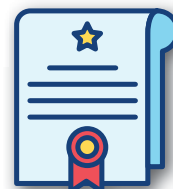
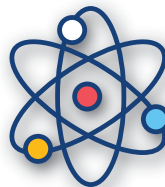
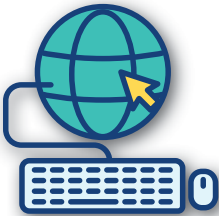
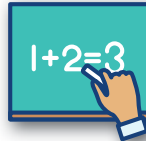




GEORGIA PARTNERSHIP
FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION



► 16TH EDITION ◀

TOP TEN ISSUES TO WATCH IN 2020

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JANUARY 2020

The Top Ten Issues to Watch is an annual publication of the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. Past editions are available on our website, www.gpee.org.

OUR MISSION

Inform and influence Georgia leaders through research and non-partisan advocacy to impact education policies and practices for the improvement of student achievement.



As the Georgia Partnership enters 2020, we do so with tremendous excitement about the future of education in Georgia and the many opportunities before us to positively impact the lives of students across our state. In 2019, we were privileged to extend much of the work we began in 2017 and 2018 while also cultivating some new opportunities and initiatives.

Deepening rural engagement, for instance, was foundational to the Georgia Partnership’s work in 2019. We continued to utilize our *Economics of Education* research first published in 2017 to convene leaders in rural communities throughout Georgia and discuss ways to leverage education for local and statewide economic advancement. We also presented at two of the Georgia Chamber’s largest rural prosperity-focused events to share the importance of investing in rural education. Further, we proudly launched a new podcast, entitled *Field Notes*, to shine a brighter spotlight on successful cross-sector education initiatives happening in Georgia’s rural communities. In 2020, we plan to build on our 2019 rural successes and make an even deeper impact across Georgia’s rural education landscape.

With one set of our core and unique competencies being our ability to convene, connect, and communicate to diverse groups of statewide stakeholders to improve student outcomes in Georgia, we also expanded our suite of community-based services in 2019 to include asset mapping. Through asset mapping, the Partnership works with local community leaders to identify strengths, assets, cracks, and gaps in their educational pipeline, while also serving as a conduit in connecting them to each other to share resources and connecting them to other agencies or communities to support their work. We successfully piloted this new offering in partnership with the LaGrange Troup County Chamber of Commerce and are looking forward to establishing new asset mapping partnerships in 2020.

2019 also delivered new successes and opportunities for our *Education Policy Fellowship Program* (EPFP). Not only did we graduate our 11th cohort of newly-minted education advocates from across government, education, business, and civic sectors, but we also re-engaged our EPFP alumni throughout the year via VIP professional development and networking opportunities. With over 200 EPFP alumni across Georgia actively advocating for quality education for all students, we are committed to staying connected and supporting their growth and development.

With almost thirty years “under our belt” advocating for high quality education for all of Georgia’s students, we remain poised to be the leading voice in state-wide conversation on public education, providing high quality expertise on Georgia’s most critical issues. We hope that the 16th edition of the *Top Ten Issues to Watch* report will inform Georgia’s leaders of our biggest education challenges and equip them to devise solutions that improve life outcomes for public school students across the state. We are, of course, always open to partnering with those who want to make Georgia’s public education system a national leader. We welcome your support and participation in our work. Georgia’s children need you.





INTRODUCTION

Welcome to 2020 and the 16th Edition of the Georgia Partnership's *Top Ten Issues to Watch* report.

With the release of this edition, it is fitting to consider the educational progress Georgia has made over the past decade and look forward to 2030. Recent data indicate that Georgia is making significant progress toward ensuring all students graduate from high school ready for the next step of college, career, or the military. Consider the following:

- ▶ **Achievement** – Georgia ranks 13th in the nation for K-12 achievement, according to Education Week's 2019 Quality Counts report. Georgia's K-12 achievement score, 74.4, was higher than the national average, 73.0. In 2015, Georgia was ranked 37th for K-12 achievement.
- ▶ **High school graduation** – Between 2011 and 2016, the high school graduation rate increased from 68% to 82%.
- ▶ **Post-secondary readiness** – In 2019, for the fourth year in a row, Georgia students posted ACT scores that were higher than the national average. Average SAT scores for Georgia students were higher than the national average for the second straight year.

While these results are to be celebrated, there is still room for improvement, especially in light of other data that show troubling trends for Georgia's economic development and workforce pipeline. Consider these troubling statistics:

- ▶ Only 40% of Georgia's adult population has at least an associate degree.
- ▶ More than 60% of students enrolled in the public K-12 system come from low-income families.
- ▶ Over 42% of those entering a University System of Georgia institution receive a Pell Grant. There is a full 24 percentage-point gap in six-year USG graduation rates between Georgia's poorest students (46%) and its wealthiest students (70%).

There's no doubt that the educational attainment of a state's population – its workforce – is critical to supporting its economic development goals. The overall education level of Georgia's population has not kept pace with the state's economic development plans. In fact, according to research conducted by the Southern Regional Education Board on Georgia's economic outlook for 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."*

These are data we cannot afford to ignore. The question for state leaders, then, isn't whether there will be sufficient jobs in the future. The question is whether there will be enough skilled workers to fill those jobs. Without a coordinated plan across all education agencies (early learning through post-secondary) and workforce development entities, decades of poverty, undereducation, and dependence on low-skilled jobs will hinder the state's ability to meet the challenges of economic globalization and advancing technology.

So how does Georgia move forward with the clear understanding that we must act now to ensure we continue to be an economically competitive state? That's the overarching theme of this edition of *Top Ten Issues to Watch*. Issue by issue, the report tackles the question of what needs to be done across the entire birth-to-work pipeline to address the educational challenges of today and meet our economic goals of tomorrow.

Dr. Stephen D. Dolinger
President, Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education



Indicators For Success: Where Is Georgia Today?

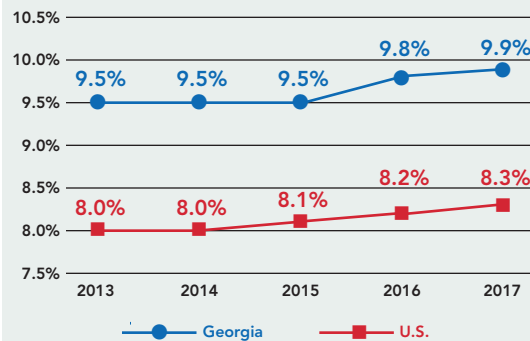
How does Georgia fare in producing excellent results for our citizens throughout the birth-to-work pipeline?

What additional progress is necessary to move our state above the national average and into the top tier of states to make Georgia a national leader?

These *Indicators for Success* reveal where Georgia stands on critical indicators of child well-being, educational attainment, and workforce readiness. Shown in each graph is a comparison of trends in Georgia relative to national averages. These data represent outcomes related to student achievement and success. Changes in these outcomes will require focused, collaborative work on each of the issues discussed in this publication. The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education is committed to tracking these indicators over time and advocating for policies and practices that will enable our state to emerge as a national education leader.

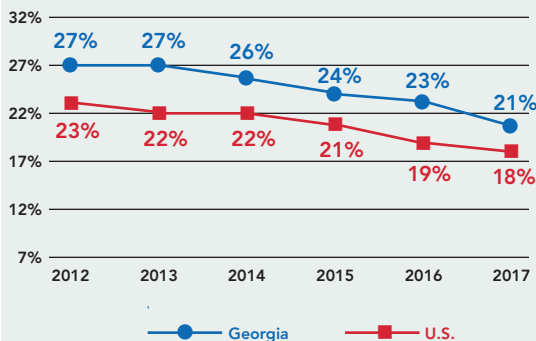
LOW-BIRTHWEIGHT BABIES, 2013-2017

SOURCE: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. datacenter.kidscount.org



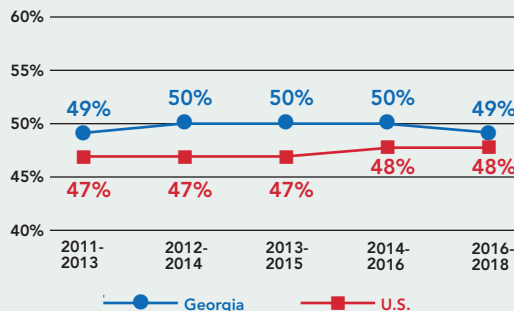
CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY, 2012-2017

SOURCE: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. datacenter.kidscount.org



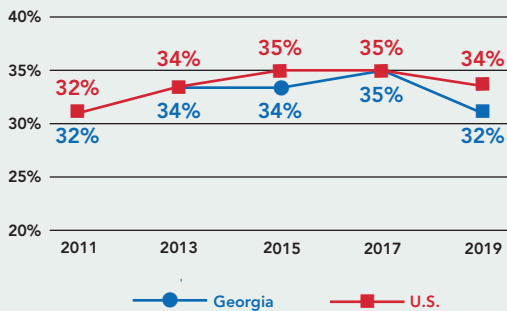
CHILDREN AGES 3 TO 4 ATTENDING PRESCHOOL, 2011-2018

SOURCE: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS COUNT Data Center. datacenter.kidscount.org "Young children not in school" indicator



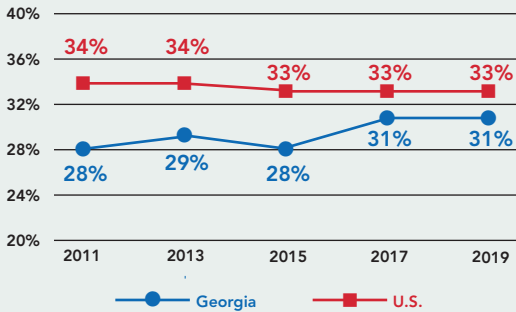
FOURTH GRADE NAEP READING, AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT, 2011-2019

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Education Progress



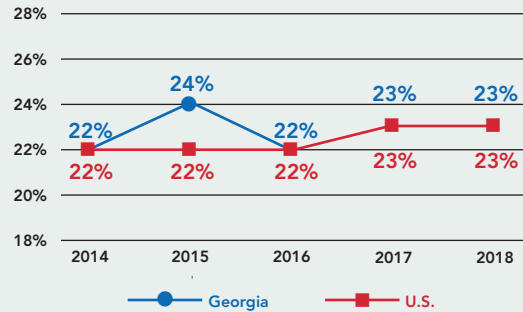
EIGHTH GRADE NAEP MATHEMATICS: AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT, 2011-2019

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics,
National Assessment of Education Progress



PERCENTAGE OF GRADUATING CLASS EARNING 3 OR HIGHER ON AN AP EXAM, 2014-2018

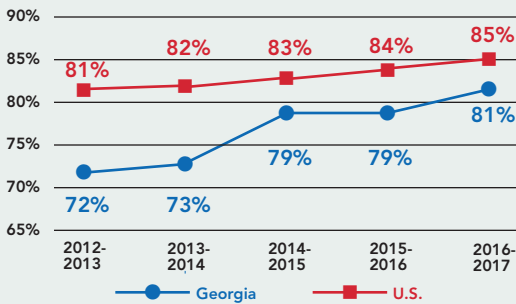
SOURCE: Georgia Department of Education



HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES*

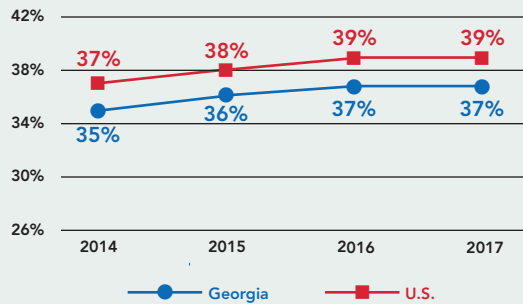
SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, Public Four-Year
On-Time Graduation Rates: School Years 2012-2013, 2013-2014,
2014-2015, 2015-2016, 2016-2017

*Public high school 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate.



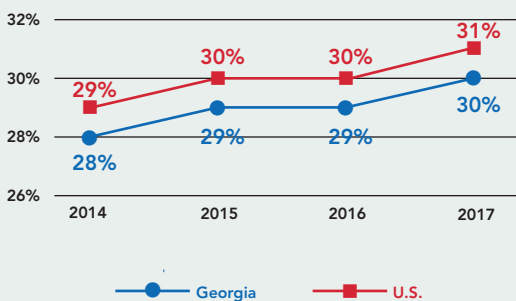
ADULTS OVER AGE 25 WITH AN ASSOCIATE DEGREE OR HIGHER, 2014-2017

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder
American Community Survey 2012-2016 (Georgia/United States)



ADULTS OVER AGE 25 WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER, 2014-2017

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder
American Community Survey 2012-2016 (Georgia/United States)





ISSUE 1

PREPARING FOR 2030: SHIFTING DEMOGRAPHICS AND GEORGIA'S FUTURE

ISSUE OVERVIEW

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."¹

This is according to research conducted by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) on Georgia's economic outlook for 2030. The study concluded that due to the impact of automation and the changing economy, coupled with the current education level of the state's population, Georgia is in danger of creating a multigenerational system of poverty that will result in more workers across the state being unemployed or underemployed, earning incomes below the poverty level, and becoming more reliant on state services.²

These facts have the potential to severely undercut Georgia's economic gains made over the past decade. Economies once built on low-skill industries, like most southern states, must compete globally for jobs requiring training beyond high school.³ To account for this, the state has made deliberate attempts to diversify its economic base and move away from low-skill jobs in areas such as manufacturing and construction that had previously undergirded its development. In its Georgia 2030 report, the Georgia Chamber of Commerce projects that the state's economic base and future growth will be centered on the following industries:⁴

- ▶ Agriculture
- ▶ Defense
- ▶ Film and tourism
- ▶ Advanced manufacturing
- ▶ Logistics and transportation
- ▶ Health care

Growth across these industries is being fueled by increasing automation and technological advancements. SREB estimates that automation in the coming decade will impact most of Georgia's 4.2 million workers.⁵ These technological and economic shifts have already eliminated many of the basic retail and manufacturing jobs that were once available to adults with lower levels of education and has created new jobs that require some level of education beyond high school. These *middle-skill jobs* often require an associate degree, an industry credential or certificate, or significant on-the-job-training.

There is no doubt that the educational attainment of a state's population – its workforce – is critical to supporting its economic development goals. The overall education level of Georgia's population has not kept pace with its economic development plans. In Georgia, approximately 55% of all jobs are categorized as middle-skill jobs, and 51% of job openings over the next decade are expected to

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

2 SREB, 2019, June, *Georgia's Economic Outlook*.

3 National Skills Coalition. 2018, June. *Building a Skilled Workforce for a Stronger Southern Economy*. Retrieved from State Policy: Skills in the States: <https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/Building-a-Skilled-Workforce-for-a-Stronger-Southern-Economy.pdf>.

4 Georgia Chamber of Commerce. 2018. *Georgia 2030 2.0: Georgia Outlook*. Atlanta: Georgia Chamber of Commerce.

5 SREB, 2019, June, *Georgia's Economic Outlook*.

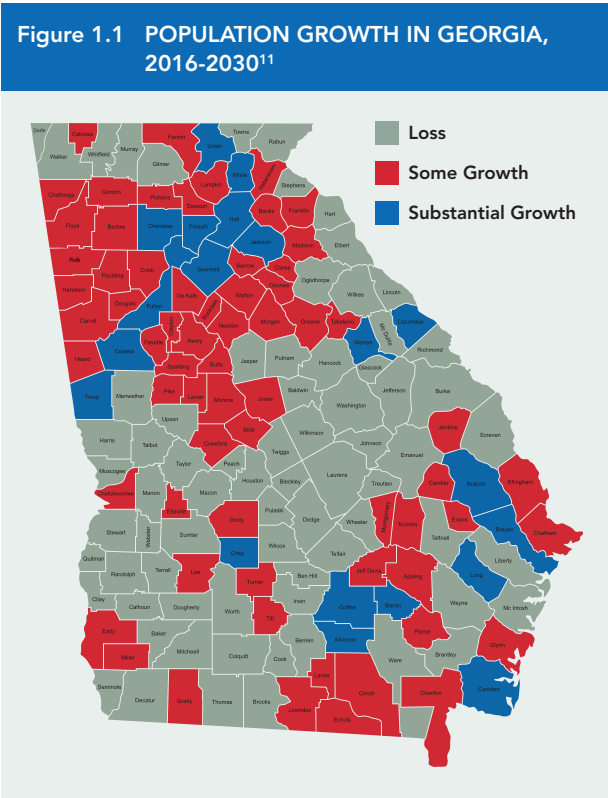
be in this middle-skill category.⁶ However, only about 43% of the state’s workforce is currently trained at the middle-skill level.⁷ What is more troubling is the overall educational attainment of Georgia’s adult population. On average in Georgia, only 40% of adults have at least an associate degree.⁸

As noted by the National Skills Coalition, “The question for state leaders, then, isn’t whether there will be sufficient jobs in the future. The question is whether there will be enough skilled workers to fill those jobs.”⁹ To close this gap and meet the challenges of economic globalization and advancing technology, Georgia must tackle issues of increasing poverty, undereducation, and the state’s historical dependency on low-skilled jobs.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

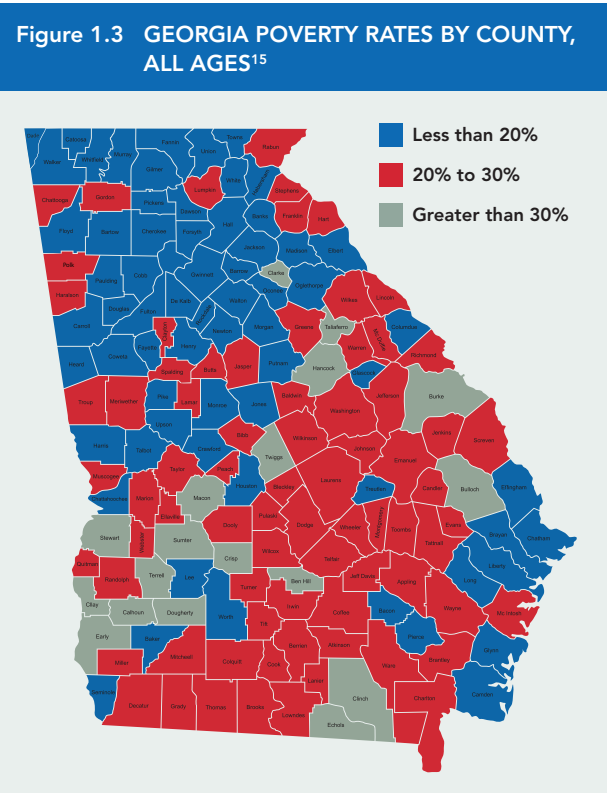
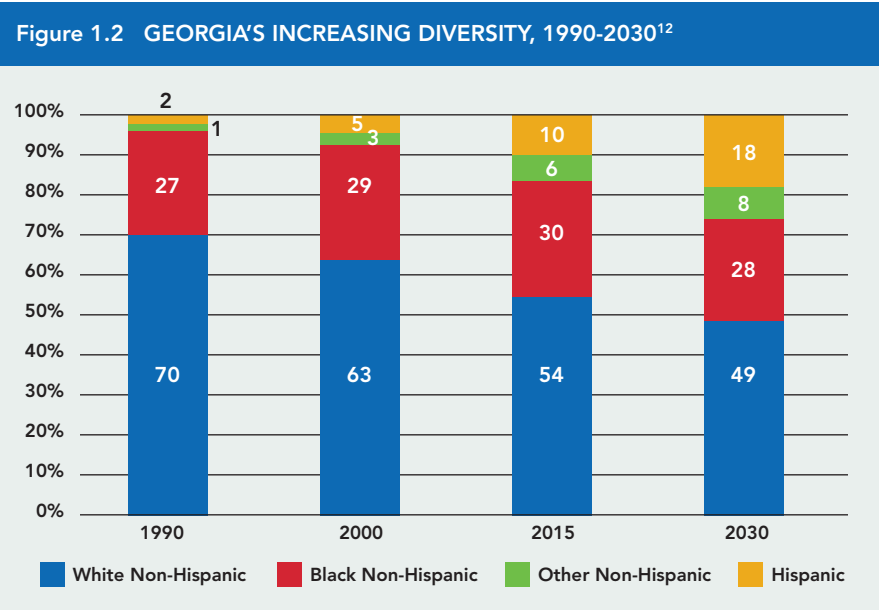
Like the nation, the demographics of Georgia’s population is shifting, dramatically changing the composition of the state’s current and future workforce. Population growth is directly related to job growth and the healthy economic growth of a town, region, and a state. To meet the challenges of post-secondary educational attainment and future workforce needs, issues of Georgia’s overall population, demographic shifts, and educational opportunity for all its citizens must be addressed.

Between 2016 and 2030, Georgia is expected to add over 1.3 million people (12% increase). However, that growth is not likely to be uniform statewide. Nearly 70% of that growth will be concentrated in the 10-county metropolitan Atlanta area. In fact, 74 Georgia counties will lose population or have a 0 growth rate.¹⁰ (See Figure 1.1.)



6 National Skills Coalition. 2016. *Georgia’s Forgotten Middle: Middle-Skill Jobs State by State*. Washington, DC: National Skills Coalition.
7 National Skills Coalition, 2016, *Georgia’s Forgotten Middle*.
8 Georgia Chamber of Commerce, 2018, *Georgia 2030 2.0*.
9 National Skills Coalition, 2018, June, *Building a Skilled Workforce*.
10 Georgia Chamber of Commerce, 2018, *Georgia 2030 2.0*.
11 Georgia Chamber of Commerce, 2018, *Georgia 2030 2.0*.

Further, as Georgia grows, it is becoming more ethnically and racially diverse. As shown in Figure 1.2, by 2030, Georgia is expected to be a minority-majority state, with 49% of the population being White and the fastest growing population being Hispanic.



Racial and ethnic diversity is a key driver of economic growth and is one of the most important predictors of business sales revenue and profitability.¹³ However, race and ethnicity are not the only demographic shifts occurring. The growing number of people living in poverty has become a significant challenge for Georgia, especially outside of the metro Atlanta region. In 2017, for example, Georgia's poverty rate was 16.9%.¹⁴ However, certain areas of the state have significantly higher concentrations of poverty; 59 counties have poverty rates above 25%. (See Figure 1.3.)

12 Estimates provided by the Atlanta Regional Commission, *The Regional Plan Forecast*. Series 15.
13 National Skills Coalition. 2019, September. *The Roadmap for Racial Equity*. Retrieved from https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/Racial-Equity-Report_6x9_web.pdf.
14 US Census Bureau. n.d.. American Community Survey Table S1701, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Table. Retrieved from Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months: <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=Poverty%20and%20race&lastDisplayedRow=67&table=S1701&tid=ACST5Y2017.S1701&t=Poverty&hidePreview=true&g=0400000US13>.
15 Georgia Chamber of Commerce, 2018. *Georgia 2030 2.0*.

The interaction between race and poverty is also a growing concern. Non-Whites are over-represented as a proportion of those living in poverty: 13% of White Georgians were living at or below the poverty line in 2017, compared to 24% of Black Georgians and 27% of Hispanic/Latino Georgians.¹⁶

Georgia’s public education system mirrors similar demographic shifts as the state; however, it has experienced a greater increase in poverty rates than the national average. Georgia’s K-12 public schools have the eighth-largest percentage of low-income students in the nation – 62%.¹⁷ Economically disadvantaged and Hispanic students are among the state’s fastest growing demographic groups, while the percentage of White students is shrinking. In 2018, White students comprised only 40% of all students enrolled in public K-12 education in Georgia.¹⁸

As the population changes, our education system needs to adapt to the new economy. Jobs are now requiring more skills and training, including stronger basic proficiency in math and skills such as problem solving, communication, and complex thinking. These are competencies in which historically underserved students struggle the most.

Achievement gaps in Georgia are compounded by issues of race and poverty. The outcomes of achievement gaps are clear and especially pronounced by income level, with a full 10-percentage-point difference in high school graduation rates between economically disadvantaged students and their more affluent peers. (See Table 1.1.).

Table 1.1 GEORGIA GRADUATION RATES BY SUBGROUP, 2018-2019 ¹⁹		
All Students		82%
Income	Economically Disadvantaged	77%
	Not-Economically Disadvantaged	87%
Race	White	86%
	Black	80%
	Hispanic	76%

Commonly, student outcome gaps are examined by race or poverty. Tables typically highlight achievement differences between White students and non-White students or low-income students versus their more affluent counterparts. When taken together, the data show that not only do students of color, no matter their economic strata, face achievement gaps compared to their White counterparts with similar income levels, but gaps exist within the same racial category by income level. Figures 1.4 and 1.5 illustrate these trends. For example, 69% of White third-graders who were not economically disadvantaged scored at least proficient on the Georgia Milestones test for third-grade English/language arts, compared to 52% of Black students in the same income category. Conversely, 44% of low-income White students scored proficient on the same assessment, compared to only 23% of low-income Black students. These gaps hold true for eighth-grade math as well.²⁰

16 US Census Bureau. n.d. American Community Survey Table S1701.
17 National Center for Education Statistics. 2019. Table 204.10: Number and Percentage of Public School Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch, by State: Selected Years, 2000-01 through 2016-17. Retrieved from Digest of Education Statistics: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_204.10.asp?current=yes.
18 Governor’s Office of Student Achievement. 2019. Report Card. Retrieved from <https://gaawards.gosa.ga.gov/analytics/saw.dll?dashboard>.
19 Georgia Department of Education. 2019, September 18. Georgia’s Graduation Rates Continue to Rise [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid=709>.
20 Data provided by the Georgia Department of Education.

These differences persist through post-secondary education. Historical wealth and income inequality creates barriers to post-secondary completion for low-income and minority students. Figures 1.6 and 1.7 illustrate the six-year graduation rate for University System of Georgia (USG) institutions by income and race. There is a full 24-percentage-point gap in six-year graduation rates between Georgia's wealthiest students and its poorest. As Georgia strives to meet the 2030 workforce needs, low-income students are at a considerable disadvantage in completing a degree USG institution. A majority of students graduating from high school and entering post-secondary institutions are low-income, and less than half (46%) are graduating within six years, compared to 70% of their most affluent counterparts.

One in three students who starts a technical certificate, diploma, or degree at a Technical College System Georgia (TCSG) institution will finish that credential within 150% of normal time (e.g., three years for a two-year degree program) to completion. It is important to note that many students choose to work full-time or transfer to four-year institution before completing their credential. The completion gaps within the TCSG are not as dramatic. The completion rate for White students is 38%, compared to 30% for Black students and 34% for Hispanic students.²³

Figure 1.4 2019 THIRD-GRADE ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS GEORGIA MILESTONES, PERCENT PROFICIENT AND DISTINGUISHED

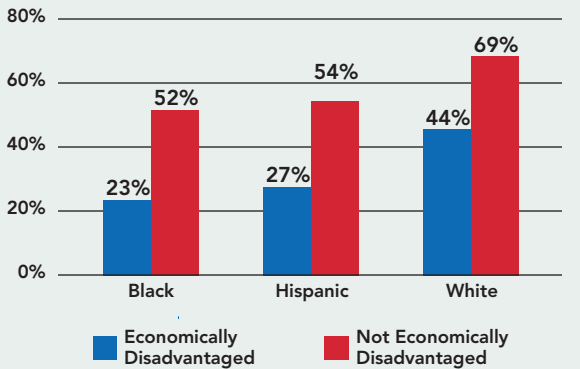


Figure 1.5 2019 EIGHTH-GRADE MATHEMATICS GEORGIA MILESTONES, PERCENT PROFICIENT AND DISTINGUISHED

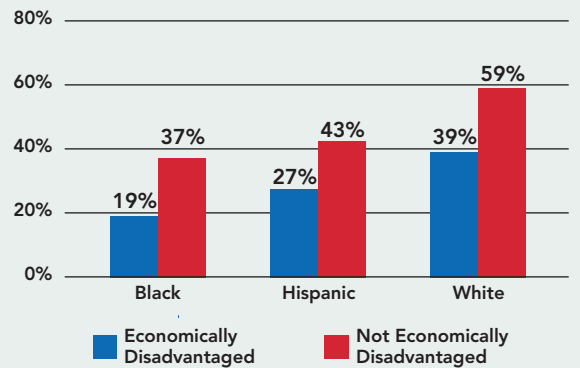


Figure 1.6 USG SIX-YEAR BACHELOR'S DEGREE RATES BY INCOME, 2012 COHORT²¹

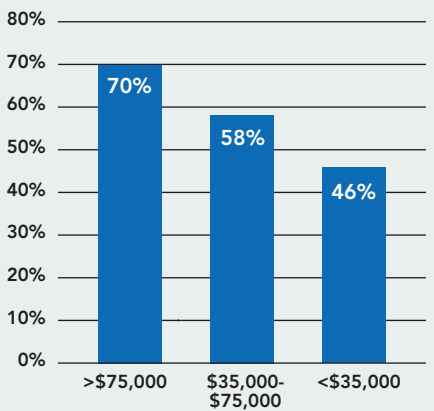
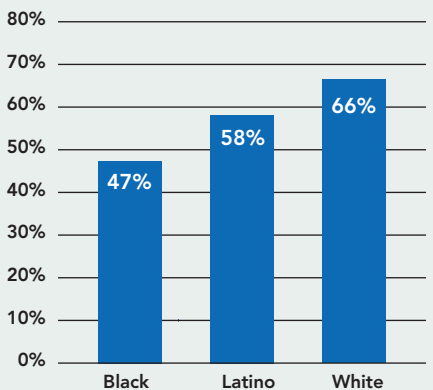


Figure 1.7 USG SIX-YEAR BACHELOR'S DEGREE RATES BY RACE, 2012 COHORT²²



21 Lee, J. 2019. 2019 Georgia Higher Education Data Book. Atlanta: Georgia Budget & Policy Institute.
22 Lee, 2019.
23 Lee, 2019.

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education researched the policies that high-performing states, countries, and school systems share, and created a framework to ensure that those same policies that enable and accelerate strong public education are in place in Georgia. This framework, EdQuest Georgia, has seven core policy priorities:

1. **Foundations for learning**, which include supports from birth for families, schools, and communities as well as access to high-quality early learning
2. **Quality teaching** for all students, ensured by providing supports for teachers across recruitment, retention, and professional development and learning
3. **Quality leadership** within schools – such as teacher-leaders, counselors, and principals – and those outside the school building, such as district and state leaders
4. **Supportive learning environments** that promote positive conditions for learning within schools through fostering a positive school climate and social and emotional learning for students, and outside of school in the home and throughout the community
5. **Advanced instructional systems** that support high standards, personalized learning, innovation, a strong accountability system, and aligned curricula
6. **Clear pathways to post-secondary success** that support the transition from high school into post-secondary education, and ensure post-secondary education access and success
7. **Adequate and equitable funding** for all students

The seven core policy areas addressed by EdQuest each challenge education policy makers and stakeholders in different ways, and each has an impact that reaches far beyond the students in Georgia's schools. The state's workforce, crime rate, and health care system are just a few examples of areas outside of education that are deeply connected and affected by the condition of the public education system in Georgia.

If Georgia is to address the challenges of the 2030 workforce, state and local leaders must provide opportunities to increase educational attainment and skills training for all students and adults. The achievement gaps seen in Georgia are not unique to the state. In fact, these gaps exist across the country. However, the history of systematic barriers, especially in the South, that have prevented people of color from accessing quality education and employment have created and perpetuated higher poverty rates related to lower educational attainment levels and job opportunities.²⁴

Currently, factors such as class, race, and ethnicity are stronger predictors of educational success than aptitude or inherent talent. Research shows that advantaged students have safety nets to keep them on track that less advantaged students do not. Among children who start kindergarten with similar academic potential, the achievement levels of low-income students are more likely to decline and stay low throughout elementary, middle, and high school compared to their more affluent peers.²⁵

Consider the following outcomes based on income rather than aptitude:²⁶

- ▶ A child from a family in the highest quartile of socioeconomic status (SES) who has *low* test scores in kindergarten has a 71% chance of being above-median SES by age 25.
- ▶ A child from a low-SES family with *high* test scores has only a 31% chance of reaching above-median SES by age 25.

The disparity is more severe by race. Among 10th-graders who score within the top half of their 10th grade math scores, 62% of White students will earn a college degree within 10 years. This compares to only 51% of Black students and 46% of Hispanic students in the top half at the 10th grade. And, regardless of SES, Black kindergartners with math scores in the top half of their grade are more likely than other kindergartners to have bottom-half math scores as eighth-graders.²⁷

24 National Skills Coalition. 2019, September. *The Roadmap for Racial Equity*. Retrieved from https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/Racial-Equity-Report_6x9_web.pdf.

25 Carnevale, A., M. Fasules, M. Quinn, and K.P. Campbell. 2019. *Born to Win, Schooled to Lose: Why Equally Talented Students Don't Get Equal Chances to Be All They Can Be*. Washington DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

26 Carnevale et al., 2019.

27 Carnevale et al., 2019.

As previously stated, minorities comprised 46% of Georgia's population in 2015 and will make up a majority of the population by 2030.²⁸ Currently, more than 60% of students enrolled in the K-12 system live in low-income families.²⁹ With a system where success is based disproportionately on race and class, Georgia will not be able to meet its economic and workforce needs if it does not begin to address some of the structural barriers encountered by low-income and minority students.

Moreover, focusing on grade-school students alone will not be enough to close the skills gap and meet the 2030 challenge. If every graduating high school senior stayed in Georgia and trained for the open jobs, there would still be unfilled positions.³⁰ Georgia needs to invest in initiatives designed to help low-skill adult workers earn diplomas and aid all adults in staying current with technological advancements in the job market.

Considering Georgia's changing demographics, shifting workforce demands, and the current educational attainment of the population, the question remains for state leaders: Will there be enough skilled workers to fill those jobs?³¹ Without a coordinated plan across all education agencies (early learning through post-secondary) and workforce development entities, decades of poverty, undereducation, and a long dependence on low-skilled jobs will hinder the state's ability to meet the challenges of economic globalization and advancing technology.

The EdQuest Georgia research found that top-performing school systems make explicit decisions to ensure all students are educated to the high standards set by the state and all schools have the resources to do so across the entire birth-to-work pipeline from early learning through post-secondary access and completion.³² Georgia needs to focus on the same equitable access across the birth-to-work pipeline to close the skills gap and meet the workforce goals for 2030.

28 Estimates provided by the Atlanta Regional Commission, *The Regional Plan Forecast*. Series 15.

29 GOSA, 2019, Report Card.

30 National Skills Coalition, 2018, June, *Building a Skilled Workforce*.

31 National Skills Coalition, 2016, *Georgia's Forgotten Middle*.

32 Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. 2017, November. *EdQuest Georgia: Charting Educational Reform*, 2017 Baseline Report. Retrieved from EdQuest Georgia: www.EdQuestGa.org



ISSUE 2

EARLY LEARNING: BUILDING TOWARD THE FUTURE

ISSUE OVERVIEW

The research is clear: Early childhood education is critical and provides numerous benefits for both students and society. Participation in early childhood education is linked to higher graduation rates, a decreased likelihood of involvement in the juvenile or adult justice system, and higher lifetime earnings.³³ Studies like the Perry Preschool Project have estimated a return to society of between \$7 and \$12 for every \$1 invested in early childhood programs.³⁴ Investments in early learning are an important part of developing a strong workforce and can yield increased workforce productivity decades later.³⁵

For years, Georgia has recognized the importance and value of early childhood education and has invested significant resources into its youngest citizens. From establishing the first universal pre-K program entirely funded by the state lottery, to creating the first state-level department responsible for early learning, Georgia has made intentional investments in providing high-quality early childhood education.

In 2013, the state applied for the Race to the Top: Early Learning Challenge Grant, a competitive grant designed to help states align, coordinate, and improve the quality of existing early learning and development programs. The federal government recognized Georgia's commitment to early learning and awarded the state \$51.7 million over a four-year period. Under the leadership of the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), the state put additional resources into scaling up its existing early learning systems while also implementing new, innovative strategies.

As the Early Learning Challenge Grant officially came to a close in 2018, Georgia has an important opportunity to reflect on the progress and changes made under the grant, and also to look ahead to how to sustain and build upon these improvements.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

The Race to the Top: Early Learning Challenge (ELC) Grant focused on improving early learning and development programs for young children by supporting states' efforts to ultimately do two things: (1) increase the number and percentage of low-income children enrolled in high-quality early learning programs and (2) design and implement an integrated system of high-quality early learning programs and services.³⁶ The grant made awards in three phases: to nine states in 2011, to five states in 2012, and to six states in 2013. Georgia applied for the grant in 2011 but was not selected. DECAL used the next two years to continue building its systems and applied again in 2013 for the final round of funding. Georgia's application received the second-highest score among 16 state applicants and was awarded a \$51.7 million grant over four years to expand on five critical areas: (1) building successful state systems, (2) increasing high-quality accountability programs, (3) promoting

33 Vail, C.O., and S. Neuharth-Pritchett. 2011. *Realizing the Potential of Quality Early Care and Education: Longitudinal Benefits of Georgia's Pre-K Program*. 2011 State of Education in Georgia Conference, Athens, GA.

34 Schweinhart, L.J., and D.P. Weikart. 1989. The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study: Implications for Early Childhood Care and Education. *Prevention in Human Services* 7(1), 109-132.

35 Grunewald, R. 2018. Early Childhood Investments: Paving the Way for the Future Workforce. In *Investing in America's Workforce: Improving Outcomes for Workers and Employers* (pp. 297-314). Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.

36 Race to the Top: Early Learning Challenge. 2018, November 1. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/index.html>.

early learning outcomes, (4) developing a great early childhood education workforce, and (5) measuring outcomes and progress.

Key Accomplishments Under the Grant

Georgia’s grant application outlined five critical areas with 12 distinct projects, shown in Table 2.1. The state’s focus areas demonstrate the wide range of activities that took place with the support of the ELC funds.

Table 2.1 EARLY LEARNING CHALLENGE, CRITICAL AREAS ³⁷					
Critical Areas	Building Successful State Systems	Increasing High Quality Accountability Programs	Promoting Early Learning Outcomes	Developing a Great Early Childhood Education Workforce	Measuring Outcomes and Progress
Projects	Grant management	Quality Rated access and availability	Early learning and development standards	Workforce knowledge and competencies	Comprehensive assessment system
	Early Education Empowerment Zones	Quality Rated validation	Statewide family engagement and community grants	Supporting early educators	Kindergarten entry assessment
			Supporting families through center-based home visitation and in family, friend, and neighbor care		Unified data system

Though numerous initiatives were propelled forward during the ELC Grant period, a handful of key projects made possible by the award proved to have a significant impact during that time and beyond.

Early Education Empowerment Zones

Under the “building successful state systems” critical area of the grant, Early Education Empowerment Zones (E3Zs) were created to increase the availability of high-quality learning and development options and to integrate new or expanded services into programs with high percentages of high-needs children. The zones were in North Georgia (Catoosa, Whitfield, Murray, Gordon, and Gilmer counties), South Georgia (Colquitt, Cook, Brooks, Lowndes, and Echols counties), Clarke County, and Bibb County. The zones were selected based on quantitative and qualitative data that indicated high need, including third-grade reading proficiency, poverty level, premature birth rates, the percentage of licensed child care capacity filled by children receiving subsidies, and Georgia Pre-K saturation.³⁸

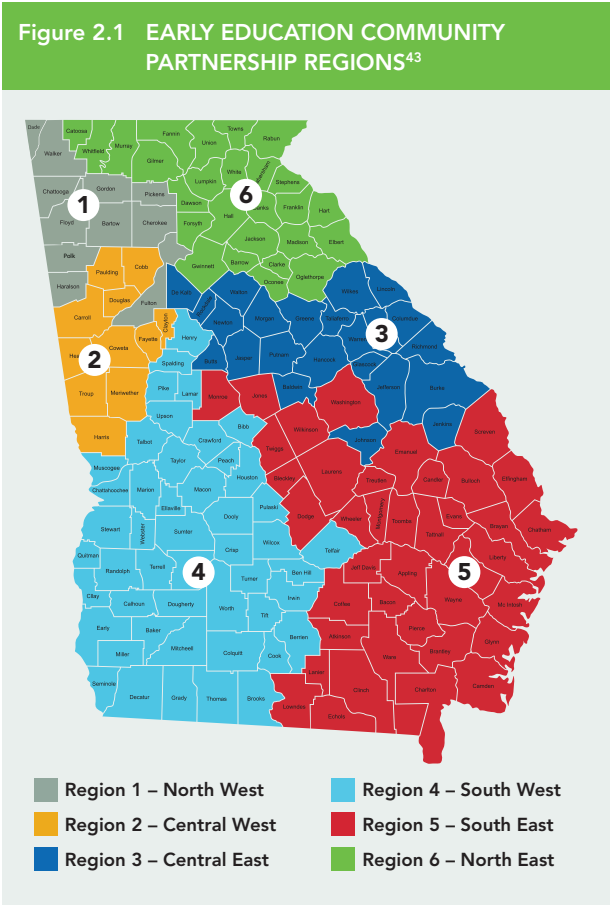
Each zone received over \$1 million in targeted resources, including quality improvement grants for programs, enhanced child care subsidy payments, family engagement grants, voluntary home visitation through Great Start Georgia, and specialized professional development for teachers.³⁹ Each zone was also appointed a community coordinator, whose role was to develop, implement, and monitor community-based projects and programs. The coordinator also facilitated the work of Birth-to-Eight Teams, which were formed to lead the implementation of the ELC grant strategies throughout the zone. The teams consist of community stakeholders from various organizations,

37 Bright From the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. Projects to Accomplish Georgia’s Early Learning Challenge Agenda. Retrieved from <https://decal.ga.gov/documents/attachments/ProjectstoAccomplishGeorgiaELCAgenda.pdf>.
38 Bright From the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. 2014, July 2. Selection Process Underway for Early Education Empowerment Zones [Press release]. Retrieved from <http://decal.ga.gov/documents/attachments/empowermentzones0714.pdf>.
39 Hartman, C. 2015. Early Education Initiatives Aligned with Great Start Georgia Framework [PowerPoint slides]. Atlanta: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. Retrieved from https://gahomevisiting.org/sites/default/files/gsg_leadership_team_2-24-15_slides_ehs_and_elc__0.pdf.

including public and private child care programs, local school systems, post-secondary institutions, for-profits and nonprofits, technical assistance providers, chambers of commerce, local library systems, public and private health care providers, state departments, elected officials from the Georgia General Assembly, and members of the general public.⁴⁰ Each team focuses on its own priority areas, including comprehensive early childhood and grade-level reading, school readiness, summer learning, dual-generation education, and Quality Rated.⁴¹

The Empowerment Zones showed promising results. In 2016, the number of programs participating in Quality Rated, the state’s Quality Rating and Improvement System, almost doubled compared to other areas of the state.⁴² The community partnership coordinators also supported more cross-agency collaboration and drove forward the ELC initiatives.

Based on this success, DECAL has now expanded upon this strategy and created a new unit called the Early Education Community Partnership Regions. Now, each of the six DECAL regions pictured in Figure 2.1 – central west, south east, north east, north west, central east, and south west – has its own community partnership coordinator to work with community partners and coordinate the delivery of state and local services for young children and families.



Because of the positive results seen in the E3Zs under the ELC, the initiatives and strategies will be sustained and potentially scaled up to provide an even greater impact for children across Georgia.

Quality Rated

Quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and education systems. Georgia’s QRIS, known simply as Quality Rated, launched statewide in 2012. It uses one, two, and three stars to indicate programs that meet defined program standards beyond Georgia’s minimum licensing requirements. The program is voluntary for all child care centers, but participating programs become eligible for free professional development, technical assistance, and financial incentive packages supported by foundations and businesses.⁴⁴

40 Governor’s Office of Student Achievement. 2016, March. *Georgia’s Early Education Empowerment Zones Quarterly Evaluation Report*. Retrieved from <https://gosa.georgia.gov/research-evaluation-auditing/evaluation-reports/race-top-early-learning-challenge-grant-evaluation>.

41 Williams, A., and N. Ogbu. 2017. *Building Quality: A Contextual Profile of Georgia’s Early Education Empowerment Zones*. Retrieved from <https://gosa.georgia.gov/building-quality-contextual-profile-georgias-early-education-empowerment-zones>.

42 Caron, B., R. Kendall, G. Wilson, and M. Hash. 2017. *Taking on the Challenge: Building a Strong Foundation for Early Learning. Early Learning Challenge Summary Report*. Herndon, VA: AEM Corp.

43 Source: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning.

44 Bright From the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. 2012, October. Georgia’s New “Quality Rated” Program Marks Another Milestone [Press release].

The additional funds from the ELC Grant enabled the rapid growth of programs participating in Quality Rated. DECAL invested in a statewide marketing strategy to inform families with young children about the Quality Rated system, the importance of high-quality learning, and how to locate a Quality Rated program.⁴⁵ Public service announcements, news articles, social media, and speaking opportunities were the primary methods used to raise awareness about Quality Rated.⁴⁶ The state also used funds to focus recruitment efforts on centers and programs serving children and families receiving subsidies and programs with a greater need for additional resources and supports.⁴⁷

Under the ELC Grant, participation in Quality Rated dramatically increased, as seen in Table 2.2. The number of Georgia’s Pre-K programs participating in Quality Rated nearly doubled over the grant period.

Table 2.2 QUALITY RATED PARTICIPATION ⁴⁸								
Program Type	Baseline		2014		2015		2016	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Programs Receiving State Childcare and Development Funds (CCDF)	775	23.5%	1,242	32.5%	1,610	47.2%	1,931	55.3%
Early Head Start and Head Start	48	14.1%	151	46.5%	201	56.7%	244	69.5%
GA’s Pre-K Program	433	23.9%	598	32.9%	741	40.3%	830	44%

Not only did quantity increase, but the percentage of children enrolled in programs rated in the top tiers (Tiers 2 and 3) of Quality Rated also grew. Only 3.6% of Georgia’s Pre-K students were enrolled in Tier 2 or Tier 3 programs at the beginning of the grant, but by the end of the grant period that percentage had grown to 15.9% of students. Even greater gains were made for Early Head Start and Head Start Programs: 2% of students were enrolled in Tier 2 or Tier 3 programs at the beginning of the grant, jumping to 38.6% by 2016.

Funds from the ELC went to not only expanding the number of Quality Rated programs but also to evaluating Quality Rated and determining the extent to which the ratings are accurate and meaningful indicators of quality. The study found that center-based programs and family child care learning homes with the highest Quality Rated star rating (three stars) were generally of higher quality than lower-rated programs.⁴⁹

In sum, though Quality Rated was established and underway before the Early Learning Challenge grant, the additional resources allowed Georgia to significantly scale up the number of programs that were rated as well as complete a rigorous study on the effectiveness of that rating system as a whole. Quality Rated will continue to play an important part in helping parents and families across the state find high-quality child care, preschool, and pre-K programs.

45 Early Learning Challenge 2016 Annual Performance Report. 2017, June. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED584935.pdf>.

46 Georgia’s Early Learning Challenge Grant: September Spotlight. 2016, September. Retrieved from <https://myemail.constantcontact.com/September-Early-Learning-Challenge-Newsletter.html?oid=1121423523358&aid=TbA2rJgbghk>.

47 Early Learning Challenge 2016 Annual Performance Report, 2017, June.

48 Caron et al., 2017.

49 Early, D., K. Maxwell, A. Blasberg, B. Miranda, N. Orfali, G. Bingham...T. Gebhart. 2019. *Quality Rated Validation Study Report #4: Quality Rated Star Ratings and Independent Measures of Quality, Children’s Growth, and Work Climate*. Bethesda, MD: Child Trends.

Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS)

Georgia introduced its latest set of early learning standards in 2013, the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS). These standards promote high-quality learning experiences and address the question, “What should children from birth to age five know and be able to do?”⁵⁰ For two years prior to the release, the state conducted an alignment and revision study to redevelop high-quality, research-based early learning standards for children ages birth to five.⁵¹ The timing of the new standards and the Early Learning Challenge grant was well-aligned, and allowed the state to effectively roll out the standards to teachers, providers, and families.

With funds from the grant, DECAL was able to create and develop printed, online, and in-person training resources around the standards. For example, DECAL developed free teacher toolboxes for the GELDS, which were designed to support teachers plan developmentally appropriate and standards-based learning activities.⁵² In 2016 alone, 4,423 GELDS toolboxes were ordered.⁵³ Funding also provided free GELDS in-person training for teachers focused on how to use the many resources the state developed. In August 2016, DECAL also launched PEACH – Planning Educational Activities for Children – an interactive website that aids teachers in lesson planning for students ages birth to five directly aligned to the GELDS.

Ultimately, the ELC funds allowed for increased awareness and resources to support the adoption of the revised GELDS, which remain in use across the state today.

Reflecting on Georgia’s Progress Under Race to the Top

Over the four-year grant period, Georgia made clear progress in its five critical areas outlined in the Early Learning Challenge Grant. In addition to the E3Zs, expansion of Quality Rated, and resources and support for the GELDS, the state made significant progress in its approaches to family engagement, incentives for teachers to obtain higher education, and the creation of a cross-agency data system. However, not all credit for the success of the initiatives can be attributed to solely the ELC funds. Georgia already had a strong foundation in its early learning systems, and the grant allowed the state to build on this progress and strategically launch programs and initiatives. The grant did, however, give the state a strong push of momentum to achieve all it did under the Early Learning Challenge.

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

The Early Learning Challenge Grant enabled the state to strategically invest funds and expand upon an already strong foundation and system, while also allowing for innovation. Georgia has much to celebrate for what it accomplished during the grant period. However, work must still be done to ensure all young children in Georgia have access to high-quality early learning programs.

Attracting and Retaining Talent

A major win for the state attributed to the ELC Grant was the talent and accomplished individuals that came to Georgia during the grant period to lead and implement the grant work. The funds created several new positions within DECAL and across the state, many of which have become permanent. It will be important to continue this investment in top talent not only in the state agencies, but in the workforce and teachers who are directly executing early learning programs on the ground. While the ELC Grant allowed for additional professional development and training for its teachers, more work must be done to elevate the early learning teaching profession. In 2017,

50 Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards. 2019. DECAL. Retrieved from <https://www.decal.ga.gov/Prek/GELDS.aspx>.

51 GELDS, 2019.

52 September Spotlight: Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) Teacher Toolboxes. 2015, September. Retrieved from https://www.decal.ga.gov/documents/attachments/ELC_Sept2015.pdf.

53 Early Learning Challenge 2016 Annual Performance Report, 2017, June.

the median hourly wage for child care workers was \$9.53 and \$13.42 for preschool teachers.⁵⁴ While a major goal of early childhood services has been to relieve poverty among children, many of these same efforts continue to generate poverty in the early care and education workforce due to low wages and limited growth opportunities within the profession.⁵⁵

Sustaining Quality

DECAL has set a deadline for all child care programs that wish to continue receiving Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS)⁵⁶ funding to be Quality Rated with one, two, or three stars by December 31, 2020. This will incentivize more programs to be Quality Rated. However, a continuing challenge for the state will be to sustain high-quality programs and the number of programs in the highest tiers. The ratings of some programs decrease after the annual review process primarily due to staff turnover. While a major focus of the state has been rating all programs, the next phase of the work will involve supporting centers to not only attain but also sustain high-quality standards.

Ensuring Access

Another challenge for the state, which is also a nationwide trend, is the decline in the number of family child care centers. Across the country, the number of licensed family child care providers decreased by 13% from 2008 to 2011, with an additional 11% decline from 2014 to 2015 alone.⁵⁷ Historically, families with infants and toddlers and those living in rural communities are the highest users of family child care, as it is often more flexible and more affordable than center care.⁵⁸ A decline in providers means fewer choices for families in need of child care, particularly those in rural communities, a large portion of Georgia. To increase the supply of high-quality family child care, more support and resources will need to be focused on these providers.

EdQuest research shows that top-performing states and educational systems have strong foundational systems in place to support children and families before students arrive at school.⁵⁹ Through the Race to the Top: Early Learning Challenge, Georgia made significant structural changes to support that goal and its citizens, changes that are helping working parents today and ensuring a strong workforce for the future. Now that the grant has ended, leaders at the state and local levels – elected, business, community, and education – must sustain and build on the many improvements made under the grant and continue to help Georgia be a nationwide leader and innovator in the early learning space.

54 Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018: Georgia. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/files/2018/06/2018-Index-Georgia.pdf>.

55 Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018: Georgia.

56 The CAPS program assists low-income families with the costs of child care while parents work, go to school or training, or participate in other work-related activities.

57 Family Childcare Brief. Administration for Children & Families. Retrieved from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/occ/occ_fcc_brief.pdf.

58 Family Childcare Brief.

59 EdQuest Georgia. 2019. Foundations for Learning. Retrieved from <http://www.edquestga.org/foundations-for-learning/>.



ISSUE 3

LITERACY: THE GREAT EQUALIZER

ISSUE OVERVIEW

Literacy is the foundation on which all other learning is built. In Georgia, 58% of third-graders are not reading with proficiency,⁶⁰ bringing long-term learning challenges to students and their families – and significant negative economic impact to our state.

Early intervention is key, given that the strongest predictor of reading outcomes in third grade is a child’s language skills at age five. Additionally, because of the proven relationships among adult low literacy skills (defined as a reading level equivalent to the fifth grade or lower), poverty, and educational outcomes for children, increasing the literacy of the one million low-literate adults in Georgia is paramount. Children whose parents have low literacy levels have a 72% chance of being at the lowest reading levels themselves.⁶¹

According to a recent Southern Regional Education Board presentation, an estimated 66% of jobs by 2026 will require at least some post-secondary education.⁶² Yet, currently, only 37% of Georgians age 25 or older have a post-secondary degree or certification.⁶³ Consider the impact of literacy on Georgia’s competitiveness and economic strength:

- ▶ Low literacy in the workplace costs Georgians \$1.3 billion annually.⁶⁴
- ▶ Of adults with the lowest literacy levels, 43% live in poverty, with 70% receiving adult welfare services.⁶⁵

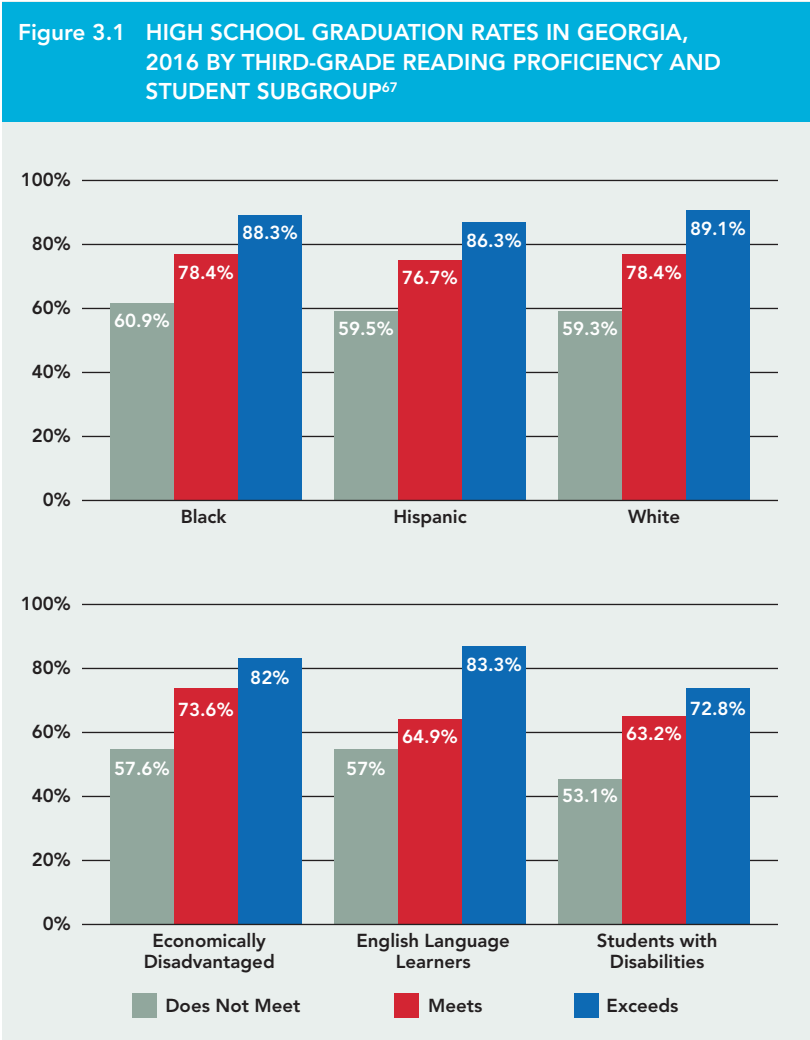
Literacy is a driver of sustainable economic growth, full participation in the labor market, and improved child and family physical and mental health. Georgia’s economic growth relies on the state’s ability to provide a literate, skilled workforce to meet demand in key sectors such as agriculture, trade and transportation, advanced manufacturing, health care, and technology.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

Literacy impacts all segments of the birth-to-work pipeline. Early language development forms the building blocks for third-grade reading proficiency, a key determinant for middle and high school success, on-time graduation, and ultimately employment or post-secondary opportunities. Without basic literacy, adults will not be employable in the labor market of tomorrow. And without employment, the cycle of poverty – and low literacy – will continue.

60 Georgia Department of Education. Georgia Milestones 2018–2019 Statewide Scores. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Assessment/Pages/Georgia-Milestones-2018-2019-Statewide-Scores.aspx>.
61 National Bureau of Economic Research, <https://www.nber.org/>.
62 Southern Regional Education Board. 2019, June 22. Unprepared and Unaware [Presentation]. Retrieved from <https://www.sreb.org/presentation/unprepared-and-unaware>.
63 Statistical Atlas. Educational Attainment in Georgia. Retrieved from <https://statisticalatlas.com/state/Georgia/Educational-Attainment>.
64 Deloitte. 2017. *The State of Literacy in Georgia: Action Needed for Georgia’s Thriving Workforce and Economy*. Atlanta: Literacy for All.
65 Source: National Institute for Literacy.

Research has shown that third-grade reading proficiency eliminates achievement gaps. Analyses of third-grade reading scores and high school graduation rates of 98,000 Georgians found that reading proficiency translated into a 30% higher graduation rate. (See Figure 3.1.) The results were consistent regardless of race and ethnicity, gender, poverty status, English-learner status, or disability status – making early reading proficiency the great equalizer. Further, students who earned higher scores on third-grade end-of-course reading tests were more likely to later take the ACT or SAT, and they had higher average scores compared to students at the other performance levels.⁶⁶



So how does Georgia ensure that ALL children are reading on grade level? Figure 3.2 shows the 12 key factors affecting child literacy identified by the Get Georgia Reading Campaign (GGR). Living in poverty has an outsized impact across all these factors.⁶⁸ One example is the dramatic difference in the vocabularies of 18-month-olds in various socioeconomic groups. By age two, the disparity in vocabulary development is significant. By three years of age, there is a 30-million-word gap between children from the highest and lowest income families.⁶⁹

66 Beaudette, P., K. Chalasani, and S. Rauschenberg. 2017, March 22. *How Do Students' 3rd Grade Reading Levels Relate to Their ACT/SAT Performance and Chance of Graduating from High School?* Atlanta: Governor's Office of Student Achievement. Retrieved from <https://gosa.georgia.gov/document/publication/how-do-students-3rd-grade-reading-levels-relate-their-actsat-performance-and/download>.

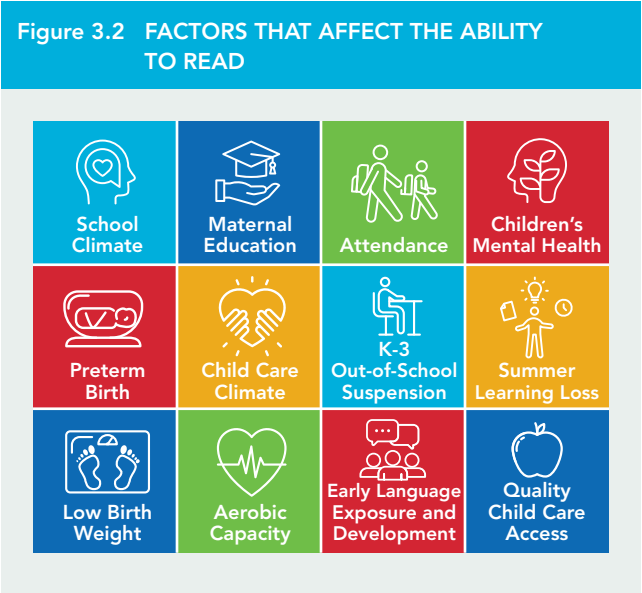
67 Beaudette et al., 2017.

68 Source: National Institute for Literacy.

69 Colker, L.J. 2014. The Word Gap: The Early Years Make the Difference. *Teaching Young Children* 7(3). Retrieved from <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/feb2014/the-word-gap>.

To address the many issues affecting literacy, GGR, which has grown to 100 campaign communities in 95 counties,⁷⁰ crafted a shared framework for literacy solutions. Incorporated across education agencies serving Georgia⁷¹ and other public and private partners, the campaign’s four research-based pillars outline areas of opportunity for improving literacy:

- 1. **Language Nutrition** in the form of abundant, language-rich adult-child interactions
- 2. **Access** to healthy physical and social-emotional development and high-quality early childhood and elementary education year-round
- 3. **Positive Learning Climate** focused on social-emotional development, attendance, engagement, and academic achievement as factors for student success
- 4. **Teacher Preparation and Effectiveness** to meet the literacy needs of children ages 0–8 in a developmentally appropriate manner⁷²



To address the state’s literacy challenge, Georgia is infusing these four pillars across the entire birth-to-work spectrum, from birth through adulthood.

Birth Through Age Five: Preparing to Learn to Read

To address factors related to high-quality learning and early language nutrition, interventions from birth to age five are critical in preparing early learners for reading success. GGR notes that children with underdeveloped language skills at age two are up to five times more likely to have language delays in kindergarten.⁷³

Early literacy has garnered the attention of the state’s top leaders. Recent legislation mandated screening for dyslexia and pushed for changes in teacher literacy training.⁷⁴

The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) has several programs to support development for teachers of Georgia’s youngest learners. The following are just two examples:

- ▶ Through LITTLE (Lifting Infants and Toddlers Through Language-Rich Environments) grants, DECAL is providing onsite coaching, professional learning, and materials.⁷⁵
- ▶ DECAL, in partnership with World Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA), is creating a statewide plan for supporting, instructing, and assessing K-12 dual-language learners. Further, WIDA Early Years is supporting the language development of dual-language learners in early education and care programs.⁷⁶

70 Get Georgia Reading Beyond 2020 Report.
71 The following state agencies are involved: the Georgia Department of Education, Department of Early Learning and Learning, Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, Technical College System of Georgia, and University System of Georgia.
72 See <http://getgeorgiareading.org/framework-overview/>.
73 Rvachew, S. 2018, September. *Speech Development and Literacy*. Retrieved from Get Georgia Reading: <http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/language-development-and-literacy/according-experts/speech-development-and-literacy>.
74 Tagami, T. 2019, May 3. Will Georgia’s New Dyslexia Mandate Make a Difference? *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Retrieved from <https://www.ajc.com/news/local-education/will-georgia-new-dyslexia-mandate-make-difference/fHvhukNqfwzvAyltySiEhP/>.
75 Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. Lifting Infants and Toddlers through Language-Rich Environments (LITTLE) Grants. Retrieved from <http://www.decals.ga.gov/InstructionalSupports/EarlyLanguageandLiteracy.aspx>.
76 See <http://decals.ga.gov/Prek/DualLanguageLearners.aspx>.

DECAL is also developing a Language & Literacy Endorsement, which will support early care centers and programs that are working to instill responsive caregiving and appropriate language and literacy development in their classrooms. The endorsement, which is expected to be available to early learning centers in early 2020, will provide additional recognition to programs that have already made this type of investment.

Below are just a few of Georgia's innovative partnerships designed to reach the state's youngest citizens:

- ▶ Talk With Me Baby⁷⁷ is built around the psychology of "serve and return,"⁷⁸ engaging professionals with access to young children and parents/caregivers to encourage frequent talking and interaction with infants to promote healthy brain development.⁷⁹
- ▶ Reach Out & Read distributes books to children through their pediatricians at each of their annual well visit checkups, birth to age four.⁸⁰
- ▶ Let's Read a Book Today Shared Reading for NICU Babies educates parents and caregivers of neonatal intensive-care patients on the importance of reading to infants.⁸¹

Third-Grade Reading – Reading to Learn

We know that third-grade reading proficiency is the great equalizer (Figure 3.1), setting children up for success in subsequent grades. And, because third-grade reading proficiency is the major indicator for high school graduation, this milestone is not just important for children: It is consequential for all Georgians. A thriving state economy is built upon a strong, educated workforce and tax base.

To improve upon instruction for children, Georgia is combining comprehensive community-based approaches and teacher training programs. Examples of community programs to improve Georgia's third-grade reading rates include the following:

- ▶ The Georgia Department of Education's (GaDOE) Literacy for Learning, Living and Leading in Georgia, recently awarded \$179.2 million to fund birth through grade 12 literacy programs through local school districts and community partners.⁸²
- ▶ Under Lunch at the Library, a collaborative effort between GaDOE, the Georgia Public Library Service, and DECAL, 100 libraries have become summer meal sites.
- ▶ The Early Language and Literacy Mini-Grant Program, a joint effort between the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) and the Sandra Dunagan Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy at Georgia College, supports partnerships targeting birth to age eight language and literacy development needs.⁸³

Beyond school and family-centered approaches, Georgia is providing high-quality professional development for teachers focused on delivering effective reading instruction to improve K-3 literacy skills. The following are examples of such programs:

- ▶ GOSA's Growing Readers Program (GRP) places certified reading specialists in 53 schools in all 16 regional educational service agencies (RESAs). GRP reaches nearly 400 teachers and 7,600 K-3 students throughout the state.⁸⁴
- ▶ DECAL, the Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy, GaDOE, GOSA, the Rollins Center for Language and Literacy, and the Marcus Autism Center have teamed up to train educators on how to incorporate social-emotional engagement strategies into lesson plans and enhance positive learning climate.⁸⁵

77 Collaborating partners: Georgia Department of Public Health, Marcus Autism Center at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, Atlanta Speech School's Rollins Center for Language and Literacy, Emory University's School of Nursing and Department of Pediatrics, Georgia Department of Education, and Get Georgia Reading. For more information, see http://www.talkwithmebaby.org/our_story.

78 See <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/serve-and-return/>.

79 See http://www.talkwithmebaby.org/get_georgia_reading.

80 See <http://www.reachoutandread.org/georgia/>.

81 See <https://galiteracycenter.org/neque-porro-quisquam-est-qui-dolorem-ipsam-quia-dolor-sit-amet/>; Emory University, Grady Hospital, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library Foundation, Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy

82 Governor's Office of Student Achievement. 2019, October 3. Georgia Receives \$180 Million for Literacy [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://gosa.georgia.gov/press-releases/2019-10-03/georgia-receives-180-million-literacy>.

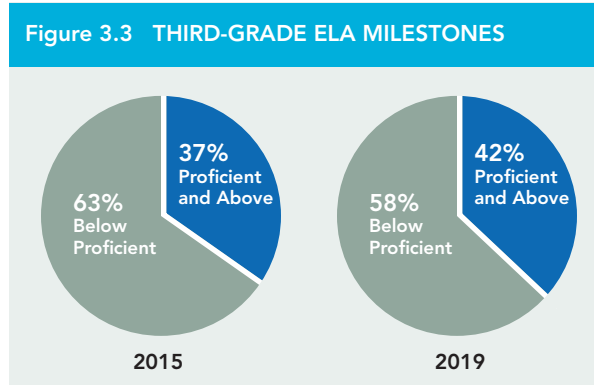
83 For information on GOSA's mini-grant program, see <https://gosa.georgia.gov/programs-initiatives/impact-previous-programs-initiatives/early-language-and-literacy-mini-grant>.

84 See <https://gosa.georgia.gov/programs-initiatives/resa-growing-readers-program>.

85 See-KS Video Modules: Early Childhood. Retrieved from Georgia Department of Education website: <https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Pages/SEE-KS-Video-Modules-Early-Childhood.aspx>.

- ▶ The Deal Center’s language and literacy mentors provide professional development to 238 K-3 teachers and impact 4,500 students.⁸⁶
- ▶ The University System of Georgia (USG) is piloting a redesigned professional educator curriculum intended to build capacity of evidence-based reading instruction for teacher candidates.⁸⁷

Early intervention, from birth to pre-K, will build a pipeline of reading-ready students, but Georgia must continue to deliver engaging instruction to those already in the K-12 pipeline who are not reading on grade level. Figure 3.3 illustrates the state’s recent success in improving third-grade reading proficiency. Up 5 percentage points from 2015, 42% of third-graders scored proficient or above in English/language arts end-of-course assessments.⁸⁸



Adult Literacy

In Georgia, an estimated one in six adults ages 19 to 65 has low literacy. As with poverty, there is an intergenerational cycle of low literacy that is difficult to break.

The personal financial incentives around increasing literacy and education level are well known. Full-time workers age 25 and older without a high-school diploma earn \$9,204 less per year than those with a high-school diploma and no college education.⁸⁹ Associate degrees pay off as well, bringing in 18% more in wages than a high school credential alone.⁹⁰

The Technical College System of Georgia’s (TCSG) Office of Adult Education provides adult literacy and education programs through 450 instructional sites, serving 38,000 students annually including 10,000 GED graduates. The TCSG’s GED preparatory programs include a workforce component through which enrollees can earn their GED in conjunction with an in-demand career certification.

The TCSG also offers credentialing courses that provide job-appropriate literacy, numeracy, and basic employability skills for job seekers with no high school diploma or GED. Coordination with local industry and WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) boards facilitates this exchange of information.⁹¹

USG adult literacy work includes Georgia State University’s Adult Literacy Research Center, which conducts research on health, financial, digital, and basic literacy for adults. The center tests adult literacy programs to evaluate reading interventions for adults reading below the eighth-grade level, and works with health profession students and health care professionals on effectively communicating with patients.

Serving an average of 1,000 adults each year, Literacy Action provides a broad range of tuition-free classes and support services. Adult basic education, GED preparation, and workforce literacy advance learners toward improved educational outcomes and employment opportunities. Serving students ages 16 to 86, Literacy Action tailors programming to meet student needs for flexibility, offering specialized summer courses and a “fast track” program for select levels.

86 Center for Early Language and Literacy, n.d. Investing in Young Readers. Retrieved from <https://galiteracycenter.org/impact/>.

87 University System of Georgia, Dr. Cynthia Bolton-Gary, Associate Vice Chancellor Educator Preparation & Policy - interview.

88 Georgia Department of Education. 2019, July 26. Students Record Strongest-Ever Overall Gains on Georgia Milestones Assessments [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid=701>.

89 Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2019, September 4. Unemployment Rates and Earnings by Educational Attainment, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/emp/chart-unemployment-earnings-education.htm>.

90 Southern Regional Education Board. 2019. Georgia Featured Facts. Retrieved from https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/georgia19_finalweb.pdf?1563373198.

91 For more information on the TCSG’s adult education programs, see <https://tcsgeu.edu/adult-education/>.

Research continues to shed light on the importance of literacy and language skills into adulthood. Nationally, 75% of state prison inmates did not complete high school or can be classified as low literate. Two-thirds of youth in juvenile justice have significant problems with language skills.⁹² Based on these findings, the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice is working with GGR to enhance services that increase the language and literacy of youth in the system.

Research also indicates that inmates who are educated are 43% less likely to return to prison.⁹³ In an effort to reduce recidivism, Georgia Piedmont Technical College is working with the DeKalb County Jail to provide inmates, 80% of whom do not hold a high school diploma, with on-site, short-term training in a high-demand career field as well as literacy and GED courses.

Two-Generation Initiatives

The 12 factors identified by GGR in Figure 3.2 have significant poverty correlations related to maternal prenatal health and education level. For this reason and more, intergenerational approaches, which are based on findings that the economic and educational well-being of parents is linked to their children's overall well-being,⁹⁴ have expanded in recent years. Also known as two-generation or two-gen, these programs simultaneously address the needs of parents and children to improve outcomes for the whole family.

For example, to serve the high number of females with dependent children enrolled at its institutions, the TCSG has partnered with DECAL to connect parents pursuing workforce training or post-secondary education with child care and family supports. Cross-training of DECAL field workers and TCSG special populations coordinators focuses on increasing awareness and identification of those who qualify for Quality Rated child care services and free GED preparatory courses or TCSG scholarships, easing the way to earning family-supporting wages. Similarly, Quality Care for Children (QCC) partnered with four Georgia colleges to pilot BOOST, which helps student-parents afford high-quality child care. The graduation rate for BOOST students is double the national average for student-parents.⁹⁵

DECAL, along with the USG and TCSG, funds Two-Generation Innovation Grants to pilot or expand community initiatives that connect the early learning, post-secondary, and workforce systems at the local level to deliver benefits to the two generations within a family unit – children and their parents.⁹⁶

Private organizations are also taking up this multigenerational approach. The South Rome Early Learning Center is a pre-K-to-third-grade early education program based on the Berry College child development model of teaching and learning through exploration, discovery, and hands-on experiences. Housed at Anna K. Davie Elementary, early learners receive literacy and STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) exposure. Parents and caregivers attend an eight-week "Circle of Security" course and receive coaching at daily teacher meetings on how to support their child's learning.⁹⁷ Additionally, Piedmont Athens Regional Hospital, with support from private donors as well as DECAL and the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, opened a child development center located on the hospital campus to serve hospital staff as well as the surrounding community. See the sidebar for more impacts of two-gen programs.

92 Snow, P. 2013. Language Competence: A Hidden Disability in Antisocial Behavior. *InPsych* 35(3). Retrieved from <https://www.psychology.org.au/publications/inpsych/2013/june/snow/>.

93 US Department of Justice, Rand Report: *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education*.

94 National Conference of State Legislatures. 2019, July 24. Two-Generation Strategies Toolkit. Retrieved from <http://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/two-generation-strategies-toolkit.aspx>.

95 Goldberg, H., T. Cairl, and T.J. Cunningham. n.d. *Opportunities Lost: How Child Care Challenges Affect Georgia's Workforce and Economy*. Retrieved from https://www.metroatlantachamber.com/assets/opportunities-lost-report-final_ymXE7Za.pdf; Participating schools are: Clayton State University, Columbus State University, Georgia Southern University's Armstrong Campus, and Savannah State University.

96 Get Georgia Reading. 2018, October 18. DECAL Announces Two-Generation Innovation Grant Funding Opportunity [Press release]. Retrieved from <http://getgeorgiareading.org/2018/10/18/decal-two-gen-innovation-grant/>.

97 For information about the South Rome Learning Center, see <https://www.berry.edu/laboratory-schools/srelc/>; formed by Berry College, Rome City Schools, and the South Rome Redevelopment Corporation.

Two-Gen Importance and Impact

Literacy for All (LFA) advocates for multigenerational literacy approaches and the expansion of wrap-around services with year-round access. LFA has worked to expand literacy opportunities at housing communities; afterschool, summer school, and early learning opportunities; health services for families at education sites; and early intervention systems to retain learners. Literacyforallfund.org offers extensive online resources for community leaders and service providers.

The DeKalb County School District (DCSD) and Georgia Piedmont Technical College have teamed up to market GED prep courses to parents during K-12 registration. Response has been strong, with 400 attending an initial information session. Classes are held at the DCSD main office, accessible by public transportation, with child care, tutoring, and a mobile computer lab made available through the district’s Family IMPACT Hub. Digital distance learning is available through a new, mobile-friendly platform that students can access in the onsite mobile computer lab.

The Dalton and Whitfield County “Birth to Eight Leadership” effort includes learning academies, power lunches, summer literacy camps, and professional development for teachers. Learning academies connect Dalton State College education faculty and students with elementary school students and their families to improve reading skills. Spearheaded by the Greater Dalton Chamber of Commerce and Believe Greater Dalton, the program involves more than 40 organizations.

Other two-gen efforts leverage technology to connect parents with resources. GOSA’s words2reading.com features curated resources for families, caregivers, and teachers to help develop and sharpen early childhood language and literacy skills. One such resource, Ready4KGA, has engaged 6,500 parents who receive text messages with tips for improving learning in children birth to age five.⁹⁸

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

Alignment of resources and funding is critical as Georgia continues to move the needle on literacy. In 2017, the Georgia Literacy Commission (GLC) examined statewide literacy challenges, bringing to light the need for coordination among stakeholders to improve literacy for all Georgians.⁹⁹ The commission prioritized key issues, including early learning, annual reading assessments in K-12, adult literacy coaching, and funding for libraries. Expanding on the work of the GLC and Get Georgia Reading, GOSA has developed a statewide literacy strategy with input from GaDOE, postsecondary educators, and agencies from across the state. The GOSA strategy outlines opportunities for collaboration to more effectively deliver and fund birth to adult literacy services.

Statewide campaigns that increase awareness of the availability and importance of literacy programs are essential. Equally vital, adult learners – as well as parents of school-aged children – need relevant workforce information to better understand in-demand jobs, reskilling, and how to maintain employability in the face of increasing automation. To engage the state’s one million low-literate adults, Georgia will need to expand marketing efforts to include more targeted digital marketing, social media, and two-gen strategies.

The TCSG has implemented flexible class schedules and distance-learning platforms for adult learners, and it is refining its marketing messages and expanding marketing channels to broaden its reach. With new adult literacy and GED applicants reporting “word of mouth” as the number one source of information on TCSG adult education programs, referral programs may be one way to increase enrollment.

⁹⁸ See <https://words2reading.com/ready4kga/>.
⁹⁹ The GLC was formed by Literacy For All, the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, and the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education after a Deloitte study (Deloitte, 2017, *The State of Literacy in Georgia*) highlighted the potential crisis looming for Georgia’s businesses in identifying an educated and literate workforce.

Georgia will continue to see low-skill jobs diminish while demand for mid-level skills will grow. Today, over half of American jobs are held by adults who have no education beyond high school; however, estimated job growth by 2026 shows that 66% of jobs will require at least some post-secondary education.¹⁰⁰ Georgia's Certified Literate Community Program (CLCP) has never been more important in meeting middle-skill job demand. Managed by the TCSG Office of Adult Education, CLCP takes a local, grass-roots approach to making improved literacy a community-wide commitment. After a recent rebrand, CLCP will execute a statewide relaunch to increase enrollment in adult literacy and workforce programs. CLCP should continue to embrace new means of marketing to attract target learners as well as community partners, who play a critical role in meeting child care and transportation needs, identified by adult learners as the most significant barriers to adult education enrollment. Ninety counties have participated in the certification program so far, and the newly launched CLCP hopes to attract Georgia's 69 remaining counties. Focusing on the foundation of literacy and developing literate communities is critical to the continued economic growth of the state – and to Georgia's ability to close the skills gap.

The impact of technology further exacerbates the literacy crisis. Forbes reports that artificial intelligence and automation are fundamentally transforming the labor market, eliminating many low-skill jobs and impacting all workers in all lines of work.¹⁰¹ Of significant concern for Georgia, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) cites a McKinsey study that shows four of the top five industries in the SREB region also rank highest for potential automation impact, leaving the undereducated even more vulnerable.¹⁰²

Basic literacy, while essential, is the first step toward workplace literacy. And as technology advances, complementary forms of literacy – digital, health, financial – will be needed by workers. Interactive applications, automation in advanced manufacturing, and digital platforms for daily life require learners of all ages to expand their literacy repertoire beyond the conventional pillars of reading, comprehension, grammar, and writing. The takeaway: today's workers must be prepared with new literacy skills that supersede basic reading and writing.¹⁰³

While Georgia needs to address the numerous factors affecting early learning, adult basic education must also be expanded to facilitate continuous renewal of the talent pipeline and improve citizens' economic mobility. Georgia's 2030 literacy challenge will be in preparing its citizens – from birth through adulthood – to develop the literacy skills necessary to earn living wages and effectively decipher the continuous flow of information that has become the new normal. The prosperity of all Georgians depends on this.

100 See <https://www.sreb.org/presentation/unprepared-and-unaware>.

101 Cobert, B., and M. Chang. 2019, July 11. Future-Proofing the Workforce: Why Digital Literacy Is Key. Retrieved from Forbes: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/civictionation/2019/07/11/future-proofing-the-workforce-why-digital-literacy-is-key/#6edae21c7f23>.

102 Southern Regional Education Board. 2019, June. *The Potential Impact of Automation and AI*. Retrieved from <https://www.sreb.org/publication/sreb-regions-economic-outlook>.

103 Southern Regional Education Board. 2019, August 28. *Postsecondary Trends Threaten Workforce Needs*. Retrieved from <https://www.sreb.org/news/postsecondary-trends-threaten-workforce-needs>.



ISSUE 4

FUNDING: RIPPLE EFFECTS OF BUDGET CUTS

ISSUE OVERVIEW

On August 6, 2019, Governor Brian Kemp directed all state government offices to cut state spending and prepare budget requests that included a 4% cut to current budgets (fiscal year 2020 which began July 1, 2019) and 6% for the following fiscal year (FY) 2021. Because the Georgia constitution requires a balanced budget each year, Governor Kemp requested the potential cuts based on a combination of economic forecasts and recent changes in Georgia tax policy.

First, during his final months in office, then-Governor Nathan Deal announced a \$194 million increase to 2019 estimated state revenue over projections, most of which was directed to K-12 education funding. As a result, the FY 2019 K-12 education budget was increased by \$167 million, which brought an end to the austerity cuts in the state funding formula.¹⁰⁴ Second, along with his promise to continue to fully fund the state's education formula, Governor Kemp included a \$3,000 teacher pay raise in the FY 2020 budget, which increased state education spending by \$530 million, in addition to needed increases in the allotment for enrollment growth. Additionally, in 2018 the Georgia legislature passed changes to the state tax code that reduced Georgia's revenue stream by approximately \$500 million. This annual reduction will last until the cuts expire in 2025.¹⁰⁵

As a result of these budgetary changes, Georgia's economy must grow by approximately 2.5% this year just to meet revenue demands; otherwise, spending will have to be cut to balance the budget. However, during the first quarter of the current fiscal year, revenue collections were flat and did not meet the 2.5% goal. In fact, during the first two months of FY 2020 (July and August), tax collections were \$97 million below where they needed to be.¹⁰⁶ Moving forward, the Georgia General Assembly is set to consider lowering the top income tax rate again during the 2020 legislative session, costing the state an additional \$550 million in lost revenue per year, thereby requiring further expenditure cuts to balance the reduced revenue.

At the time of the publication of this document, the 4% and 6% proposals are just that – proposals. However, effective October 1, 2019, all state agencies began operating under the 4% cut in case tax revenues do not recover. The final amended FY 2020 and 2021 budgets will be approved by the General Assembly and signed by the governor during the 2020 legislative session. The challenge will be balancing the revenue demands of the state agencies under decreasing income strands.

It is important to note that the K-12 education funding formula (called the Quality Basic Education or QBE funding in Georgia), Medicaid, and transportation are all excluded from the proposed cuts. Therefore, a significant portion of state education funding is currently protected. However, other areas that support strong educational outcomes are being considered. Some of the largest proposed cuts include a reduction of \$23 million in adult mental health services, \$12 million in child welfare services, and \$7.6 million to county public health departments.

104 Tagami, T. 2018, March 27. Georgia's Next Budget to Fully Fund Education. Retrieved from *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: <https://www.myajc.com/news/state—regional-education/more-money-for-schools-georgia-next-budget-fully-fund-education/UNFE66TMTVG4IMLgIQkFO/>.

105 Harper, C. 2019, October 4. State Grapples with Tax Revenues and Budget Cuts. Retrieved from *Savannah Morning News*: <https://www.savannahnow.com/opinion/20191004/charlie-harper-column-state-grapples-with-tax-revenues-and-budget-cuts>.

106 Salzer, J. 2019, September 26. Georgia Fiscal Economist Says 50-50 Chance of a Recession. Retrieved from *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: <https://www.ajc.com/news/state—regional-govt—politics/georgia-fiscal-economist-says-chance-recession-next-year/vbomRE72KH6mqSesq80afJ/>.

Georgia has taken important steps in recent years to recognize and address the impacts on student outcomes of non-academic barriers, such as poverty, mental and physical health, and community factors. In doing so, Georgia has seen impressive academic gains. As the state weighs potential budget cuts, it must address the need to balance the state budget as well as meet the commitment to serve all students and not lose the educational progress it has made.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

Across the US, states distribute education funds to school districts through a funding formula set forth in state law. State funding formulas typically have two distinct parts: the “foundation” (or base) and “categorical” funding. In most states, the foundation amount is designed to cover the basic cost of education, while categorical funding is applied to specific initiatives such as special education, reduced class size, or summer-school programs.¹⁰⁷

Current Funding Considerations

For the FY 2020 budget, K-12 funding in Georgia totaled more than \$10 billion and accounted for 41% of the state’s budget. A majority of these funds are provided to local districts according to the Quality Basic Education (QBE) formula, which was established by state legislation in 1985. The total amount of state revenue received by local districts is made up of three components: QBE earnings, categorical grants,¹⁰⁸ and equalization grants.¹⁰⁹ The largest portion is the QBE earnings.

The QBE is a highly complex formula consisting of 18 student categories based on grade and academic level, such as special education or career, technical and agricultural education programs (CTAE). The weights are based on the class size of each category, which determines the number of teachers the state will fund for each district. The state’s salary schedule for teachers, based on education level and years of experience, determines how much money is allocated for each teacher. Essentially, districts “earn” money from the state based on how many teachers are required to meet their class size needs.

The formula also provides funding for maintenance and operations, instructional materials, other instructional and administrative staff, and other routine costs. These amounts are determined on a per-student basis.

Georgia lawmakers added \$2.5 billion to the K-12 budget from 2014 to 2019, a sizeable investment. However, it must be noted that most of this increase was to restore prior cuts or to cover routine cost increases due to growing enrollment and pension obligations, rather than new investment dollars into classroom programs.¹¹⁰

In the FY 2020 K-12 budget, an additional \$707 million was allotted to K-12 education. While that is again a sizeable investment in public education, a considerable portion of the increase was targeted toward salaries and growth.¹¹¹

- ▶ Of that \$707 million, nearly \$530 million were the new dollars required for the \$3,000 raises for K-12 teachers and other certified employees.
- ▶ An additional \$3.7 million was authorized by the General Assembly for merit-based pay adjustments and a 2% salary increase for Department of Education employees.
- ▶ Routine student growth accounted for \$134 million.

107 Education Commission of the States. Finance: Funding Formulas. Retrieved from <http://www.ecs.org>.

108 Local school systems receive additional funding from the state in the form of categorical grants. These grants can include funds for transportation, sparsity (designated for areas with sparse populations), and low-incidence special education students.

109 Because not all counties in Georgia have equal property tax wealth, the amount of funds localities can raise through the local 5-mill share varies substantially. The state provides additional funding to these low-wealth counties according to an equalization formula that compares the relative property tax wealth of all counties in the state.

110 Suggs, C. 2018, July 1. *Georgia’s K-12 Education Budget Primer for State Fiscal Year 2019*. Retrieved from Georgia Budget and Policy Institute: <https://gbpi.org/2018/georgia-k-12-education-budget-primer-state-fiscal-year-2019/>.

111 Owens, S. 2019, July 1. *Georgia Education Budget Primer for State Fiscal Year 2020*. Retrieved from Georgia Budget and Policy Institute: <https://gbpi.org/2019/georgia-education-budget-primer-for-state-fiscal-year-2020/>.

As previously stated, state money provided to local districts through the QBE calculation is protected from the requested cuts. Districts are not facing the austerity of previous years that forced teacher furloughs and reductions in instruction-related offerings. However, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) is facing reductions in non-QBE-related programs and operations. Many of the proposed cuts are being absorbed through staff attrition and reduced operating expenditures such as technology purchases, travel, registrations, subscriptions, and the like. In addition, other non-exempt state-funded programs that GaDOE administers to support schools and districts are being reduced by 4% for the current year. These programs include grants related to CTAE, technology, the Chief Turnaround Office, Communities in Schools, curriculum development, school improvement, assessments, preschool disability services, and nutrition services.

Georgia has recognized non-academic factors that impact student learning, such as asthma, vision and hearing problems, dental issues, persistent hunger, and untreated mental and behavioral health issues. Each of these is directly related to student outcomes that schools and districts must address. (For a complete discussion of non-academic barriers to learning, see Issue 7).

Therefore, while the QBE allotment is currently not subject to budget cuts, many state agencies that either support schools or directly address many of these non-academic barriers are having to reduce their budgets. The following are examples of agency line-item reductions proposed to meet the 4% reduction in the current FY 2020 budget:¹¹²

- ▶ The Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities plans to cut over \$11 million from child and adolescent mental health services and over \$1 million from child and adolescent developmental disabilities services.
- ▶ The Department of Human Services is set to cut 21 state child welfare positions.
- ▶ The Department of Public Health has proposed reducing funds for adolescent and adult health promotion (\$2 million) and infant and child essential health treatment services (\$930,000).

Those reductions are even greater as agencies seek to meet the 6% target for the FY 2021 budget. Of particular concern are the relationships between non-academic barriers to learning, poverty, and local school systems' ability to meet those challenges. In a survey of Georgia school district leaders, the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute (GBPI) found that 70% of district leaders believe poverty is the most significant out-of-school issue that limits student learning.¹¹³ The percentage of students living in poverty is also highly correlated to student, school, and district performance. In fact, the majority of schools where at least half of students come from low-income families received a D or F rating from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement on their annual report cards. In contrast, only 5% of low-poverty schools – schools where no more than 25% of the population was considered living in poverty – received a D or F rating.¹¹⁴

Also of consideration, over the past decade, costs have been shifting from the state to local districts. In 2012, Georgia lawmakers ended their contribution to the cost of health insurance for non-teaching staff, including bus drivers and custodians. Districts now spend an additional \$430 million per year to absorb those costs.¹¹⁵ Local districts also cover a majority of the costs for student transportation. In 2019, local districts' total transportation expenditure was over \$945 million, yet student transportation is allotted only \$135 million (14% of actual spending) through QBE.¹¹⁶

As state leaders look for cost savings to balance the budget, there needs to be an understanding of how the shifting of financial responsibilities, as well as reductions in many of the supporting functions of state agencies, will impact local school districts' ability to educate all students. Districts with high percentages of low-income students tend to have fewer resources to meet the needs of their students.

112 See Amended Fiscal Year 2020 Agency Requests at <https://cdn.gbpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/AFY-2020-Agency-Requests-190911.pdf>.

113 Suggs, C. 2017, December. *Tackle Poverty's Effects to Improve School Improvement*. Retrieved from Georgia Budget and Policy Institute: <https://gbpi.org/2017/tackle-povertys-effects-improve-school-performance/>.

114 Suggs, 2017, December, *Tackle Poverty's Effects*.

115 Suggs, 2018, July 1, *Georgia's K-12 Education Budget Primer*.

116 Owens, 2019, July 1, *Georgia Education Budget Primer*.

Future Funding Considerations

When making budgetary decisions for the FY 2021 state budget and beyond, lawmakers will face some difficult choices. The 2020 General Assembly will be holding discussions around issues such as the Teacher Retirement System, dual enrollment, and teacher salary increases, all within the context of possible further tax cuts.

Georgia's Teachers Retirement System (TRS) is a statewide defined-benefit plan that provides lifetime monthly benefits for retirees. A defined-benefit plan is a guaranteed annual pension based on factors such as retirement age, years of service, and salary.¹¹⁷

The Great Recession greatly set back the system, which counts on a certain rate of return on investments. Data from the TRS shows approximately \$78 billion in assets and \$100 billion in liabilities, leaving \$21.5 billion in unfunded accrued liability.¹¹⁸ Even with strong stock market performance over the past few years, the market losses from the recession, combined with demographic changes, account for a majority of this shortfall. During the recession, the number of teachers and employees contributing to the fund dropped by about 15,000 at one point because jobs were eliminated or positions went unfilled. While some of those teaching positions have since returned, fewer active workers are currently paying into the fund than in 2009. Meanwhile, more retirees are drawing from the fund as more and more baby boomers retire. The combination of these factors has put considerable stress on the system.¹¹⁹

In response, the Georgia legislature authorized nearly \$600 million (\$223 million in 2017 and \$361 million in 2018) to ensure the financial security of the system. TRS administrators contend that the system is now stable and getting stronger. Employer contributions, in this case local school systems, are expected at 21.14% for FY 2020 but to be reduced to 19.06% in FY 2021.¹²⁰ This analysis indicates that the TRS is strengthening its position and recovering from the financial crisis of the past few years.

However, current projections are based on an assumed rate of return of investments of 7.5%. There is concern that the 7.5% return is unrealistic and the projected returns over the next 10-20 years will be less than that. Global market forecasts from BNY Mellon and JP Morgan Chase predict that the chance of hitting the 7.5% target is about 20%, and the current average investment return is 5.7%.¹²¹ Without changes to the structure of the fund or increased state dollars, if the fund does not meet the target growth rates, those costs will be passed on to local districts. This increased burden on local school systems would require them to shift money away from teacher salaries, classroom supplies, and the like.

State lawmakers introduced several bills during the 2019 legislative session that could significantly alter the TRS. The proposals included adjustments related to salary caps and average salary calculations, increasing staff contributions, and limiting early retirement options. Funding for TRS is anticipated to be a significant issue during the 2020 legislative session.

117 Teachers Retirement System of Georgia. 2018, July 10. Teachers Retirement: Policy, Sustainability, & Maximizing the System for Supporting Education in Georgia. Retrieved from Georgia Association of Educational Leaders: http://www.gael.org/uploads/conference_presentation/1531921085-a50b97b9d05ecd0a8/TRS_presentation.pdf.

118 Teachers Retirement System of Georgia. 2019. Comprehensive Annual Financial Report: Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 2019. Retrieved from https://www.trsga.com/uploads/CAFR_2019.pdf.

119 Salzer, J. 2018, March 5. Ga Lawmakers Say Teacher Pensions Need Fixing, Just Not Now. Retrieved from Atlanta Journal-Constitution: <https://politics.myajc.com/news/state-regional-govt-politics/lawmakers-say-teacher-pensions-need-fixing-just-not-now/wUEq3TmyEOXSfoB1TlpnDL/>.

120 Teachers Retirement System of Georgia. 2019, July 16. Teacher Retirement: Summer GAEL Update. Retrieved from Georgia Association of Educational Leaders: <http://www.gael.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/TRS-Update-Summer-GAEL-2019.pdf>.

121 Salzer, J. 2019, February 19. Lawmakers Try Again to Change the State Teacher Retirement System. Retrieved from Atlanta Journal-Constitution: <https://www.ajc.com/news/state-regional-govt-politics/lawmakers-try-again-change-the-state-teacher-retirement-system/InNJl48LHnLYIGe5Lno04M/#>.

Dual enrollment also will place a large demand on the state education budget. State appropriations have doubled in the past three years, growing from \$49 million in FY 2016 to \$105 million in FY 2019.¹²² House Bill (HB) 444 was introduced in 2019 to clarify program goals, limit courses to older high school students, codify credit-hour caps, and restrict summer-term courses. While HB 444 did not pass during the 2019 legislative session, the Georgia Student Finance Commission used its regulatory authority to change dual enrollment payment rates to colleges, eliminating awards for books and fees.¹²³ This resulted in a cut of \$4.2 million in state funds. Georgia's FY 2020 dual enrollment is currently set at \$101 million. (For more on dual enrollment, see Issue 9.)

Governor Kemp is also committed to his election promise of a \$5,000 raise for teachers. He was able to provide \$3,000 raises during the 2019 legislative session. It remains to be seen when the remaining \$2,000 will come. An important note, the teacher pay raises also affect the TRS. While higher salaries mean more money coming into the system, it also places increased financial stress on local districts to pay higher amounts relative to the employer contribution portion, which is currently approximately 20% of an employee's salary.

Finally, as previously stated, during the 2020 legislative session, the General Assembly is set to consider lowering the top income tax rate again. Current estimates conclude that this would result in an annual state revenue reduction of \$550 million.

ACTION STEPS

Top-performing systems make explicit decisions to ensure that all students are educated to the high standards set by the state and that all schools have the resources to do so. They intentionally target more resources to students who come to school with greater disadvantages. Further, most high-performing countries provide more teachers to support at-risk students and those with additional learning barriers, along with offering strong incentives for their best teachers to work in classes and schools serving students and families from low-income and minority groups.¹²⁴

Relatedly, national discussions and policies around funding formulas for K-12 systems are shifting from ones of equal funding across districts to ones built on considerations of equity. Unlike equal funding models, which provide all students, regardless of need, with the same allotment of resources, the equity-based model takes into consideration that it simply costs more to educate some students than others. For example, low-income students tend to start school academically behind their higher-income counterparts and require additional academic supports, extra learning time, and potentially outside services related to social services, physical and mental health, or housing.¹²⁵

Over the past two decades, K-12 funding discussions in Georgia have primarily focused on adequacy, with little attention being paid to equity.

Education Week publishes an annual assessment of state education policy, which includes an overview of school finance. The publication's analysis examines both education spending patterns and the equity in the distribution of funding across the districts within each state.¹²⁶ In terms of equity, Georgia received a B+. In terms of adequacy, however, Georgia was not rated nearly as highly. *Education Week* gave Georgia an F on spending, bringing the state's overall school finance grade to a D+ when combined with the B+ in equity, ranking Georgia 37th out of 49 states.¹²⁷

122 Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts Performance Audit Division. 2018. Special Examination, Report No. 17-09.

123 Lee, J. 2019, March 13. Legislation Curbs Growth of Dual Enrollment Costs: Bill Analysis: House Bill 444. Retrieved from Georgia Budget and Policy Institute: <https://gbpi.org/2019/legislation-curbs-growth-of-dual-enrollment-costs/>.

124 Center on International Education Benchmarking. 2016. *9 Building Blocks for a World-Class Education System*. Washington, DC: National Center on Education and the Economy.

125 The Education Trust. 2015. *Funding Gaps 2015: Too Many States Still Spend Less on Educating Students Who Need the Most*. Washington, DC: The Education Trust.

126 Education Week. 2019, September 4. Educational Opportunities and Performance in Georgia. Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2019/01/16/highlights-report-georgia.html>.

127 Education Week, 2019, September 4, Educational Opportunities.

Of course, money is not the only thing that matters to school success. Districts with similar demographics and similar funding levels can, and do, produce very different outcomes for their students. However, inequalities in funding can fuel increasing inequalities within and across school systems. Simply put, districts with more resources can pay teachers more and attract higher quality teaching candidates. More affluent districts can provide students with enrichment activities and support services absent in cash-strapped districts.

Students living in poverty frequently need extra supports from their school system to meet high levels of academic achievement. Strategies such as longer school days and years and smaller class sizes can help low-income students catch up with their more affluent peers. Georgia is one of only eight states that does not provide additional funding to students living in poverty through the state funding formula (QBE). Many programs that support low-income students and their families come through other state agencies, such as the Department of Public Health and the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities. It is vital that any budgetary decisions recognize how interconnected these agencies' budgets are and the possible cascading impact of cuts.

High expectations for Georgia students' educational outcomes has been recognized as a state policy priority. State leaders have made "fully funding" the state funding model a top priority and have kept their promise to the funding model and support for teachers. These are needed investments and target the academic achievement of students. However, GaDOE has also championed the need to support the whole child and address non-academic barriers to learning as part of the continuous improvement and success of the public education system. Considering that a majority of students in the K-12 system come from low-income families, equitable access to services that address their non-academic barriers to achievement must be guaranteed to reap the full impact of the investments being made in the QBE formula.

As the economic forecast becomes clearer, Georgia lawmakers may face difficult decisions to balance the state budget. As state leaders consider budget cuts of up to 6%, they must recognize that protecting QBE, while important and necessary, may not be sufficient. They must also protect broader impacts on educational outcomes and achievement, especially for the state's most vulnerable populations. Local school districts will likely have to make hard choices on serving the needs of their students and must prepare for possible decreases in support for those children and their families. Serious discussions must focus on how to financially support all of the expectations Georgia has for all of its students and the educators who serve them.



ISSUE 5

PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP: INSULATING THE TEACHER PIPELINE

ISSUE OVERVIEW

Teacher quality matters. In fact, it is the most important school-related factor influencing student achievement.¹²⁸ As with the rest of the nation, the robustness of the teacher pipeline is a significant issue in Georgia. A shortage of well-qualified teachers poses significant challenges for state policy makers as well as for district and school leaders. Teacher shortages and high rates of teacher turnover have negative effects on student outcomes, schools, and communities.¹²⁹

Over the past five years, Georgia has enacted several reforms targeting teacher preparation, recruitment, and retention efforts, beginning with Governor Nathan Deal's Education Reform Commission in 2015, followed shortly thereafter by the 90-member Teacher Advisory Committee. Together, these efforts addressed issues as far ranging as compensation models, pre-service training recommendations, and teacher certification ladders.¹³⁰ Strategies designed to affect teacher recruitment and retention have continued under Governor Brian Kemp, whose 2020 budget included a \$3,000 pay increase for certified teachers and public-school personnel.¹³¹

In Georgia, the data show that efforts to increase teacher retention are beginning to have an impact. Among all teachers employed in 2013, 68% were still in a teaching role five years later, and a full 70% were either still in the classroom or in administration. The four-year teacher retention rate among new educators that completed a teacher education program in Georgia in 2014 or 2015 was 82%.¹³² This is a significant increase from those hired in 2010, 44% of whom were no longer teaching five years later.¹³³

As much as these reforms can help professionalize teaching and strengthen the teaching pipeline, the role of the principal cannot be understated. The principal is responsible for creating the right conditions to support and increase teacher leadership. Empowering school-level leaders to transform and support a culture of learning is one of the most important steps districts and schools can take to support student learning.

School leaders are responsible for all aspects of student learning, both inside and outside the classroom. In fact, research shows that principals play a significant role in recruiting and retaining effective teachers and ensuring their success in the classroom through maintaining a positive school climate, motivating school staff, and enhancing teacher practices.¹³⁴

128 Rice, J. K. 2003. *Teacher Quality: Understanding the Effectiveness of Teacher Attributes*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.

129 Castro, A., D.J. Quinn, E. Fuller, and M. Barnes. 2018. *Policy Brief 2018-1: Addressing the Importance and Scale of the US Teacher Shortage*. Charlottesville, VA: University Council for Educational Administration.

130 For a full discussion of Governor Nathan Deal's Education Reform Commission and final report, see <https://gosa.georgia.gov/education-reform-commission>.

131 Kansa, D. 2019, April 4. *Georgia's FY 2020 Budget: Majority of New Spending Dedicated to \$530 Million Teacher Pay Raise*. Retrieved from Georgia Budget and Policy Institute: <https://gbpi.org/2019/georgias-fy-2020-budget>.

132 Georgia Professional Standards Commission. 2019, September. *Georgia Teacher Supply and Retention*. Atlanta: GaPSC.

133 Henson, K., C. Stephens, T. Hall, and C. McCampbell. 2015. *The 2015 Georgia Public P-12 Teacher Workforce: A Status Report*. Atlanta: GaPSC.

134 Levin, S., and K. Bradley. 2019. *Understanding and Addressing Principal Turnover: A Review of the Research*. Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

According to research, “highly effective principals raise the achievement of a typical student in their schools by between two and seven months of learning in a single school year; ineffective principals lower achievement by the same amount.”¹³⁵ That level of success is dependent upon the stability of a high-quality leader. Creating conditions in the district that entice effective leaders to stay, improve, and lead schools has a positive effect on student outcomes. It takes principals an average of five years to put a vision in place for a school, improve instructional quality, and fully implement policies and practices that positively affect a school’s performance.¹³⁶

Among all principals in Georgia in 2014, 49% were still employed as principals in 2019.¹³⁷ On average, the annual principal turnover rate is 19%.¹³⁸ This annual turnover rate is a bigger problem for schools that struggle the most with achievement, primarily those with high percentages of students living in poverty and/or minority students. In response to a directive from the US Department of Education, Georgia submitted an educator equity plan to address achievement gaps in 2015. At that time, the data showed the following:¹³⁹

- ▶ 23% annual turnover of principals in schools in the highest poverty quartile compared to 15% in schools in the lowest poverty quartile.
- ▶ 22% annual turnover of principals in schools in quartile with the highest percentage of minorities compared to 16% in schools in the lowest minority quartile.

In developing the state’s equity plan, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) worked with multiple stakeholders, including representatives from the community, local school districts, regional support specialists, evaluation specialists, and state Equity Team members, to conduct a root cause analysis for the equity gaps. Each group identified leadership as a primary issue associated with teacher turnover and lack of student growth.¹⁴⁰ GaDOE also noted that administrators often lack the skills to effectively communicate with teachers and the community. This lack of leadership that contributed to teacher and leader turnover was especially acute in rural areas.¹⁴¹

Much like the conversation around how to recruit and retain highly effective teachers, Georgia is working at both the state and local levels to recruit and retain highly effective leaders that embrace these challenges and responsibilities.

State Level

The root cause analysis work conducted in 2015 helped identify priority themes that impact educator equity in Georgia, including recruitment, effectiveness, retention and professional growth, and the learning and work environment.

To improve recruitment and preparation, Georgia is actively implementing or developing several of the six state policy levers identified by the Wallace Foundation as best practices to ensure leaders are well-trained and supported.¹⁴² Many of these strategies are supported and coordinated by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC), especially in the areas of leadership training programs, standards, and licensing.

135 Branch, G.F., E.A. Hanushek, and S.G. Rivkin. 2013, Winter. School Leaders Matter. *EducationNext* 13(1), 62–69.

136 Van Cleef, V. 2015, February 26. *The Real Impact of Principal Turnover*. Retrieved from The New Teacher Project: <https://nttp.org/blog/post/the-real-impact-of-principal-turnover>.

137 Data provided by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission.

138 Georgia Department of Education. 2015, September 14. *Equitable Access to Effective Educators*. Retrieved from US Department of Education: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/equitable/gaequityplan91415.pdf>.

139 GaDOE, 2015, *Equitable Access*.

140 GaDOE, 2015, *Equitable Access*.

141 GaDOE, 2015, *Equitable Access*.

142 The six policy levers are principal leadership standards, recruiting professionals, approving and overseeing principal preparation programs, licensing, leader professional development, and leader evaluation. See: Manna, P. 2015. *Developing Excellent School Principals to Advance Teaching and Learning*. New York: The Wallace Foundation.

An example is a change in the preparation and licensure/certifications for education leaders. Beginning in January 2016, the Georgia Educational Leadership Certificate offered by GaPSC was made available in two tiers:

- ▶ Tier 1 programs are for future leaders who are still in the classroom but looking to make the transition to school-level leadership, with a focus on instructional leadership.
- ▶ Tier 2 programs are for current school or district leaders.¹⁴³

To further improve leader preparation and training, in 2016 Georgia was one of seven states selected to participate in a \$47 million initiative funded by the Wallace Foundation to develop models over a four-year period to improve university principal preparation programs, called the University Principal Preparation Initiative (UPPI). The seven states have been reviewing their policies concerning university-based principal training and investigating whether changes, such as program accreditation and principal licensure requirements, would result in more effective preparation programs statewide.¹⁴⁴ The grant focuses on long-term changes centered on evidence-based policies and practices in three areas:

1. Developing and implementing high-quality courses of study with practical, on-the-job experiences
2. Establishing strong university-district partnerships
3. Developing and/or implementing state policies around program accreditation, principal licensure/certification, and other opportunities like funded internships to promote more effective training statewide

Under the UPPI, Albany State University (ASU), in partnership with the Calhoun County School System, Pelham City Schools, and Dougherty County Schools, is redesigning its leader training curriculum to ensure the school systems are hiring qualified principals with specific skills the districts report needing. Project partners also include the GaPSC, GaDOE, Gwinnett County Schools, and the NYC Leadership Academy.

Currently, the redesign is focusing on equity. Measures of equity are not included in the current Georgia Leader Keys Effectiveness System (LKES)¹⁴⁵ but are part of the Georgia Educational Leadership Standards and the Every Student Succeed Act state plan. To ensure building leaders are using an equity lens in all of their decision-making processes, this focus will be included in the newly redesigned principal preparation program at ASU. Candidates will be able to earn specialized certificates in the areas of equity and cultural responsiveness.

Georgia lawmakers are also focusing on the need to enhance leadership capacity across the state. In 2017, the Georgia General Assembly passed House Bill 338, the First Priority Act. While most of the bill focused on turning around chronically struggling schools, the legislation also established a Joint Study Committee on the Establishment of a Leadership Academy, which has resulted in the Governor's School Leadership Academy (GSLA). Through its four independent programs, the GSLA and its partners¹⁴⁶ aim to serve teachers and leaders in four areas of practice:

143 Georgia Professional Standards Commission. 2016, January. Educational Leadership Tiered Transition Guidance. Retrieved from http://www.gapsc.com/Commission/policies_guidelines/Downloads/LeadershipTieredTransitionGuidance_20160825.pdf.

144 Selected university participants and their states include Albany State University (Georgia), Florida Atlantic University, North Carolina State University, San Diego State University (California), the University of Connecticut, Virginia State University, and Western Kentucky University.

145 The LKES is a statewide common evaluation system for building-level leaders to improve leader performance. Primary components include a focus on professional growth, student growth, and school climate. The goal of this system is to provide meaningful feedback and to support the continuous growth and development of each leader and their school.

146 Partners include Gwinnett County Public Schools, the Office of School Improvement at the Georgia Department of Education, the College of Education at Georgia Southern University, the Georgia Professional Standards Commission, and the 16 regional educational service agencies.

- 1. **Induction Teacher Program:** Serves teachers in years one to three of practice
- 2. **Teacher Leader Program:** Serves teachers with five or more years of experience who are interested in exploring leadership roles inside and outside the classroom
- 3. **Aspiring Principal Program:** Serves educators who work in a district with a federally identified school, have three or more years of effective practice, have an expressed desire to become a principal, and have been recommended by their current district superintendent¹⁴⁷
- 4. **Principal Support Program:** Serves principals who are currently working in a federally designated (CSI, TSI, Promise, or SIG)¹⁴⁸ school¹⁴⁹

District Examples

Work is also being done at the district level to improve leadership and the leadership pipeline.

The Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI) is an independent nonprofit organization with a mission to uplift school leaders, transform mindsets and action, create vibrant cultures of innovation, and build excellent and equitable schools. Leadership training at GLISI is aimed at transforming toxic cultures among adults that keep teachers in isolation, discourage experimentation, and undercut decision-making authority.

In the last five years, GLISI has partnered on average with 50 school districts and education organizations, preparing nearly 7,500 educators to lead in classrooms, schools, and central offices in every corner of Georgia. GLISI’s flagship training program, the Base Camp and Leadership Summit, is a powerful catalyst for shifting leader mindsets and improving team culture. A culture of learning among adults is one of the most critical precursors of school success, yet culture change is notoriously difficult to achieve at scale. GLISI’s pre-post assessments of participants’ capacity to positively influence culture, including measures of team efficacy and psychological safety, consistently show statistically significant gains. Recently, GLISI launched COBALT (Cultures of Belonging and Learning Together) to improve the social and emotional competencies of leaders, a critical complement to the technical skills of leading. GLISI’s free digital Leader SEL (social-emotional learning) Toolkit, which provides curated resources aligned to six research-based leader competencies, has been accessed by over 1,000 leaders to date.¹⁵⁰

These programs of support are unique in their emphasis on not only improving individual leaders’ technical and adaptive skills, but also in cultivating more robust collaborative learning cultures among adults. School culture indicators such as teacher and leader retention are more favorable among GLISI’s long-term partners than the state average, as are student outcomes: Graduation rates are 5.9 percentage points higher than the state average among districts that have worked with GLISI for two or more consecutive years.

The Georgia Association of Educational Leaders offers the Aspiring Principals Program, a yearlong program open to assistant principals who would like to become principals. This program helps participants prepare for the complex responsibilities of school leadership, which include tasks as varied as building manager, human resources administrator, change agent, student disciplinarian, and instructional leader.¹⁵¹

147 For more information on the Aspiring Principal Program, see <https://gosa.georgia.gov/programs-initiatives/governors-school-leadership-academy/governors-school-leadership-academy-0>.

148 The GaDOE has several categories of federally identified turnaround schools based on entry criteria and if the school is a title 1 school that qualifies for a School Improvement Grant (SIG) as a Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) or Promise school, or any school that qualifies for Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI). For more information on turnaround eligibility see <https://www.gadoe.org/School-Improvement/School-Improvement-Services/Pages/1003-School-Improvement-Grants-.aspx>.

149 For more information on the Principal Support Program, see <https://gosa.georgia.gov/programs-initiatives/governors-school-leadership-academy/governors-school-leadership-academy>.

150 See <https://glisi.org/resources/leader-sel-toolkit/>.

151 For more information on the Aspiring Principal Program, see <http://www.gael.org/resources/aspiring-principals-program>.

Finally, some efforts in Georgia to develop leaders are more localized. One of the best examples is the Gwinnett County Public Schools Quality-Plus Leader Academy (QPLA). This program's goal is to increase student achievement by identifying, recruiting, and preparing introspective school leaders. The academy works to develop, train, and support them to become highly effective instructional leaders in today's schools. Participants can choose from different leadership development tracks, each of which corresponds to a different professional development need and level of leadership.¹⁵² The QPLA directly supports the Gwinnett County School District's vision of building internal capacity.

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

Much of Georgia's current work on leadership is centered on developing new leaders, which is necessary but not enough. Strong leadership development systems and policies go beyond deepening the bench or increasing the pipeline. While this work is an important step, the state must not assume that the turnover will continue at the same rate and fail to address the root causes of turnover. The climate and culture of schools and districts must be hospitable to not only recruit, but also to retain and grow the most talented teachers and leaders.

As the principal is responsible for setting the climate and culture of his or her school, the school district creates conditions that either hinder or empower principals to lead toward excellent instruction in every classroom for every student. Research has found that leadership disparities explain almost a quarter of the difference in student performance accounted for by schools.¹⁵³ When district leaders effectively address specific responsibilities – chief among them defining clear frameworks for teaching and leading, focusing on facilitating principal growth, and re-imagining district office time and resources to align directly to deep learning – they have a profound, positive impact on student achievement in their districts.¹⁵⁴ Shifting leadership practice at the district level translates to more effective leadership at the school level. For an example of district leadership empowering principals and impacting student outcomes, see the sidebar Leadership in Carroll County Schools.

Georgia's own experiences with turnaround schools, as well as best-practice research in general, indicate that district capacity and leadership development are key factors in sustaining long-term outcomes. One of the main lessons learned through working with persistently low-performing schools in state turnaround efforts is that any improvements made within a school building are extremely difficult to maintain over the long term without district support and involvement.

Best-practice research on curbing the teacher shortage and reducing teacher turnover stresses designing stronger leadership systems that allow principals to play a greater role in driving the district's strategy for teacher recruitment and retention. This includes strong principal preparation programs that promote effective hiring strategies, methods for ensuring a sound teacher-job fit, eliminating stressful work conditions, and providing effective, culturally responsive instructional leadership and support.¹⁵⁵

152 Gwinnett County Public Schools. 2019. The Leadership Development Programs. Retrieved from <https://publish.gwinnett.k12.ga.us/gcps/home/public/about/content/key-initiatives/the+leadership+development+programs>.

153 Gwinnett County Public Schools, 2019.

154 Waters, J.T., and R.J. Marzano. 2006. *School District Leadership That Works: The Effect of Superintendent Leadership on Student Achievement*. Denver: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning; Honig, M.I. and L.R. Rainey. 2015. *How School Districts Can Support Deeper Learning: The Need for Performance Alignment*. Students at the Center: Deeper Learning Research Series. Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future.

155 Castro, A., D.J. Quinn, E. Fuller, E., and M. Barnes. 2018. *Policy Brief 2018-1: Addressing the Importance and Scale of the US Teacher Shortage*. Charlottesville, VA: University Council for Educational Administration.

Leadership in Carroll County Schools

In 2010, Carroll County native Scott Cowart returned home to assume the role of Superintendent of the Carroll County School System with a vision: Carroll County Schools would be known as a premier school district achieving expectation-defying success for all students. In his previous position as superintendent of Monroe County Schools, a much smaller district, Cowart discovered a powerful professional learning practice for improving performance: as a district office, it is imperative to support school leaders because they support teachers. He was eager to take the learnings from Monroe County and scale them up to a larger district.

And scale them up he did! The reforms started slow. In 2010, during the recession and significant budget cuts, Carroll County instituted an intentional district wide strategy to support new principals. This strategy included a combination of supports such as;

- ▶ Codified leadership expectations
- ▶ Focused onboarding for new leaders
- ▶ 2 years of performance coaching for first year principals
- ▶ Assigned mentors for new or struggling leaders
- ▶ Monthly job-alike learning communities for leaders

These are the same type of approaches that principals should be doing for new teachers in their building. The district was simultaneously administering support for new building leaders, providing a template for how principals should be supporting teachers, and sending the message that these types of relationships were intentional and expected of all building leaders. The most powerful message of all was sent when Mr. Cowart and his central office team engaged in regular learning communities of their own and received coaching to improve their practice as district leaders. This constellation of professional learning for all leaders said to every employee: Carroll County is a place where learning takes place. If you are a student, you're learning. If you're a teacher, you're learning. If you're a leader, you're the chief learner. Continuous improvement means everyone will be learning, all the time.

After solidifying professional learning structures for leaders, Carroll County has graduated to a system of self-directed learning supports recognizing that the old paradigm where the district decides what everyone needs conflicts with a message of individual empowerment and responsibility for perpetual learning and continuous improvement. Building on a long-term partnership with GLIS, the district unveiled a self-directed learning system in summer 2018 which maps to each leader's professional development plan. The system includes four key elements: an online self-directed learning site that provides leaders with curated professional learning resources; a leadership journal with structured reflection questions around each leader's growth goals; time set aside during monthly principals' meetings to individually reflect on growth toward self-directed learning goals; and alignment with the LKES process.

These changes have been an intentional process to build and retain strong leadership across the district which supports the teachers in the classroom. This investment of time and resources has paid off. In 2019, the high school graduation rate was 93%, a 23-percentage point increase since 2011. Carroll County boasts a high principal retention rate, despite its classification as a low wealth district that offers lower salaries than surrounding districts.

Carroll County's approach emphasizes that the district's role is to support principals. The role of principals is to support teachers and the role of teachers is to ensure every student succeeds. From the board room to the classroom Carroll County is focused on positively change lives!

To meet the workforce challenge of 2030 and ensure all students graduate from high school ready for a successful transition into post-secondary education, Georgia must develop a comprehensive, statewide plan to support the recruitment, training, and ongoing professional development of leaders at all levels. Georgia needs to build upon and leverage successful leadership efforts that already exist, such as GLISI and the QPLA used by Gwinnett County, that help support and retain current innovative leaders and train the next generation. These models also need to connect school leaders with each other and district priorities and supports.

Leaders at all levels share responsibility for insulating the teacher pipeline, and everyone has a role to play. Much like CEOs of corporations, both district and school leaders create and maintain the culture. They shape how people think, feel, and act in schools. They also have management responsibilities related to finance, human resources, transportation, security, building operations, food services, and so forth.

State leaders can focus on policies that support local districts and that develop and maintain a strong leadership pipeline. Business leaders can provide guidance on the leadership and operations side of running a district. Families and community members can be involved in their school systems by providing input into district priorities and even sharing in governance responsibilities. The vision for Georgia is that every district and every school has focused, innovative leaders able to set a positive culture of learning and student success.



ISSUE 6

STRONG FOUNDATIONS: STANDARDS, ASSESSMENTS, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

ISSUE OVERVIEW

For a public K-12 education system to function optimally, it requires an instructional system that makes the acquisition of knowledge and skills efficient, effective, and appealing.¹⁵⁶ This system has evolved to include standards, instruction, assessment, and accountability for all those involved in the extremely critical and important role of educating students.

These advanced instructional systems serve as the foundation for students’ educational journeys that prepare them to be productive citizens. These systems also provide a comprehensive framework for educators and allow those working in schools to support students in the best ways possible. Teachers, counselors, and principals – to name just a few of the important groups of personnel that interact with students daily – can share insights on students that will help them to best guide their students on their educational paths.

These systems also provide information to other stakeholders. Students, for example, can better monitor their own progress in a strong instructional system that includes tools and assessments to clearly benchmark their performance. Clearly defined *standards* are part of a curriculum framework that ensures students and parents are aware of expectations and milestones to be achieved to move forward. These elements also allow parents to make fully informed decisions about their children’s education using these indicators as guides. Policy makers are also aided in making the best decisions to support public education by using the results of widely publicized *assessments* and *accountability systems*.

Georgia recently began a review process of its English/language arts and math standards. State leaders are also proposing changes to the accountability system, and select districts are piloting new assessments that ultimately could replace the current statewide end-of-course and end-of-grade Georgia Milestones assessments. Taken together, these changes signify potentially significant shifts in the foundation of the K-12 instructional system that will impact all 1.4 million public school students in Georgia.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

The foundations of any instructional system are to clearly identify what a student should know and be able to do, monitor whether the student is getting the content, and understand what to do if students are not getting it. Thus, an instructional system combines standards, assessments, and accountability.

156 Merrill, M.D., L. Drake, M.J. Lacy, and J. Pratt. 1996. Reclaiming Instructional Design. *Educational Technology* 36(5), 5–7.

Standards

Implementing rigorous college- and career-ready standards that prepare students for success has been an integral aspect of education reform in Georgia for years. In 2010, Georgia infused the Common Core State Standards¹⁵⁷ into its existing standards, the Georgia Performance Standards, to add a level of rigor, resulting in the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS). Districts implemented them at the start of the 2012 school year for all grades in English/language arts (ELA) and K–9 mathematics.

On February 19, 2015, the State Board of Education (SBOE) voted on revisions to the CCGPS based on a detailed review of the standards by Georgia educators, post-secondary experts, parents, and instructional leaders from across the state.

Extensive public feedback was also collected and incorporated into the revisions. After reviewing the revisions, the SBOE approved the recommendations and renamed the ELA and mathematics standards the Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE). These standards were implemented beginning in the 2015–2016 school year. Georgia has continued its commitment to more rigorous standards by additionally revising and updating both science and social studies standards. The GSEs for science and social studies were both implemented during the 2017–2018 school year. See the sidebar for an explanation of the difference between standards and a curriculum.

Most recently, in May of 2019, Governor Brian Kemp announced his concerns with Georgia’s current educational standards.

He said that he wanted to find ways to “eliminate what remains of the Common Core...with the goal of letting our teachers teach.”¹⁵⁸ In Georgia, the governor has tremendous influence over educational standards. The authority to modify and approve the standards rests with the SBOE, whose members are appointed by the governor. Therefore, any changes to standards, from minor revisions to a complete overhaul, must go through the SBOE.

Since the governor’s announcement to dismantle the standards, the Governor’s Office has partnered closely with the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) to review and revise the ELA and mathematics standards. GaDOE is committed to maintaining a review and revision cycle for standards across all subjects every four to five years to ensure they are current, coherent, and developmentally appropriate.¹⁵⁹ The process and timeline, approved by the SBOE, for the standards review process include input from a public survey, an appointed citizens review committee, a teacher working committee, and an academic review committee. Figure 6.1 provides a flowchart of the process, and Figure 6.2 shows the review and implementation timeline.¹⁶⁰

Standards versus Curriculum

Educational standards are the learning goals for what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. Educational standards, like Common Core or the GSE, are not a curriculum. Local communities and educators choose their own curriculum, which is a detailed plan for day-to-day teaching. In other words,

- ▶ Standards are *what* we expect students need to know and be able to do.
- ▶ A curriculum is *how* students will learn it.

The standards ensure all children graduate from high school college- and career-ready, no matter where they live or how they get there. Standards are determined at the state level. Local districts, schools, and teachers decide on the curriculum, how to teach it, and how to get the students to master the standards.

157 Former Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue helped lead the coordinated effort of the National Governors Association and Council of Chief State School Officers to support states in developing internationally benchmarked ELA and mathematics standards. These standards became known as the Common Core State Standards.

158 Bluestein, G., and T. Tagami. 2019, May 21. Kemp Plan to “Dismantle” Common Core Rekindles School Controversy. *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

159 Jones, M. 2019, August 22. Standards Review Process. August 2019 Georgia State Board of Education Meeting.

160 Jones, 2019.

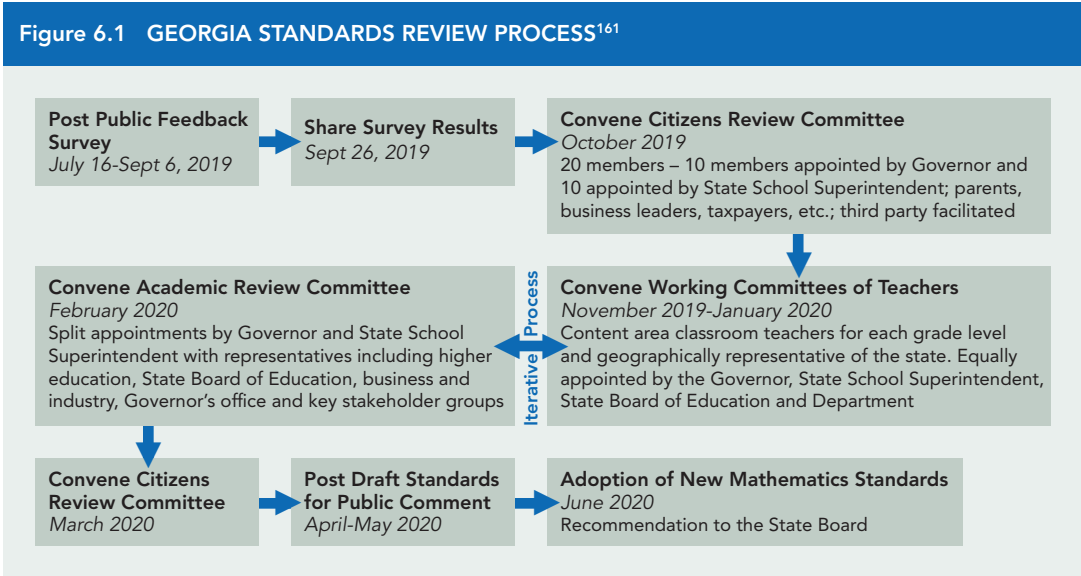


Figure 6.2 STANDARDS REVIEW AND IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE¹⁶²

2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Review/revise Mathematics standards	Professional learning/training; Update assessments	Full implementation of Mathematics standards	
	Review/revise ELA standards	Professional learning/training; Update assessments	Full implementation of ELA standards

Assessments

When Georgia decided to improve its standards, it also took on the responsibility of creating a corresponding assessment system for measuring student learning, now called the Georgia Milestones Assessment System. This system replaced the previously used Criteria-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) in grades three through eight and old end-of-course tests in high school. The Georgia Milestones were first administered to students during the 2014–2015 school year.

Under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states must continue to assess all students enrolled in public schools in grades three through eight and high school. However, ESSA offers opportunities for states to examine ways to innovate and strengthen formative testing, allowing teachers better measures of student learning.

161 Jones, 2019.
162 Jones, 2019.

Georgia is embracing this flexibility to shift away from the focus on high-stakes end-of-grade and end-of-course tests, known as *summative* assessments, and is putting more emphasis on *formative* assessments, which provide information educators can use to adjust classroom strategies while teaching and learning are underway. To help propel this work, the Innovative Assessment Pilot Program was established in 2018 under Senate Bill 362. The bill gave three consortia of districts¹⁶³ the ability to work on new formative assessments designed to help teachers gauge student learning and adjust instruction. The assessments also allowed for a summative score for each student at the end of the year.¹⁶⁴

In 2019, under a separate federal waiver program provided through ESSA, two of the consortia, the Georgia MAP Assessment Partnership and the Putnam County Consortia, were granted waivers from federal testing requirements to develop alternative assessments. The ultimate goal is for one of these alternative assessments to potentially replace the Georgia Milestones statewide.¹⁶⁵

Accountability

Accountability systems are used to ensure that college- and career-ready standards are being met as students move through the K-12 system. In Georgia, the accountability system is called the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). The CCRPI is Georgia's annual tool to measure how well schools, districts, and the state are preparing students for their next level of education. It is also used to identify schools for "needs improvement" status, per federal law.

The CCRPI was initially designed in 2012 as a school improvement, accountability, and communication measure. It rates schools using an index score 0-100 comprising multiple measures, including student achievement, progress measures of student growth, achievement gap closures, and efforts to prepare students for college and/or a career. School climate and financial effectiveness measures are also reported but are not included in the overall score calculation.

Under its state ESSA plan, Georgia made adjustments to the CCRPI, both in its scope and in specific measures. Under the new ESSA state plan, whose development was led by the GaDOE, the role of accountability in general is viewed as a supporting role to schools and districts that provide objective measures that illustrate the extent to which schools and districts are succeeding in providing improved opportunities and outcomes for all students.¹⁶⁶ The amended 100-point scale went into effect for the 2017-2018 school year.

While not part of federal accountability requirements like the CCRPI, the Georgia School Grades Reports are made available through the Governor's Office of Students Achievement (GOSA).¹⁶⁷ These reports include an A-F letter grade that corresponds to the CCRPI number score as well as other information about schools and districts, such as performance on state tests, student body composition, and graduation rates. The purpose of the reports is to communicate to parents, educators, and communities how their local schools are performing and to help focus improvement efforts.

There is growing concern among state leaders and the public, however, that Georgia has moved too far into high-stakes accountability and reliance on test scores and a single number or letter to "grade" schools. Even with the revisions for the 2017-2018 school year, assessments still comprise 70% to 80% of the total CCRPI score.

163 The three consortia are the Georgia MAP Assessment partnership, which includes Marietta, Dalton, and Trion City Schools as well as Barrow, Clayton, Floyd, Gilmer, Haralson, Jackson, and Jasper County Schools; the Putnam County Consortium, which includes Calhoun City and Dougherty, Evans, Fayette, Floyd, Liberty, McIntosh, Oglethorpe, and Pike County Schools; and Cobb County, which received an SBOE waiver to pilot the Cobb Metrics.

164 Klein, A. 2018, October. Georgia Wants In on the ESSA Innovative Assessment Pilot. Retrieved from EdWeek: <http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2018/10/georgia-essa-innovative-test.html>.

165 For complete details of the district consortiums and waiver programs, see Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. 2019, January. Issue 6 Assessments: Testing the Waters. *Top Ten Issues to Watch in 2019*.

166 Georgia Department of Education. 2017. ESSA State Advisory Committee Meeting: January 17, 2017. Atlanta: GaDOE.

167 See <https://schoolgrades.georgia.gov/>.

Throughout 2019, Governor Kemp, State School Superintendent Woods, and staff from GOSA and GaDOE conducted a listening tour to all 16 regional educational service agency regions across Georgia to get direct input and feedback from school district leadership and teachers. Those in attendance felt the CCRPI scores were largely correlated to a school's socioeconomic status and preferred a measure that captured the full efforts of individual schools and the progress being made. Participants felt that the A-F scores were particularly problematic. A single letter was viewed as too simplistic to adequately and accurately portray what is occurring in schools.¹⁶⁸

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

Over the past decade, Georgia has worked hard to develop a coherent instructional system that incorporates high standards and aligned assessments that will allow instruction to be personalized. Recent data indicate that Georgia is making significant progress toward ensuring that all students graduate from high school ready for the next step, be it college, career, or the military.

- ▶ **Achievement** – Georgia ranks 13th in the nation for K-12 achievement, according to Education Week's 2019 Quality Counts report. Georgia's K-12 achievement score, 74.4, was higher than the national average, 73.0.¹⁶⁹ In 2015, Georgia was ranked 37th for K-12 achievement.¹⁷⁰
- ▶ **High school graduation** – Between 2011 and 2016, the high school graduation rate increased from 68% to 82%.¹⁷¹
- ▶ **Post-secondary readiness** – In 2019, Georgia students posted higher than the national average ACT scores for the fourth year in a row, with scores across all subject areas either holding steady or increasing. Georgia students also posted higher than the national average on the SAT for the second straight year. The number of students taking the SAT in Georgia has increased dramatically, up to 67% of public-school graduates in 2019 compared to 59% in 2017. Despite this increase, scores have continued to rise. This is unusual. Traditionally, when more students take the college entrance exams, the state average falls. This has not happened in Georgia.

While these results are to be celebrated, there is still room for improvement. The state has many opportunities to build upon the momentum of these successes.

First, Georgia needs to maintain its commitment to college- and career-ready standards. The state has implemented college and career standards in ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies. In June 2017, the SBOE approved the first Georgia Standards of Excellence for media arts, theatre arts, and visual arts. These standards were added to address the rising demand and interest in this area of business and industry.

As mentioned earlier, the ELA and mathematics standards are currently up for review. A standardized review process is a good idea to ensure that the standards are timely, coherent, and developmentally appropriate. As reported in EdQuest Georgia,¹⁷² Georgia's current ELA and math standards are commensurate with other high-performing states and countries in the expectations for our students to succeed. They were also developed with significant input from Georgia educators and stakeholders. Since implementation, the state has witnessed vast improvements in student outcomes over the past five years, including a reduction in the percentage of students needing remedial coursework when entering post-secondary education.

168 Governor's Office of Student Achievement and Georgia Department of Education. 2019. *Reflections on the 2019 RESA Listening Tour*. Atlanta: GaDOE.

169 See <https://www.edweek.org/ew/collections/quality-counts-2019-state-achievement/state-grades-on-k-12-achievement-map-and.html>.

170 See <https://www.edweek.org/ew/qc/2015/state-highlights/2015/01/08/georgia-education-ranking.html>.

171 Governor's Office of Student Achievement. State Report Cards. Retrieved from www.gosa.org.

172 See <http://www.edquestga.org/advanced-instructional-system/>.

Moving forward, best practice research indicates that the sole purpose and focus of a review process should be to examine specific standards to determine which need to be added, removed, or revised. Any review process should rely heavily on subject matter teachers and educators as well as experts from higher education.

The standards review process should have four distinct phases:

1. Public review and commentary
2. Review by educator-led advisory teams focusing on individual standards
3. Standards Advisory Committee evaluation and recommendations
4. Final approval by the SBOE

The current process approved by the SBOE and being implemented by GaDOE meets these standards. And while needed revisions should certainly be undertaken, the goal of the review process should be to improve our current standards rather than completely dismantling them. Georgia school districts have invested significant local taxpayer dollars into professional development, aligning curricula, and utilizing well-developed resources for the current standards.

Business leaders in Georgia have also been clear on the 21st century skills they need, which are incorporated into current standards. Many of the new companies that have been recruited to Georgia over the past five years have come due to our improvements in education and the state's increased focus on 21st century skills. These skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication, are essential for the current and future workforce.¹⁷³ The Georgia Council of Teachers of Mathematics not only helped write the current math standards, but also endorsed them as meeting these critical skill areas that are essential for a strong workforce that meets the demands of a competitive economic environment.¹⁷⁴

Finally, any changes to the current standards will require revisions to the Georgia Milestones administered across the state and additional professional development for teachers, both of which will require significant increases in resources. In addition, districts that have purchased or developed their own assessments aligned to the current standards will have to spend their own funds to revise those district assessments to match any changes to the standards. This includes the district consortia that are actively piloting new assessments under Georgia's federal waiver at direct costs to themselves.

Georgia leaders are also rethinking the role that assessments do and should play within the education system. Discussions and debates are focusing on how to balance the need to monitor student progress (accountability of outcomes) with being able to provide educators with timely and useful information about student learning that can help inform instruction.

In an attempt to streamline the assessment process, the district consortia are piloting assessments that will serve two goals. First, the assessments are designed to be an instructional tool for educators at the local level that provides real-time data on student progress. Second, these new assessments provide accountability to help leaders understand who is performing and who is not.

Whether either the Georgia MAP Partnership or the Putnam County Consortium can balance these tensions remains to be seen. The intent of the federal waiver program is for states to try out a new test in a handful of districts before taking it statewide and, once again, requiring all students to take the same state test. If that regulation stays in place, it is unclear which of the Georgia consortium tests would or could ultimately replace the Milestones and by what criteria that would be decided.

173 National Education Association. 2012. *Preparing 21st Century Students for a Global Society: An Educator's Guide to the "Four Cs."* Retrieved from NEA: Partnership for 21st Century Skills: <http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/A-Guide-to-Four-Cs.pdf>.

174 Georgia Council of Teachers of Mathematics. 2019, September. *Mathematics GSE Position Statement*. Retrieved from <https://www.gctm.org/resources/advocacy/GCTM%20MGSE%20Position%20Statement.pdf>.

What also remains unresolved is the impact that these assessments, either the Milestones or alternative assessments under development, will have on Georgia’s accountability system, the CCRPI, which itself is potentially facing significant revisions. As previously stated, the CCRPI was redesigned in 2017 as part of Georgia’s ESSA state plan.

The current version of the CCRPI has been in place for two years. The latest results for the 2018–2019 school year saw the average state score sliding 0.7 points to 75.9, on a 100-point scale. This slide was not uniform across grade levels.¹⁷⁵

- ▶ The high school state average increased 1.7 points to 77.0.
- ▶ The middle school state average dropped 4.1 points to 72.1.
- ▶ The elementary school state average dropped 0.7 points to 77.1.

The high school CCRPI calculation has a greater focus on overall proficiency levels, while the middle and elementary school calculations place a greater weight on growth, explaining the difference in outcomes. There were slight decreases overall to the progress scores but larger decreases in the Closing the Gap component, which requires schools to meet improved proficiency rates for all student subgroups defined by income, race, English language learner status, special needs status, and so forth.

To reduce the achievement gaps and serve all students equitably, the accountability system needs to highlight these gaps, especially among historically underserved populations, such as low-income, minority, and English language learner students. In the CCRPI’s current form, the only indicator that counts disaggregated performance is the Closing the Gap component. However, this indicator only measures whether schools are improving proficiency rates and does not hold schools accountable for the overall mastery rates of student subgroups.

This decrease in the Closing the Gap component for the 2018-2019 school year raises serious equity concerns. Both Governor Kemp and State Superintendent Richard Woods have publicly stated their desire to completely overhaul the CCRPI, citing the incongruity between falling CCRPI scores and the “general trend of across-the-board increases in national test scores and graduation rates as well as Georgia Milestones scores.”¹⁷⁶ This misalignment, they argue, “raises concerns about the measurement used...to determine school achievement.”¹⁷⁷

Georgia certainly has seen a general trend of across-the-board increases in test scores and graduation rates. However, the recent release of the 2019 NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress), the Nation’s Report Card, highlights a potentially alarming trend. On fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade mathematics, Georgia’s scores remained relatively flat or showed a slight decrease in terms of the percentage of students reaching the proficient level. This result was consistent with the rest of the nation. However, when broken out by student subgroup, Georgia saw increases in achievement gaps across all subgroups. Table 6.1 shows that a higher percentage of White students scored at least proficient in 2019,

Table 6.1 2019 NAEP RESULTS BY STUDENT SUBGROUP – FOURTH GRADE READING			
		% Proficient/ Advanced – 2019	% point change since 2017
Race	White	63%	+4%
	Black	20%	-5%
	Hispanic	27%	-3%
Income	Low-Income	23%	-2%
	Non Low-Income	77%	0%

175 Georgia Department of Education. 2019, October 25. Georgia Department of Education Releases 2019 CCRPI Reports [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid=720>.

176 Georgia Department of Education. 2019, October 25. Georgia Department of Education Releases 2019 CCRPI Reports [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid=720>.

177 GaDOE. 2019, October 25. Georgia Department of Education Releases 2019 CCRPI Reports.

compared to 2017, when a smaller percentage of Black and Hispanic students scored at least proficient. Thus, the state has seen a widening of the achievement gap between White students and students of color.

While the NAEP is just one assessment, it does beg the question about the overall achievement of students the Closing the Gap component of the CCRPI is measuring. The measurement tool certainly needs to be valid and periodic adjustment are necessary. However, the tool must capture the nuances of student achievement, as overall trends can easily hide pockets of students who are not progressing and are falling further behind. One of the few, but important, benefits of the No Child Left Behind era was the spotlight on subgroup achievement levels. So, as Georgia works toward finding accurate measures, it also must investigate the decrease in the Closing the Gap measure and determine if and where districts are struggling to serve specific populations and what targeted supports they might need.

State leaders acknowledge that work still needs to be done to support students and increase overall achievement, but they are looking to “refine the CCRPI measurement to ensure it is a fair and stable measure that accurately captures student performance.”¹⁷⁸ While the redesign under ESSA reduced the impacts of assessments on the total score, leaders are looking to de-emphasize test scores even more and stress other school inputs such as Advanced Placement offerings, the arts, and foreign languages.¹⁷⁹

Evidenced by discussions at the statewide listening tour, school and district leaders would like an accountability measure that captures the efforts of a school and paints a fuller picture of a school's progress.¹⁸⁰ In fact, a handful of districts are in the initial stages of developing an alternative accountability system called True Accountability, described as “an educator-led, evidence-based, student-centric, community-minded system that moves beyond test scores.” Developers hope to create a holistic performance measure and thorough accounting to students, families, and communities.^{181,182}

The EdQuest Georgia best practice research tells us that top-performing states and education systems have well-developed, coherent instructional systems that incorporate standards, curricula, and assessments that allow for the personalization of instruction and appropriate methods of teaching. Combined, this coherent instructional system allows all students to reach their goals.¹⁸³ For Georgia to meet its educational goals of today and the challenges of a changing economic future, the state needs to capitalize on the progress it has made in its K-12 system over the past decade. This means a continued commitment that all students have access to high standards and expectations and the resources necessary to reach their goals.

178 Georgia Department of Education. 2019, October 25. Georgia Department of Education Releases 2019 CCRPI Reports [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid=720>

179 Tagami, T. 2019, November 1. Why Georgia Is Looking at Another Overhaul of Report Cards for Schools. Retrieved from *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: <https://www.ajc.com/news/local-education/why-georgia-looking-another-overhaul-report-card-for-schools/mJzoyJJv8KzhUtS6MschVN/>.

180 Governor's Office of Student Achievement and Georgia Department of Education, 2019, Reflections.

181 For more information, see <https://www.pageinc.org/true-accountability/>.

182 Participating districts currently include Burke County, Calhoun City, Cartersville City, Early County, Grady County, Lowndes County, Oglethorpe County, Pickens County, and Social Circle City. Newton and Jackson counties are scheduled to pilot phase 2 of the system when it is ready.

183 See Edquestga.org.



ISSUE 7

STUDENT SUCCESS: BARRIERS BEYOND THE SCHOOLHOUSE

ISSUE OVERVIEW

Many factors affect each student's ability to succeed in school. Some are directly related to academic instruction. Others, like the safety and health of students and the environments in which they learn and grow, are also instrumental to student performance. There are multiple reasons for suboptimal academic success unrelated to academic instruction. Many of these are related to unrecognized or undermanaged health conditions, referred to in best practice research as health barriers to learning (HBLs). These conditions include uncontrolled asthma, vision problems, hearing loss, dental pain, persistent hunger, and untreated behavioral and mental health problems.¹⁸⁴ In Georgia, language skill deficits are another significant HBL, as they are a dominant predictor of long-term academic, social, emotional, and mental health outcomes.¹⁸⁵

Several factors contribute to the higher prevalence and impact of HBLs among economically disadvantaged children. Poor access to health care and quality schools that can identify the presence of these barriers contribute to missed opportunities to connect children and their families with the support they need to thrive. These barriers, if left unidentified and untreated, are associated with long-term negative consequences for a child's ability to learn. HBLs are associated with grade repetition, lower academic scores, disengagement with school, and attendance problems.¹⁸⁶

Ensuring that children are successful in school is a pathway out of poverty and an essential ingredient of social mobility. Moreover, for Georgia to remain economically competitive and meet the workforce challenge of 2030, it is essential that all children are healthy and well-educated and that they graduate from high school ready for college or a career. Addressing non-academic barriers to student achievement, particularly those related to health, must be a priority.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

Over one-quarter of Georgia's children live in households with incomes at or below the federal poverty level.¹⁸⁷ Over 60% of public-school students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.¹⁸⁸ Poverty is not just the context within which schools exist. It directly impacts the students, families, schools, and broader community. A growing body of research has documented and quantified how the disproportionate exposure to stress and trauma among children living in poverty directly damages brain development, leading to significant learning and behavioral problems that impact academic achievement.¹⁸⁹

184 Gracy, D., A. Fabian, V. Roncaglione, K. Savage, and I. Redlener. 2017. *Health Barriers to Learning: The Prevalence and Educational Consequences in Disadvantaged Children – A Review of the Literature*. New York: Children's Health Fund.

185 Law, J., J. Charlton, and K. Asmussen. 2017. *Language as a Child Wellbeing Indicator*. Early Intervention Foundation, Newcastle University.

186 Law et al, 2017.

187 US Census Bureau. n.d. *American Community Survey Table S1701, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Table*. Retrieved from Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months: <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=Poverty%20and%20race&lastDisplayedRow=67&table=S1701&tid=ACST5Y2017.S1701&t=Poverty&hidePreview=true&g=0400000US13>.

188 Governor's Office of Student Achievement. 2019. Report Card. Retrieved from <https://gaawards.gosa.ga.gov/analytics/saw.dll?dashboard>.

189 Yu, E., and P. Cantor. 2013. *Turnaround for Children in Poverty, Stress, Schools: Implications for Research, Practice and Assessment*. New York: TurnAround: Partners in School Transformation.

Children growing up in poverty, and especially neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, are vulnerable to a variety of negative experiences at much higher rates than their more affluent counterparts. Researchers now understand the long-term medical, cognitive, social, and emotional impacts of these types of events into adulthood.¹⁹⁰ Children exposed to stresses and traumas associated with poverty are at an exponentially higher risk of learning and behavioral problems than children who are not – 51% versus 3%.¹⁹¹

Georgia has begun to recognize the need to address these non-academic issues for all students across all schools. The state has made concerted efforts to address these issues in Georgia's lowest performing schools and those in need of the greatest assistance. One way the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) has responded to this challenge is to emphasize the "whole child" at the center of its internal System of Continuous Improvement.¹⁹²

GaDOE's continuous improvement plan brings together multiple state agencies, statewide coalitions, and local governments to work with local schools. These partnerships have efforts underway to address child well-being across the four areas of support that students most need: positive conditions for learning through school climate efforts, physical and mental health supports, specialized school supports, and out-of-school-time options.¹⁹³

The Georgia legislature has also taken notice of the importance of these factors. In 2017, the General Assembly passed the First Priority Act, which was designed to provide a system of supports for Georgia's lowest performing schools and those in the greatest need of assistance. The act established a Chief Turnaround Office (CTO) and resource supports for participating schools. It also required school plans to address non-academic factors that negatively impact school outcomes, as well as school-related ones.¹⁹⁴

Part of the CTO, the Health and Wellness Initiative was founded to address health-related non-academic needs as part of the broader turnaround work. The CTO and Georgia Family Connection Partnership developed an approach to address HBLs, beginning with a baseline measure of schools that were participating in the CTO turnaround efforts.

The baseline measure from a small sample of schools provided the basis for partnerships with organizations that were already addressing HBLs. From this starting point, the state began to take the systems-level, scalable approaches necessary to tackle large-scale, persistent health factors, a process that could be applied in other communities. See the sidebar Barriers to Learning for a detailed description of the factors.

The baseline measure compared the reported occurrences of these barriers among the student population with the anticipated presence based on overall Georgia and county-level data. Across a sample of rural schools with some of the highest needs, the Health and Wellness Initiative found increased percentages of two to four times the rate of the general population for several non-academic barriers.¹⁹⁵

- ▶ Rates of asthma at two to three times the state average of 10.8%
- ▶ Risk of dental pain and tooth decay at three to four times the anticipated rate among school-age children
- ▶ Significantly higher rates of food insecurity (a measure for persistent hunger), in some cases two times the statewide rate
- ▶ Percentage of children with unidentified language skill deficits at two to three times the rate of the general population

190 See Hillis et al., 2010; Chapman et al., 2007; Anda et al., 2006; Dong et al., 2005; Felitti et al., 1998; Foege, 1998; Weiss & Wagner, 1998.

191 Yu and Cantor, 2013.

192 Georgia Department of Education. 2017. Department of Curriculum and Instruction. Retrieved from <http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Curriculum-and-Instruction/Pages/default.aspx>.

193 For more details, see Georgia Department of Education, <https://www.gadoe.org/School-Improvement/School-Improvement-Services/Pages/default.aspx>, and EdQuest Georgia – Supportive Learning Environments <http://www.edquestga.org/supportive-learning-environments/>.

194 See <http://www.legis.ga.gov/Legislation/20172018/170167.pdf>.

195 Survey data results provided by Georgia's CTO Health and Wellness Initiative.

Barriers to Learning¹⁹⁶

Research has identified the following as health-related issues that directly affect a student’s ability to learn:

- ▶ **Uncontrolled asthma** – On average, one in 10 children is estimated to have asthma, leading to emergency room visits, hospitalizations, and missed school. The childhood asthma prevalence in Georgia is 10.8%.
- ▶ **Dental pain** – Over half (52%) of third-graders have a history of tooth decay, 19% of which goes untreated. Those with untreated tooth decay are three times more likely to miss school and more likely to report feeling unhappy, worthless, and shy.
- ▶ **Unaddressed hearing problems** – Nationally, 10 out of every 1,000 children have permanent hearing loss by school age. Hearing loss significantly increases the chances that a child will repeat a grade and increases the risk of social, emotional, and behavior problems.
- ▶ **Uncorrected vision problems** – Common vision impairments affect up to 25% of students and lead to physical, developmental, behavioral, and academic problems. Uncorrected vision problems are disproportionality high among low-income children.
- ▶ **Persistent hunger** – Families experience food insecurity when they are unable to acquire enough food for one or more family members due to a lack of resources. The food insecurity rate among children in Georgia is 20%.
- ▶ **Lead Exposure** – Lead exposure is linked to lower academic outcomes, behavioral problems, including destructive and aggressive behavior, and mental health problems. The main source is deteriorating lead-based paint in older, poorly maintained homes.
- ▶ **Behavioral and mental health problems** – The most frequently diagnosed behavioral and mental health problems among school-aged children are ADHD (10%), behavioral problems (i.e., oppositional defiant disorder and conduct disorder, 4%), anxiety (5%), and depression (4%). These are linked to absenteeism, low reading and math scores, grade retention, suspensions, placement in special education, and failure to complete high school.
- ▶ **Language skill-deficits** – At school entry, at least 12% of children have language difficulties that impact their social development or educational progress. Compared to their peers, children with poor language skills at age five are four times more likely to have reading difficulties as adults, three times more likely to have mental health problems, and twice as likely to be unemployed.

The wellness battery approach being used by the Health and Wellness Initiative is designed to increase understanding of challenges that students may be facing. This comprehensive way of looking at the whole child provides an opportunity for schools to connect with local primary care providers and other community partners. While these results indicate non-academic barriers to learning are more prevalent in struggling schools, these barriers are present across Georgia and are a challenge for all schools. For example, data indicate that 20% of Georgia’s children are food insecure¹⁹⁷ – that is 340,000 students.

The GaDOE helps provide many resources to address the mental health of students, including PBIS (Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports).¹⁹⁸ PBIS is an evidence-based, data-driven framework that has been proven to reduce disciplinary incidents, increase a school’s sense of safety, and support

196 Data provided by Georgia’s CTO Health and Wellness Initiative.
197 Feeding America. 2019. *Map the Meal Gap 2019: A Report on County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2017*. Retrieved from <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2017/child/georgia>.
198 Some examples are Youth Mental Health First Aid, Signals 1, Apex Project, Suicide Prevention, Trauma-Informed Schools, and 2nd Step Violence Prevention. For more information, see http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/CTAE/Documents/Mental_Health_in_Schools.pdf#search=Apex%20Project.

academic outcomes. Beginning in 80 schools across Georgia in 2009, by 2017 PBIS was being implemented in over 1,000 schools in 93 districts across Georgia. Georgia is among the top five states nationwide in the number of schools trained in school-wide PBIS. Since implementing PBIS, Georgia has reached many milestones:¹⁹⁹

- ▶ The number of schools participating in PBIS increased by nearly 1,300% between 2009 and 2017.
- ▶ Over 670,000 students were enrolled in PBIS schools in 2017, an increase of 400,000 since 2015.
- ▶ The state has seen a 34% reduction in out-of-school suspensions.
- ▶ Georgia experienced a 14-percentage-point increase in high school graduation rates between 2011 (67%) and 2017 (81%).

Individual school districts are also tackling the interconnected issues of social emotional learning (SEL), student mental health, and school safety, all of which impact non-academic factors for success. For example, Forsyth County has brought together a collaborative team consisting of representatives from the district human resources department, safety, student support services, teaching and learning, and technology departments to work with schools and the community to increase academic achievement and implement SEL in all classrooms. This interdisciplinary team began its work in 2017 by focusing on trainings for all school and district leaders about the importance of embracing social and emotional learning.

Some behavioral disorders are rooted in a clinically diagnosed mental health condition. However, other root causes of behavior problems can be found in early literacy and language development. Language development is the foundation for social, emotional, and mental health development, all of which impact a student's ability to learn. Moreover, language ability significantly predicts the development of attention deficits and behavioral problems, more so than gender, ethnicity, and poverty. Language development also is a stronger predictor of behavioral problems later in life, more so than current behavioral problems impacted later language ability.²⁰⁰ Research also demonstrates that lower language skills are linked with higher rates of aggression, and higher language skills are linked with higher rates of academic engagement.²⁰¹ (For more on language and Georgia's approach to literacy, see Issue 3.)

An example of a systems-level reform that could potentially address both behavioral issues and language deficiencies is House Bill (HB) 740, which was made into law in 2018. HB 740 requires a local school system to enact a multitiered system of supports and conduct a review prior to either expelling or suspending for five or more consecutive days during a school year any student enrolled in pre-kindergarten through third grade.²⁰² A multitiered system of supports, such as a response to intervention, is a framework for identifying and addressing a student's academic and behavioral needs through a tiered systems approach. This approach supports efforts to identify potential health barriers to learning that can manifest as behavioral problems early in a child's schooling and to address those needs.

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

Countries with the highest academic performance provide strong supports for children and their families that go beyond the academic instruction students receive in classrooms. Most high-performing countries have extensive health and family supports, thereby promoting healthy child development and family structure. This foundation helps ensure children come to school healthy, eager to learn, and ready to engage in instruction.

199 McGiboney, G. 2018, June 8. *Ga Board of Education: School Safety in Georgia*. Retrieved from Georgia Senate School Safety Study Committee: <https://www.gasenatek12safety.com/committee-documents>.

200 Petersen, I.T., J.E. Bates, B.M. D'Onofrio, C.A. Coyne, J.E. Lansford, K.A. Dodge, ... C.A. Van Hulle. 2013. Language Ability Predicts the Development of Behavior Problems in Children. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 122(2), 542–557. <http://doi.org/10.1037/a0031963>

201 Chow, J.C., and J.H. Wehby. 2019. Profiles of Problem Behavior in Children with Varying Language Ability. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders* 27(2), 110–118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1063426617733714>

202 See <http://www.legis.ga.gov/Legislation/en-US/display/20172018/HB/740>.

The negative impact of non-academic factors is more prevalent in high-need schools, although these factors affect all schools. The issue for Georgia is not the percentage of students with non-academic barriers, but the limited ability to recognize non-academic barriers and mitigate their impact. The structural changes needed in Georgia require an understanding of the connections between health, education, and the community.

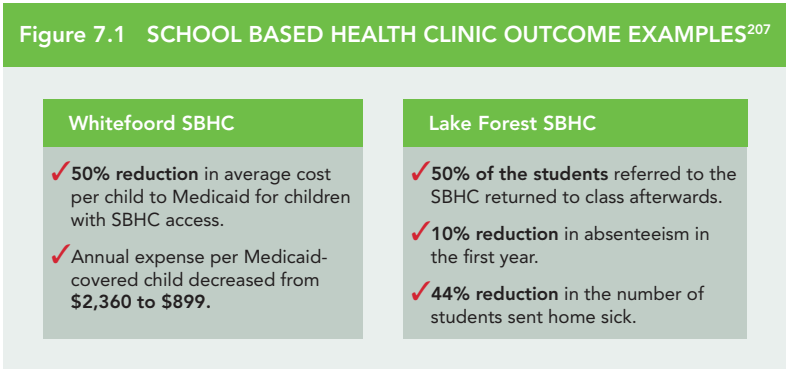
Tennessee has implemented a Coordinated School Health (CSH) program to help schools recognize and address many of these non-academic factors. Under this program, each school district has a CHS coordinator and, depending on the size of the district, support staff who coordinate across eight components: (1) health education, (2) physical education/ activity, (3) health services, (4) school counseling, psychological, and social services, (5) healthy school environment, (6) nutrition, (7) staff wellness, and (8) student, family, and community involvement.²⁰³

Through this program, districts in Tennessee have been able to expand and leverage community partnerships and other support resources to meet the needs of their students. Examples include the following:²⁰⁴

- ▶ CSH district coordinators secured an additional \$36 million in health grants to expand local capacity to address school health priorities.
- ▶ 72% of districts contracted or worked with a community-based mental health provider.
- ▶ During the 2018–2019 school year, over 5 million students visited their school nurse; 87% of these visits resulted in the student returning to class rather than going home.
- ▶ 269 schools have a school-based/linked health clinic, of which 80% use telemedicine to provide services.

Georgia has the base from which to build toward this coordinated model of services through the support and expansion of school-based health centers (SBHCs), most often affiliated with federally qualified health centers. There are more than 2,000 SBHCs across the United States, and more than 8,000 children and school personnel benefit from 38 SBHCs in Georgia.²⁰⁵ SBHCs improve health outcomes by serving children (and often their siblings and families) where they are – in schools. SBHCs provide comprehensive health care that includes services related to physical and mental health, dental health, and counseling and education. Schools that have an SBHC have shown increased access to primary, oral, and behavioral health care as well as reductions in medical costs and absenteeism, dropout rates, and school discipline referrals.²⁰⁶

Figure 7.1 shows examples of outcomes of two SBHC in Georgia.



Currently, several state-level study committees and commissions are examining many of the non-academic barriers to academic success. Two such committees met throughout 2019. The House Study Committee on Infant and Toddler Social and Emotional Health focused on evaluating a range of mental health services and supports for families with young children.²⁰⁸ At the time of the publication of this document, those recommendations have not been made public.

203 Tennessee Department of Education. 2019. *Coordinated School Health: 2018–2019 Annual Report*. Nashville: Tennessee Department of Education.

204 Tennessee Department of Education, 2019.

205 Voices for Georgia's Children. 2019. School-Based Health Centers: Maximizing Access to Quality Care. Retrieved from Learn More: Factsheets: <https://georgiavoices.org/wp-content/uploads/19.-SBHCs-Maximizing-Access-01.14.18.pdf>.

206 Voices for Georgia's Children, 2019.

207 Voices for Georgia's Children, 2019.

208 See <http://www.legis.ga.gov/Legislation/20192020/185131.pdf>.

Finally, the Georgia Behavioral Health Reform and Innovation Commission was established by HB 514 in 2019. The 24-person commission is charged with “conducting a comprehensive review of the behavioral health system in Georgia.”²⁰⁹ This review is to analyze available services and facilities, behavioral issues in children, the role of the education system in identifying and treating behavioral health issues, the relationship to the justice system, barriers to treatment, and workforce issues. The commissioners have been appointed, and their work is expected to begin in depth in 2020.

GaDOE acknowledges the need to support students’ health and wellness, and that there is an opportunity to codify partnerships within schools and across the state to better address children’s physical, oral, mental, and visual health, as well as other non-academic needs. Access to such supports is an issue for many children, especially those from low-income families and in rural, underserved areas. Current efforts by multiple state agencies and public–private partnerships have the potential for collective impact when concerned partners unite to address a community need.

To meet the challenges of a changing economy and increased global competitiveness, Georgia has been raising the bar on standards and instruction to ensure that students are college- and career-ready when they graduate from high school. Although schools have been focusing on improving instruction, the impact of non-academic factors on student outcomes must be addressed. For instruction to be successful, it must be delivered in a safe, supportive, and highly skilled learning environment for students. However, those safe, supportive environments are not always a reality. Schools must also contend with issues related to a wide variety of topics, such as firearms, adult and student sexual misconduct, substance abuse, gangs, bullying, approaches to discipline, vaping, and the social-emotional health of both students and faculty.

There is not one single framework of interventions to address school and district needs. Efforts to mitigate non-academic barriers to student learning must be tailored to individual community needs. However, such community approaches still need coordinated support from a qualified workforce, professional development for educators, and the shared knowledge of best practices across agencies. State-level actors can coordinate access and resources across agencies and help guarantee access to needed services.

For example, nearly half of all Georgia counties do not have a licensed psychologist, and over one-third of counties do not have a licensed social worker.²¹⁰ Georgia policy makers must think of creative ways to address the shortage of workers in these fields across the state. In other fields like medicine, the state legislature has instated pay incentives to attract workers to jobs, like nursing, that were experiencing a high demand for employees. Similar incentives could be used to attract social workers and mental health care workers to particular areas of the state.

For Georgia to address the projected skilled-worker shortage of 2030, the state must make a comprehensive and coordinated assessment of current policies and practices at the state and local levels in order to begin addressing non-academic barriers to success. With more than half of Georgia’s K-12 population considered low-income, the importance of these issues is only growing. For students to continue to thrive, an awareness of the impacts of these barriers to learning and a commitment from all Georgians to do something about them must be sustained. State, district, and school-level leaders must have the capacity to develop ambitious plans and implement them through broad, multisector collaborations.

209 See <http://www.legis.ga.gov/Legislation/20192020/187520.pdf>.

210 Voices for Georgia’s Children. 2016. Georgia’s Crisis in Child & Adolescent Behavioral Health. Retrieved from http://georgiavoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/HealthPolicy_Recs_12115.pdf.



ISSUE 8

RURAL POVERTY: ENDANGERING OPPORTUNITY

ISSUE OVERVIEW

Attention to rural Georgia and the challenges that it faces continues to gain traction in the state. In recent years, several important initiatives have been created to address economic and community development goals in the geography broadly defined as rural Georgia. While these efforts represent diverse areas of focus, from expanding broadband internet access, to supporting job creation, to addressing health care needs, they share a common goal: increasing the economic and social well-being of rural Georgia.

The data show that such invigorated focus is necessary. Rural Georgia continues to experience population loss, specifically among working-age adults.²¹¹ Those that remain face ongoing hospital closures,²¹² inconsistent broadband connectivity,²¹³ transportation challenges,²¹⁴ and limited resources to address education and industry needs. Poverty has an oversized footprint in rural Georgia, especially across the southern half of the state,²¹⁵ where communities were hit hardest by the recession, and in many cases have yet to recover.

Compounding its economic challenges, much of South Georgia was devastated by a powerful category 5 hurricane in October 2018 that cost the Georgia agriculture industry over \$2.5 billion. The storm was particularly devastating to cotton, pecans, timber, and poultry – the economic backbone of many rural counties. The pecan and timber industry will take decades to recover.²¹⁶

While the state can boast a growing economy, Figure 8.1 shows that that growth is overwhelmingly centered in the metro Atlanta area, with other pockets of growth in major hub cities. Rural communities, on the other hand, are facing widespread poverty, increasing job loss, and outmigration.

The pathway to the region’s economic success requires a strong educational infrastructure, from birth through post-secondary completion. Businesses and industries are attracted to talent; job creation requires a strong workforce, resulting in sustainable economic growth. The education pipeline, however, requires more than academic rigor to achieve strong outcomes. The housing, health, and infrastructure challenges that face rural Georgia directly impact educational success for students in the pipeline today and adults who need to retrain and upskill to meet changing workforce needs. This latter group is particularly important in communities with high unemployment rates and where significant parts of the current workforce are employed in sectors threatened by automation. To overcome these challenges and meet shared economic development goals, those focused on rural Georgia must align their work and closely connect their efforts with the education sector.

211 Calculations provided by Georgia Chamber of Commerce, JobsEQ data.
212 Hart, A. 2019, March 22. Rural Hospitals Brace for Changes Proposed in Georgia Legislature. Retrieved from *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: <https://www.ajc.com/news/state-regional-govt-politics/rural-hospitals-brace-for-changes-proposed-georgia-legislature/FRHxaoPadYTLdsGBIJKn8L>.
213 Georgia Department of Community Affairs. 2018. Georgia Broadband Deployment Initiative. Retrieved from <https://broadband.georgia.gov/about>.
214 Wickert, D. 2018, November 21. Lawmakers Tackle Transit Problems in Rural Georgia. Retrieved from *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: <https://www.ajc.com/news/local-govt-politics/lawmakers-tackle-transit-problems-rural-georgia/Y7ifs5CB6UOCocWdXlpgOK/>.
215 Statistical Atlas. 2018, September 4. Household Income in Georgia (State). Retrieved from <https://statisticalatlas.com/state/Georgia/Household-Income>.
216 Kempner, M. 2019, October 10. A Year Later, Georgia Communities Wait for Promised Hurricane Relief. *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

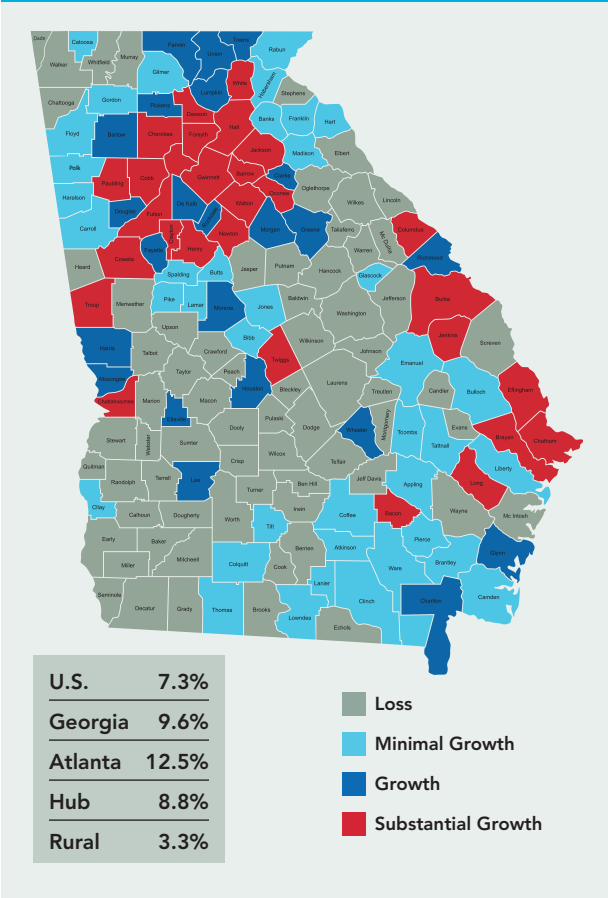
Georgia’s economy is changing, and the way the state prepares its workforce must adapt to ensure current and future economic competitiveness. Looking across the entire birth-to-work pipeline, the state’s rural communities are facing challenges with respect to education, poverty, and automation in the employment sector.

Impacts of Education

To understand and improve economic development in rural Georgia, establishing a clear picture of rural education is necessary. Consider the following:²¹⁸

- ▶ The number of rural students in Georgia is third-highest in the nation.
- ▶ One in four Georgia students attends a rural school.
- ▶ Rural schools tend to be extremely racially diverse, serving communities where poverty is prevalent.
- ▶ Across the U.S., the education funding per pupil is significantly lower than the national average.

Figure 8.1 JOB GROWTH IN GEORGIA, 2017-2027²¹⁷



Rural student achievement levels within the K-12 system are not particularly dire compared to students across the rest of Georgia. According to the 2019 NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) scores, the Nation’s Report Card, students who live in rural communities or small towns are less likely than the average Georgia student to be reading on grade level by fourth grade. However, rural students, on average, perform better than students living in cities. These results hold for math proficiency by eighth grade as well.²¹⁹ (See Table 8.1.)

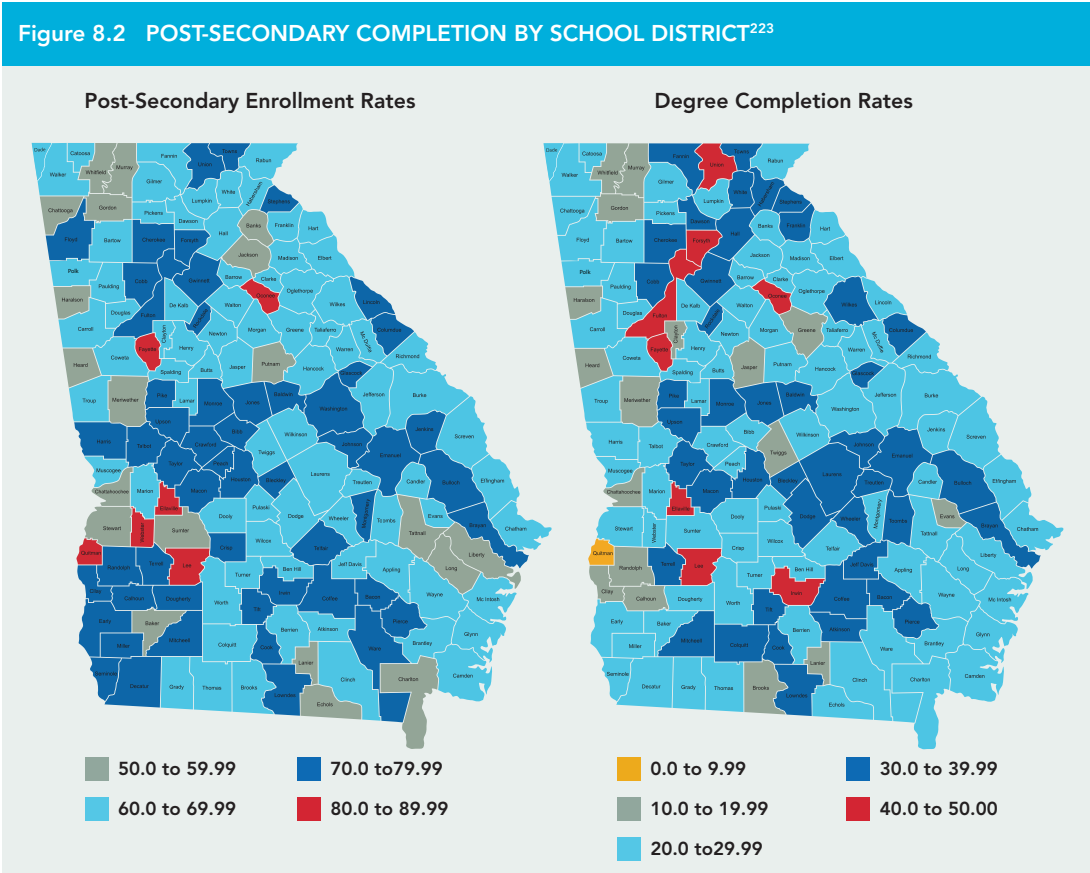
Table 8.1 2019 NAEP SCORES, PERCENT AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENT

Georgia Regions	4th Grade Reading	8th Grade Math
City	26%	25%
Suburb	37%	34%
Town	30%	25%
Rural	29%	31%
All Students	32%	31%

217 Calculations provided by Georgia Chamber of Commerce, JobsEQ data.
218 Showalter, D., S.L. Hartman, J. Johnson, and B. Klein. 2019, November. *Why Rural Matters 2018–2019: The Time Is Now*. Retrieved from Rural School and Community Trust website: <http://www.ruraledu.org/WhyRuralMatters.pdf>.
219 NAEP Data Explorer, 2019 Reading and Mathematics Results. Retrieved from <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/xplore/NDE>.

Rural students graduate at a slightly higher rate than the state average: 85.9%²²⁰ versus 82%.²²¹ However, these graduation rates are not translating into post-secondary success. In July 2016, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) found that a majority of students from rural school districts enroll in a post-secondary institution after graduating from high school; however, only a small percentage complete a degree.²²²

As shown in Figure 8.2, on average, anywhere from 60% to 90% of students enroll in a post-secondary institution regardless of what county they live in. However, six years later, less than half of those enrolled have earned a credential.



220 Showalter et al., 2019, November.
221 Georgia Department of Education.
222 Paige, H. 2016, July. *High School Graduates Outcomes Report: An Analysis of Postsecondary Enrollment and Degree Completion of Georgia High School Graduates*. Retrieved from Governor's Office of Student Achievement website: <https://gosa.georgia.gov/research-evaluation-auditing/research-reports>.
223 Paige, 2016, July.

The Rural School and Community Trust found Georgia’s rural schools and districts to be among the most concerning in the nation, stating that “more than any other gauge, it is the dire college readiness rankings that drive Georgia’s overall priority ranking as the seventh most serious situation for rural education in the US.”²²⁴ It is college readiness that is predictive of barriers to post-secondary completion. For example, only 41.2% of Georgia’s rural students took the ACT or SAT,²²⁵ compared to nearly 70% of students statewide.²²⁶ In terms of Advanced Placement (AP) classes, only 12% of rural student passed at least one AP exam by scoring a three or higher, compared to 23% of Georgia students statewide.²²⁷

Poverty

Poverty, which is prevalent in rural Georgia at 20.3%, is driven by multiple factors. The most significant is employability. Whether located in urban or rural areas, well-paying jobs tend to require skills and training that typically are acquired through post-secondary education. However, one of the largest barriers to completing such training is poverty itself. Rural parts of the state lag urban centers in per-capita income and exceed urban areas in unemployment and poverty rates. (See Table 8.2.)

Students from low-income or first-generation college students are among the least likely to complete their post-secondary education. Within the 2012 cohort of the University System of Georgia, only 46% of students whose families earn less than \$35,000 a year have graduated. Only 48% of first-generation students from the same cohort have earned their degree. Given the low income and educational attainment rates of rural Georgians, these statistics are particularly relevant to rural post-secondary students.

Table 8.2 COMPARISON OF POVERTY RATES, UNEMPLOYMENT RATES, AND PER-CAPITA INCOME FOR RURAL AND URBAN GEORGIA²²⁸

	Rural	Urban
Poverty Rate (2017)	20.3%	13.9%
Unemployment Rate (2018)	4.3%	3.9%
Per-Capita Income (2017)	\$33,483	\$46,349

Rural Georgians are more likely to graduate from high school than non-rural Georgians, but they are less likely to attend or complete post-secondary school. The barriers to both access and completion that these students face are not just academic and frequently start prior to beginning post-secondary studies. The 2019 Rural Task Force, formed by the Georgia School Boards Association, listed challenges to the success of rural K-12 systems.²²⁹ While some of the task force’s recommendations were specific to education policy such as school funding or teacher retention efforts, many were not. Rather, the task force identified community-level, multisector challenges that directly impact educational outcomes in rural Georgia, many of which are closely associated with living in poverty. Examples include access to health care for students and their families, which encompasses keeping rural hospitals open, gaining access to transportation to health care facilities, accessing telemedicine, and having a robust health care workforce pipeline. Poverty itself was noted as a significant challenge to educational outcomes. The task force’s recommendations reflect the varied and interconnected challenges that threaten a strong educational pipeline to and through post-secondary schooling and adult education programs.

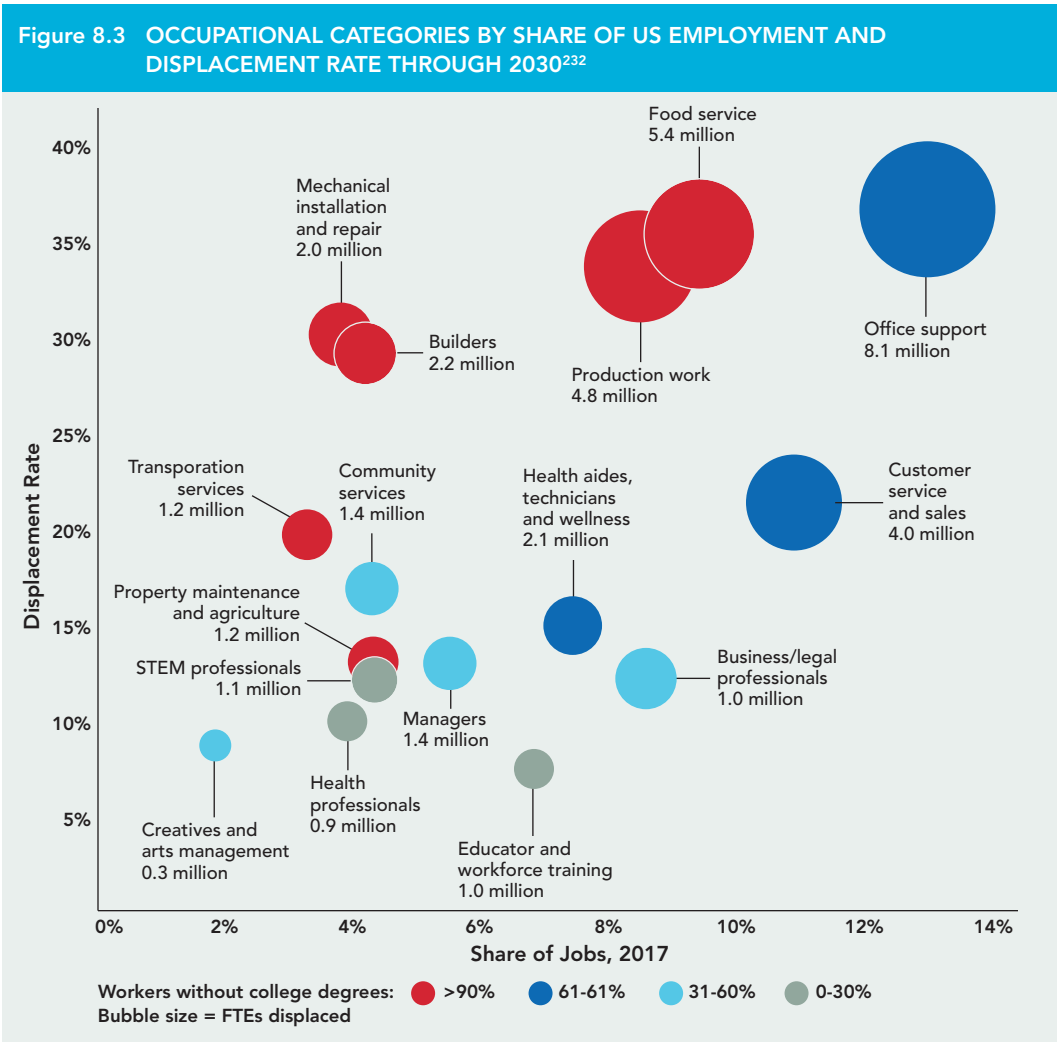
224 Showalter et al., 2019, November.
225 Showalter et al., 2019, November.
226 Georgia Department of Education. 2019, October 25. Georgia Public-School Students Beat the National Average on SAT [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid=656>.
227 Showalter et al., 2019, November; Georgia Department of Education. 2019, February 6. Georgia AP Pass Rates Continue to Increase [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid=667>.
228 US Department of Agriculture. 2019, October 31. State Fact Sheet: Georgia. Retrieved from USDA Economic Research Service: <https://data.ers.usda.gov/reports.aspx?StateFIPS=13&StateName=Georgia&ID=17854>.
229 Georgia School Boards Association. 2019, June. GSBA Rural Task Force Recommendations. Retrieved from <https://gsba.com/resources/gsba-rural-task-force-recommendations/>.

Financial aid for post-secondary schooling can address many of these non-academic barriers. The ability to afford enrollment, transportation costs, and missed wages while focusing on post-secondary study is directly related to post-secondary completion, especially among low-wealth students. Rural Georgians have, on average, less wealth than non-rural Georgians, and this trend bears out in the post-secondary student population as well. Georgia offers the HOPE Grant, HOPE Scholarship, and HOPE Career Grant to qualifying Georgians as merit-based programs. Federal need-based aid is available through Pell Grants. However, to date, Georgia offers no strictly need-based statewide financial aid program.

Impacts of Automation

As industries change and require increased technical and professional training, those currently in the workforce must be retrained and reskilled to retain living-wage employment. The McKinsey Global Institute found that some of the largest occupational sectors in the nation were also the most threatened by displacement through automation.²³⁰ As Figure 8.3 shows, the jobs most likely to undergo automation by 2030 closely correspond with those filled by workers with low educational attainment. For example, across the country the top three industries undergoing automation are predicted to be:²³¹

- 1. Office support: 8.1 million jobs displaced
- 2. Food services: 5.4 million jobs displaced
- 3. Production work: 4.8 million jobs displaced



230 McKinsey Global Institute. 2019, July. *The Future of Work in America*. Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/the-future-of-work-in-america-people-and-places-today-and-tomorrow>.

231 McKinsey Global Institute, 2019, July.

232 McKinsey Global Institute, 2019, July.

These trends closely match the situation in rural Georgia today. Behind agriculture, the top three industries in rural Georgia are manufacturing, retail, and health care, all of which have seen declining job openings over the past 10 years.²³³ As these industries undergo further automation in the coming decade, reskilling and upskilling rural residents must be a priority. Otherwise, this economic threat to rural Georgia becomes permanent, and potentially catastrophic.

ACTION STEPS

Georgia's focus on rural development is timely and necessary to ensure prosperity across the state. During his campaign for governor, Brian Kemp promised to strengthen Georgia's rural economy by prioritizing internet access, reducing regulations, and building more inland ports and other infrastructure. To help achieve the goal of strengthening the rural economy, in 2019 Governor Kemp announced a Rural Strike Team that will leverage state resources, including the Georgia Department of Economic Development's Global Commerce team, the Department of Community Affairs' regional team, the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government, the Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College's Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation, and others. They will tailor marketing plans for particular locations, develop a target list of specific industries, and provide training to local leaders who are actively recruiting business prospects. Moreover, a rural economic development coordinator will work closely with the Rural Strike Team and state and local agencies to spur greater opportunities in rural Georgia.²³⁴

Governor Kemp is not the only state or local leader focused on revitalizing rural Georgia. (See sidebar.) For example, the Georgia House Rural Development Council was initially created by House Resolution 398 during the 2017 legislative session as a two-year working group to study and provide recommendations to stabilize rural Georgia and encourage growth. Some of the results included several bills on rural broadband, as well as some changes to Certificate of Need laws and nonprofit hospital transparency.²³⁵ The council has since been reauthorized for a second two-year cycle, through the 2019–2020 legislative session. Throughout 2019, the Council has held public meetings around rural health and mental health access, K-12 opportunities, broadband, workforce training partnerships, transportation, and other issues.

The Georgia Chamber of Commerce's Center for Rural Prosperity, established in 2017, made a series of 80 recommendations to help address challenges in rural Georgia. After the center worked with the House Rural Development Council in 2018, 18 of the recommendations were adopted, including the following:²³⁶

- ▶ Senate Bill (SB) 395 – Georgia Joint Defense Commission
- ▶ House Bill (HB) 769 – Establishment of Micro-Hospitals
- ▶ SB 402 – Achieving Connectivity Everywhere (ACE) Act
- ▶ HB 375 – Short Line Infrastructure Investment.

The Georgia Chamber has also established the Rural Prosperity Council to help address the needs of rural Georgia across a variety of economic development and quality-of-life issues. The Council is focusing on entrepreneurship and innovation, rural incentives, military communities, and rural talent recruitment.

233 Bluestone, P., and M. de Zeeuw. 2016. *Jobs in Georgia's Urban and Rural Regions and Counties, Changes in Distributions, Type, and Quality from 2007–2014*. Atlanta: Georgia State University, Center for State and Local Finance.

234 Governor Brian P. Kemp, Office of the Governor. 2019, September 13. Gov. Kemp Announce Rural Strike Team [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://gov.georgia.gov/press-releases/2019-09-13/gov-kemp-announces-rural-strike-team-statewide-georgia-made-tour>.

235 A Certificate of Need is how the state of Georgia evaluates the need for new hospitals or clinics.

236 Georgia Chamber of Commerce, Center for Rural Prosperity. 2019. *2019: Recommendations for a Rural Renaissance*. Retrieved from https://www.gachamber.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/GCCFRP-RuralRecReport_Final.pdf.

The Georgia Department of Education has established the Partnership for Rural Growth, an initiative to expand the resources available to public school districts in rural Georgia. The following are major components of the Partnership for Rural Growth:²³⁷

- ▶ Grants to establish or expand fine arts programs
- ▶ STEM and STEAM coordinators in Southwest and Southeast Georgia
- ▶ Workshops to increase access to advanced placement, dual enrollment, and gifted coursework
- ▶ Grants to help schools teach entrepreneurship
- ▶ A school improvement network for school and district leaders in rural Georgia

These are just a sampling of the type of work focused on rural Georgia. While they are needed, there is very little coordination or overlap between the economic revitalization of rural communities and strengthening the education pipeline in those same communities. To effectively address the challenges facing the region, the efforts of these groups must be coordinated. Cross-pollination between them is necessary, as is multisector involvement to ensure their efforts are working in alignment.

Issues such as transportation, health care, and broadband access are closely tied to educational attainment and success. Economic development, in turn, predicates a strong workforce. Efforts focusing on these and other facets of the challenges of rural Georgia will be stronger if they work collaboratively and in close alignment.

Matt Arthur, commissioner of the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), argues that a combination of education, skills, and retraining must be a priority to revitalize and reinvigorate rural Georgia. He cites three priorities for the state: (1) increasing post-secondary completion, (2) increasing the number of students pursuing high-demand career fields, and (3) promoting partnerships between local businesses and the technical colleges.²³⁸

Connecting rural students to dual enrollment opportunities is a vital means of increasing post-secondary completion. Dual enrollment allows qualifying high school students to take college courses for free while earning both high school and post-secondary credit. The program can help address concerns about both college affordability and access. Currently, the counties with the highest dual enrollment student participation rates lie outside traditional metropolitan areas. These counties also earn more credits: 80% of dual enrollment credits were provided to students in high schools outside the Atlanta and Savannah metro areas in 2017. Most dual enrollment students in rural counties take classes through the TCSG, which offers 85 campuses statewide.²³⁹ Rural K-12 districts are able to leverage partnerships with local TCSG campuses, receive transportation grants, or bring dual enrollment instructors to high school campuses. For more on dual enrollment, see Issue 9.

Examples Rural Initiatives in Georgia

- ▶ Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College's Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation
- ▶ Carl Vinson Institute of Government's Rural Development Office
- ▶ Georgia Chamber of Commerce's Rural Prosperity Council
- ▶ Georgia Council for Rural Housing and Development
- ▶ Georgia Department of Economic Development Rural Georgia Initiatives
- ▶ Georgia Department of Education's Partnership for Rural Growth
- ▶ Georgia EMC Rural Broadband Initiative
- ▶ Georgia Foundation for Public Education – Rural Education Fund
- ▶ Georgia Hospital Association Center for Rural Health
- ▶ Georgia House Rural Development Council
- ▶ Georgia Rural Health Association
- ▶ Georgia School Boards Association's Rural Task Force
- ▶ Governor Brian P. Kemp's Rural Strike Force
- ▶ Locate South Georgia
- ▶ South Georgia Nonprofit Network
- ▶ West Georgia Non-Profit Network
- ▶ University of Georgia's Archway Partnership

237 Georgia Department of Education. 2018, October 24. Georgia Department of Education Launches Partnership for Rural Growth: Dedicating an Additional \$1.6 Million to Education in Rural Georgia [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid=655>.

238 Downey, M. 2019, May 23. Commission of Technical College Says We Must Educate More Students for Careers in High-Demand Fields. Retrieved from *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: <https://www.ajc.com/blog/get-schooled/opinion-improve-horizons-for-millions-georgians-outside-metro-atlanta/zXxHTgTLLKaSEdjg2qqAjK/>.

239 Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts Performance Audit Division. 2018. Special Examination, Report No. 17-09.

Related to post-secondary access and completion is a focus on the high-demand career fields. The Georgia Chamber of Commerce reports that \$75 billion of Georgia's economic output is in agriculture and forestry, and an additional \$60 billion is in advanced manufacturing, agricultural technology, wholesale trade, and logistics.²⁴⁰ Each of these industries is vital to the economic well-being of rural Georgia. Through the HOPE Career Grant, students can go to a TCSG institution tuition-free if they pursue one of 17 career fields such as industrial maintenance, welding and joining technology, logistics, electrical line worker, or precision manufacturing, among others. These are fields in which Georgia is in desperate need of skilled workers, especially in rural areas.

Finally, businesses in rural areas need to partner with their local technical colleges to address their workforce needs. Local industry-led partnerships with technical colleges ensure companies have the skilled employees they need, both now and in the future. For more information about the TCSG's statewide efforts around career pathways and industry partnerships such as WorkSource Georgia, and Career Plus, see Issue 9.

These efforts must also incorporate partnerships with local K-12 districts. One good example is the Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) program, which has engaged state agencies, businesses, community leaders, and other statewide initiatives to increase post-secondary access and completion. As highlighted in more detail in Issue 9, the CTAE Division is particularly focused on working with the business community, key Georgia industries, and the TCSG to meet the needs of a 21st century workforce.²⁴¹

Education, as a critical element in the economic development toolbox, should be considered often within all rural development efforts. Such consideration should focus on not only the educational outcomes themselves, but also on what is driving those outcomes. As Georgians work toward revitalizing rural areas, they must be able to answer the following questions:

- ▶ Why do rural high school graduation rates exceed the state average, but so few rural Georgians are successful in post-secondary education?
- ▶ What are the non-academic access barriers to success in a community, such as transportation, health barriers, and work opportunities?
- ▶ What percentage of a county's high school graduates leave for college and then return home with no diploma and increased debt?

Prosperity cannot be achieved without a strong education pipeline. It is critical to poverty alleviation and economic development for a town, a region, and a state. Without close coordination among groups and intentional focus on education, sustainable and wide-reaching rural development will remain an elusive goal.

240 Georgia Chamber of Commerce, Center for Rural Prosperity, 2019.

241 Georgia Chamber of Commerce, Center for Rural Prosperity, 2019.



ISSUE 9

SCHOOL TO WORK: PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT

ISSUE OVERVIEW

In light of the Southern Regional Education Board's workforce 2030 analysis, Georgia must refine its ability to equip each citizen with the tools necessary to identify, train for, and pursue a career path. Doing so is critical as the state strives to fill in-demand jobs to sustain economic growth. In particular, meeting the demand for middle-skill jobs, those requiring less than a bachelor's degree but more than a high school diploma, requires clear linkages between the K-12 system and post-secondary institutions. These linkages, or pathways, need to allow students to earn in-demand credentials and degrees that bolster the talent pipeline.

The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (CEW) launched the Good Jobs Project in 2017 to demonstrate the importance of intentional career planning and to analyze "good jobs." Good jobs are defined as those that pay at least \$35,000 per year for workers between the ages of 25 and 44, and at least \$45,000 for workers age 45 and older. Based on these categories, the median earning of those with good jobs was \$65,000 in 2016. In an analysis of workers holding good jobs, the CEW found that

- ▶ 54% of workers with good jobs hold at least a bachelor's degree (BA), and
- ▶ 46% of workers without a BA have good jobs.

The split between non-BA job holders was almost even, with 52% in low-skill blue-collar jobs compared to 48% in skilled service jobs. Of note for Georgia, non-BA jobs for skilled trades grew by almost four times the rate of low-skill blue-collar jobs from 1991 to 2015.²⁴²

In addition, a recent study by the CEW found poor equity in the distribution for these good jobs. Whites hold more good jobs at every education level, earn higher wages, and have significant earnings gap advantages. Although Blacks and Latinos have made progress in educational attainment, the likelihood of these groups holding good jobs is not equal to that of White workers with the same level of education, confirming the existence of continued racial disparities in the workforce. The earnings gap is notable. For example, the study found that Black and Latino worker earnings in good jobs requiring BAs were lower by an average of \$10,000 in comparison to White workers. Cumulatively, White workers with good jobs earn \$554 billion more annually than they would if good jobs and good job earnings were distributed equitably among all workers.²⁴³

Traditionally, there generally have been three routes to good jobs: high school graduation; middle-skill acquisition, which includes associate degrees, post-secondary certificates, licenses, and job credentials; and finally a bachelor's degree that may lead to a master's degree or professional/doctoral degree. However, a Brookings Institution report notes that these career pathways are not always so easily defined or navigated.²⁴⁴ Additionally, these pathways are restricted by racial and economic inequities. Employer-based training goes disproportionately to highly educated workers, further jeopardizing inclusive talent development. Addressing these issues will prove critical for Georgia, particularly as talent-driven economic development continues to fuel the state's prosperity.

242 Carnevale, A.P., J. Strohl, and A. Gulish. 2018. *Three Educational Pathways to Good Jobs*. Washington DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

243 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. 2019, October. *The Unequal Race for Good Jobs: How Whites Made Outsized Gains in Education and Good Jobs Compared to Blacks and Latinos*. Retrieved from CEW: The Unequal Race for Good Jobs: <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/raceandgoodjobs/>.

244 Parilla, J., and S. Liu. 2019. *Talent-Driven Economic Development: A New Vision and Agenda for Regional and State Economies*. Washington, DC: Brookings.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

Top-performing systems and best practices research point to key elements to ensure that every student completes a post-secondary option. These elements include clear pathways and innovative policies for post-secondary access and success.²⁴⁵

Georgia's K-12 Pathways to Jobs

Consideration of graduation pathways begins in middle school. Students in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades receive counseling, advisement, career awareness, career interest inventories, and information to assist them in evaluating their academic skills and career interests. In addition to the regular high school graduation requirements, once students enter high school, they must also complete a graduation pathway selected from four primary categories: advanced academics, fine arts, world languages, or Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE).²⁴⁶

Georgia's most robust graduation route is through the CTAE's Career Clusters and Career Pathways program. Students can take courses in more than 130 Career Pathways within 17 Career Clusters (see Table 9.1), earn industry-recognized credentials, and participate in work-based learning and apprenticeships. CTAE career pathways enable students to experience the workplace relevance of what they are learning in the classroom. For example, the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) career cluster includes separate pathways and work-based learning for electronics, engineering and technology, and engineering drafting and design.²⁴⁷ The clusters are based on the National Career Cluster program used across the country. Georgia's CTAE program leverages partnerships with industry and higher education to prepare students for employment or post-secondary success after graduation.

During FY 2018, over 271,064 middle school students (61.75% of all Georgia middle school students) and 385,431 high school students (67.88% of all Georgia high school students) participated in CTAE Career Cluster programs. The top four high school CTAE programs – Business Management and Administration, Information Technology, Finance, and Health Sciences – logged enrollment of over 260,000 students during the 2017-2018 school year. Two of those clusters, Health Sciences and Information Technology, are directly focused on areas experiencing workforce shortages and thus link post-secondary preparation with industry needs.²⁴⁸

A primary indicator of program success is the graduation rate of students participating in CTAE. In 2019, the graduation rate for CTAE students rose to 96.5%. Utilizing their skills after high school graduation, CTAE pathway graduates are prepared for the next step in their career journey, with 99.6% moving on to post-secondary education, advanced training, military service, or employment within six months of graduation.²⁴⁹

Table 9.1 GEORGIA CTAE CAREER CLUSTERS

- Agriculture, Food, & Natural Resources
- Architecture & Construction
- Arts, A/V Technology, & Communications
- Business Management & Administration
- Education & Training
- Energy
- Finance
- Government & Public Administration
- Health Sciences
- Hospitality & Tourism
- Human Services
- Information Technology
- Law, Public Safety, Corrections, & Security
- Manufacturing
- Marketing
- Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics
- Transportation, Distribution, & Logistics

245 EdQuest Georgia. 2019. Clear Pathways to Post-Secondary Success. Retrieved from <http://www.edquestga.org/clear-pathways-to-postsecondary-success/>.
246 Georgia Department of Education. Georgia's Career Pathways. Retrieved from <http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/CTAE/Pages/pathways.aspx>.
247 Georgia Department of Education. Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/CTAE/Pages/default.aspx>.
248 Georgia Department of Education. 2018. CTAE: Partnering with GA's Business & Industry. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/CTAE/Documents/CTAE-Annual-Report-2018.pdf>.
249 Georgia Department of Education. 2019, November 4. Georgia's 2019 CTAE Graduation Rate Reaches 96.54 Percent [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid=724>.

Georgia CTAE has also led the way in innovative pathways to increase post-secondary credentials by partnering with other state agencies, businesses, community leaders, and other statewide initiatives. The CTAE Division is particularly focused on working with the business community and key Georgia industries to meet the needs of a 21st century workforce.²⁵⁰ CTAE is leveraging these partnerships with local communities, businesses, and technical colleges and is highlighting best practices between industry and education/ workforce preparation. One example is the Carrollton/ Carroll County Education Collaborative (CCEC). Consisting of leadership from both school districts, West Georgia Technical College, and the University of West Georgia and representatives from the local chamber of commerce and the community, the CCEC has established a common vision for K-16 success. Established in late 2014, this regional effort is focusing on aligning curricula and on bolstering post-secondary success through dual enrollments, post-secondary education early readiness through the middle schools, and data sharing on student performance to inform programming and necessary interventions. The goal of this collaborative is for every student to identify and be supported in their own pathway to post-secondary success.

To encourage industry participation, Georgia also is promoting work-based learning opportunities, which allow students to enroll in a CTAE class and earn class credit by working at a local business. In 2016, the Georgia House of Representatives passed House Bill 402 to incentivize businesses to engage students in their communities in work-based learning opportunities.

Another important initiative focused on preparing students for the workforce is the Georgia College and Career Academy Network, a network of charter high schools with deep collaborations between business, industry, and community stakeholders to advance workforce development. Partnerships throughout the state with the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) and businesses have established more than 45 of these charter schools, giving students another option beyond the traditional school model. Many of the schools are based on academic partnerships between multiple school systems and incorporate project-based learning in math and science problem-solving.²⁵¹

Post-Secondary Pathways to Jobs

In yet another effort to connect talent with opportunity, the TCSG Office of Workforce Development oversees WorkSource Georgia, the state's federally funded employment and training system. These federal funds are part of a grant program called the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). At the local level, WorkSource Georgia provides WIOA services across the state through 19 local workforce development areas. WIOA funds are administered to individuals or businesses through services specifically geared toward helping individuals who are unemployed or underemployed obtain training to lead to a meaningful career.²⁵²

To continually improve the delivery of these services, WorkSource Sector Partnerships have been developed across all of the state's 12 economic development regions. A product of the High Demand Career Initiative,²⁵³ WorkSource Sector Partnerships are designed to support the development of regional partnerships that will work to understand and act on the needs of key regional industries. These sector partnerships engage businesses and inform the educational and workforce development efforts at the regional level in order to further build an infrastructure of communication and collaboration between the public and private sectors. Through the support of two rounds of grant funding by WorkSource Georgia over the past four years, a diverse group of stakeholders²⁵⁴ in each region have collaborated to develop comprehensive strategies for building sustainable talent pipelines for each regions' in-demand industries.²⁵⁵

250 GaDOE, 2019, November 4, Georgia's 2019 CTAE Graduation Rate.

251 See <https://tcsgeu/gcca/>.

252 See <https://tcsgeu/worksource/>.

253 The Georgia Competitiveness Initiative brought state government and the business community together to develop a long-term strategy for economic development in the state. Led by the Georgia Department of Economic Development and the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, the Georgia Competitiveness Initiative examined Georgia's strengths and weaknesses, gathered information and ideas from leaders from various regions and industries, and developed recommendations to stimulate job creation and economic growth. For more information, see <http://www.georgiacompetitiveness.org/about/#sthash.XBrWaj6N.dpuf>.

254 Stakeholders included economic development, workforce development, education (including K-12), social services, and community-based organizations.

255 See <https://tcsgeu/workforce-development/high-demand-career-initiative/>.

Dual Enrollment

While the TCSG's WorkSource Sector Partnerships focus on aligning industry needs with education and training, the TCSG and the University System of Georgia (USG) also play a direct role in preparing high school students for the rigor of college coursework and post-secondary success through Georgia's dual enrollment program. Dual enrollment allows qualifying high school students to take college courses for free while earning both high school and post-secondary credit. The program can help address concerns about college affordability while increasing college access and success.

A partnership between the TCSG and the Georgia Student Finance Commission to increase awareness and access to dual enrollment, specifically for underserved populations, boosted TCSG dual enrollment by nearly 300% from 2004 to 2018. A total of 554,742 credit hours were taken across private colleges and USG and TCSG institutions in 2018, an increase of 31% over the previous year.²⁵⁶

Georgia's dual enrollment program has its merits. A longitudinal study (2008–2016) of dual enrollment participants demonstrated that more than 90% of high school students with dual enrollment credit graduated from high school within four years; 83% of high school graduates in the class of 2015 who participated in dual enrollment were enrolled in a post-secondary institution within a year of graduating; and 29% of dual enrollees had earned a post-secondary credential four years after high school graduation, while nearly half of dual enrollees had earned a credential six years after graduation.²⁵⁷

More recently, a November 2019 Georgia Budget & Policy Institute report on dual enrollment confirmed the program's significance:²⁵⁸

- ▶ Dual enrollment is vital to rural areas in Georgia. One in four students in the seven most rural counties in Georgia took at least one dual enrollment course in 2019, compared with one in 20 high school students in metro Atlanta systems.
- ▶ Core academic courses accounted for 61% of credit hours taken in 2019, with technical colleges serving as the state's largest provider.
- ▶ Equity is improving, with dual enrollment 2016–2019 participation rates increasing at a faster pace for Black and Hispanic students.

While the dual enrollment program is considered a key indicator of continued post-secondary work and credential attainment, the question for Georgia is one of financial sustainability. Georgia, one of the five states that take responsibility for paying for their students' dual enrollment tuition,²⁵⁹ has seen dual enrollment appropriations double in the past three years, growing from \$49 million in fiscal year (FY) 2016 to \$105 million in FY 2019.²⁶⁰ In 2019, House Bill (HB) 444 was introduced to clarify program goals, limit courses to older high school students, codify credit-hour caps, and restrict summer-term courses. While HB 444 did not pass during the 2019 legislative session, the Georgia Student Finance Commission used its regulatory authority to change dual enrollment payment rates to colleges, eliminating awards for books and fees.²⁶¹ Despite these challenges, demand continues to rise, with enrollment projections calling for more than \$125 million to fund the program in 2020.

256 Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts Performance Audit Division. 2018. Special Examination, Report No. 17-09. Retrieved from <http://www.open.georgia.gov/openga/report/downloadFile?rid=20803>.

257 Governor's Office of Student Achievement. n.d. Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (GA?AWARDS). Retrieved from <https://gosa.georgia.gov/statewide-longitudinal-data-system-ga%E2%80%A2awards>.

258 Lee, J. 2019. *Dual Enrollment Requires Sustainable Funding to Promote High School and College Success*. Atlanta: Georgia Budget and Policy Institute.

259 Education Commission of the States. 2016. 50-State Comparison: Dual/Concurrent Enrollment Policies. Retrieved from <https://www.ecs.org/dual-concurrent-enrollment-policies/>.

260 Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts Performance Audit Division, 2018.

261 Lee, J. 2019, March. *Legislation Curbs Growth of Dual Enrollment Costs, Bill Analysis, House Bill 444*. Retrieved from Georgia Budget and Policy Institute: <https://gbpi.org/2019/legislation-curbs-growth-of-dual-enrollment-costs/>.

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

Best practice research conducted by EdQuest Georgia highlighted the need for clear post-secondary and career pathways to ensure success in college and/or careers for all public education students.²⁶² As workforce needs change, so must the state's education system. Further, Georgia's policies must support career education, college preparation, and post-secondary achievement to ensure a prepared workforce and economic prosperity for all citizens.

As Georgia looks to improve education equity, it is important to understand the factors that affect career pathways. A Brookings Institution study on disadvantaged youth corroborated what is widely known: Post-secondary degrees (associate, bachelor's, and graduate) are the strongest predictor of a high-quality job among young adults who were disadvantaged as adolescents. This finding highlights education's potential as an equalizing force. Additionally, work-based learning experiences that involve supervision, mentoring, and coaching affect job quality up to a decade later. The study also found that early experiences in the labor market, such as holding a job as a teenager, predict higher job quality in adulthood.²⁶³

The Brookings report makes the following recommendations for improving the employment prospects of disadvantaged young people that are relevant for Georgia:²⁶⁴

- ▶ Strengthening the *work-based learning* elements of high school career and technical education;
- ▶ Increasing completion rates of post-secondary degrees, with an explicit focus on quality and equity;
- ▶ Improving "on-ramps" to employment for teens and young adults, including work-based learning, community-based support groups, and internship networks; and
- ▶ Promoting further research and action on the role of mentors in employment and training programs for youth and young adults.

One step toward engaging disadvantaged youth who are not succeeding in the traditional high school setting is the TCSG's pilot program Career Plus, which will be offered at Columbus Tech, Albany Tech, Savannah Tech, Athens Tech, and Central Georgia Tech in 2020.²⁶⁵ An alternative to other high school equivalency programs like the GED, Career Plus will assign credit for core classes already passed in high school and formulate a plan to complete the remaining needed credits through the TCSG. Students may enroll in one of the 17 high-demand career pathways offered through the TCSG. Upon successful completion of the Career Plus program, students will receive their high school equivalency and a minimum of two industry-recognized career certificates.

From a legislative vantage, the reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and Perkins V gives Georgia the opportunity to align and leverage these federal statutes to further augment workforce initiatives. The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) notes that the creation of one coherent system will immeasurably improve the lives of citizens, while partnerships between educators and business leaders, policy makers, and parents will build both trust and engagement.²⁶⁶ We must ask ourselves how we define, measure, and provide guidance for college and career readiness; how we align programs of study for high-wage, in-demand careers; and most importantly, how we braid funding from the three federal acts to develop career paths relevant to Georgia's economic vitality.

262 EdQuest Georgia, 2019, Clear Pathways to Post-Secondary Success.

263 Ross, M., K.A. Moore, K. Murphy, N. Bateman, A. DeMand, and V. Sacks. 2019. *Pathways to High-Quality Jobs for Young Adults*. Washington, DC: Brookings.

264 Ross et al., 2019.

265 Interview with TCSG Office of Adult Education, Joe Dan Banker and Dr. Cayanna Good.

266 Southern Regional Education Board. 2019, February. A Unified Statewide Vision. Retrieved from https://www.sreb.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/a_unified_statewide_vision.pdf?1551370793.

As part of the Perkins V renewal, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and the TCSG are working together to draft a plan for evaluating current programs and aligning workforce development efforts to create a unified statewide vision. GaDOE's CTAE has set forth strategic priorities aligned with Georgia's workforce needs, including increasing quality career counseling and development throughout K-12, expanding real-world business experiences, and enhancing the professional development of teachers and guidance counselors. In tandem, the TCSG is reviewing all technical programs to ensure that program competencies meet business and industry needs. The TCSG is also engaging industry partners across the state to expand apprenticeships and better utilizing technology to monitor academic progress and completion. As part of this collaboration, the State Workforce Development Board, which is appointed by the governor and tasked with administering WIOA funds across the state, will need to advance workforce development initiatives to sustain Georgia's competitive advantage.²⁶⁷

Funding uncertainty surrounding dual enrollment continues to complicate this issue for Georgia. Recent data show that more than 50,000 students total, 8.5% of all Georgia public high school students, took college courses through the program in 2019. Despite evidence that dual enrollment opportunities can benefit students' high school and college performance, current appropriations represent less than 1% of Georgia's total public K-12 and higher education spending.²⁶⁸

Considering the increasing costs and scale of dual enrollment, Georgia faces issues of sustainability. To curb growth and financial strain, Georgia must define dual enrollment goals, objectives, and expected workforce outcomes in statute. When developing these goals, the legislature must define the role the program should play in addressing the state's workforce and equity needs. Additionally, Georgia should streamline the application and management of data around dual enrollment to better track outcomes. The Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts' report on the program provides several recommendations that policy makers and administrators should consider in developing these goals and setting metrics to measure and maximize the return on investment for dual enrollment.²⁶⁹

Additionally, Georgia must continue to focus on dual enrollment equity for participants by race and income. White students are overrepresented in current dual enrollment programs, compared to their presence in public schools. While enrollment rates among Black and Hispanic students are growing, these groups are still underrepresented. Further, low-income students' participation has been historically low in the program, despite representing a majority of the K-12 student population.²⁷⁰ Maximizing dual enrollment outcomes for underrepresented students will depend on the state's ability to improve K-8 academic preparation for advanced coursework and remove post-secondary financial barriers.

No matter the funding solution, the benefits are encouraging. A cost-benefit analysis of dual enrollment in Texas found that the benefits – measured in reduced time to degree, increased post-secondary attainment, lifetime earnings and tax revenues, and decreased spending on public benefits – were more than five times the program costs.²⁷¹ Georgia's dual enrollment program is increasingly opening higher education doors to students statewide while providing vital cost-savings for families. As both participation and costs grow, the state must consider long-term sustainability. How do we further define the program to contribute to our state's workforce goals?

267 See <https://tcsgeu/worksource/state-workforce-development-board/>.

268 Lee, 2019, *Dual Enrollment Requires Sustainable Funding*. Nearly 52,000 public, private, and homeschooled students participated in dual enrollment.

269 Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts Performance Audit Division, 2018.

270 Governor's Office of Student Achievement. 2017. *Georgia Dual Enrollment and Postsecondary Outcomes*. Retrieved from <https://gosa.georgia.gov/sites/gosa.georgia.gov/files/Dual%20Enrollment%20and%20Postsecondary%20Outcomes%20Report%20from%202008%20to%202016%20Nov92017%20FINAL.pdf>.

271 Miller, T., H. Kosiewicz, C. Tanenbaum, D. Atchison, D. Knight, B. Ratway, ... J. Levin. 2018, October. *Dual-Credit Education Programs in Texas*. Washington, DC: American Institute for Research. Retrieved from <http://reportcenter.theccb.state.tx.us/reports/data/board-v-a-air-theccb-study-on-dual-credit-education-in-texas-10-18/>.

How do we target the right students aligned with the goals of the program to make sure all students have the same opportunities regardless of their geographic location or socioeconomic status? And how do we grow and monitor the program to make sure every state dollar counts? These are critical questions that must be addressed to meet the needs of the state, employers, and students and their families. Tying reforms to the dual enrollment program with the efforts being undertaken by Georgia's workforce development entities and ensuring continued access through the TCSG is a strong start toward maintaining the program and meeting Georgia's workforce challenge.

Georgia's education system must stay abreast of workforce changes and industry expectations to provide students with their best chances for success. To ensure that the state continues to have a prepared workforce and economic opportunities for all, state policy must support career education, college and technical school readiness, and innovative programs that drive post-secondary achievement.

To maintain its competitive economic edge, Georgia will need to modify the lens through which it views student development, shifting from the current fragmented system to a seamless learning continuum from cradle to career. In addition to improving education and career outcomes for future generations, the payoffs for Georgia include inclusive economic growth and a robust talent pipeline – one that is ready for the workforce demands of 2030.



ISSUE 10

BEYOND THE DIPLOMA – KEYS TO POST-SECONDARY SUCCESS

ISSUE OVERVIEW

In 2019, Georgia was proud to be named the “Top State for Doing Business” for a record-setting seventh consecutive year by *Site Selection Magazine*, a publication covering corporate site selection and expansion planning information like business climate analysis.²⁷² Many factors go into this designation, and Georgia is particularly renowned for efforts to reduce red tape and promote a positive business environment across the state. These assets are significant and should be celebrated, yet on their own they paint an incomplete picture of what undergirds Georgia’s long-term business success. In a 21st century economy, business is driven by talent, and a trained workforce is critical to success.

Georgia is home to many top-tier universities as well as the #1 rated workforce development program in the country, Quick Start. However, a closer look at demographic and workforce trends indicates that we are quickly approaching challenges in maintaining a robust workforce pipeline. The state has strong programs, but many Georgians continue to fall through the cracks and are left without the credentials they increasingly need to be competitive in the workforce.

As stated in Issue 1, research conducted by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) on Georgia’s economic outlook for 2030 raised the alarm concerning the state’s workforce pipeline. The study concluded that due to the impact of automation and the changing economy, coupled with the current education level of the state’s population, Georgia is in danger of creating a multigenerational system of poverty that will result in more workers across the state being unemployed or underemployed, earning incomes below the poverty level, and becoming more reliant on state services.²⁷³

Yet, it is this same combination of automation and technological advancements that is fueling Georgia’s economic growth. SREB estimates that automation in the coming decade will impact most of Georgia’s 4.2 million workers²⁷⁴ and will leave those with low skills and/or incomplete post-secondary education (approximately 60% of the adult population)²⁷⁵ in debt and without the skills and credentials needed to attain well-paying jobs. It is clear that improving post-secondary access and completion must be made a priority for all Georgians. Otherwise, the SREB research predicts that “1.5 million Georgia workers and their children could be unemployable or stuck in low-wage jobs” by 2030.²⁷⁶

272 Arend, M. 2019, November. VII Straight: Georgia Sets Record for Most Consecutive Top State Business Climate Wins. Retrieved from *Site Selection: Business Climate Rankings*: <https://siteselection.com/issues/2019/nov/business-climate-rankings-seven-straight-georgia-sets-a-record.cfm>.

273 Arend, M. 2019.

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

275 Georgia Chamber of Commerce. 2018. *Georgia 2030 2.0: Georgia Outlook*. Atlanta, GA: Georgia Chamber of Commerce.

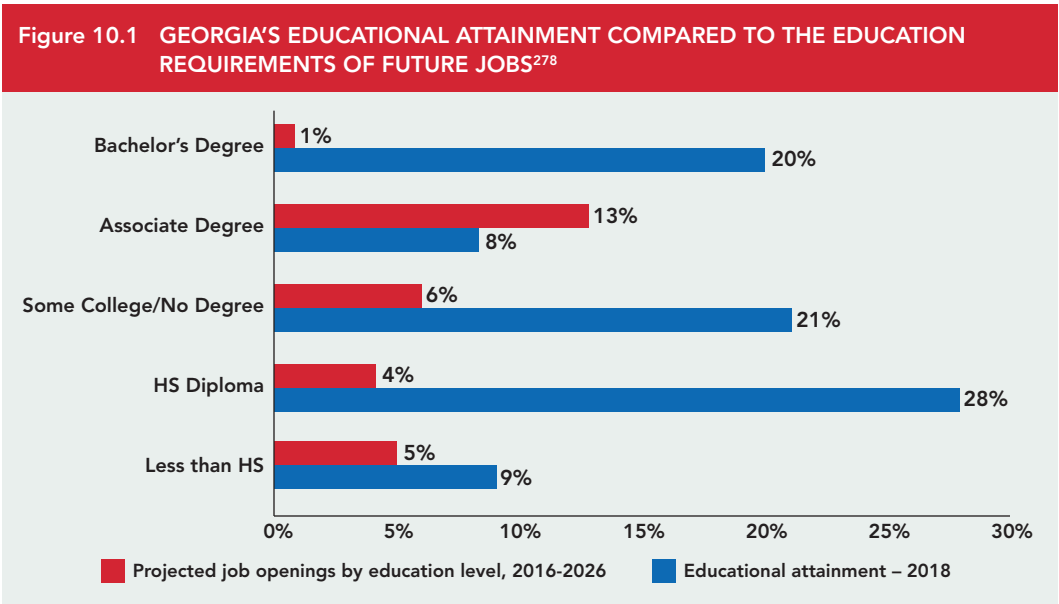
276 SREB, 2019, *Georgia’s Economic Outlook*.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR GEORGIA

Georgia is currently facing challenges in meeting its workforce needs. Much like other southern states, Georgia’s economy was built upon low-skilled jobs, with decades of intergenerational poverty and undereducation.²⁷⁷ Now, in 2019, changes in automation and technology are conflicting with the population’s current and future post-secondary education levels, which further threatens access to living-wage jobs.

Current Education Levels and Automation Trends

Figure 10.1 compares the educational attainment of Georgians today with the projections for job requirements over the coming years. The gaps are significant. For example, 28% of Georgia’s adult population has only a high school diploma, but only 4% of job growth for those with that education level is predicted. Conversely, jobs that require an associate degree are predicted to grow by 13%, and only 8% of Georgia’s adult population has that credential.

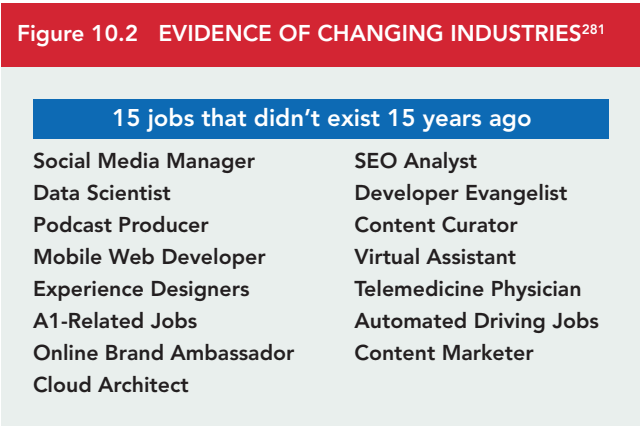


277 SREB, 2019, *Georgia’s Economic Outlook*.
278 Data compiled from SREB. *Georgia Featured Facts: SREB Fact Book on Higher Education*. Atlanta: Southern Regional Education Board and US Census Bureau. Educational Attainment: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Georgia. 2019. Community Facts. Retrieved from <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>.

These shifting educational demands are being driven by advancements in technology and automation, the impacts of which are being felt across all sectors. Low-skill jobs are disappearing, replaced by automated processes that require trained workers to create and maintain them. For example, in manufacturing, industry output increased seven-fold between 1950 and 2008. But, manufacturing jobs as a share of all jobs fell from 30% to 10% during that same period.²⁷⁹

The stable jobs that were once held by low-skill workers without advanced degrees are becoming scarcer. The positions that remain require the skills and training to oversee, maintain, and improve highly advanced production pipelines. This increase in education and training requirements is present in other industries as well. In the agricultural industry, farmers are quick to adopt new technology to monitor and cultivate their crops. In the retail space, customers are encouraged to place their own orders or check out their own purchases at automated kiosks. As technology continues to advance, those positions held by workers who either have not attended a post-secondary institution or have not completed a degree are at highest risk.

Related to automation, Deloitte’s 2019 Global Human Capital Trends Report found that 81% of respondents expect the use of artificial intelligence to increase or increase significantly over the next three years.²⁸⁰ These trends in technology represent opportunities for new, previously nonexistent positions and fields. (See Figure 10.2).



279 Westbury, B. 2008, June. Change We Can Believe Is All Around Us. Retrieved from *Wall Street Journal*: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB121314078329762429>.

280 Deloitte. 2019. Leading the Social Enterprise: Reinvent with a Human Focus, 2019 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends. Retrieved from https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/insights/us/articles/5136_HC-Trends-2019/DI_HC-Trends-2019.pdf.

281 Moore, E. 2017, October. 15 Awesome Jobs That Didn't Exist 15 Years Ago. Retrieved from *glassdoor*: <https://www.glassdoor.com/blog/jobs-that-didnt-exist-15-years-ago/>.

An analysis of predicted high-demand jobs in Georgia based on number of openings, growth, and strong wages found that only one (industrial machinery mechanic) would only require a high school diploma. And among those positions, only 25% would accept a high school diploma, while nearly half (48%) of jobs in that field required at least an associate degree. The job most in demand (CNC machine tool programmer) most commonly required either a post-secondary certificate or an associate degree.²⁸² (See Table 10.1.)

The tide of automation and new technology represents a fast-moving change in workforce qualifications that requires post-secondary skills development. Workers who are not prepared for these coming changes will be left behind.

Table 10.1 MOST IN-DEMAND JOBS IN GEORGIA BASED ON JOB GROWTH BY 2026²⁸³

Job	Projected % Change to 2026	Median Wage	Common Degree Requirement
CNC Machine Tool Programmer	36%	\$46,830	Post-Sec Certificate – 41% Associate 19%
Market Research Analyst	29%	\$59,250	Bachelor's – 57% Master's – 39%
Software Development, Application	27%	\$97,780	Bachelor's - 80% Master's – 16%
Occupational Therapist	26%	\$80,270	Master's – 71% Bachelor's – 19%
Medical and Health Services Manager	25%	\$93,700	Bachelor's– 65% Associate– 19%
Industrial Engineer	22%	\$78,860	Bachelor's – 62% Post-Sec Certificate – 14%
Airline Pilot	20%	\$93,450	Bachelor's – 61% Post-Sec Certificate – 18%
Registered Nurse	18%	\$66,110	Associate – 66% Bachelor's – 23%
Civil Engineer	18%	\$75,080	Bachelor's – 43% Master's – 26%
Supply Chain Logistics Manager	17%	\$99,570	Bachelor's – 60% Associate – 17%
Industrial Machinery Mechanic	16%	\$46,630	Post-Sec Certificate – 48% High School Equivalent – 25%
HVAC Mechanic and Installer	15%	\$42,110	Post-Sec Certificate – 55% Associate – 16%
Transportation Manager	15%	\$98,770	Bachelor's Degree – 41% Associate – 34%

282 Jordon, J. 2019. Statewide In-Demand Occupations. Presentation at the Georgia Chamber of Commerce Talent and Leadership Policy Committee.

283 Jordon, J. 2019.

Post-Secondary Access and Completion Trends

To meet Georgia's changing economic development needs, the post-secondary education pipeline must adapt quickly and address issues of access and completion. To do so, demographic shifts in Georgia's population must be addressed. (See Issue 1 for a complete discussion of the impact of changing demographics in Georgia.) The number of families and students living below the federal poverty line remains high at approximately 21%.²⁸⁴ While pockets of poverty exist in every county, widespread impoverished communities disproportionately persist in rural areas that have not experienced the economic recovery from the recession that has lifted metro areas. For example, in 59 counties, more than one-quarter of the population lives below the federal poverty line.²⁸⁵

Georgia's persistent poverty is a significant factor in the K-12 public education system, which has experienced a greater increase in poverty rates than the national average. Georgia's K-12 public schools have the eighth-largest percentage of low-income students in the nation – 62%.²⁸⁶ Economically disadvantaged residents are among the state's fastest growing demographic groups. As these students graduate from high school, the pathways to post-secondary education must be able to serve their needs.²⁸⁷

Minority populations continue to grow at a rate that outpaces White residents. More and more of Georgia's post-secondary population is composed of students of color, with current K-12 data indicating that this trend will only increase: Georgians ages 19 and under are already majority-minority by race.²⁸⁸

In terms of post-secondary enrollment, minority enrollment rates are climbing even faster than population growth. In the 2019 Higher Education Data Book, the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute found that though they remain in the minority, Black, Hispanic, and Asian students enroll in college in greater numbers each year, outpacing population growth, while White student enrollment has declined. The last 20 years has seen changes in student enrollment: ²⁸⁹

- ▶ Black student enrollment grew 90%, compared to a 45% increase in Black residents overall.
- ▶ Asian student enrollment grew 192%, compared to 162% overall growth.
- ▶ Hispanic student enrollment grew a stunning 606%, compared to 136% overall growth.
- ▶ White student enrollment grew 15%, compared to 19% overall growth.

At the same time that these demographic cohorts comprise more of the higher education community, they remain underrepresented in higher education enrollment overall. Black, Hispanic, and low-income high school students are less likely to take college entrance exams such as the ACT or SAT, leaving high school students unable to apply to many higher education institutions.²⁹⁰ Figure 10.3 shows that among those who do apply, enrollment rates are not representative of Georgia's population at large. For example, Blacks make up 35% of Georgia's population, yet they comprise 28% of the University System of Georgia (USG) student population. White students comprise 49% of USG enrollment, but they represent only 47% of the college-age population.²⁹¹

284 Southern Regional Education Board. 2019. *Georgia Featured Facts: SREB Fact Book on Higher Education*. Atlanta: SREB.

285 Georgia Chamber of Commerce, 2018. *Georgia 2030 2.0*.

286 National Center for Education Statistics. 2019. Table 204.10: Number and Percentage of Public School Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch, by State: Selected Years, 2000-01 through 2016-17. Retrieved from Digest of Education Statistics: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_204.10.asp?current=yes

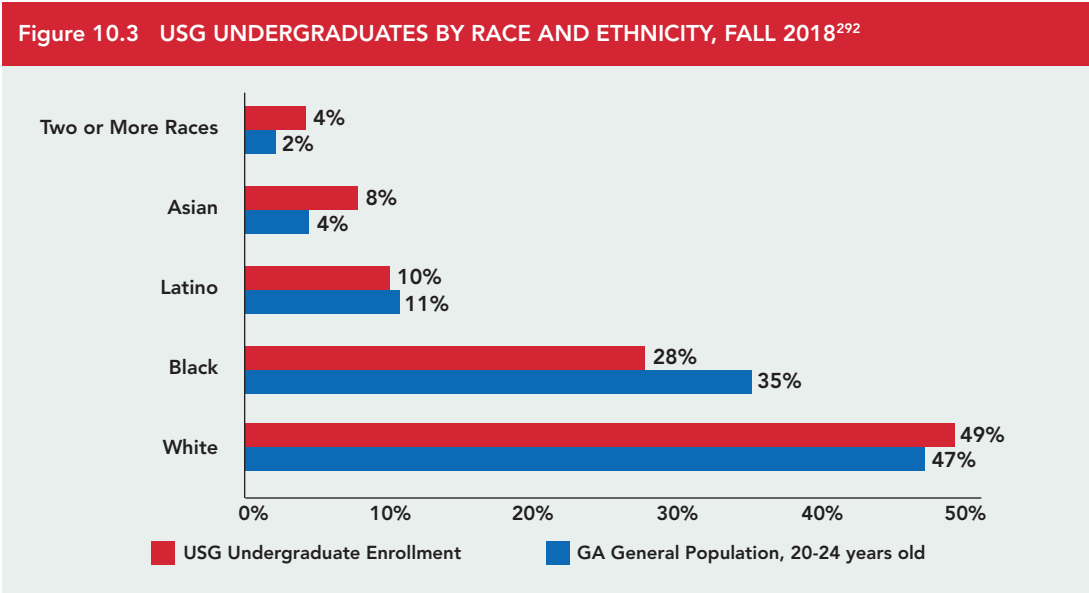
287 Governor's Office of Student Achievement. 2019. Report Card. Retrieved from <https://gaawards.gosa.ga.gov/analytics/saw.dll?dashboard>.

288 See <https://statisticalatlas.com/state/Georgia/Race-and-Ethnicity>.

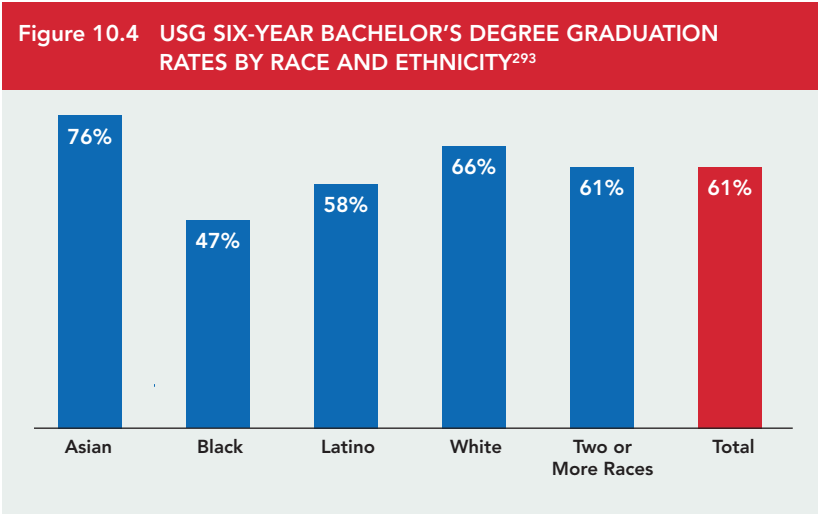
289 Lee, J. 2019. 2019 *Georgia Higher Education Data Book*. Policy Analysis. Atlanta: Georgia Budget and Policy Institute.

290 Smart Decisions Coalition. 2020. *Recommendations: Solutions to Increase College Enrollment and Completion to Build Georgia's Workforce of the Future*. Atlanta: Georgia Chamber of Commerce.

291 Lee, 2019, 2019 *Georgia Higher Education Data Book*.

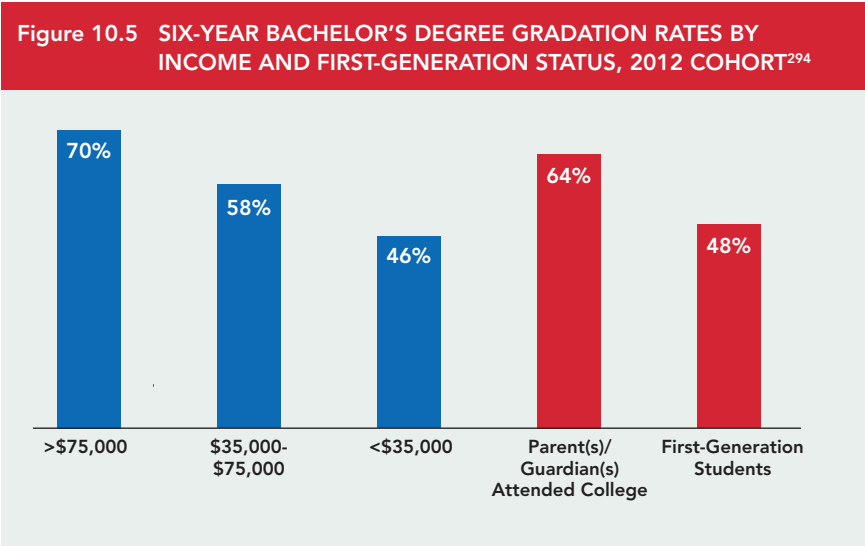


Finally, as Figure 10.4 shows, of those who do enroll, completion levels for Black and Hispanic students are far outpaced by Asian and White students.



292 Ibid.
293 Lee, 2019, 2019 Georgia Higher Education Data Book.

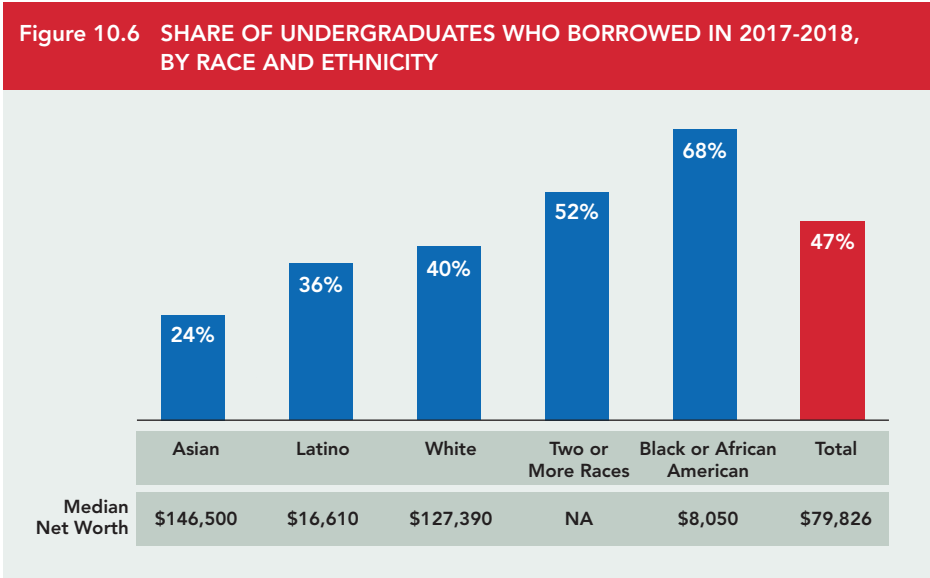
Low-wealth and first-generation college students are also among the least likely to graduate, as shown in Figure 10.5.



Income levels and the cost of attending post-secondary education are directly related to the variance in completion rates. Low-income students are less likely to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and are more likely to take out student loans to fund their post-secondary study than students from well-resourced families.²⁹⁵ As Figure 10.6 shows, this trend also breaks down by race, as Asian and White families tend to have the highest net worth in the state on average, with Black and Hispanic families’ net worth significantly trailing behind. Student debt is a significant problem in Georgia, as with the rest of the nation. In Georgia, 57% of the class of 2018 graduated owing money, with an average debt of \$28,824.²⁹⁶ In fact, Atlanta is ranked second among metropolitan areas across the county with the most student loan debt.²⁹⁷

Note that the reported student debt is for students who graduated from college. Data sources do not track those who take on student debt and never finish. The reliance on student loans for post-secondary completion leaves the students with the most debt also at the highest risk of not earning a credential. The financial burden of incomplete study takes a toll on the state as low-income students, with accrued debt and no credential, struggle to find living-wage jobs.

294 Lee, 2019.
295 Page, L., D.J. Lowry, and A. Nurshatayeva. 2017, April 22. *An Examination of the Relationship Between School District FAFSA Completion Rates and District Poverty Levels*. Washington, DC: National College Access Network.
296 Institute for College Access and Success. 2019. Student Debt and the Class of 2018. Project on Student Debt. Retrieved from <https://ticas.org/interactive-map/>.
297 Darnell, T. 2019, July 19. How Atlanta Ranks in Student Loan Debt. Retrieved from Patch: <https://patch.com/georgia/atlanta/how-atlanta-ranks-student-loan-debt>.



Considering that minority students and low-income students are the fastest growing populations in Georgia, the state’s ability to meet their needs and ensure they successfully complete post-secondary is a priority for the strength of the workforce pipeline.

While Georgia must address the students currently in the K-12 education pipeline and preparing for post-secondary education, it also must consider the adult population. As previously stated, approximately 40% of Georgia’s adult population has at least an associate degree, leaving 60% of adults with low skills and few credentials to access the job market. Therefore, whether a worker fell out of the education pipeline recently or decades ago, reskilling and upskilling is increasingly necessary to participate in the workforce and qualify for the high-demand careers that support Georgia’s economy. Without such skills, would-be workers will have less and less access to employment opportunities. This trend is particularly threatening to those currently least likely to complete a post-secondary credential: low income and minority families and students, especially in rural communities. (For more information on how these trends affect rural Georgia specifically, see Issue 8.)

ACTION STEPS FOR GEORGIA

In the face of these growing and troubling trends, Georgia has put some interventions in place. The Georgia Chamber of Commerce has spearheaded the Smart Decisions Coalition to address just these challenges.²⁹⁸ This coalition examines strategies to eliminate barriers to post-secondary success for Georgians. The goal is to improve college affordability and access in order to advance the state’s workforce. The initiative aims to help Georgia students and families make smarter decisions about their personal post-secondary paths, and to help teachers, counselors, and policy makers make smarter decisions on how to advise and invest in higher education for Georgians.

This work culminated in a series of recommendations crafted to support Georgia’s workforce needs through post-secondary access and completion. Accounting for specific challenges by region (urban, suburban, rural), these recommendations must be closely considered by lawmakers as well as by education, business, and community leaders across the state. Chief among the recommendations is a shift away from viewing post-secondary degrees as terminal degrees. Higher education must adapt to

298 Smart Decision Coalition members include Coastal Pines Technical College, the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, the Georgia Economic Developers Association, the Technical College System of Georgia, Columbus State University, the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute, the Georgia Center for Opportunity, the Georgia Institute of Technology, the College Advising Corps, the College Board, the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, Achieve Atlanta, GeorgiaCan, and the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce.

a model of life-long learning that allows for individuals to be adaptable to changing workforce demands over the long term. Such a strategy would include offering more stackable credentials, nano-degrees, and short-term continuing education classes.²⁹⁹ The following are some of the coalition's specific recommendations to ensure post-secondary access and completion:³⁰⁰

- ▶ Provide funding for schoolwide SAT/ACT Days³⁰¹ during the school day for every high school junior.
- ▶ Standardize financial aid letters for Georgia colleges and universities.
- ▶ Create statewide last-mile grants³⁰² for post-secondary students.
- ▶ Provide state funding so every high school in Georgia has a College Advising Corps adviser to provide strategic career and college advising at the K-12 level.
- ▶ Require the FAFSA to be completed to be eligible for the HOPE scholarship.
- ▶ Support the expansion of the USG's nexus degree program.³⁰³
- ▶ Encourage employers to host experience days with high schools to raise awareness of career opportunities.
- ▶ Support collaboration among employers, K-12 school districts, and post-secondary institutions to ensure program offerings continue to meet job needs.

Also meeting throughout 2019, the Senate Study Committee on Higher Education Outcomes took a hard look at Georgia's post-secondary pathway challenges. This committee was charged with reviewing the changing labor market and evolving requirements for higher education, including continuing education, certifications, and degrees. The Committee issued its final recommendations in three categories.³⁰⁴

- 1) **Increase Post-Secondary Enrollment** – Support a statewide expansion of the College Advising Corps, promote increases FAFSA completion and encourage local school districts to adopt offering the ACT/SAT during the normal school day for juniors and seniors.
- 2) **Persist and Progress in Post-Secondary** – USG and TCSG scale the strategic gap and emergency funding for post-secondary students through corporate and private giving through foundations.
- 3) **Prepare the Workforce for Lifelong Learning** – Expand USG's Nexus Degree program throughout the state.

Both the Technical College System of Georgia and USG have done impressive work identifying interventions to keep students in school once they have enrolled. Programs such as the momentum year, last-mile grants, and targeted advising for low-income, minority, and first-generation students have produced significant and laudable results. For example, Georgia State University's last-mile grant, known as the Panther Retention Grant, has helped more than 8,000 students persist in completing their degree. The initiative identifies academically qualified students who are at risk of non-enrollment because of nonpayment and provides an average award of \$900 to cover the remaining cost of tuition. Since the program's inception in 2011, more than 60% of senior Panther Retention Grant recipients have graduated within a year, and more than 75% of non-seniors were still enrolled a year later.³⁰⁵ As identified by the Smart Decisions Coalition work, these programs need to be supported and expanded, especially to institutions serving more rural and low-income students.

299 Smart Decisions Coalition, *Recommendations*.

300 Smart Decisions Coalition, *Recommendations*.

301 SAT/ACT Day would allow local districts to adopt a day during the normal school year for all high school juniors to take a college entrance exam.

302 Last-mile grants are allotted to students, typically in their last year or semester of post-secondary education, to alleviate financial pressures.

303 The Nexus Degree is a specialized degree with a curriculum developed in tandem with industry partners to ensure adaptability to the needs of industry. Nexus Degrees are 60-credit credentials that, as of 2019, are available in Blockchain and Cybersecurity.

304 Georgia State Senate Research Office. 2019. *The Final Report of the Senate Study Committee on Higher Education Outcomes*. Atlanta: Georgia State Senate.

305 Georgia State University. 2017, July. Groundbreaking Alliance of Public Research Universities to Provide Students with Last-Mile Grants to Support College Completion. Retrieved from GSU: *Student Success*: <https://success.gsu.edu/2017/08/16/university-innovation-alliance-completion-grants/>.

While state leaders clearly have a role in increasing post-secondary success, as the Smart Decisions work points out, business leaders across Georgia also have a role to play in helping ensure their employees receive the necessary training to keep their skills current. One example of a company doing just that is Gas South. Faced with the increasing need for educational attainment among its employees, Gas South has put the following policies in place to grow its own workforce:

- ▶ Tuition reimbursement and the opportunity to borrow from 401(k) for tuition costs,
- ▶ Relaxation of educational requirements for positions (Applicants must be in the appropriate program of study, but are not required to be already credentialed.),
- ▶ Flexible schedules to allow for classes,
- ▶ Internal training and development with a focus on building practical skills and embracing diversity and inclusion, and
- ▶ Incentives for learning such as a performance review system that focuses equally on results and competencies.

Over time, the needs of the workforce change, and the education system must stay abreast of these changes to provide students with their best chance for success. To ensure that Georgia continues to have a prepared workforce and economic opportunities for all, best practice research identified by EdQuest Georgia found that states must have policies in place that support career education and college preparation as well as innovative programs that support and ensure post-secondary achievement. Key to this achievement is removing barriers and ensuring students have the resources they need to complete their degrees.³⁰⁶

In 2018, Georgia took a significant step toward removing a key financial barrier when the General Assembly passed House Bill 787. This bill called for the creation of a needs-based aid program for higher education students in Georgia. However, since its passage, the details of the bill have not been developed, nor has a funding stream been identified. Support for low-income students is a necessary component of any comprehensive plan to improve Georgia's enrollment, attendance, and completion rates. A statewide need-based funding program must be made available to ensure successful post-secondary education completion for all students.

Georgia will not continue to be the "Top State for Doing Business" without more students entering, completing, and reentering the post-secondary education system. Technological advancements will not slow down, and a strong workforce must continually adapt to new and disruptive changes. As we consider the role of post-secondary education in the state, we must recognize that the ever-evolving landscape of automation, artificial intelligence, and technology will continue to require additional reskilling and upskilling. Higher education can no longer be considered a unique, one-time event for a select group of residents. To meet Georgia's current and 2030 economic needs, workers will likely have to return to education again and again. Continued economic development depends on having systems in place that meet the evolving needs of industry and allow all Georgians to live, work, and thrive.

306 See <http://www.edquestga.org/clear-pathways-to-postsecondary-success/>



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