

# IDRA Georgia Legislative Priorities 2022



## Fair and Full Funding for Public Schools

Since Georgia's passage of the Quality Basic Education Act in 1985, public education has been subject to hundreds of millions of dollars in budget cuts nearly every year. Every public school should have the resources to provide high quality education to students. To accomplish this goal, Georgia legislators should adopt the following policies.

- Commission a long-overdue comprehensive study of education to understand the needs of a diverse Georgia student population. If a cost study cannot be commissioned, leaders should adopt student-based funding recommendations made under former Governor Nathan Deal's Education Reform Commission (Knapp, 2015).
- Protect the state budget from continuous cuts, identify additional sources of tax revenue that may fund public schools and establish new funding streams to alleviate property tax pressures and disparities. Since 2003, Georgia has underfunded education by over \$10 billion (Owens, 2021).
- Update the funding formula weights to provide additional funding for students who come from families with limited economic resources. Georgia is one of only eight states that fail to provide such additional funding (McKillip & Farrie, 2019).
- Fully fund categorical and other non-QBE (Quality Basic Education) grants, such as sparsity grants that support rural districts and communities with lower wealth. Rural districts in Georgia face additional challenges for educating their students. Georgia is ranked in the bottom 10 for rural student achievement and has one of the lowest rates of per pupil spending in rural districts (Showalter, et al., 2019).
- Repeal current voucher programs and reinvest those funds into public schools to ensure that the needs of all students, particularly students with disabilities, can be met. Georgia uses vouchers to divert public money into privately-run programs that have less accountability and oversight than public schools.
- Require public participation in school budget planning processes. In order to receive federal funding over the past

year, state education leaders were required to solicit feedback for how public money should be invested in education and take that input into account (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).



## Safe Schools and Culturally-Sustaining Educational Environments

Georgian students should have access to safe and culturally-sustaining environments. Georgian legislators can facilitate these environments by focusing on the resources and support that protect and sustain students' racial and cultural identities.

- Eliminate the state's reliance on harmful, unnecessary exclusionary discipline practices inside schools and maintain mechanisms to track incidents and their impact on school climate ratings. Students of color, particularly Black students, are disproportionately subjected to exclusionary discipline practices (Craven, 2020).
- Prohibit the use of corporal punishment on any student by repealing GA Code §§ 20-2-730-732. Georgia is in the minority of states that still allow corporal punishment, which has been shown to be harmful and disproportionately applied to students of color and students with disabilities (SPLC & CCRR, 2019; Craven, 2021).
- End the regular presence of police inside schools while also collecting and publishing comprehensive and disaggregated policing data from schools that have a continued police presence. Studies have shown that school police are harmful for student environments and are associated with higher amounts of arrests, suspensions, and expulsions, outcomes borne out disproportionately by Black students (Homer, 2020; Fisher & Hennessy, 2016).
- Ensure school safety and foster positive school climates by providing critical funds for school-based professionals, like counselors and social workers, while expanding implementation of safer research-based programs, such as restorative practices and social-emotional learning programs. The recommended ratio of students-to-counselors is 250:1 (ASCA, 2017), but the current ratio in Georgia is nearly twice that at 480:1. Across the country, 14 million students are in schools with police but no counsel-

or, nurse, psychologist or social worker (Whitaker, et al., 2019).

- Reject any attempts to censor learning for students and instead adopt culturally-sustaining curricula and pedagogical approaches that affirm students. Over the past year, policymakers throughout the South, including Georgia's own State School Board, have enacted policies aimed at censoring what students can learn and what educators can teach (Wilson, 2021).



## Excellent Education for Emergent Bilingual Students

Emergent bilingual students have the civil right to access excellent educational opportunities that ensure English mastery while honoring and supporting their home languages and cultures.

- Celebrate the diversity of languages spoken by Georgia's students and repeal Georgia's English-only official language law. According to 2020 U.S. Census data, people of color are among the fastest-growing populations in Georgia, and unsurprisingly Georgia's English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program has grown 3.5 times the national average (Owens, 2020).

- Update Georgia statutory language from English learner students to emergent bilingual students. Georgia's reference to students as English learners and the corresponding program for educating these students as ESOL does not reflect students' asset-based potential for bilingualism (García, 2021).
- Support paraprofessional pipeline and grow-your-own programs to encourage individuals to become bilingual education teachers in their communities. Analyses of Georgia spending for emergent bilingual student educators shows a lack of full staffing for educators in these positions (Owens, 2020). Georgia legislators should support districts to identify ways to address teacher shortages for emergent bilingual students.
- Expand Georgia's statewide assessments to be offered in students' home language. Georgia is one of 19 states that do not provide state assessments in languages other than English (Tabaku, et al., 2018).
- Expand the Georgia Department of Education's reporting dashboard to include seal of biliteracy attainment and ensure that the seal is accessible to emergent bilingual students. Georgia is one of many states that offer students the seal of biliteracy, but IDRA analysis of seal recipients shows that the seal designation may be inaccessible to emergent bilingual students.

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### Resources

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