



◆ 13TH EDITION ◆

TOP TEN ISSUES TO WATCH IN 2017



GEORGIA PARTNERSHIP
FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

1992



2017

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JANUARY 2017

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

AUTHORSHIP

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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.



If you are one of the many readers who have chosen to pick up and study this 13th edition of the Top Ten Issues to Watch report, you may already know the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education and are familiar with our work. For newcomers, welcome, we are happy to have you and would like to tell you about us in hopes you will get to know us even better and become engaged with our work.

It was just five short years ago we observed the organization’s 20th anniversary. We are proud of that accomplishment and what has transpired since as we now celebrate our 25th year of making a positive impact on public education in Georgia. 25 years... It was 1992 when a group of visionaries from multiple walks of life – education, business, government, civic – called together by the Georgia Chamber of Commerce and the Georgia Economic Developers Association, sat down around a table to discuss the possibilities of creating a new organization designed to advocate for the state’s public education system. It would have a business focus, both informing that community and energizing their support. They knew “the times were a changing” and if the state’s schools did not meet the coming challenges, the economic impact would be devastating.

There were the proverbial “movers and shakers” at that table, 44 original members focused on implementing 85 recommendations for public school system improvement ranging from how local school boards and their superintendents were selected to expanding our pre-K program to highlighting best practices in schools. We invite you to take a look at our 20th anniversary web site we created to document and honor some of our accomplishments from 1992 – 2012.



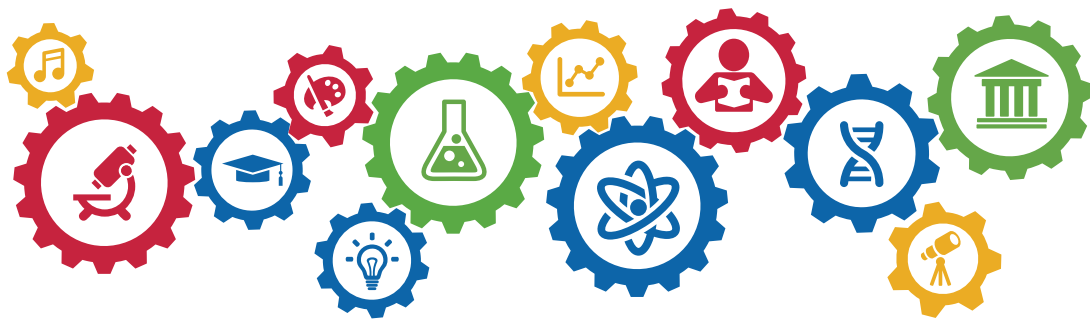
So, here we are at our 25-year milestone and we are going strong. The last five years seem like a whirlwind. Just like the first 20, they have found the Georgia Partnership engaged in most of the key education issues facing the state...The fight for higher standards, the importance of a quality early education program, increasing the education policy expertise of our state, defining the economics of education, raising public awareness by spotlighting key critical education issues, building and leading coalitions to address pressing education needs, studying and improving college readiness and access for Hispanic students, improving workforce readiness, studying assessments, the transition from No Child Left Behind to the Every Student Succeeds Act...And more!

Over 25 years, the Georgia Partnership has seen four governors and a transition from a traditionally blue state to red. There have been three presidents, each with his own education priorities and now the transition has begun to the fourth. How has the Georgia Partnership managed to deal with such change both to prosper and maintain its reputation as a classic convener for education progress? Two points stand out.

First, leadership. The founders dictated that to get things done, the Board Chair would be a member of the business community who clearly understood return on investment and enjoyed a reputation of decisive management and leadership. A visit to our 20th anniversary and current web pages will reveal our Who’s Who of Chair leadership from 1992 to the present.

Second, a spirit of continuous improvement. The proverbial “never a dull moment” is one rallying cry for the six full time staff members. There is always a new challenge waiting and a new energy to tackle it. But through it all, the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education is guided by a simple principle, every Georgia student deserves a world class education. Our work is to make sure that happens. Join us!





INTRODUCTION

Welcome to 2017! This is an exciting year for the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education – it is our 25th Anniversary! We are proud to kick-off this commemorative year with the publication of our 13th edition of the *Top Ten Issues to Watch*. We at the Georgia Partnership will be observing our anniversary throughout the year and reflecting on past changes and future opportunities.

This is an exciting year for education in Georgia as well. The passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act has provided an opportunity to reflect on past changes and embrace future opportunities as well. This legislation substantially reduces federal control over K-12 education and it returns much of the decision-making power to states and school districts, including issues related to standards and accountability, and how to identify and intervene in low-performing schools. Throughout 2017, Georgia will continue to investigate new and innovative ways to improve teaching and learning. Free of many former federal guidelines, the state can now set its own direction and determine the best way to support its schools and districts.

With this opportunity, however, comes a greater responsibility for building a world class education system at a time when there are many challenges facing Georgia's children. More than one-quarter now live below the poverty line, ranking Georgia as the ninth highest in the nation. More distressing, the state ranks 10th highest in the country for the number of children living in extreme poverty. These children tend to live in communities of concentrated, persistent poverty. Of the 159 counties, 51 have more than a quarter of their population living in poverty. Seventeen counties have more than one-third of their citizens living below the poverty line. These communities generally lack equitable access to high quality schools, health care, community supports and the economic opportunities that come with them.

Under these circumstances, schools are frequently challenged to make improvements by themselves. However, it is difficult for a school to outperform its community. Therefore, we need to work together to make improvements across the state in all communities. It will take a collective effort to realize the desired outcomes.

Throughout 2017, Georgia will be considering education reform strategies, policies, and programs to strengthen education and provide all its children with equitable access to a high-quality education. Georgia must have positive and effective leadership at both the state and local levels working together on visionary plans and innovative opportunities to address this growing need. We must have leaders with the courage to demand high standards for all students while providing proper equity in resources to meet those standards.

We believe that the data and commentary presented in this document will guide conversations with policy-makers, educators, and community and business leaders about these challenges and opportunities. Armed with reliable, comprehensive information and guided by a common vision for excellence, together we can target strategies that will ensure educational success and a brighter future for all our students, our state, and our nation.

Dr. Stephen D. Dolinger

President, Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education



INDICATORS FOR SUCCESS: WHERE IS GEORGIA TODAY?

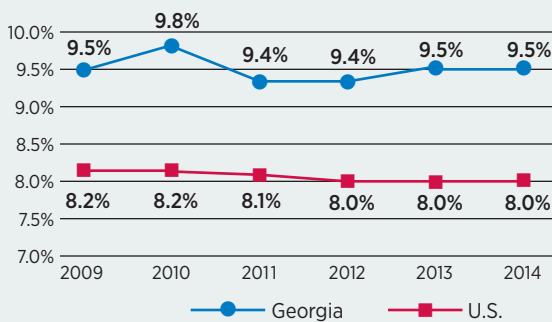
How does Georgia fare in producing excellent results for our citizens throughout the birth to work pipeline?

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.

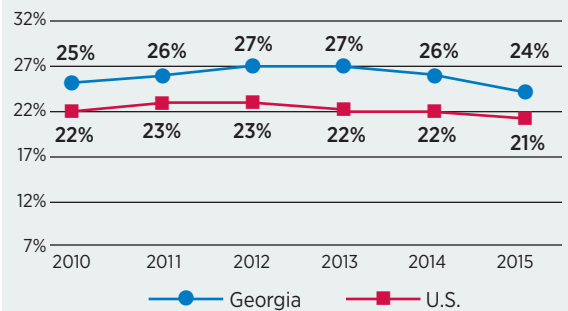
LOW-BIRTHWEIGHT BABIES, 2009-2014

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



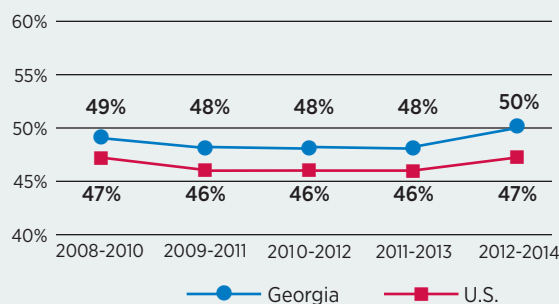
CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY, 2010-2015

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



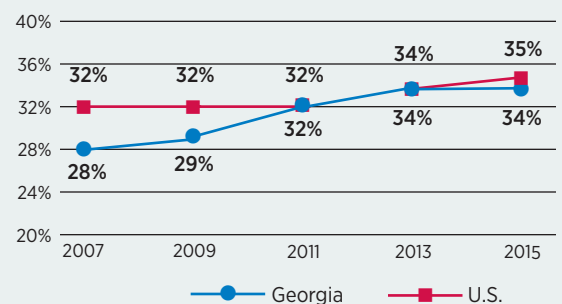
CHILDREN AGES 3 TO 5 ATTENDING PRESCHOOL, 2008-2014

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



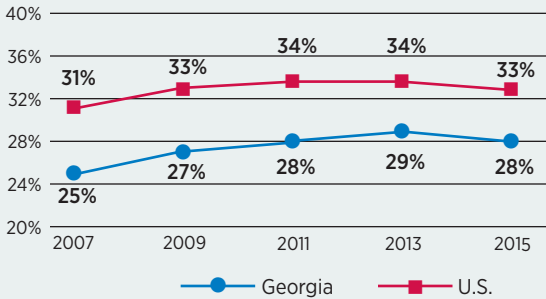
FOURTH GRADE NAEP READING: AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT, 2007-2015

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



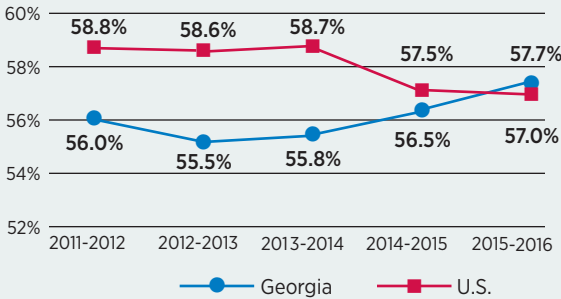
EIGHTH GRADE NAEP MATHEMATICS: AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT, 2007-2015

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



PERCENT OF AP EXAMS RECEIVING 3 OR HIGHER, ELIGIBLE FOR COLLEGE CREDIT

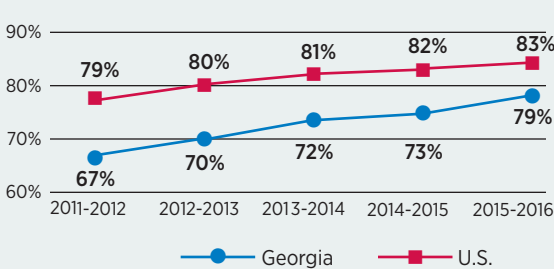
SOURCE: The College Board, AP National and State Summary Reports



HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES*

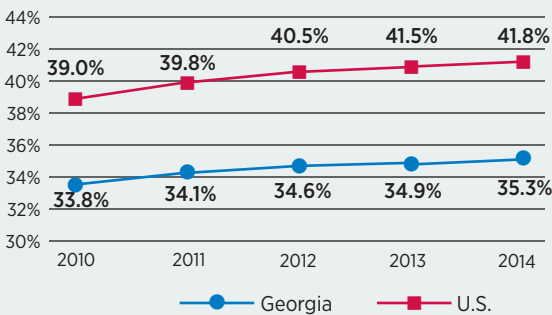
SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, Public Four-Year On-Time Graduation Rates: School Years 2010-2011, 2011-12, 2012-2013, 2013-2014

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



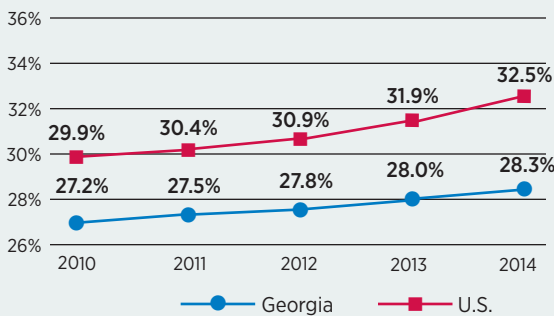
ADULTS OVER AGE 25 WITH AN ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE OR HIGHER, 2010-2014

Source: US Census Bureau, American Fact Finder



ADULTS OVER AGE 25 WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER, 2010-2014

US Census Bureau, American Fact Finder





THE SHIFTING FEDERAL LANDSCAPE AND STATE POLICY – WHAT'S AHEAD?

Issue Overview

In November 2016, Republican Donald Trump was elected the 45th President of the United States. His election creates widespread uncertainty about public education. Other than proposing a \$20 billion federal plan to expand school choice, the Trump campaign was largely silent on other education policies. However, the federal government and state education leaders had already been working through redefining the federal/state relationship and reassigning roles and responsibilities in education policy.

The passage of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in December 2015 effectively brought an end to federally driven education policy. The new education policy replacing the much-maligned No Child Left Behind (NCLB) frees states from previous federal regulations and grants them greater responsibilities for building their own education systems.

The bi-partisan support for the passage of ESSA was a response to the general agreement that federally driven school accountability under NCLB had gone too far and was ineffective. NCLB came to be viewed as an “overbearing and counterproductive role for the federal government in education.”¹

Throughout 2016, regulations and details of ESSA implementation were going through the process of “negotiated rulemaking.” There were contentious debates. For example, Republicans and Democrats are split on how to ensure that the federal funds are reaching low-income students and not replacing state and local dollars, known as supplement-not-supplant.

In response to the passage of ESSA, Georgia has been working over the past year to develop a new consolidated state plan to address issues such as how to measure the performance of schools, the state assessment systems, how to support struggling schools, and its accountability system. With new Republican leadership in the White House and Republican control over both houses of Congress, it is natural to ask: What are potential federal policy changes that will impact how Georgia defines its educational plan moving forward?

¹ Tucker, M. (2016, January 27). Tough-minded federal accountability is dead: What will the states do now? *Education Week's Blogs: Top Performers*.

Significance for Georgia

While it is difficult, if not impossible, to predict the future, many pundits and observers believe the Trump administration will likely embrace the local control spirit of ESSA and not make any major changes to the law as it was written. While there may be some significant modifications to pending regulations — supplement not supplant, for example — the overall law reduced the federal role and embraced more local control over education, which most Republican lawmakers support.²

Much of Georgia’s state plan that was in place under NCLB was replaced under the federal waivers to NCLB administered by the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. ED) under President Obama. Georgia is now transitioning again from the state waiver program to ESSA. Table 1.1 highlights some primary differences among the three programs.

Table 1.1. Select Differences in Federal Education Policies³

	NCLB	U.S. ED Waivers	ESSA
College and Career Ready Standards		✓	✓
Annual Statewide Assessment of All Students	✓	✓	✓
Innovative Local Assessment Pilot		✓	✓
Student Performance Targets and School Ratings	✓ Target set by federal government (100% proficient), based on tests alone	✓ State-driven and based on multiple measures	✓ State-driven and based on multiple measures including a non-academic measure of school quality/success
Accountability, Interventions and Supports for Struggling Schools	✓ Single federal identification and prescriptive interventions	✓ State-developed identification/ intervention support for bottom 5% of schools, those with subgroups falling substantially behind, and high dropout rates Dedicated funding for lowest performing schools	✓ State-developed identification/ intervention support for bottom 5% of schools, those with subgroups falling substantially behind, and high dropout rates Dedicated funding for lowest performing schools
Teacher/Leader Evaluation and Support Systems that Include Student Learning Objectives		✓	
Competitive Grant Programs for Innovation and Evidence Building, Replicating High-Quality Charters, Encouraging Wrap-Around Support Systems for Vulnerable Communities		✓	✓
Includes Pre-K/ Early Learning			✓

2 Klein, A. (2016, November 14). Predictions on how the Trump administration could handle ESSA rules. *Education Week’s Blogs: Politics K-12*. Retrieved from http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2016/11/see_some_predictions_on_how_th.html.

3 The White House. (2015, December 7). *The bipartisan bill to fix No Child Left Behind: Education side by side*. Retrieved from The Press Office: https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/images/Blog/120715_Education_SideBySide.jpeg.

Georgia is now charged with developing a new consolidated state plan to address issues such as the following:

- How to measure school performance and set state academic goals and measures of student progress,
- The role of the state assessment system in teaching and learning as well as in the accountability system, and
- How to intervene in struggling schools and what resources will be made available to support them.

The state plan not only will need to answer these questions, but it will also set the educational goals and priorities for the state. Georgia now has a unique opportunity to have a new dialogue with a broad base of education stakeholders about how we, as a state, see our education system. State leaders can now ask questions like: What do we want for our state? What kind of future do we want for our students? How can our education pipeline directly support our state's economic development goals?

To help answer these questions, throughout 2016, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) was actively engaged in the state planning process, and this work continues into 2017. So far, a diverse group of stakeholders have been convened as a state-level advisory committee to guide the overall process. Working groups have also been established around five priority areas for Georgia: accountability, assessment, whole child, federal programs, and teacher and leader development. Additionally, GaDOE conducted a series of ESSA feedback sessions to gather input from across the state around each of these five priority areas. GaDOE is looking for specific types of feedback in anticipation of possible changes in the state plan.⁴

Accountability – ESSA provides more leeway in designing the state's accountability system, known as the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). The CCRPI provides annual data on how well schools, districts and the state are preparing students for their next level of learning. It is composed of multiple measures encompassing academic achievement, academic progress and achievement gap closures. It also reports on school climate and financial efficiency. GaDOE is considering changes to the CCRPI that would provide school performance information in a public-friendly way that balances the need to provide accurate information about student achievement while not overburdening schools and districts.

Assessment – 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 districts to review testing requirements and needs, and examine ways to innovate and strengthen formative testing, providing teachers with better measures of student learning. This is 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.

Education of the Whole Child – ESSA allows state education leaders to broaden the focus on social-emotional learning, and the new law emphasizes “well-rounded” education. This provides Georgia an opportunity to move away from the high priority of assessment-based outcomes built on a few key subjects, and prioritize other areas such as fine arts; physical, social and emotional well-being; and positive learning environments.

Federal Programs – Georgia participates in many federal programs that support local schools, such as Title I for low-income/at-risk students and supports for turnaround schools, English language learners, after-school opportunities and so forth. Georgia's plan needs to streamline and coordinate these federal dollars with state and local dollars.

4 Georgia Department of Education. (2016). *What can we accomplish together through ESSA?* Retrieved from <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Documents/Summary%20of%20ESSA%20Topics.pdf>.

Teacher and Leader Development – The working groups are continuing to explore new ways to structure teacher preparation, recruitment, retention and personalized professional learning.

One exciting opportunity for Georgia under ESSA is the inclusion of early learning in the state education plan. When developing a state strategic vision for education, ESSA allows Georgia to consider the following questions:⁵

- How can improvements in early childhood program quality, effectiveness and access contribute to our state's overall vision for improving public education?
- How can ESSA funding and policies strengthen and accelerate efforts by state pre-K, Head Start, child care, early childhood special education, home visitation, and grade-level reading programs to eliminate opportunity and achievement gaps and improve outcomes for young children?

Moving forward, GaDOE's current timeline includes having a draft of a new state plan available for public review and feedback in early 2017. As of the writing of this document, U.S. ED has already made changes to the original timeline, which initially required state plan submissions by March or July 2017, with implementation by the start of the 2017–2018 school year. However, the revised timeline announced at the end of 2016 gives states until either April 3 or September 18, 2017 to submit their plans. Moreover, states now have until the 2018–2019 school year to identify their lowest performing 5 percent of schools, as opposed to the 2017–2018 school year as called for in the original regulation.⁶ However, with a new presidential administration taking office in January 2017, these timelines may be adjusted further.

Action Steps for Georgia

Despite the work that Georgia has been engaged in over the past year, basic questions remain: What will a Trump administration mean for federal education policy, and what impact will that have on the states? Due to the lack of focus on education policy during the campaign, many believe the role of the Republican-controlled Congress and the Department of Education could grow under President Trump.

The new administration could substantially affect the implementation of ESSA and influence the state planning process across a variety of issues. Some could be focused on logistical considerations like the state plan approval process and timeline. Others could be more complicated if the administration decides it does not like the rules and guidances issued under the Obama administration. New regulations could be issued, and old ones could be thrown out. Of particular interest to Republican lawmakers are final rules around how states hold schools accountable and how they show they are using federal money to supplement their state and local budgets — the supplement not supplant argument.

In regard to accountability, Republicans, led by Senator Lamar Alexander, have argued against the regulations pertaining to a single summative rating for schools. In terms of federal expenditures, the most contentious disagreements are over supplement not supplant, the regulation that ensures federal funds for low-income students do not replace state and local dollars. Title 1 of ESSA provides federal funds to schools with high concentrations of poverty. The goal is to guarantee that those schools receive additional resources relative to their more affluent peers to support their higher needs. Title 1 also requires that states use these federal funds as additive (supplement) and that they do not take the place (supplant) of state and local funds at these schools.⁷ The current regulations require local districts to annually demonstrate to the state they are in compliance with the rule. In addition, states must adopt one of four options in their funding formulas to demonstrate compliance. See the sidebar on supplement not supplant for more details.

5 Council of Chief State School Officers. (2016). *ESSA and early childhood education: Opportunities for state leadership*. Retrieved from The Every Student Succeeds Act – Resources: http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2016/ESSA/CCSSO_ESSA_ECE_Guide.pdf.

6 Klein, A. (2016, November 28). Final ESSA accountability rules boost state flexibility in key areas. Retrieved from *Education Week Blogs: Politics K-12*: http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2016/11/ed_dept_releases_final_account.html?cmp=eml-enl-eu-news2.

7 U.S. Department of Education. (2016, August 31). *Fact sheet: Supplement-not-supplant under Title 1 of the Every Student Succeeds Act*.

Recently, 25 lawmakers asked U.S. ED to rescind this proposal because they believe it gives the federal agency too much power over state and local budget decisions.⁹

Changes at the federal level are likely to bring more opportunities for the choice and charter communities as well. Donald Trump proposed a \$20 billion federal plan to dramatically expand school choice for low-income students. His plan would allow students to use federal funds to help them attend private, charter, magnet and traditional public schools of their

choice. He also proposed to leverage an additional state investment of up to \$100 billion nationwide.¹⁰ The GOP education platform adopted during the 2016 convention also promotes the use of charters and parent choice options as a central means of school improvement.¹¹

As of the printing of this document, Donald Trump has nominated Betsy DeVos for Secretary of Education. DeVos is the chairwoman of the American Federation for Children, an advocacy and research organization that promotes a variety of forms of school choice, including vouchers and tax-credit scholarships. The federal government has not historically played a large role in funding and providing oversight for school choice programs. However, increased national attention on these issues is bound to have an impact at the state level.

Buoyed by this support, legislators in Georgia are expected to move forward with proposals centering on choice options for parents, including expanding vouchers, raising the cap on student scholarship organizations (SSOs)¹² and introducing legislation around education savings accounts (ESAs). ESAs in particular could be hotly debated under the Gold Dome during the 2017 session. ESAs place state tax dollars designated for a child's education into a personal account that parents can use to cover the cost of customized learning, such as private school tuition, textbooks, private tutoring and contributions to a college savings plan. Proponents argue ESAs create a flexible approach to education and fully empower parents to select the best available services for their children.¹³ Opponents contend that the program is not cost-effective.¹⁴

Supplement Not Supplant Regulations (SNS)⁸

The proposed regulation presents four options for districts to annually demonstrate compliance with the SNS requirement in the statute:

1. Distributing state and local funds based on the characteristics of students
2. Distributing state and local funds based on the average costs of personnel and nonpersonnel resources
3. Distributing state and local funds based on an state departments of education-established compliance test
4. Distributing state and local funds using another methodology that results in each Title I school receiving, per pupil, at least 95 percent of the average per pupil funding received by non-Title I schools

Under the proposed regulation, each district would be required either to demonstrate to the state that it has a methodology for meeting the SNS requirements that it will begin using no later than the 2018–2019 school year, or provide to the state a plan for meeting the requirements no later than the 2019–2020 school year.

U.S. ED estimates that 90 percent of districts are presently in compliance with the fourth option described above. Therefore, some 1,500 local school districts currently would not be able to demonstrate compliance and, thus, would have to either redistribute a total of \$800 million in state and local funds or provide a total of \$2.2 billion in additional state and local funds to Title I schools.

8 Fryer, L. (2016). *Key elements of ESSA, congressional action, and impact of the election*. Penn Hill Group.

9 Ujifusa, A. (2016, November 9). Donald Trump elected 45th President of the U.S.: Trump presidency brings uncertainty to big education issues. *Education Week*.

10 Ibid.

11 GOP. (2016, July 18). *The 2016 Republican Party Platform*. Retrieved from <https://www.gop.com/the-2016-republican-party-platform/>.

12 The Georgia Private School Tax Credit law allows private citizens and corporations to receive tax credits for donations to SSOs, which in turn award scholarships to parents to help cover the cost of private school education.

13 The Foundation for Excellence in Education. (2016). *Education savings accounts: Giving parents a choice*. Retrieved from ExcelinEd: <http://www.excelined.org/education-savings-accounts/>.

14 Suggs, C. (2015). *Education savings accounts carry big sticker shock*. Atlanta: Georgia Budget and Policy Institute.

An analysis of a proposal put forth during the 2015 legislative session found that the diversion of tax dollars would cost Georgia more than \$223 million per year.¹⁵ There are also concerns that this approach lacks proper oversight and accountability of taxpayer dollars and can be used as a tool to funnel public money into the private sector.

Finally, federal decisions also impact higher education and early education policy. Around higher education, Georgia is currently wrestling with the rising cost of postsecondary education and how to ensure more of its citizens earn a postsecondary degree. (For a complete discussion of issues surrounding postsecondary education, see Issue 5 – Barriers to Completion.) The Higher Education Act (HEA) is the federal law that governs the administration of the federal student aid program, known as Pell Grants. Debates about HEA's reauthorization are expected to begin early in the Trump administration. The GOP education platform states clearly "the federal government should not be in the business of originating student loans"¹⁶ and encourages private sector participation in student financing.¹⁷ Those decisions will have a tremendous impact on how Georgians finance and pay for college completion.

On the other end of the spectrum, a large amount of federal money goes to support early learning programs throughout the nation and in Georgia. For example, the federally funded preschool development grants are currently expanding access to high-quality early learning for high-need 4-year-olds across 18 states, including Georgia. Due to changes in a different federal funding stream, in August 2016 Georgia instituted a funding restriction to the Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program, which helps low-income families access and afford quality child care. During CAPS reauthorization at the federal level, the program raised reimbursement rates for child care providers; however, the total amount of available money was not increased. Therefore, without additional dollars and to stay compliant with federal regulations, Georgia had to decrease the number of low-income students it could serve.¹⁸ (For a complete discussion of access to early learning, see Issue 7.)

Over the past several decades, globalization, advances in technology, and free trade have changed the economy of the United States. While the overall economy benefited, segments of the population were left behind. Those living in rural areas, communities built around a manufacturing plant and poorly educated citizens who did not have access to high skills training were hurt the most. The new economy has left them behind.

Georgia faces many of those same issues. Economically disadvantaged students are among the state's fastest growing demographics. With more than 26 percent of its children living below the poverty line, Georgia ranks 40th in the nation.¹⁹ Over 10 percent of children in Georgia live in extreme poverty (less than 50 percent of the poverty line).²⁰ Access to high-quality education, from early learning through postsecondary, is the opportunity that must be afforded to all children if our state is to thrive.

The transition from NCLB to ESSA has changed the relationship between the federal and state governments. The specifics around the implementation of federal regulations may change in the coming year. However, there has been no indication there will be a departure from the values Republican leadership hold dear: local control, choice and flexibility, parent-centered policies and privatization. If this trend continues, Georgia has the opportunity and the responsibility to ensure that all of the state's students have equitable access to a quality education.

15 Ibid.

16 GOP. (2016, July 18). *The 2016 Republican Party Platform*. Retrieved from The GOP: <https://www.gop.com/the-2016-republican-party-platform/>.

17 Ibid.

18 Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. (2016). *Questions about Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) funding restrictions*. Retrieved from <http://www.dec.state.ga.us/documents/attachments/fundingrestrictionsqa72716.pdf>.

19 Georgia Family Connection Partnership. (n.d.). *KIDS Count data center*. Retrieved October 30, 2016, from datacenter.kidscount.org.

20 Ibid.



TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION – KEEPING TEACHERS TEACHING

Issue Overview

Between August 1, 2016 and October 21, 2016, readers of *Education Week*, one of the education industry's top sources for education news and analysis, saw a series of headlines like the ones listed below:

“Help Wanted: Teacher Shortage Hot Spots” Aug. 26, 2016

“Amid Shortage Fears, States Ease Teacher-Licensing Rules” Sept. 7, 2016

“We Know What to Do About Teacher Shortages” Oct. 19, 2016

“Is STEM Education in Permanent Crisis?” Oct. 26, 2016

The newspaper ran 110 separate articles about the teacher shortage across the United States during that three-month window. Reported shortages are acutely severe in the STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and math), special education and bilingual/English language learner education. Moreover, locations with lower wages and areas of concentrated poverty report shortages in qualified teachers across all fields. These shortages are projected to continue to grow across the country as enrollments in teacher education programs decline and student enrollments continue to increase.²¹

The reduction in the teaching force in the late 2000s was spurred by the economic recession beginning in 2008. Districts facing austerity measures had to reduce teachers, support staff and new teacher hires while also increasing class sizes. Now that the economy has largely recovered, districts are decreasing class sizes and reinstating classes and programs reduced or eliminated during the Great Recession, thereby increasing the demand for teachers.²²

This hiring surge is coming at a time when the supply of available teachers is low due to two primary factors: a decrease in enrollments in teacher education programs and high teacher attrition. Nationwide, enrollments in teacher education programs have fallen by 35 percent over the past five years.²³ This decline holds true in Georgia as well. Between 2010 and 2015, enrollments in Georgia's teacher education programs declined by 36 percent.²⁴

21 Sutchter, L., Darling-Hammond, L., & Carver-Thomas, D. (2016). *A coming crisis in teaching? Teacher supply, demand, and shortages in the U.S.* [research brief]. Washington, DC: Learning Policy Institute.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Title II Higher Education Act. (2016). Data tools: *Enrollment by state 2010 & 2015*. Retrieved from 2015 Title II Reports: National Teacher Preparation Data: <https://title2.ed.gov/Public/DataTools/Tables.aspx>.

However, the bulk of the demand for teachers is caused by attrition — teachers leaving the classroom. In 2014, nationwide attrition accounted for 95 percent of the hiring need. Moreover, only about one-third of teacher attrition is due to retirement. A study by the Learning Policy Institute found that most teachers who leave the profession before retirement indicate “dissatisfaction with teaching conditions” as their primary reason.²⁵ Studies show that if the national attrition rate could be reduced from the current rate of 8 percent to 4 percent (closer to other developed nations), the demand for teachers would be cut nearly in half and the current teacher shortages would be eliminated.

Teacher quality matters. In fact, it is the most important school-related factor influencing student achievement.²⁶ The challenge for the nation, and for Georgia, is how to implement policies that create and sustain a supply of well-prepared educators teaching in the classrooms.

Significance for Georgia

As with the rest of the nation, teacher attrition is a significant issue in Georgia. Approximately 70 percent of teacher hiring statewide is done to replace teachers who have left the workforce.²⁷ Since 2010, 13 percent of Georgia’s newly hired teachers left after their first year. After five years, 44 percent of those newly hired in 2010 were no longer teaching.²⁸

Table 2.1 shows that retention rates vary across grade level and subject. According to a 2015 study for the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC), attrition in Georgia’s high schools was the highest among the teaching subgroups. High school attrition is particularly problematic because high school teachers are not produced at replacement levels here. For example, in 2013, the combined total of English, history and mathematics teachers produced was 713.²⁹ In 2015, Georgia public schools hired more than 12,100 teachers in those fields.³⁰ Within high school, math, science and foreign language had the lowest retention rates (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.1. Five-Year Cumulative Attrition by Georgia Teaching Subgroups³¹

Kindergarten	29.2%
Elementary	32.5%
Middle School	33.4%
High School	40.5%
Special Education	31.8%
English as a Second Language	40.4%

Table 2.2. Five-Year Cumulative Attrition for High School Teaching Fields³²

Mathematics	44.4%
English	39.2%
Science (All)	41.5%
Social Sciences (All)	40.3%
Foreign Languages	44.7%
Physical Education	26.0%

25 Sutchter, L., Darling-Hammond, L., & Carver-Thomas, D. (2016). *A coming crisis in teaching? Teacher supply, demand, and shortages in the U.S.* [research brief]. Washington, DC: Learning Policy Institute.

26 Rice, J. K. (2003). *Teacher quality: Understanding the effectiveness of teacher attributes.* Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.

27 Henson, K., Stephens, C., Hall, T., & McCampbell, C. (2015). *The 2015 Georgia public P-12 teacher workforce: A status report.* Atlanta: Georgia Professional Standards Commission.

28 Ibid.

29 2013 is the most recent year complete comparison data were available at the time of this report writing.

30 Henson, K., Stephens, C., Hall, T., & McCampbell, C. (2015). *The 2015 Georgia public P-12 teacher workforce: A status report.* Atlanta: Georgia Professional Standards Commission.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

To understand the reasons behind Georgia’s high attrition rates, especially during the first five years of teaching, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) surveyed more than 53,000 educators across the state. Teachers were asked to rank the eight often-cited reasons for teachers leaving the education field listed in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3. Causes for Public School Teacher Attrition³³

Causes for Public School Teacher Attrition	Average Ranking 1 = Most Prominent 8 = Least Prominent
Number and emphasis of mandated tests	3.13
Teacher evaluation method	3.65
Level of teacher participation in decisions related to profession	4.20
Non-teaching school responsibilities/duties	4.22
Level of benefits/compensation	4.50
Level/quality of support, resources and professional learning	5.00
School level/District level leadership	5.01
Level of preparation when entering the profession	6.29

The answers can be grouped into four general categories:³⁴

1. Standardized tests and teacher evaluations
2. Level of teacher participation in decisions, nonteaching responsibilities and pay
3. Level and quality of support and resources necessary, and school and district leadership
4. Level of teacher preparation

Most troubling, when asked if they would encourage one of their own students to consider teaching as a profession, over 66 percent of respondents said it was unlikely or highly unlikely. Despite the high attrition rate among new teachers, the likelihood of recommending teaching decreased with the amount of time a teacher had been in the classroom.³⁵

A study by the Learning Policy Institute found that, nationwide, more the 200,000 teachers leave the profession each year, with nearly two-thirds leaving for reasons other than retirement. In analyzing why teachers were leaving the profession, researchers found answers that mirrored those provided to GaDOE by Georgia educators. Two-thirds of those who left reported areas of dissatisfaction ranging from teaching conditions, such as class size or salary, to unhappiness with administrative practices, such as lack of support or lack of classroom autonomy, to policy issues, such as the effects of testing and accountability. Accountability pressures focused on test preparation that lead to sanctions was the most common area of dissatisfaction — listed by 25 percent of teachers who had left the field.³⁶

Georgia is actively working on addressing many of these issues. In January 2015, Governor Nathan Deal appointed the Education Reform Commission (ERC) to develop recommendations to reshape Georgia’s education system. The ERC was charged with examining five areas: funding; early education; Move On When Ready; expanding educational opportunities and school choice; and teacher recruitment, retention and compensation.

³³ 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.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Sutter, L., Darling-Hammond, L., & Carver-Thomas, D. (2016). *A coming crisis in teaching? Teacher supply, demand, and shortages in the U.S.* [research brief]. Washington, DC: Learning Policy Institute.

The Teacher Recruitment, Retention and Compensation Committee proposed 12 recommendations across their priority areas, as displayed in Table 2.4.³⁷

Table 2.4. Recommendations of the ERC Teacher Recruitment, Retention and Compensation Committee³⁸

Compensation	Develop guidance to assist districts in creating strategic compensation models for teachers.
	Increase K-12 funding to allow local districts to recruit, retain and reward effective teachers and maintain competitive salaries.
	Investigate a sustainable state-level funding program to compensate teachers for supervising teacher interns.
Recruitment and Training of New Teachers	Provide grants to districts for developing strong teacher induction programs. Charter system and strategic waiver system contracts should provide details on how districts will support induction-level teachers.
	Investigate a service-cancellable loan program for students graduating from a University System of Georgia teacher education program and designate the teaching profession as a High Demand Workforce Initiative in Georgia.
	Reimburse the costs of the required Georgia Assessment for the Certification of Educators (GACE) exams and the Teachers Performance Assessment (edTPA) of preservice teachers enrolled in a University System of Georgia (USG) teacher education program who have signed a contract to teach in a Georgia school.
	Study replacing a single semester student-teaching model with a full year of clinical practice for teacher candidates, without adding semesters to the established degree timeline.
	Develop and implement a statewide media campaign to promote the positive aspects of teaching as a profession.
Support for Current Teachers	Establish and maintain the preservation of teacher planning time as a top priority of the education community.
	Encourage the General Assembly and the State Board of Education to implement guidelines promoting the best and most respectful use of teacher instructional time.
	Modify the implementation of the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System to allow fewer classroom observations for effective teachers.
	Implement a study of the Teacher Retirement System of Georgia to measure system health and ensure long-term program vitality.

After receiving the final report and recommendations in December 2015, Governor Deal appointed a 90-member teacher advisory committee (TAC) to review the recommendations and provide feedback in the two areas of Move On When Ready and teacher recruitment, retention and compensation. The TAC analyzed all recommendations concerning teaching and Move On When Ready, and provided additional thoughts on recruitment, retention and compensation.³⁹

Recruitment – The TAC fully supported the implementation of a positive media campaign with current teachers. Committee members believed that having current teachers be a positive voice for the profession, both within schools and across the community, is the first step to recruiting the next generation of teachers.⁴⁰

Retention – The TAC agreed with and supported several of the ERC committee’s recommendations.

- A yearlong student internship for preservice teachers
- Intense mentoring for induction-level teachers and support for teacher mentors
- Preservation of teacher planning and instructional time to enhance teacher effectiveness
- Reinstating provisions for service-cancellable loans as both a recruitment and retention tool

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

38 Education Reform Commission. (2015). *Final recommendations to Governor Nathan Deal*. Atlanta: Office of the Governor.

39 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.

40 Ibid.

Like the ERC committee, the TAC also supported reimbursement of GACE and ed/TPA but noted that the number of exams eligible for reimbursement should be limited.⁴¹

The TAC also provided additional recommendations around the implementation and use of the teacher evaluation system, known as the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES). The TAC noted an inconsistency and lack of quality among the assessments required by the evaluation system to determine student growth. This inconsistency is a negative factor for teacher retention. Teachers would like the TKES to be used as a tool to “identify strengths and weaknesses, inform professional development, encourage and reward excellence.”⁴²

Compensation – The TAC advised that teacher participation in the development of a new compensation model was critical. The TAC report recommended that a new model should continue to consider years of experience and degrees as well as including a measure of effectiveness and additional duties performed. The committee reasserted that if effectiveness was to be a serious consideration, then a more reliable growth component for the TKES needs to be established.⁴³

It should be noted that during the 2016 legislative session, Senate Bill (SB) 364 was passed and made significant changes to the TKES that were implemented during the 2016–2017 school year.⁴⁴ The weight of the student growth component of the TKES was reduced from 50 percent to 30 percent. Districts were also given flexibility in how to measure professional growth, which could include multiple student growth measures, observations, standards of practice or other district-determined professional growth measures. Professional growth contributes 20 percent of the total evaluation score. The remaining 50 percent continues to be teacher evaluation and observations.

SB 364 also reduced the required number of classroom observations for proficient and exemplary teachers, as originally recommended by the ERC. Depending on which of the remaining recommendations Governor Deal and state legislators choose to act on during 2017, there could be significant changes to how teachers are trained and compensated in Georgia.

Action Steps for Georgia

Georgia is continuing to strengthen the teacher workforce pipeline. The recommendations of the ERC and TAC are aimed at accomplishing that goal. However, many of the suggested approaches can build upon strategies already in progress and being implemented by the GaPSC.

To strengthen induction programs and facilitate relationships with school districts, the GaPSC has set a new requirement that educator preparation programs establish formal collaborative partnerships with local school systems that are aimed at school improvement and student achievement. Many of these P-20 Regional Collaboratives are focused on changing the clinical model, as recommended by the ERC.

For example, Armstrong Atlantic State University and Savannah-Chatham Schools are using a co-teaching and collaboration model. Co-teaching is defined as “two teachers working together with groups of students and sharing the planning, organization, delivery and assessment of instruction and physical space.”⁴⁵ In this

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ For details on SB 364, see <http://www.legis.ga.gov/Legislation/20152016/162438.pdf>.

⁴⁵ St. Cloud State University, Academy for Co-Teaching and Collaboration. (2013). What is co-teaching? Retrieved from <http://www.stcloudstate.edu/soe/coteaching/default.asp>.

model, an experienced teacher is paired with a teaching candidate, allowing both adults to share responsibilities in the classroom. Data from an evaluation of programs in other states show that students in co-taught classrooms scored approximately 20 percentage points higher on their state reading tests than students who were not co-taught. There was an approximate 10 percentage point increase in math scores.

Georgia is also exploring new ways to strengthen the number of teachers in the STEM fields throughout the state. The Woodrow Wilson Georgia Teaching Fellowship program has been established to help meet this need. This fellowship program is working with five universities and their local school districts to 1) recruit high-ability individuals with an undergraduate degree in math or science to prepare them to teach in those subjects in high-need schools for a minimum of three years, and 2) transform the teacher education programs that prepare science and math teachers at participating universities with the goal of creating models for the state and the nation. Participating fellows receive a mentor from the school where they are placed as well as a mentor from their university program. Research has demonstrated that double mentoring reduces professional dropout by a third and helps move new teachers along the induction track.⁴⁶

While the state is focusing on how to recruit more teachers and train them appropriately, keeping existing teachers in the classroom is vitally important. As mentioned earlier, in previous years teacher attrition accounted for 70 percent of district hiring needs in Georgia.⁴⁷ Through the passage of SB 364, Georgia began to address the leading concern driving teachers out of the classroom — an overemphasis on assessments and evaluations. A second area of concern for classroom teachers is compensation. Research indicates that individuals are more likely to become teachers when teacher salaries are competitive with other industries.⁴⁸ Salaries also influence attrition. Both beginning and veteran teachers are more likely to leave the classroom if their district pays lower wages than surrounding areas, leading to more experienced teachers moving to districts that pay higher salaries. Teachers are more likely to leave the profession entirely when their salaries are low relative to alternative wage opportunities, especially in high-demand fields like math and science.⁴⁹

In terms of the teacher pay and salary structure in Georgia, the Teacher Recruitment, Retention and Compensation Committee of the ERC recommended increasing the base salary of teachers. The committee's rationale is that the decline in enrollments in teacher preparation programs must be met with a strong statement, through compensation, that says teaching is viewed as a worthy profession.⁵⁰

Currently, the state sets a base salary of \$33,424, and teachers receive step increases based on the number of years of experience in the classroom and education level. Georgia's starting teacher salaries rank 28th out of the 50 states, and the average Georgia salary ranks 21st.⁵¹ The ERC recommends that Georgia provide guidance to assist districts in developing their own strategic compensation models for teachers. The alternative compensation models would allow local districts to waive experience and education level as factors in determining teacher pay and weigh other factors, such as teacher classroom effectiveness, high-need teaching areas and so forth.

Some local school systems are currently experimenting with alternative compensation models based on district need and teacher performance. They have waived the standard state salary model driven only by years of experience and education level. The new tiered-certification system provides a career ladder for

⁴⁶ For a full description of the Teaching Fellows program, see <http://www.teachingfellows.org>.

⁴⁷ Henson, K., Stephens, C., Hall, T., & McCampbell, C. (2015). *The 2015 Georgia public p-12 teacher workforce: A status report*. Atlanta: Georgia Professional Standards Commission.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Education Reform Commission. (2015). *Final recommendations to Governor Nathan Deal*. Atlanta: Office of the Governor.

⁵¹ Teacher Portal. (2016). Georgia teacher salary: 2016. Retrieved from Teaching Salary Data by State: <http://www.teacherportal.com/salary/Georgia-teacher-salary>.

classroom teachers, but those differing levels of certification have not been tied to teacher pay. As these are new experiments, results on the success of these programs have yet to be determined.

Generally, research does not link earning advanced degrees with increased teacher effectiveness, as measured by student test scores, except in math and science. However, research does show that teacher effectiveness is connected to years of experience. The greatest gains from experience tend to come during the first few years of teaching, but they do continue in the years beyond. Decoupling teacher salary from both years of experience and education level may come with unforeseen consequences.

Finally, implementing most of the ERC's recommendations will require a significant investment of state dollars, such as raising the base pay of teachers, offering service-cancellable college loans, and providing bonuses to mentor teachers. It is currently unclear how much additional state revenue will be earmarked for such programs.

In recent years, Georgia has implemented a myriad of new policies aimed at strengthening the teacher pipeline and supporting high-quality teachers in the classroom. With the recommendations of both the ERC and TAC, Georgia has an opportunity to make significant reforms and consider a long-term, unified approach to establishing a comprehensive pipeline for the educator workforce. Georgia must focus on policies that prevent and eliminate the teacher shortages that plague high-poverty and hard-to-staff schools and subject areas so that all children have continuous, high-quality instruction throughout their educational careers.

The feedback from the governor's advisory groups echoes strategies supported in research. We have the answers, now Georgia needs action.



LEADERSHIP – NEW CHALLENGES, NEW OPPORTUNITIES

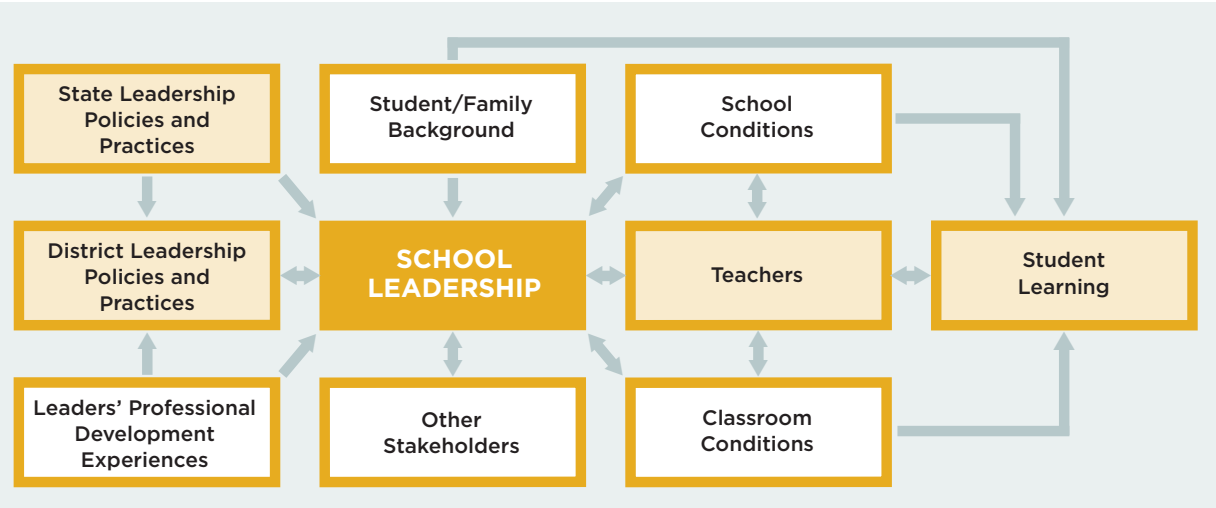
Issue Overview

In school systems, the leadership role is paramount. School districts have enormous power to support principals and teachers in driving instructional improvement. Research has shown that when district leaders effectively address specific responsibilities, they can, and do, have a profound, though indirect, positive impact on student achievement in their districts. Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to student learning.⁵²

Positive leadership at the district level translates to effective leadership at the school level, which directly influences school and classroom conditions. Empowering school-level leaders is one of the most important steps districts can take to support student learning, as school leaders manage other influences on student learning both inside and outside the classroom. In their study of education leadership, researchers at the Wallace Foundation constructed a framework, pictured in Figure 3.1, that highlights the importance of leadership, its relationship to student outcomes, and the complex environment within which education leaders work.

14

Figure 3.1. Leadership Influences on Student Learning⁵³



52 Wahlstrom, K. L., Louis, K. S., Leithwood, K., & Anderson, S. E. (2010). *Learning from leadership project: Investigating the links to improved student learning*. New York: Wallace Foundation.

53 Ibid.

Over the past decade, the complexities and responsibilities of the education leadership role have grown and become more visible. Georgia has implemented reforms to ensure that more students graduate from high school ready for college or to begin a career. These reforms included increasing standards and accountability and placing high-quality educators in every classroom, school and district.

While the state increased its focus on rigor and student outcomes, the parent choice movement was on the rise and pushing for educational options and local control. With many children seemingly trapped in low-performing schools, the choice movement increased the pressure on local education leaders to govern school systems in ways that focus on individualized student performance. The choice model also demanded an array of educational options that meet the differing needs of a student body that is becoming increasingly diverse.

As new policies are implemented across the state that prioritize local control and increased student outcomes amid growing diversity and increasing poverty, the question of leadership becomes paramount. Much like the conversation around how to recruit and retain highly effective teachers, how does Georgia recruit and retain highly effective leaders that embrace these challenges and responsibilities?

Significance for Georgia

Georgia has been moving away from state-mandated centralization toward a decentralized approach that values local input and control. Considering the state's growing diversity, this trend will allow for greater innovation in the classroom and at the district level to support the needs of students. For example, districts with a high percentage of refugees or English language learners will need to prioritize resources differently from districts that are not as diverse. Some urban districts and those near military bases have a highly transient student population whose needs are different from those with more stable enrollments.

Changing Responsibilities

To help facilitate this move to local control, district leaders have been empowered with the flexibility and authority to lead their districts. In 2007 the Georgia General Assembly passed the Charter Systems Act. This act granted school systems considerable autonomy by freeing them from many of the state's education regulations, which are specified in Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia.⁵⁴ Thus, districts have selected one of three different management frameworks:⁵⁵

1. Strategic Waiver School System (SWSS) – Districts enter a performance contract with the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) in exchange for freedom from many Title 20 regulations.
2. Charter System – Districts are allowed maximum flexibility from Title 20 regulations in exchange for more rigorous performance targets.
3. Title 20/No Waiver – Districts continue operating under Title 20 rules and forfeit recently granted waivers.

The key distinctions among the options are found in the level of flexibility granted and the preferred leadership approach: centralized or distributed.

⁵⁴ Title 20 specifies broad areas of education such as the required qualifications for teachers, the required number of school days, and where and how state money must be spent. Other specific issues governed in this section of the official state code range from protective eyewear for students to traffic crossing guard directions.

⁵⁵ As of the writing of this document, district selection is 42 Charter Systems, 136 Strategic Waiver School Systems, and two Title 20/ No Waiver.

Charter systems offer the greatest flexibility and autonomy. Aside from federal regulations and laws pertaining to health and safety, all other Title 20 requirements are waived. However, they are required to implement school-level governance teams and solicit community involvement. Charter systems require a distributed leadership approach, particularly through the school governance teams. According to the GaDOE, distributed leadership is most effective when

“people at all levels engage in action, accepting leadership in their particular areas of expertise. It requires resources that support and enable collaborative environments together with a flexible approach to space, time and finance which occur as a result of diverse contextual settings in an institution.”⁵⁶

An SWSS is required to have individual school improvement plans to drive student performance, and it must request a waiver in at least one of the following areas: class size, expenditure controls, certification or salary schedule. In an SWSS, decision-making authority can stay at the district level or be shared with school governance teams. These districts are held accountable for school-level performance improvements. Charter systems are held accountable for goals set at the district level only.

When deciding on a management framework, districts must understand the challenges within their district and which strategies are best to address them. For example, is it a well-resourced district with a robust parent and community engagement strategy that can help share leadership responsibilities? Is it a district that would benefit from streamlined decision-making from the district office? Each district decides which operational approach will best help it achieve its goals and meet its needs.

Under this new structure, district leaders can lead with a collective vision and set district priorities based on local needs. However, with greater autonomy comes an increasing amount of accountability. If districts fail to meet their accountability goals, much of their flexibility will be forfeited.

Legislation is likely to be introduced in the 2017 General Assembly that would grant more flexibility and control to the district level as policymakers consider recommendations from Governor Nathan Deal's Education Reform Commission (ERC). Governor Deal charged the funding committee of the ERC to develop a new formula to distribute state dollars to public schools to replace the current formula. The governor specifically requested that the commission provide district leaders with greater flexibility in how they spend state money.

The final recommendations, which were released in December 2015, proposed a student-based budgeting (SBB) model. (For a complete discussion of SBB and the proposed changes to Georgia's state education funding formula, see Issue 6 – Funding.) An SBB formula would allow districts to allocate resources in line with student needs and focus on factors that research says drives student outcomes.⁵⁷ In fact, proponents of SBB formulas recommend that these types of formulas be developed in concert with district and state goals. The first step is to identify fundamental district needs and build budgets and strategic plans based on those needs and goals.⁵⁸ SBB combined with either a charter system or strategic waiver contract would allow district leaders to do just that.

⁵⁶ Georgia Department of Education. (2014). *IE2, charter, and status quo school systems: A nuts and bolts comparison*. Atlanta.

⁵⁷ Education Resource Strategies. (2014). *Awarding dollars based on student need*. Watertown, MA.

⁵⁸ Travers, J., & Catallo, C. (2015). *Following the dollars to the classroom doors: Why and how effective student-based budgeting must be linked with strategic school design*. Watertown, MA: Education Resource Strategies.

Developing a Leadership Pipeline

With such explicit responsibility and authority, it is important that district and school personnel have opportunities to develop and grow as leaders to gain the skills and confidence necessary in their roles. Georgia needs a strong leadership pipeline. A few efforts are currently underway to address this issue.

One such initiative is helping school and district leaders hone their leadership ability and gain new skills: The Educational Leadership Certification program offered by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC). As of 2016, the program has two tiers:

- Tier 1 is for future leaders who are still in the classroom but looking to make the transition to school-level leadership, and the focus is on instructional leadership.
- Tier 2 is for current leaders — assistant principals and principals — and is tied to performance-based accountability for leaders.

Upon completion of the tiered leadership programs, leaders earn a “leadership level” that corresponds to a designated compensation level if that person is in a leadership role in their school or system. This program provides an opportunity for educators to participate in professional learning that carries with it the option of a compensatory reward if they get or are already in a leadership position.⁵⁹

Another successful initiative is the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI). GLISI is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that works with district and school leaders to build leadership capacity, improve organizational effectiveness and create conditions that improve student achievement.⁶⁰ GLISI’s flagship program is the “Base Camp and Leadership Summit,” which combine to form an intensive leadership development experience for teams of school and district leaders. Participants have shown statistically significant increases on all learning indicators after the program, and more than 90 percent of participants reported that completing the program changed the way they taught and led.⁶¹

The Georgia School Superintendents Association (GSSA) offers a Superintendent Professional Development Program (SPDP). This program is designed to develop new leaders in the pipeline and is open to aspiring superintendents. The SPDP is a two-year program of study that emphasizes executive knowledge around strategic leadership, school governance, community relations and organizational leadership. GSSA also offers a full year executive coaching program for all new superintendents who are either new to the role or new to the state.⁶²

Other efforts in Georgia to develop leaders are more local. One of the best examples is the Gwinnett County Public Schools Quality-Plus Leader Academy (QPLA). This program’s goal is to increase student achievement by identifying, recruiting and preparing introspective school leaders. The program is designed to select, develop, train and support them to become highly effective instructional leaders in today’s schools. Participants can choose from a variety of leadership development tracks, and each corresponds to a different level of leadership and professional development need. The programs that comprise the QPLA are the Aspiring Leader Program, the Aspiring Principal Program, the Certified Quality Leader Training Program, an array of leadership seminars, and ongoing leadership support. This model balances pedagogy and curriculum, classroom or knowledge-based instruction, and experiential learning, and it emphasizes appropriate, reliable and valid selection of aspiring assistant principals and principals.⁶³ Mentoring is available through the program to first- and second-year principals and assistant principals. The QPLA directly supports the Gwinnett County School District’s vision of building internal capacity.

59 Georgia Professional Standards Commission. (2016, January 15). *Educational leadership tiered transition guidance*. Atlanta. Retrieved from http://www.gapsc.com/Commission/policies_guidelines/Downloads/LeadershipTieredTransitionGuidance_20160825.pdf.

60 GLISI. (2016). About us. Lawrenceville, Georgia. Retrieved from <http://glisi.org/about-us/>.

61 GLISI. (2016). Basecamp and Leadership Summit. Lawrenceville, Georgia. Retrieved from <http://glisi.org/about-us/our-work/leadership-development/base-camp-and-leadership-summit/>.

62 For more information on the SPDP, see <http://gssaweb.org/superintendent-pof-dev/>.

63 Gwinnett County Public Schools. (2016). The leadership development programs. Retrieved from <https://publish.gwinnett.k12.ga.us/gcps/home/public/about/content/key-initiatives/the+leadership+development+programs>.

Action Steps for Georgia

To realize the benefits of local control and maximum flexibility, Georgia must have strong leaders and support the development of a leadership pipeline that is equally distributed across a diverse state. Policymakers have begun to investigate the extent to which highly qualified teachers are available to all students largely because evidence shows that poor and minority students are less likely to encounter highly experienced teachers. In the same way, that question must be asked of the distribution and supply of highly qualified leaders.

Like the distribution of highly qualified teachers, research has shown that leadership varies by district wealth, size and location. The following are results from a Wallace Foundation study examining teacher perceptions of leadership in their districts from a national sample.⁶⁴

Poverty and Diversity – Both district and school leadership that is focused on improving student learning decreases as poverty and diversity increases.

Location and Urbanicity – Teachers in schools in larger metropolitan areas report significantly less leadership from both principals and district leaders. Moreover, these districts are less likely to develop strong, shared leadership with parents.

Poverty and District Size – Student poverty and district size constitute a double disadvantage. Larger districts with high poverty rates are the most likely to experience limited leadership.

Relatedly, Georgia has made a priority of turning around chronically failing or struggling schools. The recent debate over the proposed Opportunity School District (OSD) centered on who was best suited to help students that have been trapped in struggling schools for years. (For a complete discussion about the OSD, see Issue 10 – No Opportunity School District.) The OSD-eligible schools were almost entirely made up of poor, minority students. More than 90 percent of enrolled students participated in the free/reduced-price lunch program, a proxy measure for poverty, and 95 percent were either black or Hispanic. Many of the root problems around chronically low-performing schools can be found in the impacts of poverty and a history of disinvestment in local communities.

These schools were also more likely to be led by less experienced principals and inexperienced, unqualified or out-of-field teachers. In an examination of the distribution of teacher and leader quality, Georgia's Equity Report revealed that schools with the highest concentrations of poverty and minority students had significantly higher percentages of inexperienced, first-year teachers. They were also twice as likely to have a teacher teaching out-of-field and significantly more likely to have a first-year principal leading the school.⁶⁵

The state Equity Report also put in place an equity plan that will require district- and building-level leaders by 2018 to review placement procedures to ensure an equitable distribution of effective teachers. Likewise, at the district level, leaders will work to ensure placement of effective school leaders in the highest need situations. The successful completion of this plan depends on current leaders having the capacity to differentiate school-level needs and plan for support. It also depends on a pipeline of strong leaders ready to step into those positions where needed.

There is a role for higher education and leader preparation programs in meeting this need. GaPSC is instituting a Preparation Program Effectiveness Measure (PPEM) to evaluate educator preparation

64 Wahlstrom, K. L., Louis, K. S., Leithwood, K., & Anderson, S. E. (2010). *Learning from leadership project: Investigating the links to improved student learning*. New York: Wallace Foundation.

65 Georgia Department of Education. (2015). *Equitable access to effective educators*. Atlanta: Author.

programs (both university-based and alternative certification programs). The new evaluation program has five primary goals:

- Holding educator preparation programs accountable to high program standards;
- Applying a consistent set of state-determined effectiveness measures across all teacher and leader preparation programs;
- Improving the effectiveness of teacher and leader preparation programs;
- Informing the citizens of Georgia about preparation program quality; and, ultimately,
- Improving teaching and learning in P-12 schools.⁶⁶

The effectiveness measures for each institution are made up of two components: outcomes from former participants who completed the program and are working in education leadership roles (50 percent), and programmatic measures (50 percent). The outcome measures will be derived from employer perceptions of program completers' preparation and completers' performance within the Georgia leader evaluation system. The programmatic measures are related to completion rates and completers' perceptions of how well prepared they were for their leadership role.

Georgia is currently finalizing the components of the PPEM and nonconsequential implementation is expected to take place during the 2017–2018 school year. Consequential implementation is expected in the 2018–2019 school year. Programs will get a rating based on their PPEM score as exemplary, effective, at-risk or low-performing. Low-performing programs will have two years of support from GaPSC and/or exemplary peers to improve their rating. Three years of a low-performing rating may cause a program to be closed. As the demands on leaders change, it is anticipated that these types of evaluation tools will spur changes in how leaders are educated and prepared for their positions.

There are pockets of leader excellence across the state, both urban and rural. For an example of strong district leadership in rural Georgia, see the sidebar. As we work to build a pipeline of strong leaders, Georgia needs to build upon and leverage successful leadership efforts that already exist, such as the GLISI and GSSA programs. State innovation funds could be used to replicate successful models being used in local districts such as Gwinnett County's QPLA, which supports innovative leaders and trains the next generation.

As illustrated in the sidebar at the end of this issue, many factors affected Dr. Mike Duncan's success in Pike County. Note the school district's focus on incrementalism and its long-term commitment. Much like CEOs of a corporation, district leaders can create and maintain the culture. They can create a set of values that shape how people think, feel and act in schools. That takes time. The vision for Georgia is that every district has a focused, innovative leader able to set a positive culture of learning and student success.

Everyone has a role to play in making this vision a reality. State leaders can focus on policies that support local districts and on developing and maintaining a leadership pipeline. While the primary goal of district leaders is to maximize student learning, superintendents also operate as a CEO with management responsibilities related to finance, human resources, transportation, security, building operations, food services and so forth. Business leaders can provide guidance on the operations side of running a district. Families and community members can become involved in their school systems by providing input into district priorities, and even sharing in governance responsibilities.

To realize the benefits of local control and maximum flexibility, Georgia must have strong leaders and support the development of a leadership pipeline that is equally distributed across a diverse state. District leaders need the capacity and resources to formulate strategies and support practices that enable principals, teachers and students to thrive.

66 Georgia Professional Standards Commission. (2016). *Preparation Program Effectiveness Measures (PPEMs)*. Retrieved from Georgia Education Reform: <http://www.gapsc.com/GaEducationReform/PPEMs/PPEMs.aspx>.

Successful System Leadership in a Rural District

In 2005 then-principal Mike Duncan, Ed.D., became superintendent of the rural Pike County School District. Over the 11 years since, he has demonstrated visionary leadership and guided the school system on a journey that saw the graduation rate rise 25 percentage points. Dr. Duncan has followed a cycle of continuous improvement and taken the time to see it work.

- **Needs Assessment, Data Collection, Analysis:** Dr. Duncan began by bringing all district stakeholders to the table during a 20-month community engagement process. At that time, the graduation rate was in the 60–70 percent range, but the community was very supportive of their school system. Dr. Duncan and his team gathered thousands of responses from these meetings to the question, “What do you want us to do for the children of Pike County?”
- **Goals & Objectives:** After reviewing those responses, the Pike County School Board changed its mission to “developing creative problem solvers for college and careers.”
- **Strategies & Activities:** The main strategy was to align the entire system around the goals that were important to the community and around developing creative problem solvers. Within Professional Learning Communities throughout the district, teachers and leaders revised and distilled the curricula, eventually employing a new project-based learning strategy anchored by cornerstone tasks and rooted in the concept of authentic intellectual learning.
- **Implementation: Who? What? What Do We Need?** The change strategy undertaken in Pike County requires buy-in at all levels. District leaders are empowered by the county school board to adopt its vision of change, and in turn they empower school leaders. Without the support of the community and residents’ willingness to compensate leaders generously, these change efforts, which will take years, would not be possible.
- **Professional Development & Sustained Support:** Leaders across the district are part of Professional Learning Communities, and the county has cut classroom instruction days to provide teachers with more time for professional development.
- **Ongoing Formative Evaluation:** As the transformative process continues, district-level leaders are continuously evaluating these processes and their performance. The district also takes part in a research partnership with the University of Wisconsin, which provides more detailed feedback and evaluates the authentic intellectual work.
- **Summative Evaluation:** Dr. Duncan’s philosophy is one of incrementalism and continuous improvement. He has strived to achieve the simple goal of doing better tomorrow than we did today. Real change happens incrementally over time, with real buy-in, and Dr. Duncan’s change journey in Pike County shows what is possible when a plan for change is implemented effectively.





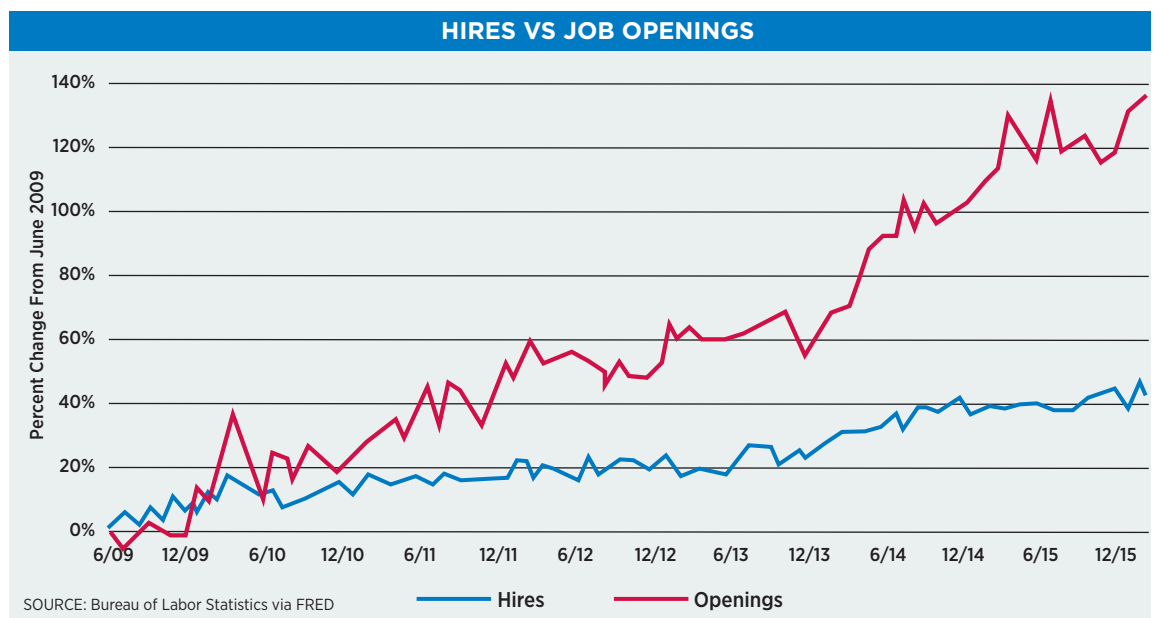
PREPARING THE WORKFORCE – ROLE FOR K-12

Issue Overview

One goal of the public education system is to prepare students to ultimately be successful members of the workforce. To achieve this goal, students must graduate with the skills and dispositions they need to find a career and work toward success. Over time, the needs of the workforce change, and the way that the education system responds to those needs must change as well. Technological advances and a growing population are two of the factors that are changing the landscape of the workforce across the United States. More jobs are available in occupations that require specific skills, and fewer jobs are available in some areas that were previously more prevalent.

For the past two years, a record numbers of jobs have been available in the United States. Figure 4.1 shows that, unfortunately, there is also a growing and persistent gap between these openings and actual hires taking place.⁶⁷ This skills gap is the difference between the skills potential employees offer and those that employers need.

Figure 4.1. The Skills Gap



67 Udland, M. (2016, May 10). There's something wrong with the U.S. labor market. *Business Insider*. Retrieved from <http://www.businessinsider.com/labor-market-skills-gap-widening-2016-5>.

The skills gap is prevalent in several sectors. In 2016, the Adecco State of the Economy Survey revealed that manufacturing, technology, professional services and engineering are all industries that leaders see as the most affected by this gap. More than half of leaders surveyed blamed the U.S. education system for this gap in U.S. workforce skills.⁶⁸

Adding to the problem of the shifting needs of employers is an aging workforce. Across the country, a large population of aging Baby Boomers are retiring or nearing retirement. They create a skills gap in the professions they are leaving behind. In addition, this large retirement-age population has created a higher demand for workers in the health care industry, as these older Americans require more health services. These national trends are also being seen here in Georgia, especially those related to the changing workforce. By 2030 the population of Georgians over age 65 will have doubled over the previous two decades.⁶⁹ In addition, recent studies show that Georgia's workforce has some significant shortages. There are not enough people trained for the jobs that are in demand and on the rise.

Significance for Georgia

In a study done with global professional services consultant Accenture PLC, the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce found serious shortages of qualified workers for the highest demand jobs in Georgia.⁷⁰ Conversely, the study also revealed a major surplus of Georgians with postsecondary degrees and certificates that qualify them for positions in low demand. Public education leaders have recognized Georgia's changing demographics and workforce shortages. Combatting this issue has been a focus of many education stakeholders, including the legislature and the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE).

GaDOE's Career, Technical and Agricultural Education (CTAE) program is one of the main ways the state is working to provide students with in-demand skills. CTAE programs serve students in grades 6–12. In Georgia, CTAE has programs in 180 local school systems. Enrollment in CTAE programs is strong: 60 percent of all students in grades 9–12 were enrolled in at least one CTAE program in the 2014–2015 school year. Student participation was almost as strong in grades 6–8, with 57 percent of all students in those grades participating in at least one CTAE program. Enrollment is also growing, and 2015 saw course enrollments in both middle school and high school increase from the previous year.

Georgia students can choose from a variety of Career Clusters to gain practical experience that can translate to future employment opportunities. The Georgia CTAE program offers 130 career pathways within 17 Career Clusters, modeled after the National Career Cluster Program used across the United States. Five of the programs saw the enrollment of more than 32,000 students in the 2014–2015 school year: business management and administration, finance, information technology, government and public administration, and health science.⁷¹ As Figure 4.2 shows, two of those clusters — health science and information technology — are directly focused on areas that are experiencing a workforce shortage, so this interest is positive.

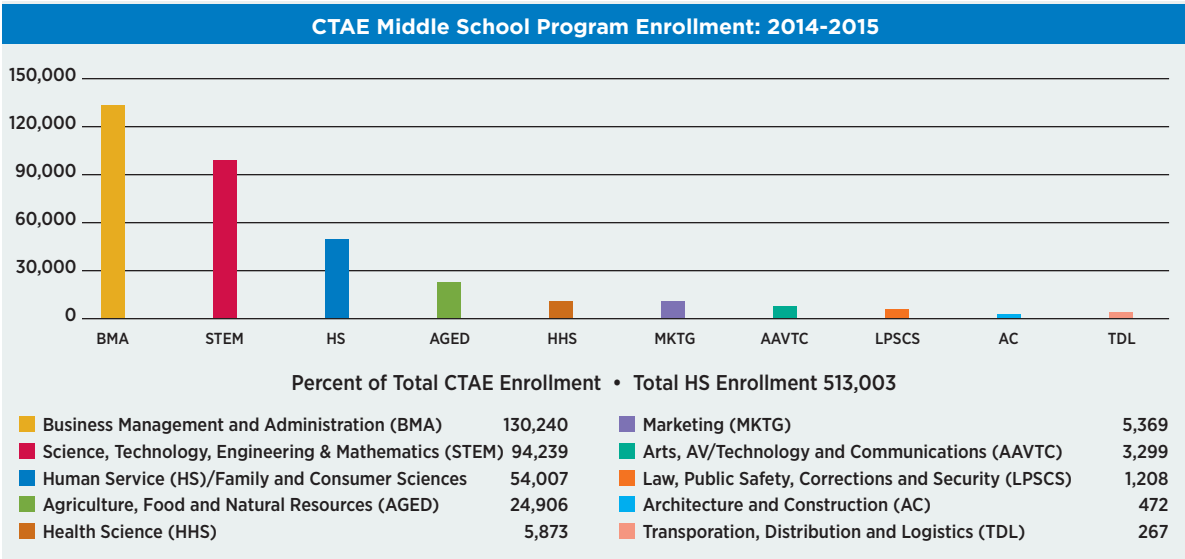
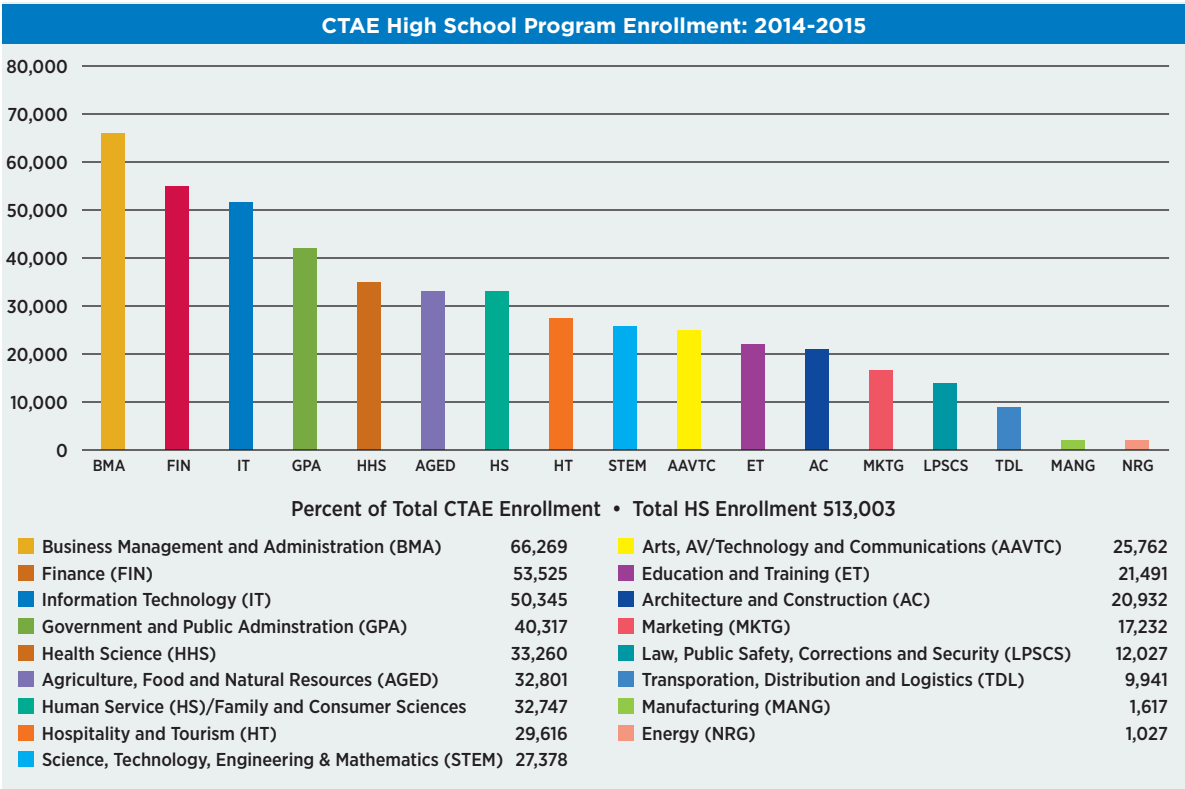
68 Adecco USA. (2016, October 4). *Watch the skills gap*. Retrieved from <https://www.adeccousa.com/employers/resources/skills-gap-in-the-american-workforce/>.

69 Putnam, M. (2011, June 16). *Workforce shortages in Georgia*. Retrieved from Georgians for a Healthy Future: <http://healthyfuturega.org/2011/06/16/workforce-shortages-in-georgia/>.

70 Williams, D. (2016, September 9). Study reveals Ga.'s high-demand jobs, workforce gap. *WABE*. Retrieved from <http://news.wabe.org/post/study-reveals-gas-high-demand-jobs-workforce-gap>.

71 Georgia CTAE. (2015). *CTAE Georgia's pathways to future workforce: CTAE annual report 2015*. Atlanta: Georgia Department of Education.

Figure 4.2. CTAE Program Enrollments⁷²



Georgia students who completed at least one CTAE program saw a 94.9 percent high school graduation rate in 2015, up six percentage points from 2014 and significantly higher than the overall state graduation rate from 2015 of 78.8 percent.⁷³ This indicates that the CTAE programs in Georgia schools are preparing students for success both inside and outside of the classroom. Schools are partnering now more than ever with the business community, and CTAE directors are working to get teachers more actively involved with their business partners. With a clearer understanding of the needs of local businesses, the programs can better prepare students for eventual entry into the workforce.

⁷² Ibid.
⁷³ Cardoza, M. (2015, November 9). Georgia's graduation rate increases significantly [press release]. Atlanta: Georgia Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid=395>

Several districts have exceptional programs that exemplify the power of school–business community partnerships.

- **Carroll County** – To decrease the school dropout rate, Southwire partnered with Carroll County Schools and Florence City Schools in Alabama to create 12 For Life. This program places at-risk students in real jobs in Southwire that allow them to be paid for their work while earning school credit. Students work a shift in the Southwire plant for half of the day and take classes in a traditional school setting for the other half. Participants also benefit from instruction on the job and a mentoring program with Southwire employees.⁷⁴
- **Chatham County** – Two programs in Chatham County and the surrounding area serve students through a partnership with Gulfstream, which actively recruits high school students from the area for its Youth Apprenticeship Program, and from Chatham County Schools for the High School Explorer Post Program. In the Youth Apprenticeship Program, students link school-based learning with actual business experience in highly skilled occupations. Through the Explorer Program students attend monthly meetings to learn about career paths, make professional contacts and acquire skills they would need to pursue a career in aviation.⁷⁵
- **Forsyth County** – Through a partnership with Siemens, Forsyth County has developed a thriving program focused on a manufacturing career pathway. At the end of the four-year program, student participants earn both their diploma and a manufacturing certificate that could help them enter the field more easily. Siemens provides advice, training and feedback, and the partnership has led the company to sponsor other school and community programs including programs for students with special needs.⁷⁶

The Work-Based Learning program is another innovation in CTAE that is helping to prepare students for the workforce. It provides students with a CTAE class that aids in the transition from school to work by allowing students to receive class credit while also working at a local business. Students improve their employability and gain skills as they become familiar with potential future careers. Students must have a job that follows state and federal withholding guidelines and must provide their own transportation to and from their jobs. Each participant's job should relate to their chosen CTAE career pathway, and the student must have previously taken at least one CTAE class. Work-Based Learning Program staff within schools work with the system CTAE director to guide the programs. Fewer students participate in this program than in traditional CTAE programs, but those that do get a rigorous apprentice-style experience that helps prepare them for the workforce. In 2016, the Georgia House of Representatives passed House Bill (HB) 402, which provides incentives for businesses to engage students in their communities in work-based learning opportunities.

Another initiative seeking to prepare students for the workforce is the Georgia College and Career Academy Network, founded by Lieutenant Governor Casey Cagle in 2006. Over the past 11 years, partnerships throughout the state with the Technical College System of Georgia and businesses have opened 37 of these charter schools, which give students another option to choose instead of the traditional school model. Grant funds are available each year through the state for areas interested in opening one of these schools. For example, in December 2016, Governor Nathan Deal announced that TCSG approved grants totaling \$9 million to establish three new College and Career Academies in Chattahoochee, Tift, and Worth Counties. Each of the three academies will receive \$3 million, which will be matched with local funds to support startup costs, construction, and staffing.

⁷⁴ Southwire. (2016). *12 For Life: Carrollton, Georgia*. Retrieved from <http://www.southwire.com/ourcompany/sustainability/12-for-life.html>.

⁷⁵ Gulfstream. (2014). *High school students: Savannah, Georgia*. Retrieved from http://mygdas.com/careers/high_school_students.html.

⁷⁶ Hall, C. (2015, October 2). Siemens and Forsyth County. *Atlanta Business Chronicle*. Retrieved from <http://www.bizjournals.com/atlanta/print-edition/2015/10/02/siemens-and-forsyth-county-schools.html>.

College and Career Academies allow students to receive a technical certificate upon graduation and potentially continue as employees with local companies. Many of the schools are based on academic partnerships between multiple school systems and incorporate project-based learning in math and science problem-solving. As in the case of other business and industry partnerships, the College and Career Academy Network aims to curtail dropouts.⁷⁷

Action Steps for Georgia

Though many great programs throughout Georgia are seeking to alleviate the workforce shortage and skills gap, there are still opportunities to continue to improve and better prepare students for future careers. Communities and school districts must prioritize workforce development to address this issue. Small steps can be taken within the public-school system that could have big impacts on bridging the skills gap and better addressing the needs of today's workforce through education.

In the K-12 system, career advising is largely left to school counselors. This task is difficult to fulfill because the role of the school counselor generally includes much more than just career advising. In many schools, counselors are also responsible for treating the social and emotional health needs of students. This can leave little time for giving career and future planning advice, and sometimes that type of planning takes a back seat to more pressing health concerns. The current average ratio of K-12 students to counselors in Georgia is 490 to 1.⁷⁸ Though this is similar to the national average, counselors are still left with a much larger volume of students than recommended by the American School Counselors Association. Consequently, they have little time to tend to all the various needs that counselors are responsible for addressing for those students. One step that would help to address workforce development within schools is to provide greater support and priority to career advising in grades K-12. An additional counselor providing career advice has the potential to help students get on a path to a career with opportunity instead of pursuing an area without high prospects for future employment.

CTAE directors work for each school district, but in some districts, they also have other roles. Better support for these staff members will help provide focus for the CTAE programs and allow these directors to work on forging meaningful partnerships within their local business communities. A leader with vision is important for growing a thriving CTAE program and for creating and maintaining relationships with local businesses that give students opportunities beyond whatever is taking place currently within their schools.

Better support for CTAE educators is another way to improve these programs and thus be more responsive to the needs of the local business community. In the past, some teacher-training programs focused on certifying those currently working in industry to teach in CTAE, but this type of teacher training has largely disappeared. Some technical colleges, like Wiregrass Technical College in Valdosta, have similar efforts underway, but they must be more widespread. Programs designed to train individuals currently working in industry for a career in CTAE teaching will be useful in helping students acquire the skills they will need to find successful employment in the future. To better connect with the business community, CTAE educators need greater support. This would include professional development and support for participating in professional organizations where they can learn from each other and connect with those currently working in related industries.

77 Fink, A. (2016, May 12). Georgia's College and Career Academies Preparing 21st Century Workforce. Atlanta, Georgia. Retrieved from <http://www.ongorgia.org/education/georgias-college-and-career-academies.html>.

78 American School Counselor Association. (2014). Student-to-School-Counselor Ratio 2013-2014. Retrieved from <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/home/Ratios13-14.pdf>.

A primary way that the education system can help develop a future workforce with the skills and attributes demanded by business and industry is by partnering with the business community and the employers who are seeking talent. This is how both educators and employers can grow to understand each other's needs and respond accordingly. It also provides a great return on investment for employers since participants in such programs have higher graduation rates, which creates a more educated and capable workforce. Both the education and business sectors must take advantage of structures that are already in place to support these partnerships. There are already some great examples here in Georgia. If other communities use these thriving partnerships as models for their own efforts, they will surely find success and see other positive effects throughout the community.



HIGHER EDUCATION – BARRIERS TO COMPLETION

Issue Overview

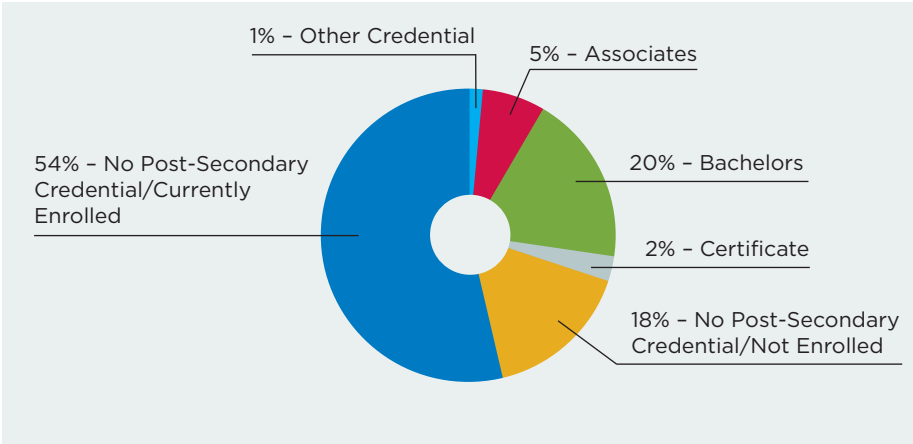
The Georgia economy is expanding and economic opportunities are on the rise. Since 2010, employer job postings have grown 154 percent, compared to 142 percent growth nationally.⁷⁹ Between January 2011 and December 2014, Georgia added nearly 400,000 new private sector jobs.⁸⁰ At the same time, however, national rankings place Georgia 34th among states for unemployment.⁸¹ While Georgia is experiencing an increasing number of jobs, a significant number of potential workers are reporting that they are unemployed or underemployed.

Georgia is experiencing a *talent gap* — a mismatch between degrees and skills needed by employers versus the degrees and skills of the population. For example, currently only 31 percent of job postings require only a high school diploma or some college. Sixty percent of job postings require at least an associate's degree, yet only about 38 percent of Georgia's adult population has at least that level of education.⁸²

Many young students already recognize the need for postsecondary training. The college enrollment rate among those who graduated from high school in 2010 is nearly 70 percent.⁸³ However, a

significant proportion of these students did not finish the programs they began. As shown in Figure 5.1, five years after graduation, over half (54 percent) did not have any postsecondary credential or degree.

Figure 5.1. Highest Postsecondary Credential Earned Five Years after HS Graduation⁸⁴



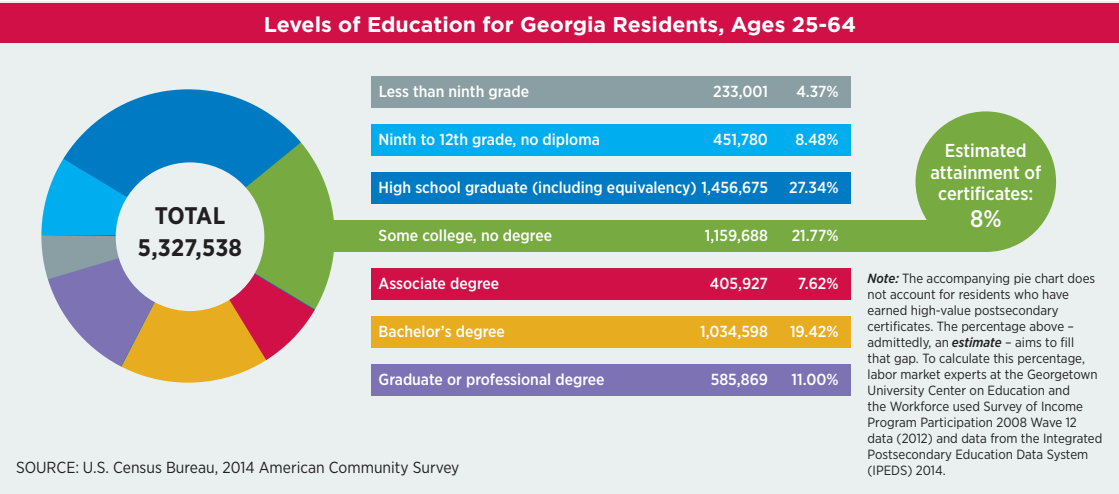
79 Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce. (2016). *Georgia: Your talent your future, educators and policy makers report*. Atlanta: Author.
 80 Hunt, A. (2015, February 3). Claims about job creation under Deal accurate. *Politifact Georgia*.
 81 Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce. (2016). *Georgia: Your talent your future, educators and policy makers report*. Atlanta: Author.
 82 Carnathan, M. (2016, October 12). *Georgia and metro Atlanta demographics and education*. Education Policy Fellows Monthly Colloquium Presentation. Atlanta, GA: Atlanta Regional Commission.
 83 Governor's Office of Student Achievement. (2016, November 2). *High school graduate outcomes report*. Retrieved from State Education Data.
 84 Ibid.

Higher education access and completion is one of the most important economic development issues facing the state of Georgia.

Significance for Georgia

It's a statistic that we all know well. By 2020, 60 percent of jobs in Georgia will require some form of postsecondary education, ranging from a certificate to a university degree.⁸⁵ As previously stated, about 38 percent of Georgia's adult population has at least an associate's degree. Add to that, another 8 percent of the population that has a high-quality postsecondary certificate and the state's overall attainment rate reaches 46 percent (see Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2. Levels of Education for Georgia Residents⁸⁶



Georgia has set a goal to increase the number of postsecondary graduates by 250,000 by the year 2025. Through the Complete College Georgia Initiative, the University System of Georgia (USG) and the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) have designed strategies to meet this goal, including strengthening remediation, improving access for underserved students, shortening time to degree and restructuring instructional delivery.⁸⁷

However, the rising costs of postsecondary programs, combined with the increase in the percentage of students and families living in poverty, are limiting Georgia's ability to meet its 250,000 goal. As with the rest of the nation, Georgia families have experienced the rising cost of higher education, limiting access for low-income students. The state's allocation for higher education funding for the TCSG and USG has decreased dramatically over the last decade and has yet to return to pre-recession levels. For fiscal year (FY) 2017, state funding per full-time student at TCSG institutions is about 3 percent below 2007 levels in inflation-adjusted dollars.⁸⁸ For the USG, state funding is a full 50 percent below the 2001 level in inflation-adjusted dollars.⁸⁹

85 Carnevale, A., Smith, N., & Strohl, J. (2013). *Recovery: Job growth and education requirements through 2020. Georgia state report*. Washington, DC: Center on Education and the Workforce.

86 Lumina Foundation. (2016). *A stronger nation: Georgia*. Indianapolis: Author.

87 Complete College Georgia. (2016, November 2). *About Complete College Georgia*. Retrieved from CCG – The University System of Georgia: <http://www.completegeorgia.org/content/about-complete-college-georgia>.

88 Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. (2016). *Georgia budget primer 2017*. Retrieved from <https://gbpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/GBPI-Budget-Primer-2017.pdf>.

89 Ibid.

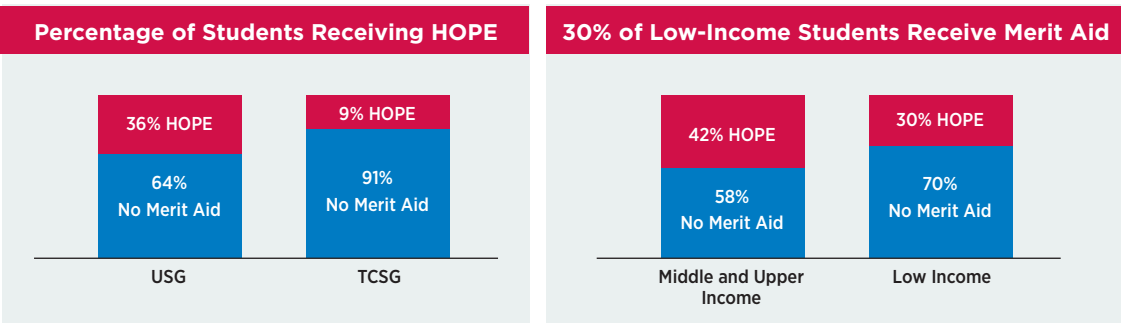
This reduction in state support has translated into increased tuition. Between 2007 and 2017, tuition has increased an average of 99 percent at USG institutions. At TCSG institutions, tuition increased 65 percent (\$35 per credit hour) between 2009 and 2015.⁹⁰ As the medium family income remains below pre-recession levels, these tuition increases come at a time when families are less able to absorb the costs.

Georgia has two primary strategies to provide postsecondary financial aid. The HOPE and the associated Zell Miller Scholarship provide merit-based aid to students pursuing a bachelor’s or associate’s degree in the USG or TCSG. The HOPE Grant is targeted at students in diploma and certificate fields at TCSG institutions and is not based on merit.

Figure 5.3 shows that the HOPE Scholarship merit-based program leaves a large unmet need, especially among Georgia’s low-income population. Research conducted by the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute found some limitations to the program.⁹¹

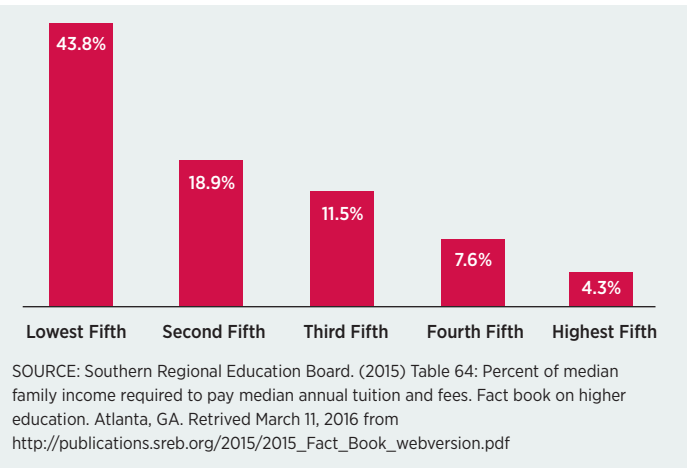
- Less than half of in-state students benefit from the HOPE and Zell Miller Scholarships. They only reach about 36 percent of USG students and 9 percent of TCSG students.
- The HOPE and Zell Millar Scholarship programs are not equitable in their distribution:
 - 30 percent of low-income students receive either the HOPE or Zell Miller Scholarship, compared to 42 percent of middle-upper income students.
 - 20 percent of black students and 36 percent of Hispanic students receive either the HOPE or Zell Miller Scholarship, compared to 46 percent of white students.

Figure 5.3. The Limits of the HOPE Scholarship⁹²



Tuition paid by students and families now covers about half of the cost of attending a USG institution, up from about 25 percent in the 1990s.⁹³ Lower income families feel this increase even more, as a greater portion of their income is required to support the full costs of postsecondary attendance, which includes expenses related to room and board, books, transportation and other living expenses (see Figure 5.4).

Figure 5.4. Higher Education Costs Hitting Lower Income Families



90 Technical College System of Georgia, Research Office. Calculations based on \$54 per semester credit hour in 2009 (converted from quarter to semester equivalent) and \$89 per semester credit hour in 2015.

91 Suggs, C. (2016). *Troubling gaps in HOPE point to need-based aid solutions* [policy brief]. Atlanta: Georgia Budget and Policy Insitute.

92 Ibid.

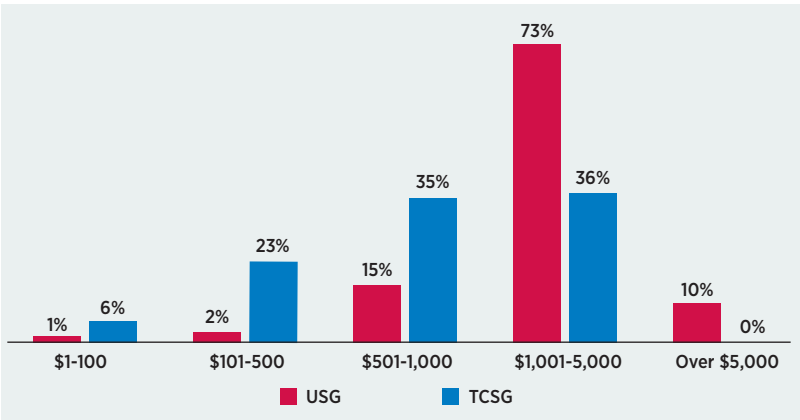
93 Ibid.

To cover these costs, many students turn to their own earnings, help from their families, other grants and scholarships, federal financial aid and student loans. Even with these resources, many students still cannot cover the costs of postsecondary attendance and completion. Federal Pell Grant awards cover approximately 22 percent of the costs of attending college in Georgia and about 15 percent at Georgia’s research universities.⁹⁴ In 2014, approximately 97,000 students in the USG were unable to cover the full cost of college in Georgia, even after combining scholarships, grants and a federal subsidized student loan — which caps at \$5,500. Their unmet need averaged \$6,800. To make up this difference, many students turned to unsubsidized loans, which have a larger price tag than the federal subsidized loans. In 2013, students graduated from Georgia colleges and universities owing an average of \$23,000–\$25,000 in student loan debt, depending on their school.⁹⁵

The inability to pay tuition is a leading cause of noncompletion for many students. If a student has any outstanding balance on their tuition bill at the beginning of the semester, he or she is “purged” from the rolls. In other words, such students are disenrolled from the institution. Each year, approximately 25,000 are purged for unpaid balances.⁹⁶ These students are being dropped for relatively small amounts of money relative to the overall costs of postsecondary education. Figure 5.5 shows that over 90 percent of the dropped students owe less than \$5,000, with the average debt below \$1,000.

In addition to dropping students already enrolled, the TCSG has seen declining total enrollments every year since 2010, and they are currently lower than 2008 enrollment rates.⁹⁸ An improving economy with greater job options is one factor in the reduced enrollments, as TCSG enrollments typically rise during a recession. However, if Georgia is to reach its goal of 250,000 additional postsecondary graduates by 2025, it must engage all students at all income levels across all its postsecondary settings.

Figure 5.5. Unpaid Balances of “Purged” Students⁹⁷



Action Steps for Georgia

The HOPE and Zell Miller Scholarships, along with the HOPE Grant, provide a strong foundation of financial aid in Georgia. However, Georgia is missing a strategy to help low-income Georgians keep up with the rising costs of postsecondary education. Under the Complete College Georgia Initiative, as part of broader efforts to increase retention rates, Georgia State University (Georgia State) has established Panther Retention Grants. 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 percent of freshmen receiving a Panther Retention Grant were retained.⁹⁹

94 Ibid.
 95 Ibid.
 96 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.
 97 Ibid.
 98 Suggs, C. (2016). *Troubling gaps in HOPE point to need-based aid solutions* [policy brief]. Atlanta: Georgia Budget and Policy Institute.
 99 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.

Along with the Panther Retention Grant, in 2010 Georgia State launched a strategic plan to improve graduation outcomes for all its students. As a result, the institutional graduation rate improved 22 points. Rates are up 32 points for Hispanic/Latinos (to 54 percent), and 28 points for African Americans (to 57 percent). Pell-eligible students currently represent 59 percent of Georgia State's undergraduate student population. With the help of targeted need-based aid like the Panther Retention Grants, recipients have graduated at rates, on average, equal to those of non-Pell students over the past three years. Georgia State now graduates more Hispanic, Asian, first generation and Pell students with bachelor's degrees than any other university in Georgia.¹⁰⁰ Table 5.1 shows changes in degree conferrals at Georgia State since the 2010–2011 academic year.

Table 5.1. Georgia State University Undergraduate Degree Conferrals, Since Launch of Complete College Georgia Strategic Plan¹⁰¹

	Academic Year					Four-Year Change
	2010–2011	2011–2012	2012–2013	2013–2014	2014–2015	
Pell-Eligible Students	2,015	2,321	2,607	2,711	2,742	36%
African American Students	1,300	1,440	1,552	1,682	1,777	37%
Hispanic Students	288	313	360	394	415	44%

These increases in graduation rates at Georgia State prove that a targeted yet comprehensive strategy can dramatically increase postsecondary success. Another targeted strategy designed to increase the number of low-income students receiving further aid is the Realizing Educational Achievement Can Happen (REACH) Program. Governor Deal created REACH, which is part of the Complete College Georgia Initiative, 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 available in 41 of the state's 181 school districts. An important caveat for statewide expansion is that local school districts must raise anywhere from \$1,500 to \$5,000 to contribute toward the cost of each student's scholarship.

As Georgia looks to increase its overall educational attainment across all of its postsecondary institutions, state policy makers should consider a key question: Taken to scale, what does a good needs-based financial aid program look like?

Supported by the Lumina Foundation, Strategy Labs has issued a series of research-based recommendations on how states can maximize their investments in a needs-based financial aid program.¹⁰²

- 1. Is the investment well targeted?** The investments must be targeted based on financial need to make the greatest impact. For institutional targets, these programs make a difference to the extent to which institutions serve low-income students. For example, Tennessee provides a 40 percent premium in the state funding formula to institutions for low-income students.
- 2. Does it create the right incentives?** Grade-based incentives in excess of degree requirements can reduce student course loads, discourage STEM majors and decrease retention rates for low-income students. However, progress-based incentives related to the completion of credit hours increase students' rates of progress toward degrees.

100 Georgia State University. (2015). 2015 status report: *Georgia State University*. Atlanta: Complete College Georgia.

101 Ibid.

102 Johnson, N. (2016, September 22). State investments in affordability. *Forum on the Future: Needs-Based Aid and Preparing a Competitive Workforce for Georgia*. Atlanta: Strategy Labs: State Policy to Increase Higher Education Attainment

3. *Is it timed to maximize impact?* Students and institutions need to know about the program and receive the money in time for it to make a difference. Tax-credit programs do not impact low-income families.

4. *Is it clearly communicated and well understood?* The program should not be overly complex. Students and families do not take advantage of programs they do not understand.

5. *Is it well coordinated with other resources, such as other private, state and federal sources?* Need-based financial aid programs should be implemented with an eye toward filling gaps left by other investments.

Georgia's economic development plans depend on a highly skilled workforce with postsecondary training. Only 46 percent of the adult population has at least a certificate beyond high school, and the state is not adding new graduates fast enough. For high school graduates, 72 percent still do not have any postsecondary credentials after five years, despite postsecondary enrollment rates reaching 70 percent. Many do not complete higher education due to the cost and lack of financial aid. The limited reach of Georgia's financial aid offerings is not sufficient to meet the state's workforce development needs. While the strength of Georgia's existing programs offer an excellent foundation to build upon, the state is still missing one critical element to ensure that all students can be successful in closing the talent gap: a statewide needs-based scholarship. Georgia is one of only three states missing this critical piece. It's time to close that gap and establish need-based aid in Georgia.



FUNDING – EQUITY FOR ALL

Issue Overview

Nationally, discussions and policies around public education funding formulas for K-12 systems are shifting from a focus on equal funding across districts to considerations of equity. The equity approach acknowledges that it simply costs more to educate some students than others. Of growing concern is that funding levels are not equitably distributed. Specifically, students living in poverty are not receiving an adequate level of resources to meet their needs. School resources are not going to where they are most needed.

A recent national study found that funding inequalities are large. The highest poverty districts receive about \$1,200 less per student than the lowest poverty districts.¹⁰³ Nationally, when accounting for the needs of low-income students, the highest poverty districts receive an average of \$2,200, or 18 percent, less than low-poverty districts.¹⁰⁴

These inequities have resulted in lawsuits in which judges have ruled that individual state funding formulas for K-12 education were unconstitutional. Most recently, a Connecticut Superior Court found that the state's funding formula does not meet the constitutional standards of providing equal educational opportunities for all students.¹⁰⁵ The judge ruled that the state must “overhaul its public-school system to fix the disparities between its poor and wealthier students.”¹⁰⁶

South Carolina's high court also ruled that state officials failed to fulfill their constitutional obligations to adequately fund poor and rural schools.¹⁰⁷ That ruling stated that the funding formula failed to address the “effects of pervasive poverty on students within the plaintiffs’ school districts” and that state leaders have “failed in their constitutional duty to ensure that all students receive the requisite opportunity.”¹⁰⁸ The Washington State Supreme Court ruled the state school formula unconstitutional and went as far as fining the state \$100,000 a day in 2015 when the state legislature did not adequately increase resources per a 2012 court decision.¹⁰⁹

103 The Education Trust. (2015). *Funding gaps 2015: Too many states still spend less on educating students who need the most*. Washington, DC: Author.

104 Ibid.

105 Burnette, D. (2016, September 21). Conn. Supreme Court will hear appeal to school funding case. *EdWeek*.

106 Ibid.

107 Superville, D. (2014, November 13). S.C. Supreme Court rules for poor, rural districts in equity lawsuit. *EdWeek*.

108 Ibid.

109 O'Sullivan, J., & Brunner, J. (2015, August 13). School funding back on table as court fines state \$100,000 a day. *The Seattle Times*.

Georgia is not currently facing any legal challenges to its funding formula, but the state is now taking a serious look at how it funds education. The state constitution includes language guaranteeing an adequate public education for all its citizens. A debate over how Georgia meets that obligation is expected to dominate the 2017 legislative session.

Significance for Georgia

In February 2015, Governor Nathan Deal established the Education Reform Commission (ERC) to conduct a “top to bottom review of public education” during his second term.¹¹⁰ As part of this review, Governor Deal directed the ERC’s funding subcommittee to develop a new formula to distribute state dollars to public schools. The governor is also requesting that the state provide district leaders with greater flexibility in how they spend state money.

One budget model — student-based budgeting (SBB), also called the weighted student-funding model — is designed to allow for increased flexibility and could also lead to increased equity based on student need. Under SBB, schools receive funding based on the number of enrolled students and their individual needs. These needs can vary from poverty to special education status to English language learners, low academic performance, gifted and so forth.¹¹¹

Across the country, more than 10 of the largest urban districts have adopted SBB. A few states, including New Jersey and most recently California, have adopted similar funding systems that distribute money to districts based on student need, including poverty status.¹¹² The funding committee of the ERC has recommended that Georgia move to an SBB model.

To understand where Georgia may go with its funding model, it is important to understand the current model it would be replacing: the quality basic education (QBE) formula. The QBE was established by state legislation in 1985. QBE earnings are the state’s primary mechanism for funding public schools and represent the state’s estimate of what it costs to provide a quality basic education for students. The QBE earnings are used to fund both direct and indirect instructional costs. In total, for fiscal year (FY) 2014, the most recent state comparison data available, Georgia’s per pupil spending ranked the state 37th in the nation (14th from the bottom).¹¹³

The QBE is a highly complex formula consisting of 18 student categories based on grade and academic level, such as special education, or career, technical and agricultural education programs (CTAE), and the like. The weights 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, 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 they require to meet their class size needs.

The formula also provides funding for maintenance and operations, instructional materials, other instructional and administrative staff, and other routine costs. These amounts are determined on a per student basis. Because the QBE model is based on teacher allotment determined by segments of time students are in particular classrooms, it restricts any flexibility districts may have or need over how to expend state

¹¹⁰ Yarbrough, D. (2014, October 21). Everything on the table, public education reform, says Gov. Deal. *The Telegraph*.

¹¹¹ Travers, J., & Catallo, C. (2015). *Following the dollars to the classroom doors: Why and how effective student-based budgeting must be linked with strategic school design*. Watertown, Ma: Education Resource Strategies.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Governing Data. (2016, August). *Education spending per student by state*. Retrieved from Governing: The States and Localities: <http://www.governing.com/gov-data/education-data/state-education-spending-per-pupil-data.htm>

dollars or be strategic with their resources. The formula also does not account for poverty. By not considering poverty, particularly concentrations of poverty, the formula can drive inequalities in funding allocations.¹¹⁴

The SBB model recommended by the ERC sets a base amount that districts receive for every student and then identifies additional categories for students whose needs will require increased financial resources. The final proposal being considered by Governor Deal recommends the base amount for students in grades 6–8 be set at \$2,393.13 per student.¹¹⁵ Students in the remaining categories receive the base amount, plus extra dollars determined by a weight intended to account for providing additional services. Table 6.1 shows the student categories and proposed weights.

The recommended move to an SBB model would award dollars to districts based on student need rather than staff allotments. It would also provide greater flexibility to districts to strategically target resources around student need. With this increased flexibility, all SBB models increase accountability to districts over student outcomes. This accountability shifts the focus from questions around funding resource inputs to questions concerning funding student outcomes.¹¹⁷ However, it must be noted that the weights are not based on an assessment of the actual costs of educating students in each category. Rather, the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement staff developed preliminary weights based on a review of similar categories assigned by other states and the current QBE formula, while taking into account that total funding was not to exceed the already established 2016 level.¹¹⁸

Table 6.1. Summary of the Student-Based Budgeting Model with Proposed Weights¹¹⁶

Student Category	Funding Weight
1. Grades 6–8 (base)	1.000
2. Grades K–3	0.2872
3. Grades 4–5	0.0800
4. Grades 9–12	0.0822
5. Economically Disadvantaged	0.0970
6. English to Speakers of Other Languages	0.1937
7. Gifted	0.3231
8. CTAE	0.0502
9. Special Education - Category A	0.4089
10. Special Education - Category B	0.7099
11. Special Education - Category C	1.7762
12. Special Education - Category D	2.4710
13. Special Education - Category E	4.8947

By not considering the actual cost of education, this could limit a local district’s ability to meet the needs of its students, while, at the same time, the district is being increasingly held accountable for student outcomes. This could also increase inequalities between districts instead of alleviating them. For example, the number of children living in poverty has increased nearly 20 percentage points since 2008. In fact, economically disadvantaged students are among the state’s fastest growing populations. With more than 26 percent of its children living below the poverty line, Georgia ranks 40th in the nation.¹¹⁹ Over 10 percent of children live in extreme poverty (less than 50 percent of the poverty line).¹²⁰

114 Education Resource Strategies. (2014). *Awarding dollars based on student need*. Watertown, MA: Education Resource Strategies, Inc.
115 Education Reform Commission. (2015, December 15). *Education Reform Commission: Final recommendations to Governor Nathan Deal*. Retrieved from <https://gov.georgia.gov/education-reform-commission>.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
118 Governor’s Office of Student Achievement. (2015, August 12). Student-based funding formula. Retrieved from https://gov.georgia.gov/sites/gov.georgia.gov/files/related_files/site_page/Narrative%20August%2012%20FINAL.pdf.
119 Georgia Family Connection Partnership. (2016). *KIDS COUNT data center*. Retrieved October 30, 2016, from datacenter.kidscount.org
120 Ibid.

Students living in poverty frequently need extra supports from their school systems to meet high levels of academic achievement. Strategies such as longer school days and 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.

The SBB formula does provide extra funds to account for low-income students; however, the amount is very low. The current recommendation would provide \$232.23 per student per year.¹²¹ It is unlikely that would be enough to cover the additional resources needed to implement the strategies known to meet the needs of low-income students. That would leave the local districts to make up the difference. Many districts with high concentrations of low-income students lack the tax base to offset this problem.

As previously stated, South Carolina's funding formula was ruled unconstitutional primarily due to the inequalities around poor and rural districts. Georgia's rural districts stand to be at a significant funding disadvantage due to how transportation costs are handled in the proposed model. Under the current QBE formula, transportation is a grant program, but under the proposed SBB model, transportation costs are included in the base amount built on the current state average — \$455 per student. However, that average varies significantly across districts. Rural districts can spend upward of \$900 per student.¹²² To account for the difference between the average state costs and actual costs, districts with high transportation expenditures may have to divert an increasing share of local money.

Another area where the new formula could impact equity is in teacher pay. In addition to changing the funding formula, the ERC is recommending changes to how districts earn money from the state to pay their teachers. The proposed formula would provide districts with the 2016 statewide average teacher salary (\$50,768) for each teacher, which is reflected in the base amount provided to districts. This is not how much teachers will actually be paid, but the amount districts earn from the state. Districts will develop their own compensation models to be approved by the state. These new models must include at least one measure of teacher performance. All new teachers hired after this proposal is approved will be subject to the new pay models. (For more on teacher policies, see Issue 2 – Teacher Recruitment and Retention.)

Current teachers may choose to opt into the new system or continue to be paid under the old state salary structure, which is exclusively based on years of experience and education level.¹²³ This recommendation would allow local districts to design compensation models to 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 would be able to pay a much higher premium for high-need areas, such as science and math, than lower wealth districts. Low-wealth districts, especially those in rural areas, will have a difficult time competing for talent in hard-to-staff areas.

In considering the adoption of an SBB model, Georgia is moving away from funding inputs to a focus on funding based on student needs and outputs. In doing so, the state should be careful that the formula put in place does not exacerbate the problems it is intended to address.

¹²¹ Suggs, C. (2016). *Student success in the balance: Update for 2017*. Atlanta: Georgia Budget and Policy Institute.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Education Reform Commission. (2015, December 15). *Education Reform Commission: Final recommendations to Governor Nathan Deal*. Retrieved from <https://gov.georgia.gov/education-reform-commission>.

Action Steps for Georgia

The Georgia Constitution includes language guaranteeing an adequate public education for all citizens. Yet, determining whether the state actually provides adequate resources to schools is a dominant issue in school finance in Georgia, as well as in many other states. The policy debate over adequacy in education funding centers on two primary questions:

1. What is an adequate education in terms of standards, teachers and curriculum?
2. What is the appropriate funding level to provide that?

Georgia has put a stake in the ground on defining an adequate education by publicly proclaiming that “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.”¹²⁴ To accomplish this goal, Georgia has committed to increasing standards and accountability for students, teachers and districts. What Georgia has not done is determine what the actual costs are of this ambitious vision. Lawmakers set what the state is willing to spend, but that is different from what it would cost to achieve the stated outcomes.

When considering a new funding formula, cost assessments are common. Recent examples include an effort currently underway in Maryland, an effort in Wyoming that finished in 2015, and one in Michigan completed in 2016.¹²⁵ In Georgia, instead of assessing the cost of education, the ERC focused on ways to reallocate the funds generated by the current QBE.

However, it must be noted that even without doing a cost assessment, the ERC recognized that more money would be needed to support the new formula. It recommends \$258 million be added to the K-12 budget in FY 2018 and an additional \$209 million when funds are available. Combined, this would offset the \$466 million austerity cut in the FY 2016 budget.¹²⁶ Moreover, the legislature preemptively restored \$300 million to the QBE funding level for the FY 2017 budget, reducing the current austerity cut to \$166 million.¹²⁷ Still, even though the funding levels are being returned to pre-austerity cut days, the question remains: How much does it cost districts to educate students to the level of achievement now required by the state?

Not being based on actual cost is a weakness of both the current QBE and the proposed SBB formulas. However, the SBB formula would allow districts to allocate resources in line with student needs, district priorities and other factors that research says drive student outcomes. In this way, the SBB would be an improvement over the QBE formula. The General Assembly is expected to take up this issue during the 2017 legislative session. Coupled with other reform efforts recommended by the ERC such as Move On When Ready and a focus on early literacy, an SBB model could be a valuable tool for local districts. However, the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute has recommended four specific changes to the proposed recommendations that should be considered.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Georgia Department of Education. (2010). *Race to the Top: State of Georgia scope of work*. Atlanta.

¹²⁵ Suggs, C. (2016). *Student success in the balance: Update for 2017*. Atlanta: Georgia Budget and Policy Institute.

¹²⁶ Austerity cuts were instituted in 2003 and represent state-level reductions in funding. It is the amount the QBE formula says the state should pay to districts minus the amount paid. Since 2003, Georgia has cut more than \$8.8 billion dollars from K-12.

¹²⁷ Suggs, C. (2016). *Student success in the balance: Update for 2017*. Atlanta: Georgia Budget and Policy Institute.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

1. **Add an inflation adjustment factor to account for rising costs over time.** Without an inflation factor, districts could be locked into today's funding levels for an unforeseen amount of time. Low-wealth districts may not be able to supplement the rising costs related to inflation, thereby exacerbating equity issues.
2. **Increase funding for students, schools and districts with greater needs.** The current weight allots \$232 per low-income student per year. The national average for poverty weights is a significantly higher \$600 per year. Moreover, supplemental funding should also be provided for districts with high concentrations of poverty and those with high numbers of English language learners.
3. **Broaden the definition of economically disadvantaged.** The ERC recommended a new definition of low-income that would cut the percentage of eligible low-income students in half. The national standard, and the current measure for Georgia, for defining low-income is participation in the free/reduced-price lunch program. Eligible students come from families whose income is up to 185 percent above the poverty level, which translates to an annual income of approximately \$37,000 for a family of three. The new definition only would qualify students who receive welfare or food stamps, are homeless, live in foster care or are identified as migrants. These levels of income are significantly lower than the current definition. The most generous category is food stamp participation, which caps eligibility at 130 percent of poverty — which is an annual income of approximately \$26,000 for a family of three. Under this new definition, the number of students who would qualify for the poverty weight would shrink from nearly 63 percent under the current definition to 35 percent under the proposed definition.
4. **Maintain a separate grant program for student transportation.** Including the state transportation average as part of the base amount threatens to shortchange rural areas and districts with higher than average transportation costs.

If Georgia is committed to producing world-class students, a properly funded SBB formula is a good place to start to allow districts to target resources. It is possible that many schools are producing results that would match Georgia's student outcome goals with current funding levels through innovation and the flexibility allowed under an SBB formula. However, many schools and districts are not. If an SBB formula is implemented, the state should conduct an evaluation of the impact of the new model with special considerations to equity. The evaluation should also include 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 procedures would go a long way toward informing any funding reforms being considered at the state level. Georgia has made high expectations for student educational outcomes a policy priority. Serious discussions about how to financially support that priority are now in order.



EARLY LEARNING – INCREASING QUALITY AND ACCESS FOR ALL CHILDREN

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,¹²⁹ and an increased focus and evaluation of social and educational outcomes of early learning programs.

Results show that disadvantaged children who participated in high-quality early learning programs had higher achievement scores, decreased grade retention and fewer referrals for special education services later in life. Moreover, they were significantly less likely to have chronic disease such as cardiovascular and diabetes as adults, and their earnings in adulthood were increased by 25 percent, putting their wages on par with their more advantaged peers. These individual outcomes provide societal benefits as well. The long-term economic return on investment in early learning averages between 7 and 10 percent through better outcomes in education, health and economic productivity as well as reduced crime.¹³⁰

However, not all children have access to early learning experiences, especially high-quality programs. This is particularly true for low-income children — the population that benefits from these programs the most. Just one-third of 3- and 4-year-olds from low-income families nationally were enrolled in preschool in 2014,¹³¹ and even fewer participated in quality infant and toddler programs.¹³² At-risk children who do not participate in high-quality early education programs are

- 50 percent more likely to be placed in special education,
- 25 percent more likely to drop out of school,
- 60 percent more likely to never attend college,
- 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime, and
- 40 percent more likely to become a teen parent.¹³³

129 See the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/>.

130 Heckman, J. J. (2015, January 21). *4 big benefits of investing in early childhood development*. Retrieved from The Heckman Equation: <http://heckmanequation.org/content/4-big-benefits-investing-early-childhood-development>.

131 Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2016). *Young children not in school by poverty status*. Retrieved November 30, 2016, from the KIDS COUNT Data Center: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/9011-young-children-not-in-school-by-poverty-status?loc=1&loc=1#detailed/1/any/false/1485,815/4172,4173/17979,17980>.

132 Stark, D., & Stark, F. H. (2016). *Equity starts early: How chiefs will build high-quality early education*. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.

133 Ibid.

For a state to gain the full benefits of investments in early learning, both in terms of educational outcomes for children and financial savings for the state, it must do two things: 1) expand and sustain the number of high-quality early learning options, and 2) ensure that those options are accessible to all families. Georgia has been working hard to increase the number of high-quality options for families across the state. However, recent changes in federal and state laws have created new challenges around accessibility for Georgia's poorest families that will be ongoing issues throughout 2017.

Significance for Georgia

Low-income and minority children are less likely to reach cognitive developmental milestones. Research has shown that if children are not reading on grade level and meeting their developmental milestones by the end of third grade, they are significantly less likely to graduate from high school. That is a problem for a state like Georgia, where 26 percent of children currently live below the poverty line, ranking the state as the ninth highest in the nation for child poverty rates. More distressing, Georgia ranks 10th highest in the country for the number of children living in extreme poverty at 12 percent.¹³⁴

Per a report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, by the third grade, African American children in Georgia are five times less likely to meet state standards in reading, and Hispanic children are four times less likely to meet state reading standards, as compared to white children. The cognitive gaps for low-income children and minority children are even larger when measured against national test standards.¹³⁵

In recent years, in an effort to address this issue, Georgia has taken aggressive action to improve the quality of and access to early learning programs across the state. Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) administers the state-funded Georgia's Pre-K Program, licenses child care centers and home-based child care, administers federal nutrition programs and manages voluntary quality-enhancement programs.

The Supply Side

Based on the strength of Georgia's Pre-K Program — a free early learning program for 4-year-olds available to all children, depending on space and availability — Georgia has been viewed as a national leader in early learning. Independent evaluations confirm that the program is having a positive and significant impact on students. Studies show that Pre-K Program participants had significantly higher school-readiness skills across most measures of language, math and general knowledge than students who did not participate. The studies also show that children who attended a Georgia Pre-K Program continued to show significant growth through kindergarten.¹³⁶

While Georgia continues to focus on quality improvements to the Pre-K Program, DECAL is also working to improve the quality of early care in both early learning centers and home-based care for all young children. DECAL developed and implemented Quality Rated, a tiered quality rating and improvement system. Quality Rated provides incentives and resources to early childhood programs to improve quality while working through several manageable steps, or levels. At the same time, the child care providers receive public recognition for their achieved quality efforts.

Quality Rated was launched in January 2012. It uses one, two and three stars to indicate programs that meet defined standards beyond Georgia's minimum licensing requirements. The program is voluntary for all child

¹³⁴ Georgia Family Connection Partnership. (2016). *KIDS Count data center*. Retrieved November 30, 2016, from datacenter.kidscount.org.

¹³⁵ The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2013). *The first eight years: Giving kids a foundation for a lifetime of success*. Baltimore: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

¹³⁶ For a complete discussion of the Pre-K evaluation, see <http://dec.al.ga.gov/BftS/EvaluationGAPreKProgram.aspx>.

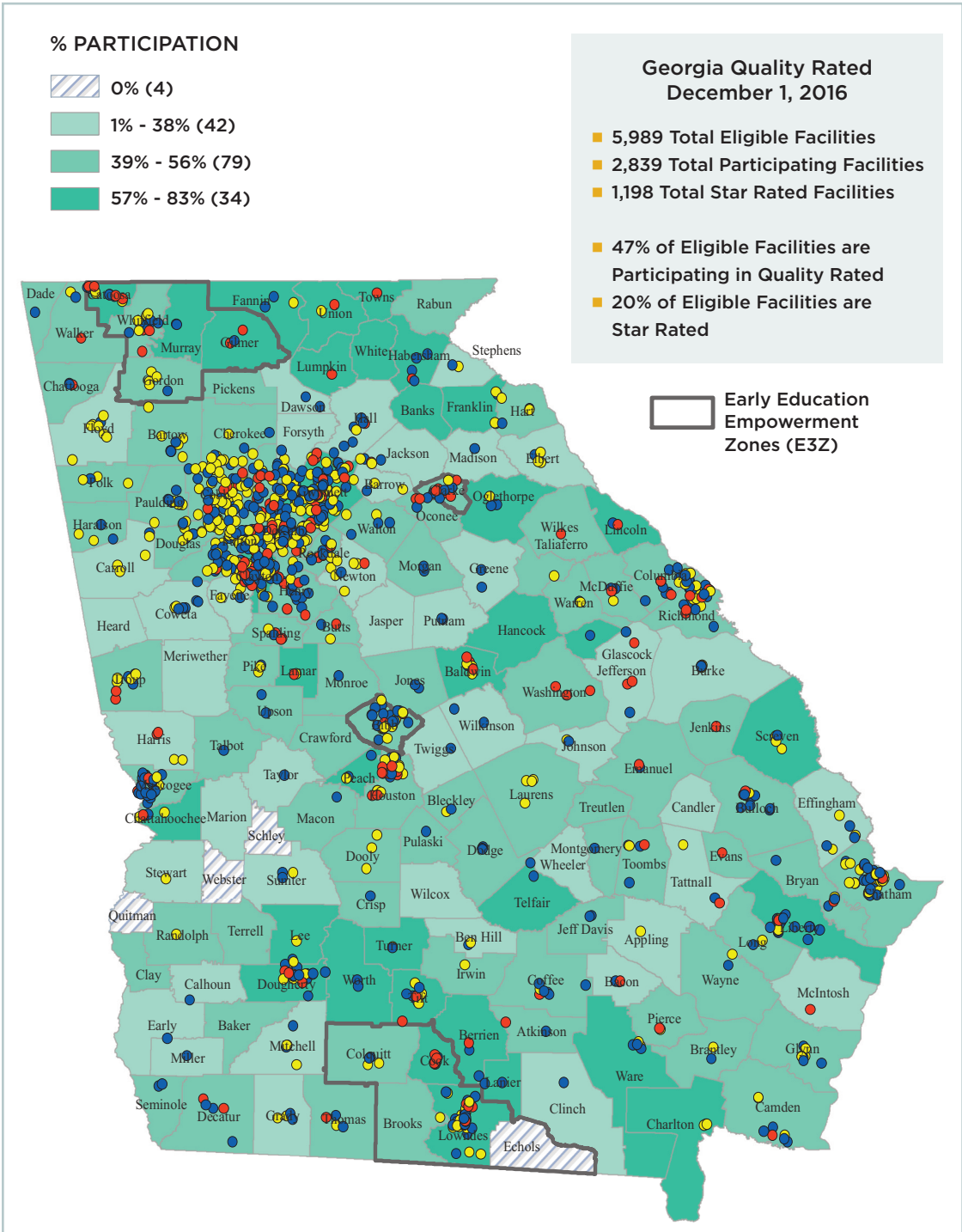
care programs. Participating programs become eligible for free professional development, technical assistance and financial incentive packages supported by foundations and businesses.¹³⁷

Since Quality Rated's inception, more than 1,170 facilities have received a star rating. Table 7.1 shows the state count, and Figure 7.1 shows the statewide distribution.

Table 7.1. Quality Rated Facilities, State Counts, December 2016

- 1 Star (461)
- 2 Star (560)
- 3 Star (177)

Figure 7.1. Quality Rated Facilities & County Participation Rates¹³⁸



137 For more information on Quality Rated, see <http://families.decal.ga.gov/ChildCare/QualityRated>.
138 Count current as of November 1, 2016.

In addition to the ongoing expansion of Quality Rated, Georgia is continuing to implement the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant (RT3-ELC), which is a state-level competitive grant program targeted at early learning and development. While the goals of the grant are to improve program quality and outcomes for all children, Georgia is specifically focusing on increasing the number of children with high needs who attend high-quality early learning programs. The projects associated with the grant must also help close the achievement gap between children with high needs and their peers by supporting efforts to increase kindergarten readiness. Georgia received \$51.7 million over a four-year grant period, beginning in 2014, to expand the five critical areas outlined in Table 7.2.

Much of the work proposed in the grant expands programs that were already underway such as increasing participation in the Quality Rated program and expanding the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards and home visiting programs.

Table 7.2. RT3 – ELC Grant¹³⁹

Critical Area	Project List
1. Building Successful State Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Develop Early Education Empowerment Zones (E3Zs), where the state will align supports, activities and services in four geographical areas with large numbers or high percentages of children with high needs and improve infrastructure for high-quality early learning programs.
2. Increasing High-Quality Accountability Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Validate Quality Rated and expand research and data activities that will evaluate current and future efforts and support policy revisions. ■ Drastically increase program and parent participation in Quality Rated.
3. Promoting Early Learning Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Expand the comprehensive roll-out of the newly launched Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards. ■ Expand Georgia's home visiting program, Great Start Georgia, by creating home visiting and family engagement hubs in three-star child care centers in each E3Z.
4. Developing a Great Early Childhood Education Workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increase articulation among institutions of higher learning to increase student success and persistence in achieving advanced credentials in early childhood education. ■ Expand scholarships and incentive programs to increase the number of early childhood educators moving along a knowledge and career pathway.
5. Measuring Outcomes and Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Create a Task Force for Comprehensive Assessment to identify a single set of common child assessments with professional development and policy guidelines. ■ Design and implement a formative assessment that will be conducted during the first six weeks of children's kindergarten experience so that each student receives a measurement of kindergarten readiness that teachers can use to individualize instruction. ■ Expand the quality of data collected for children, programs and educators by pooling additional, existing data feeds from participating state agencies to expand the Cross-Agency Child Data System.

¹³⁹ Bright From the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. (2014). *Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Grant*. Retrieved from <http://dec.al.ga.gov/BftS/EarlyLearningChallenge.aspx>.

Access

For high-quality programs to have their intended impact, the supply side must be accessible. The ability for low-income families to access quality care remains a challenge both in terms of availability and affordability.

While the state has been working hard to expand the number of high-quality options, many Georgians living in poverty still have a hard time locating any child care providers, much less those of high quality. One-third of Georgia zip codes are considered “child care deserts.” These are defined as zip codes with at least 30 children under the age of 5 where there are either no child care centers or so few centers that there are three times as many children as there are spaces in the centers.¹⁴⁰ About half of the more than 800,000 residents living in these deserts are in places where the poverty rate is more than 20 percent. With 650,000 children under age 5 in Georgia, demand for child care assistance is much higher than the supply available.¹⁴¹

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 percent of family income on child care, a low-income family in Georgia spends nearly 40 percent of their budget on these services (see Figure 7.2).

On average, the annual cost for center-based child care in Georgia ranges 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.¹⁴³

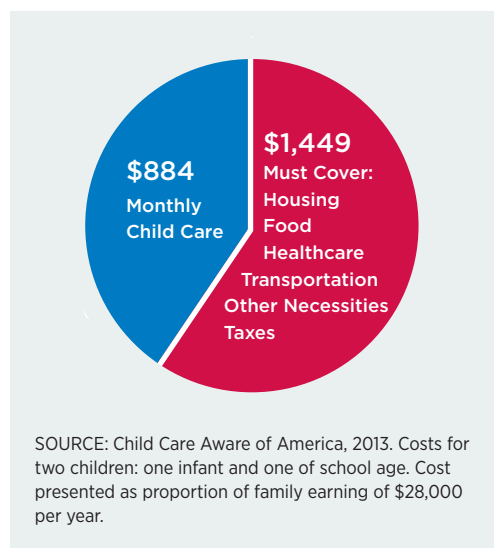
Georgia’s Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS)

Program helps low-income families afford quality child care. CAPS is a child care subsidy program administered through a partnership between DECAL and the Georgia Division of Human Services. It is funded through the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), a federal block grant. Eligible families can earn up to about 150 percent of the federal poverty level and still potentially qualify for subsidies.¹⁴⁴

The reauthorization of the federal block grant that passed in 2014 brought significant changes to the implementation of the CAPS program in Georgia. One specific change was the amount of money each subsidy would be worth. The new regulations require that state agencies pay higher subsidy rates to higher quality providers. For example, in Georgia, a new tiered reimbursement rate would be based on the Quality Rated star rating. Though a higher rate is now in place for quality programs, the total amount of the block grant funds has not increased. When more money is needed per provider, the total number of families that can be served with the same amount of money decreases.

To comply with the higher rates that must be paid to centers of higher quality, Georgia implemented funding restrictions in August 2016. To maintain the current CAPS funding without terminating child care assistance

Figure 7.2 Child Care Can Equal Nearly 40% of Low-Income Family Budget¹⁴²



140 Malik, R., Hamm, K., Adamu, M., & Morrissey, T. (2016, October 27). *Child care deserts*. Center for American Progress. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2016/10/27/225703/child-care-deserts/>.

141 Ibid.

142 Johnson, M. (2015, March). *Child care assistance: Georgia's opportunity to bolster working families, economy*. Atlanta, Georgia: Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://gbpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Child-Care-Report-2015.pdf>.

143 Ibid.

144 Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students. (2016). *Supporting affordability*. Retrieved from <http://geears.org/business-toolkit/supporting-affordability/>.

to families already enrolled in the program, restrictions were implemented on new enrollees. New families must now not only meet need-based eligibility requirements, as before, they must also be identified as part of a priority group. Priority groups include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) applicants and recipients, children in Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) custody or in Child Protective Services, minor parents in school, grandparents raising grandchildren, children with special needs, children in Georgia's Pre-K Program requiring extended care or victims of a natural disaster.¹⁴⁵

The new state plan around CAPS implementation was due to take effect in October 2016. However, concerns expressed during the public comment phase of the plan have resulted in implementation being delayed until sometime in 2017 while state officials evaluate how to adequately compensate providers for the higher cost of quality and continue serving as many eligible families as possible.

Action Steps for Georgia

For the past several years, Georgia has been focused on improving both quality of and access to early learning programs, especially for young children with high-needs and their families. Under DECAL's leadership, the state has

- Established the Quality Rated program,
- Implemented the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards,
- Provided resources for statewide family and community engagement grants,
- Expanded center-based home visitation programs for family, friend and neighbor care for children being cared for in private homes,
- Continued to increase the knowledge and competencies of educators who work in the early care industry, and
- Developed a comprehensive assessment system for early learning.

This commitment is being supported and potentially enhanced by Governor Nathan Deal's Education Reform Commission (ERC). Working throughout 2015, the commission's goal was to provide recommendations to improve Georgia's educational system, including increasing access to early learning programs. Governor Deal challenged the Early Childhood Education Committee to study and make recommendations for expanding early education options, including the following:¹⁴⁶

1. Addressing the current funding formula for Georgia's Pre-K Program,
2. Expanding Pre-K access in Georgia,
3. Increasing access to Quality Rated programs for all children from birth to age five, and
4. Considering innovative approaches for getting more children into high-quality programs.

To help support the ongoing work of DECAL and the early learning community, the ERC Early Childhood Education Committee proposed a series of recommendations in the final report submitted in December 2015 aimed at increasing both the supply of quality programs and the demand for them from consumers. Table 7.3 provides a partial list of the committee's recommendations.

The ERC also recommended increased supports for Georgia's Pre-K Program, teachers and assistant teachers. Many of these recommendations were incorporated in 2016. What remains for 2017 are the recommendations concerning supporting the expansion of Quality Rated and increasing the affordability of quality — allowing for centers to provide it and parents to afford it.

¹⁴⁵ Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. (2016). *Questions about Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) funding restrictions*. Retrieved from <http://www.caps.dec.ga.gov/en/EligibilityRequirements>.

¹⁴⁶ Education Reform Commission. (2015). *Final recommendations to Governor Nathan Deal*. Atlanta: Office of the Governor.

Table 7.3. Education Reform Commission: Selected Recommendations of the Early Childhood Education Subcommittee

Increase the Number of Quality Rated Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Develop a timeline in which child care programs must be Quality Rated in order to receive child care subsidy funds.■ Appropriate funding to adjust the subsidy rates for Quality Rated providers to more closely align with the true cost of tuition.
Increase the Demand for Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Appropriate funding to at least match private dollars raised to support a comprehensive marketing and public relations campaign to promote awareness of Quality Rated and the importance of high-quality early learning.■ Pass legislation to create business tax incentives for Quality Rated child care providers.■ Pass legislation to create an occupational tax incentive based upon teacher credentials for educators employed by a Quality Rated provider.■ Pass legislation to create a consumer tax incentive for families who enroll their children in Quality Rated programs.

The commitment to Georgia’s Pre-K Program is a necessary step in the right direction. However, the early learning industry is more than just the Pre-K Program. The entire industry generates more than \$4.7 billion in economic activity annually. That puts it on par with other important sectors in Georgia’s economy such as the hotel and motel industry, pharmaceutical preparation manufacturing and home health care.¹⁴⁷ These industries receive significant state support in the form of tax credits, training and support programs, and other subsidies.

To ensure that the child care industry continues to thrive and that there are quality options for families, providers must be compensated at a higher rate. Changes to the CAPS program ensure that payments to Quality Rated providers are higher for a reason: Higher quality early learning is worth it. During 2017, Georgia will be debating how to balance this need with the need to serve as many low-income families as possible. Implementation of the ERC recommendations would go a long way toward solving this debate.

The first recommendation, which requires a center to be Quality Rated to receive the subsidy, would expand the number of available spots for low-income children in Quality Rated centers. Consequently, this would cut down on the child care deserts many poor families face. The second recommendation is to appropriate funding to allow for adjustments in rates for higher quality centers. This would meet the new federal requirements and increase the ability for Georgia to serve income-eligible families.

Finally, the recommended combination of tax incentives described in Table 7.3 would allow centers to increase quality and would help families pay for higher quality. Businesses also have a role to play. Currently, a combination of state and local tax credits are available to encourage businesses to make child care more affordable for their employees, such as offering on-site child care, contracting for child care, assisting families in locating care and offering flexible spending accounts.¹⁴⁸

As Georgia’s population shifts toward becoming a minority-majority state — and the K-12 system already has — the educational system must adjust to the needs of our changing demographics. The fastest growing population of school children in Georgia are low-income and children of color. Starting at the beginning of the educational pipeline, high-quality early learning has never been more important.

147 Child Policy Partnership. (2016). *Economic impact of the early care and education industry in Georgia: Executive summary*. Retrieved from <http://www.cviog.uga.edu/pdf/child-care/summary>.

148 For a full description of federal and state tax relief, see <http://gears.org/business-toolkit/supporting-affordability/>.



STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH – TIME TO TAKE CENTER STAGE

Issue Overview

The mental health of Georgia students is critical to their ability to succeed in school and in life. So many factors of everyday life, especially those faced by our public-school students, are affected by untreated mental health issues of either the students themselves or their peers. Collateral impacts of untreated mental illness are felt inside and outside of schools and include issues of personal safety and public health.

Education stakeholders consistently cite student academic performance as one of the most important outcomes of public education. A student's mental health has a significant impact on that performance. It is easy to see the link between the physical health of children and their ability to perform well academically. Physical health affects a student's attendance and ability to concentrate. Mental health works in the same way, affecting both concentration and the ability to attend school. Half of students age 14 and older with a mental illness drop out of high school, per the National Institute for Mental Health.¹⁴⁹ To fully support students, Georgia must aid with their mental health.

Mental Health America's 2015 report on the condition of mental health care in America indicates that 8 percent of Georgia's children have a serious emotional disorder — that's 91,000 children.¹⁵⁰ The report further estimates that more than 85,000 children in Georgia have a mental health need and are not receiving support or treatment. Research on children's mental health shows the extent of the problem.

- 1 in 10 children has a serious enough mental health problem to impair his or her functioning in home, school and the community.¹⁵¹
- 50 percent of children with mental disorders had received treatment for their disorder within the past year.¹⁵²
- Of school-age children who receive any mental health services, 70 to 80 percent receive them at school.¹⁵³
- 70 percent of youth in state and local juvenile justice systems have a mental illness.¹⁵⁴
- Suicide is the third leading cause of death in youth ages 10–24, and 90 percent of those who die by suicide had an underlying mental illness.¹⁵⁵

149 National Alliance on Mental Illness. (2014, June). *Children's mental health by the numbers*. Retrieved from <https://www.nami.org/getattachment/Learn-More/Mental-Health-by-the-Numbers/childrenmhfacts.pdf>.

150 Nguyen, T. (2015). *Parity or disparity: The state of mental health in America 2015*. Mental Health America.

151 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute of Mental Health. *Disorders among children*. Retrieved 2016.

152 National Institute of Mental Health. (2016). *Use of mental health services and treatment among children*. Retrieved from <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/prevalence/use-of-mental-health-services-and-treatment-among-children.shtml>.

153 Atkins, M. S., Hoagwood, K. E., Kutash, K., & Seidman, E. (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.

154 Ibid.

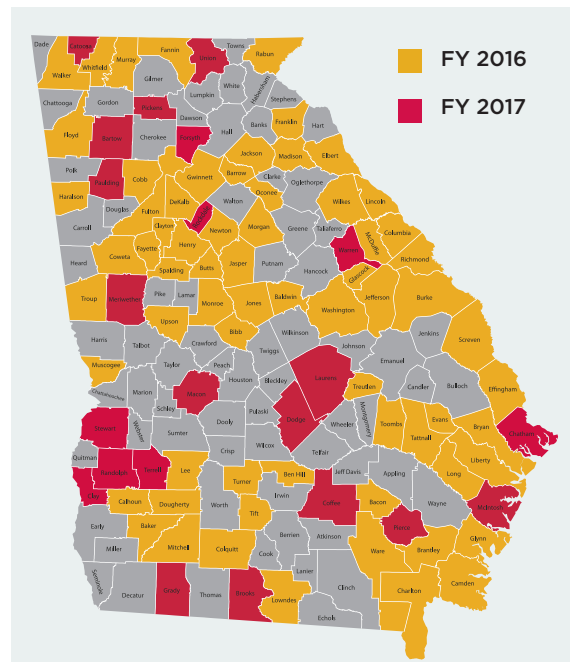
155 Ibid.

Significance for Georgia

Given the seriousness and extent of these issues for children, there are multiple areas of need that Georgia must address. First, the state is facing a workforce shortage in the areas of child psychiatry and psychology. Second, the state services that do exist in these areas are extremely fragmented. There are not enough providers in schools and across the state to meet the demand for their services. Across Georgia, 76 of 159 counties do not have a licensed psychologist, and 52 of 159 counties do not have a licensed social worker at all.¹⁵⁶ The recommended ratio of social workers to students is 250 students for every one social worker. Currently that ratio stands at one social worker for every 2,742 students in Georgia.¹⁵⁷ Many local school systems do not have the capacity to identify students with mental health and behavioral challenges. When they do, there is often not an accessible provider outside of school from which a student can obtain treatment.

In a survey of school social workers, only 11 percent of respondents reported that all or most students on their caseloads received mental health services outside of school.¹⁵⁸ Those students who can access treatment outside of school likely have greater financial resources. Students in poverty are disproportionately affected by the lack of access to mental health supports in schools, as their barriers to access are even greater due to limited family financial resources. As the number of families in poverty increases in Georgia, the state's national child well-being ranking has gone down two spots in two years — to 45th in the United States.¹⁵⁹ This ranking by the Annie E. Casey Foundation incorporates trends in education, health and economic well-being. Poverty and related circumstances are contributing factors to many behavioral and mental health issues in children such as childhood trauma, adverse features of housing and neighborhoods, and food and housing insecurity.

Figure 8.1. Georgia PBIS Districts¹⁶²



The Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports program (PBIS) is one way the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) is addressing some of these issues. PBIS is an evidence-based, data-driven framework that is being implemented in more than 50 counties, with nearly as many beginning the program next year (see Figure 8.1).¹⁶⁰ PBIS reduces disciplinary incidents and increases a school's sense of safety as well as supporting improved academic outcomes. To reduce discipline issues and advance a climate of increased productivity, safety and learning, PBIS promotes continual teaching combined with acknowledgement or feedback of positive student behavior. The Georgia program is expanding, with an increase of almost 300 PBIS-trained school teams from 2014 to 2015.¹⁶¹

156 Voices for Georgia's Children. (2015, December). *Georgia's crisis in child & adolescent behavioral health*. Retrieved from http://georgiavoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/HealthPolicy_Recs_12115.pdf.

157 Ibid.

158 Kelly, M. B. (2015). *The state of American school social work 2014: Initial findings from the Second National School Social Work Survey*. New Orleans: Society for Social Work and Research.

159 The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *KIDS COUNT data center*, <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>.

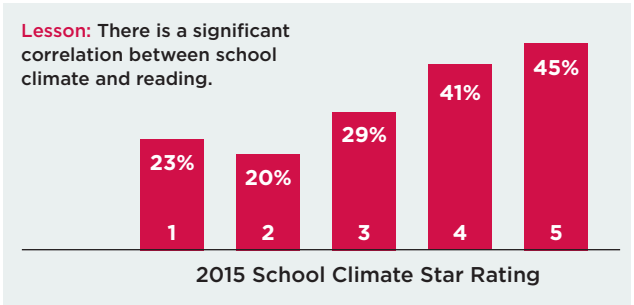
160 Georgia Department of Education. (2016). *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports*. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Pages/Positive-Behavioral-Interventions-and-Support.aspx>.

161 McGiboney, G. (2016). *Changing the conversation*. Atlanta: Georgia Department of Education.

162 Georgia Department of Education. (2016). *2016-2017 active PBIS districts in Georgia map*. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Documents/PBIS/2016-17/PBIS%20Map%20with%20FY17%20projections.pdf>.

The new emphasis on school climate is also helping to increase support for student mental health. PBIS implementation has been linked to a higher School Climate Rating. The School Climate Star Rating, published on the individual school report cards, is a combination of student and parent perceptions, student data on discipline, a safe and substance-free learning environment, and attendance. Schools receive between one and five stars.¹⁶³ When a school's climate is improved, students are freer to concentrate academically. One example of how climate can affect students is the correlation between the 2015 School Climate Star Rating and average third-grade English/language arts (ELA) test scores. Figure 8.2 shows that more students scored proficient or higher at schools with higher climate ratings.¹⁶⁴

Figure 8.2. Correlation Between School Climate and Third Grade English/Language Arts Scores, 2015¹⁶⁵



Another ongoing effort to address mental health issues among Georgia's public school students is Project AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education). This program began in 2015 as a five-year federal grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Agency (SAMHSA) awarded to GaDOE.¹⁶⁶ Though Project AWARE is currently only in three Georgia school districts, the hope is that the program will be successful and can serve as a model for the rest of the state.

Project AWARE is a partnership between GaDOE and the school districts to provide training in Youth Mental Health First Aid and to establish methods for connecting families and affected students to mental health services that are based in their own communities. The lack of teacher training in dealing with childhood trauma and mental health issues is something that exacerbates the problems faced in schools today.¹⁶⁷ Since most children with mental health issues receive treatment at schools, it is imperative that schools become better equipped to at least recognize the signs that these conditions are present.

One of the goals of Project AWARE is to train educators, first responders and parents to respond to the mental health needs of youth. Solutions to student problems are most effective when they involve efforts both within and outside of schools, and Project AWARE seeks to ensure that student mental health is addressed with help from the community. Its goals include increasing community participation in identifying resources for students with mental health problems, increasing the number of families receiving services through collaboration, and raising awareness and identification of mental health and behavioral concerns in schools using the PBIS framework.¹⁶⁸

163 Ibid.
164 Ibid.
165 McGiboney, G. (2016). *Changing the conversation*. Atlanta: Georgia Department of Education.
166 Georgia Department of Education. (2016). *Georgia Project AWARE*. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Pages/Georgia-Project-AWARE.aspx>.
167 Lahey, J. (2016, October 18). The failing first line of defense. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/10/the-failing-first-line-of-defense/504485/>.
168 Georgia Department of Education. (2016). *Georgia Project AWARE*. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Pages/Georgia-Project-AWARE.aspx>.

Action Steps for Georgia

Georgia is making many positive efforts to strengthen student mental health resources, but much more work is needed to fully address this issue and support children's mental health in Georgia. Throughout 2015, the Georgia House of Representatives convened a study committee on children's mental health that published a report of its findings at the end of that year. The report also included recommendations for steps Georgia can take to improve work on this issue. The primary recommendation of the House Study Committee on Children's Mental Health is to create a statewide Children's Mental Health Strategic Plan, developed by a statewide coalition of stakeholders. The committee recommends that the plan include a state budget for children's access to mental health prevention resources and early intervention based on an assessment of currently available services and resources. Another element is a mental health workforce development plan to increase the number of mental health workers practicing in the state, an area in which Georgia's workforce falls far short of the demand. By increasing this workforce, Georgia can reduce the ratio of students to mental health personnel in and outside of schools. Maintaining currently active programs including PBIS and Project AWARE should also be addressed by the plan.¹⁶⁹

The report of the House Study Committee recommends that a coalition be formed to construct this plan, based on the model used during Georgia's juvenile justice reform movement — one that consists of advocates, legislators and educators called together by the governor.¹⁷⁰ The coalition should be made up of a variety of stakeholders representing government departments including both justice and education, other public agencies, schools, the legislature, advocacy groups and parents. This coalition must work together to develop the recommendations and implementation ideas necessary for a statewide strategic plan to address the many issues surrounding children's mental health and the current lack of adequate services to support our students. The plan must be one on which they all agree to and can work toward through multiple initiatives generating from various departments working together to achieve the same goal. This plan would "provide comprehensive, accessible and coordinated mental health prevention, early and timely interventions, and appropriate treatment service for children."¹⁷¹

To fully support students across the state, Georgians must come together to support children's mental health. It is evident that many students in the state are suffering from unidentified or untreated mental health issues. A statewide plan for improving and caring for student mental health will be an important first step in addressing this need. This work can be accomplished by bringing together public education agencies, public safety agencies and public health professionals to serve Georgia's youth. Georgians need to support the call for the governor to convene a task force around this issue. By supporting student mental health, students have a better chance to become strong, independent adults and members of the workforce.

¹⁶⁹ McGiboney, G. (2016). *Children's mental health and adult outcomes*. 2016 House Study Committee on Mental Illness Initiatives, Reform, Public Health and Safety.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.



THE ECONOMICS OF EDUCATION – BREAKING THE POVERTY CYCLE

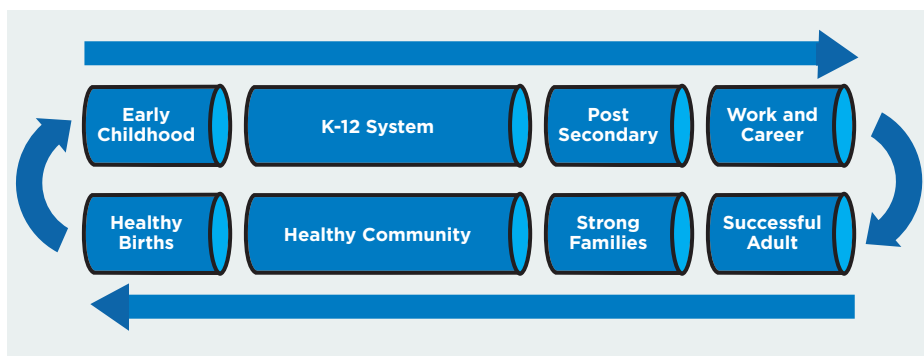
Issue Overview

A Harvard University study has shown that American children are less likely than children living in other developed countries to grow up and make more money than their parents. The lack of social mobility (the ability to work one's way out of poverty) was especially prominent in the Southeast, and the Atlanta metropolitan area ranked 48th out of the nation's 50 largest commuting areas.¹⁷²

This crisis has consequences — not only for individuals living in segregated poor neighborhoods, but also for the nation's long-term economic growth and viability. In terms of economic well-being, the ingredients of a healthy lifecycle for an individual, family, community and state are the same. A healthy birth supports preparation for strong early learning and K-12 experiences, which in turn support successful transitions to postsecondary education and a career. With the ability to earn adequate wages, successful adults build strong families and make investments in their communities, thereby providing more opportunities and increasing the chances that the next generation will be even more successful. Figure 9.1 shows the healthy economic lifecycle.

When students and individuals do not successfully complete the K-12 system and move on to postsecondary education, their own economic trajectory is compromised. When enough people within a concentrated area fall

Figure 9.1. The Healthy Economic Lifecycle

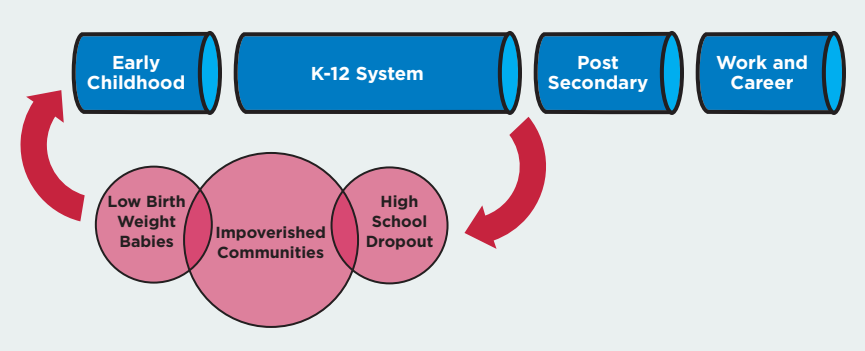


out of the healthy economic lifecycle, the prosperity of their neighborhood, region and state may also be at risk. Thus, it is less likely the next generation of children will realize their own dreams, creating intergenerational poverty, communities of disinvestments and regions of economic stagnation. Figure 9.2 illustrates the poverty lifecycle.

¹⁷² The Equality of Opportunity Project. (2015). *Upward mobility in the 50 biggest metro areas*. Retrieved from <http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/index.php/previous-research>.

The key to breaking out of the poverty lifecycle and moving into the healthy economic lifecycle — what many call social mobility — is education. Education is viewed as the great equalizer and mobilizer of upward mobility in American society. However,

Figure 9.2. The Poverty Lifecycle



persistent achievement gaps have called this notion into question. Students from our nation’s lowest income families are over twice as likely to drop out of high school as students from families in the top half of incomes. The likelihood of college enrollment for low-income high school graduates is less than 50 percent, while 80 percent of their high-income peers will enroll. Therefore, we must ask ourselves: How well is the education system serving all students, helping all students rise, regardless of where they start out?

Significance for Georgia

Nationwide, children born into the bottom fifth of the income distribution have a 40 percent chance of remaining there into adulthood.¹⁷³ Moreover, factors associated with being poor increase the risk of remaining poor. For example, a child raised by a poor, single mother has a 50 percent risk of remaining poor, rising to nearly 60 percent if that child does not finish high school. The odds of working out of poverty are also complicated by factors of race, with the contrast particularly stark between African American and white children. Over half (51 percent) of all African American children born into the lowest income strata remain there, as opposed to just 23 percent of their white counterparts.¹⁷⁴

While education has historically been viewed as the way out of poverty, low-income students, especially minority students, face an achievement gap. Table 9.1 shows that in Georgia, as in the rest of the nation, they are less likely to read on grade level by fourth grade, be proficient in math by eighth grade, and graduate from high school on time.

Table 9.1. Georgia Achievement Gaps by Race and Income¹⁷⁵

		2015 Georgia 4th Grade NAEP Reading - % At or Above Proficient	2015 Georgia 8th Grade NAEP Math - % At or Above Proficient	2015 Georgia High School Graduation Rates
State Average		34%	28%	79%
Income	Economically Disadvantaged	23%	15%	75%
	Not Economically Disadvantaged	55%	52%	84%
Race	White	45%	41%	83%
	African American	22%	13%	75%
	Hispanic	22%	19%	72%

173 Reeves, R. (2014). *Saving Horatio Alger: Equality, opportunity, and the American Dream*. The Brookings Essay. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

174 Ibid.

175 NAEP data provided by The Nations Report Card, 2015. See <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2015/pdf/2016008GA4.pdf>. High school graduation data provided by the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, School Performance Report Cards: <https://gosa.georgia.gov/report-card>.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is a national assessment given every two years to fourth and eighth graders in subjects such as reading and math. Students who score “at or above proficient” are deemed on track to graduate ready for college or career. As reading assessments are given in fourth and eighth grade only, the fourth grade results are used as a proxy for reading on grade level by the third grade.

In Georgia, African American students had an average NAEP reading score 20 points lower than their white counterparts. Low-income students, defined as eligible for free or reduced-price school lunch, scored a full 25 points lower than students who were not eligible.

These achievement gaps have serious implications not only for the individual students and their ability to move out of poverty, but also for Georgia’s long-term economic development. For example, children who are not reading on grade level by the third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school, which makes them significantly more likely to be incarcerated, become a teen parent and be recipients of Medicaid and welfare.¹⁷⁶

Moreover, it is projected that over 60 percent of jobs by 2025 will require some sort of postsecondary degree or certificate. Based on current high school graduation rates, minorities and low-income students are less likely to graduate from high school and obtain postsecondary credentials to allow them to participate in Georgia’s growing economy. This gap is especially prominent in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) fields. Figure 9.3 shows that between 2014 and 2024, jobs in the STEM fields will outpace all other job growth areas.¹⁷⁷

While these growing fields offer economic opportunities for individuals and the state, Figure 9.4 indicates that minorities and low-income students are significantly under-represented in the STEM fields in the public K-12 education system.

Individual and family factors are not the only impediments to social mobility. Students and the schools they attend are usually subject to

Figure 9.3. Growing Demand for STEM Jobs in Georgia, Between 2014 and 2024¹⁷⁸

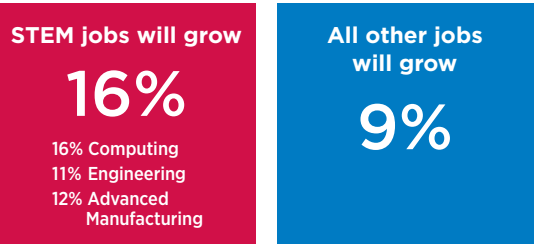
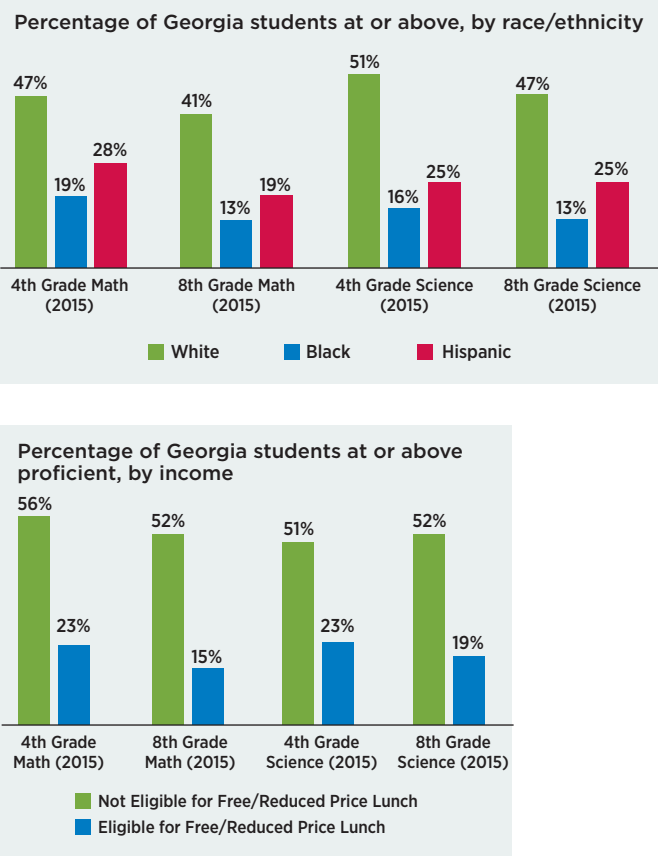


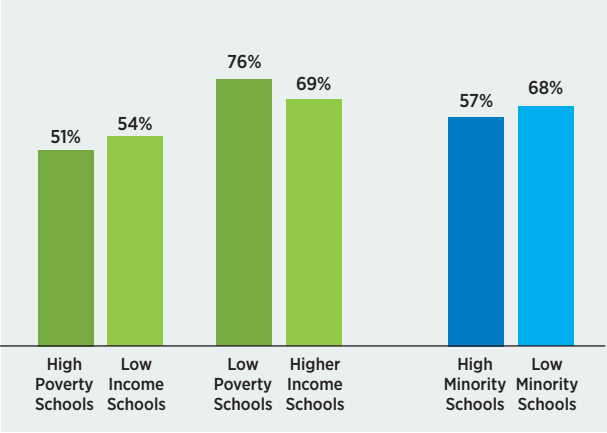
Figure 9.4. STEM Participation Gaps by Race and Income¹⁷⁹



176 Get Georgia Reading. (n.d.). *Data landscape*. Retrieved from www.getgorgiareading.org.
177 Change the Equation. (n.d.). *Vital signs: Georgia STEM demand*. Retrieved October 30, 2016, from Vital Signs: <http://vitalsigns.changetheequation.org/state/Georgia/demand>.
178 Ibid.
179 Ibid.

community factors as well. Poor students are significantly more likely to live in disinvested neighborhoods that have low-performing schools, higher crime rates, and few social and institutional supports for those in need. Students who attend high-poverty schools or schools with high minority enrollments are significantly less likely to enroll in college. Research has examined the impact of low-income schools (at least half of all students are eligible for free/reduced-price lunch) and schools with high concentrations of poverty (more than 75 percent of students are eligible for free/reduced-price lunch).¹⁸⁰ As Figure 9.5 shows, concentrations of poverty have a slightly greater impact on college enrollment than income levels alone.

Figure 9.5. College Enrollment Rates in the First Fall After High School Graduation, Class of 2015¹⁸¹



Related to the issue of achievement are questions about the quality of education being provided in high poverty, high minority schools. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Education required all states to analyze their data and create comprehensive educator equity plans to ensure that students from low-income families and students of color are not taught by inexperienced, unqualified or out-of-field teachers at higher rates than other children. Georgia's Equity Plan revealed an equity gap on every metric included in an analysis for both low-income students and minority students.¹⁸² For example, schools with the highest concentrations of poverty and minority students had significantly higher percentages of inexperienced, first-year teachers and were twice as likely to have a teacher who was teaching out of field.¹⁸³

The state plan not only highlighted the problem, but also identified root causes and identified strategies to address the equity gap. In addition to issues such as teacher recruitment, training and professional growth, and improvements in local school environments, the state plan requires that by 2018, building-level leaders will review placement procedures to ensure an equitable distribution of effective teachers. Likewise, at the district level, leaders will work to ensure placement of effective teachers in the highest need situations.

Action Steps for Georgia

As Georgia implements ambitious plans to increase the skill level of its workforce (e.g., more rigorous learning standards, dual enrollment, Move On When Ready programs) to support its economic development strategies, the state is also being hit with a growing number of students and communities trapped in the poverty cycle. More than one-quarter of children in Georgia currently live below the poverty line, making the state the ninth highest in the nation for child poverty rates. More distressing, Georgia ranks 10th highest in the country for the number of children living in extreme poverty at 12 percent. These children tend to live in communities of concentrated, persistent poverty. Of Georgia's 159 counties, 51 have more than a quarter of their population living in poverty. Seventeen counties have more than one-third of their citizens living below

¹⁸⁰ High School Benchmarks. (2016). *National college progression data*. National Student Clearinghouse.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Georgia Department of Education. (2015, September 14). *Equitable access to effective educators*. Retrieved from U.S. Department of Education: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/equitable/gaequityplan91415.pdf>. The full list of variables examined included the percentage of teachers in their first year of teaching, average years of experience, the percentage of teachers teaching "out of field," the percentage of classes taught by teachers not highly qualified, the average days absent, teacher salary, teacher turnover, principal turnover, graduation rates for students with disabilities and mean growth percentiles.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

the poverty line.¹⁸⁴ These communities generally lack equitable access to high-quality schools, health care and community supports, and the economic opportunities that come with them.

As Georgia’s demographics change, more children and families are living in the poverty lifecycle and unable to make the move into the healthy economic lifecycle. To help break this pattern and encourage social mobility, Georgia must not only focus on the school system but also on community and family issues. In short, the state must take a multigenerational approach to break the poverty cycle.

At the beginning of the lifecycle, high-quality early learning opportunities are still unavailable for many children. Studies show that such programs are crucial for alleviating the achievement gap that exists for minority and low-income students. Using achievement gains made by students who participated in Georgia’s Pre-K Program, researchers estimate that adult earnings for these children will increase by 1.3–3.5 percent — a strong return on the money invested in these programs.

Georgia must also focus on the adults. There is a proven relationship among adult illiteracy, poverty and educational outcomes for children. Children whose parents have low literacy levels have a 72 percent chance at being at the lowest reading levels themselves.¹⁸⁵ In Georgia, 20 percent of the adult population lacks basic literacy skills. In 32 counties (20 percent), more than 40 percent of the adult population lacks these basic skills.¹⁸⁶ This level of illiteracy in the adult population has serious consequences for the next generation of students as well as for Georgia’s economic development. For example,

- 75 percent of state prison inmates did not complete high school or can be classified as low literate, and
- Low literacy costs the United States \$225 billion each year in nonproductivity in the workforce, crime and loss of tax revenue due to unemployment.¹⁸⁷

The harsh reality is that economic performance of a city, region and state is dependent upon the education level and skills of the population. Stanford professor Eric Hanushek studied Georgians’ educational outcomes and their impact on the state’s economy. As measured by eighth-grade math NAEP outcomes, he compared Georgia’s growth in GDP (gross domestic product) across three measures of improvement: 1) if the results matched that of the highest scoring state (Minnesota), 2) if the results matched that of the best state in the geographic region (Virginia), and 3) if Georgia brought ALL students up to the “basic” level on the NAEP assessment.¹⁸⁸ The startling results are presented in Table 9.2.

Table 9.2 Economic Improvements Tied to Educational Outcomes¹⁸⁹

Eighth-Grade Math Outcomes Equal to:	% Change in GDP with NAEP Improvements
Top Performing State (MN)	599%
Equal to Regional Best (VA)	283%
All at Least Basic	204%

184 Georgia Family Connection Partnership. (n.d.). *KIDS Count data center*. Retrieved October 30, 2016, from datacenter.kidscount.org.
185 ProLiteracy. (2016, November 1). *US adult literacy facts*. Retrieved from Proliteracy Education Network: <https://proliteracy.org/Resources/Adult-Literacy-Facts>.
186 National Center for Educational Statistics. (2016, November 1). *State & county estimates of low literacy, Georgia*. Retrieved from National Assessment of Adult Literacy: <https://nces.ed.gov/naal/estimates/StateEstimates.aspx>.
187 Ibid.
188 Hanushek, E. A., Ruhose, J., & Woessmann, L. (2016, Summer). Georgia: Economic future with educational reform. *Education Next*.
189 Ibid.

If Georgia could improve educational outcomes for *all* students to a minimal “basic” level on the NAEP eighth-grade math, the state would realize a 204 percent increase over the current state GDP. In 2015, 67 percent of all eighth graders in Georgia, and 57 percent of low-income students, met at-least this basic standard. Georgia has a long way to go.

As a growing percentage of our population, children living in poverty cannot wait for equitable opportunities to be presented to them so that they can work their way out of poverty and become productive citizens. Our workforce and economic development plans cannot simply assume that the next generation of workers will be up to the competitive challenge. To maximize the state's economic future, Georgia must bring positive and effective leadership across all levels of the state and throughout local communities together to champion equity for all kids and adults across the entire economic pipeline.



NO OPPORTUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT – WHAT NOW?

Issue Overview

In November 2016, voters in Georgia rejected a constitutional amendment to establish an Opportunity School District (OSD) that would have created a new state-run district with the authority to step in and run “chronically failing” schools. This proposal was based on the work of other states, such as Louisiana and Tennessee, that have enacted policies to allow the state to intervene in persistently failing schools.

Simply stated, opponents of the constitutional amendment in Georgia argued that the proposal violated local control, did not incorporate the role of the community and did not adequately address the problems of the struggling schools. Proponents countered that these schools have been in chronic failure for multiple years and that a dramatic and different intervention is needed.

Now that voters have rejected the idea of an OSD, more than 68,000 students continue to attend the 127 schools that would have qualified for state takeover. These schools had been identified as failing for at least three consecutive years, and many for far longer. Therefore, the question remains: If an OSD is not an option to try and do something different, what is?

Significance for Georgia

Defining the Problem

The first step in solving a problem is to accurately define it. Nationally, research on low-performing schools shows that in over 92 percent, at least half of the study body lives in poverty. Nearly 75 percent are schools of concentrated poverty.¹⁹⁰ In Georgia, the OSD-eligible schools were almost entirely made up of poor, minority students. More than 90 percent of enrolled students participated in the free/reduced-price lunch program, a proxy measure for poverty, and 95 percent were either black or Hispanic. Many of the root problems around chronically low-performing schools can be found in the impacts of poverty and a history of disinvestment in local communities.

¹⁹⁰ Elgart, M. (2016, November 11). Moving beyond Amendment 1: Creating real opportunity for Georgia students. *Atlanta Journal Constitution*.

Poverty is not just the context within which underperforming schools exist. It directly impacts the students, families, schools and broader community. A growing body of research has documented and quantified how the disproportionate exposure to stress and trauma among children living in poverty directly damages brain development, leading to significant learning and behavioral problems that affect academic achievement.¹⁹¹

Children growing up in poverty, and especially neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, are vulnerable to a variety of negative experiences at much higher rates than their more affluent counterparts. Experiences such as chronic insecurity, unexpected loss of a loved one and exposure to violence all impact critical brain structures that manage attention, memory and the learning process.¹⁹²

Researchers now understand the long-term medical, cognitive, social and emotional impacts of these types of events into adulthood.¹⁹³ Children exposed to stresses and traumas associated with poverty are at an exponentially higher risk of learning and behavioral problems than children who are not: 51 percent versus 3 percent.¹⁹⁴

As many underperforming schools continue to feel the impacts of poverty and continue to struggle, Georgia has been raising the bar on standards and instruction to ensure that students are college- and career-ready when they graduate from high school. Georgia has transitioned to the Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE) in English/language arts and mathematics to improve critical thinking skills. Georgia has also implemented the Georgia Milestones assessment system, which holds students and educators to a higher standard of learning. Educators in high-poverty schools have a difficult time reaching these higher standards without the ability to provide a safe, supportive and highly skilled learning environment for students.

Addressing the Problem

The good news is that Georgia is beginning to address this problem. Best-practice research concludes that positive learning environments that emphasize a constructive school climate and prioritize social and emotional learning can mitigate stress factors associated with living in poverty.¹⁹⁵

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, a safe and substance-free learning environment, and attendance. Schools receive a rating of between one and five stars. Those with a School Climate Rating of 5 earn an average of 25 points higher on the CCRPI (the College and Career Ready Performance Index), Georgia's school accountability system.¹⁹⁶

However, simply highlighting a school's climate is not enough to foster change. Implementing PBIS across the state is a valuable way to create a positive learning 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. Currently, more than 800 schools across Georgia are implementing PBIS.¹⁹⁷ (For a more detailed discussion of school climate and PBIS, see Issue 8 – Student Mental Health.)

191 Yu, E., & Cantor, P. (2013). *Turnaround for children in poverty, stress, schools: Implications for research, practice and assessment*. New York: TurnAround: Partners in School Transformation.

192 Ibid.

193 See Hillis et al., 2010; Chapman et al., 2007; Anda et al., 2006; Dong et al., 2005; Felitti et al., 1998; Foege, 1998; Weiss & Wagner, 1998.

194 Yu, E., & Cantor, P. (2013). *Turnaround for children in poverty, stress, schools: Implications for research, practice and assessment*. New York: TurnAround: Partners in School Transformation.

195 Ibid.

196 Georgia Department of Education. (2016). *Educating Georgia's Future 2016*. Atlanta: Georgia Department of Education.

197 Ibid.

Focusing on social and emotional learning (SEL) is also an effective strategy to improve school climate and student outcomes. 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.¹⁹⁸

The results related to implementing an SEL framework are dramatic. Across 213 studies involving more than 270,000 students, those that participated in an evidence-based SEL program showed an 11-percentage point gain in academic achievement. SEL programs also affect equity and poverty outcomes. The promotion of these skills has been shown to have long-term life outcomes such as reducing the use of public housing and public assistance, and decreasing involvement with the criminal justice system and use of mental health services. Finally, studies have found a cost-benefit ratio of 11:1, meaning that for every \$1 invested in SEL, there is an \$11 return on investment.¹⁹⁹

While the concept of implementing a positive learning climate to turn around low-performing schools seems straightforward, is it a complicated strategy that requires multiple supports and interventions. Best-practice research says that turning around low-performing schools involves a combination of three primary things: resources, will and capacity.

First, in terms of resources, students living in poverty frequently need extra supports from their school systems to meet high levels of academic achievement. Strategies such as longer school days and years and smaller class sizes can help low-income students catch up with their more affluent peers.

The question of resources is not just focused on the total amount of funding needed, but the equitable distribution of those funds. To address low-performing schools, the state and districts need to examine how resources are allocated. Low-performing schools require additional resources not only focused on academic outcomes such as educator recruitment and professional development, and academic support specialists, but on student and family support as well, such as mental health professionals, social workers, housing specialists and similar services. (For a complete examination of funding equity, see Issue 6 – Funding, Equity for All.)

The second element is will: the will of the families, community, schools, districts and the state to engage with these schools in a profound manner. For the past two years, districts have faced the threat of the OSD and school takeover, which has prompted them to rethink how they approach their lowest performing schools. For example, in a direct response to their schools being on the OSD list, Atlanta Public Schools implemented an aggressive turnaround strategy focused on neighborhoods with the lowest performing schools and high concentrations of poverty. Their approach includes a charter school partnership model to transform schools and communities. The approach includes the following:

- High-impact tutoring in targeted schools
- Development of out-of-school-time academies and extended learning times
- Use of additional reading and math specialists
- Talent development, including the recruitment of turnaround leaders and teachers and intensive professional development²⁰⁰

198 CASEL. (2016). *What is SEL?* Retrieved from <http://www.casel.org/what-is-sel/>.

199 CASEL. (2016). *SEL impact*. Retrieved from <http://www.casel.org/impact/>.

200 Carstarphen, M. (2016, March 16). *APS advances school turnaround strategy*. Retrieved from Atlanta Public Schools: <http://www.atlantapublic-schools.us/domain/11088>.

Other districts with schools on the OSD list, such as DeKalb and Bibb counties, have taken different approaches focused more on the internal targeting of resources around educator professional development and instruction. DeKalb County invested more than \$6 million in fiscal year 2016 on developing curricula, changing instruction and adding reading specialists, parental liaisons and academic coaches. Bibb County has closed under-enrolled low-performing schools, and partnered with local universities to provide professional support to teachers.²⁰¹

The third area is capacity. The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) has been providing intensive turnaround assistance to low-performing schools through its Division of School and District Effectiveness, which have had positive impacts.

Through its ongoing work with the schools, GaDOE has made significant changes to how it supports struggling schools. GaDOE found the same elements that national research has cited as necessary to implement and maintain turnaround efforts: leadership and support for sustainability. Relatedly, one of the main lessons learned through working with these persistently low-performing schools is that any improvements made within a school building are extremely difficult to maintain over the long term without district support and involvement. Along with the school improvement focus, GaDOE is working to increase the capacity of districts and district leaders to support struggling schools.

To support the connection between school and district leaders, state turnaround efforts work in tandem with schools and their district leaders. While working in schools, GaDOE also supports district improvements in a variety of ways.

- Connecting and coordinating the improvement efforts from different district and state divisions and departments
- Developing a sense of ownership and responsibility within district leadership for the success of leaders within the school building
- Building the capacity of district personnel in the various areas of leadership and technical skills by expanding their knowledge base
- Coaching district leaders to focus on limited goals and initiatives, and on how to plan, develop, implement and monitor progress

GaDOE has developed the Georgia District Performance Standards, which allow districts to assess their progress across standards of best practices for high-performing districts. Developing leaders in the school system and at the district level has become a key strategy for addressing the needs of priority and focus schools.

Action Steps for Georgia

The debate over the OSD was contentious and dominated much of the political talk in Georgia — no easy deed considering the nature of the 2016 presidential election. However, as heated as the debate was, nobody was arguing in support of the status quo. Everybody agreed that too many students had been stuck in low-performing schools for too long. The combative debate was over the correct approach to solve the problem.

²⁰¹ Superville, D. R. (2016, October 25). Georgia voters to decide state's role in struggling schools. *Education Week*.

The proponents of the OSD argued that a change in governance structure could help solve a problem that had seemingly plagued districts for multiple years. Districts had control over these schools for many years and were unable to solve the problem. Opponents argued that the proposed solution offered by the OSD would not fix the problem. Changing a school's governance structure could not address the systemic impacts of poverty and inequality that plague most of the identified OSD-eligible schools.

However, just the threat of a state takeover of a school gave the will for many local districts to act on their own. Now that the measure has been defeated, an important next step for Georgia is not to let the absence of that threat undermine its determination to do something different. With the defeat of the Opportunity School District, all Georgians, from local parents and community leaders to state officials, have the opportunity to come together to create a meaningful plan that generates the will and provides the needed resources and capacity to tackle this complicated issue.

With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), individual states are free from many previous federal regulations and are responsible for building their own state plans. Under the leadership of GaDOE, Georgia is now developing new rules for how to measure success, how to define “failing” schools, and how to support and intervene in struggling schools.

First, as previously stated, we must agree on the problem. One criticism of the OSD proposal was the use of the CCRPI as the criteria for identifying “failing schools.” Opponents argued that CCRPI was intended to measure student growth. In fact, between 2012 and 2014, schools identified as OSD-eligible as a group showed greater student growth during that three-year period than their higher achieving counterparts. Moreover, many of the CCRPI measures are based on the relatively new Georgia Milestones assessment system. The Milestones have yet to be independently validated and tested for reliability, thereby calling into question such a heavy reliance on their results. Fortunately, under ESSA, Georgia can now have a conversation and agree upon a definition of what constitutes “failing,” but not without a validation study.

In the state ESSA plan, Georgia must also decide what interventions should look like — how does the state resource and build capacity? Work already being done by GaDOE has demonstrated that successful turnarounds require changing the culture, expectations and routines within a school. That begins with establishing high goals for individual teachers and staff, while providing them with the appropriate support, tools and professional development necessary to achieve those goals. In changing the culture of a school, the focus should be on policies and procedures that improve the quality of teaching and learning. This would include plans to systematically recruit and retain highly qualified teachers in turnaround schools, which historically are difficult to staff. Finally, engaging district leaders and building district capacity to support school turnaround efforts are necessary to sustain long-term changes.

In addition to work being done within the school building, work outside the building must take place as well. These schools are generally located in neighborhoods of high poverty and high crime, both of which can easily undermine any effective school turnaround reform agenda if not addressed. Community engagement and comprehensive services are needed to support and stabilize a school. Districts are already rethinking how to engage resources and help struggling schools identify existing community supports that can be integrated into the improvement process.

In light of the debate around the OSD that dominated the education policy landscape, it is important to remember the work of Governor Nathan Deal's Education Reform Commission (ERC). The recommendations put forth, many of which may be debated during the 2017 legislative session, could be helpful for informing the “what next” discussion.

The ERC has suggested reforms to Georgia's funding model to give districts flexibility in spending, allowing for resource allocation more in line with student need and district priorities. The proposed formula also includes allocating more money for students living in poverty, though it does not include additional funds for districts with high concentrations of poverty. The ERC also has put forth a series of recommendations around teacher recruitment and professional development. Georgia lacks adequate numbers of highly qualified teachers throughout the state. These teachers are a necessary component of any successful turnaround strategy. (For more on the ERC recommendations and Georgia's teacher policies, see Issue 2 – Teacher Recruitment and Retention.)

Finally, at the legislative biennial conference in early December 2016, House Education Committee Chairman Brooks Coleman announced potential legislation that would give the State Board of Education more leverage to let students in troubled classrooms ultimately go elsewhere. As of the writing of this document, specifics about the proposed legislation are not clear. However, it has been publicly reported that this “Plan B” would provide a six-year process that would offer Georgia's most troubled schools more administrative support and resources to help them improve. If performance does not improve, student could be offered vouchers or other options to switch to other schools.²⁰²

Many of the solutions are in our midst; they just need to be coordinated and leveraged. GaDOE has a commitment to supporting local districts and schools in their turnaround efforts. The agency is working to support broad implementation of PBIS and has signaled a commitment to developing and implementing SEL standards.²⁰³ The organized opposition to the OSD proved that people from different ideologies, income strata and backgrounds can come together with a unified voice to fight for what they believe in. That unity needs to continue to help provide local school boards, districts and educators the resources they need to implement the changes that are necessary. Innovative local and state leaders can provide mentoring and coaching to other districts struggling to address students with the greatest needs. Community and business leaders can help raise investments to support the local school systems.

Most importantly, state leaders cannot abdicate responsibility to provide adequate resources and support to local districts. All stakeholders, from state leaders to educators and families, must come together. The greatest test for an educational system is turning around the lowest performing schools and ensuring that all children — regardless of their zip code — have access to a quality education. For Georgia to be successful, it will take a comprehensive and coordinated assessment of current policies and practices at the state and local levels as well as visionary plans to address the need. It will also require commitment from all Georgians to ensure that the will to do something is sustained and that the state, districts and individual schools have the capacity to see their ambitious plans through.

202 Blustein, G. (2016, December 7). ‘Plan B’ in works after defeat of school takeover plan in Georgia. *Atlanta Journal Constitution*.

203 In 2016, Georgia was selected along with seven other states (California, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Washington) to participate in the Collaborating States Initiative, funded by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The collaborative was a partnership of states working together to support deeper learning and educational practice related to SEL. However, in September 2016, GaDOE withdrew from the collaborative and opted not to accept the grant funding, citing the importance of control over Georgia's decision making as the reason.



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