



UNIVERSITY OF  
**GEORGIA**

Carl Vinson  
Institute of Government

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# Teacher Burnout in Georgia

## **Voices from the Classroom**

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Commissioned by The Georgia Department of Education  
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“If you want to address the burnout problem, the first step is repeating and internalizing this mantra: Burnout is about your organization, not your people.”

—Jennifer Moss, *The Burnout Epidemic*<sup>1</sup>





To all who pick up a copy of this report,

In my time as a teacher, school administrator, and now spending time in schools throughout Georgia as State School Superintendent, there's one thing I've learned to be true.

The most important thing you can provide in the classroom, if you want students to be successful, is an excellent teacher. That is where success happens – not through off-the-shelf programs or silver-bullet initiatives, not through high-stakes testing or rigid accountability, but through the efforts of our highly skilled and knowledgeable classroom teachers.

Unfortunately, we are at risk of losing many of these highly qualified educators if we do not take a careful look at the factors contributing to burnout in the profession.

This report contains the observations and recommendations of some of Georgia's top teachers, who brought their heart for the classroom and their dedication to students to every conversation reflected here. I want to thank each member of the task force – especially Cherie Bonder Goldman, our 2022 Georgia Teacher of the Year, who led this work and has been an incredible representative of Georgia's public schools.

I encourage policymakers, district and school leaders, community members, and parents to review these recommendations and consider how they can be enacted within their schools and communities.

We will do the same at the state level, continuing the work to support those who directly support students – our teachers.

Sincerely,



Richard Woods  
State School Superintendent





Policymakers, School Leaders, Community Members, and My Fellow Teachers:

Thank you for taking the time to read this report and hear the voices of teachers sharing their suggestions and experiences.

The data is clear, and I have seen it personally as a classroom teacher and in my role as Georgia Teacher of the Year: every year, Georgia is losing talented teachers to burnout. This is to the detriment of Georgia's students, whose success depends on having excellent, experienced teachers in the classroom.

The teachers I know don't *want* to walk away. Their motivation for becoming a teacher, their aspiration to make that dream come true, their heartfelt passion for making a difference in the lives of students – none of those things have changed. But too many of our teachers are running on empty.

We cannot change how we got here, but we can change how we go forward. In this report, you will hear the raw, insightful voices of classroom teachers from across the state. The actionable strategies and solutions they present will enable all stakeholders in education to meet the challenge of burnout head-on and create an educational environment where everyone thrives. I'm also hopeful this report will encourage schools and districts to perform their own reflective, intentional local analyses of the factors contributing to burnout and the solutions available.

I want to thank the participants in this task force for participating with such clarity and passion and State Superintendent Woods for welcoming them so openly and completely.

When we elevate and take care of our teachers, we elevate and take care of our students and communities. And that is what public education is all about.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cherie Goldman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Cherie Bonder Goldman  
2022 Georgia Teacher of the Year

# Task Force on Teacher Burnout in Georgia

A task force consisting of teachers from across Georgia was convened in the winter of 2022 to examine teacher burnout. Discussions were powerful and authentic. Teachers discussed factors contributing to teacher burnout, along with consequences for students, the teaching profession, teacher preparation, and the day-to-day operation of schools. The task force identified five key themes: assessment, preserving and protecting time, pressures and unrealistic expectations, teacher voice and professional growth, and mental health and wellness. Additionally, the task force members suggested specific strategies and solutions for directly addressing those themes.

This report provides a look inside the classroom, makes recommendations, and offers actionable steps for state and local leaders. The *Framework for Action* section of this report provides best practices and essential questions for selected recommendations and actions.

By identifying key factors and implementing recommended actions, Georgia can lead the nation in supporting its teachers and students.

## Background

In November 2015, the Georgia Professional Standards Commission released a status report, *The 2015 Georgia Public P-12 Teacher Workforce*. Among the report's findings was this disturbing statistic: The statewide cumulative attrition of new teacher hires from 2008 to 2015 was 44%.<sup>2</sup>

State School Superintendent Richard Woods and the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) sought to better understand teachers' perspectives on this unusually high attrition rate and conducted a survey of teachers across the state. Over 53,000 teachers responded to the survey, and in December 2015, GaDOE released its report: [Georgia's Teacher Dropout Crisis](#).

Compounding the deep concern raised by the attrition statistic, the GaDOE report revealed an equally troubling trend: 66.9% of teachers answered that they were "unlikely" or "very unlikely" to encourage high school graduates to pursue teaching. Only 2.7% of teachers were "very likely" to encourage their students to go into teaching.<sup>3</sup>

The report also outlined the top three factors that teachers identified as causing their colleagues to flee the profession: the number of and emphasis on mandated tests, the teacher evaluation method, and the level of teacher participation in decisions related to the profession.



## **ACTIONS TAKEN IN RESPONSE**

In response to the report, state leaders pursued a number of reforms to address the concerns teachers identified. Those actions include the following:

- Completing two rounds of legislation to reduce state-mandated high-stakes assessments (ultimately cutting the number of high school state-mandated tests in half and only requiring Georgia students to take federally mandated tests plus eighth-grade social studies and high school US history), eliminate Student Learning Objectives, reduce the number of observations for veteran teachers, and lower the weight of high-stakes testing in the teacher evaluation system (known as the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System, or TKES)
- Providing a \$5,000 pay raise for teachers (\$3,000 passed in fiscal year (FY) 2019 and \$2,000 passed for FY 2023). A one-time \$2,000 bonus was given in FY 2022.
- Using federal relief funding to provide an additional \$1,000 bonus to all teachers and support staff and to compensate teachers for money spent on classroom supplies
- Adding the Georgia Teacher of the Year as an ex-officio member of the State Board of Education

## **THE NEXT STEPS: ADDRESSING TEACHER BURNOUT**

While the actions above represent positive first steps, they cannot be the end of Georgia’s work to support teachers. Beginning in 2020, the teaching profession was placed under enormous pressure as a result of the pandemic, magnifying institutional issues already contributing to burnout.

A key finding from the 2022 PAGE Legislative Survey conducted by the Professional Association of Georgia Educators in the fall of 2021 found that of the 4,583 members who completed the survey, “approximately 31% of all responding educators report that they are unlikely or highly unlikely to remain in education for another five years.”<sup>4</sup>

Partnering with 2022 Georgia Teacher of the Year Cherie Bonder Goldman, Superintendent Woods organized a Task Force on Teacher Burnout. Chaired by Goldman and facilitated by the University of Georgia’s Carl Vinson Institute of Government, the task force included the top 10 Georgia Teacher of the Year finalists from the 2022 cohort, a representative from GaDOE, and classroom representatives from each of the state’s teacher organizations: Educators First, the Georgia Association of Educators, and the Professional Association of Georgia Educators. The group represented suburban, urban, and rural parts of the state; the elementary, middle, and high school levels; and multiple content areas and grade configurations.



## Members of the Task Force on Teacher Burnout

**Natasha Berry, M.Ed.**

Sallas Mahone Elementary School, Valdosta City Schools

**Tewanna Brown, Ed.S.**

Mount Zion Middle School, Carroll County Schools

**Rebecca Carlisle, Ed.S.**

North Gwinnett High School, Gwinnett County Public Schools

**Beth Foster, M.Ed.**

Educators First representative

**Shanika Nelson, Ed.S.**

Moreland Road Elementary School, Griffin-Spalding County Schools

**Cherie Bonder Goldman, Ed.S.**

Hesse K-8 School, Savannah–Chatham County Public Schools

**Nikki Hampton, M.Ed.**

W.L. Swain Elementary School, Gordon County Schools

**Daerzio Harris**

Professional Association of Georgia Educators representative

**Kimberley Hatcher, M.Ed.**

Georgia Department of Education representative

**Michelle Mickens, Ed.S.**

Washington-Wilkes Comprehensive High School, Wilkes County Schools

**Maggie Pruitt, M.Ed.**

Buford High School, Buford City Schools

**Jennifer Hawthorne Smith, M.Ed.**

Jeffersonville Elementary School, Twiggs County Schools

**Matt Taylor, M.Ed.**

Southwest Laurens Elementary School, Laurens County Schools

**Christie Turner, M.Ed.**

Georgia Association of Educators representative



# Proceedings of the Task Force on Teacher Burnout

## FEBRUARY 1, 2022 SESSION

Prior to the first meeting, task force members received research information, topics, and questions related to factors contributing to teacher burnout prepared by Institute of Government faculty.

After viewing presentations highlighting information about Georgia's teacher dropout crisis and recent efforts to support Georgia teachers, members of the task force broke into small groups to examine the following questions. Members were asked to identify the top three factors for each question and discuss how these factors could be minimized or eliminated.

- *What do you believe are factors contributing to teacher burnout in Georgia as the result of the pandemic?*
- *What do you believe are factors contributing to teacher burnout in Georgia as a result of policies and procedures initiated at the school level?*
- *What do you believe are factors contributing to teacher burnout in Georgia as a result of policies and procedures initiated at the school system level?*
- *What do you believe are factors contributing to teacher burnout in Georgia as a result of policies and procedures initiated at the state level?*

The small groups also discussed the following questions:

- *What are the consequences of teacher burnout for students?*
- *What are the consequences of teacher burnout for the teaching profession and teacher preparation?*
- *What are the consequences of teacher burnout for the day-to-day operation of schools?*

Finally, task force members considered the following questions during a whole-group discussion.

- *What is making you stay in education?*
- *If you are thinking of walking away from education, why?*
- *Would you encourage others to enter the profession of teaching?*  
*If yes, why?*  
*If no, why?*



## Themes and Threads from Questions

Five theme areas emerged from the small- and whole-group task force member discussions:

- Assessment
- Preserving and Protecting Time
- Pressures/Unrealistic Expectations
- Teacher Voice and Professional Growth
- Mental Health and Wellness

### **MARCH 14, 2022 SESSION**

After viewing presentations highlighting information about options for flexibility afforded to school systems, state and local governance processes, and the basics of funding K-12 public education in Georgia, members of the task force broke into small groups to examine the five theme areas that emerged during the February 1, 2022 meeting.

The small groups discussed recommendations and actionable suggestions for each of the five themes. Task force members also identified best practices and essential questions for the implementation of selected recommendations and actionable suggestions (indicated with an asterisk in the sections that follow). Those best practices and essential questions are provided in the *Framework for Action* section of this document.



# ASSESSMENT

## Theme

While at the state level, high-stakes testing requirements have been reduced to be more in line with federal testing requirements, the number of district-level tests has increased.

## Recommendations

The state, local school districts, and school leaders should work collaboratively to accomplish the following:

- Inventory, evaluate, and reduce tests at the local level to preserve instructional time, reduce redundancy, and ensure a more consistent benchmark of student performance.
- Build on the progress made in reducing the number of state-required tests by continuing to lower the emphasis on high-stakes testing in the accountability system.

## Actions

The state, local school districts, and school leaders should work collaboratively on the following actions.

1. Conduct local assessment inventories to identify and eliminate redundant testing requirements.\*
2. Establish a process that includes current classroom teacher input in the adoption and/or creation of new assessments and uniformity of grading practices and policies.\*
3. Make transparent and easily accessible to the public the number and type of assessments administered locally, along with time spent testing.
4. Reduce the emphasis on high-stakes testing for students, teachers, and schools.

**"... the time taken out of instructional time to administer assessments causes precious teaching time to be cut short; therefore, students aren't receiving the instruction they need."**

**- Elementary ELA Teacher,  
10-15 years experience**

**"There were so many tests from every angle, district and state required, that the students were numb. And it doesn't just impact them. These scores fall on us. They reflect on us."**

**- Middle Grades Science Teacher,  
15 years experience**



5. Re-evaluate the disproportionate weight of high-stakes testing in the state's accountability system (the College and Career Ready Performance Index, or CCRPI) and teacher evaluation system (TKES) to paint a fuller and fairer picture of performance.\*

\*Best practices and essential questions are provided in the *Framework for Action* section.



## PRESERVING AND PROTECTING TIME

### Theme

Making up for lost in-person instructional time due to the pandemic is essential to the state's academic recovery. Teachers' planning and instructional time must be treated as sacred, both for our state's academic recovery to be successful and effective going forward.

### Recommendations

The state, local school districts, and school leaders should work collaboratively to achieve the following:

- Prioritize teachers' time to plan for and deliver quality instruction without being interrupted for excessive meetings, trainings, or other duties.
- Seek ways to streamline and reduce time-intensive paperwork and processes.
- Increase awareness of and appreciation for the job responsibilities teachers perform outside of instructional time (planning, making parent contacts, grading assignments, engaging in professional learning, completing paperwork, etc.).

### Actions

The state, local school districts, and school leaders should work collaboratively on the following actions.

1. Preserve and protect teacher planning time to ensure that teachers are able to use it productively.\*
2. Compensate teachers who cover classes, take on additional classes/preparations, or are assigned other duties during their planning time.\*

**"Teaching 120 students during a day without a break (3-4 days a week due to meetings during planning time) becomes exhausting."**

**- Middle Grades Math Teacher,  
4-7 years experience**

**"The workload is nearly impossible to tackle during the hours we are actually at the school. So many of us have to 'volunteer' our time simply to do what is required of us."**

**- Elementary Gifted Resource Teacher,  
8-15 years experience**



3. Inventory and evaluate regularly occurring meetings to clearly define their purpose, participation, and value. Establish productive, streamlined meeting time culture and distribute responsibilities so that they are shared more broadly.\*
4. If and when new initiatives are introduced, ensure there is adequate time for training and rollout, while protecting time for teachers to meet their existing obligations. Consider that creating new initiatives without these measures in place impacts teachers' ability to implement them effectively.\*
5. Free up teachers by reforming and streamlining intensive paperwork and data-collection processes such as those required for Response to Intervention (RTI), Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and Individualized Education Program (IEP) to ensure they adhere to state and federal law while renewing their focus on removing barriers for students.\*
6. Ensure that the RTI, MTSS, IEP, and other processes to support students do not restart when students move from one school district to another.
7. Evaluate whether utilizing duty-free lunch waivers increases student achievement and supports teachers.
8. Ensure lesson plan requirements and procedures are practical, purposeful, and efficient to support quality instructional practices, instead of being tedious and cumbersome.\*
9. Define quality instruction by the interaction between teachers and their students instead of by checklists, printed artifacts and documentation, and formulaic information displayed on classroom walls and boards.

\*Best practices and essential questions are provided in the *Framework for Action* section.



## PRESSURES/UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

### Theme

Teachers have endured unrealistic expectations that ultimately hinder student achievement. Coming out of the pandemic, the desire to “return to normal” has also come with an unrealistic expectation that student learning and achievement should immediately return to pre-pandemic levels without giving teachers the time, support, resources, and compassion to meet students at their current academic level.

### Recommendations

The state, local school districts, and school leaders should work collaboratively to achieve the following:

- Set realistic post-pandemic academic benchmarks.
- Identify ways to communicate a fair and clear picture of the hard work occurring in classrooms.
- Continue the commitment to compassion over compliance.
- Establish productive partnerships among educators, students, families and community stakeholders.

### Actions

The state, local school districts, and school leaders should work collaboratively on the following actions.

1. Set realistic post-pandemic expectations when planning for grade-level instruction, closing gaps, benchmarking performance, and using accountability measures.\*
2. Balance and reduce class sizes so teachers can build relationships with their students. Specifically, teachers need additional support and lower class sizes to meet the individual needs of students.\*

**“If we take on a new initiative, we have to take something off of educators' plates. Burnout occurs when we keep piling on too much and creating feelings of overwhelm and fatigue.”**

**– Elementary Language Arts Teacher,  
8-10 years experience**

**“My to do list seems to be never ending. One task is completed and three more are added.”**

**– Elementary Teacher of All Subjects,  
4-7 years experience**



3. Evaluate whether using class size waivers increases student achievement and supports teachers.
4. Provide teachers with needed additional support with discipline issues that disrupt the educational setting.
5. Eliminate the inclusion of discipline data in the School Climate Star Rating, which provides an incentive for schools to keep discipline issues in classrooms or to under-report chronic issues.
6. Increase the funding, talent pipeline, and hiring of support staff, such as counselors, school nurses, school psychologists, media specialists, social workers, paraprofessionals, etc., to assist teachers with addressing student needs.\*
7. Focus on rolling things off teachers' plates instead of just rolling out new initiatives. Conduct an assessment of current initiatives affecting instruction such as standards, curricula, and pedagogy, including initiatives being considering for introduction.\*
8. Develop an action plan to encourage and foster an understanding between educators, parents, and students that is transparent, accountable, respectful, and solution-driven so that students are successful and educator efforts and expectations in school are supported.\*
9. Modernize the funding formula for education so that it properly supports the needs of all students.

**“The emphasis needs to shift from expecting high standardized test scores to celebrating student growth. The unspoken message that if a student isn’t successful then it’s the teacher’s fault needs to go away- there are so many factors outside of a teacher’s control that impact student achievement.”**

**– Elementary Language Arts Teacher,  
8-15 years experience**

\*Best practices and essential questions are provided in the *Framework for Action* section.



## TEACHER VOICE AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

### Theme

Teachers serve on the frontlines and directly impact the learning of students; we must support those who support our students.

### Recommendations

The state, local school districts, and school leaders should work collaboratively to achieve the following:

- Go beyond recovery and reimagine an educational system that engages teacher voice and treats teachers as professionals.
- Clearly define and provide support for teachers throughout their professional careers—from first-year teacher to teacher leader and beyond.

### Actions

The state, local school districts, and school leaders should work collaboratively on the following actions.

1. Preserve and protect health care and retirement benefits, which serve as a major teacher recruitment and retention tool for the state.
2. Build on the teacher pay raises by extending the teacher salary scale to fund step raises at every stage of a teacher's career and on every level. Doing so will recognize teachers who stay committed to the profession and provide teachers with a salary that is commensurate with their status as professionals.\*
3. Evaluate whether using teacher certification and salary schedule waivers increases student achievement and supports teachers.

**"... so many decisions are made regarding what should be happening in a classroom by people who are no longer in a classroom and have been out for a long time, or by people who have never been in a classroom. "**

**– Elementary ELA Teacher,  
10-15 years experience**

**"If we want to keep good teachers in the classroom, our practices should provide them with a sense of autonomy. We must demonstrate in meaningful ways that their expertise is valued and their voices have weight."**

**- High School History Teacher,  
12 years experience**



4. Continue to remove barriers (tuition, fees, travel, and time) for certification and endorsements.
5. Transform the teacher evaluation system from a punitive tool to a professional growth tool that supports the development of teachers from beginning teacher to teacher leader.\*
6. Ensure decisions being made are connected to the realities of the classroom. Ensure hired instructional coaches, consultants, and leaders have classroom experience and credibility.
7. Engage teachers who are currently in the classroom in district- and school-level decisions and discussions regarding strategic/improvement planning, allocation of resources, and programs and initiatives. Encourage and promote the value of and respect for teachers' voices.\*
8. Provide teachers who are currently in the classroom with leadership opportunities on advisory councils, task forces, and leadership teams. Foster clear pathways for teacher leadership, promoting a culture of shared governance and dialogue.\*
9. Personalize professional development programs to successfully advance teacher efficacy and expertise.\*
10. Establish strong induction and mentoring programs for beginning and struggling teachers.\*

\*Best practices and essential questions are provided in the *Framework for Action* section.



# MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

## Theme

Just as it created stress on students and families, the pandemic both contributed additional stressors and exposed existing stressors.

## Recommendations

The state, local school districts, and school leaders should work collaboratively to achieve the following:

- Provide a stable and supportive environment where teachers and teacher morale are valued.
- Provide additional administrative support, recognition, and access to wellness programs.
- Recognize that teachers are people—with the same challenges, stresses, hopes, dreams, and potential we all have—and treat them accordingly.

## Actions

The state, local school districts, and school leaders should work collaboratively on the following actions.

1. Provide mental health support or strengthen existing programs of mental health support for teachers and staff (i.e., Employee Assistance Program).\*
2. Provide mental health support or strengthen existing programs of mental health support for students.\*
3. Provide teachers and administrators with professional development on how to effectively partner with school counselors.\*
4. Re-evaluate the negative labeling of schools that undermines morale and does not serve as an effective recruitment or retention tool for quality teachers or school leaders.

**“Understand that we as teachers are doing EVERYTHING we can, but we also are human and can only do so much...”**

**– Elementary Teacher All Subjects,  
1-3 years experience**

**“Teachers always seem to go above and beyond their call of teaching but are hardly compensated or acknowledged for their efforts.”**

**– High School Math Teacher,  
7 years experience**



5. Recognize teachers for their efforts beyond just test scores. Encourage a collaborative environment where teachers can work together toward student success versus a competitive environment that undermines partnership across the school community.
6. Ensure that the right things are being celebrated. Refrain from celebrating programs over the people who make them happen.
7. Nurture a culture that fosters trust, respect, autonomy, empathy, communication, innovation, and creativity.
8. Ensure school leaders can be a voice for their teachers and schools within their school district.

\*Best practices and essential questions are provided in the *Framework for Action* section.



# FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

BEST PRACTICES AND ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS  
FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SELECTED  
RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS



## **Assessment: Best Practices and Essential Questions**

### **FOR ACTION ITEMS 1, 2, AND 5**

**Action 1. Conduct local assessment inventories to identify and eliminate redundant testing requirements.**

- A. What assessments are presently being used? By whom?
- B. How much instructional time is required for each assessment? How much instructional time is required for all district assessments in their totality? (Suggestion: Create a cumulative assessment calendar for each grade level to understand and analyze the complete impact of assessment in all subjects on the instructional time of teachers and students.)
- C. What is the specific purpose of each assessment?
  - a. Assessment for adjusting classroom instruction?
  - b. Assessment for accountability?
  - c. Assessment for standards alignment within a continuum of learning?
- D. What redundancies in assessment might be eliminated to preserve instructional time?
- E. How is the amount of assessment impacting overall student engagement in school and the attitude of students toward the assessments themselves?
- F. How does the district/school ensure teachers have the autonomy to design and administer assessments they professionally know to be relevant for the next steps of instruction and/or aligned with the needs and abilities of their students?
- G. Is the district/school requiring teacher-created assessments be given to students for the purpose of capturing grades rather than using district-mandated assessments for grades? If so, how much instructional time is required for the teacher-created assessments? (Add this to the cumulative assessment calendar.)
- H. How might assessment at the school/classroom level function as the determinant of student growth for the purpose of informing instruction while district and/or state assessments function as the accountability piece for student growth?

**Action 2. Establish a process that includes current classroom teacher input in the adoption and/or creation of new assessments and uniformity of grading practices and policies.**

- A. How are teachers brought back into the discussions and the work as empowered leaders who become a part of the design teams for effective assessment practice, use, and accountability?



- B. How might assessment teams which include current classroom teacher representatives within schools/districts/regions prioritize the purpose and effective use of specific assessments?
- C. How might teachers work across districts to define standards-based grading practices?
  - a. How might there be a return to best practices on the effective use of student work samples, rubrics, and anchor papers to increase the overall consistency of expectation as it relates to standards-based grading?
  - b. How does standards-based grading align to student growth along a continuum of learning?
  - c. How do standards-based grading, growth targets, and individual gap closure impact promotion, retention and placement of students?
- D. How might state and local policy be aligned so that guidelines for promotion and retention are aligned?
  - a. What is the role (if any) of standardized testing in promotion and retention? (Is the role of state testing for school/district/state accountability or is it for student success?)

**Action 5. Re-evaluate the disproportionate weight of high-stakes testing in the state’s accountability system (CCRPI) and teacher evaluation system (TKES) to paint a fuller and fairer picture of performance.**

- A. How can the school/district culture demonstrate that it values or gives as much weight, if not more weight, to what teachers know from firsthand experience with students in the classroom as it does to district-mandated assessments?
- B. Are assessment results being used fairly and appropriately in the analysis of teacher/school/district performance? Does the district utilize quantitative and qualitative variables to provide a fuller and fairer picture of performance, instead of just overall test scores?



## **Preserving and Protecting Time: Best Practices and Essential Questions**

### **FOR ACTION ITEMS 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, AND 8**

**Action 1. Preserve and protect teacher planning time to ensure that teachers are able to use it productively.**

- A. How is planning time defined and structured? What are the established guidelines?
- B. Are guidelines in place for how much planning time can be used for meetings that are not scheduled by teachers, and for how much of a teacher’s planning time is self-determined?
- C. How much time during work hours do teachers have to plan for the needs of their individual classrooms? Knowing their responsibilities, is that a reasonable amount of time?
- D. Is planning time scheduled so that teachers can effectively collaborate when necessary or desired?
- E. How is the value of meetings that take place during planning time assessed?
  - a. Does the information have to be delivered face-to-face? Can it be communicated virtually or delivered electronically?
  - b. If the meeting has to be face-to-face, can documents be sent ahead of time for review so teachers are prepared and time can be used efficiently? (Think “Flipped Classroom”)
  - c. Is the content of the meeting applicable to all in attendance?
- F. Reflect. What are examples of meetings for which the use of planning time would be reasonable? Examples might include:
  - a. Professional development that offers best practices to teachers (specific to grade level and teacher experience)
  - b. Individualized professional development meetings (micro-credentials)
  - c. Training specific to new curriculum initiatives

**Action 2. Compensate teachers who cover classes, take on additional classes/preparations, or are assigned other duties during their planning time.**

- A. Could educators be compensated for taking on additional duties and responsibilities (including stipends for covering classes, teaching with larger class sizes, losing planning



time, tutoring students, and being on duty before, after, or during school)? Note: This is an allowable use of federal ESSER funds.

- B. Could administrative support be provided directly to teachers, including hiring or using contractors to run copies, organize supplies and handouts, and alleviate paperwork requirements? Note: This is an allowable use of federal ESSER funds.
- C. Could hired or contracted services be used to address the nonacademic needs of students, freeing up educators to catch up students academically? Note: This is an allowable use of federal ESSER funds.

**Action 3. Inventory and evaluate regularly occurring meetings to clearly define their purposes, participation, and value. Establish productive, streamlined meeting time culture and distribute responsibilities so that they are shared more broadly.**

- A. What are the non-negotiables/norms for meetings, and do they serve the needs of all participants?
- B. Are teachers involved in the scheduling of meetings?
- C. Does the timing, structure, and content of each meeting communicate that teachers' time is valued?
- D. Based on teachers' personal prior knowledge or level of professional experience, do all of the participants truly need to be invited or could their time be better spent?
- E. Is information communicated efficiently and effectively during meetings?
- F. Are all participants given opportunities to participate openly — making contributions, raising questions, and expressing needs or concerns?
- G. Is follow-up information disseminated efficiently and effectively after meetings?
- H. Are reasonable meeting time and work hour expectations being established and communicated to all school community stakeholders so that the boundaries of teachers' personal time at home with their own families are being protected?

**Action 4. If and when new initiatives are introduced, ensure there is adequate time for training and rollout, while protecting time for teachers to meet their existing obligations. Consider that creating new initiatives without these measures in place impacts teachers' ability to implement them effectively.**

- A. How can initiatives be prioritized so teachers have the time to fulfill their present responsibilities?



- B. Would the introduction of new programs or initiatives best take place on professional development days (especially at the end of the year) when teachers can focus and absorb, rather than on an instructional day or during a planning period when their present responsibilities are interrupted?
- C. How can professional development be differentiated so there are no redundancies and/or wasted time for experienced teachers?
- D. How much cumulative time will it take for teachers to complete the professional development for all initiatives presently being undertaken or that are being considered for implementation? (Suggestion: Create a cumulative professional development time analysis so that district/school leadership can understand the complete impact of all training on teachers. Look at state-, district-, and school-level initiatives.) Where will that time come from? If teachers are required to do it all, will they be able to implement any or all of the initiatives with true fidelity?
- E. Could some training/professional development occur virtually so teachers can learn at their own pace, giving them a sense of ownership of their own time management?

**Action 5. Free up teachers by reforming and streamlining intensive paperwork and data-collection processes such as those required for RTI, MTSS, and IEPs to ensure they adhere to state and federal law while renewing their focus on removing barriers for students.**

- A. What guidelines are in place for consistent determination of which students should be placed in RTI for math or reading?
- B. How are qualitative observations by teachers taken into consideration when determining the placement of students in RTI, so that placement is not based on a single assessment score?
- C. While remaining in compliance with federal IDEA requirements, are there clear and consistent guidelines surrounding parent requests for evaluation? Are steps taken to ensure the time and resources of teachers and school psychologists are wisely allocated?
- D. What procedure/system is the school/district currently using for the collection of data? Has an electronic platform been adopted or is data collected paper-pencil?
- E. Are teachers given sufficient planning time to write goals, enter data, analyze data, update outcomes, and hold all necessary meetings in the context of all of their other responsibilities?



**Action 8. Ensure lesson plan requirements and procedures are practical, purposeful, and efficient to support quality instructional practices, instead of being tedious and cumbersome.**

- A. What needs to be included on lesson plans and what can be excluded? Is there a consistent template and clarity of expectation for each of the elements?
- B. Do all required elements on lesson plans lead to student achievement?
- C. Could lesson plan requirements be adjusted depending upon the experience level of the teacher?
- C. Could the requirements for lesson plans be driven by a general trust in the knowledge, experiences, and professionalism of the majority of teachers rather than by the needs of a subsegment or group of teachers to improve their lesson planning?
- D. How much time is required of teachers to post their lesson plans on multiple platforms and/or format them in multiple ways for the needs of different stakeholders each week?
- E. Are the platforms where teachers are required to post lesson plans user-friendly such that they require minimal time for posting? Or is posting on the platforms unnecessarily time-intensive?



## **Pressures/Unrealistic Expectations: Best Practices and Essential Questions**

### **FOR ACTION ITEMS 1, 2, 6, 7, AND 8**

**Action 1. Set realistic, post-pandemic expectations when planning for grade level instruction, closing gaps, benchmarking performance, and using accountability measures.**

- A. Are teachers and students being expected both to close learning gaps and to teach/learn grade level standards at the same time?
- B. If they are being expected to do so, are those expectations realistic given the amount of time students did not have regular, routine face-to-face instruction since March 2020?
- C. If it is determined those expectations are not realistic, how could expectations be realigned with the reality of post-pandemic learning and reimagined such that students can still feel confident and teachers are not overburdened?
- D. If it is determined those expectations are not realistic, how could measures of student achievement be realigned with reality so that students can feel confident about their progress and the efficacy and efforts of teachers are not misrepresented?
- E. What professional development is being offered for teachers related to accelerated learning so that they might grow in their knowledge about how to simultaneously close gaps and teach grade level standards?

**Action 2. Balance and reduce class sizes so teachers can build relationships with their students. Specifically, teachers need additional support and lower class sizes to meet the individual needs of students.**

- A. What guidelines are being followed for the number of students in a general education classroom?
  - a. With those numbers, are teachers able to meet the individual needs of each student in the classroom to the best of his/her ability? Are students making the amount of progress that they are capable of and that teachers are being expected to deliver?
- B. Are ESOL, EIP/REP, and gifted students being served in compliance with state/federal regulations, both in terms of the number of students served by a given resource teacher and the amount of time that should be dedicated to that resource service? Are those teachers able to meet the individual needs of each student served with fidelity?
- C. Are resource teachers (ESOL, EIP/REP, gifted) being taken away from their mandated responsibilities to cover responsibilities for which their position is not funded?



- D. Could class sizes be lowered by hiring additional personnel, providing stipends for teachers who take on additional classes, and utilizing long-term substitute teachers?  
Note: These are allowable uses of federal ESSER funds.

**Action 6. Increase the funding, talent pipeline, and hiring of support staff, such as counselors, school nurses, school psychologists, media specialists, social workers, paraprofessionals, etc., to assist teachers with addressing student needs.**

- A. Could paraprofessional positions be expanded beyond pre-K and kindergarten in the early elementary grades so that young students have additional classroom support?  
Note: This is an allowable use of federal ESSER funds.
- B. Can additional interventionists be brought on board to alleviate the pressure that comes from the volume of intervention needed? These personnel would assist with observations and design and implement interventions.
- a. What is the caseload requirement for each special education teacher at a school? Is that number reasonable, and does it allow those teachers to meet the individual needs of each student served with fidelity?
- C. What additional supports are in place for students with special needs, including alternative post-graduation options?

**Action 7. Focus on rolling things off from teachers' plates instead of just rolling out new initiatives. Conduct an assessment of current initiatives affecting instruction such as standards, curricula, and pedagogy, including initiatives being considering for introduction.**

- A. What are the drivers behind each initiative? Is there data to support the need for their implementation?
- B. Do any of the initiatives serve the same purpose? Are there redundancies?
- C. Do initiatives complement one another or do any of them compete with each other for time or resources?
- D. Have teachers currently in the classroom been a part of the decision-making processes related to current and upcoming initiatives, so that their firsthand professional knowledge and classroom perspectives play a part in all considerations?
- E. When examining current initiatives and initiatives under consideration for introduction, are teachers provided the resources needed to implement the initiative with fidelity?
- F. When initiatives are under consideration for introduction, is the school, district, state also considering the appropriate timing for their introduction, taking into consideration the prior knowledge of teachers and the amount of professional development and



preparation time required for teachers to be able to implement the initiative(s) with fidelity?

- G. When initiatives are under consideration for introduction, is the school, district, state also considering what can be taken off teachers' plates in return?
- H. When looking at initiatives under consideration for introduction, what action plan is being constructed to ensure that initiatives are being introduced with consistency, commitment and stability?
- I. Are expectations for initiatives being clearly communicated to all stakeholders?
- J. What mechanism is in place for the provision of open, honest feedback from all stakeholders about initiatives, without any parties having to be concerned about retribution?

**Action 8. Develop an action plan to encourage and foster an understanding between educators, parents, and students that is transparent, accountable, respectful, and solution-driven so that students are successful and educator efforts and expectations in school are supported.**

- A. What are ways in which parental involvement presently supports educators?
- B. How are families being encouraged to build connections and productive relationships with their children's teachers, to the benefit of their children?
- C. How can academic expectations for all students be communicated clearly and followed through on consistently, so that all stakeholders (educators, parents, and students) recognize their responsibilities, respect the boundaries of those expectations, and understand the consequences of not following through on academic responsibilities?
- D. How can behavioral expectations for all students be communicated clearly and followed through on consistently, so that all stakeholders (educators, parents, and students) recognize their responsibilities, respect the boundaries of those expectations, and understand the consequences of not following through on behavioral responsibilities?
- E. How are current classroom teachers involved in the development of school, district, and state policies and procedures related to academic and behavioral expectations?
- F. How can all stakeholders work to ensure that the overall focus on education is brought back to the common commitment to meeting the individual needs of every child?
- G. Is the community involved in, or encouraged to be involved in, the elevation of teachers and public education? If so, how?



## Teacher Voice and Professional Growth: Best Practices & Essential Questions

### FOR ACTION ITEMS 2, 5, 7, 8, 9, AND 10

**Action 2. Build on the teacher pay raises by extending the teacher salary scale to fund step raises at every stage of a teacher’s career and on every level. Doing so will recognize teachers who stay committed to the profession and provide teachers with a salary that is commensurate with their status as professionals.**

- A. How can salaries for support staff be permanently increased so they are not driven away from their valuable positions?
- B. What kind of assistance or relief can be offered to current teachers for the debt they have incurred earning education degrees? What kind of financial assistance or relief could be offered to individuals who are considering a degree in education so they might follow through on their desire to join the profession without the fear of burdensome financial debt? What kind of partnerships could be developed with education programs at colleges and universities to pay student teachers as paraprofessionals?
- C. How can salary gaps be closed in the districts that cannot provide as much of a local supplement as other districts?
- D. With state salary step increases stopping at year 20 and local salary step increases between years 20-30, the most seasoned teachers essentially receive negligible pay increases for one-third of their careers. How can step increases on the state and local levels better recognize the contributions made by experienced teachers?

**Action 5. Transform the teacher evaluation system from a punitive tool to a professional growth tool that supports the development of teachers from beginning teacher to teacher leader.**

- A. Are observations and evaluations approached with a punitive, “gotcha” mindset or with a growth mindset focused on helping teachers succeed to the benefit of their students?
- B. How are administrators supported through training to approach observations and evaluations from an asset-based (strength-based) perspective rather than a deficit-based perspective?
- C. How are administrators trained to coach teachers such that they are providing effective, actionable, constructive feedback?



- D. How are observations and evaluations being used to inform and carry out the goals within teachers' personalized professional growth plans in partnership with teachers? How are administrators offering resources and mentorships in support of those goals?
- E. Does the manner in which TKES is being implemented contribute to positive school culture and student success?
- F. How can guidance from the state provide for and ensure a more universally consistent scoring system?

**Action 7. Engage teachers who are currently in the classroom in district- and school-level decisions and discussions regarding strategic/improvement planning, allocation of resources, and programs and initiatives. Encourage and promote the value of and respect for teacher voices.**

- A. What structures are already in place that allow teachers to share feedback, questions, suggestions, or concerns openly and honestly without fear of retaliation?
- B. What initiatives are in place or roles are reserved for teachers that communicate trust and confidence in their professional ability, opinion, and perspectives?
- C. Are teachers asked what they need?

**Action 8. Provide teachers who are currently in the classroom with leadership opportunities on advisory councils, task forces, and leadership teams. Foster clear pathways for teacher leadership, promoting a culture of shared governance and dialogue.**

- A. What structures are already in place? Are administrators open to developing and partnering with teacher leaders?
- B. Does the district/school have a leadership team or advisory council (Think Tank) rooted in the following essential considerations:
  - What is the purpose of the team/council? What are its meetings designed to accomplish?
  - Is the team/council managed or is it collaborative in nature?
  - Are there matters on which it could engage in shared decision making?
  - Have administrators received training on how to effectively establish and utilize a team/council that engages in shared decision making?
  - What are the expectations/roles for each of the participants on the team/council?
  - Does/should the team/council include representatives from support staff and educators in specialty areas such as: special education, ESOL, gifted, EIP/REP, connections, paraprofessionals, induction teachers?



- Does the team/council include teacher representatives currently serving in the classroom so that the “boots on the ground” classroom perspective might be brought to discussions?
  - Is the team/council simply a recipient of information or does the culture of the team/council foster connection and encourage open two-way communication between teachers and administrators, administrators and district leaders, and/or district leaders and state leaders such that there is no fear of retaliation for feedback, questions, suggestions, or raised concerns?
- C. How is the school, district, state partnering with educational degree programs at colleges and universities or RESAs to support teacher participation in teacher leadership training, endorsements, and programs?

**Action 9. Personalize professional development programs to successfully advance teacher efficacy and expertise.**

- A. What do the school, district and state’s professional development programs look and sound like? Are they passive “sit and get” experiences, or do educators have an active role in facilitating their learning?
- B. Is the school, district, state’s professional development rooted in a growth mindset? Are professional development programs differentiated so that they meet the differing needs of teachers based on their level of experience, areas of interest, or areas of struggle?
- C. Does the school, district, state ensure educators understand why they are engaging in the professional development and how it will be offered?
- D. Is professional development scheduled such that educators will have sufficient time to complete the program, assimilate knowledge, and implement what they have learned as effectively as expected?
- E. How does the school, district, state minimize discrepancies between the professional development and actual implementation? Is there a mechanism (i.e., coaches/mentors? additional workshops? a resource hub?) to support educators who struggle to implement what they learn in the professional development program or if they need resources?
- F. Does the school, district, state’s professional development program give educators opportunities to share their strengths with one another?



**Action 10. Establish strong induction and mentoring programs for beginning and struggling teachers.**

- A. Does the school, district, state's mentorship program provide options and support for both induction teachers and veteran teachers?
- B. Does the school, district, state's mentorship program encourage and promote sustained, supportive, and collaborative relationships between teachers? Between teachers and leaders?
- C. Does the school, district, state's mentorship program have a mechanism by which mentor teachers can advocate for their mentees, especially mentees in their first few years of teaching?
- D. Are induction teachers presented with opportunities to see themselves and be seen by others as mentors?



# Mental Health and Wellness: Best Practices and Essential Questions

## FOR ACTION ITEMS 1, 2, AND 3

**Action 1. Provide mental health support or strengthen existing programs of mental health support for teachers and staff (i.e., employee assistance program).**

- A. What are the current mental health and wellness initiatives in place for staff and teachers?
  - a. Are classroom teachers included in the decision-making process for these initiatives?
  - b. Are the initiatives stable and consistent?
  - c. Do the initiatives address the root causes of teacher stress or are they “band-aids,” putting the burden for self-care on teachers?
  - d. Is there an institutional culture that provides open, non-judgmental avenues of support for staff and teachers if they are struggling personally or professionally?
  - e. How are staff and teachers connected with state and community mental health and wellness resources?

**Action 2. Provide mental health support or strengthen existing programs of mental health support for students.**

- A. What are the current mental health and wellness initiatives in place for students?
  - a. Are teachers included in the decision-making process for these initiatives?
  - b. Are the initiatives stable and consistent?
  - c. Do the initiatives address the root causes of student stress or are they “band-aids,” putting the burden for self-care on students?
  - d. Do the initiatives address the impact the pandemic had on students’ social maturity and their interactive skills with peers and adults?
  - e. How do the initiatives serve students who are socially behind their peers?
  - f. Is there a reasonable number of on-site behavioral and mental health professionals with a clinical background available at each school to support the needs?
  - g. What type of response do these professionals provide? Do school counselors have the time and bandwidth to provide counseling services, or are they being assigned other duties, such as discipline?



**Action 3. Provide teachers and administrators with professional development on how to effectively partner with school counselors.**

- A. Are teachers and administrators prepared to identify mental health concerns?
- B. Are teachers and administrators trained to have a foundational understanding of counseling so that students can be supported in a relational, developmentally appropriate way before they are able to get to a counselor?
- C. Are teachers and administrators trained in strategies such as mindset training and de-escalation skills for when students are in distress?
- D. Are teachers and administrators properly trained to understand the role and responsibilities of counselors?
- E. Are teachers included in the decision-making process for personalized learning?

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<sup>1</sup> Moss, Jennifer. 2021. *The Burnout Epidemic: The Rise of Chronic Stress and How We Can Fix It*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Henson, Kelly, Cyndy Stephens, Tom Hall, and Chuck McCampbell. 2015, November. *The Georgia Public P-12 Education Workforce Status Report 2015*. Table 5a, p. 7. Retrieved from [www.gapsc.com/media/workforce2015.pdf](http://www.gapsc.com/media/workforce2015.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Owens, Stephens J. 2015, December. *Georgia's Teacher Dropout Crisis: A Look at Why Nearly Half of Georgia Public School Teachers are Leaving the Profession*. Atlanta: Georgia Department of Education, p. 2. Retrieved from [www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Documents/Teacher%20Survey%20Results.pdf](http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Documents/Teacher%20Survey%20Results.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Professional Association of Georgia Educators. 2020. *Views from the Schoolhouse: Insights from Georgia Educators on the Education Profession and Supporting Students*, p. 6. Retrieved from [www.pagelegislative.org/2022-legislative-survey-summary](http://www.pagelegislative.org/2022-legislative-survey-summary)

