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2025 SESSION: EDUCATION BUDGET AND LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

Education was a key focus of the 2025 Legislative Session. The Legislature took up measures to improve reading outcomes for elementary grades by funding a state-wide literacy coach initiative; enhance student safety and security with the passage of HB 268 and one-time security grant funding in the Amended FY 2025 budget and continued security grant funding in FY 2026; and support the needs of students inside and outside of the classroom, with expanded access to mental health and wraparound services. Additionally, the FY 2026 budget includes a poverty weight for school systems with a large percentage of economically disadvantaged students, recognizing their additional educational needs. The FY 2026 budget fully funds the Quality Basic Education (QBE) program, totaling \$14.7 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 seven out of eight years.

Literacy

- [HB 68](#), the FY 2026 budget, includes a statewide literacy initiative to improve reading outcomes for students in grades kindergarten through fifth. Research shows that reading proficiently by the end of third grade contributes to future academic achievement and life success. The FY 2026 budget includes \$22.7 million, including \$10 million in newly appropriated funds, for recommendations by the Georgia Council on Literacy. The FY 2026 budget includes \$18.5 million for 116 Regional Education Service Agencies (RESA)-based literacy coaches to provide individualized teacher support to ensure structured literacy and the science of reading are implemented with fidelity. Additionally, \$2 million is provided for a free universal reading screener for all school systems pursuant to HB 538 (2023 Session). The literacy initiative also contains funds for a state-level coaching coordinator position and competency-based research, training, and measures for literacy coaches and educators.
- [HB 307](#) (Rep. Bethany Ballard, 147th) amends the 'Georgia Early Literacy and Dyslexia Act,' to include provisions for students significantly at risk of not achieving grade level reading proficiency or with characteristics of dyslexia to align instruction with the science of reading principles. The bill prevents using three-cueing instruction as the primary means of providing literacy instruction. This Code section creates the Georgia Literacy Plan Coordination Council, which will support coordination of state literacy efforts to ensure training is standardized across the state. The bill repeals O.C.G.A. 20-2-159.6, relating to screening for dyslexia and related disorders, and joins the dyslexia Code section with the literacy Act. The bill extends the repeal date of the Georgia Council on Literacy from 2026 to 2030, and allows members of the council to receive per diem expenses for travel related to service on the council.

- [SB 93](#) (Sen. RaShaun Kemp, 38th) amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-153.1 to provide for the Professional Standards Commission to adopt rules to require that the content standards align with the science of reading for core curricula for state-approved educator preparation programs.

School Safety and Security

- [HB 67](#), the Amended 2025 budget, includes \$50 million in additional funding for school security grants. Grants are provided to systems at \$21,635 per school for one-time security expenses. When combined with \$109 million in the base, systems will receive a total of \$68,759 per school in FY 2025. Additionally, \$1.5 million is added to the Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA) for start-up for funds for a school threat assessment system.
- The Amended FY 2025 budget provides \$160,000 in one-time funding for the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement to establish a Regional Crisis Recovery Network in partnership with the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). The network will utilize and train 650 counselors across 16 participating states who can be deployed for up to 10 days at a time to offer students stabilization and psychological first aid following traumatic events or natural disasters.
- HB 68 includes \$6.9 million to provide reimbursable grants to school systems for “qualified student advocacy specialists” to identify and facilitate appropriate intervention for students at risk for mental health concerns. The budget maintains \$109 million for school security grants at \$47,124 per school, allowing school systems to allocate the grants as they deem necessary to enhance security system-wide.
- [HB 268](#) (Rep. Holt Persinger, 119th) is a comprehensive bill to provide for the safety, health, and well-being of students and school communities.

Section 1-1 amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-590, to enact 'Ricky and Alyssa's Law.' The bill requires local school systems to implement a mobile panic alert system capable of connecting disparate emergency services technologies to ensure real-time coordination between multiple state and local first responder agencies in the event of a school security incident.

Section 1-2 and 1-3 authorize the Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency to adopt rules and regulations for the requirements for school mapping data. Schools shall procure school mapping data by July 1, 2026.

In Section 2-1, student records must be requested from the transferring school within five school business days of notification by the custodian of a child in state custody or care. When a local unit of administration is tasked with educating a child in custody, all educational and medical records from the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), the Department of Human Services (DHS), or the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) will be shared. These records must include, but are not limited to, whether the child has been adjudicated delinquent of a felony; if the child is serving a suspension or expulsion and why; and if the child is subject to a disciplinary hearing, or other criminal action, disciplinary action, or behavioral correction plan. The custodian agency must release all records within five days to the requesting local unit of administration.

In Section 2-7, local boards of education must immediately provide an electronic copy of a student's complete education record to any parent, legal custodian, or another authorized person within three business days of the request. Should any part not be available electronically, the requesting individual will be notified on the third business day when it will be ready for retrieval.

Section 2-8 provides that when a parent or legal custodian seeks permanent student enrollment of students above third grade, the parent or custodian must attest to the existence or non-existence of

certain non-educational data when enrolling a new student. For example, the parent or guardian must disclose if the student has been adjudicated guilty of a class A felony or if the student is currently the subject of a notice of a disciplinary hearing. Students may be provisionally enrolled for a 10-day period after the parent or custodian executes the document. Parents may request to view all student records forwarded to the transferring school, and no local board of education can have a policy which denies a parent or legal custodian of a student the ability to review the student's education records.

Section 2-14 allows a court to intervene if it finds a parent or custodian has willfully and unreasonably failed to authorize the release of student education records.

Section 2-2 provides that each school system will earn reimbursement for one or more qualified student advocacy specialists based on the number of full-time equivalent enrollment totals. These coordinators will identify and facilitate appropriate interventions for students with or at risk of mental health concerns, including, but not limited to, telehealth services.

Section 2-4 requires Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs) to designate one staff member as the RESA student affairs officer. RESAs are authorized to provide dispute resolution services related to data-sharing concerns between state agencies, local units of administration, local education agencies, and public and private schools.

Section 2-6 requires the chief privacy officer to create a guidance document to provide to all local, state, and federal agencies that hold student education data, student health records, student data, and personally identifiable information of students and their families regarding current state and federal laws surrounding such data. This guidance should include what data can and cannot be shared with other educators, schools, DJJ, DHS, DFCS, and the federal Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA). This guidance will also govern what these respective entities can and cannot share with law enforcement and other entities in the judicial system, and vice versa.

Section 2-10 pertains to the notification of children taken into custody. Each official taking action pursuant to O.C.G.A. 20-2-699, which is the Code section relating to the disposition of children taken into custody, will notify a school official, public or private, where the child is enrolled and the child's parent or guardian of the outcome of such disposition.

Section 2-12 pertains to positive behavioral interventions and supports. All local boards of education will implement Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Response to Intervention (RTI) initiatives in all high needs elementary and middle schools in their districts.

Section 2-15 pertains to suicide prevention and youth violence training. Beginning in the 2026-2027 school year, public schools serving students in grades six through 12 must provide one hour of suicide awareness and prevention training, and one hour of youth violence prevention training each school year.

Section 2-16 pertains to absenteeism. When a student is absent for 30 consecutive days, with certain conditions being met, the local school will refer the matter to DFCS to conduct an assessment and the RESA student affairs officer to determine whether the student has withdrawn.

Section 2-18 pertains to model law enforcement agreements. By August 1, 2025, the Department of Education must publish on its website model language for agreements between local school systems and law enforcement officers. Schools must update their written agreements with law enforcement officers by October 1, 2025. Such agreements must specify which educational information is accessible to law enforcement and what constitutes educational records that are protected by the federal 'Family Education Rights and Privacy Act' (FERPA).

Sections 2-19 and 2-20 require school safety plans to include provisions to address the behavioral health needs of students and staff by January 1, 2027. Each school safety plan will also include a behavioral threat assessment management (BTAM) plan to provide a multidisciplinary process to identify, assess, and mitigate potential threats to school safety. The Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency (GEMA/HS) will provide training and technical assistance to the Department of Education, RESAs, all local school systems, and private schools on BTAM plans.

Section 2-21 pertains to the GEMA/HS emergency alert response system. This section creates O.C.G.A. 20-2-1186, which requires GEMA/HS to establish an emergency alert response system that allows public and secondary schools to communicate information with the local school system about threats made on or impacting a school campus or emergency procedures initiated due to an active threat to safety.

Section 3-1 amends O.C.G.A. 15-11-2, relating to the juvenile Code by revising the definition of assault with a deadly weapon.

Section 3-2 amends O.C.G.A. 15-11-560, by giving superior courts concurrent and original jurisdiction relative to delinquency in which a child is alleged to have committed a crime which would be punishable by loss of life, life without parole, or life in a penal institution were the child an adult. Superior courts have exclusive original jurisdiction over a trial when a 13 to 17-year-old has committed certain violent crimes.

Section 3-4 clarifies what situations are considered disrupting or interfering with the operation of any public school, which is a misdemeanor of a high and aggravated nature. Local school systems must implement a system of progressive discipline that allows a school to move a student to remote learning when there has been a credible threat of violence until such time as an investigation has been concluded.

Section 3-5 creates O.C.G.A. 20-2-1181.1, stating a person commits the offense of a terroristic threat of a school when they threaten to commit any crime of violence, release any hazardous substance, or burn or damage property.

The Act will become law upon the approval of the governor or upon its becoming law without such approval. Sections 2-8, 3-3, and 3-4 will be applicable to any offences committed on or after the effective date of this Act.

- [HB 340](#) (Rep. Scott Hilton, 48th) amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-324.8, to enact the 'Distraction-Free Education Act.' The bill requires local school systems and public schools to enact policies and procedures for the use of personal electronic devices at school and school-sponsored events by students in kindergarten through eighth grade by July 1, 2026. The bill provides for permissible student use of personal electronic devices, school electronic devices, and authorizes the Department of Education to provide guidance and technical assistance.

Student Support Services

- The Fiscal Year 2026 budget includes a new program under the Department of Education called “Student Support Services,” providing academic and mental health supports for students in and outside school. The program contains \$19.6 million for mental health support grants to school systems. Structured like school security grants, systems will earn \$20,000 for each middle and high school (979 statewide) for mental health services, to include contracting with mental health providers, tele-mental health contracts, or hiring staff for in-school counseling. The program also includes \$2.4 million for social work services grants. Additionally, the program includes \$12.5 million for out-of-school care for statewide and community

grantees; the federally-funded BOOST program was shown to improve academic outcomes among students following the COVID-19 pandemic and this funding would continue that initiative. Finally, the program includes \$15.3 million to systems for targeted support to economically-disadvantaged students. With this funding, Georgia joins 45 other states in providing additional funds through a “poverty weight” to systems with a high level of these students.

- The FY 2026 budget lowers the school psychologist ratio from 1:2,475 to 1:2,420, totaling \$871,982 in the Quality Basic Education program.
- [HB 81](#) (Rep. Bethany Ballard, 147th) creates the Interstate Compact for School Psychologists to establish a pathway for school psychologists to obtain equivalent licenses in member states to ensure that safe, effective school psychological services are available and delivered by appropriately qualified professionals in an educational setting.

Early Childhood Education

- House Bill 67 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 over 100 counties last year, and utilized Amended FY 2024 funding to partner with 12 new and experienced sponsors, serve over 100,000 additional meals, and reach 14 previously unserved counties.
- The Amended FY 2025 budget includes \$7.42 million in new lottery funds for DECAL to complete the implementation of the recommendations provided by the House Early Childhood Education Working Group. Funding will complete the recommendations 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.
- In the Department of Early Care and Learning, HB 68 includes \$3.9 million to provide 500 additional state-funded slots in the Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program and \$1.5 million to annualize the state match provided in the FY 2025 budget to increase reimbursement rates to the 60th percentile.
- The FY 2026 budget provides \$14 million in lottery funds for the Georgia Pre-K Program to continue the implementation of the recommendations provided by the House Early Childhood Education Working Group. Funding will provide for year two of a four-year phase in to reduce the class size from 22 to 20 students to improve instructional quality. Year two funding includes the addition of 93 Pre-K classrooms and associated costs.
- [HB 175](#) (Rep. Todd Jones, 25th) amends O.C.G.A. 20-1A-2 to require comprehensive background checks for employees of early care and education programs, and Head Start programs. The bill provides for revocation and nonissue of licenses and commissions for early care and education programs for noncompliance.

School System Funding

- HB 67 provides \$114.3 million to the Department of Education for the Quality Basic Education (QBE) midterm adjustment to reflect an increase in 3,431 students (or 0.05%) over last year, also reflecting more student growth in higher cost student categories.
- The FY 2026 budget includes \$300.4 million to provide for enrollment growth and training and experience for an additional 1,291 students and 3,413 teachers.

- [HB 92](#) (Rep. Shaw Blackmon, 246th) amends O.C.G.A. 48-5-44.2, relating to base year homestead exemptions, by allowing a governing authority that has opted out of the homestead exemption program provided for in in this chapter to rescind their opt out resolution through 2029. For the rescension of the opt out to be effective in tax year 2025, the governing authority must take appropriate steps by April 30, 2025, or by March 1 of any given tax year from 2026 through 2029. A governing authority that has opted out of the homestead exemption program provided for in this chapter must complete the same existing opt out procedures again by March 1, 2027 if they elect to remain opted out. Related to the definition of 'homestead' as it pertains to this statewide homestead exemption, eligible homesteads are a primary residence and up to five acres of land. Additionally, the exemption may pass to a surviving spouse without the need for reapplying for the homestead exemption.

Local school systems that have adopted a base year value or adjusted base year value homestead exemption may be exempted from local sales and use taxes collected on the purchase of construction materials utilized for projects funded using E-SPLOST revenue.

As it relates to the sales tax provided for in O.C.G.A. 48-8-109.31, a municipality that levies a property tax and has a population that represents less than 5% of the county's total population will not disqualify an otherwise FLOST-eligible county and municipalities.

If a local government or school system opts out of the homestead exemption provided for in O.C.G.A. 48-5-44.2 and does not otherwise have a base year value homestead exemption, then the tax bill issued by the governing authority shall contain specific language stating the governing authority has opted out of the statewide homestead exemption program.

Relating to requirements for annual notices of current assessments, the bill allows for a levying or recommending authority to provide an estimate for the current year's taxes utilizing the previous year's millage rate and current assessment if the estimated rollback rate is not certified by the time the annual notice is given. Additionally, the bill allows for a homestead exemption applicant to complete an application for an exemption during or in lieu of an appeal of a homestead reassessment.

- [HB 371](#) (Rep. John Corbett, 174th) amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-260, relating to capital outlay funds, to increase the state's maximum authorization of capital outlay funding from \$300 million to \$375 million annually. Section 2 amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-261, to require new construction for all elementary schools commencing on or after July 1, 2027, to include an inclusive playground design. The playground must address the physical, sensory, cognitive, social, emotional, imaginative, and communication needs of students. The playground should include a sensory-diverse environment that enables children of all abilities to develop physically, socially, and emotionally.
- [SB 44](#) (Sen. Sam Watson, 11th) amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-165, which revises the definition of the "qualified local school system" by reducing the minimum required or equivalent millage rate from 14 mills to 10 mills. This bill provides for a 25 percent reduction of equalization grant awards for local school systems whose millage rate or equivalent millage rate does not meet the minimum requirement. A report created by the Department of Education will be sent to certain members of the General Assembly, the House Budget and Research Office, Senate Budget and Evaluation Office, and Office of Planning and Budget each year by September 1. The report will show systems that received an equalization grant the previous fiscal year, the total amount of equalization earned over the past 10 years, and list any systems with a millage rate less than 10 percent.

Educational Choice Opportunities

- The FY 2025 QBE midterm adjustment funds \$267,110 in growth for charter system grants; \$203,344 for state completion special school grants; \$12.9 million in growth for the state charter school supplement reflecting two additional schools; and \$12.3 million in growth for the Special Needs Scholarship.
- House Bill 68 fully funds the Promise Scholarship providing at \$141 million, or 1% of total QBE earnings. Full scholarship participation is 21,700 students at \$6,500 each.
- The Fiscal Year 2026 budget includes \$21.5 million for growth in the State Commission Charter School supplements and local charter schools receive an additional \$48,477 in funding. Additionally, the budget includes \$500,000 for the implementation of SB 82 (2025 Session), incentivizing local school systems to authorize local charter schools.
- [SB 63](#) (Sen. Clint Dixon, 45th) amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-324.8, which requires that local school systems allow home school students to take the PSAT/NMSQT, SAT, PreACT, ACT, Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, or Advanced Placement exams offered by the school system to resident students. The local school system may require home school students to pay for such an exam if the school is requiring all students to pay a fee to take the exam.
- [SB 82](#) (Sen. Clint Dixon, 45th) amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-260, enacting the 'Local Charter School Authorization and Support Act of 2025.' The bill requires the Office of Charter School Compliance to prepare guidelines for local boards of education for the evaluation of charter school petitions and revises reporting. Local boards of education must provide a written statement of denial to the charter petitioner, the state board, and the office within 10 days of denial by the local board. Local school boards of education that deny charter schools, which are later approved by the Charter Schools Commission, could face the loss of the current charter system contract or strategic waivers school system contract. The bill also provides for the State Board of Education, in collaboration with the State Charter Schools Commission, to establish a program for the purposes of promoting and supporting the approval of new local charter school petitions by local boards of education, and to provide \$250,000 incentive grants to local boards of education that approve new local charter school petitions.

Other Education Budget Items/Legislation

- The FY 2026 budget includes \$10.2 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 budget includes \$158,400 for required federal bus safety training. The total pupil transportation funding is \$364.2 million in FY 2026.
- In HB 68, the Non-Quality Basic Education program includes \$5.9 million for sparsity grants for 131 qualified schools based on updated survey data. Schools that receive sparsity grants have a student population below the base school size, and do not generate an adequate amount of funds through QBE for proper staffing and operating ratios. The program also includes an additional \$75,000 for feminine hygiene products, for a total appropriation of \$1.6 million; these grants are targeted to low property tax wealth districts with high concentrations of economically-disadvantaged students. Finally, the program includes \$2 million for character education programming.
- In the Agricultural Education program, \$100,000 is provided for a new young farmer position in Bibb County. Additionally, HB 68 provides \$55,000 for five new extended day/year programs. Youth camps receive \$451,666 for two education specialist positions and other camp-affiliated staff. In the Technology/Career Education program, the FY 2026 budget includes \$1.25 million for a high demand

equipment grant for new and expanding career and technical education labs to support high demand careers, to include grants for heavy equipment simulators.

- The FY 2026 budget includes an additional \$750,000 for college preparatory exams based on increased utilization. Currently, the state funds PSAT exams for all 10th grade students and one AP/IB exam for free and reduced-price lunch students and one AP/IB STEM exam for any student. In FY 2025, the state funded 99,960 PSAT exams and 80,000 AP exams for Georgia students.
- HB 68 provides \$221,922 to the Professional Standards Commission for two new educator ethics investigators to help reduce the backlog of cases.
- [HB 37](#) (Rep. Rob Leverett, 123rd) amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-55 to provide for payment of the costs of health insurance coverage for family members of local boards of education. Section 2 amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-219.1, to require local school systems to notify new hires whether Social Security taxes are withheld from employee's paychecks beginning July 1, 2025. Every five years and upon separation of employment, the school system must remind employees whether Social Security taxes are withheld from the employee's pay during employment.
- [HB 105](#) (Rep. Will Wade, 9th) is the 'Daniel D. Podsiadly, Jr. Act.' The bill requires the State Board of Workers' Compensation to investigate and notify the Department of Administrative Services when a peace officer is awarded benefits and suffered catastrophic injury under certain circumstances. Law enforcement agencies must notify peace officers of the existence of the Georgia State Indemnification Fund within 10 days of a temporary or permanent disability suffered in the line of duty. Section 4 amends O.C.G.A. 45-9-78, which increases the indemnification award from \$75,000 to \$150,000 for certain state public school personnel in the event of death.
- [HB 192](#) (Rep. Matt Gambill, 192nd) creates the 'Top State for Talent Act,' which references programs included in the High Demand Career List published by the State Workforce Development Board with respect to the State Board of Education's minimum course of study in career education for students in grades six through 12. The bill aligns all workforce-related Code sections and incorporates all agencies that are performing workforce readiness. The High Demand Career List will be consulted when the Georgia Department of Education creates course work for career education. The bill also requires a report on articulation agreements to make sure students do not repeat courses for skills already mastered and completed.
- [HB 235](#) (Rep. Rick Townsend, 179th) amends O.C.G.A. 20-1-12, known as the 'Georgia Supporting Living Donor Educators Act,' to require employers of school employees, teachers, and postsecondary employees to provide a leave of absence for the donation of bone marrow and organs.
- [HR 711](#) (Rep. Chris Erwin, 32nd) establishes the House Study Committee on Student Attendance in Pre-K-12 Education. The study committee will conduct a comprehensive review of student attendance in pre-K through grade 12. The study committee will be composed of six members of the House of Representatives appointed by the speaker of the House.
- [HR 887](#) (Rep. Shaw Blackmon, 146th) establishes the House Study Committee on Reducing and Prioritizing Mandates for Public School Administration. The study committee will be composed of six members of the House of Representatives appointed by the speaker of the House.
- [SB 1](#) (Sen. Greg Dolezal, 27th) amends various titles in the Code, known as the 'Riley Gaines Act,' to provide for separate restrooms and changing areas for males and females during athletic events in schools and postsecondary institutions. Schools and postsecondary institutions must provide reasonable accommodations for individuals unwilling or unable to use a restroom or changing area designated for

such an individual's sex. The bill provides for separation according to sex for sleeping arrangements on school trips. All public schools, local school systems, and private schools participating in competitions or athletic events must designate each team, competition, or athletic event as for males, females, or coed. The bill provides for legislative findings on the importance of certain distinctions between the sexes and student athletes deserve to have a competitively fair and safe opportunity to participate and succeed in sports. The term "gender" is replaced with "sex" throughout the Code.

- [SB 123](#) (Sen. John Kennedy, 18th) amends O.C.G.A. 20-4-141, 20-2-690, and 20-2-690.1. The bill updates and revises provisions of the state's compulsory school attendance laws. The bill provides that no student will be expelled by a public school due solely to absenteeism. Beginning in 2026, and every other year after, the Department of Education will submit a county-by-county report of compliance by local school systems with provisions related to the student attendance and school climate committee to the chairs of the House Education Committee and the Senate Education and Youth Committee. If a school system has a chronic absenteeism rate of 10 percent or higher, the system must create an attendance review team. If one or more schools has a school chronic absenteeism rate of 15 percent or higher, the system will establish an attendance review team for each such school.
- [SB 154](#) (Sen. Bo Hatchett, 50th) amends multiple Code sections by adding the words "or its successor" across Georgia Code after references to the U.S. Department of Education. The bill updates dated language by replacing a reference to student aid reports with Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) in O.C.G.A. 20-3-660.
- [SB 212](#) (Sen. Shawn Still, 48th) prevents the disclosure of confidential voter registration record information to unauthorized persons, and prohibits the disclosure of public student directory information for political use. The bill amends O.C.G.A. 21-5-16 to prevent students from being solicited to organize political events on school property when such event is otherwise prohibited by law or by policy of the local school system or school.