



2023 Professional Association of Georgia Educators Legislative Priorities

- **Protect educator planning time and reduce class size to enhance instruction and improve student learning.**

Educators need time to design engaging and effective instructional plans for students. PAGE members across Georgia consistently identify lack of unencumbered planning time, free from meetings, as a significant barrier to providing high quality instruction. Lack of planning time is also a reason teachers leave the profession¹, and it undermines the successful implementation of interventions to improve student learning.²

PAGE members also highlight large class sizes as detrimental to student learning. Small class size in primary grades is linked to improved achievement, particularly among low-income and minority students.³

- **Foster student health and safety by:**

- *Funding school counselors for special education and gifted students as statutorily required.*

In 2013, the General Assembly passed HB 283, which aimed to boost funding for school counselors. The legislation laid out a timeline to provide funding for school counselors for special education, gifted, remedial and ESOL⁴ students—none of whom were provided funds for counselors at that time—and set a ratio of one counselor per 450 students for all student categories under the Quality Basic Education formula.

In FY 2018, legislators allocated funds for school counselors for ESOL and remedial students, but they have not yet invested in school counselors for special education or gifted students. Lawmakers should ensure funds for school counselors are allocated to these students in the FY 2024 budget.

¹ Provasnik, S. & Dorfman, S. (2005) *Mobility in the teacher workforce* (NCES 2005-114). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/2005114.pdf>

² McGoey, K.E., Rispoli, K.M., Venesky, L. G., Schaffner, K.F., McGuirk, L., & Marshall, S. (2014) A preliminary investigation into teacher perceptions of the barriers to behavior intervention implementation, *Journal of Applied School Psychology, (30)*4, 375-390

³ Krasnoff, B. (2015) What the research says about class size, professional development, and recruitment, induction, and retention of highly qualified teachers: A compendium of evidence on Title II, Part A, program-funded strategies. Portland, OR: Northwest Comprehension Center. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED558138.pdf>

⁴ ESOL refers to English to Speakers of Other Languages

- *Enhancing school safety by incorporating funding as an annual supplemental grant to the Quality Basic Education (QBE) formula.*

Safety measures in public schools are an ongoing and increasing concern. While the state has made periodic investments to help make schools safer, there is no line item in the budget to make this a consistent priority. Legislators should incorporate an annual allocation in the state budget beginning in FY 2024.

- *Expanding the mental health workforce in high-need areas by increasing investment in their training.*

Forty-five counties in Georgia do not have either a licensed psychologist or a licensed social worker,⁵ and 152 of the state's 159 counties face a county-wide shortage of mental health workers.⁶ Lawmakers should grow the mental health workforce by including mental health professionals in Georgia's existing service cancellable loan programs for healthcare workers.

- **Boost state funding for student transportation to enable districts to increase local funds allocated to teaching and learning.**

State funding to transport students to and from school safely has not kept pace with districts' transportation costs. State dollars currently cover only about 15 percent of these costs, down from approximately 50 percent in the 1990s. This shift adds significant costs to local budgets and limits the amount of local dollars that can be directed to the classroom. Lawmakers examined student transportation funding in [2000](#) and [2012](#) and laid out recommendations to increase the state's contribution, which have not been implemented. Guided by these recommendations, legislators should develop and enact a plan to bring funding back to a partnership level beginning with an increase in the FY 2024 budget.

- **Reduce barriers to entering the teaching profession by restoring the Promise Scholarship and the Teacher Scholarship programs and the Promise II Scholarship program.**

Georgia faces persistent teacher shortages in special education, math, and science. School districts in many rural communities also struggle to attract and keep educators. To reduce the financial burden of earning a degree and initial certification to teach, the General Assembly should restore service cancellable loan programs it eliminated:

- Promise Scholarship for college juniors and seniors going into teaching
- Teacher Scholarship for individuals pursuing advanced degrees in critical shortage areas such as math and science

⁵ Voices for Georgia's Children. (2021) *Sustaining Georgia's child and adolescent behavioral health workforce through supervision*. Atlanta, GA: Same. <https://georgiavoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/BHWF-Brief-FINAL.pdf>

⁶ *Health professional shortage areas: Mental health, by county, 2022-Georgia* (n.d.). Rural Health Information Hub. <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/charts/7?state=GA>

- Promise II Scholarship for paraprofessionals seeking to complete their degrees and earn certification
- **Sustain student recovery from pandemic-driven learning disruptions by investing in funding for low-income students in the Quality Basic Education formula.**

Students across Georgia experienced multiple learning disruptions since March 2020. Districts are using federal pandemic relief funds to meet immediate health and safety needs and address student academic and non-academic concerns. The impact of the pandemic on student learning is uneven with some students experiencing large declines in expected academic progress, particularly low-income students, while others experienced smaller decreases.⁷ Effectively addressing the pandemic's negative effects on students will require extra support beyond the timeframe of federal relief dollars, which expire in September 2024.⁸ Incorporating additional funds for low-income students in the QBE formula will allow districts to sustain practices that are accelerating student learning.

To support effective deployment of these funds, lawmakers should invest in an education research collaborative that leverages the capacity of the university system to undertake rigorous examinations of critical education practice and policy concerns. Priority focus areas could include literacy development practices and the educator workforce, which have emerged as key issues in the pandemic's wake.

PAGE Legislative Priorities are created and approved by members every year. While the priorities reflect areas of PAGE advocacy focus during the legislative session for which they are generated, PAGE also strongly supports and continuously advocates for policies benefitting educators, students, and public education, including raising educator salaries and promoting strong retirement and healthcare benefits for Georgia educators.

⁷ Sass, T. R. & Goldring, T. (2022). *Student achievement during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Georgia Policy Labs, Georgia State University. <https://gpl.gsu.edu/publications/student-achievement-growth-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-fall-2021-update/>

⁸ Shores, K. & Steinberg, M.P. (2022). Fiscal federalism and K-12 education funding: Policy lessons from two educational crises, *Educational Researcher*. doi.org/10.3102/0013189X221125764