

Education & Workforce Speaker Series

Summer 2021



Panel Summary: Follow the Money

Introduction

Programs cannot exist without funding; therefore, it is vital we explore how we fund our education and workforce initiatives. Over the past two decades, Georgia's education funding has continued to be cut despite rising inflation and student population rates. Currently, Georgia K-12 students receive \$12.5 billion in funding, with \$2.3 billion coming from the federal government and the rest from state and local sources. The Georgia University System gets \$2.5 billion in funding and funds the technical colleges at about \$373 million. Many critical educational programs, such as Head Start, continually fail to be [funded at capacity](#).

On June 30th, 2021, Science for Georgia — in partnership with Science is US, Technology Association of Georgia, Urban League of Greater Atlanta, Partners in Change, and Literacy for All — held the second panel in a four-part speaker series on Education and Workforce. The panelists, representing leaders in education and workforce pipeline funding, spoke on the complex concerns surrounding these issues and put forward evidence-based suggestions to address current funding gaps. Their suggestions and resources for continued learning have been included in our summary in the hopes that we carry these recommendations forward. For a complete recording of our panel, please visit <https://bit.ly/GAEduWork21>.

The Issues

The first panelist, State Senator [Jason Anavitarte](#), serves Georgia State Senate District 31 and is the current Vice-Chair for the Education and Youth Committee. As both a former member of the Board of Trustees for Chattahoochee Technical College and the Paulding County School Board, Senator Anavitarte has worked to fund learners of every background. Opportunities for education, especially for adult learners, must be broadened to all geographic areas of the state. It is specifically vital that adult learners, who are often overlooked in education appropriations, are given the appropriate educational support they need. Senator Anavitarte said that to maximize our funding dollars, we must think boldly. He recommended that Georgia not be reactive in jumping from one crisis to the next, but rather be proactive in thinking about solutions that build off of the current work in the education space to put Georgia first.

[Stephen J Owens](#), Ph.D., is a senior policy analyst at the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute, whose work focuses on state policy that affects public K-12 education in Georgia. He discussed how Georgia determines education funding, which is based primarily on the Quality Basic Education Act, referred to as QBE.

QBE was implemented in 1985. At the time it was revolutionary. Unfortunately, in the past two decades, [Georgia has often failed to meet the minimum QBE funding](#).

Currently, Georgia is 35th in the nation for education funding. Dr. Owens noted that while education funding has gone down, transportation and other infrastructure costs have gone up (busses, buildings, etc), leaving even less money to devote to students' education in the classroom. These increased costs often have a larger impact on rural school districts.

Dr. Owens stated that to solve these underfunding issues, we must remain active in education policy by speaking with our representatives, getting involved in our communities, and staying informed.

NOTE: [How the QBE is calculated](#): The QBE takes the total number of students, placing a unique emphasis on students enrolled in non-general education programs. From there, QBE adds in indirect student costs. Examples of this would be library funding, nursing staff salaries, administrative supports, and other similar expenses. From the formula, the local share of education costs is subtracted from the state allotment, and applicable categorical grants are added. Finally, QBE accounts for equalization grants, which help offset districts' limited inability to collect property taxes.


$$\begin{array}{cccccc} \text{Total} & & \text{Indirect} & & \text{Local Share of} & & \text{Applicable} & & \text{Owed State} \\ \text{Number of} & + & \text{Student} & - & \text{Education} & + & \text{Equalization} & = & \text{Education} \\ \text{Students} & & \text{Costs} & & \text{Costs} & & \text{Grants} & & \text{Contribution} \end{array}$$

The next panelist, [Polly McKinney](#), stated that many issues blocking student success do not directly fall under education umbrellas. As the Advocacy Director for Voices for Georgia Children, Ms. McKinney works to support all aspects of child wellbeing. Many issues surrounding education don't fall neatly under the strict jurisdiction of education departments and school boards. Issues such as healthcare access, food access, stable housing, and quality childcare, all profoundly impact a child's ability to be a successful student. If a student is hungry or sick, their learning is blocked, and no education program with any amount of funding can overcome that. It is vital that when addressing issues of funding, these gaps are addressed as well. Braided funding measures and dual-purpose infrastructure can help us save significantly on the financing while still providing these essential services. To fully support education, schools must become centers that advocate for student health and security, not just learning. Ms. McKinney believes social shame (i.e. being unable to afford clothes, or have clean clothes, or lunch or supplies) is a barrier to learning. We must uplift students with the equitable in-school supports they need to reach their goals.

Our last speaker, Superintendent of Fulton County Schools [Mike Looney](#), EdD, provided an example of putting education funding toward evidence-based practices. His new program for the county, "Every Child Reads," is a \$90 million investment into evidence-based literacy supports. Dr. Looney said that we must think strategically about how we are helping our students in this post-pandemic environment. Analyzing internal data trends on literacy in the

county showed that while literacy rates were high, programs failed to educate everyone successfully. Fulton County is using its Covid-Recovery funds to invest in implementing science-supported, evidence-informed learning initiatives. Dr. Looney also emphasized the importance of funding programming that helps students garner real-world experiences, such as dual enrollment and career tech options that can help place students directly into Georgia industry. By forging new pipelines to the workforce, students are empowered and have more opportunities to support themselves economically. Dr. Looney stated that these experiences are crucial to education and that schools must continue equipping students and teachers with current materials and course programs to ensure student success. It is critical that despite background, all students are given equitable opportunities to flourish.

Proposed Actions to Take

From the perspectives of our panelists, as well as current research in the field, we have created a list of actionable ways we can move to fund education.

1. Support commitments to education

The state of Georgia, as well as many local municipalities and the federal government, frequently provide grants. While grant money does help bolster educational infrastructure and support, it is no replacement for consistent commitments to fund our school systems. Annual statewide education funding is ultimately decided by our elected leaders. During upcoming legislative sessions, [reach out to your state legislators](#) to advocate for education as a priority for the budget.

2. Get involved

Much of education decision making comes down to the local level. By getting involved with your county's school board, and other associated groups, you can advocate for smart funding initiatives, and programs that are supported through science. Educational needs are incredibly diverse and can differ drastically from county to county. Staying active in your area's community helps us all to put education first.

3. Support students, teachers, and everyone in between

Acknowledge that education is a multifaceted area, and that to learn, children and adults need to have adequate healthcare, food, and shelter. As school buildings are already "where the children are" utilizing this existing infrastructure as both a place to learn and a place to provide community support is cost-saving and pragmatic. . No one's education should be blocked by circumstances outside of their control. Speak with your local or state school boards about programs that support needs outside of learning, such as health, food, housing, and childcare services.

The pandemic highlighted how this is already the case, for example: buses went on reverse routes to deliver food to children.

When looking at appropriations for education and workforce programs, the [Georgia Budget Policy Institute](#) is an excellent resource to learn more about what role your taxes play in our state's education.