Top Ten Issues
TO WATCH IN 2018

EDQUEST GEORGIA – CHARTING EDUCATIONAL REFORM

LITERACY – A FOUNDATIONAL NECESSITY

EQUITY AND FAIRNESS – THE OPPORTUNITY TO SUCCEED

TEACHERS – LEADERSHIP FROM THE CLASSROOM

THE EARLY LEARNING WORKFORCE – A CHALLENGE FOR GEORGIA

RURAL GEORGIA – IT MATTERS, A LOT

STUDENT HEALTH – A PATHWAY TO CLASSROOM SUCCESS

THE MISSING 20% – INCREASING GEORGIA'S HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE

GEORGIA'S TALENT GAP – TIME TO CLOSE IT

THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA) – WHAT'S NEXT FOR GEORGIA

GEORGIA PARTNERSHIP
FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

14TH EDITION

Table of Contents

ii **Indicators for Success – Where is Georgia Today**

1 **ISSUE 1: EdQuest Georgia – Charting Educational Reform**

8 **ISSUE 2: Equity and Fairness – The Opportunity to Succeed**

16 **ISSUE 3: The Early Learning Workforce – A Challenge for Georgia**

23 **ISSUE 4: Teachers – Leadership from the Classroom**

29 **ISSUE 5: The Missing 20% – Increasing Georgia's High School Graduation Rate**

37 **ISSUE 6: Georgia's Talent Gap – Time to Close It**

44 **ISSUE 7: Literacy – A Foundational Necessity**

51 **ISSUE 8: Student Health – A Pathway to Classroom Success**

58 **ISSUE 9: Rural Georgia – It Matters, A Lot**

65 **ISSUE 10: The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) – What's Next for Georgia**

January 2018

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

Our Mission

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

© 2017 Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education

The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education celebrated its 25th anniversary last year. We enter 2018 with many opportunities to grow and make lasting impact. The Georgia Partnership continues its mission of working tirelessly to improve student achievement in our state. The pages that follow will detail many of the current education challenges facing us all.

So, what exactly does the Georgia Partnership do?

Nonpartisan research is a hallmark of our work. We are always searching for the best way to make Georgia's public education system better, unencumbered by political influences, and to ensure it provides equal opportunity for every student throughout the birth to work pipeline. We often review our findings with Georgia's policy and decision makers.

At the top of the research list last year was our new education framework: ***EdQuest Georgia.*** Based in best practice research, EdQuest highlights seven core policy areas that are common across high-performing states and countries. The baseline report examines where Georgia is strong and should continue the great work being done, as well as opportunities that need to be addressed to move the state forward.

Without a strong education foundation, maximum success is simply not possible. That is why we developed the ***Economics of Education.*** The Georgia Partnership produced the Fifth Edition of this popular report in October 2017. You can learn more—including how to request a briefing—about the program, which began in late 2003, by visiting the "Econ of Ed" page on our web site: gpee.org.

We start every year on the fast track with our **Media Symposium** in early January. This event brings education reporters and editors in from around the state for a day-long look at the key issues facing legislators as they start their new term. It is here that the newest Top Ten report is released to the public.

Addressing key topics is something we have been doing almost since our creation. We do this through our **Critical Issues Forums,** which we present three times a year. Looking back over 2017, we provided inside looks at public perceptions of education and *EdQuest Georgia,* Closing Georgia's Talent Gap, and Arts Learning and the Innovation Workforce. The Forums are always free and open to all.

We are especially proud of our **Education Policy Fellowship Program** (EPFP). This year we are excited to work with our 10th EPFP class. Since 2008 we have been increasing Georgia's education policy expertise by graduating Georgians from a variety of fields—government, education, business, civic—who better understand the complexities of education policies and the critical need to make the right decisions first. Take a look and consider applying for the Class of 2019.

This brief review only scratches the surface. The door is always open to those who want to learn more about our work and to those who want to partner with us to make Georgia's public education system a national leader. We encourage you to join our mailing list and follow us on Twitter and Facebook. The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education's greatest strength is that it creates and nurtures the conditions that stimulate critical change. We welcome your support and participation in our work. Georgia's children need you.

Introduction

Welcome to 2018 and the 14th edition of the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education's Top Ten Issues to Watch. In the years since we released the inaugural edition of this publication, the Top Ten has become one of the Partnership's signature efforts, and its release each year is anticipated by education stakeholders across the state.

With the release of this edition—the *Top Ten Issues to Watch in 2018*—it is fitting to consider the educational progress Georgia has made since our first issue was published in 2005. During that time, Georgia has embarked on a series of education policy improvements to ensure all students are successful in college and/or their chosen career, and we have made progress. For example:

- Georgia students have the 9th largest increase in the nation on the average scale score of fourth-grade students in reading between 2005 and 2015 on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP).
- Georgia students have the 11th largest increase in the nation on the average scale score of eighth-grade students in mathematics between 2005 and 2015 on the NAEP.
- The 2017 high school graduation rate was over 80%.

That progress has moved Georgia from one of the lowest performing states to rank around the national average in student performance across the country. While that is an improvement, we are not where we need to be. Our goal is to be a global leader in education outcomes for our students. The Top Ten is built to inform and guide Georgia's educational policy to help us meet that goal by focusing on each year's key issues.

Additionally, the Georgia Partnership has created a framework called EdQuest Georgia based on the policies that high-performing states, countries, and school systems share. You will see EdQuest mentioned in greater detail in the following pages. The framework represents an essential policy ecosystem, identifying core policy areas and where Georgia stands within them. The Top Ten takes a deeper dive into specific issues facing Georgia today—and how they fit into a broader policy framework for education improvement—across those core policies.

It is the goal of the Georgia Partnership that the commentary in this document serves as a tool for policymakers, educators, community and business leaders, and all education stakeholders to identify where opportunities exist to move Georgia forward. We hope that you join us on this quest to make Georgia a top-performing state for public education!

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

Indicators for Success: Where is Georgia Today?

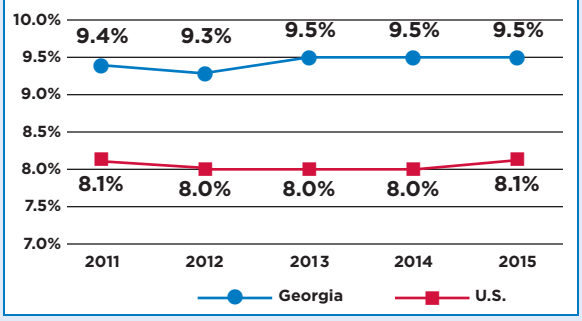
How does Georgia fare in producing excellent results for our citizens throughout the birth to work pipeline?

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.

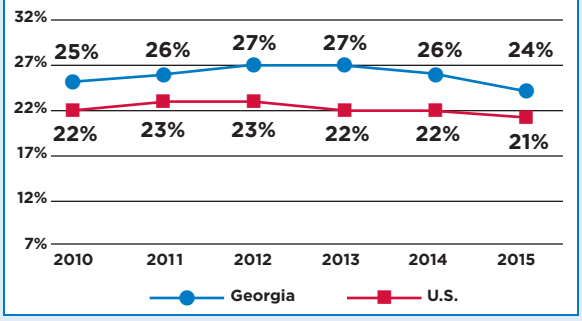
Low-Birthweight Babies, 2011-2015

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



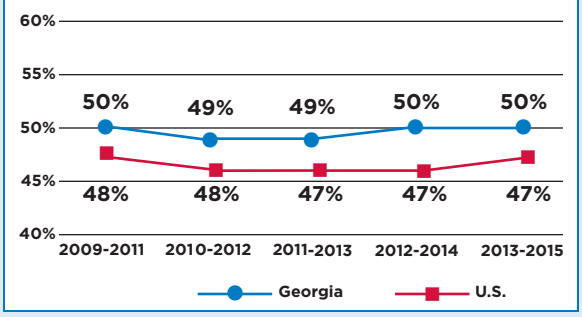
Children Living in Poverty, 2010-2015

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



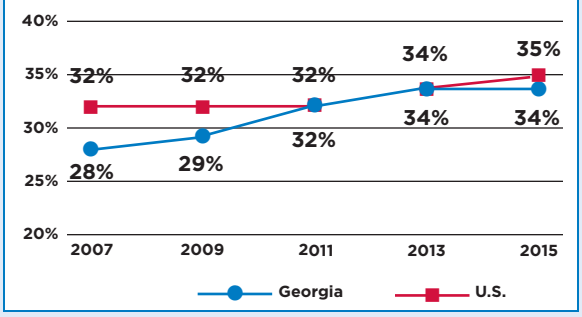
Children Ages 3 to 4 Attending Preschool, 2009-2015

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



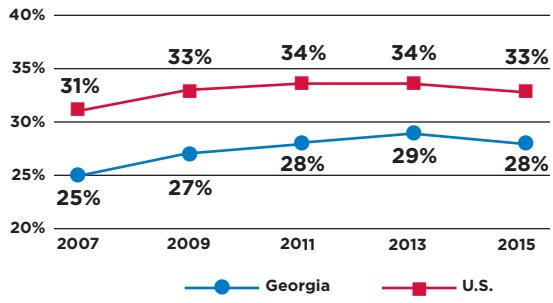
Fourth Grade NAEP Reading: At or Above Proficient, 2007-2015

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



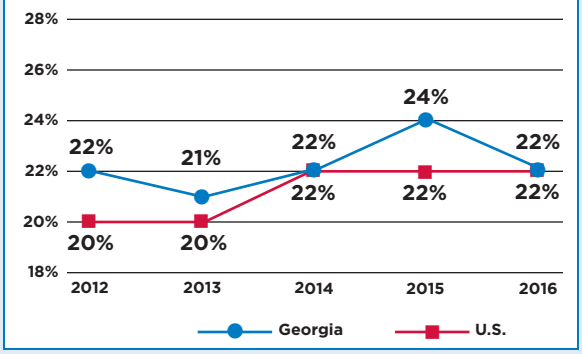
Eighth Grade NAEP Mathematics: At or Above Proficient, 2007-2015

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



Percentage of Graduating Class Earning 3 or Higher on an AP Exam, 2012-2016

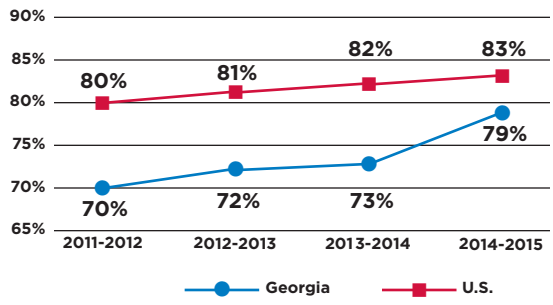
SOURCE: Georgia Department of Education



High School Graduation Rates*

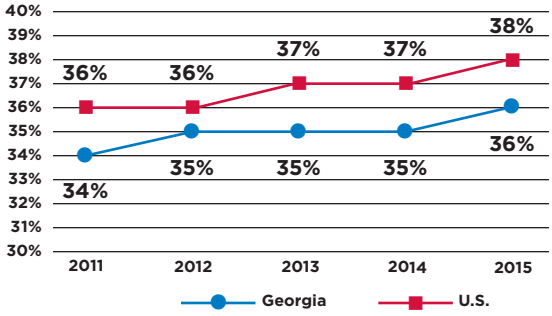
SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, Public Four-Year On-Time Graduation Rates: School Years 2011-12, 2012-2013, 2013-2014, 2014-2015

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



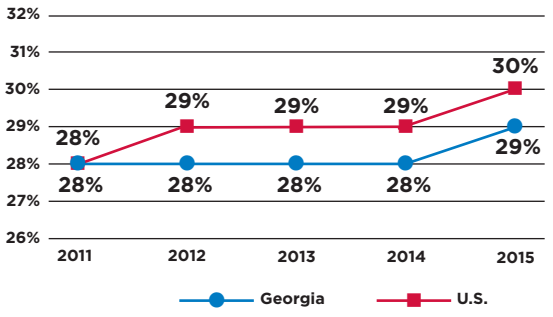
Adults Over Age 25 with an Associate's Degree or Higher, 2011-2015

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder American Community Survey 2011-2015



Adults Over Age 25 with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher, 2011-2015

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder American Community Survey 2011-2015



ISSUE 1

EdQuest Georgia: Charting Education Reform

ISSUE OVERVIEW

Over the past several decades, globalization, advances in technology, and broadening free trade have changed the economy of the United States. While these changes have brought benefits for the economy as a whole, many people have been left behind. Those living in rural communities, communities built around manufacturing plants, and regions with high proportions of citizens with a low level of education who lack access to advanced skills training have been hurt the most.[1]

This uneven growth has created a challenge for the state of Georgia. In 2010, over half of the state's labor force worked in sales, office support, or blue-collar jobs—jobs in which the projected growth by 2020 remains below average and sectors that have still not fully rebounded from the economic recession of 2007–2009.[2]

In response to these changes, Georgia has invested in an economic development plan based on a diversified economy that includes trade and transportation, a growing high-tech sector, and natural resources. The state is predicted to add 1.5 million new jobs by 2020, nearly 60% of which will require some sort of education beyond high school.[3] Currently, only about 42% of Georgia's adult population has education beyond the high school level. The current skill level of Georgia's workforce does not meet the growing needs of this ambitious plan for the state's economic development.

To address the needs of its citizenry, Georgia has embarked on a series of education reforms to transform its public education system so that every student who graduates from high school is successful in college and their chosen career, and is competitive with their peers throughout the country and the world. The state is moving in the right direction to ensure an internationally competitive, educated citizenry. Georgia now ranks around the national average on the important indicators of grade-level reading and mathematics and the percentage of students needing remediation upon entering post-secondary education is decreasing.[4] To be a global leader, however, Georgia must take its education system to the next level by creating conditions in which schools continuously advance their own performance through teaching and learning.

The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education researched the policies that high-performing states, countries, and school systems share, and created a framework to ensure that those same policies that enable and accelerate strong public education are in place in Georgia.

1 Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. 2017, November. *EdQuest Georgia: Charting Educational Reform, 2017 Baseline Report.* Retrieved from EdQuest Georgia: www.EdQuestGa.org.
2 Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, 2017.
3 Carnevale, A.P., and N. Smith. 2012. *A Decade Behind: Breaking Out of the Low-Skill Trap in the Southern Economy.* Washington, DC: Georgetown University, Center on Education and the Workforce.
4 Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, 2017.

This framework, called EdQuest Georgia, includes seven core policy areas that when fully implemented and working together produce optimum outcomes for students.

1. **Foundations for learning,** which include supports from birth for families, schools, and communities as well as access to high-quality early learning
2. **Quality teaching** for all students ensured by providing supports for teachers across recruitment, retention, and professional development and learning
3. **Quality leadership** within schools—such as teacher leaders, counselors, and principals—and outside the school building, such as district and state leaders
4. **Supportive learning environments** that promote positive conditions for learning within schools through fostering positive school climate and social and emotional learning for students, and outside of school in the home and throughout the community
5. **Advanced instructional systems** that support high standards, personalized learning, innovation, a strong accountability system, and aligned curricula
6. **Clear pathways to post-secondary success** that support the transition from high school into post-secondary education, and ensure post-secondary education access and success
7. **Adequate and equitable funding** for all students

Working as a holistic approach, and not viewed as individual silos, these integrated policy gears can drive education reform. These policy supports create the foundation needed for individual schools and districts to focus on teaching and learning.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

The seven core policy areas addressed by EdQuest each impact education policymakers and stakeholders in different ways. To those with young children, foundations for learning are likely of immediate importance, but not only parents are affected by the outcomes of the state's early learning system. Each of these education policy areas has an impact that reaches far beyond the students in Georgia's schools. The state's workforce, crime rate, and health care system are just a few examples of areas outside of education that are deeply connected and affected by the condition of the public education system in Georgia. Each core area is part of a broader policy framework that impacts the well-being of the entire state.

Foundations for Learning

Studies show that a person's earliest experiences have a direct connection to success later in life. Factors such as relationships, environments, and health care impact children's development even before birth. A child's capacities for communication, self-regulation, learning, and social interaction are all fostered by good health, stable and nurturing relationships, appropriate learning environments, and supportive communities.[5] When these factors are not present, children are at risk of having poor mental and physical health, behavioral problems, and eventual school failure.

Georgia is home to more than 650,000 children under the age of five.[6] These children will be adults by 2050, and their environments and supports now have a direct impact on their ability to thrive in the future. The state faces many challenges in providing positive, foundational, early life experiences for these children to ensure their future success.

5 Tout, K., T. Halle, S. Daily, L. Albertson-Jenkins, and S. Moodie. 2013. *The Research Base for a Birth Through Age Eight State Policy Framework.* Washington, DC: Alliance for Early Success and Child Trends.

6 KIDS COUNT Data Center. 2017. KIDS COUNT. Retrieved from Georgia Family Connection Partnership: gafcp.org/kids-count/.

- More than half (51%) of children under age five live in low-income families.[7]
- More than one-third (34%) of these children live in communities of concentrated poverty.[8]
- More than one-third have experienced life events that lead to trauma or toxic stress.[9]

Georgia must tackle these challenges to ensure that these children grow and thrive. Unaddressed, these issues can lead to negative outcomes later in life, such as a higher likelihood of incarceration, that affect many citizens outside of the education system.

Supporting children is vital to ensuring they grow up to become productive, happy, and healthy members of society as adults. If they do not have strong foundations for learning, the issues that result from untreated health and behavioral conditions can have many negative societal impacts. To have the strongest Georgia possible, the state must invest in supporting children and their families.

Quality Teaching

Teachers are at the heart of every school system. They often spend more time with children than any other adults in their lives; thus, their influence is significant. Studies reveal that student performance is correlated with the quality of a student's teachers. Students exposed to consistent high-quality teaching are more likely to attend college, are less likely to become teenage parents, and tend to have higher earnings in adulthood. When taught by low-quality teachers, however, student performance lags, and this effect compounds over time. With this strong relationship between students' success in life and school and their exposure to quality teaching in mind, it is clear to see why the state should make facilitating quality teaching a priority.

According to rankings by the National Council on Teacher Quality, Georgia is in the top 10 states in the US when it comes to policies that govern the teaching profession.[10] This ranking examines teacher preparation, the teacher pool, teacher effectiveness, retainment of effective teachers, and treatment of ineffective teachers. Georgia showed room for improvement, especially in the areas of delivering well-prepared teachers and identifying and retaining effective teachers. Because teachers have such a significant influence on the next generation of Georgians, it is important to focus on ways to improve teacher quality and support teachers, so they stay in the field.

When a profession is highly regarded, it is able to attract the best and brightest students. When teachers are properly mentored for longer periods of time, they are more likely to be effective. When teachers feel respected and adequately compensated, they are more likely to stay in the profession. If students have the benefit of receiving instruction from high-quality teachers, they are more likely to find success later in life. Teachers are key to a thriving future for Georgia.

Quality Leadership

Leaders can make or break a school or a system. Their role is central to the performance of teachers and indirectly to that of students as well. School districts have enormous power to support principals and teachers in driving instructional improvement. Positive leadership at the district level translates to effective leadership at the school level, which directly influences school and classroom conditions. Leaders enable quality teaching and support process improvement within schools. They have enormous power to guide the direction of the schools or systems with which they work, and their stability or lack thereof impacts their districts and schools.

7 In 2017, the federal poverty level (FPL) was $20,160 for a three-person household. "Low-income" is defined as incomes less than twice FPL ($40,320), which many experts believe is the threshold that more accurately reflects an income that meets a family's basic needs. See KIDS COUNT Data Center, 2017.

8 Bishaw, A. 2014, June. Changes in Areas with Concentrated Poverty: 2000 to 2010. Retrieved from US Census Bureau: www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2014/acs/acs-27.pdf. Communities of concentrated poverty are defined as communities where 20% or more of residents live below the poverty line.

9 Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students and Child Trends. 2016, May. Care for Georgia's Infants and Toddlers: Boosting Young Children and Their Parents in the Peach State. Retrieved from geears.org/wp-content/uploads/2016-02GeorgiaInfantsToddlers.pdf.

10 National Council on Teacher Quality. (2015). 2015 State Teacher Policy Yearbook, Georgia. Washington, DC: NCTQ.

As Georgia public education moves away from state-mandated centralization toward a decentralized approach that values local input and control, local leaders need to set the pace for their districts now more than ever. This trend should allow for greater innovation at the classroom and district levels to support the needs of students. Districts can prioritize resources differently depending on the distinct characteristics of their student body and schools—from catering to the needs of a large population of English language learners to supporting a large group of children from military families.

One of the challenges to leadership in Georgia is the turnover rate for superintendents and principals.

- 3.2 – Average number of years of tenure of a district superintendent in Georgia; equivalent to the national average[11]
- 22% – Average percentage of districts in Georgia every year that have a change in superintendent[12]
- 19% – Annual turnover of principals in Georgia[13]
- 23% – Annual turnover of principals in Georgia schools in the highest poverty quartile[14]
- 22% – Annual principal turnover in Georgia schools in the highest minority quartile[15]

Various groups in Georgia are focused on strengthening the pipeline for education leaders, and the Georgia legislature has made this a priority. In 2017, lawmakers formed a study committee on establishing a leadership academy that would offer opportunities for principals and other school leaders to update and expand their leadership knowledge and skills. In December 2017, the study committee recommended the establishment of the Governor's School Leadership Academy (GSLA). The GSLA will, among other things, be a statewide school leadership academy focused on training, developing, and supporting leaders in the chronically lowest-performing schools in Georgia.

There are good examples already in Georgia, such as the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement and the Gwinnett County Quality-Plus Leadership Academy, which both focus on recruitment, training, and ongoing professional development of leaders.

With the increase in flexibility and power that Georgia public education leaders now have, ensuring that they are of the highest quality is critically important. Georgia should develop a comprehensive statewide plan to support leaders at all levels of the system. The support of strong leaders is crucial to ensuring that the public education system reaches its potential.

Supportive Learning Environments

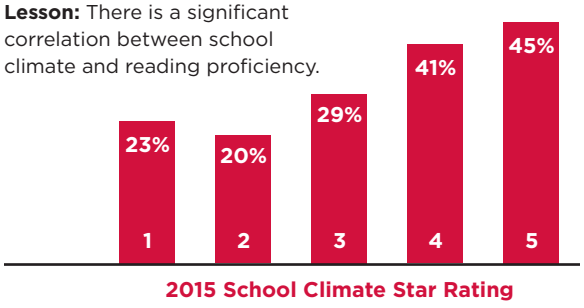
Even if other elements of a successful education system are in place, students are not able to learn without a supportive learning environment where they feel safe, healthy, and comfortable. Research shows these conditions must be present for students to thrive. When children have trauma or untreated mental health issues, it is more difficult for them to perform well in school. Those in poverty are at a higher risk of not receiving treatment for health issues due to lack of insurance and access to treatment. Many circumstances related to poverty like childhood trauma and food and housing insecurity are also contributing factors to many behavioral and mental health issues in children.[16] These students can benefit from wraparound services that help to create more supportive environments for students facing adverse conditions in their homes and communities.

11 Data provided by the Georgia School Superintendents Association.
12 Data provided by the Georgia School Superintendents Association.
13 Georgia Department of Education. 2015. Georgia's Equity Plan: Equitable Access to Effective Educators. Atlanta: GaDOE.
14 Georgia Department of Education, 2015.
15 Georgia Department of Education, 2015.
16 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.

With more than 60% of Georgia's public school children enrolled in the free or reduced-price lunch program (a proxy measure for living in poverty), services to augment students' safety and health are crucial in the state.[17] Efforts like the School Climate Rating System integrated with the Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports framework are already showing that when students feel safe and supported at school, they are able to perform better academically. Higher school climate ratings have been correlated with better performance on the Georgia Milestones assessments in third-grade English/language arts, as shown in Figure 1.1.

FIGURE 1.1 School Climate and Georgia Milestones Third-Grade English/Language Arts Scores, 2015[18]

Lesson: There is a significant correlation between school climate and reading proficiency.



Other services, like school-based health centers, provide additional health supports to students who may not have access to these supports at home. Services like these keep students healthy and happy and able to attend school and benefit from instruction. When students from economically disadvantaged households can stay in school and thrive, then it is possible for them to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and contribute to the economic health of the state.

Advanced Instructional System

Students are on a journey to gain knowledge throughout their time in the public education system, and a system that makes that acquisition of knowledge and skills efficient, effective, and appealing is an advanced instructional system. This is the type of education system that all top-performing nations, states, and districts have—one that is linked from one step to the next and that provides options to students, so they can make successful transitions along their journey. An advanced instructional system includes systems of standards, instruction, assessment, and accountability for all of those involved in the process of educating a student. When these systems are strong, students can transition into success in work and life, thereby benefiting the economy and the broader society.

Top-performing systems incorporate standards, curricula, and assessments that allow instruction to be personalized and teachers to use the most appropriate methods of teaching. Georgia has made a commitment to ensuring that student performance is measured to standards of college- and career-ready performance in most subjects. The Georgia Milestones assessment system has been independently verified to be aligned to those standards as well. Innovation is supported in Georgia's schools in various ways including the GOSA Innovation Fund and STEM Georgia, which work to increase STEM and STEAM programs in Georgia public schools, programs that focus on science, technology, engineering, (the arts), and mathematics. For the advanced instructional system in Georgia to continue its trajectory of increasing success, communities must support these efforts to innovate the curriculum and to maintain high standards and formative assessments in Georgia schools.

Clear Pathways to Post-Secondary Success

All the knowledge acquired on students' journeys through the public education system is intended to help them prepare and plan for their next steps in life. States and nations with the highest performing educational systems offer students clear pathways for post-secondary success in both college and careers. For the economy to thrive in Georgia, students must receive the best preparation possible to one day participate and contribute as adults. The state must have policies in place that support career education and college preparation, and innovative programs that promote and ensure post-secondary achievement.

17 The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center. Retrieved from datacenter.kidscount.org.
18 McGibeony, G. 2016. *Changing the Conversation.* Atlanta: Georgia Department of Education.

Georgia facilitates student planning for post-secondary options in a variety of ways. All students create individual graduation plans that help map the steps of their journey to high school graduation and through a graduation pathway of advanced academics, fine arts, world language, or CTAE (Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education). A high percentage of Georgia students are enrolling in post-secondary institutions—68% of the class of 2012. However, many have a problem with persistence. Only 15% of the class of 2012 had earned any post-secondary credential four years later (in 2016). With so many of the jobs predicted to come to Georgia requiring education, a certificate, or a credential earned after high school, it is important for the state to concentrate on helping students find success after high school graduation. Focusing on nontraditional students and increasing need-based financial aid for post-secondary pursuits are two ways Georgia could enhance efforts to support the post-secondary success of students. For economically disadvantaged citizens, post-secondary education or training can help them re-enter the workforce or earn more to help their families break the poverty cycle.

Adequate and Equitable Funding

Equity, or fairness in funding, is now in the spotlight of the national dialogue around school funding policies for K-12 systems. Students from low-income households tend to require additional academic supports and wraparound services to help them succeed at comparable levels to their non–economically disadvantaged peers.[19] This greater need for extra services is compounded by the fact that districts with high percentages of students living in poverty are further challenged by receiving less funding per student than districts with lower poverty rates.[20] Districts with more resources can pay teachers more, attract higher quality teaching candidates, and provide students with enrichment activities and support services that are not possible in cash-strapped districts.

Top-performing systems make sure their schools have the resources to educate all students to the high standards they have set. More resources are allocated to students who come to school with greater disadvantages, and these systems offer the best teachers strong incentives to work in classes and schools serving students and families from low-income and minority groups. Research shows that substantive and sustained school finance policy reform can reduce outcome disparities and improve results for all students. Georgia should pursue improving the school funding formula to focus on fairness for all students with consideration of the added challenges involved with educating students from economically disadvantaged households. Improved outcomes for all students will lead to greater success in work and life and an economically healthier Georgia.

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

Each of the seven core policy areas of EdQuest works hand-in-hand to raise up students and promote their academic and social achievement—like interlocking gears moving the system forward, as shown in Figure 1.2. States, nations, and systems with the greatest success view all seven core areas as a coherent system. For each of the core policy areas of EdQuest Georgia, opportunities are identified to protect critical work already being done and to change or implement policies that need improvement to put the state on the path to having a top-performing education system. These opportunities are the action steps that should be taken to improve or sustain success in each core area of education policy in Georgia.

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

20 The Education Trust, 2015.

FIGURE 1.2 EdQuest Georgia, Policy Framework for Education

Education research has historically focused on evaluating and assessing the success of individual programs. While this is still a vitally important part of the process, focusing only on programmatic outcomes limits the impact of these studies. No matter how well designed and implemented, a single program—or series of programs—in isolation has a relatively small impact on student achievement. For example, an increase in the rigor of standards does nothing to raise student achievement if textbooks and curricula are not aligned to the new standards, teachers are not trained on teaching them, or the school environment is not conducive to learning. By looking at all the gears of the education system in Georgia together, EdQuest provides a clearer picture of what the system looks like and how improvement can be achieved.

EdQuest is a map, grounded in best practice research, designed to show how to move the Georgia public education system forward. The remaining nine issues in this Top Ten edition examine specific policies and issues facing Georgia; each is related to this policy framework. They also highlight opportunities for Georgia to move education forward.

It is the goal of the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education that EdQuest Georgia serve as a tool for the education advocacy community and all public education stakeholders to show where opportunities for progress exist. We hope that you will join us on this quest to make Georgia a top-performing state in public education!

ISSUE 2

Equity and Fairness: The Opportunity to Succeed

ISSUE OVERVIEW

What is educational equity? What does it look like? What would it take to achieve it? These questions have long been present in education policy discussions. However, with the growing focus on accountability, coupled with changing demographics and the shifting roles of federal and state responsibilities, issues of educational equity have taken centerstage. The Council of Chief State School Officers defines educational equity this way:

> ***Every student has access to the resources and educational rigor they need at the right moment in their education, despite race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, family background, or family income.***[21]

The passage of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 clarified the role of the federal government in education to protect "the education of disadvantaged children." Subsequent reauthorizations of the federal law have emphasized equal access to education for all children, including through 2001's No Child Left Behind and most recently the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), passed in December 2015. Importantly, ESSA gives more flexibility and responsibility to state leaders to define accountability and determine interventions and supports for underperforming schools.

This downsizing of the federal role in ensuring equal access to educational resources comes at a time when economic inequality is at its highest and social mobility is at its lowest since the original legislation was passed more than 50 years ago.[22] In 1965, more than 80% of public school students were white. According to estimates from the National Center for Education Statistics, the majority of public school students are now students of color. More than half of public school students also qualify for subsidized meals because of low family income. Currently, children of color are more than twice as likely as their white counterparts to be poor.[23]

The EdQuest Georgia research found that top-performing school systems make explicit decisions to ensure all students are educated to the high standards set by the state and that all schools have the resources to do so.[24] With a greater state role granted under ESSA, Georgia now has the opportunity and the responsibility to ensure all of the state's students have equitable access to a quality education.

21 The Aspen Education and Society Program and the Council of Chief State School Officers. (2017). *Leading for Equity: Opportunities for State Education Chiefs.* Washington, DC.

22 Gonzales, D., and R. Wiener. 2017, May 17. Our Schools Have an Equity Problem: What Should We Do About It. Retrieved from Education Week: www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2017/05/31/our-schools-have-an-equity-problem-what.html?qs=Our+Schools+Have+an+Equity+Problem.

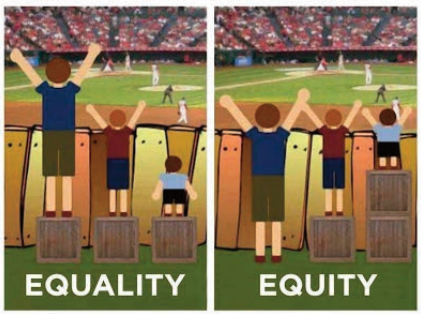
23 Gonzales and Wiener, 2017.

24 Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. 2017, November. *EdQuest Georgia: Charting Educational Reform, 2017 Baseline Report.* Retrieved from EdQuest Georgia: www.EdQuestGa.org.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

Equity does not mean creating equal conditions for all students, but rather targeting resources based on individual students' needs and circumstances so that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed. Figure 2.1 depicts the difference between equality and equity.

FIGURE 2.1 Equality V. Equity[25]



Thinking in terms of the opportunity to succeed and closing the "opportunity gap" shifts the focus from achievement deficits in student performance to the role of schools in promoting equity of access and treatment. Targeted supports remove barriers and allow equal opportunity for all students regardless of their neighborhood, family income level, race or ethnicity, language proficiency, or disability status.

Like the nation, the demographic composition of Georgia is shifting and changing the demands of the public education system to provide equal opportunity for all students. Non-white and low-income subgroups are rapidly increasing, far outpacing the growth rate of whites. In 2016, 60% of Georgia residents were white (a 5 percentage-point decrease since 2000).[26] Non-whites are overrepresented as a proportion of those living in poverty: 14% of white Georgians lived at or below the poverty line in 2015, compared to 27% of black Georgians and 30% of Hispanic/Latino Georgians.[27]

Georgia public schools mirror similar demographic shifts; however, they have experienced a greater increase in poverty rates than the national average. Georgia public schools have the seventh-largest percentage of low-income students in the nation.[28] Economically disadvantaged and Hispanic students are among the state's fastest-growing demographic groups, while the percentage of white students is shrinking. In 2016, white students comprised only 41% of all students enrolled in public K-12 education in Georgia.[29]

Achievement gaps in Georgia are compounded by issues of race and poverty. The outcomes of achievement gaps are clear. White students and students who are not economically disadvantaged graduate at significantly higher rates than black, Hispanic, and impoverished students (see Table 2.1).

TABLE 2.1 Georgia Graduation Rates by Subgroup, 2016-2017

All Students		**80.6%**
Income	**Economically Disadvantaged**	**76.4%**
Race	**White**	**84.0%**
	Black	**77.8%**
	Hispanic	**73.6%**

Commonly, student outcome gaps are examined by race or poverty. Tables typically highlight achievement differences between white students and non-white students or low-income students versus their more affluent counterparts. When

25 Mann, B. 2014, March 12. Equity and Equality Are Not Equal. Retrieved from The Education Trust: edtrust.org/the-equity-line/equity-and-equality-are-not-equal/.
26 US Census Bureau. 2000 and 2015. American Fact Finder. Washington, DC.
27 US Census Bureau, 2000 and 2015.
28 Southern Education Foundation. 2015, January. *A New Majority Research Bulletin: Low Income Students Now a Majority in the Nation's Public Schools.* Retrieved from www.southerneducation.org/getattachment/4ac62e27-5260-47a5-9d02-14896ec3a531/A-New-Majority-2015-Update-Low-Income-Students-Now.aspx.
29 Governor's Office of Student Achivement. 2016. Report Card. Retrieved from gaawards.gosa.ga.gov/analytics/saw.dll?dashboard.

FIGURE 2.2 2016 3rd Grade English/Language Arts Milestones – Percent Proficient and Distinguished

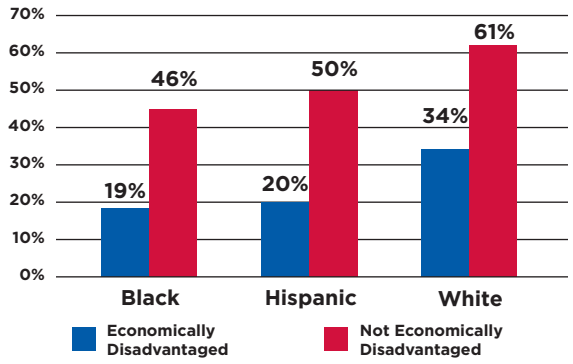
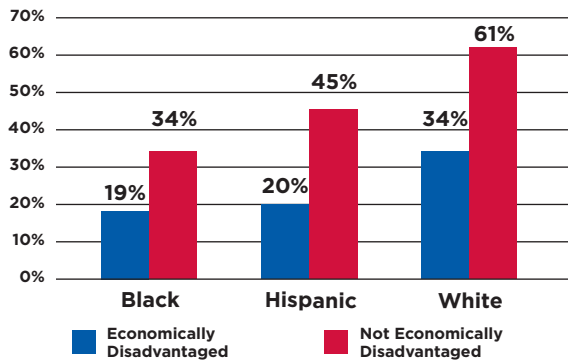


FIGURE 2.3 2016 8rd Grade Mathematics Milestones – Percent Proficient and Distinguished



taken together, the data show that achievement gaps exist within racial categories and between racial categories within the same economic strata. (See Figures 2.2 and 2.3.) For example, over 60% of white third-graders who were not economically disadvantaged scored at least proficient on the Georgia Milestones test for third-grade English/language arts, compared to 46% of black students in the same income category. Conversely, 34% of low-income white students scored proficient on the same assessment, compared to only 19% of low-income black students. These gaps hold true for eighth-grade math as well.

Examining outputs such as achievement rates are but one measure of equity. Importantly, inputs such as the distribution of funding, access to educational supports such as high-quality teachers, rigorous coursework, support services, supportive school climates, and extracurricular opportunities all contribute to educational equity and the opportunity gap.

Funding

In terms of funding, equity considers that it simply costs more to educate some students than others. For example, low-income students tend to start school academically behind, requiring additional academic supports, extra learning time, and potentially outside services related to social services or foster care.[30]

One national study found that funding inequalities are large. The districts with the highest percentage of the student-age population living in poverty receive about $1,200 less *per student* than the lowest poverty districts.[31] Further, when accounting for the specific needs of low-income students compared to their more affluent counterparts, the highest poverty districts receive an average of $2,200, or 18%, less per student than low-poverty districts.[32]

Georgia already does relatively well when compared to most other states in distributing more funds to districts with higher percentages of low-income students through the use of sparsity, low-wealth equalization, and other categorical grants. For example, a recent study from the Urban Institute found that Georgia is a relatively progressive state in terms of equitable funding between poor and non-poor students, with poor students, on average, receiving $282 more than non-poor students. Comparatively, in nearly half of all states, students from low-income families receive less state and local funding than their non-poor counterparts.[33]

30 The Education Trust. 2015. *Funding Gaps 2015: Too Many States Still Spend Less on Educating Students Who Need the Most.* Washington, DC: The Education Trust.
31 Education Trust, 2015.
32 Education Trust, 2015.
33 Urban Institute. 2017, May. *School Funding: Do Poor Kids Get Their Fair Share?* Retrieved from apps.urban.org/features/school-funding-do-poor-kids-get-fair-share/.

Where Georgia struggles is on the adequacy question. The same Urban Institute report that cited the state's progressiveness in terms of equity ranked Georgia eighth from the bottom in overall per student spending.[34] While the 2018 state budget represents an increase of $714 million for education from the General Fund, Georgia ranks 38th in spending per student and invests $1,965 less per student than the national average.[35]

Since 2003, K-12 public education has experienced a cumulative cut of more than $9.2 billion.[36] Students living in poverty frequently need extra supports from the school systems to meet high levels of academic achievement. Strategies such as longer school days and years and smaller class size 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.

High-Quality Teachers

In response to the directive from the US Department of Education, Georgia submitted an educator equity plan to address achievement gaps. In the plan, data reveal an equity gap on every metric included in an analysis for both low-income students and minority students, as highlighted in Table 2.2.[37]

TABLE 2.2 Educator Equity Profile by Poverty and Minority Quartiles[38]

School Type	% of Teachers in First Year	Average Years Experience	% of Teachers "Out-of-Field"	% of Classes Taught by Teachers not Highly Qualified (N Classes= 300,000)	Average Days Absent	Adjusted Average Teacher Salary	% Teacher Turnover, Fall 2012-Fall 2013	% Principal Turnover, Fall 2012-Fall 2013 (N=2,300)	Graduation Rate for SWD at District Level, 2014	Mean Growth Percentile 2012-2013
All Schools N Teachers=112,000	5.6% (N=6,200)	13.5	1.6% (N=1,800)	1.1% (N=3,300)	9.5	$56,235	17.1% (N=19,00)	18.7% (N=400)	36.5	49.1
Schools in the Highest Poverty Quartile N Teachers=23,000	7.7% (N=1,800)	12.6	2.1% (N=500)	1.4% (N=800)	N/A	$55,260	20.9% (N=4,800)	23.1% (N=100)	N/A	47.5
Schools in the Lowest Poverty Quartile N Teachers=33,000	4.4% (N=1,400)	14.0	1.5% (N=500)	0.6% (N=600)	N/A	$55,452	14.3% (N=4,700)	15.5% (N=100)	N/A	51.5
Poverty Equity Gap	3.4%	1.4	0.6%	0.8%	N/A	$192	6.5%	7.6%	N/A	3.9
Schools in the Highest Minority Quartile N Teachers=26,000	9.2% (N=2,400)	11.8	2.2% (N=600)	2.2% (N=1,500)	N/A	$52,995	23.1% (N=5,900)	22.4% (N=100)	N/A	48.0
Schools in the Lowest Minority Quartile N Teachers=27,000	3.5% (N=900)	14.9	0.9% (N=200)	0.4% (N=300)	N/A	$58,654	13.4% (N=3,600)	16.5% (N=100)	N/A	50.4
Minority Equity Gap	5.7%	3.1	1.3%	1.8%	N/A	$5,659	9.7%	5.9%	N/A	2.3

34 Chingos, M.M., and K. Blagg. 2017. *Do Poor Kids Get Their Fair Share of School Funding?* Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
35 Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. 2017. Georgia Budget Primer 2018. Atlanta.
36 Georgia Budget and Policy Institute, 2017.
37 Metrics include the percentage of teachers in their first year of teaching, average years of experience, the percentage of teachers "out-of-field" (teachers not teaching in their field of certification), the percentage of classes being taught by teachers who are not "highly qualified," average teacher days absent, adjusted average teacher salary, and the teacher turnover rate.
38 Georgia Department of Education. 2015, September 14. Equitable Access to Effective Educators. Retrieved from US Department of Education: www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/equitable/gaequityplan91415.pdf.

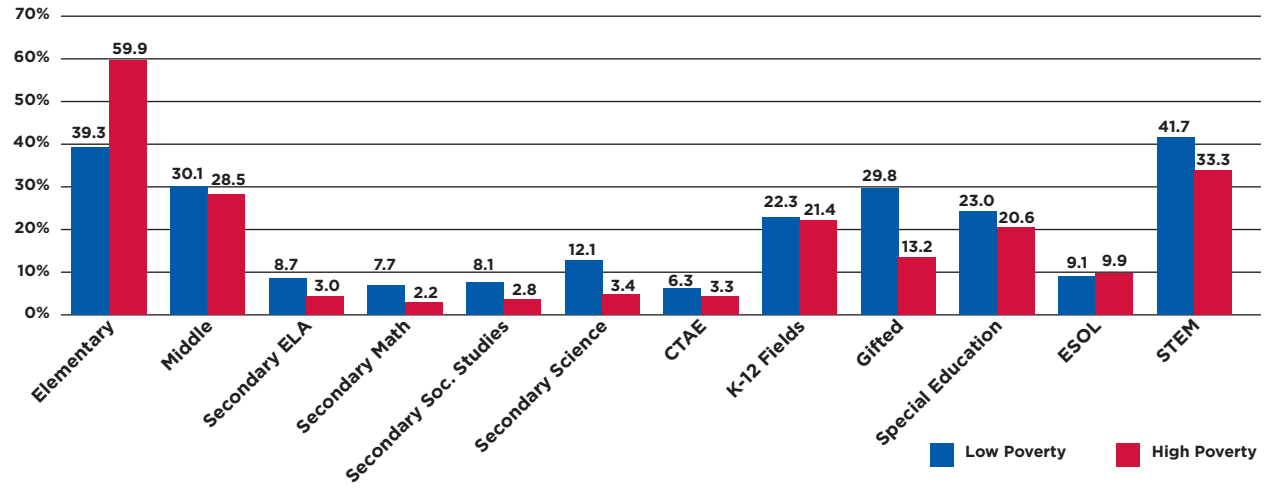
Looking closely at Table 2.2, higher percentages of inexperienced, first-year teachers are found in schools with the highest concentrations of minority students and students living in poverty. Students in these schools are twice as likely to have a teacher teaching out of field. Both teacher and principal turnover is also higher.

In its 2016 report on Georgia's teacher workforce, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) compared the workforce patterns of high-poverty and low-poverty schools.[39] The findings have implications for equity of opportunity. The study found that compared to their low-poverty counterparts, high-poverty schools:[40]

- did not retain as many teachers and leaders,
- had a statistically significantly smaller share of teachers with master's degrees as their highest earned degree, and
- had more teachers with five or fewer years of experience and fewer teachers with 11 to 20 years of experience.

Figure 2.4 shows the breakdown of certificate fields of teachers in high-poverty and low-poverty schools. Low-poverty schools had more than double the share of teachers with a gifted certificate compared to high-poverty schools. Moreover, high-poverty schools had fewer teachers certified in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields and fewer special education teachers.

FIGURE 2.4 Certificate Fields of Teachers in Low and High Poverty Schools[41]



39 GOSA defined high-poverty and low-poverty schools by identifying the top and bottom quartile of schools using the free and reduced-price lunch direct certification percentages.

40 Governor's Office of Student Achievement. (2017, January). *2016 Georgia K-12 Teacher and Leader Workforce Report.* Retrieved from gosa.georgia.gov/research-reports

41 Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017, January.

Attracting high-quality teachers in hard-to-staff subjects and schools has always been a challenge. Under the flexibility provided by Charter System or Strategic Waiver School System Partnership contracts, districts can opt out of the state salary schedule and design compensation models to meet their local 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 subjects, 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.

Turnaround-Eligible Schools List

In November 2017, GOSA released its first annual Turnaround-Eligible Schools list of 104 elementary, middle, and high schools in Georgia. The identified schools have an average three-year score on the state report card that is in the bottom 5% of public schools. This list replaces the chronically failing schools list that had been published in prior years.[42]

The 104 schools identified come from 27 districts across Georgia with common demographic characteristics:

- In over 80% of the schools, greater than 95% of enrolled students received free or reduced-price lunch, a proxy measure for poverty.[43]
- In over 70% of the schools, the student body was made up of at least 90% black or Hispanic students.[44]
- In 62% of the counties represented, more than one-third of children under 18 were living in poverty.[45]

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. As many under-performing schools feel the ongoing 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. Educators in high-poverty schools have a difficult time reaching these higher standards without the ability to provide a safe, supportive learning environment with highly skilled educators for students.

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

Educational equity in the United States is becoming more urgent as the diversity of the nation grows. Racial and ethnic minorities make up almost half of children under age five, and a majority of students in public schools are from low-income families.[46] By 2030 the American labor force will be a racial and ethnic tapestry made up mostly of non-white individuals.

As a nation, we have been working on issues of equality and equity for over half a century. When it comes to education, there has always been tension between the federal government and states' rights. Beginning in 1954 in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education,* physical desegregation was the nation's goal. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 shifted the focus to equal treatment and equal access under the law. Most recently, Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which scales back the federal role in education. It does require states to continue to focus on equity by (1) requiring reporting on the achievement of students by subgroup, and (2) ensuring that low-income students and students of color are not served at disproportionate rates by inexperienced, out-of-field, or ineffective teachers. But, states have been freed of federal requirements and can formulate their own accountability measures, monitor progress, and decide if and when to intervene in low-performing schools.

42 See gosa.georgia.gov/turnaround-eligible-schools-list.
43 See gosa.georgia.gov/turnaround-eligible-schools-list.
44 Governor's Office of Student Achievement. 2016. Report Card.
45 KIDS COUNT Data Center. 2017. Children Living in Poverty. Retrieved from datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/694-children-living-in-poverty?loc=12&loct=5#detailed/5/1927-2085/false/573/any/8891.
46 Annie E. Casey Foundation. 2014. Race for Results: Building a Path to Opportunity for All Children. Baltimore.

In the ESSA state plan developed by the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and submitted to the US Department of Education, Georgia addressed how the state would ensure that low-income and minority children are not served at disproportionate rates by ineffective, out-of-field, or inexperienced teachers. Annually, GaDOE provides local districts with data at the district and school levels regarding the effectiveness, experience, and background of teachers. Local districts are then "charged with identifying gaps, analyzing district and evaluating school processes and programs that may have led to these gaps, and selecting strategies/activities that will address identified inequities."[47] Districts must address these inequities through their annually submitted district improvement plans, which include an equity component and school improvement goals.

In 2018, the GaDOE anticipates that these data will be used in an online equity dashboard that will be made available to local districts and will be publicly reported as an addition to one of the current public reporting mechanisms. The details about what information will be included in the public version of the equity dashboards, or how the dashboards will be communicated, have yet to be announced. In addition, no resources have been identified to help local districts identify equity gaps.

The P-20 Collaboratives—regional partnerships between local school districts, the GaDOE, the Georgia Professional Standards Commission, the University System of Georgia, Regional Education Service Agencies, and alternative certification programs—have been established to formalize collaborative partnerships with local school systems. In addition to focusing on induction pathways, these collaboratives help clearly identify specific needs of students, teachers, and leaders in each region and work toward implementing the state equity plan within local districts. The state ESSA plan recommends further strengthening these partnerships.

These regional collaboratives can go a long way toward identifying strategies for recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers and addressing teacher equity issues within schools. However, there is still a clear role for the state. A report published by the Education Trust found five promising equity-focused initiatives that can bolster access to strong teachers.[48]

1. **Be transparent about which students get which teachers.** State departments of education can provide districts and the public with information on assignment patterns of strong teachers, potential causes of these patterns, and their impact on students.
2. **Set clear improvement expectations for leaders at all levels and make them matter.** State leaders can set numeric goals and timelines for eliminating inequalities, and those expectations must matter to staff and district and school leaders.
3. **Target resources to the districts and schools struggling the most with this issue.** Real supports are needed, and the state must prioritize districts and schools that need help the most.
4. **Develop networks of district leaders to problem-solve together.** State leaders can play a role in helping district leaders learn from each other.
5. **Break down silos between efforts to increase access to strong teaching and school improvement work.** Many times, the lowest-performing schools tend to be the ones with teachers with the fewest resources and the least support. Also, less equity-oriented school leaders fail to assign students who need the most support to the strongest teachers.

Georgia is moving forward on some of these recommendations. The equity dashboards and P-20 Collaboratives will highlight where inequities exist and help districts and regions learn from each other to solve the problem. However, without clear consequences for not addressing the problem and no articulated resources to support the activities of local districts and regions, the effort falls short of what needs to be done.

47 Georgia Department of Education. 2017, September. *Educating Georgia's Future: Georgia's State Plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).* Retrieved from www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Documents/GA_ConsolidatedStatePlan.pdf.

48 Rose, A., and R. Metz. 2017, October 3. *Tackling Gaps in Access to Strong Teachers.* Retrieved from The Education Trust: edtrust.org/resource/tackling-gaps-access-strong-teachers/.

As the best practice research in EdQuest shows, the majority of students in high-performing education systems attain high-level skills and knowledge, with their accomplishments depending more on student ability and drive than socioeconomic background. In Georgia, as in much of the United States, socioeconomic background is still a strong predictor of educational success. Nationwide, states are struggling to address equity of opportunity and the distribution and prevalence of effective educators with their educator equity plans.

Access to a high-quality teacher is but one aspect of equity of opportunity. Teachers and school leaders need resources and support to help overcome the deleterious impacts of poverty and neighborhood factors. It is rare that a school can outperform its neighborhood. Can Georgia use collaboration, data, clear accountability, community support, and limited resources to move the dial on equity in education? The American promise of educational opportunity—regardless of background or family—depends on it.

ISSUE 3

The Early Learning Workforce: A Challenge for Georgia

ISSUE OVERVIEW

Happy 25th Anniversary Georgia's Pre-K! The Georgia Pre-K Program began as a pilot program serving 750 at-risk four-year-old children and their families at 20 sites in 1992. These were school-based, center-based, and home-based programs best suited to meet individual community needs. The pilot launched with just $3 million in state funding.

Over the past 25 years, the program has reached many important milestones. Georgia Pre-K became the nation's first universal preschool program for this age group in 1995, extending access to all children regardless of income. In the 2009–2010 program year, Georgia celebrated its one-millionth child participating in the Pre-K Program. During the 2015–2016 school year, Georgia Pre-K served more than 80,000 children with a funding budget of over $321 million.

Since Georgia Pre-K's inception as a small pilot program, the state has led the nation in providing quality early learning for four-year-olds. Bright from the Start, the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), the state agency that administers the Georgia Pre-K Program, has been committed to continuous quality improvements. Some examples are

- implementation of learning goals and quality standards,
- intensive training initiatives,
- revised instructional learning standards, and
- program evaluations aimed at assisting providers in raising the quality of services and meeting the needs of children.

Independent evaluations confirm that the program is having a positive and significant impact on students. Results indicate that students who participated in the program had significantly higher school-readiness skills across most measures of language, math, and general knowledge than students who did not participate.[49] Over the past 25 years, the Georgia Pre-K Program has not only changed outcomes for young students preparing for kindergarten, it has transformed the role and professionalization of lead teachers in early learning classrooms. In 1992, lead Pre-K teachers were only required to hold a child development associate (CDA)[50] credential. Today, lead teachers are required to have a bachelor's degree and are viewed as on par with their peers teaching older children. Georgia is also the first state to have salary parity for Pre-K teachers with teachers of older children.[51]

49 For a complete discussion of the Pre-K evaluation, see decal.ga.gov/BftS/EvaluationGAPreKProgram.aspx.

50 The CDA is issued by the Council for Professional Recognition. It requires fewer credit hours than an associate degree from a university or technical college.

51 The requirements are not identical to K-3 teacher salaries but are equivalent where educational qualifications are the same, i.e., a teacher with three years of experience, holding a bachelor's degree with state certification. See nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Pre-K-parity-case-studies-report_FINAL-1.pdf.

As Georgia Pre-K has evolved and become a key fixture in the state's educational trajectory, there has been a growing understanding of brain development in infants and toddlers,[52] and an increased focus on and evaluation of the social and educational outcomes of early learning programs. As the state continues to raise the quality of early learning experiences for all young children in Georgia, what lessons can be learned from the professionalization of the Pre-K workforce that are applicable to those engaging younger children—the birth through three population?

SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

Young children thrive when they have secure, positive relationships with adults who are knowledgeable about how to support their health, development, and learning.[53] Many of these relationships take place in high-quality early learning environments from birth through kindergarten entry. Conversely, a lack of high-quality early learning opportunities and responsive interactions puts children at risk for poor mental and physical health, behavior problems, and school failure.[54]

As revealed in the EdQuest Georgia research, all high-performing school systems have policies aimed at providing effective early learning options across multiple settings from birth to support positive outcomes. The research shows the effectiveness of policies that expand access to high-quality programs and a dedicated focus on building a high-quality early childhood workforce.[55] The quality of Georgia's early learning workforce has a direct impact on building a strong foundation for future success.

State of the Workforce

In 2016, DECAL commissioned the University of Georgia and Georgia State University to conduct a study of the economic impact of the early learning industry in Georgia. The resulting report estimated that more than 67,000 people across the state were directly employed in the early care and education industry. Their roles ranged from administrators and owners to teacher and assistant teachers to clerical and office staff to kitchen staff, drivers, and specialists who provide services for children with disabilities or technical assistance to providers.[56] This early care and learning workforce includes[57]

- more than 15,000 infant through preschool lead teachers,
- more than 13,000 infant through preschool assistant teachers,
- more than 8,000 Georgia Pre-K and Head Start lead teachers, and
- more than 7,000 Georgia Pre-K and Head Start assistant teachers.

A variety of factors contribute to the well-being and effectiveness of a professional workforce. Compensation and benefits, staffing structures and advancement, retention, education level, and certification requirements are but a few examples.[58]

In terms of compensation and benefits, the early learning industry is a relatively low-paying field. According to the Economic Impact Study, in 2015 Georgia Pre-K lead teachers made, on average, $16 per hour. This compares to $9 per hour for classroom lead teachers in other early learning centers.[59] See Table 3.1.

52 See Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, developingchild.harvard.edu/
53 Institute of Medicine and National Research Council. (2015). *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation.* Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
54 Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students and Child Trends. (2016, May). *Care for Georgia's Infants and Toddlers: Boosting Young Children and Their Parents in the Peach State.* Retrieved from geears.org/wp-content/uploads/2016-02GeorgiaInfantsToddlers.pdf.
55 Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. (2017, November). *EdQuest Georgia: Charting Educational Reform, 2017 Baseline Report.* Retrieved from EdQuest Georgia: www.EdQuestGa.org
56 Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, Georgia State University, and the University of Georgia. (2016). *The Economic Impact of the Early Care and Education Industry in Georgia, Supplemental Appendix A.* Retrieved from www.decal.ga.gov/documents/attachments/AppendixA_EconomicImpactStudy.pdf.
57 Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, Georgia State University, and the University of Georgia, 2016.
58 Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015.
59 Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, Georgia State University, and the University of Georgia, 2016.

TABLE 3.1 Hourly Median Wages for Teaching Staff at Child Care Learning Centers by Position[60]

Teaching Position	State Hourly Average
Lead Teachers, non-Georgia Pre-K or Head Start	$10.14
Lead Teachers, Georgia Pre-K or Head Start	$16.45
Assistant Teachers, non-Georgia Pre-K or Head Start	$8.85
Assistant Teachers, Georgia Pre-K or Head Start	$9.68

Across all centers, regardless of whether they offered Georgia Pre-K or Head Start or independent classes, the most common benefits for full-time employees were paid leave and paid holidays. In child care centers, most teachers worked full time, with medians between 28 and 40 hours per week. However, within family child care homes, paid assistants worked an average of 31 hours per week and were more likely to be considered part-time employees.[61]

Moreover, among full time staff, 55% reported being paid for time off to attend training and education courses. Half reported that their employer paid for professional development training and associated costs. This leaves a significant portion of the profession self-funding professional development programs and having to use personal time to attend. Table 3.2 shows the benefits that early care and education providers offer their full-time employees.[62]

TABLE 3.2 Percent Early Learning Centers Offering Benefits to Full Time Employees[63]

Type of Benefit	
Paid holiday	63%
Paid leave	59%
Health insurance	29%
Retirement plan	26%
Paid time for training and education	55%
Payment for training, tuition, registration fees	50%

Many early learning directors and owners are reluctant to bear the burden of professional development costs of their staff due to the high rate of staff turnover within the industry. Staff turnover is an often-mentioned concern, primarily due to its impact on children. Research shows that a key to providing quality child care programs is the retention of staff members, particularly teachers. However, turnover can also be costly to early care and education programs due to the expense involved in training new staff in areas such as curriculum, best practices, health, and safety. The Economic Impact Study found that[64]

- 80% of centers had one or more permanent employees leave during the prior year.
- 37% of centers used seasonal or temporary staff to meet their needs.
- Teachers were the most likely of all types of staff members to leave the center.

As shown, there are some significant differences between Georgia Pre-K classroom lead and assistant teachers compared to other teachers in the early learning workforce. This is to be expected. Since its inception, DECAL has worked to raise the quality of the workforce within Georgia Pre-K classrooms by raising the minimum education levels and certification requirements for classroom lead and assistant teachers over time.

60 Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, Georgia State University, and the University of Georgia, 2016.
61 Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, Georgia State University, and the University of Georgia, 2016.
62 It is important to note that Georgia Pre-K provides annual training for both lead and assistant teachers free of charge during the work day. In addition, regional specialists from DECAL provide onsite technical assistance and coaching.
63 Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, Georgia State University, and the University of Georgia, 2016.
64 Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, Georgia State University, and the University of Georgia, 2016.

For example, in 1995, all lead teachers were required to hold a high school diploma or its equivalent. Although a Georgia teaching certificate issued by the Professional Standards Commission was not required, it was highly recommended. There was no salary requirement. Beginning in 2001, the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential and Child Care Professional (CCP) nationally recognized credentials were no longer accepted and lead teachers needed at least a two-year degree in Early Childhood Education or related Associate Degree or Montessori Diploma, with a minimum salary requirement of $15,045.

By 2010, current teachers with a two-year degree were grandfathered, however, new teachers were required to have at least a four-year degree in early childhood or a related field with a minimum salary requirement of $22,265.74. Beginning in the 2017-2018 school year, Georgia Pre-K lead teacher salaries had two components: base salary and supplemental compensation. Base salary is based on the teacher's verified credential(s). Supplemental compensation is based on the teacher's creditable years of experience.

It is important to note that these changes took place within an established state structure that administered the Georgia Pre-K Program. While Georgia Pre-K classrooms are operated by local school districts and private child care providers, they all have the same standards, oversight, and most importantly, consistent funding stream that comes from the Georgia Lottery and is distributed by DECAL.

The remainder of the early learning industry depends primarily on private dollars and parent fees and tuition. Across the industry, parent fees represent more than 60% of gross receipts, estimated to be $1.58 billion annually.[65] Comparatively, federal and state funding combined (including the Georgia Pre-K lottery funding) comprises about 35% of gross receipts for the industry.

Simply raising staff salaries to compensate for higher education and certification levels in the private sector is not a reasonable option. Many families, especially low-income families, already have a hard time finding and paying for quality child care. On average, the annual cost of 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.[66]

Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Program helps low-income families afford quality care. CAPS is a child care subsidy program administered by DECAL. It is funded through the Child Care and Development Fund, a federal block grant. Eligible families can earn up to about 150% of the federal poverty level and still potentially qualify for subsidies.[67]

The reauthorization of the federal block grant that passed in 2014 instituted 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 state agencies to pay higher subsidy rates to higher quality providers. For example, in Georgia, a new tiered reimbursement rate is 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.

65 Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, Georgia State University, and the University of Georgia, 2016.

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

67 Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students. 2016. Supporting Affordabilty. Retrieved November 30, 2016, from GEEARS: geears.org/business-toolkit/supporting-affordability/.

To maintain the current CAPS funding without terminating child care assistance to families already enrolled in the program, restrictions were implemented on new enrollees. New families must not only meet need-based income eligibility requirements, as before, they now must also be identified as part of a priority group. Priority groups include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) applicants and recipients, children in the custody of the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services or in Child Protective Services, minor parents in school, grandparents raising grandchildren, children with disabilities, children in Georgia Pre-K Program requiring extended care, or victims of a natural disaster.[68]

Governor Nathan Deal recommended an additional $5.5 million in state funds to provide tiered reimbursements to higher quality early education programs for eligible families. The Subcommittee on Early Learning, part of the Governor's Education Reform Commission, recommended that $10 million was needed for the program. Therefore, an additional $4.5 million is necessary to reach this goal. Currently, Georgia is only serving a fraction of eligible families, and as the state's poverty rate continues to grow, greater investments in CAPS will be required to meet the need.[69]

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

As the Georgia Pre-K Program enters its 25th year, it has much to celebrate. Over the past quarter century, DECAL has worked hard to professionalize the Georgia Pre-K teacher workforce by

- investing in training and professional development,
- increasing employment standards across the field, and
- achieving a critical mass of teachers with a certain level of education and certification.

These were long-term, incremental changes that were supported by a dedicated funding stream and state structure. This is vitally important. Public education (like the Georgia Pre-K Program) has a stable funding source, but even those resources are not always adequate or distributed evenly. In the non-Georgia Pre-K sector of the industry, the variability of funding streams and the unpredictability of sustained funding means limited resources are problematic.[70]

Georgia has several programs in place to recruit more professionals into the industry. The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) offers an early childhood care and education career cluster pathway for high school students. This pathway introduces the foundations of education, combined with knowledge and skills gained in both the classroom and workplace, to prepare students for a career in education. GaDOE also offers an early childhood industry certification for high school students through the Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) program.

The early childhood industry has also been targeted for the HOPE Career Grant (formerly known as the Strategic Industries Workforce Development Grant). This grant program offers free tuition to qualified students to receive diplomas or certificates in industries where there are more jobs available than skilled workers to fill them. Under the HOPE Grant, qualified students can earn a Child Development Specialist Certificate, Early Childhood Care and Education Diploma, or Early Childhood Program Administration Certificate.

68 Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. 2016. Questions About Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Funding Restrictions. Retrieved from CAPS: Eligibility Requirements: www.caps.decal.ga.gov/en/EligibilityRequirements.
69 Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, 2016.
70 Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015.

As Georgia aims to recruit more students into the profession, it is also focusing on training and career pathways for teachers. Administered by DECAL, the Georgia Professional Development System (GaPDS) is designed to capture educational attainment in early childhood education, ongoing professional learning, and experience working with young children. Career levels are outlined on a continuum from Level I to Level XII.[71] Table 3.3 shows examples of level descriptions.

TABLE 3.3 Examples of Early Childhood Career Levels

Level I	**Professionals at the beginning of their career**	• **High school diploma or GED; and** • **0-3 years experience in early care; and** • **0-30 clock hours of state approved/accepted training**
Level VI	**Professionals who have earned an intermediate level, formal, education credential in the early education field**	• **Technical College Diploma (TCD) in Early Childhood Education (ECE) or Child Development**
Level IX	**Professionals with a four-year degree**	• **Professionals with a Georgia Professional Standards Commission (PSC) teaching certificate in Early Care/ Early Education Field**
Level XII	**Professionals with Doctoral degrees**	• **Doctoral Degree (PhD/EdD) in ECE or Child Development OR** • **Non-ECE Doctorate with an: ECE Associate, TCD, or containing ECE/ECE-related coursework or PSC Cert Level 6 in an early education field of study**

In addition to overseeing the Professional Development System, the Professional Learning Unit within DECAL also administers the DECAL Scholars program, which offers a combination of professional coaching, the INCENTIVES salary bonus program, scholarships, and AWARDS for Early Educators, a federally funded bonus program. Other professional learning initiatives include developing training opportunities in the following areas: Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards, Professional Learning Community Facilitation, Foundations of Coaching, and WIDA Early Years, for English language learners.

However, as previously noted, approximately half of professionals in the field must pay for their own additional trainings and do not receive paid time off to attend. Hampered with a high turnover rate of early care and education staff, Georgia needs to support programs and systems to encourage retention and deliver effective professional development.

The retention rate within Georgia Pre-K programs is relatively high. For the 2017 school year, 80% of lead teachers returned to the classroom and 66% of assistant teachers were retained from the previous year. The professionalization process has helped stabilize that segment of the early learning workforce. Rigorous career pathways that are fully supported by communities could help increase the professionalization of the infant-through-preschool workforce. Critical to this would be to include DECAL within the P-20 Collaboratives. The P-20 Collaboratives—regional partnerships between local school districts, GaDOE, the Georgia Professional Standards Commission, the University System of Georgia, the Regional Education Support Agencies, and alternative certification programs—have been established to formalize collaborative partnerships with local school systems. In addition to focusing on induction pathways for K-12 teachers, these collaboratives help identify the specific needs of students, teachers, and leaders in each region.

71 For a full description of all 12 levels, see gapds.decal.ga.gov/Documents/CareerLevels.pdf.

With the rise of dual enrollment programs, the career pathways in early learning offered by GaDOE and the HOPE Career Grant, local education communities could use the P-20 Collaboratives to address the needs of the early learning workforce. What trainings are needed for the workforce? How can higher education align programs to the needs of early learning centers and early learning standards? Where are the workforce shortages? Many of these questions can be addressed at a regional level through the P-20 Collaboratives.

The transformation of the Georgia Pre-K workforce took time and resources. As Georgia turns its focus to increasing the professional level of the infant-through-preschool workforce, it must be prepared to take the time and invest the resources. Georgia's Quality Rated program could also serve as the statewide system to coordinate these investments. Quality Rated is Georgia's system to determine, improve, and communicate the quality of programs that offer child care. Similar to rating systems for restaurants and hotels, Quality Rated assigns one, two, or three stars to early education and school-age care programs that meet or exceed the minimum state requirements. By participating in Georgia's voluntary Quality Rated program, programs make a commitment to work continuously to improve the quality of care they provide to children and families.[72] Participating programs become eligible for free professional development, technical assistance, and financial incentive packages supported by foundations and businesses.[73]

Recent changes to the CAPS program already ensure that payments to Quality Rated providers are higher. Higher quality simply costs more. There are recommendations resulting from the Education Reform Commission to require a center to be Quality Rated to participate in the CAPS program. This is an attempt to expand the number of available spots for low-income children in Quality Rated centers. If this change is made, Georgia needs to fully fund the demand for the CAPS program at the level required by centers to operate to higher standards of quality. The commission also recommended a combination of tax incentives for parents, teachers, and centers to increase quality and help families pay for higher quality. These recommendations should be funded and adopted by the state.

The importance of early learning has become increasingly visible in recent years, only re-emphasizing what educators have known for quite some time: High-quality early learning is the building block for student success. Through time and resources spent on quality improvements and access across the Pre-K Program, Georgia is once again leading the nation in providing this foundation to the state's four-year-old population. Now is the time to establish a similar long-term commitment to the rest of the early learning industry.

72 Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. 2017. FAQ for Quality Rated. Retrieved from decal.ga.gov/BftS/Faq.aspx?cat=QualityRSRated.
73 For more information on Quality Rated, see families.decal.ga.gov/ChildCare/QualityRated.

ISSUE 4

Teachers: Leadership from the Classroom

ISSUE OVERVIEW

In school systems, the leadership role is paramount. Research has found that leadership disparities explain almost a quarter of the difference in student performance accounted for by schools.[74] While traditional definitions of educational leadership focus on school and district administrative positions, the vital role of the "teacher leader" is gaining considerably more attention. What is teacher leadership? Why now?

Many factors are changing the demands of the education profession. Education reforms related to rigorous standards, high-stakes federal and state accountability measures, the expanded use of technology and individualized instruction with an increasingly diverse student population, and a growing number of students living in poverty—all of these issues impact education.[75] These changes require new roles for educators. Research describes teacher leadership as the "process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school community to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement."[76]

A defined position of "teacher leader" is increasingly becoming a cornerstone of well-functioning school systems. Collaborative, shared leadership—between classroom educators and building administrators—is now viewed as essential to meet student achievement expectations and to support student success.[77]

The EdQuest Georgia research revealed that quality teaching is a core area that all high-performing systems share. High-performing states and school systems have processes designed to ensure high-quality teaching throughout by focusing on attracting talented college graduates committed to the profession. Those students are subjected to rigorous

> ***"Teaching today is a more complex set of roles and responsibilities than ever before. The skills and knowledge required to successfully engage students and prepare them for our quickly changing societies define how teachers lead within the classroom and without. Traditionally, teachers who have wanted to lead beyond the classroom went into administration, meaning oftentimes the best and brightest left the classroom after a few years of teaching. But today many more opportunities are emerging for teacher leadership, both formally and informally."***[78]
>
> **– Walter McKenzie**

74 Wahlstrom, K.L., K.S. Louis, K. Leithwood, and S.E. Anderson. 2010. *Learning from Leadership Project: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning.* New York: Wallace Foundation.

75 ASCD. 2015. *Teacher Leadership: The What, Why, and How of Teachers as Leaders.* A Report on the Fall 2014 ASCD Whole Child Symposium. Retrieved from ASCD.org: www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/siteASCD/wholechild/fall2014wcsreport.

76 Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement. 2015, October. *Cultivating Teacher Leadership: Where Do Principals Begin?* Retrieved from glisi.org/resources/cultivating-teacher-leadership-glisi-research-brief/.

77 ASCD, 2015.

78 See inservice.ascd.org/whole-child-symposium-redefining-teacher-leadership.

preparation and induction systems, and their work environments and career pathways support teacher learning and professional development. Teacher leader programs were found to be crucial in the professionalization of the field, leading to higher rates of recruitment and retention. For example, in Singapore the teacher career ladder is designed so that as teachers move toward the top, they are expected to lead teams of teachers by doing serious instructional development work in the schools, researching the effects of their development projects on student achievement, and writing research papers on those projects that they submit to university-run, peer-reviewed journals.[79]

A crucial opportunity for Georgia found in the EdQuest research is to recognize teachers as professionals. Professionalization includes how the profession is viewed, how educators are compensated, and how teachers are mentored and supported through ongoing professional learning. Focusing on teacher leadership gives Georgia the opportunity to further professionalize the field, leading to the retention of higher quality teachers, which ultimately impacts outcomes for all students.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

Research has shown that engaging teachers as leaders can promote a culture of collective responsibility and shared accountability for school improvement in our most struggling schools.[80] Teacher leadership can also provide a career ladder for teachers who want to stay in the classroom. Historically, career pathways for teachers involved leaving the classroom and taking on administrative roles within education. However, a national survey of teachers found that most teachers (69%) are not interested in becoming a principal, the traditional education career ladder.[81] The same survey found one in four teachers were "extremely" or "very interested" in serving in a hybrid role that would allow them to both teach students and lead educational reforms.[82]

Best practice research says that teacher leadership must be formalized, funded, and supported through professional development.[83] Purposeful pathways to teacher leadership are needed. Supporting the development of teacher leadership is not equivalent to removing teachers from the classroom and putting them into principal or assistant principal training programs to ultimately move them into administrative positions. Two entirely different career development programs are needed: one for teacher leaders and a different one for administrators.[84]

Within the teaching profession, Georgia has implemented career ladders that support teacher leadership and allow teachers to stay in the classroom and advance their careers. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) has identified three fields for educators to upgrade their certificate level (i.e., from a level 4 bachelor's to a level 5 master's degree),[85] instructional technology, curriculum and instruction, and teacher leader. The certificate level determines placement on the salary scale, so an upgrade leads to an increase in pay.

79 Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. 2017. *EdQuest Georgia: Charting Educational Reform Baseline Report.* Retrieved from EdQuestga.org: www.edquestga.org/download-edquest/.
80 Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement, 2015.
81 MetLife. 2013, February. *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Challenges for School Leadership.* Retrieved from www.metlife.com/assets/cao/foundation/MetLife-Teacher-Survey-2012.pdf.
82 MetLife, 2013.
83 ASCD, 2015.
84 ASCD, 2015.
85 The professional certificate is a five-year renewable license. To renew, a teacher must show a "proficient" or "exemplary" on their Georgia teacher assessment rating for four out of five years.

Within their education programs, nine colleges and universities across the state[86] offer an advanced degree program in teacher leadership, and Georgia is the only state that has a specific certification related to teacher leadership. These programs focus on preparing individuals to serve in teacher leader roles in grades P-12, including by providing professional development to other teachers, building a school culture of continuous improvement, and leading education reforms while maintaining the role of classroom teacher.[87]

In addition to the full-field certificate, Georgia also offers endorsements in specific areas to recognize additional expertise. Two such endorsements are the Teacher Leader Endorsement and the Coaching Endorsement. The Teacher Leadership Endorsement requires recipients to accomplish the following:[88]

- Design job-embedded professional learning based on student and teacher needs
- Work with others to promote a positive school culture
- Work to align curriculum, instruction, and assessments to standards
- Model best practices in pedagogy and serve as a mentor for other educators
- Design and implement assessment practices
- Conduct research and apply findings to improve teaching
- Collaborate with all stakeholders to improve student learning and influence change

The Coaching Endorsement offers enhanced competencies to use performance assessment data to provide feedback to other individuals in various education positions. Teachers with this endorsement may serve as

- supervisors to student teachers,
- mentors to beginning teachers,
- instructional or academic coaches to classroom teachers, or
- classroom teachers providing professional development for peers.[89]

These options provide different career ladders for teachers with a Professional Certificate who wish to further their career while staying in the classroom—either the teacher leader certification or endorsements. Either of these two pathways can be used to upgrade the Professional Certificate to a Lead Professional Certificate. The Lead Professional Certificate is one of two top-tier certificates above the Professional Certificate.

The Lead Professional Certificate is for teachers who positively impact other teachers and adults. This certificate requires at least five years of experience, at least one annual teacher assessment rating of "exemplary," and no ratings below "proficient." The teachers also must either be certified in teacher leadership or have an advanced degree in their certification field, curriculum and instruction, or instructional technology, *and* a Teacher Leadership Endorsement, a Coaching Endorsement, or a Teacher Support and Coaching Endorsement. Teachers must also demonstrate through a rigorous performance assessment the capability to work with their colleagues in ways that improve student learning.

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

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

87 Georgia Professional Standards Commission. 2012, May. GaPSC Certificate Level Upgrade Rule 505-2-.41 Guidance for Educators. Retrieved from www.gapsc.com/commission/policies_guidelines/downloads/guidance_for_educators_20120515.pdf.

88 Georgia Professional Standards Commission. 2016, January. 505-2-.181 Teacher Leader Endorsement. Retrieved from www.gapsc.com/Rules/Current/Certification/505-2-.181.pdf.

89 Georgia Professional Standards Commission. 2016, January. 505-2-.162 Coaching Endorsement. Retrieved from www.gapsc.com/Rules/Current/Certification/505-2-.162.pdf.

Georgia is also working in other ways to support the development of teacher leaders. The state plan created by GaDOE under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) calls for the development of broad state strategies that give districts flexibility to address several aspects of teacher effectiveness:

- Formalized recruitment strategies
- Preparation pathways
- Leadership and opportunities for advancement
- Ongoing mentoring and coaching

The state ESSA plan calls for a continued focus on and support for the leadership career pathways implemented by GaPSC to bolster leadership opportunities and ongoing mentoring and coaching. The importance of mentoring (especially for new teachers) and ongoing coaching cannot be overstated. The responsibility for strengthening induction support for new teachers rests with school systems. The plan encourages schools and districts to use teacher leaders (and those holding the Lead Professional Certificate) to support new teachers and student teachers.

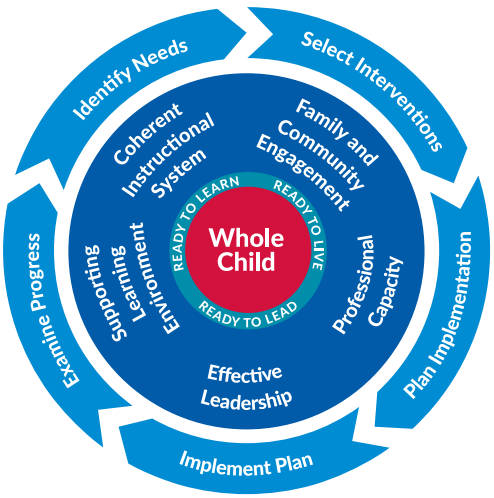
GaPSC and the state ESSA plan both call for a transition to a full-year clinical model of student teaching, as opposed to the current single-semester requirement. Yearlong teacher residencies depend upon the mentoring and support of expert teachers, those who have earned credentials in teacher leadership or coaching and who have earned the top tier of certification—Lead Professional.

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

For several years, Georgia has debated how to help chronically struggling schools. A proposed constitutional amendment in the fall of 2016 would have created a new state-run Opportunity School District with the authority to step in and run "chronically failing" schools. The amendment was ultimately defeated by Georgia voters. In 2017, the Georgia General Assembly passed House Bill 338, the First Priority Act, which was compromise legislation creating the position of chief turnaround officer (CTO) that reports directly to the State Board of Education. While these debates have been contentious, nobody was arguing in support of the status quo. All sides of this debate agree that too many students have been stuck in low-performing schools for too long.

In the state ESSA plan, the GaDOE described its approach to supporting and intervening with struggling schools. The GaDOE has implemented a strategic plan that emphasizes the development of a common, continuous improvement framework to ensure all schools are receiving meaningful support. Georgia's System of Continuous Improvement framework focuses on the specific systems and structures that must be in place (the what) for sustained improvement. It also uses a problem-solving model (the how) to ensure these foundational elements are leading to stronger student outcomes.[90] Figure 4.1 illustrates how the Continuous Improvement framework functions.

FIGURE 4.1 Georgia's System of Continuous Improvement[91]



90 Georgia Department of Education. 2017. Department of Curriculum and Instruction. Retrieved from www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Curriculum-and-Instruction/Pages/default.aspx.

91 See www.gadoe.org/School-Improvement/School-Improvement-Services/Pages/Georgia%E2%80%99s-Systems-of-Continuous-Improvement.aspx.

Effective leadership is crucial to the continuous improvement approach and includes the distributed leadership approach. This approach requires leadership throughout the school, from teachers and from building-level leaders. The leadership structure ensures three primary objectives are met:

- A school climate and culture that are conducive to learning
- High-quality instruction in all classrooms
- Strategic improvement efforts

In addition to this work being done by GaDOE, as previously mentioned, Georgia recently passed the First Priority Act, which created the CTO position. In December 2017, 11 schools across four counties were selected for the first round of intense intervention services coordinated through the office of the CTO.

Whether a school receives turnaround support under GaDOE's turnaround plans or is selected for interventions from the CTO, both approaches require a cadre of highly effective teachers in the classroom and a prominent role for teacher leaders. Research has shown that effective school reforms are more successful when teacher-led collaborations strengthen skills, competencies, and overall school climate and culture.[92] Increasing teacher leadership within these efforts should be a priority.

Moreover, successful turnaround efforts can take five to seven years and cannot be accomplished if teachers do not stay long enough to develop collective expertise. Teacher attrition in Georgia is a significant issue. Approximately 70% of teacher hiring statewide is done to replace teachers who left the workforce.[93] Since 2010, 13% of Georgia's newly hired teachers left after their first year. After five years, 44% of newly hired teachers in 2010 were no longer teaching.[94] A study by the Learning Policy Institute showed that most teachers who leave the profession before retirement list "dissatisfaction with teaching conditions," which includes the lack of opportunities for professional collaboration, shared decision-making, and classroom leadership.[95] Expanding the number of teacher leaders in the classrooms can go a long way toward addressing the needs of Georgia's struggling schools.

Finally, the role of the principal in creating the right conditions to support and grow teacher leadership is crucial. The principal role has become increasingly complex. Principals are "expected to be educational visionaries, instructional and curriculum leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarians, community builders, public relations/communications experts, budget analysts, facility managers, special programs administrators, as well as guardians of various legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives."[96]

To meet these demands, many principals may designate "teacher leaders" as a way to help manage the competing priorities of school improvement efforts, often relying on teachers who are most senior or those with a previous relationship whose skills may or may not match the needs of the school. Principals and administrative leaders need their own training and professional development about how best to grow, support, and utilize teacher leaders. Professional development for building leaders requires principals to be able to match the needs of the school to the skills of the individuals in the building.[97]

92 Leana, C.R. 2011, Fall. *The Missing Link in School Reform.* Retrieved from Stanford Social Innovation Review: ssir.org/articles/entry/the_missing_link_in_school_reform.
93 Henson, K., C. Stephens, T. Hall, and C. McCampbell. 2015. *The 2015 Georgia Public P-12 Teacher Workforce: A Status Report.* Atlanta: Georgia Professional Standards Commission.
94 Henson et al., 2015.
95 Podolsky, A., T. Kini, J. Bishop, and L. Darling-Hammond. 2016, September 15. *Solving the Teacher Shortage: How to Attract and Retain Excellent Educators.* Washington, DC: Learning Policy Institute.
96 Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement, 2015.
97 Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement, 2015.

Georgia lawmakers have also recognized the need to enhance leadership capacity across the state, especially related to turnaround schools. While the majority of the First Priority Act addressed turning around chronically struggling schools, the legislation also created a Joint Study Committee on the Establishment of a Leadership Academy. The committee had the following charge:

> Study the possibility of establishing a leadership academy to provide opportunities for principals and other school leaders to update and expand their leadership knowledge and skills. The committee shall study and recommend the scope of a potential leadership academy…focusing on leadership in schools that have unacceptable ratings, criteria for participants and faculty, and any other matters deemed appropriate by the committee. The committee shall identify a process for establishing such leadership academy, which may be known as the Georgia Academic Leadership Academy, with a proposed beginning date of July 1, 2018.[98]

In December 2017, the study committee recommended the establishment of the Governor's School Leadership Academy (GSLA). The GSLA will, among other things, be a statewide school leadership academy focused on training, developing, and supporting the leaders in the chronically lowest-performing schools in Georgia.[99]

More broadly, work is also being done at the district level to improve leadership and the leadership pipeline. The Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI) is an independent, nonprofit organization committed to developing world-class education leaders—both teachers and principals—for all of Georgia's students. Other efforts in Georgia to develop leaders are district-specific. One of the best examples is the Gwinnett County Public Schools Quality-Plus Leader Academy. This program's goal is to increase student achievement by identifying, recruiting, and preparing introspective school leaders.

Throughout 2018, GaPSC and GaDOE will establish a task force to help answer a vital question: How can the state effectively utilize teacher leaders? Recommendations from this task force should be incorporated into the leader training programs across the state.

These initiatives all offer an opportunity to address an urgent issue highlighted by the EdQuest Georgia research: Georgia needs a comprehensive, statewide plan to support the recruitment, training, and ongoing professional development of leaders at all levels, including schools, districts, and school boards.[100] This professional development should recognize and demonstrate the interconnectedness of teacher leadership and building- and district-level leadership.

Why now for teacher leadership? Increased rigor and accountability, new state and federal reforms, and more students living in poverty have significantly increased the responsibilities of school principals. At the same time, teachers are seeking opportunities to expand their roles while staying in the classroom and asking for more professionalization within their field. Supporting and expanding teacher leadership can help ease the pressure on principals, provide teachers with meaningful opportunities, and impact overall student achievement.

98 See text of House Bill 338 at www.legis.ga.gov/Legislation/20172018/170167.pdf.

99 Joint Study Committee on the Establishment of a Leadership Academy. 2017, December. *Final Recommendations to Governor Nathan Deal.* Retrieved from: http://www.house.ga.gov/Documents/CommitteeDocuments/2017/Leadership_Academy/FinalReport_Joint_Study_Committee.pdf

100 Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, 2017.

ISSUE 5

The Missing 20%: Increasing Georgia's High School Graduation Rate

ISSUE OVERVIEW

In 2017 Georgia students passed a major milestone: the high school graduation rate was above 80% for the first time since using the adjusted cohort calculation now required by federal law. This number represents a growth of more than 10 percentage points since 2012. Even better, 50 Georgia school districts recorded 2017 graduation rates at or above 90%. Since 2010, the number of graduates requiring remediation upon entering post-secondary education has dropped over six percentage points for English and nearly 10 in math. Georgia is increasing its percentage of graduates and better preparing them for college and careers.

These numbers represent significant achievements for education in the state and are the result of many initiatives put in place to bring about this improvement. Access to career pathways, dual enrollment, work-based learning and internships, the more effective use of data to identify and meet students' individualized needs, and an increasing emphasis on supporting the whole child and creating a positive school climate are but a few examples.[101]

While this growth is significant and should be celebrated, to continue to improve, Georgia must understand and address the remaining 20% of students who are not completing high school. Who are these students that have not responded to current interventions? What are their needs? To build effective interventions that will support these students in completing high school, we must answer these questions and address the factors contributing to their noncompletion.

We know the incidence of dropping out of high school is higher among low-income students, students with disabilities, and minority students. Other high-risk groups for noncompletion of high school include students involved with the foster care system or the Department of Juvenile Justice and students with interrupted education. Understanding these populations and the overlap between them in Georgia can go a long way to guiding appropriate interventions that will help the state's graduation rate continue to rise.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

Research has identified the primary early warning indicators of not graduating from high school as the ABCs—attendance, behavior, and course performance.[102] In 2006, the preeminent study that established the ABCs found that among sixth graders, those who did not attend school regularly (defined as attending less than 80% of the time), received poor behavior marks, or received a failing grade in math or English had no more than

101 Georgia Department of Education. 2017, September 27. Georgia's Graduation Rate Increases for Sixth Straight Year, Tops 80 Percent [Press release]. Retrieved from www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid=567.

102 MDRC. 2016, June. *Addressing Early Warning Indicators.* Retrieved from I3 Study Findings – Diplomas Now: diplomasnow.org/research/i3-study-findings/.

- a 10% chance of graduating on time and
- a 20% chance of graduating one year late.[103]

Subsequent research has built upon that foundation and confirmed that these key factors were more predictive of high school graduation than student demographics or test scores.[104] The impact of the ABCs varies by grade span, but students can be thrown off the path toward graduation at any point along the elementary through high school continuum. In the early elementary grades, students must master key academic skills that provide the foundation for future learning, namely reading proficiently on grade level by the end of the third grade. The emerging evidence indicates that chronic absenteeism in the early grades inhibits this, and hence consistently attending school from kindergarten forward matters.

By early adolescence, the impact of behavior becomes a more prominent factor. It is critical that students firmly believe that doing well in school is important and that they come to school regularly and engage positively in their classes. The existing evidence indicates that from the fourth grade on these behaviors begin to shape graduation outcomes.

Finally, in high school, skills and behaviors continue to matter but credit accrual carries more predictive value. Advancement and passing courses becomes paramount.[105] It is important to remember that attendance plays a significant role in course completion. For example, regular attendance in the ninth grade is a stronger predictor of high school graduation than eighth-grade test scores.[106]

Of important note is the interaction of poverty with the ABCs. Poor children are four times more likely to be chronically absent in elementary school than their higher income peers. The negative impact of absences on literacy is 75% larger for low-income children.[107]

Attendance Works and the Everyone Graduates Center conducted a 50-state analysis of how many schools faced high levels of chronic absences. They documented absence trends by grades served, poverty status, and region. High schools, schools with more than 50% of students living in poverty, and urban schools had the highest percentage of students with high or extreme chronic absences.[108] Figures 5.1–5.3 shows these trends among Georgia students.

103 Balfanz, R., and Herzog, L. 2006. *Keeping Middle Grade Students on Track to Graduation.* Baltimore: The Center for Everyone Graduates at Johns Hopkins University.

104 Bruce, M., J.M. Bridgeland, J.H. Fox, and R. Balfanz. 2011. *On Track for Success: The Use of Early Warning Indicators and Intervention Systems to Build a Grad Nation.* Retrieved from The Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University: new.every1graduates.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/on_track_for_success.pdf.

105 Bruce et al., 2011.

106 Allensworth, E.M., and J.Q. Easton. 2007. *What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public High Schools: A Close Look at Course Grades, Failures, and Attendance in the Freshman Year.* Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago.

107 Ready, D.D. 2010. Socioeconomic Disadvantage, School Attendance, and Early Cognitive Development: The Differential Effects of School Exposure. *Sociology of Education* 83(4).

108 Attendance Works. 2017, September. *Portraits of Change: Aligning School and Community Resources to Reduce Chronic Absence, Georgia Data.* Retrieved from www.attendanceworks.org/portraits-of-change/.

FIGURE 5.1 Chronic Absences Across Georgia by Severity and School Grades Served[109]

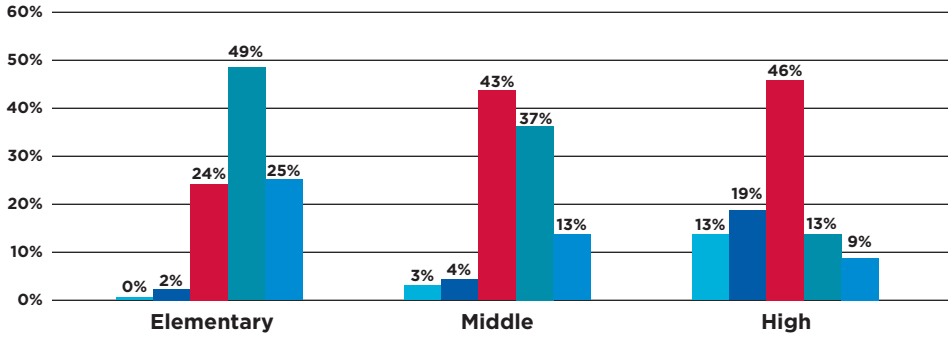


FIGURE 5.2 Georgia Schools Serving More Students in Poverty Have Higher Chronic Absence Levels[110]

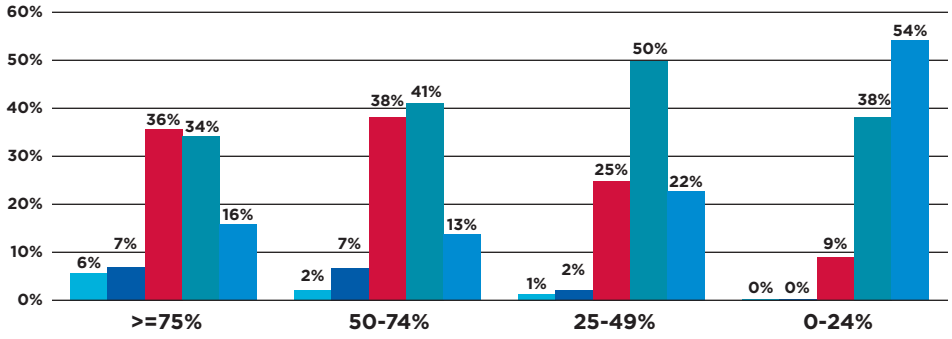
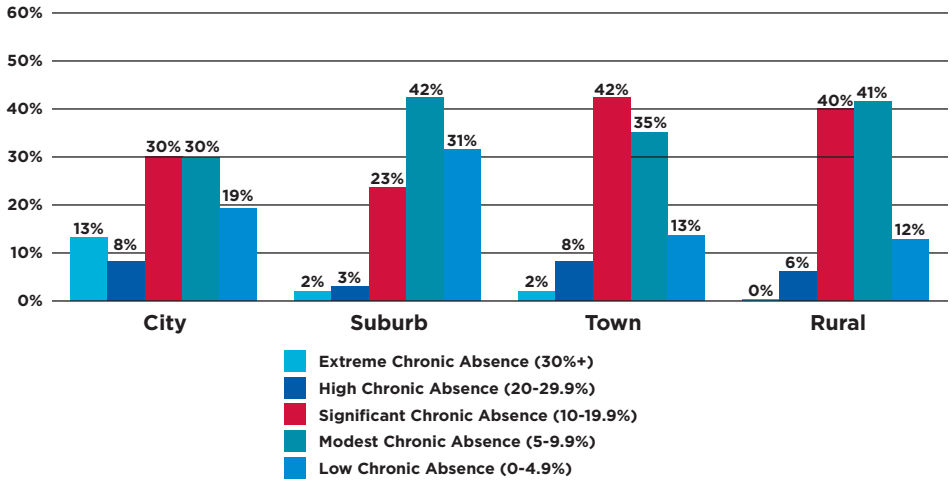


FIGURE 5.3 Distribution of Chronic Absence Levels for Georgia Schools by Region[111]



109 Attendance Works, 2017.
110 Attendance Works, 2017.
111 Attendance Works, 2017.

Georgia's own data illustrate the impact of absences on graduation rates. Table 5.1 shows that among eighth graders who missed 15 or more school days, only 38% went on to graduate high school within the traditional four-year period. Worth noting, even a relatively small number of absences are related to reduced graduation rates. More than 80% of eighth graders who were absent five or fewer days graduated from high school on time. However, among students with six to 10 days absent, that rate dropped to 72%.[112]

While attendance data are not publicly available on the missing 20%—those high school students who did not graduate on time in 2017—it is highly plausible that a large portion of them missed a significant amount of school.

TABLE 5.1 Georgia 8th Grade Student Absences and 4-Year Graduation Rate[113]

Days Absent	4-Year Graduation Rate
0	82%
1 to 5 Days	80%
6 to 10 Days	72%
11 to 14 Days	61%
15 or More Days	38%

Attendance instability can occur for a variety of reasons, many of which could be overlapping, such as health issues, pregnancy, behavioral issues that remove the student from the classroom, or involvement with the foster care or juvenile justice systems.

Schools and local districts that have conducted close reviews of student attendance issues have found that health issues account for many absences. For example, across Georgia,[114]

- 27% of children between the ages of 10 and 13 are obese.
- 10% of children suffer from asthma (75,000 students missed over 470,000 school days).
- Dental health issues are the leading cause of health-related school absences.

Behavioral problems also lead to absences and missing class time, primarily due to suspensions. Georgia Appleseed Center for Law and Justice conducted an in-depth study of school discipline processes and the use of out-of-school suspensions (OSS) and their effectiveness. The study found that OSS rates and graduation rates are negatively correlated. That is, schools with relatively high OSS rates tended to have lower-than-average graduation rates. For example, the cohort of schools with the highest OSS rates for the seven-year period analyzed had an average graduation rate 15 percentage points lower than the average reported graduation rate of the group of school districts with the lowest OSS rates during the same period.[115]

The use of exclusionary discipline is highly variable among the school districts in Georgia. In some districts, its use is rare. Other school districts consistently impose OSS on more than 20% of the school population annually. In some individual schools, the percentage of OSS actions can affect up to 40% of the students per year. More concerning is that subgroups of students are disproportionately subjected to OSS discipline.[116]

- Black students were three times more likely to receive an OSS than students of any other racial classification.
- Students eligible for the free or reduced-priced lunch program (a proxy measure for poverty) and English language learners had OSS discipline rates twice that of students not in those subgroups.
- Special needs students received OSS slightly more than one-and-a-half times as often as general education students.

112 Georgia Department of Education. 2016, March. *Student Attendance: Changing the Conversation.* Retrieved from GaDOE Student Attendance Improvement: www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/Policy/Documents/Student%20Attendance%20and%20Student%20Achievement%20Updated%20March%202016.pdf.

113 Georgia Department of Education, 2016, March, *Student Attendance.*

114 Georgia Department of Education, 2016, March, *Student Attendance.*

115 Georgia Appleseed Center for Law and Justice. 2011. *Effective Student Discipline: Keeping Kids in Class.* Retrieved from gaappleseed.org/initiatives/esd/keepingkidsinclass.

116 Georgia Appleseed Center for Law and Justice, 2011.

Students with health or behavioral issues, as well as those who live in poverty, are more likely to show one or more of the warning signs associated with the ABCs. There are also fragile student populations that experience all of these issues, such as children in foster care, those in the juvenile justice system, and special needs students.

Foster Care Youth

Students involved with the foster care system have a high risk of dropping out of high school.[117] National research shows that foster care students face barriers that put them far behind their peers.

- An average of four to six months of educational progress is lost with every change of schools when compared to peers.
- Only 28% of youth can remain in their original school when they enter foster care.
- 75% of foster care students function below grade level.
- 2% of foster care students earn a bachelor's degree.[118]

The Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) reported in March 2017 that there were 12,705 children under the age of 18 in foster care in Georgia.[119] This represents a slight increase over the preceding 12 months, and is nearly double the number in 2013. The rate of increase is among the highest in the nation.[120] This increase has been attributed to two factors: (1) the recent increase in prescription drug abuse, which has led to the opioid crisis, and (2) increased DFCS resources. Since 2014, DFCS has spent tens of millions of dollars on hiring more caseworkers and implementing a statewide reporting hotline and a high-tech tracking system to keep children from slipping through the cracks.[121]

Importantly, this number does not include the many children who have either been reunited with their families or adopted into other families after having been in the system at a younger age. Children enter the care of the state because of verifiable abuse or neglect. Even after they have left the care of the state, these children must still contend with factors that can result in poor educational outcomes: trauma and educational interruption.

In Georgia, the 2016 graduation rate for foster youth was 10%.[122] This graduation rate is driven by the ABCs. A full 75% of foster care students function below grade level. Foster youth can move seven to 10 times while in state care, resulting in a potential loss of four to six months of educational progress for each move.[123]

Juvenile Justice

Including those placed on probation, more than 50,000 youths were involved with the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) in 2017. The vast majority were not living in correctional facilities but were arrested, released on probation, or in other ways came in contact with DJJ. Students in DJJ care are enrolled in the Georgia Preparatory Academy (GPA), a stand-alone Georgia school district that operates in DJJ facilities across the state. Students may be enrolled for a brief period or for years, depending on how long they are in custody. Students remanded into long-term confinement are enrolled into GPA immediately upon intake to the youth detention center.

117 US Department of Education. 2016, June 27. Students in Foster Care. Retrieved from www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/foster-care/index.html.
118 McGhee, E. 2012, August 15. Dare to Care: Part II Addressing the Needs of Foster Care Students [PowerPoint presentation]. Retrieved from www.gadoe.org/Technology-Services/Data-Collections/Documents/DC_Conf_FederalProg/Foster%20Care%20Students.pdf.
119 Georgia Division of Family and Children Services. n.d. Monthly Measures and Results for April 2017 [PowerPoint presentation]. Retrieved from dfcs.georgia.gov/sites/dfcs.georgia.gov/files/MonthlyOutcomes_April2017.pdf.
120 Diamant, A. 2016, December 1. Number of Foster Kids in Georgia Nearly Doubles Since 2013. *WSB-TV Atlanta.* Retrieved from www.wsbtv.com/news/local/number-of-foster-kids-in-georgia-nearly-doubles-since-2013/472256113.
121 Diamant, 2016.
122 See www.fultoncountycasa.org/2016/06/24/improving-the-graduation-rates-of-our-foster-youth/.
123 Georgia Appleseed Center for Law and Policy. 2014, July. *Fostering Educational Success: Improving Academic Stability and Attainment for Georgia's Children in Care.* Retrieved from gaappleseed.org/media/docs/children-in-care.pdf.

Since 2014, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and DJJ have been sharing information that allows the GaDOE to track graduation outcomes of students who have been involved with DJJ, but only those who have been in correctional facilities for over six months. This makes up a small percentage of DJJ youth. For example, 32,285 children under 18 were arrested in Georgia in 2013. That same year, only 1,788 (5%) lived in juvenile correction facilities.[124]

School districts across the state are required to have policies in place to address students who have been arrested, but those policies vary system by system. Many systems immediately track these students to alternative schooling, especially in cases where the students have served a sentence in a youth detention center. Students with lower level and nonviolent offenses are often tracked out of mainstream schooling as well. Of those systems that do not automatically transfer offenders to alternative schools, many require a student to go before a tribunal before their educational path is decided. In the interim, the youth are often not attending school, falling further behind.

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities (SWD) make up about 11% of Georgia's public K-12 students.[125] They graduate at a significantly lower rate than those without disabilities. Georgia offers a special education diploma for students who complete their individual education plan goals, which recognizes their completion of high school but does not count as a regular diploma for the purposes of enrolling in higher education. This graduation option is intended only for students with cognitive disabilities that preclude their mastery of the regular high school course content, a small portion of all students with disabilities.[126] The majority of SWD in high school are attempting a regular high school diploma, yet in 2013, only 35.1% of Georgia's SWD graduated. That rate ranked Georgia as the third-lowest state for graduating students with disabilities, far below the national average of 61.9%.[127]

Students with significant emotional or behavioral disorders can receive services through the Georgia Network for Educational and Therapeutic Support (GNETS). This program has been under scrutiny since 2016, when the Department of Justice (DOJ) sued the GaDOE, alleging that the state was unnecessarily segregating those children and not offering them basic amenities or educational opportunities on par with nondisabled students.[128] Since the DOJ's action, the GaDOE and GNETS have pursued a program of action to improve their instructional and therapeutic services. The results of these efforts are not yet available to the public.

124 CWLA. n.d. Georgia's Children 2015. Retrieved from www.cwla.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/2015-State-Fact-Sheet-Georgia-.pdf.
125 GOSA k-12 report card. 2013–2016. Retrieved from gaawards.gosa.ga.gov/analytics/saw.dll?dashboard.
126 Georgia Department of Education. n.d. Georgia High School Graduation Requirements [PowerPoint presentation]. Retrieved from archives.doe.k12.ga.us/DMGetDocument.aspx/Georgia_High_School_Graduation_Requirements_3-10.pdf?p=6CC6799F8C1371F6FF3B361EE4785D3399CF106AC43568396816C7FA914AE7B7&Type=D.
127 Samuels, C. 2015, June 9. Diplomas and Special Education: Different State Policies, Different Results [Weblog post]. Retrieved from blogs.edweek.org/edweek/speced/2015/06/diplomas_and_special_education.html.
128 Brown, E. 2016, August 23. Justice Department Sues Georgia over Segregation of Students with Disabilities. Retrieved from *The Washington Post:* www.washingtonpost.com/news/education/wp/2016/08/23/justice-department-sues-georgia-over-segregation-of-students-with-disabilities/?utm_term=.12a1522024ef.

Overlapping Subgroups

The subgroups detailed above represent some of the highest risk groups for not completing high school. Importantly, these subgroups often overlap. That is, students involved in foster care or DJJ tend to have higher absenteeism because of their involvement with the state. They switch schools more often than their peers, interrupting their education. These trends lead to lower graduation outcomes. Additionally, students who are involved with DJJ have a higher incidence of disabilities like language disorders than their non-offending peers.[129] Low-income communities have a higher incidence of crime[130] as well as of untreated disabilities.[131] To address the missing 20% of high school graduates, these subgroups and their overlap must be understood, and appropriate interventions put in place to keeps students in the birth-to-workforce pipeline.

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) articulates a goal of serving all students, including the 20% who are still not completing high school in Georgia. Sections of the state's ESSA plan are designed around assessments and an accountability strategy to identify the most seriously struggling schools and subgroups of students. Georgia is required to set goals for all student subgroups (including graduation levels), schools, and districts. For more on ESSA, see Issue 10 – The Every Student Succeeds Act – What's Next for Georgia.

Georgia's ESSA plan is built around cultivating the whole child and addressing some of the challenges described above. Doing so includes accounting for attendance, reporting school climate, and investing in Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports within each district and every school. These are strong, ongoing supports for our students.

Local communities are also addressing some of these issues. For example, operating in Fulton County since 1991, Truancy Intervention Project Georgia ("TIP") focuses on children in the Atlanta and Fulton County Public School Systems who are chronically absent from school and, as a result, either become involved in the juvenile court or are referred for early intervention at the elementary school level. This program partners volunteer attorneys with children who have been charged with a truancy offense in the Fulton County Juvenile Court. These pro bono attorneys serve not only as legal advocates to the children but also as adult mentors who, often joined by paralegals and others, regularly meet with and visit the child, exploring and addressing the child's concerns and issues, often the root cause of the truancy.[132]

The needs of very vulnerable students, including foster youth, those with chronic health conditions, and those involved with the justice system, need to be directly addressed. Early interventions, especially for very young children in foster care, must be built. This includes shoring up mental health support for children and youth, and addressing how disabilities are diagnosed and treated, especially among low-income and minority populations.

Importantly, ABC issues can stem from a range of sources that can vary among communities. It is incumbent upon each school and community to examine the root causes affecting these vulnerable students and work collectively to address them.

129 Anderson, S., D. Hawes, and P. Snow. 2016, April 12. *Language Impairments Among Youth Offenders: A Systematic Review.* Retrieved from isiarticles.com/bundles/Article/pre/pdf/75856.pdf.

130 Harris, B.H., and M.S. Kearney. 2014, April 28. The Unequal Burden of Crime and Incarceration on America's Poor. *Brookings.* Retrieved from www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2014/04/28/the-unequal-burden-of-crime-and-incarceration-on-americas-poor/.

131 Patel, V., R. Araya, S. Chatterjee, D. Chisholm, A. Cohen, M. De Silva, C. Hosman, H. McGuire, G. Rojas, and M. van Ommeren. 2007. Treatment and Prevention of Mental Health Disorders in Low-Income and Middle-Income Countries. The Lancet 370(9591), 991–1005. Retrieved from www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140673607612409.

132 See www.atlantabar.org/?428.

Nationally, foster youth, those involved with the justice system, students with disabilities, and low-income students are highly likely to drop out of high school. To continue to improve Georgia's high school graduation rate, the state needs to fully understand these students and what appropriate, effective steps might be put in place to keep them on track to graduate. Successfully completing high school and some form of post-secondary education, and engaging in the healthy economic lifecycle, all benefit individuals and their families. These individual advantages then add to the health of the communities in which they live and ultimately accrue benefits across the state. The economic viability of Georgia's future depends on reaching the missing 20%.

ISSUE 6

Georgia's Talent Gap: Time to Close It

ISSUE OVERVIEW

Key goals of the public education system are to help students plan for their next steps in life and to prepare them for college and careers. It is important for school systems to offer students clear pathways for post-secondary success. Over time, the needs of the workforce change, and the education system must stay abreast of these changes to provide students with their best chance for success. EdQuest Georgia best practice research found that clear pathways to post-secondary success was one of seven core policy areas that high-performing systems had in common.

Economic opportunities are on the rise in Georgia as the economy is expanding. Employer job postings have grown over 150% since 2010, outpacing the national growth rate.[133] Meanwhile, Georgia ranks 34th among states for unemployment. Though the number of jobs available is increasing, many potential workers are unemployed or underemployed. These factors indicate that Georgia is experiencing a talent gap, meaning there is a mismatch between the degrees and skills needed by employers and those held by the population.

To ensure that Georgia continues to have a prepared workforce and economic opportunities for all, the state must have policies in place that support career education and college preparation, and innovative programs that promote and ensure post-secondary achievement.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

It's a statistic that we all know well. By 2020, 60% of jobs in Georgia will require some form of post-secondary education, ranging from a certificate to a university degree.[134] Georgia has set a goal to increase the number of post-secondary graduates by 250,000 by the year 2025.

In recent years, Georgia has been aggressively putting in place multiple pathways for post-secondary success to achieve this goal and close the talent gap. The state has been focusing on increasing the rigor of traditional pathways to high school graduation, readying students for post-secondary education, and implementing innovative programs that blend high school, career, and post-secondary education.

Pathways

The Georgia Department of Education requires high school students to complete a career pathway in order to graduate. The most robust of these are in Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education fields, or CTAE. There are 17 career clusters within CTAE, offering students a way to focus on a particular field and get a head start on some of the skills they may be required to pursue in post-secondary education or employment after high school. Students can graduate

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

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

from high school having already completed occupational or state assessments and having earned industry credentials. The state has worked hard to involve industries in mapping out these pathways so that students graduate with the right skills and credentials to give them the foundation they need to thrive in their chosen career pathway. In 2017, for students within the CTAE clusters, the graduation rate was an impressive 96%.

Dual Enrollment

Dual enrollment allows current high school students to begin college-level courses, letting them graduate from high school already on a higher education path. They leave high school with college credits for each course completed that transfer seamlessly into post-secondary study. The program has seen remarkable growth in recent years, offering Georgia's students a head start on earning a higher education credential for no additional cost to them or their families.

The Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) released a snapshot of post-secondary outcomes for dual enrollment public high school students from 2007 to 2016. Immediately obvious is the expansion and growth of the dual enrollment program, which has accelerated over the last five years. During this time frame, Georgia has instituted multiple policies to expand the dual enrollment program and increase access. In the 2015–2016 school year, 23,693 Georgia high school students participated in dual enrollment. This represents a 181% increase from 2011–2012, when dual enrollment participation was at its lowest[135]

Other significant trends are summarized in Table 6.1.[136] More females than males are enrolled in dual enrollment programs, as has been the case throughout the GOSA study period. Of potential concern is the distribution of dual enrollment participants by race and income. White students are overrepresented in current dual enrollment programs, compared to their presence in public schools, while black student participation in dual enrollment has been on the decline. Low-income students, designated by free and reduced-price lunch eligibility, are underrepresented in dual enrollment courses, though the gap has narrowed.[137, 138]

TABLE 6.1 Demographic Trends in Dual Enrollment Students 2007 to 2016[139]

		2007-08	2011-12	2015-16
Female	Dual Enrollment	56%	62%	62%
	Public High School Students	50%	50%	50%
Male	Dual Enrollment	44%	38%	39%
	Public High School Students	50%	50%	50%
Black	Dual Enrollment	34%	27%	28%
	Public High School Students	40%	39%	38%
Hispanic	Dual Enrollment	3%	5%	7%
	Public High School Students	7%	10%	13%
Asian	Dual Enrollment	2%	4%	4%
	Public High School Students	3%	3%	4%
White	Dual Enrollment	59%	61%	58%
	Public High School Students	47%	45%	43%
FRL*	Dual Enrollment	39%	39%	52%
	Public High School Students	44%	53%	58%

***FRL=free and reduced-price lunch, a proxy measure for low-income students.**

135 Governor's Office of Student Achievement. 2017. Dual Enrollment and Postsecondary Outcomes. Retrieved from gosa.georgia.gov/sites/gosa.georgia.gov/files/related_files/site_page/Dual%20Enrollment%20and%20Postsecondary%20Outcomes%20Report%20Summary%2011092017%20final.pdf.

136 Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017.

137 Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017.

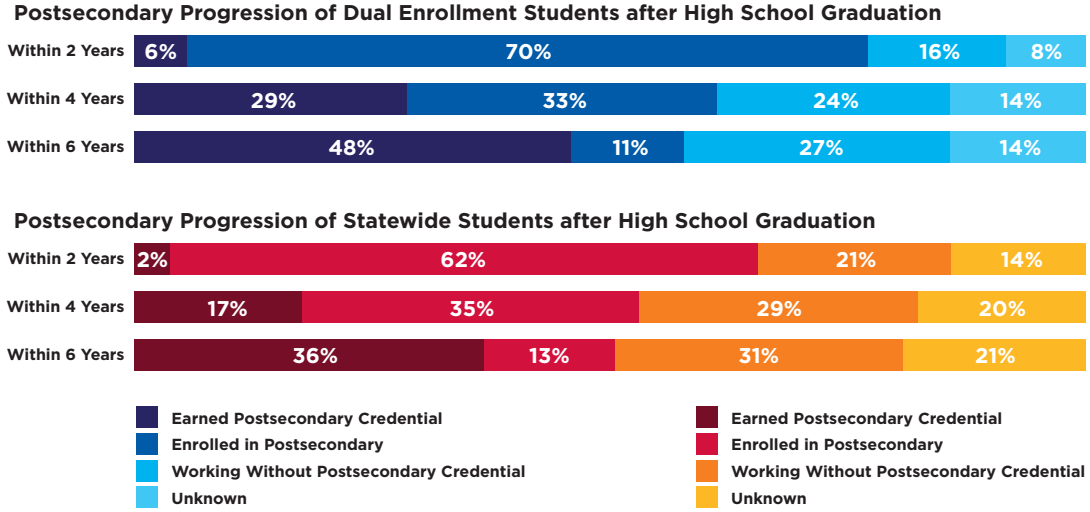
138 GOSA acknowledges that this change may have been affected by the increase in schoolwide free lunch designation related to a change in federal law.

139 Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017.

In terms of outcomes, dual enrollment students are a high-achieving cohort, with a 94% graduation rate. As GOSA notes, however, "This pattern does not necessarily indicate that dual enrollment increases a student's chance of graduating from high school. Students must meet minimal post-secondary entrance requirements to become eligible for dual enrollment courses, which means they are already performing at a level higher than peers not eligible for dual enrollment."[140]

Once dual enrollment students have left high school, long-term trends indicate that most enroll in post-secondary education and achieve a post-secondary credential at higher rates than the general high school graduate population. See Figure 6.1.

FIGURE 6.1 Postsecondary Progression of Dual Enrollment and Statewide High School Graduates[141]



Looking at the graduating class of 2015, 83% of dual enrollment graduates enrolled in some kind of higher education within a year of graduation. The same could only be said of 64% of overall high school graduates.[142] This gap has widened steadily since 2008. Dual enrollment students are increasingly enrolling in Georgia public four-year colleges and universities as well. While more of these students are also enrolling in technical schools, these raw numbers represent an increasingly smaller percentage of overall dual enrollment high school graduates.

Addressing the Talent Gap

To address the talent gap in Georgia, Governor Deal created the High Demand Career Initiative (HDCI) in 2014.[143] This initiative creates open, ongoing dialog between major Georgia industries and employers, and state entities such as the Governor's Office of Workforce Development, the University System of Georgia, and the Technical College System of Georgia. HDCI allows workforce pipeline strategies to be expanded, with industry feedback.[144] Industries identify the types of workers they need and are struggling to find as well as the skills relevant credentials should cover. State and educational policymakers can then create informed pathways to respond to these needs in a variety of ways, from high school to post-secondary education.

140 Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017.
141 Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017.
142 Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017.
143 See www.georgia.org/competitive-advantages/workforce-division/programs-initiatives/high-demand-career-initiative-hdci/.
144 Middle Georgia CEO. 2016, March 31. Q&A with High Demand Career Initiative Program Manager Jamie Jordan. Retrieved from middlegeorgiaceo.com/news/2016/03/q-high-demand-career-initiative-program-manager-jamie-jordan/.

As Georgia moves to increase the number of students successfully transitioning into post-secondary education for a degree, it must be noted that having a credential is not the same as having the *right* credential. To address the talent gap, not just any credential will do. Having a degree will not qualify a job-seeker for any job that requires a degree; having a certificate in the sought-after subject may not qualify a candidate for a position requiring a higher degree; completing a higher degree saddles students with potentially crippling debt when the available job openings only ask for a certificate and the pay level they offer is not commensurate with the debt that students have amassed.

As stated above, post-secondary completion is important in Georgia for closing the talent gap. However, enrollment and even completion alone will not close the gap. People must study a field and attain a level of education (certificate, associate degree, bachelor's degree, etc.) that matches job openings and economic trends for the state in order for the talent gap to shrink.

In 2017, the Atlanta Regional Commission released research tracking the jobs available in Georgia, their pay, the credentials they require, and the corresponding graduates in the state, along with their level of education.

Figure 6.2 compares the most-conferred certificates in Georgia in 2015–2016 to the demand for entry-level positions that require those certificates. Figure 6.3 does the same for associate degrees, and Figure 6.4 for bachelor's degrees. For example, the figures indicate strong employer demand for certificates in business, management, and marketing. The highest-earning business administration certificates in Georgia qualify applicants for jobs that pay just over $27,000 one year after graduation.[145] For business operations, that wage goes down to approximately $14,000 a year,[146] about $10,000 below the living wage line for Georgia. Thus, while there is a significant demand for applicants who have earned a certificate in business, all certificates and their resulting career paths are not equal.

Similarly, while health care professionals are among the most in-demand occupations in the state, with all data suggesting this demand will continue, the level of education that is in demand is the bachelor's degree. For certificates and associate degrees, the supply actually surpasses employer demand. Thus, if a student is considering a post-secondary program at the associate level, a nursing degree will not be in great demand, even though health care is one of the most undersupplied fields in the state as a whole. At the associate level, a student hoping to be well-positioned in the Georgia job market would be better served studying business, transportation and materials moving, or construction.

145 Atlanta Regional Commission. 2017. Georgia: Your Talent, Your Future 2.0.
146 Atlanta Regional Commission, 2017.

FIGURE 6.2 Certification Talent Gap[147]

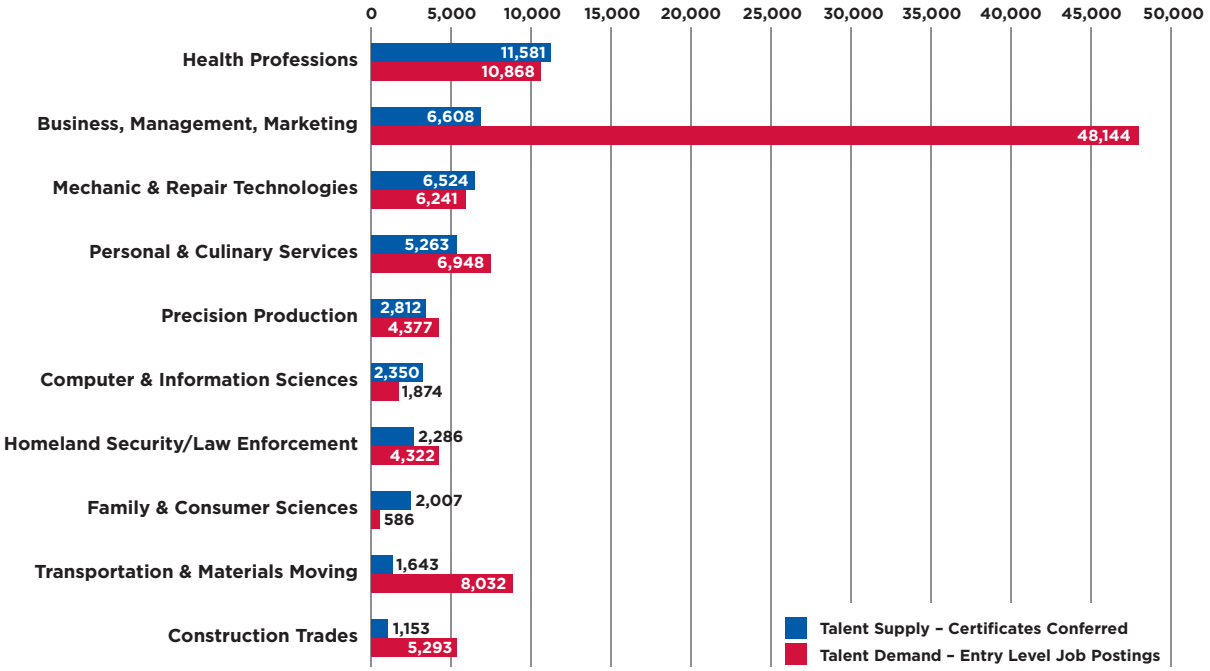
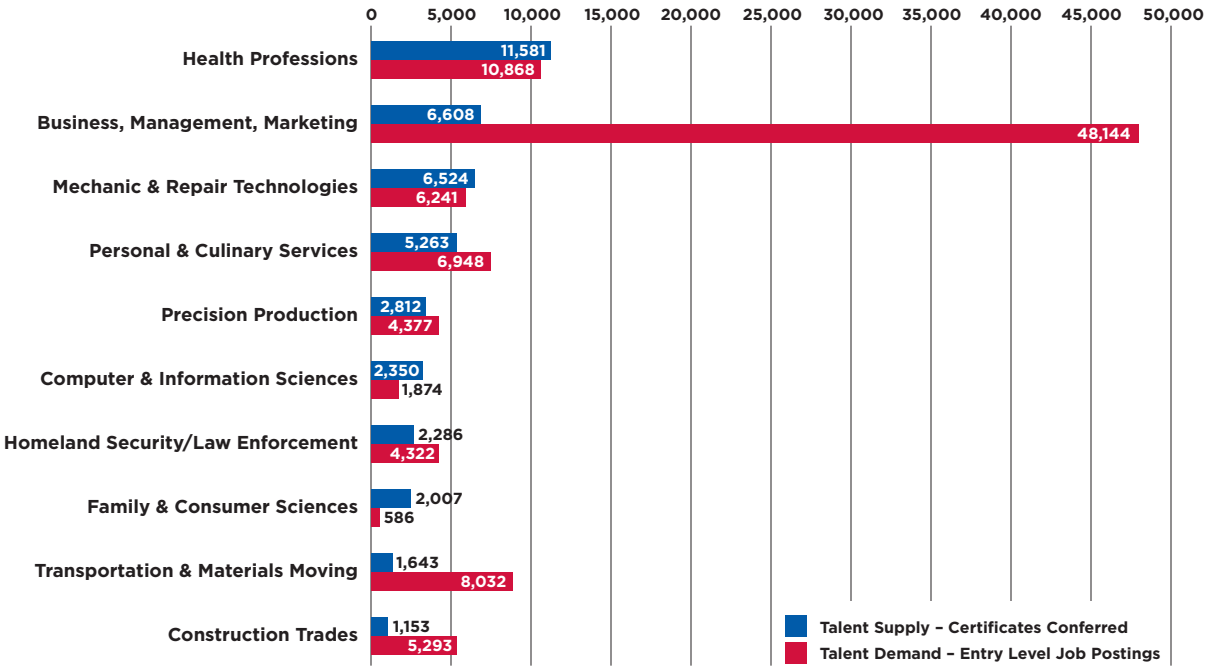
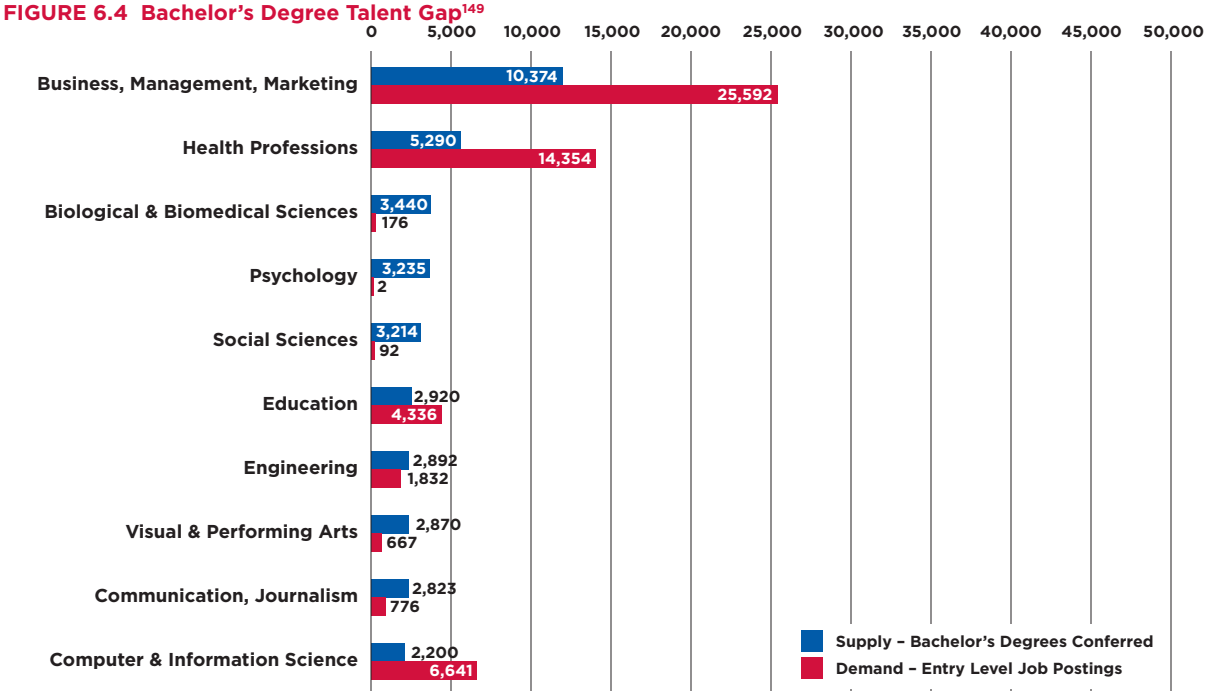


FIGURE 6.3 Associate's Degree Talent Gap[148]



147 Atlanta Regional Commission, 2017.
148 Atlanta Regional Commission, 2017.

FIGURE 6.4 Bachelor's Degree Talent Gap[149]



ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

As previously stated, to ensure that Georgia continues to have a prepared workforce and economic opportunities for all, the state must have policies in place that support career education and college preparation as well as innovative programs that promote and ensure post-secondary achievement.

To accomplish this, EdQuest Georgia recommends that the state "continue to promote and expand high school graduation pathways and CTAE programs." As it does so, Georgia must pay attention to the impact of dual enrollment and any potential unintended consequences on equity. These programs are designed to give students a more efficient pathway to complete a post-secondary credential or degree. The increased enrollments in post-secondary education support that. Graduation pathways and CTAE programs offer a cost-effective and efficient pathway for success, especially for low-income and minority students—the population of students who are less likely to complete post-secondary work.

If functioning as intended, dual enrollment programs would help close the opportunity gap for these low-income and minority students. However, if current trends persist, a disproportionate number of white, non-low-income students are more likely to take advantage of this opportunity. That trend will further increase the opportunity gap.

Closing the talent gap in Georgia will take a multipronged approach. Programs like HDCI are a great first step. In addition, Georgia recently announced the expansion of the HOPE Career Grant.[150] This grant provides free tuition for 12 high-demand programs of study such as early childhood education, health sciences, and industrial maintenance. Starting in January 2018,

149 Atlanta Regional Commission, 2017.
150 Demuth, M. 2017, November 20. HOPE Career Grants Expanded [Weblog post]. *Georgia Trend.* Retrieved from georgiatrendblog.com/hope-career-grants-expanded/.

five new programs will also be covered by the grant. These additions represent some of the fastest-growing industries in the state. HOPE Career Grants can only be applied to diplomas and certificates, and do not require a specific high school GPA for grantees to qualify. This program is a valuable resource for Georgia and its workforce, and should continue to be supported and expanded.

In addition, information about the details of the workforce landscape must be made widely available and put into the hands of parents, students, and counselors at critical decision moments when mapping out career pathways or dual enrollment courses before high school graduation. Informed decisions coming from the workforce pipeline based on the state's workforce needs allow more alignment between the two. One resource is the Georgia Higher Learning and Earning (GHLE) dashboard: learnearn.gosa.ga.gov/, administered by GOSA. The GHLE compares wages by degree type, program of study, and one and five years after college graduation.

Finally, the state should increase its focus on nontraditional students. To reach Georgia's goal of 250,000 new post-secondary graduates by 2025, a significant portion will have to come from part-time students, adult learners, and former students with some college credit who are encouraged to return to complete their higher education. These recommendations are echoed by EdQuest and represent a true opportunity for the state. The mismatch between available jobs and qualified applicants cannot be filled by students coming through the K-12 pipeline today; there simply are not enough of them. Georgia must get more people back into the workforce pipeline by expanding adult education programs offered by the Technical College System of Georgia, or the "Go Back. Move Ahead" program designed to reengage higher education noncompleters.

Georgia is moving in a positive direction to ensure an internationally competitive, educated citizenry. The state has increased academic expectations of its students and educators. As a result, more students are graduating from high school and going on to post-secondary education. To be a global leader, however, Georgia must take its education system to the next level, broaden the student base to include nontraditional and adult students, and support career development activities that tie post-secondary education more closely to the employment demands of the state.

ISSUE 7

Literacy: A Foundational Necessity

ISSUE OVERVIEW

How important is literacy? For many, literacy is considered a fundamental human right. It is the basis for any individual's ability to learn.[151] Literacy encompasses more than just being able to read, but rather one's ability to use written information to function in modern society.

Research has shown that individuals with good literacy skills have an overall higher quality of life, including being more likely to be employed, earn higher wages, live longer, and raise healthy children. Having a population with high literacy skills also helps a city, region, state, and the country as a whole. Regions with strong literacy skills generally have increased life expectancy, reduced child mortality rates, and overall economic growth.[152]

Conversely, a lack of vital literacy skills holds a person back at every stage of life. Students who cannot read proficiently by the end of third grade are more likely to experience poor health, have discipline problems, perform poorly in eighth-grade math, and drop out of high school compared to proficient readers.[153] Young adults are more likely to be locked out of the job market, and parents are not able to support their own children's learning. The most significant predictor of a child's literacy is the literacy level of his or her mother.[154]

These outcomes impact Georgia's competitiveness and economic development as well. A study conducted by Deloitte for the Literacy For All Fund estimated the following:[155]

- Approximately 1 in 6 Georgia adults have low literacy skills.
- Adults with low literacy cost Georgia approximately $1.26 billion annually in social service expenses and lost tax revenues.

The economic returns to education, both for the individual and for economies, has been studied extensively. Education level in general is a significant determinant of individual income. However, studies have recently shown that literacy has a positive effect on earnings beyond the impact of the quantity of schooling.[156] Education is viewed as the great equalizer and mobilizer of upward mobility in American society. A solid foundation in literacy is the primary driver of overall education success.

151 United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. 2006. *Education for All: Global Education Monitoring Report.* Retrieved from en.unesco.org/gem-report/report/2006/literacy-life.
152 United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2006.
153 Get Georgia Reading Campaign. 2016. Get Georgia Reading Campaign Overview Presentation. Retrieved from Community Action T oolkit: getgeorgiareading.org/resources-overview/community-action-toolkit/.
154 ProLiteracy America. 2003. *US Adult Literacy Programs: Making a Difference, A Review of Research on Positive Outcomes Achieved by Literacy Programs and the People They Serve.* Retrieved from www.proliteracy.org: literacyconnects.org/img/2011/11/US-Adult-Lit-Programs-Making-a-Difference-Research-review.pdf.
155 Deloitte. (2017). The State of Literacy in Georgia: Action Needed for Georgia's Thriving Workforce and Economy. Atlanta: Literacy For All.
156 United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2006.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

To address the needs of its citizenry, Georgia has embarked on a series of education reforms. The state is working to transform its public education system so that every student who graduates from high school is successful in college and their chosen career, and is competitive with their peers throughout the country and the world. The full potential of these reforms can only be realized if they are based on a solid foundation of literacy.

Third-Grade Reading

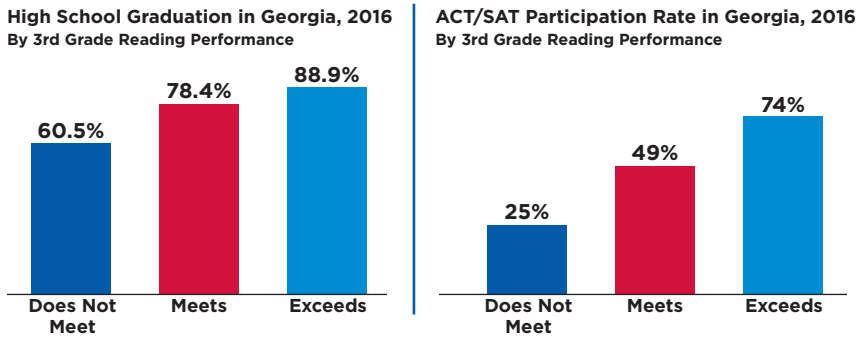
Much has been made about the importance of reading on grade level by the end of third grade and its link to academic success. As summarized by the Get Georgia Reading Campaign,

> The end of third grade marks the critical time when children shift from learning to read to reading to learn. Children unable to make this shift face serious barriers for future learning, because they can't grasp half of the printed fourth-grade curriculum and beyond, including math and science. As a result, these children fall even further behind.[157]

Reading proficiency by the end of third grade is not just a data point in time that students either meet or do not meet. In research terms, it is both a lagging indicator—a measure that focuses on a result or output—and a leading indicator that predicts future events and can be used as a predictor. As a lagging indicator, third-grade reading is a marker for how well a system has prepared its youngest citizens to engage in the next step of their education—reading to learn. As a leading indicator, it denotes important information about the birth-to-work pipeline, the strength of the future workforce, and the general health and welfare of the citizenry.

In 2017, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) studied the relationship between third-grade reading proficiency and later academic success by analyzing student data from third grade through high school graduation. The study found that, in Georgia, students who earned higher scores on their third-grade end-of-grade reading assessment had higher high school graduation rates, were more likely to take the SAT or ACT, and had higher average SAT and ACT scores.[158] See Figure 7.1.

FIGURE 7.1 Third Grade End-of-Grade Reading Assessment by Exceeds, Meets, and Does Not Meet[159]



157 Get Georgia Reading. Common Agenda Overview. Retrieved from getgeorgiareading.org/common-agenda/common-agendaoverview/.

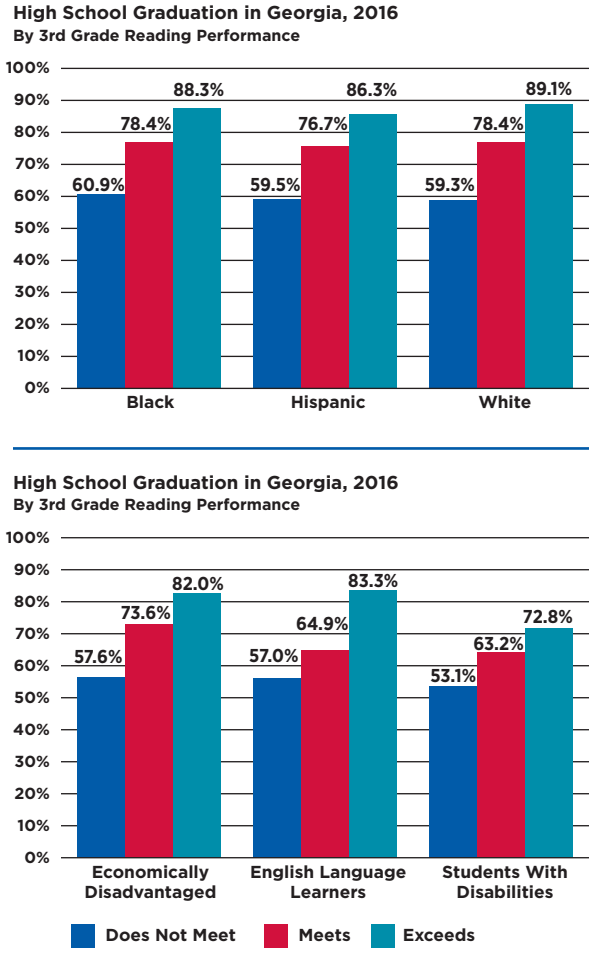
158 Beaudette, P., K. Chalasani, and S. Rauschenberg. 2017, March. *How Do Students' 3rd Grade Reading Levels Relate to their ACT/SAT Performance and Chance of Graduating from High School?* Retrieved from Governor's Office of Student Achievement: gosa.georgia.gov/research-report.

159 Beaudette, Chalasani, and Rauschenberg, 2017.

Literacy, as measured by third-grade proficiency, is clearly correlated with better long-term education outcomes for students. The GOSA study revealed that a strong foundation in literacy eliminated the achievement gaps found among Georgia's minority and low-income students. (For more on Georgia's achievement gaps, see Issue 2 – Equity and Fairness). The outcomes related to high school graduation, ACT/SAT participation rates, and ACT/SAT scores were consistent regardless of student race/ethnicity, gender, poverty status, English language learner (ELL) status, and disability status.[160]

As shown in Figure 7.2, the high school graduation rates of white students and black students were nearly identical based on their mastery of reading by the end of third grade. The same holds true for economically disadvantaged students, ELLs, and (to a slightly lesser extent) students with disabilities.

FIGURE 7.2 Third Grade End-of-Grade Reading Assessment by Exceeds, Meets, and Does Not Meet by Student Subgroup and High School Graduation[161]



Impacts of Low Literacy

Early literacy and language development is not just predictive of future academic success. Related to that success, literacy is associated with many learning challenges students and their schools face today. Language development is the foundation for social, emotional, and mental health development—all of which impact a student's ability to learn. It is estimated that 12% of students entering school across the US have a language impairment, putting them at greater risk for social, emotional, and behavioral problems.[162]

Moreover, language ability significantly predicts the development of attention deficits and behavioral problems, more so than gender, ethnicity, or poverty. Language development is also a stronger predictor of behavioral problems later in life than current behavioral problems impact later language ability.[163]

160 Beaudette, Chalasani, and Rauschenberg, 2017.
161 Beaudette, Chalasani, and Rauschenberg, 2017.
162 Rvachew, S. 2010. Language Development and Literacy. *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development.* Canada.
163 Petersen, I.T., J.E. Bates, B.M. D'Onofrio, C.A. Coyne, J.E. Lansford, K.A. Dodge, ... C.A. Van Hulle. 2013. Language Ability Predicts the Development of Behavior Problems in Children. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 122(2), 542–557. DOI: 10.1037/a0031963.

Statistics show that language impairments are significant factors among Georgia's students who struggle the most.

- Children in foster care are twice as likely to suffer a language impairment as their counterparts.[164]
- Youth in the juvenile justice system are up to five times more likely than their non-offending peers to have a language disability, reducing their ability to benefit from talk-based therapies designed to reduce recidivism.[165]
- More than two-thirds of youth in secure detention facilities had below-average language skills.[166]

Finally, children with a speech and language impairment, compared to children without such impairments, are[167]

- five times more likely to experience neglect and physical abuse,
- nearly three times more likely to experience sexual abuse, and
- nearly seven times more likely to experience emotional maltreatment.

Researchers now understand the long-term medical, cognitive, social, and emotional impacts of these types of events into adulthood.[168] Children exposed to stresses and traumas are at an exponentially higher risk of learning and behavioral problems than children who are not—51% versus 3%.[169]

Get Georgia Reading

In 2017, 36% of Georgia third-graders scored at least proficient on the English/language arts end-of-grade assessment.[170] Georgia has been working across a number of fronts to dramatically increase that number. The most prominent of these efforts is Get Georgia Reading—the Campaign for Grade Level Reading. The campaign strives to ensure that all children are on a path to reading proficiently by the end of third grade. To achieve this objective, the campaign created a common agenda based on four research pillars that combine to create the foundations necessary for student success:[171]

1. **Language Nutrition:** All children receive abundant, language-rich adult-child interactions, which are as critical for brain development as healthy food is for physical growth.
2. **Access:** All children and their families have year-round access to, and supportive services for, healthy physical and social-emotional development and success in high-quality early childhood and elementary education.
3. **Positive Learning Climate:** All educators, families, and policymakers understand and address the impact of learning climate on social-emotional development, attendance, engagement, academic achievement, and ultimately student success.
4. **Teacher Preparation and Effectiveness:** All teachers of children ages zero to eight are equipped with evidence-informed skills, knowledge, and resources that effectively meet the literacy needs of each child in a developmentally appropriate manner.

164 Hollo, A., J.H. Wheby, and R.M. Oliver. 2014. Unidentified Language Deficits in Children with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders: A Meta-Analysis. *Council for Exceptional Children* 80(2).

165 Hopkins. T., J. Clegg, and J. Stackhouse. 2017. Examining the Association Between Language, Expository Discourse and Offending Behaviour: An Investigation of Direction, Strength and Independence. *International Journal of Language and Communications Disorder.* DOI: 10.1111/1460-6984.12330.

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

167 Sullivan, P.M., and J.F. Knuton. 2000. Maltreatment and Disabilities: A Population-Based Epidemiological Study. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 24(10) 1257–1273.

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

169 Yu, E., and P. Cantor. 2013. *Turnaround for Children in Poverty, Stress, Schools: Implications for Research, Practice and Assessment.* New York: TurnAround: Partners in School Transformation.

170 Beginning in the 2014–2015 school year, Georgia implemented the new Georgia Milestones Assessment System, which changed proficiency categories from three (does not meet, meets, and exceeds) to four (beginning learner, developing learner, proficient learner, and distinguished learner).

171 See getgeorgiareading.org/common-agenda/common-agenda-overview/.

The campaign's work is guided by the collective voice of 21 high-level statewide public/private organization leaders.[172] These leaders work across agencies and organizations to implement each of the four pillars at the systems level. The Get Georgia Reading Campaign also consists of more than 60 partner organizations focused on investing and implementing strategies around the four pillars into communities across the state.

The Sandra Dunagan Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy was established in 2017 at Georgia College. This center will work with universities, technical colleges, early childhood education programs, alternative educator preparation programs, and other public and private stakeholders to engage the community at large around the importance of grade-level reading. Its mission is to improve Georgia's literacy rate by promoting research-based practices for children from birth to age eight and providing professional learning and training to educators in K-3 classrooms, child care centers, and preschools.[173]

Relatedly, the Early Language and Literacy Mini-Grant Program was launched in August 2017. This program is a joint effort between GOSA and the Sandra Dunagan Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy. Grants ranging from $5,000 to $20,000 will be awarded to support innovative projects that develop or strengthen community initiatives targeting at least one of the four pillars of the Get Georgia Reading Campaign: language nutrition, access, positive learning climate, or teacher preparation and effectiveness.

GOSA also offers other grant programs aimed at grade-level reading.

- **GOSA Innovation Fund Grant Program –** A competitive funding program that targets the root causes of challenging and complex problems in one of four priority areas: applied learning with a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, the arts, mathematics) education focus, blended and personalized learning, teacher and leader development for high-need schools, and birth-to–age eight language and literacy development.
- **RESA Growing Readers Program –** A K-3 literacy professional learning grant that aims to provide consistent and high-quality professional development to teachers on effective reading instruction to help more children read at grade level by the end of third grade.
- **Reading Mentors Program –** A reading instruction mentor program that provides language and literacy specialists to serve districts and schools with varied socioeconomic and academic backgrounds.
- **Words2Reading –** The Words2Reading website has curated resources for families, caregivers, and teachers to help develop and sharpen early childhood language and literacy skills.

These are only a few examples of the focused attention that Georgia is paying to the issue of literacy. However, there is more work to be done and further opportunities to continue to ensure that literacy is guaranteed for all Georgians.

172 Cabinet members include the Alliance of Education agency heads, the Annie E. Casey Foundation – Atlanta Civic Site, the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, Governor Nathan Deal, First Lady Sandra Deal, the Department of Community Health, the Division of Family and Children Services, the Georgia Department of Education, the Georgia Department of Public Health, the Georgia Early Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS), the Georgia Family Connection Partnership, the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, the Georgia Professional Standards Commission, the Georgia Public Library, the Georgia School Superintendents Association, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, the Marcus Autism Center, Polk Family Connection, the Rollins Center for Language and Literacy at the Atlanta Speech School, the Technical College System of Georgia, and Voices for Georgia's Children.

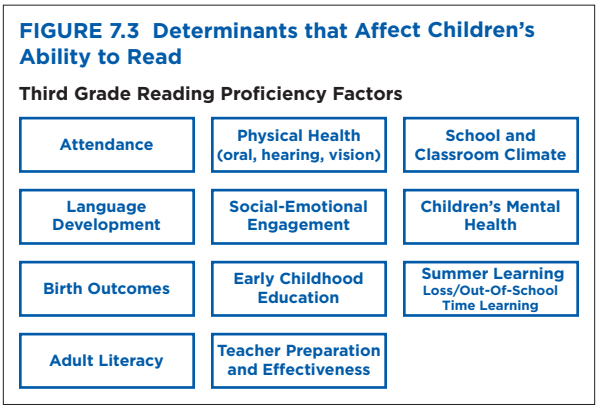
173 See galiteracycenter.org/.

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

The Get Georgia Reading Campaign has used the percentage of third-graders reading on grade level as a lagging indicator, an outcome measure of the foundations for learning Georgia provides its students. To move the needle on grade-level reading, the campaign has identified several underlying factors, shown in Figure 7.3, that affect children's ability to read.

Campaign partners and stakeholders across Georgia have been working on formulating and implementing policies and programs, both at the state and local levels, to mitigate the impact of these factors on literacy. As they do so, it is important to remember that Georgia must work on two tracks simultaneously: (1) sustaining and expanding the effective programs that are already in place and (2) focusing on what is next, including identifying what is missing.

FIGURE 7.3 Determinants that Affect Children's Ability to Read



One determinant that Georgia is already effectively addressing is school and classroom climate. Georgia is integrating strategies from the preschool model of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) into a schoolwide model. 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.[174] The Metropolitan Regional Education Service Agency, the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), and the Georgia Department of Education are leveraging the state's investment in PBIS with funding from the David, Helen, and Marian Woodward Fund – Atlanta. By integrating practices from the preschool PBIS model into the schoolwide model, these partners are developing a new, scalable approach aimed at supporting the social-emotional development of children across their first eight years of life.

Adult literacy is another issue that Georgia must also focus on with greater urgency. There is a proven relationship between adult illiteracy, poverty, and educational outcomes for children. Children whose parents have low literacy levels have a 72% chance of being at the lowest reading levels themselves.[175] In Georgia, 20% of the adult population lacks basic literacy skills. In 32 of 159 counties (20%) more than 40% of the adult population lacks these basic skills.[176] Georgia has the ninth-highest percentage of adults in the US between the ages of 18 and 64 *without* a high school diploma or GED.[177]

The Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) has awarded nearly 160,000 GED diplomas since 2006.[178] However, more can be done in the area of adult literacy. The TCSG also coordinates multiple adult learning programs such as Accelerating Opportunity and the Certified Literate Community program, which is a collaboration with the Council on Adult Literacy. The TCSG also focuses on adult learners in the workplace. Successful programs such as these can be further leveraged to reach a broader population so all have access to the opportunities provided by post-secondary training.

174 See galiteracycenter.org/.
175 ProLiteracy. 2016, November 1. US Adult Literacy Facts. Retrieved from Proliteracy Education Network: proliteracy.org/Resources/Adult-Literacy-Facts.
176 National Center for Education Statistics. 2016, November 1. *State and County Estimates of Low Literacy, Georgia.* Retrieved from National Assessment of Adult Literacy: nces.ed.gov/naal/estimates/StateEstimates.aspx.
177 Johnson, M. 2015, August. *Improved Adult Education Support Critical to Georgia's Bottom Line.* Retrieved from the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute: gbpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Improved-Adult-Education-Support-Critical-to-Georgia%E2%80%99s-Bottom-Line.pdf.
178 Technical College System of Georgia. 2017. Technical College System of Georgia Fast Facts and College Directoy 2015–2016.

As previously stated, only 36% of Georgia third-graders scored at least proficient on the English/language arts end-of-grade assessment. As a leading indicator, this low percentage portends problems for Georgia's birth-to-work pipeline, the strength of the future workforce, and the general health and welfare of its citizens. To respond to this issue, Literacy For All, a donor-advised fund of the Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta, came together with support from the Georgia Chamber of Commerce and the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education to convene a business-led delegation, the Georgia Literacy Commission (GLC). The GLC is composed of chief executive officers, high-ranking business executives, and government agency heads from across the state. The GLC's mission is to explore the lifecycle of low literacy, understand root causes, and determine levers for positive change. Throughout the summer and fall of 2017, the GLC sought to identify sustainable, practical, aligned, and actionable solutions that could be executed at the state and local levels.

The GLC united many organizations and efforts to raise yet more awareness and collective work to address the root causes of low literacy. It produced a series of recommendations that are community-driven and incorporate a multigenerational approach to improve the trajectory of literacy for all students. One highlighted area of need is adult literacy. Specifically, the GLC recommended the creation of a multipronged public awareness campaign around adult literacy and private funding for community-based adult literacy education programs.

The EdQuest Georgia (See Issue 1) best practice research indicates that the most successful education systems view core areas as a coherent system, with each area working hand-in-hand with the others. This is clearly illustrated as education systems work to address literacy. Many of the determinants of reading on grade level can be found in a strong foundational system: quality early learning, health, and family supports; supportive learning environments that embrace positive school climate; quality teacher trainings that focus on literacy; advanced instructional systems that prioritize early literacy, so children can learn to read in order to read to learn; and clear pathways to post-secondary education so literate adults can raise literate children.

The work of the GLC highlighted gaps in Georgia's approach to ensuring all citizens are literate, particularly in the area of adult literacy. In the way successful education systems view education as a coherent and integrated system, Georgia's work around literacy must do the same. One option is to expand the mission of the Get Georgia Reading Campaign. Grade-level reading is an indicator—a leading indicator—of adult literacy. Expanding the scope of the campaign to include adult literacy would bring powerful leverage to this issue.

Georgia has invested in an economic development plan based on a diversified economy that includes trade and transportation, a growing high-tech sector, and natural resources. The state is predicted to add 1.5 million new jobs by 2020, nearly 60% of which will require some sort of education beyond high school. The current skill level of Georgia's workforce does not meet the growing needs of this ambitious plan for the state's economic development. A focus on the literacy of all the state's citizens by addressing the factors that impact literacy in young children and increasing access to literacy programs for adults would significantly close the skills gap our state faces.

ISSUE 8

Student Health: A Pathway to Classroom Success

ISSUE OVERVIEW

For students to be successful in school, they need to be healthy. While this seems like an obvious statement, research has highlighted the direct links between student outcomes and all aspects of health: physical, vision, hearing, oral, nutritional, and mental health. Consider the following:

- Visual functioning level significantly predicts academic performance in school-age children.[179]
- Nearly 15% of children between ages six and 19 have a hearing impairment so severe it could put them at risk of failing at least one grade level.[180]
- Children with poor oral health are nearly three times more likely to miss school due to dental pain than their counterparts. These pain-related absences are associated with poorer school performance, compared to counterparts who receive routine oral care.[181]
- Research shows that nutritional deficiencies early in life can affect the cognitive development of school-aged children, and access to nutrition improves students' cognition, concentration, and energy levels.[182]
- Children with vision and hearing impairments are at significantly higher risk of having mental health problems than their sighted and hearing peers.[183]
- Children and adults with mental health issues are significantly more likely to have limited reading proficiency.[184]

These issues tend to disproportionately affect students from economically disadvantaged households. Those in poverty are at increased risk of not receiving adequate health care. In addition, poverty and related circumstances, such as childhood trauma, adverse features of housing and neighborhoods, and food and housing insecurity, are contributing factors to many behavioral and mental health issues in children.[185]

As Georgia works to improve educational outcomes for all students, it must consider the health of the student population. The EdQuest Georgia best practice research showed that high-performing systems all have policies in place to support students' physical and mental health.

179 Maples, W.C. 2003. Visual Factors That Significantly Impact Academic Performance. *Optometry* 74(1), 35–49.
180 Packer, L. 2015. *How Hearing Loss Affects School Performance.* Healthy Hearing.
181 Jackson, S.L., W.F. Vann, J.B. Kotch, B.T. Pahel, and J.L. Lee. 2011. Impact of Poor Oral Health on Children's School Attendance and Performance. *American Journal of Public Health* 101(10), 1900–1906.
182 Stuber, N. 2014. Nutrition and Students' Academic Performance. St. Paul, MN: Wilder Research.
183 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2006. Improving the Nation's Vision Health: A Coordinated Public Health Approach. Atlanta, GA.
184 Benjamin, R.M. 2010. Oral Health: The Silent Epidemic. *Public Health Reports* 125(2), 158–159.
185 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.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

While Georgia does have some efforts in place to address student health, benchmarks indicating aspects of the health of children in Georgia show that there are opportunities to further support these needs so that students are healthy and ready to learn. KIDS Count is a national data repository for various statistics on the well-being of children in the US. Table 8.1 shows that Georgia has a higher percentage than the national average of several problematic health-related indicators: low birthweight babies; children without health insurance; births to women receiving late or no prenatal care; children with developmental, emotional, or behavioral disorders; and households that are food insecure.

TABLE 8.1 Health Statistics for Georgia's Children[186]

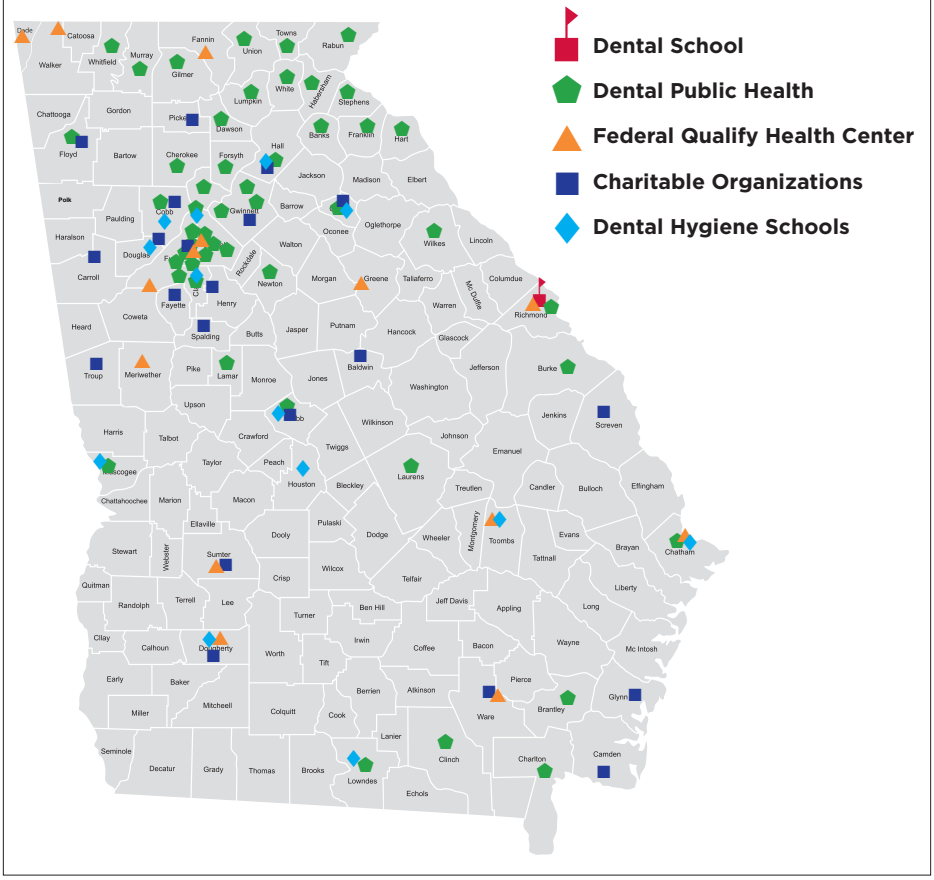
KIDS Count Health Indicators	Georgia	U.S
Low-birthweight babies	**9.5%**	**8.1%**
Children without health insurance	**7%**	**5%**
Births to women receiving late or no prenatal care	**8%**	**6%**
Children with one or more emotional, behavioral or developmental condition	**17%**	**17%**
Households that are food insecure	**14.9%**	**13.7%**

For each of the indicators in Table 8.1, poverty is a complicating and exacerbating factor. Families that are economically disadvantaged are less likely to have health insurance; therefore, they are more likely to not seek or receive prenatal care.[187] Those living in households at or below the federal poverty level are also more likely to be considered food insecure—meaning these families cannot afford to regularly buy healthy food. For children from these families, meals and health care provided at school may be their only access to these essentials.

About one in four children in Georgia is living in a home with an income at or below the federal poverty level, and more than 60% of public school students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch—more than 1 million children in Georgia are part of one or both of those groups. For these students, access is the number one challenge in addressing their health care needs: Access to insurance, access to nutritious food, and access to physical and mental health care are all more difficult for economically disadvantaged students. For example, as already stated, children with poor oral health are nearly three times more likely to miss school due to dental pain than their counterparts. Children and adolescents in families living below the federal poverty level experience more dental decay than do children who are living above the federal poverty level. Nationally, 50% of children ages two to 11 years in low-income households have one or more untreated decayed primary teeth, compared with 31% of children in high-income households.[188] Access to dental health is a significant problem for low-income families, especially for those living in rural communities where no public oral health offices exist. See Figure 8.1.

186 KIDS COUNT Data Center. 2017. KIDS COUNT. Retrieved from Georgia Family Connection Partnership: gafcp.org/kids-count/.
187 Jarlenski, M.P., W.L. Bennett, C.L. Barry, and S.N. Bleich. 2014. Insurance Coverage and Prenatal Care Among Low-Income Pregnant Women: An Assessment of States' Adoption of the Unborn Child Option in Medicaid and CHIP. *Medical Care* 52(1), 10–19.
188 Kabore, H.J., C. Smith, J. Bernal, D. Parker, S. Csukas, and T. Chapple-McGruder. 2014. *The Burden of Oral Health in Georgia.* Georgia Department of Public Health, Maternal and Child Health, Office of MCH Epidemiology, Georgia Oral Health Program.

FIGURE 8.1 Access to Public Oral Health Care[189]



Supports for student health are not a traditional part of the academic instruction structure of schools, but they are essential to student well-being—the condition of being comfortable, healthy, and happy. The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) has recognized the importance of the connection between health and student outcomes. Various programs that work to support student physical and mental health in Georgia are provided by the GaDOE and through partnerships with other state agencies and public-private coalitions. These programs respond to various types of student health care needs, from providing meals to supporting student mental health.

School Nutrition

Like many states, Georgia is a part of the US Department of Agriculture's federal school lunch program. This program provides lunch for a reduced price or no cost to many students from low-income families. As previously noted, over 60% of public school students in the state receive meals through the School Nutrition Program, in many cases both breakfast and lunch. Some school districts intent on addressing food insecurity for their most vulnerable students also provide dinners. For certain students, these meals are their only access to nutrition—food necessary for sustaining life and well-being. Studies show that when the nutritional quality of meals provided to students at school is improved, student academic performance also improves. And for poor students, the improvements are even greater than those of their counterparts.

189 See www.gaohcoalition.org/care/map.aspx.

Physical Education

By law, Georgia requires that all students in grades one through 12 are exposed to a course of study in health and physical education. All students must also participate in an annual fitness assessment as prescribed by the 2009 Student Health and Physical Education Act. These requirements were put in place to involve schools in childhood obesity prevention. The US childhood obesity rate has more than tripled since the 1970s. Obese children are at higher risk of having other chronic health conditions including asthma, type 2 diabetes, and risk factors for heart disease.[190]

To help reinforce student physical fitness and nutrition, Governor Nathan Deal launched the Georgia Shape program. This program was founded by a multi-agency coalition consisting of government, philanthropic, academic, and business community stakeholders that came together to address the growing issue of childhood obesity in the state. The Governor's Advisory Council on Childhood Obesity oversees Georgia Shape, and the initiative has received significant business investment since its inception. Strategies of the program center around increased physical activity both before and during class, as well as structured recess.[191]

Power Up for 30 works hand-in-hand with Georgia Shape and shares its goals of increasing physical activity during and around class time in public schools. It is a cross-agency initiative by the Georgia Department of Public Health and GaDOE. Power Up for 30 specifically focuses on integrating an additional 30 minutes of physical activity into the school day, and the program incorporates professional development for school staff that can help to prepare educators to use the methods. This program and its training delivery partner, HealthMPowers, have provided direct professional development to nearly 2,000 teachers and administrators since 2013.[192]

Wraparound Health Services

School-based health centers or clinics (SBHCs) are another way the education system is addressing student health by providing an additional supportive, wraparound service to students. SBHCs have existed in Georgia for more than two decades, but the Georgia House of Representatives demonstrated a renewed interest in their potential by establishing a study committee in 2015. These centers place a general medical clinic on the grounds of a public school, thereby increasing access to health care that some students would not otherwise have. A greater percentage of children in Georgia are uninsured compared to the national average, meaning around 166,000 students do not have health insurance coverage. Moreover, 250,000 Georgia children stay home sick more than six days each year.[193] About one in four Georgia counties is home to an SBHC, and there are efforts in place to expand their reach. PARTNERS for Equity in Child and Adolescent Health is a grant-making organization based at Emory University that since 2010 has helped provide start-up funds to schools for SBHCs.

Another way SBHCs are expanding their capacity is with telemedicine, the remote diagnosis and treatment of patients through telecommunications technology. The Georgia Partnership for Telehealth has championed this cause by introducing telemedicine to Georgia schools, and as of 2017 there are 63 SBHCs equipped for telehealth. Working in conjunction with local hospitals, telehealth-supported centers operate as "spokes" to the hospital "hubs." Georgia has also supported telehealth through the 2005 Telemedicine Act, which ensures that health service providers can receive standard insurance reimbursement for patient services offered via telemedicine.

190 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2017. Childhood Obesity Facts. Retrieved from www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/obesity/facts.html.
191 Georgia Shape. 2017. Communications and Research. Retrieved from www.georgiashape.org/story/communications-and-research.
192 Georgia Shape. n.d. Power Up for 30. Retrieved from georgiashape.org/story/power-30-0.
193 Voices for Georgia's Children. 2017, January 14. School-Based Health Centers in Georgia. Retrieved from georgiavoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/SBHC-GA_Centers_12317.pdf.

Mental Health Programs

Georgia public schools are also addressing student mental health, especially as it relates to student behavior and well-being. Through a partnership with the US Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Agency, GaDOE is implementing Now Is the Time: Project AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education) to increase awareness of student mental health issues by providing staff training and aid for students and families struggling with mental or behavioral health issues. The project also offers training in youth mental health first aid and works to connect those in need with available mental health aid resources. Youth mental health first aid training through Project AWARE has been extended throughout the state of Georgia, with more than 1,500 school personnel trained as of 2017.

Project AWARE has three primary goals:

1. To increase participation of community and mental health providers in identifying resources available to help students
2. To raise awareness and identification of mental health and behavior concerns, and increase student and family access to mental health providers
3. To train educators, first responders, and parents to appropriately respond to youth mental health needs[194]

Another initiative aimed at increasing access to services for school-aged youth is the Georgia Apex Project. This project is an initiative of GaDOE, the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, and the Georgia Health Policy Center at Georgia State University. The Apex Project works to build infrastructure to allow for increased access to mental health services.[195]

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

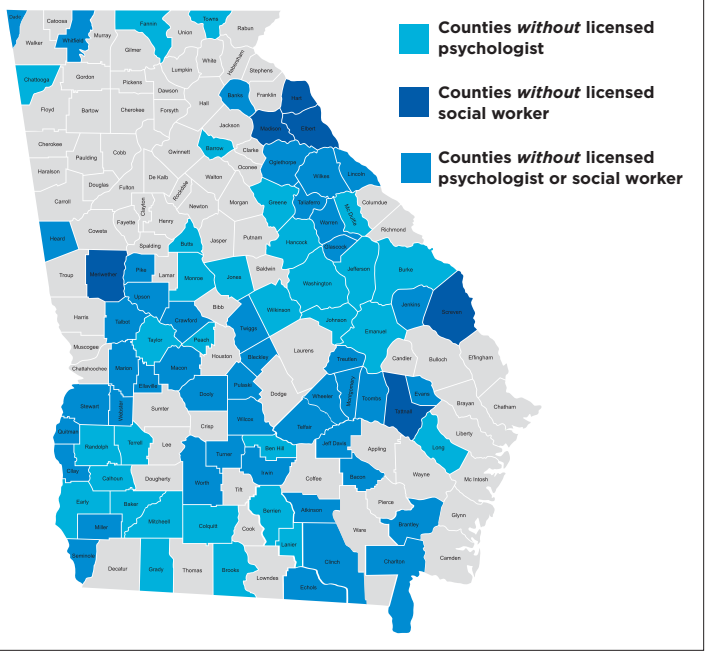
Access is one of the most significant issues when it comes to caring for the health of students in Georgia. Students in poverty are less likely to have access to health supports than their peers, with one primary barrier being lack of health insurance. In EdQuest Georgia research, increasing access to health insurance for children and their families is an opportunity identified as a core foundation for learning. Supporting students and their families from pregnancy throughout childhood is a strategy pursed in all countries with high-performing education systems. An additional related opportunity identified in EdQuest is for the state to take steps to increase the mental health workforce. Both of these steps will increase access to health care for Georgia students. Another opportunity identified in EdQuest that will increase student access to health care is to expand the use of SHBCs in public schools. These strategies would be instrumental steps to improving and supporting student health in Georgia.

Continuous and adequate health insurance coverage is crucial to ensuring that students facing health issues are able to address them in a timely manner. In Georgia in 2015, 14% of the population was without insurance, higher than the national average of 9%, and the second-highest percentage of uninsured individuals in the nation.[196] Among all children under the age of 18, 8% were uninsured, placing Georgia as the fifth-highest in the nation for uninsured children.[197] Among children living in poverty in Georgia, that number rose to 10%, despite the availability of both Medicaid and PeachCare.

194 Georgia Department of Education. 2017. Georgia Project AWARE. Retrieved from www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Pages/Georgia-Project-AWARE.aspx.
195 Georgia Health Policy Center. 2017. Georgia Apex Project. Retrieved from ghpc.gsu.edu/project/4745415/.
196 Kaiser Family Foundation. 2017. State Health Facts. Health Insurance Coverage of Total Population. Retrieved from www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/total-population/?state=GA.
197 Kaiser Family Foundation, 2017.

Another serious factor in the access crisis for children's health care is that Georgia faces a shortage of mental health professionals. Across Georgia, 76 of 159 counties do not have a licensed psychologist, and 52 of 159 counties do not have a licensed social worker. Figure 8.2 illustrates this dire need.

FIGURE 8.2 Distribution of Mental Health Workers in Georgia[198]



In 2017, Governor Deal formed a Commission on Children's Mental Health. The commission has acknowledged that the workforce is one of the biggest challenges in responding to children's mental health care needs. In December 2017, the commission released the following recommendations:

- Increase access to behavioral health services for Georgia's school-aged children by sustaining and expanding the Georgia Apex Program for school-based mental health.
- Fund Supported Employment/Supported Education programs for youth and emerging adults with severe mental illness.
- Provide support for the development and implementation of additional levels of support within the behavioral health continuum of care for youth with the highest levels of need.
- Strategically increase telemedicine infrastructure capacity for child-serving, community-based, behavioral health provider organizations in order to improve access to children's behavioral health services.
- Invest in coordinated training for priority areas of interest and concern for the child-serving workforce, including clinical training in evidence-based practices, trauma-informed care and administrative practices that support the delivery of high-quality behavioral health services across service settings.
- Fund expanded provider training, fidelity monitoring, technical assistance and evaluation for evidence-based High Fidelity Wraparound.
- Support multi-pronged early intervention and prevention approaches to combat the opioid crisis among Georgia's youth and emerging adults.
- Support a multi-pronged suicide prevention approach, including the expansion of prevention programming and expansion of Georgia Crisis and Access Line hours, to reduce rising suicide rates among Georgia's youth and emerging adults[199]

198 Voices for Georgia's Children. 2016. Georgia's Crisis in Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health. Retrieved from georgiavoices.org/wpcontent/uploads/2016/02/HealthPolicy_Recs_12115.pdf.
199 Commission on Children's Mental Health. 2017. The Commission on Children's Mental Health.

Governor Deal also designated $2.5 million for early childhood mental health in 2017. While this response is positive, it should be noted that in 2015 the Georgia House of Representatives convened a study committee on this same issue. It recommended the creation of a statewide Children's Mental Health Strategic Plan, designed and determined by a statewide coalition of stakeholders. The committee recommended that the plan include creating 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.

The study committee also recommended a mental health workforce development plan be created, as Georgia's workforce falls far short of the needed number of care providers. By increasing this workforce, Georgia can reduce the ratio of students to mental health personnel in and out of schools. These plans have yet to be officially created or adopted. However, they would be instrumental in ensuring student mental health needs are addressed.

One recommendation of the governor's commission that will be a positive step in supporting student health in Georgia is also identified as an opportunity in EdQuest: expanding telemedicine and SBHCs in Georgia public schools. As noted earlier, these centers and clinics go a long way in bridging the access gap to health care that exists for many Georgia students, especially those from economically disadvantaged households. Expanding the prevalence of SBHCs has the potential to provide students with greater access to physical and mental health care that they otherwise may not be able to obtain due to family circumstances. The Education Committee of the Georgia House of Representatives has demonstrated a renewed interest in wraparound services and hosted a convening to explore the importance of services provided beyond the classroom in December 2017 at the Marietta Student Success Center. This center is a hub for student support services—providing access to tutoring and even food—for students in need.

Student health is a significant factor in the ability of students to perform well in school and benefit from the instruction offered there. Currently, many children in Georgia are living in households with limited access to nutrition and physical and mental health care. For Georgia to see improved educational outcomes for all public school students, supporting student health and ensuring that students have access to quality nutrition and physical and mental health providers must be priorities for the state.

ISSUE 9

Rural Georgia: It Matters, A Lot

ISSUE OVERVIEW

Rural Georgia matters. Supporting rural communities has been a growing concern in Georgia and across the nation in recent years. These areas have fallen behind the growth and prosperity of more urban hubs. In 2016, 30.9% of Georgia's schools were classified as rural.[200] Maintaining Georgia's competitiveness on the national and international level requires that these schools, their students, and their communities not be allowed to fall by the wayside.

The network of issues that affect rural communities is borne out of an intricate interplay of factors including economic development, infrastructure, health care, and more. All of these impact education, and in turn, education impacts all of these factors. To support safe, healthy, thriving, prosperous rural communities, education is a critical but vulnerable sector that must be supported at a high level in ways appropriate to the needs of each community.

Rural communities face challenges distinct from those of suburban and urban centers. Success within all communities depends on a rich ecosystem of interrelated factors: health affects families, families affect schools, schooling affects work, and so forth. The growth or decline of one sector has direct impacts on all others. In communities that have fewer or more remote resources (i.e., rural communities), this impact is more extreme than in communities that have many resources operating in every sector. For example, closing one acute care clinic in a city might be disruptive for many citizens. In a rural community, where it was the only clinic within 40 miles, the closure can be devastating.

Many parts of rural Georgia are in a precarious situation as populations shrink and change, and economic sectors of long-standing significance decline or, in some cases, disappear. Rural education, a crucial sector in any thriving community, is also facing increasing challenges. Successful students are necessary for successful communities. Poor educational outcomes are closely tied to poor outcomes in health, employment, and wages, and increases in crime and the need for government assistance. How Georgia responds to this current decline in many of the state's rural communities will affect not only the lives of the citizens living there, but the economic future of the state as a whole.

200 Showalter, D., R. Klein, and J. Johnson. 2017, June. *Why Rural Matters 2015–2016: Understanding the Changing Landscape.* Retrieved from the Rural School and Community Trust: www.ruraledu.org/user_uploads/file/WRM-2015-16.pdf.

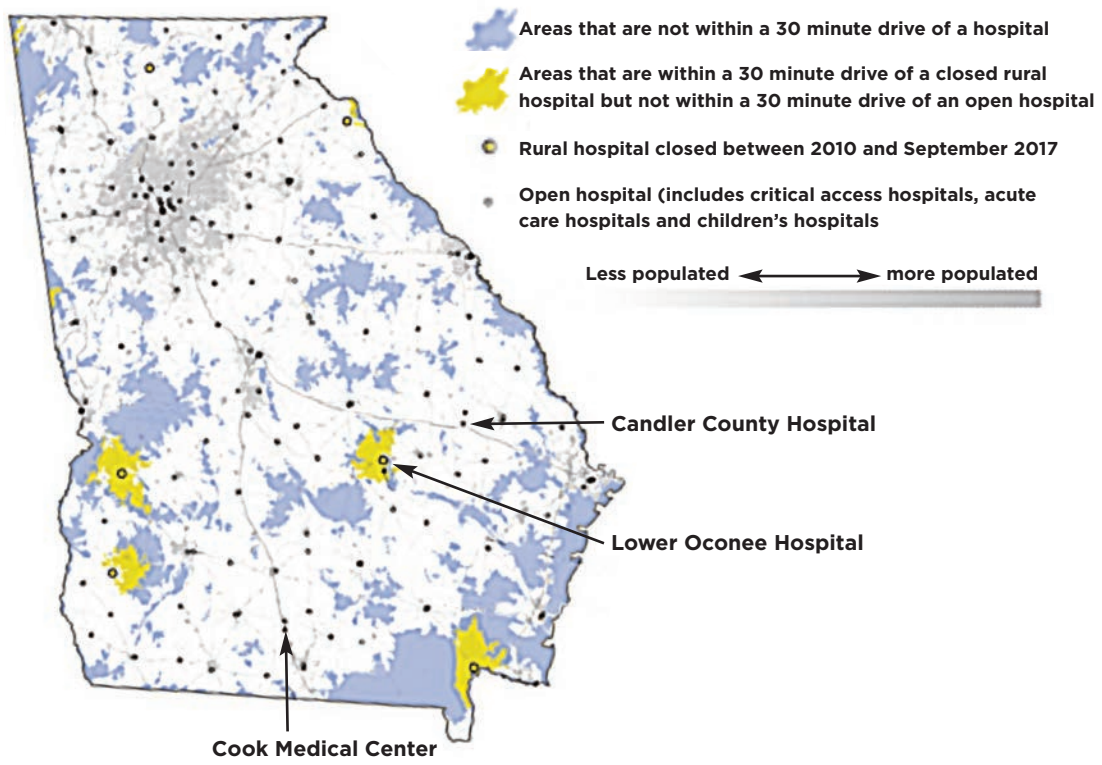
SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

To frame the situation for rural education in Georgia, it is important to understand the broader rural context and its effects on the educational sector. Issues such as health and access to health care, economic distress, and funding strategies all impact educational outcomes for students living in rural areas.

Access to Health Care

Across the state, Georgia has seen four rural hospitals close since 2010. This is partially due to the population migration from rural to suburban and urban communities. However, lack of access to medical insurance is also a factor. Rural Georgians are less likely to have health insurance,[201] a factor that both inhibits people from going to the doctor outside of emergency situations, and cuts into payments hospitals receive for the care they provide. In 2015, research found that "each additional uninsured person costs local hospitals $900 per year."[202] That year, Georgia's uninsured population tied for third-highest in the nation at 13.1% or 1,388,000 people,[203] located overwhelmingly in rural parts of the state. As shown in Figure 9.1, many rural Georgians do not live within a 30-minute drive of a hospital. That number increases with hospital closings.

FIGURE 9.1 Rural Georgia's Dwindling Access to Hospitals[204]

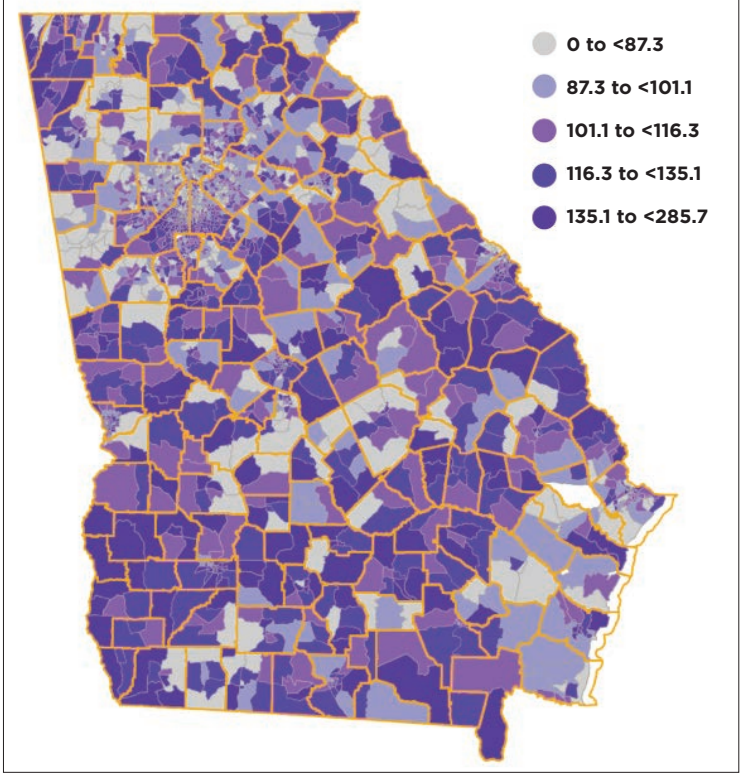


201 Georgia Chamber Quality Healthcare Access Study.
202 Kellogg Insight. 2015, June 22. Who Bears the Cost of the Uninsured? Nonprofit Hospitals. Retrieved from insight.kellogg.northwestern.edu/article/who-bears-the-cost-of-the-uninsured-nonprofit-hospitals.
203 Miller, A. 2016, September 13. Georgia Again Ranks High in Rate of Uninsured. *Georgia Health News.* Retrieved from www.georgia-healthnews.com/2016/09/georgia-ranks-high-rate-uninsured/.
204 Weber, L, and A. Miller. 2017, September 22. A Hospital Crisis Is Killing Rural Communities. This State Is "Ground Zero." *Georgia Health News.* Retrieved from www.georgiahealthnews.com/2017/09/hospital-crisis-killing-rural-communities-state-ground-zero/.

The first department to close in a declining hospital is almost universally obstetrics and gynecology. This is one of the most expensive branches to maintain, as it requires highly specialized equipment and personnel who cannot be redeployed into other services or departments. At least 350 deliveries must be performed a year for a hospital to break even in costs.[205] In shrinking, underinsured, and remote communities, the use of OB/GYN services declines to a point where the department cannot sustain itself and is closed. In 2015, more than 40 counties in Georgia had no obstetrical providers, and fewer than 75 of 180 hospitals across the state offered services for labor and deliveries.[206] Access to prenatal care has been shrinking. Without prenatal care, mothers are 7.4 times more likely to give birth prematurely, and babies are three times more likely to be born at low birth weight.[207] In 2016, the United Health Foundation ranked Georgia 48th in the nation for maternal mortality,[208] and the state's rates for premature births are growing.[209]

Being born preterm or underweight can affect children's early learning outcomes in profound ways, which in turn affect overall educational outcomes. The risks of premature births, low birth weights, and complications in pregnancy due to limited or nonexistent prenatal care include hearing, vision, and oral health issues, asthma, and language impairment.[210] These health issues impact a child's lifelong outcomes[211] including education. Figure 9.2 shows the distribution of preterm births by county and the increased prevalence in rural areas.

FIGURE 9.2 Infants Born Preterm (<37 Weeks) – Per 1,000 Births by County[212]



205 Miller, A. 2015, April 13. 2 More Hospitals Closing Baby Delivery Units. *Georgia Health News*. Retrieved from www.georgiahealthnews.com/2015/04/2-hospitals-shutting-baby-delivery-units/.
206 Miller, 2015.
207 Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition of Georgia. 2016. 2016 State of the State of Maternal and Infant Health in Georgia. Retrieved from www.hmhbga.org.
208 See www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/2016-health-of-women-and-children-report/measure/maternal_mortality/state/ALL.
209 Miller, A. 2017, October 16. An Alarming Trend: Premature Births Go Up in Georgia. *Georgia Health News.* Retrieved from www.georgia-healthnews.com/2017/10/alarming-trend-premature-births-georgia/.
210 Language impairment is increasingly understood to have direct ties to educational and social outcomes for children and young people. As one example, youth involved in the juvenile justice system are up to five times more likely to suffer from a language impairment than their non-offending peers. Incidence of language impairment is higher among babies born preterm.
211 See www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/MaternalInfantHealth/PretermBirth.htm.
212 Get Georgia Reading. Low Birthweight. Retrieved from getgeorgiareading.org/data/relevant-data-points/low-birthweight/.

Being born prematurely has been shown to directly correlate to children's ability to read proficiently by the third grade. Compared with infants born at 37 weeks or later, infants born preterm (34–36 weeks) face the following:[213]

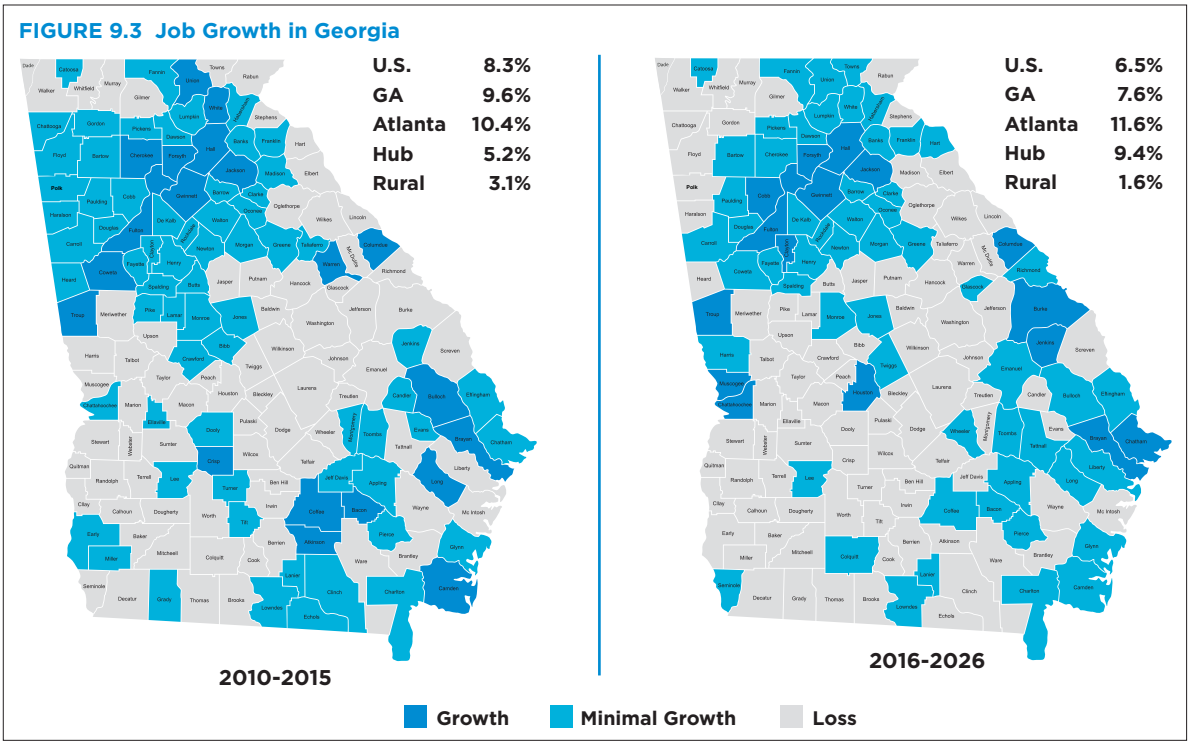
- 36% increased risk for developmental delay or disability
- 19% higher risk for suspension in kindergarten
- 10 to 13% increased risk for disability in prekindergarten at three and four years of age, special education placement, and retention in kindergarten

Economic Distress

As mentioned earlier, uninsured rates in Georgia are significantly higher in rural areas. This reflects broader economic realities in these parts of the state. While the nation and the state have in many ways recovered from the recession of 2008, that recovery does not impact all communities equally. Georgia ranks as the fourth most economically distressed state in the country, despite the growth and prosperity of Atlanta and other hub cities. Figure 9.3 shows that between 2010 and 2015, job growth in rural Georgia was only 3.1%, compared to 10.4% in Atlanta. The projections through 2026 are more striking: Rural job growth is projected to be 1.6%, compared to 11.6% for Atlanta.[214]

As economic opportunity moves, counties on the losing end of those shifts will see wages shrink and un- or underemployment grow. Across Georgia weekly wages are below the national average. But in many, primarily rural, counties weekly wages are half the national average. A wage of $600 per week equates to roughly $31,000 per year, which is below 200% of the federal poverty level for a family of two.

FIGURE 9.3 Job Growth in Georgia



213 Morse, S.B., H. Sheng, Y. Tang, and J. Roth. 2009. Early School-Age Outcomes for Late Preterm Infants. *Pediatrics* 123(4), 622–629.
214 Georgia Chamber PowerPoint, JobsEQ.

Funding

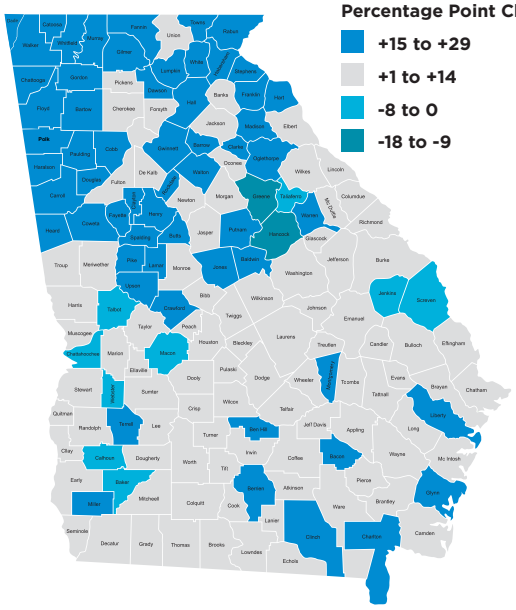
These factors affect school funding. On the one hand, fewer students means less funding from the state. On the other hand, fewer students can mean less expense for the school. For smaller schools like those in rural communities, this dynamic can create serious financial stress. For example, a class with 17 students needs a full-time teacher. In a small school, this class may be the only 10th grade algebra class or the only advanced placement English class offered. The loss of one, two, or even seven students does not preclude the need for that teacher, but it results in the loss of funding for that classroom and that school. That loss of revenue also impacts funding for air conditioning, keeping the lights on, and other operational factors.

Additionally, as economic viability goes down in a community, so does property value. As communities lose major employers and local wealth, their property values go down, which affects local funding. For fiscal year 2016, local funding raised through property taxes among county school districts comprised an average of 40% of a district's total funding, ranging from 69% in Rabun County to 16% in Jeff Davis County.[215] However, because not all counties in Georgia have equal property tax wealth, the amount of funds localities can raise through the local 5 mill share varies greatly.[216]

Programs like E-SPLOST[217] provide an alternative to using property taxes to renovate, modify, or construct school buildings.[218] As E-SPLOST funds come from a sales tax increase, they are grown through a community's buying power. Poorer communities raise less money. Perhaps more importantly, if there is no major commerce area in a community, as is often the case in rural Georgia, residents go to the next county to shop. This builds their neighbors' E-SPLOST funds and, by extension, increases funding for their neighbors' schools.

Changing demographics affect school resources as well. Some populations, such as those living in poverty, English language learners (ELLs), and students with disabilities, cost more to educate (see Issue 2 – Equity and Fairness). Many of these populations are growing across the state, especially in rural areas. As a percentage, Georgia's rural students represent among the highest in the nation for poverty and for minority students.[219] Not only are rural communities the poorest, rural poverty is growing the fastest. Figure 9.4 shows changes in poverty over time. According to the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA), the population of students with disabilities between 2003–2004 and 2012–2013 only grew in rural communities.[220] At 3.8%, Georgia ranks 14th in the nation for rural ELL students, and 41st for rural students with disabilities at 11.9%.[221]

FIGURE 9.4 Change in the Percentage of Students Eligible for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch, 2003–2004 to 2012–2013[222]



215 See Georgia Department of Education – Revenue Reports: app.doe.k12.ga.us/ows-bin/owa/fin_pack_revenue.display_proc.

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

217 The education special-purpose local-option sales tax (ESPLOST) allows an optional 1% sales tax levied by any county that adopts it for the purpose of funding the building of specific capital improvement projects for educational purposes, retire general obligation bond debt related to capital improvement projects, or issue new general obligation bonds for capital outlay projects.

218 See www.gadoe.org/Finance-and-Business-Operations/Facilities-Services/Pages/Splost.aspx.

219 Showalter, Klein, and Johnson, 2017.

220 gosa.georgia.gov/states/gosa.georgia.gov/files/Change%20SWD_3.pdf.

221 Showalter, Klein, and Johnson, 2017.

222 Beaudette, P. 2014, May 30. Mapping Trends in Georgia's Student Population Over the Past Ten Years. Retrieved from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement: gosa.georgia.gov/mapping-trends-georgia%E2%80%99s-student-population-over-past-ten-years.

While rural districts have been seeing an increase in students requiring greater supports to achieve academically, in recent years state funding for education has shrunk, increasing the financial responsibilities of local governments. Severe austerity cuts put in place by the state hit smaller and more remote school districts hard, as the communities they served had fewer resources to fill in the funding gaps left by the cuts. Since 2015, Georgia's General Assembly has reversed many of those cuts; however, because of simultaneous changes in the funding system, schools are not seeing the relief this reversal would imply. Specifically, costs associated with student transportation and health insurance for all districts' non-teaching staff, previously paid for with state dollars, now must be paid through local monies.[223] Thus, while the state has in some way relieved the extreme austerity cuts of the last decade, in other ways it has shifted more of the financial burden of the school system back onto local communities. In rural communities, this burden can be overwhelming, and some districts have teetered on insolvency.[224]

All of this context lays the foundation on which rural Georgia's student outcomes are built. These outcomes were prioritized as the sixth most urgent in the nation in the *Why Rural Matters* 2015–2016 report released by the national nonpartisan and nonprofit Rural School and Community Trust. This research provides an overall "priority" ranking of the 50 states, showing the greatest needs in rural education based on a number of contributing factors including poverty, student achievement, state resources, academic achievement, and college- and career-readiness.[225] In that report, Georgia's rural students' outcomes were analyzed by their 2015 NAEP scores and college readiness[226] and compared with outcomes from the rest of the country. Rankings closest to 1 are of the highest priority (See Table 9.1).

TABLE 9.1 Why Rural Matters: Rural Georgia's Urgency Ranking[227]

Educational Outcomes	Score	Rank
Rural grade 4 NAEP performance (math)	239.79	12
Rural grade 4 NAEP performance (reading)	224.62	26
Rural grade 8 NAEP performance (math)	278.79	9
Rural grade 8 NAEP performance (reading)	262.25	10
Rural grade 8 NAEP performance (science)	154.22	15
Overall Academic Priority Level		12

College Readiness	Percent	Rank
Overall graduation rate in rural districts	77.1%	5
Graduation rate for rural minority students	71.4%	17
Graduation rate for rural free or reduced-price lunch–eligible students	70.6%	8
Percent juniors and seniors taking at least one AP course	29.3%	31
Percent juniors and seniors who took the ACT or SAT	37.6%	15
Overall College Readiness Priority Level		9

223 Suggs, C. 2017, July 12. Georgia K-12 Education Budget Primer for State Fiscal Year 2018. Retrieved from the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute: gbpi.org/2017/georgia-k-12-education-budget-primer-state-fiscal-year-2018/.

224 Rural Policy Matters. 2012, September 26. Georgia Districts Nearing Insolvency, but Funding Commission Recommends Only Minor Changes. Retrieved from the Rural School and Community Trust: www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2961.

225 Rural School and Community Trust. 2017, June 13. New "Why Rural Matters" Report Now Available. Retrieved from www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=3297.

226 The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas. NAEP scores allow students to be compared across all regions and subgroups.

227 Rural School and Community Trust, 2017.

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

Georgia is home to the third-largest rural student enrollment in the United States, at almost 380,000. The future of Georgia depends on these students becoming successful, productive adults. To address some of the inequities that plague rural Georgia, the state has begun several important initiatives that focus on the distinct and significant needs of these communities.

The Georgia Foundation for Public Education's Board of Directors restablished the Rural Education Opportunity Fund in 2017, which will provide support for school districts located in communities around Georgia. The first grant cycle of this fund will start in 2018.

The Georgia General Assembly established two study committees to better understand and address the challenges faced by rural Georgia. The first was the Senate Rural Georgia Study Committee. Created during the 2017 legislative session, this committee was appointed to ensure that rural "needs are considered, voices are heard, and ideas are vetted," according to its chairman, Senator David Lucas.[228]

The second study committee was the House Rural Development Council, also established in 2017. Similar to the Senate study committee, this council focused on educational achievement, access to health care, infrastructure, and economic growth incentives in the rural parts of the state. In December 2017, the Council approved a report proposing a slate of changes meant to spark job growth and reverse population declines in the state's beleaguered counties. The council's work is expected to lead to as many as five major bills during the 2018 session that are focused on workforce development, broadband deployment, economic development, education and health care. Other smaller bills are also likely.[229]

Also, established in 2017 is the Center for Rural Prosperity, created by the Georgia Chamber of Commerce. The goal of this new center is to bring business, nonprofit, government, education, and private-sector leaders together to address the challenges facing rural communities.

For Georgia to thrive, these efforts must continue. They represent a good start and are indicative of the attention and commitment that Georgia has to its rural citizens. That commitment must continue and, importantly, it must move beyond the study stage to the action stage. Any intervention supporting rural Georgia must be built on the understanding that in smaller communities every sector is tied together more tightly than in urban or suburban communities. Thus, cross-sector collaboration and alignment is critical, as each sector so immediately affects the others. Leadership, as always, is critical in nurturing this alignment into robust momentum that allows communities to address challenges and barriers that are themselves cross-sector.

This necessarily includes the education sector. Georgia has been celebrated as the number one state in the nation for business for an impressive five years in a row. The critical factor that employers consider when deciding where to locate is talent, a trained workforce pipeline—and that is an extension of the educational pipeline. Yet the student population of rural Georgia is in a situation of increasing vulnerability, from birth to graduation. In order for Georgia to continue to be the best state in the nation in which to do business, we must ensure a future talented workforce in rural Georgia.

228 Fletcher, E. 2017, June 22. Sen. David Lucas Appointed Chairman of the Rural Georgia Study Committee [Press release]. Retrieved from senatepress.net/sen-david-lucas-appointed-chairman-of-the-rural-georgia-study-committee.html.

229 See: http://www.moultrieobserver.com/news/local_news/panel-signs-off-on-plan-to-bolster-rural-georgia/article_baf383da-e074-11e7-9da1-dffcfcd15888.html

ISSUE 10

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) – What's Next for Georgia?

ISSUE OVERVIEW

The passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in December 2015 was touted as bringing an end to federally driven education policy. Free of the overburdensome federal regulations of its predecessor, the much-maligned No Child Left Behind, ESSA was viewed as an opportunity for states to hit the reset button and provide school and district officials a roadmap to meet state expectations for the next generation of students.

Under ESSA, states can choose their own measures of progress for student learning aligned to their own educational goals and priorities. Accountability plans must show how states will implement academic standards aligned to help students stay on track for success in college and the workplace; ensure students from all backgrounds have an equal footing; track the progress of schools across a variety of measures not limited to test scores; and identify ways to offer additional support where students are struggling.

In developing the new state plan under ESSA, Georgia addressed three primary issues:

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

As of mid-December 2017, US Department of Education (USED) provided feedback to the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) asking for clarifications about the proposed plan. When the plan is ultimately approved by USED, what will that mean for Georgia? How did Georgia answer the questions related to school performance, assessments, and interventions? What's next?

SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

In response to the passage of ESSA, the GaDOE developed a new consolidated state plan to address issues such as how to measure the performance of schools, assessment systems, how to support struggling schools, and the state's accountability system. GaDOE submitted the plan on September 18, 2017, to the USED and is awaiting final approval.

The state ESSA plan addresses a wide variety of areas and ways in which Georgia will utilize federal dollars to support student learning. The plan has the following primary foci of concern:

- Student learning goals
- How progress toward those goals is measured (assessments)
- How well schools and districts help students meet those goals (accountability)
- Identification of schools not meeting accountability standards
- What to do with schools that do not meet expectations; interventions in turnaround schools

Goals and School Performance

Under ESSA, every state must establish "ambitious, state-designed long-term goals" and interim progress targets for all students and for each subgroup for academic achievement, high school graduation, and English language proficiency. With the loosening of federal requirements, education stakeholders want to ensure that states are held accountable for the performance of these subgroups that have historically been marginalized. These subgroups include English language learners, students in special education, racial minorities, and students living in poverty.

States selected a wide range of goals and timelines to meet this directive. Some states chose fixed goals requiring all students and subgroups to reach the same target. For example, Kansas aims for 75% of all students (and in each subgroup) to score proficient on state tests by the 2029–2030 school year.[230] Other states, including Georgia, chose relative targets based on students' current performance. This means that groups of students who are further behind do not have to meet the same ultimate goal as those who start further ahead.[231]

Georgia will set annual goals for all schools and student subgroups. The goals will be calculated using the formula of 3% of the gap between a baseline and 100%.[232] What does this look like for a school and its student subgroups? Using a fictitious high school—Central High School—the annual high school graduation progress goal for Central's black population would be calculated as follows:

1. Central's 2017 graduation rate for black students is 60%.
2. Central's gap between the baseline graduation rate (60%) and 100% is 40.
3. 3% of 40 is 1.2.
4. Central's 2018 graduation rate goal for black students would be set at 61.2%.

This formula will be applied to each school and student subgroup within the school to determine annual goals for the following:

- Academic achievement; based on the percent proficient on state assessments
- High school four- and five-year graduation rates
- English language proficiency goals; based on the percent proficient on Georgia's English language proficiency test[233]

230 Klein, A., S. Sawchuk, and A. Ujifusa. 2017, October 2. A Guide to State ESSA Plans: Goals, Teacher Quality, and More. Retrieved from *Education Week:* www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/a-guide-to-state-essa-plans-goals-teacher-quality.html?qs=A+GUide+to+State+ESSA+Plans:+Goals,+Teacher+Quality.

231 Klein, Sawchuk, and Ujifusa, 2017.

232 Georgia Department of Education. 2017, September 18. Educating Georgia's Future: Georgia's State Plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Retrieved from ESSA: Developing a Plan for Georgians, By Georgians: www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Documents/GA_ConsolidatedStatePlan.pdf.

233 GaDOE, 2017, September 18, Educating Georgia's Future.

Related to setting goals, ESSA requires states to establish a "system of meaningfully differentiating schools on an annual basis" based on indicators for all students and each subgroup across the following areas:

- Academic achievement
- Another academic indicator such as academic growth or graduation rate
- English proficiency
- An additional indicator of school quality or student success

Georgia's accountability system is the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI), which was designed to provide annual data on how well schools and districts are preparing students for their next level of learning. In the plan submitted to USED, GaDOE made changes to the CCRPI, both in its scope and in specific measures. Under the new plan, accountability is generally viewed as having a supporting role for schools and districts. The ESSA state plan intentionally redesigns the CCRPI with the goal of being a continuous school improvement tool that will help guide long-term, sustainable improvement. For Georgia, the CCRPI has several specific goals:[234]

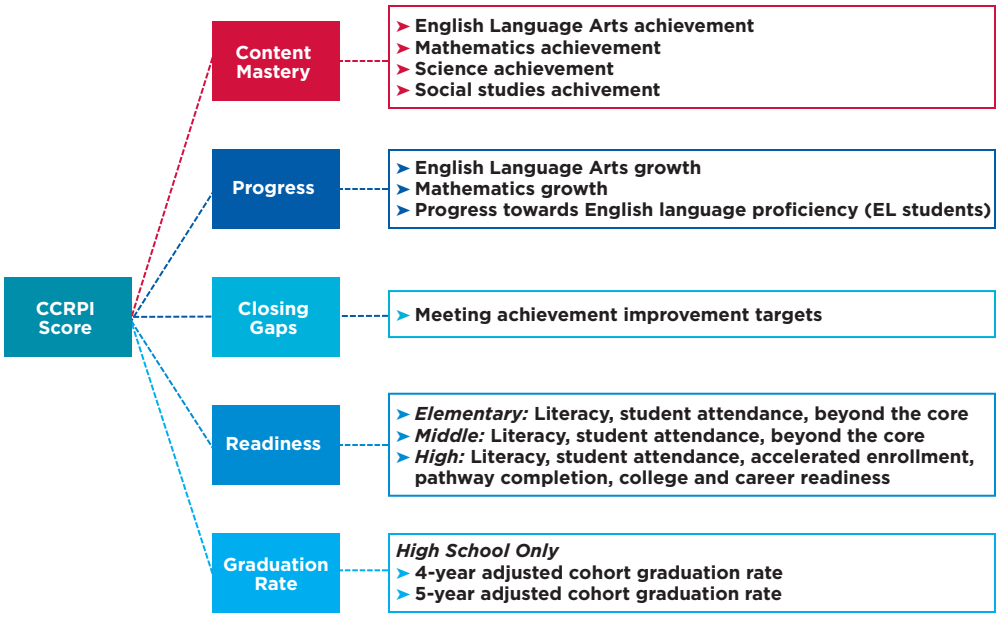
- Increasing student achievement for all students and making progress in closing achievement gaps
- Increasing graduation rates
- Increasing student performance in literacy and numeracy in the early grades
- Increasing student completion of advanced courses
- Increasing the percentage of students on the path to college- and career-readiness

The CCRPI combines scores across the five components shown in Figure 10.1.[235]

1. **Content Mastery –** Are students achieving at the level necessary to be prepared for the next grade, college, or career?
2. **Progress –** How much academic growth are students demonstrating relative to academically similar students?
3. **Closing Gaps –** Are all students and all student subgroups making improvements in achievement rates?
4. **Readiness –** Are students participating in activities that prepare them for and demonstrate readiness for the next grade, college, or career?
5. **Graduation Rate –** Are students graduating from high school with a regular diploma in four or five years?

234 Georgia Department of Education, 2017, September 18, Educating Georgia's Future.
235 Georgia Department of Education. 2017. Redesigned College and Career Ready Performance Index. Retrieved from www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Documents/RedesignedCCRPIOverview.pdf.

Figure 10.1. Revised CCRPI Indicators Under the Proposed State ESSA Plan[236]



Assessments

Key components of the accountability system are assessments. Determining how assessments fit into the accountability system, as well as their broader role in teaching and learning, was a central issue in designing the state plan.

Under ESSA, states must continue to assess all students enrolled in public schools in grades three through eight and high school. However, ESSA offers states the opportunity to work with districts to review testing requirements and needs. They can examine ways to innovate and strengthen formative testing to provide teachers with better measures of student learning. This was an opportunity for Georgia to have a statewide conversation about how to balance the need to monitor student progress (accountability of outcomes) with being able to give educators timely and useful information about student learning that can help inform instruction.

In 2017, Senate Bill (SB) 211 directly addressed the issue of assessments and Georgia's state plan required under ESSA. It called for the ESSA plan to take advantage of the full flexibility allowed by USED. This flexibility will potentially mean local districts can pilot innovative approaches to assessments in grades other than high school. In addition, the state and local districts can potentially use nationally recognized high school assessments, provided comparability can be established, in place of the Georgia Milestones end-of-course assessments.

However, it is important to note that this is not blanket flexibility given to all states. ESSA allows up to seven states to apply for a pilot that would involve a group of districts administering the same innovative assessment for a specified number of years, with the intent of ultimately scaling it statewide. The innovative assessment must be built and ready to implement before a state can apply to participate in the pilot. Therefore, SB 211 calls for a comparability study of other assessments aligned with state standards, such as the SAT/ACT and Accuplacer. Overall, this legislation is viewed as trying to separate out assessments used to inform teaching (formative) from those used for accountability.

236 Georgia Department of Education, 2017, Redesigned.

School Improvement

Using an accountability system that is informed by assessments, states are required under ESSA to identify schools for comprehensive and targeted support and improvement. Essentially, how will states identify chronically struggling schools and recruit them for school turnaround efforts?

No Child Left Behind was very prescriptive in how states could intervene and support struggling schools. Under ESSA, the federal government is more focused on how states identify struggling schools. All states submitted criteria for each of the intervention categories. Table 10.1 lays out Georgia's identification plans.

TABLE 10.1 Georgia's Identification of Schools[237]

Intervention Category	School Entrance Criteria	Exit Criteria (Eligible Annually)
Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI)	**Title I school, and CCRPI score less than 60, and Among the lowest-performing 5%, and 4-year graduation rate less than 67.7% (high schools)**	**CCRPI score above 60 *or* is above the bottom 5% *AND* Achieved the CCRPI or high school graduation rate annual target**
Targeted Support and Intervention (TSI)	**Any school in which one or more subgroups fails to meet its targets, or make progress toward those targets for three consecutive years**	**When relevant subgroup meets, or makes progress toward meeting, its target**

Within the GaDOE, the Office of School Improvement is responsible for school improvement across the state. It focuses its efforts on schools identified for support through the state plan approved by USED, schools identified as comprehensive support and intervention (CSI) or targeted support and intervention (TSI) schools.

For the past several years, Georgia has had conflicting lists of "turnaround-eligible" schools because the list of "priority and focus" schools supported by the GaDOE as defined by federal guidelines was different from a list of "chronically failing" schools compiled by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) using a slightly different qualifying definition. Due to these competing definitions of "failing," some schools were on both lists and others were only on one. Through the ESSA plan, Georgia has aligned the qualifications for the schools that need the most intensive involvement—those in the comprehensive support category. GOSA now calculates an annual Turnaround-Eligible Schools list. Identified schools have a three-year average CCRPI score that is in the bottom 5% of the state, excluding nontraditional schools and state special schools, which matches the criteria for CSI identification. This list replaces the chronically failing schools list that GOSA published in prior years.

In 2017, Georgia passed House Bill 338, *The First Priority Act - Helping Turnaround Schools Put Students First,* which created the position of Chief Turnaround Officer (CTO). The CTO, hired by and reporting to the Georgia State Board of Education, identifies schools from this Turnaround Eligible Schools list for targeted turnaround interventions coordinated through the CTO's office. In December 2017, 11 schools across four counties were selected for the first round of intense intervention service.[238]

237 Georgia Department of Education, 2017, September 18, Educating Georgia's Future.

238 The 11 schools selected are 1) Bibb County: Appling Middle, Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary and Veterans Elementary; 2) Clay County: Clay County Middle; 3) Dooly County: Dooly County High, Dooly County Middle and Dooly County Elementary; 3) Dougherty County: Alice Coachman Elementary, Morningside Elementary and Northside Elementary; and 4) Randolph County: Randolph Clay Middle.

Related to plans and resources to support struggling schools, is the equitable distribution of teachers and setting a definition for an "ineffective" teacher. An analysis by the National Council on Teacher Quality gave Georgia mixed reviews on the ESSA teacher equity plan, commending some strengths and also opportunities for improvements. Among the strengths, the report highlighted promising strategies included in Georgia's ESSA plan.

> Georgia intends to implement promising, potentially high-impact strategies designed to eliminate its existing educator equity gaps, including: 1) providing technical assistance to districts and institutions of higher education to support their collaboration; 2) developing an equity data dashboard, including data such as principal and teacher retention rates; 3) using Equity Labs to collaborate more thoroughly with stakeholders; and 4) supporting the collaboration of government entities and nonprofit groups in the state as they develop teacher preparation routes that address the staffing needs of the most difficult-to-staff areas of the state.[239]

Among the opportunities for improvement, the report stated the following:

> Georgia's 2015 Educator Equity Plan (which Georgia indicated was appropriate to evaluate as part of this ESSA analysis) contains the rates at which low-income and minority students are taught by out-of-field or inexperienced teachers. Georgia's ESSA state plan does not include data on the rates at which low-income and minority students are taught by ineffective teachers. Without these data, Georgia cannot demonstrate that low-income and minority students are not taught at higher rates than other students by ineffective teachers, nor can it guarantee that where such educator equity gaps exist, it is targeting its resources to ensure that they do not persist.[240]

The Georgia plan also does not include timelines or interim targets for eliminating the identified educator equity gap. Georgia's 2015 Equity Plan, which was used to inform the state ESSA plan, shows an equity gap on every measure of teacher qualifications and experience for both low-income students and minority students. Addressing these gaps is essential for Georgia to ensure all students are college- and career-ready when they graduate from high school.

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

As previously stated, after nearly two years of planning and preparation by states, ESSA is on the verge of being implemented throughout the country. A previous issue, Issue 5 – The Missing 20%: Increasing Georgia's High School Graduation Rate, explored how the state addresses the remaining 20% of high school students who are not graduating. In many ways, the state ESSA plan is directed at that 20%. How does the state assure accountability for *all* students? What role do assessments play in teaching and learning? How does Georgia identify not only struggling schools but also the resources needed to address barriers to success?

In their review of all 51 ESSA accountability plans, the Thomas J. Fordham Institute gave Georgia top marks, rating Georgia among the top eight states in the country.[241] The Fordham study examined three key factors:[242]

239 National Council on Teacher Quality. 2017, November. ESSA Educator Equity Analysis. Retrieved from www.nctq.org/dmsView/GA_NCTQ_ESSA_Educator_Equity_Analysis.
240 National Council on Teacher Quality, 2017.
241 Wright, B.L., and M.J. Petrilli. 2017, November 14. *Rating the Ratings: An Analysis of the 51 ESSA Accountability Plans.* Retrieved from Thomas B. Fordham Institute: edexcellence.net/publications/rating-the-ratings
242 Wright and Petrilli, 2017.

1. **Clear and intuitive annual results –** Georgia's CCRPI uses a 100-point system for schools' annual ratings.
2. **Focus on all students, not just the low performers –** There are two primary ways for state accountability systems to encourage schools to focus on all students: (1) use a performance index or scale scores in place of proficiency rates when measuring achievement, and (2) measure the growth of all students. Georgia receives a strong rating because both approaches constitute 65% of schools' annual ratings. A performance index counts for 30%, which encourages schools to look beyond those pupils who are near the cutoff for proficiency. A measure of growth for all students constitutes another 35% of schools' summative ratings, which should also lead schools to heed the educational needs of every child.
3. **Fairness to all schools, including those with high rates of poverty, by utilizing growth measures –** Georgia earns a strong rating here because academic growth constitutes 50% of schools' annual ratings—35% growth for all students and 15% devoted to growth in closing achievement gaps.

In Georgia's ESSA state plan, the accountability system balances progress and achievement. This is one of the reasons Fordham gave the system such high marks. However, when ESSA passed, there was widespread concern that states would walk away from making sure that particular groups of students mattered in their school accountability systems.

Georgia had the opportunity to use the accountability system to highlight achievement gaps, especially among low-income students, students of color, special needs students, and English language learners. While the state will show those gaps on the report cards published by GOSA, these gaps are not adequately addressed in the accountability index. In its current form, only the "closing the gaps" indicator counts disaggregated performance. This indicator only measures whether schools are improving proficiency rates and does not hold schools accountable for the overall mastery rates of student subgroups.

Bellweather Partners, with the Collaborative for Student Success, convened an independent panel of accountability experts to review ESSA plans. The reviewers did laud Georgia's accountability system for placing significant emphasis on both academic achievement and growth. They also reported that Georgia selected a straight-forward set of indicators that focus on college- and career-readiness. However, one weakness highlighted by the review is that Georgia's accountability system is largely based on overall results, which can mask large disparities in student outcomes.[243]

To reduce the achievement gaps and provide equity for all students, stakeholders should pay close attention to the school report cards—which are different than the CCRPI scores—and demand progress on addressing them. Otherwise, subgroup gaps could be masked by overall schoolwide averages.

The Bellweather report also notes that the ESSA plan could be improved by providing more specific detail about the roles for the state and its districts in supporting struggling schools. The state's plan offers only limited information about how they intend to support these schools, and does not include timelines, processes to engage with stakeholders, detailed interventions, a school improvement funding strategy, or how they will ensure that its efforts produce the necessary improvements for identified schools.

243 Bellweather Education Partners. (2017, December 12). An Independent Review of ESSA State Plans - Georgia Project Overview. Retrieved from www.bellweathereducation.org

Currently, the specific roles of the state and districts in supporting those schools is vague to many education advocates and stakeholders. There are now two sources of support for struggling schools that are articulated within ESSA. The first, state designated turnaround schools could potentially receive turnaround supports in collaboration with the newly established Chief Turnaround Officer (CTO), who reports directly to the Georgia State Board of Education, but is considered an employee of GaDOE while getting resources from both GaDOE and GOSA. As previously stated, The First Priority Act established the position of CTO with the duties of managing and overseeing a system of supports and assistance to the lowest-performing schools in the state, identified as being in the greatest need of assistance. The identification of these schools are determined by the CTO, in conjunction with the GaDOE and the GOSA. As stated in the ESSA plan, assistance will include the following activities: contracting with a third-party expert to conduct a comprehensive on-site technical review, working with a turnaround coach to determine root causes of low performance and lack of progress (including a leadership assessment), and developing with stakeholder input an intensive school improvement plan.[244]

The second source of support for struggling schools, the Office of School Improvement, has its own deputy superintendent for school improvement within GaDOE. This office will continue to support all other schools identified under ESSA for comprehensive support interventions or targeted support interventions. The Office of School Improvement will work with identified schools and districts to create common school improvement plans that connect with a comprehensive needs assessment.[245]

Even though the ESSA plan has been submitted, and is awaiting final approval (as of the publication of this document), Georgia has not settled key issues related to accountability or assessments. Governor Nathan Deal refused to sign the ESSA plan, stating that it "falls short of setting high expectations for Georgia students and schools" and is too restrictive on how local districts run their schools.[246] The conflict between the governor and Superintendent Richard Woods largely centers around the CCRPI measures. Governor Deal prefers a simpler test-based accountability system focused on student outcomes. The CCRPI redesign under Woods deemphasizes testing by rewarding schools for non-test outcomes such as reduced student absenteeism or increased participation in advanced placement courses.[247]

Going into 2018, there are many uncertainties around the implementation of the ESSA plan. As plans are approved by USED, state departments will ask local school districts to create their own plans for local implementation. These plans will require districts to address issues related to teacher equity, incorporation of early learning and kindergarten transition, and the use of flexibility options to meet school improvement goals, among other issues. Depending on district capacity, there may be a wide range of effective implementation of these plans.

Finally, at the time of the printing of this issue, the CCRPI remains an open question. For federal accountability purposes, USED only needs to approve the GaDOE submitted plan. However, the State Board of Education, whose members are appointed by Governor Deal, must approve any changes to the CCRPI for state accountability purposes. The governor has already expressed his dissatisfaction with the revised CCRPI and the State Board has echoed those concerns.[248]

244 Georgia Department of Education. (2017, September 18). Educating Georgia's Future - Georgia's State Plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Retrieved from ESSA: Developing a Plan for Georgians, By Georgians: http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Documents/GA_ConsolidatedStatePlan.pdf

245 Georgia Department of Education, 2017, September 18, Educating Georgia's Future.

246 Johnson, K.D. 2017, September 28. Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal Rejects State's Education Plan. Retrieved from *Atlanta Journal-Constitution:* www.myajc.com/news/local-education/georgia-gov-nathan-deal-rejects-state-education-plan/Kan1YQIY10kZ9yv81PjahJ/.

247 Johnson, 2017.

248 Johnson, 2017.

All but two local school districts have performance contracts with the state, either as a strategic waiver school system (SWSS) or a charter system contract, both of which are student performance contracts that allow flexibility while maintaining accountability. For SWSS, the contracts require schools to decrease by 3% the gap between their baseline performance on the state accountability system—the CCRPI—and the maximum CCRPI score of 100. This is the same formula used to establish school goals under ESSA. At this point, the impact on local districts and their state accountability contracts is an open question if USED approves the accountability plan as is but the State Board does not.

As stated in EdQuest Georgia, to truly empower local leaders to make decisions that best support their students, a strong state policy framework should ensure that each of the seven core areas are working in concert. Local districts that are sustained by strong communities, have access to quality teachers and leaders, can offer supportive learning environments to their students, are engaged with advanced instructional systems that provide clear pathways to post-secondary success, and have equitable access to resources are significantly more likely to be able to innovate, customize, and meet the needs of their students.

The state ESSA plan provided Georgia with the opportunity to set out a policy framework that would ensure accountability for *all* students, outline the role assessments will play in teaching and learning, and most importantly, ensure equity of opportunity to the state's schools and populations that struggle the most. The implementation of this plan in 2018 will begin to answer a key question: Did Georgia accomplish its goals?

GEORGIA PARTNERSHIP
FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

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