

**Clarke County School District
Resolution on the 2022 Legislative Agenda**

The Clarke County School District Board of Education adopts the following priorities for the 2022 State Legislative Agenda:

I. Increasing Support to Title I School Systems

Recognize the need for increased support to Title 1 School Systems by expanding funding beyond the QBE formula.

Rationale: Title I School Systems have a disproportionate share of families living below the poverty level. Black and Indigenous students of color also comprise the majority in most Title Schools. It is important to acknowledge that the communities that support these school systems often have economic and social barriers that stem from histories of slavery, systemic racism, and inequities. The experiences and needs of children in Title I schools can differ greatly and extend into the school systems' needs for systems of support.

For example, when CCSD reviews the policies for transporting children to school, the safety needs of children living in low-income neighborhoods must be accounted for; thus, CCSD transports students within a half mile of their school, increasing the district's transportation costs for our school district. In the 2018-2019 school year, CCSD spent \$9M to transport students to school. The state allocated \$1.6M, or 18 percent. As a result, the district utilized local tax funds to cover the additional \$7.4M, which would be better utilized in classroom instruction or student support services.

Districts with a disproportionate share of students who live below the federal poverty level also have increased needs for trauma-informed care and support services that the school systems undertake as a means of improving classroom behavior, absenteeism, and performance. There are myriad reasons, including home instability, housing insecurity, insufficient provision of basic needs, and physically unsafe environments. These experiences can hinder students from focusing on their education. Increased access to behavioral, social, and mental health professionals in the school environment could dramatically address disruptive behavior and aid in improving academic achievement.

II. Ceasing the Expansion of Publicly Funded Private School Options

CCSD supports the Georgia School Board Association's (GSBA) call to end the Georgia Private School Tax Credit program, a voucher program funded by \$100 million in state tax credits. Lawmakers should also reject education savings account programs.

Rationale: The Georgia Tax Credit Voucher Program, also referred to as the private school scholarship program, diverts funds from public education and other critical state investments. It lacks accountability and has minimal transparency. There is no existing data on eligibility criteria, the number of voucher recipients and their district residence, or the student grade levels. Existing data on outcomes does point to voucher recipients having lower levels of learning in math and reading, but little evaluative data exists to further study learning outcomes. Additionally, information about participating private schools is not collected.

III. Increasing Support for Pre-Kindergarten

Increase funding to Pre-Kindergarten programs to provide teacher salaries and retirement benefits comparable to the state's salary schedule for K-12 teachers, and increase assistant teacher salaries.

Rationale: The state allocated compensation for Pre-K teachers is substantially less than K-12 teachers. The state's share for a K-12 teacher with a bachelor's degree is \$8,720 more than for a first-year Pre-K teacher with comparable credentials. This leads to higher attrition rates among Pre-K teachers, which compromises the quality of Pre-K programs in the state.

Equally problematic is the state-funded salary for Pre-K assistant teachers, which is currently \$16,190. This level of compensation, again, results in high attrition rates, which compromises the quality of Pre-K education.

IV. Improving Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Maintain the current structure of the Teacher Retirement System, provide loan forgiveness programs for teachers in high-need schools or high demand subject areas, and ensure new teachers have effective mentoring and systems of support.

Rationale: Teacher quality is the most significant institutional factor influencing student achievement but attracting and retaining quality teachers is a growing challenge. Across the state, 44 percent of new teachers leave the profession within five years, a troubling trend that may worsen as the pandemic rages on. Making the teaching profession a more attractive career pathway is essential to improving recruitment as well as retention. This includes maintaining a robust retirement program and introducing loan forgiveness programs. Additionally, state supported, high quality mentoring programs, where mentors are trained and compensated will increase support systems for those first crucial years of the teaching profession.

V. Improving Postsecondary Enrollment and Completion

Fund the need-based grant program created in 2018 by the General Assembly through HB 787 sec. 20-3-360. Increase funding for the HOPE Grant program to cover full tuition for students in the Technical College System of Georgia. Require the Georgia Lottery Corporation to dedicate 35 percent of its revenue to the Lottery for Education Account.

Rationale: Georgia is one of two states without a funded, comprehensive need-based financial aid program for postsecondary education. The HOPE Scholarship and the Zell Miller Scholarship, the state's most prominent aid programs, are both merit-based. In 2018, 44 percent of undergraduate students in the University System of Georgia (USG) and 8 percent of associate degree students in the technical college system (TCSG), received these forms of educational support. Economically disadvantaged students and students of color are far less likely to receive HOPE and Zell Miller scholarships, and the profile of scholarship recipients skews towards higher income families. According to the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute, more than 90 percent of students with annual family income greater than \$120,000 received either HOPE or Zell Miller Scholarships, compared to less than 10 percent of students with a family income less than \$30,000. This means that a much larger proportion of low-income students pay full tuition to attend a USG or TCSG school. Providing the Georgia Student Finance Commission the funding to support the grant program detailed in HB787 will support more students who wish to attend college, and improve retention and graduation rates.

Expanding the Hope Career Grant to all technical colleges will also help students reduce the out-of-pocket expenses for tuition from \$619 to \$119, again, improving retention and graduation rates in higher education.

By law, the Georgia Lottery Corporation (GLC) is required to return “as nearly as practical” up to 35 percent of revenue to the state’s education account, which funds the HOPE scholarship program and the voluntary Pre-Kindergarten program. It has not come close to meeting that level in over 20 years. The portion of lottery revenue invested in the education account in 2020 was 26.1 percent. Mandating the GLC return 35 percent of lottery revenue would increase state funding for education programs.

VI. Fostering Equitable Educational Opportunities for All Students

Remove barriers for immigrant children raised in Georgia who seek a postsecondary education. This includes rescinding SB 494 which requires undocumented students to pay out-of-state tuition. This also includes a ban on Georgia Board of Regents discriminatory practice of banning undocumented students from attending public institutions of higher education.

Rationale: Students who are immigrants, and raised in Georgia, are valuable to our communities and economy. By 2025, over 60 percent of Georgia’s jobs will require postsecondary education. Currently 48 percent of young adults in the state have postsecondary training. Imposing these barriers to higher education will continue to suppress our postsecondary graduation rates as well as hinder these students’ full participation in the workforce. It also reduces the pool of qualified candidates for vital jobs in our state and increases the likelihood of generational poverty in our communities.

VII. Improving Employee Retirement Benefits

Increase state funding of the Public-School Employees Retirement System (PSERS), which covers classified K-12 staff.

Rationale: Lower wage staff, such as para-professionals, custodians, nutrition, transportation, and grounds workers comprise a large portion of those covered by PSERS. In 2022, classified staff paid an annual fee of \$90, and the state’s share was \$889 for each employee. Comparatively, the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) requires certified staff to pay 6% of their salary, and the state’s share is 21%, which translates to \$10,000 for a teacher earning \$50,000. Additionally, TRS retirement includes a bi-annual Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA), while PSERS recipients are infrequently awarded COLA by the Georgia State Legislature. Improving state sponsored retirement plans for classified staff will promote equity among all K-12 staff in Georgia’s public schools.