2019 SESSION: EDUCATION BUDGET AND LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

K-12 TEACHER AND SCHOOL EMPLOYEE PAY RAISES

- HB 31, the FY 2020 Budget, includes a $3,000 pay raise for certified teachers and certified personnel, including counselors, social workers, psychologists, special education specialists, speech and language pathologists, media specialists and technology specialists starting July 1, 2019. The pay raise maintains one state salary schedule for certified teachers and certified employees, as stated in Georgia Code.

- The $3,000 pay raise is reflected in all Department of Education programs where funds for certified teachers and certified employees are earned on the state salary schedule, including $522.1 million for the Quality Basic Education (QBE) Program and $7.7 million for programs outside of QBE, specifically Georgia Network for Educational and Therapeutic Supports (GNETS), Preschool Disabilities Services, Residential Treatment Facilities, State Schools, and Extended Day and Extended Year programs in agriculture and technology/career education.

- The FY 2020 budget also includes $2.8 million to provide bus drivers, lunch room workers, and school nurses with a 2% pay raise.

FUNDING FORMULA ADJUSTMENTS

- HB 31 reflects the second year that the Quality Basic Education (QBE) formula has been fully funded at $9.5 billion, bringing the total spent on K-12 education to 42% of the state general funds budget.

- The FY 2020 budget provides the Department of Education with $133.7 million for enrollment growth and training and experience. The majority of funding is for training and experience, reflecting 2,063 new teachers and corresponding health insurance costs. The budget also includes $47.8 million for growth in charter system grants and State Commission Charter School supplements.

- Funds for equalization grants are also increased in the FY 2020 budget by $78.6 million, bringing the total amount of funding to $694 million. In the bond package, $284 million in new bonds is provided for local school construction, renovations and additions statewide.
• HB 31 reflects formula adjustments in other DOE programs. Sparsity grants receive an additional $968,634 based on enrollment decline in eligible schools. Schools that receive sparsity grants do not have enough students enrolled to earn funds through the QBE formula to provide for the basic educational costs. Also, the budget provides the 16 Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs) with an additional $413,000 to their base grant to reduce austerity and reflect the important support they provide local school systems, especially in rural areas of the state.

• HB 527 (Rep. Robert Dickey) amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-161, relating to the Quality Basic Education Formula, by updating the weights of instructional programs to reflect actual weights used in the FY 2020 QBE funding formula.

SCHOOL SAFETY AND SECURITY

• The safety and well-being of children at school and state facilities was a priority in the AFY 2019 and FY 2020 budgets. HB 30, the Amended FY 2019 budget, includes $69.4 million to provide school security grants of $30,000 each for 2,314 school facilities including charter schools, college and career academies, GNETS facilities, and the three state schools.

• A recommendation of the 2018 House School Security Study Committee was to ensure adequate security at facilities owned by the state and frequented by students. The Amended FY 2019 budget includes $38,860 to provide security through local law enforcement for the state FFA-FCCLA Center in Covington and Camp John Hope in Fort Valley when students are present. Additionally, HB 30 includes $1 million for the Georgia School for the Blind and the Georgia School for the Deaf to purchase generators to help ensure the safety and well-being of residential students during inclement weather.

• The FY 2020 budget adds $83,462 to contract with local law enforcement to provide security at the two youth camps when students are present and $1.2 million in bonds for infrastructure improvements at the camps, including cameras, fencing, and gates. The state’s five 4-H Centers receive $150,000 in bonds for security improvements and $747,600 to contract with local law enforcement to provide security when students are present. Lastly, Georgia Military College receives $213,810 for security camera and notification system improvements.

• Another recommendation of the 2018 House School Security Study Committee highlighted the need for school safety threat assessment trainers to work with local school systems to develop threat assessment plans. The final version of the FY 2020 budget includes $274,920 within the Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency (GEMA) to hire three trainers.

• HB 12 (Rep. Ricky Williams, 145th) creates O.C.G.A. 20-2-324.4, which is a new Code section requiring the posting of signs that contain the toll-free number to report incidents of child abuse in a visible, public area of a school.

• SB 15 (Sen. John Albers, 56th) (VETOED) creates the 'Keeping Georgia's Schools Safe Act'. The act requires public schools to conduct site threat assessments by a certified private individual or
company or by a government agency. Every public school must conduct a site threat assessment before January 1, 2021 and every five years thereafter. Every public school must submit a school safety plan to the Department of Education after the local law enforcement agency has approved the plan. The Department of Education will post a list of which schools have submitted a school safety plan and which schools have yet to meet this requirement. Additionally, SB 15 streamlines communication efforts between schools and relevant state intelligence agencies by designating a single individual at each school as the school safety coordinator. The bill requires schools to use and promote a statewide mobile application, the ‘See Something Send Something’ anonymous app, to report suspicious activity or potential threats.

**AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND TECHNOLOGY/CAREER EDUCATION**

- HB 31 includes $299,216 in the Agriculture Education Program to provide for staff and operations at Camp John Hope in Fort Valley and the Georgia FFA/FFLA Center in Covington. HB 31 includes $205,000 to fully fund the Agriculture Education Extended Day and Extended Year program.
- The budget for the Technology/Career Education Program includes $220,000 for high school industry certification in construction in collaboration with the Construction Education Foundation of Georgia; $250,000 for cyber security initiatives in high schools across the state; and $323,000 for life science industry certification in rural school districts through a collaboration with Georgia Youth Science and Technology Centers.
- The final version of the budget includes $12.2 million in bonds to purchase vocational equipment; $2 million to purchase agriculture education equipment; and $250,000 in bonds for equipment for construction industry certification programs.

**CHARTER SCHOOLS, SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT, AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

- HB 31 includes an additional $2 million, combined with $1.5 million in existing funds, to provide facilities grants for local charter schools of up to $100,000 per school pursuant to HB 430 (2017 Session).
- The General Assembly provides Communities in Schools with an additional $200,000 for wraparound support for dropout prevention in new schools. The School Improvement program receives $1 million for additional high school counselors and enriching all counselor programs at Title I schools.
- The Governor’s Office of Student Achievement receives $250,000 for 50 additional participants in the Governor’s School Leadership Academy in FY 2020, bringing the total program cost to $1.75 million.
• The Curriculum Development Program in the Department of Education includes $750,000 for grants for professional development programs for teachers providing instruction in computer science courses and content per SB 108 (2019 Session) as well as $100,000 for a pilot program to demonstrate and evaluate the effectiveness of early reading assistance programs for students with risk factors for dyslexia per SB 48 (2019 Session).

• HB 52 (Rep. John Corbett, 174th) encourages all schools, local educational agencies, and the Georgia Department of Education to recognize the profound educational impact students with dyslexia experience and work toward early diagnosis and implementation of remedial interventions for dyslexic students.

• SB 48 (Sen. P.K. Martin, 9th) instructs the State Board of Education to develop policies for referring students in kindergarten and grades one through three for screening who have been identified as having dyslexia characteristics or other disorders. SB 48 also requires the Georgia Department of Education to implement guidance and training in all schools regarding the teaching of students with dyslexia and requires that all schools submit data to the department regarding students with dyslexia. Additionally, the bill requires the Professional Standards Commission to create a dyslexia endorsement for teachers and require dyslexia instruction in teacher preparation programs. The state school superintendent will establish a three-year pilot program. After the pilot program is concluded, the state school superintendent will make recommendations regarding the identification of and interventions for students with characteristics of dyslexia to the House Education Committee and the Senate Committee on Education and Youth.

• SB 108 (Sen. P.K. Martin, 9th) requires all public high schools to offer a course in computer science by the 2024-2025 school year. SB 108 outlines a phase-in schedule, lays out the requirements for charter and middle schools, and allows the General Assembly to offer grants for the professional development of teachers who wish to teach computer science courses. Courses may be taught by a teacher trained in computer science instruction or through a proctored virtual course offered by the Georgia Virtual School.

PUPIL TRANSPORTATION

• HB 31 includes $818,906 in additional funds for pupil transportation based on student growth. The budget also includes $20 million in the bond package for school bus replacement and $1.815 million to incentivize the purchase of alternative fuel school buses.

• SB 25 (Sen. Bill Heath, 31st) requires drivers to stop for a stopped school bus on a highway unless the highway is separated by a grass median, unpaved area, or physical barrier.

STUDENT HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
• The Amended FY 2019 budget includes $8.4 million in the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities to expand the Georgia Apex Program by providing support counselors for mental health services in high schools. The program will now serve all high schools in Georgia.

• The General Assembly provides full funding for school nurses in addition to $1 million for grants to schools to provide feminine hygiene products for low-income students.

• HB 83 (Rep. Demetrius Douglas, 78th) (VETOED) amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-323 to require local boards of education to provide recess, an average of 30 minutes per day, for kindergarten and grades one through five beginning in the 2019-2020 school year. Recess is not required on any school day a student has physical education, structured activity time, or any day when reasonable circumstances may impede recess. Local boards of education will establish policies to ensure recess is safe, scheduled in a manner that allows a break from academic learning, and prohibits recess from being withheld from students as a form of punishment.

• SB 60 (Sen. P.K. Martin, 9th) creates the 'Jeremy Nelson and Nick Blakely Sudden Cardiac Arrest Prevention Act'. This act requires the Department of Education to develop and publish guidelines relating to cardiac arrest. A student who faints or passes out during or immediately after participating in an interscholastic athletic activity will be removed from participation by the athletic director, coach, or trainer. If a student exhibits any of the other warning signs for cardiac arrest, that student may be removed immediately if the athletic trainer reasonably believes the symptoms are cardiac related.
In the absence of an athletic trainer, coaches who observe any symptoms must notify the parents or guardians of the student so the parent or guardian can determine what treatment, if any, is necessary. A student who is removed from participation after exhibiting a symptom of cardiac arrest will not be allowed to return to play without a written release by a health care provider. A coach must review the guidelines and materials each school year and is not allowed to coach until the requirements of this act are completed.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

• The Department of Early Care and Learning receives $500,000 enhancement for the Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program to provide assistance to low-income families for the cost of childcare and encourage quality-rated programs. This will serve an estimated additional 125 low-income families with childcare.

• The FY 2020 budget includes $15 million in lottery funds for the $3,000 pay raise for certified teachers and $1.5 million for a 2% salary increase for assistant teachers in Georgia’s Pre-Kindergarten Program.

OTHER EDUCATION LEGISLATION
HB 59 (Rep. Dave Belton, 112th) amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-150 to allow parents or guardians on active duty in the military to pre-enroll a student when official military orders to transfer into or within the state of Georgia are received. Students will be eligible to enroll in the same manner and time as students residing within the local school system, in the public school of the attendance zone in which he or she will be residing, or in a public school in a school system in which the military base or off-base military housing is located. House Bill 59 amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-2066 relating to the admissions requirements of start-up charter schools to clarify that a student must reside in the attendance zone specified in the charter at the time of enrollment. HB 59 amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-2081 relating to state charter schools by clarifying the definition of attendance zone. House Bill 59 allows state charter schools with a state-wide attendance zone the ability for board members to meet through teleconference as allowed under Chapter 14 of Title 50.

HB 68 (Rep. John Carson, 46th) amends O.C.G.A. 20-2A-2.1 by limiting the type of entity which can be a student scholarship organization. No entity which provides accreditation of elementary or secondary schools or is affiliated with an accreditation entity is eligible to be a student scholarship organization under this Code section.

HB 130 (Rep. Randy Nix, 69th) amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-14.1 as it relates to the 'Georgia Foundation for Public Education' to authorize the foundation to establish a non-profit under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. The creation of a nonprofit would allow the foundation to solicit and accept more funding to carry out its purpose for supporting educational excellence in public schools and at the Georgia Academy for the Blind, Georgia School for the Deaf, and Atlanta Area School for the Deaf.

SB 83 (Sen. Jeff Mullis, 53rd) amends O.C.G.A. 20-2-148 by expanding curriculum provisions to allow high schools to provide elective courses on the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. Also, Senate Bill 83 codifies the 'Realizing Education Achievement Can Happen (REACH) Scholarship Act'. The REACH scholarship is a needs-based mentoring and scholarship program established to provide support to students to ensure graduation from high-school and postsecondary educational success. The legislation further defines the student's eligibility, school requirements, and commitment requirements by all parties to the REACH Scholarship program.