



## **My Siblings Deserve Better, Fully Funded Schools**

**IDRA Testimony Submitted by Jordan Madden to the Senate Education and Youth Committee, in support of SB 284/HB 668, March 20, 2024**

Dear Chair Erwin, Chair Dixon, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Jordan Madden, and I am the policy intern at IDRA, an independent, non-partisan non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

**I am asking for your support of SB 284, also known as Georgia's Opportunity Weight Act.**

I grew up in DeKalb and Clayton County, attending various elementary schools, McNair Middle School, and Mount Zion High School in Jonesboro, Georgia. I am a sibling of eight children, and while coming from a large family was fun and exciting, we often endured rough times: foster care, homelessness, unstable housing, and lack of resources to thrive in school.

Fortunately, I attended public schools supported by the community, which helped push my education further; I was given school supplies during back-to-school drives and received uniforms from the local churches and nonprofits. We were not always fortunate, though, and in class, we often had to endure large class sizes and a lack of teachers and counselors to support students' daily needs, as well as not being able to eat a diverse and healthy breakfast before coming to school. It sometimes put me and my siblings behind.

It is a fact that academic achievement is heavily based on the family's income level in the state. In 2021, Georgia ranked 49<sup>th</sup> in performance between students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch performance vs. students who do not (Center, 2021). I would be considered one of those students. The Opportunity Weight Act is a unique chance to support students who are left behind for reasons outside their control. Students rely on free and reduced-price lunch programs to give them the essential start to their day, which sets them up for success and gives schools the resources they need to support instruction.

Lastly, this bill would ensure students receive the needed resources for classrooms like school supplies, textbooks, and additional learning resources not readily available at schools who serve students living in poverty.

### **The facts are clear.**

- Georgia has one of the highest rates of children living in poverty in the United States.
- Georgia is one of six states that does not allocate additional funding to educate students living in poverty.
- The Quality Basic Education (QBE) funding formula has been underinvested for over 20 years, with full funding allocation in 2020.

While I am no longer a student going through the Georgia K-12 education system, I think about my siblings who are. And I remember the 20 years of budget cuts to the QBE and reflect on why I do not want them to live in a world where their school must choose between a counselor or school lunch. We indeed can have both by modernizing the Georgia QBE Funding Formula and providing funding for impoverished students.

IDRA is available to answer any questions or provide any further resources. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Jordan Madden at [jordan.madden@idra.org](mailto:jordan.madden@idra.org).

## Resources

Center, E.R. (2021, September 3). *State grades on K-12 achievement: 2021 map and Rankings*. Education Week. <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/state-grades-on-k-12-achievement-2021-map-and-rankings/2021/09#grading-summary>

IDRA. (2024). IDRA Priorities for the 2024 Georgia General Assembly Session [https://www.idra.org/education\\_policy/georgia-education-advocacy/](https://www.idra.org/education_policy/georgia-education-advocacy/)

Owens, S. (January 26, 2023). *State of Education Funding (2023): Opportunity is Knocking*. Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. <https://gbpi.org/state-of-education-funding-2023-opportunity-is-knocking/>

*IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.*