



# **LEGISLATIVE UPDATE PUBLIC EDUCATION IN GEORGIA**

*GAINS Conference, May 7, 2026*

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# Fund Balance June 30, 2025



- **\$14.6B** in General Fund Reserves
  - **\$9.1B** in Undesignated Reserves
  - **\$5.6B** in Revenue Shortfall Reserves (“Rainy Day” Fund)
- **\$2.5B** in Lottery Reserves

# FY26 Georgia State Revenue YTD



Year-to-date, net tax revenue collections totaled **\$24.5 billion**, for an **increase** of \$463.6 million (1.9%)

- January Net Tax Collections totaled **\$3.03B** for a **decrease** of \$18.1M (**0.6%**) over January 2025 (FY25)
- February Net Tax Collections approached **\$2.13B** for a **decrease** of \$2.4M (**0.1%**) compared to February 2025 (FY25)
- March Net Tax Collections totaled **\$2.62B** for an **increase** of \$120.4M (4.8%) compared to March 2025 (FY25)



# Georgia State Economist's Outlook

## State Economist Robert Buschman:

- Despite the U.S. and Georgia not being in a recession, people are acting as if we are.
  - Believes the public's feelings and behavior are due to “stagflation” from slow economic growth, high inflation, and high unemployment; uncertainty about the impacts of artificial intelligence; political instability in the U.S. and abroad; and rising pass-through costs to consumers from tariffs and new tariff threats
- Outlook Summary:
  - Slowdown with slow Real Gross Domestic Product (RGDP) and job growth but no recession
  - Continued higher inflation due to tariffs & monetary easing
  - Modest nominal income growth, keeping personal income tax (PIT) collections flat after rate cuts
  - Slow real income growth due to weak consumer sentiment, leading to slower sales tax growth
  - Business costs rising & bankruptcies at record levels

# AFY26 State Budget Highlights



- Increase in funds to provide a one-time salary supplement of **\$2,000** to full-time regular state employees, including teachers, custodians, nutrition workers, bus drivers & school nurses
- **\$388M** for pupil transportation
- **\$18.5M** increase for RESA-based literacy coaches
- **\$1.4M** increase to fund social worker grants
- **\$1.3M** increase for mental health support grants
- **\$750K** to provide one-time grants to districts' pilot programs that assist in maximizing mental health reimbursement

# FY27 State Budget Highlights: GaDOE



- **\$128K** increase for one financial review position at GaDOE
- **\$240K** increase for one statewide attendance officer at GaDOE
- **\$500K** increase for college prep exams (AP & PSAT)
- **\$18.4M** increase in existing funds for regional coaches and Growing Readers coaches
- **\$2.7M** in one-time funds for vision and auditory screening

# FY27 State Budget Highlights: QBE



## QBE Fully Funded

- **\$69.8M** increase in funds to reflect an increase in the health insurance employer contribution PMPM from \$1,885 to \$1,935 effective July 1, 2026 (**\*Note: This is for certified staff, but the increase also applies to non-certified staff.**)
- **\$70M** increase in funds to provide literacy coaches in schools with students in grades K-3 per HB 1193 (2026 session)
- **(\$8,179,568)** reduction for virtual schools that have failed to maintain an acceptable College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) for out-of-system students per HB 1259 (now in HB 328)

# FY27 State Budget Highlights: School Nurses & School Security



- **\$0** to maintain current school nurses
- **\$116M** for school security grants
- **\$6.9M** to utilize existing funds to allow schools to engage in part-time or full-time student advocacy specialists pursuant to HB 268 (2025 session)
- **\$11.9M** to provide **\$50M** in 5-year bond funds for school safety equipment grants, statewide

# FY27 State Budget Highlights: Student Support Services



- **\$1.5M** increase for school social work services
- **\$1.3M** increase for mental health support grants
- **\$2.5M** to recognize existing funds (\$800K) for administering grants and increase in funds for additional out-of-school care for statewide and community grantees (BOOST 2.0 program)

# FY27 State Budget Highlights: Technology & Transportation



- **\$1M** increase for Artificial Intelligence & coding literacy program
- **\$121K** increase for one pupil transportation consultant position at GaDOE
- **\$38M** increase for pupil transportation formula grants to reflect updated bus counts and operations



# FY27 State Budget Highlights:

## Governor's Office of Student Achievement

- **\$301K** increase for personnel and operations for two new policy reporting positions at GOSA
- **\$150K** increase for professional learning & development for current teachers, literacy coaches & administrators
- **\$330K** increase to support the review and recommendations of high-quality instructional literacy materials in Pre-K through third grade
- **\$96K** increase for the review and recommendations of universal reading screeners
- **\$1.5M** one-time increase in funds to conduct phase two research and landscape analysis, conduct a leadership pilot with selected RESAs, establish a framework for the Georgia READS community collaborative, and provide ongoing data monitoring and quarterly reports to the General Assembly, and the Georgia Literacy Coordinating Committee beginning July 1, 2026
- **\$5.5M** increase reflected in the University System of Georgia Regents to establish a reading center that will design professional development programming for teachers and literacy coaches

# FY27 State Budget Highlights: Georgia Student Finance Commission



- **\$21M** increase for Dual Enrollment
- **(\$41,016,057)** reduction to the Promise Scholarship voucher to align funds to meet prior year utilization and provide funding for 80% growth

# FY27 District Budget Challenge: State Health Benefits Plan



**SHBP employer contribution rate for non-certified employees increases from \$1885 to \$1935 PMPM July 1, 2026.**

- Will continue to increase as needed in future fiscal years to match the PMPM of certified school employees to maintain the financial stability of the plan
- In 2012, the state ended its contributions to the SHBP for non-certified employees
- The annual cost of SHBP coverage for each non-certified staff member will be **\$23,220** in FY27, an amount that exceeds the salary of some non-certified staff.
- A district with 100 non-certified staff spent an estimated \$261,600 in FY 2011 for SHBP coverage for these employees. That amount will climb to \$2,322,000 in FY 2027.

# FY27 District Budget Challenge: Declining Enrollment



**21,041** fewer students in Georgia public schools over the last 5 years

- Enrollment March 2021 FTE Count = **1,723,127**
- Enrollment March 2025 FTE Count = **1,736,730**
- Enrollment March 2026 FTE Count = **1,702,086**
- Contributing Factors = Private schools, homeschooling, vouchers & declining birth rates

# Impacts of South Georgia Wildfires



Wildfire Conditions = Hurricane Helene Debris Buildup, Dry Air & Drought

- The Highway 82 Fire began on April 18, and the Pineland Road Fire began days later, burning >55,000 acres combined & destroying 120+ homes
  - As of May 6, Brantley Highway 82 Fire = 85% contained; Estimated Cost = \$7M
  - As of May 6, Clinch/Echols Pineland Road Fire = 65% contained; Estimated Cost = \$13.6M
- Governor Kemp's State of Emergency for Georgia Wildfires remains in effect for the 17 Affected Counties: Appling, Atkinson, Bacon, Berrien, Brantley, Camden, Charlton, Clinch, Coffee, Echols, Glynn, Jeff Davis, Lanier, Lowndes, Pierce, Ware & Wayne
- Georgia Forestry Foundation launching Forest Wildfire Fund

# 2026 Legislative Session:

## Top K-12 Education Issues



- Property Taxes (SB 33, SB 382, HB 1116 & HR 1114)
- Financial Management & Accountability (HB 1164 & SB 472)
- Literacy (HB 1193)
- Advanced Math (HB 1030)
- Cell Phones in Schools (HB 1009)
- Voucher Expansion (HB 328 & SB 446)
- Chronic Absenteeism (SB 513)

**\*Note: The Governor's signing/veto period ends on May 12.**

# 2026 Legislative Session: Property Taxes (Failed)



- HB 1116 by Representative Shaw Blackmon would have capped property taxes at the greater of either 3% or CPI with exceptions for emergencies and economic growth.
  - Required a local referendum to increase the millage rate above the cap
  - Added an LHOST for cities and counties to use by converting a 1% sales tax to be implemented next year
    - Status: *The bill failed on the Senate floor with a vote of 24-28.*
- HR 1114 by Representative Shaw Blackmon would have reduced assessable taxable value on homestead property by 75 percent.
  - The reduction would have gone from 40% to 10% in value by 3% increments over the course of 10 years.
  - Provided a 100% exemption for veterans who are 100% disabled
  - Established a state grant program for local governments and allowed taxes from data centers to fund the grants
  - Addressed a transfer of sales tax for schools, established a Local Homestead Option Sales Tax, and included the ballot language
  - All base year exemptions would have applied.
    - Status: *The resolution failed with a vote of 99-73 as it required a two-thirds majority to pass.*

# 2026 Legislative Session: Property Taxes (Cont.)



- SB 382 by Senator Chuck Hufstetler would have allowed a FLOST to be used for homestead relief for cities and counties, but not schools.
  - Cut homestead property tax in half in the next five years
  - Mandated all governments into HB 581 from the 2024 legislative session by capping property taxes at the greater of 3% or CPI (rate of U.S. inflation)
  - Required a referendum to raise the millage rate above the cap and included a non-binding ballot question about property tax elimination
    - Status: *The bill passed the Senate in a different form with a vote of 31-19 but did not come up for a vote on the House floor.*
- SB 33/Georgia Hemp Farming Act by Senator Kay Kirkpatrick was stripped on the floor to add language to cap property taxes.
  - Opts all local governments into HB 581 from the 2024 legislative session, which requires a cap of 3% or inflation on assessments
  - Allows local exemptions to count toward the digest for the 5-mill share calculation
  - Increases the reserve cap for schools from 15% of the budget to 25% of the budget
  - Does not include a referendum to increase the millage

# 2026 Legislative Session: Financial Management



- SB 472 by Senator Billy Hickman allows local board members to be suspended and superintendents to be fired for cause following certain high-risk audit findings or findings by the state auditor of financial mismanagement or misconduct
  - Like HB 1164, limits superintendent contract renewals to one year when a school district is designated high risk
  - Places a 50% cap on the total amount of advance distributions of state-allocated funds that may be made by the State Board of Education to local districts
  - Creates fiscal intervention plans and designates the state auditor as the authority for intervention plans
  - Includes language to lower the required petition threshold from one-fourth to 10 percent of qualified voters when seeking a referendum to dissolve a city school system and join a county school system

# 2026 Legislative Session: Financial Management (Cont.)



- HB 1164 by Representative Will Wade requires the State Board of Education to establish an audit committee that meets at least six times annually with DOAA and State Charter Commission representatives present.
  - Mandates annual audits for all school systems and state charter schools
  - Requires superintendents, chief financial officers, and school board chairs to certify that payments to the State Health Benefits Plan, the Teachers Retirement System of Georgia, the Georgia Public School Employees Retirement System, and the Department of Labor are current
  - The Department of Audits and Accounts (DOAA) must implement a progress monitoring and intervention program for local school systems and state charter schools, including a four-tier risk assessment model.
  - Tier 1 is for “fiscally sound,” Tier 2 is for “fiscal watch,” Tier 3 is for “fiscal distress,” and Tier 4 is for “critical fiscal emergency.”
  - For school districts designated as Tier 3 or 4 and therefore considered “high risk,” superintendent contract extensions are limited to one year.
  - The State Board may amend or revoke flexibility contracts under the progress monitoring and intervention program.
  - Third-party auditors may be used, but they must follow standards and submit audits to DOAA.

# 2026 Legislative Session: Literacy (Signed)



- HB 1193/Georgia Literacy Act of 2026 by Representative Chris Erwin
  - Calls for literacy coaches at every K-3 elementary school
  - RESA-level coaches will provide oversight and coaching to school-based literacy coaches.
  - High-quality instructional materials (HQIM) will be recommended by the Literacy Task Force, and then the State Board of Education will approve HQIM recommendations.
  - Only HQIM aligned with the Science of Reading can be purchased with state funds.
  - Establishes a Georgia Literacy Director for oversight.
  - The Georgia Council on Literacy will sunset at the end of this year.
  - School districts must offer full-day kindergarten programs.
  - Students must attend kindergarten or be deemed ready before enrolling in first grade.

# 2026 Legislative Session: Advanced Math (Signed)



- HB 1030/Math Matters Act by Representative Sandy Donatucci incorporates SB 171 regarding advanced math pathways.
  - Requires the State Board of Education to adopt content standards for advanced middle and high school math courses and directs local education agencies to establish those courses for academically ready students
  - Requires the Professional Standards Commission to ensure teacher preparation programs equip candidates with the skills to teach math across the four strands of mathematical proficiency, which include conceptual understanding, procedural fluency, real-world problem solving, and productive disposition
  - Beginning in the 2027–2028 school year, the bill mandates at least 60 minutes of daily core math instruction for fourth- and fifth-grade students.
  - The State Board will adopt advanced math content standards for grades 8-10.
  - The Georgia Department of Education is charged with assisting districts that do not have advanced math.
  - Local districts must allow students categorized as “distinguished learners” on the statewide end-of-grade or end-of-course math assessment in grades 6-10 to be automatically enrolled in advanced math.
  - Districts must establish a procedure to allow a parent or guardian to opt out of automatic enrollment.
  - Local districts must provide information about advanced math courses to the parents or guardians of students who score “distinguished” or “proficient.”
  - Cannot be waived

# 2026 Legislative Session: Cell Phones Grades 9-12 (Signed)



- HB 1009 by Representative Scott Hilton expands the bell-to-bell personal electronic device ban to grades 9-12.
  - Allows exceptions for dual enrollment, work-based learning, apprenticeship programs, and students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), Section 504 Plans, or medical plans that mandate cell phone use and e-readers
  - Implementation will occur during the 2027-2028 school year.

# 2026 Legislative Session: Voucher Expansion (Passed)



- HB 328, a voucher bill, by Representative Kasey Carpenter was amended by the House to include several bills.
  - Increases the cap for tax credits for donations to Student Scholarship Organizations from \$120 million to \$150 million
  - Includes language from HB 1220 by Representative Bethany Ballard, which waives the six-week requirement and raises the scholarship cap for military-connected students, students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or Section 504 Plans, and students diagnosed with dyslexia, autism spectrum disorder, speech-language delays or disorders, hearing loss, or other developmental disabilities to participate in student scholarship organizations (SSOs)
  - Includes HB 1259 by Representative Matt Dubnik, which prohibits virtual school programs from enrolling out-of-system students unless the local school system or virtual school has maintained an average score of at least 65 on the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) over the previous two school years
  - Increases the cap for the Peach State Tax Credit to \$25 million
  - Includes language about free and reduced fares for public transit and prohibits Transit SPLOST elections eight years after a failed vote

# 2026 Legislative Session: Voucher Expansion (Did Not Pass)



- SB 446 by Senator Clint Dixon related to student scholarship organizations by providing for Georgia to participate in the federal tax credit program for contributions of individuals to scholarship-granting organizations.
  - Governor Kemp has already opted Georgia into the federal program via executive order, but this would codify participation in law so that participation would not have to be reinstated every year
  - Included language from HB 1135 by Representative Scott Hilton to align with federal law and to allow public school students to participate
  - Did not receive a vote on the House floor

# 2026 Legislative Session:

## Foster Enrollment & Maternal Leave



- SB 431 by Senator Kay Kirkpatrick requires foster care students to be enrolled in a school within three school business days, as defined in the bill, following the receipt of a completed enrollment registration form from the student's parent or legal custodian.
  - Students cannot be enrolled in virtual school simply because a school district is waiting to receive a student's critical records.
- HB 1118 by Representative Sandy Donatucci provides 120 hours of maternal birth leave to eligible employees who work for the executive, legislative, or judicial branch of the state government, or a local education agency.
  - Creates a new category of leave for birth mothers called "maternal birth leave" and must be used in the first three weeks after giving birth
  - Employees must have been employed for six months to be allowed to use this leave.
  - Signed by Governor Kemp

# 2026 Legislative Session: Personal Leave (Signed)



- SB 148 by Senator Bo Hatchett includes language from four bills.
  - Creates a pilot program for outdoor learning spaces and requires an evaluation of and a report on the pilot program
  - Increases the maximum number of accumulated sick leave days from 3 to 5 days that teachers and other school personnel may take each school year for personal or professional reasons (SB 412 & the original language from HB 127)
  - Removes the requirement of a licensed physician to sign off on the maintenance of AEDs for schools (HB 629)
  - Authorizes local school boards to provide hunting safety courses in grades 6-12 (HB 451)

# 2026 Legislative Session: Charters (Passed)



- SB 369, referred to as the “U.S.S. Charter Schools,” by Senator Shawn Still originally only pertained to dropout recovery charter schools by establishing a new definition for dropout recovery charter schools in the Georgia code, allowing these schools to apply for local approval, and requiring the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) to separately report on the performance of these schools.
  - Includes Representative Robert Fluornoy’s language from HB 1218 to allow virtual school students in grades 6-12 to participate in extracurricular and interscholastic activities.
  - Includes HB 1206 by Representative Todd Jones, which requires local boards of education to consider the total costs of purchasing electronic devices, including maintenance, installation, and resale or salvage value of technology
  - Includes language from HB 1257 by Representative Carmen Rice to amend SB 82 from the 2025 session regarding incentive grants for local charter approvals, charter school governing boards, petitions for local and state charter approval, and student record retention.
  - The State Board of Education will establish the definitions, rules, regulations, policies, and procedures to govern the operation of nontraditional education programs and services.

# 2026 Legislative Session: Charters (Did Not Pass)



- Senator Clint Dixon amended SB 10, a bill originally concerning superior court judges, by stripping it to include language from HB 1308 by Representative Deborah Silcox.
  - Provided for local and state charter schools and charter school petitioners to have the right to lease, utilize, or buy facilities that have been unused by a local board of education for the previous two school years
  - Gave the first offer and the first right of refusal to charter schools
  - The House did not agree to the Senate's changes
- SB 475 by Senator RaShaun Kemp would have required local boards of education to treat local charter schools no less favorably than other local schools in terms of dispensing special purpose local option sales tax (ESPLOST) proceeds.

# 2026 Legislative Session: “Return to Work” (Signed)



- SB 150 by Senator Billy Hickman regarding “Return to Work” allows retired educators who retired after 30 years or more to sit out of the classroom for one year and then return to teach in high-needs areas, which include math, special education, science, CTAE, and reading, writing, or English language arts with a dyslexia or reading endorsement.
  - Three areas of highest need will be determined based on unfilled positions for classroom teachers in a public school system.
  - If an educator’s subject area is no longer considered an area of highest need, the school system can still retain the educator.
  - Requires the state auditor to conduct and publish a performance audit by July 1, 2029 and extends the sunset to June 30, 2030

# 2026 Legislative Session: School Zone Cameras



- HB 651 by Representative Alan Powell relates to speed cameras in school zones.
  - The Senate language requires a local referendum by a city or county (with school districts as co-applicants) to deploy speed cameras in school zones.
  - If the local referendum passes, cameras can be used for up to six years before holding another referendum.
  - Allows counties and cities that already have cameras to continue using them until contracts expire, and then a referendum is required

# 2026 Legislative Session: Roofing Improvements (Signed)



- SB 284 by Senator Larry Walker concerns the Commissioner of Securities and retrieving money from those who commit fraud and returning it to victims.
  - Includes language from HB 669 by Representative Steven Meeks to allow schools to receive low-wealth capital outlay funds through cooperatives for roofing improvement projects

# 2026 Legislative Session: Sovereign Immunity



- HB 295 provides procedures for real property owners to make claims for compensation from counties and cities for loss of property value or expenses incurred due to the local government's failure to comply with or non-enforcement of certain laws, ordinances, and resolutions, or due to the local government maintaining a public nuisance.
  - Amended on the Senate floor to add language from SB 21, which waives sovereign and governmental immunity for local governments, including school districts, that violate the prohibition on immigration “sanctuary” policies
  - Amended on the House floor to “ensure” that an individual in a sanctuary jurisdiction can seek a mandamus action in court

# 2026 Legislative Session: Chronic Absenteeism (Failed)



- SB 513/Every Day Counts Act by Senator Jason Dickerson would have revised state law governing student attendance and defined “chronically unexcused student.”
  - Required public schools to implement a multi-tiered framework for supports and incentives and attendance intervention plans approved by an attendance review team for chronically unexcused students
  - Updated provisions related to attendance review teams at the school-level and district-level
  - Established consequences for a chronically absent student with unexcused absences
  - A chronically unexcused student would have been ineligible to participate in extracurricular or interscholastic activities until the student and the parent or guardian meet with the attendance review team and enter an attendance intervention plan.
  - If a student is chronically unexcused and noncompliant with an attendance intervention plan, a new permit or driver’s license may not be issued for students who are 15 to 17 years old until they comply with an attendance intervention plan.
  - Status: *The bill failed on the House floor with a vote of 80-90.*

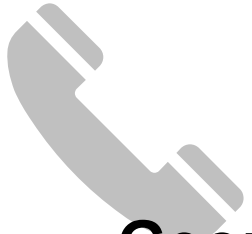
# 2026 Legislative Session:

## Weapons Detection (Did Not Pass)



- HB 1023 by Representative Chuck Efstration would have required weapons detection measures at school building points of entry for student use.
  - Applied to permanent buildings but not emergency exits
  - Allowed measures to include electronic, analytical, visual, olfactory, or means to detect weapons
  - Implementation by January 1, 2028

# Questions?



## Contact Us

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