



## TEACHING: ELEVATING THE PROFESSION...NOW!

### Issue Overview

In 2015, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) surveyed more than 53,000 educators across the state to understand teacher job satisfaction and reasons for wanting to leave the profession. Georgia, like states across the country, suffers from teacher shortages across the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields, special education, and bilingual/English language learner education. This shortage is driven by a combination of a decrease in enrollments in teacher education programs and teacher attrition, teachers leaving the classroom. In fact, the bulk of the demand for teachers is caused by attrition. Most teachers who leave the profession before retirement list “dissatisfaction with teaching conditions” as their primary reason. Educating children requires specialized knowledge and skills and deserves the same status and standing as other traditional professions. For a state to attract and maintain a highly qualified, effective teaching pool, educators need to feel they are valued for their expertise. How does Georgia professionalize teaching to inspire a shared spirit of high standards and public service—a sense of professionalism—among both those inside and outside of education?

### Significance for Georgia

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

However, that does not mean Georgia does not have issues that need to be addressed to ensure high-quality teachers are recruited and retained in classrooms across the state. A feeling remains that educators are not valued at the same level as other highly regarded professions, impacting both retention and recruitment. The debate over teachers’ professional standing usually revolves around three key issues: wages, benefits, and professional pathways.

### Action Steps

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