



## Higher Education and Post-Secondary Pathways

The ability to determine your future starts with access to quality education at every level, regardless of where you begin. Every child – urban, rural, suburban – deserves high-quality affordable childcare and universal access to pre-kindergarten programs, excellence in K-12 public schools and affordable educational opportunities after high school. In Georgia, higher education investment must expand to create pathways for every level of post-secondary education, and we must provide access to aid for all students – not just those with a B average. Stacey Abrams knows Georgia must do more to increase educational opportunities beyond high school and help students graduate from any public program of their choice without debt.

### 1. GRADUATING WITHOUT DEBT:

Debt is a key barrier our students face in pursuing their dreams and continuing education after high school.<sup>1</sup> As our next Governor, Stacey Abrams will help our students graduate without debt at every level of post-secondary education. Critical to that effort will be instituting need-based aid in the state of Georgia.<sup>2</sup>

Georgia is rightfully proud of the different pathways students can pursue – from apprenticeships to state colleges, technical colleges, private colleges, HBCUs, and universities. The state offers an array of scholarships and programs from technical college tuition assistance, HOPE merit scholarships, military and veteran scholarship programs, service cancellable loans, and more.

However, some students are guaranteed more opportunity because of merit or their academic path.<sup>3</sup> Stacey Abrams wants to ensure that our students – regardless of the pathway they choose, or the financial challenges they face – will have the opportunity to pursue their dreams and graduate without debt.

As Governor, Abrams' plan will address rising costs, gaps in support, and unmanageable debt for those who have already graduated. Her plan is also based on the belief that everyone must do their part. Just as families and students step up to share the responsibility with part-time

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/fact-sheet-focusing-higher-education-student-success>

<sup>2</sup> <https://gbpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/case-for-need-based-financial-aid-20111208.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://gsfc.georgia.gov/hope>

jobs and family contributions where they can, Abrams will ensure the state provides support as well.

### *Increase Aid*

- **Fund a need-based component** to the HOPE Scholarship – known as HOPE 2.0
- **Restore tuition-free technical certificates** and diplomas for students with a 2.0 GPA
- **Increase access to HOPE** for students seeking associates degrees and students over the current age cap
- **Introduce interventions** to help students maintain or regain HOPE
- **Expand service cancellable loans** to provide more pathways of service and debt-forgiveness for students
- **Create the *Cradle to Career Savings Program***, which seeds a savings account for children at birth and can be used for higher education, among other investments.

**Cost:** Year One investment in affordability is \$100 million.

### *Support Graduates*

We will support graduates who are already in the workforce and hold debt or those who will soon graduate.

- **Introduce a Student Loan Bill of Rights** to ensure consumer protections. Other states are placing these protections into law to make sure loan servicing is fair and transparent and to create an ombudsman for complaints.<sup>4 5</sup>
- **Mandate entrance and exit reviews** at every USG school to ensure students are aware of and can take advantage of federal programs that forgive debt for teachers, firefighters, law enforcement officers, child care workers, nonprofit workers, and government employees.

### *Control Costs*

- **Encourage Colleges to Control Costs.** The USG Chancellor has undertaken promising initiatives: 1) the College 2025 Initiative to provide a 5- to 10-year roadmap for evolving needs of the USG; and 2) Comprehensive Administrative Review to improve administrations by streamlining processes and efficiencies.<sup>6</sup> We will work with the

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.consumerfinancemonitor.com/2018/02/20/d-c-releases-revised-bill-of-rights-for-student-loan-borrowers/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2017/11/09/illinois-student-loan-bill-rights-become-law>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.usg.edu/adminreview/>

Chancellor, Board of Regents, institutions, and legislators to ensure the funding formula meets the outcomes of the College 2025 Initiative and Comprehensive Administrative Review. Likewise, we will work with the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) to ensure funding aligns with strategic priorities for the years ahead and funds are available for them to attract students.

## **2. STRENGTHEN ACCESS TO POST-HIGH SCHOOL OPPORTUNITIES:**

**Support Programs for Under-served Communities.** As Governor, Abrams will support policies and programs that increase higher education opportunities for Georgians experiencing barriers to access, including foster youth, students of color, disadvantaged youth, first-generation college students, DREAMers, adult learners, veterans and military families.

**Increase Support for Historically Black Colleges and Universities.** We will invest in our Historically Black Colleges and Universities, both public and independent, to support their service to Georgia students. Through our reforms to HOPE, more students at our public HBCUs will have the economic ability to complete their education. An Abrams administration will also continue the Tuition Equalization Grants to help students afford tuition at private institutions within Georgia.<sup>7</sup> We will explore how to partner with independent colleges and universities for summer bridge programs that aid students, particularly first-generation college students, in transitioning from high school to college. We will use the strength of our state finances and bond capacity to aid institutions in capital projects.

## **3. SAFE, HEALTHY, INCLUSIVE CAMPUSES**

Success in school requires communities that are safe and student-centered policies to enhance diversity and inclusion. Stacey Abrams is the strongest candidate in the race to promote a campus environment where everyone feels welcome and secure. We will take the following steps:

- **Create grant programs for prevention and awareness programs** on campuses and work to identify gaps in protections, reporting processes, and supports for survivors of sexual assault. We will support community and campus partnerships that strengthen awareness, prevention, and response.
- **Work to repeal campus carry**, provide greater training for campus police, and encourage productive dialogue between law enforcement and our students to address their safety concerns.
- **Expand mental health supports** and substance abuse treatment options.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gafutures.org/hope-state-aid-programs/scholarships-grants/georgia-tuition-equalization-grant/award-amount/>

- **Defend the rights of DREAMers** as they pursue their educational goals.
- **Support the inclusion of student voices in all levels of administration** and formalize student input beyond the Student Advisory Council and expand student civic engagement on campuses.
- **Encourage diverse perspectives in governing** by making appointments to the Board of Regents to that reflect the diversity of our state by including immigrants, women, people of color, and those with disabilities.

#### 4. HELP STUDENTS PREPARE TO EXCEL, GRADUATE AND SUCCEED

In order to improve post-secondary outcomes, we must also make sure students are prepared and excited to begin their time in college. Stacey Abrams will invest in programs to increase student capacity before they begin their college careers.

- **Provide free SAT/ACT testing statewide** to remove a critical hurdle to achievement. Atlanta Public Schools, for example, recently provided all juniors the opportunity to take a free college entrance test on-site, during the school week. Making these tests convenient and accessible is a cost-effective approach to helping students advance statewide.
- **Aid institutions in reducing “summer melt,”** when students — particularly disadvantaged students — fail to transition from high school to college even though they’ve been accepted. Georgia State University recently launched a texting program aimed at breaking through the summer melt. Connecting with potential students in a new way to address questions and barriers resulted in a 22% drop in summer melt.<sup>i8</sup>
- **Explore how data-supported best practices can spread across the USG and TCSG.** When one institution finds a solution to issues such as summer melt or retention, we must ensure all institutions have the capacity to replicate and tailor solutions that work.
- **Commit to continuing progress in increasing retention and graduation rates across institutions.** Governor Deal’s Complete College Georgia re-oriented the state’s focus towards completion and performance. We support those efforts, such as Momentum Year, which offers grants for initiatives that set first-year students on a path to graduating on time.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://success.gsu.edu/initiatives/reduction-of-summer-melt/>

- **Support Georgia’s dual enrollment program for high schoolers.** As a recent audit found,<sup>9</sup> the program needs improvements in defining goals and outcomes, and we commit to aligning this program more fully with the education goals we set for our state.
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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.myajc.com/news/local-education/state-auditors-find-costs-rising-for-georgia-dual-enrollment-program/EuFLxr0ERKC6r6FOOPJudN/>