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2024 SESSION: EDUCATION BUDGET AND LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

The FY 2025 budget (HB 916) fully funds the Quality Basic Education (QBE) program in the Department of Education, totaling \$14.1 billion in state funds; a record amount of state funds provided to K-12 education. The QBE formula has been fully funded the last six out of seven years, providing funds to educate more than 1.7 million students and employ over 138,000 teachers. The FY 2025 budget includes a \$2,500 pay raise for teachers, for a total increase of \$9,500 since FY 2020. This brings the beginning salary for new K-12 teachers to \$43,592. The average teacher salary in Georgia is \$65,184, the highest of all southeastern states¹.

Budget Highlights

- HB 915, the Amended 2024 budget, provides \$102.5 million to the Department of Education (DOE) for the QBE midterm adjustment to reflect an increase in 825 students (or 0.05%) over last year, also reflecting more student growth in higher-cost student categories. The formula also funds \$277,905 in growth for charter system grants; \$6.3 million for state completion special schools; \$27.7 million in growth for the state charter school supplement reflecting eight additional schools; and \$8.9 million in growth for the Special Needs Scholarship.
- The Amended FY 2024 budget also includes \$1.57 million for Communities in Schools (CIS) to leverage a three-year grant to expand the program to 10 additional school districts. By the 2025-2026 school year, CIS will serve 46 districts, 240 schools, and 140,000 students. Communities in Schools supports students to improve attendance, behavior, academic performance, retention, and graduation.
- The Amended FY 2024 budget also includes \$980,924 to reflect increased utilization of Advanced Placement (AP) STEM exams due to the rollout of a new AP Precalculus course.
- House Bill 915 provides \$100,000 to the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) to offer start-up grants of \$10,000 each to Summer Food Service Program providers in unserved and underserved areas. DECAL's program, Happy Helpings, served 100 counties last year, and when combined with DOE's summer nutrition programs, 158 out of 159 counties were served.
- The Amended FY 2024 and FY 2025 budgets both include \$8.9 million in lottery funds to allow DECAL to continue the Summer Transition Program at its current level of service. The Summer Transition Program provides rising Pre-K students and rising Kindergarten students with extra support in language, literacy, and math to close the achievement gap. The program was expanded with federal funds following COVID.

¹ ["Rankings of the States 2022 and Estimates of School Statistics 2023,"](#) National Education Association

These additional dollars—provided by the House and Senate—allow the program to continue providing these needed services to 396 classrooms and over 4,600 students.

- The Amended FY 2024 budget provides \$65,000 to the Governor’s Honors Program, through the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, to fund needed technology updates and to further efforts toward increasing rural participation in the program.
- The FY 2025 budget fully funds QBE, totaling \$14.1 billion in state funds; a record amount of state funds provided to K-12 education. The QBE funding formula has been fully funded the last six out of seven years.
- HB 916 provides \$373.6 million to increase the state base salary schedule for certified teachers and employees by \$2,500, for a total adjustment to the state base salary schedule of \$9,500 since FY 2020. This adjustment can be found in the following programs with certified employees and certified staff: Agricultural Education (\$513,154), Georgia Network for Educational and Therapeutic Support (GNETS) (\$1.6 million), Sparsity Grants (\$461,897), Residential Treatment Facilities (\$296,944), Preschool Disabilities Services (\$1.5 million), Quality Basic Education Program (\$367.8 million), and Technology/Career Education (\$1.4 million).
- The budget also includes \$7.8 million for a 4.1% pay raise for school nutrition workers (\$1.4 million), bus drivers (\$5 million), school nurses (\$1.5 million), and Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs) staff (\$396,624). The budget also includes \$8.5 million for a \$1,000 salary supplement for school custodians.
- The FY 2025 budget includes \$243.5 million to provide for enrollment growth and training and experience for an additional 825 students and 3,311 teachers. The budget also includes \$40.2 million for growth in the State Commission Charter School supplements. Charter system grants receive \$301,659 in additional funding and state completion schools (previously alternative education state charter high schools) receive \$6.3 million, pursuant to HB 87 (2023 Session).
- House Bill 916 provides \$266.8 million in new funds for Equalization grants, a grant to systems whose property tax wealth per weighted FTE falls below the statewide average. In FY 2025, Equalization grants are funded at a total of \$1 billion.
- HB 916 includes \$109 million for school safety, in a new program under the Department of Education called School Security Grants. The program provides a \$45,000 grant per school to be used for school safety and security. The funds can be used for infrastructure expenses or operating expenses, to include salaries for school resource officers (SROs). The FY 2025 budget also includes \$362,000 in one-time funds for student health and safety, including funds for automated external defibrillators (AEDs) pursuant to HB 874 (2024 Session) and grants to school systems for CPR training.
- The budget includes \$200 million in additional funding for pupil transportation based on updated buses and mileage. The increase also includes additional funds for operations to reflect the increased cost of fuel, oil, and other operating expenses. The total pupil transportation funding is \$353.5 million in FY 2025.
- The school nutrition program receives an additional \$6.3 million in state funds to provide for the cost of breakfast and lunch for reduced-paying students. This is expected to cover the cost of more than 17 million meals for students. Additionally, \$2 million in school nutrition formula funds is provided to local school systems to keep the price of meals affordable for paying students and families.
- In the Agricultural Education program, \$192,000 is provided for two new young farmer positions in Barrow and Peach counties. Additionally, HB 916 provides \$88,000 for eight extended day/year programs. In the Technology/Career Education program, the FY 2025 budget includes \$1 million for construction industry certification to improve career path placements, teacher recruitment and

retention, and program alignment with elementary and middle schools, as well as \$3 million for three heavy equipment simulators at ten schools.

- The budget includes an additional \$177,000 for life sciences industry certification in the Curriculum program for a total budget of \$500,000. The funds will support current teachers in urban areas through additional professional development, expanded access to lab equipment, and new teacher life science professional development.
- The FY 2025 budget provides \$1.5 million for dyslexia screening pursuant to SB 48 (2019 Session) and universal screening pursuant to HB 538 (2023 Session), recognizing available universal screeners can also screen for dyslexia.
- HB 916 includes \$6.1 million for literacy to include: regional literacy coaches at each RESA; \$1,000 supplements to school literacy leads upon the completion of an accredited training mode; and training for local coaches, teachers, and supplemental training for ESOL teachers, prioritizing training to schools identified by the RESA as needing additional literacy intervention.
- The budget includes \$319,000 for one STEM International Baccalaureate (IB) exam for all students and one IB exam for free and reduced-paying lunch students. This mirrors state funding currently provided for AP exams.
- The FY 2025 budget includes \$250,000 for a mentorship program for new teachers to increase retention.
- Communities in Schools receives an additional \$1 million, recognizing additional county participation and a per affiliate increase. Communities in Schools supports students academically and non-academically to improve student attendance, behavior, academic performance, retention, and graduation.
- House Bill 916 provides \$9.3 million to increase Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) reimbursement rates for childcare providers in the Department of Early Care and Learning. Current reimbursement rates are at the 25th percentile, and this infusion, along with federal funds, will bring the reimbursement rates above the 50th percentile.
- The FY 2025 budget includes over \$57.5 million in new lottery funds for the Department of Early Care and Learning to implement the recommendations provided by the House Early Childhood Education Working Group. These recommendations include: a class size reduction from 22 to 20 students, phased-in over four years; an increase in start-up grants for new classrooms; funds for classroom replenishment grants every five years; an increase in transportation funding; an operating increase for private Pre-K providers; and funds to improve Pre-K lead teacher and assistant teacher pay by bringing pay parity between Pre-K assistant teachers and K-12 paraprofessionals and moving Pre-K lead teachers to the State Board of Education salary schedule.

Legislative Highlights

- [HB 51](#) (Rep. Clay Pirkle, 169th) amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-316.3 to ensure athletic associations include and recognize all other voluntary nonprofit school activities associations of Georgia high schools as a member. Section 2 amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-1076 to allow local boards of education to utilize alternative means of transportation other than school buses to transport students to school and school-related activities where appropriate.
- [HB 318](#) (Rep. Scott Hilton, 48th) amends Chapter 2 of Title 20 to re-establish the Office of Charter School Compliance, create the Office of District Flexibility, and require administrative fees held back by the state or

local school system for the administration of charter schools to be used solely for that purpose. The Office of Charter School Compliance is re-established under the State Charter Schools Commission and assists with the administration, review of, and creation of new local charter schools. The bill creates the Office of District Flexibility under the Department of Education to help school systems become and remain a charter system.

Up to three percent of charter school funding may be retained by local boards of education to provide administrative services for the local charter school. The local board of education must spend these funds solely and directly on administrative services performed for the local charter school. Any funds not expended should be remitted to the local charter school each year by June 30. The Department of Education may retain up to three percent for the administration of state chartered special schools. Any funds not used by June 30th for administration of the state chartered special school will be remitted to the school. The State Charter School Commission must follow the same structure with a November 1 deadline relating to retaining and reimbursing state charter schools for the three percent administrative fee collected.

HB 318 amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-262 to revise the eligibility criteria for project-specific capital outlay grants for low-wealth school systems. Under the bill's provisions, the eligibility criteria are that a local school system must be currently, or in the most recent three years, ranked in the bottom 25 percent of school systems in sales tax revenue per full-time equivalent (FTE) student count and value of property per FTE student count. For local school systems in which the amount of special purpose local option sales tax revenues is ranked in the bottom 25 percent of eligible local school systems receiving such sales tax revenues, that system may submit a request to the department for consideration. The system must commit five years of such revenues to the project. Educational facilities must be more than 35 years old to be consolidated. Once a local school system has received a capital outlay grant and its need is met as determined by the department, it is not eligible to receive another grant for a period of 10 years. The State Board of Education is required to establish rules and regulations to implement the provisions of this bill. The legislation updates the definition of energy cost savings measure to include revenue generating alterations and changes "guaranteed energy saving contract" to "guarantee energy savings performance contract".

- [HB 995](#) (Rep Josh Bonner, 73rd) creates O.C.G.A. 20-2-281.2, which requires local school systems to provide an optional nationally recognized multiple-aptitude battery assessment to predict future academic and occupational success in the military to students in grades 11 and 12. This assessment will be provided to students during school hours at least once per school year.
- [HB 1122](#) (Rep. Scott Hilton, 48th) amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-186, which outlines specific funding criteria based on student enrollment for state charter schools to earn a superintendent, and state and local charter schools to earn principals. Section 2 includes part-time teachers and paraprofessionals as allowable employees in O.C.G.A. 20-2-239 to enroll a student in a school other than the student's residence if the student's parent works at the school. Section 3 includes full-time or part-time paraprofessionals as allowable employees in O.C.G.A. 20-2-2066 to enroll a student at a start-up charter school, a conversion charter school, or a state-chartered special school as the parent of such student. Section 4 prohibits state charter school governing board members from being an officer, member, or executive-level employee of a local board of education or a local school system. Section 5 provides additional requirements for schools relating to publishing the Office of Student Achievement's school rating.

- [SB 50](#) (Sen. Max Burns, 23rd) requires the State Board of Education to create content standards in life guard and aquatic safety beginning in the 2026-2027 school year. Local boards of education may adopt curriculum and provide instruction in lifeguarding and aquatic safety. Curriculum should provide sufficient training to allow students to successfully complete certification as a lifeguard upon course completion.
- [SB 169](#) (Sen. Chuck Payne, 54th) amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-754, which revises the hearing dates for suspensions. A hearing should be held no later than 10 school days from the beginning of the suspension unless there is an agreement between the parents and school system, in which case the hearing must be no later than 15 days after the beginning of the suspension. A hearing can be held later than 15 days upon written request to the school system by a parent or guardian.
- [SB 233](#) (Sen. Greg Dolezal, 27th) creates the Georgia Education Savings Authority and the 'Georgia Promise Scholarship Act'; changes program weights in the Quality Basic Education formula; allows capital outlays funds to be used for pre-kindergarten programs; caps tuition fees for out of district student transfers; revises grants to low-performing schools; and amends the tax credit for qualified education donations.

Section 1-1 creates the Georgia Education Savings Authority to establish and administer student assistance programs. The powers, duties, functions, and organization of the authority are outlined in the newly created Title 20, Chapter 2B, Article 1.

Section 2-1 creates the 'Georgia Promise Scholarship Act', which would provide \$6,500 per student to families for qualified education-related expenses outside of the public school system. Qualified education expenses include: tuition at a participating school; tutoring; purchase of curriculum; professional services; transportation; fees for the management of account funds; other expenses authorized by the State Board of Education or the Georgia Education Savings Authority; or individual education expenses authorized by the parent review committee under Code Section 20-2B-25. Funds will go into an account controlled by a parent to be used for qualified education expenses. In order to allow parents and taxpayers to measure the achievements of this program, students participating must take nationally norm-referenced tests that measure student academic progress in math and language arts or a state-wide assessment annually. The Education Savings Authority will report annually to the General Assembly on the number and demographics of participating students and schools, student performance on assessments, parental satisfaction, percentage of funds utilized for each qualified education expenses, and the fiscal impact of the program on the state and school systems.

Section 3-1 revises the weights under the Quality Basic Education formula for instructional programs. Section 3-2 amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-260(5), relating to capital outlay funds, to include Georgia's pre-kindergarten programs provided and operated by the local school system to be included as an allowable use. School systems are currently unable to use capital outlay funds for this purpose.

Section 4-1 amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-293 relating to a student attending a school in a system other than the system of the student's residence. Beginning July 1, 2026, if a student attends a school outside of the student's local school system, the new school system cannot charge more than the local share of funding for tuition to transfer students.

Section 5-1 amends the Georgia Foundation for Public Education to provide that schools in the lowest 25 percent of schools should be prioritized to receive funding to implement academic and organizational innovations to improve student achievement. Section 5-2 increases the maximum allowable income tax credit for individuals and businesses for qualified education donations for grants to public schools. The tax credit cap will increase from \$5 million in 2023 to \$15 million in 2024.

[SB 351](#) (Sen. Jason Anavitarte, 31st) creates the 'Protecting Georgia's Children on Social Media Act of 2024' in Section 1-1. Section 2-1 adds to the character education program relating to bullying a new requirement to teach "responsible digital citizenship and the safe and appropriate use of technology, the internet, and social media" beginning in the 2025-2026 school year. Section 2-2 requires the Department of Education to develop model programs regarding online safety for grades six through 12, and post on its website recommended curricula and instructional materials. The model programs should be re-evaluated periodically to reflect changes in internet and social media use.

Section 2-3 revises O.C.G.A. 20-2-234 relating to internet safety and requires local governing bodies to adopt an acceptable-use policy for internet use by October 1, 2025. Schools should implement technology protection measures to block access to prohibited materials. The department will provide guidance and assistance to local schools and school systems to comply with these requirements. The State Board of Education will have the authority to withhold state funding if a local governing body fails to comply with this Code section.

Section 2-4 requires local governing bodies to adopt a social media policy by April 1, 2026. The department will assist in the creation of social media policies, and have the authority to withhold a portion of state funding if a local governing body fails to comply with this Code section or fails to enforce its social media policy.

Section 2-5 requires the department to include cyberbullying in its model policy regarding bullying by July 1, 2026. The department will post on its website resources for online and local in-person providers throughout the state available to families for students who have been found to be perpetrating bullying and those who have been targets of bullying.

Section 3-1 requires providers of social media platforms to make commercially reasonable efforts to verify the age of account holders. Any person under the age of 16 will be treated as a minor by social media platforms, and the platform must obtain the express consent of such minor's parent or guardian for use of the platform. The attorney general has the exclusive authority to enforce Chapter 6 of Title 39.

Section 3-2 requires a commercial entity to use a reasonable age verification method before allowing access to a public website that contains a substantial portion of material that is harmful to minors. It holds that a commercial entity liable for damages and a fine of up to \$10,000 per violation if it fails to perform reasonable age verification, namely that the individual is at least 18 years of age, of the individual attempting to access the material. When performing a reasonable age verification, the commercial entity will not retain any identifying information after access to the material has been granted.

- [SB 395](#) (Sen. Clint Dixon, 45th) amends O.C.G.A. 16-13-71 by making any opioid antagonist exempt from classification as a dangerous drug when used for overdose prevention. Section 2 creates O.C.G.A. 20-2-776.5 known as 'Wesley's Law', to allow for visitors and school employees to possess and administer an opioid antagonist if the person believes someone is suffering from a drug overdose on school property or at a school-sponsored activity. No cause of action can be brought whether a school personnel administers or chooses not to administer an opioid antagonist when this decision is brought in good faith. Section 3 clarifies that prescription drugs may not be dispensed by a vending machine in O.C.G.A. 26-4-89. Section 4 allows for the sale and supply of opioid antagonists in vending machines. Additionally, persons and harm reduction organizations that dispense, supply, and administer opioid antagonists are immune from liability when acting in good faith. Section 5 requires government buildings, courthouses, and schools with automated external defibrillators provide opioid antagonists to assist in the event of an opioid overdose.
- [SB 440](#) (Sen. Matt Brass, 28th) revises O.C.G.A. 20-2-149.2, known as the Accelerated Career Diploma program, to simplify the dual enrollment program and allow for academic flexibility to better align with pathway programs. This diploma path is only available for an associate degree for applied science within the Technical College System of Georgia. The Dual Enrollment ACE (Accelerated Career Education) grant program creates a grant for students participating in the Accelerated Career Diploma program. These students will not be subject to the 30-hour dual enrollment cap, and will allow dual enrollment funding to distinguish between academic and technical students. The sunset for this program is June 30, 2027.
- [SB 464](#) (Sen. Clint Dixon, 45th) revises the Georgia Early Literacy Act to create an executive committee of voting members of the Council on Literacy made up of five members appointed by the governor, president of the Senate, speaker of the House, a representative from the State Board of Education, and the chairperson of the council. Section 2 provides for the identification of universal reading screeners by the Department of Education and Georgia Council on Literacy, one of which will be free to local school systems, for use by public schools and local school systems by May 15, 2025. Section 3 establishes the 'School Supplies for Educators Act' to provide financial and technical assistance to educators to purchase school supplies online subject to appropriations.