

May 19, 2021

Sent via electronic mail

Mr. Richard Woods
State School Superintendent
Georgia Department of Education
205 Jesse Hill Jr. Drive SE
Atlanta, GA 30334
state.superintendent@doe.k12.ga.us

Members of the Georgia Board of Education
205 Jesse Hill Jr., Drive, SE
Atlanta, GA 30334

Dear Superintendent Woods and Members of the Georgia Board of Education:

We, the **133** undersigned parents, students, community members, and organizations submit the following recommendations for the utilization of the Georgia Department of Education ARP funds.

The conversation must begin and end with equity. We all know the health, finances, and well-being of low-income communities of color were at risk before COVID-19 sickened our families, closed our schools, shuttered our businesses, and threatened our livelihoods. During this pandemic, Georgia's students have experienced grief on many levels: loss of life (relatives, friends, neighbors, beloved celebrities); family economic loss; displacement through loss of housing; and a lack of stability, certainty and routine. It has been a year since thousands of young people in our state were traumatized by the murders of Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd and took to the streets in protest of racial hatred and police brutality amid a still-spreading health crisis. In addition, there has been a documented increase in childhood suicide ideation since the onset of this pandemic.¹

The systemic inequities experienced by communities of color were laid bare by the disparate impact of COVID-19. For far too long, long-standing and well-known differences in performance between and among groups in our local communities, and between and across different parts of our state, have continued unabated:

- Excessive disparities persist between groups with respect to consequential outcomes and/or resources (e.g., high school graduation rate, higher education attainment, job/career access, etc.);

¹ [*https://www.aappublications.org/news/2020/12/16/pediatricssuicidestudy121620](https://www.aappublications.org/news/2020/12/16/pediatricssuicidestudy121620)

- There is an unacceptably poor correlation (fit), observable at a group level, between resources and student needs (e.g., teacher/student ratio, mental health supports, enriching extracurricular activities, transportation access, etc.);
- Previous efforts have not mitigated the effects of structural disadvantages including poverty, geography, racism, xenophobia, deleterious segregation—faced by students.²

The persistent and fundamental inequities so deeply rooted in our state's dual education system are so well-known to our department of education (GaDOE), that it is somewhat perverse to ask our communities—yet again—to articulate their “top 2 or 3 issues.”

We Want What Works

Leading experts have converged around child brain development research, on how children learn, and how their surroundings either nourish or limit the expression of their fullest potential. The basic idea of “whole child” education—that success means meeting the full array of students’ learning and developmental needs—is uncontroversial as acknowledged by the GaDOE in our state’s Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan.³ The concept of attending to the whole child is widely accepted in education and other fields, backed by ample research, and supported by simple common sense. In fact, families and caregivers have been saying this for years.

We want our schools to support the cognitive development of our children and their social and emotional well-being. The way forward for our schools—a “world class education for all”—has to start with providing these conditions for all of our communities, starting with the people most impacted by the vast inequities in our system.

What this means in “real life” is simple and straightforward:

1. Focus on strengthening relationships throughout school communities.

Students flourish when there are sustained strong and positive relationships throughout a school community; therefore, the state should—

- a. Use American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds to:
 - i. Provide for parent and teacher engagement opportunities that lead to shared understanding and support of and for the student.
 - ii. Ensure there are family liaisons on staff at each public school, in a number proportionate to the number of families that attend the school.
- b. Require districts and schools to hold “back to school” meetings with parents at times and locations that work best for the parents. Require that districts and schools provide transportation to these meetings for parents who lack transit resources.
- c. Ensure all students who cannot return to in-person learning have free and reliable access to the internet and to internet-connected devices. Additionally, online learners should have daily access to teachers and not be relegated to independent study.
- d. Partner with local and regional employers and workforce development programs to establish summer employment and career and technical education programs, particularly for rural and low-income communities.

2. Help schools provide environments that foster belonging and safety.

²Adapted from *Getting Down to Facts II* (Edley & Kimner, 2018)

³ Educating Georgia’s Future: Georgia’s State Plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), (Georgia Department of Education, 2019), pg.1

- a. No ARP funds should be used to hire or contract with law enforcement, security personnel, or any security- or law enforcement-related systems.
- b. Instead, use federal rescue funds to:
 - i. Provide planning and implementation grants for local education agencies (LEAs) to form the foundation for sustainable systemic change to disciplinary practices and policies.
 - ii. Increase the number of culturally competent school counselors, social workers, school nurses, and child psychologists within all public school systems.
 - iii. Provide training to all school personnel in:
 - 1. trauma-informed practices;
 - 2. cultural competencies and appreciation; and
 - 3. implicit bias awareness.
- c. GaDOE can also specifically supplement ARP funds used by LEAs to ensure every student has access to culturally competent mental health counseling services, as needed, from outside providers.
- d. Use ARP funds to ensure that all students and staff have enough personal protection equipment (PPE) supplies to learn and work in a safe school environment for the duration of the school year:
 - i. Provide grants for LEAs to support the modernization of air filtration systems in school buildings;
 - ii. Provide PPE supplies for parents to participate in school-related activities.

3. Support a developmental approach to instruction.

Teaching is impactful when structured and sequenced in thoughtful ways, with testing used to measure student progress and improve and modify practices.

- a. Use ARP funds for additional paraprofessionals who can assist students with in-class assignments and after-school tutors to assist students with learning recovery.
- b. Do not permit schools and districts to use the participation of students with disabilities in general after-school programs as a substitute for any extended school year (ESY) or compensatory services those students are eligible to receive.

4. Take a comprehensive approach to learning supports.

Schools are responsive when they address students' individual needs for academic, health, and social and emotional support.

- a. Center the needs of students in Title I schools where the needs have multiplied since the pandemic. GaDOE must allocate resources in a way that prioritizes the needs of students who have access to fewer resources. This is why the federal rescue funding levels were based on Title I enrollments.
- b. Expand ESY and compensatory services to students with disabilities who may not have previously qualified. Ensure that the participation of these students in general activities does not deny them access to the expanded ESY or compensatory services they may otherwise be eligible to receive.
- c. Use ARP funds to ensure all school systems conduct a thorough investigation to identify all students who would be considered homeless under the McKinney-Vento

Act and provide all required and necessary resources to these students for their return to in-person learning.⁴

5. **Develop students’ agency and bring their voices into instruction.**

Educators achieve successful outcomes when they intentionally support the development of critical skills, mindsets, and aspirations of students.

- a. Some students may have developed a sense of autonomy within the remote learning environment that was not previously afforded to them within the physical classroom. Help educators recognize this development as an opportunity to provide guidance in the use of this acquired skill that would further students’ educational attainment.
- b. Work with educators to ensure that their ability to “disconnect” a student during remote learning does not lead to increased disciplinary actions upon return to in-person learning.
- c. Use ARP funds to fully fund the implementation of positive discipline practices with fidelity in all public schools, such as: Child in Need of Services (CHINS), Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), restorative practices and programming related to social-emotional learning.

Resource Equity and Transparency

That resource equity and transparency are conditions not typically present in our highest-need schools means that we need to rethink our educational system and the distribution of resources within the system. The American Rescue Plan, the third COVID-19 relief bill, was, like its predecessors, intended to be rescue funding, relief funding amid an ongoing public emergency, not a federal “prop” for deeply inequitable state funding systems.

Across the country, the school districts that have tended to do better with educational equity have not only been more likely to prioritize broad and deep engagement within their communities, but also to make budgetary decisions that reflect a commitment to equity by prioritizing resources for the most underserved students with the greatest needs. In Georgia, those students reside within our Title I schools and alternative education system. The use of ARP and other federal rescue funding must be a participatory and transparent process:

1. Ensure that **maintenance of effort** and **maintenance of equity** requirements are met and are publicly reported. These requirements would ensure the state education agency (SEA) and LEAs maintain the same level of financial support as compared to the average financial support provided in previous years. Any cuts to state and local funding shall not disproportionately impact high poverty and rural districts and schools.
2. Ensure that Georgia’s funding plan and local education agency plans, as required by the ARP, **specifically articulate how resources will be prioritized** for historically marginalized student populations and students who have been pushed into the alternative education pipeline.

Transformation through an Asset-Based Approach

The pandemic is underscoring that our health and prosperity as a state is closely bound up with the well-being of each of our local communities. This is to say our collective moment of need presents us with an opportunity to move forward in ways that confront and resolve our state's most

⁴ (\$123 billion for K–12 state education agencies (including \$800 million for homeless children))

persistent inequities and fully meet the needs of each and every child in Georgia. The foundational approach for this work comes from the basic principles of the science of learning and development.

Supporting schools to actually meet the needs of each and every student can deliver the economic impact that our state needs and that businesses are demanding. We need to implement proven measures that advance educational equity and improve outcomes for all children. We must use this opportunity to reimagine and build an education system that serves each and every student, family and community in our great state.

Submitted jointly by,

Gwinnett SToPP

Marlyn Tillman, Co-Founder/Executive Director

mtillman@gwinnettstopp.org

404-590-7877

End Mass Incarceration Georgia Network

Pamela Perkins Carn, Co-Convener

emiganetwork@gmail.com

470-747-8119

Additional Supporting Organizations

<u>Additional Supporting Organizations</u>	<u>State</u>
Alpha & Omega Society, Inc	Georgia
Amplify Atlanta	Georgia
Atlanta Legal Aid Society	Georgia
Augusta's Interfaith Coalition	Georgia
Concerned Black Clergy of Metropolitan Atlanta, Inc.	Georgia
EdLanta Student Coalition	Georgia
Georgia Alliance for Social Justice	Georgia
Georgia Working Families Party	Georgia
Greater Towers Community Association	Georgia
Gwinnett County Association of Educators	Georgia
Gwinnett Educators for Equity and Justice	Georgia
Gwinnett NAACP	Georgia
Human Capital Endurance, LLC	Georgia
Living On Purpose ATL	Georgia
Mariell & Company Advocacy Group	Georgia
RECIPE INC.	Georgia
Represent GA Action Network	Georgia
Restore Dekalb	Georgia
South GA Coastal District UMW	Georgia
SPLC Action Fund	Georgia
Sur Legal Collaborative	Georgia

Supporting Individuals

Samia Abdulle
Dorothy Adams
Lydia T. Arnold
Tamara Askew
Sarah Babcock
Tanisha Banks
Stacy Bell
L. S. Boykin
Zsa Boykin
Kim Bradley
Melody Brooks
Linda Brooks-Cooper
Kae Brown
Joe Carn
Harmel Codi
Domonique Cooper
Dyanne Cunningham
Kim Davis
Gloria Dixon
Rev. Dr. Candi Dugas
Joel Edwards
Susi Edwards
Sheneka Ellis
Melissa Finch
Rebecca H. Fisher
Eudene Fleming
Johnnie R. Follins
Shawn Francis
B. Gail
Melba Gates
Jessica Godfrey
Angela Greene
Ellen Hankinson
Jewell A. Harper
Bernadette Hartfield
Kenneth High
Sabrina Hixon
Jacque Hodges
Cynthia Holland
Sandra Holmes
Laila Hudda
Mindy Hudson
Raleigh Hussmann

City, State

Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Powder Springs, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Lawrenceville, Georgia
Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Snellville, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Watkinsville, Georgia
College Park, Georgia
Ellenwood, Georgia
Lawrenceville, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Decatur, Georgia
Rome, Georgia
Lilburn, Georgia
College Park, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Covington, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
College Park, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Suwanee, Georgia
Winterville, Georgia
Decatur, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Decatur, Georgia
Union City, Georgia
Kennesaw, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Ellenwood, Georgia
Decatur, Georgia
Fairburn, Georgia
Rome, Georgia

Supporting Individuals

Mattie Ingram
Bisi Jackson
Phyllis Jackson-Smith
Marilyn Jennings
Yolanda Jerkins
Deborah Johnson
Kathleen Johnson
LG Johnson
Celest Jones
Shirley Jones Everett
Sharon Kelly
Patricia Kenly
Erin Kilpatrick
Robert Samuel King
Claudette Leak
Leslie Lipson
Debora Mack
Gabriela Maduro Salvarrey
Beverly Marshall-Goodell
Angela R. McClung
Destney McCowan
Jessie McQueen Bell
Leroy Miller
Paige Mitchell
Carol Moore
Adrienne Myers
George O'Donnell
Harriet Oliver
Joscelyn C. O'Neil
Dorothy Owens
Jacqueline Parker
Sargent Payne
Veronica Pennington
Vanessa B. Perkins
Valerie Phipps Jewell
Willie Pringle
Lena Render
Paula Roberts
Jacqueline W. Rose
Dr. Addie Shopshire-Rolle
Jacque Smith
Dr. Brenda J. Smith, ThD,MDIV,MSW,M.A. CPE
Joyce Spaulding

City, State

Atlanta, Georgia
Buford, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Smyrna, Georgia
Covington, Georgia
Georgia
Peachtree Corners, Georgia
Douglasville, Georgia
Conley, Georgia
Decatur, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Duluth, Georgia
Georgia
Decatur, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Fayetteville, Georgia
Duluth, Georgia
Smyrna, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Lawrenceville, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Powder Springs, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Douglasville, Georgia
Smyrna, Georgia
Marietta, Georgia
Clarkston, Georgia
Decatur, Georgia
Jonesboro, Georgia
Stockbridge, Georgia
Decatur, Georgia
Dacula, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Decatur, Georgia
Decatur, Georgia
Decatur, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Mableton, Georgia
Conley, Georgia
Winder, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia

Supporting Individuals

Helen Spears
LaRita Sprott
Theophilus Stanford
Beverly A. Starks
V. Ricki Stroud
Eloise Sykes
Jackie Sykes
Lenora Tanner
Catherine Taylor
Jacqueline Twiggs
Toyasha Vaughn
Merry Wakur
Iona S. Walker
Janice M. Walker
Taheerah Walker
Connie Michele Ward
Dr. Renva Watterson
Michelle Whitby
Crystal White
Sharon Anne Williams
Wanda J. Williams, MD
Almetta Wilson
Georgia Wilson
Sherrie L. Wilson

City, State

College Park, Georgia
Smyrna, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Lithonia, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Union City, Georgia
Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Lawrenceville, Georgia
College Park, Georgia
Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia
Snellville, Georgia
Jonesboro, Georgia
Rome, Georgia
Georgia
Union City, Georgia
East Point, Georgia
McDonough, Georgia
Jonesville, Georgia
Jonesboro, Georgia
Atlanta, Georgia