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By Craig Harper, PAGE Executive Director

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We look forward to partnering with you on this incredible journey as you endeavor to encourage and inspire Georgia’s children.
Standout New Educators Share How They Tackled Technology and Classroom Management to Reach Students Virtually and in the Schoolhouse

By Meg Thornton
Lauren Sieg
Resource Teacher, Chattanooga Valley Middle School

Lauren Sieg, who is beginning her second year as a resource instructor at Walker County’s Chattanooga Valley Middle School, is relieved to have her first full year of teaching behind her. “The most challenging aspect of my first year of teaching was definitely managing my time at work,” says Sieg. “It is easy to get caught up in planning lessons and rounding up the materials needed for activities, and end up not having enough time to do things like grade assessments, communicate with parents and take care of work-related paperwork.” On top of that, she began working extended days about midway through the school year, which meant that she did not have a planning block during the workday.

The answer to managing the workload, she found, was twofold: she streamlined assessments using the technology she learned to use with her virtual students, and she began coming to work early to get ready for the day. “That ensured that I was in a good groove once students rolled in,” says Sieg.

Google Classroom and the G Suite of applications have been a “lifesaver” for Sieg. “A plethora of resources link with my virtual classroom, allowing me to present, share, adapt and provide meaningful materials and assessments for my students,” she says. Tools, such as Commonlit, NewsEla and EPIC Books offer free, differentiated and engaging content that can be shared through Google Classroom to students at home or in the classroom.

Sieg, who grew up in Northwest Georgia and graduated from Western Governors University, was fortunate in that the last leg of her collegiate career took place online, “so I had fresh experience with many of the tools and supports in the virtual realm,” she says. “Many of my student-teaching experiences were centered around incorporating technology into lessons and using new software to get students engaged and excited about learning outside of the book and notebook.”

Sieg also learned quite a bit about assessing students virtually and using resources online to better track and use student data quickly and meaningfully. Tools, such as Google Forms, make it easy to collect student responses and export them to graphs and charts to save time and notice trends in learning. “It is easy to see in assessment data whether students are ‘getting it’ or if we need to revisit a topic or concept. I can tell right away that I need to plan a review!” she adds.

Even so, Sieg’s just-begun second year is beset with its own daunting challenges. “The students that I teach in my school have...
suffered tremendously since the initial COVID-19 shutdown, " she laments. "Students had limited access to the necessary technology and software to interact with peers and teachers in meaningful ways. There are the obvious gaps in their learning as far as grade-appropriate standards, and there seems to be a general regression in their overall performance that stems from a lack of academic focus and motivation." Furthermore, during the time they were out of the classroom, "many of my students developed a mindset that school and effort towards learning was optional. There was just a disconnect between the school we were used to, and the new COVID-era idea of ‘school’ as being one long Zoom call and a Google Doc to fill in. It has been our jobs as teachers this year to not only teach the standards, but to retrain them to be enthusiastic students and learners."

When students ask things like "Why do we have to do work?" or "Why is learning important?" Sieg makes real-world connections. "For example, if I am teaching a writing unit, and a student expresses frustration or lack of motivation, I remind them that writing is a universal skill that they will use for the rest of their lives. I show students that almost every aspect of their working and personal lives will involve some kind of writing, and that the better writers they are, the better they will be at whatever they choose to do." She also takes time to amp up the fun factor. "So much of the learning we do is focused on mastering a skill, but there are ways to make that enjoyable and make coming to school exciting," she adds.

Her best approach to dealing with especially challenging students is by modeling respect and kindness, "even when they do not show either to each other or to me," says Sieg, who has also co-taught sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade ELA, life science, and social studies. "I have seen a gradual change in the behaviors in one particular class and have begun to see the students’ mindset towards how they treat others changing. They catch themselves saying things that are hurtful, and even apologize when they do. It has also seemed to promote a more positive and productive learning environment. The students come in knowing that I have certain expectations, and do their best to live up to that."

Joyce Cho, M.Ed
ESOL Teacher, Marietta High School

As a new teacher, third-year Marietta High School ESOL teacher Joyce Cho, M.Ed., says her most pleasant surprise was how welcomed and supported students, parents, peers, administrators, and even the district made her feel. "The reason why I have stayed and enjoyed being a teacher is because I feel that I am part of a community," she says. "I also know that my presence has an influence on those around me."

The Atlanta native and Georgia State University graduate is also grateful to her mentor, Maegan Dwelley. "She welcomed me with open arms, and to this day still catches up with me. She advised me to be personable, be available, and be relational."

Even so, Cho experienced a learning curve when it came to parents who were unresponsive. "I always expected that the parents who called me..."
or messaged me 24/7 would be the more challenging parents. Instead, I found that the parents that seem to be unresponsive were the ones that gave me more anxiety,” she says. “I thought: How could a parent be so disengaged with their child that they couldn’t possibly know that their student was failing almost every subject, let alone not even attending class. Then I thought about my high school experience and what my parents were doing when the school was reaching out to them. My parents were working, slaving away endlessly for their child — it also didn’t help that my parents or my students’ parents could barely speak English,” explains Cho, who is biliterate in South Korean and English, and is learning Spanish. “So, instead of bombarding my parents with negative and urgent phone calls and emails about their child, I decided to text them (in their native language) to see if they were doing okay and remind them that I’m available. I allow parents to reach out to me on their time while at the same time letting the parents know that I am looking out for their child.”

The best solution Cho has found for dealing with especially challenging students is to exercise patience. “Everyone is going through something. Sometimes taking a step back and letting the students open up on their own time has allowed me to build relationships with challenging students.”

Girded by solid technology skills, Cho has fared better than many educators during the pandemic. At Georgia State, where she earned both her bachelor’s and master’s degrees, she experienced online courses and even delivered some lessons virtually as an adjunct professor. “So, instead of trying to come up with my own new lesson, game or material for students, as a team we collaborated and shared all of our resources. It helped ease the pressure to do things on my own.”

The Marietta Schools district also eased demands on educators by carving out one day a week for teachers to plan and to hold meetings with students and others. “Knowing that I had one whole work day to plan helped with my own mental health,” Cho notes.

Cho’s students also fared better than many others throughout the state. “I am so proud of my students,” she says. “They showed up and they tried. Navigating through school is hard enough, but to do it independently, virtually, and for most of them, not in their native language, is on another level. Overall, my students have learned so many new skillsets that I believe they have learned more than I can imagine.”

As to her best advice for other educators trying to navigate nascent technology and virtual instruction, Cho, who is ESOL-endorsed and has a Reading Specialist degree, says: “Be patient with

Continued on next page
you yourself, your students, peers, administrators. Everyone is trying to navigate this the best they can. I believe my principal said it the best: “We are building a boat in the middle of a storm.”

And her best overall advice to those just embarking on their career as an educator is: “Find a friend. Be a friend.”

**Austin Davis**  
Math Teacher, South Tattnall Middle School  
As a youth, Austin Davis, a standout new math teacher beginning year two at South Tattnall Middle School in Glennville, Ga., struggled in school.

“I was never in the top math classes, and math never really made sense to me,” says Davis, who in December expects to earn a master’s degree in middle grades mathematics from Georgia Southern University, where he earned his bachelor’s degree. “Fractions were foreign language, and calculating the median of a data set was not for me. It wasn’t until I went to college and had an amazing math teacher who showed me how to grasp these concepts that I decided to teach middle school math,” he notes. “I now try to use my struggle as a learner (still struggle some) to help my scholars.”

Davis is also getting a handle on his biggest challenge: classroom management. “I want the kids to feel comfortable in my room, so I was often too lenient or passive when it comes to behaviors,” he recalls of his first year of teaching. “I really felt this at the end of the school year when I was trying to rein them all in.”

Davis discovered that the key to keeping an orderly classroom is consistency. “If you tell students they will have consequences, then you need to enforce them when students stray. You also need to consistently have respect for your students. Never get out of line or respond in a negative way; they hold onto those things,” he says.

He has also learned the power of staying organized. “I have to make notes of everything and place reminders in my calendar and desk, even in my car, all the time. I set a timer for everything while I’m at school. I also set time aside to complete my grad school work.”

According to Davis, keeping a detailed schedule “is the only way to keep me from going crazy.” He also closely safeguards his mental health. “I see a therapist every week. This helps me to destress and unload any craziness going on in my professional and personal life,” he shares. “I also am very honest with my administration, and if there is a day that I need to just take a break and have a mental health day, I do just that. They have been very supportive of this, I’m super lucky.”

Like many new teachers, Davis’ most pleasant surprise as a new teacher is how he and his students have bonded. “I have formed some of the most meaningful relationship with my students,”

‘It wasn’t until I went to college and had an amazing math teacher who showed me how to grasp these concepts that I decided to teach middle school math,’ Davis notes. ‘I now try to use my struggle as a learner (still struggle some) to help my scholars.’
he says. “I never even realized that some of these relationships were developing. I have students who feel like they can confide in me and come to me for comfort. It was always my goal to be that for them, but I wasn’t actively seeking this out.”

Regarding especially challenging students, Davis says, “It’s important to not react but to respond. Students often do things to get a reaction out of us, and I am easy to get one out of. I have had to learn to let things go and to only respond to situations that require a response,” notes the Vidalia native, whose aunt also teaches in Tattnall County. “I don’t take things personally anymore.”

The most impactful advice he ever received about teaching was given by his supervising teacher. “She always told me that it’s important to ‘see the students.’ What she meant was, they are not only in my class for 100 minutes, but they also have lives outside of my room, just as I do,” he says. “They have things going on and struggles that have impact on them. I always try to remember this whenever a student is giving me trouble.”

As for challenging moms and dads, he says, “It’s important to stand your ground. Some parents are going to take the side of their child no matter what, and they may (try to) take advantage of you. Their children will also pick up on this and begin to run over you as well.”

Unlike most Georgia schools, Davis’ rural community did not go virtual last year. “The students would not have had the required tech to complete virtual school,” he says. Still, “many students missed out on a lot of content from last year,” he laments. “I worry that for many of them, they were not prepared for the next level of education. Because of this, I made sure to review prior content that they had missed out on before jumping into my content.”

Davis’ own advice for fledgling educators is to know going in that teaching is hard, but invaluable beyond measure. “You will feel defeated and ineffective some days, but just know that you are making a difference. This is a job full of mistakes and learning moments, so take each of those lessons and grow as an educator and a human.”

Ariana Armenta
Math Teacher, Russell Middle School
When Ariana Armenta interviewed for her teaching position at Barrow County’s Russell Middle School, she considered classroom management to be her biggest weakness due to inexperience. “My student teaching experience prepared me to work with a specific demographic of students, but those students were very different than the students that I had in my own classroom during my first year,” says the Piedmont University graduate.

“I had to learn what kind of students I would be serving and how they commonly reacted to certain situations,” says Armenta, who is starting her third year as a seventh-grade math teacher. A saving grace, she adds, was her school’s “excellent” PBIS system. “It didn’t leave much room for surprises regarding classroom management.”

Armenta, who ‘tried tons of tech tools in the first couple years of teaching,’ especially likes using Pear Deck, because it allows students to demonstrate their understanding of the content in engaging ways, such as by drawing.
What Armenta regrets, however, were her first-year struggles with time management. “Honestly, there was so much that I had to learn to do during my first year, that I didn't build strong relationships with a lot of my students.”

By Armenta’s second year, however, she learned to manage her time by delegating to students jobs, such as desk disinfectors (using charged water), passing out papers and assigning a student to end a Google Meet and another to start the next one. That approach allows her to focus on instructional delivery rather than menial tasks. “It really does make my job much less stressful when I’m not trying to micromanage every single thing happening in my classroom.” Best of all, “last year, I felt as if I have had a lot more fun with my students, and vice versa.”

She has also learned to balance her life. “You don’t want to bring work home with you every night or you will feel like you are always at work. This is extremely important for my mental health and helps me maintain my passion for teaching. Teacher burn out is a very real thing. Manage your time and set boundaries,” she advises.

As it does for all educators, technology remains ever-challenging. “Although I did grow up with a lot of the technology that was used with digital teaching, there were still a lot of technology tools that I did not know how to use,” says Armenta, who will graduate in December with a master’s degree in Curriculum and Instruction in Accomplished Teaching. She also will have earned an endorsement in online teaching and learning. Born in Arizona, Armenta is Hispanic, but says she never picked up Spanish, the native language of her parents.

A key to using technology effectively, she says, is to recognize when and which tech tools are necessary. “There are some really great programs out there, but they won’t be effective if you use them for everything.” Armenta, who “tried tons of tech tools in the first couple years of teaching,” especially likes using Pear Deck, because it allows students to demonstrate their understanding of the content in engaging ways, such as by drawing. “And, as of last school year, we have been lucky enough to have one-to-one access to Chromebooks. Students are able to access Pear Decks in class with ease. It is a very simple platform, only requiring students to use a code that their teacher provides.”

The math teacher tried using Google Forms for summative assessments but it didn’t fit the needs of her classroom. “Google Forms is a great tech tool, but didn’t allow me to monitor student progress, and text formatting was not available at that time.”

All in all, Armenta says her time at Russell Middle School “has been such a great experience so far!” She credits much of her success to her grade-level teammates. “I feel supported, and I can reach out to anyone on my grade level if I need help.”

She is also bolstered by her school’s policy regarding parents. “One thing that we do at my school is to never make a parent phone call on our own. We call with another teacher so that the parent knows that certain things are happening either in only one class or in all of their student’s classes.” The goal, of course, is to establish good relationships with all parents, and Armenta does that by making positive phone calls to parents from the start of the school year.

As to her advice to new teachers, Armenta says: “Find people you can lean on, vent to and get advice from — other teachers, friends, family, etc. This will help you stay sane throughout your career.”

Katelyn Brooks
Gifted ELA, Thomson-McDuffie Middle School (after Norris Elementary School)
Classroom management was hard for Katelyn Brooks at the start of her career. “I made the
mistake of not being consistent with the rules. Students pick up on that quickly,” says the Thomson native who returned home to teach in McDuffie County after graduating in 2019 from Augusta University. She taught fifth grade at Norris Elementary School from January through May 2020, and moved up with her students last August to Thomson-McDuffie Middle School, where she teaches sixth-grade gifted ELA.

With her fifth-graders, Brooks found success in awarding tickets, to be cashed in for prizes, to students who met expectations. But that didn’t work well for middle schoolers, so she uses other rewards, such as letting students sit near friends. Athletes in her classes also know that Ms. Brooks communicates with their coaches.

“I have also learned to let the little things go. My policy is: If it isn’t harming the learning environment, let it go. I let students snack in my class, wear a hood if they want to, write what notes they NEED rather than every word, etc.”

To reach challenging students, Brooks gets personal. She jokes with them, inquires about their weekends and asks them to help with small classroom tasks. She also shares insights into her own life. “Students love to know about teachers’ lives outside of school. My students ALWAYS ask about my dog because they know that I am obsessed with him.”

As with all educators, the past 18 months proved extremely trying. “My fellow teachers and I faced many challenges, such as extremely low attendance, students not knowing how to log in or how to turn in an assignment, and virtual teaching expectations. … In 2021, we started the year virtually and then moved to the blended-hybrid model. I don’t think I have ever experienced something as challenging as that.”

Some students came on A Days (Monday/Tuesday), some on B Days (Wednesday/Thursday) and some were completely virtual. “So not only was I teaching in person and dealing with everything that comes with, but also teaching students online. "Keeping up with who turned in what and how they turned it in was a nightmare.”

And the impact on her district’s Title 1 students was wrenching. “I would guess that only 30 percent of my students consistently log on to virtual lessons. So many students do not have devices or internet access. Even when the school provided Chromebooks, only one was allowed per family, and some families had four-plus students sharing one computer.”

Brooks was buoyed, however, by her technological prowess. “I 100 percent had an advantage as a person who is very familiar with technology,” says Brooks, who was often asked to help other teachers with their Google classrooms, websites and other technology platforms. “I didn’t realize how much I would appreciate the tech skills I have. Being tech-savvy definitely makes life easier, even when we hate technology sometimes.”

The novice educator was also able to turn on a dime, time and again. That pliancy was invaluable as her school ricocheted from virtual to A/B days to full in-school attendance and back again. “Change used to be hard for me, but long ago, my mom told me that the only constant in life is change; flexibility is a must,” she adds.

The hardest part of Brooks’ job is worrying about students. “It never gets easier to hear about someone going hungry, being abused, or having the responsibilities of an adult.” But through the pandemic, Brooks says that she has gained insight. “Going through all the struggles this past year has taught me so much. I have a better understanding of students’ home lives, I have learned about and used many different technology platforms that I otherwise may not have known about, and I have increased my teamwork and communication skills with students, teachers and parents.”

The best part of her career so far, however, has been the fellowship. At Norris Elementary, for example, she had a blast as she and her fellow educators bonded as a team and then learned to navigate virtual learning together, such as by taking students on virtual field trips as COVID gripped the nation. "It showed me that working as a team is so much easier and way more fun than working alone,” says Brooks. "The teachers at Norris Elementary School rocked virtual teaching for the last part of the 2020 school year.”

Another challenging but hopefully less chaotic year lies ahead for the now wise-beyond-her-years, home-grown teacher who has immense love for her hometown: She is working on Gifted Endorsement and, this fall, Brooks begins work on her master’s degree.
It’s About Getting to Know Your Students

By Tom Krause

It is normal for a beginning teacher to ask, “How am I doing?” More experienced teachers, however, learn to be more concerned about “How are my students doing?” To grow as a teacher, the focus must come off oneself and on to the students, and the only true way to know how your students are doing is to get to know them.

The Teacher/Student Connection

A young teacher was having trouble controlling her classroom. Frustrated to tears, she told a successful co-worker how nothing she had tried worked and that students seemed to be daring her to punish them. The fledgling teacher dreaded walking into her room each day, and she was already thinking of leaving the profession.

The experienced educator took out a piece of paper and instructed her co-worker to write down everything she knew about each student. The teacher was at a loss for words. Besides the names of the students, she could barely describe anything else about them. Her colleague then gave the teacher an assignment. She was to interview each student individually to learn as much about them as she could. During the interviews, the new teacher began to make connections with each student. Almost immediately, the atmosphere in the room changed. The teacher learned that her real source of power does not come from the student discipline code; it comes from her positive connection with the students.

You’ll discover that the more you know about each student, the wiser you become as a teacher. Many studies have found that a strong teacher/student connection brings positive results. Test scores increase, discipline referrals decline and the overall atmosphere in the classroom improves. If you have the opportunity, drive by the homes of your students to see the environment from which they come. That could explain why your students may feel your room is the best place they see all day.

President Theodore Roosevelt once said, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” The same applies to students. The personal connection a teacher has with the student is the most influential factor in student success.

Tom Krause is a retired Missouri Public School System educator and an international motivational speaker.
Dealing With Teacher Evaluations

By Mary Ruth Ray, PAGE College Services Representative

All professionals expect to be held accountable for the quality of their work, and teachers are no exception. The implementation of the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) as Georgia’s evaluation system for classroom teachers has generated much hype and uncertainty around teacher evaluations, which can be nerve-wracking if not downright scary. Is your future in the hands of students’ decisions and abilities (or inabilities)? Will a single test score determine your pay? While policymakers are wrestling with such issues, teachers can avoid getting overly anxious about their evaluations by keeping a few pointers in mind.

• It’s rarely as bad as the hype. Humans can be excitable creatures. Rumors abound, truths get distorted and well, you know the rest. Do your best to tune out the gossip and distill the truths from the abundance of information floating around. TKES includes a mandatory orientation and familiarity component to introduce you to the process. You should also talk with your principal or immediate supervisor in advance of your first observation. Allow them the opportunity to set your mind at ease. They want you to succeed as much as you do. No administrator wants a “failing” teacher. They will eagerly spell out what they will be looking for and how to demonstrate it.

• New teachers, in coordination with their administration, establish a Professional Learning Plan as part of the evaluation process. The plan may include your individual professional goals, school improvement goals, district improvement goals or any other district- or school-identified need.

• View the evaluation as an opportunity for professional feedback, not a pass/fail exam. If you have a weak point (and who among us doesn’t?), you want that pointed out so that you can take steps to shore up that particular skill. After all, our students are the ultimate beneficiaries of our competencies. If your evaluator identifies an area for improvement, don’t panic. Discuss it and ask for advice on how to develop that skill. Ask your supervisor to recommend veteran teachers who have expertise in that area with whom you can observe and confer.

• Be sure you get credit for everything you do. TKES allows for teachers to provide evidence of a skill not observed. If an evaluator identifies a “needs improvement” area because they did not see you meet a particular standard, you can provide artifacts after the observation that show that you met it.

• Keep calm and carry on. While we certainly must be cognizant of what is required of us and meet those requirements, those who have been in education for decades realize that seasons come and seasons go. Changes come and can be challenging, but at the end of the day, the sky never falls as people predict. Seek the advice of quality mentors, do what is required and enjoy the magic of teaching!

Talk with your principal or immediate supervisor in advance of your first observation. They will eagerly spell out what they will be looking for and how to demonstrate it.
A
n adage says that the perfect host-
ess is like a duck on water: calm on the surface but paddling like heck underneath! I have found that good teaching is the same. Have you ever noticed how excellent teachers make it look so easy? Their feathers aren’t ruffled, and their classrooms seem to run themselves without a ripple. How do they do it? They would probably be the first to tell you that despite all appearances of calmness, they are indeed paddling like there’s no tomorrow, but there are also some tricks of the trade that can help even novice teachers conduct smoother-running classrooms. Here are a few strategies that I found particularly helpful.

Look ready. During pre-planning, you will be overwhelmed with things to do from lesson planning, meetings and permanent records, to securing textbooks and other materials. Prioritizing is a must.

Standing in the doorway during class changes lets you monitor behavior in the hall and your room at the same time, and you are positioned to curtail a situation before it blossoms into a problem. Furthermore, greeting each student with a warm welcome sets a positive tone for class.

Keep your classroom organized and tidy, and teach your students to do the same. A neat, uncluttered environment promotes calmness and security for you and your students. A chaotic environment can have the opposite effect and unintentionally communicate a haphazard approach to learning. Teach students to straighten their desks or chairs and pick up paper off the floor before leaving. Live by the old saying, “a place for everything and everything in its place.” My desk would accumulate papers throughout the day and become quite a mess, but each afternoon I cleaned, graded and filed until it was all gone. Before I left, a printed copy of my lesson plans for the next day and all necessary materials were laid out neatly enough that if a substitute had to be called in...
unexpectedly, he or she could walk in and teach my lessons without missing a beat.

- Assign a seating chart — at least until you know your students’ names. I always kept the seating chart for each class in front of me so that I could call on students by name from day one. This makes the student-teacher interaction more personal and promotes the idea that you know what’s going on and are “in charge.” If you are resistant to the idea of assigning seats to older students, allow them to select their own desks on the first day, make a note of the seating arrangement and ask that they stay in those same desks for two weeks until you learn everyone’s name.

- Create routines that are not dependent on you. The more you can make the classroom run itself without your direct involvement, the more you are free to teach students. For instance, I took attendance each morning with a shoebox and clothespins. Each student had a clothespin with his or her name on it clipped to the side of the shoebox. As a student arrived in the morning, he or she unclipped that clothespin and dropped it in the box. After class was underway and I had a free moment, I could look at the clothespins left “standing” and easily see who was absent. Other ideas include training students to turn in homework to a specific location as they enter the room and assigning students to water plants or feed the class hamster. One exception to this rule is class dismissal. I recommend establishing that you, not the bell, dismiss the class. Otherwise, you have chaos break out when the bell interrupts you mid-sentence while you are giving important, last-minute homework instructions.

- Greet your students at the door. Much misbehavior begins in the hallway and is brought into the classroom. Standing in the doorway during class changes enables you to monitor behavior in both the hall and your room at the same time, and you are positioned to curtail a situation before it blossoms into a behavior problem. Furthermore, greeting each student with a warm welcome sets a positive tone for class.

- Have a warm-up assignment ready as students enter. Younger students may have a coloring sheet, while older students may have a math word problem or writing prompt. Train your students to begin working on the warm-up activity without having to be told. This takes advantage of every instructional minute and prevents behavior problems that arise from “down time.” It is also a helpful way to review previously taught skills. To be effective, the warm-up activities need to be meaningful, and students must know they will be held accountable for getting the work done.

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working on the warm-up activity without having to be told. This takes advantage of every instructional minute and prevents behavior problems that arise from “down time.” It is also a helpful way to review previously taught skills. Keep in mind that in order to be effective, the warm-up activities need to be meaningful, and students must know they will be held accountable for getting it done.

- **When possible, use low-profile interventions.** All the routines and procedures in the world are not going to completely prevent behavior problems. Prepare ahead of time how you will address inappropriate actions and, when possible, intervene as privately as you can. This gives the student the opportunity to correct his or her behavior rather than feeling the need to “save face” in front of the class. For instance, if Katelyn is playing at her desk rather than participating in class discussion, inconspicuously drop a note on her desk that reads, “I think you would have some good ideas to share if you will pay attention. Thanks!” Keeping the intervention positive and encouraging gives the student every reason to cooperate. More serious or chronic misbehaviors may need stronger intervention, but a private conference after class will be more effective than raising your voice.

- **Learn that “fair” is not always “same.”** Early in my career, I felt trapped by the notion that I should treat all students the same, because I thought this was only fair. In time, however, I came to realize that “fair” is not always “same.” Students have individual needs, learning styles and circumstances. You certainly want to have consistent rules and policies and be careful about making exceptions, but allow yourself room for professional judgment. I had a student who was severely hyperactive. Without the help of his medication, he literally could not keep still. He would put one knee in his seat, the other foot on the floor and bounce like a basketball. Furthermore, he was constantly traveling back and forth to the pencil sharpener. No amount of pleading, cajoling or threatening could stop him, or if it did stop him, he was unable to concentrate on his work from concentrating on staying still. So, acting on advice from a veteran educator, I moved his desk to the back of the room right next to the pencil sharpener and gave him carte blanche to bounce and sharpen to his heart’s content. Because he was in the back, his movements were not distracting to his classmates, and his mind was free to concentrate on his work. The system worked beautifully. Of course, it wouldn’t have made sense to allow this freedom to everyone in the class, but for this student it was the fairest thing I could have done.

- **Don’t go it alone.** Before actually having one’s own classroom, it is difficult to realize how isolating teaching can be. For much of the day you are confined to the four walls of your classroom and are often the only adult within them. You will need to be intentional about seeking advice and ideas from your colleagues. Ask your principal for opportunities to observe outstanding teachers and for them to observe you to give you feedback. Plan lessons collaboratively within your grade level or department. Reflecting on your craft and discussing it with colleagues can be invaluable. However, be sure to select colleagues who are positive and professional. Planning sessions that morph into gripe sessions are counterproductive and can undermine your effectiveness and personal satisfaction on the job.

- **Give yourself the gift of time.** A new teacher should understand that despite years of quality preparation, the first year is hard. It is hard and exhausting. You will wonder what you have gotten yourself into, and yes, there will be days when you want to quit. Do not let this alarm you. I shed many tears and made more than my share of mistakes during my first year. So now that you know to expect, what do you do? You keep at it. You will be surprised how much easier your second year is, and your third will be even easier. It never gets easy, but it does get easier. Most new teachers need about five years to really hit their stride and get truly comfortable.
New teachers: Beware the ides of late fall, specifically October through the December break. This period can be especially daunting for first-year educators.

New teachers start the year filled with excitement and a tremendous commitment to making a difference. Soon, however, they are consumed with unexpected challenges and the nonstop demands of teaching. According to the New Teacher Center, new teachers tend to hit the "disillusionment" phase in late fall. That’s when, coupled with being overwhelmed and tired, you realize that things aren’t going as smoothly as planned. In fact, you’re probably wondering what you’ve gotten yourself into.

Just knowing that this is completely normal can be a big help. In fact, many teachers experience this disillusionment phase each fall for several years. When you hit these rough waters, be sure to seek encouragement from a veteran teacher with a positive outlook. Visit other classrooms and watch experienced teachers. Take constructive criticism as positive feedback and grow from it. Find your groove. Remember, great teachers are made, not born.

Most of all, take care of yourself physically and emotionally and ride the wave until spring when disillusionment tends to give way to rejuvenation and ultimately anticipation for a great second year!

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The ABCs of ‘Educationese’

One of the challenges with any new career is learning the vernacular of the field, and education is no different. In an effort to help you develop fluency in “Educationese,” PAGE has assembled a reference list of commonly used acronyms — some specific to the field of education and some general.

**AASA:** American Association of School Administrators  
**ADA:** Americans with Disabilities Act  
**ADD:** Attention Deficit Disorder  
**ADHD:** Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder  
**AP:** Accommodation Plan (Section 504 Students)  
**AP:** Advanced Placement  
**BEOG:** Basic Education Opportunity Grant  
**BOE:** Board of Education  
**BST:** Basic Skills Test  
**CAP:** Corrective Action Plan  
**CBA:** Curriculum-Based Assessment  
**CCGPS:** Common Core Georgia Performance Standards  
**CCRPI:** College and Career Readiness Performance Index  
**CDC:** Centers for Disease Control  
**CEC:** Council for Exceptional Children  
**CEU:** Continuing Education Unit  
**CIEA:** Coalition of Independent Education Associations  
**CO:** Central Office  
**COE:** Code of Ethics or College of Education  
**CPI:** Certified Personnel Information  
**CRT:** Criterion-Referenced Test  
**CTAE:** Career, Technical and Agricultural Education  
**DFCS:** Department of Family and Children Services  
**DOE:** Department of Education  
**DOL:** Department of Labor  
**DPH:** Department of Public Health  
**EBD:** Emotional/Behavioral Disorders  
**ECE:** Early Childhood Education  
**EIP:** Early Intervention Program  
**ELG:** Education’s Leadership Georgia  
**ELL:** English Language Learners  
**EOCT:** End of Course Test  
**EOGT:** End of Grade Test  
**ESL:** English as a Second Language  
**ESOL:** English to Speakers of Other Languages  
**ESSA:** Every Student Succeeds Act  
**F & RP:** Free and Reduced Price Policy  
**F2F:** Face to Face (Learning)  
**FAPE:** Functional Behavior Assessment  
**FERPA:** Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act  
**FFCRA:** Families First Coronavirus Response Act  
**FGE:** Future Georgia Educators  
**FICA:** Federal Insurance Contributions Act (Social Security Tax)  
**FIP:** Formative Instructional Practices  
**FTE:** Full Time Equivalent  
**FY:** Fiscal Year  
**GACE:** Georgia Advisory Council on Education  
**GACIS:** Georgia Association of Curriculum and Instructional Supervisors  
**GACTE:** Georgia Association for Career and Technical Education  
**GACTE:** Georgia Association of Colleges for Teacher Education  
**GAEL:** Georgia Association of Educational Leaders  
**GAESP:** Georgia Association of Elementary School Principals  
**GAMSP:** Georgia Association of Middle School Principals  
**GASCD:** Georgia Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development  
**GASPA:** Georgia Association of School Personnel Administrators  
**GASSP:** Georgia Association of Secondary School Principals  
**GAfTAP:** Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy  
**GBOE:** Georgia Board of Education  
**GCASE:** Georgia Council of Administrators of Special Education  
**GKAP:** Georgia Kindergarten Assessment Program  
**GBOE:** Georgia Board of Education  
**GCE:** Georgia Council of Administrators of Special Education  
**GKAP:** Georgia Kindergarten Assessment Program  
**GMAS:** Georgia Milestones Assessment System  
**GPEE:** Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education  
**GPS:** Georgia Performance Standards  
**GSSA:** Georgia School Superintendents Association  
**GTAP:** Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program  
**H/H:** Hospital/Homebound  
**HI:** Health Insurance  
**HIPAA:** Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act  
**HOPE:** Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally  
**IAP:** Individualized Accommodation Plan  
**IDEA:** Individuals with Disabilities Education Act  
**IEP:** Individualized Education Plan  
**ILT:** Instructional Lead Teacher  
**ISS:** In-School Suspension  
**IT:** Instructional Teacher  
**IV:** Instructional Television  
**IU:** Instructional Unit  
**LAPS:** Leader Assessment Performance Standard  
**LBOE:** Local Board of Education  
**LD:** Learning Disability  
**LEP:** Limited English Proficiency  
**LEP:** Limited English Proficiency  
**LIKES:** Leader Keys Effectiveness System  
**LRE:** Least Restrictive Environment  
**LUA:** Local Unit of Administration  
**MEA:** Migrant Education Agency  
**MID:** Mildly Mentally Handicapped  
**MIMH:** Mildly Mentally Handicapped  
**MOD:** Modification  
**MID:** Mildly Mentally Handicapped  
**NBPTS:** National Board for Professional Teaching Standards  
**NRT:** Norm-referenced Test  
**NTE:** National Teacher’s Examination  
**OCGA:** Official Code of Georgia Annotated (state law)  
**ODD:** Oppositional Defiant Disorder  
**OH:** Other Health Impaired  
**PAGE:** Professional Association of Georgia Educators  
**PBIS:** Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports  
**PDP:** Professional Development Plan  
**PPF:** Pay for Performance  
**PL:** Public Law  
**PLU:** Professional Learning Unit  
**PO:** Purchase Order  
**PR:** Percentile Rank  
**PSC:** Professional Standards Commission  
**PSERS:** Public School Employees Retirement System  
**PSRS:** Public School Recruitment Services  
**PTA:** Parent-Teacher Association  
**PTO:** Parent-Teacher Organization  
**PTSA:** Parent-Teacher-Student Association  
**QBE:** Quality Basic Education  
**REP:** Remedial Education Program  
**RESA:** Regional Educational Service Agency  
**RF:** Reduction in Force  
**RT:** Race to the Top  
**RTI:** Response to Intervention  
**SAAC:** Student Assessment Advisory Committee  
**SAD:** Severe Behavior Disorder  
**SADD:** Significant Developmental Delay  
**SBD:** Severe Behavior Disorder  
**SED:** Severely Emotionally Disturbed  
**SGM:** Student Growth Model  
**SL:** Speech/Language Impairment  
**SIA:** Special Instructional Assistance  
**SID:** Severe Intellectual Disability  
**SIP:** School Improvement Plan  
**SIS:** Student Information System  
**SLD:** Specific Learning Disability  
**SLDS:** Student Longitudinal Data System  
**SLO:** Student Learning Objective  
**SLP:** Speech/Language Pathologist  
**SOE:** Schools of Excellence  
**SOP:** Standard Operating Procedure  
**SPLS:** Special Local Option Sales Tax  
**SREB:** Southern Regional Education Board  
**SSI:** Supplemental Security Income (Social Security)  
**SST:** Student Support Team  
**STAR:** Student Teacher Achievement Recognition  
**STAR:** Student Transfer And Recovery  
**S-T-W:** School to Work  
**SY:** School Year  
**TAP:** Teaching As a Profession  
**TAPS:** Teacher Assessment Performance Standards  
**TESOL:** Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages  
**TKES:** Teacher Keys Effectiveness System  
**TOTY:** Teacher of the Year  
**TRS:** Teacher Retirement System  
**VAM:** Value-Added Model  
**WFH:** Work from Home  
**YAP:** Youth Apprenticeship Program  
**YTD:** Year to Date
As a new teacher years ago, I learned the value of building relationships with school support personnel — secretaries, custodians, cafeteria workers and bus drivers. While teachers and administrators are highly visible in schools, support personnel make the school function smoothly. Another valuable relationship to build is with your PAGE member services representative (MSR). We provide Georgia educators with real-time connections to legal, legislative and member services, and we foster professional relationships with every staff member in our schools to show how much we value the work you do on behalf of Georgia students.

New teacher orientation usually provides the first opportunity to meet your PAGE MSR. Throughout Georgia, 15 MSRs and their consultants attend orientations (often bearing snacks) to welcome new teachers to their system. During the school year, you'll also likely see your PAGE MSR at a faculty meeting or at a meet-and-greet session. Please become acquainted with your MSR. He or she always has useful “freebies” as well as important information regarding legislation, the State Health Benefit Plan, the Professional Standards Commission, the Teachers Retirement System and more.

You might also see your MSR accompanying a PAGE attorney for a code of ethics presentation in your system or school. We provide these sessions at no cost to the school, and we welcome your questions. It’s also a good idea to have your MSRs contact information handy. While MSRs do not provide legal advice, they can assist you in contacting one of the six PAGE staff attorneys. And you always can call PAGE yourself. The legal department is available during business hours, but if you are unable to speak with someone directly, an assistant can arrange to have your call returned after hours.

During the legislative session, the PAGE legislative team produces the “Capitol Report,” a summary of education legislation. Throughout the year, PAGE reports on meetings of groups that influence salary, retirement, insurance or certification. PAGE MSRs forward this information to school building contacts, who forward it to PAGE members. You may receive reports directly by signing up for them at www.pageinc.org. And in mid-February of each year, PAGE sponsors PAGE/GAEL/GACTE Day on Capitol Hill, a time to hear from House and Senate education leaders and to meet with your senator or representative personally.

You also might see a PAGE MSR teaching a high school class in the Early Childhood Education or Teaching as a Profession pathway. After all, most PAGE MSRs are former classroom teachers.

Finally, in a time when teachers often are taken for granted, PAGE believes that you and your colleagues provide Georgia families with unparalleled services. One of the many ways we like to acknowledge that is with treats. So, if your “chocolate first-aid kit” needs to be restocked, look no further than your PAGE MSR. We know that sometimes chocolate is the best medicine.

In a New School? Update Your Membership

Teachers new to a district often ask about upgrading their PAGE student membership or transferring their PAGE professional membership from another school system. New teachers, please remember that once you have signed your employment contract, your PAGE student membership must be upgraded to professional status to maintain liability coverage. PAGE offers a first-year discount to student members upgrading to professional membership, so be sure to take advantage of that opportunity.

If you have moved to a new school system and you have previously taken advantage of payroll deduction, please be aware that you must complete a new application (online at www.pageinc.org or on paper) to maintain continuous liability protection and access to PAGE staff attorneys. Even if you pay by credit card, we still need to know if you have changed systems.
As the new school year begins, there is always an excitement, especially for new teachers. However, along with the excitement comes some apprehension about the unknown. What if you get a student who occasionally exhibits violent behavior? What if a parent is overly protective of his or her child and would not hesitate to file a lawsuit against you for the slightest slipup on your part? Or, what if you have a new principal who scrutinizes and second-guesses everything you do?

To help you avoid legal problems, follow this advice:

• Report suspected child abuse in writing within 24 hours of the time you first have reason to believe that a student in your care has been abused. Keep a copy of that report for your records. In most Georgia counties, you are to report the suspected abuse to a designated authority in your school. (In Fulton County, you must report it to DFCS.) Check your school’s written policy. “Child abuse” means physical injury or death inflicted upon a child by a parent or caretaker by other than accidental means; neglect or exploitation of a child by a parent or caretaker; sexual abuse of a child; or sexual exploitation of a child.

• Report all incidents of bullying in writing as soon possible: physical, mental or cyber. Keep a copy of that report for your records.

• Do not permit a student to be alone with you in a closed area. Furthermore, do not drive a student home from an after-school event unless absolutely necessary, and even then, always have another person in the car with you. If at all possible, secure written permission from an administrator.

• Force against a student may not be used unless it is absolutely necessary to defend yourself or protect someone else from injury.

• Do not leave your class unattended, especially if a fight has started between students. In case of such emergencies, have a designated student in your class go to the front office for assistance. Teachers have a duty to exercise proper supervision over students in their classes and reasonable care to prevent injury to them.

• Corporal punishment may only be administered by the principal or the principal’s designee and authorized by written policy adopted by the school board. Even if you are authorized to administer corporal punishment, strict guidelines must be followed.

• Do not search a student’s body (i.e., “strip search”) even if you believe you have probable cause that warrants a search. In almost every case, strip searches of students are found to be a violation of students’ Fourth Amendment rights.

• Do not change a young child’s underwear or diapers unless another adult is present.

• Follow the chain of command if you have a complaint. First, go to your immediate supervisor, and then move up the chain of command.

• Do not tutor one of your students for compensation.

• Keep accurate records and receipts in the collection and disbursement of school monies (for example, school clubs or athletic events).

• Always maintain a professional relationship with students, even if they may be close to your age. Do not have a relationship with a student outside of school or school activities.

• Do not establish electronic relationships with students through email, text or social media that do not relate directly to school. Any use of electronic communication with students should first be approved by your administrator.
One of the most important areas of school law in Georgia is the Professional Standard Commission’s implementation and interpretation of the Code of Ethics for Educators. The Code of Ethics defines the required professional behavior of educators. All educators in Georgia, from paraprofessionals to superintendents, hold a license issued to them by the PSC. Failure to follow the Code of Ethics can result in the PSC issuing sanctions against an educator’s certificate.

The Code of Ethics consists of 10 standards of conduct. It is imperative for educators — not those just newly certified — to maintain familiarity with all 10 standards. While some unethical conduct is very clear (i.e., don’t become romantically involved with a student), there are seemingly murkier areas where educators often have the right intentions, but those intentions lead to the wrong results. Two areas that pose potential minefields for educators are handling Individualized Education Program documents and mandated reporting of child abuse.

**Individualized Education Program Documents**

An IEP document is a federally mandated document for children with special needs and/or learning disabilities. Generally, an IEP document identifies the student and his/her disability, and it includes accommodations that the school must implement in order for the child to be successful. IEPs are governed by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

There are several mistakes in the IEP process that may result in a sanction from the PSC. First, drafting, revising, updating or amending an IEP requires an IEP meeting. This meeting involves the parent(s), student, special education teacher, regular education teacher and administrator. At the end of the meeting, each person involved signs off on the IEP. Do not sign an IEP document without having an IEP meeting with everyone in the room at the same time. Sporadic contact, such as phone calls to parents regarding the IEP, emails among faculty members about the IEP, or discussing the case outside of the IEP meeting, does not constitute the actual IEP meeting. No educator should sign his/her name unless he/she was actually in the meeting with all of the others present. Such action, in the eyes of the PSC, constitutes dishonest conduct under Standard 4. Moreover — and this should come as no surprise — there is no reason to sign someone else’s name to an IEP. This also is considered unethical conduct under Standard 4.

Failure to implement the IEP does not always constitute unethical conduct; however, it could result in the parent filing a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education. For example, if the IEP mandates that a student must have all assessments read aloud to him/her, then this must happen, even if the student indicates that he/she wishes to waive the right. While this may not be considered unethical conduct, it could result in adverse employment action, such as a reprimand, termination or non-renewal.

**Required Reporting of Child Abuse**

Georgia law mandates that all school employees are required reporters of child abuse. Ethically, this is codified as Standard 8. If you suspect that a child has been abused, you must report your suspicions in writing within 24 hours. Most school systems in Georgia require that an educator submit this report to someone at the school, such as a school counselor or administrator. Some school systems require educators to report directly to the Department of Family and Children Services. Regardless, it is important for all educators to familiarize themselves with the reporting procedures of their respective district at the beginning of the school year.

Failure to report child abuse often results in the PSC issuing severe sanctions, particularly when a child has been harmed after the educator became aware of the abuse. Because of the criminal component of the reporting statute, several Georgia educators have been arrested for failure to report. Educators who file mandated reports should also keep thorough documentation regarding the report.

All PAGE members confronted with questions about ethics should contact the PAGE Legal Department for guidance.

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Contracts
Educators must have a signed contract of employment to teach in a Georgia school system. Contracts are binding agreements between an educator and the state or local employer. A contract can be terminated by:

- Mutual agreement, which means by resignation of the employee and acceptance of the resignation by the employer; or
- Dismissal from employment for cause.

Resigning without the employer’s consent constitutes breach of contract and abandonment of position. In such cases, the Georgia Professional Standards Commission may sanction one’s teaching certificate and the school system may pursue legal action for breach of contract or seek liquidated damages — if permitted by the contract.

Tenured and Non-tenured Employees
Contracts have a one-year term; there is no guarantee that you will be offered a new contract. That situation changes if the educator has signed four consecutive, full-year, full-time teaching contracts in the same school system; or if the employer has failed to notify the employee of non-renewal of contract for the fourth year by May 15. Once the employee has signed a fourth, full-year, full-time consecutive contract by the same employer, he or she enjoys “tenure,” which means that the school system must renew your contract year after year, unless good cause for non-renewal can be shown.

If a tenured employee transfers to a different school system, the time needed to become tenured in the new system is shortened to one year plus the acceptance of a second-consecutive contract; or if the employer failed to notify the employee of nonrenewal of contract for the second-consecutive year by May 15.

A school system can choose to non-renew the contract of a non-tenured teacher by sending written notification of non-renewal by May 15. Upon the request of a non-renewed employee, state law requires local systems give a written explanation for the reasons of non-renewal.

Termination and Suspension
An educator may have his or her contract terminated or suspended for the following reasons: incompetence; insubordination; willful neglect of duties; immorality; inciting, encouraging or counseling students to violate any valid state law, municipal ordinance or policy or rule of the local board of education; reducing staff due to loss of students or cancellation of programs; failure to secure and maintain necessary educational training; or any other good and sufficient cause. A suspension without pay must be preceded by formal charges and a hearing. A temporary relief from duties is always given with pay and occurs when the educator’s alleged conduct is of such a nature that his or her continued presence in the classroom or administrative office is indefensible. In the case of temporary relief from duties, a hearing to adjudicate the charges must be made available to the educator within 10 working days after he or she has been relieved from duty.

Insubordination is the willful nonadherence to a reasonable direct order issued by a proper authority. More often than not, insubordination and willful neglect of duty go hand in hand.

School Board Records
Pursuant to the Georgia Open Records Law, all state, county and municipal records, except exempted records, are open for inspection by any Georgia citizen. The person in charge of the records has up to three business days to determine whether a requested record is accessible under the law.

Records not subject to public disclosure include the following:

- Records that reveal a public school employee’s home address, home phone number, Social Security number, insurance or medical information.
- Performance evaluation records. (Performance evaluations shall not be transferred to another employer or potential employer, unless authorized in writing by the person who was evaluated.); and
- Confidential evaluations/references submitted in connection with the hiring of an employee. The right of privacy extends only to freedom from unnecessary public scrutiny. It does not protect a legitimate inquiry into the operation of a government and those employed by it.

Note about Charter and Strategic Waiver systems: Charter Systems/Schools are exempt from most Title 20 Georgia public education laws. Strategic Waiver School Systems may also waive some laws. If you teach in one of these schools, consult your system’s local policies and procedures as the above listed information may not apply in your district.

Legal Rights & Responsibilities of Georgia Educators

By Jill Hay, PAGE General Counsel
The following are important questions frequently asked by PAGE members throughout the pandemic. New teachers are entering the profession during an unprecedented time in education. Below is sound advice offered by our PAGE attorneys.

Am I still responsible for keeping student information confidential?
Yes, to the best of your ability. To ensure that student confidentiality is maintained, it’s important to follow your district’s guidelines for online teaching. Only use approved systems to administer online content. Do not invite anyone into your class sessions that does not have an educational need to be there. Do not take and share screen shots of your classes for anything other than educational purposes.

Can I record my students? Again, follow the districts requirements. Some districts require classes to be recorded while others do not allow classes to be recorded. When in doubt, ask your administrator.

Can I get in trouble for something a student, parent or admin sees on my screen?
Yes, it’s important to remember that you are a professional and need to maintain the same professionalism on screen that you would maintain in your classroom. This includes, dressing professionally, controlling the sounds in the background, and controlling what can be seen in the background of your screen.

Does my duty to report abuse/neglect extend to things I see online?
Yes, you are required to report suspected abuse/neglect within 24 hours of any event that causes you to suspect abuse may be occurring. This includes things you may see online with your students.

What is the best way to address safety concerns if I believe my district is not doing all it should to protect the employees?
If you have any concerns about the safety procedures put in place in your school, we recommend that you address these concerns with your principal and suggest specific solutions. Making your administration aware and having an open dialogue is imperative. If you are concerned about retaliation, put your concerns in writing in an email to your principal. Many times, your administration is just as concerned and looking for ideas to keep students and staff safe. If a principal dismisses your concerns without a response, you can then take your concerns up the chain of command.

Is it required that students and staff wear masks and follow social distancing guidelines while in the school building?
There is no state mandate for masks. Each local school system will have rules or procedures about wearing masks and/or face shields as well as procedures about social distancing. Educators who have concerns should wear their facemasks and/or face shields and talk with their principals about how this will be handled at their schools.

What should I do if my school system or school asks me to sign a waiver regarding the coronavirus?
Generally, we advise avoiding signing any waiver unless and until you have discussed the matter with an attorney. We do not believe that a district can require you to sign a waiver nor do we think a waiver would be enforceable if an employer is guilty of gross negligence. In addition, an employer cannot waive its responsibility under workers’ compensation laws. If you are asked to sign a waiver, do not sign it. You should be non-committal if you are asked whether you will eventually sign it. Be sure to contact the PAGE Legal Department as soon as possible to discuss the matter with an attorney. You will probably be asked to submit a copy of the waiver to the department for review.

Can I be held liable by the parents if a child in my classroom gets coronavirus at school?
This is highly unlikely. So long as you follow the safety procedures put in place by your district, you will not be liable for resulting infections.

Can I be disciplined for being absent at this time?
Yes, if your absence is unapproved. To avoid this situation, an employee should always seek an approved leave by their supervisor or central office.
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- Secondary
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**Certificate-Only**
- Non-Degree

**DEADLINES**
- Fall - July 1
- Spring - December 1
- Summer - April 15

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Whether it is a traditional manila file folder or digital files, make sure to keep important personal and professional records. Such documents provide a clear history and proof of your professional experience and development. Your career may span many years in many locations, and in our hectic society, a key document may be difficult to track down when you need it most.

The following are a dozen document types to keep safely on hand:

1. **College transcripts from every college you attended:** K-12 systems often require that universities send an official transcript directly to them, but a student copy can assist you in completing applications and employment-related papers.

2. **GACE, Praxis or Graduate Record Examination scores:** Obtaining copies of test scores later can be time consuming and expensive.

3. **Letters of recommendation:** Letters of recommendation from principals and peer teachers document your on-the-job performance and are important in determining future career opportunities.

4. **Teaching contracts:** A copy of each signed contract is important because it verifies your employment with a school system and your length of service.

5. **Payroll records:** Pay stubs and tax documents issued by your school system record your salary, as well as your tax deductions, retirement plan, Social Security contributions and insurance costs.

6. **Sick leave:** These records show how much remaining sick leave you have available before deductions are taken from your salary. In Georgia schools, two years of sick leave may be accumulated and used toward retirement upon completion of 28 years of service.

7. **Evaluations and professional development plans:** Retain all documents pertaining to your performance evaluations, responsibilities and employment status, including commendations or recommendations. If you have formally disagreed with any part of an evaluation or professional development plan, attach a copy of your written response to the file.

8. **Major correspondence from district administrators:** Letters of appointments to committees, positions of leadership or recognition help build a strong résumé.

9. **Copies (or at least computer screen shots) of conference or workshop programs listing you as a presenter/contributor:** This résumé-boosting documentation will improve your accuracy and confidence in citing your participation.

10. **Activities, accomplishments and awards:** Keep a running list of in-service training, subject specialization, classes/subjects taught, extracurricular responsibilities, special skills and honors/awards. It will make updating your résumé a breeze.

11. **Records of severe student matters:** These records concern any major student problem that involves hearings and/or court proceedings.

12. **PAGE membership:** A current PAGE membership provides you with liability coverage and immediate access to legal advice.
Lean In, Georgia Educators:

Educators Must Be the Most Vocal Advocates of Public Education

By Meg Thornton

State laws impact all aspects of your work as a Georgia public schools educator — from compensation and benefits, to testing, evaluation, curriculum, class size and rules of conduct. State funding and regulations also determine whether Georgia’s children are afforded an education that fuels lifelong stability and achievement.

Given the massive power and reach of legislation, Georgia educators must continually take an active role in shaping education policy. Lawmakers making education decisions are rarely educators, so they need to hear from us — they need our insight to understand the impact of their decisions on us and, more importantly, on our students.

People who don’t vote lose their voice in government, yet many Georgia public school educators do not exercise their right to vote. Until many more educators participate in this critical civic responsibility, the governor and legislators will continue to insist that we need to do more with much, much less. With continuing attacks on educator rights and benefits, it is more important than ever to be politically active.

Furthermore, how can educators who are not even registered to vote encourage students to vote? The best educators practice what they preach.

If the past decade has taught us anything, it is that we cannot simply expect that Georgia K–12 education will be appropriately funded. The state cut billions of dollars out of its education budget about 10 years ago, and, even though some of funds have been reinstated, the number of children living in poverty here still hovers at about 20 percent.

PAGE brings the message of public education to the General Assembly each and every day, but that alone is not enough. Educators must be the most vocal advocates of public education. We keep folks informed about what is going on at the Capitol and when it is important to contact your legislator about an important upcoming vote. The bottom line is that it is important for lawmakers to hear from you on key education issues.

Given the massive power and reach of legislation, Georgia teachers must continually take an active role in shaping education policy.
Earn an A+ in Advocacy

Follow these steps to influence policy and make a big difference in Georgia public education:

• Register to vote. It’s simple. Register online via the Georgia Secretary of State’s office; there’s a link on the PAGE website (pageinc.org) in the “Legislation” section. You may also register at your local library or when you renew your driver’s license.

• Stay abreast of key legislation issues impacting education in Georgia. Visit pageinc.org to sign up today for the PAGE legislative newsletter delivered to your personal email address.

• Learn about the candidates and their positions on education issues. Know if the elected officials serving your area are voting with the best interests of students in mind. Again, PAGE legislative emails are a great starting point.

• Reach out regularly to your representatives. Voice your opinion based on your experience as a Georgia educator. Simply identify yourself, note your role in education, and briefly and professionally state why you oppose or support a bill. Always contact policymakers using personal — not school — email accounts and electronic devices, outside of instructional time.

• Know election dates and be sure to vote. Voting early is easy and convenient. Mark your calendar for early voting dates in your district.

• Inform others of important education issues, and urge others to register and vote on behalf of education.

In recent years, Georgia educators have come out in force for the annual PAGE Day on Capitol Hill, co-sponsored with GAEL and GACTE. In fact, educator calls and emails played a major role in convincing lawmakers to reduce standardized testing and educator evaluation requirements.
The Valdosta State University Master of Arts in English Studies for Language Arts Teachers is an innovative online degree program designed specifically for language arts teachers who wish to expand their content knowledge in the major subfields of the discipline, including literature, composition, rhetoric, linguistics and creative writing.

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- Can be completed in two years including summers.
- Content covers all major subfields in English studies.
- Traditional Master of Arts in English also offered.

Application Deadlines
Spring: November 1
Summer: April 1
Fall: July 1

www.valdosta.edu/maeslat
The 2021-2022 educator salary schedule had not been approved by the State Board of Education by press time. PAGE anticipates no changes from the 2020-2021 version.

# 2020-2021 Georgia Department of Education Salary Schedule

## GEORGIA ANNUAL/MONTHLY SALARY SCHEDULE FOR 10 MONTHS EMPLOYMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Creditable Service</th>
<th>Salary Step</th>
<th>Base Equals $37,092.00</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T-1</td>
<td>$35,217.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-2</td>
<td>$35,217.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROV T-4</td>
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<tr>
<td>OF T-4</td>
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<tr>
<td>OF T-5</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OF T-6</td>
<td>$56,625.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Level of Certification

- **E**: 12 months
- **L1**: 10 months
- **L2**: 8 months
- **L3**: 6 months
- **L4**: 4 months
- **L5**: 2 months

### Understanding the Teacher Salary Schedule

Georgia's teacher salary schedule is based on certification levels, education and years of satisfactory experience. Educators with fewer than three years of creditable experience start at Salary Step E. (*"E" stands for "entry.")

The state salary schedule represents the minimum that must be paid to teachers. Some school districts add a local supplement set by the local board of education.

### How to Read the Salary Schedule

**Column 1** lists the years of creditable experience. Beginning teachers start at zero.

**Column 2** shows the salary steps. Beginning teachers start at Step E.

**Columns 3-12** are the state minimum salary for each certification level based on education and experience. The larger figure in each column is the yearly 10-month salary. The smaller figure is the yearly pay divided by 12 so that teachers receive a paycheck over the summer.

Beginning teachers with a four-year degree who enter the workforce in the fall of 2019 will start at the T-4 level and earn $37,092 for 10 months ($3,091.00 per pay period over 12 months). Teachers who reach Step 7 remain at that level for two years before reaching the L1 step (although they may receive state or local pay raises). The "L" in steps L1 through L6 stands for longevity. L1 through L5 teachers remain at each salary step for two years before moving to the next step (although they may receive state or local pay increases). L6 educators — those with 21+ plus years of experience — receive no step increase, only the state and/or local salary increases.
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- Elementary Education, M.A.T.
- Middle Grades Education, B.S.Ed.
- Middle Grades Education Certification Only (Undergraduate Non-Degree)
- Middle Grades Education, M.A.T.
- P-12 Education, M.A.T.
- Secondary Education, M.A.T.

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  - ESOL
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  - Curriculum and Instruction, Ph.D.

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- Educational Leadership (P-12 Tier One) Certification Only (Non-Degree)
- Educational Leadership (P-12 Tier Two) Certification Only (Non-Degree)
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