

# OPINION

ANNE HYDRICK KAISER

## Economic development starts in Georgia's classrooms

For more than 100 years, Georgia Power has remained committed to growing business and the economy in Georgia. We are proud of our company's decades-long track record of creating thousands of new jobs by supporting the growth of existing businesses and recruiting new companies to Georgia.

Our economic development initiatives are broad and a prime focus for our business. Every day, we meet with businesses of all sizes across all areas of industry to discuss their needs and how Georgia Power can work for them. At our Georgia Resource Center, dedicated to business attraction and expansion since 1991, we meet with prospective businesses to educate them on the benefits of bringing and building their business to Georgia. The facility is co-located with state agencies and other economic development partners in Midtown Atlanta and houses state-of-the-art visualization technologies, graphic information system (GIS) databases and site-optimization software. We also provide online resources for businesses at [www.SelectGeorgia.com](http://www.SelectGeorgia.com).

While the companies we work with each have unique requirements, one need is consistent among them: the availability of talent with a quality education, relevant experience and leadership skills.

### Enhancing education: Foundation for economic growth

There is a strong link between quality public education that produces a prepared workforce, economic development and prosperity. Because of this important link, in conjunction with our longstanding commitment to give back to our communities, Georgia Power places a significant focus on enhancing the education system in Georgia – specifically around science, technology, engineering and math (STEM).

Our efforts in classrooms across the state include our signature Learning Power program, developed by Georgia Power in collaboration with the State Board of Education, educators and other stakeholders. The program helps shape the energy future of Georgia, while developing future leaders in Georgia schools.

Through Learning Power, our teams deliver a standards-based STEM curriculum at no cost to schools, with lessons focused on energy and energy efficiency. The hands-on program is designed to meet Georgia Performance Standards for science and allows students to experiment with simple circuits, insulators and conductors as they relate to energy in their



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daily lives. Since its inception, the Learning Power program has engaged more than 285,000 students in 11,000 classrooms statewide.

Other Georgia Power education initiatives include partnerships with organizations such as Junior Achievement, grants for new teachers and a company-wide volunteer program that mobilizes hundreds of employee volunteers to conduct interactive reading sessions in the classroom.

### Economic development: Building business with strong talent

Georgia Power is not alone in our corporate commitment to education and to bonding the talent who will one day be leaders in our community. Georgia is home to dozens of leading companies that understand that for Georgia to remain competitive globally, we must work together to collectively strengthen the tie between good education and economic vitality.

While we have made some progress through our respective education initiatives, Georgia companies still have a long road ahead to enhance the quality of education in the communities we serve and ensure that our students graduate prepared to fill the careers of tomorrow.

Public-private partnerships, where corporations and business leaders join forces with educators, are an essential piece of this formula. Organizations such as the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, which has worked for nearly 25 years to improve education and shape positive policy, are helping bridge the gap and make education a priority among key influencers.

Making higher education affordable

and available has to be one of the most basic, yet most challenging, components of improving education in Georgia. Innovative programs such as Realizing Educational Achievement Can Happen for “the REACH scholarship,” are putting higher education within reach of so many Georgia students.

REACH, an integral part of Gov. Nathan Deal's Complete College Georgia Initiative, was launched in 2012 as Georgia's first public-private, needs-based scholarship program. It is now in 41 school systems, helping support academically promising students with 100 percent of funds raised going to college scholarships. One of its most unique aspects is that REACH is highly localized with school systems encouraged to use existing community resources and to “connect the dots” to foster local partnerships.

We also have to understand that traditional four-year colleges are not necessarily the answer for every student, or fit the needs of every business, and that career opportunities, revolving around the STEM areas, abound at companies such as Georgia Power. Engagement and support of the Technical College System of Georgia is critical to filling this pipeline with qualified workers and preparing them to succeed. Similar to REACH, the Strategic Industries Workforce Development Grant (SIWDG) is a state-funded award for students enrolled in certain programs. SIWDG awards are available for certified engineering assistant, computer technology, health science, precision manufacturing and more.

### Business and education: Strengthening the link

We are moving in the right direction. An understanding of the role that education plays in our economic future is shared by our state's elected and business leaders and we are increasingly putting tools and initiatives in place to help our students succeed in the classroom and in their careers.

Georgia Power is committed to linking our economic development initiatives and commitment to education to help students realize their full potential and develop top talent to fill key positions across diverse industries in the communities we serve. By staying in the course, we can better prepare for the future and ensure Georgia remains the best place to live and work.



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