



IDRA Priorities for the 2023 Georgia General Assembly Session

IDRA's mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. To do this, IDRA works to promote educational justice, build excellent and equitable schools, and protect the civil rights of systemically-excluded students in Georgia, particularly those who are Black, Latino and/or emergent bilingual students.

Put children first...

Secure full & fair school funding for Georgia's public schools

Ensure excellent educational opportunities for emergent bilingual & immigrant students

Create safer schools without harmful disciplinary practices

Promote culturally-sustaining school climates that support all students



Secure

Full & Fair School Funding for Georgia's Public Schools

All students deserve to attend free, high-quality, fully funded schools. However, since Georgia passed the Quality Basic Education Act in 1985, the public education system has been consistently underfunded by more than \$10 billion.

IDRA Policy Recommendations

The state's recurring lack of investment, coupled with the systematic diversion of taxpayer funds toward private education, has undermined Georgia's public schools and their ability to support the needs of our most vulnerable students, particularly those students living in poverty and in rural communities. To ensure full and fair funding for Georgia's public schools, IDRA urges the Georgia General Assembly to...



-  **Protect the state budget from continuous cuts and identify additional sources of revenue to fully fund public schools.** Since 1985, Georgia's Quality Basic Education Act has been funded fully only three times and has received over \$10 billion in cuts since its inception (Owens, 2021).
-  **Support schools and families with limited economic resources with additional state funding.** Georgia is one of only six states that does not provide additional funding to schools for serving students from families with limited economic resources despite the additional costs that are associated with educating students who are living in poverty (McKillip & Farrie, 2019).
-  **Supplement rural district funding by amending the QBE formula to include a sparsity adjustment for rural districts.** Rural districts have significant unmet funding needs. In fact, according to the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA), rural school districts are serving larger populations of students living in poverty than their urban counterparts, yet urban revenue is growing at nearly twice the rate of rural school districts. Additionally, QBE funding to rural school districts increased at about half the rate of their non-rural peers despite per-student costs increasing at twice that rate (2020).
-  **Increase funding allotted in the annual budget for dual language immersion (DLI) programs, with appropriate oversight mechanisms to ensure that funding is applied appropriately.** DLI programs have limited availability despite evidence showing their success in Georgia (Morales & Sass, 2021).
-  **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 is one of the states that diverts public money into privately-run education programs through vouchers. These programs have less accountability and oversight than their public counterparts, especially for vulnerable student populations (Ladd, 2022).
-  **Require participatory budget practices for all districts.** At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Georgia education leaders were required to solicit and incorporate public feedback into spending plans to receive federal relief funds. Georgia legislators should codify this approach and require public participation in all local school budget planning processes.
-  **Commission a modern cost study to understand the needs of all Georgia students.** Legislators should supplement the findings of the Senate Committee to Review Education Funding Mechanisms created by Georgia Senate Resolution 650 with a comprehensive cost study. If a modern cost study cannot be commissioned, leaders should revisit student-based funding recommendations made under former Governor Nathan Deal's Education Reform Commission.

Ensure

Excellent Educational Opportunities for Emergent Bilingual & Immigrant Students

Despite being home to the seventh largest population of emergent bilingual students in the country, Georgia continues to under-resource critical language programs in schools.

IDRA Policy Recommendations

It is imperative that we secure their rights to excellent schooling that support English mastery while developing and honoring students' home languages and cultures. To accomplish this goal, IDRA urges the Georgia General Assembly to...



- Adopt a statewide strategic plan to strengthen emergent bilingual student education as other southern states have done.** Georgia's emergent bilingual programs, called ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages), is subject to variable levels of support and success across the state. This is in part due to a lack of a comprehensive state plan to identify gaps in resources and fill them for the benefit of emergent bilingual students (Latham Sikes & Villanueva, 2021).
- Celebrate the diversity of languages spoken by Georgia's students by expanding Georgia's English-only language law to include other languages.** Georgia can follow the lead of other states across the nation and expand access for our increasingly diverse population by adopting the second most spoken language in the state, Spanish, and other languages as appropriate official languages.
- Modernize Georgia's statutory language from "English learners" to "emergent bilingual learners."** Georgia currently categorizes students in English language programs as "English learners," which neglects to reflect the asset-based potential that these students often already speak one or more languages (García, 2021).
- Identify ways to address teacher shortages in Georgia's language programs.** Analyses of Georgia's spending for emergent bilingual student educators show understaffing for educators in these positions (Owens, 2020). Georgia legislators should support districts in recruiting and retaining effective teachers of emergent bilingual students, such as through programs to encourage individuals to become bilingual education teachers in their communities. Legislators also should support the paraprofessional pipeline for bilingual education (Piñón 2022).
- Expand Georgia's statewide assessments to be provided in students' home language.** Georgia is one of 19 states that do not provide state assessments in languages other than English (Tabaku, Carbuccia-Abbott & Saavedra, 2018).
- Expand the Georgia Department of Education's reporting dashboard to include seal of biliteracy attainment and ensure its accessibility for emergent bilingual students.** Georgia is one of many states that offer students the Seal of Biliteracy, but IDRA's analysis of seal recipients shows that the seal designation may be inaccessible to emergent bilingual students.
- Direct the Board of Regents to repeal Policies 4.1.6. and 4.3.4. and expand access to higher education and financial aid for undocumented and DACA students.** Georgia is one of three states, along with South Carolina and Alabama, that prohibits undocumented students from accessing in-state tuition rates. Additionally, Board of Regents policy 4.1.6. prohibits the admission of undocumented students at Georgia's top three public institutions (Hultin, 2015; Atfeh, Duperrault & Wejsa, 2019).

Create

Safer Schools Without Harmful Disciplinary Practices

Georgia's students should have access to safe and supportive learning environments where teachers and school administrators do not rely on harmful exclusionary discipline and policing strategies. Instead, we must invest in research-based strategies that support positive school climates and student success.

IDRA Policy Recommendations

The legislature can make sure students have access to safe and welcoming schools. IDRA urges the Georgia General Assembly to...

-  **Eliminate the state's reliance on harmful, unnecessary exclusionary discipline practices inside schools.** Exclusionary discipline practices are disproportionately applied to students of color (Craven, 2020). Legislative leaders should require annual reviews of disciplinary incidents and track disproportionality and impact on school climate ratings.
-  **Expand the mandatory use of Multi-Tiered Support Systems (MTSS) to include the entire prekindergarten-12th grade continuum to reduce the state's reliance on exclusionary discipline.** MTSS is currently required in Pre-K through third grade before expulsion or long-term suspension (OCGA § 20-2-742 [2021]). Legislative leaders should expand these efforts to include restorative practices, mediation and other evidence-based alternatives to exclusionary discipline.
-  **Prohibit the use of corporal punishment on any child by repealing O.C.G.A §§ 20-2-730-732.** Georgia is in the minority of states that still allow corporal punishment, a practice that has been shown to be harmful and disproportionately applied to students of color and students with disabilities (Craven, 2021).
-  **End the presence of police inside schools while also collecting and publishing comprehensive and disaggregated policing data, including arrest, citation and use of force 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 numbers of arrests, suspensions and expulsions. Black students disproportionately experience these outcomes (Homer, 2020; Fisher, 2016).
-  **Ensure students, including LGBTQ+ students and students of color are safe from identity-based discrimination in schools by expanding anti-bullying, reporting and notice requirements.** The U.S. Department of Education and several courts have interpreted Title IX's anti-discrimination protections to cover students' sexual orientation and gender identity (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Best practices for protecting LGBTQ+ youth require leaders to enact strong anti-bullying, reporting, notice and support policies for these youth (GLSEN, 2019).
-  **Provide critical funds for school-based professionals, like counselors and social workers, while expanding implementation of research-based programs, such as restorative practices and social-emotional learning.** Across the country, 14 million students are in schools with police but no counselor, nurse, psychologist or social worker (Whitaker, et al., 2019). The recommended ratio of students-to-counselors is 250:1, but the current ratio in Georgia is nearly twice that at 480:1 (ASCA, 2021).



Promote

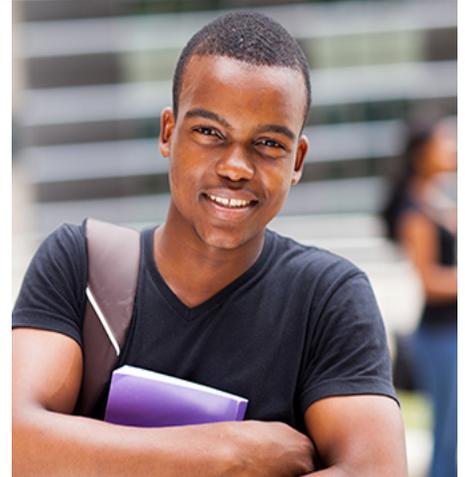
Culturally-Sustaining School Climates that Support All Students

All students deserve to learn in culturally-sustaining school environments that affirm their racial, ethnic, gender and other identities. Culturally-sustaining schools create positive, safe and supportive school climates for all students to receive high-quality educational opportunities to succeed. Recent classroom censorship policies have made schools less safe or supportive for students, especially for students who are Black, Latino and identify as LGBTQ+, and are significantly more likely to experience identity-based discrimination.

IDRA Policy Recommendations

The legislature can make sure students attend culturally-sustaining and supportive schools. IDRA urges the Georgia General Assembly to...

-  **Codify standards that would emphasize the history and contributions of African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Latinos and Afro-Latinos.** The inclusion of culturally representative curriculum has been shown to increase academic outcomes for all students, particularly those students who are at higher risk of dropping out (Dee & Penner, 2017; NEA & LFAA, 2022).
-  **Continue support for cultural and ethnic studies courses by including these courses as social studies credit to meet graduation requirements.** Currently only three credits of social studies are required for graduation. Legislators can incentivize students to take these culturally-sustaining courses by allowing students to receive social studies credit for the ethnic studies courses already approved by the Georgia Department of Education.
-  **Reverse the move toward censoring our classrooms by repealing Georgia's classroom censorship bills (HB 1084/Act 719, SB 226/Act 720).** These policies attempt to whitewash history, limit access to diverse curriculum and increase administrative burdens on already overburdened educators (Noll, 1994; Latham Sikes, 2021; Taskforce on Teacher Burnout in Georgia, 2022).
-  **Amend the Parents' Bill of Rights (HB 1178/Act 718) to include students' rights.** Georgia's Parents' Bill of Rights (HB 1178/Act 718) codified parents' already-existing rights to participate in the learning process, but best practices emphasize involving students in the instruction development process increases investment and improves outcomes (Jagersma, 2011). Additionally, students are entitled to a free and truthful education separate from the rights of their parents, thus it is a natural extension to further engage more key stakeholders in the instructional process.
-  **Ensure curricula and pedagogies equip students to understand gender and sexuality.** Best practices indicate that all students, including LGBTQ+ students, have better educational outcomes when curricula and pedagogies reflect and support their lived experiences (GLSEN, 2019). Georgia legislators should ensure that students continue to have access to curricula and pedagogies that help them understand gender and sexuality.
-  **Incentivize school districts to implement culturally-sustaining educational practices.** Legislators can encourage districts by allocating grant funding for efforts in diversifying the teacher workforce, implementing diverse curricula and training educators in culturally-sustaining pedagogical practices (IDRA, 2017; NEA & LFAA, 2022).



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