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1

The EdQuest Georgia Framework: Starting the Journey Toward the North Star

Issue Overview

In the Top Ten Issues to Watch in 2022, the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (Georgia Partnership) recommended that state policymakers, education leaders, and the business sector unite around a North Star goal: ensuring that 65% of Georgians aged 25 to 64 have earned a post-secondary credential by 2033.

Throughout 2022, working with a coalition of state agency and nonprofit leaders, the Georgia Partnership took the first step toward developing a state plan by revising the EdQuest Georgia Framework. The revised framework establishes core-area goals, identifies power strategies, and provides recommendations to state and local leaders.

Call to Action

1. **Invest in people-centered systems.** Place individuals at the center of education reform by addressing the factors that limit educational success and economic opportunity.
2. **Invest in school and community leaders.** Reconfigure state systems and investments to ensure local leaders are well-positioned to support youth and working adults.
3. **Invest in spreading and scaling local solutions.** Spotlight local initiatives that address perennial challenges. Integrate local best practices into current state-level strategies.

Addressing the Issue

The pandemic has provided an opportunity for state leaders to address structural barriers that have reinforced inequitable opportunities for vulnerable Georgians, such as individuals living in poverty, people of color, rural residents, and workers lacking post-secondary training.

A coalition of state agency and nonprofit leaders revised the EdQuest Georgia Framework to encourage state leaders to reconfigure systems, structures, and strategies to expand access and opportunity to all Georgians. The forthcoming EdQuest Georgia State Policy Plan goes a step further, highlighting specific strategies that leaders can execute to achieve the North Star goal.

Moving Georgia Forward

While the EdQuest Georgia Framework identifies high-impact strategies that state and local leaders should implement, the document does not prescribe a specific path forward. Instead, it encourages leaders to leverage current strengths and reform existing strategies to align with new goals and priorities. It also emphasizes the importance of crisp and coherent messaging around state goals and priorities. The Georgia Partnership will adapt the framework as social and economic circumstances change and new strategies emerge.

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Early Childhood Supports: Toward a Seamless State Child Development Strategy

Issue Overview

A strong foundation built during the early years is critical for students to successfully transition into kindergarten and be proficient readers by the end of third grade. For children and youth, the most important academic milestone is reading at a proficient level by the end of third grade. Children who are not proficient readers at this juncture are four times less likely to graduate from high school than their peers who are proficient readers.

Gaps in reading proficiency are present long before children enter kindergarten. Since nonacademic factors like low parental education, community poverty, and lack of access to health care widen these gaps, a statewide strategy should also ensure greater access to early education, public health, and social services that foster an environment conducive to child development.

State agency and nonprofit leaders in the child development space should identify shared goals, coordinate investments, and, most importantly, design and execute a unified delivery plan that provides greater assurance that vulnerable children receive the education, health, and family services and supports necessary to be ready for school and life.

Call to Action

State leaders should create a people-centered approach to early learning and care that includes a schedule for delivering early learning, health, and social services to families with children under age eight.

A unified delivery plan does not require consolidated funding or governance. However, the plan would require agencies to develop shared goals and schedules for delivering interventions and supports to children who need specific services.

Addressing the Issue

How Can State Leaders Create a Coordinated Delivery Plan?

1. Build upon the foundation laid by the Georgia General Assembly and DECAL.
2. Use data and evidence to identify interventions and supports that should be part of the comprehensive plan.
3. Set performance metrics and service benchmarks to determine access, quality, and impact.

Moving Georgia Forward

A unified delivery plan would not require consolidated funding or governance. Agencies would retain their missions and operate their programs independently. The proposed plan would provide a schedule of services and supports that are apparent to parents and community leaders. The plan would serve as a unifying strategy for a group of agencies that all serve young children but may have different missions, funding levels, and governance arrangements. The plan would put the focus where it should be — on infants, toddlers, young children, and their families. A unified plan also has two other underemphasized benefits: (1) expanding access to underserved groups and (2) ensuring greater transparency, accountability, and shared responsibility around child development and school readiness.

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Post Secondary Readiness: Closing the Gap

Issue Overview

To address the post-secondary readiness gap, state leaders have invested in expanding access to dual enrollment and career-technical education opportunities. Local school systems have invested in instructional materials and educational technologies that assist in measuring academic readiness. These tools provide educators with diagnostic data to deliver personalized instruction. Although these efforts contribute to closing the post-secondary readiness gap, state and local leaders can address the issue more effectively and expeditiously by accomplishing three objectives:

1. Creating benchmarks in math, English, science, and writing in the 8th, 10th, and 11th grades;
2. Individualizing instruction based on students' status compared to these milestones; and
3. Using these data to provide students with proactive, personalized post-secondary advisement.

Call to Action

Local school systems should develop — and state leaders should support — simple, transparent, and open-ended instructional systems that allow students to demonstrate skills mastery through diploma seals, badges, micro-credentials, and other performance assessments.

To execute this vision, state and local leaders should ensure their instructional strategies embody three themes – alignment, articulation, and acceleration.

Alignment

Invite parents, community and nonprofit partners, post-secondary leaders, and the corporate sector to participate in the development and execution of a revamped grade 6–12 instructional system.

Articulation

Design academic and career pathways that allow students to earn post-secondary credits and credentials before graduating high school.

Acceleration

Ensure students who are lagging academic benchmarks receive grade-level instruction with supplemental academic support. Provide early post-secondary opportunities for students who demonstrate readiness.

Addressing the Issue

Counselors demystify the college and careers transition by focusing on the costs and benefits of several post-secondary options and the tasks required to access these options. In doing so, counselors “shape the path,” helping students understand how various post-secondary opportunities align with their knowledge, skills, and abilities. However, large caseloads prevent most middle and high school counselors from delivering strong college and career advisement.

Moving Georgia Forward

Students demonstrate skill mastery at different points in their academic journey. Some students are ready for post-secondary opportunities in ninth grade, while other students need all four years of high school to prepare for what comes next. While states should have clear and unambiguous readiness standards, greater access to accelerated learning opportunities could benefit all students, regardless of skill level.

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Post-Secondary Promise: Rethinking the Pathway to Economic Prosperity

Issue Overview

Since 2011, Complete College Georgia (CCG) has focused on shortening time to degree, improving college readiness, restructuring instructional delivery, and transforming remediation. Over the past decade, post-secondary institutions have made significant progress in meeting these goals. State post-secondary systems can continue to leverage these ongoing efforts in three ways:

1. **Increase institutional adoption of CCG programs**, such as 15 to Finish, Guided Pathways to Success, and Momentum Year (see Table 1). These programs address the barriers that stymie students' persistence toward a post-secondary credential.
2. **Conduct skills and credential mapping** from short-term certificates and certifications to doctoral degrees. Engage corporate and economic development partners to hone the maps to ensure they align with workforce needs.
3. **Improve public messaging** related to the labor market value of different post-secondary credentials and student incentives that make post-secondary opportunities more accessible and affordable.

For Georgia to remain competitive on the global stage, state leaders will need to invest in rebuilding not only systems that motivate traditional college-going students, but also systems that engage and support disconnected youth and working adults to enter post-secondary programs.

Call to Action

State leaders should ensure young adults and working adults have multiple pathways to enroll in post-secondary programs and complete credentials of value.

To execute this vision, state and local leaders should restructure systems with three groups in mind: 1) recent high school graduates; 2) working adults; and 3) community and corporate leaders.

Addressing the Issue

How Do State and System Leaders Create Pathways to Post-Secondary Success?

1. Maintain momentum created by the Complete College Georgia initiative
2. Create skill and credential maps that show how knowledge, skills, and abilities progress from short-term credentials to doctoral degrees.
3. Communicate the value of short-term credential programs as a means of accelerating economic opportunity for Georgians, especially those who are not recent high school graduates.

Moving Georgia Forward

State leaders should use existing system assets to build a statewide post-secondary and workforce strategy that transcends sector-based decisions and governance. Expanding access to all types of credential programs could provide a way for all Georgians, especially nontraditional students, adult learners, disengaged youth, and low-income residents, to fully participate in the state's economic prosperity.

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**Educator Burnout:
Creating Conditions
for Success****Issue Overview**

In a survey conducted by the Professional Association of Georgia Educators in fall 2021, more than half of educators (57%) reported burnout as the top reason that they would leave the profession, outpacing salary (38%), student behavior (31%), and school leadership (27%).

State and local leaders should address the underlying causes of burnout: poor working conditions, noncompetitive salaries, inadequate preparation, and lack of professional growth opportunities. These conditions will continue to worsen without bold action and systemic attention.

Call to Action

State and local leaders can address the root causes of burnout in three primary ways.

- 1. Support teacher leadership.** The Georgia Department of Education, regional educational service agencies, and nonprofit partners should provide guidance, training, and technical assistance for local school systems to create robust teacher leadership programs.
- 2. Prioritize professional growth.** State and district leaders should create professional growth systems that deliver personalized learning and career support based on educators' needs, interests, and aptitudes. Districts should deploy teacher leaders to induct, mentor, and coach their early-career peers.
- 3. Address personal well-being through community conversations.** School leaders should convene school councils in which students, parents, and educators develop strategies to improve the physical and mental well-being of all school stakeholders.

Addressing the Issue

State and district leaders can mitigate the effects of burnout by tailoring their recruitment and retention strategies to the needs voiced by educators and community leaders. District and school leaders should provide coaching and professional growth opportunities centered on the content that educators identify as necessary to enrich their professional practice. While systems and structures can reinforce effective practice, developing formal teacher-leader roles is the most critical piece of state and local workforce plans. Creating positions for highly effective educators to coach and mentor peers signals to aspiring professionals that career advancement is possible while spending most of their time in the classroom.

Moving Georgia Forward

The EdQuest Georgia Framework highlights three ways that school and district leaders can mitigate the effects of burnout:

1. Clarify the roles and responsibilities of individual educators,
2. Redesign systems of educator support that prioritize collaboration and shared responsibility for student outcomes, and
3. Rethink how school systems support educators' social, emotional, and professional growth while developing aligned systems that attend to similar challenges confronting students.

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School Safety: A Multidimensional Approach

Issue Overview

The debates about how to respond to school shootings often overshadow a deeper, more nuanced discussion of how to improve school safety. School shootings, like those in Uvalde, Texas, are still statistically rare. Bullying, fighting, and other disruptive behaviors, in comparison, are realities students encounter daily. However, “hardening” schools by installing visible security measures and hiring more school resource officers can have adverse effects. Studies have found that, undertaken in isolation as an approach to increase school safety, such measures can change students’ perceptions of school and make them feel less safe – the opposite of the intended effect.

Call to Action

State and local leaders can address the root causes of school safety challenges in three ways:

1. Expand access to wraparound services.

Local leaders should provide or expand wraparound services, especially for vulnerable populations, such as unhoused children, foster youth, and children living in poverty. Wraparound services are resources that address academic and nonacademic barriers to student success.

2. Support local efforts to promote a positive school culture and climate.

Local strategies should address the physical, academic, social, and emotional needs of school stakeholders.

3. Interrupt practices that disproportionately and negatively affect vulnerable students.

District leaders should ensure that threat assessments and surveillance practices do not discriminate against students of color and those with intellectual disabilities or behavioral issues.

Addressing the Issue

Comprehensive safety and student support plans should include at least three components:

- safe school planning,
- wraparound services, including physical and mental health screenings, and
- initiatives to address positive school climate.

To thrive as learners, students must feel safe in school and empowered in their learning environment, and they must believe that adults in the school building care about their success. While systems reinforce effective strategies, the primary challenge is creating a climate that propels student success. A conducive climate requires culture change and a focus on cultivating leadership – in schools, in communities, and among students.

Moving Georgia Forward

GaDOE provides extensive resources to implement school safety protocols, positive behavioral interventions, and school culture and climate strategies. The Georgia Partnership recommends that local school systems integrate these efforts into comprehensive school safety and support plans. These plans complement the academic and school improvement planning that already occurs annually. While these plans will not immediately reduce school violence and behavioral disruptions, identifying and addressing school and community risk factors is an effective way to promote lasting change.

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School-Community Engagement: Redefining Relationships

Issue Overview

The pandemic engendered anger, anxiety, and conflict in schools and communities. Over the past two years, anger and confusion over issues such as mask mandates, debates over critical race theory, and divisive concepts have disrupted learning, contributed to rancorous school board meetings, and resulted in legislative action during the 2022 session of the Georgia General Assembly.

The pandemic spotlighted how fragile our state and local systems are. Instead of rebuilding systems as they existed in pre-pandemic times, the EdQuest Georgia Framework urges state and local leaders to identify the resources that educators, parents, and students need to succeed and rebuild systems that remove barriers to success for all students.

Call to Action

State and district leaders should empower educators, students, parents, and community members to participate in remaking school culture. Leaders can support safe and supportive environments in three ways:

- 1. Accelerate learning.** Support efforts to personalize learning for students and educators by restructuring the school day.
- 2. Involve all members of the school community in decision-making processes.** Explore ways for students, educators, parents, and community leaders to contribute to the planning and execution of school improvement initiatives.
- 3. Support principals as cultural change agents.** Provide tools, resources, and guidance to school leadership teams as they implement school culture and climate initiatives.

Addressing the Issue

Positive school climate promotes accelerated learning, the delivery of integrated services and supports, and opportunities to deepen relationships with parents and community leaders. By inviting stakeholders — educators, students, parents, and community members — to get involved in improving the school's health and vitality, school leaders can co-create the conditions for safe and supportive learning environments.

Moving Georgia Forward

School and district leaders are the key trendsetters for executing positive school culture strategies. They help school stakeholders — educators, students, parents, and community leaders — understand how their norms, beliefs, and efforts contribute to a vibrant school culture. In this ecosystem, school leaders facilitate change but let stakeholders negotiate how they fit within the culture.

Any friction that results from misalignment between the principal's vision and the efforts of other stakeholders provides an opportunity for considering how to reallocate resources and rethink strategies. State leaders can support school systems by creating resources and guidance to scale and sustain local efforts.

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Out-of-School Learning: Expanding Student Opportunities

Issue Overview

The American Rescue Plan, enacted in March 2021, provided \$4.25 billion in funding to support accelerated learning. The law required that the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) use about \$85 million on afterschool and summer activities. GaDOE created a statewide program called the Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time (BOOST) grant to execute this requirement. The department tapped the Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network (GSAN) to manage the three-year grant program, which is now delivering training and technical assistance to 101 grantees.

The investments to build the BOOST grant infrastructure, coupled with the extensive evaluations underway to measure program quality and impact, should enable state leaders to develop a robust afterschool and summer learning policy framework that supports providers and expands access for students who would benefit from extended learning opportunities.

Call to Action

State leaders should leverage the BOOST work to develop a statewide out-of-school framework that increases the number of school-aged children who have access to high-quality afterschool and summer learning opportunities.

The framework should include three components:

1. Predictable and recurring state investments in programming
2. A system of training and technical assistance that surfaces, spreads, and scales best practices
3. Guidance on how to integrate out-of-school services and supports within core K-12 strategies and activities

Addressing the Issue

How Can State Leaders Make Better Use of Current Assets?

1. Develop a statewide strategy based on the infrastructure created to support the BOOST program.
2. Make use of available evidence to demonstrate need and impact.
3. Blend sources of funding to create a more robust network of school and community providers.

Moving Georgia Forward

Extended learning programs have a diverse set of goals based on their missions. Across the state, programs operate in schools, community centers, and places of worship. Most funding comes from federal sources and parent tuition. While several federal programs operated by state agencies subsidize part of the tuition cost, especially for low-income students, the primary threats to the expansion of high-quality programming are access and affordability. State leaders should invest state resources to ensure greater student access to afterschool and summer learning programs.

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Local Leadership: A Blueprint for Reconfiguring State Strategies

Issue Overview

Communities are best positioned to develop broad-based strategies that transform service delivery across several sectors: education, public health, housing, and social services. As state leaders explore ways to accelerate recovery from the pandemic and subsequent social and economic disruptions, they should assess how local communities have transformed policy and practice since March 2020.

From these lessons, state agency leaders can reconfigure priorities and investments to align with the people-centered strategies first executed in local communities. State agencies can encourage their stakeholders – school systems, county health departments, community service boards, and workforce investment boards – to pursue local cross-sector strategies modeled on plans already executed in communities across Georgia.

Call to Action

State and local leaders should coordinate strategies to ensure communities are well-equipped to create approaches that simultaneously address personal well-being, workforce readiness, and community prosperity.

Addressing the Issue

Whole-family strategies

Multigenerational approaches recognize the value of supporting all family members to reach their educational and economic potential. Generally, these approaches focus on a primary group, such as school-aged students, while providing services and supports to their parents, caregivers, and older siblings. In most cases, whole-family strategies use a combination of education and workforce development initiatives as the basis for providing social, economic, and public health services. The holistic approach supports and maintains family well-being and economic self-sufficiency.

Whole-community strategies

Like whole-family strategies, whole-community strategies address the factors that limit social-economic success and post-secondary attainment but operate at a broader scale, focusing on workforce readiness and community supports rather than on the education and economic opportunity of individual families. Effective whole-community strategies build upon strong family supports and are complementary with multigenerational approaches.

Barriers to scaling people-centered programs and strategies

1. Sector-based considerations, such as funding, governance, and accountability requirements
2. Building and managing relationships in a fragmented, decentralized ecosystem
3. Building and sustaining community capacity so that all stakeholders understand and are committed to shared goals and priorities

Moving Georgia Forward

Community assets are present, but they are not always coordinated in ways that allow local leaders to expand access to education and workforce opportunities. Local leaders should focus on immediate challenges while simultaneously creating long-term plans to transform personal well-being and community resilience.

Issue Overview

As the first nine issues in this edition have demonstrated, Georgians would benefit from a people-centered, rather than sector-based, strategy. Sector-based strategies limit innovation, collaboration, and the recognition of shared goals because the focus is on accomplishing narrow objectives. A people-centered approach, in contrast, requires more significant coordination and alignment between systems but does not mandate consolidated funding, governance, or accountability.

Call to Action

State leaders should support evaluations of how local districts are utilizing their federal pandemic relief dollars and incorporate those findings when updating the current Quality Basic Education (QBE) state funding model for K-12 education.

State leaders should draft a K-12 accountability framework that includes multiple measures of school quality and embeds structures that support performance-based feedback and school improvement.

Addressing the Issue

Finance

The CARES Impact Study Year One Report, released in November 2022, spotlighted three concerns voiced by school district leaders:

1. Ensuring districts have enough qualified staff to accelerate learning and foster well-being
2. Exploring revisions to school staffing models and state support for certified staff in schools, and
3. Considering revisions to Georgia's state K-12 funding mechanism, the QBE formula.

Accountability

In September 2020, GaDOE released a new vision for state education policy. The Roadmap for Reimagining K-12 Education recommends that the state "develop an accountability system that aligns to the unique priorities of local communities and lifts up our schools." GaDOE should fulfill this vision by building upon community-based school improvement efforts while maintaining rigorous state metrics of college and career readiness, which is crucial to achieve if Georgia is to remain competitive in the global economy.

Moving Georgia Forward

When GaDOE releases school and district-level accountability results, media outlets publish numerous articles that interpret the results. The period of attention and action, however, is short-lived. District and school leaders should encourage the active involvement of students, parents, and community members in reviewing the results and explaining how current initiatives will contribute to improvement in accountability metrics. Family and community engagement is crucial as schools allocate limited funds and identify opportunities to accelerate learning and address nonacademic learning barriers.

In the same way that a new accountability framework could spark more community-driven conversations about how to improve student and school performance, revising education finance structures could also contribute to reimagining how to use federal, state, and local resources to create more student-centered approaches.