

- 17TH EDITION -

TOP TEN ISSUES TO WATCH IN 2021

VIRTUAL LEARNING ..—.

MENTAL HEALTH ...— . LEARNING LOSS

..— GEORGIA — ..—

ECONOMIC CRISIS

WORKFORCE . — . — .

EQUITY ..— PARENT ENGAGEMENT ..—

TEACHER TRAINING — . — .

..— PANDEMIC

..— RECOVERY — ..—

ACCOUNTABILITY — . FUNDING



GEORGIA PARTNERSHIP
FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

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JANUARY 2021

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.

ALSTON & BIRD

Special thanks to Altson & Bird for their support of this publication.



It is an understatement to say that 2020 was a tumultuous year filled with unprecedented challenges and uncertainties. Here at the Georgia Partnership, we were not completely insulated from these challenges, but we remained focused on advancing our mission to inform and engage leaders to positively impact education in Georgia.

We are especially proud of what we accomplished in 2020 through a combination of agility and steadfastness in our commitment to make Georgia a top performing state where all children have the same equitable access to a high-quality education.

The Partnership responded to the COVID-19 pandemic at both the state and regional level. At the state policy level, the Partnership led the 40+ member **EdQuest Georgia Coalition** (Coalition) in examining the priority policy and programmatic issues that need to be addressed for our state's equitable road to recovery. The Coalition focused on COVID recovery work, which, in large part, included incorporating and highlighting COVID-related concerns into its previously established state-level education policy agenda. The Coalition produced two policy briefs related to long-term recovery: *Post-Secondary Access and Success and Adequate and Equitable Educational Funding*, both of which will be the basis for the Coalition's policy platform going into 2021.

In 2020, the Partnership also rapidly expanded our **Regional Initiative** work, which included establishing multi-sector **Rural Learning Networks (RLNs)** – comprised of more than 50 members in over 30 communities across Georgia. These RLNs have provided valuable insight into the impact of COVID-19 on local school systems and communities and served as a forum for rural communities to share resources and strategies for overcoming the challenges related to a rural recovery. We also leveraged our podcast, **Field Notes**, to bring more attention to the challenges of leaders in rural communities by giving them an opportunity to share their stories with our stakeholders. Looking ahead to 2021, the RLNs will continue to convene and connect rural communities to learn and support each other, and the Partnership will continue to share, so that all communities can benefit from these important conversations and interactions.

In 2020 we graduated the 12th cohort of the Partnership's professional development **Education Policy Fellowship Program (EPFP)**. EPFP is one of the key components of the Partnership's strategy to inform and influence leaders and emerging leaders so that they are then able to meaningfully contribute to the development of educational policy decisions in our state. The current, 13th cohort, like previous classes is exploring the necessary policies and procedures that must be implemented to help ensure equitable student success, but they're doing so through the lens of COVID-19 and in an exclusively virtual format. Virtual EPFP convenings are a first for the Partnership, but they have allowed for more participants from beyond the metro Atlanta area and have shown that there is opportunity to expand on this virtual model of program delivery.

The promise of virtual engagements was also apparent in the success of online convenings we either hosted or were invited to support. Our 2020 **Critical Issues Forum**, for instance, was our first ever livestreamed event and yielded record-breaking attendance for the Partnership. We also successfully co-hosted a superintendent webinar series with the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce and served as panelists during virtual events hosted by the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, the Georgia School Boards Association, and the Georgia Municipal Association, to name a few.

As the Georgia Partnership enters 2021, we do so sober-mindedly, yet confident that the organization is stronger than ever and well equipped to continue advocating for high quality education for all of Georgia's students. We believe that the 17th edition of the *Top Ten Issues to Watch* report will serve as a critical guide for Georgia's leaders looking to understand our state's biggest education challenges and equip them to devise solutions that improve life outcomes for public school students across the state. We are grateful for your ongoing support and welcome your participation in our work. Georgia's children need you.



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to 2021 and the 17th Edition of the Georgia Partnership's Top Ten Issues to Watch report.

The past year was a year like no other and the challenges facing Georgia in 2021 are unprecedented. The pandemic has upended education systems and plunged Georgia into another economic downturn that could take years to recover from. As Georgia moves from response to recovery and ultimately to success, it is important to take a step back and consider the longer-term imperative to create a better system for all individuals.

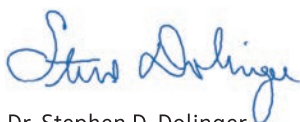
Of utmost importance moving forward to support long-term recovery is the ability to successfully address the needs of students and their families, including the persistent achievement disparities across income levels and between white students and students of color. While Georgia has made progress in addressing achievement gaps in its educational system, overall achievement gaps continue in the K-12 system and persist through post-secondary attainment due to historical and structural barriers that have reinforced and propagated unequal outcomes. Simply “catching up” to pre-pandemic achievement does not address the academic inequities that now plague a majority of Georgians.

It also does not address the serious challenges Georgia faces in meeting its workforce and economic development needs. Last year's Top Ten Issues to Watch focused on addressing a pending educational and economic development crisis highlighted by research conducted by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). At that time, SREB concluded that due to the impact of automation and the changing economy, coupled with the current education level of the state's population, Georgia was in danger of seeing 1.5 million of its workers and their children be unemployed or underemployed in low-wage jobs by 2030. Since then, the COVID-19-induced shutdowns have accelerated the economic trends related to automation, artificial intelligence, smart devices, and virtual reality. The pandemic has also accelerated the workforce demand crisis. Due to impacts from the pandemic, SREB now estimates that 2 million Georgia workers (45% of the workforce) are at risk for unemployment, reduced work hours, or exiting the labor force by 2025.

Georgia's economic pipeline is fueled by its education system, from early learning through post-secondary completion and adult training and reskilling. That system, the education system, is the key to economic recovery in Georgia and across the US. The pandemic has provided an opportunity to implement true educational reform by addressing historical structures and removing barriers that have kept many Georgians from fully participating in the state's economic prosperity.

However, reinventing education involves rethinking funding formulas, redesigning teacher training and professional development models, addressing statewide broadband access, strengthening alignments between early learning, K-12, and post-secondary, and local, regional, and state workforce pathways, as well as whole system overhauls. These broad policy plans need a commensurate funding strategy and focused leadership to fully support the implementation of the necessary changes.

This edition of the Top Ten Issues to Watch takes a deep dive into education policy areas ranging from early learning through post-secondary completion to inform conversations with policymakers, educators, and community and business leaders about these challenges and opportunities. The time to reinvent education is now. Let us not waste this opportunity.



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

INDICATORS FOR SUCCESS: WHERE IS GEORGIA TODAY?

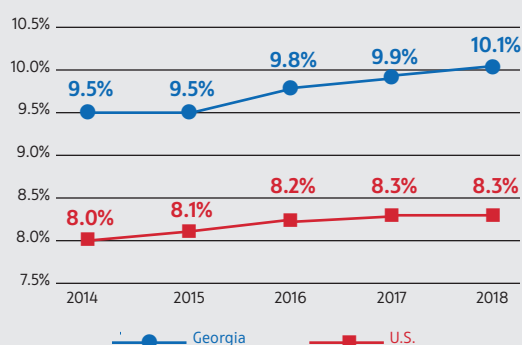
How does Georgia fare in producing excellent results for our citizens throughout the birth to work pipeline?

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.

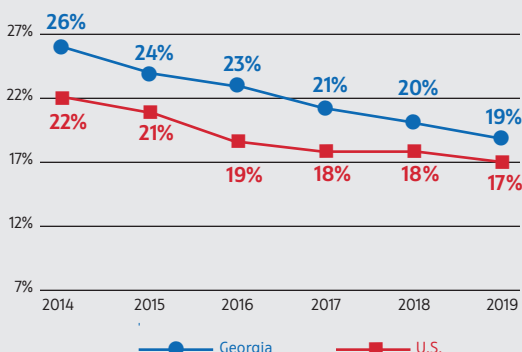
LOW-BIRTHWEIGHT BABIES, 2014-2018

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



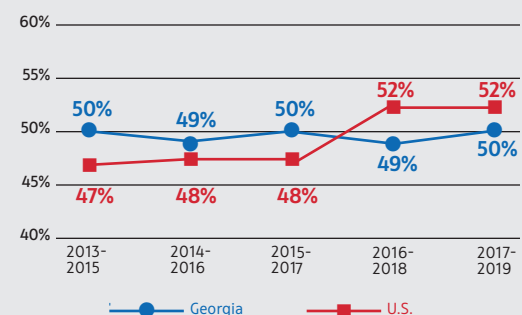
CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY, 2014-2019

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



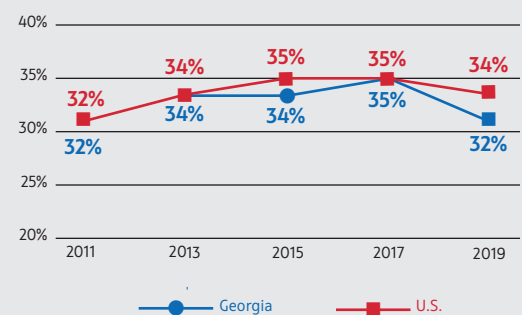
CHILDREN AGES 3 TO 4 ATTENDING PRESCHOOL, 2013-2019

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



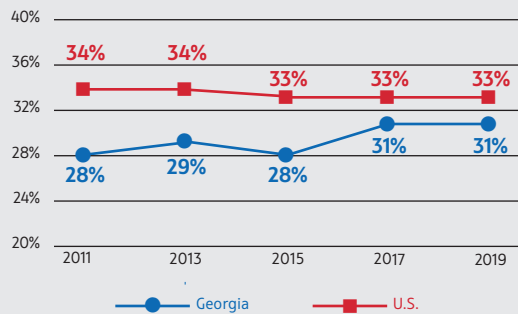
FOURTH GRADE NAEP READING, AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT, 2011-2019

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



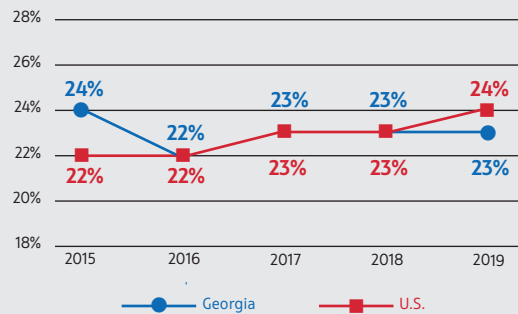
**EIGHTH GRADE NAEP MATHEMATICS:
AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT, 2011-2019**

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



**PERCENTAGE OF GRADUATING CLASS EARNING 3 OR
HIGHER ON AN AP EXAM, 2015-2019**

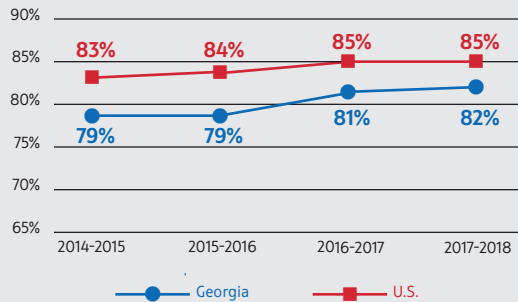
SOURCE: AP Program Results: Class of 2019



HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES*

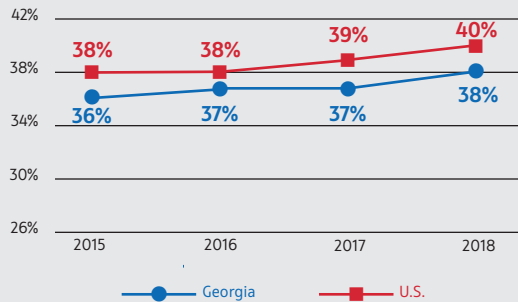
SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, Public Four-Year
On-Time Graduation Rates: School Years 2014-2015, 2015-2016,
2016-2017, 2017-2018

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



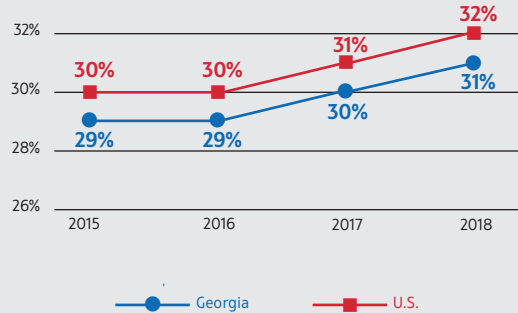
**ADULTS OVER AGE 25 WITH AN ASSOCIATE DEGREE
OR HIGHER, 2015-2018**

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder
American Community Survey 2018 Five-Year Estimates
(Georgia/United States)



**ADULTS OVER AGE 25 WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE
OR HIGHER, 2015-2018**

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder
American Community Survey 2018 Five-Year Estimates
(Georgia/United States)





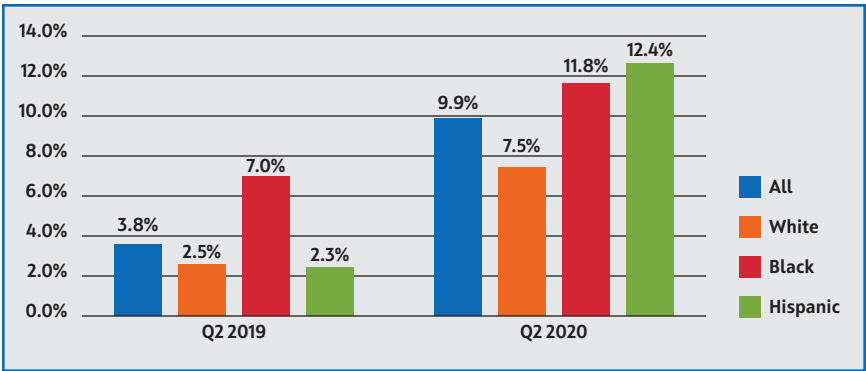
EQUITY – THE IMPERATIVE FOR RECOVERY TO SUCCESS

Issue Overview

At the beginning of 2020, Georgia faced serious challenges in meeting its workforce needs by 2030. Research conducted by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) concluded that the impact of automation and the changing economy, coupled with the current education level of the state’s population, put Georgia in danger of seeing 1.5 million of its workers and their children unemployed or underemployed in low-wage jobs by 2030.¹

Since that grim reality was revealed, the impacts of COVID-19 and the subsequent economic crisis have accelerated the automation trends underpinning that prediction, as businesses look for ways to quickly innovate to meet the demands of a remote workforce. More importantly, however, the pandemic and subsequent economic turmoil exposed many of the systemic, structural barriers that have historically been preventing a significant percentage of Georgians from fully participating in and benefiting from the state’s economy and economic growth. As data continue to demonstrate, the impacts of the economic crisis have been disproportionately felt by workers of color, immigrants, and workers with only a high school diploma or less. Unemployment data show that while all populations have been impacted by the economic slowdown, minorities and those with no post-secondary degrees have been disproportionately affected.² Figure 1.1 shows the disparate unemployment averages for Georgia by race/ethnicity in quarter 2 of 2020, compared to quarter 2 of 2019.

FIGURE 1.1 AVERAGE GEORGIA UNEMPLOYMENT RATES BY RACE³



1 Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). 2019, June. *Georgia’s Economic Outlook*. Retrieved from <https://www.sreb.org/publication/georgia-0>.

2 Van Kleunen, A. 2020, September 9. *Skills for an Inclusive Economic Recovery*. National Skills Coalition. Retrieved from <https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/news/blog/skills-for-an-inclusive-economic-recovery-a-call-for-action-equity-and-accountability>.

3 Wilson, V. 2019, November. *Economic Indicators: State Unemployment by Race and Ethnicity*. Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.epi.org/indicators/unemployment-race-ethnicity-2019-q2q3/>; Williams, J. 2020, August. *Latest Data: Black-White and Hispanic-White Gaps Persist as States Record Historic Unemployment Rates in the Second Quarter*. Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.epi.org/indicators/state-unemployment-race-ethnicity/>.

These unemployment numbers highlight the widening cracks in Georgia's economic pipeline, many of which have always existed because of historical inequities. Workers whose highest level of education is a high school diploma or less have been displaced at nearly three times the rate as those with a bachelor's degree. During the COVID-19 crisis, workers of color, particularly women, encountered the greatest job loss across the labor market, as they are overrepresented in the jobs hit hardest by the economic downturn, such as low-wage service-sector jobs.⁴ These are also the same workers that continue to have limited access to high-quality skills training and higher education opportunities that would help them participate in Georgia's economic recovery.

But the impact of the pandemic has not been restricted to the state's unemployment numbers. People of color have been and continue to be more likely to contract COVID and are less likely to have health insurance. They are also more likely to report food insecurity, to have missed a mortgage or rent payment, and to report experiencing symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorders since the pandemic started.⁵

These impacts on people of color and those with lower levels of educational attainment are not an accident. Generations of national public policy decisions have institutionalized structural racism for decades.⁶ Georgia's own history of Jim Crow laws, mass incarceration, and the exclusion of Black Americans from home loans and jobs, combined with decades of low investment in high-minority schools, has dramatically driven these outcomes.⁷

Georgia's economic pipeline is fueled by its education system, from early learning through post-secondary completion and adult training and reskilling. That system is the key to economic recovery across the US and in Georgia. However, those systems have failed the pandemic stress test as they are continuing to fall short of meeting the needs of a growing majority of Georgia's population. Undoubtedly, a return to pre-pandemic normal is not the path of recovery that will lead to success. The pandemic has provided an opportunity to address and remove these historical and structural barriers that have reinforced and propagated unequal outcomes. The path from recovery to success must consider a new normal that revolutionizes the role of education, how instruction is delivered, and the role the entire education system plays in economic recovery and development.

Significance for Georgia

Of utmost importance moving forward to support long-term recovery is the ability to successfully address the needs of students and their families, including the persistent achievement disparities across income levels and between White students and students of color. While Georgia has made progress in addressing achievement gaps in its educational system, overall achievement gaps continue in the K-12 system and persist through post-secondary attainment. The gaps persist not just in Georgia, but also across the country. For example, Black and Latino students nationwide remain roughly two academic years behind their White counterparts, and low-income students are systematically underrepresented among the nation's top academic performers.⁸

4 Van Kleunen, 2020, *Skills for an Inclusive Economic Recovery*.

5 Pearce, T. 2020, August. Greater Atlanta COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund – Phase 2 Planning [Presentation]. Atlanta: Neighborhood Nexus.

6 Van Kleunen, 2020, *Skills for an Inclusive Economic Recovery*.

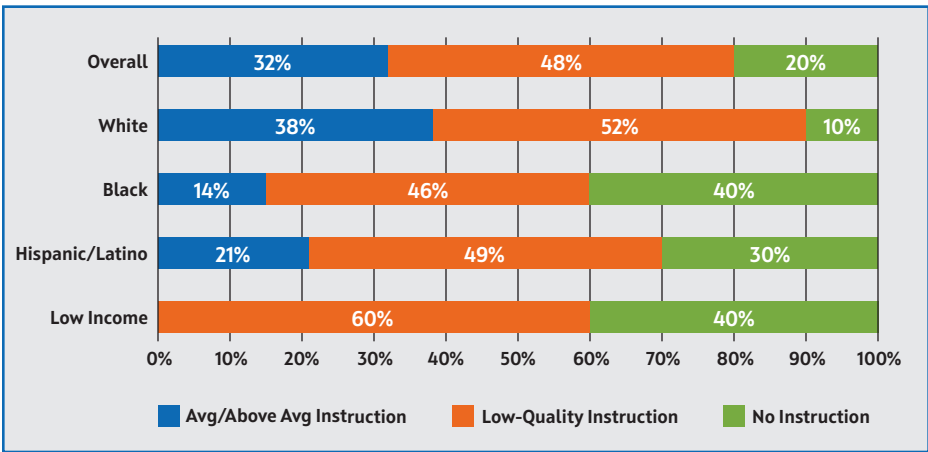
7 Tharpe, W., and A. Camardelle. 2018, October. *Embracing Equity and Inclusion to Bolster Georgia's Economy*. Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://gbpi.org/growing-diverse-thriving-together/>.

8 Dorn, E., B. Hancock, J. Sarakatsannis, and E. Viruleg. 2020, June. *COVID-19 and Student Learning in the United States: The Hurt Could Last a Lifetime*. Retrieved from McKinsey & Company – Public Sector Practice: <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-student-learning-in-the-united-states-the-hurt-could-last-a-lifetime>.

The pandemic exacerbated many of the inequalities already existing in the education system, from domestic learning environments, to the availability of devices and online learning opportunities commensurate with quality teaching and learning. Much like the economic fallout from the pandemic, learning losses suffered are estimated to be greater for low-income, Black, and Latino students compared to their more affluent, White counterparts.

National data suggest that when schools across the country were physically closed (March–May 2020), only 60% of low-income students were participating in online instruction, compared to 90% of high-income students. Quality engagement rates also varied by race. During the school shutdown, it was estimated 38% of White students received average or above-average remote instruction that included reliable virtual access, coupled with a detailed online curriculum. This compared to only 21% of Hispanic/Latino students and 14% of Black students (see Figure 1.2).⁹

FIGURE 1.2 QUALITY LEVEL OF REMOTE INSTRUCTION IN THE US, PERCENTAGE OF K-12 STUDENTS¹⁰



At the end of May 2020, 88% of White households with students enrolled in public or private K-12 education in Georgia reported having regular access to a computer for educational purposes, compared to 75% of Black households and 68% of Latino households. During that same time period, 90% of White families in Georgia reported having reliable internet access, compared to 85% of Black families and 72% of Latino families.¹¹

National data show that these variations are directly related to greater learning loss for low-income and minority students. The average estimated pandemic-related learning loss is about seven months, but that estimate increases to more than 10.3 months for Black students and 9.2 months for Hispanic students (see Figure 1.3).¹²

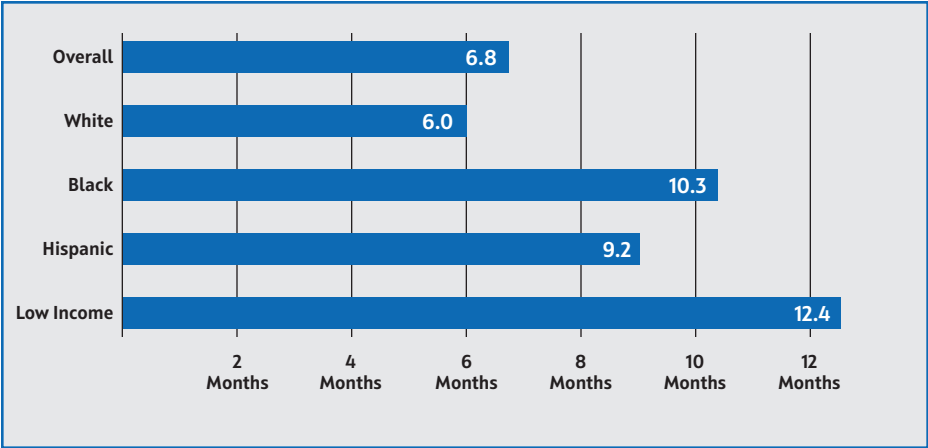
9 Dorn et al., 2020, *COVID-19 and Student Learning*.

10 Dorn et al., 2020, *COVID-19 and Student Learning*.

11 US Census Bureau. Household Pulse Survey Tables. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/household-pulse-survey/data.html>.

12 Dorn et al., 2020, *COVID-19 and Student Learning*.

FIGURE 1.3 AVERAGE MONTHS OF LEARNING LOSS COMPARED WITH TYPICAL IN-CLASS LEARNING, NATIONAL AVERAGE¹³



At the time of the writing of this report, estimates or actual measures of learning loss across all of Georgia schools are not available. However, in the summer of 2020, research commissioned by redefinED Atlanta and Learn4Life – The Metro Atlanta Regional Education Partnership predicted that students across the metro-Atlanta region could lose up to a year and a half of progress, more than the national estimates.¹⁴ The study estimated that if end-of-grade assessments had been given at the end of the school year in 2020, the results would have shown the following:

- Proficiency rates for third-grade reading and eighth-grade math would have declined 3.5% and 4.8%, respectively, compared to the previous year.
- The decline represents 21,000 fewer students in English/ language arts and 29,000 fewer students in math being on track for grade-level proficiency than before the shutdown caused by COVID-19.
- The achievement gap for low-income and minority students would have increased as only 30% of historically underserved students would have been on track to grade-level proficiency, reversing recent gains.

Academic instruction is not the only issue that will need to be addressed to ensure students regain lost learning time. Other elements, like the safety and health of students and the environments in which they learn and grow, are also instrumental to student performance. For instance, a growing body of research has documented and quantified how the disproportionate exposure to stress and trauma among children, and those living in poverty specifically, directly damages brain development, leading to significant learning and behavioral problems that impact long-term academic achievement.¹⁵

There is evidence that the pandemic has impacted students' mental health. Early national surveys report that the COVID-19 pandemic has threatened children's emotional well-being.¹⁶

- More than 25% of surveyed young people reported losing sleep due to worry, feelings of unhappiness or depression, or constant strain.
- 47% of surveyed teens reported increased loneliness.
- 40% of all student respondents reported not being offered social or emotional support by an adult from their school.

¹³ Dorn et al., 2020, *COVID-19 and Student Learning*.
¹⁴ EmpowerK12. 2020, June 10. *Quantifying the Impact of COVID-19 School Closures on Metro Atlanta Student Proficiency*. Atlanta: EmpowerK12 Atlanta/ Learn4Life.
¹⁵ 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.
¹⁶ Lake, R. 2020, July. *Student Count: Highlights from COVID-19 Student Surveys*. Retrieved from CRPE – Reinventing Public Education: <https://www.crpe.org/thelens/students-count-highlights-covid-19-student-surveys>.

Moreover, households in Georgia headed by persons of color have reported higher levels of adverse life circumstances that related to increased stress for children such as food scarcity, lack of health insurance, and housing instability (see Table 1.1).

TABLE 1.1 REPORTED ADVERSE LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES AMONG GEORGIA ADULTS, JULY 2020¹⁷

	Black	Hispanic/Latino	White
Sometimes or often not enough food to eat in the past 7 days	18%	13%	7%
Lack health insurance	22%	40%	12%
No or only slight confidence in ability to pay next month's mortgage	10%	14%	8%
No or only slight confidence in ability to pay next month's rent	47%	36%	19%

These cumulative and disproportionate impacts of academic learning loss and increased stress are not likely to be temporary shocks to the system that can be easily regained within one academic year. There is a strong probability that they will lead to long-term harm for individuals and communities. It is estimated that an additional 2% to 9% of high school students could drop out due to the pandemic and associated school closures, representing between 232,000 and 1.1 million students in grades 9–11 nationwide.¹⁸

Further, the economic impact of the learning loss and associated increased high school dropout rate will likely result in long-term economic harm. Based on national estimates, the average K-12 student could lose up to \$82,000 in lifetime earnings solely as a result of COVID-19–related learning loss. However, these averages vary significantly by race. White students are predicted to lose an average \$53,000, Black students \$87,000, and Latino students \$72,000. This translates into an estimated impact of \$110 billion annual earnings across the entire current K-12 cohort.¹⁹

Action Steps for Georgia

As is often said, crises create opportunities for broader change. The pandemic has upended education systems and plunged Georgia into another economic downturn that could take years to recover from. As Georgia moves from response to recovery and ultimately to success, it is important to take a step back and consider the longer-term imperative to create a better system for all individuals. Simply “catching up” to pre-pandemic achievement does not address the academic and economic inequities that now plague a majority of Georgians and does not address the economic skills gap that Georgia faced pre-pandemic when the state was looking at potentially 1.5 million unemployable people by 2030.

17 US Census Household Pulse Survey Tables, Week 12. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/household-pulse-survey/data.html>.

18 Dorn et al., 2020, *COVID-19 and Student Learning*.

19 Dorn et al., 2020, *COVID-19 and Student Learning*.

Currently, factors such as class, race, and ethnicity are stronger predictors of educational success than aptitude or talent. Consider the following:²⁰

- A child from a family in the highest quartile of socioeconomic status (SES) who has low test scores in kindergarten has a 71% chance of being above median-SES by age 25.
- A child from a low-SES family with high test scores has only a 31% chance of reaching above median-SES by age 25.

The disparity is more severe by race. Among 10th graders who score within the top half of their 10th grade math scores, 62% of White students will earn a college degree within 10 years. This compares to only 51% of Black students and 46% of Latino students in the top half at the 10th grade. And, regardless of SES, Black kindergartens with top-half math scores are more likely than other kindergartners to have bottom-half math scores as eighth graders.

When ultimate academic achievement is more consistently and reliably predicted based on race and economic factors than on individual aptitude or inherent characteristics, that indicates a problem with the system, not with the individuals within the system. Many of the systemic, structural barriers that are preventing a significant percentage of Georgians from reaching their full potential were dramatically revealed during the COVID-19 shutdown and subsequent economic turmoil. The ongoing pandemic has done more than just highlight existing inequalities in the educational system such as unequal access to devices and the internet. These systemic structures all but ensured that the overall impacts of the crisis would also be disproportionately felt by persons of color and low-income populations.

Because Georgia's most vulnerable students were hit first and hardest by the impacts of the pandemic, it is imperative that state and local leaders intently focus on equity to ensure they are among the first to recover and at the forefront of the state's overall economic recovery. Moving forward, Georgia should ensure that resources and policy decisions are focused on correcting past inequities and distributing resources to the most vulnerable populations first. Decisions should prioritize support for growing student concerns, not only related to academic needs but also economic, social, and emotional needs; expanding and improving remote access and learning; extended learning time; and easing high school to college transitions.²¹

The remaining issues in the Top Ten Issues to Watch 2021 will apply a social/racial equity lens across the birth-to-work pipeline to highlight where the pandemic revealed strong foundations upon which to build, cracks that were exposed or exacerbated, and systemic barriers to access and achievement that need to be addressed.

20 Carnevale, A., M. Fasules, M. Quinn, and K.P. Campbell. 2019. *Born to Win, Schooled to Lose: Why Equally Talented Students Don't Get Equal Chances to Be All They Can Be*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

21 Alliance for Excellent Education. 2020, July. *Recommendations for Prioritizing Equity in the Response to COVID-19*. Retrieved from: <https://all4ed.org/coronavirus-and-the-classroom-recommendations-for-prioritizing-equity-in-the-response-to-covid-19/>.



FUNDING – ESSENTIAL FOR ACHIEVING EQUITY

Issue Overview

At the writing of this issue, we do not know when the pandemic will no longer be a significant factor in our daily lives. We also do not know the full educational and economic impacts of the abrupt school closures and economic shutdown in the spring of 2020. We do know that whenever the pandemic threat ends, Georgia, and the nation, will need an education system stronger and more just than it was before the pandemic began.

As schools across the country reopened in the fall 2020, they faced extensive new expenses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the short term, they faced unplanned costs associated with just operating a school and trying to make up for the lost learning time. A conservative estimate for Georgia based on addressing the digital divide, expanding nutritional supports and increasing learning time projects that Georgia schools will need an additional \$300,828,448.²² That estimate does not include other costs related to changes in instructional staff required by smaller class size demands, increased transportation costs as buses must transport fewer students per busload, personal protective equipment, additional cleaning materials and health supplies, school health staffing, and investments in meeting the social, emotional, and mental health needs of students and staff. Estimates from AASA, the School Superintendents Association, released in May 2020 show it would cost an average district more than \$1.7 million to account for personal protective equipment, additional staff such as custodians and nurses, and health and disinfecting equipment.²³

At a time when schools are facing these dramatic increases in costs, state revenues have seen significant declines due to the economic fallout from the pandemic. Georgia revenue collections were down 4.5% in June 2020,²⁴ leading state leaders to make hard choices in addressing budget cuts as resources dwindled.

As lawmakers implement budgetary cuts to education funding due to COVID-19, they must understand the impacts that spending reductions that took place during the Great Recession had and the impacts that districts, schools, and most importantly students continue to experience.

22 This increased cost estimate is based on the following assumptions: (1) estimates of the number of students that do not have access to high-speed internet in their home, (2) districts required to provide low-income students with an average of 20 additional days of food services to help them through the end of the 2020 school year and the beginning of the 2021 school year, and (3) extended learning time equivalent to an additional 20 days for the most at-risk students, estimated at about 25% of students in Georgia. For more details, see the Learning Policy Institute's COVID-19 cost calculator at <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/blog/what-will-it-take-stabilize-schools-time-covid-19>.

23 Modon, N. 2020, August 19. 5 Financial Issues Schools Will Face Due to the Coronavirus-Induced Recession. *K-12 Dive*. Retrieved from <https://www.educationdive.com/news/5-financial-issues-schools-will-face-due-to-the-coronavirus-induced-recessi/583054/>.

24 Fowler, S. 2020, August 3. *Georgia Built Up Savings Over the Past Few Years. COVID-19 Wiped Much of That Out*. Retrieved from NPR Special Series, COVID-19 Throws States Into Budget Crisis: <https://www.npr.org/2020/08/03/895378734/georgia-built-up-savings-over-the-past-few-years-covid-19-wiped-much-of-that-out>.

Research has shown that the reduction in school spending during the Great Recession had a direct and significant negative effect on student learning and college-going rates. Most importantly, nationwide these reductions were larger for students living in low-income neighborhoods, and they increased the Black-White test score gap within states. Specifically,²⁵

- Declines in per-pupil spending had a significant and negative impact on the growth of NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) scores and college-going rates.
- These declines **did not** abate as the overall economic conditions improved.
- Test scores in **high-poverty areas were more adversely** affected by spending cuts than in lower-poverty areas.
- A \$1,000 reduction in per-pupil spending **increased the Black-White test score gap by approximately 6%.**

Between 2008 and 2015, Georgia reduced overall state spending on K-12 education by 16.9%, the fifth-highest reduction in the country.²⁶ In fact, in 2017, Georgia was one of only seven states where combined state and local funding remained at least 10% below pre-recession levels. Georgia's was 12% lower.²⁷ The reductions put in place during that time negatively impacted student learning and college access and exacerbated achievement gaps.

While the pandemic has touched every school district, the impacts on the levels of student needs are not equally distributed. Many of the communities that have borne the brunt of COVID-19 have also been subject to long-standing inequities prior to the current crisis. Decades of data show that certain groups of students have long been systematically underserved by the current education system. This includes students of color, students from low-income families, and English language learners, as well as those with special needs, those who are experiencing homelessness, those who are in foster care, and those whose families are engaged in seasonal work.²⁸ These are also the populations hit hardest by the pandemic and will need the most supports to recover.

Two essential questions must be considered:

1. What can be done to help districts meet the current funding shortfalls they face due to the combination of increased costs and decreasing revenues?
2. What long-term changes are needed to the funding formula to ensure an inclusive recovery so all students can succeed?

Significance for Georgia

Structural Inequalities in Education Funding

The inherent links between race and class across the country have not been remedied by school-funding lawsuits nor the passage of time. While there has been some progress made on the issue of economic inequality in America's schools, it is still a fundamentally inequitable system.

25 Jackson, C.K., C. Winger, and X. Heyu. 2018. *Do School Spending Cuts Matter?* Evidence from the Great Recession. Retrieved from Northwestern University, from the Selected Works of C. Kirabo Jackson: https://works.bepress.com/c_kirabo_jackson/35/.

26 Leachman, M., K. Masterson, and E. Figueroa. 2017. *A Punishing Decade for School Funding*. Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

27 Leachman, M. 2019, May 29. *K-12 Funding Still Lagging in Many States*. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Retrieved from <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/k-12-funding-still-lagging-in-many-states>.

28 DiNapoli, Jr., M.A. 2020, July 17. *Making School Budgets Whole and Equitable During and After COVID-19*. Retrieved from Learning Policy Institute – Learning in the Time of COVID: <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/blog/covid-making-school-budgets-whole-and-equitable>.

Even after accounting for wealth disparities, the United States invests significantly more money to educate children in White communities.

—EdBuild, 23 Billion²⁹

For students of color, the problem is even worse. The concentration and partitioning of low-wealth communities is even more pronounced for communities of color due to the history of racial segregation, both formal and informal. And, despite decades of lawsuits throughout the country, there remains a \$23 billion gap nationwide between White and non-White school districts, even though they serve the same number of children.³⁰

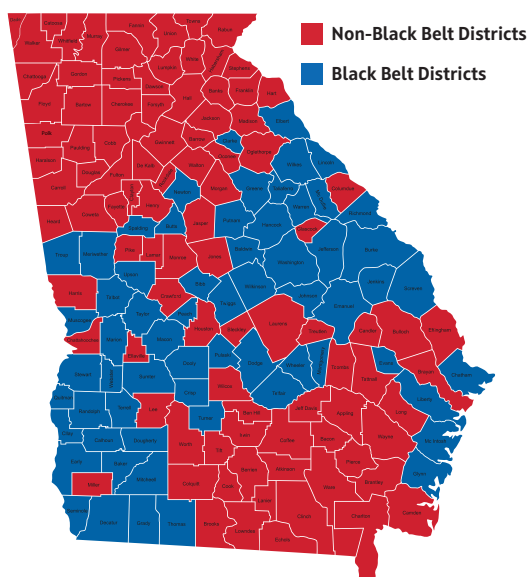
National data show the disparities of education funding by race and income:³¹

- 20% of students are enrolled in districts that are both poor and predominantly non-White.
- 5% of students are enrolled in districts that are both poor and predominantly White.
- The average non-White school district receives \$2,226 less in per-pupil state and local funding than White school districts.
- While poor White districts receive about \$150 less per student than the national per-student average, they still receive nearly \$1,500 more per student than poor non-White school districts.

In 2019, the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute (GBPI) published *Education in Georgia's Black Belt: Policy Solutions to Help Overcome a History of Exclusion*.³² This report analyzed how education investments in communities within Georgia's Black Belt³³ have historically, and continue to be, systematically disadvantaged compared to the rest of the state and the resulting outcomes. Figure 2.1 provides a map of these districts.

Georgia's Black Belt comprises 69 school districts in 67 counties. Compared to the rest of the state, these districts have a higher percentage of Black students and, more striking, nearly double the percentage of economically disadvantaged students (see Table 2.1).

FIGURE 2.1 GEORGIA'S BLACK BELT DISTRICTS



Source: Based on a GBPI analysis of historical data of enslaved labor, current enrollments of Black students and current enrollments of students living in poverty.

29 EdBuild. 2019, February. *23 Billion*. Retrieved from . EdBuild – The School Funding System Is Broken: [https://. EdBuild.org/content/23-billion/full-report.pdf](https://EdBuild.org/content/23-billion/full-report.pdf).

30 EdBuild, 2019, *\$23 Billion*.

31 EdBuild, 2019, *\$23 Billion*.

32 Owens, S.J. 2020, September 21 updated. *Education in Georgia's Black Belt: Policy Solutions to Help Overcome a History of Exclusion*. Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://gbpi.org/education-in-georgias-black-belt/>.

33 According to the GBPI report, there is no uniform definition of the Black Belt. What began as a regional description based on the coloring and fertility of the soil has morphed into a term to generally describe communities in the Southeast with a majority-Black population or where a majority of people live in poverty. GBPI's analysis relied on a combination of the historical presence of slavery, current poverty levels, and the percentage of Black students to define a sample of county and city school districts. For a full methodology report, see <https://gbpi.org/education-in-georgias-black-belt/>.

TABLE 2.1 DEMOGRAPHICS OF GEORGIA BLACK BELT SCHOOL DISTRICTS³⁴

	Student Counts	Average District Enrollment	Percent Economically Disadvantaged	Percent Black
Black Belt	335,829	4,867	47.0%	57.9%
Rest of Georgia	1,381,555	12,446	26.6%	31.5%

The GBPI study found marked differences in investments in these districts. Compared to the rest of the state, the study reported that Black Belt students were

- 21% more likely to be taught by a teacher with fewer than four years of experience, and
- 28% more likely to have a teacher teaching “out of field.”

Access to advanced coursework in these districts was also limited. The average school district outside the Black Belt offers 12 Advanced Placement (AP) courses, compared to seven within Black Belt districts. Fifteen districts within the Black Belt, serving over 12,000 students, did not have a single student take an AP exam in 2018. Of those who did take AP exams in 2018, 61% of Georgia students living outside the Black Belt achieved a passing score, compared to 40% of students living in a Black Belt district. Moreover, 36% of 2018 high school graduates in Black Belt districts were eligible for the HOPE Scholarship, compared to 47% in the rest of the state.

It is important to note that while these outcomes show that students living in the Black Belt do not perform as well academically as their counterparts across the rest of the state, it is not due to intelligence. In Georgia, as in the rest of the nation, there is a strong and causal relationship between poverty and school performance. In fact, as noted by the GBPI report, an analysis of student growth indicates that any differences in test scores between Black Belt students and the rest of the state is explained by the percentage of students living in poverty.

Finally, households in the Black Belt are **twice as likely** as households outside the region to lack access to high-speed internet. In a time when remote learning and enrichment options are critical, this puts these students at a significant disadvantage.

Fiscal Year 2021 Budget and Beyond

In its 2020 Quality Counts report, *EdWeek* examined two critical aspects of school spending. The first was adequacy. This measure captures overall spending related to how many resources states are devoting to education. On this measure, Georgia received an F compared with a national average of D. Georgia ranks 35th in the nation in this area. The second aspect was the equitable distribution of funds across districts. In this category, Georgia fared better. Georgia received a B, which placed it 33rd in the national rankings. The national average was a B-plus.³⁵ In 2018, Georgia ranked 35th in the nation for total pupil spending at \$10,810, less than the national average of \$12,612.³⁶

As previously stated, Georgia saw large reductions in education spending during the Great Recession.³⁷ These cuts took several forms. First, temporary austerity budget cuts to the Quality Basic Education (QBE) funding formula, the primary source of state funding for local districts, ranged from

³⁴ Owens, 2020, *Education in Georgia's Black Belt*.
³⁵ Education Week Research Center. 2020, September 2. Education Opportunities and Performance in Georgia. Excerpt from *Quality Counts 2020: Chance for Success*. Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/01/22/highlights-report-georgia.html>.
³⁶ US Census Bureau. 2018 Public Elementary-Secondary Education Finance Data, Table 8. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2018/econ/school-finances/secondary-education-finance.html>.
³⁷ Leachman et al., 2017, *A Punishing Decade*.

\$135 million to \$1.4 billion annually. Second, in 2012 lawmakers made structural changes to equalization grants, which are directed to low-wealth districts. These changes decreased the amount of funding the state provided. Finally, Georgia stopped contributing to health insurance for bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and other non-teaching staff, shifting those costs directly to the local districts.³⁸ In 2019, Georgia lawmakers restored the austerity cuts and successfully “fully funded education.” This change marked the end to the temporary austerity cuts, but, importantly, not to the reductions stemming from the changes in equalization or health benefits for some non-teaching staff.

Georgia lawmakers have been faced with lagging revenues caused in part by the pandemic in early 2020. Due to this shortfall, lawmakers passed a \$26 billion state budget for fiscal year (FY) 2021, which covers state spending beginning July 1, 2020. The budget included a 10% cut in state spending, totaling \$2.2 billion. This included a \$950 million reduction for K-12 education spending for local school systems. At the time of the passage of the budget, state leaders claimed that local districts had reserve funds and that federal aid would offset the state reductions in funding.³⁹

Of course, money is not the only thing that matters to school success. Districts with similar demographics and similar funding levels can, and do, produce very different outcomes for their students. However, inequalities in funding can fuel increasing inequalities within and across school systems. Students living in poverty frequently need extra supports from the schools to meet high levels of academic achievement. Georgia is one of only eight states that does not provide additional funding to students living in poverty through the state funding formula (QBE). Many programs that support low-income students and their families come through other state agencies, such as the Department of Public Health and the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities. Budget reductions in these state agencies also have a direct impact on a local school system’s ability to serve its students.

On average, revenue sources for local school systems in Georgia are split evenly between state and local funds, approximately 46% each, with the remaining 8% coming from federal funds.⁴⁰ However, that percentage can vary significantly by district depending on available revenues. The percentage of state funds used to support local school systems varies in Georgia from 20% to over 80%. In fact, excluding state charter schools, 21 local school systems rely on state dollars for more than 70% of their total budget, making any sort of reduction potentially devastating for these districts.⁴¹

One of the many immediate concerns for local districts was the precipitous drop in enrollment across Georgia’s K-12 system in the fall 2020. Based on the fall 2020 student count, Georgia anticipates a decline of about 34,000 students statewide. Currently, state funding is determined on a per-pupil basis and that enrollment count is generally used to determine funding for the subsequent year. It seems plausible that due to multiple changes in re-opening plans, concerns about safety, and unequal access to technology, many students are staying home this school year but will most likely return when the situation normalizes. Facing additional cuts based on a reduced enrollment count would further hamper districts’ ability to serve all students, especially if many of these 34,000 students start returning. While this reduction would impact all districts, poorer districts that rely on state funding for a majority of their budget will be more adversely impacted.

38 Owens, S. 2020. *Georgia at a Crossroads: Raising Revenues Sensibly or Forcing Schoolchildren to Pay for Years to Come*. Atlanta: Georgia Budget and Policy Institute.

39 Salzer, J. 2020, June 30. Kemp Signs \$26 Billion Budget as Georgia Faces Uncertain Fiscal Future. *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Retrieved from <https://www.ajc.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/kemp-signs-billion-budget-state-faces-uncertain-fiscal-future/d9UngiJ5G7r2MV51VOBNxJ/>.

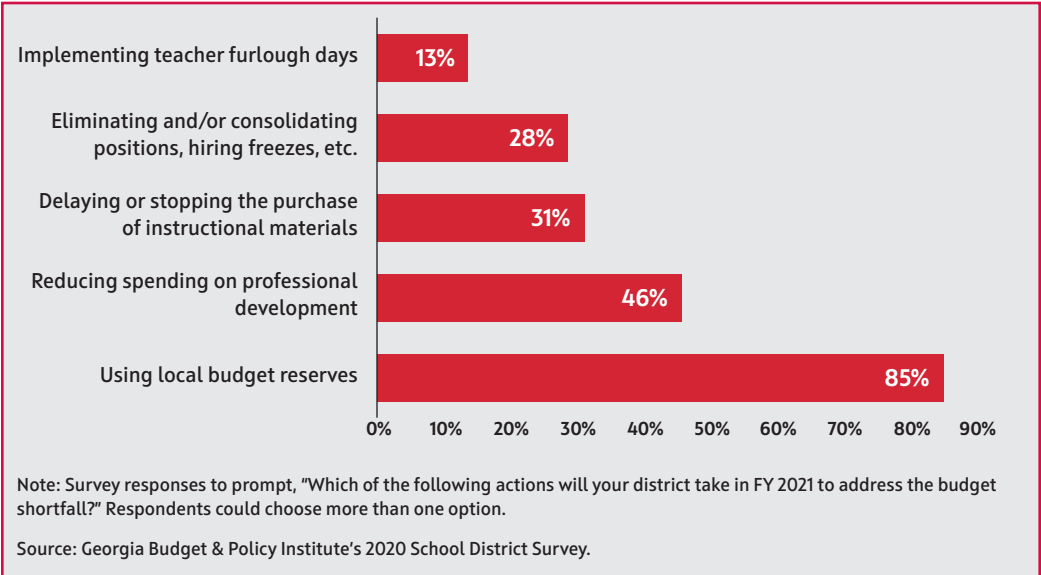
40 US Census Bureau. 2018 Public Elementary-Secondary Education Finance Data, Table 5. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2018/econ/school-finances/secondary-education-finance.html>.

41 See Georgia Department of Education, School System Financial Reports, Revenue Reports: https://app.doe.k12.ga.us/ows-bin/owa/fin_pack_revenue.entry_form.

The availability of local reserve funds also varies among local districts. In its annual survey of local superintendents, GBPI found that 89 school districts responded that they planned to use their local reserves to help offset state budget cuts. On average, they expected to deplete 34% of those funds supporting their FY 2021 budget needs. However, this percentage was not evenly distributed. Thirteen districts, representing approximately 250,000 students, anticipated depleting the entirety of their local reserve funds during FY 2021.⁴²

Far from state reductions being offset by local reserves, the combination of cuts across multiple state agencies that support education have led many districts to once again begin cutting budgets to account for the loss of state dollars, including implementing furlough days, changing their hiring plans, and reducing professional development (see Figure 2.2).

FIGURE 2.2 DISTRICT RESPONSES TO ADDRESS THE BUDGET SHORTFALL⁴³



Action Steps for Georgia

How does Georgia make up for lost learning time while also focusing on the recovery from trauma suffered by students, educators, and communities? This will require a different type of system than has traditionally existed across multiple sectors of education, health, mental health, community supports, juvenile justice, and so forth. The current education system was shaped a century ago and produced real inequities in quality and access, yet our knowledge around human development, how students learn, and what supports are needed to encourage student learning has drastically changed. The Learning Policy Institute offers a framework for restarting and reinventing education that would support not only recovery but a transformation in how school is done. See the sidebar Restarting and Reinventing School for more details on this framework. These policy recommendations cover everything from addressing distance learning and the digital divide to expanded learning time, wraparound services, and shifts in professional development for educators.

42 Owens, S. and E. Allen. 2020, August. *Difficult Choices Made Worse by Budget Cuts: Results from GBPI's 2020 School District Survey*. Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://gbpi.org/difficult-choices-made-worse-by-budget-cuts-2020-school-district-survey/>.

43 Owens and Allen, 2020, *Difficult Choices*.

To address the enormity and intricacies of the challenge facing Georgia, leaders need a comprehensive plan to assess and then meet the needs of all students post-COVID that incorporates all aspects of teaching and learning. As important, Georgia needs a comprehensive funding plan that prioritizes equitable distribution and access to resources to support these changes.

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.⁴⁵ This framework, EdQuest Georgia, found seven core policy priorities, one of which is adequate and equitable funding.

In the summer of 2020, the EdQuest Georgia Coalition published recommendations to support adequate and equitable funding for all students.⁴⁶ Among the immediate recommendations is for Georgia leaders to address the state revenue shortfall by raising alternative sources of revenue. At the beginning of 2020, Georgia had \$2.8 billion in the state's rainy-day reserve. However, \$100 million was allocated to fight the pandemic in March 2020. Another \$1 billion was used to fill budget gaps at the end of FY 2020, and an additional \$250 million was added to the FY 2021 budget. It is estimated that half of the rainy-day fund will be expended by spring 2021. Some economists are predicting full recovery may take years.⁴⁷ If so, without additional revenue streams, Georgia will have to continue budget cuts that impact essential state services.

The EdQuest Georgia Coalition joined recommendations to raise revenue through the following sources:

- Raising the tobacco tax
- Trimming tax expenditures, credits, and loopholes
- Eliminating double deductions
- Limiting expansion of school vouchers and tax-credit scholarships

LEARNING POLICY INSTITUTE – RESTARTING AND REINVENTING SCHOOL, LEARNING IN THE TIME OF COVID AND BEYOND⁴⁴

This overarching framework focuses on how both policymakers and educators can support equitable, effective teaching and learning regardless of the medium through which that learning takes place. Work should be done across these 10 key areas to transform learning and to close opportunity and achievement gaps.

1. Close the digital divide.
2. Strengthen distance and blended learning.
3. Assess what students need.
4. Ensure supports for social and emotional learning.
5. Redesign schools for stronger relationships.
6. Emphasize authentic, culturally responsive learning.
7. Provide expanded learning time.
8. Establish community schools and wraparound supports.
9. Prepare educators for reinventing school.
10. Leverage more adequate and equitable school funding.

44 Darling-Hammond, L., A. Schachner, A. Edgerton, A. Badrinarayan, J. Cardichon, P.W. Cookson, . . . S. Wojcikiewicz. 2020, August. *Restarting and Reinventing School: Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond*. Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://restart-reinvent.learningpolicyinstitute.org/>.

45 The following are the seven core policy areas of EdQuest: (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 those 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; and (7) *adequate and equitable funding* for all students.

46 For a full list of policy recommendations and more information about EdQuest Georgia, see http://www.edquestga.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/EdQuest-Adequate-and-Equitable-Funding_2020_FINAL.pdf.

47 Salzer, 2020, June 30, Kemp Signs.

Also, among the immediate challenges state leaders must address is the drop in attendance during the 2020 school year. Leaders need to pass measures stating that the fall 2020 enrollment count does not automatically equal a budget cut for the following school year. Time needs to be given to see if students begin to return as time passes.

Among the long-term policy recommendations for Georgia is to pass funding reform legislation that includes a weighted student formula that allocates more funding based on student and district characteristics, including poverty. Foundational to developing a new funding formula, Georgia must conduct a cost study to determine actual costs associated with supporting student achievement to guide state and district policy. By not considering the actual cost of education, local districts' ability to meet the needs of their students could be limited while at the same time these districts are being increasingly held accountable for student outcomes. This could also further increase inequalities between districts instead of alleviating them.

Even in this time of uncertainty, we are beginning to glimpse the magnitude of the needs associated with COVID-19. Georgia has known for decades where educational inequities exist. The state knows which communities are being hardest hit by the pandemic, the level of investments needed, and where those investments should be made. To meet those needs and move Georgia from recovery to success, the state needs to invest in an equitable funding model that prioritizes the most at-risk communities and students and leverages federal and local dollars to ensure all children have access to a quality education.



EARLY LEARNING – THE FOUNDATION FOR AN INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Issue Overview

Due to its foundational importance to success in school, some aspect of early learning has always been included in the *Top Ten Issues to Watch* – from improved literacy rates and lifetime earnings to overall health and well-being. The 2020 economic disruption further accentuated the issues around early learning, including its role in supporting a statewide workforce and the lack of access to quality child care in many areas of the state. With more than 657,000 children from birth to age 4 living in Georgia,⁴⁸ this age group represents 26% of the state's under-18 population; however, the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), the state agency responsible for serving the early care and education needs of Georgia's children and their families, only serves 60% of four-year-olds through Georgia's Pre-K Program and only 14.8% of income-eligible children through Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) due to limited funding.⁴⁹

The pandemic's effect on child care reverberated through families, workers, and business owners:

- The supply issue was amplified as more families wrestled with balancing job commitments and at-home learning. Before March 2020, 70% of families utilized formal child care programs. By August 2020, only 13% were utilizing formal programs and 62% had shifted to parent or guardian in-home care.⁵⁰
- Child care workers quickly earned the "essential worker" moniker, despite the fact that many lacked adequate health care services and were dealing with child care issues themselves. Georgia ranks 38th in the US for child care worker salaries, with teachers earning an annual average of \$21,810 – \$3,000 below the national average.⁵¹

48 Annie E. Casey Kids Count Data Center. 2020, November. Georgia Indicators: Child Population by Age Group. Retrieved from <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#GA/2/0/char/0>.

49 Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS). 2019, December 3. *Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS): Helping Working Georgians Afford Child Care*. Retrieved from <https://geears.org/publications/childcare-and-parent-services-caps-helping-working-georgians-afford-child-care/>.

50 GEEARS. 2020, August 27. *Simply Not Sustainable: Georgia Parents' Experiences During the COVID-19 Crisis*. Retrieved from <https://geears.org/wp-content/uploads/COVID19-Family-Experience-Survey.pdf>.

51 Early Childhood Teacher. 2020, November. Early Childhood Education Jobs in Georgia. Retrieved from <https://www.earlychildhood-teacher.org/jobs/georgia/>.

- Child care center owners juggled the overwhelming costs associated with safety mandates required to keep their centers open. In the first round of the federal Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding allocations, DECAL awarded \$38.8 million to 3,789 licensed child care providers to avoid closures and supply personal protective equipment; a second round of payments was initiated in November 2020 totaling up to \$55 million to assist centers struggling due to COVID-19.⁵²

Availability and access to early learning are critical to many families in Georgia, but are of utmost importance to marginalized families. On average, 30% of Georgia children in the birth-to-age 4 population live in low-income families with at least one parent working 50 hours a week during the previous year.⁵³ As Georgia addresses the impacts of the pandemic and moves to recovery and success, how does the state create a new early learning system that addresses inequities as the state looks to strengthen this critical segment of the birth-to-work pipeline?

Significance for Georgia

Georgia has arrived at a critical crossroads in the early learning space. Expanding this issue to consider drivers of inclusive economic recovery, Georgia has the opportunity to rethink equitable access to high-quality early learning, particularly in rural and underserved communities, and develop a statewide funding structure for infant through pre-school, pre-K, afterschool, and early learning workforce education supports.

Since establishing the first Pre-K program in 1992, Georgia's early care and learning system has made great strides and is a national leader. DECAL administers Georgia's nationally recognized Pre-K Program, licenses child care centers and home-based child care, and oversees Georgia's CAPS program, federal nutrition programs, and the Head Start State Collaboration Office. Additionally, DECAL manages Quality Rated, Georgia's system to determine, improve, and communicate the quality of programs that provide child care by assigning one, two, or three stars to early education and school-age care programs that meet or exceed the minimum state requirements.⁵⁴ Despite Georgia's progress in the early care and learning space, there are substantial racial disparities in affordability, access to quality child care, and wage equity for early care and education (ECE) workers.

Workforce Threats Caused by Inequities

In Georgia, the early care and education industry generates \$4.7 billion in economic activity each year, and the Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS) estimates that \$24 billion of parents' annual earnings is supported by the availability of child care in Georgia.⁵⁵ Further, it is estimated that Georgia has lost \$1.75 billion in economic activity annually and an additional \$105 million in tax revenue due to child care issues, with 25% of Georgia parents signaling a significant disruption to family employment due to child care issues.⁵⁶ Figure 3.1, from the GEEARS Opportunities Lost report, demonstrates the pre-pandemic impact on parents in Georgia and the disproportionate impact on women.

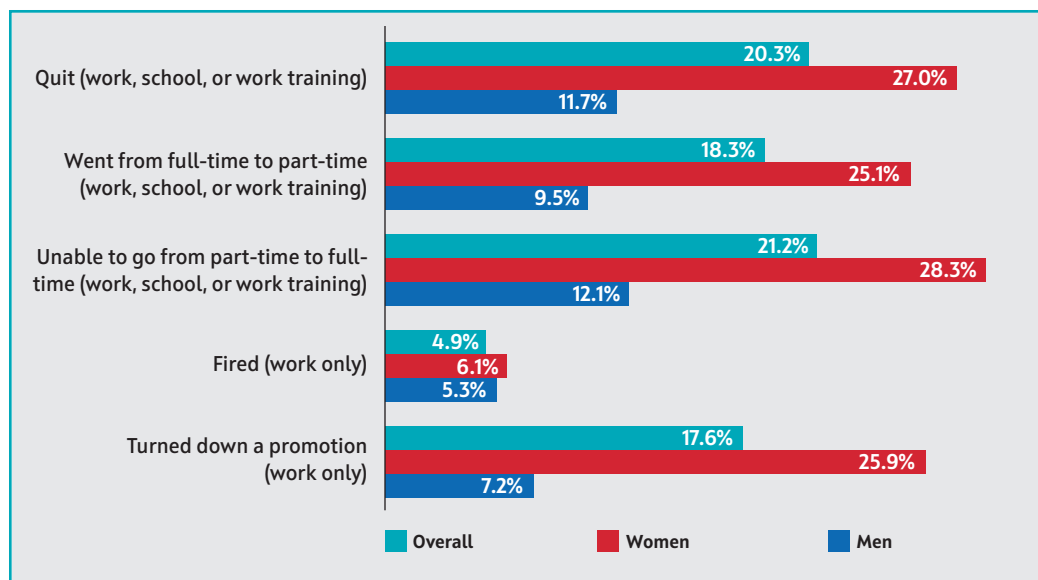
52 Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). 2020, October 22. Georgia Child Care Program Eligible for Round 2 of STABLE Payments [Press release]. Retrieved from http://www.dec.ga.gov/documents/attachments/release_STABLE%20Funds%20Round%202%2010-22-2020.pdf.

53 Annie E. Casey Kids Count Data Center. 2020, November. Children in Low-Income Working Families by Age Group in Georgia. Retrieved from <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5048-children-in-low-income-working-families-by-age-group?loc=12&loc=2#detailed/2/12/false/37,871,870,573,869,36,868,867,133,38/34,35,36/11455,11456>.

54 See DECAL website: <https://www.dec.ga.gov/bfts/About.aspx>.

55 See GEEARS website: <https://geears.org/>.

56 GEEARS. 2020, March 5. *Advancing Opportunity: Recommendations for Policy Makers*. Retrieved from <https://geears.org/publications/advancing-opportunity-recommendations-for-policymakers/>.

FIGURE 3.1 INCIDENTS OF LONG-TERM DISRUPTIONS TO EMPLOYMENT, SCHOOLING, OR WORK TRAINING DUE TO CHILD CARE ISSUES, BY GENDER⁵⁷

The pandemic only exacerbated these challenges. An August 2020 GEEARS survey indicated that only one-third of Georgia parents reported their current child care situation as manageable, one-third had taken paid leave to provide child care, and one in five families reported taking unpaid time off.⁵⁸ Women were most directly affected by the child care center and school closings. National research shows that between February and September 2020, labor force participation for mothers declined by 3.3 percentage points, equivalent to 900,000 people, compared to only 1.3 percentage points for fathers. Data suggest that a 10% rise in the K-12 school closing rate in September 2020 resulted in 1.6 million fewer mothers in the labor force during that time related to shifts in home/family care.⁵⁹

As the pandemic fueled the work-from-home trend, many workers simply did not have this option, intensifying their need for child care. Low-wage workers and people of color, already under financial and health burdens, were ironically some of the first workers called back to job sites.⁶⁰ Statistics show that only 35% of working parents with young children from any income level can telework; however, low-income parents raising young children are six times less likely to be able to work from home than higher-wage workers. Further, fewer than one in five Black and one in six Latino workers are able to telework.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Goldberg, H., T. Cairl, and T.J. Cunningham. n.d. *Opportunities Lost: How Child Care Challenges Affect Georgia's Workforce and Economy*. Retrieved from GEEARS: <https://geears.org/oppslost/>.

⁵⁸ GEEARS. 2020, August 27. *Simply Not Sustainable: Georgia Parents' Experiences During the COVID-19 Crisis*. Retrieved from <https://geears.org/wp-content/uploads/COVID19-Family-Experience-Survey.pdf>.

⁵⁹ Tedeschi, E. 2020, October 29. The Mystery of How Many Mothers Have Left Work Because of School Closings. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/29/upshot/mothers-leaving-jobs-pandemic.html>.

⁶⁰ Harker, L. 2020, September 15. *Support for Early Education Programs for Health and Well-Being of Georgia Families*. Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. Retrieved from https://gbpi.org/support-early-childhood-education-programs-for-health-and-well-being-of-georgia-families/#_edn25.

⁶¹ Gould, E., and H. Shierholz. 2020. *Not Everybody Can Work from Home: Black and Hispanic Workers Are Much Less Likely to Be Able to Telework*. Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.epi.org/blog/black-and-hispanic-workers-are-much-less-likely-to-be-able-to-work-from-homes/>.

Equitable Access

Equitable access to early learning experiences, especially high-quality ones, is not available to all children. This is particularly true for low-income children – the population that benefits from it the most. In 2019, less than 50% of children from low-income families were enrolled in Georgia's Pre-K Program.⁶² Many low-income families in Georgia need child care to earn certifications and degrees to improve employment outcomes. Consider these population demographics:⁶³

- 189,000+ Georgia children live with parents who lack secure employment.
- 42% of Latino children, compared to 7% of White and 8% of Black children, are from families where the household head lacks a high school diploma.
- Over 1 million children, 44% of the under-18 population, live with a head of household whose maximum educational attainment is a high school diploma or equivalent; another 9% have heads of household with an associate degree. Educational attainment is a key driver for employability and job security.

Families in rural areas face the greatest challenges in finding licensed child care, with three in five rural communities lacking an adequate child care supply. The Center for American Progress defines child care deserts as “neighborhoods or communities that are either lacking any child care options or have so few child care providers that there are more than three children for every licensed child care slot.” The analysis noted that 32% of Georgia's zip codes were considered child care deserts in 2016;⁶⁴ in the years since, Georgia has expanded its program offerings, but there are still areas of the state with no child care services. Of note, rural area centers, many of which are family child care learning homes (FCCLH), get high marks for quality. DECAL found that 93% of all FCCLHs qualified as Quality Rated; of those, 71% earned a two- or three-star rating.⁶⁵

Deepening the problem of equitable access, Latino families disproportionately reside in child care deserts, with nearly 60% of that population living in areas with an undersupply of licensed child care.⁶⁶ Regional efforts are underway in Georgia to address this issue. For example, to address the critical need for teachers, a Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) and community collaboration in Northwest Georgia has developed a Spanish language Child Development Associate (CDA) program, yielding promising results. See the sidebar Collaborating for Cuidado de Niños for details about this program.

COLLABORATING FOR CUIDADO DE NIÑOS

A collaboration among three organizations in the Dalton area yielded two cohorts of 30 graduates with the Spanish Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. The partnership between the Community Foundation of Northwest Georgia, Georgia Northwestern Technical College (GNTC), and DECAL was driven by demand for qualified educators at child care centers in the Dalton area. The 120-hour certification classes, held at GNTC's Whitfield Murray Campus, targeted area parents who were interested in taking early education classes and entering the professional field of education, but who lacked the English skills necessary to enter GNTC or other English-only secondary school systems. Bilingual professors oversaw the CDA course, which included lesson planning, CPR, and required DECAL background checks, as well as on-the-job training at local child care centers. The program, part of the Northwest Georgia community literacy plan, has a goal of preparing children for school by age five in support of meeting third-grade reading-level expectations. A win-win for the community, the bilingual early learning teachers fill a special need in a diverse community, bringing cultural competence and communication skills to the Quality Rated centers that serve Latino children and their families.⁶⁷

62 Annie E. Casey Kids Count Data Center. 2020, November. Children Enrolled in the Georgia Pre-K Program from Low-Income Families in Georgia. Retrieved from <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/632-children-enrolled-in-the-georgia-pre-k-program-from-low-income-families#detailed/2/any/false/1729,37,871,870,573,869,36,868,867,133/any/8968,8969>.

63 Annie E. Casey Kids Count Data Center. 2020, November. Georgia Indicators. Retrieved from <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#GA/2/0/char/0>.

64 Malik, R., and K. Hamm. 2017, August 30. *Mapping Our Child Care Deserts*. Center for American Progress. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2017/08/30/437988/mapping-americas-child-care-deserts/>.

65 DECAL. 2019, May. Quality Rated Validation Report #4. Retrieved from <http://www.dec.ga.gov/documents/attachments/QRValidationReport4.pdf>.

66 Malik and Hamm, 2018, *Mapping Our Child Care Deserts*.

67 Popham, J. n.d. Students Earn Spanish CDA at GNTC. Retrieved from the Georgia Northwestern Technical College website: <https://www.gntc.edu/123119-spanish>.

In November 2020, of the 4,345 DECAL Quality Rated licensed centers in Georgia, 3,404 were open, with 941 closed due to the impact of the pandemic.⁶⁸ As part of its pandemic response, DECAL conducted ongoing analyses and focus groups to support program and agency decision making. In tracking open rates for child care centers statewide, DECAL found the following:

- Child care learning center (CCLC) providers saw the greatest percentage-point change in temporary status, with only 29% of CCLCs reporting being open in April compared to 74% in September.
- In contrast, 58% of family child care learning homes (FCCLH) across the state reported being open in April compared to 72% in September.
- Quality Rated providers had an open rate of 36% in April, compared to 79% in September; 40% of unrated providers, by comparison, reported being open in April and 66% in September.
- Of note, CAPS providers were more likely to report being open than non-CAPS providers, with 41% reporting being open in April compared to 34% of non-CAPS providers, and 82% reported being open in September compared to 60% of non-CAPS providers.⁶⁹

Funding the Future of Early Care

Public investment, driven by new funding formulas, is the key to improving the early learning landscape. While the US has seen advances in science and policy, with a focus on quality and workforce development, the country falls to the bottom quartile in comparison to other countries in terms of investment, quality, and equitable access.⁷⁰ Complicating matters, the COVID-19 pandemic dealt the child care industry yet another financial blow. Without significant federal and state investment, the industry – comprising a significant number of private businesses – could collapse.

DECAL's 2019 agency funding model included 50.9% federal funds; 41.8% Georgia Lottery proceeds, which are dedicated to Georgia's Pre-K Program; and 7.3% in state and other funds.⁷¹ Federal funding related to the pandemic shifted that balance to 56.5% federal and 37.3% lottery funds for 2020. The fiscal year (FY) 2021 state budget allots \$54.2 million for DECAL, a \$7.3 million reduction from the previous year, and \$378.7 million in lottery revenue to fund Georgia's Pre-K Program.⁷²

Staffing and resources for the Georgia Pre-K classrooms are the only positions directly funded by the state through DECAL. Staff and resources for other programs, including birth to age 3 child care learning centers and family care homes, are the responsibility of the centers, which tend to be small businesses with costs disproportionately covered by parent tuition and to a much lesser extent federal support programs. An economic impact study commissioned by DECAL showed that parent fees and tuition are the largest portion of gross receipts in Georgia, totaling more than \$1.5 billion per year or 52.7% of gross annual revenue for child care learning centers and family child care homes. While some programs serve families that have employer-based tuition reimbursement assistance, the majority of programs, 65.3% of centers and 80.7% of family child care homes, serve no children with employer-paid fees or tuition.⁷³

68 For details on the Quality Rated program, see <http://qualityrated.org/>.

69 The Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program assists low-income families with the cost of child care while they work, go to school or training, or participate in other work-related activities. Calculations provided by DECAL.

70 National Center on Education and the Economy. 2020, November. International Education Benchmarking Study [Video presentation by Dr. Sharon Lynn Kagan]. Retrieved from <https://ncee.org/earlyadvantage-livestream/>.

71 DECAL. 2019 *Annual Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.dec.al.ga.gov/documents/attachments/BFTSAnnualReport2019.pdf>.

72 DECAL. 2020, August. Board Presentation. Retrieved from http://www.dec.al.ga.gov/documents/BoardMeetings/2020-08-27_Board_Presentation.pdf.

73 Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, Georgia State University, and Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia. 2016, June. *Economic Impact of the Early Care and Education Industry in Georgia*. Retrieved from DECAL: <https://www.dec.al.ga.gov/documents/attachments/EconImpactReport.pdf>.

This funding distribution further exacerbates inequities in the availability of quality care – and also suppresses industry wages. Historically, the early learning industry has been a relatively low-paying field, and workers of color are often relegated to the lowest-paid positions. DECAL's economic impact study supports this trend, noting that the highest paid positions, including center directors and Georgia Pre-K lead teachers, are filled by just over 50% White and 41% Black workers; in contrast, lower paid positions such as infant/toddler teachers are 52% Black and 40% White. In family child care homes, the majority of owners and paid assistants are Black (53% and 59%, respectively).⁷⁴

An Early Childhood Workforce Index indicates that nearly 33,000 teachers comprise the early childhood workforce in Georgia; however, the median wage is very low, with workers earning between \$10 and \$13 an hour. Inequities between early learning and grade school teacher wages exist as well. A preschool teacher's median wage, for example, is 43% that of a kindergarten teacher. And leadership positions do not pay much better: A preschool director earns a \$19 median hourly wage, compared to \$31 for a kindergarten teacher.⁷⁵ In spite of their low earnings, early childhood educators were moved to the front lines of the pandemic as they provided child care to other essential workers, exposing themselves to health and economic stressors.

The pandemic amplified the personal economic strain on child care teachers. A Brookings Institute study outlined the impact, noting that 29% of child care teachers reported they had run out of food with no money to buy more in the previous three months, compared to 5% of school-based teachers. Further, only about 40% of child care teachers reported receiving health care benefits through their jobs on average; thus, it is not surprising that 35% of child care teachers reported insufficient funds to meet medical needs.⁷⁶

Filling a critical need during the pandemic, Short-Term Assistance Benefit for Licensed Entities (STABLE) funding was part of the first phase of administering the \$144 million Georgia received under the federal CARES Act. DECAL received high marks for its communication and support for providers seeking STABLE funds. In a survey of providers, respondents indicated that funds would be used for facility costs, supplies needed to comply with CDC guidelines, and classroom materials/supplies. Further, 90% of surveyed providers said that STABLE funds helped their programs reopen or remain open.⁷⁷

To understand the full economic impact of the pandemic on early child care business owners, consider the finding that without additional financial assistance, 50% of the country's child care centers are predicted to close permanently, leading to a loss of 4.5 million child care slots. Specific to Georgia, 29% of centers surveyed stated they could not survive closing for more than two weeks without significant public investment to allow for compensation and retention of staff and to pay rent.⁷⁸ Driven by reductions in program capacity due to physical distancing requirements and increased payroll and sanitation expenses, costs for child care providers skyrocketed, with Georgia providers reporting a 115% increase in the average monthly cost of child care during the pandemic.⁷⁹

74 Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, Georgia State University, and Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia. 2016. *Economic Impact*.

75 Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. *Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018*. Retrieved from <http://cscce.berkeley.edu/files/2018/06/2018-Index-Georgia.pdf>.

76 Bassok, D., A. Markowitz, and M. Michie. 2020, October 23. *COVID-19 Highlights Inequities in How We Treat Early Educators in Child Care vs. Schools*. Brookings Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2020/10/23/covid-19-highlights-inequities-in-how-we-treat-early-educators-in-child-care-vs-schools/>.

77 Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia. 2020, October 27. Short-Term Assistance Benefit for Licensed Entities (STABLE) Child Care Survey. Retrieved from http://dec.al.ga.gov/documents/attachments/STABLE_Survey_Report.pdf.

78 National Association for the Education of Young Children. 2020, March 27. *A State-by-State Look at Child Care in Crisis: Understanding Early Effects of the Coronavirus Pandemic*. Retrieved from https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/public-policy-advocacy/state_by_state_child_care_crisis_coronavirus_surveydata.pdf.

79 Workman, S., and S. Jessen-Howard. 2020, September 3. *The True Cost of Providing Safe Child Care During the Coronavirus Pandemic*. Center for American Progress. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2020/09/03/489900/true-cost-providing-safe-child-care-coronavirus-pandemic/>.

Other federal funding sources intended to offset the direct costs for child care centers include the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). This fund provides support for low-income, working families through child care assistance for children ages birth through 13, and it promotes improving the quality of child care and afterschool programs. As part of Georgia's renewal for CCDF, DECAL will use funds to continue the tiered bonus percentages of 5%, 10%, and 25%, respectively, for one-, two-, and three-star Quality Rated providers and will subsidize eligibility thresholds of 50% of the state median income.⁸⁰

Finally, Georgia was one of 26 states to receive the Preschool Development Grant (PDG) from the US Department of Health and Human Services and the US Department of Education. This three-year \$11.2 million grant builds on an initial \$2.9 million PDG planning grant the state received in January 2019. As the lead agency for the grant, DECAL will oversee activities that focus on the unique needs of children and their families from vulnerable and underserved populations, such as those living in poverty, experiencing homelessness, living in foster care, living in rural areas, or living with disabilities.⁸¹

Action Steps for Georgia

Georgia has been a national pacesetter in the ECE ecosystem and now has the opportunity to remodel the system. DECAL provides the expertise and resources to continue improvements around key issues that support early learning: subsidies for low-income family infant/toddler care, expanded preschool access and subsidies, and alignment/transition services for preschool through third grade. Not surprisingly, these issues are top of mind for many Georgia voters. In a recent poll, expanding access to ECE and paid family and medical leave were high priorities, with nearly 9 in 10 voters ranking these issues as important.⁸²

Specific to early learning, 91% of Georgia voters ranked ensuring access to quality affordable child care as a top priority.⁸³ This access is crucial for family economic mobility and stability as well as children's healthy development. Georgia educators and legislators have an obligation to address inequities in accessing high-quality, early learning. Recommendations for improving affordability and access to quality child care in Georgia include the following:⁸⁴

- Increase the CAPS budget by \$20 million, allowing an additional 3,000+ infants and toddlers to be served.
- Modify the funding strategy related to CCDF to prioritize infants and toddlers.
- Expand CAPS eligibility to 85% of state median income, allowing more families subsidy access.
- Build a state fund for capital improvements, rewarding child care facilities committed to improving quality.

80 DECAL. 2020, November. Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Plan for Georgia, FY 2019–2021. Retrieved from <http://www.dec.al.ga.gov/BftS/CCDFPlan.aspx>.

81 DECAL. 2020, November. Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Age Five. Retrieved from <https://www.dec.al.ga.gov/BftS/PreschoolDevelopmentGrant.aspx>.

82 GEEARS. 2020 Georgia Voter Poll.

83 GEEARS. 2020 Georgia Voter Poll.

84 GEEARS. 2020, March 5. *Advancing Opportunity: Recommendations for Policy Makers*. Retrieved from <https://geears.org/publications/advancing-opportunity-recommendations-for-policy-makers/>.

Continued support for workforce development – within the ECE industry and at-large – is needed. In support of upskilling existing workers and building a strong talent pipeline, DECAL awarded \$2.4 million through its DECAL Scholars program. DECAL also has shown success as a skill-building agency for the early learning industry, increasing Professional Learning Community facilitators by 273 and training nearly 2,300 teachers on the Georgia Early Learning Standards.⁸⁵ In support of working parents, DECAL Two-Gen (two-generation) grants in 2020 continue to fund organizations focused on promoting workforce development opportunities at local child care programs and Head Start, and those connecting parents to resources for adult education, workforce opportunities, and quality child care.⁸⁶

DECAL also has implemented qualification-based wage incentives to boost educator continuing education and professional development, but Georgia must do more to improve compensation rates and increase retention rates. The average hourly wage for educators in child care centers is unacceptable given the importance they play in the economic recovery. The drivers of early childhood policy must shift from relying on low-wage workers to serve the majority population to placing value on a diverse, skilled workforce. Georgia needs to consider health insurance, debt forgiveness, refundable tax credits, and professional development support to bolster the early learning and child care workforce – and in turn, improve outcomes for the children, families, and communities they serve.⁸⁷

Finally, Georgia can now reimagine early education and dismantle long-standing funding and organizational disparities between early learning and K-12 systems. Better alignment between P-3 (pre-K to third grade) educators will build shared expectations and understanding of student benchmarks, school readiness, and child development. In addition to creating formal communication channels between ECE workers and public educators, Georgia needs to invest in tools, shared data platforms, and relationship building among agencies and across sectors. Without alignment, the gains made by children participating in high-quality early learning programs often fade or disappear completely – and given Georgia's literacy rates in K-8, transition learning loss is simply not something the state can afford.

Georgia's future economic prosperity is at risk without proper support and funding for early child care and learning. Now more than ever, workers will need new skills to retain and gain employment in the new, post-pandemic economy – and for families, this escalates the urgency for high-quality, affordable, accessible child care. Improving equitable access to early child care, funding strategies, and pre-K-third-grade alignment are paramount for Georgia as the state transitions to post-pandemic learning and work environments.

85 DECAL. *2019 Annual Report*.

86 DECAL. 2020, June 5. DECAL Awards Two-Generation Innovation Grants for 2020–2021 [Press release]. Retrieved from https://dec.al.ga.gov/documents/attachments/release_2Gen%20Innovation%202020-2021.pdf.

87 Bassok et al., 2020, COVID-19 Highlights Inequities.



DELIVERY OF INSTRUCTION – NEW APPROACHES TO LEARNING

Issue Overview

In March of 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered the doors of the nation's public schools, parents and educators alike were left scrambling to find alternatives to the traditional, in-person instructional model. For the remainder of the school year, districts did their best to pivot toward distance learning strategies to engage students, while families found themselves searching for ways to accommodate their children's needs in an unfamiliar, remote learning environment. Since then, the broader impact of the pandemic on public schools and the communities in which they exist has come into clearer view. Challenges stemming from severe learning loss for students, schools and parents exploring alternative learning models, teachers weighing the benefits of returning to school or retiring, and measuring the extent of the pandemic-related economic devastation are front and center.

At the start of the 2020–2021 academic year, schools, parents, and communities had to navigate the shifting responsibility of educating children. Schools broadened their approach to include a variety of instructional models, ranging from face-to-face to online to hybrid models to serve their students, recognizing that the unpredictability of the virus and rollercoaster-like trends of infection required leaders to move fluidly between instructional strategies. At the same time, many parents sought more intimate and presumably safer learning environments like private school, in-home tutoring, homeschooling, and learning pods for their children. As schools and parents worked to navigate new instructional terrain, they were also trying to mitigate learning loss and a decline in students' social-emotional health.

These issues lay bare the many challenges and inequities that have an impact on the effectiveness of our public education system, particularly access to technology and high-quality online learning opportunities. However, they also reveal new opportunities for educators to think more boldly and innovatively about the ways we deliver instruction to a diverse population as a means of improving equity. Online, technology-driven learning is only going to become more common as we move forward, so it is imperative that the state develop a more comprehensive and robust strategy that will be inclusive and meet the needs of all Georgia students.

Significance for Georgia

The pandemic forced school systems across Georgia to consider alternatives to a traditional, face-to-face instructional model when they reopened in the fall of 2020. Without the pressure of high-stakes accountability, coupled with a greater focus on addressing equity in schools, districts have had more flexibility to try different ways of educating and meeting the needs of their students.

Virtual Learning

Virtual learning has become one of the most common alternative instructional methods available to teachers and students. Leveraging high-speed digital technology, virtual instruction transforms the in-class learning experience into a digital one. Examples of virtual learning formats include the following:⁸⁸

- Computer-based
- Internet-based
- Remote teacher online
- Blended learning
- Facilitated virtual learning

Research shows that virtual learning can be an effective means of improving educational access and equity, engaging students in interactive learning experiences, and improving the cost-effectiveness of schooling.⁸⁹ In many cases, virtual learning offers teachers opportunities to be more innovative and creative in their instruction and can provide students with more opportunities to learn according to their own strengths, pace, and instructional preferences.⁹⁰

This does not mean that all students will thrive in a virtual model, however. Research suggests that middle and high school students are better equipped to manage virtual learning environments than their younger, elementary school counterparts. Elementary-age students as well as special needs students are likely to perform better in traditional, face-to-face classroom settings, due to the hands-on, adult interactions those environments provide.⁹¹ Economically disadvantaged students can also struggle in virtual learning environments if they lack access to technology, which is common,⁹² or have limited at-home support during school hours. Of course, even when students are personally equipped to thrive in a virtual learning, sometimes the local school district lacks a robust technological infrastructure and cannot facilitate a high-quality virtual learning experience.

Georgia's technological inequities became apparent at the onset of the pandemic when districts shifted to virtual learning. Dalton Public Schools, for instance, transitioned smoothly to a virtual instructional model when COVID-19 required their move to a virtual format. They had been well prepared to facilitate remote learning for several years, having provided each of their students with personal laptops in 2016. Other districts, on the other hand, did not pivot as easily. One district, for example, closed schools on March 17, but communication challenges between the district and students led to a delay in the dissemination of laptops and work packets. One parent explained the frustration felt by many:

88 Van Beek, M. 2011. *Virtual Learning in Michigan's Schools*. Mackinac Center for Public Policy. p. 2. Retrieved from <https://www.mackinac.org/archives/2011/s2011-01-VirtualLearningFINAL.pdf>.

89 Van Beek, 2011, *Virtual Learning*.

90 Bendici, R. 2020, April 21. Remote Learning and Digital Equity: Challenges and Opportunities. Tech & Learning. Retrieved from <https://www.techlearning.com/news/remote-learning-and-digital-equity-challenges-and-opportunities>; Fleming, N. 2020. Why Are Some Kids Thriving During Remote Learning? *Edutopia*. Retrieved from <https://www.edutopia.org/article/why-are-some-kids-thriving-during-remote-learning>.

91 Povich, E. 2020, July 29. *Virtual Learning Means Unequal Learning*. The Pew Charitable Trusts. Retrieved from <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2020/07/29/virtual-learning-means-unequal-learning>.

92 Herold, B. 2020, April 10. The Disparities in Remote Learning under Coronavirus. *EdWeek*. Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/04/10/the-disparities-in-remote-learning-under-coronavirus.html>.

*How do the parents know that they can get their children Chromebooks?
How are they getting in touch with these families? I know that it's only so
much the school can do, and some of the responsibilities are for the parents.
I just think more can and should be done to get this information out.⁹³*

The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education administered a survey in rural Georgia in the fall of 2020 and found these frustrations were shared by many parents. In describing the confusion surrounding the local school's hybrid learning offering, one parent responded,

*I want the 4-day option – but if that is not possible, then help me understand
why. What are the indicators that would mean, NOW we can do it? I am sure
there is a process, but I don't know what it is, and it would be helpful to know.⁹⁴*

Hybrid Learning

Blended learning, sometimes called hybrid learning, is an instructional approach that mixes traditional, face-to-face instructional opportunities alongside virtual learning opportunities. The ratio of in-class instruction to online learning can vary from classroom to classroom and school to school, but essential to the model is “combining the best parts of face-to-face and online learning to create the ideal learning experience.”⁹⁵ The logistics of developing and deploying a hybrid learning model take time and certainly require a shift in thinking about the “how” of educating large numbers of students to ensure continuity between in-person and online instruction. But the hybrid approach also presents new possibilities for providing all students access to an equitable education.⁹⁶

Like a purely virtual learning model, a hybrid instructional model offers students tremendous flexibility with respect to when they engage in learning and at what pace they move through the content. Students looking to revisit or dive more deeply into concepts can access learning materials outside of traditional classroom hours, while students needing to accelerate the pace of their learning or decelerate it to better comprehend concepts are able to tailor the learning experience to their needs. For students who may benefit from a more traditional in-person experience, the hybrid learning model is also beneficial because it allows for flexible scheduling that reduces the number of students in the school building and allows more one-on-one instruction. In practice, this means that schools can reserve in-class learning opportunities for vulnerable student populations, like English language learners, low-income students, those in special education, and elementary-level students who sometimes struggle in remote learning environments.⁹⁷

Competency-Based Learning

Another instructional practice that Georgia's education stakeholders have considered is competency-based education (CBE). The Competency-Based Education Alliance defines the practice as follows: “As a personalized learning approach, CBE provides a flexible and engaging learning environment in which progression is based on mastery of explicit learning objectives, or competencies, as demonstrated through evidence of student learning, rather than the time spent in a course/topic.”⁹⁸

93 Williams, R. 2020, April 6. With Georgia Classrooms Closed for the School Year, Digital Divide Emerges. *Georgia Recorder*. Retrieved from <https://georgiarecorder.com/2020/04/06/with-georgia-classrooms-closed-for-the-school-year-digital-divide-emerges/>; Williams, R. 2020, August 28. Schools In for Most Georgia Students, Many Online and All Disrupted by Virus. *Georgia Recorder*. Retrieved from <https://georgiarecorder.com/2020/08/28/schools-in-for-most-georgia-students-many-online-and-all-disrupted-by-virus/>.

94 Georgia Partnership Stakeholder Survey (October 2020).

95 Boyarsky, K. 2020, June 12. What Is Hybrid Learning? Here's Everything You Need to Know. *Owl Labs*. Retrieved from <https://www.owllabs.com/blog/hybrid-learning#:~:text=Hybrid%20learning%20is%20an%20educational,video%20conferencing%20hardware%20and%20software.>

96 Superville, D.R. 2020, June 24. Hybrid School Schedules: More Flexibility; Big Logistical Challenges. *EdWeek*. Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/06/25/hybrid-school-schedules-more-flexibility-big-logistical.html>.

97 Superville, 2020, Hybrid School Schedules; TeachThought Staff. 2016, February 24. The Benefits of Blended Learning. Retrieved from <https://www.teachthought.com/technology/the-benefits-of-blended-learning/>.

98 Regional Education Laboratory Southeast. 2020, August. COVID-19 and *Competency-Based Education: Where Do We Go from Here?* Retrieved from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southeast/blog/2020_08_05_COVID-19_and_competency-based_education.asp.

In 2015, former-Governor Nathan Deal's Education Reform Commission released a report that included specific recommendations from its Move On When Ready subcommittee for how and why Georgia should be looking to adopt a CBE system. The report argued that "competency-based learning fosters equity by holding all students to a common set of rigorous expectations while providing flexibility in the way credit can be earned, allowing students to progress through content as they demonstrate mastery, regardless of time, pace, or place." The report went on to recommend that the state "develop a pilot program of competency-based education prior to statewide implementation . . . and explore possibilities of integration into various school governance models."⁹⁹

The efficacy of competency-based learning is still to be determined. Based on the experiences of local Georgia districts that have tried implementing a competency-based instructional model, a district must decide upon some foundational aspects of the model before adopting this approach:

- The district must have clearly defined standards and accepted markers of growth to promote accountability around the content teachers should be teaching and the content students should be learning.
- The district must be equipped and committed to providing the necessary professional development and instructional supports to teachers to effectively lead in instruction in a competency-based model.
- The district must be able to anticipate and mitigate the variety of non-academic circumstances that impact student achievement. For instance, students with special needs, English language learners, and those from low-income families often require more resources and more frequent interventions to ensure they are succeeding academically. If teachers and schools are allowed to move at their own pace without regard for these students' needs as well as performance standards or benchmarks, then such students are most likely to get left behind.

Absent these considerations, a district's implementation of a competency-based model could easily exacerbate existing inequities in a school district. Empowering students through self-paced, mastery-focused learning is a worthwhile pursuit, but it should not be implemented at the cost of providing students with equitable opportunities for academic growth.

Learning Hubs

At the onset of the pandemic, many families began forming so-called pandemic pods. Also known as learning pods or micro-schools, these groups began forming in homes with "closed groups of a few families' children to learn together under the rotating supervision of parents or a paid supervisor" as a means of providing ongoing learning opportunities, social-emotional engagement, and child care.¹⁰⁰ These pods have provided personalized learning options for wealthy families who can afford the shared costs of hiring a private educator, but they have raised concerns among education experts about their impact on equity. For many, the concern is that the proliferation of learning pods may exacerbate already-existing disparities in education, particularly if their rise in popularity causes a decline in public school enrollments and negatively impacts school budgets.¹⁰¹

99 Education Reform Commission. 2015. *Education Reform Commission*. Retrieved from https://nathandeal.georgia.gov/sites/nathandeal.georgia.gov/files/related_files/document/FinalGovERCReport_121415.pdf.

100 Samuels, C., and A. Prothero. 2020, July 29. Could the "Pandemic Pod" Be a Lifeline for Parents or a Threat to Equity? *EdWeek*. Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/07/29/could-the-pandemic-pod-be-a-lifeline.html>.

101 Samuels and Prothero, 2020. Could the "Pandemic Pod."

While it is too early to measure the impact of private learning pods on public schools, public educators have an opportunity to experiment with the learning pod model and adapt it to fit the needs of their students. Some districts have already begun this work, offering their most vulnerable students pod-like environments called learning hubs.¹⁰² These are spaces where students can safely spend their school day learning and socializing under adult supervision. Some school districts were able to finance learning hubs directly out of their budgets,¹⁰³ while others partnered with city leaders and community-based organizations to offer free or heavily subsidized access to learning hubs based on income.

The hubs can serve not only as alternatives to traditional in-class learning but also as out-of-school service providers. For example, learning hubs can be designed around extended day or afterschool learning support, or they can be used for special needs students, enrichment opportunities, or other distinct groups of learners.¹⁰⁴

To fully capitalize on this unique opportunity to deliver instruction, there must be a focus on aligning and coordinating the efforts of public schools and afterschool or summer programs. This alignment requires the strategic sharing of data, better cross-sector training, and leveraging of existing physical locations. Currently, one of the challenges community-based organizations face is identifying and serving a local school's highest-need students. Because these organizations lack access to the type of data that could help them prioritize students according to need, they are often left serving whoever requests assistance first rather than those with the greatest need. School districts, of course, have detailed profiles of their students and could support community-based organizations looking to serve students who need the most assistance. Similarly, because leaders and support staff of these community organizations are not usually trained educators, they could benefit from being granted access to existing professional development opportunities to enhance their capacity to support the students they are serving. Lastly, districts and community-based organizations could tighten alignment by more thoughtfully leveraging spaces that are already serving school-aged children. For instance, libraries as well as parks and recreational facilities could find ways to incorporate academic opportunities into their existing programs and initiatives.

In Georgia, Marietta City Schools is a strong model for how a school district can partner with local nonprofits and community-based organizations to create hubs to support students' learning needs. The district has established relationships with organizations like the Boys & Girls Club of Metro Atlanta, Girls Inc., and the YMCA as well as faith-based entities like Mount Paran North Church and Mosaic Church Marietta to provide affordable or free on-site learning support for the district's elementary school students. The district, through grant funds, has also hired education students from Kennesaw State University to provide tutoring support for their students at many of these locations. Due to social distancing protocols, learning hubs have not been scaled to serve large numbers of students, but in the future they could provide an alternative mode of instructional delivery.¹⁰⁵

Ultimately, Georgia's education leaders must position their districts to not only think differently about instructional delivery, but also to capitalize on opportunities to deliver instruction differently when circumstances dictate. Dr. Stephen Pruitt, president of the Southern Regional Education Board,

102 Belfiore, G. 2020, September 21. *The Emergence of Public and Community Learning Pods*. Next Generation Learning. Retrieved from <https://www.nextgenlearning.org/articles/the-emergence-of-public-and-community-learning-pods>.

103 Schimke, A., and M. Aldrich. 2020, August 10. Pods for All? Some Districts and Nonprofits Are Reimagining the Remote Learning Trend. *Chalkbeat*. Retrieved from <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2020/8/10/21362268/pods-for-all-some-districts-and-non-profits-are-reimagining-the-remote-learning-trend>.

104 Kametz, A. 2020, September 1. "Learning Hubs" Offer Free Child Care and Learning – But Only for a Lucky Few. NPR. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/01/906663624/-learning-hubs-offer-free-child-care-and-learning-but-only-for-the-lucky-few>; Pillow, T. 2020, August 18. *Reinventing on the Fly: How Learning Pods May Hint at a New Structure for Public Education*. Center on Reinventing Public Education. Retrieved from <https://www.crpe.org/thelens/reinventing-fly-how-learning-pods-may-hint-new-structure-public-education>.

105 Marietta City Schools. n.d. Virtual Learning Childcare Support. Retrieved from <https://www.marietta-city.org/VirtualLearningChildcareSupport>.

noted that alternative instructional models are important because they help teachers cultivate multiple teaching styles that can be leveraged in a variety of instructional scenarios.¹⁰⁶ In essence, the more instructional delivery models schools can deploy, the greater their capacity to effectively teach all students in their district. State leaders, then, must provide Georgia school districts with adequate resources to ensure schools and teachers are prepared to provide continuous, high-quality instruction for all students, no matter the circumstances.

Action Steps for Georgia

If 2020 taught us anything, it is that we cannot always predict the future, but we can do our best to be prepared for it. The pandemic was a watershed moment for education, simultaneously exposing the vulnerabilities in our education system and offering a tremendous opportunity to rethink how schools and teachers can deliver instruction, whether face-to-face in school or remotely or through some combination of the two.

Of course, such a shift in thinking will require the system to revisit approaches to other areas of education like teacher training, parent engagement, and assessments and accountability. So how do we get there?

The report from former-Governor Nathan Deal's Education Reform Commission not only presented the imperative for action, it also laid solid groundwork for how Georgia can and should move forward with a plan for providing students diverse instructional delivery options. The commission reported that "opportunities such as blended learning, middle/high school partnerships, competency-based learning, computer-based learning, flipped classrooms, new pathways for graduation, project-based learning and test-out options, in addition to traditional modes of instruction, were considered in terms of not 'Can Georgia do this?' but rather, 'How Georgia can do this?'"

Five years later, the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our schools and the subsequent revelation of education-related inequities prompted Georgia education leaders to revisit that question. In October of 2020, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) sought to offer an answer with its report *A Roadmap to Reimagining K-12 Education*. In it, GaDOE laid out 10 objectives that Georgia should be pursuing to help realize "a clear vision of what our education system can be – and how our children's futures can unfold." Goals 1, 2, 7, and 8 would most likely help expand instructional delivery options for students across the state:¹⁰⁷

- Goal 1 calls for eliminating financial and geographical barriers to providing all students in Georgia equal access to a "well-rounded" education.
- Goal 2 focuses on promoting a personalized approach to instruction that ensures students are learning at their own pace and working toward mastery rather than "standalone and stagnant academic standards."
- Goal 7 calls for the modernization of the state's K-12 funding formula, a change that would include the recognition of poverty, the protection of "funding for rural and low-wealth schools," and an update to "fund non-academic supports (i.e., school nurses, counselors, social workers, school psychologists, wraparound services, etc.) and education support professionals."
- Goal 8 calls for Georgia to "define and provide access to a 21st century classroom for every teacher and student – whether it is at home or in the school building."

106 Tagami, T. 2020, September 5. Schools District Trying Hybrid Model Mixing Online, In-Person Learning. *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Retrieved from <https://www.ajc.com/education/school-districts-trying-hybrid-model-mixing-online-in-person-learning/DNQPDRTRKZDIDARBS64O7VRLKI/>.

107 Georgia Department of Education. 2020. *A Roadmap to Reimagining K-12 Education*. p. 2. Atlanta, GaDOE. Retrieved from https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Documents/A_Roadmap_to_Reimagining_K-12_Education.pdf.

A beginning step toward accomplishing some of the goals articulated in GaDOE's plan would be ensuring tight alignment between the *Roadmap* and the three-year, \$18.5 million Rethink K-12 Education Models (REM) grant Georgia recently received from the US Department of Education. The grant's overall aim is to expand virtual and personalized learning by "creating new, innovative ways for students to continue learning in ways that meet their needs."¹⁰⁸ Georgia plans to use the funding "to improve the professional learning available to leaders and educators on personalized learning, expand student connectivity, and improve the infrastructure of – and expand access to – the Georgia Virtual School."¹⁰⁹ These plans dovetail nicely with many of the goals outlined in GaDOE's *Roadmap* plan, and the accompanying funds should help jumpstart the implementation of the plan. At the local level, this grant could prove essential for Georgia's district and school-level leaders looking to develop their teachers' capacity to leverage new, student-centered instructional delivery models.

Even with Georgia educators making some clear moves toward diversifying the ways in which instruction is delivered, it is imperative that we keep in mind the complexity and far-reaching implications of making this shift, not just in terms of how students learn but also what roles families play in student learning, how teachers will be prepared to employ new instructional models, and what combination of formative and summative assessments local and state entities will need to develop to determine the effectiveness of those models. In other words, there are some very important questions that we must keep in front of us as we initiate this process. For instance, if learning hubs prove to be effective, can more school districts leverage the model to support expanded learning for high-needs and/or special needs students?

More broadly, how will a statewide move toward personalized learning impact school choice? Ostensibly, giving families more options for where and how students learn should create greater opportunity for choice within the public education system. However, an expansion of choice that includes more private out-of-school options could introduce a greater call for vouchers, tax credit scholarships, and/or education savings accounts (ESAs), as many families would want the financial support provided by such options to take full advantage of these expanded choices. Currently, data on the effectiveness of these choice options are contradictory at best, with some studies suggesting the programs improve student outcomes and others claiming they yield limited improvements if any at all.¹¹⁰ In Georgia, the debates around these programs have stemmed from their high cost as well as the lack of transparency and accountability about how the funds are being utilized and whether students are experiencing academic growth. Without more data showing these options to be advantageous to students, Georgia leaders should delay their expansion.

The importance of prioritizing the thoughtful expansion of instructional models cannot be overstated, particularly in regard to our most vulnerable student populations (e.g., low-income, special education, English language learner students). Investing the resources necessary to provide these students with access to diverse but equitable learning opportunities, regardless of their circumstances, is essential to ensuring that Georgia has a robust talent pipeline to contribute to the vitality and economic health of the state, today and into the future.

108 US Department of Education. 2020, July 29. Secretary DeVos Awards More Than \$180 Million to States Rethinking K-12 Education to Better Meet Students' Needs During Coronavirus Disruption [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/secretary-devos-awards-more-180-million-states-rethinking-k-12-education-better-meet-students%E2%80%99needs-during-coronavirus-disruption#:~:text=The%20Rethink%20K%2D12%20Education,ways%20that%20meet%20their%20needs.&text=The%20program%20supports%20new%2C%20innovative,during%20the%20coronavirus%20national%20emergency>.

109 Georgia Department of Education. 2020, July 30. GaDOE Awarded \$18.5 Million for Virtual and Personalized Learning [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid=790>.

110 Carnoy, M. 2017, February 28. *School Vouchers Are Not a Proven Strategy for Improving Student Achievement*. Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.epi.org/publication/school-vouchers-are-not-a-proven-strategy-for-improving-student-achievement/>; Usher, A. 2011, July. Keeping Informed about School Vouchers: A Review of Major Developments and Research. Center on Economic Policy. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED522161.pdf>.



TEACHERS – PROFESSIONALISM, PAY, AND PREPARATION

Issue Overview

It has long been known that of all the school resources needed to boost student learning and well-being, teachers are the most important. If schools do not have enough teachers, or if teachers are not adequately qualified and able to support their students' needs, improving the quality and equity of education is unlikely to occur. Effective teacher policies can be the foundation on which to build successful education systems.¹¹¹

The impact of the global pandemic has put unprecedented strains on the educational system and most directly on teachers. Educators across the country are asking themselves how to deliver instruction and stay connected to their students safely and responsibly. But they are also recognizing that schools may never look the same and instructional models may never go completely back to pre-pandemic approaches. As most educators acknowledge the value of and preference for in-person learning, many other education stakeholders are discussing what education should and could look like in the future.

This uncertainty over the future of education has led education leaders to reevaluate the strength of the current teaching workforce and the pipeline of future teachers. For the immediate future, education systems will be impacted by a series of questions around teacher workforce policies. How many teachers feel safe with reopening plans? How many are leaving the profession all together or asking to work from home full-time because they are high risk? How are educators coping with the challenges of distance learning? How are they dealing with the mental health needs of their students as well as their own trauma? In the long term, how many students entering college no longer want to become teachers? What does all this disruption and additional responsibilities put on educators mean for the long-term attractiveness of teaching as a career?¹¹²

Significance for Georgia

The K-12 workforce faces multiple challenges ranging from preparation to compensation to difficult working conditions. All of these factors collectively lead to teacher shortages. The teacher workforce also faces a significant diversity gap. The nation's K-12 student population is racially and ethnically diverse, with more than 50% being from non-White backgrounds. Compare this with the educator

111 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. 2020. *PISA 2018 Results, Volume V: Effective Policies, Successful Schools*. Paris: OECD.

112 Boren, M. 2020, September 14. *COVID-19 Effects on the Teacher Workforce*. Southern Regional Education Board. Retrieved from <https://www.sreb.org/blog-post/covid-19-effects-teacher-workforce>.

workforce that is approximately 80% White.¹¹³ In Georgia, slightly more than 60% of the K-12 population is made up of students of color, while nearly 70% of the certified teaching staff is White.¹¹⁴

As Georgia looks to recover from the disruptions of the pandemic and move to success by addressing systemic barriers to access and achievement, the state must focus on overall teacher quality and retention as well as the racial disparities between the teaching workforce and the student population.

Challenges to Professionalism

Educating children requires specialized knowledge and skills and deserves the same status and standing as other traditional professions. To attract and maintain a highly qualified, effective teaching pool, educators need to feel they are valued for their expertise.

Research has shown that systems that value educators and treat teachers as professionals attract people to the field and prevent them from retiring or quitting the profession early. Teachers' judgement is critical to identifying the needs of their students. Teachers should have meaningful input in the decisions impacting their jobs and careers, from the materials they use to the types of trainings they receive.¹¹⁵

The professional role that teachers play was on full display during the spring of 2020 as educators struggled to pivot quickly to continue to teach their students during the unprecedented school closures. Parents, communities, and even businesses began to recognize the vital role teachers and the education system play in a new and revealing way. Overall, teachers and schools received more respect, appreciation, and support for their role in society.

In August 2020, Americans' approval of public schools remained at or near the peak confidence recorded by the *Education Next* survey since it began in 2007. Fifty-eight percent of respondents gave their local public schools a grade of A or B, and 30% gave the nation's public schools a similar grade: the highest level the survey has recorded. The public also gave teachers high marks during this difficult time. On average, respondents rated 61% of local teachers as either excellent or good – a 5-percentage-point increase since 2018. At the same time, support for teacher pay increases remained as high as it has been at any point since 2008. Among those given information about current salary levels in their state, 55% said teacher salaries should increase – a jump of 19 percentage points over 2017. Among those not given salary information, 65% supported an increase.¹¹⁶

Despite this increased public support and appreciation for teachers and the profession as a whole during this turbulent time, teacher morale is steadily declining. The *EdWeek* research center conducted a series of surveys between March 2020 and August 2020 to examine how the COVID crisis was impacting teachers. Over that time, due to pandemic-related stresses, teachers reported declining morale and an increased likelihood of resigning from the profession. Specifically, responses to the August 2020 survey revealed the following:¹¹⁷

113 Education Commission of the States. 2020, July. *Teacher Pipelines*. Retrieved from ECS: Key Issues – Teaching: <https://www.ecs.org/research-reports/key-issues/teaching/>.

114 Data retrieved from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement K-12 Report Cards: <https://gaawards.gosa.ga.gov/analytics/K12ReportCard>.

115 Garcia, E., and E. Weiss. 2020, September 10. *COVID-19 and Student Performance, Equity, and US Education Policy*. Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.epi.org/publication/the-consequences-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-for-education-performance-and-equity-in-the-united-states-what-can-we-learn-from-pre-pandemic-research-to-inform-relief-recovery-and-rebuilding/>.

116 Education Next. 2020, August 18. *The 2020 Education Next Survey Reveals Sharply Growing Approval of Online Education, Record-High Support for Public Schools*. Retrieved from <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2020/08/18/2079743/0/en/The-2020-Education-Next-Survey-reveals-sharply-growing-approval-of-online-education-record-high-support-for-public-schools.html>.

117 Kurtz, H. 2020, September 1. Teacher Morale and Student Enrollment Declining Under COVID-19, Survey Shows. *Education Week*. Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/09/01/teacher-morale-and-student-enrollment-declining-under.html>.

- 31% of teachers and district leaders say that teacher morale is “much lower” than it was prior to the pandemic, nearly double what it was in March.
- 32% of teachers are reporting that they are likely to leave their jobs this year even though they would have been unlikely to do so prior to the pandemic.

Part of this decreasing morale can be attributed to the increased pressure on teachers in the face of the unknown going into the fall of 2020. When teachers returned, classrooms as they had traditionally known them were gone, but their instruction and their ability to engage their students was more critical than ever. While we have yet to fully understand the impact of the school closures, it was generally understood that months of unequal access to instruction from the previous spring meant that students were returning with varying degrees of learning loss, and the inequalities that students have traditionally suffered were exacerbated.

Teachers were forced to address those losses while also needing to introduce grade-level content. They also faced challenges of teaching coherently across online and in-person settings while creating flexible, adaptable assignments that students could complete in different environments and with varied levels of technology access.

The pandemic did not just disrupt learning last spring; it impacted academic and emotional needs in students that adults must try to meet. All of that has created a new set of staffing and professional development challenges for school and district leaders. Teachers needed professional development across a variety of areas, such as the following:¹¹⁸

- Recognizing trauma in children and providing support;
- Weaving social-emotional skills into academic instruction;
- Deepening instructional skills for the most vulnerable students;
- Maximizing the effectiveness and engagement of online instruction;
- Pivoting easily from online to in-person instruction;
- Building new kinds of professional-learning communities that work as well remotely as in person;
- Analyzing the year’s curriculum and identifying the highest priority standards to focus on;
- Shifting thinking about assessments to focus heavily on informal classroom assessments; and
- Remediating on just the few key concepts students need most for the next unit.

In addition to these new challenges, districts and schools also were considering and experimenting with new staffing arrangements to provide for the deep academic and emotional needs of students, either physically or virtually. The Council of Chief State School Officers, which represents state superintendents, outlined various staffing roles that schools should consider for teachers and other educators such as instructional coaches, paraprofessionals, counselors, social workers, and school leadership when school reopened in the fall of 2020. These priorities focused on reorganizing staff around key areas of academics, technology, emotional support, and family outreach.¹¹⁹

While this type of guidance holds promise to help students and allow the education system to emerge stronger in a “new normal,” there is concern that many of these approaches are being implemented without teacher consultation. In other words, these changes are being done to teachers instead of with them, undermining a sense of professionalism and creating unrealistic burdens on teachers without allowing their input and guidance.

¹¹⁸ Shafer, S. 2020, August 5. Teaching and Learning in the Pandemic. *Education Week*. Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/reopening-schools/teaching-and-learning-in-the-pandemic.html>.

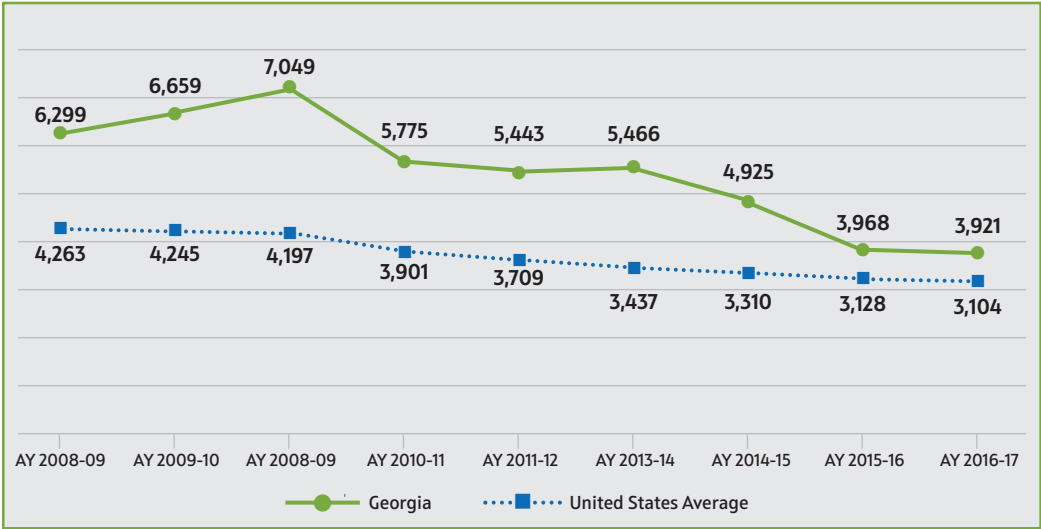
¹¹⁹ Council of Chief State School Officers. 2020, August 5. How We Go Back to School: New Roles for Educators. *Education Week*. Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/new-roles-for-educators.htm>.

Georgia's Teacher Pipeline Challenge

All these new challenges for teachers and the teaching profession are occurring at a time when districts across the country and in Georgia are facing a shortage of teachers. The shortages are especially acute in certain subjects (math, science, special education, and bilingual education) and specific schools (those that are underperforming, those that serve a high percentage of low-income students and students of color, and rural areas).¹²⁰

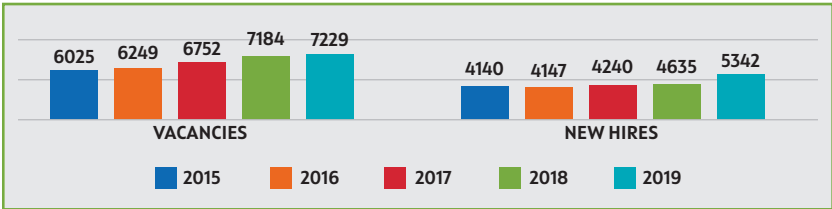
Since 2011, Georgia has seen a decline in enrollments and completion of educator preparation programs, signaling longer-term shortages that, if the trend continues, will exacerbate the current state shortages (see Figure 5.1).

FIGURE 5.1 GEORGIA EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAM COMPLETERS, 2008–2017¹²¹



For the 2019–2020 school year, pre-pandemic, Georgia was already facing teacher shortages in the key areas of math and science in grades 6–12 and special education across all K–12 grades.¹²² Overall, the number of teacher vacancies rose steadily between 2015 and 2019 (see Figure 5.2).

FIGURE 5.2 DISTRICT SELF-REPORTED VACANCIES AND NEW HIRES, GEORGIA STATEWIDE AGGREGATE¹²³



120 Education Commission of the States. 2019, October. *50-State Comparison: Teacher Recruitment and Retention*. Retrieved from <https://www.ecs.org/50-state-comparison-teacher-recruitment-and-retention/>.

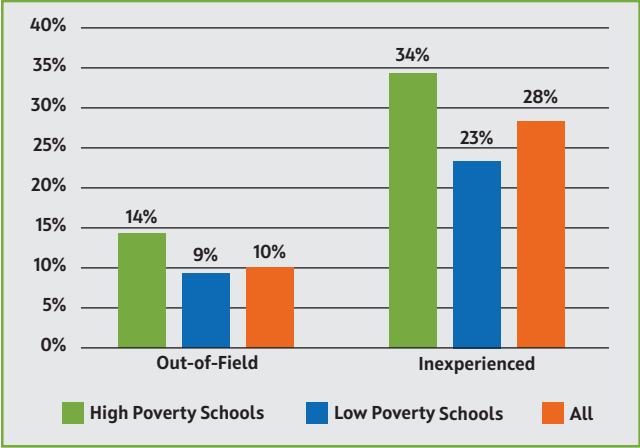
121 Education Commission of the States. 2019, August. *Individual State Profile – Georgia*. Retrieved from Teacher Recruitment and Retention State Profiles: <http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/mbstcprofnc?Rep=TRRGA&st=Georgia>.

122 Southern Regional Education Board. n.d. *Teacher Shortage by Subject and Grade Span, 2019–2020*. Retrieved from <https://www.sreb.org/resources/teacher-shortage-subject-grade-span>.

123 Georgia Department of Education. 2020. *ESEA: Title II, Part A 2018–2019 Annual Report*. Atlanta: GaDOE.

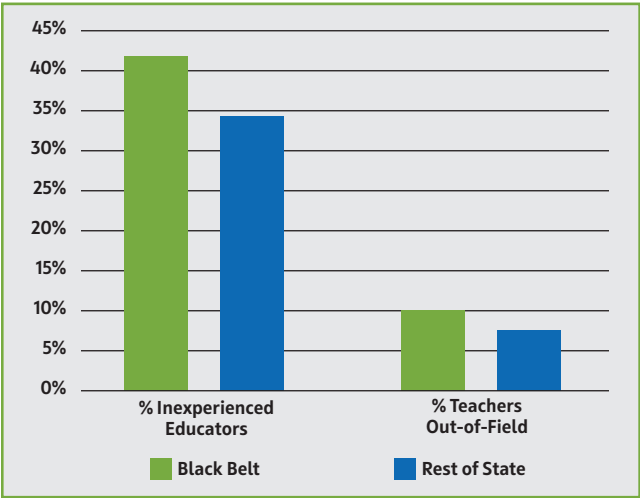
These shortages are not distributed evenly across the state, leading to equity of access issues, primarily for Georgia’s low-income students and students of color. Students who attend high-poverty schools are more likely to see inexperienced¹²⁴ and or out-of-field teachers¹²⁵ in their classrooms, compared to their more affluent counterparts (see Figure 5.3).

FIGURE 5.3 PERCENTAGE OF OUT-OF-FIELD AND INEXPERIENCED TEACHERS BY SCHOOL POVERTY IN GEORGIA, 2019¹²⁶



Out-of-field and inexperienced teachers were also more prevalent in schools with high percentages of minority students. Research conducted by the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute (GBPI) found that students living in Georgia’s Black Belt were significantly more likely to be taught by teachers with less experience and fewer credentials (see Figure 5.4).¹²⁷

FIGURE 5.4 PERCENTAGE OF OUT-OF-FIELD AND INEXPERIENCED TEACHERS IN GEORGIA’S BLACK BELT¹²⁸



124 “Inexperienced” is defined as having less than four consecutive years being reported as a teacher. See https://gosa.georgia.gov/sites/gosa.georgia.gov/files/OBIEE-Help/New/Inexperienced_Teachers_COUNT.html.

125 “Out-of-field” is defined as those who are not teaching in the subject or field for which the teacher is certified or licensed. See https://gosa.georgia.gov/sites/gosa.georgia.gov/files/OBIEE-Help/New/Out_of_Field_COUNT.html.

126 Data provided by the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, Educator Professional Qualifications: <https://gaawards.gosa.ga.gov/analytics/saw.dll?dashboard>.

127 Georgia’s Black Belt consist of 69 school districts across 67 counties. According to the GBPI report, there is no uniform definition for the Black Belt. What began as a regional description based on the coloring and fertility of the soil has morphed into a term to generally describe communities in the Southeast with a majority-Black population or where a majority of people live in poverty. GBPI’s analysis relied on a combination of the historical presence of slavery, current poverty levels, and the percentage of Black students to define a sample of county and city school districts. For a full methodology report, see <https://gbpi.org/education-in-georgias-black-belt/>. For more information on Georgia’s Black Belt and state investments, see Issue 2 – Equitable Funding.

128 Owens, S.J. 2020, September 21. *Education in Georgia’s Black Belt: Policy Solutions to Help Overcome a History of Exclusion*. Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://gbpi.org/education-in-georgias-black-belt/>.

The diversity of the teacher workforce also impacts student learning and student outcomes. Research has shown the significant benefits that teachers of color provide to all students, and to students of color in particular. For example, consider the following:¹²⁹

- Studies have found that teachers of color boost the academic performance of students of color, including improved reading and mathematics test scores, higher graduation rates, and increased aspirations to attend college. One such study found that the benefit to Black students of having a Black teacher for just one year in elementary school persisted over several years, especially for Black students from low-income families.
- Students of color also experience social-emotional and nonacademic benefits to having teachers of color, such as fewer unexcused absences and lower likelihoods of chronic absenteeism and suspension.

Georgia’s K-12 student population is considered majority-minority; however, the teaching corps does not mirror that distribution, as shown in Table 5.1. In fact, nearly 70% of the certified teaching workforce is White, compared to only 39% of the student body.

TABLE 5.1 K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENT ENROLLMENTS AND CERTIFIED TEACHER, BY RACE, 2018–2019¹³⁰

	STUDENT K-12 ENROLLMENT	K-12 CERTIFIED TEACHERS
Asian	4%	1%
Black	37%	26%
Hispanic/Latino	16%	2%
White	39%	69%
Multiracial	4%	2%

Action Steps for Georgia

As Georgia moves forward to reimagine its instructional delivery system and address systemic barriers to access to quality teaching and instruction, the state must focus on overall recruitment and retention strategies while simultaneously addressing the teacher workforce diversity challenge. The EdQuest Georgia policy research tells us that high-performing states and education systems ensure high-quality teaching throughout the system by focusing on attracting talented students committed to the profession. Those students are subjected to rigorous preparation and induction systems and provided work environments and career pathways that support teacher learning and professional development. Each of these requirements and supports reinforces a commitment to profession-alizing teaching as an occupation.¹³¹

State policy options to support this pipeline fall into two broad categories: recruitment and retention. Recruitment strategies include grow-your-own teacher programs, transparency and accountability in teacher preparation programs, and yearlong teacher residency programs. Retention strategies tend to focus on induction and mentoring support for new teachers, a targeted system of professional supports, career pathways, and increasing planning time and reducing testing loads. Underlying all of these policy options are pay and financial incentives (see Figure 5.5).

129 Carver-Thomas, D. 2018, April 19. *Diversifying the Teaching Profession Through High-Retention Pathways*. Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/diversifying-teaching-profession-brief>.
130 Data from the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement K-12 Report Cards: <https://gaawards.gosa.ga.gov/analytics/K12ReportCard>.
131 Darling-Hammond, L., D. Burns, C. Campbell, A.L. Goodwin, K. Hammerness, . . . K. Zeichner. 2017. *Empowered Educators: How High-Performing Systems Shape Teaching Quality Around the World*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

FIGURE 5.5 STATE POLICY OPTIONS¹³²

RECRUITMENT	RETENTION
Grow-your-own teacher programs <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ High school recruitment programs■ Paraprofessional advancement	Induction and mentoring support for new teachers
Transparency and accountability in teacher preparation programs	Targeted systems of teacher support: Professional development based on teacher evaluations
Teacher residency programs	Career pathways <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Teacher leadership opportunities■ Tiered licensure pathways
Teacher license reciprocity	Increased planning time Reduced teaching loads
Teacher pay and financial incentives in hard-to-staff schools and subjects: <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Loan forgiveness■ Additional pay	

Georgia has made progress across many of these topics. For example, in terms of teacher leadership and career pathways, teachers in Georgia can qualify for one of two types of teaching licenses beyond the standard professional license: advanced professional or lead professional. Both are considered top-tier licenses in Georgia’s four-tiered certification system.¹³³

Research shows that teacher retention is crucial to reducing shortages of all teachers, including teachers of color. High turnover rates – teachers switching schools or leaving the profession – have more than offset the successful recruitment of teachers of color in recent years. Studies show that both teacher recruitment and retention policies must be designed to retain teachers of color more effectively if diversity in the teaching profession is to be achieved and sustained.¹³⁴

Increasing the pool of teachers of color begins with increasing the number of college students enrolling in and completing teacher preparation programs. Currently, college students of color are less likely to enroll in teacher preparation programs than White college students. One reason for this lower enrollment is the high opportunity cost of teaching. While teacher salaries remain relatively low compared to other professions with the same level of training, the cost of a college degree has increased. Twelve years after earning a bachelor’s degree, on average, Black graduates owe \$43,000 more in student debt than White graduates. This amount is due to Black students borrowing more as undergraduates and graduate students, as well as greater interest accumulation when interest accrues faster than loan payments are made.¹³⁵ The more money a graduate makes after graduation, the faster the loan can be paid off.

132 Education Commission of the States, 2020, *Teacher Pipelines*.

133 For more information on teacher professional pathways and teacher professionalization, see Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education *Top Ten Issues to Watch 2019* and *Top Ten Issues to Watch 2018*, found at GPEE.org. Also, for information about Georgia’s grow-your-own programs, teacher residency requirement pilots, and changes to accountability to teacher preparation programs, see EdQuest Georgia Quality Teaching at <http://www.edquestga.org/quality-teaching/> and Georgia Professional Standards Commission at <https://www.gapsc.com/>.

134 Carver-Thomas, 2018, *Diversifying the Teaching Profession*.

135 Carver-Thomas, 2018, *Diversifying the Teaching Profession*.

The federal government and states can support candidates of color and encourage their retention by subsidizing the cost of teacher preparation. Service scholarships, grants, and loan forgiveness programs cover or reimburse a portion of tuition costs in exchange for a commitment to teach in high-need schools or subject areas, typically for three to five years. Several states currently offer service scholarship or loan forgiveness programs aimed at increasing the number of teachers of color.¹³⁶

During the 2020 legislative session, the Georgia General Assembly considered House Bill 736, which was originally proposed to establish a loan forgiveness program for teachers of math, science, special education, or another designated high-demand field who teach in a public “turnaround” school. A substitute version of the bill passed out of the House; the modified bill would create a teacher recruitment and retention program offering refundable income tax credits for teachers who agree to teach in certain rural school districts or turnaround-eligible schools. At the time of this writing, the bill is currently awaiting a committee assignment in the Senate for consideration during the 2021 legislative session.¹³⁷

Grow-your-own (GYO) programs are another way to address the lack of diversity in the teaching pipeline. Nationwide, these programs take different forms, but many are local or regional efforts that seek to recruit residents to build a workforce that reflects the ethnicity of the student population. There is no universal model. Some GYO programs encourage middle and high school students to pursue education majors in college; others help adults with ties to schools (e.g., paraeducators, uncertified school staff, substitutes, and community members) obtain their teaching certification and often a bachelor’s degree, which is required to teach. GYO programs typically involve partnerships between districts and institutions of higher education, both universities and community colleges.¹³⁸

Through dual enrollments, career pathways, and P-20 Regional Collaboratives,¹³⁹ Georgia has multiple GYO pathways. One example is the RISE (Realizing Inspiring Successful Educators) program, established in 2017 at the University of North Georgia (UNG). This program is designed to prepare Spanish-speaking Latino students for careers in education. Though a partnership between UNG and Hall County Schools, heritage Spanish-speaking individuals enrolled in UNG’s teacher preparation program have their tuition paid by the local school system and work as paraprofessionals within the Hall County elementary schools, working with English language learners. Upon graduation, these UNG students receive a job offer from Hall County Schools.¹⁴⁰

Disruptions in the teaching workforce have consequences for every district, but research shows that high-poverty districts experienced a disproportionate share of funding and staffing cuts following the Great Recession. When there are shortages of qualified teachers, students of color and students from low-income families bear the brunt of the burden. As Georgia educational leaders at the state and local levels respond to the crisis of 2020, they have the opportunity to rethink instructional delivery and education models to better meet the needs of all students. Such decisions must be made in collaboration with teachers. A high-quality, diverse teacher pipeline requires policy decisions that support and enable teachers to work together as professionals and that provide adequate resources to allow teachers to respond to the needs of each of their students.

136 Examples include Florida’s Fund for Minority Teachers, the Kentucky Minority Educator Recruitment and Retention Scholarship, Minnesota’s Collaborative Urban and Greater Minnesota Educators of Color Program, the Missouri Minority Teaching Scholarship, and the Tennessee Minority Teaching Fellows Program. See Carver-Thomas, 2018, *Diversifying the Teaching Profession*.

137 For full details, see <http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20192020/HB/736>.

138 Carver-Thomas, 2018, *Diversifying the Teaching Profession*.

139 In 2014, the Georgia Department of Education, the Georgia Professional Standards Commission, and the University System of Georgia came together and established P-20 Regional Collaboratives, systems of support that brought together the local K-12 school systems, universities, and regional education support agencies (RESAs) to provide a seamless transition for preservice candidates as they seek to become professional educators. The Collaboratives also provide continued professional learning for practicing educators and leaders based on regionally defined needs. For more information, see https://www.gapsc.com/EducatorPreparation/P20_Collaborative.aspx.

140 For more information, see <http://ung.imodules.com/s/1863/cf19/interior.aspx?sid=1863&gid=2&pgid=769>.



ACCOUNTABILITY AND ASSESSMENTS – THE OPPORTUNITY TO RETHINK AND GET IT RIGHT

Issue Overview

Schools will need resources to adapt to very real and serious challenges, but assessment and accountability must be part of their plans moving forward. Policymakers and education leaders need reliable evidence to show how well students are learning, even as schools manage health and safety concerns.

– Bellwether Education Partners¹⁴¹

In February 2020, before the global pandemic upended education systems across the country, Governor Brian Kemp announced plans to cut the number of state-mandated assessments administered in K-12 public education to just four in high school and one in fifth grade. The governor also advocated shortening the overall length of the assessments and confining school testing to the last five weeks of the school year. In his announcement backing the legislation required to make these changes, Kemp stated, “Georgia simply tests too much.”¹⁴²

For nearly two decades, state and federal policymakers have built standards-based accountability systems focused on improving educational outcomes with the goal of holding all students to the same rigorous standards. During that time, achievement scores and graduation rates have risen, particularly for the most disadvantaged students. Yet those results have come with trade-offs. Imposing state standards can limit teacher autonomy; testing all students every year takes time out of the school day and costs money. And many have voiced criticisms of standardized tests and their limitations as measures of quality, as well as pushed back against how the data are used to drive decisions that affect schools, educators, and students. Finally, as federal accountability requirements have placed more pressure on states and schools, support for accountability has eroded on both the left and right ends of the political spectrum.¹⁴³ The legislation backed by Governor Kemp that ultimately passed the General Assembly in 2020 is a cumulation of those forces in Georgia.

¹⁴¹ Bellwether Educational Partners. 2020, July. 6 *Takeaways – and Video – from Our Webinar on Accountability*. Retrieved from Bellwether Education Partners: Ahead of the Heard: <https://aheadoftheheard.org/6-takeaways-and-video-from-our-webinar-on-accountability>.
¹⁴² Tagami, T. 2020, February 5. Kemp Wants Fewer Tests, Especially in High School. *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Retrieved from <https://www.ajc.com/news/local-education/kemp-wants-fewer-tests-especially-high-school/xYyRY3fZhlCv9bWx12aUtK/>.
¹⁴³ Olson, L., and C. Jerald. 2020, April. *The Big Test: The Future of Statewide Standardized Assessments*. Future Ed: Georgetown University. Retrieved from https://www.future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/TheBigTest_Final-1.pdf.

Added to that educational and political environment, when the pandemic hit, K-12 students across Georgia and throughout the country were abruptly sent home and continued their final months of the school year remotely. In March 2020, the US Department of Education allowed states to cancel their annual assessments and school accountability ratings for the spring of 2020. All 50 states, Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico took advantage of this flexibility and spring assessments were cancelled across the country.

Moving forward into the 2020–2021 school year, districts and states were understandably tempted to continue to pause assessments for another year, as schools struggled to open safely for in-person instruction and students and educators continued to deal with the traumas and economic fallout of the pandemic. However, instead of simply pausing assessments, this crisis has offered an opportunity to rethink the purpose and uses of assessments and accountability to understand not only who has been the most impacted by the COVID crisis, but also which students have the greatest needs. Properly designed and utilized, assessments and accountability systems can match needs with appropriate levels of resources to ensure that all students succeed.

Significance for Georgia

Understanding Assessments

Assessments in schools serve two distinct purposes: (1) They support effective teaching and learning, and (2) they inform decisions on where states, districts, and schools should allocate and focus resources. There are three types of assessments, each of which produces different types and levels of necessary information.¹⁴⁴

- Diagnostic tests are given at the beginning of the school year to gauge a student's starting point.
- Formative and interim tests provide touchpoints throughout the year to give guidance on how teachers should customize their practice to improve student learning. The main differences between formative and interim assessments are the time of year they are given and the length.
- Year-end summative tests show how well all students achieved the state's academic standards and can be compared across student subgroups.

When thinking about assessments, it is important to consider a well-aligned combination of assessment types that each have their own purpose for teachers, families, administrators, and policymakers.¹⁴⁵

One reason for the perception that there is too much state testing is that both parents and the public more generally often conflate state-mandated testing with the many district-administered interim, formative, and diagnostic tests that are not part of an overall assessment system. Studies have found that the average classroom spends about 2% of instructional time taking mandated tests, a small fraction of the school year. But some schools and school districts spend much more, contributing to perceptions of "overtesting." One study of a dozen urban districts found that test-taking ranged from three days in one district to two weeks in another and that test preparation ranged from 16 to 30 school days.¹⁴⁶

144 Jimenez, L. 2020, September. *Student Assessment During COVID-19*. Center for American Progress. Retrieved from https://cdn.american-progress.org/content/uploads/2020/09/09063559/COVID-Student-Assessment1.pdf?_ga=2.267415885.2130038980.1603738426-285914838.1603738426.

145 Jimenez, 2020, *Student Assessment*.

146 Olson and Jerald, 2020, *The Big Test*.

Anecdotal evidence in Georgia supports this as well. The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education piloted the Assessment Inventory tool and process in five diverse school districts across Georgia.¹⁴⁷ The pilot found that students actually spend less time on assessments than is perceived by both the general public and school staff. But more importantly, it also found that teachers and leaders often do not have the skill to analyze data to improve instruction; most local and district leaders do not know how to address the issues created by less instructional time and low quality assessments; and districts impose many more requirements for assessing progress than does the state. This type of inventory process provides districts this vital information to engage in the assessment discussion in Georgia.

Assessments in Georgia

Pre-pandemic Georgia was already shifting away from the focus on high-stakes end-of-grade and end-of-course tests and more toward formative assessments, which are used to provide the information necessary to adjust classroom strategies while teaching and learning are underway in the classroom.

In the *Roadmap to Reimagining K-12 Education*, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) codified this shift, outlining the department's goals for the months and years post-COVID, which focus on providing a well-rounded education for every child. The following are specific goals included in the roadmap:¹⁴⁸

- Provide multiple diploma pathways.
- Reduce high-stakes testing.
- Develop an accountability system aligned to local community priorities.
- Modernize the state K-12 funding system.

GaDOE has already begun reducing the number of high-stakes tests. Through Senate Bill (SB) 367, which was signed into law in 2020, the department eliminated a total of five state-mandated tests, including reducing by half the number of end-of-course assessments required of high school students. Specifically, the fifth-grade social studies end-of-grade required test and four required end-of-course tests in high school were eliminated.¹⁴⁹

The SB 367 legislation also gives the Georgia State Board of Education (SBOE) control over whether end-of-course tests count toward a high school student's final grade in a subject. Currently, those tests count 20% toward a student's final grade, though the SBOE has proposed a 10% course weight for the 2020–2021 school year. This proposal was over the objection of State School Superintendent Richard Woods, who recommended the weight be reduced to 0.01%. After a public comment period, which garnered support for reducing the weight to 0.01%, the SBOE passed the rule that the weight would be lowered to a minimum of 0.01%.

¹⁴⁷ An assessment inventory is a tool district leaders can use to take stock of their assessments and their assessment strategy. For a more holistic view, the inventory incorporates a student's perspective on assessments in the district. The tool supports a process by which districts evaluate the assessments students are taking and determines the minimum testing necessary to serve essential diagnostic, instructional, and accountability purposes. The tool also helps ensure that every district-mandated test is of high quality, is providing the information needed for specific school and district purposes, and is supported by structures and routines so that results are used and action steps are taken that will help students.

¹⁴⁸ Georgia Department of Education. (2020, September). *A Roadmap to Reimagining K-12 Education*. Retrieved from Georgia Department of Education: https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Documents/A_Roadmap_to_Reimagining_K-12_Education.pdf.

¹⁴⁹ The Georgia State Board of Education (SBOE) eliminated geometry, ninth-grade literature and composition, physical science, and the exam for economics, business, and free enterprise. High school students are now only required to take state standardized tests for algebra, American literature and composition, biology, and US history.

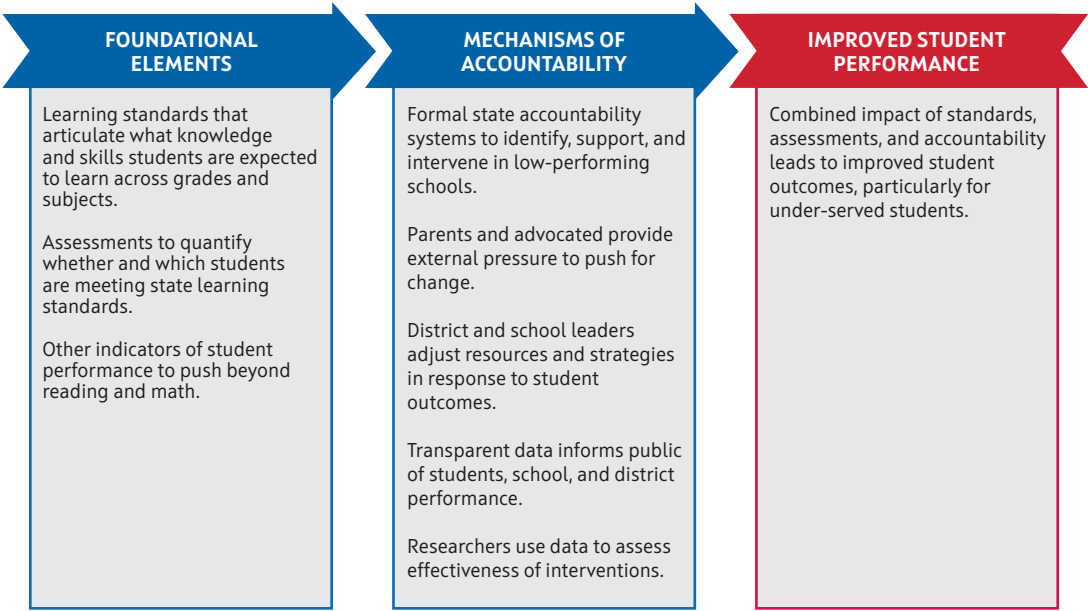
In its move away from high-stakes testing and toward more formative assessments, GaDOE in fall 2020 launched DRC BEACON, an interim assessment for grades three through eight that measures student progress throughout the year. It is aligned to the Georgia Milestones end-of-grade tests and will be able to predict estimated end-of-year performance. BEACON is currently being provided free to all Georgia public school districts and schools as an optional formative assessment resource.¹⁵⁰

Understanding Accountability

The second purpose of assessments is to inform decisions on where states, districts, and schools should allocate and focus resources. A well-designed accountability system is the tool that informs those allocation decisions.

All standards-based accountability systems, including Georgia's, have changed a lot over the past 20 years. Every state's system works differently under individual state law, but they all follow the same basic structure outlined in Figure 6.1.¹⁵¹

FIGURE 6.1 SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY THEORY OF CHANGE¹⁵²



Assessments and other indicators of student performance are considered foundational elements of an accountability system that lead to improved student outcomes, particularly for underserved students. When considering these foundational elements, it is important to clearly establish the type and purpose of academic assessments.

Accountability in Georgia

How the shifting focus of assessments will impact the accountability system is an open question. In Georgia, the accountability system is called the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). The CCRPI is Georgia's tool to measure annually how well schools, districts, and the state are preparing students for their next level of education.

150 For more information on the DRC-BEACON, see <https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Assessment/Pages/BEACON.aspx>.

151 Bellwether Education Partners. 2020, September. Takeaways for State Policymakers and Advocates. Retrieved from Making Next Year Count: Summer 2020 Accountability Series: https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/Bellwether_Accountability-TakeawaysForPolicyMakers.pdf.

152 Bellwether Education Partners, 2020, Takeaways for State Policymakers.

Although Georgia has used the CCRPI for nearly a decade, there is growing concern among state leaders and the general public that Georgia has moved too far into high-stakes accountability and reliance on test scores and a single number or letter to “grade” schools. Throughout 2019, Governor Kemp, State School Superintendent Woods, and their staffs conducted a listening tour across Georgia to get direct input and feedback from school district leadership and teachers. Those in attendance shared concerns that the CCRPI scores were largely correlated to a school’s socioeconomic status and preferred a measure that captured the full efforts of individual schools and progress being made.

While the redesigns to the CCRPI in 2017 reduced the impacts of assessments on the total score, leaders are looking to de-emphasize test scores even more and emphasize other school inputs such as Advance Placement offerings, arts, and foreign languages.¹⁵³ Evidenced by discussions at the statewide listening tour, school and district leaders have argued for an accountability measure that captures the efforts of a school and paints a fuller picture of a school’s progress.¹⁵⁴

A handful of districts are in the initial stages of developing an alternative accountability system, True Accountability. Described as “an educator-led, evidence-based, student-centric, community-minded system that moves beyond test scores,” True Accountability is designed to serve as a holistic performance measure and provide thorough accounting to students, families, and communities.¹⁵⁵

Action Steps for Georgia

Under the leadership of State Superintendent Richard Woods, GaDOE has been clear about its intentions to reduce overall state-mandated tests and overhaul the state’s accountability system to reduce the importance of summative state tests. In the summer of 2020, for instance, Georgia was the first state to announce its intent to apply for a waiver from the US Department of Education (USED) for federally mandated assessments and accountability for the 2020–2021 school year. That waiver was denied by federal authorities.

Shortly thereafter, Superintendent Woods issued a response, telling districts, families, educators and students, “don’t worry about the tests. No test prepping or cramming. No punishing students, teachers, or schools for scores. No giving up weeks to administer, remediate, and administer tests.”¹⁵⁶ GaDOE immediately released the following list of actions to remove any high-stakes accountability tied to any state assessments:¹⁵⁷

- Recommending lowering the 20% end-of-course grade weight to .01%, with the stated goal of making the tests count essentially zero. State law does not allow zero, however, so the SBOE changed that recommendation to 10%.
- Waiving all promotion/retention consequences tied to the state tests.
- Providing flexible options for administering the 2020–2021 end-of-course assessments.

153 Tagami, T. 2019, November 1. *Why Georgia Is Looking at Another Overhaul of Report Cards for Schools*. *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Retrieved from <https://www.ajc.com/news/local-education/why-georgia-looking-another-overhaul-report-card-for-schools/mJzoyJJv8KzhUtS6MschVN/>.

154 Governor’s Office of Student Achievement and Georgia Department of Education. 2019. *Reflections on the 2019 RESA Listening Tour*. Atlanta: Georgia Department of Education.

155 Participating districts currently include Burke County, Calhoun City, Cartersville City, Early County, Grady County, Lowndes County, Oglethorpe County, Pickens County, and Social Circle City. Newton and Jackson counties are scheduled to pilot phase 2 of the system when it is ready. For more information about True Accountability, see <https://www.pageinc.org/true-accountability/>.

156 Georgia Department of Education. 2020, September 3) Superintendent Woods on US Department of Education Lack of Support for Common-Sense Testing Waivers [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid=800>.

157 Georgia Department of Education. 2020, September 24. Georgia Department of Education Announces Action, Recommendations to Reduce High-Stakes Testing Pressure [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid=810>.

Superintendent Woods' position was that the current state-mandated tests are only used to undermine public education and not to support teaching and learning. He went on to argue that the tests would not be valid or a reliable measure of academic progress or achievement.¹⁵⁸

In the official letter from USED denying any assessment waivers, Secretary DeVos stated,

*The challenges posed by this crisis only underscore the value of collecting and reporting on a standard measure of student performance. Leaders should not have to continue to steer recovery efforts in the dark, and families and communities should be able to access the information they deserve about how schools are serving all students... Now may be the perfect time for you to rethink assessment in your state, including considering competency and mastery-based assessments, to better gauge the learning and academic growth of your students.*¹⁵⁹

In that regard, she is correct. Statewide annual assessments provide critical data to help measure equity in education. Many parents in Georgia agree. A statewide poll of registered voters in Georgia, many of whom are also parents, supported the return to statewide annual assessments in the coming spring.¹⁶⁰ Of those polled,

- 51% approved of state summative tests being administered in spring 2021; only 27% disapproved.
- 63% were convinced the spring assessments would provide important information to parents not provided through grades or report cards.
- 58% were convinced that advocates need these data to fight for change, particularly for students of color, those from low-income families, students with disabilities, and English language learners.
- 61% were convinced that summative assessment data help direct resources to students who need them the most.

If, as Superintendent Woods stated, the current set of mandated state tests would not provide an accurate measure of student learning, then now is the time to "rethink assessments... to better gauge the learning and academic growth," as suggested by Secretary DeVos. What could a coordinated system of assessments look like in Georgia that would meet the instructional needs of educators and ensure all students are learning and having their needs met?

Ultimately, formative and state summative assessments should be coherently linked through a well-articulated model of learning that includes learning goals, along with intermediate stages and instructional means for reaching those goals. Both formative and summative assessments should represent these goals and stages well and should foster the kind of instruction that will lead to critical thinking and problem-solving, the transfer of knowledge to new situations, and the ability to continue to learn.¹⁶¹

158 Georgia Department of Education. 2020, Superintendent Woods on US Department of Education.

159 See: <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Documents/Secretary%20DeVos%20Letter%20to%20CSSOs%2009%2003%202020.pdf>.

160 Democrats for Education Reform. 2020, August 25. *Public Opinion of Diagnostic and Summative Assessments – Georgia*. Retrieved from <http://dfer.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Assessment-Polling-Presentation.Release.8.19.20.pdf>.

161 Darling-Hammond, L., A. Schachner, A. Edgerton, A. Badrinarayan, J. Cardichon, P.W. Cookson, . . . S. Wojcikiewicz. 2020, August. *Restarting and Reinventing School: Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond*. Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://restart-reinvent.learningpolicyinstitute.org/>.

Assessment reform efforts in states such as New Hampshire, which have emphasized formative processes and the use of performance tasks for measuring learning more frequently and authentically, have led the way toward more coherent and meaningful assessment policies across the country.¹⁶²

In 2019, Georgia received an assessment waiver from the USED under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to develop alternative assessments, with the ultimate goal of one of them potentially replacing the Georgia Milestones statewide.¹⁶³ Two pilot programs were approved to develop these alternative assessments over the next five years: the Georgia MAP Assessment Partnership (GMAP)¹⁶⁴ and the Putnam County Consortium.¹⁶⁵ Both pilots rely heavily on formative assessments, which provide ongoing feedback to teachers to help inform instruction. The formative assessments will ultimately roll-up into a summative score at the end of the year that is comparable to the Milestones assessments for required grades and subjects.

During the pandemic, school systems across Georgia are experimenting with different approaches to student learning, including virtual, in-person, hybrid, and other models. There is a window of opportunity for districts to experiment with alternative delivery systems, such as competency-based learning, to better meet the learning needs of their students. Assessments and student performance data are essential to gauge which delivery systems are working for which populations of students.

The state can help districts collect and report data on the various school models being used during the pandemic. With comparative data across districts and schools, Georgia would gain a stronger understanding of the impact of COVID and the success of the subsequent attempts to mediate those impacts. The BEACON assessment is a good start in this direction but is currently only being offered as an option to districts, and it is unclear how many districts will take advantage of the assessment. It is also unclear whether results will be compiled across districts to help identify best practices.

In South Carolina, the state education agency is partnering with NWEA to conduct a study using MAP® Growth™ scores and student demographic data to determine the impact of prolonged school closures and interrupted learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This study will use assessment data from MAP Growth assessments to demonstrate the extent to which student achievement was affected, and evaluate whether this impact varies across student subgroups, grades, and schools. This will allow the state to answer questions such as how achievement has been impacted, broken down by poverty, special needs status, race, and English language learner status by district. This study will also provide insights into the differential impacts of the various learning approaches taken by districts. The results will also help prioritize limited resources to effective practices for the neediest students.

State leaders can also provide more guidance on streamlining academic assessment systems. SB 367 authorized GaDOE to help districts conduct an assessment inventory to align their assessment systems, but currently no funding has been allocated to this work.

162 Darling-Hammond et al., 2020, *Restarting and Reinventing School*.

163 For complete details on the district consortiums and waiver programs, see Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. 2019, January. Issue 6 – Assessments: Testing the Waters. *Top Ten Issues to Watch in 2019*.

164 GMAP will be piloting a version of the nationally available MAP test that has been aligned with Georgia academic standards. Current partnership members include Clayton, Floyd, Jackson, Jasper, and Polk County Schools, along with Marietta City Schools, starting this school year. Gilmer, Haralson, and Dalton County Schools and Trion City Schools will join next year. GMAP tests were initially being developed in math, English/ language arts (ELA), and science for grades three through eight to be administered no later than 2020–2021. Each participating district was to administer a combination of the GMAP and Milestones during the first three years of the program. That timeline has been paused by one year due to the pandemic.

165 The Putnam County Consortium hopes to administer the Navy test, developed by a partnership between Putnam County Schools and Navy Education, LLC, during the 2018–2019 school year in math and ELA in grades three through eight, and high school math and ELA classes. Putnam County, the only participating member, proposed to use Navy for accountability purposes for grades three through eight and high school beginning in the 2018–2019 school year in lieu of administering Georgia Milestones. Affiliate members – Calhoun City Schools, Dougherty, Evans, Fayette, Floyd, Liberty, McIntosh, Oglethorpe, and Pike County Schools – used Navy during this first pilot year but will still administer the Milestones for accountability purposes.

Finally, Georgia leaders need to develop a plan for how assessments can be used to inform an accountability system. Given how different annual assessments will be in the short term and the unique circumstances schools currently face, assessments and accountability systems should not be used at this time to formally rate teachers or schools but rather should be used to inform how to meet student and educator needs. And while assessments can help educators focus on short-term remediation needs, there needs to be a state plan that prescribes what is done with assessment data and how. The plan should also, in combination with accountability, inform where the state and local districts need to focus their resources.

With COVID-19 amplifying equity gaps and with traditional assessment and accountability systems paused, now is the time for state leaders to consider how to drive more equitable student achievement over the short, medium, and long term. As schools and districts experiment with different forms of instructional delivery, accountability systems can be used for identifying students who need additional support and to provide additional focus to students who are English language learners, are experiencing homelessness, have a disability, live in rural areas, or are impacted by the juvenile justice or foster care systems.

The full effect of the abrupt transition to remote learning in spring 2020 will likely not be known for years. But past research confirms that school closures cause significant learning losses. Thus, the COVID-19 school closures and ongoing education disruptions have likely caused significant learning losses as well, especially among the most disadvantaged students, exacerbating inequities and achievement gaps.¹⁶⁶ The full impact and how it differs across schools, districts, and different populations of students cannot be known until states resume testing of all students. Tied to a well-designed accountability system, these assessments can help identify and target resources to the students who need the most help.

In the immediate future, researchers are concluding that cancelling a second year of meaningful assessments will only deepen existing inequities, since assessments can help schools identify which students have experienced the greatest disruptions in their learning trajectories.¹⁶⁷ More long term, students are now learning across a wider variety of educational settings – virtual, hybrid, learning pods, homeschooling, and more. Consequently, it is more important than ever that assessments and the corresponding accountability systems be designed and implemented to meet the needs of these new settings. Assessments are the key to understanding which of these new schooling arrangements are working, which are not, and how best to identify needs and offer supports to the most vulnerable students.

166 Spurrier, A., C. Aldman, J.O. Schiess, A.J. Rotherham. 2020, August. *Assessment and Accountability in the Wake of COVID-19*. Retrieved from Bellwether Education Partners – Making Next Year Count Summer 2020 Accountability Series: https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/Bellwether_Accountability-COVID19_Final.pdf.

167 Education Commission of the States. 2020. *Assessments and Accountability*. Retrieved from State Legislative Development on Key Issues: https://www.ecs.org/covid-19-pandemic/?utm_source=ECS+Subscribers&utm_campaign=1a7c300c4e-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_10_26_07_36&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1a2b00b930-1a7c300c4e-53612455.



PARENT ENGAGEMENT— POSITIONING FAMILIES AS PARTNERS

Issue Overview

Many educators have lamented that it took a global health crisis to heighten awareness of the family's role in a child's academic success. The benefits of family engagement related to student success are well known. Multiple studies have shown that children whose parents/caregivers are actively engaged in their learning typically present the following:¹⁶⁸

- Higher grades,
- Higher test scores,
- Greater social skills,
- Better reported behavior,
- Easier adaptation to school, and
- A greater likelihood of continuing into post-graduate education.

Families have discovered a newfound appreciation for teachers – recognizing the amount of work they do, the challenges they face, and their impact on the social and cognitive development of children. There is now an opportunity for educators and families to harness this new understanding to ensure student success in and out of the classroom. The question is how? Is there a shared definition of family engagement among state leaders, educators, and parents? The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines parent engagement in schools as follows:

...parents and school staff working together to support and improve the learning, development, and health of children and adolescents. Parent engagement in schools is a shared responsibility in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage parents in meaningful ways, and parents are committed to actively supporting their children's and adolescents' learning and development. This relationship...cuts across and reinforces children's health and learning in multiple settings – at home, in school, in out-of-school programs, and in the community.¹⁶⁹

Positioning families as partners can have a significant impact on long-term student outcomes as at-home and hybrid learning models continue to evolve. A global Brookings Institute study recognized the significance of forging stronger, more trusting relationships between parents and teachers, citing

168 Wolpert-Gawron, H. 2019, August 7. The Eight Ps of Parent Engagement. *NEA News*. Retrieved from <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/eight-ps-parent-engagement>.

169 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2018, August 7. Adolescent and School Health. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/parent_engagement.htm.

the “opportunity for parents and families to gain insight into the skill that is involved in teaching and for teachers and schools to realize what powerful allies parents can be.”¹⁷⁰ Further, increased family engagement has the “potential to influence important cultural and structural leverage points,” from shaping public perception on expected outcomes of education to creating new communication loops that bring all stakeholders to the table.¹⁷¹

The pandemic pushed family engagement from the edge to the center of education conversations – giving Georgia an opportunity to rethink education, engagement, and equity. The question now is around how we can transform education systems to amplify innovations and family involvement in a way that creates equal access so all children gain the skills they need to build a better future.

Significance for Georgia

Georgia should not pass up the opportunity to capitalize on new levels of family engagement. Innovative delivery models hold great promise for Georgia students – but how do we support and sustain the engagement of parents and caregivers as students move through the K-12 system, realizing that family support for kindergarteners differs greatly from the needs of middle and high school adolescents?

There are strong indications that the virtual component of learning is here to stay. The only way to prevent significant disruptions, like a pandemic, from deepening inequality for an entire generation is to equip families to support at-home and virtual learning. An important equity insight is challenging the mindset that families with low levels of resources are not capable of or interested in helping their children learn. A recent study found that the bias that families from marginalized communities offer less support for their child’s education is unfounded:

*While likely surprising to many, these examples of the capability of low-income or marginalized parents and families to be powerful allies in support of their children’s learning aligns with existing evidence. In the US, for example, several decades of research have shown that parents, especially for low-income students, have a positive influence on student academic achievement largely through equipping parents to support their children’s learning at home.*¹⁷²

As Georgia continues to integrate families into the learning process, return on investment comes in the form of improved learning outcomes and empowering parents to be advocates. An analysis of nearly 10 million students found that 15 minutes of parent engagement seems to be the “magic number” for substantial positive gains in reading achievement, proving that small investments can lead to big wins.¹⁷³ Consider the work of the Springboard Collaboration Family-Educator Learning Accelerator, which teaches at-home learning skills to low-income parents. With 30% of the parent population experiencing literacy or language barriers, Springboard equipped parents with the tools needed to help their children make a three-month reading gain in just five weeks. By engaging children in dialogue, asking questions before, during, and after reading, even low literate parents – investing as little as 15 minutes a day – improved their child’s ability to read.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Vegas, E., and R. Winthrop. 2020, September 8. *Beyond Reopening Schools: How Education Can Emerge Stronger Than Before COVID-19*. Brookings Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/research/beyond-reopening-schools-how-education-can-emerge-stronger-than-before-covid-19/>.

¹⁷¹ Winthrop, R. 2020, October 21. *Can New Forms of Parent Engagement Be an Education Game Changer Post-COVID-19?* Brookings Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2020/10/21/can-new-forms-of-parent-engagement-be-an-education-game-changer-post-covid-19/>.

¹⁷² Vegas and Winthrop, 2020, *Beyond Reopening Schools*.

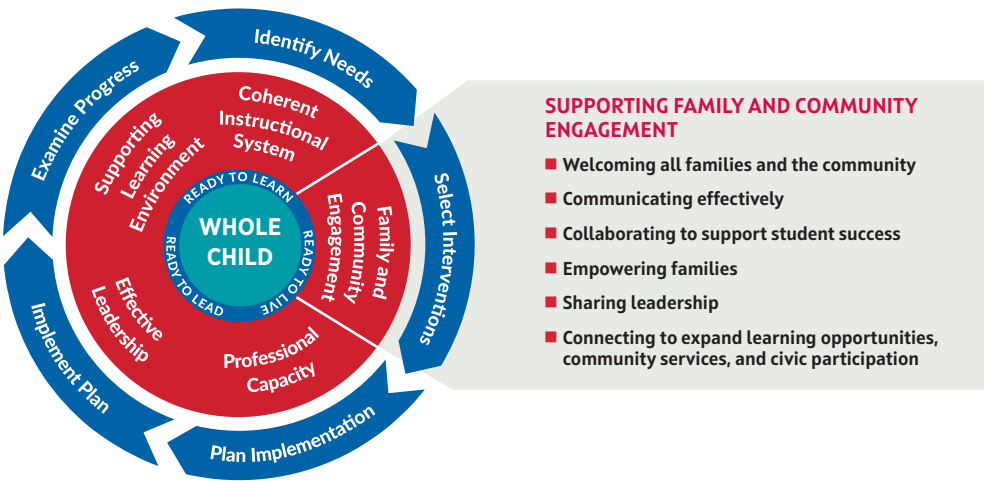
¹⁷³ Renaissance. 2018. *The Magic of 15 Minutes: Reading Practice and Reading Growth*. Retrieved from https://www.renaissance.com/2018/01/23/blog-magic-15-minutes-reading-practice-reading-growth/?utm_source=school-leaders-now&utm_medium=featured-article&utm_campaign=guide-to-reading-growth.

¹⁷⁴ Seale, C. 2020, May 19. Parent Involvement Has Always Mattered. Will The COVID-19 Pandemic Finally Make This the New Normal In K-12 Education? *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/colinseale/2020/05/19/parent-involvement-has-always-mattered-will-the-covid-19-pandemic-finally-make-this-the-new-normal-in-k-12-education/#73a2b4985e46>.

Increased family engagement also prepares parents/caregivers for advocacy on important issues, including testing and standards. Understanding specific student needs helps parents be better advocates for resources and multiple community connections that improve the outcomes of broader student populations.

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) is already trying to engage families in new ways. The concept of “community + school + families” is at the foundation of GaDOE’s “Whole Child” model for meeting children’s physical, mental, and social needs (see Figure 7.1). As part of the commitment to the whole child, the Georgia State Board of Education adopted six family engagement structures, aligned with the National PTA Family and Community Engagement Standards: welcoming all families and the community to promote active participation in the life of the school; communicating effectively; collaborating to support student learning and healthy development; empowering families to be advocates for their own and other children; sharing leadership on decision making; and connecting students, families, and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation.¹⁷⁵

FIGURE 7.1 GADOE’S WHOLE CHILD MODEL AND FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRUCTURES¹⁷⁶



Leveraging technology to advance these family engagement practices, GaDOE created online resources including “Power Tips,” five-minute feature videos capturing best practices and community partnerships to build capacity at the local level. A YouTube channel and Facebook and Twitter platforms offer other opportunities for districts to exchange ideas on successful programs. Additionally, Georgia Public Broadcasting has partnered with GaDOE to create at-home learning enhancements for students, parents, and educators.¹⁷⁷

Focused on meeting the needs of low-income families, GaDOE’s Family-School Partnership Program aligns services with Georgia’s 1,500+ Title I schools and associated Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requirements. Implementation is left to the districts, but GaDOE supports community partnerships, parent mentors, and the Superintendent of School’s Parent Advisory Council statewide through technical assistance, training, materials, and professional development programs.¹⁷⁸

175 Georgia Department of Education. 2020. *Educating the Whole Child*. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/wholechild.aspx>.

176 Source: GaDOE: <https://www.gadoe.org/School-Improvement/School-Improvement-Services/Pages/Family-and-Community-Engagement.aspx>.

177 Georgia Department of Education. n.d. Family-School Partnership Program. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/AskDOE/Pages/Parent-Engagement.aspx>.

178 GaDOE, n.d., Family-School Partnership Program.

Another GaDOE program that supports family engagement is Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT). Over the course of the academic year, the APTT model features three 75-minute team meetings between the teacher and the parents of all the students in the teacher's class, along with one 30-minute individual parent-teacher meeting. APTT enables teachers to create a parent-centered environment where parents' voices, ideas, experiences, and feedback contribute to creating a collaborative and respectful place to learn.¹⁷⁹

Enhanced engagement helps families rechannel their perceptions of the education cycle. Increasing awareness of grade-level standards and why they matter, understanding student achievement data to set learning goals, and implementing fun, engaging ways to reinforce concepts can positively impact student outcomes. Lifelong learning – where students (and parents) understand how interests and aptitudes can transfer to a career – has real implications for enrollment in college and career academies, Career Technical and Agricultural Education (CTAE), and post-secondary pathways.

It is not just at the state level that leaders are taking a new approach to family engagement. Regional and local efforts are underway as well, with collaborative community partnerships resulting in unique experiences for students and their families. For example, a partnership with Office Depot gives families a night of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) activities geared toward improving math skills. Georgia PTA has long been a resource for schools seeking to improve family engagement, offering comprehensive resources like the "Parents' Guides to Student Success," which provides clear, consistent expectations for what students should be learning at each grade level in order to be prepared for college and career.¹⁸⁰ Schools in Baldwin County have integrated the "Parent University" concept into their engagement strategy.¹⁸¹ See the sidebar titled Empowering Parents for more details about Parent University.

EMPOWERING PARENTS

With multiple locations throughout Georgia and the nation, the Parent University community collaborative has found success as a parent engagement tool. Founded in Chatham County in 1988, Parent University is a two-generation program that helps parents become full partners in their children's education. Through partnerships with school districts and community agencies and organizations, Parent University offers free courses, family events, and activities to equip families with new skills, knowledge, resources, and confidence. The Savannah–Chatham County School District has incorporated this empowerment program into its parent engagement strategy, regularly seeing 300+ parents at Saturday morning sessions held at local schools. Topics, chosen by families based on their needs, include technology tips for parents; reading and literacy tools; and health, nutrition, and wellness information. The Parent University Bus Tour is a special project designed to help meet families in their neighborhoods and provide them with helpful information and resources. Specific programming for parents of children birth to age 5, the Early Learning College offers training to help parents create high-quality learning environments for early learners and teaches parents skills to be better partners with teachers when their children enter school.

179 West Ed. 2019, May 31. *Engaging Families to Boost Student Learning: Academic Parent-Teacher Teams in Georgia*. Retrieved from https://www.wested.org/rd_alert_online/families-boost-student-learning-academic-parent-teacher-teams-georgia/.

180 See Georgia PTA – Community Resources at <https://www.georgiapta.org/family-engagement/community-resources>.

181 See Baldwin County School District at <https://www.baldwincountyschoolsga.org/family-engagement>.

Action Steps for Georgia

Imagine what school could look like for students and parents/caregivers alike. Can Georgia leverage increased family engagement to improve the education experience and lifelong outcomes? Will parents advocate for education systems that enhance creative, critical thinking and the pursuit of lifelong learning? Could we redefine “success” and encourage students to achieve beyond grade 12?

Strong Feedback Loops

A critical component of family engagement success is communication. Traditional methods – quarterly report cards and once-a-year “meet and greets” – will make way for more frequent, effective feedback. Georgia must focus on building sustainable educator–family relationships that support the journey from pre-K to post-secondary options with easy-to-understand information that is culturally appropriate. Further, communication between parents/caregivers and employers will be needed to sustain family engagement. Flexibility of scheduling, additional time off to engage with teachers and other parents, and family leave time are possible supports that employers can provide.

Georgia also must prioritize the support and guidance that families are seeking as they help maintain at-home learning. A global study of educators and education leaders in 59 countries reported that continuity of education was among a list of learning priorities for administrators and teachers; however, only four out of 10 respondents ranked ensuring “support for parents to assist their students, ensure continuity and integrity” as a high priority.¹⁸² With “Teams” and “Zoom” becoming regulars at the dinner table, Georgia will need to deliver ongoing technology support for families as well as teachers.

Innovations that emerged out of necessity could prove beneficial post-pandemic. Creative use of text messaging, family support hotlines, daily e-assessments, and offline e-learning utilized by teachers in rural and under-resourced communities is setting the stage for continued improvements in education.¹⁸³ Further, technology gives access to a whole new world through virtual field trips, training, and apprenticeships. When jobs and skills of the future are showcased, students, parents, and educators become better informed on how to prepare for the workforce. While technology has opened the door to numerous, creative mechanisms for improving the communication feedback loop, Georgia must allocate resources to close the digital divide – ensuring statewide, equitable access to technology and broadband.

Inclusivity in Recovery

Georgia’s approach to engaging marginalized families must be top of mind for educators, community groups, and legislators. Personalized engagement gives teachers and counselors the platform to inform families – who may not see education as a stepping stone out of poverty – on the value of education. With 13.3% of Georgia’s citizens living below the poverty level,¹⁸⁴ educators need tools that demonstrate the relevance and value of lifelong learning. Forbes notes that connections matter more than connectivity:

Over the last decade, college-educated parents have quadrupled their investment of time and money in their children, while parents without a college degree have only modestly increased their investment. Experts describe this as a “parenting gap” that leads to a vicious cycle of intergenerational wealth inequality. What matters most in a child’s life is their family. Not their school, and certainly not their technology.¹⁸⁵

182 Reimers, F.M., and A. Schleicher. 2020. *Schooling Disrupted, Schooling Rethought: How the Covid-19 Pandemic Is Changing Education*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Retrieved from https://globaled.gse.harvard.edu/files/geii/files/education_continuity_v3.pdf.

183 Vegas and Winthrop, 2020, *Beyond Reopening Schools*.

184 US Census Bureau. 2020, October. Georgia Quick Facts. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/GA>.

185 Seale, 2020, May 19, Parent Involvement.

The Brookings Institute argues that “strong and inclusive public education systems are essential to the short- and long-term recovery of society.”¹⁸⁶ Including parents in the education process has a valuable, long-term impact for Georgia students. Achievement through family goal setting – whether it is a literacy goal or preparing for a career pathway – has implications far beyond the classroom. Equipped with a better understanding of their children’s levels of mastery, aptitudes, and learning styles, parents will become better advocates for resources to help their children succeed. To improve learning outcomes, Georgia must elevate the relevance of every step of education and the central role of the family – looking through the lens of equity and inclusion.

186 Vegas and Winthrop, 2020, *Beyond Reopening Schools*.



POST-SECONDARY COMPLETION – A PATHWAY TO PROSPERITY

Issue Overview

The pipeline to and through post-secondary education in the United States has long been known to have notable cracks when it comes to serving students of color. Dr. Anthony Carnevale, professor and director of the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, has studied these inequities, finding that class and race play a significant role in educational and workforce outcomes. Research has shown large and consistent gaps between White, Black, and Latino subgroups in post-secondary degree pursuit and attainment.¹⁸⁷

- One-third of White students who perform well on standardized tests enroll at selective post-secondary institutions; only one-fifth of similarly performing Black and Latino students do the same.¹⁸⁸
- Black students are overrepresented at underfunded, open-access institutions where students complete their degrees at much lower levels, leaving them in debt but without a credential.¹⁸⁹
- Since the 1990s, almost two-thirds of selective public universities have seen their population of lower-income students shrink; at the same time, they have increased their enrollment of students whose families have incomes in the top 20% of the population.

In other words, selective higher education institutions are increasingly serving richer and whiter student bodies, regardless of test scores, while at the same time the population has been rapidly diversifying.

Preliminary data show that the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated these trends of racial inequity in post-secondary success. The pandemic has shifted student priorities and increased students' general stress and anxiety levels across the board. The pressures to postpone or pause the pursuit of higher education are growing. A nationally representative survey of more than 4,000 undergraduates conducted in the fall of 2020 found that fewer than one in five current college students strongly agree that their education will be worth the cost.¹⁹⁰ Moreover, half of the 2020

187 Carnevale, A. 2020, September 2. *White Flight to the Bachelor's Degree*. Retrieved from <https://medium.com/georgetown-cew/white-flight-to-the-ba-e604ee4e3967>.

188 Carnevale, 2020, *White Flight*.

189 Jones, T.A. 2020, January. *HARD TRUTHS: Why Only Race-Conscious Policies Can Fix Racism in Higher Education*. EdTrust. Retrieved from <https://edtrustmain.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/14161442/Hard-Truths-Why-Only-Race-Conscious-Policies-Can-Fix-Racism-in-Higher-Education-January-2020.pdf>.

190 Strada Center for Education Consumer Insights. 2020, October 27. *Public Viewpoint: COVID-19 Work and Education Survey*. Retrieved from <https://www.stradaeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Report-October-27-2020.pdf>.

graduating class has changed their college plans, and 40% of those graduates report they might not be able to now afford college.¹⁹¹ The survey further found that Black and Latino students face more significant financial barriers to continuing their higher education compared to their White peers: 52% of Latino students and 48% of Black students described paying tuition for the fall 2020 semester as a challenge, compared to only 36% of White students. In fact, 19% of Latino students and 20% of Black students described finances as their biggest struggle during the semester, compared to only 11% of White students.

Before the coronavirus pandemic struck, trends in Georgia had been moving toward a higher need for post-secondary credentials and a forecast of automation impacting our low-skilled workforce.¹⁹² The COVID crisis has pushed the nation into an economic downturn. During recessions, many jobs that are lost do not return, and most that are created in the subsequent recovery require some form of higher education.¹⁹³ At a time when workforce needs continue to shift away from low-skilled workers at an accelerated pace, barriers to educational attainment are continuing to grow, especially along racial lines.

Dr. Carnevale makes the argument that these trends are the result of longstanding and systemic policies that have favored White families and students, especially those from middle- and upper-income brackets. These same policies pigeonhole students of color into lower-quality housing and restrict access to capital and employment opportunities, all of which in turn create barriers to the educational attainment of their children.¹⁹⁴ For the 2020–2021 school year, the majority (62%) of Georgia's K-12 population is non-White,¹⁹⁵ and 60% qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.¹⁹⁶ To meet the demands of the state's economy and to truly move from recovery to success in a post-COVID world, Georgia needs for more of its population to access and complete a post-secondary education. This is especially true for students of color, who have long faced systemic barriers to accessing higher education. Georgia has the opportunity to redesign access to post-secondary schooling, remove historical structural barriers to success, and connect higher education to high schools and labor markets.

Significance for Georgia

The degree attainment of students of color in Georgia reflects the racial attainment gaps found across the nation. A study by the Education Trust in 2016 found that 32.3% of Black Georgians and 20.8% of Latino Georgians aged 25–64 had a college degree (associate degree or above), compared to 43.8% of White Georgians (see Table 8.1).¹⁹⁷ Black enrollment levels at Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) institutions were found to be slightly over representative of the Black population at-large. This was not the case at public four-year institutions, especially at flagship and more selective institutions, where the inequities in enrollment were significant.¹⁹⁸

191 Southern Regional Education Board. 2020. *Bouncing Back from COVID Using Education and Workforce Development Dollars* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from: https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/sreb_bouncing_back_from_covid_session_3_students.pdf?1600798930.

192 Southern Regional Education Board. 2019, June. *Georgia's Economic Outlook*. Retrieved from State Workforce Outlooks: <https://www.sreb.org/publication/georgia-0>.

193 Lee, J. 2020, November. *How Student Debt Worsens Racial Inequality*. Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://gbpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/How-Student-Debt-Worsens-Racial-Inequality.pdf>.

194 Carnevale, 2020, *White Flight*.

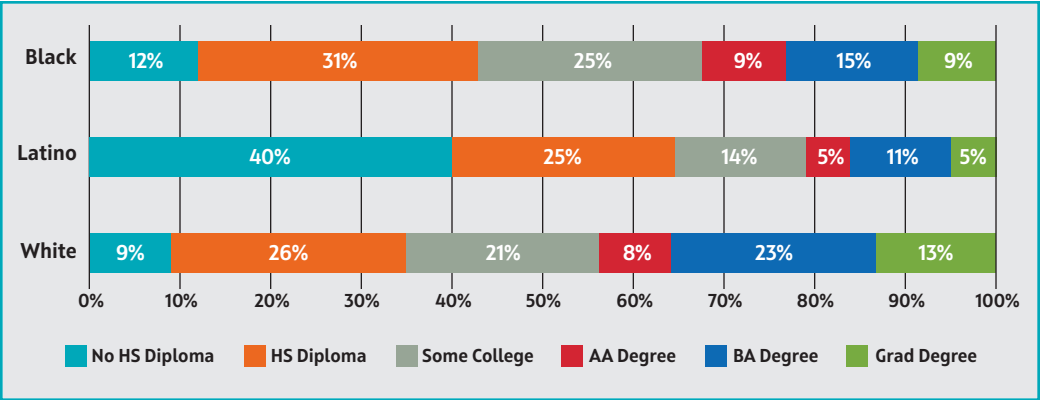
195 Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE). 2020, October 6. Enrollment by Ethnicity/Race, Gender, and Grade Level (PK-12). Retrieved from https://app3.doe.k12.ga.us/ows-bin/owa/fte_pack_ethnicsex.entry_form.

196 GaDOE. 2019, October 1. Free and Reduced-Price Meal Eligibility. Retrieved from https://oraapp.doe.k12.ga.us/ows-bin/owa/fte_pack_frl001_public.entry_form.

197 The Education Trust. State Equity Report Card Overview Georgia – Black Americans and Latino Americans. Retrieved November 24, 2020 from <http://stateequity.org/state/georgia>.

198 The Education Trust, State Equity Report Card Overview Georgia – Black Americans and Latino Americans.

FIGURE 8.1 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN GEORGIA BY RACE¹⁹⁹



It is important to recognize the barriers that low-wealth individuals and families face when trying to access higher education.²⁰⁰ Those barriers are more significant for Black residents than White residents of similar income levels. Nationally, students of color tend to be significantly poorer than White populations, and so socioeconomic status and family income are often used as a stand-in for race when considering policies to support more representative post-secondary student enrollment and success. However, data show that income factors are not a comprehensive stand-in for race. That is, while students of color tend to face financial challenges, their challenges are not financial alone. They have different experiences, obstacles, and circumstances than White students at the same income level that result in differences in post-secondary enrollment and completion rates even within the same socioeconomic status (see Table 8.1). Thus, policies that only address income discrepancies do not effectively address racial discrepancies or achieve the racial equity that Georgia needs to support the state economic and workforce needs.

TABLE 8.1 SIX-YEAR BACHELOR'S DEGREE COMPLETION RATES AND AVERAGE ADJUSTED GROSS INCOME (AGI) BY RACE/ETHNICITY FOR DEPENDENT, FULL-TIME, FIRST-TIME STUDENTS AT FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS IN GEORGIA²⁰¹

Family Income	Black Completion	White Completion	Completion Gap	Black AGI	White AGI
Low	37%	51%	14 pts	\$14,140	\$14,034
Lower Middle	50%	67%	17 pts	\$39,707	\$42,119
Upper Middle	59%	73%	15 pts	\$78,110	\$84,559
High	74%	84%	11 pts	\$152,131	\$165,451
Overall	49%	74%	25 pts	\$49,845.03	\$101,807.09

In part, this discrepancy can be traced to the history of systemic barriers to the accumulation of wealth – from the lack of access to veteran's benefits, housing assistance, and federal Social Security under the New Deal to redlining and limited access to mortgages, mortgage insurance, and bank credit through the late 20th century.²⁰² The effect of these policies is that Black families at every income level have had less access to credit, capital, and intergenerational wealth than their White counterparts. Thus, Black families, even at higher incomes, experience higher financial instability and less economic resilience when faced with unexpected costs, financial losses, or family needs. Today, White middle-income families have four times the financial assets of Black families at the same

199 The Education Trust, State Equity Report Card Overview Georgia – Black Americans and Latino Americans.
200 For a full discussion of the full costs of post-secondary access/ completion, see Issue 10: Beyond the Diploma – Keys to Post-Secondary Success, *Top Ten Issues to Watch in 2020*.
201 Jones, 2020, *HARD TRUTHS*.
202 Carnevale, 2020, *White Flight*.

income level.²⁰³ In Georgia, the average net worth of White families sending a student to undergraduate study in the 2017–2018 school year was almost \$130,000. The average net worth for corresponding Black families was \$8,050.²⁰⁴ At every income level, Black student borrowers are significantly more likely to default on their loans than their White counterparts (see Table 8.2). Such trends directly impact the capacity of an individual or a family to afford post-secondary education.

TABLE 8.2 TWELVE-YEAR DEFAULT RATES AND AVERAGE ADJUSTED GROSS INCOME (AGI) BY RACE/ ETHNICITY FOR DEPENDENT FULL-TIME, FIRST-TIME STUDENTS AT FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS IN GEORGIA²⁰⁵

Family Income	Black Default Rates	White Default Rates	Black AGI	White AGI
Low	48%	23%	\$14,250	\$15,761
Lower Middle	40%	15%	\$41,920	\$41,940
Upper Middle	36%	9%	\$69,228	\$70,449
High	34%	5%	\$129,291	\$132,348
Overall	42%	11%	\$38,168	\$71,367

Note: Family Income: Low <\$32,000 , Low Middle ≥\$32,000 & <\$60,000, High Middle ≥\$60,000 & <\$92,000, High ≥\$92,000.
Source: Ed Trust analysis of U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (BPS: 04/09).

In Georgia today, the effects of these wealth discrepancies are clearly reflected in post-secondary enrollment as well as in disparities in student debt. Families who struggle to afford higher education are less likely to pursue it. Students from such families are more likely to work while enrolled and are more likely to take on hours that put their coursework at risk. In 2016, Georgia students from low-income backgrounds would need to work on average 32 hours per week to cover the financial gap between the average tuition of a public four-year institution and the average grant and scholarship awards.²⁰⁶ The ACT Center for Equity in Learning found in 2017 that college students working more than just 15 hours per week were at risk of getting behind in their academic classes and eventually failing to complete their degree. This was especially true for low-income students.²⁰⁷ Georgia students from families that make less than \$35,000 a year are 24% less likely to graduate than students from families that earn more than \$70,000 (see Figure 8.2). Lower-income students, especially Black and Latino students, are more likely to leave school with outstanding student debt, whether or not they earn a credential.

These disparities are particularly true in Georgia, where no state-sponsored, statewide, needs-based aid program exists. The only state-sponsored, statewide financial aid programs in Georgia are merit based: the HOPE Scholarships and Grants, and the Zell Miller Scholarship. These programs have increased the accessibility and affordability of college for almost 2 million Georgians since the inception of the HOPE

FIGURE 8.2 SIX-YEAR BACHELOR'S DEGREE GRADUATION RATES BY INCOME²⁰⁸



203 Jones, 2020, *HARD TRUTHS*.
204 Lee, J. 2019. *2019 Georgia Higher Education Data Book: Policy Analysis*. Atlanta: Georgia Budget and Policy Institute.
205 Jones, 2020, *HARD TRUTHS*.
206 The Education Trust. *State Equity Report Card Overview Georgia – Black Americans*.
207 Kyte, S.B. 2017, July. *Who Does Work Work For? Understanding Equity in Working Learner College and Career Success*. Retrieved from <http://equityinlearning.act.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/WhoDoesWorkWorkFor.pdf>.
208 Lee, 2019, *2019 Georgia Higher Education Data Book*.

Scholarship in 1993. However, certain patterns have become clear in the more than 25 years that HOPE has been in place that reinforce the inequities of higher education in Georgia. Higher-income students are more likely to receive HOPE and Zell Miller Scholarships (see Figure 8.3). White and Asian students are the most likely to get Hope or Zell Miller Scholarships, while Black students are the least likely (see Figure 8.4). Among full-tuition Zell Miller Scholars, Black students are severely underrepresented compared to their numbers in the student population as a whole.²⁰⁹

FIGURE 8.3 HOPE AND ZELL MILLER SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS BY FAMILY INCOME WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF GEORGIA, 2013-2014²¹⁰

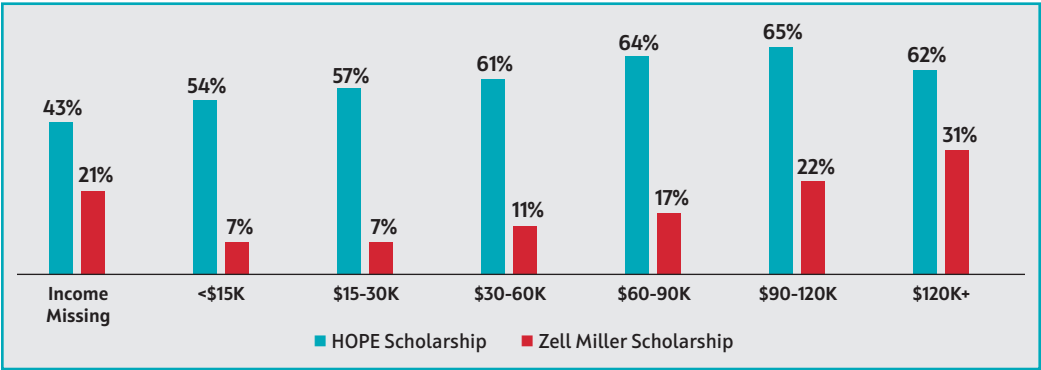
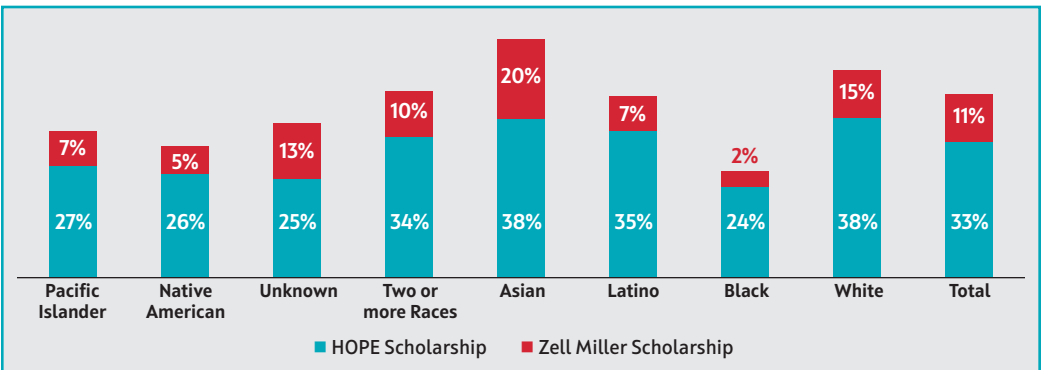


FIGURE 8.4 HOPE AND ZELL MILLER SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS BY RACE WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF GEORGIA²¹¹



The COVID-19 crisis has thrown these longstanding inequities into stark relief. At a time when families across the state, especially Black and Latino families, are facing unprecedented challenges, the state budget is also suffering. The last legislative session saw a 10% budget cut for state higher education entities for fiscal year (FY) 2021, which started on July 1, 2020. Much is unknown about the current economic downturn and eventual recovery, including how bad this recession will be and how long it will take to bounce back. One thing we do know is that when facing similar budget shortfalls and economic challenges during the Great Recession, Georgia drastically cut state support for our higher education institutions. To balance the annual budget, state leaders shifted the cost burden onto students through increasing tuition and fees while reducing state support.²¹² Black students and their families are particularly affected by these policies, as they are the most likely to take out student loans, and at among the largest levels, within the University System of Georgia (USG) (see Figures 8.5 and 8.6).²¹³ As tuition burdens increase, the barriers to post-secondary enrollment and

209 Lee, J. 2020, September 14. *Moving HOPE Forward into the 21st Century*. GBPI. Retrieved from <https://gbpi.org/moving-hope-forward-into-the-21st-century/>.
210 Lee, 2020, *Moving HOPE Forward*.
211 Lee, 2020, *Moving HOPE Forward*.
212 Lee, 2020, *How Student Debt Worsens Racial Inequality*.
213 Lee, 2020, *How Student Debt Worsens Racial Inequality*.

completion become steeper, and the debt load of Georgia’s students has grown by almost \$7,000 since before the Great Recession.²¹⁴ As the state faces fresh budget cuts, it is important to balance the realities of a tight budget with the economic development and workforce needs of the state. Cuts to the USG and TCSG have the potential to reverse years of progress toward a higher education pipeline that supports the state’s economic needs including retraining displaced workers and creating a skilled workforce pipeline that can effectively serve Georgia’s residents.²¹⁵

FIGURE 8.5 SHARE OF UNDERGRADUATES IN UNIVERSITY STYSTEM WHO BORROWED IN 2017-2018²¹⁶

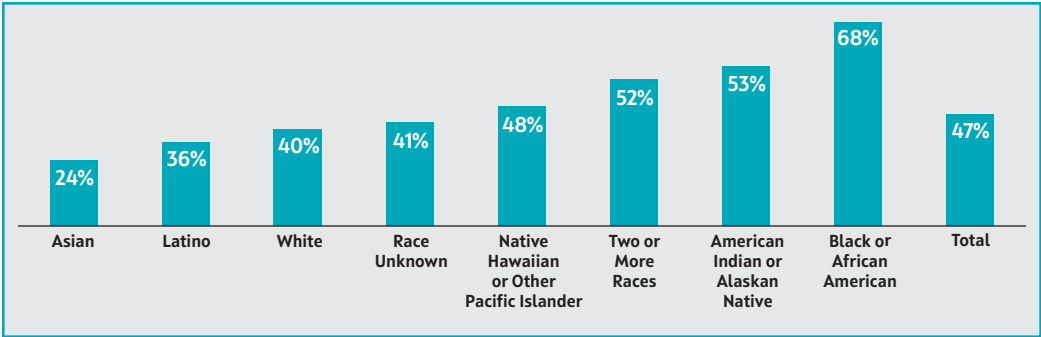
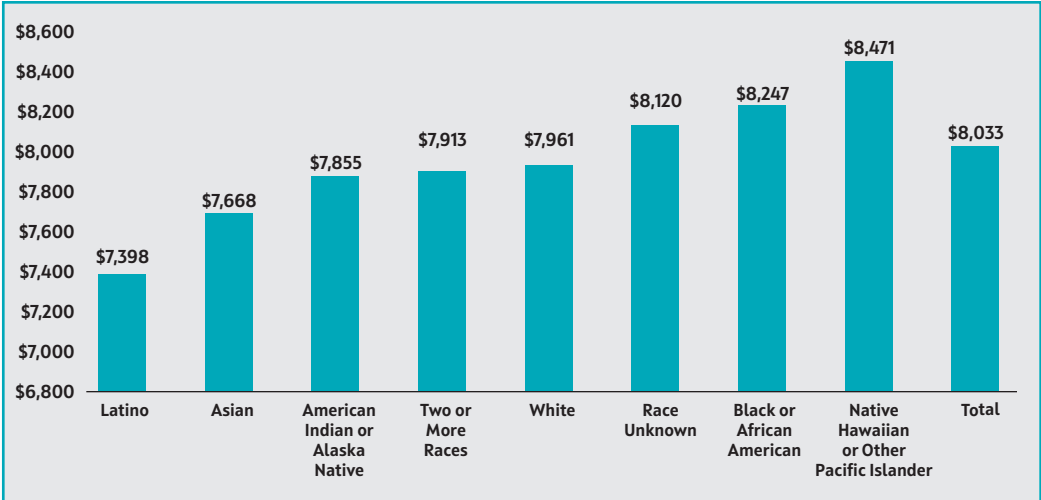


FIGURE 8.6 AVERAGE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT LOAN AMOUNT BORROWED IN 2017-2018²¹⁷



Both the USG and TCSG have been turning their focus to resolving post-secondary inequities in recent years, with some important successes. The TCSG has implemented the e-campus initiative, special services to support PELL Grant recipients, and the “Succeed Sooner” campaign to lower student debt and increase job placement success. (For more information, see Issue 9 – Georgia’s Workforce Pipeline.)

Within the USG, Georgia State University has become a nationally recognized flagship institution for graduating students of color and low-income students, finding success with its robust advising system, predictive analytics, and last-mile Panther Grants.²¹⁸

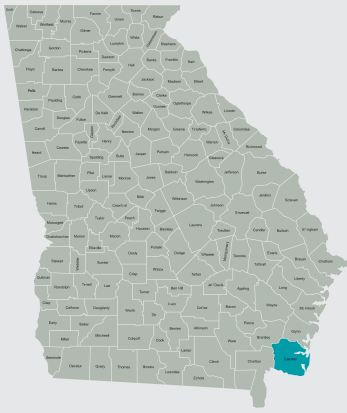
214 Lee, 2020, How Student Debt Worsens Racial Inequality.
215 Lee, J. 2020, May 21. *Commonsense Solutions Can Mitigate Unprecedented Cuts to Higher Education*. Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://gbpi.org/moving-hope-forward-into-the-21st-century/>.
216 Lee, 2020, *How Student Debt Worsens Racial Inequality*.
217 Lee, 2020, *How Student Debt Worsens Racial Inequality*.
218 For a full discussion of Georgia State University’s interventions to increase college completion, see Issue 10: Post-Secondary: Costs, Other Barriers Impede Success, *Top Ten Issue to Watch in 2019*.

The Momentum Year program has rolled out across the USG, implementing a suite of strategies at state institutions designed to help students create a foundation in their freshman year that allows them to progress successfully through graduation.²¹⁹

In 2018, the USG was awarded a competitive grant to serve as a scaling site for the Strong Start to Finish program. This program aims to significantly increase the number of students completing high-quality degrees, certificates, and licenses with labor market value while eliminating racial, ethnic, and income gaps in achievement. Early results have shown the importance of a simplified and streamlined support systemwide on students' transition to college as critical to long-term success.²²⁰

The dual enrollment program in Georgia is a powerful system for supporting post-secondary access and success. It allows high school students to earn credentials and establish academic momentum, giving them a head start on their higher education. In September 2020, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) examined effective strategies to leverage dual enrollment to support COVID recovery. One factor the board found critical to the success of dual enrollment programs is the consideration of and commitment to equity in their development and implementation. Further, SREB determined that the most effective programs lead to stackable credentials that are valued by local industries, can be earned quickly, and advance the long-term vision of the state.²²¹ For more information about dual enrollment, see the sidebar on Camden County's strong program.

CAMDEN COUNTY DUAL ENROLLMENT



In fall 2020, Camden County enrolled the most dual enrollment students in the state for the fourth year in a row. Camden County is a rural, Title 1 district in Southeast Georgia. A total of 32 district teachers have been certified through Coastal Pines Technical College to teach dual enrollment courses in Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) as well as core academic subjects. The money earned through the dual enrollment contract with the technical college is reinvested in the dual enrollment program. The district supports high-performing teachers in pursuing their master's degrees, both a retention tool and a vehicle to create more dual enrollment instructors. The district also funds tutors for students facing barriers to success, creating a hiring pool of potential future district teachers, which further supports the local teacher pipeline.

219 Complete College Georgia. 2019. *The Momentum Year*. Retrieved from <https://completegeorgia.org/momentum-year>.
220 Strong Start to Finish. 2020, August. *The University System of Georgia: Early Progress*. Retrieved from https://strongstart.org/sites/default/files/resource-center/pdfs/2020-08-13_SSTF_USG-CaseStudy_0.pdf.
221 Southern Regional Education Board, 2020, *Bouncing Back*.

Action Steps for Georgia

Considering Georgia's long-term recovery needs, in August 2020 the EdQuest Georgia Coalition published recommendations to support clear pathways to post-secondary success.²²² The highest priority among those recommendations was equalizing institutional resources and accessibility across the state through funding models that meet the demands of changing post-secondary needs. These strategies range from remote learning to sharing of faculty and resources across institutions and developing professional programs to addressing funding, affordability, and equity of access for all students. Also of paramount importance is creating, promoting, and funding a needs-based aid program that allows students to achieve success in higher education based on their own hard work and not the financial situation of their families. Such a system also requires keeping racial equity in mind when crafting and implementing policy to ensure our higher education population represents the demographic realities of our state population.

In this dynamic time, it is also essential to consider changing industry needs and to accelerate efforts to align the education pipeline with these needs. This includes incentivizing and supporting rapid degree programs and stackable credentials, reinforcing close alignment between dual enrollment programs and industry needs, and updating articulation agreements between K-12, TCSG, and USG institutions relative to each other as well as to dual enrollment and Advanced Placement programs. The effectiveness of any of these efforts is predicated on an emphasis on equity of access for all Georgia students, specifically including students of color and low-income and nontraditional learners.

While the state budget is still in a weakened position, legislators can take steps to ensure that one of the strongest economic recovery engines, Georgia's post-secondary system, has the support it needs to produce the workforce we need. This includes a commitment to enrolling and graduating students from historically underrepresented groups in higher education.

Education leaders in Georgia and across the country have long struggled to create a pathway to and through post-secondary education that effectively serves the entirety of the population. While this sad reality has always been an injustice, when considering current demographic trends and economic development needs, the status quo is now untenable for economic prosperity in the state. Georgia must intentionally and with deliberation pursue policies that commit to equitable access to and completion of higher education for all of Georgia's residents, especially Black, Latino, and low-income residents, or the entire state is at risk of economic depression.

²²² For a complete list of recommendations, see http://www.edquestga.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/EdQuest-Clear-Pathways-to-Postsecondary-Success_2020-FINAL_August.pdf.



GEORGIA'S WORKFORCE PIPELINE – CREATING EQUITABLE ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Issue Overview

The Southern Regional Education Board's (SREB) Workforce 2030 report sounded the alarm about worker displacement over the next 10 years. The pandemic and related industry adjustments have accelerated this timeline and urgency for response. In light of these considerations, Georgia's efforts to develop reskilling, upskilling, and professional development programs are more important than ever. A recent jobs report signals significant job transformations by 2025:

Automation, in tandem with the COVID-19 recession, is creating a "double-disruption" scenario for workers. In addition to the current disruption from the pandemic-induced lockdowns and economic contraction, technological adoption by companies will transform tasks, jobs, and skills by 2025. Forty-three percent of businesses surveyed indicate that they are set to reduce their workforce due to technology integration, 41% plan to expand their use of contractors for task-specialized work, and 34% plan to expand their workforce due to technology integration.²²³

To remain responsive and nimble to ever-changing workforce demands, Georgia must do the following:

- Prepare citizens to secure good jobs.²²⁴
- Support career education and clear pathways for college preparation.
- Provide equitable access to skills training and continued professional development.

An inclusive economic recovery, as defined by the National Skills Coalition, is "an expansion of the US economy in which the workers and businesses who were most impacted by this recession, as well as workers who were previously held back by structural barriers of discrimination or lack of opportunity, are empowered to equitably participate in and benefit from the economy's expansion and restructuring."²²⁵ To ensure an inclusive economic recovery, Georgia must work to remove institutional and systemic access and completion barriers that exist for students of color and those from low-income families.²²⁶

223 World Economic Forum. 2020, October 20. *The Future of Jobs Report 2020*. Retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs-report-2020>.

224 Carnavale, A.P., J. Strohl, N. Ridley, and A. Gulish. 2018. *Three Educational Pathways to Good Jobs*. Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce. Retrieved from <https://1gyhoq479ufd3yna29x7ubjn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/3ways-FR.pdf>. "Good jobs" are defined as those earning \$55,000 without a bachelor's degree and \$65,000 with a bachelor's degree.

225 National Skills Coalition. 2020, September. *Skills for an Inclusive Economic Recovery: A Call for Action, Equity, and Accountability*. Retrieved from <https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/NSC-Skills-for-an-Inclusive-Economic-Recovery-web-Sept-2020.pdf>.

226 EdQuest Georgia. 2020. Retrieved from <http://www.edquestga.org/clear-pathways-to-postsecondary-success/>.

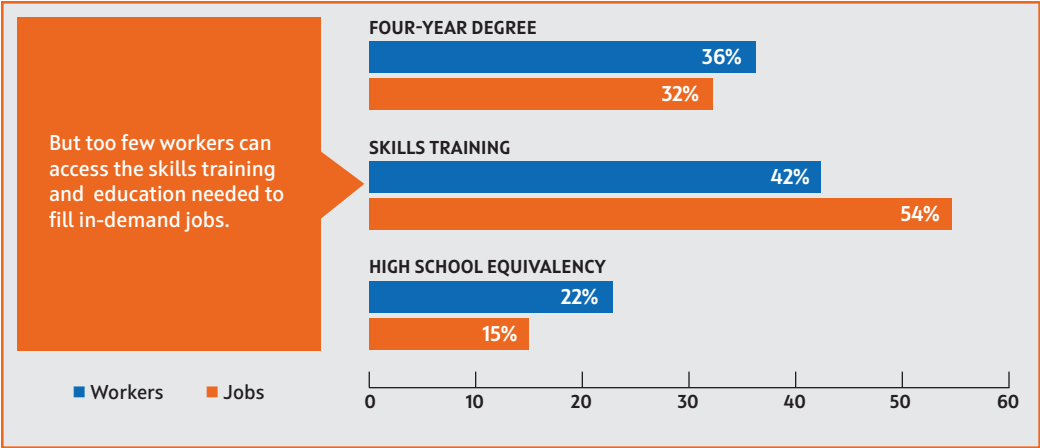
The COVID-19 pandemic exposed equity gaps in Georgia’s education and workforce systems. People of color were hit disproportionately by the pandemic with disruptions to work and education enrollment – and the impact was immediate. A March 2020 survey indicated that while 16% of White adults canceled or delayed education plans, 24% of Blacks and 32% of Latino adults were forced to postpone education and training. Additionally, low-quality jobs – those that do not pay living wages or provide benefits or sick leave – are largely filled by people of color; however, the education and training these workers need to upskill and advance in a career is elusive, with enrollment and graduation rates for Black and Latino workers far below those of White workers.²²⁷

Now more than ever, students and job seekers need career skills that qualify them for good jobs and equitable wages. This work cannot be siloed in education, government, or business. Rather, collaborative partnerships, with a continuous flow of timely and pertinent information, will allow educators, legislators, and employers to align academics and work-based learning experiences with in-demand jobs, improving individual career success and economic competitiveness.²²⁸ Inclusive economic development requires Georgia to address these gaps and improve how education, government, business, and the community work together.

Significance for Georgia

Georgia still falls short in meeting demand for skilled labor jobs, as Figure 9.1 shows. To formulate an inclusive economic recovery, broader understanding of regional and state labor market values, alignment of certifications and degrees with job demand, and equitable access to skills training will be required.

FIGURE 9.1 GEORGIA’S JOBS AND WORKERS BY EDUCATION LEVEL, 2018²²⁹



227 Strada Education Network, 2020, *Public Viewpoint*.
228 Southern Regional Education Board. 2020, October. Partnerships to Align Education and Careers. *Report of the Commission on Strategic Partnerships for Work-Ready Students*. Retrieved from <https://www.sreb.org/publication/partnerships-align-education-and-careers>.
229 National Skills Coalition. 2020, March 10. Georgia Skills Mismatch Fact Sheet. Retrieved from <https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/state-policy/fact-sheets>.

Connecting Learning with Earning

To make fully informed decisions, students and parents should receive clear information – before enrollment and at progress checks – about the estimated economic return on their investment of time, effort, and money.²³⁰ Tools that offer comparison data on degree type, program of study, and potential earnings, such as the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) Higher Learning and Earnings portal,²³¹ are particularly important for students on the middle-skills pathway, as earnings vary widely depending on alignment of curriculum and available jobs. For example, information from the Your Talent Your Future report from the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce includes health professions and computer occupations among Georgia’s high-demand fields.²³² Mapping to the GOSA site, a student would find information on associate degrees in health professions with median earnings of \$49,409 one year out of school and \$60,244 10 years out of school; and computer and information sciences jobs median earnings of \$34,398 and \$49,777 at one and 10 years out of school, respectively.

There is also a mismatch between aptitudes and interests of students, highlighting the opportunity to improve communication around in-demand careers. A study of metro Atlanta high school students showed that of the 36% of high school students with high aptitude for in-demand, high-wage computer occupations, only 3% showed both high aptitude and high interest.²³³

Aligning Degrees with Demand

As students and job seekers navigate the career-planning journey, they need broader understanding of the value that the regional and state labor market place on credentials. Consider the data from Credentials Matter, an ExcelinEd platform that examines how industry credentials address the skills gap and create pathways to careers. The site gives Georgia a “low alignment” ranking on high school students earning credentials that align with workforce demand. Of the 43,353 Career, Technical and Agricultural Education (CTAE) credentials earned in the 2018–2019 school year, only 16% were aligned with workforce demand. Further, the data point to a misalignment of high-demand computing credentials, with approximately 3,900 Microsoft Specialist certificates earned, falling far short of the more than 103,000 demanded.²³⁴

This misalignment is not specific to Georgia. While many states are working to align their credentialing programs with demand, ExcelinEd found no state secondary credential program to be “highly aligned” with the job market. “To be clear: we are not suggesting that CTE programs are failing to teach the skills they promise. But it is clear from our analysis that the credentials these programs provide too often have little currency with today’s employers and are, therefore, of questionable career value to students.”²³⁵

230 Carnevale, A.P., T.I. Garcia, N. Ridley, and M.C. Quinn. 2020. *The Overlooked Value of Certificates and Associates Degrees*. Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce. Retrieved from <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/subba/>.

231 Governor’s Office of Student Achievement. 2020, November. Georgia Higher Learning and Earnings. Retrieved from https://learnearn.gosa.ga.gov/noauth/extensions/ghle_earnings/ghle_earnings.html.

232 Metro Atlanta Chamber and Accenture. 2019. *Your Talent Your Future*. Retrieved from <https://www.metroatlantachamber.com/public-policy/your-talent-your-future>.

233 Metro Atlanta Chamber and Accenture, 2019, *Your Talent Your Future*.

234 Credentials Matter. n.d. State Summary: Georgia. Retrieved from <https://www.credentialsmatter.org/state-summary/ga/>.

235 Foundation for Excellence in Education. 2020. *Credentials Matter: Examining How Industry Credentials Create Pathways to Careers*. Retrieved from <https://www.excelined.org/credentials-matter>.

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) CTAE program, boasting a 96.5% graduation rate for its students, had 2018–2019 enrollment of approximately 68% for ninth to 12th graders and 63% for sixth to eighth graders.²³⁶ GaDOE is helping districts examine and align program offerings to meet the needs of regional economies, regularly reviewing the overall strategy with economic development and industry partners. This continual process seeks to better align pathways with labor market demand and prepare students for post-graduation success.²³⁷

Another alignment strategy to connect education and industry is high-quality, work-based learning experiences. Experiential learning helps students understand their strengths and interests, solve real-world problems, and formulate realistic career goals.²³⁸ Financial incentives to employers, virtual learning and training platforms, teacher externships, and stronger school-industry partnerships can advance these programs in counties throughout Georgia – especially in rural and other underserved communities. Lanier College Career Academy leveraged community support to develop a model where students can earn while they learn. See the sidebar Earning While Learning for more information on this program.

While post-secondary field of study affects earnings potential, some shorter-term degrees may hold more value than four-year degrees. They also may offer more affordability and flexibility. The convenience of certificates and associate degree programs make these program attractive.²⁴⁰ TCSG's "Succeed Sooner" campaign is targeted to students seeking zero debt, job placement success, and two years or less of college. For fiscal year (FY) 2020, TCSG awarded 43,243 technical certificates of credit, or 73% of total awards conferred, as well as 7,834 diplomas and 8,158 associate degrees.²⁴¹ The University System of Georgia (USG) awarded nearly 1,600 certificates and another 7,127 associate degrees.²⁴²

EARNING WHILE LEARNING – THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP²³⁹

Lanier College Career Academy (LCCA) has created a unique, work-based learning solution for students who needed to work on campus due to transportation issues. A partnership with Goodwill's Oakwood Career Services team provide internships through Goodwill's Youth Employment Services (YES) program. The internships, supported by a grant from the Bank of America Foundation, has enabled 68 students to work across eight Goodwill career centers to achieve 10,000+ hours of hands-on learning. LCCA's student-based enterprises provide job skills, including critical soft skills, and career exploration. Students learn what types of jobs will be good fits for their interests and personalities. The work experience can provide a career jumpstart as well as the valuable ability to explore alternatives.

236 Georgia Department of Education. Archives. 2018-19 Enrollment Data. Retrieved from <http://archives.gadoe.org/ReportingFW.aspx?PageReq=218&PID=219&PTID=222&Source=enrollment&StateId=ALL&T=1&FY=2019>.

237 McIver, R., B. Wall, and G. Wilson. 2020, November/December. ACTE Techniques: Aligned for Success. Techniques. Retrieved from <https://www.acteonline.org/publications/techniques/>.

238 Southern Regional Education Board. 2020, October. *Partnerships to Align Education and Careers: Report of the Commission on Strategic Partnerships for Work-Ready Students*. Retrieved from <https://www.sreb.org/publication/partnerships-align-education-and-careers>.

239 Georgia Work-Based Learning. 2020, March 2. BOA Success Story FY20 Program – Oakwood. Retrieved from <https://gawbl.org/businesses-in-action>.

240 Carnevale et al., 2020, *The Overlooked Value*.

241 Technical College System of Georgia. 2020, November. Enrollment and Graduate Reports. Retrieved from <https://www.tcsgeu/about-tcsgeu/system-office-services/data-research/enrollment-graduates/>.

242 University System of Georgia. 2020. Degrees Conferred report. https://www.usg.edu/research/degrees_conferred.

Georgia post-secondary institutions are continuing to align programs of study with high-demand careers. For example, the TCSG has 17 HOPE Career Grant programs based on the High Demand Career Initiative (HDCI) founded by Governor Nathan Deal. A product of HDCI, WorkSource Sector Partnerships are in place to support the development of regional partnerships between business and education.²⁴³ This regional approach facilitates industry-based training models that support local workers – especially during periods of economic disruption – allowing for quicker rehiring and job stability. An ongoing exchange of industry information, such as at the twice-yearly meetings that technical college programs hold with local business partners, facilitates curriculum and training adjustments to keep pace with employer expectations.

Many students are seeking short-term skills training to secure immediate employment. National numbers bear this out, with 57% associate degrees and 94% of certificates being awarded in career-oriented fields with employment as the goal. These statistics underscore the importance of understanding the labor market value of the various certificates and associate degrees available, particularly because these programs enroll a high proportion of Black and Latino students, as well as low-income students and older adults.²⁴⁴

Transfer and Applicability of Credit

Transferability is a significant concern as more students have modified their post-secondary plans due to the pandemic. Credit transfer policies for students transferring from two-year to four-year institutions or from one institution to another can lead to excess spending, inefficiencies, and inequities in post-secondary education. National data show that 53% of transfer students who attained a bachelor's degree were unable to use all of their transfer credits toward their degree requirements.²⁴⁵ And, attending a community college should not be a barrier to getting a bachelor's degree. Some estimates indicate that transferring students pay from three to 10 times more in tuition to take classes not offered at their community college or because credits would not transfer.²⁴⁶

The average graduation rate for colleges in Georgia is 45.82% and the transfer-out rate is 24.68%.²⁴⁷ Currently, 28 courses are listed on the TCSG–USG articulation agreement²⁴⁸ in an effort to reduce state and student funds spent on repeating courses. Additionally, dozens of articulation agreements, based on local industry demand and input, exist between individual TCSG colleges and Georgia higher education institutions.²⁴⁹ For FY 2019, the USG reported that 12,533 students transferred within the university system and another 7,210 transferred in from non-USG institutions.²⁵⁰

Transfer and credit issues are primary drivers of inequities by race and ethnicity. Black, Latino, and low-income students are hardest hit by restrictive credit transfer policies because they are the most likely to start their post-secondary education at a two-year institution. National data indicate that while 21% of White and 26% of Asian community college students who begin at a two-year public institution go on to graduate from a four-year institution within six years, the rates for Black and Latino students are 10% and 13%, respectively.²⁵¹

243 Technical College System of Georgia. 2020, November. Preparing Georgia's Future Workforce Now. Retrieved from <https://tcsgeu/workforce-development/high-demand-career-initiative/>.

244 Carnevale et al., 2020, *The Overlooked Value*.

245 Scaling Partners Network. 2020. *Transfer and Applicability of Credit: Call to Action*. Retrieved from <https://www.utdanacenter.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Scaling%20Partners%20Network%20-%20Transfer%20and%20Applicability%20of%20Credit%20-%20Call%20to%20Action%2010-26-20.pdf>.

246 Mulane, J. 2020, April 23. Free with no Degree. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2020/04/23/policy-makers-and-colleges-must-better-serve-transfer-students-opinion>.

247 Colleges in Georgia: 2020 Graduation Rate Comparison. Retrieved from <https://www.collegetuitioncompare.com/compare/tables/?state=GA&factor=graduation-rate>.

248 University System of Georgia. 2020, October 13. 2.17 Acceptance of Core Coursework and Placement Test Scores from TCSG Colleges. *Academic and Student Affairs Handbook*. Retrieved from https://www.usg.edu/academic_affairs_handbook/section2/C782.

249 Technical College System of Georgia. Retrieved from https://teched.tcsgeu/aa_articulation_agreements.php

250 University System of Georgia, Research and Policy Analysis, Strategy and Fiscal Affairs Division. n.d. Student Progression and Transfer reports. Retrieved from https://www.usg.edu/research/student_progression.

251 Scaling Partners Network, 2020, *Transfer and Applicability*.

Equitable Access

While awareness and alignment are essential elements in increasing post-secondary educational attainment, Georgia must develop equitable access to career pathways to realize equitable outcomes for its citizens. Issue One notes what has long been known: Factors such as class, race, and ethnicity are stronger predictors of educational success than aptitude or talent. Colleges and universities need to look at the enrollment process, funding access, class scheduling, and coursework transferability to minimize barriers to completion and to attract a diverse pool of students.

Studies have shown that the largest enrollment groups in certification or associate degree programs are the poorest independent students (those students who financially support themselves).²⁵² For example, the TCSG enrolled 68,010 (47.3%) students during the 2019–2020 academic year who were considered economically disadvantaged as defined by Pell Grant eligibility requirements; another 12.8%, or almost 10,000 students, were single parents. These students face additional barriers to enrollment and completion; in response, the TCSG has special services to accommodate the needs of this student population, from child care assistance to guidance counseling to tutoring.

To avoid perpetuating racial inequities and reinforcing systemic barriers that have long existed, Georgia should design post-secondary pathways to ensure they lead to follow-on opportunities. Learners must have access to training and credentialing that allows for continued employability and career growth.

Nationally, among post-secondary students pursuing undergraduate education, approximately 56% of Black students and 62% of Latino students are enrolled in certificate or associate degree programs, compared to 47% of White students. While it is good news that Blacks and Latinos are earning post-secondary certifications and associate degrees, for many of these students, this will be their highest level of educational attainment. The result is average lifetime earnings that fall far below those of workers with bachelor's degrees and fewer employment options as job transformation continues.

A look at Georgia's post-secondary enrollment, while not program specific, indicates some alarming trends:²⁵³

- 50.9% of Black students enrolled in a post-secondary program within 16 months of high school graduation; however, only 31% had completed at least one year of credits (24 credit hours) within the first two years of enrollment.
- 48.2% of Latino students enrolled in a post-secondary program within 16 months of high school graduation, but only 32.9% had earned at least one year of credits within the first two years of enrollment.
- In comparison, 61.3% of White students enrolled in a post-secondary program within 16 months of high school graduation, and nearly 45.5% had completed 24 credit hours within two years.

If these enrollment and completion trends continue for Black and Latino populations, the workforce equity gaps by race and ethnicity will be exacerbated.²⁵⁴

See Issue 8, Post-Secondary Completion, for more on barriers that affect graduation and completion rates.

252 Carnevale, 2020, *The Overlooked Value*.

253 Governor's Office of Student Achievement. 2018-19 Post-Secondary C12 Report for 2015 Graduating Class [Excel file]. Retrieved from https://download.gosa.ga.gov/2019/C12_FY2019_HS%20Graduates%202015_Enrolled%20in%2016%20Mos%20_%20Completed%2024%20Credits%20-Redacted.xlsx.

254 Carnevale, 2020, *The Overlooked Value*.

Reskilling and Upskilling the Workforce

Reskilling and upskilling are top of mind for many Georgia adult learners. Lifelong learning will require reskilling as jobs change, upskilling to remain competitive, and credentialing to maintain value in the job market.

Adults seeking reskilling must understand the relationship between level of educational attainment, job availability, and earnings potential, and they must have equitable access to these programs. The National Skills Coalition notes “the moral and economic imperative to dismantle the structural racism within workforce education and training systems that hold back workers, businesses, and the economy.”²⁵⁵ While inclusive skills policies alone will not eliminate structural racism, they will play a pivotal role in mapping a recovery path forward.

Many adult learners are seeking high school equivalency (HSE) programs, work-related courses, and other nondegree options. Additionally, adults need the option of making progress in shorter bursts, with the ability to start and stop without penalty. The TCSG’s Adult Education system accepts students on an ongoing, rolling basis, so students have the flexibility they need to continue their adult education amidst life interruptions, and it offers programs to accommodate learners of all levels, with 68% of enrollees reading below a ninth-grade level and 31% being English language learners.

For FY 2020, 32,205 adult learners were enrolled in the TCSG’s Adult Education program. GED awards totaled 6,271 in 2020, with 25% of those awardees enrolling in post-secondary coursework within the year. The Careers Plus pilot, launched in 2020 with 70 students at five TCSG campuses, allows learners to earn four credit awards in addition to their HSE.²⁵⁶ The largest age group of TCSG adult learners is between 24 and 44 (44%), with another 35% between the ages of 16 and 24.²⁵⁷ In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Office of Adult Education was the first program of its kind in the US to arrange for online verification and enrollment of adult learners. The TCSG’s flexibility of scheduling and online courses allow adult learners to fit education around family, work, and other commitments.

The Office of Adult Education also was one of the first state programs in the US to provide interactive education and training (IET) in all adult education programs. IET provides adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation and workforce training.

Other skill groups that employers view as essential in the lead up to 2025 include critical thinking and analysis, problem-solving, and skills in self-management such as active learning, resilience, stress tolerance, and flexibility. On average, companies estimate that around 40% of workers will require reskilling every six months.²⁵⁸ In response to pandemic-related employment disruptions, the TCSG offered 10 online, free professional development certifications;²⁵⁹ in an eight-month period (March–October), 4,500 individuals enrolled, earning 7,700+ certifications in time management, business etiquette, and teleworking, among others.

255 National Skills Coalition, 2020, *Skills for an Inclusive Economic Recovery*.

256 TCSG. 2020. Career Plus HSE Pilot. Retrieved from <https://www.tcsge.edu/adult-education/adult-education-high-school-equivalency-ged/career-plus-hse/#:~:text=Career%20Plus%20HSE%20offers%20the,skills%20at%20the%20same%20time>.

257 TCSG Office of Adult Education. 2020. *Overview and Outcomes* [Internal report].

258 TCSG Office of Adult Education, 2020, *Overview and Outcomes*.

259 See website for the Technical College System of Georgia, Office of Economic Development at <https://gvtc.tcsge.edu/econdev>.

Action Steps for Georgia

If there is a silver lining to the economic disruption caused by the pandemic, it has manifested in more discussion around how to provide inclusive opportunities and improved access to employment opportunities for all workers. The central role of education in workforce development has never been better understood, yet the challenge for Georgia remains. The state must address workforce preparation and education across the K-16 spectrum to drive economic recovery. How can Georgia chart a vision in which education is stronger and more aligned with economic opportunities? What will equitable economic inclusion look like for Georgians?

Aligning programs with earnings and regional demand is critical to unlocking post-secondary credential value. Students, their families, and educators who understand the earnings potential associated with various pathway and degree options can map a better path toward career fulfillment and advancement. Integrating workforce development into dual enrollment coursework is a cost-effective way to minimize college expense and graduate career-focused students. In support of this, Georgia should facilitate regional business collaborations to guide the work of high school career education – supporting both work-based learning opportunities and career pathways.

Georgia also must consistently bring employers and industry to the table in creating, updating, and communicating the value of high-demand credentials. As jobs transform, continual updating is required to ensure skills training is relevant. A better understanding of the regional and state workforce needs, through the WorkSource Sector Partnerships, gives students the opportunity to map out education plans aligned with in-demand jobs, and gives adults the information they need to reskill for jobs of the future.

If nothing else, the pandemic exposed workers without transferable skills. Career ladders in many technology-based, middle-skill jobs require constant learning on or off the job for workers to keep up or catch up with technological change. Continuing expansion in 2021, the USG's NEXUS programs will offer additional short-term upskilling opportunities and the TCSG's e-campus initiative, boosted by a \$10.4 million grant through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, will improve access for learners regardless of location.

Workers who were facing economic challenges before the pandemic need to understand the importance of continually learning new skills so they are prepared for future disruptions. To this end, the growing digital skills gap cannot be understated. Digital displacement is only exacerbated by foundational skills gaps, including English proficiency, numeracy, and problem-solving skills. This lack of digital literacy adds further barriers to learners seeking new skills to increase their job prospects. The National Skills Coalition notes that workers of color are disproportionately affected. "At least 48 million US workers lack these foundational digital skills, and even more lack access to the high-quality training which would empower them to increase their skills to meet future technological shifts."²⁶⁰

Georgia needs to take steps to ensure those workers disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, including workers of color, women, and immigrants, have equitable access to skills training, thereby improving their ability to weather future disruptions. Racial equity and inclusion can be advanced through job and training awareness campaigns, modified entry requirements, tuition and fee support, mentoring, tutoring, transportation, child care, and technology/internet access. Without system-level changes, Georgia risks perpetuating systemic inequality and racial discrimination through the very education system that should be the foundation of equity in our state.

260 National Skills Coalition. 2020. *Applying a Racial Equity Lens to Digital Literacy*. Retrieved from <https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/Digital-Skills-Racial-Equity-Final.pdf>.



REINVENTING EDUCATION IN GEORGIA – A CALL FOR LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

Issue Overview

Pre-pandemic, Georgia faced serious challenges in meeting its workforce and economic development needs by 2030. Research conducted by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) concluded that due to the impact of automation and the changing economy, coupled with the current education level of the state's population, Georgia was in danger of seeing 1.5 million of its workers and their children be unemployed or underemployed in low-wage jobs by 2030.²⁶¹ Since then, the COVID-19-induced shutdowns have accelerated the economic trends related to automation, artificial intelligence, smart devices, and virtual reality. The pandemic has also accelerated the workforce deadline. Due to impacts from the pandemic, SREB now estimates that 2 million Georgia workers (45% of the workforce) are at risk for unemployment, reduced work hours, or exiting the labor force by 2025.²⁶²

Of course, the economic fallout is not the only repercussion of the pandemic. The near-universal closing of schools at all levels can lead to not only learning loss but also increased dropouts, further impacting already-existing inequalities in educational outcomes.²⁶³ Recent data indicate that young people are experiencing chronic stress and trauma as they navigate basic needs and health concerns, a lack of connectivity to their school communities, and exhaustion from constant anxiety about the future.²⁶⁴

The pandemic has been disruptive for nearly everyone but has also exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities, including those related to physical health and safety, mental health, and learning opportunities and enriching experiences.²⁶⁵ These differential impacts of the pandemic exposed decades of policy decisions rooted in structural racism. Systems that were supposed to protect the most vulnerable populations are failing as more and more families fall into poverty, causing issues such as food insecurity, lack of health care access, and unstable housing. Between

261 Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). 2019, June. *Georgia's Economic Outlook*. Retrieved from State Workforce Outlooks: <https://www.sreb.org/publication/georgia-0>.

262 SREB. 2020, November. *Pandemic Accelerates Jobs Lost to Automation*. Retrieved from SREB – Georgia 2020 State Workforce Outlook: <https://www.sreb.org/state-workforce-outlooks>.

263 World Bank Group. 2020, May 7. *The COVID-19 Pandemic: Shocks to Education and Policy Responses*. Washington, DC: World Bank. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/publication/the-covid19-pandemic-shocks-to-education-and-policy-responses>.

264 Darling-Hammond, L., A. Schachner, A. Edgerton, A. Badrinarayan, J. Cardichon, P.W. Cookson, . . . S. Wojcikiewicz. 2020, August. *Restarting and Reinventing School: Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond*. Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://restart-reinvent.learningpolicyinstitute.org/>.

265 Darling-Hammond et al., 2020, *Restarting and Reinventing School*.

May and October 2020, nearly 8 million Americans, many of them children and minorities, are estimated to have fallen into poverty.²⁶⁶ All of these issues have deleterious impacts on families and on children's ability to learn and succeed.

As Georgia moves into 2021, an essential question remains: How does the state move from response to recovery to success? There was tremendous pressure for schools to open for in-person learning in fall 2020, with the recognition that schools are the foundation that needs to be in place for the economy and the rest of society to begin to recover from the pandemic. The recovery for Georgia schools, however, is intrinsically linked with the recovery and support of other government-led sectors such as economic development, health and safety, and social service providers. It also depends on the involvement of the private and nonprofit sectors, from business and industry leaders to community-based and faith organizations. Finally, the recovery for Georgia schools depends on leaders from across each of these agencies and entities engaging at the state, regional, and/or local levels.

Truly reinventing a public education that removes systemic barriers to success and provides the opportunity for all residents to participate in a fully inclusive economic recovery requires a coordinated, collaborative response across multiple actors. In a state that values local control, where does the responsibility for coordination lay and who is ultimately responsible?

Significance for Georgia

Local Control

A striking feature of American governance in nearly all policy areas is federalism – the allocation of constitutional authority across federal, state, and local governments. And nowhere is the impact of federalism more profound than in education. This distribution of power leads to one question that tends to dominate education policy, pandemic or not: Who is in charge of public education?

Generally, state governments have both the responsibility to ensure students are educated and the authority to decide how.²⁶⁷ Georgia's state constitution states: "The provision of an adequate public education for the citizens shall be a primary obligation of the State of Georgia."²⁶⁸ While the state government has the ultimate public K-12 education obligation, state leaders in Georgia, like in many other states, have been steadily moving away from state-mandated centralization toward a decentralized approach that gives decision-making authority for how students are educated to local school systems. For example, the 2007 Charter Systems Act granted school systems considerable autonomy by allowing them to choose system-wide flexibility from state mandates – such as class size, expenditure controls, teacher pay, or certification requirements – based on needs at the local level in exchange for increased accountability.

This act helped facilitate greater local control of public education. For more than a decade, district leaders have been empowered with the flexibility and authority to lead their districts through student performance contracts between local boards of education and the State Board of Education.

266 Parolin, Z., M. Curran, J. Matsudaira, J. Waldfogel, and C. Wimer. 2020, October. *Monthly Poverty Rates in the United States During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Poverty and Social Policy Working Paper. Retrieved from <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5743308460b5e922a25a6dc7/t/5f87c59e4cd001fabd38973/1602733471158/COVID-Projecting-Poverty-Monthly-CPSP-2020.pdf>.

267 Thomas B. Fordham Institute. 2016, April 4. *Local Control versus State Obligation*. Retrieved from <https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/commentary/local-control-versus-state-obligation>.

268 Georgia Constitution, article VIII, §1, ¶1.

Georgia's state plan for the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), developed under State Superintendent Richard Woods in 2017, articulates the current state view of the roles of the state and local districts in Georgia's education system:

This plan captures the Georgia Department of Education's shifting role from one focused on compliance to one focused on service and support. It defines the Department's shared responsibility to expand opportunities and increase outcomes for students, in partnership with other state agencies, nonprofit and civic organizations, districts, schools, and communities.²⁶⁹

The Georgia Department of Education's (GaDOE) *Roadmap to Reimagining K-12 Education*, published in 2020 as a new vision for education, commits to maximum flexibility from state mandates to allow local districts to take "strategic risks... to elevate instructional quality, create new instructional models, and foster innovation."²⁷⁰

Governor Brian Kemp was elected in 2018 on a platform that championed local control. Then-gubernatorial candidate Kemp stated, "Education policy should always revolve around the fundamental concept of local control. To improve educational outcomes in Georgia, we must look to local school boards and stakeholders – not to state government."²⁷¹

In states like Georgia where local control is generally favored, there is a great deal of deference to longstanding local institutions, communities, families, and practitioners. Ideally, most education decisions are made locally; state governments set the direction and create conditions for success; and the federal government gets involved when something has become unjust.²⁷²

Generally, district and school administrators greatly appreciate increased decision-making authority and a shift in emphasis toward supports to achieve goals and away from sanctions to induce compliance. To be successful, local district leaders are forced to have transparent relationships with their community to understand needs and cultivate local buy-in and support for priorities and action plans.²⁷³ All of these actions are good for education outcomes.

School Challenges

Local control in education generally grants local districts the authority to make decisions related to issues such as school takeovers, teacher evaluations, textbook and curricula adoption, budget allocation priorities, and the like. However, from the beginning of the pandemic, it has become obvious that schools have been charged with serving not only their students' educational needs, but also with playing a critical role in the social safety net, as an essential provider of many children's basic needs such as food security and physical and mental health.²⁷⁴

269 Georgia Department of Education. 2017. *Educating Georgia's Future: Georgia's State Plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/Documents/Georgia's%20State%20ESSA%20Plan%20--%20Governor%20Deal.pdf#search=compliance%20to%20support>.

270 Georgia Department of Education. 2020. *A Roadmap to Reimagining K-12 Education*. Retrieved from GaDOE.org/ReimagineK12.

271 See <https://kempforgovernor.com/posts/news/it%E2%80%99s-time-put-students-first>.

272 Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2016, *Local Control*.

273 Marsh, J., S. Bush-Mecenas, and H. Hough. 2016, October. *Local Control in Action: Learning from the CORE Districts' Focus on Measurement, Capacity Building, and Shared Accountability* [Policy brief]. Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE). Retrieved from <https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/local-control-action>.

274 Garcia, E., and E. Weiss. 2020, September 10. *COVID-19 and Student Performance, Equity, and US Education Policy*. Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.epi.org/publication/the-consequences-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-for-education-performance-and-equity-in-the-united-states-what-can-we-learn-from-pre-pandemic-research-to-inform-relief-recovery-and-rebuilding/>.

As Georgia schools made their plans to reopen for fall 2020, they were provided guidance from multiple sources. During the summer of 2020, Governor Kemp and Superintendent Woods launched six K-12 Restart working groups. These groups provided guidance and recommendations for districts around school meals; distance learning and professional development; connectivity and devices; mental health and wellness; supplemental learning; and facilities, transportation, and equipment.²⁷⁵ In August 2020, the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) released updated guidance to help schools “move into the next phase of restart.”²⁷⁶ That guidance provides schools and districts information related to keeping students healthy, including recommendations around social distancing, cleaning and hygiene, communications, and water and ventilation systems.

All the guidance from state agencies, both GaDOE and DPH, emphasizes that these are recommendations, respecting local control and decision-making processes. The only state requirements are reporting and quarantine mandates if an individual tests positive for COVID-19. The remainder are recommendations and suggested resources that local schools and districts can draw upon when developing their own plans to keep students and educators safe as they explore new avenues of instruction. Governor Kemp has reinforced this commitment to local control: “We’ve given the responsibility to the schools, to the local superintendents... I think schools are trying to do the right thing, and it’s just my hope that we’ll get kids back in the classroom.”²⁷⁷

While most local leaders generally welcome autonomy in running their school systems, running them in the midst of a pandemic is a different animal all together. The overreliance on local control, in this case, led to district leaders making sometimes life and death decisions without essential data and resources. Typically, local boards of education and superintendents make their plans around clear benchmarks and consistent messaging from state leaders, which have been lacking during the pandemic. For example, when district leaders were weighing the risks of continuing in-person versus virtual learning options, there was no state-coordinated reporting system of school-related COVID cases to inform districts of the differing risk levels of in-person learning. All of Georgia’s 180 districts put together their own systems of reporting.²⁷⁸ The information in these systems ranged from highly informative to incredibly opaque. This lack of consistency and coordination has led to incomplete records that continue to prevent parents and educators from understanding differing risk levels in their own neighborhood.

Recovery to Success

Schools are not only struggling with how to safely educate their students. The shutdowns and economic crisis have also exposed and exacerbated the opportunity gaps that existed in the education and economic systems. Low-income students and children of color and their families experienced less access to nutrition, stable housing, health insurance and care, and financial relief measures and were disproportionately impacted by the crisis. This lack of access has real consequences for their learning and development that schools must address.²⁷⁹ One of the most critical opportunity gaps was, and continues to be, uneven access to virtual devices and the internet, both of which are critical to learning online. This digital divide made it essentially impossible for some students to learn during the pandemic. It also impacts schools’ ability to innovate with differing instructional delivery models essential to creating a continuous learning environment.

275 Georgia Department of Education. 2020, August 8. *Georgia’s K-12 Restart and Recovery*. Georgia Insights. Retrieved from <https://www.georgiainsights.com/recovery.html>.

276 Georgia Department of Public Health. 2020, August. *COVID-19 Guidance for Georgia K-12 Schools and School-Based Programs*. Retrieved from Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Insights: https://www.georgiainsights.com/uploads/1/2/2/2/122221993/covid_guidance-georgia_schools_08_12_2020n.jn.pdf.

277 The AJC Editorial Board. 2020, August 25. Opinion: Local Control Can’t Work with Virus Without Boundaries. *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Retrieved from <https://www.ajc.com/education/get-schooled-blog/opinion-local-control-cant-work-with-virus-without-boundaries/TS2LFHXDNBGLKZMQDICEJSIVU/>.

278 The AJC Editorial Board, 2020, Opinion: Local Control.

279 Garcia and Weiss, 2020, *COVID-19 and Student Performance*.

To move from recovery to long-term success, schools are being asked to rethink and reinvent education. This is a heavy lift. AASA, The School Superintendents Association, detailed 10 priority areas that cover not just essential topics for reopening but also changes necessary to address inequities revealed and exacerbated during the pandemic. These include expanded focus on the safety of and the physical, and social/emotional needs of students and educators.²⁸⁰

Similarly, the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) offers a framework for restarting and reinventing school that would support not only recovery but a transformation in how school is done. These policy recommendations cover everything from addressing distance learning and the digital divide to expanded learning time, wraparound services, and shifts in professional development for educators. Table 10.1 provides details on the two frameworks. For more on the LPI framework, see Issue 2 – Funding.

TABLE 10.1 GUIDANCE FOR REINVENTING SCHOOLS

LEARNING POLICY INSTITUTE – RESTARTING AND REINVENTING SCHOOL, LEARNING IN THE TIME OF COVID AND BEYOND ²⁸¹	AASA – NEW PARADIGM FOR POST-COVID-19 EDUCATION ²⁸²
<p>This overarching framework focuses on how policymakers and educators can support equitable, effective teaching and learning regardless of the medium through which it takes place. Work should be done across these 10 key areas to transform learning and close opportunity and achievement gaps.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Close the digital divide.2. Strengthen distance and blended learning.3. Assess what students need.4. Ensure supports for social and emotional learning.5. Redesign schools for stronger relationships.6. Emphasize authentic, culturally responsive learning.7. Provide expanded learning time.8. Establish community schools and wraparound supports.9. Prepare educators for reinventing school.10. Leverage more adequate and equitable school funding.	<p>These 10 guiding principles are viewed as essential for all education districts to ensure students’ equitable access to quality education that is personalized, differentiated, and consistent with the rigors and demands of the technology-driven and change-dominated world of 21st century education. This includes an expanded and renewed commitment to educational equity and ensuring that all learners have access to broadband communication and the internet and have the resources to learn in a virtual environment.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Importance of educating the whole child2. Imperative of addressing inequities that impede student learning3. Focus on key health and safety measures4. Clearly articulated communication involving policies, practices, and funding5. Need for social and emotional learning6. Necessity of schools and districts becoming trauma-informed and trauma-skilled7. Virtual/distance learning as an organic component of teaching and learning8. Power of collaboration9. Need to ensure that every student’s education is personalized, differentiated, and engaging10. Anticipating and preparing for predictable and unanticipated change as a part of continuous improvement and strategic planning

280 AASA, The School Superintendents Association. 2020. AASA COVID-19 Recovery Task Force Guidelines for Reopening Schools: An Opportunity to Transform Public Education. Retrieved from <http://aasacentral.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/AASA-COVID-19-Recovery-Task-Force-Guiding-Principals-and-Action-Steps-for-Reopening-Schools.pdf>.

281 Darling-Hammond et al., 2020, *Restarting and Reinventing School*.

282 AASA, 2020, AASA COVID-19 Recovery Task Force Guidelines.

While the models differ in some of their specifics, they are aligned in advocating systems-level changes that need to be made concerning access to digital technology and broadband, teacher training, and differentiated learning, among other topics.

Action Steps for Georgia

As has been said throughout this 17th edition of the *Top Ten Issues to Watch*, the pandemic has provided a unique opportunity to address structural problems within Georgia's education system. These structural issues have led to not only differential educational outcomes and opportunities for economic mobility among individuals, but also threaten the long-term health of Georgia's economy.

To address the full spectrum of educational and economic disparities, the entire birth-to-work pipeline must be insulated through the coordination of community partners, philanthropy, business leaders, and state and national government leaders across a multitude of agencies and departments from education, public health, economic development, and more. The current systems must be replaced by a statewide policy agenda that lifts children up and reduces educational inequities. Such an agenda requires coordination across multiple systems that address serving the whole child, including their physical and mental health; elevating the teaching profession; reversing the impacts of poverty and discrimination; and coordinating education policy with economic development policy.²⁸³ (Many of the details of these systems are addressed in other issues within this *Top Ten Issues to Watch* edition.)

First, education systems and related policies must embrace a whole-child approach to education, as GaDOE has already begun to do. This approach includes exploring new and alternative instructional practices that support differential learnings and closes the opportunity and enrichment gaps. These instructional models need to incorporate both socioemotional and cognitive skills. With these changes in instructional delivery models, school systems need to incorporate a broader range of assessments that inform instruction and evaluate how different instructional models impact student learning. As instructional and assessment models change, rethinking the role of parent/family engagement is critical.

To support the whole child, systems addressing children's health, physical and emotional, are a priority. Millions of children each year access health services through school-based health clinics, school screening and early intervention programs, and on-site counseling. However, these services may be suspended in schools that are not open for in-person instruction. Reports based on health care claims show declines in rates of vaccinations, child screenings, dental services, and outpatient mental health services among Medicaid/CHIP child beneficiaries. Many children are currently facing substantial access barriers, emotional strain, and financial hardship that could have long-term repercussions for their lives. Policies are needed to ensure access to health services, particularly behavioral health services. Policies that facilitate access to social services to support families with children are also critical.²⁸⁴ Finally, school systems and community partners can work together to establish a set of wraparound supports, such as health clinics, afterschool enrichments, and the like, that meet the specific needs of communities and their local schools.

²⁸³ Garcia and Weiss, 2020, *COVID-19 and Student Performance*.

²⁸⁴ Garfield, R., and P. Chidambaram. 2020, September. *Children's Health and Well-Being During the Coronavirus Pandemic*. Kaiser Family Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/childrens-health-and-well-being-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>.

Second, school and central office leaders, university and other community leaders, and state leaders must treat teachers as professionals whose knowledge and experiences are a valuable and necessary resource in this process. Teachers must be provided useful professional development and supports to allow them to keep pace with technological and pedagogical advances.

Third, an education policy agenda must acknowledge and fully address the differential impacts of poverty and racial and economic segregation on students' capacity to learn. Schools and districts need resources to conduct detailed needs assessments to identify and address where poverty impacts learning and close the opportunity and enrichment gaps. Education funding must be more adequate and equitable to address the disparities in learning inputs – such as access to highly qualified teachers, AP classes, trauma-informed trainings, and more.

Finally, to truly move Georgia from recovery to long-term success, education policy must be ultimately tied to an economic development agenda that focuses on lifting all children and families out of poverty. This includes examining access pathways to post-secondary completion and strengthening workforce pathways.

As previously stated, SREB estimates that 2 million Georgia workers are at risk for unemployment, reduced work hours, or exiting the labor force by 2025 due to impacts from the pandemic.²⁸⁵ In response, SREB recommends alignment between K-12, higher education, and adult education and workforce investment boards to provide students and adults with the skills they need to support local economies. Through strategic industry sector partnerships, educators and employers can align academics and work-based learning experiences with local in-demand jobs.

At a state policy level, SREB recommends intentional alignment among the state plans across three federal statutes: (1) Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century (Perkins V), (2) the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and (3) the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). As states finalize their Perkins V and WIOA plans, they can refine their ESSA plans so together they provide a coherent, systematic approach to preparing a ready workforce. Table 10.2 provides details about all three federal statutes.

285 Southern Regional Education Board. 2020, November. *Pandemic Accelerates Jobs Lost to Automation*. Retrieved from SREB – Georgia 2020 State Workforce Outlook: <https://www.sreb.org/state-workforce-outlooks>.

TABLE 10.2 THREE FEDERAL STATUTES TO HELP PREPARE A READY STATE WORKFORCE²⁸⁶

THREE STATUTES	
1	<p>Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) funds K-12 education. ESSA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Emphasizes rigorous academics, a well-rounded education and preparation for college and careers ■ Promotes equitable opportunities for all children
	<p>2</p> <p>Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act of 2018 (Perkins V) supports CTE as early as the fifth grade, in high schools and in postsecondary settings such as community colleges, technical colleges and area CTE schools. Perkins V:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Aims to prepare youth and adults for postsecondary education and careers ■ Emphasizes technical knowledge, employability skills and rigorous academics ■ Promotes equitable opportunities for all students
3	<p>Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) funds education and job training for youth and adults. WIOA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Aims to prepare individuals for careers, meet the workforce needs of employers and promote economic prosperity ■ Emphasizes alignment of education and workforce training ■ Promotes equitable opportunities for all individuals

²⁸⁶ Anderson, K. 2020, May. Designing a Ready Workforce. Southern Regional Education Board. Retrieved from https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/epw_aligned_efficient_designing_a_ready_workforce_final.pdf?1589212669.

To align these programs, SREB identified the following six opportunities for states to shape a coordinated system across education, workforce, and economic development:²⁸⁷

1. Articulate a shared vision for improvement to guide efforts under all three statutes.
2. Better coordinate the creation of in-demand career pathways so educators, businesses, and communities can develop programs that focus on critical regional industries.
3. Target funds for work-based learning to strengthen in-demand career pathways.
4. Identify opportunities to work across sectors toward equity, and coordinate more comprehensive support services for individuals in need.
5. Emphasize the alignment of the accountability indicators in each statute and maximize state flexibility to tailor indicators to state priorities.
6. Better facilitate the use of data for improvement by integrating cross-agency data systems and coordinating research and reporting.

The recovery and long-term restructuring of the educational system cannot be left to individual districts to do alone. There is a need for a strong state policy frame that coordinates across multiple – traditionally siloed – agencies and programs. Issues range from equipment and connectivity needs to the range of social services required to not only combat a public health and economic crisis, but an educational one as well. To accomplish this, there is a need for a fundamental restructuring of governmental systems that serve children and their families.

In many states, cross-agency collaborations and policy agendas focusing on removing silos and fragmentation are coordinated through the governor's office. Likened to an orchestra conductor, a governor can keep many players in sync by using the powers of the office. Noted orchestra conductor Benjamin Zander explains, "The conductor of an orchestra doesn't make a sound. He depends, for his power, on his ability to make other people powerful."²⁸⁸

Georgia already has two structures that could serve in this capacity: the Georgia Children's Cabinet and the Alliance of Education Agency Heads (AEAH). The Georgia Children's Cabinet, administered by First Lady Marty Kemp, consists of all state agency heads that work with child populations²⁸⁹ as well as select community members and philanthropic, education, and business stakeholders. The charge of the cabinet is to "take a comprehensive, systematic, and whole family approach to ensure children are and feel safe, are healthy, and learning."²⁹⁰ Cabinet priorities include health, safety, literacy, and the two-generation approach. Throughout 2020, the Children's Cabinet focused on issues related to the social-emotional health and well-being of children.

The AEAH was initiated by Governor Sonny Perdue in 2006 to strengthen the seamlessness and overall quality of education opportunities in the state. It consisted of the heads of the state's seven education agencies.²⁹¹ The charge for AEAH was to "work collectively to move the state of Georgia toward a common vision for education." While its public activities have been dormant for

287 Anderson, 2020, *Designing a Ready Workforce*.

288 Gonzales, D. 2020, September. *How Governors Can Lead Schools Out of the Pandemic*. Retrieved from ED Note Education Policy Blog: https://ednote.ecs.org/how-governors-can-lead-schools-out-of-the-pandemic/?utm_source=ECS+Subscribers&utm_campaign=ffcdcc5bf-Ed_Note_Daily&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1a2b00b930-ffcdcc5bf-5773739.1.

289 State agency membership includes the following: Georgia Departments of Community Health, Human Services, Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, Early Care and Learning, Juvenile Justice, Public Health, and Education as well as the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, the Council of Juvenile Court Judges, the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, and the Division of Family of Children Services. Cabinet members also include representatives from the Georgia legislature, the University System of Georgia, the Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS), regional United Way offices, Voices for Georgia's Children, and Georgia Head Start.

290 For more information on the Georgia Children's Cabinet, see <http://www.gachildrencabinet.org/>.

291 The state superintendent of schools at GaDOE, president of the Georgia Student Finance Commission, chancellor of the University System of Georgia, commissioner of the Technical College System of Georgia, commissioner of the Department of Early Care and Learning, executive director of the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, and the executive director of the Professional Standards Commission.

some time, under Governor Perdue it had success coordinating the American Diploma Project in Georgia. It also helped establish the Alliance Math and Science Task Force, which resulted in the 2009 passage of House Bill 280, a statute that established differentiated pay for math and science teachers. The AEAH worked with the business community to launch a series of Work Ready Initiatives and industry-certified programs. It was also used to coordinate the acquisition and distribution of federal funds, such as the Race to Top Grant and other competitive stimulus funds.

To meet the challenge of cross-agency recovery planning, either the Children's Cabinet or a relaunched AEAH could be expanded to include economic and workforce planning agencies such as the Georgia Department of Economic Development and the Department of Community Affairs. The Children's Cabinet could also expand to include the TCSG, which hosts Georgia's State Workforce Development Board.

Reinventing school involves rethinking funding formulas; revisiting how teachers are educated and what constitutes a robust professional development model; addressing statewide broadband access; strengthening alignments between the education system (early learning, K-12, and post-secondary) and local, regional, and state workforce pathways; and considering whole-system redesigns. These broad policy plans need a commensurate funding strategy and focused leadership to fully support the implementation of the necessary changes.

These goals around reinventing education are beyond any one system's or local district's ability to innovate. There certainly continues to be a vital role for local control and decisions, particularly around coordinating through the schools and the community to identify local needs and set local priorities. Local control still needs to flourish around issues related to innovative teaching delivery models, out-of-school time structures, teacher incentives and recruitment strategies, and workforce pathway priorities, among other issues. However, to truly empower local leaders to make decisions that best support their students and Georgia's long-term prosperity, a strong state policy framework centered on these systems-level issues, along with adequate and equitable resources and coordinated leadership, must be in place.



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