CREATING COMMUNITY, BUILDING SKILLS, & BOOSTING THE TEACHER PIPELINE: HOW THREE DISTRICTS SUPPORT EDUCATORS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Georgia faces a teacher shortage, a challenge shared by states across the nation. In fall 2024, 6,700 individuals taught in Georgia's public schools with a waiver or provisional certificate. While these educators receive professional learning and guidance from mentors during the school year, they are not fully trained to provide effective instruction or classroom management when entering the classroom on day one. The state needs more people to become fully qualified teachers, and it needs more teachers to stay in the profession.

The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (Georgia Partnership) sought to understand how districts are supporting educators and improving their recruitment and retention. The Georgia Partnership produced a case study that explores how three districts—Lumpkin County Schools, Rockdale County Schools, and Tattnall County Schools— have addressed these goals. The case study is part of the CARES Impact Study, a multi-year project funded by the Georgia Department of Education that examines how districts are assisting students and educators in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Teachers are the most important in-school factor in student success. Students understand new ideas, learn to read, and apply new skills because of the complex work teachers do in classrooms every day. Educators in the featured communities describe teaching as deeply rewarding, and teachers in Georgia report higher morale than their peers across the nation.[1] However, only 21% of Georgia teachers would recommend a career in education.[2] The number of individuals completing teacher preparation programs in Georgia has declined by about 24% since 2014. Many new teachers view teaching as one of multiple

1 Kurtz, H. & Baker, L. (2025, March 5). What teacher morale looks like in every state." EducationWeek, 44(15).
2 Professional Association of Georgia Educators. (2024). Views from the Schoolhouse: Georgia Educator Workforce Insights. https://www.pagelegislative.org/_files/ugd/bd220f_4075e72b3b824ef9a10b6b90e2ee8225.pdfhttps://www.pagelegislative.org/_files/ugd/bd220f_4075e72b3b824ef9a10b6b90e2ee8225.pdf

jobs they could do during their professional lives, not as a 25+ year career according to education leaders. School and district leaders have also found that many new teachers who enter the profession through alternative preparation programs need higher levels of support during their first few years than those who complete traditional preparation programs. These and other issues within the educational landscape heighten the need for robust strategies to attract and retain skilled teachers.

The Georgia Partnership visited educators in Lumpkin County Schools and Tattnall County Schools and conducted virtual interviews with educators in Rockdale County Schools to learn about their approaches to educator recruitment and retention. Each district uses multiple strategies to support educators across their careers, including the following:

Lumpkin County: Established a comprehensive three-year teacher induction program that matches each new teacher with a mentor coach and provides differentiated learning activities and support to them.

Rockdale County: Implemented a framework of intensive support for new teachers and mentors at high-attrition schools, which supplements the district's teacher induction program.

Tattnall County: Built a teacher apprentice program for high school students and formed a network to encourage and provide support for paraprofessionals pursuing certification.

While the districts' recruitment and retention strategies are distinct, they share four attributes:

1. **Committed leadership**. In each district, superintendents prioritized a skilled and stable workforce. Superintendents reinforced the importance of this goal through visible actions, such as substituting for new teachers so they could participate in induction activities or regularly meeting with teachers in each school to encourage open dialogue.
2. **Investment in early-career teachers**. Supporting new teachers is a focus for these

districts. Each school system matches new educators with veteran mentor teachers and provides additional support to help them address the challenges they encounter in the classroom.

3. **Intentional design and iterative implementation**. District leaders designed recruitment and retention strategies. They adapted their programs and practices based on educator feedback and emerging needs.
4. **Relationship-driven recruitment and retention strategies**. Educators across these districts—from the classroom to central office—believe that cultivating caring professional relationships is essential to the success of their recruitment and retention strategies and to foster a supportive climate for educators.

The districts' strategies are making a difference. In Lumpkin County Schools, the annual retention rate among new teachers is typically about 95%. Rockdale County Schools has seen significant improvement in teacher retention rates at schools receiving supplemental induction support. In Tattnall County Schools, about 20% of the district's certified teachers are former paraprofessionals, which includes former students who participated in the district's apprentice program, and nearly 30% of current paraprofessionals are in certification programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As district and state leaders explore how to improve educator recruitment and retention, they can look to the approaches these three districts have taken for guidance. Policymakers can also take specific steps to enhance the work of these districts, help more people become educators, and enable districts across Georgia to undertake similar initiatives.

1. **Remove financial barriers to entering the teaching profession**. Becoming a teacher is expensive, and the high cost can deter people from entering the field or contribute to their decisions to leave it. State lawmakers can reduce financial barriers by:
    a. Sustain and expand teacher apprenticeship programs for high school students and paraprofessionals
    b. Provide stipends to offset the financial costs of student teaching, a full-time but

unpaid job

c. Restore and update the HOPE Promise Scholarship and the Teacher Scholarship programs, which provided service cancellable loans for teacher candidates, and the Hope Promise II Scholarship for paraprofessionals enrolled in teacher certification programs

2. **Provide dedicated funding for teacher induction**. New teachers who receive comprehensive mentoring and induction supports are more likely to remain in the profession.[3] The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) created the Certified Teacher Induction Program, which provides a comprehensive framework for a three-year induction program that districts can use to develop their own induction programs. However, the state does not fund induction programs, and not all districts offer them. State lawmakers can help fill this gap by providing grants to districts for mentors and other induction-specific activities.
3. **Institute a comprehensive annual report on Georgia's educator workforce**. Multiple state agencies collect data on Georgia's educator workforce, but the data is not compiled in a single easily accessible location. The GaDOE provides valuable educator workforce data through its Teacher and Leader dashboards. The Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) also offers helpful information about educators through its Teacher and Leader Workforce Reports. However, there are gaps in the data that make it difficult to identify and understand specific challenges within the educator workforce, such as retention data based on years of experience or school poverty rates. These data also lack information on shortages and vacancy rates which may vary by subject area, geography, district demographics, educator experience, and other factors. Lawmakers should require an annual educator workforce report and an aligned dashboard that integrates existing workforce data and is expanded to incorporate data from all state agencies that have a role in the educator pipeline. This would allow state and local policymakers and stakeholders to make more informed decisions to improve educator recruitment and retention.

3 Ingersoll, R., & Smith, T. M. (2004). Do Teacher Induction and Mentoring Matter?. https://repository.upenn.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/1968ac1e-3b17-488f-adae-51a03125b7d6/content