

S **DISTRICT**
E **CASE**
R **STUDY**

A

**CREATING COMMUNITY,
BUILDING SKILLS, &
C** **BOOSTING THE TEACHER
PIPELINE**

PREPARED BY

The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education



TABLE OF CONTENTS

President's Letter 3

Creating Community, Building Skills, & Boosting the Teacher Pipeline: 4

Recommendations 6

Methodology 8

Educator Workforce Landscape 9

Lumpkin County Schools 13

Rockdale County Schools 21

Tattnall County Schools 27

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Between March 2020 and March 2021, Georgia was awarded \$6.6 billion from the federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund to operate schools safely during the Covid-19 pandemic and address students' academic and non-academic needs. The Georgia State Board of Education distributed 90% of these dollars (\$5.9 billion) to local school districts and state-approved charter schools – also called local education agencies or LEAs. These LEAs received significant flexibility to use ESSER funds to help mitigate the adverse impacts of the global pandemic, accelerate learning, and improve student well-being.

In August 2021, the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (Georgia Partnership) launched the CARES Impact Study, a multi-year research project designed to 1) understand how LEAs used ESSER funds; 2) identify best practices emerging from LEA efforts to accelerate student learning and foster student well-being; 3) and reveal common challenges LEAs have encountered as they carry out their plans.

Funded by the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE), the study has drawn on interviews with LEA leaders and other stakeholders and experts, as well as an annual survey of LEAs. Findings from previous surveys and interviews are available in the CARES Impact Study [Baseline Report](#), [Year-One Report](#), [Year-Two Report](#), and [Year-Three Report](#).

In March 2024, GaDOE commissioned the Georgia Partnership to produce three case studies that identify promising practices in three areas: closing learning gaps, improving student well-being, and strengthening the educator workforce. The [first case study](#) focused on closing learning gaps through literacy reform. The [second case study](#) focuses on improving student well-being through robust support systems. This third case study focuses on strategies to help more people enter and remain in the teaching profession.

The Georgia Partnership continues to advance our mission to inform and engage leaders to positively impact education and workforce readiness. The examples detailed in this case study can inform and engage leaders at the state and local levels about Georgia's education challenges and provide them with solutions that could improve education and economic outcomes for all Georgians.



Dr. Dana Rickman
President/CEO, Georgia Partnership For Excellence in Education

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

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 instructional or classroom management strategies when entering the classroom on day one.

The state needs more people to become teachers, and it needs more teachers to stay in the profession. Lumpkin County Schools, Rockdale County Schools, and Tattnall County Schools—the three school systems that are the subject of this case study—have each designed creative strategies to accomplish these aims.

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 described 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. District leaders report changing expectations and needs among new teachers. Many new teachers view teaching as one of multiple 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 compared with 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.

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.pdf
https://www.pagelegislative.org/_files/ugd/bd220f_4075e72b3b824ef9a10b6b90e2ee8225.pdf

The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (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, but adapted implementation based on educator feedback and emerging needs.
- 4. Relationship-driven recruitment and retention strategies.** Educators across these

districts—from the classroom to the central office—believe that cultivating caring professional relationships is essential to the success of their recruitment and retention strategies and to fostering 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. Helping paraprofessionals and former students become teachers has been critical for the district, which, like many rural districts, has faced difficulties recruiting new teachers.

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. Sustaining and expanding teacher apprenticeship programs for high school students and paraprofessionals
 - b. Providing stipends to offset the financial costs of student teaching, a full-time but unpaid job
 - c. Restoring and updating 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. The Promise Scholarship and Teacher Scholarship

were eliminated in 2010, and the Promise II Scholarship was eliminated in 2007.

- 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. 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 critical 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 reports and dashboards. The existing report and dashboards should be expanded to incorporate data from all state agencies that have a role in the educator pipeline and include disaggregated data on educator vacancies, educator retention rates, the number of educator preparation program completers, and other key information. 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>

METHODOLOGY

This case study is part of the [CARES Impact Study](#), a multi-year project the Georgia Partnership launched in 2021 to understand how districts across the state support student learning and wellbeing as well as educators following the pandemic. The project is funded by the Georgia Department of Education and includes annual reports, three case studies, and an analysis of the needs of rural districts. This report is the third case study.

To develop this case study, Georgia Partnership staff and consultants solicited recommendations for districts that have led the way in supporting educators and boosting recruitment and/or retention from Georgia Department of Education staff, district leaders, and other stakeholders who are knowledgeable about the educator workforce. Staff and consultants also reviewed publicly available information about the districts' efforts.

The superintendents in each district were invited to participate, and each agreed. A Georgia Partnership consultant visited Lumpkin and Tattnall County Schools and interviewed educators in schools and district offices to learn about their approaches to cultivating a skilled and stable workforce. The consultant conducted virtual interviews with educators at the district and school levels in Rockdale County.

Educators in these districts generously gave their time and knowledge to this project, enabling the Georgia Partnership to learn about and share their stories with communities across the state. This case study is not an evaluation. The report offers an opportunity for other district and state leaders to learn from practitioners in the field who report success with their efforts to attract and retain educators.

The case study provides an overview of Georgia's educator workforce landscape followed by detailed descriptions of the three districts' approaches to attract and support educators.

EDUCATOR WORKFORCE LANDSCAPE

Educators in Lumpkin, Rockdale, and Tattnall Counties described several factors, some new and some persistent, that affect the educator workforce in their communities. Their concerns are not unique. The issues they raised were also shared by multiple local district superintendents across Georgia in interviews conducted for other reports prepared for the CARES Impact Study. The issues these superintendents flagged include:

- Changing career expectations
- Heightened needs among non-traditional pathway teachers
- High cost of becoming a teacher
- Funding constraints

Changing Career Expectations. District leaders reported many people entering teaching now do not plan to stay in education for 20 or more years. This is a shift from the leaders' own, and earlier, generations of educators. These leaders are considering how to train and support new teachers who anticipate staying only a few years and to persuade them to remain longer. Superintendents also described an increased willingness among these teachers to change districts, which can be disruptive.⁴

Heightened Needs Among Non-Traditional Pathway Teachers.⁵ New teachers who have not completed a traditional educator preparation program require more support than those who completed a traditional program, according to educators in these districts. The increased need for assistance among these teachers often requires more time from mentor teachers and more comprehensive information and strategies to support school and induction leaders, which can be difficult to provide. Individuals who enter the classroom as teachers without any training, under the expectation that they will become certified within three years, require particularly high levels of support.

4 Suggs, C. CARES Impact Study 2023: Year Two. Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. (2023). <https://gpee.org/programs/cares-impact-study/>

5 Traditional teacher preparation programs are those offered by four-year colleges and universities and lead to initial certification to teach. Individuals with a degree in a field outside of education can earn certification while teaching through the [Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy](#) (GaTAPP), which provides training and intensive job-embedded professional development. Individuals with a non-education degree can also gain certification by enrolling in a university-based program while beginning their teaching careers.

High Cost of Teacher Preparation. Paraprofessionals⁶ in degree/certification programs and student teachers said becoming a teacher is expensive, which can be a deterrent to pursuing certification, particularly for low- and moderate-income individuals. Tuition and fees add up quickly. Teacher candidates in traditional preparation programs also flagged the high cost of getting to and from K-12 schools for required site placements, which occur over several semesters. Student teaching is a full-time but unpaid job. Student teachers described taking additional jobs to cover rent, gas, and other necessities. Paraprofessionals, whose salaries are typically quite low,⁷ reported working second jobs while going to school, taking on significant student loan debt, or both.

Funding Constraints. Funding for initiatives that bolster the educator workforce is often temporary or vulnerable to economic pressures. Tattnall County Schools used federal pandemic relief funds to aid paraprofessionals seeking certification, but those funds have expired. The district also caps the number of high school students who serve as teacher apprentices at six due to limited funds. Emerging budget pressures are leading Rockdale County Schools to scale back its initiative to reduce new-teacher turnover despite its positive impact.

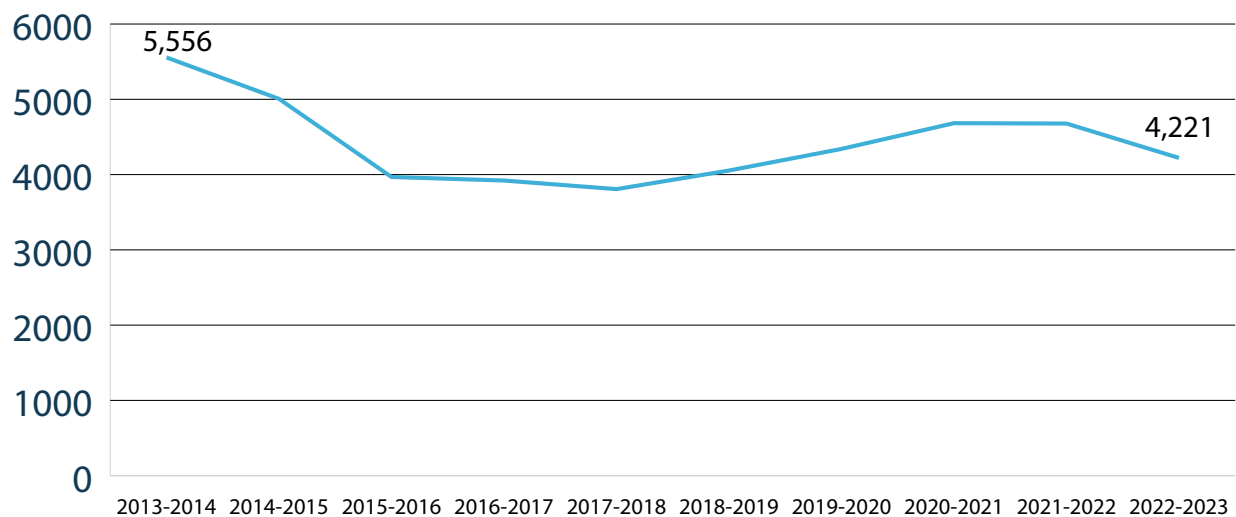
Broader Concerns

These concerns raised by superintendents intersect with broader shifts within the educator workforce. A notable one is the decline in the number of individuals completing educator preparation programs. Between the 2013-2014 and 2022-2023 academic years, the number of program completers in Georgia fell by 24%.

⁶ Paraprofessionals assist certified teachers in classroom activities including providing instruction and behavioral support to students, helping with classroom management, and preparing instructional materials.

⁷ In Fiscal Year 2026, the state allocates \$17,975 for salary per paraprofessional in kindergarten classes. It does not fund paraprofessionals for other grade levels.

Figure 1: Education Preparation Program Completers in Georgia⁸



Source: U.S. Department of Education, 2024 Title II Reports, National Teacher Preparation Data, Academic Years 2013-2014 to 2022-2023.

This decline contributes to shortages in the educator workforce. Georgia districts need more teachers than educator preparation programs, both traditional and alternative, graduate. This shortage requires schools and districts to hire people who are not fully trained in instruction and classroom management: in fall 2024, more than 5% of educators in Georgia—6,700 individuals—taught in public schools under a waiver or provisional certificate.⁹

The shortage can also result in teachers leading classes in subject areas outside their certification area. More than 19% of high school science classes and 17% of high school math classes were taught by out-of-field teachers in 2021-2022.¹⁰

While there are not precise data on teacher shortages in Georgia, math, special education, science, English language arts, elementary education are the subject areas identified as

8 This data includes completers from both traditional and alternative teacher preparation programs in Georgia. It does not include out-of-state program completers.

9 McRoy, Penney. (2025, April 23). GaPSC Educator Workforce Quantitative Data [Conference presentation]. 2025 Teacher Pipeline Summit, Milledgeville, GA

10 Flamini, M., & Wang, S. (2024). 2022 Georgia K-12 Teacher & Leader Workforce. Governor's Office of Student Achievement.

high need statewide.¹¹

Shortages often differ at the district level. Some districts have difficulty filling teaching positions in world languages, Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) and other subject areas, in addition to the state shortage areas described above.¹²

Retaining teachers is as important as attracting more individuals to the field. Across Georgia, 90% of teachers who taught in the 2022-2023 school year returned to the classroom in 2023-2024, and, on average, 86% of teachers remained in their home districts.¹³ District retention rates varied from less than 50% to 94%. Retention rates tend to be higher in districts with low student poverty rates.¹⁴

Retirement is not the primary reason teachers leave the field. In 2023, 78% of teachers who left resigned, and about 11% retired.¹⁵ Other reasons teachers left include taking positions in other districts (5%), non-renewal of contract (2%), and family/illness (2%). Issues that negatively affect teachers' work and can lead to resignation include unmanageable workload, student behavior, and low salary.¹⁶

Teacher turnover can have a negative impact on student learning and is expensive.¹⁷ Nationally, replacing a single teacher in a small district is estimated to cost \$11,860, \$16,450 in a medium district, and nearly \$25,000 in a large district.¹⁸ A 2006 analysis of the cost of teacher attrition in Georgia estimated districts spent about \$122 million per

11 Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts. (2025). Retired Teachers Return to Work: Requested Information on the Full-Time Employment of Retired Teachers. <https://www.audits2.ga.gov/reports/summaries/retired-teachers-return-to-work>

12 Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. (2023). [District Survey ESSER Funding] [Unpublished raw data]

13 Georgia Department of Education. (n.d.). Educator Pipeline Dashboard, Teacher Retention Trend. <https://georgiainsights.gadoe.org/Dashboards/Pages/EducatorPipeline-Teachers.aspx>

14 Flamini, Monica & Wang, Shuyang. (2024). 2022 Georgia K-12 Teacher and Leader Workforce Report. Governor's Office of Student Achievement.

15 Georgia Department of Education. (n.d.). Educator Pipeline Dashboard, Teacher Attrition. <https://georgiainsights.gadoe.org/Dashboards/Pages/EducatorPipeline-Teachers.aspx>

16 Professional Association of Georgia Educators. (2024). Views from the Schoolhouse: Georgia Educator Policy Insights. <https://files.constantcontact.com/9a72cb1c001/30a70952-341d-4c2b-8f0a-532aee42d0ac.pdf>

17 Carver-Thomas, D., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2019). The trouble with teacher turnover: How teacher attrition affects students and schools. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 27, 36.

18 Learning Policy Institute. (2024, September 17). 2024 Update: What's the Cost of Teacher Turnover? <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/2024-whats-cost-teacher-turnover>

year to replace teachers who left after Fiscal Years 2003 and 2004.¹⁹

LUMPKIN COUNTY SCHOOLS: BUILDING A STRUCTURE OF SUPPORT FOR EDUCATORS

Lumpkin County Schools is tucked into the Blue Ridge Mountains of northeast Georgia. The school system serves approximately 3,700 students across three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. Most students—86%—are white, 9% are Hispanic, 1% are Black, and 3% are multiracial. Nearly half of the district’s students are economically disadvantaged.

Overview

Leaders in Lumpkin County designed and implemented an induction program that provides comprehensive support to teachers in their first three years. Nearly a decade old, the program is having an impact: about 95% of new teachers are retained while in the program, a level that exceeds the district’s overall retention rate.

District leaders have taken steps to support staff members in other ways. In the wake of the pandemic’s upheaval, they established two wellness initiatives. One focuses on fostering physical health through free, on-site exercise classes, and the other aims to cultivate a sense of community among staff through shared art and recreational activities. The district also launched an on-site childcare center for staff to help recruit and retain teachers.

The district is developing an apprenticeship program to help its own students as well as paraprofessionals become teachers. Apprentice programs are one form of “grow your own” teacher programs, which districts are turning to so they can recruit and train

19 Nweke, W.C., Eads, G.M., Afolabi, C.Y., Stephens, C.E., & Toth, F.D. (2006). The Impact of Teacher Workforce Retirement/Attrition on Personnel. https://www.gapsc.com/Commission/research_publication/downloads/Teacher_Workforce_Retirement_and_Turnover_Cost.pdf

teachers from their own communities.²⁰ The apprenticeship program builds on the district's Teaching as a Profession (TAP) pathway for high school students by expanding its partnership with the University of North Georgia (UNG) to help recent graduates and paraprofessionals transition to and be supported through a certification program.

Nurturing New Teachers

For many years, Lumpkin County Schools operated an induction program for new teachers, but steep funding cuts initiated during the Great Recession resulted in the program's elimination. In 2017 then-superintendent Dr. Rob Brown asked Dr. Kerri Whitmire, a member of the district's leadership team, to create a new induction program to fill this gap. Whitmire brought expertise to the task, having earned an endorsement as a teacher support specialist and gained experience serving in that role.

Whitmire built a three-year induction program that provides different levels of support as new teachers progress through the program. Program activities, such as monthly new teacher meetings, are designed to develop new teachers' skills so they can successfully serve their students. Equally important is cultivating a strong sense of community where new teachers feel they belong. A core component of achieving both aims is matching each new teacher with a mentor coach, who supports their mentee all three years of the program.

Mentor Coaches

Mentor coaches are skilled veteran teachers recommended by their principals for the role. Whitmire and principals aim to match mentors and new teachers by grade level or content area. This creates more opportunities for mentors and new teachers to work together during the school day, as they often have shared planning time and work on common activities.

²⁰ Grow Your Own (GYO) is an umbrella phrase for initiatives school districts and institutions of higher education are developing to recruit and train individuals from their area for the teaching profession. They vary in who they target—high school students, college students, paraprofessionals, parents or other community members—as well as their format and financing.

“You can’t just look at somebody and say, ‘Oh, they’ve been teaching 10 years in this grade, just stick this new teacher with them...’ (You) need to make sure you’re taking into account who would really benefit from working together, because that relationship piece is going to help keep that new teacher from getting burned out or overwhelmed.”

-MENTOR COACH

Mentors must meet with their mentees at least once a month, but they typically meet and communicate far more frequently, often daily. Whitmire developed a manual that outlines the topics mentors should cover each month, which aligns with the flow of the school year. It also includes expectations for mentors and mentees and guidance on what to do and not do. Whitmire revises the manual each year based on feedback she gathers from mentors and mentees through annual surveys. The manual is electronic, with each topic linked to an array of resources if mentors or mentees need additional information.

Mentor and mentee discussions extend beyond topics in the manual. One mentor described conversations with her second-year induction teacher that led to shared learning for both: “(I)n this second year, we’ve had bigger, broader conversations. She’s putting in

her ideas, ‘okay, I did this last year, but how about this?’ And I’m like, ‘I never thought about that.’ So, we’re growing together as the years progress.”

Mentors do not have a role in evaluating induction teachers, and all interactions between mentors and mentees are confidential. This creates a safe space where induction teachers can comfortably ask questions and admit challenges.

Whitmire developed an online, self-paced training program for mentors. Initially the training was delivered in person during the summer, but that schedule proved difficult for many mentors. As with the manual, the training is updated each year based on survey responses.

Mentors receive a \$500 stipend per year, an indication that serving as a mentor is additional work. One mentor noted, “Our system invests in us... They’re recognizing we’re putting in time, this is work, and we’re giving our time to help others.”

In addition to the mentor coaches, each program year provides a different set of activities. The program years are named:

- Year One: Rising Indians
- Year Two: Tribe Vibe
- Year Three: Lumpkin for Life

Year One: Rising Indians

First year teachers, Rising Indians, receive the most intensive support. They participate in monthly professional learning community (PLC) meetings with Whitmire and school improvement specialists, who serve the districts' elementary and middle schools and assist all teachers with improving instruction.

The PLC meetings provide space for first-year teachers to connect and gain assurance that their feelings and concerns are normal and shared by their peers. They offer a safe space to describe what is going well and what is not, as well as to ask for help. The meetings also help the teachers and improvement specialists build relationships, linking each teacher to another person in their building they can rely on for support and guidance.

The meetings help first year teachers build their skills. Meeting topics are organized around 101 Answers for New Teachers and Their Mentors by Annette Breaux, which the teachers and the improvement specialists read together. Whitmire and the improvement specialists identify key topics from the book to explore more deeply and provide presentations on them during the PLC meetings. Whitmire and the improvement specialists use their presentations to model dynamic instructional strategies the new teachers can apply with their own students.

“I have a purposeful set of eyes on our new teachers. It is a very intentional type of role, that you’re aware of them, their needs, their struggles, and their strengths. It’s just a constant accountability of ‘these people are new and are always going to need support this year.’”

**-SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT
SPECIALIST**

The PLCs are held during the school day, which requires a substitute for each induction teacher. Instead of bringing in external substitutes, which would be expensive, central office staff, including the superintendent, serve as substitutes. Each staff member is assigned to the same induction teacher for the year, so they get to know his or her students. This helps district staff stay connected to the classroom, but, most importantly, it sends a powerful message that supporting new teachers is a top district priority.

Principals also embrace the program. They build their school schedules around the PLC dates, and they act as cheerleaders for the new teachers, making them feel welcome and serving as a resource if there is an issue mentors and improvement specialists cannot address. Principals are not directly involved in the program, however. District leaders did not want to add to their plates by making them responsible for designing or implementing supports for new teachers.

The Rising Indians year closes with a celebratory dinner. Induction teachers and a family member or spouse, mentors, and school and district administrators come together to celebrate the work first-year teachers have accomplished and the growth they have made. Each new teacher is recognized with the goal “that they just feel that love and that they’re enveloped in all of this support.”

Year Two: Tribe Vibe

During their second year, induction teachers have three PLC meetings with Whitmire and the school improvement specialists. The topic of each meeting is based on issues identified in the annual surveys Whitmire conducts with the teachers and their mentors. This ensures the topics reflect the specific concerns and questions the induction teachers have.

The induction teachers continue to meet with their mentors throughout their second year. With a year of experience, they can dig deeper into topics reviewed in their first year and refine instructional strategies.

Year Three: Lumpkin for Life

In the final year of the program, induction teachers visit two master teachers to observe their practice. Principals nominate highly skilled teachers—their “rockstars”—to be observed. Whitmire aims to match the induction teachers with teachers who are vertically aligned with their grade level; for example, an induction teacher who teaches second grade would visit master teachers in first and third grades. This encourages induction teachers to think about what their students learned in the previous year and what they will need to learn in the following year. As part of the observation, induction teachers debrief with the master teachers, which gives them an opportunity to ask questions and explore how they might adapt strategies to their own classrooms.

Occasionally an induction teacher teaches specialized content and is the only one doing so in the district. In these instances, Whitmire reaches out to neighboring districts to connect those induction teachers to master teachers in the same content areas in those districts.

Creating a Supportive Culture

District leaders have sought to create a positive culture for all staff members in the district. One strategy for doing so is Tribe Fitness. Three times a week, a staff member leads fitness classes for all district staff at the high school’s athletic facility free of charge. She runs two daily sessions to accommodate the varying schedules of different schools and the central office. One of the elementary schools has adopted the same approach. Beyond improving physical health, these regular fitness sessions have become a place where staff in different roles connect with one another. They cheer on each other’s fitness goals, share their stories and experiences, and forge friendships.

A similar initiative is Tribe Wellness, which was created by one of the district’s social workers, Michelle Pisarik. She recognized that the pandemic created mental health challenges for teachers and staff as well as students. To effectively serve students, staff needed to restore their own positive mental health. One way to do so was to bring staff together for a fun activity. Many staff have creative skills and passions ranging from cooking to crafting to dancing and more. Pisarik realized creating a setting where staff

members could share their passion by leading a hands-on class would connect people. She recruited staff to lead sessions, which are held about once a month. Sessions have included cooking classes on appetizers and casseroles, Christmas caroling, painting pottery, and wreath making. The district covers the cost of materials for all participants and provides a stipend to the instructors. The Tribe Wellness sessions have attracted staff in different roles from across the district, including paraprofessionals, custodians, nutrition staff, teachers, and administrators.

In the 2024-2025 school year, the district opened a childcare center for staff, another recruitment and retention strategy. It is overseen by the director of the pre-kindergarten program, ensuring its quality, and its fees are lower than other childcare centers in the area. The center is in a former elementary school, which helped keep startup costs low. It is staffed by a mix of high school students in the Teaching as a Profession career pathway and part-time workers, which also helps keep costs low.

Designing a Teacher Apprenticeship Program

Faced with a growing number of veteran teachers reaching retirement age, the district is expanding its efforts to recruit more future teachers by establishing a teacher apprenticeship program. It is launching the program with assistance and federal grant funds from the Georgia Department of Education's Office of Rural Education and Innovation. The program, which is in the design phase, will have two components: a pre-apprenticeship for high school students and an apprenticeship for high school graduates as well as paraprofessionals who are seeking their degree and certification.

“There’s a parapro who works with significantly disabled kids. She has some hard days... it’s really interesting how she is worn out and shows up for every class. I can see how much she’s getting out of it, just the chance to interact with other adults after you’ve been with only kids who are very needy.”

-DISTRICT STAFF MEMBER

Pre-Apprenticeship

The pre-apprenticeship program will build on Lumpkin County Schools' Teaching as a Profession (TAP) program, which introduces high school students to teaching and other careers in education. The TAP program is comprised of two classes and a practicum, in which high school students work with elementary or pre-kindergarten students under the supervision of a certified teacher.

Through the pre-apprenticeship program, the district will broaden TAP students' learning experiences. Activities may include field trips and guest speakers. The district is also encouraging TAP students to pursue dual enrollment to begin post-secondary classes in education. It has forged a strong partnership with UNG, which is reordering the sequence of several of its education classes so that dual enrollment students are able to take them instead of waiting until later in their post-secondary studies. The aim of enabling students to take education classes earlier is to keep them engaged in education instead of pursuing other fields.

The district intends to enroll 10 high school students in the first year of the pre-apprenticeship program.

Apprenticeship

The apprenticeship program will create a route for TAP graduates and paraprofessionals to become certified teachers while offsetting the cost of doing so. Apprenticeship programs combine real-world work in classrooms with teacher training, enabling apprentices to test and apply what they are learning, and provide support to apprentices, often through mentors.

The district plans to hire TAP graduates to work as paraprofessionals while they are earning their degree and certification and to encourage paraprofessionals to pursue certification. As apprentices, both groups would have mentors to support them through the process of becoming certified. Apprentices would pursue their degrees at UNG, which has a fully online option that makes working and going to school more manageable.

The district would use grant funds to help cover candidates' tuition, books or other costs directly related to earning their degrees. In their final year in the UNG program, apprentices could participate in the university's teacher residency program, which would enable them to serve as a teacher in Lumpkin County Schools. Because they would not yet be certified, they would not earn the full salary of a first-year, certified teacher, but they would earn more than paraprofessionals. As district employees, apprentices would also enroll in Teacher Retirement System of Georgia.

The district aims to enroll five new and continuing paraprofessionals in the first year of the apprenticeship program.

ROCKDALE COUNTY SCHOOLS: TACKLING HIGH TURNOVER AMONG NEW TEACHERS

East of Atlanta, Rockdale County Schools is an urban district that serves about 15,200 students across 11 elementary schools, four middle schools, and three high schools. The district also offers a career academy, a magnet program in science and technology, and an alternative school. About 69% of students are economically disadvantaged. Most students are students of color: 68% are Black, 19% are Hispanic, 5% are multi-racial, 1% are Asian, and 7% are white.

Overview

Despite having a well-established teacher induction program, Rockdale County Schools had several schools that struggled to retain new teachers. One district leader described new teachers in these schools as “running out the door.” Dr. Terry Oatts, then superintendent, recognized these schools needed help to keep more new teachers and created a new position, teacher induction specialist, to provide that help. He recruited Dr. Rosetta Riddle, a veteran educator with extensive experience in the classroom and working with new teachers, to tackle this challenge. With support from the district's professional learning team, she collaborated with Michele Stephens, the chief human resources officer, to design a framework to provide dynamic support to educators in these schools.

This framework addresses the challenges Riddle and Stephens identified across the targeted schools when they began meeting with principals and lead mentors, who coordinate the induction program in schools. They discovered many school leaders and mentors had slipped into focusing on complying with the requirements of the induction program. Interactions between mentor teachers and induction teachers in these schools had become transactional with an emphasis on “checking the boxes,” not on building nurturing and trusting relationships that would lead to significant and sustained professional growth for new teachers. High turnover among principals and lead mentors complicated efforts to recruit veteran mentors to support early-career educators.

Riddle and Stephens also saw that the need for assistance was greatest among new teachers who had not gone through traditional educator preparation programs or had begun their education careers as paraprofessionals. Like most new teachers, they needed help with classroom management, assessments, and lesson planning, but they also needed to learn how to regulate their emotions and present a calm demeanor in the classroom.

Early Career Teacher Support Initiative

The framework Riddle and Stephens designed to address these needs—the Early Career Teacher Support Initiative—is built on the teacher induction program and has three interconnected components: the New Teacher Village, the Effective Teacher Toolbox series, and Classroom Visits. Each component aims to foster strong relationships between mentor teachers and induction teachers while building the skills of induction teachers.

Teacher Induction Program

Mentor teachers are the core of Rockdale County’s Teacher Induction Program. Every new teacher in Rockdale County Schools, even experienced teachers moving to the county, is matched with a veteran teacher. Mentor teachers support induction teachers for three years and up to five years for induction teachers who need continued assistance.

Mentor teachers meet with their induction teachers a minimum of 15 hours each

semester or about once a week in practice. They often communicate and meet more frequently.

Throughout the year, mentors participate in training, which is provided on district professional learning days. The district developed a guidebook for the induction program that includes expectations for mentors and induction teachers and different strategies for supporting induction teachers with examples of how they could be implemented.

Each school has at least one lead mentor who is selected by the principal and coordinates the implementation of the induction program. This includes recruiting mentors, with the goal of matching induction teachers with veterans in their grade level or content area. Lead mentors support mentors by providing advice on mentoring strategies, brainstorming responses to difficulties with induction teachers, offering encouragement, and more. Lead mentors also track mentor and induction teachers' completion of required induction program activities and follow up to ensure they do.

Riddle highlighted the importance of selecting lead mentors who are excellent teachers and committed to cultivating adult learning. Not every good classroom teacher wants or has the right skills to guide induction teachers and mentors. Having the right person in this role is so critical that, in schools participating in the initiative, if a lead mentor does not prove to be a good fit for the role, a new one is selected.

Riddle meets monthly with each lead mentor at the schools participating in the initiative. They discuss challenges lead mentors may see among mentors and induction teachers and potential solutions. Riddle also creates tools to help them manage their work such as a log to track feedback for induction teachers. Sometimes, Riddle simply listens and offers encouragement. Lead mentors come together twice a year with Riddle for training, to share feedback, and to build relationships. Her aim with both individual and group meetings is to build a supportive relationship with lead mentors, serving as their mentor and modeling how to do the same for the mentors they guide in their schools.

Another key component of the teacher induction program is classroom observation videos. All classrooms in the district are equipped with video recording equipment,

which induction teachers use to record a minimum of six videos a year of themselves delivering instruction. The videos remove the need for mentor teachers to leave their classrooms to observe their mentees. The induction teachers decide what to record and share the videos with their mentors. Induction teachers and

mentors both review the videos, looking at the behavior of the induction teacher as well as students, and identify what went well and what could be improved, which they discuss during their weekly meetings. They develop an improvement goal for the induction teacher, identify strategies the induction teacher can use to meet it, and track progress toward meeting the goal at subsequent weekly meetings.

Mentors receive \$200 per year, and lead mentors receive \$500, which the district funds through federal Title IIA funds, which support effective instruction.

New Teacher Village

The lead mentor, mentors, and induction teachers at each participating school and Riddle come together for the New Teacher Village, a monthly meeting to examine key issues related to instructional practice. The village meetings also provide a consistent

setting for participants to develop relationships with each other. Induction teachers get to know each other and find reassurance that they are not alone in their classroom challenges. The village creates a broader group of mentor teachers that induction teachers can reach out to if they need help,

“I feel (the videos) were really helpful. (My mentor) was able to say, ‘I watched the video and you were excellent here, but I saw you had problems with transitions and you need to add a timer and put it on the board.’ She was able to give me different strategies.”

-INDUCTION TEACHER

“We got to interact with all the new teachers in the building, and it was a good thing. You got to hear that you weren’t the only person struggling in particular areas... You were able to ask that question and get a good strategy or two that you might be able to fix that particular problem.”

-INDUCTION TEACHER

reducing their reliance on their assigned mentor teachers to meet all their needs.

The village meetings also foster relationships among mentor teachers. In the early stages of her work with several schools, Riddle found that all teachers, not only induction teachers, often worked in isolation from their colleagues, especially those outside their grade level or content area. Bringing them together in the village meetings helped break down this isolation, which carried over into the school day and helped improve school climate.

Effective Teacher Toolbox Series

The Effective Teacher Toolbox Series is a series of interactive presentations on instructional topics that Riddle and lead mentors deliver at the village meetings.

Before the start of the school year, Riddle meets with the principal and lead mentor at each participating school to identify the specific issues most critical to cover for new teachers during that school's village meetings and when each topic will be discussed. Common topics include strategies to differentiate instruction, classroom management, formative assessments, and self-regulating along with grit and growth mindset of the new teachers. Riddle collaborates with each lead mentor to develop the specific content that will be presented in the village meetings and how they will present it. Riddle and lead mentors use interactive instructional strategies to deliver the content, modeling the type of instruction they want induction teachers to provide to their students. Induction teachers also have opportunities to practice new strategies at the meetings, testing whether the strategies could work in their own classrooms and getting feedback on them.

Information on each topic is compiled in a web application, referred to as the toolkit, that mentors and induction teachers can access. Mentors described using the toolkit with induction teachers as well as sharing information with other colleagues.

Classroom Visits

Riddle visits each induction teacher in schools participating in the initiative at least once

a month to observe them, provide feedback, and model instructional and classroom management strategies. The visits also enable Riddle to get to know the teachers, building trust between them. This encourages induction teachers to reach out to Riddle for guidance and encouragement, and they do, often calling, emailing, or asking her to come to their classrooms to get her feedback or assistance.

Riddle invites principals to accompany her on each induction teacher’s first classroom visit of the year. This helps keep them engaged in the induction process and is an opportunity for Riddle to model conducting an effective and supportive visit.

“She (Dr. Riddle) came in with great strategies and a lot of good advice that really helped a lot of new teachers because I do feel like my first year, I was drowning some days.”
-INDUCTION TEACHER

This work has had an impact. Following the initiative’s first year, the retention rate among new teachers went up at the schools participating that year.

Figure 3: New Teacher Retention Rate

	2022-2023	2023-2024
School 1	65%	90%
School 2	55%	77%
School 3	88%	89%
School 4	68%	82%

Despite the initiative’s success, its future is uncertain. The district faces growing financial pressures, and leaders are unsure if the initiative will be sustained.

TATTNALL COUNTY SCHOOLS: GROWING YOUR OWN TEACHERS BY CULTIVATING A CARING COMMUNITY

Tattnall County Schools in southeast Georgia is a rural agricultural community known for its famous Vidalia onions. It serves nearly 3,500 students across two elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. Half of the district's students are white, 23% are Black, 22% are Hispanic, 5% are multiracial, and 1% are Asian. More than seven of 10 students—72%—are economically disadvantaged.

Overview

Leaders of Tattnall County Schools use multiple strategies to attract and retain teachers. This has been a priority for leaders because the district faces constraints that can hamper its appeal to prospective employees. With limited industry and a limited tax base, the district cannot match higher salaries offered by districts in neighboring counties. The county does not have a daycare center, a Walmart, or other amenities that could attract employees. District leaders also said teaching has become characterized in public discourse as a “lowly profession,” one that students should aspire to go beyond, which has diminished its appeal to some young people.

Tattnall County Schools has long relied on “grow your own” strategies as a core mechanism to attract and keep skilled educators. Leaders recognized that people from the community and invested in it were their best workforce resource. The district's first grow your own strategy links its Early Childhood Education pathway to a teacher apprenticeship program that introduces high school students to, and prepares them for, careers in education. The district's second strategy encourages and assists paraprofessionals in becoming certified teachers.

These efforts have an impact. Twenty percent of the district's certified teachers began their careers in Tattnall County Schools as paraprofessionals, including the superintendent, Dr. Kristen Waters. Many of these educators started as high school students in the apprenticeship program. About 28% of current paraprofessionals are enrolled in certification programs to become teachers.

District and school leaders have also cultivated a community for educators, recognizing that when staff feel supported and valued, they are more likely to stay. This includes providing mentors for new teachers, creating meaningful opportunities for educator voice in decision making, and intentionally showing appreciation for staff.

Growing Your Own Educators

There are two grow your own strategies used in Tattnall County Schools. The Early Childhood Education Pathway/Teacher Apprenticeship Program has a formal structure with set processes. The second strategy, the paraprofessional-to-teacher path, is more organic and rests on informal support and assistance from educators at both the school and district levels. As one district leader said, “It’s just what we do.” Both are vital to ensuring the district has a skilled educator workforce.

Early Childhood Education & Teacher Apprenticeship Program

The district launched its educator apprenticeship program in 2007, several years before the state introduced the current Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) clusters, which include the Early Childhood Education (ECE) program. Tattnall County Schools’ apprenticeship program has evolved since its early days and is built on the district’s strong ECE program.

High school students can enroll in the ECE program as early as ninth grade, and many do. The program consists of three classes, which introduce students to key concepts in child development, effective instruction, and professionalism. ECE students in the first and second classes have regular opportunities to work with students in the pre-kindergarten program, which is located at the high school. During the third ECE class, a practicum, each ECE student is assigned to an elementary school teacher, who they assist for about one hour, four days a week.

The district provides transportation to the ECE practicum students. Prior to doing so, many students were not able to participate in the practicum because they lacked

transportation.²¹

After successfully completing the ECE program, students can apply for the apprenticeship program, which offers a paid part-time job in an elementary classroom. The program is competitive, and selection criteria include students' grade point average, attendance, discipline, and letters of recommendation. Prospective apprentices must have a career goal in education or in another role related to child development and be willing to commit to a year of postsecondary study. Principals interview applicants and select the apprentices.

Each apprentice is mentored by their assigned teacher, a relationship which often continues informally after the apprenticeship ends. Apprentices supply critical support in classrooms. Under their mentor teachers' guidance, apprentices often provide one-on-one or small group instruction. They assist with assessments and support classroom management strategies.

For these future educators, the ECE program and apprenticeship provide a strong foundation to pursue their degree and certification. One current teacher who is also a former apprentice said, "When I got to college, I felt like I was so much more prepared for my education classes. I'd already been in front of a classroom. I was a step ahead."

Students in the apprentice program are encouraged to participate in dual enrollment so they can complete their core postsecondary classes while still in high school. This enables them to move more quickly into their education coursework in college.

The district currently supports six teacher apprentices, up from four initially. Each earns the minimum wage, \$7.25 an hour. The district could readily fill more teacher apprentice slots if funding were available, and if it was able to pay a more competitive wage. The school system loses potential apprentices, especially those who are economically disadvantaged, to better-paying jobs.

21 The state ECE pathway offers an option for a third class in place of the practicum. However, CTAE staff in Tattnall believe the hands-on learning in the practicum is critical for students to develop a deeper understanding of working with young children.

“We’re low socio-economic and a lot of times, even though we have students who would like to be in the teacher apprenticeship program, they’re helping pay the bills at home. So, they’re going to go to the jobs that pay more and where they can get more hours working on the weekend.”

-TEACHER

Paraprofessional to Teacher Path

Many veteran teachers began their careers as paraprofessionals in the district, and many current paraprofessionals are following in their footsteps.

There is not a formal recruitment process to encourage paraprofessionals to become certified teachers. Instead, it has become part of the district’s culture.

Former paraprofessionals who are now teachers and current paraprofessionals pursuing certification describe being repeatedly encouraged to consider teaching by teachers, school administrators, and district administrators. Some needed little encouragement. They had taken paraprofessional positions with the intent of becoming teachers. Many of these paraprofessionals are recent graduates of the school district who completed the ECE program and apprenticeship. Becoming a paraprofessional is a natural next step, particularly in a school community where they feel supported.

However, other paraprofessionals needed a bigger nudge from colleagues, administrators or even former teachers to see themselves as teachers and believe they could accomplish all the steps to become one. One teacher who got that nudge said, “I found out teaching was my calling all along, and it took my high school coach to help me figure that out... he helped me get back into college and guided me through the education side of college.”

Becoming a certified teacher is a demanding path. Paraprofessionals juggle working full-time in schools while taking as many classes as they can handle for their teaching degree, and many are also parents. The spread of online teacher preparation programs has made this process somewhat more manageable as they eliminate the need to spend time and money driving to campuses. Some teacher preparation programs have also increased the flexibility of their program offerings, enabling students to move through courses more quickly than in traditional, in-person programs. This increased flexibility has

proven critical to paraprofessionals balancing work and the time and cost of certification programs.

The district communicates regularly with teacher preparation programs in the region, including Valdosta State University and Georgia Southern University, to assist paraprofessionals interested in becoming teachers. The preparation programs provide regular updates on program admissions and courses, which the district pushes out to staff. Information about preparation programs is also shared informally by paraprofessionals who are in or have completed a program with their colleagues considering entering one.

Teacher preparation programs, including online ones, require participants to fulfill specific in-person learning experiences, including conducting classroom observations across grade levels and student groups and student teaching. School administrators as well as classroom teachers across the district have consistently been willing to adapt paraprofessionals' work schedules and responsibilities to align with these requirements. One current paraprofessional commented, "Tattnall is very supportive, and all the admin at my school have been very helpful with scheduling and all the different things. I'm finishing student teaching, which was kind of difficult to figure out, but the admin have helped me so much. They recognize, 'Hey, we want you to work here, so we're going to help you figure it out.'"

"If I didn't have the GI Bill and the grants, honestly it would have been a difficult decision (to become a teacher) because the money's not there. As a para, you do not make a living wage. You cannot, if you're a para, you cannot survive in this world. You definitely have to have some support."

**-PARAPROFESSIONAL IN A
CERTIFICATION PROGRAM**

Covering the cost of earning a degree and certification is often very difficult. Several paraprofessionals described working full-time in the district and part-time in a second job to pay for their certification program while taking classes. Others moved through certification programs slowly because they could afford only one class or two at a time. Several who are military veterans, or whose family members are, tapped the GI Bill education benefits to help cover certification costs,

which was critical. Others took on student loan debt, which will take years to pay off. One former paraprofessional who is now a teacher said, “Taking out loans is nerve wracking. Knowing you’re going to have to pay all this money back on the income of a teacher.”

Tattnall County Schools used federal pandemic relief funds to help offset these costs for paraprofessionals for several years, but those funds have expired, and the district is no longer able to provide financial support.

The district highlights the successes of former paraprofessionals as well as the progress they make as they pursue certification on social media and in internal communications. Leaders believe this recognition helps raise awareness of the opportunity to become a teacher and helps other paraprofessionals envision following the same path.

Creating a Supportive Community

Waters, the superintendent, says many graduates and paraprofessionals choose to become teachers in Tattnall County because they feel they’re part of a community that cares about them. This reflects deliberate steps leaders have taken to create a supportive community for staff.

Supporting New Teachers

For over two decades, every new teacher in Tattnall County has been assigned a mentor teacher who provides real-time support throughout their first year. Principals select the mentors, aiming to match skilled veterans in the same grade or subject area as their mentee teachers. This makes regular discussions between mentor and mentee teachers much easier as they typically have common planning time and focus on the same or similar content.

Mentors connect with their mentees at the start of the school year, reviewing key things they need to know about their schools and helping set up their classrooms. They meet frequently with their mentees, digging into challenges of lesson planning, classroom management, fire safety drills, using technology and the array of other things teachers

juggle every day. As one mentor noted, “It’s not just somebody who’s checking in saying, ‘Hey, do you need anything?’ It’s literally someone who says, ‘Hey, let’s sit down and look at your lesson plans together.”

Mentors also help new teachers decide what is most critical to focus on and to do amid the deluge of information and tasks new teachers must master. They have no role in evaluating new teachers, which allows mentors to serve as a trusted resource new teachers can turn to when they are struggling.

“(My mentee and I are) together everyday. We have lunch together, we have planning together. She’s in my room. I’m in her room... that’s the real key to success, being able to have all that interaction with that veteran teacher.”

-MENTOR TEACHER

The district developed a checklist of topics mentors cover with their mentees throughout the year. Mentors value the checklist, which helps ensure they do not miss anything critical with their mentees. The district also has a part-time, district-level mentor for new teachers, who provides another layer of support with observations and coaching.

Mentors flagged a distinction between new teachers who completed a teacher preparation program and those who enter the classroom without any preparation. Districts can hire individuals with a bachelor’s degree to teach without training in education under the requirement that these new teachers earn certification within three years. Faced with a growing teacher shortage, districts, including Tattall County, have brought on individuals without training to fill vacant positions. Some grow into highly skilled teachers, but others do not. All, however, require much more assistance from mentors in their early years than teachers who completed teacher preparation programs.

Supporting Veteran Teachers

District leaders provide opportunities for experienced teachers to continue their professional growth. The district covers the cost of earning endorsements for teachers with seven or more years of experience in Tattall County. The aim is to “pour into

teachers personally” with the additional benefit of expanding teachers’ areas of expertise so they can better support students.

Valuing Educator Voice

Waters believes that authentic teacher buy-in requires genuine opportunities for their input, and she has developed multiple methods to provide those opportunities. She has lunch with the staff of each department in each school twice a year. These small group settings enable her to build relationships with staff and dig into issues big and small. Sometimes the discussions focus on family and sports and sometimes they focus on more complicated issues related to curriculum and instruction.

Waters surveys staff twice a year and visits each school to share survey results and explain how she and the district leadership team use the results. She cannot act on every request or concern raised in the surveys, but these discussions with staff provide transparency into the decisions she makes.

She also substitutes twice a year in each school. This keeps Waters connected to students and staff and offers a chance to identify and explore issues that are bubbling up. During one of her lunches at an elementary school in the 2024-2025 school year, teachers described concerns about the district’s new phonics program. Waters returned to the school to substitute and taught the phonics program in four grade levels so she could better understand teachers’ concerns. Waters said, “I learned so much, and then we could have a better conversation... ‘This is what I saw, tell me what you see from your perspective.’ And it really led to growth on all ends.”

By creating opportunities for input, Waters and the district leadership team are usually able to identify issues quickly when they are still small and easier to resolve.

Showing Appreciation

The district arranges several events each year to show appreciation for staff’s work and commitment. They host annual faculty and family tailgates each year during football and

basketball seasons with free food, activities for children, and celebrations with the players and cheerleaders. They host a similar evening for staff and families at a local waterpark. Throughout the school year, every birth and wedding among staff is acknowledged, and each new baby receives a Tattnall County Schools onesie.

At the end of each school year, the district team organizes a celebratory event for all staff. One recent example is a picnic at a nearby state park that included kayaking, putt putt golf and other games. Beyond recognizing staff's work, events such as these provide an opportunity to build camaraderie across staff.

Recommendations

Districts across Georgia and the nation are grappling with the challenge of how to attract and retain skilled educators at a time when it is becoming more difficult to do so. Fewer people are entering the profession, and some who do plan to stay for only a few years. The recruitment and retention strategies Lumpkin County Schools, Rockdale County Schools, and Tattnall County Schools have designed—along with their intentional, relationship-focused implementation—can inform the approaches other districts pursue.

State 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. More than 66% of teachers report having student loan debt.²² The high cost can deter people from earning their degree and certification, particularly those with limited financial resources²³, or contribute to their decisions to leave the classroom.²⁴ The state previously invested in strategies to reduce the cost of becoming a teacher. It

22 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

23 Elliot, W. & Lewis, M. (2013). High-Dollar Student Debt May Compromise Educational Outcomes. University of Kansas. <https://aedi.ssw.umich.edu/sites/default/files/publications/publication-cd-briefs-b3.pdf>

24 Garcia, E., Wei, W., Patrick, S. K., Leung-Gagne, M. & DiNapoli, M.A. (2023). In Debt: Student Loan Burdens Among Teachers. Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/media/4180/download?inline&file=Student_Loan_Burdens_Among_Teachers_REPORT.pdf

offered two financial aid programs for teacher candidates pursuing initial certification: the HOPE Promise Scholarship for college juniors and seniors with a grade point average of 3.0 who were in education programs, and Teacher Scholarships for individuals enrolled in advanced education degree programs in critical shortage areas such as math and science. Both were eliminated in 2010.

The state also offered Promise II Scholarships for paraprofessionals seeking to complete their degrees and earn certification. The program was eliminated in 2007.

The Georgia Department of Education used federal pandemic relief funds to establish a grant program to help paraprofessionals in certification programs cover tuition and related costs. However, those funds have expired, and the department ended the program.

The department won a federal grant to help rural districts, including Lumpkin County, create apprenticeship programs, which reduce the financial burden of certification currently borne by individuals. In addition, several districts have been awarded federal grants to launch apprenticeship programs.

State lawmakers can renew earlier programs and build on new efforts to reduce financial barriers and expand pathways into the profession.

- 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 financial aid programs for postsecondary students, including paraprofessionals, pursuing teacher certification.

These initiatives could be targeted to high need subject areas including special education, math, elementary education, English language arts, and science or to high-poverty schools.

2. Provide dedicated funding for teacher induction. New teachers who receive comprehensive mentoring and induction supports are more likely to remain in education.²⁵ The Georgia Department of Education 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 or ensure that their existing induction programs align with the framework. However, the state does not fund induction programs, and not all districts offer them. State funding for professional development, which can include induction activities, is limited, and districts must stretch these and other fund sources to provide professional development to teachers on an array of topics including literacy, mental health, and school safety.

State lawmakers can help fill this gap by providing grants to districts for mentors and other induction-specific activities, helping ensure that new teachers get the targeted support they need to succeed in the classroom.

3. Institute a comprehensive annual report on Georgia’s educator workforce. The Georgia Department of Education, the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, the Georgia Professional Standards Commission, and the University System of Georgia collect data on Georgia’s educator pipeline. The data from each agency is valuable and offers insight into educators’ career trajectories. However, it is not compiled in a single, easily accessible format. In addition, gaps in the data make it difficult to identify and understand some of the challenges within the educator workforce, which vary by subject area, geography, district and school demographics, educator experience, and other factors.

Information on the number of teachers on a provisional certificate or waiver, for example, is not disaggregated by subject area, geography, or school poverty rate. Available data do not reveal how retention varies by teachers’ years of experience, race, gender, school poverty rate or combinations of these factors. Data on the number of teacher vacancies at the start of the school year, including by subject area,

²⁵ 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>

school type (e.g., elementary, middle, etc.) and school and district poverty rate, are not reported.

Compiling data such as these could provide policymakers with information to develop targeted strategies to identify and address the most pressing challenges to the educator workforce. Teacher retention rates by school poverty quintile would help clarify how significant the difference in retention rates is between higher and lower poverty schools and assist policymakers in determining whether targeted interventions for the highest poverty schools would be beneficial. Additional data and analysis on special education, math, and science teachers could help pinpoint specific problems within those subgroups of teachers that could be addressed.

Lawmakers should require an annual educator workforce report and dashboard that integrates data from each agency and includes but is not limited to:

- a. Educator vacancies disaggregated by district, subject areas, school poverty rate, and school type (e.g., elementary, middle)
- b. Educator retention rates disaggregated by district, subject areas, number of years in the profession, school poverty rate, and educator demographics. Retention rates should also be provided for teachers who began serving as teachers through usage of a provisional teaching certificate or waiver
- c. The number of educator preparation program completers from approved, in-state teacher preparation programs, disaggregated by subject areas and completer demographics

This would align with states that undertake comprehensive analyses of their educator workforces, including [South Carolina](#) and [Michigan](#), which help state and local policymakers and stakeholders make more informed decisions to improve educator recruitment and retention.²⁶

²⁶ Michigan passed a law in 2020 requiring similar data collection and reporting requirements on its educator workforce, which may serve as a model for Georgia. Educator workforce reports prepared per the law are available here.



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