



EdQuest Georgia  
**2023 State Policy Plan**  
*Executive Summary*  
August 2023



Georgia Partnership  
FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION



## Introduction — Calling for Change

### *The Challenge*

Georgia faces a serious challenge in meeting its workforce needs by 2030.

*“If state and business leaders do not act, 1.5 million workers and their children could be unemployable or stuck in low-wage jobs: an endless cycle of poverty.”<sup>1</sup>*

This is according to research conducted by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) in 2019 on Georgia’s 2030 economic outlook. The study concluded that the impact of automation and the changing economy, coupled with the current education level of the state’s population, would leave approximately 1.5 million more Georgia workers not just unemployed, but unemployable. Across Georgia, more residents will earn incomes below the poverty level and draw more heavily on state health and human services.<sup>2</sup>

In a follow-up report released in November 2020, SREB updated their estimate: because of the pandemic and the corporate sector’s accelerated investments in automation and artificial intelligence, approximately 2 million workers, or 45% of the state’s workforce, were now at risk for unemployment or underemployment by 2025.<sup>3</sup>

This trend is playing out in Georgia’s post-pandemic economic recovery. For instance, the state has seen four years of overall economic growth between 2019 and 2022, adding over 165,000 jobs and \$51 billion in real GDP growth. However, the shortage of qualified candidates for employment threatens this growth and endangers future opportunity for individual Georgians. In 2023, it was estimated that 3.2 million employment-eligible Georgians were not working.<sup>4</sup> While Georgia’s unemployment rates returned to pre-pandemic levels by the 4th quarter of 2022, labor market participation rates in mid-2023 were still lower than they were in January 2020, with the state reporting a workforce shortage of 230,000 in 2023.<sup>5</sup>

By transforming some positions and eliminating others altogether, rapid advances in automation and changes in global economic trends have increasingly displaced adults with no degree or credential beyond a high school diploma. In fact, most new jobs — especially ones that pay well — will require education and training beyond high school. Currently, roughly four in ten Georgians (42.4%) have earned at least an associate degree, and another 10.4% of Georgians has earned non-degree credentials like certificates, certifications, and occupational licenses. While attainment rates have increased significantly over the last 15 years, only 52.8% of residents have earned degrees and credentials — 12.2% short of the 10-year, 65% target needed to maintain Georgia’s economic growth and global competitiveness.

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

2 Ibid.

3 Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). (2020, Nov.) *The Pandemic’s Dual Threat for Vulnerable Workers – Accelerated automation and post-pandemic impacts could displace millions*. Retrieved from: [https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/pandemic\\_brief.pdf?1609858659](https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/pandemic_brief.pdf?1609858659)

4 Georgia Chamber of Commerce. (2023, July). *The New Georgia Economy – 2023 War for Talent*. Presentation at the Georgia Chamber of Commerce Rural Prosperity Conference.

5 Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (n.d.). “Labor Force Participation Rate for Georgia.” Retrieved from <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/LBSSA13>.

## *The Opportunity*

The past few years have been like no others. While it appears that in 2023 we are emerging from the pandemic and Georgia's economic recovery is strong, we still face 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 while simultaneously addressing the needs of students and their families, including the persistent, and sometime worsening, achievement disparities across income levels and between white students and students of color.

Public education systems are also facing increased social and political polarization that distracts from core issues of teaching and learning and discourages nuanced and substantive dialogue about what strategies will propel the state forward. What is needed now is unity: a common vision for excellence that rises above the divisive rhetoric. We need a vision that allows Georgia 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.

In this context, the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (the Georgia Partnership) calls on state policymakers, education leaders, the business community and other stakeholders to unite around a common **North Star Goal – ensuring that 65% of Georgians aged 25 to 64 have earned post-secondary credentials of value by 2033**. By aligning education policy and workforce development policies, this singular goal should motivate and inspire collective action while also promoting personal well-being, community resilience, and state economic security.

### *EdQuest Georgia - 2023*

The Georgia Partnership is working with state policymakers, education leaders, advocates, and the business sector to reach the North Star. In 10 years, Georgia will need to increase postsecondary attainment rates by about 12.2% to achieve the North Star goal and keep up with the state's economic growth demands. While an annual increase of 1% attainment is feasible, two factors make achieving the goal more difficult: 1) a generation of skilled and credentialed workers reaching retirement age; and 2) a growing share of the youth population lacking access to high-quality educational opportunities.

Throughout 2022, working with a coalition of state agency and nonprofit, business, and local leaders, the Georgia Partnership took the first step toward developing a state plan by revising the original *2017 EdQuest Georgia Framework*. The original framework was based on researched policies and practices that high-performing states, countries, and school systems shared and created a state-level policy blueprint to ensure that those same policies that enable and accelerate strong public education are in place in Georgia. The 2017 framework identified seven core areas integral to maintaining high-quality state education and workforce systems.

Building on the foundation laid in 2017, *EdQuest Georgia 2023* is a multifaceted strategy (a framework and a state plan) designed to strengthen Georgia's education system and workforce pipeline. First, the EdQuest Framework is the overall map for the next 10 years about what should be done. Second, the EdQuest State Policy Plan is an implementation guide for the next two years (2023-2025), prioritizing 'must dos' to move the overall framework forward.

Building on Georgia’s existing strengths and assets, EdQuest Georgia aims to inform, engage, and mobilize stakeholders – particularly in the education, business, philanthropic, and policy-making communities – to work together to support innovative and evidence-based educational reform, from early learning through adults, to achieve the North Star goal.

### ***EdQuest Georgia 2023 – Framework***

The 2023 EdQuest Georgia Framework includes seven core policy areas that, when fully implemented and working together, produce optimum outcomes for students. It prioritizes rebuilding systems and improving the capacity of individuals and organizations to support innovation.

1. ***Foundations for learning***, promoting child development and family well-being through integrated early education, health, and family supports.
2. ***Quality teaching***, supporting the educator workforce by prioritizing professional growth and career advancement strategies.
3. ***Quality leadership***, identifying, recruiting, and retaining highly effective leaders within schools and those outside the school building, such as district and school board leaders.
4. ***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.
5. ***Advanced instructional systems***, maintaining rigorous instructional standards, accelerated learning for all students, and accountability systems that support school and district improvement.
6. ***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.
7. ***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 Georgia Partnership, in collaboration with the EdQuest Coalition, produced one-page summaries for each of the seven core areas. Each summary includes the following elements:

- Big Bet for 2033: a vision and strategy for how to move the work forward. The big bets outlined in the 2023 EdQuest Georgia Framework require all stakeholders in the ecosystem to work together to reconfigure structures, systems, and investments.
- Power Strategies: high-impact activities that directly contribute to the attainment of the Big Bet
- Concrete and actionable recommendations for how state and community leaders can get involved.



The seven core policy areas of the EdQuest Framework work together to elevate students and promote their academic and social achievement – like interlocking gears moving the system forward. States, nations, and systems with the greatest success view all seven core areas as a coherent system. The framework identifies opportunities to protect great work already underway and recommendations for adapting existing strategies to accelerate momentum toward leading the nation in education opportunity and economic growth. These opportunities are the action steps that should be taken to improve or sustain success in each core area of education policy in Georgia. See **Appendix A** for the full *2023 EdQuest Georgia Framework*.

## **EdQuest Georgia – 2023 State Policy Plan**

Taken together, the full EdQuest Framework includes over 20 power strategies to examine and work through over the next 10 years. Which begs the question: Where do we start?

In support of the 10-year framework, the *EdQuest Georgia State Policy Plan* provides deeper analysis and implementation recommendations around current “to do” priorities to move the overall state framework forward. The plan identifies eight priorities that state and community leaders should consider over the next two years to move closer to 65% post-secondary attainment. As an implementation document, the state plan provides concrete action steps that leaders can take to accelerate progress toward the North Star. Each priority describes the current policy landscape, sets a specific 2033 goal, and suggests a mix of immediate and long-term activities that will contribute to the successful achievement of the given priority.

The State Policy Plan prioritizes immediate action steps for state and community-based efforts that will help Georgia reach the North Star goal. As an action-oriented plan, the state policy plan will serve as a launchpad for mobilizing stakeholders, enabling them to act in common purpose and shared responsibility.

What follows in this report are details of the 2023–2025 State Policy Priorities.

- Comprehensive Birth to Eight Strategy
- Innovative Instruction and Accountability
- Post-Secondary and Workforce Readiness
- Coordinated and Aligned Funding
- Educator Recruitment and Preparation
- Civic and Corporate Engagement
- Afterschool and Summer Learning
- Safe and Supportive Learning Environments

## ***Conclusion***

Considering Georgia’s changing demographics, shifting workforce demands, and current education achievement levels, the question remains for state leaders: “Will there be enough skilled workers to meet Georgia’s workforce needs by 2033?”<sup>6</sup> Without a coordinated plan and a thorough appraisal of the effectiveness of current investments, the answer is likely “no.” However, we are hopeful because the state already has significant policy assets and structural advantages that if better leveraged could jump start education and workforce efforts.

The 2023-2025 EdQuest Georgia State Policy Plan, then, is an implementation plan for how to overcome Georgia’s challenges and move this work forward. The priorities and key outcomes outlined in the plan are based on the recommendations provided in the Framework and build on current state strengths, strategies, and investments. Lasting impact for change is forged through a community-centered approach and innovations at the local level to meet local and regional education and workforce needs. EdQuest Georgia 2023 provides a state policy framework and plan that supports effective community approaches and sustained state educational and economic growth.

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<sup>6</sup> National Skills Coalition. (2016). *Georgia’s Forgotten Middle - Middle-Skill Jobs State by State*. Washington, DC: National Skills Coalition





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Charting Educational Reform