

# THE BALANCE SHEET: OCTOBER 2022



**RESOURCE EQUITY IN GWINNETT  
COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**





## **The Gwinnett Parent Coalition to Dismantle the School to Prison Pipeline (Gwinnett STOPP)**

is a community-centered advocacy group focused on reversing the School to Prison Pipeline (STPP) trend.

The organization formed in response to the growing frustration of the number of schools relying on harsh punishment and law enforcement to address typical student misconduct. Gwinnett STOPP advocates for policies that keep more students in school, while concurrently empowering youth and parent leadership in schools. Our work does not solely benefit one community but benefits an entire intersection of marginalized communities impacted by the pipeline. Our goal is for parents, students, and community members to harness their collective power into a sustainable vision for just schools.



**The Opportunity Institute** works to advance principles of social and economic mobility, equity, and racial justice by focusing on the education space and adjacent areas of social policy, cradle-through-career.

It seeks to deepen the connectedness and shared purpose within the broader equity and opportunity movement by bridging the domains of policy, research, advocacy, and implementation. The Opportunity Institute works with elected officials, quantitative researchers, civil rights groups, community-based organizations, and school and parent organizations to advance its mission.

**The Parent Leadership Institute (PLI – The Balance Sheet Project)** is a program of Gwinnett STOPP that promotes effective parent advocacy and active community involvement in their local public schools. PLI provides education and training to parents of public education students that helps them realize their power to improve the quality of their children's education within their local schools. PLI has been a conduit for an increasing number of parent advocates who are demanding better treatment and learning outcomes for their students in Gwinnett County's public schools, as well as public schools across metro Atlanta.

In partnership with the Opportunity Institute, PLI – The Balance Sheet engages participants in taking a targeted look at equity within the Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) 2022–2023 school budget. The goal is to strengthen the capacity of parent advocates to understand and analyze the school and district budgeting process through an equity lens and to become proficient in advocating for funding in the budget for programs that address the educational needs of their children. Participants will develop a GCPS budget advocacy plan and a diagnostic of the annual budget.

TheBalance Sheet is adapted from:  
Resource Equity Diagnostic materials developed and published by  
the Alliance for Resource Equity. Images on the front cover are by Allison Shelley  
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# INTRODUCTION

## What is Education Resource Equity?

Education resource equity means that school system leaders ensure that there are adequate resources and funding to educate all students and support their individual educational needs—so that their background, ethnicity, ability or geographical location are not used as reasons to deny or restrict their access to the resources they need to succeed. Resource equity focuses on allocating funding and resources so that each and every student receives a positive school climate, a high-quality education, and opportunities to achieve greater learning outcomes.

## What is the School to Prison Pipeline?

The school to prison pipeline is the funneling of children from the public school system into the youth and criminal justice systems, in part due to:

- zero tolerance school discipline policies
- disproportionate application of student suspensions
- high stakes testing, and
- discriminatory administrative practices

that adversely affect children of color, children in poverty/of low income, children with mental health challenges, learning and/or physical disabilities/differences, children who identify as LGBTQIA+, and other vulnerable students.

## OUR FOCUS

TRANSPARENCY &  
EASE OF ACCESS TO  
INFORMATION



SCHOOL FUNDING



INSTRUCTIONAL  
TIME &  
ATTENTION



STUDENT  
SUPPORTS &  
INTERVENTIONS



## What is the Purpose of this Diagnostic?

This diagnostic is designed to help educators, school system leaders, advocates, and families start conversations about the causes of the challenges in the school system, and consider ways to improve the experiences that students have in school each day. By helping to identify strengths and gaps across four key indicators of education resource equity within the Gwinnett County Public Schools System —1) transparency and ease of accessing information; 2) student supports and interventions; 3) instructional time and attention; 4) school funding— this targeted look at the budget planning and allocations processes is intended to help create shared understandings that lead to shared plans for action.

## Key Terms

**Students of color**, in this context, include Black, Latinx, Asian Pacific American, and Native American students and other historically underserved racial/ethnic groups.

**Students with higher needs** includes students who may face additional barriers to success, such as students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, students with disabilities, and students experiencing foster care, homelessness, or the youth justice system.



**Equity** means that all students have the resources they need to be successful. All students have the right to schools that are safe and healthy and nurturing environments where every student has the opportunity to reach their full potential. Some students need additional funding for specialized educators, targeted behavioral supports, and increased opportunities for engagement.



**"Excellence Looks Like"** gives our vision of what is necessary to support equity and excellence for all students.

**"GCPS Now"** gives our assessment of current school district practices and policies, based on our review of district documents and interviews with staff.

**"Beginning, Developing, Proficient, Distinguished"** are the four achievement levels on the Georgia Milestones Assessment System, the end-of-year exams given to students from 3rd grade through high school. These levels are how we assessed GCPS' performance for each of the indicators we examined:

- Beginning means "does not yet demonstrate proficiency"
- Developing means "demonstrates partial proficiency"
- Proficient means "demonstrates proficiency"
- Distinguished means "demonstrates advanced proficiency."

## INDICATOR 1

## TRANSPARENCY &amp; EASE OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION



## CORE QUESTIONS

- How easy is it to obtain useful information about how resources are distributed in GCPS?
- How easy is it to reach school and district officials with relevant knowledge?
- Are school budget information and district budget information accurate and comprehensive?

## EXCELLENCE LOOKS LIKE:

- The district and schools are making clear, evidence-based investments to advance equity and improve school climates.
- Schools across the district have policies and rules that are transparent, culturally sensitive, consistently enforced, and incorporate student and family voice.
- Students with higher needs, students of color, and their families feel welcomed and valued at school.
- It is easy for parents to identify available supports for students and to track classroom activities.

## GCPS RIGHT NOW:

- At one school, questions about the school budget were directed to the Title I parent liaison, not to staff responsible for budgetary issues.
- Staff regularly referred parents to the GCPS website for answers to specific questions about the district budget and resource equity. Staff were unable to easily and quickly find the information on the website themselves.
- There is no clear guide for parents and community members to the district budget, to accounting codes, or to budget line items.

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## INDICATOR 2

# STUDENT SUPPORTS & INTERVENTIONS



## CORE QUESTIONS

- Beyond standardized testing, how does GCPS determine what supports students need?
- Does GCPS have an equity-based plan to reduce class sizes and increase instructional time?
- How does GCPS measure the effectiveness of student supports and interventions?
- What supports are present for systems-level cultural competency?

## EXCELLENCE LOOKS LIKE:

- Students have the access they need to culturally competent support staff, including: psychologists, social workers, nurses, occupational therapists, counselors, and other staff.
- The district consistently, transparently, and reliably identifies students' needs and timely provides services.
- Students with higher needs and students of color:
  - receive appropriate supports inside and outside of the classroom, including specialized services
  - are not criminalized by school discipline policies
  - have the support they need for post-secondary success
  - receive appropriate family supports.

## GCPS RIGHT NOW:

- School climate is one of GCPS' strategic priorities. In its current budget, GCPS has increased its spending on school resource officers to improve "safety" and school climate even though research shows these officers are harmful to both.*
- When asked how GCPS measures the effectiveness of the money it spends on student supports and services, staff referred parents to GCPS' compliance with GA DOE reporting requirements and its use of external financial audits.*
- At least one school has circulated a social emotional learning (SEL) survey, but students and families do not know how or when the data are to be used.*

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## INDICATOR 3

## INSTRUCTIONAL TIME &amp; ATTENTION

## CORE QUESTIONS

- | How will GCPS increase learning time for students with the greatest need?
- | How will GCPS' spending plan help to close opportunity and achievement gaps?
- | Are educational resources distributed according to need?



## EXCELLENCE LOOKS LIKE

- Lower-performing students receive differentiated, individualized, high-quality instructional attention as needed.
- Schools can shift instructional attention (including strategic use of staffing) and instructional methods to meet students' needs, including by providing high-quality instruction in smaller settings (e.g., class size reductions, small group instruction).
- Students with higher needs and students of color are as likely as their peers to have full course loads.
- Instructional staff are allocated based on student need.
- Instructional materials and school resources reflect the community.

## GCPS RIGHT NOW

- GCPS allocates staff to each school based on a formula that looks at overall enrollment and how many students are in specifically identified groups. For high schools, the ratio allocates one teacher for 27 students (1:27).
- Roughly 182 teaching positions were included in the FY23 budget to reduce class sizes across all schools, without explicit priorities for higher-need students and schools.
- Various staff were unclear whether these positions were intended to fill existing vacancies or to add to the overall number of teachers.
- GCPS has allocated additional funding for technological devices to help English language learners better access the curriculum.
- Instructional materials and school resources do not reflect the racial, cultural diversity of the community.

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## INDICATOR 4

# SCHOOL FUNDING

## CORE QUESTIONS

**Does school funding match the needs of students and is it transparently reported?  
Are GCPS budgetary materials clearly written and easily understood?  
How does GCPS ensure funds and resources are equitably distributed?**

## EXCELLENCE LOOKS LIKE:

- Schools with higher-needs students receive the resources they need to be successful.
- Schools that serve higher numbers of students of color receive as much funding as other schools.
- Federal grants and programs are used on top of district funding instead of replacing district funds.
- Budget documents show all of the funds each school receives.
- The formulas that govern the allocation of resources that each school receives are widely shared and understood.
- Budget related documents are accessible to a wide range of community members.

## GCPS RIGHT NOW:

- *Per-pupil spending numbers do not include funds from outside groups, so it is unclear how much each school actually receives.*
- *School funding in GCPS is primarily based on the percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch, not on a comprehensive needs assessment.*
- *The current funding system does not necessarily provide the most support for the highest-need schools or support the most effective educational practices.*
- *Other than this diagnostic, there is no community-based review or auditing of the GCPS budget.*

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# RESOURCE EQUITY REPORT CARD: GWINNETT COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS, SY 2022-23

Indicator	Score (out of 4.0)	Achievement Level*	Rationale
Transparency & Ease of Access to Information	1.5	<b>Beginning/Developing</b>	<p>Staff referred parents to GCPS website for answers to budget questions. Website is hard to navigate.</p> <p>No clear and comprehensive guide to the district budget for community members.</p> <p>At one school, questions about the school budget were directed to the Title I parent liaison, not to staff responsible for budgetary issues.</p>
Student Supports and Interventions	1.0	<b>Beginning</b>	<p>GCPS has increased spending on school resource officers even though research shows they are harmful to school climate, safety.</p> <p>Students and parents unclear about practical relevancy of social emotional learning surveys, references to science of learning and development.</p> <p>Various GCPS staff responded to questions about effectiveness and equity by talking about compliance with financial reporting requirements.</p>
Instructional Time & Attention	1.4	<b>Beginning</b>	<p>GCPS allocates staff to school based on numerical formulas. For high schools, GCPS allocates one teacher for every 27 students (1:27).</p> <p>Staff unclear about whether 182 new teaching positions in FY23 are to fill existing vacancies or increase overall number of teachers.</p> <p>Significant investment in technology to aid English language learners.</p> <p>Instructional materials and school resources do not reflect the racial, cultural diversity of the community.</p>
School Funding	1.5	<b>Beginning/Developing</b>	<p>Per-pupil spending numbers do not include funds from outside groups, so it is unclear how much each school actually receives.</p> <p>The current funding system does not necessarily provide the most support for the highest-need schools or support the most effective educational practices.</p> <p>Other than this diagnostic, there is no community-based review or auditing of the GCPS budget.</p>

\*Grading system adopted from Georgia Milestones examinations

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## INDICATOR 1

### TRANSPARENCY & EASE OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION



- Transparency of budget and services and resources available to parents/members of community
  - Explanation of line items in the budget, table of contents, index or guide to help navigate information, glossary of funding terms and accounting codes, explanatory sections that clarify any adjustments made to the budget
  - Provide school-based budgeting documents that include an explanation of the funding formula used
  - Materials must be made available in the most widely spoken languages in Gwinnett schools
  - Engage parents in a participatory budgeting process.
- Supports for students and classroom activities are easy to find for parents, especially for local school areas that experience a high mobility rate
  - Ensure information is easily and readily available across various platforms (e.g., online, documents, mobile app, etc.) where information can be easily and readily available.

## INDICATOR 2

### STUDENT SUPPORTS & INTERVENTIONS



- Schools are open and welcoming to students, parents, and caregivers and the school offers the resources and supports that reflect community.
- Implement alternatives to the hiring of more school resource officers at the school, such as providing more funding for academic support (e.g., tutoring), afterschool programs, mental and behavioral health supports for students, group counseling, restorative justice, and student court.
- Invest in culturally-sensitive history and social studies textbooks.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## INDICATOR 3



### INSTRUCTIONAL TIME & ATTENTION

- Tie budget allocations to the academic needs of the students, especially for students who have been historically marginalized by race, socio-economics and/or ability.
- Implement smaller class sizes in high-needs schools as recommended by decades of education research.
- Provide adequate ESOL translation and translation devices for students and their families.
- Ensure that students who have been identified as gifted receive needed instructional, social, emotional and mental supports.
- For students who are struggling academically, provide more opportunities for instructional support through afterschool learning, online tutoring, Saturday school, one-on-one tutoring (in or after school), and IEP coaches.

## INDICATOR 4



### SCHOOL FUNDING

- Perform independent equity audits of all school funding received by schools in the district to determine how and for what purposes those dollars are allocated and publish the audit report in its entirety for public review.
- Create a fully staffed Office of Parent Engagement that is culturally proficient for the diverse GCPS student body and community.
- Implement a credible, transparent and sufficient oversight process for the usage of Title 1 funding within the schools.

# RE–BALANCING THE LEDGER

For far too long, well–known inequities in performance between and among groups in our local communities, and between and across different parts of our state, have continued unabated. The changes we need—and deserve—require a fundamental re–balancing of the ways we fund and support public education. The conversation we must have begins and ends with equity, and keeps our students at the center.

To have shared success in our schools we must meet the full array of students’ learning needs. Our children develop individually, so there is no single, shared path to success. GCPS’ instructional programs must be flexible enough to address the needs of students as they arise while also being sufficiently structured to anticipate some of those needs. Although this approach is not controversial, is backed by research, and widely accepted by parents and educators, this is not, regrettably, how GCPS currently funds and supports our schools.

An equitable education system is one that develops programs, allocates resources, focuses on equity, and delivers on the practices that support student–centered teaching and learning. Strong working relationships among teachers and students, and teachers and families, are critically important to this vision. Inadequate funding, hard–to–find and hard–to–read budget documents, and regressive investments in school police all work to hinder this vision.

The changes we seek happen through trusted relationships and community–building, and in school communities with the belief, commitment, and resources to support a developmental approach to education. We must invest in nothing less.





Parent  
Leadership  
Institute  
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