



Education from cradle to career is essential to achieving prosperity for every Georgia family. That means three things:

- 1) An historic investment in early childcare and learning;
- 2) Targeted investments in K-12 education that support kids, teachers and parents and;
- 3) Expanding opportunities beyond high school.

I have already introduced comprehensive proposals to address early childhood learning and opportunities beyond high school. Our K-12 education plan addresses quality public schools – the lodestar of a thriving state, and our most fundamental obligation.

Public schools moved my parents out of poverty and, despite their continued economic challenges, allowed them to achieve progress and provide opportunity for their children. They rented housing on one of the poorest streets on the middle-class side of town so we could get zoned into good schools. This access to quality education ensured that my five siblings and I were able to attend college and pursue our careers. Public education saved my family's life. Too often, though, a family's income or zip code determines if their child has a strong beginning or receives an education to power a lifetime of opportunity. Even now, too many children cannot access the education they require from their local schools, especially if they have special needs.

We are ready to imagine more for our children than simply an adequate education and to elect leaders committed to making excellence a reality. As Georgia's next governor, I understand ensuring access to quality public education for all children – no matter who they are or where they live – is fundamental to building a state where every family has the freedom and opportunity to thrive.

Voters have a clear choice in this election. In Georgia, years of austerity cuts have left countless students without a pathway to quality schooling that prepares them for the future. Elected officials on both sides of the aisle have abdicated their responsibility to our students by voting to undermine public education again and again, siphoning off funds from our schools and opening the door to interests that put profit over our children's success. Georgia must reverse the impact of these cuts by investing in the needs of the whole child from cradle to career – and our investment must extend beyond the walls of a classroom to meet the needs of the whole child. We must guarantee an excellent education as the foundation for mobility and success.

**Georgia needs more than an "Education Governor."  
I will be Georgia's "Public Education Governor."**

## K-12 Public Education Priorities

### 1. Full Funding and Access

**Continued full funding of the current education funding formula and adoption of a more comprehensive education funding formula** that directly addresses the correlation between poverty and educational outcomes, invests in student transportation to ensure safety and to stop the shifting of local dollars from the classroom to the bus route, supports educators as they seek to best serve our students, and invests in access to the technology that is an essential part of learning in the 21st century.

**Public dollars for public schools** by opposing private school tax credits and vouchers.

**Respect for student diversity** by enacting policies that meet students and parents where they are and provide solutions that meet individual needs, including supports for ESL learners, students of color, children with disabilities, and low-income students.

**Rural commitment** through support for teacher recruitment, student transportation, AP course offerings, 4-H youth development, a strengthened library system, and afterschool initiatives.

### 2. Outcomes

**Improvements in student achievement and preparedness** through the use of comprehensive community-driven strategies including expanded wrap-around services (e.g., primary health, mental health, and dental care and family engagement supports).

**Investment in high-return educational inputs** through a focus on third grade reading proficiency, expanded arts education, increased high school graduation rates, STEAM afterschool programming, and major new investments in early care and learning.

### 3. Empowerment

**Empowered parents** through innovative communications and toolkits.

**Support for educators** through smaller class sizes, less high-stakes testing, competitive salaries and benefits, recognition of mentor teachers, better working conditions, and true partnership so educators' voices can be heard.

**Respect for local, community voices in school improvement** through inclusion in policy development, implementation and evaluation.

## 4. Safety

**Safe schools** through gun safety policies, focus on school climate and Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports, breaking the school to prison pipeline, supports for school mental health professionals and school resource officers and digital citizenship programs.

**Safe facilities** by providing resources for safety and security building improvements through changes to the ESPLOST program.

### *Full Funding and Access*

#### Full Funding

Georgia serves more than 1.7 million students in our K-12 public schools. We must value investing in our public schools rather than defunding and diminishing their ability to give our students the best outcomes. Georgia schools endured 16 straight years of austerity cuts, combined with cost-shifting to local districts and educators. While the austerity cuts will end in 2018-19, we must now move towards increasing our investment in education, as it is the bedrock of our economic future. I commit to fully funding our public schools, identifying additional resources and rolling back measures that siphon funds from public school dollars. We must also invest in our special needs students, including the ability to wholly access federal funding available for their supports.

**Support Transportation.** When school systems are overburdened with transportation costs, they must then take from resources needed in the classroom. Student transportation has been a state and local partnership, with the state providing a portion of operations costs as well as bus replacement costs. The state has been underfunding its transportation formula and shifting this cost further and further onto local systems. We must ensure school transportation needs are met throughout the state.

**Expand Our School Funding Model.** Quality schools depend on attracting and retaining quality educators—ones who are paid competitively with other professions. However, research clearly shows even the most proficient educator cannot solve for the broader complications of poverty in our schools. Therefore, in addition to fully funding QBE (our current funding model), we must adopt a more comprehensive education funding formula that directly addresses the correlation between poverty and educational outcomes; supports educators as they seek to best serve our students; and invests in access to the technology that is an essential part of learning in the 21st century but remains out of reach for too many of our kids. Some districts are able to supplement funding from external sources, but many communities do not have access to these resources. We must fully recognize our state commitment to funding public schools so that zip codes do not determine educational outcomes.

## Public Dollars to Public Schools

Under my leadership, we will not privatize our public schools or encourage private for-profit management of our schools. Profit should not guide the education of our children. I am the only candidate who has an unblemished voting record on this issue.

**Eliminate Private School Tax Credits.** Our constitutional responsibility as a state is to educate students through our public K-12 system. Shifting tax dollars to private schools through the tax system diminishes our ability to meet this fundamental responsibility. I opposed private school tax credits as a Georgia legislator, and I am the only candidate who has publicly stated she would eliminate such credits as governor. I will veto any legislation that expands private school tax credits. If we have tax credits for education, those credits should focus on public schools. I voted YES to HB 237 in 2017 to establish the Public Education Innovation Fund Foundation, which offers tax credits for donations targeted to public schools.

**Oppose Vouchers.** Similar to private school tax credits, I fought vouchers as a state legislator and will continue to fight vouchers as governor. I have worked with educators to block proposed constitutional amendments to permit vouchers. Our focus must be on providing high-quality, public education to students across the state. Vouchers degrade the resources for our students and lack accountability.

## Respect for Student Diversity

Georgia is a diverse state with students from many different backgrounds. Our diversity is a strength and I know that our state is better for it. I also recognize that diversity means one-size-fits-all solutions will not serve all our students. We must do more to meet students and parents where they are and provide solutions that meet their individual needs. I will pursue initiatives that strengthen outcomes and opportunities, such as wraparound supports for low income students. We will strive to recruit diverse candidates to teach and serve in leadership roles in our schools so that staff is reflective of the students they serve, because we know that role models matter.

We need a governor who understands and values Medicaid as a tool to support students. We can leverage Medicaid dollars so that the federal government helps with mental health, substance abuse, autism, and other services, supports and interventions.

Students come to our schools with diverse abilities. I will strengthen supports for ESL learners and provide stronger resources for the parents of ESL learners, and support children with special needs, physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities and autism. As governor, I would also direct my administration to work with parents, educators, and advocates to define gaps in screenings and services for children with dyslexia and other learning differences. I commend the Georgia Senate for creating the Study Committee on Dyslexia (SR 761) this year, but those efforts must be met with action. I look forward to improving services in collaboration with them.

## Rural Commitment

Our rural schools face particular challenges, including struggling tax bases, teacher recruitment, access to expansive AP courses, and transportation costs, among others. I commit to partnering with rural communities and educators to meet these challenges. The revision of the funding formula must help all school districts, regardless of their local tax base, truly thrive. This is in the best interest of all Georgians. Funding for student transportation is also a critical issue for rural communities, as the state share of funding has fallen from 54% to 15% in the last 25 years.<sup>1</sup> The state must invest in student transportation, so districts are not shifting dollars out of the classroom to cover these costs. Additionally, I will invest in 4-H youth development programs, STEAM Afterschool Initiatives that place leading programs such as robotics in every school district, and our library system, which offers crucial community supports throughout the state. As mentioned earlier, I am also committed to competitive pay for educators. In rural areas, in particular, schools are some of the largest employers. We can contribute to stable economies by offering competitive, family-supporting salaries.

## *Outcomes*

### Student Achievement and Preparedness

**Expand and Deepen Wraparound Supports.** Every child deserves an excellent, comprehensive education, regardless of their beginning. To ensure achievement and preparedness, our obligation will be to expand and deepen wraparound supports that facilitate learning for children, including access to public benefits, mental health supports, ESL assistance for children and parents, and health services. By engaging the whole life of the child through school and community resources, we can make our schools stronger and our communities more vibrant. Promising programs abound in Georgia and we must ensure those opportunities are spread across the state.

**Focus on Third Grade Reading.** In addition to wraparound services, I will continue Georgia's focus on third grade reading proficiency because we know it to be the marker for future success and serves as an indicator for the need to provide additional aid to students.

**Increase High School Graduation Rates.** I will lead Georgia to invest in evidence-based policies and programs that increase high school graduation rates and prepare students for college and career.

**Invest in Comprehensive Education.** I will support expansion of arts and science/technology education through K-12 classes and afterschool programming.

**Support Early Care and Learning.** To build a strong foundation, we must also empower our children before they reach kindergarten. I am the only candidate to have released a [comprehensive early childhood education platform](#) that proposes an historic investment in early care and learning, targeting children aged 0-5. Our Bold Start Scholarship would provide funds for families to afford high-quality early care and learning beginning at birth. The plan targets additional initiatives that focus on STEAM afterschool programs and increased early academic options for rural Georgians, shift workers, and children with disabilities. Education goes beyond the walls of the classroom, and so must our policies and funding priorities.

## *Empowerment*

### Empowered Parents

A strong student/parent/school partnership is vital. We need parents to feel welcome and confident in their ability to best advocate for their children. I value the voices of parents and know they are key to student motivation. We will work with parents, educators, parent-teacher organizations, and districts to find innovative ways to communicate with parents and provide the tools they want as they support their children's learning, including for parents with language barriers.

### Support for Educators

I pledge to support our educators through:

- **Smaller class sizes and less high-stakes testing.** The teacher-student relationship is the foundation of our education system. Large class sizes and an over-emphasis on testing diminish that sacred opportunity when an educator can spark a lifelong love of learning in a child or respond to learning differences or challenges. As governor, I will ensure all districts have the resources they need to maintain effective class sizes. As regards high-stakes testing, I supported SB 364 to reduce testing and will continue to support reasonable minimization of high-stakes testing as governor. I will support efforts identified under Georgia's ESSA plan to examine testing, develop greater flexibility on assessments, and partner with educators in making these changes. Further, I will support innovative assessments in teacher evaluations so that high stakes testing is not used to penalize teachers and schools.
- **Competitive salaries and benefits.** Salary sends a signal, demonstrating how we value educators among our workforce. We must prioritize competitive pay for educators and avoid pay-related turnover. I will prioritize educators in the budget process, including protection of the current salary schedule. I support increased pay for Education Support Professionals (ESPs), who are earning poverty wages in some areas. Our schools cannot succeed without the dedicated support of these men and women. We must ensure a living wage for ESPs, as well as professional development that will aid them in advancing in the education workforce. Healthcare and retirement benefits must also be prioritized.
- **Better working conditions.** Fostering healthy schools supports both students and teachers. As a legislator, I defeated attempts to eliminate payroll deduction for educators, a critical tool for securing a healthy work environment. As governor, I will support quality relations between administrators, teachers, and ESPs. Additionally, I will prioritize behavioral health services for children so that teachers are supported in the challenges they experience in the classroom.
- **Support for mentor teachers.** Mentor teachers are the best example from which new educators learn and become acclimated. Mentor teachers who are leaders and take the time to invest in young educators deserve additional compensation for the time, commitment and knowledge they impart to new educators.

- **True partnership with educators.** As governor, I will always have an open door to our educators and ensure they are formally included in education policy decisions before they are made. Seeking input from those on the frontlines—teachers and school administrators—will be a top priority. Insight from educators about the impact of education policy in practice can, and should, drive truly meaningful educational policy. I have a strong track record of collaborating with the education community, receiving multiple A ratings from the Georgia Association of Educators during my time as both legislator and as Minority Leader. In 2014, I co-chaired the national advocacy group, Democrats for Public Education, along with Gov. Ted Strickland and Gov. Jennifer Granholm. I supported the inclusion of educators in the Education Turnaround Advisory Council because I know educators must have a seat at the table. I will continue to work collaboratively as governor to ensure a true partnership between the governor and our educators.

### Respect for Local Voice in School Improvement

I am the only candidate for governor that **voted NO to Opportunity School Districts (OSD)**. As House Democratic Leader, I led the House Democratic Caucus to take a position opposing its adoption because I understood that OSD did not value the voices of educators and local communities and would replicate the failed policies of Michigan, Tennessee and Louisiana. I strongly opposed OSD for taking power away from local schools and concentrating power in the hands of the Governor without any accountability or investment in our students.

When the bill passed due to the votes of some Democrats, I led the House Democratic Caucus to fight the adoption of the constitutional amendment through our campaign funding and by only supporting targeted candidates in the general election who opposed OSD. After its defeat, I negotiated with Republicans to substantially improve the follow-up legislation, House Bill 338, first by securing a removal of vouchers from the proposal. Throughout the process, I sought and received input from communities and education leaders to ensure that any final product would not result in a watered-down version of OSD but would instead create a meaningful pathway to improving our lowest performing schools by collecting empirical data, committing real resources, and supporting local communities and educators.

HB 338 allows us to collect the necessary information about impediments to student performance. Our next step is ensuring there is funding to provide the supports to achieve school improvement. That includes ensuring schools have enough funding to promote excellent working conditions for teachers and faculty, paying teachers for the essential work they do to educate Georgia's children, and facilitating the creation of a robust pipeline of teachers who are ready to work in every part of the state. I am committed to exploring programs that would help educate quality teachers and provide incentives like student loan repayment programs for those willing to educate children in underserved areas.

# Safety

## Safe Schools

Securing public schools requires a holistic approach that examines both external and internal threats. I am the only gubernatorial candidate who has consistently opposed laws to weaken gun safety in our state. I have released my [gun safety priorities](#) to keep guns out of the wrong hands. The safety of the learning environment must be our highest priority, as the ability to learn and to educate are wholly impacted by the security of our schools.

**Support PBIS initiatives, the Georgia Education Climate Coalition, Mental Health Funding, and School counselors, Social Workers, and School Psychologists.** In addition to external threats, we must also improve the ability of children and educators to navigate and support the emotional and mental health of our students to build resilience and capacity. Through strong partnerships among students, teachers, parents, and communities we can ensure safe public schools. To do this, we must prioritize preventative measures and continue to build on Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) initiatives. For Georgia schools using PBIS, the results are striking; and we must institute these approaches and trainings statewide. We know that children come to school with different challenges, and PBIS allows us to rely less on force from police in a learning environment. We must leverage our state dollars to take full advantage of federal dollars for mental health and early intervention supports. Georgia has a number of pilot projects right now, and it will fall to the next governor as to whether we make progress.

**Support School Resource Officers.** I have supported legislation to encourage expanded training for school resource officers, so they can be advocates for safety and for the students. However, encouragement must be matched with funding. As governor, I will examine funding mechanisms for making resource officers and training available across the state.

**Prioritize Digital Citizenship.** As we incorporate and encourage technology in schools and learning, we must prioritize digital citizenship. As both a legislator and as Minority Leader, I played a key role in moving forward anti-bullying legislation. Technology must be paired with learning on cyber-bullying and responsible technology use.

**Create the School Safety and Security Capital Task Force.** Safety and security must be a critical component of our capital projects. Some schools have relied on ESPLOST funds to improve security, and we must explore allowing funds to be used for operations as well. I will create a School Safety and Security Capital Task Force to inventory needs across the state and direct resources to systems unable to meet needs through local sources.

**Break the School-to-Prison Pipeline.** My campaign has released the [Justice for Georgia platform](#). A key component of criminal justice reform must be the dismantling of the school-to-prison pipeline. In some areas, our state has gone too far in criminalizing behavior—setting students on a path to prison rather than a path to productivity. Student discipline issues must be addressed, but with mindfulness to students' ability to hold hope for future success. I will bring education, public safety, and



community leaders together to build on recent criminal justice reform. We will focus on providing early interventions, intensive supports when needed, and a path back to school. We must effectively dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline once and for all.

---

<sup>i</sup> <https://gbpi.org/2018/valuable-progress-more-work-ahead-georgia-public-school-funding/>