

Priority: Coordinated and Aligned Funding

Develop a statewide finance model that assures greater continuity of service and support as Georgians move from one education milestone to another.

Policy Context

State policymakers have developed a strong early-learning infrastructure in Georgia over the last 30 years, anchored by Georgia’s Pre-K Program. The program has provided pre-kindergarten to over 1.87 million of Georgia’s four-year-olds.

Bolstered by state revenue surpluses, the Georgia General Assembly fully funded the K-12 Quality Basic Education (QBE) formula for the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years. Legislators also funded HOPE scholarships and grants at 100% in FY 2024 – the first time in over a decade.

Between 2020 and 2021, Georgia also received significant federal funds – \$2 billion for early learning, \$6 billion for K-12 education, and \$1.4 billion for post-secondary education – to stabilize systems disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

With federal pandemic-relief funding ending in September 2024, state and local leaders must focus on how to continue the practices aimed at accelerating student learning, protecting student well-being, and removing non-academic learning barriers.

The state treasury projects a \$5 billion surplus for use in FY 2025 budgeting. The surprise surplus could help protect current investments in early learning, K-12 education, and post-secondary and workforce training, while empowering state leaders to explore how to increase cross-sector coordination of priorities and investment.

Key Outcomes

Revise K-12 and post-secondary education formula funding to reflect state educational, economic and workforce development priorities.

Increase state investments in early care and learning to improve school readiness and close opportunity gaps.

EdQuest Framework

Adequate and Equitable Funding

Foundations for Learning

Clear Pathways to Post-Secondary Success

Power Strategies		
Early Care and Learning	K-12 Education	Post-Secondary Education
Allocation of additional resources to provide high-quality school readiness programs for infants and toddlers.	Revision of the Quality Basic Education formula to address the effects of poverty on educational outcomes and emerging district needs, such as transportation, counseling, school safety, and physical and mental health supports.	Redesign of financial aid strategies to ensure programs are student-centered, goal-driven, timely and flexible, and available to all students, regardless of the chosen post-secondary pathway.

Getting Started: Focusing on Quick Wins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ State leaders should convene a working group to determine how current early learning investments develop a statewide framework that describes how new state investments align and support a comprehensive education and health strategy for children aged zero to eight, based on a cost assessment and accounting for increasing costs over time. ➤ State policy and advocacy organizations should explore how to fund student support strategies and wraparound services and address the higher costs of teaching students living in poverty, either through the QBE formula or another funding mechanism. ➤ State policymakers should charge post-secondary leaders and advocates with recommending a new framework for funding post-secondary education. Currently, the state funds institutions based on student enrollment and square footage. A model that rewards institutions for persistence and completion efforts, especially among underserved populations, could reinforce efforts to reach the North Star goal.

Sustaining Momentum Through 2033

Progress Metrics

Each of the priorities presented in the EdQuest State Policy Plan includes at least one outcome measure and a set of metrics that help state and community leaders know whether they are making progress. This profile includes a non-exhaustive list of measures that help policymakers track returns on state investments.

- Percent children attending preschool, age 3-4
- Percent enrollment in Georgia Pre-K – total and from low-income families
- Third grade reading proficiency
- High school graduation rates
- Labor force participation rates
- High school diploma and post-secondary credential attainment
- Percentage of children and adults with health insurance
- Percent of food-secure residents
- Percent of residents not living in poverty

State Leadership

State leaders can support coordinated and aligned funding in several ways including:

- Considering how to leverage current education funding to support innovative, community-based strategies that accelerate educational opportunity and economic mobility.
- Investing in multi-generation strategies: joint early learning and workforce development strategies that address barriers to learning and employment at opposite sides of the lifelong continuum.

Building a Strong Foundation

State strengths and assets

Georgia Pre-K program [\$400 million in FY (Fiscal Year) 2024]

Fully funded Quality Basic Education Formula in FY 2023 and FY 2024

HOPE Scholarship and Grant programs [\$1.07 billion in FY 2024]

Improving on current policy and practice

State leaders should protect existing investments by increasing coordination and alignment of funding priorities across the early learning, K-12, and post-secondary and workforce sectors.

A comprehensive funding strategy will bring coherence to a fragmented ecosystem in which goals, priorities, and strategies are often unaligned.

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 people-centered approaches.

Alignment with the North Star goal of 65% post-secondary attainment

Research supports the idea that increasing education funding for effective strategies and interventions aligned with education priorities improves educational achievement. Meaning, in addition to the amount of money, what state and local governments spend money on also matters.

For instance, based on local needs and priorities, some Georgia districts have used federal pandemic-relief funds for non-direct instructional purposes, such as renovating school facilities and covering school transportation costs. Other districts have hired school interventionists to support student learning gains. Both types of expenditures affect student performance, just in different ways.

Establishing funding amounts and determining effective uses are important strategic considerations. State leaders can accelerate the closing of opportunity and resource gaps by ensuring that current finance strategies more closely align with policies and practices that support educational attainment.