

GSBA RURAL TASK FORCE REPORT

HOUSE RURAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

AUGUST 20, 2019

CHATTAHOOCHEE TECHNICAL COLLEGE

44 MEMBERS ACROSS THE STATE

- 30 School Board Members
- 14 Superintendents
- All Volunteered
- Split into North and South
- Worked with National Rural Education Association and Dr. Mara Tieken, author of *Why Rural Schools Matter*, Associate Professor of Education Bates College, Georgia Department of Education, Department of Early Care and Learning, Atlanta Regional Commission

TASK FORCE GOALS

- Identify ways for GSBA to support rural districts' efforts to meet their challenges and take advantage of their opportunities.
- Identify educational challenges that need to be addressed through cross-sector collaboration.
- Improve the understanding of public education advocates statewide on issues/challenges impacting rural school systems.
- Develop methods for information sharing with the public and across public school systems.
- Develop an ongoing discussion with state legislators and key decision-makers for public education policy and public policy.
- Explore ways to promote investment in rural communities.

CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED AND RANKED

SOUTH GEORGIA

- Poverty; Economic Development
- Funding; Teacher Recruitment and Retention
- Transportation; Technology
- Early Learning; Healthcare

NORTH GEORGIA

- Funding
- Early Learning; Technology
- Teacher Recruitment and Retention; Healthcare
- No priority votes for Transportation or Economic Development

POVERTY VS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

POVERTY

- Opportunity gap – lack of literacy and numeracy at start of school
- Lack of opportunities to “catch up” and stay caught up
- Generational issues – poor parenting habits, teen pregnancies, little urgency around education

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Students and workforce – Graduation requirements, lack of consistency in agencies, time for soft skills, global skills vs local opportunities
- Losing the best with no jobs to come back to as professionals
- Helping people understand why it is important (they like their location as is)

TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION: ISSUES

- Equity in being able to attract teachers, especially Special Education and STEM
- Quality of life, need things to do
- Amount of turnover seemed to depend on geographic location, whether they pay Social Security, lack of a place for the spouse to work

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support teaching as a high demand workforce initiative
- Pilot a marketing specialist from the Department of Economic Development to work with district on promotional package of area to attract teachers
- Allow retired teachers to return to the classroom in rural areas without impact to retirement, particularly subjects with a teacher shortage
- Explore a fast track for paraprofessionals to obtain teaching certificate while working

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Assistance with setting up a “Grow Your Own” program
- Pilot for financial incentives targeted to special education and STEM teachers to test viability and effectiveness
- Mentor program
- Districts partner with HBCUs and Latino organizations to build teacher pipeline and mentors
- Develop marketing campaign with higher education to showcase the profession, provide support and guidance needed to succeed

FUNDING: ISSUES

- Out of date formula
 - \$150 to cover 8 days sick leave, same as 1985
 - Counselors funded at 1:450, needs and duties increasing
 - No weight for poverty

FUNDING: ISSUES

- Transportation
 - Mileage and terrain shorten bus lifespan
 - Finding school bus drivers
 - Impact of opioid crisis
- Healthcare costs for non-certified personnel
 - Currently \$11,340 per year

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Phase in an increase for sick leave to mirror current costs or by rate of inflation – 2018 would bring it to \$350 for 8 days
- Update and fund pupil transportation formula to take into account variable costs
- State partially fund insurance for non-certified employees
- Continue to explore less expensive ways to provide this benefit

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Research costs and grants for wi-fi on some buses for student use on long commutes and creating community hotspots
- Phase in an increase to bring counselor ratio to national recommendation 1:250
- Add a QBE weight for poverty and prioritize funding for rural areas

EARLY LEARNING: ISSUES

- Access
 - PreK cap
 - Funding for PreK space
 - Transportation funding
- Beginning parental involvement
- Lack of aligned curriculum in PreK and child care centers with kindergarten
- Ability to provide mobile learning for early learning support
- No state mandate for early learning

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Districts work with private early learning providers on shared professional development
- Require early learning centers receiving state funding to align curriculum so students are prepared for kindergarten
- Additional funding for transportation and space for PreK

HEALTHCARE: ISSUES

- Access to health services
 - Transportation
- Few healthcare professionals in area
- Keeping rural hospitals open
- Increasing costs of insurance

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Districts explore use of telemedicine with city and county governments, seek USDA grants
- Explore and/or partner with healthcare profession to recruit and retain personnel to provide access to care for students and adults
- Funding for low cost or subsidized transportation to healthcare facilities that are not easily accessible
- Increase awareness of rural hospital tax credit and prioritize receiving hospitals if not designated on contribution

CONTACT INFORMATION

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