



Georgia Partnership  
FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

19TH EDITION  
**TOP TEN  
ISSUES TO  
WATCH  
IN 2023**

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### JANUARY 2023

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](http://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.

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Georgia Partnership  
FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

2022 was a milestone year for the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, as it marked the 30th anniversary of our founding in 1992 by the Georgia Economic Developers Association and the Georgia Chamber of Commerce. It is difficult to believe that 30 years have passed since we were first

established and given our charge – to bring together leaders from across education and business, along with elected officials, to tackle and solve Georgia's most critical and complex education and economic development challenges. At the time of our founding, public education in Georgia was facing several challenges. Most notably, reading and math performance were in decline and the state's high school graduation was hovering around 50 percent. Understandably, Georgia's leaders in business, education, civic and government sectors were deeply concerned. Those leaders knew then, as we know now, that high quality education was not only the key to individual success, but also essential to community, regional, and statewide prosperity. The Georgia Partnership's mission since that time has remained the same: inform and influence leaders to improve student achievement.

In 2022, we not only reflected on our mission, work, and legacy, but we also continued to build on it. As Georgia public schools continued to recover from the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Georgia Partnership continued to examine the ways in which education stakeholders are leveraging federal pandemic relief funds to support student achievement. We accomplished this through the **CARES Impact Study**, a multi-year, multi-strand research project designed to capture the ways Georgia school districts were planning to use the \$5.9 billion they received in federal relief funding. Having launched the study in 2021, we published the study's Baseline Report in January 2022 and the Year-One Report in November 2022. The Year-One Report describes district spending activities to date and highlights the ways in which the use of relief funds has shifted as school systems transition from crisis to recovery.

The Georgia Partnership also continued to deepen our **Community Engagement** work, partnering with leaders in Thomasville/Thomas County to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment project called The Workforce Plan. The project brought together multisector leaders and stakeholders from across Thomas County to determine strengths, challenges, assets, and gaps in the workforce pipeline. Building off the work Thomas County Family Connections has done assessing the condition of children and families in the county, the Workforce Plan provides a snapshot of Thomas County's economic, educational, and community needs, and brings local stakeholders together to identify shared interests and existing community assets to develop strategies to address pressing needs.

In 2022, we also graduated the 14th cohort of the Georgia Partnership's flagship professional development experience, the **Education Policy Fellowship Program** (EPFP), adding 14 fellows to our 200+ person Georgia EPFP alumni network. It was the first cohort we facilitated in person since the pandemic. The current, 15th cohort, like previous cohorts, is navigating the ins and outs of the Georgia education policy landscape. This program is one of the Georgia Partnership's key strategies 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.

In all that we accomplished in 2022 and the three decades prior, what is still clear to us is that what was true 30 years ago remains true today: high quality education is not only the key to individual success, but it is also the key to community, regional, and statewide prosperity. For the Georgia Partnership, this means that the next decade of our work must be focused on pursuing an ambitious yet achievable, North Star goal – ensuring 65% of Georgia's residents aged 25 to 64 have earned a postsecondary credential by the end of 2033. The foundational elements of the plan to achieve that goal are presented in the 19th edition of the *Top Ten Issues to Watch* report. The document 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 2023 and the 19th Edition of the Georgia Partnership's *Top Ten Issues to Watch* report.

The past couple of years have been like no other. And while it appears we are emerging from the pandemic and Georgia's economic recovery is strong, Georgia is still facing challenges. The state's education systems, from early learning through post-secondary, are pushing through unprecedented headwinds, as they continue to support long-term recovery and address the needs of students and their families, including the persistent achievement disparities across income levels and between White students and students of color.

They are doing this at a time of increased social and political polarization aimed at our public-school systems. Nationwide, common are headlines such as:

"Expect more attacks on public education in Virginia"

"Political rancor has chilling effect on public education"

"We can't have 2 countries: 2022 elections foreshadow new divisions in public education"

These types of news headlines and increasing polarization have distracted from real issues of teaching and learning and have discouraged nuanced and substantive dialogue about what strategies will propel states forward. What is needed now is not more polarization, but unity, a common vision for excellence. What Georgia needs is a vision that allows our state to leverage all its unique strengths and reconfigure state systems and investments to ensure that Georgia leads the nation in educational opportunity and economic growth by 2033.

In the *Top Ten Issues to Watch in 2022*, the Georgia Partnership offered a common vision for excellence. We recommended that state policymakers, education leaders, and the business sector unite around a North Star goal – ensuring 65% of Georgians aged 25 to 64 have earned a post-secondary credential by 2033. The goal is attainable through long-range planning. 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 original 2017 EdQuest Georgia Framework, which served as a model for education reform in Georgia. The updated framework identifies opportunities for leaders at all levels to enhance existing systems and redesign strategies to expand education and workforce opportunities for all Georgians, especially those living in poverty or who lack post-secondary credentials.

The current 2023 *Top Ten Issues to Watch* is organized around this framework and is laid out in three sections:

**1. Invest in people-centered systems:** place individuals at the center of education reform by addressing the factors that limit education success and economic opportunity. This section focuses on big bets – statewide initiatives led by business, community, and government leaders that reconfigure structures, systems, and investments to respond to inefficiency, ineffectiveness, or inequality.

**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. This section prioritizes increased coordination between state policy and local programs and strategies.

**3. Invest in spreading and scaling local solutions:** spotlight promising local initiatives that state leaders could integrate into existing state structures and strategies. This section emphasizes the role of state leaders in aiding in the spread and scale of local practices across Georgia.

It is the goal of the Georgia Partnership that the EdQuest Georgia Framework and the annual *Top Ten Issues to Watch* will serve as a tool for all public education stakeholders to unite under a common vision of excellence that will transform education, economic development, and workforce readiness in Georgia. We hope that you will join us on this journey to ensure Georgia leads the nation in educational opportunity and economic growth by 2033!



Dr. Dana Rickman

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 across the birth to work pipeline?

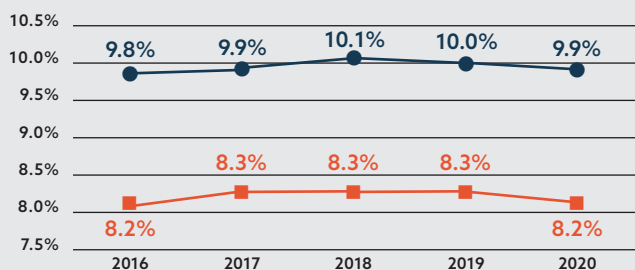
What additional progress is necessary to move our state above the national average and into the top tier of states to make Georgia a national leader?

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. 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 and economic development leader.

### LOW BIRTHWEIGHT BABIES, 2016-2020

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

● Georgia    ■ U.S.

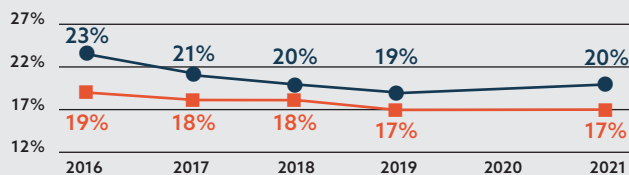


### CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY, 2016-2021

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

● Georgia    ■ U.S.

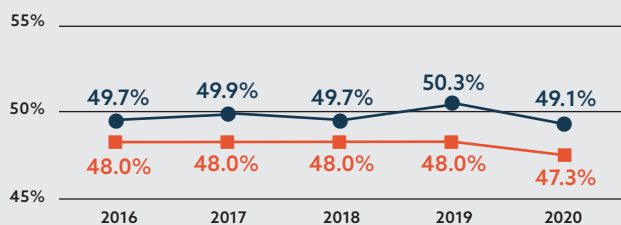
Note: Data not reported for 2020



### CHILDREN AGES 3 TO 4 ATTENDING PRESCHOOL, 2016-2020

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

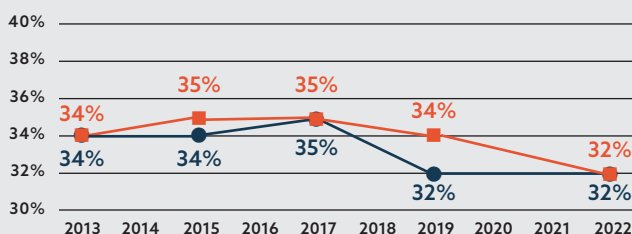
● Georgia    ■ U.S.



### FOURTH GRADE NAEP READING, AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT, 2013-2022

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress

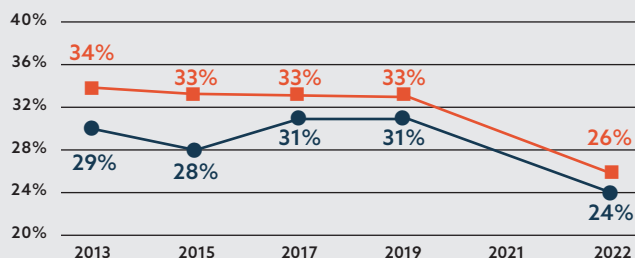
● Georgia    ■ U.S.



### EIGHTH GRADE NAEP MATHEMATICS, AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT, 2013-2022

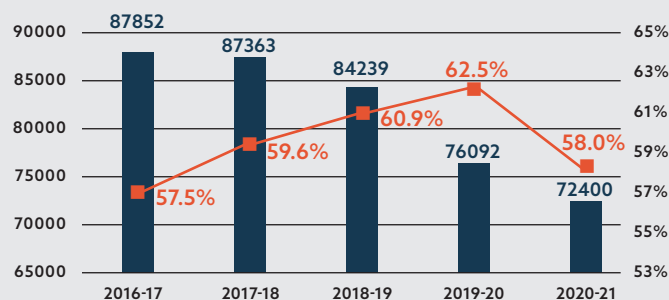
Source: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress

— Georgia — U.S.



### AP PARTICIPATION AND SUCCESS, 2017-2021

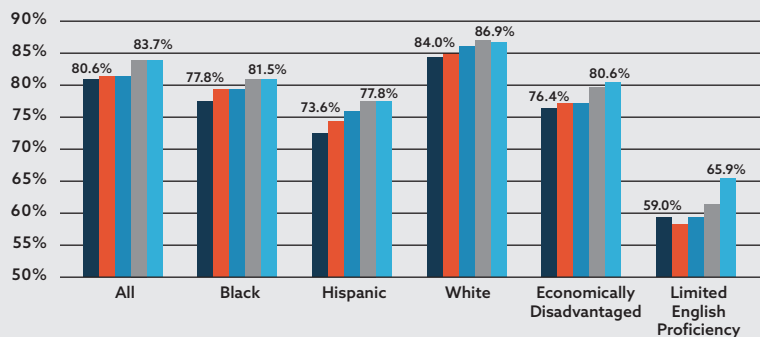
Source: Governor's Office of Student Achievement K-12 Report Card



### HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES, 2017-2021

Source: Governor's Office of Student Achievement K-12 Report Card

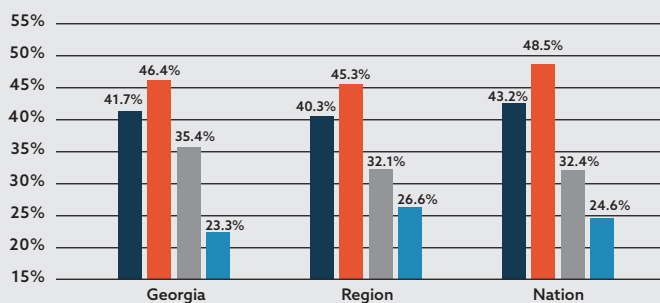
■ 2016-17 ■ 2017-18  
■ 2018-19 ■ 2019-20  
■ 2020-21



### ASSOCIATE DEGREE OR HIGHER, BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 2019

Source: US Census Bureau, American Fact Finder. American Community Survey 2019 5-Year Estimates

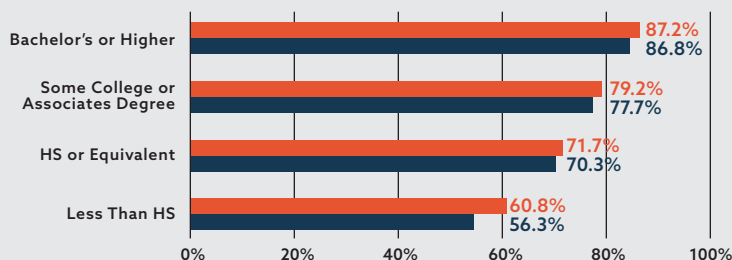
■ All ■ White  
■ Black ■ Hispanic



### PERCENT EMPLOYMENT BY EDUCATION LEVEL, 2021

Source: US Census, American Community Survey, Table B23006 (2021 1-Year Estimate)

■ Georgia ■ U.S.



# ISSUE

# 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.<sup>1</sup>

#### The North Star

65% of Georgians aged 25 to 64 have earned a post-secondary credential by January 2033.

#### EdQuest Georgia Framework

A set of strategies that improve the capacity of state and local leaders to support education success and economic well-being of all Georgians.

**The goal is bold but achievable.** In 10 years, Georgia would need to have increased post-secondary attainment rates by about 12.2% to achieve the North Star goal.<sup>2</sup> While an annual increase of 1% attainment is feasible, two factors will make achieving the goal more difficult: a generation of skilled and credentialed workers reaching retirement age and a growing share of the youth population lacking access to high-quality educational opportunities.

**The goal is attainable through long-range planning.** Previously, the Georgia Partnership urged the development of a 10-year plan to reach the 65% threshold. 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, which was originally launched in 2017 and served as a model for education reform in Georgia. The original framework identified seven core areas integral to maintaining high-quality state education and workforce systems.<sup>3</sup>

The revised framework builds on this strong foundation by establishing core area goals, identifying power strategies, and providing recommendations to state and local leaders.

<sup>1</sup> Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. 2022, January 7. *Top Ten Issues to Watch in 2022* (18th ed.). Retrieved from [https://gpee.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/GPEE-Top-Ten-2022-Full-Report\\_Final.pdf](https://gpee.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/GPEE-Top-Ten-2022-Full-Report_Final.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Lumina Foundation. n.d. *A Stronger Nation: Georgia's 2021 Progress Report*. Retrieved from <https://luminafoundation.org/stronger-nation/report/2021/#/progress/state/GA>.

<sup>3</sup> The seven core policy areas are Foundations for Learning, Quality Teaching, Quality Leadership, Supportive Learning Environments, Advanced Instructional Systems, Clear Pathways to Post-Secondary Success, and Adequate and Equitable Funding.

**The revised EdQuest Georgia policy framework will ultimately serve as the basis for the EdQuest Georgia State Policy Plan, which will be developed and released in 2023.** The framework identifies opportunities for leaders at all levels to rebuild systems and redesign strategies that expand opportunity and that are responsive, effective, and coherent.

### Call to Action

A comprehensive state plan will bring coherence to a fragmented ecosystem in which goals, priorities, and strategies currently are unaligned.

The plan will allow stakeholders to implement new strategies, develop joint education and economic development objectives, and monitor progress toward reaching the North Star goal.

The strategies identified in the EdQuest Georgia Framework prioritize rebuilding systems and improving the capacity of individuals and organizations to support innovation.

The EdQuest Georgia Coalition identified three ways that state and local leaders can support the drive toward 65% post-secondary attainment.

#### 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 programs and strategies.

The EdQuest Georgia Framework embodies these themes, which serve as the three sections of the current edition of the *Top Ten Issues to Watch*.

### Addressing the Issue

Georgia's education and workforce systems fuel economic growth across the state. However, these systems fall short of meeting the needs of a growing majority of Georgians.

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, describing concrete ways that leaders can use existing state assets to ensure more Georgians participate in economic recovery.

The EdQuest Georgia Framework

The framework identifies seven core areas that, when part of a comprehensive state strategy, produce optimal education and economic outcomes for the state’s residents. Figure 1.1 summarizes the key objectives of the revised framework.

Figure 1.1 EdQuest Georgia Core Areas	
Foundations for Learning	Promoting child development and family well-being through integrated early education, health, and family supports
Quality Teaching	Supporting the educator workforce by prioritizing professional growth and career advancement strategies
Quality Leadership	Identifying, recruiting, and retaining highly effective leaders within schools as well as those outside the school building, such as district and school board leaders
Supportive Learning Environments	Developing positive conditions for learning through the development of comprehensive school plans that address student health, school safety, and school culture and climate
Advanced Instructional Systems	Maintaining rigorous instructional standards, accelerated learning for all students, and accountability systems that support school and district improvement
Clear Pathways to Post-Secondary Success	Ensuring multiple pathways for youth and working adults to enroll in post-secondary programs and complete credentials of value
Adequate and Equitable Funding	Funding a birth-to-work strategy that closes opportunity and resource gaps and prepares all Georgians for kindergarten, high school, and post-secondary and workforce options

The seven core policy areas impact Georgians in different ways. However, each policy area benefits all Georgians, not just those who receive clear and direct support. For instance, parents with young children are most impacted by early learning strategies outlined in the Foundations for Learning area. However, early learning and school readiness initiatives benefit all Georgians, not just those with infants and toddlers. Each of these education policy areas has an impact that reaches far beyond the students in Georgia’s schools. The state’s workforce, crime rate, and healthcare system are just a few examples of areas outside of education that are deeply connected to and affected by the condition of Georgia’s public education system. Each core area fits into a broader policy framework that impacts individual and community well-being.



## Principles in the EdQuest Georgia Framework

The EdQuest Georgia Framework provides a series of recommendations across each of the seven core areas. This framework embodies four system principles strongly correlated to factors that produce personal well-being, community resilience, and state economic security: opportunity for all, responsiveness, effectiveness, and coherence.

### *Opportunity for All*

Personal background should not predict education and economic outcomes. The EdQuest Georgia Framework includes strategies that interrupt cycles of poverty and disconnection that make a large proportion of Georgians more vulnerable to recessions and pandemics.

### *Responsiveness*

The framework focuses on how to rebuild education and workforce systems and reconfigure state investments. It recommends creating more responsive strategies to improve personal well-being and community resilience. These strategies should meet Georgians where they are, accelerating opportunity and providing smoother transitions to the next education or work milestone.

### *Effectiveness*

While responsiveness is a critical objective, the framework also champions strategies that interrupt ineffective policies and practices. The Georgia Partnership and the EdQuest Georgia Coalition have identified evidence-based strategies and barriers to their eventual scale across the state. By January 2025, the coalition will identify a common set of education and workforce metrics to help state leaders track progress toward the North Star goal.

### *Coherence*

The last theme expressed throughout the EdQuest Georgia Framework is the importance of cross-sector strategies. Most of the power strategies would require state leaders to build systems and structures that create continuity between different services and supports. Aligning statewide efforts will require increased coordination in the delivery of resources, training, and technical assistance. However, greater coordination does not necessarily require consolidated finance, governance, and accountability systems.

## 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.

Action Steps	
Policy	State leaders should reconfigure state systems, structures, policies, and investments so that they promote the achievement of key goals and priorities.
Practice	Education and workforce leaders should redesign programs and strategies to address the factors that limit access and opportunity, including lack of access to health care, housing, and transportation.
Partnerships and Public Messaging	<p>State agency leaders and state-level nonprofit partners should assess needs and document areas of shared interest and responsibility.</p> <p>State and local leaders can use the EdQuest Georgia Framework to develop shared goals and set performance metrics to evaluate whether initiatives are successful.</p> <p>Advocates and experts should identify champions, intermediaries, and supporters of the power strategies outlined in the EdQuest Georgia Framework.</p>

The EdQuest Georgia Coalition identified goals and power strategies that advance the state’s education and economic and workforce development objectives. The remaining nine issues in this Top Ten edition describe the specific opportunities presented by a focus on rebuilding systems and reconfiguring state investments.

It is the goal of the Georgia Partnership that the EdQuest Georgia Framework continues to serve as a tool for all public education stakeholders to transform education, economic development, and workforce readiness in Georgia. We hope that you will join us on this journey to ensure Georgia leads the nation in educational opportunity and economic growth by 2033!

**INVESTING  
IN PEOPLE-  
CENTERED  
SYSTEMS:  
ISSUES 2-4**

# Big Bets *n, pl.*

**Initiatives led by  
businesses,  
communities, and  
governments  
that reconfigure  
structures, systems,  
and investments  
to respond  
to inefficiency,  
ineffectiveness,  
or inequity.**

The EdQuest Georgia Framework encourages state policymakers, educators, and corporate and community leaders to bust structures and mindsets that stand in the way of transforming personal well-being, ensuring more resilient communities, and securing the state's economic future.

In some cases, these groups can champion change within existing structures and strategies. In other situations, more dramatic structural changes could promote the outcomes more effectively and efficiently. The next three issue briefs focus on system-level initiatives that could help Peach State achieve the goals and objectives outlined in the EdQuest Georgia Framework.

# ISSUE

# 2

## Early Childhood Supports: Toward a Seamless State Child Development Strategy

### Issue Overview

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) developed the Whole Child Toolkit<sup>4</sup> for school, district, and community leaders to learn more about the chronic health and environmental conditions that threaten student success and well-being. The toolkit provides resources organized around five whole-child tenets:

1. Healthy
2. Safe
3. Engaged
4. Supported
5. Challenged<sup>5</sup>

While the Whole Child Toolkit is intended for use by K-12 leaders, the emphasis on expanding access to high-quality education, health, and community supports aligns with strategies that promote child development and school readiness.

In 2016, the Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS) assembled education, health, and community leaders to develop a statewide school readiness framework. The committee released a report in August 2017 that suggested that a cross-sector response to school readiness is crucial to close opportunity gaps to ensure all students enter kindergarten ready to learn.<sup>6</sup> The report also described the roles that parents, educators, early care providers, policymakers, and community leaders play in creating favorable conditions for child development and well-being.

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.<sup>7</sup>

4 Georgia Department of Education. n.d. Whole Child Toolkit. Retrieved from <https://www.georgiainsights.com/wholechild.html>.

5 "Engaged" means students feel connected to learning, their school, and the community. "Supported" relates to the assurance that students receive personalized learning and encouragement from caring adults. Schools "challenge" students when they provide them with rigorous instruction and prepare them for post-secondary opportunities.

6 Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students. 2017, August. *A Framework for School Readiness in Georgia*. Retrieved from <https://www.decal.ga.gov/documents/attachments/GA-School-Readiness-Framework.pdf>.

7 Annie E. Casey Foundation. 2012, January 1. Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation. Retrieved from <https://www.aecf.org/resources/double-jeopardy>.

The challenges are not confined to academics. Because reading is fundamental to adult functioning, low literacy affects lifelong earning potential, employment odds, access to health care, and life expectancy.<sup>8</sup>

**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.

The state agencies listed below deliver various services and supports to families with young children. For instance, the Department of Public Health conducts mandatory vision and hearing screening for students entering kindergarten. The Department of Early Care and Learning administers Georgia Pre-K, the federally funded Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS), and two federal nutrition programs. The Department of Community Health operates the PeachCare program for children who require comprehensive health care but do not qualify for Medicaid. **A state child development schedule would publicize these services and supports so families and communities are able to access them.**

Over the next 10 years, state agencies charged with improving child development should coordinate systems and investments in service of a statewide child development strategy.

The following state agencies are integral to creating a unified plan:

- Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD)
- Department of Community Health (DCH)
- Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL)
- Department of Education (GaDOE)
- Department of Human Services (DHS)
- Department of Public Health (DPH)

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.

8 Diallo, A. 2020, May 28. *Improving Literacy in the United States: Recommendations for Increasing Reading Success*. Center for American Progress. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/improving-literacy-united-states-recommendations-increasing-reading-success/>.

## Addressing the Issue

The pandemic destabilized the early care industry. While families sheltered in place, early care centers closed, some never to reopen. The number of childcare workers in Georgia decreased by 17% between 2019 and 2020.<sup>9</sup> Forty percent of child care centers closed during the first six months of the pandemic, more than double the 18% national average.<sup>10</sup> Nationally, since February 2020, the childcare workforce has lost 88,000 jobs, or 8.4% of the pre-pandemic workforce.<sup>11</sup> The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) received COVID relief funds to address childcare access and affordability, but these funds will run out in September 2023.<sup>12</sup>

The pandemic also contributed to a decline in the number of infants and young children who received preventative healthcare services.<sup>13</sup> According to a national household survey conducted in spring 2021, about one-quarter of young children had missed routine checkups and preventative healthcare visits.<sup>14</sup> The suspension of the enhanced child tax credit in January 2022 also negatively affected long-term family health and economic outcomes.<sup>15</sup>

A unified child development strategy is crucial for accomplishing the following:

- addressing access, affordability, and quality challenges;
- leveraging resources across all levels, especially as federal investments dwindle; and
- most importantly, better serving the children, families, and communities that will contribute to the state's economic future.

## How Can State Leaders Create a Coordinated Delivery Plan?

### ***Build upon the foundation laid by the Georgia General Assembly and DECAL.***

State leaders unleash creativity and innovation when agencies work together, not in silos. Different state agencies operate different programs and strategies, but integrated services and supports could have a greater impact on the education, health, and well-being of communities than the current separate delivery models.

While the unified plan would not result in the consolidation of funds, the strategy should provide a sequence of proof points that would encourage increased state and private-sector investment. State leaders should use the DECAL strategic plan<sup>16</sup> and the requirements outlined in the Mental Health Parity Act<sup>17</sup> as starting points for developing a comprehensive state strategy.

9 Bipartisan Policy Center. 2021, August 15. National and Student Child Care Data Overview. Retrieved from <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/national-child-care/>.

10 Dalton, M. 2020, August 3. "It's Been Knocking at Our Door": COVID-19 Takes a Toll on Child Care Centers. WABE. Retrieved from <https://www.wabe.org/its-been-knocking-at-our-door-covid-19-takes-a-toll-on-childcare-centers/>.

11 Coffey, M., and R. Khattar. 2022, September 2. *The Child Care Sector Will Continue to Struggle Hiring Staff Unless It Creates Good Jobs*. Center for American Progress. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-child-care-sector-will-continue-to-struggle-hiring-staff-unless-it-creates-good-jobs/>

12 Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. 2021, October. Frequently Asked Questions from the Provider Webinar. Retrieved from <http://www.dec.al.ga.gov/documents/attachments/SpendingPlanWebinarFAQ.pdf>.

13 Lebrun-Harris, L.A., and M.D. Warren. 2021, December 30. Missed and Delayed Preventive Health Care Visits Among US Children Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Public Health Reports*, 137(2). Retrieved from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00333549211061322>.

14 Nguyen, K.H., K. Nguyen, D. Lekshmi, L. Corlin, and R.W. Niska. 2022. Delays in Children's Preventive Health Services During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Family Medicine*, 54(5):350-361.

15 Garfinkel, I., L. Sariscsany, E. Ananat, S. Collyer, R.P. Hartley, B. Wang, and C. Wimer. 2022, March. *The Benefits and Costs of a US Child Allowance*. National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved from [https://www.nber.org/system/files/working\\_papers/w29854/w29854.pdf](https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w29854/w29854.pdf).

16 Department of Early Care and Learning. 2021, September 1. *Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning Strategic Plan*. Retrieved from [https://www.dec.al.ga.gov/documents/attachments/DECALStrategicPlan\\_SF2022-2025.pdf](https://www.dec.al.ga.gov/documents/attachments/DECALStrategicPlan_SF2022-2025.pdf).

17 Georgia General Assembly. 2022, May. Georgia Mental Health Parity Act. Retrieved from <https://gov.georgia.gov/document/2022-signed-legislation/hb-1013/download>.

First, DECAL's first strategic goal is to "align, integrate, and coordinate programs to improve school readiness for children birth to five in Georgia." The other four strategic goals describe priorities embedded in the EdQuest Georgia Framework (see Issue 1), including strengthening the early education workforce, increasing the quality and accessibility of early learning services, using multigenerational approaches to support children and families, and using technology and data to support communities.

Second, the Mental Health Parity Act requires state agencies to coordinate strategies and public messaging around the delivery of mental health services. A statewide child development strategy would require similar cross-agency and cross-sector collaboration.

State leaders can build on this strong foundation, leveraging government and community infrastructure to develop a unified strategy.

***Use data and evidence to identify interventions and supports that should be part of the comprehensive plan.***

An effective unified strategy should be rooted in data and evidence of need.

For example, the Get Georgia Reading Campaign, an initiative of the Georgia Family Connection Partnership, identified 12 indicators that influence a child's ability to read by the third grade. Policies, programs, and initiatives that address opportunities and barriers associated with those indicators increase the likelihood all children in Georgia will read at grade level.<sup>18</sup> Identifying root causes and designing interventions to address them increase the likelihood of success. Like the EdQuest Georgia Framework, the Get Georgia Reading Campaign's metrics align to the three-part focus on education, health, and community supports.

Similarly, early screening for developmental and intellectual disabilities can identify deficits that could be remedied or addressed before children enter school. While later identification of developmental or intellectual delays is not ideal, the available data on community prevalence can help state agency leaders determine what interventions have the highest impact on the affected populations.

***Set performance metrics and service benchmarks to determine access, quality, and impact.***

State agencies involved in designing the comprehensive plan should also create a dashboard with performance metrics and service benchmarks. The dashboard would support greater understanding among state policymakers and the public about how the various services and supports improve children's physical health, cognitive development, and literacy.

## **Moving Georgia Forward**

A unified delivery plan, as outlined in this brief, would not require consolidated funding or governance. Agencies would retain their missions and operate their programs independently. Instead, 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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<sup>18</sup> Get Georgia Reading Campaign. n.d. Relevant Data Points. Retrieved from <https://getgeorgiareading.org/data/relevant-data-points/>.

Action Steps	
Policy	<p>State leaders should invest in evidence-based, early education and health strategies, such as home visitation, Early Head Start programs, comprehensive health screenings, and early interventions for children with developmental and intellectual disabilities.</p> <p>State agency leaders, nonprofit executives, and researchers should conduct two studies: one to estimate the cost of ensuring all Georgians aged 0 to 5 have access to evidence-based early education and health programs, and a second to create a comprehensive early learning workforce strategy focused on improving working conditions, strengthening professional preparation, and achieving pay parity relative to similar professions.</p>
Practice	<p>State agencies and local community leaders should implement multigenerational strategies that support the integration of services across Georgia's education, health, and economic and workforce development sectors.</p> <p>State agencies and nonprofits should partner to deliver training and technical assistance to informal care providers who disproportionately serve families that lack access to high-quality early learning programs.</p> <p>State leaders should assemble direct-service nonprofits and local providers to recommend a comprehensive process for screening infants and toddlers, providing more targeted supports to children with developmental and intellectual disabilities.</p>
Partnerships and Public Messaging	<p>DECAL should partner with the nonprofit community and local providers to generate a sustainability plan for initiatives funded by federal pandemic relief funds.</p> <p>State leaders, nonprofits, and the private sector should collaborate to create a state campaign that demonstrates the value of investments in early learning and care for young children and their parents.</p>



# ISSUE

# 3

## Post Secondary Readiness: Closing the Gap

### Issue Overview

In October 2022, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) released the high school graduation rate for the Class of 2022. Over 84% of the class graduated within four years — significantly higher than the 69.7% rate for the 2012 cohort.<sup>19</sup> This high percentage is especially impressive as the Georgia State Board of Education maintained rigorous graduation requirements over the past decade.

Despite growth in high school graduation rates, students continue to struggle after graduation. Less than one-third of Georgia high school seniors in the Class of 2022 (30%) met the ACT college-readiness benchmarks in English, mathematics, reading, and science.<sup>20</sup> Nearly three out of four (74%) high school seniors who took the ACT and met all four benchmarks graduated with a bachelor's degree within six years of post-secondary enrollment.<sup>21</sup> On average, each benchmark not met decreases graduation rates by about 8% for four-year students and 3% for students attending community and technical colleges.<sup>22</sup>

To address the post-secondary readiness gap, state leaders have invested in expanding access to dual enrollment and career-technical education opportunities. GaDOE has invested federal pandemic relief funds to accelerate student learning.<sup>23</sup> Local school systems, as well, have invested in instructional materials and educational technologies that assist in measuring academic readiness.<sup>24</sup> These tools provide students with a truer understanding of where they stand and schools with diagnostic data to deliver personalized instruction.

19 Frick, M. 2022, October 6. Georgia High-School Graduation Rate Rises in 2022 [Press release]. GaDOE. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid=996>.

20 ACT, Inc. 2022. The ACT Profile Report – State: Graduating Class 2022 Georgia. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Documents/Georgia%20-%20All%20Students.pdf>.

21 Allen, J., and J. Radunzel. 2017, October. *What Are the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks?* Retrieved from <https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/pdfs/R1670-college-readiness-benchmarks-2017-11.pdf>.

22 Ibid.

23 Frick, M. 2021, July 22. Georgia's state plan for final portion of K-12 education stimulus funds approved [Press release]. GaDOE. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid=878>.

24 Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. 2022, November. *2022 CARES Impact Study Year One Report*. Retrieved from <https://gpee.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/CARES-Impact-Study-Year-One-Report-Final.pdf>.

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 readiness milestones in math, English, science, and writing in the eighth, 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 and 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

Invite an inclusive group of stakeholders — 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

### How Can State and District Leaders Support Informed Student Decision-making?

#### *Identify milestones.*

GaDOE released draft English Language Arts standards for public comment in November 2022.<sup>25</sup> The standards include learning progressions, which demonstrate what students need to know and do as they move from one grade to the next. State policymakers should use the concept of learning progressions to create academic readiness benchmarks for students in secondary school (grades 6–12) environments, specifically in 8th, 10th, and 11th grades. These benchmarks are critical to signaling progress toward post-secondary readiness during high school and upon graduation. Crucially, the state standards also are foundational in another respect: they provide evidence of student learning that verifies student mastery of specific skills.

25 Frick, M. 2022, November 3. GaDOE Posts New ELA Standards for Public Comment [Press release]. GaDOE. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid=1005>.

***Empower students through personalized learning options.***

As states and districts roll out new, early post-secondary options or expand access to existing opportunities, more students can preview post-secondary transitions. Aligning state policy is a necessary step in ensuring a more seamless transition, and prepping students for this transition is critical.

Schools should empower students in three ways.

1. Give them a more accurate picture of their readiness level using the readiness milestones described above.
2. Encourage enrollment in accelerated learning options.
3. Plot realistic post-high school pathways based on student interests and aptitudes.

This approach would allow easier identification of individualized learning pathways that could accelerate students who are ready for more challenging material and provide more support for students who are struggling with the content. Underprepared students can take advantage of readiness courses or credit recovery, where available. Students who have achieved the English and math benchmarks could enroll in college-level courses in high school or pursue early college admission.

***“Shape the path” for students through proactive advising.***

Traditionally, high school counselors were thought to have a singular role: improving the likelihood that students transition to college or into a viable career. In practice, however, counselors advise students and provide them with realistic data on their current post-secondary path. Counselors also 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. The Georgia Quality Basic Education (QBE) formula allocates funding at a ratio of one counselor to 450 students, which is higher than the American School Counselor Association’s recommendation of 1:250.<sup>26</sup> Further, the need to support students’ physical and behavioral health has become part of a counselor’s job and further reduces the time dedicated to proactive advisement. State leaders must consider a new strategy that provides funding for two types of counselor positions in each secondary school: one for social-behavioral issues, the other for academic and career counseling.

**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.

The action steps below offer recommendations for how state policymakers, local education leaders, advocates, and the corporate community can each play a role in closing readiness gaps.

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<sup>26</sup> Owens, S. 2022, August 9. *Three Ways to Fix Georgia Education Funding*. Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://gbpi.org/three-ways-to-fix-georgia-education-funding/>.

Action Steps	
State Policy	<p>State policymakers should narrow content standards to deepen student knowledge, skills, and abilities.</p> <p>GaDOE, in consultation with community stakeholders, should draft state board rules to govern statewide endorsements of college and career readiness.</p>
Local Policy and Practice	<p>Districts should use emerging formative assessments and educational technologies to personalize learning for all grade 6-12 students regardless of current performance levels.</p> <p>Districts should adopt individual career and academic plans (iCAPS) that document student milestones related to career exploration, applying for college or financial aid, and taking the ACT or SAT. Local school systems should pair iCAPs with proactive career counseling to improve students' <b>institutional match</b> (e.g., academic profile and career interests) and <b>fit</b> (e.g., college cost, location, and campus attributes), two indicators associated with post-secondary persistence and completion.</p>
Partnerships and Public Messaging	<p>District leaders should invest in community partnerships that expand access to career-connected learning for all students, regardless of their chosen learning pathway.</p> <p>GaDOE should continue to work with the two state post-secondary systems to award post-secondary credit for the completion of rigorous academic and career pathways.</p> <p>State and local leaders should publicize student incentives that support smoother post-secondary transitions. For instance, the completion of certain endorsements or credentials could help graduates earn college credit or prevent students from repeating entry-level college courses, such as statistics, college algebra, or freshman English composition.</p> <p>A group of state leaders, advocates, and corporate representatives should develop a communications campaign to demonstrate the value of enrolling in career and work-based learning programs while in high school.</p>

# ISSUE

# 4

## Post-Secondary Promise: Rethinking the Pathway to Economic Prosperity

### Issue Overview

If current trends hold, annual state high school graduation rates could eventually exceed 90%. However, as available post-secondary enrollment, persistence, and completion data continue to demonstrate, most high school graduates do not earn a post-secondary credential within six years of enrolling in a post-secondary program.

In May 2016, over 103,000 Georgians graduated from high school. Five years later, only 36.9% of those graduates had earned a post-secondary credential.<sup>27</sup> In 2021, about one in seven graduates (13.8%) of the Class of 2016 remained enrolled in post-secondary programs. The remaining members of this cohort, nearly half (49.3%), were not enrolled in post-secondary education and had never earned a post-secondary credential.

Since 2011, Complete College Georgia (CCG), a statewide initiative led by the University of System of Georgia (USG) and the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), has adopted strategies to improve student access to and graduation from post-secondary institutions in Georgia. The initiative has focused on shortening time to degree, improving college readiness, building strong sector partnerships, restructuring instructional delivery, and transforming remediation.<sup>28</sup> 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 4.1). 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.

27 Data generated by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement High School Graduation Outcomes Dashboard. See <https://hsgrad.gosa.ga.gov/noauth/extensions/HighSchoolGradOutcomes/HighSchoolGradOutcomes.html>.

28 For more information on Complete College Georgia, see <https://completega.org/>.

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. Systemic and structural change should ensure that pathways extend beyond immediate student, community, and workforce needs.

To execute this vision, state and local leaders should restructure systems with three groups in mind.

#### **Recent high school graduates**

Ensure access to accelerated learning options such that all high school graduates have earned or are on track to earn a post-secondary credential.

#### **Working adults**

Encourage working adults to enroll in and complete post-secondary credentials in areas in which the state is experiencing workforce shortages.

#### **Community and corporate leaders**

Engage community leaders and private-sector representatives in the development and execution of state systems and strategies.

## **Addressing the Issue**

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

#### ***Build momentum***

USG leaders have evolved the original CCG framework and incorporated a momentum approach to student success, which has allowed individual post-secondary institutions to adapt more holistic approaches to improving student outcomes and addressing persistent equity gaps. Table 4.1 summarizes some of the CCG investments in student-focused, pathways-oriented approaches.

**Table 4.1 Complete College Georgia Strategies<sup>29</sup>**

Initiative	Description
15-to-Finish <sup>30</sup>	Completing 15 credits per semester and 30 per academic year significantly increases the likelihood that students stay on track to earn post-secondary credentials.
Guided Pathways for Success <sup>31</sup>	Institutions create degree maps and meta-majors, two strategies that enable students to choose a broad career area and home in on a specific major as they complete related coursework. Guided Pathways also ensure that students take courses aligned with their degree path and their career interests, decreasing time to degree.
Momentum Year <sup>32</sup>	Participating institutions design first-year experiences that encourage students to pick an academic focus area. Program maps focus on completing entry-level English and math requirements, earning nine credits in the chosen academic area, and completing 30 credits by the end of the second semester.

Both the USG and TCSG should continue to utilize opportunities like USG's Momentum Summits, which focus on bringing the institutions together to share lessons learned and explore big ideas. Momentum Summit V, held in 2021 to help institutions update their 2022 CCG plans, highlighted significant strides made in meeting students with learning support needs, increasing the overall focus on advising and analytics, and increasing the use of program mapping.

### ***Transfer and credential stacking***

As part of the foundational CCG work, the USG and TCSG have worked toward developing strong transfer and articulation agreements for general education courses. Similarly, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and TCSG have partnered to allow students who complete one of four high school career pathways — welding, patient care, cloud computing, or automotive service technology — to receive technical college credit.

These strides are moving Georgia in the right direction. However, to meet the needs of tomorrow's post-secondary graduates, the USG and TCSG, in partnership with GaDOE, should create skill and credential maps that show how knowledge, skills, and abilities progress from short-term credentials to doctoral degrees. The skills and credential mapping work could result in more robust credential-stacking efforts that will allow adults who have earned initial, career-connected credentials to re-enter post-secondary education to complete credentials that enable them to advance in their chosen career. Providing disconnected youth and working adults with career roadmaps could help them make informed choices about what to do next.

29 University System of Georgia. n.d. "Completion Toolkit." Retrieved from <https://completega.org/completion-toolkit>.

30 University System of Georgia. n.d. "15 to Finish." Retrieved from <https://www.completegeorgia.org/15-to-finish>.

31 University System of Georgia. n.d. "Guided Pathways to Success." Retrieved from <https://www.completegeorgia.org/content/guided-pathways-success>.

32 University System of Georgia. n.d. "The Momentum Year." Retrieved from <https://www.completegeorgia.org/momentum-year>.

***Marketing and communications***

One of the strongest social and cultural messages around education is that a bachelor's degree is the primary ticket to family-sustaining wages. Economic data support this argument, to a point. Georgians who have earned college degrees, for instance, are more likely to weather recessions and pandemics than their peers without a credential. However, a 2020 Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce report found that those earning certificates in engineering, blue-collar fields, information technology, and legal studies often earn salaries comparable to peers who have earned a college degree.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, short-term credential programs are often more affordable, flexible, and convenient than degree programs. Consequently, state and system leaders should communicate the value of short-term credential programs as a means of accelerating economic opportunity for Georgians, especially those that 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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33 Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce. 2020, January 28. *The Overlooked Value of Certificates and Associate's Degrees*. Retrieved from <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/subba/>.



## Action Steps

### State Policy

The Georgia General Assembly should create a comprehensive, statewide need-based financial aid program that makes post-secondary options more accessible for youth and working adults.

State leaders should expand and deepen incentives for working adults to enroll in short-term programs to earn post-secondary credentials in areas in which the state is experiencing workforce shortages.

State and system leaders should enhance existing credit articulation agreements to ensure public institutions award post-secondary credit for alternative credentials and nontraditional experiences earned across the K-12, post-secondary, and workforce domains.

State and local leaders should develop accessible, affordable, and aligned pathways with multiple on and off ramps that encourage all Georgians to maximize their education and workforce opportunities.

### Local Policy and Practice

Post-secondary institutions should deliver nonacademic counseling services to disconnected youth and working adults, including proactive advisement and career and financial counseling.

Districts, post-secondary institutions, and the private sector should partner to expand access to early post-secondary and work-based learning opportunities for students enrolled in grades six through 12.

Post-secondary leaders at the system and institutional levels should explore ways to leverage federal resources, such as Title IV grants and loans, federal work-study, and Workforce Investment Opportunity Act funds, to expand access to and increase the affordability of post-secondary options.

### Partnerships and Public Messaging

State and system leaders should encourage business and industry representatives to co-develop rigorous pathways and curricula that help expand access to work-based learning opportunities in high-demand career areas.

The Georgia General Assembly should consider expanding incentives for private-sector companies to offer “learn and earn” opportunities for Georgians enrolled in post-secondary programs.

State, system, and corporate leaders should develop a more inclusive narrative for post-secondary opportunities that uses labor market data to demonstrate that four-year credentials are not the only pathway to family-sustaining employment.

**INVESTING  
IN SCHOOL  
AND  
COMMUNITY  
LEADERS:  
ISSUES 5-7**

## **Distributed Leadership *n*,**

**School approach that empowers educators to manage vital management functions, such as monitoring instructional delivery, providing interventions for struggling students, and coaching early-career teachers.**

## **Capacity Building *n*,**

**Interventions or supports that strengthen the ability of individuals to respond to challenges and identify opportunities to improve student and school performance.**

The EdQuest Georgia Coalition endorsed the idea of shared leadership – not just between school leaders and educators, but also extending decision-making to students, parents, and community leaders. State and local leaders should work together to increase the capacity of these stakeholders to lead in their schools and communities.

State systems of training and technical assistance can support local capacity building and leadership development, but not all school systems access these resources. The next three issues identify specific strategies that address educator burnout, school safety challenges, and the lack of meaningful engagement with parents and community leaders.

## ISSUE

## 5

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

Educators experience burnout when they exhaust the personal and professional resources that help them manage chronic workplace stress. While symptoms vary, research suggests that burnout manifests itself as exhaustion, cynicism, and a sense that one's efforts may be in vain.<sup>34</sup>

Teachers and school leaders experience burnout at greater rates than their peers in other industries. More than half of K-12 educators (52%) surveyed by Gallup in February 2022 reported that they "always" or "very often" feel burned out at work, compared to 30% of US working adults.<sup>35</sup>

When the National Education Association surveyed its members in January 2022, 55% said that the pandemic would result in them leaving the profession earlier than they intended, nearly double the percentage who reported the same in July 2020.<sup>36</sup> Educators of color and male teachers were more likely to report that they planned to leave because of the pandemic. Age and experience were not significant predictors of educator plans.<sup>37</sup> 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%).<sup>38</sup>

While "intent to leave" is an important metric for policymakers to consider, recent national research suggests that for every 100 teachers that reported they would exit "as soon as possible," only 34 did.<sup>39</sup>

34 Maslach, C., and M.P. Leiter. 2016, June 5. Understanding the Burnout Experience: Recent Research and Its Implications for Psychiatry. *World Psychiatry*, 15(2): 103–111. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4911781/>.

35 Marken, S., and S. Argawal. 2022, June 13. K-12 Workers Have Highest Burnout Rates in U.S. *Gallup*. Retrieved from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/393500/workers-highest-burnout-rate.aspx>.

36 GBAO Strategies. 2022, January 31. *Poll Results: Stress and Burnout Pose Threat of Educator Shortages*. Retrieved from <https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/NEA%20Member%20COVID-19%20Survey%20Summary.pdf>.

37 Ibid.

38 Professional Association of Georgia Educators. 2022. *Views from the Schoolhouse: Insights from Georgia Educators on the Education Profession and Supporting Students*. Retrieved from <https://www.pagelegislative.org/2022-legislative-survey-summary>.

39 Nguyen, T.D., E. Bettini, C. Redding, and A.F. Gilmour. 2020, February. Comparing Turnover Intentions and Actual Turnover in the Public Sector Workforce: Evidence from Public School Teachers [EdWorkingPaper: 22-537]. Providence, RI: Annenberg Institute, Brown University. Retrieved from <https://www.edworkingpapers.com/sites/default/files/ai22-537.pdf>.

While the mass educator exodus did not materialize, state and local leaders should address the underlying causes that contribute to 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

The EdQuest Georgia Coalition<sup>40</sup> identified teacher burnout as the primary threat to creating a more stable, diverse, and effective educator workforce.

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

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) released *Teacher Burnout in Georgia: Voices from the Classroom in June 2022*. Cherie Bonder Goldman, the 2022 Georgia Teacher of the Year, hosted meetings across the state in which participating educators identified five factors that contribute to burnout.<sup>41</sup>

1. Administration of classroom assessments
2. Not preserving and protecting instructional time
3. Increasingly unrealistic expectations for schools and educators, especially during the pandemic
4. Lack of ongoing coaching and professional growth opportunities
5. Lack of attention to mental health and the well-being of educators.

These factors are the symptoms of a larger problem: misalignment between what educators need and the systems that support professional growth and personal well-being. Creating a comprehensive educator development strategy, while necessary in the long run, will not solve the immediate problem: educators feeling undervalued and under-supported.

40 For more details about the EdQuest Georgia Coalition, see Issue 1 of this edition, "The EdQuest Georgia Framework: Starting the Journey Toward the North Star."

41 Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia. 2022, June. *Teacher Burnout in Georgia: Voices from the Classroom*. Georgia Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Documents/Teacher%20Burnout%20Task%20Force%20Report.pdf>.

Issue 8 of the 2022 edition of the *Top Ten Issues to Watch*, “Revamping the Teacher Profession – A New Moonshot,” recommended that state and local leaders prioritize three policy areas when creating coherent educator workforce strategies: recruitment and hiring, teacher leadership, and expanded professional learning opportunities.

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.

Although burnout does not automatically improve because of more strategic hiring practices and customized professional learning, these policies lay the groundwork for a workforce culture that prioritizes collaboration and excellence.

### Moving Georgia Forward

Educator burnout is one of the top K-12 stories that emerged from the pandemic. While fewer educators exited the profession than expected, the primary threat is that burnout — an often-temporary condition — will morph into demoralization, a condition in which individuals feel unable to live their values because of systemic or cultural failings.<sup>42</sup>

The EdQuest Georgia Framework reinforces the need for rebuilding state systems and establishing positive school culture as two long-term strategies to address the conditions that contribute to burnout and turnover. Three specific recommendations outlined in the EdQuest Georgia Framework describe how district leaders could develop systems to address educator burnout:

1. clarifying the roles and responsibilities of individual educators,
2. redesigning systems of educator support that prioritize collaboration and shared responsibility for student outcomes, and
3. rethinking 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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<sup>42</sup> Santoro, D.A. 2018. *Demoralized: Why Teachers Leave the Profession They Love and How They Can Stay*. Harvard Education Press.

Action Steps	
Policy	<p>The Georgia General Assembly or GaDOE should fund district pilots focused on advanced teacher roles and innovative staffing models. The North Carolina General Assembly has funded a successful district pilot program for six years.<sup>43</sup></p> <p>State leaders should draft or commission a statewide working-conditions survey that asks educators to share their opinions on the quality of instructional supports and professional learning opportunities and provide feedback on their school's safety, culture, and climate.</p>
Practice	<p>School leaders should charge educators with using professional learning communities during the school day to diagnose current challenges, pilot new interventions, and observe high-quality lessons.</p> <p>School and district leaders should reframe professional expectations through district induction and professional growth activities.</p>
Partnerships and Public Messaging	<p>State leaders should convene a stakeholder committee to develop a statewide comprehensive professional growth and personal wellness strategy for the educator workforce.</p> <p>Local leaders should involve educators in meaningful ways in designing pilots and implementing new initiatives before rolling them out. This involvement would increase educators' ownership in the process and shared responsibility for the results.</p>

43 BEST NC. 2022, July. *Advanced Teaching Roles in North Carolina: Meaningful Career Pathways for Education Professionals* [Policy brief]. Retrieved from <https://www.bestnc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Advanced-Teaching-Roles-Policy-Brief-2022.pdf>.

# ISSUE

# 6

## School Safety: A Multidimensional Approach

### Issue Overview

School shootings terrify students, educators, parents, and communities. Violence reignites polarizing debates about gun rights and school safety. Communities demand action and are desperate for state and local leaders to act. In 2019, Georgia lawmakers provided one-time, \$30,000 grants to each public school in the state to address school safety concerns.<sup>44</sup> The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) also provided technical assistance related to the completion of local school safety plans. The state is also coordinating school safety efforts through partnerships with key state partners like the Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency (GEMA/HS), the Georgia Department of Public Safety, and the Georgia Public Safety Training Center.

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. About half of school leaders in a 2022 national survey reported a significant increase in behavioral disturbances and “acts of disrespect toward teachers and staff.”<sup>45</sup>

However, simply “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.<sup>46</sup>

While the General Assembly and Georgia State Board of Education set school safety policy, local leaders must make tough decisions about how best to protect their students. They must determine, for instance, how to address behavioral problems and classroom disruptions. They must also consider the long-term implications of those decisions. While student suspensions and expulsions might remove the students exhibiting behavioral problems, these policies do not address the underlying issues that contribute to disruptive behaviors. Moreover, simply suspending or expelling a student from school increases the likelihood that the student will never graduate high school.

44 Office of the Governor. 2022, May 25. Governor Kemp Provides School Safety Update [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://gov.georgia.gov/press-releases/2022-05-25/governor-kemp-provides-school-safety-update>.

45 St. George, D. 2022, July 6. Behavioral Issues, Absenteeism at Schools Increase, Federal Data Shows. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/07/05/absenteeism-behavioral-issues-pandemic-data/>.

46 Sorensen, L.C., M.A. Acosta, J. Engberg, and S. Bushway. 2022, August. *The Thin Blue Line in Schools: New Evidence on School-Based Policing across the U.S.* Annenberg Institute at Brown University. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.26300/heqx-rc69>.

School and community leaders need to collaborate to grapple with the root causes that contribute to unsafe and unstable learning environments.

As local school systems design their school safety frameworks, district and school leaders should ensure that three dimensions of safety are embedded in their plans:

1. Attending to the physical and emotional well-being of students and educators
2. Creating safer and more supportive learning environments for students, educators, and other school stakeholders
3. Fostering strong interpersonal relationships

Effective school-wide approaches integrate activities that touch on each of these dimensions.

### Call to Action

State and local leaders should investigate the origins of threats to school safety and institute preventative measures that treat the root causes of violence and disruptive behavior.

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 student-centered resources that address academic and nonacademic barriers to student success. These supports could include providing food and clothing, additional counseling or mental health services, or access to community resources.

#### 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 and school 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

Extreme instances of violence, such as the school shootings that can dominate the headlines, are not carried out in isolation but are often the result of other factors related to school and community risk factors. For instance, poverty, violence, abuse, neglect, and trauma are all significant factors contributing to student behavioral issues.<sup>47</sup> School and community strategies that address these root causes can mitigate some of the factors that make schools unsafe.<sup>48</sup> This issue brief identifies how school and district leaders can use existing resources to create a comprehensive school safety and student support plan.

47 Turnaovic, J.J., and S.E. Siennick. 2022, February. *The Causes and Consequences of School Violence: A Review*. US Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice. Retrieved from <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/302346.pdf>.

48 Braithwaite, J., S. Calhoun, and K. Jeter. 2021, December. *Preventing and Mitigating the Harmful Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences Through School-Based Systems of Care*. ACEs Aware. Retrieved from [https://www.acesaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Preventing-and-Mitigating-the-Harmful-Effects-of-ACES-Through-School-Based-Integrated-Screenings-and-Care\\_Final.pdf](https://www.acesaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Preventing-and-Mitigating-the-Harmful-Effects-of-ACES-Through-School-Based-Integrated-Screenings-and-Care_Final.pdf).



### State Priorities

GaDOE has supported and, with the help of federal pandemic relief funds, expanded state initiatives to create school-based health centers, extend mental health supports to students and educators, and sustain training and technical assistance related to executing Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS) strategies. These investments reflect the whole-child focus championed by GaDOE.

The GaDOE's Whole Child Toolkit frames these strategies, providing districts with a roadmap and set of resources to integrate academic and nonacademic supports.<sup>49</sup> Students are at the center of the whole-child model. The primary outcome of all efforts is ensuring that children and youth are healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged.

### Local Strategies

Each of the five tenets in the Whole Child Toolkit – Healthy, Safe, Engaged, Support, and Challenged – are focus areas that school and district leaders should consider when drafting their school improvement strategies.

District leaders can use available state resources and GaDOE guidance to develop integrated strategies that create safe and supportive learning environments.

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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49 The GaDOE Whole Child Toolkit can be found online at <https://www.georgiainsights.com/wholechild.html>.

Action Steps	
Policy	<p>GaDOE should revise the School Safety Plan Template so that district leaders narrate how efforts related to positive behavioral interventions and supports, school climate initiatives, and expanded mental health services mitigate school safety challenges.</p> <p>School districts should invest in counseling programs and educator professional learning that focuses on how to identify and serve students that have experienced trauma in their family and community.</p> <p>Local leaders should leverage federal funds, especially from the Title IV, Part A program, to create interventions and supports that enable safe and healthy school environments.</p>
Practice	<p>School and community leaders should identify existing assets and determine how to use schools as the hub for accessing these services and supports.</p> <p>School and community leaders should expand access to physical and behavioral health services, whether they are delivered in schools or by referral to community resources.</p>
Partnerships and Public Messaging	<p>Districts should partner with community health and social service agencies and nonprofits to expand access to physical and mental health services and supports.</p> <p>Community leaders should develop a cross-sector plan to deliver training and technical assistance on how to successfully carry out collaborative school-community planning related to safety, public health, and targeted whole-child initiatives.</p> <p>State agency and nonprofit leaders should develop a statewide communications campaign to inform school and district leaders about how the Georgia Mental Health Parity Act<sup>50</sup> supports a unified school and community response to delivering physical and mental health services to students.</p>

<sup>50</sup> The Georgia General Assembly approved the Georgia Mental Health Parity Act during the 2022 Regular Session. The Act requires the Governor's Office of Health Strategy and Coordination to develop solutions to address barriers to mental health services through a cross-agency approach.

# ISSUE

# 7

## School-Community Engagement: Redefining Relationships

### Issue Overview

In March 2020, within two weeks of the pandemic declaration, nearly all US school districts shifted to online-only instruction. By May 2020, all but two states had ended the school year early. In this environment, parents felt overburdened and stressed, teachers were portrayed as superheroes, and students lost valuable instructional time. Research studies have since estimated that the pandemic contributed to lost learning opportunities of about four months in reading and five months in mathematics.<sup>51</sup>

The pandemic also 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 many rancorous school board meetings, and resulted in legislative action during the 2022 session of the Georgia General Assembly.

In this environment, accusations and distrust can create an unnecessary barrier to student success and school improvement. The educator burnout described in Issue 5 of this edition ("Educator Burnout: Creating Conditions for Success") has roiled students, parents, and members of the broader community.

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, described in Issue 1 of this edition ("The EdQuest Georgia Framework: Starting the Journey Toward the North Star"), 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.

The pandemic also allowed school leaders to press the reset button, creating opportunities for school stakeholders — students, educators, parents, and community leaders — to participate in school transformation.

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51 Dorn, E., B. Hancock, J. Sarakatsannis, and E. Viruleg. 2021, July 27. *COVID-19 and Education: The Lingering Effects of Unfinished Learning*. McKinsey. Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-education-the-lingering-effects-of-unfinished-learning>.

This issue brief focuses on how to activate and empower school stakeholders by

- reshaping expectations for how schools and communities operate and cooperate,
- identifying shared goals and objectives, and
- defining roles and responsibilities that contribute to the achievement of shared goals.

### Call to Action

State and district leaders should empower all school stakeholders — educators, students, parents, and community members — to participate in remaking school culture.

By identifying school needs and developing shared priorities, individuals can create a culture more conducive to student success.

State and local 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

### How Can School Leaders Lift Up Student, Educator, and Parent Voices?

Positive school climate promotes accelerated learning, the delivery of integrated services and supports, and opportunities to deepen relationships with parents and community leaders.<sup>52</sup> 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.

#### Empowerment

In a safe and supportive learning environment, all stakeholders feel like they have a voice in how schools operate. School leaders model opportunities for teachers to learn from one another and to engage with parents in a nonjudgmental way. Just as administrators allow educators to identify challenges and take risks, teachers should empower students to serve as agents of their own learning. However, this community engagement model is difficult to execute, especially if school employees do not address the mistrust or misunderstandings that can exist between a school and the community at large.

52 Aspen Institute, Education & Society Program. 2021, March. *School Climate Literature Summary*. Retrieved from <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Aspen-Institute-School-Climate-Literature-Review.pdf>.

### **School and community resilience**

Empowerment is a direct result of reshaping expectations and more rigorously defining the roles that each group plays in the school's health and vitality. State and local strategies should ensure that individuals have the resources that they need to do the job they are being asked to do. For example, community strategies can be used to deliver physical and mental health supports that supplement existing school-based efforts to support students. The recent statewide rollout of the Employee Assistance Program, a step taken to address the findings outlined in the Teacher Burnout report,<sup>53</sup> expands access to mental health, counseling, and financial and legal resources to educators.<sup>54</sup>

### **Relational trust**

Nearly three decades of evidence supports the notion that relational trust is a key asset in supporting culture change and school improvement.<sup>55</sup> Relational trust is built through thousands of daily social exchanges by individuals in a school environment. Disrespect and misapprehension can create low relational trust, which means that individuals are working at cross purposes. When individuals share similar goals and work together to achieve them, these interactions build relational trust. Research points to five factors that reinforce relational trust: the centrality of principal leadership,<sup>56</sup> authentic parent engagement, small school size, stable school communities, and voluntary association.<sup>57</sup>

### **Bringing it all together**

These three topics — empowerment, school and community resilience, and relational trust — have gained greater resonance and visibility within education settings during the pandemic. However, as we exit the heights of the pandemic, school leaders and reform advocates might be inclined to de-emphasize social and emotional efforts to focus on instruction. These strategies are not mutually exclusive; rather, the coexistence of policy structures and culture-change leadership are essential to achieving the North Star goal.

## **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.

53 Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia. 2022, June. *Teacher Burnout in Georgia: Voices from the Classroom*. Georgia Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Documents/Teacher%20Burnout%20Task%20Force%20Report.pdf>.

54 Frick, M. 2022, August 23. GaDOE launches statewide Employee Assistance Program for all public-school teachers and staff [Press release]. GaDOE. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid=987>.

55 Darling-Hammond, L., and J. DePaoli. 2020, May. *Why School Climate Matters and What Can Be Done to Improve It*. National Association of State Boards of Education. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1257654.pdf>.

56 "Centrality of principal leadership" means that school leaders acknowledge student, educator, and parent concerns and avoid decisions that arbitrarily and negatively affect school stakeholders. "Voluntary association" relates to the idea that students, educators, and parents have agency and a certain level of choice when participating in school decision-making.

57 EL Education. n.d. Relational Trust in Schools. Retrieved from <https://eleducation.org/resources/relational-trust-in-schools>.

Action Steps	
Policy	State leaders, in coordination with state professional associations, should develop a statewide principal induction and mentoring model that prepares school leaders to instill positive school culture and engage parents and community leaders in school transformation activities.
Practice	<p>District and school leaders should explore ways to adjust school structures and learning time to address challenges identified by students, educators, and parents.</p> <p>District leaders should reconfigure staffing and job roles to accommodate student and educator needs.</p>
Partnerships and Public Messaging	School leaders should facilitate feedback sessions with building staff and community stakeholders to evaluate whether current strategies contribute to increased student success.

**INVEST IN  
SPREADING  
AND SCALING  
LOCAL  
SOLUTIONS:  
ISSUES 8-10**

# **Spread v,**

**Replicating a program,  
strategy, or initiative  
across multiple schools,  
communities, or regions**

# **Scale Up v,**

**Addressing the barriers  
to successful spread,  
including adapting state  
structures, building local  
capacity, and providing  
incentives for leaders to  
refine their local strategies**

The EdQuest Georgia Framework identifies state policy structures that could support local efforts but are underutilized. Policymakers, especially state agency leaders, should partner with policy and advocacy organizations to identify ways to support the capacity of local practitioners and develop a network of training and technical assistance for school systems and post-secondary institutions. As networking leaders and relationship brokers, policymakers and advocates should spotlight effective practices, aid in their spread and scale, and incorporate them into state strategies, when appropriate.

# ISSUE

# 8

## 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 legislation required that the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) use 20% of the state reserve, about \$85 million, on afterschool and summer activities. In the plan submitted to the US Department of Education in July 2021, GaDOE shared the intention to create a statewide program called the Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time (BOOST) grant.<sup>58</sup> 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.<sup>59</sup>

**The demand for afterschool and summer programs exceeds current capacity.** According to a survey by the Afterschool Alliance, for every child enrolled in an afterschool program in Georgia, two of their peers are on waitlists to enroll.<sup>60</sup> In the same survey, over half of Georgia parents (53%) reported that they would have enrolled their school-aged children in a summer program if one were available in their community.<sup>61</sup>

**Programs vary in purpose, goals, and priorities.** Some afterschool and summer programs administered by local school systems and direct-service nonprofits focus on academic instruction. Other organizations like the Boys & Girls Club focus on social and academic development. Extracurricular programs offered by a diverse set of providers focus on athletics, career development, community service, or personal interests. These programs are delivered by a diverse group of providers, including school systems, community nonprofits, and the faith community, to name a few.

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.

58 Georgia Department of Education. 2021, July 8. *Accelerating Learning, Personalizing Supports, and Promoting Opportunity: Georgia's ARP ESSER State Plan*. Retrieved from <https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/07/Georgia-ARP-ESSER-State-Plan.pdf>.

59 Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network. 2022, August. *The Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time (BOOST) Grants Program [Fact sheet]*. Retrieved from <https://www.afterschoolga.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Afterschool-Boost-Year1-Factsheet-v7.pdf>.

60 Afterschool Alliance. 2020, December. *Georgia After 3 PM*. Retrieved from <http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/AA3PM-2020/GA-AA3PM-2020-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

61 Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network. 2022, March. *Summer Learning in Georgia*. Retrieved from <https://www.afterschoolga.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/SummerLearningGA-FactSheetv6.pdf>.



### Call to Action

State leaders should leverage the GSAN/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?

*Develop a statewide strategy based on the infrastructure created to support the BOOST program.*

The BOOST grant has increased annual state and federal investment in afterschool and summer learning by 84%.<sup>62</sup> The request for proposals sent out to prospective grantees included three priorities:

1. Expand access to serve more youth, with an emphasis on children and communities most impacted by the pandemic.
2. Reduce barriers to participation to ensure access for all.
3. Increase programmatic quality and expand or enhance the supports and services offered.<sup>63</sup>

During the program's first funded year, 2021, the state awarded \$27 million to support 101 grantees. The program funded 97 community-based and four state-level organizations that collectively serve over 160,000 youth annually. Over 71% of grantees operate on a year-round schedule. Using funds reserved for state technical assistance, GSAN provides tiered support based on grantees' needs, ranging from delivering on-demand resources and live trainings, to providing more small-group coaching and customized support. The tiered supports target four areas of high-quality operations: fiscal administration, quality measurement, programming, and provider leadership.

**State leaders should consider how to maintain these systems of training and technical assistance after federal funds lapse.**

*Make use of available evidence to demonstrate need and impact.*

As part of the BOOST grant contract with GaDOE, GSAN will commission three studies to document how state infrastructure created by the grant program has contributed to high-quality programming and provider outcomes. The first report will focus on program implementation, describing how training and technical assistance contributed to the identification, execution, and spread of best practices. The report will also highlight program success stories and narrate opportunities for state and local leaders to sustain extended learning opportunities.

<sup>62</sup> The Partnership calculated the percentage increase in state and federal funding with the BOOST add-on.

<sup>63</sup> Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network. 2021, August 11. Building Opportunities for Out-of-School Time (BOOST) Grants Request for Proposals. Retrieved from <https://www.afterschoolga.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Updated-RFP.pdf>.

An outcomes study will evaluate the degree to which grantees achieved the outcomes outlined in their program plans. Specific areas of inquiry include addressing unfinished learning and improving the well-being of the children and youth participating in programs.

The final report, a systems study, will focus on grantee oversight, grant administration, and long-term program sustainability. This report will situate the BOOST program in the state's current out-of-school ecosystem.

**State leaders should leverage data and evidence to determine how to best serve current and prospective afterschool and summer learning providers.**

***Blend sources of funding to create a more robust network of school and community providers.***

More than one-third of Georgia counties (36%) do not have publicly funded afterschool and summer learning programs. Most pledged funds for extended learning programs come from federal sources and parent fees.

The Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, also known as Title IV, Part B, is a federal program that allows school systems to operate centers before and after school and during summer. For the 2022 school year, GaDOE awarded Title IV, Part B funds to 42 school systems in Georgia through a competitive grant process.<sup>64</sup>

Other sources of federal funding include the Child Care and Development Fund, which subsidizes the cost of afterschool and summer learning for low-income families, and the Title I, Part A and Title IV, Part A programs. School systems can use Title I and Title IV, Part A funding to support out-of-school opportunities if leaders demonstrate the link between these strategies and improved student performance.

**District and community leaders should use all available sources of funding to support high-quality programs. State leaders should consider how to add supplemental funds to ensure expanded access, especially for children living in poverty and youth in underserved areas.**

## 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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<sup>64</sup> Georgia Department of Education n.d. Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers: 2022–2023 Programs. Retrieved from [https://shealy-my.sharepoint.com/personal/kevin\\_wilson\\_doe\\_k12\\_ga\\_us/Documents/FY23%2021st%20CCLC%20Subgrantee%20List.pdf](https://shealy-my.sharepoint.com/personal/kevin_wilson_doe_k12_ga_us/Documents/FY23%2021st%20CCLC%20Subgrantee%20List.pdf).

## Action Steps

### State Policy

State leaders should increase their investment in afterschool and summer learning programs to supplement funding from federal sources. State leaders should integrate funding for these strategies within mainstream K-12 investments.

State leaders should leverage the BOOST program framework to create a statewide funding, governance, quality, and accountability strategy for afterschool and summer learning providers.

### Local Policy and Practice

School system leaders and community providers should leverage varied federal funding sources to create or expand out-of-school opportunities.

State leaders should use the research findings and lesson learned from the BOOST grant program to develop a system of technical assistance and support for local providers, especially after one-time federal funds lapse.

### Partnerships and Public Messaging

State leaders should convene a study committee to create a statewide out-of-school framework, as recommended by GSAN. Specifically, the committee should conduct a landscape scan and gap analysis, both of which identify the factors that serve as barriers to opening publicly funded centers in counties where they do not exist.

# ISSUE

# 9

## Local Leadership: A Blueprint for Reconfiguring State Strategies

### Issue Overview

Local school systems, county commissions, and regional health agencies have received billions of dollars in federal pandemic relief funds to scale current development efforts and address education and public health barriers that limit economic opportunity.

Issue 10 in the *Top Ten Issues to Watch in 2022*, “Rural Transformation – From the Inside Out,” focused on how local communities can create strong birth-to-work strategies and use pandemic relief funds to create cooperative initiatives to achieve shared education and economic growth goals.

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.

This issue focuses on two community-centered approaches that state systems and structures should spotlight when supporting local leaders: (1) multigeneration strategies and (2) joint education, economic, and workforce development initiatives.

### Call to Action

The EdQuest Georgia Framework<sup>65</sup> champions local strategies that prioritize people over sector-based considerations and limitations.

Often, state agencies model their systems and structures based on financial or administrative requirements. State leaders should reshape programs and strategies based on the needs of affected populations.

The primary goal is to increase community resilience, which is the ability of local areas to use available assets to respond to adversities, including neighborhood poverty, food insecurity, lack of affordable housing, and economic stagnation.

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

### What Can State Leaders Learn from Local Community Initiatives?

#### *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. Ascend, an Aspen Institute initiative, outlines six components of multigenerational strategies:

1. Social capital
2. Health (physical, mental, behavioral)
3. Economic assets
4. Early childhood education
5. K-12 education
6. Post-secondary and employment pathways<sup>66</sup>

In most cases, multigenerational, or 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.

<sup>65</sup> See Issue 1 of this edition of the Top Ten, "The EdQuest Georgia Framework: Starting the Journey Toward the North Star."

<sup>66</sup> Aspen Institute. n.d. The 2Gen Approach. Retrieved from <https://ascend.aspeninstitute.org/2gen-approach/>.

The foundations for whole-family strategies exists in state and local policy. In fact, federal and state funds support several of the programs implemented by communities, including those listed below.

Education	Public Health	Family Supports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Literacy and English as a second language instruction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Periodic health screenings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Childcare subsidies</li> <li>■ Evidence-based home visitation</li> <li>■ Supplemental nutrition services</li> <li>■ Affordable housing</li> </ul>

### **Whole-community strategies**

Often, economic and workforce development efforts focus on upskilling — providing workers with additional skills — or technical training in response to local employer needs. These efforts improve personal well-being and contribute to greater economic output. Local leaders can and should align education and economic development strategies to increase community resilience and vitality.

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.

Together, these two approaches allow local communities to execute interrelated strategies across the birth-to-work continuum, leveraging resources in new and different ways. For example, recent statewide investments in school-based health centers, the clarification of Medicaid billing requirements for school systems, and the nascent coordination of mental health agencies and providers in Georgia all herald a new generation of leaders working across sectors to provide services based on a people-centered approach.

### **Barriers to scaling people-centered programs and strategies**

The EdQuest Georgia Coalition identified three barriers to scaling whole-family and whole-community strategies across the state.

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

State leaders can address these barriers by endorsing cross-sector initiatives. Comprehensive strategies can support community transformation without changing the funding, governance, and accountability assumptions that underlie each sector. Different sectors — education, public health, housing, and social services, to name a few — can restructure state systems to concentrate efforts. Unifying around simple yet powerful public messages can help communities understand the purpose behind comprehensive strategies and inform residents about services and supports that they did not know were available.

Local leaders can increase community support and adoption by ensuring that systems and supports are not reliant on one leader or a small group of leaders. The strength of a comprehensive strategy is that it is sustained even when one sector or group experiences a decline in funding or loss in leadership.

### 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.

While state agencies are poised to provide significant training and technical assistance to communities, to be sustainable, the solutions must be developed, implemented, and executed by local leaders.

Action Steps	
Policy	State leaders should support efforts to evaluate the success of local initiatives and determine what strategies are worth scaling and what structures are most suitable for supporting local innovation.
Practice	Community leaders and advocates should explore opportunities to improve community education and workforce outcomes by focusing on barriers, such as lack of access to health care, affordable housing, and transportation.
Partnerships and Public Messaging	<p>The state nonprofit and advocacy community should develop a population-focused initiative that brings together disparate strategies and interventions to support family and community resilience, like the statewide child development plan outlined in Issue 2 of the current edition, “Early Childhood Supports: Toward a Seamless State Child Development Strategy.”</p> <p>State policymakers should encourage community and workforce partners to become directly involved in the development of content, curricula, and work-based learning opportunities, such as internships, externships, apprenticeships, and other cooperative opportunities.</p>

# ISSUE

# 10

## Funding & Accountability: Two Sides of the Same Coin

### Issue Overview

Georgia's school systems have received nearly \$6 billion in federal pandemic relief funds since March 2020. District leaders enjoy significant flexibility to use the funds to meet student, school, and community needs.

With funding from the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE), the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (Georgia Partnership) is conducting a multi-year study to capture local school districts' use of these federal funds. In January 2022, the Georgia Partnership released the first of a series of reports called the CARES Impact Study Baseline Report,<sup>67</sup> which documented preliminary information about how local school districts planned to spend their federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds and address emerging student needs. A second report, released in November 2022, the CARES Impact Study Year-One Report, shared findings from a statewide superintendents' survey and interviews with school system leaders. During 2022, the Georgia Partnership also reconvened the EdQuest Georgia Coalition, a group of state agency and nonprofit leaders committed to a framework for strengthening Georgia's education system. The Georgia Partnership asked the coalition to develop goals, identify power strategies, and offer policy recommendations on a variety of subjects, including funding and accountability.

Discussions with local leaders through these two state engagement efforts generated insights and lessons learned that state leaders can use to rethink finance and accountability strategies in this era of unprecedented challenges.

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 and responsibility because the focus is on accomplishing narrow objectives, not achieving cross-sector outcomes that address all the factors that affect individual well-being. A people-centered approach, in contrast, requires more significant coordination and alignment between systems but does not mandate consolidated funding, governance, or accountability.

People-centered strategies are advantageous because they ensure shared goals, clear objectives, and transparent outcomes. This issue highlights local efforts to support more effective resource allocation and community-driven accountability.

<sup>67</sup> Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. 2022, January. *2022 CARES Impact Study Baseline Report*. Retrieved from <https://gpee.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/CARES-Impact-Study-Baseline-Report-Final.pdf>.



### 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

School systems received pandemic relief funds through the ESSER grant program. During the first 15 months of the program, March 2020 to June 2021, districts operated in crisis mode, focusing on providing safe and healthy learning environments, often outside of the schoolhouse. Since then, school systems have shifted to recovery, focusing on accelerating student learning, creating more positive working conditions for educators, and addressing students' nonacademic needs.

The CARES Impact Study Year One Report, released in November 2022, identified the following three finance-related needs for school districts:

1. Ensuring districts have enough qualified staff to accelerate learning and foster positive student well-being,
2. Exploring revisions to school staffing models and state support for certified staff in schools, and
3. Exploring revisions to Georgia's state K-12 funding mechanism, the QBE formula.<sup>68</sup>

**State and local leaders should focus on how to leverage ESSER funds to ensure the continuation of practices that accelerate student learning and alleviate nonacademic learning barriers.**

District leaders who participated in interviews and surveys for the Year One report elevated six themes, two of which are particularly relevant in the context of resetting finance and accountability structures to meet student and school needs: a systems approach and commitment to sustainability.<sup>69</sup> In the rush to deal with multiple crises, local leaders identified immediate challenges and created initiatives to address them. As districts exited crisis and entered recovery, they shifted their focus and began exploring how developing systems-focused approaches helped them use funds more efficiently and effectively to meet their districts' long-term goals.

Local district decisions about deploying their ESSER funds have been influenced by several components of the state's education funding formula, which desperately needs to be modernized. Georgia's primary mechanism for funding public schools, the QBE formula, was created in 1985. Though tweaks have been made to the QBE formula since then, it has not been revised to reflect current student and school system needs or state priorities. This has led to gaps in resources available to local districts, which in turn, affects how they will deploy resources after ESSER funds expire.

<sup>68</sup> Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. 2022, November. *2022 CARES Impact Study Year-One Report*. Retrieved from <https://gpee.wpenignepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/CARES-Impact-Study-Year-One-Report-Final.pdf>.

<sup>69</sup> The six themes were systems approach, commitment to sustainability, variations in evaluation capacity, limitations on a shared vision, focus on communication, and uncertainty in implementation.

**State leaders should modernize state funding for school staffing, student transportation, and school counseling to reflect the concerns surfaced by district superintendents and described within the CARES Impact Study Year One Report.**

### Accountability

The primary role of an accountability system is to inform school and neighborhood stakeholders — students, teachers, parents, and community leaders — about efforts to ensure all students succeed. As school systems continue to use ESSER funds to reform how they deliver instruction, Georgia leaders should review lessons learned during the pandemic to create a school accountability system that recognizes and rewards school systems that expand access to high-quality educational opportunities for all students.

While accountability tools promote transparency and communicate areas in which schools are meeting or not meeting expectations, the information generated by current tools like the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) is often difficult to leverage as a reform tool for school and community stakeholders. For example, district and school leaders do not receive technical support to interpret the results to improve their programs and strategies or training on how to communicate results to parents and community members.

Instead, districts should create opportunities for students, parents, and community leaders to co-author school improvement plans. Educators would facilitate a four-step process:

- Identify shared interests
- Develop shared goals
- Execute shared strategies
- Review progress and make changes, as needed.

Lessons learned from locally driven accountability conversations could result in a state accountability framework that produces actionable insights and allows all school stakeholders to use the results to assess progress toward school goals.

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.”<sup>70</sup>

**GaDOE should fulfill this vision by building upon community-based school improvement efforts while maintaining rigorous state metrics of college and career readiness, which are 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.

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<sup>70</sup> Georgia Department of Education. n.d. *A Roadmap to Reimagining K-12 Education*. Retrieved from [https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Documents/A\\_Roadmap\\_to\\_Reimagining\\_K-12\\_Education.pdf](https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Documents/A_Roadmap_to_Reimagining_K-12_Education.pdf).

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.

Action Steps	
Policy	<p>GaDOE should convene a group of students, educators, parents, and public- and private-sector representatives to draft a new state K-12 accountability framework. The framework should include state metrics and district-determined measures.</p> <p>State leaders should consider how to address the finance challenges surfaced in the CARES Impact Study Year One Report related to school staffing ratios and increasing funding for student transportation and school counselors, psychologists, and social workers.</p>
Practice	<p>State leaders should identify the organizations that could collaborate to provide technical support in interpreting accountability results and consulting with districts to jump-start the school improvement and planning process.</p> <p>District and school leaders should consider how to involve classroom educators in school governance and accountability efforts, in alignment with the recommendations outlined in the <i>Teacher Burnout Report</i> described in Issue 5, “Educator Burnout: Creating Conditions for Success.”<sup>71</sup></p> <p>District leaders should consider the benefits of participating in the Consolidation of Funds initiative, a program that enables school systems to combine all funding sources.<sup>72</sup> The process is particularly beneficial because expenditures are not limited by federal requirements for individual Title programs.</p>
Partnerships and Public Messaging	<p>District leaders should partner with local stakeholders to update strategic plans, incorporating the lessons learned during the pandemic era.</p>

71 Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia. 2022, June. *Teacher Burnout in Georgia: Voices from the Classroom*. Georgia Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Documents/Teacher%20Burnout%20Task%20Force%20Report.pdf>.

72 Georgia Department of Education. 2022. Consolidation of Funds. Retrieved from [http://www.gadoe.org/School-Improvement/Federal-Programs/Pages/consolidation\\_of\\_funds.aspx](http://www.gadoe.org/School-Improvement/Federal-Programs/Pages/consolidation_of_funds.aspx).



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