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2023 SESSION: EDUCATION BUDGET AND LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

K-12 education is the single largest expense in the budget, accounting for nearly 43% of state general fund appropriations, and the FY 2024 budget provides the most state funds ever appropriated to education. The Quality Basic Education (QBE) program is fully funded at \$13.1 billion, providing funds to educate more than 1.7 million students and employ nearly 135,000 teachers. The FY 2024 budget includes a \$2,000 pay raise for teachers, for a total pay raise of \$7,000 since FY 2020. This brings the beginning salary for new K-12 teachers to \$41,092. The average teacher salary in Georgia is \$61,249, the highest of all southeastern states¹.

Budget Highlights

- HB 18, the Amended FY 2023 budget, provides \$128.2 million to the Department of Education (DOE) for the QBE midterm adjustment to reflect an increase in 12,939 students (or 0.75%) over last year. The formula also funds \$322,608 in growth for charter system and local charter school grants; \$16.7 million in growth for the state charter school supplement reflecting four additional schools; and \$7.4 million in growth for the Special Needs Scholarship.
- HB 18 includes \$115.7 million in school security grants in the amount of \$50,000 per school, allowing local school systems flexibility in allocating funds system-wide to enhance security. This grant is similar to the \$30,000 provided to each school in Amended FY 2019, which funded reinforced entrances, security cameras, electronic locks, call buttons, metal detectors, gates, and radio systems.
- The Amended FY 2023 budget includes \$5 million for reimbursable grants for paraprofessionals who are enrolled, on or after January 1, 2023, and earn a certificate through a Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) program. A paraprofessional must have a bachelor's degree and currently work in a public school to qualify. The reimbursement would cover the full cost of the GaTAPP program.
- HB 18 includes \$2.5 million for a state match for a new character education program grant at \$50,000 per school.
- The General Assembly provides \$3.3 million for heavy construction simulators in schools to allow high school students to graduate with a construction industry certificate and immediately enter the workforce.
- The Amended FY 2023 budget includes \$3.5 million for the Professional Standards Commission to overhaul its educator certification and ethics system to provide better efficiency and improved security.

¹ National Center for Education Statistics, [2021-2022 Digest of Education Statistics](#)

- HB 19, the FY 2024 budget, fully funds the QBE program, totaling \$13.1 billion in state funds; the most state funds ever provided to K-12 education. The QBE funding formula has been fully funded the last five out of six years.
- HB 19 provides \$295 million to increase the state base salary schedule for certified teachers and employees by \$2,000, for a total adjustment to the state base salary schedule of \$7,000 since FY 2020. This adjustment can be found in the following programs with certified employees and certified staff: Agricultural Education (\$410,045), Georgia Network for Educational and Therapeutic Support (GNETS) (\$1.4 million), Sparsity Grants (\$359,641), Residential Treatment Facilities (\$347,648), Preschool Disabilities Services (\$1.1 million), Quality Basic Education Program (\$290 million), and Technology/Career Education (\$1.4 million).
- The budget also includes \$8.5 million for a 5.1% pay raise for school nutrition workers (\$1.6 million), bus drivers (\$4.6 million), school nurses (\$1.8 million), and Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs) staff (\$482,496) and \$8.6 million to provide all school custodians with a \$1,000 salary supplement.
- HB 19 includes \$154.9 million to provide for enrollment growth and training and experience for an additional 11,804 students and 1,959 teachers. The budget also includes \$13.3 million for growth in the State Commission Charter School supplements. Charter system grants receive \$296,034 in additional funding, and local charter schools, pursuant to SB 59 (2021 Session), receive \$27,154.
- HB 19 provides \$122.2 million for Equalization grants, a grant to systems whose property tax wealth per weighted FTE falls below the statewide average. In FY 2024, Equalization grants are funded at a total of \$756 million.
- HB 19 includes additional funding for pupil transportation based on an increase in FTEs, totaling \$1.3 million; when combined with the pay raise, total pupil transportation funding is \$148.8 million.
- 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. These funds will provide more than 17 million meals at no cost to low-income public school children.
- In the Agricultural Education program, \$288,000 is provided for two new young farmer positions in Barrow and Hall counties and a young farmer oversight position at the Department of Education. Additionally, HB 19 provides the state share of funds for 18 new agricultural education programs across Georgia, for a total cost of \$171,000. In the Technology/Career Education program, the FY 2024 budget includes \$711,000 for construction industry certification to improve career path placements, teacher recruitment and retention, and program alignment with elementary and middle schools.
- The FY 2024 budget provides an additional \$50,000 for feminine hygiene grants due to inflation and an increase in student population. The total funding for feminine hygiene grants is \$1.5 million, which is provided to school systems with low property tax wealth and a high percentage of economically-disadvantaged students.
- The General Assembly provides \$3.5 million for dyslexia screening that is required pursuant to SB 48 (2019 Session).
- The budget includes \$1.7 million for charter facilities grants in the Charter School program, increasing the total funding to \$9.2 million. Charter schools will now receive the \$100,000 per school, pursuant to HB 430 (2017 Session).
- Communities in Schools receives an additional \$262,000, 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.

- The appropriations bill includes \$250,000 for the Georgia Council on Literacy, pursuant to SB 211 (2023 Session) and \$750,000 to support the implementation of effective literacy methods, including digital curriculum for Pre-K through 5.
- HB 19 includes \$1 million in matching funds to allow the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) to draw additional federal Child Care and Development Funds (CCDF) to provide child care assistance to low-income families and \$20.6 million in lottery funds to provide Pre-K teachers and assistant teachers with a \$2,000 salary increase.
- The FY 2024 budget includes \$14 million in lottery funds to increase Pre-K classroom operations and ensure private providers are able to fully fund Pre-K lead teacher salaries at 100%.
- The General Assembly provides \$2.8 million for a \$0.50 increase, from \$16.00 to \$16.50, to the benefit multiplier for retired members of the Public School Employees Retirement System (PSERS).

Legislative Highlights

- [HB 87](#) (Rep. Chris Erwin, 32nd) amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-154.1 relating to alternative education programs and charters to provide for the transition of system-collaborative charter schools to completion special schools by July 1, 2023. Any system-collaborative charter school that did not transition to become an alternative charter school by July 1, 2021, will operate as a state chartered special school. If the state chartered special school does not transition to a completion special school by July 1, 2023, the school will cease operating upon expiration of its current charter with the State Board of Education. The board may not expand the current attendance zone of the school.

The bill establishes Article 31C of Title 20, which creates the 'Completion Special Schools Act'. The board will adopt policies for the establishment, funding, and operation of completion special schools, which focus on dropout recovery/prevention or high school credit recovery for grades nine through 12.

The board is authorized to provide up to \$5 million in grant funding to encourage and authorize the creation of new completion special schools, subject to appropriation. The board will adopt policies for the dissolution or temporary dissolution of a completion special school upon the recommendation of the state school superintendent for failure to comply with the requirements of Article 31C.

- [HB 340](#) (Rep. John Corbett, 174th) amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-218 to protect planning periods for teachers. Teachers who are in the classroom more than 50% of a regular school day are required to have a duty-free planning period, with some exceptions related to safety.

The bill amends O.C.G.A. 48-7-29.21, relating to tax credits for qualified education donations for the purpose of awarding grants to public schools by extending the repeal date to December 31, 2026.

Local school board members are prohibited from discussing personnel matters with superintendents or other school personnel other than a referral of a personnel matter to the superintendent.

- [HB 402](#) (Rep. Scott Hilton, 48th) the 'Edna Mae McGovern Act', amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-779.3 to require each public school to provide parents or students over 18 years of age with information on water safety education. At the beginning of each school year, the school will provide information to promote safety in, on, and around bodies of water. This may include information on local water safety courses and swim lessons.
- [HB 538](#) (Rep. Bethany Ballard, 147th) creates the 'Georgia Early Literacy Act' to implement the science of reading in Georgia. School systems will be required to teach high-quality instructional materials approved by the State Board of Education in grades kindergarten through third grade. The Department of Education must develop and provide training to kindergarten through third grade teachers on the science of reading so

teacher have the skills and knowledge to teach young students to read. Students across the state will take a universal reading screener assessment to monitor their progress in foundational literacy skills multiple times a year. The Department of Early Care and Learning must require teachers in all programs licensed or commissioned by the department to receive training on developmentally appropriate evidence based literacy instruction by July, 1 2025.

- [SB 45](#) (Sen. Jason Anavitarte, 31st) creates 'A.J.'s Law' to provide for the care of students being treated for epilepsy or a seizure disorder. A school nurse or other school employee should be trained in the proper protocols should a student experience a seizure while at school. The parent or guardian must annually supply the school with a seizure action plan which provides specific directions about what to do in emergency situations.
- [SB 204](#) (Sen. Greg Dolezal, 27th) requires accrediting agencies that operate in Georgia to focus on student achievement, academic success, and fiscal solvency of schools and school systems. The State Board of Education must establish evaluation criteria, procedures, and other requirements for recognized accrediting agencies.
- [SB 211](#) (Sen. Billy Hickman, 4th) creates the Georgia Council on Literacy to conduct a comprehensive review of birth to postsecondary literacy programs for the purpose of improving literacy outcomes of Georgia students. The council is composed of 30 members, will meet at least four times per year, and will dissolve December 31, 2026.
- [SR 175](#) (Sen. Matt Brass, 28th) creates the Joint Study Committee on Dual Enrollment for Highly Skilled Talent at Younger Ages. This committee will examine existing dual enrollment opportunities to develop highly skilled talent at younger ages, and develop solutions to produce more dual enrollment talent.

Section 2 creates the Joint Study Committee on Service Delivery Strategy. The committee will consist of 10 members as follows: the president of the Senate will appoint three members of the Senate, including the chair of the Senate State and Local Governmental Operations Committee, a county commissioner from a county currently levying a local option sales tax (LOST), and a mayor of a city within a county currently levying a LOST; the speaker of the House will appoint three members of the House of Representatives, including the chair of the House Committee on Governmental Affairs, a county commissioner from a county currently levying a LOST, and a mayor of a city within a county currently levying a LOST. A co-chairperson each from the House of Representatives and Senate will be chosen by the president of the Senate and speaker of the House, respectively.

The committee will stand abolished on December 1, 2023.