Children First
IDRA
Transforming Education

IDRA Priorities for the 2025 Georgia General Assembly Session

IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization. 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. 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.

The Georgia General Assembly has the chance to make our state a leader in education. Yet some seek to undermine trust in public schools by pushing policies that make classrooms less safe, using hostile rhetoric and disparaging Georgia's diverse communities and students.

IDRA calls on Georgia's state leaders to reject those harmful approaches and ideologies and instead to invest in a public education system that ensures every student has access to a truly excellent education that is safe, inclusive and free.

Put children first...

- **Secure full and fair school funding for all students, particularly emergent bilingual students and students living in poverty**
- **Create safer schools without harmful discipline or policing practices**
- **Promote culturally-sustaining school climates where all students feel welcome**

Provide

Full and Fair School Funding for All Students

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

Recurring cuts coupled with the systematic diversion of taxpayer funds toward private schools have undermined Georgia's public schools and their ability to serve all students, particularly those students living in poverty and in rural communities.

IDRA Policy Recommendations

To ensure full and fair funding for Georgia's public schools, Georgia legislators should adopt the following recommendations.

- **Protect the state education budget from cuts to ensure, at a minimum, the Quality Basic Education formula is fully funded.** Georgia has only fully funded the QBE formula three times in the last 25 years, underscoring a chronic underinvestment in public education. The ongoing decrease in the state share of per-pupil spending worsens financial challenges for schools, particularly in under resourced communities. And federal COVID-19 relief funding that helped fill gaps is ending.[1] The loss further jeopardizes education funding stability and equity.
- **Support schools serving students living in poverty by providing additional state funding via an "opportunity weight" in the QBE formula.** Georgia is one of only six states that does not provide dedicated funds to help local schools address the unique needs of educating students from families who have limited economic resources.[2]
- **Increase the state's share of educating students by including cost-of-living adjustments in the funding formula.** The lack of cost-of-living adjustments in the QBE formula means that school districts are forced to supplement their budgets with local property taxes, exacerbating wealth-dependent disparities between districts.[3]
- **Repeal current voucher programs and reinvest those funds into public schools to ensure the state serves all Georgia students, particularly students with disabilities.** Georgia is diverting public money into privately-run schools through vouchers. These programs have less accountability and oversight than their public counterparts, especially for serving historically marginalized students.[4]
- **Commission a modern cost study to understand what schools need to educate all students and to lead to fully funding the Georgia public education system.** The QBE formula has not been substantially revised sits its passage in 1985. Legislators should supplement the findings of the Senate Committee to Review Education Funding Mechanisms created by Senate Resolution 650 in 2022 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.[5]
- **Increase the English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program allotment to ensure schools are adequately equipped to serve our growing English learner population.** Georgia has the seventh largest population of English learner students in the country. School districts must have the necessary resources to educate these students and engage their families. Georgia must also expand access to high quality curricula and instructional materials that emphasize the inherent value of multilingual learners.

End

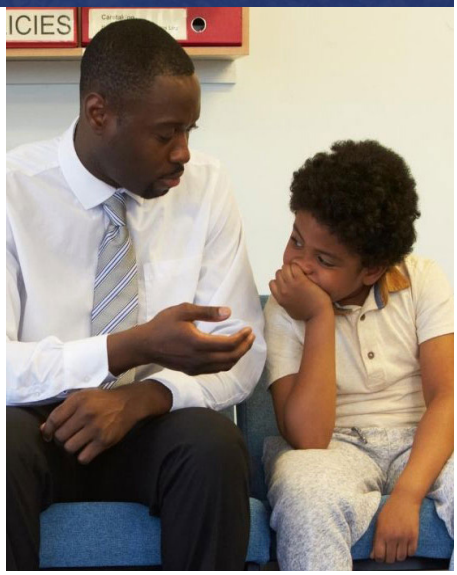
Harmful Discipline in Schools

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 exclusionary discipline practices and adopt evidence-based practices inside schools.** Exclusionary discipline, such as suspension and expulsion, has significant negative harm to students' academic, social and emotional outcomes.[6] In Georgia, Black students are more than three times as likely to receive out of school suspension than their white peers.[7]

- **Expand mandatory use of multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) to include the entire prekindergarten-12 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 (O.C.G.A. §20-2-742, 2022). Legislators should expand MTSS to include restorative practices, mediation and other evidence-based alternatives to exclusionary discipline and should ensure that students through the 12th grade can benefit from these experiences.

- **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 which has been shown to be harmful and disproportionately applied to students of color and students with disabilities.[8]

- **End the presence of police inside schools while also collecting and publishing comprehensive and disaggregated policing data, particularly use-of-force data, from schools that have a continued police presence.** Studies show that school-based police are harmful for student environments and are associated with higher rates of arrests, suspensions and expulsions. These outcomes are disproportionately experienced by Black students.[9]

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...

- **Protect and expand access to cultural and ethnic studies courses.** Ethnic studies has been an approved course offering in Georgia since 2008. In 2019, the Georgia Department of Education approved four additional cultural studies courses. Given recent attacks on AP African American Studies, it is imperative that the state legislature ensure that this coursework is protected and incentivized for all students.[10]

- **Reverse the move toward censoring classrooms by repealing Georgia's classroom censorship laws (HB 1084/Act 719, SB 226/Act 720).** These policies attempt to whitewash history, limit access to diverse curricula and increase administrative burdens on educators.[11]

- **Incentivize school districts to implement culturally-sustaining education practices.** Legislators should encourage districts by allocating grant funding for efforts in diversifying the teacher workforce, implementing diverse curricula, and training educators in culturally-sustaining pedagogical practices.[12]

- **Ensure students are safe from discrimination in schools by expanding anti-bullying, reporting and notification requirements.** Schools are seeing a rise in bullying based on or related to a student's identity, such as their race, ethnicity, national origin, sex, gender, religion or disability status. Policymakers should expand reporting, notifications and interventions aimed at decreasing identity-based bullying and creating safer, more inclusive school environments for all students.[13]

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