interdisciplinary team began their work in 2017 by focusing on trainings for all school and district leaders about the importance of embracing social and emotional learning. The school system has also instituted a number of new initiatives to address the social and mental health of the study body. See the sidebar, Forsyth County Schools – Focus on the Whole Child, for more details.⁸⁹

84 Georgia Department of Education. 2017, Fall. *Georgia Project Aware Digest*. Retrieved from www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Documents/Project%20AWARE/GDAP-Fall17-final.pdf#search=SEL.

85 McGiboney, 2018, June 8, Ga Board of Education.

86 Nguyen, T. 2015. *Parity or Disparity: The State of Mental Health in America 2015*. Mental Health America.

87 Atkins, M.S., K.E. Hoagwood, K. Kutash, and E. Seidman. 2010, March. Toward the Integration of Education and Mental Health in Schools. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research* 37(1), 40–47.

88 Some other examples are Youth Mental Health First Aid, Signals 1, the Apex Project, Suicide Prevention, Trauma-Informed Schools, and 2nd Step Violence Prevention. For more information, see www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/CTAE/Documents/Mental_Health_in_Schools.pdf#search=Apex%20Project.

89 Georgia Department of Education. 2017, Fall. *Georgia Project Aware Digest*. Retrieved from www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Documents/Project%20AWARE/GDAP-Fall17-final.pdf#search=SEL.

FORSYTH COUNTY SCHOOLS – FOCUS ON THE WHOLE CHILD⁹⁰

Forsyth County Schools (FCS) has been working on several initiatives that support SEL and school safety.

Mentor Program – The Mentor Program utilizes adult, student, and teacher mentors to meet with students for 30 minutes per week throughout the school year. Mentors work with students on social and emotional, communication, and interpersonal skills to prepare them for success. Mentors serve as essential role models and develop positive relationships with many of the county's students.

Prevention Services – District staff are implementing two new programs: Signs of Suicide in middle and high school, and Sources of Strength in high school. These programs educate students, parents, and educators about suicide prevention. The district is an active member of the Forsyth County Drug Awareness Council and the United Way Mental Health Committee. FCS continues to work with these teams to ensure substance use issues are being communicated to and to educate the community. As an offshoot of this work, all school nurses have been trained in the use of Naloxone to treat opioid overdoses.

Interagency Collaboration and District-Level Mental Health Support – District social workers continue to work with law enforcement officials, the judicial system, and community health care professionals to address the needs of students and families in the district. FCS has designated a social worker, trained in mental health procedures and practices, to work as a mental health services coordinator. This coordinator supports school leaders, teachers, counselors, and families in dealing with mental health concerns and has begun building a strong mental health program that addresses the needs of students. In addition, counselors and social workers are being trained to provide mindfulness and movement strategies to aid students in dealing with emotional stress and developing strategies to bring calmness to their bodies and minds.

Formation of Total Wellness Collaborative Team – A team system and school leaders has been charged with developing and exploring ways of ensuring the successful growth of the “whole child.” This school-community partnership is dedicated to helping develop a comprehensive strategic plan that considers health in the following areas: intellectual, physical, emotional, social, and environmental.

Student Advocacy Specialist (SAS) – FCS have an SAS in each K-12 vertical cluster to provide guidance for at-risk students and their families. The SAS collaborates with district safety personnel, student support teams, law enforcement, and other school personnel as well as agencies and private resources specializing in support for at-risk students. The primary purpose of an SAS is to be an advocate and a trusted ally to the student, with the goal of providing students someone they can turn to in a time of crisis instead of harming themselves or others. The SAS also facilitates threat assessments and crisis intervention plan implementation.

Many behavioral disorders that may ultimately threaten school safety are rooted in a clinically diagnosed mental health condition. However, other root causes of behavior can be found in early literacy and language development. Language development is the foundation for social, emotional, and mental health development – all of which impact a student's ability to learn. It is estimated that 12% of students entering school across the US have a language impairment, putting them at greater risk for social, emotional, and behavioral problems.⁹¹

Moreover, language ability significantly predicts the development of attention deficits and behavioral problems, more so than gender, ethnicity, or poverty. Language development also is a stronger predictor of behavioral problems later in life more so than current behavioral problems impacted later language ability.⁹²

90 GaDOE, 2017, Georgia Project Aware Digest.

91 Rvachew, S. 2018, October. Language Development and Literacy. Retrieved from *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development*: www.child-encyclopedia.com/language-development-and-literacy.

92 Petersen, I.T., J.E. Bates, B.M. D'Onofrio, C.A. Coyne, J.E. Lansford, K.A. Dodge... C.A. Van Hulle. 2013. Language Ability Predicts the Development of Behavior Problems in Children. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 122(2), 542-557. doi.org/10.1037/a0031963.

Language impairments are significant factors for Georgia students who struggle the most, as evidenced by the following statistics:

- Youth in the juvenile justice system are up to five times more likely than their nonoffending peers to have a language disability, reducing their ability to benefit from talk-based therapies designed to reduce recidivism.⁹³
- More than two-thirds of youth in secure detention facilities have below-average language skills.⁹⁴

Recent Legislation

As previously mentioned, during the 2018 legislative session, the Georgia General Assembly passed two bills to address student safety that became law. Both focus on promoting student mental health and a positive school climate as an essential determinant of school safety.

The first, House Bill (HB) 740, requires a local school system to implement a multitiered system of supports and review prior to either expelling or suspending a student enrolled in pre-kindergarten through third grade for five or more consecutive days during a school year.⁹⁵ A multitiered system of support, such as a response to intervention, is a framework of identifying and addressing the academic and behavioral needs of a student through a tiered systems approach. This approach supports efforts to identify potential behavioral and mental health challenges early in a child's schooling and address those needs.

The second was HB 763, which addresses compulsory attendance for students in K-12 public schools by expanding the scope of the attendance protocol committee in each county to include school climate.⁹⁶ Specifically, it reads:

*The chief judge of the superior court of each county shall establish a student attendance and school climate committee for such county. The purpose of the committee shall be to ensure coordination and cooperation among officials, agencies, and programs involved in compulsory attendance issues, to reduce the number of unexcused absences from school, to increase the percentages of students present to test which are required to be administered under the laws of this state, and to improve the school climate.*⁹⁷

This legislation calls for the attendance committee to

*make recommendations for policies relating to school climate for the purpose of promoting positive gains in student achievement scores, student and teacher morale, community support, and student and teacher attendance, while decreasing student suspensions, expulsions, dropouts, and other negative aspects of the total school environment.*⁹⁸

HB 763 also requires coordination with local law enforcement agencies and the juvenile court system in school safety plans. The law requires that all school safety plans include, at a minimum, the following:⁹⁹

93 Hopkins, T., J. Clegg, and J. Stackhouse. 2018. Examining the Association between Language, Expository Discourse and Offending Behavior: An Investigation of Direction, Strength and Independence. *International Journal of Language and Communications Disorder* 53(1), 113-129.

94 Bryan, K., J. Freer, and C. Furlong. 2007. Language and Communication Difficulties in Juvenile Offenders. *International Journal of Language and Communications Disorders* 42(5), 505-520.

95 National Conference of State Legislators. 2018, August. School Safety Legislation. Retrieved from www.ncsl.org/research/education/school-safety.aspx.

96 National Conference of State Legislators, 2018.

97 See gov.georgia.gov/sites/gov.georgia.gov/files/related_files/document/HB763.2018.pdf.

98 See gov.georgia.gov/sites/gov.georgia.gov/files/related_files/document/HB763.2018.pdf

99 See gov.georgia.gov/sites/gov.georgia.gov/files/related_files/document/HB763.2018.pdf

1. Training school administrators, teachers, and support staff, including but not limited to, school resource officers, security officers, secretaries, custodians, and bus drivers, on school violence prevention, school security, school threat assessment, mental health awareness, and school emergency planning best practices;
2. Evaluating and refining school security measures;
3. Updating and exercising school emergency preparedness plans;
4. Strengthening partnerships with public safety officials; and
5. Creating enhanced crisis communications plans and social media strategies.

Action Steps for Georgia

In 2018, Georgia passed two laws aimed at increasing school safety by addressing student discipline policies related to behavioral and mental health and attendance protocols that support a positive school climate. One of them, HB 763, also made specific recommendations about school safety plans. Moreover, both the Georgia House of Representatives and the Georgia Senate set up study committees around the issue of school safety that met throughout 2018. Both committees addressed school safety and were looking for recommendations to help communities keep schools and children safe.

The Senate School Safety Study Committee issued its recommendations in the late fall of 2018.¹⁰⁰ The committee and its recommendations centered on three key areas aimed at strengthening school safety:

1. Crisis prevention
2. The physical security of school buildings, facilities, and buses
3. Emergency response

In regard to crisis prevention, the committee's primary recommendations focus on the mental health of students. The report calls for increased state funding for specialized mental health counselors. The committee also proposes possible legislation to allow local governments to use ESPLOST (education special-purpose local-option sales tax) funds to hire specifically trained mental health professionals. The committee also recommends specialized training for educators and school personnel, and a data-sharing agreement with local law enforcement and social services to help meet the mental, emotional, and educational needs of students.

In regard to physical security, the committee recommends that each school system conduct a threat assessment of all buildings and facilities and suggests that state agencies review current statewide building codes for schools, taking into account safety needs and modern construction materials. Finally, in regard to emergency response, the committee recommends coordination among law enforcement and emergency services departments as well as the creation of joint emergency response units. For a complete listing of recommendations, see the Georgia Senate School Safety Study Committee website: www.gasenatek12safety.com/committee-documents.

The EdQuest Georgia research shows that supportive learning environments are a key element of successful education systems. Many factors impact a student's ability to succeed in school. Some are directly related to academic instruction, and others, like the safety and health of the environments in which students learn and grow, are instrumental to student performance. Supportive learning environments provide safe and healthy spaces in which individuals respond to the needs of students that might otherwise create obstacles to learning.

¹⁰⁰ Georgia Senate Research Office. 2018, November. *Final Report of the Senate School Study Committee (Draft)*. Retrieved from www.gasenatek12safety.com/committee-documents.

School safety is a complex challenge, and one strategy alone will not address all elements of school safety. State and local leaders across Georgia are recognizing the complexity of this issue and what is necessary to meet the needs of each individual student. At the state level, that includes continued, and in some cases expanded, support for programs that impact school climate and support student learning, such as PBIS, mental health supports, language and literacy, and SEL competencies embedded into state standards. At the district level, this includes developing integrated strategies that incorporate such diverse elements as climate; prevention and intervention programs related to mental health; school facilities and personnel; student behavior and discipline policies; security hardware and security systems; safe school planning; coordination of communications between schools and local law enforcement, fire, and emergency experts; and teachers, parents, students, administrators, and community members working together.

Research shows that students must feel safe, welcomed, and respected at school and in their communities. They must be given opportunities to learn, engage, interact, mature, and grow to reach their academic potential, develop emotionally, and learn positive social lessons. A safe school environment is not an outcome in and of itself, but an important factor in ensuring positive student achievement across all of Georgia's schools.



FUNDING: IS FULLY FUNDED QBE ENOUGH?

Issue Overview

Nationally, discussions and policies around funding formulas for K-12 systems are shifting focus from equal funding across districts to considerations of equity. Unlike equal funding models, which provide all students regardless of need the same allotment of resources, the equity-based model takes into consideration that it simply costs more to educate some students than others. For example, low-income students tend to start school academically behind their higher income peers and require additional academic supports, extra learning time, and potentially outside services related to social services, physical and mental health, or housing.¹⁰¹

Of course, money is not the only thing that matters to school success. Districts with similar demographics and similar funding levels can, and do, produce very different outcomes for their students. However, inequalities in funding can fuel increasing inequalities within and across school systems. Simply put, districts with more resources can pay teachers more and attract higher quality teaching candidates. More affluent districts can provide students with enrichment activities and support services absent in cash-strapped districts.

What can be done to address inequalities in student outcomes? Increasing evidence suggests that substantive and sustained state school finance reform can improve both short- and longer-term student outcomes. Tied to effective policies, school finance reforms that focus on both *adequacy and equity* can reduce outcome disparities and increase overall outcome levels for all students.¹⁰²

Over the past two decades, K-12 funding discussions in Georgia have primarily focused on adequacy, with little attention being paid to equity. Since 2003, K-12 public education in Georgia has experienced a cumulative cut of more than \$9.2 billion in state funding.¹⁰³ During the leanest budget years, 2010–2014, school districts' budget cuts topped \$1 billion *annually*.

When Governor Nathan Deal took office in 2011, he worked to reduce the austerity cut as soon as state revenues began to increase. During his final year in office, Governor Deal announced a \$194 million increase in the 2019 estimated state revenue over initial projections, most of which he directed to K-12 funding. As a result, the fiscal year (FY) 2019 K-12 education budget was increased by \$167 million, which brought an end to the austerity cuts to the state funding formula. The magnitude of this achievement was not lost on those who had been following the state's budget challenges, as news headlines on March 27, 2018, read "Georgia's Next Budget to Fully Fund Education."¹⁰⁴

101 The Education Trust. 2015. *Funding Gaps 2015: Too Many States Still Spend Less on Educating Students Who Need the Most*. Washington, DC: The Education Trust.

102 Baker, B. 2014. *School Finance 101: The Real Path to Quality, Equitable, and Adequate Schooling*. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center.

103 Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. 2017. *Georgia Budget Primer 2018*. Atlanta: GBPI.

104 Tagami, T. 2018, March 27. Georgia's Next Budget to Fully Fund Education. Retrieved from *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: www.myajc.com/news/state--regional-education/more-money-for-schools-georgia-next-budget-fully-fund-education/UNFE66TMtVG4IMLgIQgkFO/.

Now that Georgia has “fully funded education,” many believe the state can move on to other topics of education policy. However, many questions remain. The Georgia Constitution includes language guaranteeing an adequate public education for all citizens. To date, lawmakers determine what the state is willing to spend in support of that promise, but that amount is different from what it would actually cost to fulfill. What exactly is an adequate public education? How much does it cost to provide all students with one? Is the amount Georgia is spending equal to what adequate education costs? Now that lawmakers have done away with the question of austerity cuts, what is next?

Significance for Georgia

Current Funding Model

In Georgia, the majority of state funds for public schools are provided according to the Quality Basic Education (QBE) formula, which was established by state legislation in 1985. The total amount of state revenue received by local districts is based on three factors: QBE earnings, categorical grants, and equalization grants.

The QBE is a highly complex formula consisting of 18 student categories based on grade and academic level, such as special education; career, technical, and agricultural education programs (CTAE); and so forth. The amounts are based on the class size of each category, which determines the number of teachers the state will fund for each district. The state’s salary schedule for teachers, which is based on education level and years of experience, determines how much money is allocated for each teacher. Essentially, districts “earn” money from the state based on how many teachers are required to meet their class-size needs.

The formula also provides funding for maintenance and operations, instructional materials, additional instructional and administrative staff, and other routine costs. These amounts are calculated on a per-student basis. Local school systems receive additional funding from the state in the form of categorical grants. These grants can include funds for transportation, sparsity (designated for areas with sparse populations), and low-incidence special education students.

Finally, because not all counties in Georgia have equal property tax wealth, the amount of funds localities can raise through the (standard) local 5-mill share varies substantially.¹⁰⁵ The state provides additional funding to these low-wealth counties according to an equalization formula that compares the relative property tax wealth of all counties in the state.

It is due to the combination of sparsity, low wealth, and other categorical grants that Georgia fares better than other states in distributing more funds to districts with higher percentages of low-income students. The Urban Institute, for example, found that Georgia is a relatively progressive state in terms of equitable funding between poor and non-poor students, where on average, poor students receive \$282 more than non-poor students. Comparatively, in nearly half of all states, students from low-income families receive less state and local funding than their non-poor counterparts.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Currently, the law mandates that all local systems in Georgia pay an amount equal to 5 mills of the property tax generated within their taxing authority. By law, the amount of money represented by the 5 mills cannot exceed 20% of the total QBE formula earnings. Funds raised through locally levied property taxes do not leave the school system and are not sent to the state or to other school systems. (Funds raised from bonds and special-purpose local-option sales taxes also are kept locally.) The 5-mill share is simply the amount of the local funding “obligation” the state requires each system to pay.

¹⁰⁶ Chingos, M.M., and K. Blagg. 2017. *Do Poor Kids Get Their Fair Share of School Funding?* Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from apps.urban.org/features/school-funding-do-poor-kids-get-fair-share/. See “State Funding” section.

Education Week also publishes an annual assessment of state education policy, which includes an overview of school finance. Its analysis examines both education spending patterns and equity in the distribution of funding across the districts within each state.¹⁰⁷ In terms of equity, Georgia received a B. In terms of adequacy, however, Georgia was not rated nearly as highly. *Education Week* gave Georgia an F grade on spending, bringing the state's overall school finance grade to a D+ when combined with the B in equity.¹⁰⁸ In total, for FY 2015, the most recent state comparison data available, Georgia's state per-pupil spending (\$9,476) ranked 38th in the nation (13th from the bottom), with the national average at \$11,454.¹⁰⁹ The aforementioned Urban Institute report ranked Georgia as eighth from the bottom in overall per-student spending.¹¹⁰ In FY 2019, with full funding of the QBE in place, Georgia's per pupil state allotment is \$9,637.¹¹¹

Flexibility and Local Control

Over the past decade, Georgia has moved away from a state-mandated centralized approach to decision-making toward a decentralized approach that values local input and control in its educational system. The 2007 Charter Systems Act granted school systems more autonomy by freeing them from many of the state's education regulations as specified in Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia. To help facilitate greater local control of public education, district leaders have been empowered with the flexibility and authority to lead their districts through student performance contracts between local boards of education and the State Board of Education (SBOE), operating as either a Charter System¹¹² or a Strategic Waiver School System (SWSS).¹¹³ All local school systems in Georgia, except for two, are either a Charter System or an SWSS.¹¹⁴

Embedded in these new performance contracts is also greater flexibility with respect to the QBE model. Most districts have embraced that flexibility by waiving the state salary schedule, a significant portion of the QBE calculation, and direct classroom expenditure controls that are normally dictated by the formula.^{115,116} Many charter systems have established school-level governance teams that have been given authority to set the budget and reallocate QBE funds in line with school priorities. In essence, all districts are exploring opportunities to allocate resources based on need.¹¹⁷ See the sidebar titled "Experiments in Funding Flexibility" for more one prominent example. Depending on their student populations and instructional needs, districts have the freedom, within these contracts, to allocate resources that prioritize English language learners, alternative education, gifted-talented, early reading, and so forth.

107 Education Week. 2018. State Grades on School Finance: Map and Rankings. Retrieved from www.edweek.org/ew/collections/quality-counts-2018-state-finance/state-grades-on-school-finance-map-and.html.

108 Education Week, 2018.

109 Cornman, S.Q., L. Zhou, M.R. Howell, and J. Young. 2017. Revenues and Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary Education: School Year 2014-15 (Fiscal Year 2015): First Look (NCES 2018-301). Washington, DC: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

110 Chingos and Blagg, 2017.

111 Georgia Department of Education. 2018. Earnings Sheet for FY 2019. Retrieved from Georgia Department of Education QBE Reports, State Allotment Sheet: app.doe.k12.ga.us/ows-bin/owa/qbe_reports.public_menu?p_fy=2000.

112 A charter system is a local school district that operates under the terms of a charter between the SBOE and the local school district. The system receives blanket flexibility from certain state rules and regulations regarding academic programs, human resources requirements, and financial policies in exchange for greater accountability. There is an emphasis on school-based leadership and decision-making.

113 An SWSS is a local school district that operates under the terms of an SWSS contract between the SBOE and the local board of education. The system can request flexibility in the form of waivers of certain state laws covering academic programming, human resources, and financial policies in exchange for greater accountability for increased student performance.

114 Buford City and Webster County are the only non-Charter or SWSS systems in Georgia. For a complete list of Charter and SWSS systems, see www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Documents/SWSS%20System%20Flexibility.pdf.

115 Georgia Department of Education. 2017, December. Georgia's Charter Systems 2016-2017 and 2017-2018. Retrieved from www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Charter-Schools/Committee%20Members/2017%20Charter%20Systems%20Annual%20Report%20-%20UPDATED%20-%202018-07-16.pdf.

116 Georgia Department of Education. 2018, June. Summary of SWSS Exhibit B Template, Waivers Granted. Retrieved from [www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Documents/SWSS%20-%20Summary%20of%20Waivers%20Provided%20\(2018-06-14\).pdf](http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Documents/SWSS%20-%20Summary%20of%20Waivers%20Provided%20(2018-06-14).pdf).

117 GaDOE, 2017, Georgia's Charter Systems 2016-2017 and 2017-2018.

EXPERIMENTS IN FUNDING FLEXIBILITY – CONSOLIDATED FUNDS PILOT PROGRAM

Organized by the Charter System Foundation, three charter systems – Calhoun City Schools, Cartersville City Schools, and Madison County Schools – participated in the Consolidation Funds Pilot Program, which allowed state, local, and federal funds to be consolidated. The consolidation of funds can be a time-consuming process, but the goal of this pilot is to create a process for all systems in Georgia to replicate.

By being able to blend different funding streams, districts have maximum flexibility to match student and school needs with resources. Traditionally, requirements from different funding streams dictate how the dollars are to be used within a school or district. From a district perspective, it is a compliance-based process that makes it difficult to align available budgets and resources with identified needs.

Under the consolidated pilot program, districts are able to build their school and district strategic plans, identify goals and needed resources, then build budgets around those goals. Within the districts, the pilot has fostered critical discussions around the question of what resources are necessary to meet student needs and achieve community goals.

The pilot districts are seeing positive results. Using this flexibility, Madison County developed new programs and opportunities, not previously available, targeting highlighted needs, including a parent engagement specialist to work with and support the refugee population at one school, a behavior specialist hired at another school to address those needs, and a nontraditional afterschool option for students at yet another school.

This opportunity has now been extended across Georgia.

While this flexibility allows districts to target more of their resources to student needs and district priorities, if the base funding is not adequate, then flexibility may not be enough.

In a survey of Georgia school district leaders conducted by the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute, 70% of responding district leaders indicated that poverty is the most significant out-of-school issue that limits student learning.¹¹⁸ The percentage of students living in poverty is also highly correlated with student, school, and district performance. In fact, the majority of schools where at least half of students come from low-income families received a D or F rating from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement on their annual report cards. In contrast, only 5% of low-poverty schools – schools where no more than 25% of their population were considered living in poverty – received a D or F rating.¹¹⁹

By offering flexibility without seriously considering the actual cost of educating students, the policy may be limiting a local district's ability to meet the needs of its students at the same time that it is being increasingly held accountable for student outcomes through its flexibility contracts with the SBOE. Such a situation could also increase inequalities between districts instead of alleviating them.

For example, the number of children living in poverty in Georgia has increased nearly 20 percentage points since 2008. In fact, economically disadvantaged students are among the state's fastest growing demographics. With more than 26% of its children living below the poverty line, Georgia ranks 40th in the nation, with the number 1 nation having the fewest children in poverty.¹²⁰ Over 10% of children live in extreme poverty, which is defined as living below 50% of the federal poverty line.¹²¹

Students living in poverty frequently need extra supports from their school system to meet high levels of academic achievement. Strategies such as longer school days and academic years and smaller class sizes can help low-income students catch up with their more affluent peers. However, the districts with the highest percentages of low-income students tend to be the least resourced to offer these support programs.

118 Suggs, C. 2017, December. *Tackle Poverty's Effects to Improve School Improvement*. Retrieved from Georgia Budget and Policy Institute: gbpi.org/2017/tackle-povertys-effects-improve-school-performance/.

119 Suggs, 2017, December.

120 Georgia Family Connection Partnership. 2016. *KIDS Count Data Center*. Retrieved from datacenter.kidscount.org.

121 Georgia Family Connection Partnership, 2016.

Another area where local flexibility may impact equity is in teacher pay. Under the waivers, districts are not bound by the state salary schedule and can offer compensation models that meet their priorities. Districts that need to recruit literacy specialists or physics teachers, for example, could increase the salary for those areas to attract interested candidates. However, wealthier districts are able to pay a much higher premium for high-need areas, such as science and math, compared to lower wealth districts. Low-wealth districts, especially those in rural areas, will have difficulty competing for talent in hard-to-staff areas.

Allowing flexibility to local districts has shifted focus from funding inputs to funding based on student needs and outputs. However, without knowing how much it costs to meet the goals districts are aiming for, state policymakers need to ensure that this flexibility does not exacerbate the problems it was intended to address.

Action Steps for Georgia

Top-performing systems make explicit decisions to ensure that all students are educated to the high standards set by the state and that all schools have the resources to do so. They intentionally target more resources to students who come to school with greater disadvantages. Further, most high-performing countries provide more teachers to support at-risk students and those with additional learning barriers, along with strong incentives for their best teachers to work in classes and schools that serve students and families from low-income and minority groups.¹²²

Specifically, high-performing countries and states aim to ensure their K-12 funding systems have a combination of the following elements:¹²³

- Provides the basis for the general recurring funding for all students.
- The funding system includes additional resources associated with the costs of meeting educational needs, which account for socioeconomic background, disability, language proficiency, school size, and location.
- The funding scheme is based on actual resources used by schools that have already achieved high educational outcomes for students over a sustained period of time.
- Schools with similar student populations require the same level of resources.
- The system is periodically reviewed to ensure it continually reflects community needs and aspirations.
- The total resource amount is indexed to account for increasing costs over time so that the system maintains at least current levels of achievement over a period of time.

Key to these elements is a true accounting of the cost of resources commensurate with desired outcomes. When considering questions of adequacy or examining a state funding formula, cost assessments are common. Examples include recently completed cost assessments in Michigan, Maryland, Montana, Kentucky, Wyoming, Kansas, and Illinois.

In 2015, the percentage of low-income students in Wyoming meeting the proficient standard on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) was ranked in the top 10 nationally across all subjects and grade levels. Wyoming uses a "cost-based" model that is recalibrated every five years

122 Center on International Education Benchmarking. 2016. *9 Building Blocks for a World-Class Education System*. Washington, DC: National Center on Education and the Economy.

123 Gonski, D., K. Boston, K. Greiner, C. Lawrence, B. Scales, and P. Tannock. 2011, December. *Review of Funding for Schooling Report*. Retrieved from ncee.org/2016/12/review-of-funding-for-schools-gonski/.

(as per court order). The model covers at-risk students, alternative schools, salaries for all school and district staffing categories (salaries are initially based upon the state average but are then adjusted for factors such as education and experience levels of staff and also for regional cost differences), career and vocational education, transportation, special education, extra teacher compensation (e.g., bonus for national certification), health insurance, and maintenance and operations of facilities. The amounts are adjusted for inflation between review periods, except for transportation, special education, extra teacher compensation, and health insurance.¹²⁴

Wyoming also provides an additional poverty supplement through the Foundation Program based upon the number of at-risk students, defined as free and reduced-price lunch participants, English language learners, and transient students. These funds are used to supplement extended-day and summer school interventions as well as remediation programs. These funds are in addition to the base amount provided by the cost-based model.¹²⁵

In 2017, Illinois adopted a new evidence-based school funding model that delivers more state dollars to low-income and rural school districts. The new formula ties school funding to the costs of 27 evidence-based best practices shown to impact student achievement and accounts for the unique needs and resources of local school districts. Based on a common cost measure, districts in Illinois receive state funding within a range of 46% to 283% of full capacity to meet state expectations of learning.¹²⁶

Georgia has put a stake in the ground on defining an adequate education by publicly proclaiming “every student will graduate from high school, be successful in college and/ or a career, and be competitive with their peers throughout the United States and the world.”¹²⁷ To accomplish this goal, Georgia has committed to increasing standards and accountability for students, teachers, and districts. And while Georgia has now fully funded the QBE formula, which was designed to meet educational need of students in 1985, the state has not developed an understanding of the actual costs of this ambitious vision.

Georgia must conduct a study to determine the actual costs associated with supporting student achievement and then use these data to guide state and district policy. Doing so requires a comprehensive assessment of the costs of ensuring all students reach the achievement goals set for them and an understanding of the resources required to meet those goals.

While assessing the actual costs of providing all students with an adequate education, Georgia must also determine the effectiveness of the educational resources being utilized across the state. Through their flexibility contracts, Georgia districts are experimenting with different options to meet their local priorities and align resources to support struggling students. However, the state cannot currently track education expenditures to the school level, which would be required to track state dollars to the student level. In 2017, House Bill 139 passed with the aim of helping address this issue by requiring schools and districts to report their expenditures, but it did not provide additional resources to increase district capacity to do so.

124 See legisweb.state.wy.us/statutes/compress/title21.docx, 21-13-309, m, v (pp. 169-176).

125 See legisweb.state.wy.us/LSOWeb/SchoolFinance/2015WYFundingModelDeskAudit.pdf, legisweb.state.wy.us/statutes/compress/title21.docx, and legisweb.state.wy.us/InterimCommittee/2015/SSRRpt1001AppendixF.pdf.

126 Smith, T. 2018, May. *Creating a More Equitable Funding Formula: Illinois Leads for Equity*. Retrieved from Council of Chief State School Officers: ccsso.org/blog/creating-more-equitable-funding-formula-illinois-leads-equity.

127 Georgia Department of Education. 2010. *Race to the Top: State of Georgia Scope of Work*. Atlanta: GaDOE.

Moreover, federal law under the Every Student Succeeds Act now requires that “the state report card must include the per-pupil expenditures of federal, state, and local funds, including actual personnel expenditures and nonpersonnel expenditures of federal, state and local funds disaggregated by source of funds for each LEA [local education agency] and each school in the state for the preceding fiscal year.”¹²⁸ Local school districts need to increase their capacity and resources to be compliant with these new federal reporting requirements.

Finally, as the state and local districts build out the capacity necessary to track expenditures to the school level, evaluation studies are needed that examine the impact of school spending on student outcomes, with special considerations to equity. Also needed are cost studies of economically disadvantaged students and their outcomes as well as cost studies of high-performing schools. Being able to identify best instructional practices and efficient financial practices would go a long way toward informing any state-level funding discussions regarding both adequacy and equity.

The Georgia Constitution guarantees an adequate public education for all citizens. Yet determining whether the state actually provides adequate resources to schools remains a dominant issue in school finance for Georgia. Best practices from other states and countries indicate that all students should have adequate funding to reach the high standards set out for them and that additional resources should be targeted at students who come to school with greater disadvantages. Best practice research also finds that these funding levels should be tied to actual costs and periodically reviewed to reflect community needs and aspirations. Georgia has established high expectations for student educational outcomes as a policy priority. Serious discussion about how to financially support that expectation should continue to be a priority.

128 See ESSA section 111(h)(1)C (xi).



ASSESSMENTS: TESTING THE WATERS

Issue Overview

Passionate debates have been raging in Georgia and across the country for years about the role tests and assessments play in the education system. What should we test and how often? How should we use the results? Should we focus on summative or formative assessments? Norm-referenced or standardized? What do those words even mean? In short, why do we test?

One reason why states administer assessments is because the federal government requires them to do so to gauge student learning in exchange for federal funding. Beyond that, however, most educators recognize that good assessments can provide critical data that show students' academic strengths and weaknesses and provide information necessary to address the instructional needs of the students. Assessments can also be used to monitor achievement across or within years, evaluate and adjust curricula, distribute resources as part of an accountability system, or determine access to a program or grade level.¹²⁹

Since 2009, state and federal policies have dramatically influenced state testing decisions. At that time, most states – including Georgia – adopted more rigorous learning standards to ensure students were ready to participate in an increasingly complex global economy. To correspond with the new standards, states also adopted new assessment systems aimed at measuring whether students were learning the new standards.

In 2010, 46 states joined together in two different consortia – the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and Smarter Balance – to create higher quality, next-generation state assessments.¹³⁰ For the next several years, most attention around testing was focused on these new assessments, which were tied to the new standards and designed to gauge the college and career readiness of students. The purpose of these assessments was largely viewed as measuring student progress and holding teachers and administrators accountable for raising achievement. Policymakers began to rely on large-scale tests to make high-stakes decisions about students, teachers, and schools.

In 2015, the federal government passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which maintained the requirement that states test and report annual progress against college and career ready standards but created more flexibility for states to use other measures of student learning.¹³¹ This legislation has opened the door for states to think differently about how they measure student learning and the use of assessments.

¹²⁹ Forte, E. 2018, February 9. Overview of Large-Scale Assessments. Presentation to the Georgia Assessment Task Force. Atlanta, GA.

¹³⁰ Georgia was initially a member of the PARCC consortium but withdrew in 2013.

¹³¹ Porter, W., and K. Callahan. 2018, February. *Whatever Happened to All Those New & Better State Tests?* The State of State Assessments. Retrieved from Educationfirst: education-first.com/library/publication/whatever-happened-new-better-state-tests.

Today, only 20 states are participating in either PARCC or Smarter Balance.¹³² Georgia departed from the PARCC consortium in 2013 to develop its own end-of-course and end-of-grade tests. With the new flexibility offered under ESSA, all states, including Georgia, are rethinking the role of assessments within their education system. They are trying to find the proper balance between using assessments as a means of holding educators accountable and as a tool to inform instruction and support personalized learning. In short, Georgia is having the conversation: Why do we test and what is the proper role for assessments in our educational system?

Significance for Georgia

Georgia's Current Assessment System

When Georgia decided to improve its standards in 2009, it assumed responsibility for creating a corresponding assessment system to measure student learning, now called the Georgia Milestones Assessment System (Milestones). The Milestones were first administered during the 2014–2015 school year. They currently are administered as end-of-grade (EOG) tests in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics in grades three through eight, and in science and social studies in grades five and eight. High school students take an end-of-course (EOC) tests in each of the 10 courses designated by the State Board of Education (SBOE).^{133,134}

The Milestones are used not only to monitor student-learning progress but also to evaluate teacher performance in the classroom and school leader performance. They are also a significant component of Georgia's accountability system, the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). For teachers and school leaders, student growth measures – based on the Milestones – account for 30% and 40%, respectively, of teachers' and school leaders' annual evaluation. The CCRPI is Georgia's annual tool to measure how well schools, districts, and the state are preparing students for their next level of education. It is also used to identify schools for needs-improvement status, per federal law. Milestones scores are the basis for nine of the 11 indicators that make up the final score for elementary and middle schools, and nine of the 14 indicators that make up the final CCRPI score for high schools.¹³⁵

Assessment Transitions and Innovations

The federal law ESSA, passed in 2015, made specific changes to the previous No Child Left Behind federal legislation, including changes to the federal requirements regarding state assessments. Under ESSA, states must continue to assess all students enrolled in public schools in grades three through eight and high school. However, ESSA allows states to work with local school districts to review testing requirements and needs. Together, they can examine ways to innovate and strengthen formative testing, ultimately providing teachers with better measures of student learning.

132 Porter and Callahan, 2018, February.

133 The SBOE requires EOCTs in ELA (Ninth Grade Literature and Composition, American Literature and Composition), math (Algebra I or Coordinate Algebra, Geometry or Analytic Geometry), science (Biology, Physical Science), and social studies (United States History, Economics/Business/Free Enterprise).

134 See www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Assessment/Pages/Georgia-Milestones-Assessment-System.aspx.

135 Georgia Department of Education. 2018, January. Redesigned College and Career Ready Performance Index. Retrieved from www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Accountability/Documents/Resdesigned%20CCRPI%20Support%20Documents/Redesigned%20CCRPI%20Overview%20011918.pdf.

At the state level, Georgia lawmakers passed Senate Bill (SB) 211 in 2017 to directly address the issue of assessments and the state plan required under ESSA. The bill required the state ESSA plan to take advantage of the full flexibility being offered. Part of this flexibility includes potentially allowing local districts to pilot innovative approaches to assessments in grades other than nine to 12. It also allows state and local districts to potentially use nationally recognized high school assessments, provided comparability can be established, in place of the Milestones administered in high school.

The Georgia General Assembly built upon SB 211 and in 2018 passed SB 362, which established an Innovative Assessment Pilot Program. This program allows up to 10 school districts, or groups of districts, to develop an alternative assessment and accountability system aligned with state academic content standards.¹³⁶

The SBOE subsequently approved three proposals to pilot alternative assessments over the next five years: the Georgia MAP Assessment Partnership (GMAP), the Putnam County Consortium, and Cobb County. All three of the pilots will rely on a combination of formative assessments, which provide ongoing feedback to teachers to help inform instruction, that will ultimately roll-up into a summative score at the end of the year that is comparable to the Milestones assessments for required grades and subjects.

The GMAP will be piloting a version of the nationally available MAP test that has been aligned with Georgia academic standards. Current partnership members include Clayton, Floyd, Jackson, Jasper, and Polk County Schools, along with Marietta City Schools, starting this school year. Gilmer, Haralson, and Dalton County Schools and Trion City Schools will join next year. GMAP tests are being developed in math, ELA, and science for grades three through eight to be administered no later than 2020–2021. Each participating district will administer a combination of the GMAP and Milestones during the first three years of the program. The GMAP has requested a waiver from the SBOE from the Milestones during years four and five.¹³⁷

The Putnam County Consortium hopes to administer the Navy test, developed by a partnership between Putnam County Schools and Navy Education, LLC, this school year (2018–2019) in math and ELA in grades three through eight, and high school math and ELA classes. Putnam County, the only participating member, proposes to use Navy for accountability purposes in these classes in lieu of administering the Milestones. Affiliate members – Calhoun City Schools and Dougherty, Evans, Fayette, Floyd, Liberty, McIntosh, Oglethorpe, and Pike County Schools – will use Navy during this first pilot year but will continue to administer the Milestones for accountability purposes. It is expected that these affiliate members will transition to participating members in year two and request a waiver from the SBOE for the Milestones.¹³⁸

136 State Board of Education. 2018, August. Innovative Assessment Pilot Program Application Announcement. Retrieved from simbli.eboardsolutions.com/meetings/TempFolder/Meetings/Innovative%20Assessment%20Pilot%20Program%20Application%20Announcement_970536qajcb03kufj1knbyv4nnkelx.pdf.

137 Georgia Measures of Academic Progress Assessment Partnership. 2018, September. Ga Innovative Assessment Pilot: Through Year Assessments. Retrieved from simbli.eboardsolutions.com/meetings/TempFolder/Meetings/Application%20-%20Georgia%20MAP%20Assessment%20Partnership_983311qajcb03kufj1knbyv4nnkelx.pdf.

138 Putnam County Consortium. 2018, August. Innovative Assessment Pilot Application. Retrieved from simbli.eboardsolutions.com/meetings/TempFolder/Meetings/Application%20-%20Putnam%20County%20Consortium_970538qajcb03kufj1knbyv4nnkelx.pdf.

Finally, the Cobb County pilot proposes to begin using its Cobb Metrics tests this school year (2018–2019). Cobb Metrics will ultimately be a collection of district-developed formative assessments for grades K-12 aligned to Georgia academic standards in ELA, math, science, and social studies. Cobb will also use nationally normed assessments – the Iowa Assessments for grades three, five, and seven and the PSAT for high school – to comply with federal testing requirements. Cobb County plans to administer the Milestones during the current year (2018–2019) and then request a waiver from the SBOE beginning in 2019.¹³⁹

While the Putnam County Consortium is also developing formative assessments for math and ELA in the first and second grades as part of their Navy system, the focus of these innovative pilots is on the traditionally tested grades and subjects beginning in third grade and investigating alternatives to the Milestones.

To support the use of formative assessments and to work toward ensuring every child is on a path to reading on grade level by the third grade, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) is exploring innovative ways to assess first- and second-grade students through online games. These games engage students in short tasks and carry information back to the student, teachers, and parents to help them understand what the children know and what they need to learn next. This “gamification” of assessments gives learners a fun, engaging experience while also providing educators and parents with timely information about how to support the learner.¹⁴⁰

Georgia is also making changes to the GKIDS, the Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills. A yearlong assessment, GKIDS is aligned to standards and provides teachers with information about the level of instructional support needed by individual students entering kindergarten and first grade.¹⁴¹

In partnership with Bright From the Start, the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), GaDOE has been developing a new component to the GKIDS, the Kindergarten Readiness Check. The Readiness Check is designed to be administered during the first six weeks of the kindergarten year and is aligned to the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards. It is also correlated to the kindergarten content standards. The goal of the assessment is to provide information about the skills of students entering kindergarten.¹⁴² This will help kindergarten teachers more quickly individualize instruction for young students.

By using the flexibility provided by the federal law under ESSA, Georgia is taking steps to change the focus of assessments away from just being used for high-stakes purposes that drive instruction to formative assessments that help inform instruction and allow for greater personalization. The aim of the flexibility being sought is to allow districts to use assessments to meet the particular needs of their students and educators while trying to limit the amount of time students spend taking tests.

139 Cobb County School District. 2018, September. Innovative Assessment Pilot Application. Retrieved from simbli.eboardsolutions.com/meetings/TempFolder/Meetings/Application%20-%20Cobb%20County%20Schools_982436qajcb03kufj1knbyv4nnkelx.pdf.

140 Cobb County School District, 2018.

141 See www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Assessment/Pages/GKIDS.aspx.

142 See www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Assessment/Pages/Readiness.aspx.

Action Steps for Georgia

As previously stated, under ESSA, states must continue to assess all students enrolled in public schools in grades three through eight and high school; however, the new legislation offers districts flexibility to examine ways to innovate and strengthen formative testing, giving teachers better measures of student learning. The ESSA plan development was an opportunity for Georgia to have a statewide conversation about how to balance the need to monitor student progress (accountability of outcomes) with being able to provide educators with timely and useful data about student learning that can help inform instruction.

As it was developing the state ESSA plan, GaDOE held public feedback sessions across the state to help guide conversation about the plan and gather comments on assessments (among other ESSA-related topics). Georgia citizens also provided input through social media and surveys. Several common themes emerged from the public input process:¹⁴³

1. Assessments should be used to inform rather than drive instruction.
2. Assessments are important, but currently too much focus is placed on testing outcomes.
3. State assessments (the Milestones) have limited use due to when in the year they are administered.
4. Assessments taken throughout the school year are needed to provide educators with timely information.
5. Additional flexibility is needed in how assessments are administered.
6. Assessment reports need to be easier to understand and provided in a timelier manner.

To address these issues, GaDOE has been exploring ways to change the culture and purpose of testing through the implementation of the department's Vision 2020 Strategic Plan. Vision 2020 highlights a commitment to assessments that *inform* instruction rather than drive instruction through the use of quality, effective diagnostic tools that teachers can utilize in their classrooms.

The first step toward this change is to shift away from the focus on high-stakes EOG and EOC tests, known as summative assessments, and more emphasis on formative assessments, which are used to provide the information necessary to adjust classroom strategies while teaching and learning are under way in the classroom. To help propel this work, the Innovative Assessment Pilot Program established under SB 362 gave three consortia of districts the ability to work on new formative assessments that will help teachers gauge student learning and adjust instruction according. These new assessments can then be rolled into a summative score for the end of the year. The hope is that these locally created assessments are a better fit for districts than the Milestones.¹⁴⁴

However, it must be noted that each of the three pilot programs is requesting waivers from the Georgia SBOE from administering the Milestones, which are still required by the federal government under ESSA. Under a separate federal waiver program, ESSA allows up to seven states to apply for an innovative assessment pilot that would involve a group of districts administering the same innovative assessment for a specified number of years, with the intent of ultimately scaling it statewide.

¹⁴³ Georgia Department of Education. 2017. Assessments. Retrieved from www.gadoe.org/Documents/Assessment2pgr.pdf.

¹⁴⁴ Klein, A. 2018, October. Georgia Wants In on the ESSA Innovative Assessment Pilot [Web log post]. Retrieved from EdWeek:blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2018/10/georgia-essa-innovative-test.html.

Louisiana and New Hampshire were approved in round one for the federal waiver. In December 2018, Georgia submitted a formal application for the second round of waivers. In its application, the state is proposing to pilot all three programs (the GMAP, the Navy test, and the Cobb Metrics) in Georgia under this federal waiver. The goal is to allow districts to ultimately have a choice of one of three assessment systems. Even if approved, many questions remain. The intent of the federal waiver program is for states to try out a new test in a handful of districts before taking it statewide and, once again, requiring all students to take the same state test. If that regulation stays in place, it is unclear which of the three Georgia consortium tests would or could ultimately replace the Milestones and by what criteria that would be decided.

To complicate matters further, the state has provided no additional resources to local districts to develop these alternative assessments. As a result, the local districts themselves incur 100% of the financial investment required in the development and piloting process. If one – or more – were ultimately selected to replace the Milestones, it is unknown who would “own” the intellectual property rights to the assessments for scalability. Could Cobb County, for example, charge the state or other districts for access to the Cobb Metrics?

What also remains unresolved is the impact that these assessments, either the Milestones or the alternative assessments under development, will have on Georgia’s accountability system, the CCRPI. The index was originally designed to provide annual data on how well schools and districts are preparing students for their next level of learning. However, the ESSA state plan, developed by GaDOE, intentionally redesigns the CCRPI with the goal of being a continuous school improvement tool that will help guide long-term, sustainable improvement. Under this approach, accountability is generally viewed as having a supporting role for schools and districts.

However, many in Georgia felt the newly designed system was not rigorous enough or did not set a high enough standard for student learning. When submitted to the federal government for approval, Governor Nathan Deal refused to sign the ESSA plan, stating that it “falls short of setting high expectations for Georgia students and schools” and is too restrictive on how local districts run their schools.¹⁴⁵ The conflict between the governor and GaDOE largely centered on the CCRPI measures. Governor Deal has argued for a simpler test-based accountability system focused on student outcomes. The CCRPI redesign under GaDOE deemphasizes testing by rewarding schools for nontest outcomes such as reduced student absenteeism or increased participation in Advanced Placement (AP) courses.¹⁴⁶

To help inform this debate, GaDOE established an Assessment Innovation and Flexibility Taskforce comprising representatives from local school districts, business and industry, policymakers, educators, and parents.¹⁴⁷ The taskforce was charged with developing recommendations around how best to leverage the flexibly afforded under ESSA, implement best practices in assessment innovation, and develop recommendations and an implementation plan for competency-based and interim assessments of student learning.

¹⁴⁵ Johnson, K.D. 2017, September 28. Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal Rejects State’s Education Plan. Retrieved from *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: www.myajc.com/news/local-education/georgia-gov-nathan-deal-rejects-state-education-plan/Kan1YQ1Y10kZ9yv81PjahJ/.

¹⁴⁶ Johnson, 2017, September 28

¹⁴⁷ The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education was a participating member of this taskforce. For a complete list of members, see www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid=565.

The taskforce has also studied supporting districts in using an assessment inventory, which is a tool that district leaders can use to take stock of their assessments and assessment strategy and do so from a student perspective. Using the tool, district leaders can evaluate the assessments students are taking and determine the minimum testing necessary to serve essential diagnostic, instructional, and accountability purposes. The tool also helps ensure that every district-mandated test is of high quality, is providing the information needed for specific school and district purposes and is supported by structures and routines so that results are used, and action steps are taken that will help students. Final taskforce recommendations are due in early 2019.

So, why do we test? The state must have an effective and efficient assessment system to provide information on the progress students are making toward their educational goals. If teachers do not know how well their students are mastering the material, they cannot adjust their teaching practices. And principals cannot target needed professional development for their teachers if content strengths and weaknesses are not identified. Further, teacher and leader effectiveness is evaluated on measures of student growth based on these assessments. Assessments are as important to the jobs of teachers and school leaders as they are to the future of our students.

For public education to function optimally, it requires an instructional system that makes the acquisition of knowledge and skills efficient, effective, and appealing.¹⁴⁸ The EdQuest Georgia best-practice research tells us that top-performing states and education systems have well-developed, coherent instructional systems that incorporate standards, curricula, and assessments that allow for the personalization of instruction and appropriate methods of teaching. Combined, this coherent instructional system helps all students reach their goals.¹⁴⁹ Specific to assessments, best-practice research says that assessments can help students monitor their own progress and typically include tools that benchmark their progress against clearly defined expectations.

Georgia is continuing to strive to find the proper balance between an effective assessment system that supports its educational goals for students and holds the educational system accountable for serving those students.

148 Merrill, M.D., L. Drake, M.J. Lacy, and J. Pratt. 1996. Reclaiming Instructional Design. *Educational Technology* 36(5), 5-7.

149 See Edquestga.org.



ESAS/VOUCHERS: TAKING A HARD LOOK AT WHAT'S NEXT

Issue Overview

Across the United States, school choice programs – vouchers, tax credit scholarships, and education savings accounts – have become increasingly popular, with states establishing 24 programs between 2012 and 2017 and experiencing a twofold increase in enrollment from 210,000 students to nearly 450,000 students during that time. Nationwide, there are 53 choice programs spread across 25 states.¹⁵⁰

Georgia has witnessed a growing interest in choice programs that expand students' educational options as well. Among the policies that have gained traction among parents and policymakers alike are vouchers, tax credit scholarships, and education savings accounts (ESAs). While each is intended to give families greater flexibility in how they use taxpayer dollars to educate their children, they rely on different means to achieve that end.

In recent years, charter schools have become a normal part of the education landscape in Georgia, as has the general conversation around education choice. Newly elected governor Brian Kemp even campaigned on choice-related promises, like doubling the tax credit scholarship cap and piloting an ESA program for military families.¹⁵¹ These programs have become more than just novel ideas and are gaining in popularity, but where Georgia is headed in terms of choice legislation remains to be seen. In the meantime, it would be prudent to examine the effectiveness of current options in Georgia and study the implications of those being considered for expansion and implementation.

Significance for Georgia

Overview of Choice Options

Vouchers are one of the oldest mechanisms for students to use public funds to pay for a private school education.¹⁵² Vouchers give parents a portion of the public funding set aside for their children's education to choose private schools. State funds typically expended by a school district are allocated to families in the form of a voucher to pay partial or full tuition at a private school, including religious and non-religious options.

Milwaukee Public Schools is credited with launching the nation's first modern private-school voucher program in 1990 with the goal of giving low-income African American students the opportunity to use

150 ExcelinEd. 2018. Education Choice Overview: ExcelinEd Policy Toolkit. Retrieved from www.excelined.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ExcelinEd.PolicyToolkit.SchoolChoiceOverview.2018.pdf; p. 1.

151 Kemp for Governor. Retrieved from kempforgovernor.com/posts/news/it%E2%80%99s-time-put-students-first.

152 EdChoice. Resource Hub: Fast Facts. Retrieved from www.edchoice.org/resource-hub/fast-facts/#voucher-fast-facts.

public-school funds to attend an eligible private school of their choice.¹⁵³ Milwaukee's program marked the beginning of the modern voucher movement and sparked the creation of 26 voucher programs in 15 states and Washington, DC. Voucher programs have since become more common across the United States, serving thousands of students annually. However, they continue to be one of the most controversial options on the spectrum of school choice.

HISTORY OF THE VOUCHER DEBATE

Given the direct taxpayer-to-private-school funding structure of vouchers, numerous questions have been raised about whether they violate the Establishment Clause, leading to legal disputes over their constitutionality.¹⁵⁴ In 2002, the US Supreme Court weighed in, ruling on the now-marquee case, *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*. In its ruling, the court found that the Cleveland City School District's participation in Ohio's Project Scholarship Program, by way of private school vouchers, did not conflict with the US Constitution's Establishment Clause on the grounds that "government aid that reaches religious institutions only by way of the deliberate choices of numerous individual recipients...is reasonably attributable to the individual aid recipients not the government, whose role ends with the disbursement of benefits."¹⁵⁵ The decision was seen as a tremendous win for voucher proponents and spurred the creation of programs in other states.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, because states retain the constitutional right to make decisions about education, the decision to provide public funds to finance private school education belongs with the state, not the federal government.

Tax credit scholarships, like vouchers, are designed to grant public-school students access to a private-school education, but they are distinct in that they are funded entirely by private donations. Simply put, tax credit scholarship programs allow individuals and businesses to donate money to nonprofit organizations, known as student scholarship organizations (SSOs), in exchange for a partial or dollar-for-dollar state tax credit. These organizations then use the privately donated funds to award private-school scholarships to eligible students and families.

There are currently 22 tax credit scholarship programs in the United States, which, during the 2016–2017 school year alone, awarded more than 250,000 scholarships worth nearly \$1 billion.¹⁵⁷ Many states have similar scholarship eligibility criteria, funding parameters, and testing requirements, but ultimately, each state establishes its own programmatic standards.

ESAs are considered the avant-garde private choice option, as they broaden parents' educational options in an unprecedented way.

Unlike vouchers and tax credit scholarships, which provide parents with financial backing to

enroll their children in an eligible private school of their choice, ESAs allow parents to withdraw their child from public school and gain direct access to that child's share of public per-pupil funds by way of a debit card. Parents then have the freedom to customize their child's educational experience by putting those funds toward state-approved educational services, "including private-school tuition, textbooks, curricula, online learning, individual public-school classes, and Advanced Placement courses."¹⁵⁸

Moreover, any ESA funds that are unused during a K-12 school year can be saved for future use or even rolled over into a college savings account to cover post-secondary expenses.¹⁵⁹

153 ExcelinEd. 2018. School Choice: Wisconsin – *Milwaukee Parental Choice Program*. Retrieved from EdChoice: www.edchoice.org/school-choice/programs/wisconsin-milwaukee-parental-choice-program/. There were two voucher programs prior to Milwaukee's Parental Choice Program: Vermont in 1869 and Maine in 1873. See www.edchoice.org/resource-hub/fast-facts/.

154 EdChoice. Types of School Vouchers: What Are School Vouchers? Retrieved from EdChoice: www.edchoice.org/school-choice/types-of-school-choice/what-are-school-vouchers-2/. The following states have voucher programs: Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana (2), Maine, Maryland, Mississippi (2), New Hampshire, North Carolina (2), Ohio (5), Oklahoma, Utah, Vermont, Wisconsin (4), and Washington, DC. See www.edchoice.org/resource-hub/fast-facts/#voucher-fast-facts.

155 *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, No. 00-1751. 2002. Retrieved from caselaw.findlaw.com/us-supreme-court/536/639.html.

156 Prothero, A. 2017, January 26. What Are School Vouchers and How do They Work? Retrieved from *EdWeek*: www.edweek.org/ew/issues/vouchers/index.html.

157 ExcelinEd. Education Choice Overview.

158 EdChoice. 2018. Education Savings Accounts. Retrieved from www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/2016-8-EdChoice-ESAs1.pdf.

159 ExcelinEd, 2018, Education Choice Overview; EdChoice, 2018, Education Savings Accounts.

Only five states currently have active ESA programs: Arizona, Florida, Mississippi, Tennessee, and North Carolina. Nevada was the fifth state to adopt such a program, passing its ESA legislation in 2015, but the legislature defunded the program two years later.¹⁶⁰ Since 2017, 25 additional states have proposed legislation to create ESA programs. See the sidebar titled “Arizona’s ESAs” for program details.

Choice in Georgia

Currently, Georgia is home to both vouchers and tax credit scholarships. The state offers three options: the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship, the Georgia Private School Tax Credit program, and the Qualified Education Donation Tax Credit. The Special Needs Scholarship is a voucher program and was established in 2007 to allow public-school students with special needs to transfer to “another public school, public-school system, state school, or approved participating private school.”¹⁶⁴ To be eligible for the voucher, students must have attended a public school for one academic year and have an individualized education plan (IEP), which provides an overview of the services students received to accommodate their special needs. No further application or income requirements are necessary to be eligible for the program, although each school has the right to review and deny a transfer request if a student’s needs cannot be accommodated.

The Georgia Department of Education’s most recent end-of-school-year report, which provides highlights of the program during the 2015–2016 academic year, shows that interest in the special needs scholarship program continued to grow among students and private schools alike. Overall student participation increased by 511 students, bringing the total to 4,154 for the year, and the overall number of participating private schools increased from 245 to 260. The scholarship amounts ranged from \$2,500–\$13,500, with the average being \$5,700. The tuition rates ranged from \$1,000 to \$53,000, with the average being \$13,382. The total amount of money paid in scholarships for the year amounted to nearly \$23.5 million.¹⁶⁵ Demographically, whites make up the majority of participating students, with African Americans and Hispanics the second- and third-most represented groups, respectively. Georgia does not collect student performance data for program participants enrolled in private schools; therefore, it is unknown how well these students are performing relative to their public-school counterparts.¹⁶⁶

ARIZONA’S ESAS¹⁶¹

Arizona is home to the oldest of the five current ESA programs. The Empowerment Scholarship Accounts program was initially created to serve students with special needs but was expanded to also serve “students in low-performing public schools, foster children, military families, and siblings of participating students.”¹⁶² Since the program’s launch in 2011, participation has increased from 250 students to more than 5,000 students.¹⁶³ Although 22% of students in the state are eligible for the program, the law prohibits program enrollment from exceeding 0.5% of the previous year’s public-school enrollment.

Arizona currently funds its ESA program based on a percentage of the per-pupil expenditure of a participating student’s previous public school and prioritizes the funding of low-income students. On average, participating students without special needs receive about \$5,600. Students with special needs receive more financial support, but the amount varies depending on the scope of additional services needed.

160 Hewitt, G. Welcome to the Nevada Education Savings Account Program. Retrieved from www.nevadatreasurer.gov/SchoolChoice/Home/; Public Schools First NC. 2018. The Facts on Education Savings Accounts (ESAs). Retrieved www.publicschoolsfirstnc.org/resources/factsheets/the-facts-on-education-savings-accounts-esas/.

161 EdChoice. School Choice: Empowerment Scholarship Accounts. Retrieved <https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/programs/arizona-empowerment-scholarship-accounts/>.

162 National Conference of State Legislatures. Scholarship Tax Credits. Retrieved from www.ncsl.org/research/education/school-choice-scholarship-tax-credits.aspx; EdChoice, School Choice.

163 EdChoice, School Choice.

164 Georgia Department of Education. 2015–2016 Special Needs Scholarship Report.

165 Georgia Department of Education. Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program: Understanding the Program; GaDOE, Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program End of School Year Report 2015–2016, pp. 1–2.

166 Suggs, C. 2018, April 26. *Shifting Public Funds to Private Schools: High Costs, Poor Track Record*. Atlanta: Georgia Budget and Policy Institute.

The Georgia Private School Tax Credit allows individuals and businesses to donate money to SSOs, which then award private-school scholarships to eligible students and families. Participation in this program has also grown steadily since its inception in 2008, with applications increasing from 2,800 in 2008 to 18,000 in 2014. The cap on available credits was initially set at \$50 million, but Georgia legislators have since raised the cap twice, to \$58 million in 2013 and \$100 million in 2019.¹⁶⁷

The Qualified Education Donation Tax Credit, which became law in 2018, is the most recent of the three options available in Georgia and is a tax credit program designed to provide financial support to public schools, particularly those performing among the lowest 5% in the state. Like the Georgia Private School Tax Credit, individuals and corporations can make contributions to a nonprofit organization, in this case the Innovation Fund Foundation (IFF), in exchange for a dollar-for-dollar tax credit. Unlike an SSO, however, the IFF uses its donations to award grants that “build the capacity of schools and districts to develop programs that directly target the root causes of complex education problems.” The law currently caps annual donations at \$5 million, which the IFF receives on a first-come, first-served basis.¹⁶⁸

Debate around Choice

The effectiveness, transparency, use, and constitutionality of these choice programs is currently under debate. The research on tax credit scholarships, vouchers, and ESAs can best be described as limited and often contradictory. There are data-driven arguments both for and against these private choice options, making it even more difficult for families to successfully weigh their options and for state legislatures to make informed policy decisions about private choice.

A recent report, *A Win-Win Solution: The Empirical Evidence on School Choice*,¹⁶⁹ for instance, reviewed the findings of 100 academic studies on the impact of private school choice. The researcher found that 87 of the 100 studies showed that choice

- improves academic outcomes of choice participants,
- improves academic outcomes of public schools,
- saves taxpayer money,
- creates more integrated classrooms, and
- promotes shared civic values and practices.¹⁷⁰

A series of other studies have shown similarly positive results, noting that voucher recipients are more likely to graduate high school and enroll in a post-secondary institution than their peers in traditional schools.¹⁷¹

Other studies paint a different picture, however. A 2011 report from the Center on Education Policy took a broad look at research on voucher programs and concluded that achievement gains among students receiving vouchers were comparable to those of students attending public schools. Even when studies showed test score gains for voucher recipients, the report noted, “these findings are inconsistent among

167 See www.legis.ga.gov/Legislation/en-US/display/20072008/HB/1133; Buschman, R., and D.L. Sjoquist. 2014. *Georgia's Tax Credit Scholarship Program*. Retrieved from Georgia State University's Fiscal Research Center: frc.gsu.edu/download/georgias-tax-credit-scholarship-program/.

168 Governor's Office of Student Achievement. Innovation Fund Foundation Tax Credit Information. Retrieved from gosa.georgia.gov/innovation-fund-foundation-tax-credit-information.

169 It is important to note that this report was published by the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, a nonprofit organization that exists to promote “school choice as the most effective and equitable way to improve the quality of K-12 education in America,” and “is dedicated to research, education, and outreach on the vital issues and implications related to school choice.”

170 Forster, G., 2016. *A Win-Win Solution: The Empirical Evidence of School Choice*. Retrieved from EdChoice: www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/A-Win-Win-Solution-The-Empirical-Evidence-on-School-Choice.pdf.

171 ExcelinEd. 2018. The Research on Private Education Choice. Retrieved from www.excelined.org/downloads/private-education-choice-research-2018/.

studies, and the gains are either not statistically significant, not clearly caused by vouchers, or not sustained in the long run.¹⁷² These findings were echoed in a 2017 report released by the Economic Policy Institute. The report concluded that voucher programs yielded “limited improvements at best in student achievement” and noted that when programs did show improved test scores, it was likely due to other variables, such as greater accountability rather than private-school competition.¹⁷³

Georgia has also seen debates about the transparency and effectiveness of the Private School Tax Credit Scholarship. As previously mentioned, in 2018, the General Assembly passed legislation raising the cap to \$100 million. The increase did not pass without controversy, as some legislators expressed concerns about the tax credit program being used too heavily by corporations. Others questioned the prudence of increasing the cap, and thereby decreasing tax revenues, in the absence of data that clearly show the program is having a positive impact on student achievement.¹⁷⁴

Other critics have raised concerns about the lack of transparency and accountability around the allocation of scholarship dollars and the quality of student outcomes. Currently the law requires SSOs to report annually on several financial figures, including the quantity and overall dollar amount of donations received and scholarships awarded as well as “the average scholarship dollar amount by adjusted gross income category.”¹⁷⁵ However, the law does not require SSOs to report the specific scholarship amount given to families in those income categories. While program proponents stress the benefits for low-income families, the lack of mandatory reporting on this number makes it impossible to know the proportion of money being used to educate low-income students.¹⁷⁶

In addition to calls for greater transparency in fiscal management, some opponents of the program have challenged its constitutionality. In 2014, a group of taxpayers filed a lawsuit in Fulton County Superior Court on the grounds that the program, in its exchange of private donations for state tax credits, violated the separation of church and state by distributing public funds to private, religious schools.¹⁷⁷ The Georgia Supreme Court ruled unanimously in favor of the program, noting that it “does not involve the distribution of public funds out of the State treasury because none of the money involved in the Program ever becomes the property of the State of Georgia.”¹⁷⁸ With the Supreme Court’s ruling, the legality of the program is no longer in question and may serve as a stepping stone for school choice advocates looking to broaden the number of education options available to parents in Georgia. Even as the debates continue, uncertainty remains about the degree to which these choices improve student outcomes.

The same can be said of the impact of ESAs on student achievement in Georgia. Arizona, as mentioned earlier, has the oldest program in the nation, but too few outcome data are available to determine the program’s effect on student achievement. However, available data do show that operating an ESA

172 Usher, A. 2011. *Keeping Informed about School Vouchers: A Review of Major Developments and Research*. Retrieved from the Center on Economic Policy: files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED522161.pdf.

173 Usher, 2011.

174 Tagami, T. 2018, March 29. Tax Credit Scholarships for Private Schools to Grow to \$100 Million. Retrieved from *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: www.myajc.com/news/state-regional-education/tax-credit-scholarships-for-private-schools-grow-100-million/www8QFkvHOqgV5SyZKbaxK/.

175 House Bill 217. 2017. Retrieved from the Georgia General Assembly: www.legis.ga.gov/Legislation/20172018/178899.pdf.

176 Tagami, T. 2017, January 16. Tax Credit Scholarships Up Slightly. Retrieved from *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: www.ajc.com/news/state-regional-education/tax-credit-scholarships-slightly/gdLpWLpckK59GzHMODwGXqJ/; See also mission of SSO, Georgia Tax Credit Scholarship Program, Inc.: georgiataxcreditscholarship.org/our-motivation.

177 Tagami, T. 2017, January 23. Tax Credit Scholarship Case Reaches Georgia Supreme Court. Retrieved from *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: www.myajc.com/news/local-education/tax-credit-scholarship-case-reaches-georgia-supreme-court/1bWB1pOzpTQFHMNzv6ioRI/; Carpenter, W. 2017, July 15. Georgia Supreme Court Rules in Favor of Tax-Credit Scholarship Programs. Retrieved from The Red & Black: www.redandblack.com/athensnews/georgia-supreme-court-rules-in-favor-of-tax-credit-scholarship/article_5ba488ce-6997-11e7-9c5f-87e5f58d6479.html.

178 See *Gaddy et al. v. Georgia Department of Revenue*. Retrieved from cases.justia.com/georgia/supreme-court/2017-s17a0177.pdf?ts=1498478507 (p. 12).

program can come at a hefty cost. The Georgia Budget and Policy Institute estimates that within the first three years of operating an ESA program in Georgia similar to the one in Arizona, costs could exceed \$850 million.¹⁷⁹ Before allocating nearly \$1 billion for ESAs, policymakers should have more concrete data showing whether the potential returns on student achievement justify such an enormous investment.

Action Steps for Georgia

With a Republican-controlled General Assembly and a newly elected governor looking to fulfill his campaign promise to expand school choice, it is likely that Georgia will see more proposed legislation around ESAs and vouchers in 2019. During the 2018 session, the House introduced three ESA bills, but none was passed into law. However, these bills may very well serve as templates for new bills introduced during the 2019 legislative session.

Georgia may also find legislative inspiration in North Carolina's ESA program, which is the youngest in the nation. Unlike the broad reach of Arizona's program, North Carolina's program exclusively serves students with disabilities in grades K-12 and does so without regard to income.¹⁸⁰ Families of these students are issued a debit card and granted access to an account with upwards of \$9,000 that can be used for a range of educational services. As one of three choice options offered, North Carolina's ESA can be used alongside the other programs to provide additional support to students with the highest need. The North Carolina Assembly passed the ESA legislation in 2017 but delayed funding the program until the 2018–2019 school year. The initial appropriation will be \$3.4 million.¹⁸¹

As the school choice landscape in Georgia continues to shift toward a broader spectrum of education options for families and students, state policymakers must be cautious in moving forward and take seriously the need to develop robust accountability systems for new choice mechanisms. Like public schools, private schools directly receiving taxpayer dollars or SSO funds should be transparent about how they are spending those tax-payer dollars and how effectively they are educating their students. These institutions' fiscal activities and academic results should instill confidence in the public that tax dollars are being used ethically and wisely and are yielding positive outcomes for participating students.

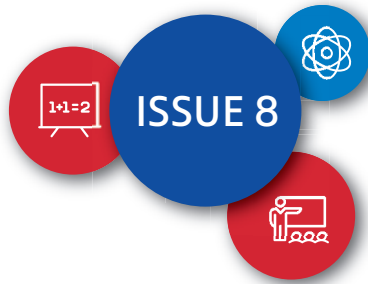
Even more, as recent research spotlights the economic imperative of education¹⁸² and Georgia again stakes its claim as the nation's number one state for business, it is imperative that we know that every available education option is serving students well. Whether students attend a traditional public school or accept a scholarship to attend a private school, state leaders must be diligent in ensuring that every publicly funded education option in Georgia is academically rigorous and designed to prepare each student for college and career success. And similar to businesses, the state should require results data from schools receiving funds to assure legislators and tax payers that they are receiving a good return on their investment. The students, families, and citizens of Georgia deserve it.

179 Suggs, D. 2017. *Education Savings Accounts Carry Huge Price Tag*. Retrieved from Georgia Budget and Policy Institute: cdn.gbpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ESA-Bill-Analysis-SB-68.pdf. Note that these estimates are based on funding the program as proposed in Georgia Senate Bill 68. The bill proposes a year-one program enrollment cap of 0.5% of Georgia's public-school population, followed by a 1.5% cap in year two and the elimination of the cap in year three. Assuming that the maximum number of students enroll in the program each year, GBPI estimates the costs would balloon from \$38 million in year one, to \$116 million in year two, to \$710 million in year three, leading to an \$865 million expenditure in just three years.

180 North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority. *Education Savings Accounts*. Retrieved from www.ncseaa.edu/ESA.htm.

181 EdChoice. *School Choice: North Carolina Personal Education Accounts*. Retrieved from www.edchoice.org/school-choice/programs/north-carolina-personal-education-savings-accounts/.

182 See Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, *Economics of Education, 5th Edition*: online.anyflip.com/jvnu/onlj/mobile/index.html#p=1



SUMMER START DATE: MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Issue Overview

The debate over summer and school calendar start dates has been a hot topic in Georgia over the past year. In March 2018, Senator Steve Gooch (R - Dahlonga) called together a senate study committee to explore the school calendar in Georgia and a possible state-mandated start date after Labor Day for all schools. The potential shifting back of the calendar has many interest groups speaking out – from parents, teachers, and administrators to local tourism groups and business executives. Schools provide a major structure that students, families, and businesses revolve around, making the calendars a central point of interest for many of these stakeholders.

But there is much more to the issue than simply whether the 180 days of school begin before or after Labor Day. The school start date debate encompasses larger educational issues, including summer learning loss, access to out-of-school learning opportunities, and local control. Historically, it has been up to local school districts to take into account “the summer slide” and incorporate community preferences into their local school calendar. Proponents of a later start date, however, argue that Georgia’s economy can greatly benefit from a start date after Labor Day, as students fill seasonal and part-time jobs and families can take summer vacations that also boost the state economy. So, how are school calendars made, and why does Georgia start school so early? And what other options are there for Georgia?

Significance for Georgia

What Influences the Calendar Now?

Currently in Georgia, local superintendents, along with school boards, choose start and end dates for their schools. Processes are often long and sometimes incorporate community feedback, resulting in several stages of revision. Typically, school districts organize a school calendar committee, which includes a variety of stakeholders from the community such as parents, teachers, administrators, and business leaders.¹⁸³ These committees then create draft calendar options and allow staff, parents, and community members to submit feedback on the proposed calendar and vote upon the final calendar. Ultimately, school board members select and approve the calendar that is the best fit for the needs and interests of their local community.

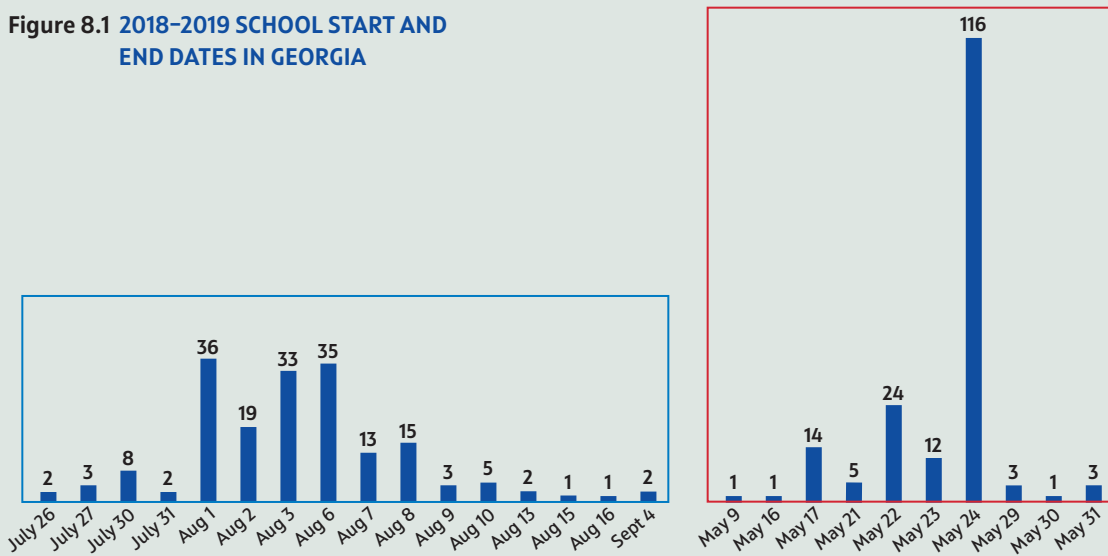
Georgia includes a mix of large, urban school districts and smaller, rural districts with unique and varying needs. The differing needs of the local communities, therefore, have a significant impact on the local calendars. For example, Houston County Schools schedules its fall break to coincide with the state fair, an annual event that is unique to its county and important to the local economy. Similarly, Richmond County Schools creates its school calendar to ensure that spring break falls during the Master’s Tournament.

¹⁸³ Georgia Department of Education. 2018. Senate Study Committee on Evaluating the School Year Calendar of Georgia Public Schools. [PowerPoint Slides].

Coweta County is yet another important example of using the school calendar to meet local needs. The district creates three-year calendars due to the large percentage of Delta employees living in the county. Because Delta requires a significant amount of advance notice for employee vacations, a stable, long-term school calendar is key to meeting employee needs.

Historically, school start dates in Georgia have ranged from July 10 to September 8, with a majority of schools beginning within the first two weeks of August.¹⁸⁴ As seen in Figure 8.1, the 2018–2019 school year start dates lacked uniformity but mostly fell around early August. Only two districts started the school year after Labor Day. A mandated September start date would significantly shift the calendar for the majority of schools in the state.

Figure 8.1 2018–2019 SCHOOL START AND END DATES IN GEORGIA



Source: Georgia Department of Education

School Start Dates: A Recurring Debate

The recent 2018 Senate study committee's inquiry into a state-mandated start date is not the first of its kind in Georgia. In 2005, a House subcommittee also explored requiring the first day of school to be between August 29 and September 7 for all Georgia districts.¹⁸⁵ At the time, then-governor Sonny Perdue and State Superintendent of Schools Kathy Cox agreed that this decision should be left to local districts.

Local school districts are also examining this question. For example, Atlanta Public Schools conducted a survey earlier in 2018 about this issue. Based on the feedback of more than 11,000 respondents, it changed the 2019–2020 start date to August 12, over a week later than in previous years.¹⁸⁶ In an effort to keep the end date before Memorial Day, the district shortened its fall and winter breaks. As a result, the summer break will now be more than one week longer. Cherokee County Schools also conducted a calendar preference survey of its parents and staff in September 2018, gathering more than 10,000 responses.¹⁸⁷ The majority – 80% of parents, 86% of employees, and 83% of students – voted against a mandated start date after Labor Day.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ GaDOE, 2018, Senate Study Committee.

¹⁸⁵ Downey, M. 2018, September 4. School's Not Out for Summer in Georgia Any Longer. Should It Be? Retrieved from *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: www.ajc.com/blog/get-schooled/school-not-out-for-summer-georgia-any-longer-should/EN1PPoaAzQjgdKDMKyE7UI/.

¹⁸⁶ McCray, V. 2018, September 5. Atlanta Schools Plan to Start Later Next Year. Retrieved from *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: www.ajc.com/news/local-education/atlanta-schools-plan-start-later-next-year/VRLUPLjntQnzUg14p6J01K/.

¹⁸⁷ Ballew, S. 2018, September 14. School District Survey: No State-Mandated Calendars. Retrieved from www.cherokee12.net/userfiles/4/my%20files/ccsd%20calendar%20survey%20results%209%2013%2018.pdf?id=4996.

¹⁸⁸ Ballew, 2018.

Factors to Consider around Mandating a Change

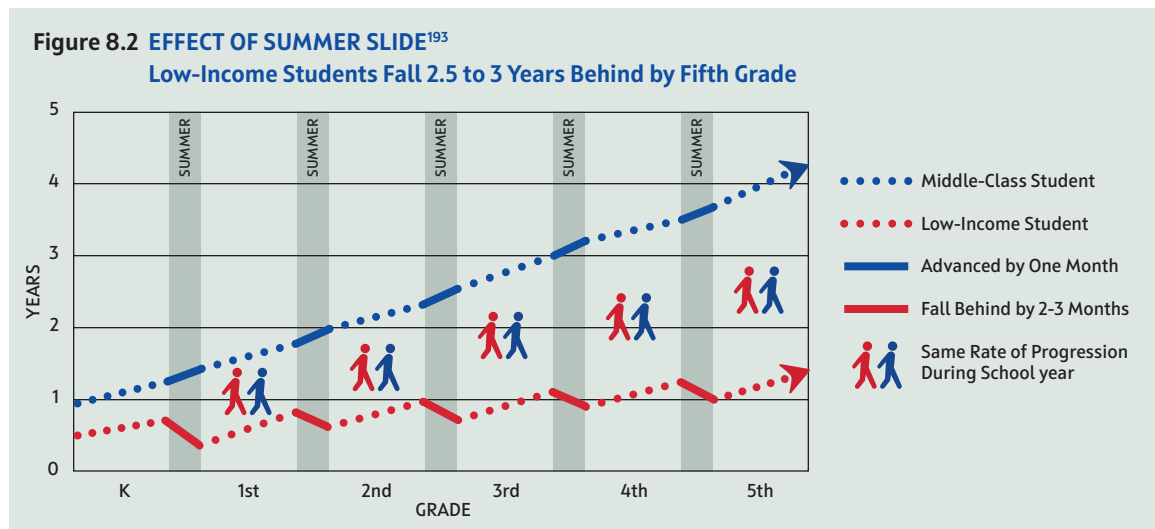
While a change in start date is not about the total number of school days in a calendar year, which is specified in Georgia Code at 180 days, many other impacts and issues should be considered before making such a change.

Benchmarks and Assessment Testing

One major contributor to earlier school start dates in Georgia is the increased focus on assessment and benchmark testing that occurred after the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001. With this greater emphasis on testing, districts sought to give teachers more time to prepare students for these important tests.¹⁸⁹ Similarly, state assessment testing windows for the Georgia Milestones have been gradually pushed back.¹⁹⁰ At the State Senate's request in 2017 to move end-of-grade and end-of-course testing as close to the end of the school year as possible, administration windows ran from April 9 to May 18 in 2018, as opposed to earlier windows in previous years of April 3 to May 5.¹⁹¹ If the start date is pushed back to after Labor Day, the state will have to consider the effects on state assessment testing dates. Additionally, Advanced Placement (AP) tests are also given nationally in early- and mid-May. With these dates set on a national level, a later end date could leave students with several weeks of less structured and less rigorous learning time after taking the AP tests.

Summer Learning Loss

Another important factor to consider around school start dates is the issue of summer learning loss, often referred to as the "summer slide." Numerous research studies have indicated that students lose academic ground over the summer, and children in low-income households lose even more ground compared to their higher income peers. As seen in Figure 8.2, low-income students lose an average of more than two months in reading achievement in the summer, while their middle-income peers tend to make gains in reading.¹⁹² This only exacerbates the achievement gap for low-income students, making it even harder for them to catch up to their peers.



189 GaDOE, 2018, Senate Study Committee.

190 GaDOE, 2018, Senate Study Committee.

191 GaDOE, 2018, Senate Study Committee.

192 Campaign for Grade Level Reading. Summer Learning Loss. Retrieved from gradelevelreading.net/our-work/summer-learning-loss.

193 Campaign for Grade Level Reading.

With the prospect of a potentially longer summer, it is important to consider what summer looks like for Georgia students. As seen with the Atlanta Public Schools example, to accommodate a later start date, districts move away from the “balanced calendar” model, which incorporates breaks throughout the school year, and opt for a longer summer break. A longer break can have negative impacts on students’ academic achievement and access to resources, particularly for low-income students. Not only do schools provide academic support, but they also provide access to meals, a safe place, organized activities, and adult role models and mentors.¹⁹⁴ Students lose access to these important resources over the summer.

Summer Learning Opportunities and Issues of Equity

While summer for some students may include sleep-away camps, family vacations, and organized activities, that is not the case for all students. Approximately 62% of students in Georgia qualified for free or reduced-price lunch during the 2016–2017 school year.¹⁹⁵ However, the cost of an average summer program is \$288 a week per child.¹⁹⁶ A six-week program for two children would cost a family nearly \$3,500, an unrealistic amount for many families. Though parents may want to send their children to summer programs, high costs can often be a barrier, and the lack of availability of programs in rural areas also poses a problem. In 2013, only 25% of Georgia families had at least one child in a summer learning program, yet 42% of families wanted their child to participate in a summer learning program.¹⁹⁷

With so much of Georgia made up of rural communities, it is important to consider what the summer learning landscape looks like in these regions. According to the After School Alliance, summer learning program participation was only 28% in rural communities, compared to 41% in urban communities. Data show that participation levels are not meeting demand in rural communities, as a survey found that 45% of rural parents wanted their child to take part in such a program.¹⁹⁸

Economic Development

Perhaps the strongest proponents of a post-Labor Day start date are those in the business community and tourism industry. Over the summer, students are a major source of seasonal talent and fill part-time jobs. With a longer break, families have time to take vacations and travel to tourist destinations across the state. Travel and hospitality is the state’s fifth-largest industry and provides 445,000 jobs for Georgians.¹⁹⁹ Tourism is a \$60.8 billion industry in the state and generates \$3.1 billion directly and indirectly in tax revenue. Therefore, the Senate committee is interested in exploring the potential to capitalize on this industry over the month of August with a later school start date.

Student Safety and Economic Considerations

Other arguments have been made for a post-Labor Day start. Senator Steve Gooch cited that schools could save money on air conditioning if they closed over the hottest months of July and August.²⁰⁰ Other student safety concerns came up in the Senate hearing on October 9, including the high temperatures on school buses. Many school buses do not have air conditioning because of the high operating costs,

194 Pitcock, S. 2018, Spring. The Case for Summer Learning. Retrieved from *American Educator*: files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1173455.pdf.

195 Governor’s Office of Student Achievement. Percentage of Enrollment by Race/Other Subgroups. Retrieved from <https://gaawards.gosa.ga.gov/analytics/saw.dll?PortalPages>. Free and reduced-price lunch is a common indicator for poverty. To qualify, a family of four must have an income of less than \$31,980. Income data retrieved from www.northwestgeorgianews.com/georgia-announces--free-and-reduced-price-meal-income/article_7936f465-32a9-59a0-be97-17c6e5867daa.html.

196 National Summer Learning Association. 2018. The Achievement Gap: Summer by the Numbers. Retrieved from www.summerlearning.org/at-a-glance/.

197 America After 3PM. Retrieved from www.afterschoolga.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/GrowingDemand-GA-page-001.jpg.

198 America After 3PM. 2016, March. The Growing Importance of Afterschool in Rural Communities. Retrieved from www.afterschoolalliance.org/AA3PM/Afterschool_in_Rural_Communities.pdf.

199 Senate Resolution 1068.

200 Tagami, T. 2018, November 15. Lawmakers Consider Changing School Calendars. Retrieved from *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: www.ajc.com/news/state-regional-education/lawmakers-consider-changing-school-calendars/X3E6NHAcBFirXhjZeH5vCK/.

leading to potentially unsafe conditions for students, especially those with long bus rides.²⁰¹ A later start date could mitigate some of these concerns. In addition, higher summer temperatures in July and August pose a threat for older students who participate in outdoor sports such as football. There have been several heat-related injuries and deaths among student-athletes in recent years.²⁰²

A 2012 study of travel patterns in five states examined whether families vacationed more when school began after Labor Day. It found that families with children in schools that started after Labor Day were 50% more likely to take a trip during August or September.²⁰³ One state with a start date mandate is Michigan, which passed a 2005 state law requiring that the first day of school be after Labor Day. A 2016 analysis found that the later start date has yielded over \$20 million in tourism revenue.²⁰⁴ However, even with these positive economic yields, more than 150 Michigan school districts applied for a waiver with the Michigan Department of Education to begin school earlier for the 2018–2019 school year.²⁰⁵ This number has grown exponentially in recent years, as only 26 applied for a waiver in the 2012–2013 school year. This trend supports a move for local control, despite state efforts to mandate a later start date.

A similar calendar debate has also played out in nearby North Carolina. In 2012, North Carolina Senate Bill 187 required a school start date no earlier than the Monday closest to August 26 and an end date no later than the Friday closest to June 11 (unless a weather-related calendar waiver or waivers related to a year-round school, charter schools, or cooperative innovative high schools has been approved). If a waiver is approved, the start date can be no earlier than the Monday closest to August 19.²⁰⁶

Action Steps for Georgia

It is clear that many stakeholders have opinions about the school calendar and start date in Georgia. How does Georgia prevent summer slide and ensure student safety, while also maximizing economic growth for our state? It is important to look at this issue from a broader perspective and consider all of these factors when discussing school calendars.

The Current Conversation

The current discussion around the school calendar appears to set up a debate between those arguing for economic development and those focused on education. The current Senate committee is composed overwhelmingly of business, tourism, and industry professionals from across the state. Yet many education and interest groups have spoken out against a mandated start date, citing the need for local control and a focus on students. During testimony to the Senate committee, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) argued that the school start date should be a matter of local control.

201 Abusaid, S. 2018, October 12. Senate Study Committee Reignites School Calendar Debate. Retrieved from *Marietta Daily Journal*: www.mdjonline.com/news/senate-study-committee-reignites-school-calendar-debate/article_474c397a-ce73-11e8-8ed1-cf262531d478.html.

202 Bratcher, E. 2016, July 27. High School Football: Georgia Group Tackles Heat Risks on Practice Field. Retrieved from *Associations Now*: associationsnow.com/2016/07/georgia-groups-policy-works-keep-athletes-safe-cool/.

203 Mykerezi, E., and G. Kostandini. 2012. Do Families Vacation More in the Summer When School Starts after Labor Day? University of Minnesota Tourism Center. Retrieved from conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/167876.

204 Anderson Economic Group. 2016. The School Year Calendar and Tourism in Michigan. Retrieved from www.andersoneconomicgroup.com/Portals/0/AEG%20MLTA%20School%20Year%20Study_9-8-2016.pdf.

205 Higgins, L. 2018, August 15. Back to School Coming Earlier for More Michigan Students. Retrieved from *Detroit Free Press*: www.freep.com/story/news/education/2018/08/15/michigan-schools-start-early/929720002/.

206 zSenate Bill 187. 2012. (Session Law 2012-145). Full text available at www.dpi.state.nc.us/fbs/accounting/calendar/.

This position supports the trend toward decentralized decision-making in education that values local input and control, a trend that has been under way in Georgia for over a decade. The 2007 Charter Systems Act granted school systems more autonomy by freeing them from many of the state's education regulations as specified in Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia. To help facilitate greater local control of public education, district leaders have been empowered with the flexibility and authority to lead their districts through student performance contracts between local boards of education and the State Board of Education (SBOE). They can choose to operate as either a Charter System²⁰⁷ or a Strategic Waiver School System (SWSS).²⁰⁸ All local school systems in Georgia, except for two, are either a Charter System or SWSS.²⁰⁹ Interestingly, these types of contracts with the state that would qualify Georgia's districts for a waiver from the start date legislation recently passed in North Carolina.

Testimony during a Senate study committee hearing indicated support for local control and decision-making. In his testimony before the Senate committee, a representative of the Professional Association of Georgia Educators stated that its members were in favor of local control. The organization distributed a survey in September to gauge its members' stance on school start dates. In less than one week, the organization received more than 18,000 responses.²¹⁰ While the results revealed a split on whether or not to start school after Labor Day, an overwhelming majority believed that the decision should be left to local decision makers. The Georgia Parent Teacher Association and the Cobb County Association of Educators also testified in favor of local control.

Shifting the Conversation

The calendar debate is drawing important attention to how students spend their summers in Georgia. This could be a good time for legislators, stakeholders, and interest groups to draw on this momentum and push conversations around summer learning opportunities for all students across the state. Summer does not look the same for all students, and many do not have access to summer learning opportunities, especially low-income students and students in rural communities.

Generally, there has been little investment in summer learning at a state level or district level. Often, parents and families are left to find and pay for summer programs on their own. However, under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Student Support Grants (Title IX, Part A), states can use this federal funding toward summer learning.²¹¹ Atlanta Public Schools recently took advantage of this additional funding and introduced a new summer school initiative in 2018 called Power Up, a free, project-based summer enrichment program. Continued and widespread investment around summer learning would be a positive step for Georgia's students. Offering summer programs within schools ensures that students have access to these programs over the summer, particularly in low-income and rural areas.

207 A charter system is a local school district that operates under the terms of a charter between the SBOE and the local school district. The system receives blanket flexibility from certain state rules and regulations regarding academic programs, human resource requirements, and financial policies in exchange for greater accountability. There is an emphasis on school-based leadership and decision-making.

208 An SWSS is a local school district that operates under the terms of an SWSS contract between the SBOE and the local board of education. The system can request flexibility in the form of waivers of certain state laws covering academic programming, human resources, and financial policies in exchange for greater accountability for increased student performance.

209 Buford City and Webster County are the only non-charter or SWSS systems in Georgia. For a complete list of charter and SWSS, see www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Documents/SWSS%20System%20Flexibility.pdf.

210 SR 1068: Senate Study Committee on Evaluating the School Year Calendar of Georgia Public Schools: Hearings before the Georgia Senate Study Committee, 153rd Georgia General Assembly. 2018. Testimony of Matthew Pence.

211 Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network. Afterschool in Georgia's State Every Student Succeeds Act Plan. Retrieved from www.afterschoolga.org/policy-advocacy/afterschool-in-essa/.

The Senate study committee has recommended changes to the state law that would place “guardrails” on each district’s ability to set school year start and end dates. The committee is recommending a required start date no earlier than seven to 10 days before Labor Day and an end date around June 1. In 2017, 22 states passed summer learning legislation. (Georgia was not one of them, though legislation was introduced.) For example, Nevada Assembly Bill 70 designates certain tax revenue to support educational programs in specific low-income communities, including summer learning and wraparound services.²¹² Creating legislation that specifically targets additional support in rural areas and low-income communities will ensure that all Georgia students have access to summer learning opportunities.

The EdQuest Georgia research shows that supportive learning environments are a key element of successful education systems. One tenet of these environments is the support of out-of-school time options for all students. To support this important element, Georgia needs to

- involve diverse stakeholders who would be affected by a calendar shift in the decision-making process, including educators, parents, and administrators;
- build on the momentum of the start date debate and shift the conversation toward providing expanded summer learning opportunities to all students in Georgia, especially students in low-income and rural communities;
- invest strategically in summer learning, ensuring that districts take advantage of ESSA Student Support Grants; and
- consider expanding summer learning legislation in the 2019 legislative session.

With the increased attention being paid to school calendars, it is an opportune time for Georgia to dig deeper into summer learning and explore what can be done to support students across the state during this critical time.

212 National Summer Learning Association. State of Summer Learning: 2017 State Policy Snapshot. Retrieved from www.summerlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/NSLA-2017-State-Policy-Snapshot.pdf.



DUAL ENROLLMENT: GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY

Issue Overview

Two birds with one stone – that is the beauty of dual enrollment courses. Dual enrollment allows high school students to take college-level courses and earn high school and college credit concurrently. Through dual enrollment coursework, students graduate high school already on a higher education path.

Under the direction of Governor Nathan Deal's Complete College Georgia initiative, Georgia has been putting multiple pathways for post-secondary success in place to close our workforce talent gap, with a goal of increasing the number of post-secondary graduates by 250,000 by 2025. The state has been focusing on increasing the rigor of traditional pathways to high school graduation, readying students for post-secondary education, and implementing innovative programs, like dual enrollment, that blend high school, career, and post-secondary education.

Today's dual enrollment program was established in 2015 through Senate Bill (SB) 132's Move On When Ready Act. The act was created in response to Governor Deal's 2014 dual enrollment task force, which made recommendations to streamline and improve dual enrollment processes. The program consolidates three prior state-funded programs into one named Dual Enrollment. The current program reduces barriers to participation by opening enrollment to all Georgia high school students and removes financial disincentives experienced by local school systems, which under previous programs lost Quality Basic Education (QBE)²¹³ funding for dual-enrolled students.^{214,215}

A second piece of legislation, SB 2, also produced in response to the governor's task force, created an alternative pathway to earning a high school diploma (rather than meeting standard requirements) for dually enrolled students.²¹⁶

The year after these two pieces of legislation passed, fiscal year (FY) 2016, the state observed its largest annual increases in both student participation (49% increase) and state spending on the program (133% increase) compared to any of the previous five years.

The program's surge in popularity throughout Georgia raises several questions. First, why is the program growing so much? What are the trends? How is Georgia financing Dual Enrollment, and what is our return on investment? Finally, as the program grows, what implications should be considered?

²¹³ In Georgia, most state funds for public schools are provided according to the QBE formula, which was established by state legislation in 1985. The QBE is a highly complex formula consisting of 18 student categories based on grade and academic level, such as special education; career, technical, and agricultural education programs; and so forth. Essentially, districts "earn" money from the state based on how many teachers are required to meet their class size needs. For more information, see "Issue 5: Funding: Is Fully Funding QBE Enough?"

²¹⁴ At the time, three programs, Accel, the Hope Grant, and Move On When Ready, supported different sets of students in earning dual enrollment credit. Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA). 2017. Georgia Dual Enrollment and Postsecondary Outcomes. Retrieved from gosa.georgia.gov/sites/gosa.georgia.gov/files/Dual%20Enrollment%20and%20Postsecondary%20Outcomes%20Report%20from%202008%20to%202016%20Nov92017%20FINAL.pdf.

²¹⁵ GOSA, 2017, Georgia Dual Enrollment and Postsecondary Outcomes.

²¹⁶ Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts (GDAA), Performance Audit Division. 2018. Special Examination, Report No. 17-09.

Significance for Georgia

Georgia's Dual Enrollment Program

Georgia's Dual Enrollment program is open to all high school students. Through the program, students can complete an unlimited number of courses at post-secondary institutions prior to high school graduation. Students become eligible for the coursework by meeting specific admissions requirements, which vary by institution and course. Most classes are delivered at post-secondary institutions (74%), while a few are delivered at high school campuses (17%) or online (9%).²¹⁷

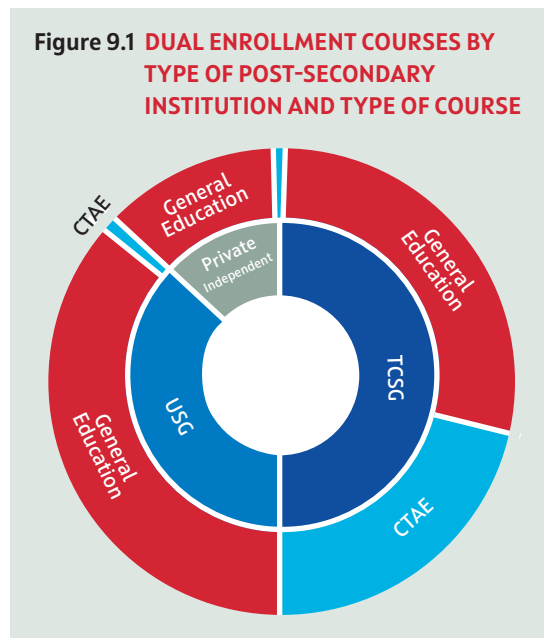
All Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) institutions, University System of Georgia (USG) institutions, and some private institutions offer dual enrollment courses. TCSG institutions provided nearly 50% of the dual enrollment credit hours to students in 2017, while USG granted 36%. TCSG institutions also deliver the most dual enrollment courses to students at high school campuses.²¹⁸

Students choose the classes they are dually enrolled in; the majority choose general education courses, which represent 78% of attempted dual enrollment credit hours. The remaining 22% are career, technical, and agricultural education (CTAE) classes. Among higher education systems, TCSG provides the most significant percentage (42%) of CTAE dual enrollment coursework to students (see Figure 9.1).

Dual Enrollment program participation has significantly increased over the last five years. Total attempted credit hours rose 258% between FY 2013 and FY 2017. This includes both increases in the number of students participating in the program (212%) as well as an increase in the number of credit hours attempted per student (15%).

Much of this increase is attributable to the streamlining of programs under the Move On When Ready Act and SB 2. Another factor contributing to dual enrollment's growth may be the expanding menu of admissions criteria TCSG is developing to promote access for more students to become eligible. Requirements vary by TCSG course and institution, but in some cases students can gain eligibility through either traditional entry criteria (such as GPA or ACT/SAT scores) or nontraditional measures (such as PSAT scores, Georgia Milestones results, or other approved placement test scores).²¹⁹

Finally, while not a new feature, it is worth noting that participation in Dual Enrollment is mandatory for both public high schools and postsecondary institutions. Conversations about Dual Enrollment start in middle school statewide; eighth grade public school students are required to receive Dual Enrollment



217 GDA, Performance Audit Division, 2018.

218 GDA, Performance Audit Division, 2018.

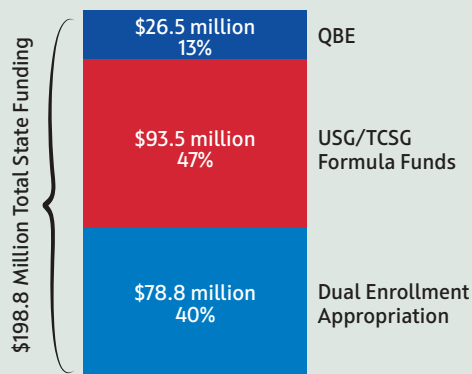
219 Note that as of October 2018, admissions crosswalks from Georgia Milestones English Language Arts courses for Dual Enrollment eligibility have been built and math admissions crosswalks are in progress.

program information as they develop their individual graduation plans. High schools are also required to annually provide information and counseling services on the Dual Enrollment program to all eligible high school students.²²⁰

Funding Dual Enrollment

Georgia is one of five states where the state is responsible for paying a student's dual enrollment tuition.²²¹ Program funding is provided to the Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC) via an annual appropriation from the General Assembly, which is then distributed to post-secondary institutions. Post-secondary institutions waive all mandatory and non-course-related student fees, provide course books at no charge to the student, and accept the amount paid by the commission as full payment for high school students' tuition, fees, and course books.²²² To promote program participation, the state also awards transportation grants to districts through the appropriation. Dual Enrollment appropriations have increased by 325% in five years, from \$18.5 million in FY 2014 to \$78.8 million in 2018.²²³

Figure 9.2 ANNUAL DUAL ENROLLMENT APPROPRIATIONS, FY 2018²²⁵



These appropriations represent only one of three components of Georgia's expenditures for Dual Enrollment. The state also provides enrollment-based formula funding to USG and TCSG institutions and provides QBE funding to local K-12 school districts for the portion of the day students take Dual Enrollment courses. Considering all three factors, an estimated total of \$198.8 million in state funding was provided for Dual Enrollment in FY 2018 (see Figure 9.2).²²⁴

Georgia is making a decisive public investment in the program. A recent Brookings Institution analysis shows that state costs for a dual enrollment course were 60% higher than if the student took the community college course via direct enrollment after completing high school.²²⁶ So, what is our return on investment?

Outcomes

Students passed an overwhelming majority, 94%, of Dual Enrollment credit hours attempted in 2017.²²⁷ It is too early to fully evaluate student outcomes under the new Dual Enrollment program (post-SB 132 and SB 2), which took effect in FY 2016. However, indicators show that students who participate in Dual Enrollment have the following positive outcomes as compared to those that did not participate:²²⁸

- Graduate from high school within four years: 94% (GA 74%)²²⁹
- Enroll in a post-secondary institution within a year of graduating: 83% (GA 64%)
- Earn a post-secondary credential four years after high school graduation: 29% (GA 17%)
- Earn a post-secondary credential six years after graduation: 48% (GA 36%)

220 State Board of Education. 2017. Rule Number 160-4-2-.34 Dual Enrollment – Move On When Ready. Retrieved from www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/State-Board-of-Education/SBOE%20Rules/160-4-2-.34.pdf.

221 Education Commission of the States. 2016. 50-State Comparison: Dual/Concurrent Enrollment Policies. Retrieved from www.ecs.org/dual-concurrent-enrollment-policies/.

222 Education Commission of the States, 2016.

223 GDA, Performance Audit Division, 2018.

224 GDA, Performance Audit Division, 2018.

225 GDA, Performance Audit Division, 2018.

226 Brookings Institution. 2017, November 30. *The Brown Center Chalkboard, States Be Aware: Cost Savings for Dual Enrollment Elude State Ledgers*. Retrieved from www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2017/11/30/states-be-aware-cost-savings-for-dual-enrollment-elude-state-ledgers/.

227 GDA, Performance Audit Division, 2018.

228 GOSA, 2017, Georgia Dual Enrollment and Postsecondary Outcomes.

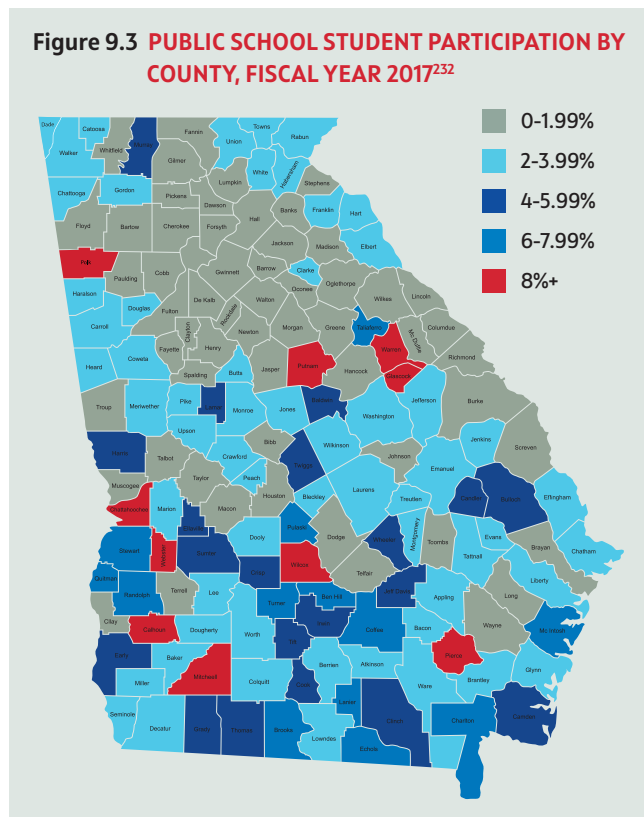
229 Governor's Office of Student Achievement. 2018. Report Card. Retrieved from gosa.georgia.gov/report-card.

A caveat to these data points is that students must meet post-secondary entrance requirements to become eligible for Dual Enrollment courses, which means they are already performing at a level higher than their peers who are not eligible for Dual Enrollment. More research is needed to determine Dual Enrollment's effects on high school and post-secondary persistence and completion.²³⁰

One important outcome is that the program provides access to critical higher education experiences in areas of the state that are often overlooked. The counties with the highest Dual Enrollment student participation rates lie outside traditional metropolitan areas. These counties also earn more credits: 80% of Dual Enrollment credits were provided to students in high schools outside the Atlanta and Savannah metro areas in 2017. Most Dual Enrollment students in rural counties take classes through the TCSG, which offers 85 campuses statewide.²³¹ Rural K-12 districts are able to leverage partnerships with local TCSG campuses, receive transportation grants, or bring Dual Enrollment instructors to high school campuses (see Figure 9.3).

In addition, the state carries the full cost of the Dual Enrollment program, which encourages students from low-income backgrounds statewide to participate as they are less likely to be able to afford expenses associated with a post-secondary education, such as tuition, fees, and the cost of books.

Despite these bright points, all students are not accessing the program equally. Of potential concern is the distribution of Dual Enrollment participants by race and income. White students are overrepresented in the current Dual Enrollment program compared to their presence in public schools. African American student participation, on the other hand, has been on the decline in comparison with this group's presence in public schools. Hispanic students are also underrepresented in the Dual Enrollment program; participation is increasing but is not keeping pace with the growth of the Hispanic student population. Finally, low-income student participation has been historically low in the program, despite such students being a majority of the K-12 student population. Recent low-income student trends are difficult to discern given increases in schoolwide free and reduced-price lunch programs. However, the gap in low-income student participation is beginning to narrow, as shown in Figure 9.4.²³³

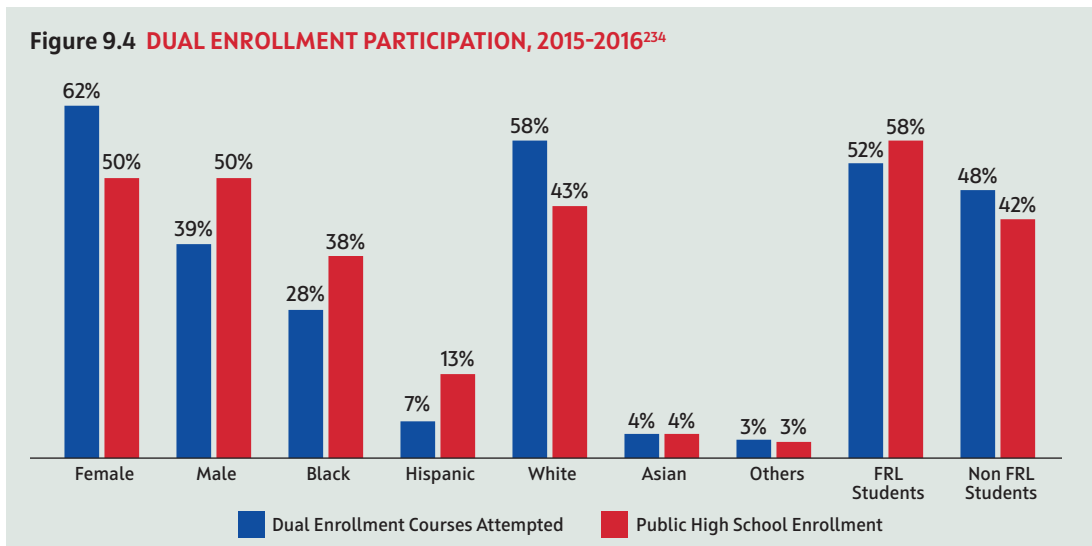


230 GOSA, 2017. Georgia Dual Enrollment and Postsecondary Outcomes.

231 GDAA, Performance Audit Division, 2018.

232 GDAA, Performance Audit Division, 2018.

233 GOSA, 2017, Georgia Dual Enrollment and Postsecondary Outcomes.



Action Steps for Georgia

As demand for the Dual Enrollment program grows among students, Georgia will be faced with multiple challenges. First, the state will need to produce an increased supply of effective Dual Enrollment instructors to keep up with rising enrollment trends. Nationally, there is concern that dual enrollment courses taught by high school teachers may not meet the same level of rigor as courses taught by faculty on post-secondary campuses.²³⁵ Conversely, some express concern that college faculty are not equipped to teach high school students. They question whether the pedagogy and supports needed for high school and college-level students should be differentiated.

While Georgia does not have a unified state policy on Dual Enrollment instructor qualifications in place, state statute directs the SBOE, the USG, and the TCSG to ensure that dual credit courses reflect post-secondary work.²³⁶ Georgia's higher education accrediting agency, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), requires that dual enrollment instructors at the undergraduate or associate's degree level have a doctorate, master's degree, or at least 18 graduate semester hours in their teaching discipline.²³⁷ SACSCOC also requires that the academic rigor of dual enrollment coursework match the quality of other institutional post-secondary coursework, regardless of location or mode of course delivery.²³⁸

As we work to keep up with student demand for Dual Enrollment courses, we can look to other states for strategies for producing quality instructors. Washburn University in Kansas delivers professional development to high school dual enrollment instructors in high-need school systems through its Concurrent Enrollment Teacher Development Project. In other states, graduate school financial aid is offered to high school teachers to complete credits to become certified.²³⁹

²³⁴ GOSA, 2017, Georgia Dual Enrollment and Postsecondary Outcomes.

²³⁵ Education Commission of the States, 2016.

²³⁶ Midwestern Higher Education Compact & Education Commission of the States. 2016. Faculty Qualification Policies and Strategies Relevant to Dual Enrollment Programs: An Analysis of States and Regional Accreditation Agencies. Retrieved from www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/Faculty-Qualification-Policies-and-Strategies-Relevant-to-Dual-Enrollment-Programs-An-Analysis-of-States-and-Regional-Accreditation-Agencies-2.pdf.

²³⁷ Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. 2018. Faculty Credentials Guidelines. Retrieved from www.sacscoc.org/pdf/081705/faculty%20credentials.pdf.

²³⁸ Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. 2018. Dual Enrollment Policy Statement. Retrieved from www.sacscoc.org/pdf/081705/Dual%20Enrollment.pdf.

²³⁹ Education Commission of the States. 2018. Increasing the Supply of Qualified High School Teachers for Dual Enrollment Programs: An Overview of State and Regional Accreditor Policies. Retrieved from www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/Increasing-the-Supply-of-Qualified-High-School-Teachers-for-Dual-Enrollment-Programs.pdf

Additionally, there are concerns that dual enrollment growth is eroding other options for students to access and complete college-level work before leaving high school. The Dual Enrollment program is one of several such options for high school students, among other choices like Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) coursework. Compared to other post-secondary opportunities available in high school, Dual Enrollment continues to represent a modest slice of the pie. About 11% of US students used dual enrollment in the most recent data.²⁴⁰ The AP and IB participation rates were three times higher. Similarly, in Georgia, three times as many students took AP tests as enrolled in Dual Enrollment courses in 2016.^{241, 242}

Given the increasing costs and scale of Dual Enrollment, Georgia faces issues of sustainability. The state spent \$198.8 million in 2018 for this relatively small share of the student population, and over the last five years appropriations increased by 350%. A recent Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts (GDAA) report on the program offers several recommendations, some of which are outlined below. Policymakers and administrators should consider these recommendations when developing the goals, data management policies, and controls of the program to help us measure and maximize our Dual Enrollment return on investment.²⁴³

1. Define Dual Enrollment Goals and Objectives in Statute

The General Assembly should consider adding defined goals and objectives for the Dual Enrollment program. The purpose of the Dual Enrollment program is “to allow students to pursue post-secondary study...while receiving dual high school and college credit,”²⁴⁴ but no specific goals or objectives are defined in statute or policy. Without these, it is not possible to determine the cost-effectiveness of the state’s investment. Several other states with dual enrollment programs have incorporated goals and objectives in their enabling legislation. Here are two examples (more are offered in the GDAA report):

STATE	LEGISLATIVELY DEFINED DUAL ENROLLMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES
Florida	“Shorten the time necessary for a student to complete the requirements associated with the conference of a high school diploma and a postsecondary degree.” (Florida Law §1007.27.(1))
North Carolina	“Outcomes to be measured shall include (1) the impact of dual enrollment on high school completion (2) the academic achievement and performance of dually enrolled high school students (3) the number of students who successfully complete college certificates while dually enrolled (4) the impact of dual enrollment and certificate completion on enrollment in college (5) the persistence and completion rates of students who continue into college programs after high school graduation and (6) the academic achievement and performance of students who continue into college programs after high school graduation.” (House Bill 200 Section 7.1A(d) 2011 Session Creating the College and Career Promise Program)

When developing such goals, the legislature must determine what role the program should play in addressing the state’s workforce and equity needs. Is the purpose of the program to extend higher education access to all students throughout the state? Increase the percentage of students enrolling in college? Shorten time to post-secondary degree completion? Increase high school and post-secondary degree attainment?

240 Mathews, J. 2016, September 18. Dual-Enrollment High School Programs Are Oversold, But They Do Have Value. Retrieved from *Washington Post*: www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/dual-enrollment-high-school-programs-are-oversold-but-they-do-have-value/2016/09/18/c2faeb5c-7ba5-11e6-ac8e-cf8e0dd91dc7_story.html?utm_term=.db1fd5ccc0f6.

241 Governor’s Office of Student Achievement. 2017, May 30. Georgia’s Advanced Placement Program: Historical Trends and Descriptive Statistics. Retrieved from gosa.georgia.gov/georgia%E2%80%99s-advanced-placement-program-historical-trends-and-descriptive-statistics.

242 GOSA, 2017, Georgia Dual Enrollment and Postsecondary Outcomes.

243 GDAA, Performance Audit Division, 2018.

244 GDAA, Performance Audit Division, 2018.

Note that both the GSFC and the USG have issued statements of support for creating goals and objectives for the program, and the USG suggests aligning them with the Complete College Georgia initiative.

2. Streamline Dual Enrollment Data Management

Once goals and objectives are established, more research will be needed to assess outcomes related to the Dual Enrollment program. While initial persistence and completion indicators related to program participation appear positive, it is not possible to determine the effects of the Dual Enrollment program without more disciplined study. Students must meet post-secondary entrance requirements to become eligible for Dual Enrollment; thus, they are already high performing and more likely to persist and succeed in high school and higher education, making comparisons to state averages unreliable.²⁴⁵ Currently, data about the program are spread among several state agencies. To unify management of the data, the General Assembly should identify a single state agency to house and track the success of the program.

3. Limit the Total Number of Allowable Credit Hours

The General Assembly should also consider limiting the total number of Dual Enrollment credit hours per student per term in a manner similar to the limitations established for the HOPE Scholarship. State law does not limit the number of Dual Enrollment credit hours students can enroll in each term. Instead, GSFC limits students to 15 credit hours per term per post-secondary institution. The GDAA's recent review showed that the state may have funded more Dual Enrollment courses than is reasonable for some students, up to 58 credit hours per term. Students who received more than 15 hours of Dual Enrollment aid per academic term were able to do so by enrolling in multiple post-secondary institutions during the same term, which neither state law nor GSFC policies prohibit.

Georgia's Dual Enrollment program is increasingly opening higher education doors to students statewide while providing vital cost-savings for families. As both participation and costs grow, we need to consider our long-term sustainability. How do we further define the program to contribute to our state's workforce goals? How do we target the right students aligned with the goals of the program to make sure all our children have the same opportunities regardless of their location and background? And how do we grow and monitor the program as smartly as possible to make sure every state dollar counts? These critical questions must be addressed to ensure the program will ultimately meet the needs of the state, our students, and our families.



POST-SECONDARY: COSTS, OTHER BARRIERS IMPEDE SUCCESS

Issue Overview

The Georgia economy continues to expand and was ranked the number one state in which to do business for a fifth consecutive year in 2018.²⁴⁶ Trends in the job market continue to point to a need for an educated workforce to support this growth: it is widely touted that the state needs an additional 250,000 workers with a certificate, two-year, or four-year degree to fill the available positions that our economy will demand by 2025.²⁴⁷ This need is apparent in rural as well as urban contexts. A qualified and skilled workforce is the number one concern in each of the 12 economic development regions of the state, as reported by the Georgia Chamber of Commerce. Post-secondary completion remains one of the most important economic development issues facing the state.

Currently, Georgia's post-secondary completion rate continues to slump below the state's need. Only 48% of Georgia residents have completed an associate's degree or beyond; however, economic forecasts predict that 60% of jobs will require at least this much education by 2020. The strongest and fastest growing industries in the state require post-secondary education, yet the pipeline from high school to the workforce is leaking. Less than 70% of college freshmen return to school for their second year.²⁴⁸ Moreover, five years after high school graduation:²⁴⁹

- 26% of students have earned a certificate or degree, and
- 57% have no post-secondary degree and are not currently enrolled in a post-secondary program.

To meet the economic needs of the state and its residents, Georgia must identify the barriers to completion facing post-secondary students.

Significance for Georgia

Barriers to Completion

Georgia has experienced a rapid growth in the percentage of low-income students and families, especially amongst minority students, and these groups underperform in post-secondary retention and completion. Figure 10.1 shows a nearly 20-percentage point difference in completion rates at research universities between the lowest and highest income categories. Figure 10.2 indicates that only 32% of low-income students complete one year of credits within two years, compared to 51% of non-low-income students.

²⁴⁶ See <https://www.georgia.org/>.

²⁴⁷ University System of Georgia. 2017. *University System of Georgia Campus Plan Update, 2017*. Retrieved from Complete College Georgia: completega.org/sites/default/files/Campus_Plans/2017/USG_2017_Update.pdf.

²⁴⁸ Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. 2017. *Economics of Education, Fifth Edition*. Retrieved from online.anyflip.com/jvnu/onlj/mobile/index.html#p=1.

²⁴⁹ Governor's Office of Student Achievement. 2018. *High School Graduate Outcomes Report 2012*. Retrieved from hsgrad.gosa.ga.gov/.

Figure 10.1 POST-SECONDARY ENROLLMENT AND PERSISTENCE, ALL GEORGIA HIGH SCHOOLS, CLASS OF 2013²⁵⁰

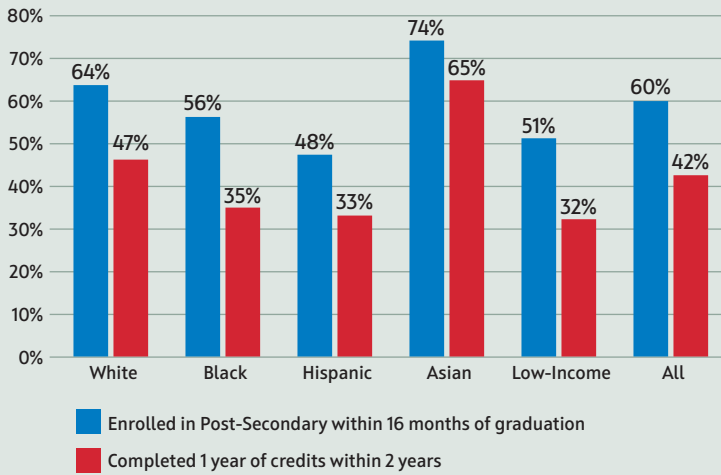
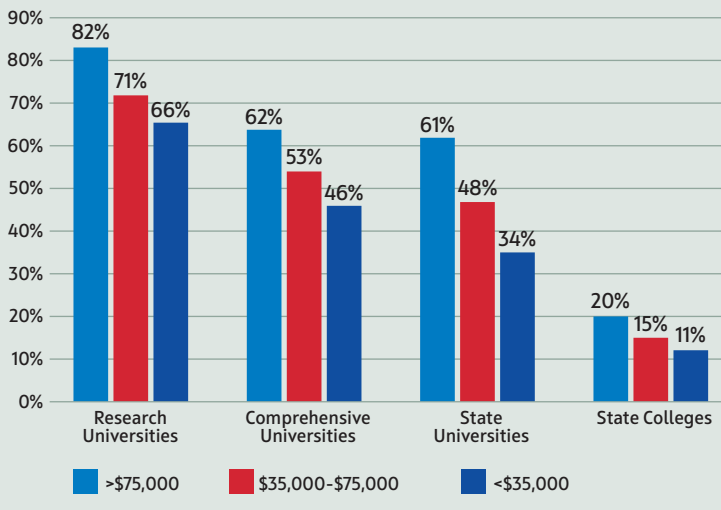


Figure 10.2 STUDENT GRADUATION RATES IN STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES BY FAMILY INCOME, SIX-YEAR BACHELOR'S DEGREE^{251, 252}



The groups least likely to complete post-secondary education are among the fastest growing in the state. At the onset of the 2017–2018 school year, 61% of Georgia’s K-12 students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, a proxy measure for poverty,²⁵³ compared to 50% in 2005–2006.²⁵⁴ The percentage of students across the University System of Georgia (USG) receiving the Pell Grant, the federal needs-based scholarship and an indicator of low-income status among undergraduate students, also grew from 27% in 2006 to 43% in 2016.²⁵⁵

250 Governor’s Office of Student Achievement. 2018. Post-Secondary C12 Report (2016-2017). Retrieved from gosa.georgia.gov/downloadable-data.

251 Lee, J. 2017, August 22. Georgia Budget & Policy Institute. Retrieved from *Georgia Higher Education Data Book*: gbpi.org/2017/georgia-higher-education-data-book/#_edn32.

252 All rates for first-time, full-time freshmen; six-year bachelors’ graduation rates presented for students starting at research, comprehensive and state universities in 2010; Three-year associate degree rates for students starting at state colleges in 2013, not counting transfers. Data not available for technical colleges

253 Georgia Department of Education. 2018. Georgia Department of Education. Retrieved from *Free and Reduced Priced Meal Eligibility (2005–2018)*: app3.doe.k12.ga.us/ows-bin/owa/fte_pack_frl001_public.entry_form.

254 GaDOE, 2018, Georgia Department of Education.

255 University System of Georgia. 2018. Pell Grant Recipients (2006–2016). Retrieved from www.usg.edu/research/financial_aid/pell_grant_recipients.

Real Cost of Post-Secondary Education

One of the most significant barriers to the completion of higher education is cost, which is particularly relevant considering the rapidly growing proportion of low-income residents in Georgia. Costs associated with post-secondary completion include not only tuition, but also basic necessities such as food, housing, health care, and transportation while students attend classes.

The Board of Regents (BOR) recently released an audit on the rising cost of higher education within the USG. The audit found that over the 10 years between fiscal year (FY) 2006 and FY 2015, the following occurred:²⁵⁶

- Decreased state expenditures and changes in the HOPE Scholarship have shifted a larger portion of costs to students through increased tuition.
- Costs have also increased due to institution-level policy decisions to increase mandatory fees and to expand requirements to live on campus and purchase meal plans.
- USG students' average costs of attendance increased 77%.
- State appropriations did not keep pace with enrollment, resulting in a 15% decrease in per-pupil funding.
- Typical housing expenses increased 56% and typical dining expenses increased 60%, both more than double inflation.

The rising cost of tuition has sparked a national debt crisis for students seeking post-secondary education. Student loan debt is the second-highest consumer debt category – behind only mortgage debt – and higher than both credit cards and auto loans. The latest 2018 loan debt statistics show that more than 44 million borrowers across the US collectively owe \$1.5 trillion in student loan debt. The average student from the class of 2016 has over \$37,000 in student loan debt. Georgia ranks fifth in the nation for total outstanding student loan debt among its residents. Collectively, more than 1.5 million Georgians owe \$54 billion.²⁵⁷ Also in Georgia, 57% of the class of 2017 graduated owing an average of \$28,653.²⁵⁸ It is important to note that these numbers do not include students that incurred debt and subsequently did not graduate.

Georgia's main financial aid for post-secondary education comes in the form of the HOPE and Zell Miller Grant and Scholarship programs. The HOPE Scholarship and the associated Zell Miller Scholarship offer merit-based aid to students pursuing bachelor's or associate's degrees through the USG or the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG). The HOPE Grant is targeted at students in diploma and certificate fields in the TCSG and is not based on merit. These are nationally recognized financial aid packages, but since the Great Recession and corresponding cuts in the state budget, they have shrunk significantly while tuition costs have risen.²⁵⁹ For example, the HOPE Scholarship has shrunk by about \$130 million since 2011, when lawmakers tied the funding stream to lottery revenue rather than tuition rates. While Georgia's economy has rebounded significantly since the recession, this policy shift remains unchanged.²⁶⁰

256 Griffin, G.S., and M. Leslie. 2016. *Board of Regents: Requested Information on Higher Education Cost Drivers*. Atlanta: Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts, Performance Audit Division.

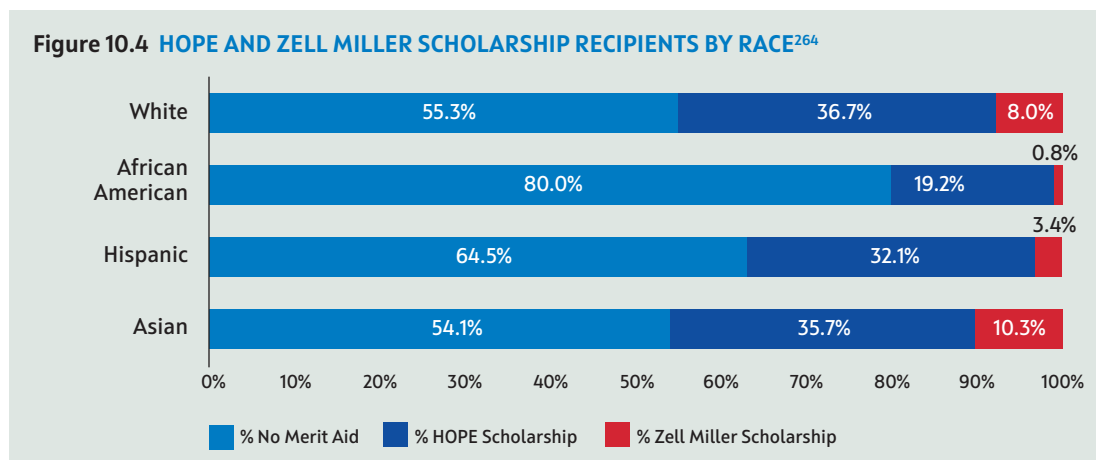
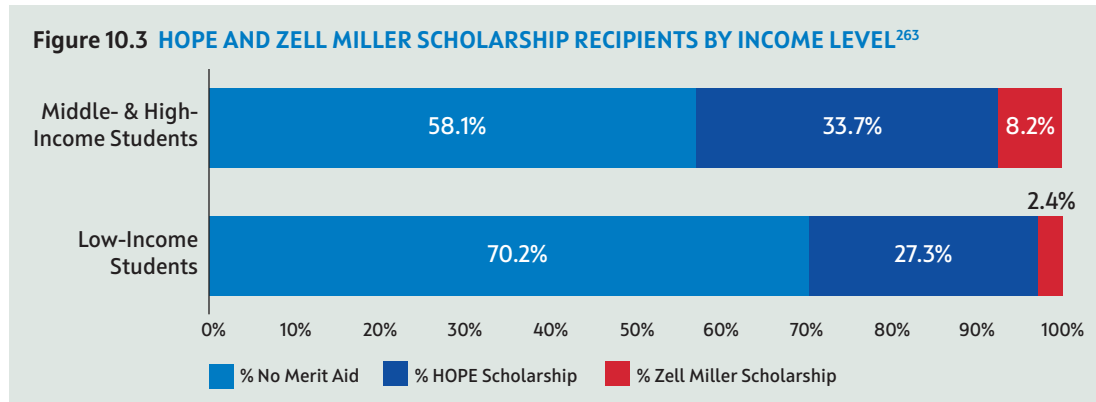
257 Friedman, Z. 2018, June 13. Student Loan Debt Statistics in 2018: A \$1.5 Trillion Crisis. Retrieved from *Forbes*: www.forbes.com/sites/zackfriedman/2018/06/13/student-loan-debt-statistics-2018/#73c3dfcb7310.

258 Institute for College Access & Success. 2018, September. *13th Annual Report: Student Debt and the Class of 2017*. Retrieved from Project on Student Debt, State by State Data: ticas.org/sites/default/files/pub_files/classof2017.pdf#overlay-context=posd/map-state-data.

259 Suggs, C. 2016. Troubling Gaps in HOPE Point to Need-Based Aid Solutions [Policy brief]. Atlanta: Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. Retrieved from gbpi.org/2016/gaps-in-hope-point-to-need-based-aid/.

260 Stirgus, E. 2018, April 1. Bill Aims to Help More Low-Income Georgians Pay for College. Retrieved from *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: www.myajc.com/news/local-education/bill-aims-help-more-low-income-georgians-pay-for-college/cOoGCOSBAUpcXuVj6XHwyO/.

Additionally, these supports reach fewer low-income students than their more affluent counterparts. Researchers at the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute found that low-income students are less likely to be awarded HOPE or Zell Miller Scholarships (see Figure 10.3).²⁶¹ In Georgia, the rate of poverty, and extreme poverty among African American students in particular is much higher than among other groups, and they are correspondingly underrepresented as HOPE scholars (see Figure 10.4).²⁶²



These trends are particularly impactful outside of major urban centers. The lowest average income and most persistent poverty in the state are found in rural Georgia, as shown in Figure 10.5.

Students from rural, low-income backgrounds who enroll in post-secondary education are directly impacted by the increasing costs associated with attending and completing higher education programs. Correspondingly, in 2016, five of the seven colleges and universities with 65% or more of their first-time freshmen receiving Pell Grants were located outside of major metropolitan areas (see Table 10.1).

261 Suggs, 2016.
 262 Suggs, 2016.
 263 Suggs, 2016.
 264 Suggs, 2016.

Georgia is one of only two states that does not have a statewide needs-based aid program. However, in 2018, the Georgia General Assembly passed House Bill (HB) 787, which authorized a needs-based aid program for low-income students. While this legislation represents a significant step in supporting Georgia’s educational and economic future, the bill lacked details about how such an aid program will work. Specifically, although the bill targets students “whose families are considered economically disadvantaged,” the definition of disadvantage is yet to be determined.²⁶⁷ More significantly, no funding source has been identified, for which the Georgia Student Finance Commission has estimated an initial cost of between \$25 and \$40 million.²⁶⁸

Georgia does have one aid program based on financial need. The Realizing Educational Achievement Can Happen (REACH) Program is designed to increase academic persistence and achievement of Georgia’s middle and high school students and to increase college access and success for Georgia’s low-income and underserved populations. Part of the Complete College Georgia Initiative, REACH was created by Governor Nathan Deal as a public-private partnership available to low-income eighth graders, who are paired with an academic coach and mentor through high school. Upon high school graduation, participants are awarded scholarships of up to \$10,000. REACH is expanding across Georgia and is currently available in 134 of the state’s 181 school districts.²⁶⁹ Local school districts must raise anywhere from \$1,500 to \$5,000 to contribute toward the cost of each student’s scholarship.

Figure 10.5 POVERTY RATES BY COUNTY IN GEORGIA²⁶⁵

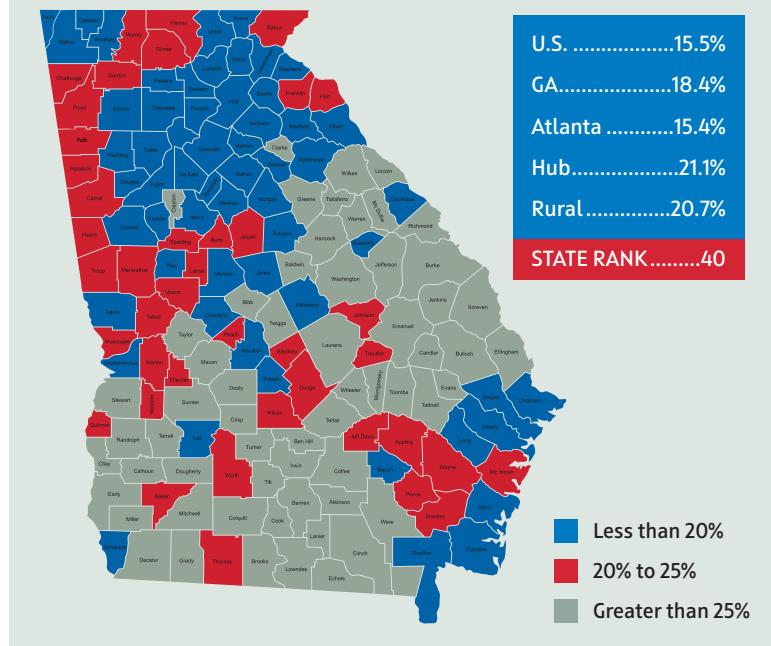


Table 10.1 GEORGIA COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES WITH 65% OR MORE LOW-INCOME FRESHMAN, 2016²⁶⁶

	First-Time Freshmen
East Georgia State College	66.8%
Bainbridge State College	68.1%
South Georgia State College	68.5%
Albany State University	71.4%
Savannah State University	79.9%
Atlanta Metropolitan College	81.3%
Fort Valley State University	81.6%

265 GPEE, 2017.

266 University System of Georgia. 2018. Pell Grant Recipients Fall 2016. Retrieved from University System of Georgia: www.usg.edu/assets/research/documents/ceu/SRPT9119_%E2%80%93Pell_Grant_Undergraduates_Recipients_Count_by_Academic_Term_by_Institution_Fall_2016.pdf.

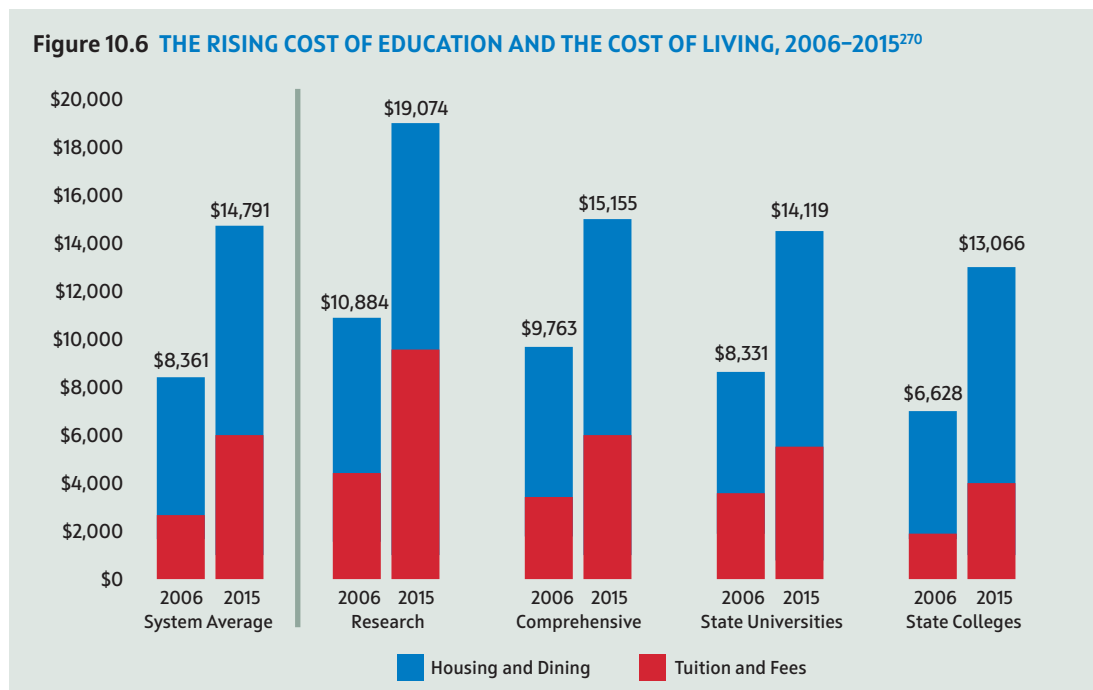
267 See www.legis.ga.gov/Legislation/en-US/display/20172018/HB/787.

268 Stirus, 2018.

269 REACH Georgia. 2018. About the Program. Retrieved from reachga.org/about-reach/about-the-program/.

While financial aid programs like HOPE, Zell Miller Scholarships, and REACH are invaluable to the state and Georgia's residents, they are not able to plug all cracks in the post-secondary pipeline. HOPE and Zell Miller Scholarships are not needs-based programs; they are not available to nontraditional students who completed high school more than five years ago; and they only address tuition and fees associated with post-secondary education. The cost of living side of the financial equation, generally the heavier of the two, remains unaddressed by state policy. Such costs may include medical and health care expenses, transportation, books, and digital access fees as well as such basics as housing and food.

Cost of living expenses are, on average, higher than tuition itself and growing, as shown in Figure 10.6. The impact of these expenses on low-income students and families can be one of the main levers that push them out of the post-secondary education pipeline.



The effects of those cost burdens add up in Georgia, especially for low-income students and families for whom growing costs represent unsustainable shares of household income. A 2017 survey found that in Georgia, about 8.7% of post-secondary students experienced some form of homelessness, 39% were housing insecure, and 37% had low or very low food security.²⁷¹ These numbers are slightly higher than national averages²⁷² and represent real barriers to completing post-secondary programs.

Some institutions have created interventions to address just such barriers. For example, Kennesaw State University created the Campus Awareness, Resource & Empowerment (CARE) Center to address these trends within their student body. Since 2013, the center has served more than 1,000 students dealing with homelessness, food insecurity, or other resource gaps. This model, driven by donations and local partnerships, has grown significantly from 25 students first served in 2012.²⁷³

²⁷⁰ Griffin and Leslie, 2016.

²⁷¹ Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. 2018, October 15. *Basic Needs Security Among Students Attending Georgia Colleges and Universities*. Retrieved from hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/GeorgiaSchools-10.16.2018.html.

²⁷² Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, 2018.

²⁷³ Kennesaw State University. 2018. CARE Services. Retrieved from care.kennesaw.edu/about.php.

To help low-income students, Georgia State University (GSU) has implemented the Panther Grant program. These targeted grants are for students at risk for leaving school due to nonpayment of tuition and fees. The results are astounding. Seventy-one percent of seniors who received the grant graduated within two semesters, and a full 90% of freshmen receiving a Panther Retention Grant were retained.²⁷⁴

GSU's Panther Grants work in conjunction with the university's Early Warning System, an innovation in data analytics and technology that identifies students who may be struggling and in danger of dropping out. Such systems allow academic advisors to focus their attention and resources on students who are the most in need of support services and help them devise a plan to move toward degree completion. This system has contributed to GSU's increased overall graduation rates and rates among specific groups of minority and economically disadvantaged students. Table 10.2 shows that since implementing the Panther Grant programs, GSU's graduation rate has greatly improved.²⁷⁵

Table 10.2 GSU GRADUATION RATES BY POPULATION, 2010–2018²⁷⁶

6-Year Graduation Rate	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
All Students	48%	48%	51%	53%	54%	54%	53%	54%	55%
African American	51%	52%	54%	57%	55%	58%	56%	58%	58%
Hispanic	58%	48%	53%	54%	56%	58%	52%	55%	57%
Pell	51%	49%	51%	53%	51%	55%	52%	54%	55%

The extraordinary work being accomplished by GSU is part of a larger statewide initiative to address challenges to post-secondary completion, Complete College Georgia (CCG). Launched by Governor Nathan Deal in 2011, CCG is a statewide initiative to improve college completion and produce 250,000 more adult post-secondary credentials by 2025. The TCSG and USG have been central to carrying out the initiative. Today, CCG has five major work areas:

- 1. College Readiness:** Mending the P-12 pipeline to increase the number of high school students who graduate and are ready to begin higher education work
- 2. Improving Access and Completion among Underserved Students:** Identifying and removing common barriers for minority, part-time, adult, military, disabled, low-income, and first-generation students
- 3. Shortening the Time to Degree:** Improving current paths and developing new paths for students to earn a high-quality degree in a timely manner
- 4. Restructuring Instructional Delivery:** Improving the quality of student learning through effective teaching, facilitation, and innovative modes of learning
- 5. Transforming Remediation:** Improving remedial education practices to remove barriers and increase success.

²⁷⁴ Renick, T. 2016, September 22. *What Do We Know About College Affordability?* Forum on the Future: Georgia's Workforce Pipeline, College Affordability and the Impact of Need-based Financial Aid. Atlanta: Metro Atlanta Chamber/ Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta.

²⁷⁵ Georgia State University. 2018, September 7. 2018 CCG Report Georgia State University Final 09 07 18. Retrieved from Georgia State University Student Success Programs: success.gsu.edu/download/2018-status-report-georgia-state-university-complete-college-georgia/.

²⁷⁶ GSU, 2018, September 7.

Through CCG, the TCSG is focusing on two primary areas of restructuring: accelerating success and establishing clearer pathways for completion. These changes are intended to create faster, more structured pathways to the completion of a degree or certificate, lessening students time to entry in the workforce and reducing the corresponding debt that post-secondary education can amass.²⁷⁷

Action Steps for Georgia

EdQuest Georgia best practice research indicates that clear pathways through the educational system are linked to employability and economic growth needs. These best practices also focus on removing barriers to post-secondary education completion, especially concerning needed resources and clear understanding of expectations. Georgia has multiple opportunities to excel in all these areas.

First, HB 787 represents an important step for Georgia, but the legislation lacks the definition required to have a true impact on the needs of Georgia citizens. As previously stated, Georgia is one of only two states in the nation without a statewide needs-based aid program. As our population continues to change and poverty continues to grow, the program laid out in HB 787 must be adequately resourced and defined to ensure that it addresses the needs of low-income students and supports them on their pathway to becoming successful, contributing members of the workforce and their communities.

Second, in addition to providing financial assistance, Georgia needs to continue to support students, especially low-income students, by helping to remove barriers and support a clear pathway to post-secondary completion. The support and expansion of programs established within Complete College Georgia are critical for this success.

For Georgia to develop the workforce the state needs, and to sustain economic growth, more of our students, especially our growing low-income and minority populations, need to enroll or reenroll in and complete some form of post-secondary education. Understanding the true cost of higher education and developing strategies to help low-income students bear those costs can boost the state's educational attainment, an essential element in future economic development. While Georgia has developed some strategies to address the true costs of post-secondary education, these programs and strategies need to be expanded and resourced to achieve the impact that our economic development depends on.



GEORGIA PARTNERSHIP
FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

270 Peachtree Street, Suite 2200
Atlanta, Georgia 30303
404.223.2280 ■ www.gpee.org

