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## 2023 Georgia General Assembly Wrap-Up

This year, state legislatures across the country, especially those in the South, produced a steady and unrelenting stream of bills that significantly hindered efforts for educational equity. However, the IDRA team and our partners stepped into the Georgia Assembly each day to coordinate support for policies that promote equity for students in Georgia.

We would first like to extend our deepest gratitude to our partner organizations, who worked tirelessly to advocate for more equitable and just public education in Georgia:

- Black Teachers Literary Society
- Georgia Coalition for the People's Agenda
- Columbia County Advocates for Public Education
- DEEP Center
- Georgia Association of Educators
- Georgia Budget and Policy Institute
- Georgia Educators for Equity and Justice
- Georgia School Boards Association
- Georgia Youth Justice Coalition
- Professionals Association of Georgia Educators
- Public Education Matters Georgia
- Southern Poverty Law Center



The Georgia Assembly opened its 2023 session on January 9 and adjourned on March 29. Throughout this time, we opposed bills that harmed our children and supported promising bills that could advance our equity goals.

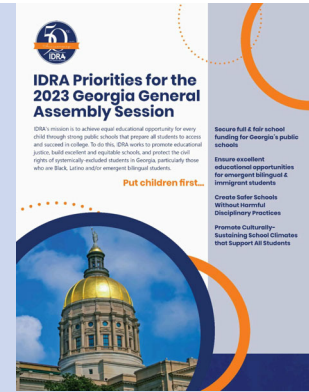
**Teamwork makes the dream work!**

## Georgia Legislative Priorities

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.

For the 2023 Georgia session, IDRA identified four key [legislative priorities](#):

- **Create safer schools without harmful disciplinary practices**
- **Secure full & fair school funding for Georgia's public schools**
- **Ensure excellent educational opportunities for emergent bilingual & immigrant students**
- **Promote culturally-sustaining school climates that support all students**



This alert outlines the status of education-related bills after the 2023 session.

Notes: The Georgia Assembly operates in two-year terms. Any bills that did not pass into law in 2023 may be considered again in 2024. When a bill is voted on the floor of a chamber but does not get passed, it may be "recommitted" and sent back to its committee for consideration in 2024, where it will have to start over. Once a bill is passed by one chamber, it must move to the other chamber by the official "crossover day."

## Status of Key Education Legislation

### School Funding and Opposition to School Vouchers



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 yet Georgia is one of the states that diverts public money into privately-run education programs through vouchers.

#### **Georgia Promise Scholarship Act (Educational Savings Account Voucher) (SB 233) – Oppose**

This bill failed to pass in the House and was therefore reconsidered and recommitted despite passing unanimously in the Senate. The bill would create educational savings accounts of \$6,500 for students who enroll in private institutions. This allotment of public dollars to private education does not guarantee civil rights protections to students and has no mechanisms for private school accountability. This bill will likely be amended and brought forth again in 2024.

- Status: Crossed over, failed to pass on the House floor, recommitted and may be brought forth again in 2024
- [Read our testimony against the bill](#)

**Opportunity Weight for Students Living in Poverty (HB 668 & SB 284) – Support**  
 HB 668 & SB 284 would create a dedicated funding stream for public schools that serve students living in poverty. This bill differs from HB 3 because it adds funding through the

Quality Basic Education formula rather than through grant funding. This is an ideal approach to funding for educating students living in poverty because it creates dedicated funding every year, even when the formula does not receive full funding.

- Status: Bills were assigned to education committees, where they may move forward in 2024

### **Support for Students Living in Poverty Act (HB 3) – Support**

This bill would allot grant funds to support students in poverty in Georgia districts. This bill was assigned to the House Education Committee but was withdrawn and refiled as HB 668 (see above).

- Status: Did not receive hearing but may be considered in 2024

### **School-linked behavioral health grant program (HB 7) – Support**

This bill would provide school-linked mental health resources and programmatic support for students navigating mental health issues and substance abuse disorders. The bill was assigned to the House Health Committee.

- Status: Did not receive hearing but may be considered in 2024

### **Increase Tax Credit Voucher Limit (HB 54 & HB 101) – Oppose**

HB 54 did not receive a hearing in the House. Instead, its language was substituted into a tax credit omnibus in the Senate (HB 101). This bill was withdrawn after amendments were made in committee. This tax credit voucher limit portion of the bill would expand the school scholarship organization tax credit limit from \$120 million to \$130 million. The voucher provides a dollar-for-dollar tax credit to individuals who donate to a School Scholarship Organization. This system has long been criticized for the lack of accountability and transparency in how these public funds are disbursed and serve to further divert much-needed public dollars into private schools.

- Status: Substituted into HB 101 after crossover day, was amended to the Senate Finance Committee and then withdrawn; may be considered in 2024

### **Increase Base Minimum Salary for Educators (HB 297) – Support**

This bill aimed to increase the base minimum salary for certified teachers and paraprofessionals in public schools. The bill was assigned to the House Education Committee.

- Status: Did not receive hearing but may be considered in 2024



## **School Safety and Discipline**

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.

### **Tribunal Due Process Bill (SB 169) – Support**

SB 169 aimed to provide limits on the extension of hearing dates for student discipline tribunals and to require local school systems to provide appropriate grade-level instructional materials to any suspended student.

- Status: Crossed over but did not pass out of committee in the House; may be considered in 2024

### **Student Gang Profiling & Armed Intruder Drills (HB 147) – Oppose**

The Governor's Safe Schools Act was signed into law on April 13. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission is now required to develop training and credentialing

for anti-gang training and armed intruder drills for all schools. One of our key concerns with this bill is that it puts Black and Latino students at high risk of being racially profiled and of criminalization and does not equip teachers with the tangible skills needed to actually support their students who may be at risk of gang involvement. Additionally, unannounced intruder drills have been shown to inflict significant trauma on students, parents and teachers. We recommend instead promoting culturally sustaining practices, youth development and gang rehabilitation programs, and mental health support accessible to all students.

- Status: Signed into law

### **Censorship Filters for School-issued Devices (HB 338) – Oppose**

HB 338's bill language claims to protect students online from harmful content but there are concerns about surveillance of students and censorship of non-harmful but politically charged content, especially LGBTQ+ content. The bill crossed over and was passed out of the Senate Education and Youth Committee. However, it did not receive a hearing on the Senate floor and was recommitted.

- Status: Crossed over, passed out of the Senate Education and Youth Committee but was not considered on receive a hearing on the Senate floor and was recommitted
- [Read our testimony on the bill](#)

## Emergent Bilingual Student Education

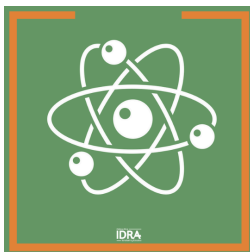
Despite being home to the seventh largest population of emergent bilingual students in the country, Georgia continues to under-resource critical language programs in schools.



### **Outreach for Emergent Bilingual Student Programs and Services (HB 127) – Support**

This bill sought to provide more resources and infrastructure for English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs and to help paving a way for equitable and asset-based programming for multilingual learners. This bill was assigned to the House Education Committee.

- Status: Did not receive hearing but may be considered in 2024



## Culturally Sustaining Schools

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.

### **Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair (CROWN) Act (SB 82) – Support**

Georgia's version of the CROWN Act would provide public employees and students from racial and cultural discrimination against their hairstyles. The bill was assigned to the

Senate Insurance and Labor Committee.

- Status: Did not receive hearing but may be considered in 2024

### Georgia's "Don't Say Gay" Bill (SB 88) – Oppose

Officially called the "Parents and Children Protection Act of 2023," the bill was tabled due to bipartisan opposition in committee. However, it will likely be amended and recommitted for a hearing in 2024. Apart from violating First Amendment rights, this bill does quite the opposite of protecting LGBTQ+ students and teachers because it aims to prohibit the discussions of gender and sexuality and creates environments where LGBTQ+ students cannot feel safe or affirmed in their identities at school.

- Status: Tabled in committee but is very likely to be considered again in 2024
- Read our testimony on the bill on [February 14](#) and [March 1](#)

### Transgender-student Exclusionary Bathroom Bill (HB 836) - Oppose

Like many other states in the South, Georgia considered a "bathroom bill." Targeted against trans students, this bill would mandate that school restrooms and changing areas be designated exclusively for use by females or males. The determination of "female" and "male" is "based on genetics and physiology," or sex, as identified on a student's "original birth certificate."

- Status: Filed on the final day of the 2023 session and assigned to the House Education Committee. Has not received a hearing but may be considered in 2024

### Librarian Criminalization (SB 154) – Oppose

This measure is an extension of the 2022 library censorship bill. This new bill would criminalize teachers and school librarians for providing materials with diverse narratives, particularly those materials that center the perspectives of LGBTQ+ authors and authors of color. It was assigned to the Education and Youth Committee.

- Status: Did not receive hearing but may be considered in 2024

## Advocacy Continues

From the cold of January to the stuffy end of March, IDRA continued our work to coordinate the **Georgia Coalition for Education Justice**. This coalition brings together organizational leaders, policy analysts, teacher educators, educators, counselors, teachers and youth committed to ensuring excellent and equitable schools for all students. In coalition with our partners, we provided updates from the Golden Dome, brainstormed strategy, and mobilized our members to take strategic action on education policy proposals. We will keep paving the way toward the schools that our communities deserve. If you are interested in joining the Georgia Coalition for Education Justice, [register here](#).

The push for a more just and equitable education system is far from over. In addition to monitoring the bills and priorities listed above, IDRA will engage legislators and stakeholders to advance proactive policy leading up to the second half of the biennial session. Key goals before us are to (1) modernize the legal language in Georgia's bilingual education (ESOL/ELL) programming to reflect more asset-based practices and framing of our emergent bilingual students, and (2) ban corporal punishment in the state.

Follow our [Tik Tok](#) and [Instagram](#) accounts for video advocacy tips



Sign up at [IDRA's Southern Education Equity Network](#) website for upcoming events and actions to stay involved.

# IDRA Southern Education Equity Network

A community forum and resource hub for advocates of strong inclusive public education

✓ Get advocacy how-to tools

✓ Share policy & action updates

✓ Plan actions with your group

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IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization whose mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

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