



May 15, 2020

Dear Representative Lewis,

Congress is engaged in a critical conversation about additional federal aid to states to protect the essential services they provide citizens, including public education. Nearly 1.8 million Georgia children are served by school districts, which rely on the state for more than half of their funding. On behalf of the 97,000 Georgia educators who are members of the Professional Association of Georgia Educators (PAGE), we write to recommend providing additional federal dollars targeted to school districts. This funding is essential to help districts continue providing instruction and other necessary supports to students in the face of sudden and steep declines in state revenue due to COVID-19. PAGE members work in every school district across Georgia and recognize the importance of adequate funding to meet students' needs during this challenging time.

State funds help ensure teachers, school counselors, social workers, nurses, principals, bus drivers and other employees assist students every day. These educators provide students the instruction and additional supports they need to succeed academically, are prepared for postsecondary study, and can participate fully in Georgia's workforce. These state funds are now at risk.

Like all state agencies in Georgia, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) has been directed to cut 14 percent from its budget. Funding for school districts will absorb most of this cut: more than 93 percent of GaDOE's budget goes directly to school districts for core operations. Districts will lose an estimated \$1.3 billion for the 2020-2021 school year.

While absorbing these cuts, school leaders must focus on helping students make up the learning lost during the COVID-19 school closures. Leaders are considering supplemental learning programs, developing plans to keep students and staff safe when schools re-open, and exploring options to ensure every student has a computer and internet access and that teachers acquire training to fully adapt to online instruction. Critically, schools must help students whose family members have contracted COVID-19 or died from the virus, whose parents have lost jobs, may have experienced abuse, or are coping with other challenges.

During the Great Recession, Georgia students and school districts experienced similar cuts: State funding for districts was slashed by \$1 billion each year from fiscal years 2010 to 2014. To cope with this financial loss, districts eliminated about 10,000 teaching positions, raised class sizes, furloughed teachers, slashed days from the school year, and eliminated or reduced fine arts and elective classes. Numerous school districts already are telling their staff to expect furloughs, some as many as 20 days which is equivalent to a full month of employment, and more importantly loss of instruction at the most critical time for students. Researchers found that state

funding cuts harmed student learning. These cuts would have been more detrimental without federal recovery funds, which partially offset state cuts for fiscal years 2009 to 2011.

At PAGE, we already have seen the initial impact of school closures. We surveyed our members to understand their experiences and those of their students. Thirty-eight percent of teachers report that students' lack of access to technology and internet is the greatest challenge they face with online instruction. Teachers in high-poverty districts are more likely to report this than those in low-poverty districts. Teachers also have significant non-academic concerns for their students including food insecurity, child-care and transportation.

We ask you to support additional federal funding for states and local governments. To date, \$30.75 billion has been invested in the Education Stabilization Fund of the CARES Act to support K-12 and postsecondary education. These resources are a strong and valuable first step, but more is needed to avoid cuts that threaten student learning. During the Great Recession, the federal government funneled more than \$97 billion to public education, including over \$2.2 billion to Georgia. We respectfully recommend a comparable investment in Georgia's public schools so that they can continue to effectively meet students' needs.

PAGE welcomes continued discussion about Georgia's public schools and the children they serve. Please contact us for more information or to answer your questions at mciccarelli@pageinc.org or 770-216-8555.

Thank you for your consideration and your service. We appreciate your support for Georgia's public school students and educators.

Sincerely,



Craig Harper
Executive Director



Margaret Ciccarelli
Director of Legislative Services