

Georgia's education funding formula: It's complicated

by Rebecca Grapevine | Feb 10, 2023 | Capitol Beat News Service



Students from the Georgia Youth Justice Coalition outside the state Capitol. (Photo courtesy Georgia Youth Justice Coalition)

ATLANTA – The General Assembly is unlikely to change Georgia's education funding formula this session, legislators have told Capitol Beat.

A state Senate study committee chaired by Sen. Mike Dugan, R-Carrollton, met several times last fall to consider changes to the state's complicated education

funding method, which was established in 1985. The formula provides funds to local school districts based on how many students are enrolled, using a host of additional factors to determine amounts.

After listening to testimony from educators, experts and others from across the state, Dugan said he has identified four priority areas he'd like to see updated in the funding formula. The formula should be changed to provide for more school counselors and psychologists, add funding for technology and create a mechanism to provide additional funding for schools serving students living in poverty, he said.

Dugan said legislators will likely introduce bills aimed at these areas later this session, but he does not expect the General Assembly to fully debate or vote on the bills until 2024.

"I'd rather not be haphazard with something that affects the lives of so many," Dugan said. "Once it hits, it's going to suck a lot of air out of the room."

A plan to create a "poverty index" or "opportunity weight" to help school districts address the additional challenges of educating students in poverty has drawn support from across the political spectrum. But it's not yet clear what shape Georgia's opportunity weight will take.

"The poverty weight is a compelling necessity," said state Sen. Nan Orrock, D-Atlanta, who was the sole Democrat on the Senate study committee. "We heard testimony from a number of sources ... that we are in a big minority [among states] in not having that opportunity funding."

Orrock noted that with a record budget surplus, there is plenty of funding for the state's education system.

"Georgia already devotes money to trying to improve outcomes for students who live in poverty, but it isn't as direct or clear as it might be," said Kyle Wingfield, president of the Georgia Public Policy Foundation, a think tank that advocates free-market approaches to public policy. "It would be a good idea for the state, under a student-centered budgeting reform, to fund low-income students in a direct way."

“But absent a broader reform, lawmakers may be asked simply to increase funding overall without much of a plan or explanation for how that is going to improve outcomes for those students.”

“We appreciate that the conversation has begun,” said Lisa Morgan, president of the Georgia Association of Educators. “The discussions of the resources needed by our students living in poverty, the need for more school counselors, psychologists and social workers [and] the relief educators need from administrative tasks must continue and move us toward actions to address these needs.”

One bill would, if passed, address the poverty weight this session. House Bill 3, sponsored by Rep. Sandra Scott, D-Rex, would provide an additional 25% in funding for each student living in poverty.

“In our opinion, it’s surgical and good stewardship, said David Schaeffer, vice president at the left-leaning Georgia Budget and Policy Institute. The bill has also drawn the support of the Georgia Youth Justice Coalition, a group of high school and college students from across the state.

However, it’s unlikely that the Democratic-sponsored bill will garner sufficient support to pass in a Republican-controlled legislature.

Another funding challenge school districts will soon face is a dramatic increase in the cost of employee health insurance. That’s because the State Health Benefit Plan (SHBP) has increased the cost of health insurance for each employee from \$945 to \$1,580 per month, about a 67% increase.

The state will pick up that tab for certified school employees, including teachers, administrators, counselors and media specialists. But local districts themselves typically cover that cost for non-certified, or classified, employees, including custodians, bus drivers and school nutrition workers. There are about 96,000 such workers across Georgia.

The dramatic increase, which is set to start in 2024, would pose a heavy burden for local school districts, Schaeffer said.

To help them cope with the increase, the state House of Representatives’ budget proposal includes a three-year phase-in, in which the state would help

cover the increase for the first three years.

There are some bright spots for teachers and students coming out of this year's budget. The state is fully funding the existing education formula.

"That's good news," Schaeffer said, noting the full funding will help schools maintain their buildings and attract and retain teachers.

The fiscal 2024 budget also includes \$27 million to provide one counselor for every 450 students. However, that would still mean Georgia has a lower-than-recommended student-to-counselor ratio. The proposed budget also includes an additional \$5.9 million for student transportation costs and \$23 million in bond funding to buy school buses.

Gov. Brian Kemp has also proposed \$2,000 pay raises for state employees, including teachers, which is likely to be approved. The increase would take effect in September and comes after a \$2,000 raise last year.

This story is available through a news partnership with Capitol Beat News Service, a project of the Georgia Press Educational Foundation.

<input type="text"/>	Search
----------------------	--------

Recent Posts

Georgia's education funding formula: It's complicated

CON reform bill looks to exempt rural hospitals

Rising sales, corporate taxes in Georgia mask drop in income taxes

New bill takes aim at gender-affirming care for transgender youth

Legislative committee approves raising truck weights in Georgia after lengthy hearing

Archives

- [February 2023](#)
- [January 2023](#)
- [December 2022](#)
- [November 2022](#)
- [October 2022](#)
- [September 2022](#)
- [August 2022](#)
- [July 2022](#)
- [June 2022](#)
- [May 2022](#)
- [April 2022](#)
- [March 2022](#)
- [February 2022](#)
- [January 2022](#)
- [December 2021](#)
- [November 2021](#)
- [October 2021](#)
- [September 2021](#)
- [August 2021](#)
- [July 2021](#)
- [June 2021](#)
- [May 2021](#)
- [April 2021](#)
- [March 2021](#)
- [February 2021](#)

Categories

- [Capitol Beat News Service](#)
- [Elections](#)
- [Governor](#)
- [State Politics](#)

Meta

- [Log in](#)
- [Entries feed](#)
- [Comments feed](#)
- [WordPress.org](#)

- January 2021
- December 2020
- November 2020
- October 2020
- September 2020
- August 2020
- July 2020
- June 2020
- May 2020
- April 2020
- March 2020
- February 2020
- January 2020
- December 2019

