



March 15, 2021

The Honorable Matt Dubnik
508-D Coverdell Legislative Office Bldg.
Atlanta, GA 30334

Dear Chairman Dubnik,

On behalf of the more than 94,000 members of the Professional Association of Georgia Educators, we write to thank you for your leadership of the 2021 House Education Committee and to express concern regarding SB 47. [This bill](#) seeks to include students who have Section 504 Plans and one of about 20 conditions in Georgia's Special Needs Scholarship, a private school voucher program which currently covers students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). The bill would also open the program to students who have one of the conditions but do not have a 504 plan.

PAGE has a longstanding position prioritizing public dollars for public schools, with associated transparency for use of public resources and accountability for student outcomes. We respectfully oppose SB 47. Students with special needs are legally entitled to services in public schools. When they accept private school vouchers, they waive their right to these critical services in a private setting. Teacher certification and experience serving students with special needs is not required in private schools. There is limited information about student experiences and outcomes under the existing special needs voucher program because a state evaluation has not been conducted since the program's inception more than a decade ago.

Short of holding SB 47, the House Education Committee can improve the legislation by:

- Requiring eligible students to have both a 504 plan and at least one of the 20 conditions listed in the bill, with a diagnosis connected to the eligible student's instructional plan.
- Requiring GOSA to include retention and graduation rates of participating students at each school in its annual program report.
- Requiring private schools to administer standardized student assessments determined by GaDOE and report results to GOSA for inclusion in the annual program report.
- Including a means test to ensure that students from low-income families are prioritized for the special needs voucher.
- Requiring collection of data regarding participating families' financial backgrounds, mirroring reporting requirements in Georgia's other private school voucher program¹, the tuition tax credit voucher.

We look forward to working with you and the House Education Committee on policies which strengthen Georgia public education and student outcomes. Thank you for your service.

Sincerely,



Margaret Ciccarelli
PAGE Director of Legislative Services

Cc: House Education Committee

¹ OCGA 48-7-29.16, Georgia's tuition tax credit voucher requires collection of participating families' financial data in the following quartiles:

- Under 125% of federal poverty line
- Between 125% and 250% of FPL
- Between 250% and 400% of FPL
- Above 400% of FPL

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