



Position Statements

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I. Beliefs of the Georgia School Superintendents Association

The Georgia School Superintendents Association (GSSA) believes all children can be successful in school. We believe it is the responsibility of all citizens to participate actively to ensure that a successful educational experience is provided for all children.

- The Association believes** that local school superintendents create an environment in the communities they serve which ensures a quality education program for all students. The leadership provided by local school superintendents is crucial to ensuring an effective and efficient system of schools in each community in our state. Local school superintendents are and must continue to be advocates for children in collaboration to seek solutions and to consider the best interests of students in all of their actions.
- The Association believes** that all students in the state should have the educational experience that increases their success in school and their future.
- The Association believes** that valued, talented and caring professionals should be employed to teach and lead in the schools of our state in order to achieve the goal of ensuring a high quality educational experience for all children.
- The Association believes** that safe schools are crucial to reflect a positive school environment, and that a healthy school climate is essential to high levels of student achievement.
- The Association believes** that all superintendents must engage in personal and professional learning opportunities to improve leadership effectiveness.

II. Improvement of Student Success

GSSA believes that student learning should be the focus of every initiative to strengthen public education in Georgia. All school districts must have a system strategic plan and school improvement plans that focus on student success.

2.1 Appropriate expectations and standards for student achievement

GSSA supports the implementation of the Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE) and seeks to maximize every opportunity to ensure that the state’s curricular standards are effectively implemented in every school.

2.2 Assessment of student achievement

GSSA recommends that initiatives continue at the state and local level to determine appropriate student educational expectations and accurate methods of assessing and reporting student achievement. It is of paramount importance that the assessment system be based upon instruments that are valid, reliable and consistent.

2.3 Helping all students to realize their potential

GSSA is committed to the goal of helping all students succeed. The state must place a high priority on securing and allocating resources helping all students to realize their full potential.

2.4 School improvement initiatives

GSSA encourages active support for school improvement initiatives. Comprehensive programs of targeted assistance to under-performing schools have the potential to make significant contributions toward helping those schools make progress. Adequate state funding for these programs is a priority.

2.5 Resources for the classroom

GSSA supports equal access and a commitment to targeting new state support for direct instructional costs of digital resources that support instruction. We recommend the state place a high priority on the investment needed to cover increased costs, all formats of instructional materials and content, classroom consumable materials and supplies, media materials, and replacement of instructional equipment.

2.6 Student Information

GSSA supports the GDOE’s longitudinal data system and supports the partnership between the GDOE and local systems as both work to improve the timeliness and accuracy of data used to support student and local system progress.

2.7 Accountability for improved student learning

GSSA highly recommends that all Members of the organization actively participate in all discussions regarding accountability to ensure validity and reliability of the assessment. Educators should be fully involved in continued refinement of the state’s educational accountability plan. An accountability plan should stress support for system and school initiatives to improve student success. Any accountability requirements imposed by the state should be coordinated with criterion-referenced tests that measure appropriate content standards for the K-12 curriculum. The determination of acceptable student performance should not be based on a single measurement or indicator. We recommend a two year deferment for new to the country students taking state

assessments. Norm-referenced tests should play no role in a plan of educational accountability.

III. Funding for Public Education

GSSA supports the establishment of a state school finance structure that places emphasis on programs and services that have the greatest impact on the improvement of education for students.

GSSA strongly believes that essential costs included in Georgia's plan for funding its schools should be reflected in the state's formula for financial support of K-12 schools and should be fully funded. Local boards should have the flexibility to augment the state's funding formula with additional local revenue.

3.1 A new state plan for funding Georgia's public schools

- State financial support should be guided by the Georgia Constitution, which states: **"The provision of an adequate public education for the citizens shall be a primary obligation of the state of Georgia."** The QBE formula should be fully funded at a level that meets the state's constitutional obligation. As the State moves forward with the development of any new funding mechanism, the Association supports the following basic principles:
- GSSA believes** that flexibility should be provided to all systems in determining the most effective funding strategies to meet the needs of the children in their systems.
- The quality of a child's education should not be a function of the wealth of the community in which he or she happens to live, but rather, should be a function of the wealth of the State of Georgia. The Association does not support any legislation that requires the expenditure of additional local funds without ensuring an adequate level of state appropriations needed to meet the state's obligation.

The funding shortfall continues to be exacerbated by the imposition of unfunded or under-funded mandates created by legislation or regulation. GSSA will request the fiscal note for all educational legislation to identify the financial impact for the state and local Boards of Education.

3.2 Revenue and tax balance

GSSA recommends that a comprehensive study and review, including members of the GSSA explore by the Governor and both chambers of the Georgia General Assembly to determine appropriate revisions to Georgia's revenue.

- GSSA has long supported** a comprehensive, independent analysis of the state and local tax and revenue system in Georgia. The goal should be a balanced tax system that does not give advantage to one class of taxpayer at the expense of another.
- Legislated state tax cuts and exemptions have the effect of shifting the tax burden from the state to local boards of education which concentrates a greater portion of the tax burden on local ad valorem taxpayers.
- GSSA specifically opposes** exemptions that have the effect of freezing property assessments for owner-occupied residential property.

- **GSSA opposes the elimination** or curtailment of the taxing authority of local boards of education. Instead, a reasonable increase in the state sales tax or LOST access to a one-cent
- **GSSA supports** the continued use of SPLOST dollars for capital outlay purpose

3.3 Appropriate state-local partnership in funding public education

There has been a significant shift taking place toward substantially heavier reliance on the local tax portion of the education budget.

The state's share of the QBE formula does not have an automatic mechanism for addressing the increased cost of providing educational services.

Local boards of education cannot modify tax rates or reduce the number of contracted personnel at midterm. If allotments that were determined prior to the beginning of a school year are reduced at midterm, systems must use already-strained reserves. Any changes in the state budget need to be adjusted to coincide with the budget cycle of local school districts. School district planning includes the requirement that the fiscal year budget be approved prior to July 1st each year.

- When the local five mill share increases, and the QBE formula amounts earned per student remain unchanged or decline from the previous year, then the per-student allocation becomes increasingly under-funded by the state.
- **GSSA strongly urges** the Governor and General Assembly to increase earnings in the state program of financial support in a manner that reflects a renewed commitment to strengthening the original partnership between state and local funding responsibility and revenue sources.
- **GSSA recommends that** the state-local partnership in funding be defined in law so as to provide that the state shall finance 80 percent of total statewide formula earnings. The responsibility for providing the remaining 20 percent of formula earnings should be distributed among local school systems in a manner that reflects each system's proportionate share of the statewide taxable wealth as defined in the state formula.
- **The Association further recommends** that alternatives for measuring local wealth be developed in the interest of identifying an accurate reflection of the taxing ability of local boards of education and the taxpaying ability of their citizens.
- When certain property is exempted from local ad valorem taxation by application of general state law, the required local effort and equalization calculations should not be based on property tax digest data that fail to account for the exempted values.
The organization highly recommends that if a school district equalization grant drops 25% or more in one year, a hold harmless mechanism should be enacted.
- **The Association supports** the removal of the 65% Rule or include counselors in the calculation. School Districts are required by the State Chart of Accounts to include counselors in direct instruction but they are removed from the 65% test.
- The average property tax millage rate for K-12 public school operation in Georgia has increased by almost three mills since the inception of the QBE Act. Further increases in property tax rates can be avoided only if the state makes an annual commitment to ensure an adequate level of funding for each essential cost identified in the state plan for investing in public education.

- A reasonable allowance for local systems to raise revenue would be having local communities to vote to have access to a one-cent LOST as is currently available in ten local school systems.
- The continued escalation in costs for health insurance represents a portion of the education budget that is having negative financial consequences for both the state and local school systems in supporting the instructional mission of public schools.
- **GSSA encourages** the state to identify all reasonable options for controlling the increase in such costs in a manner that does not disrupt the state-local partnership in supporting K-12 education and does not impose an undue burden on individual personnel employed by local school systems.
- **GSSA supports** the state funding mechanism for supporting essential personnel in small schools and systems. (i.e. sparsity grant)
- **GSSA strongly opposes** any cut in state funds and health care premium increases at mid-year for allocations to local school systems in the amended state appropriations act.

Local boards of education cannot modify tax rates or reduce the number of contracted personnel at midterm. If allotments that were determined prior to the beginning of a school year are reduced at midterm, systems must use already-strained reserves. Any changes in the state budget need to be adjusted with budget cycle of local school districts.

3.4 Recognition of the annual increase in the cost of maintaining educational programs and services

GSSA strongly urges an annual percentage increase be applied to the base amount per student as defined in the state program of financial support. This annual budgetary procedure, which was originally envisioned for QBE Formula funding but was abandoned after 1988, would prevent the erosion of the state-local partnership and would ensure no formula component would be neglected for several years in the future. It should become an integral component of the new plan for funding Georgia's public schools.

3.5 Public revenue for public education

GSSA does not endorse the use of public funds to support private education and is opposed to any "scholarship", voucher, tuition tax credit, or other plan that would divert public funds to private use.

- The premise, as with other governmental services, is that public schools are established for the good of all citizens and are to be supported by all the citizens, not just those who happen to use the service at a particular time.
- Public education is a governmental service made available to all the citizens of each state and is provided for the purpose of ensuring an educated citizenry and the perpetuation of our democratic society. It has played a pivotal role in America's growth and development and continues to be the foundation upon which our society is built. While providing a system of public schools is the responsibility of the state, much of the responsibility has been placed in the hands of local boards of education composed of lay citizens.

3.6 Taxpayers' funds to private schools

It is the firm opinion of the Association that, should the General Assembly continue to approve the use of taxpayers' funds in private schools, there must be a clear expectation that strict accountability standards accompany those funds. Sending taxpayers' funds to a private setting based on the limited criteria of parental choice creates a double standard of accountability for use of taxpayers' money.

3.7 Public School Choice

GSSA believes school choice initiatives should be at the discretion of local boards of education and is opposed to state and federal legislation mandating choice. Additionally, **GSSA specifically opposes** the practice of allowing state-level entities to approve the formation of new schools or to access state/local funds on behalf of schools not authorized or created by local boards of education.

IV. Providing and Supporting Highly-Qualified Personnel

GSSA believes all personnel must receive appropriate preparation and ongoing professional development for their assigned roles in the education of our students, which must be aligned with the system strategic plan and school improvement plans.

4.1 Professional learning opportunities

Effective professional learning activities are critical to the transformation of school improvement programs; therefore, the allocation of funds for appropriate professional learning programs should be given a high priority by the state.

- Expectations that teachers should be prepared to re-invent the schools in which they teach will require additional time for professional learning opportunities. Thorough teacher training on the Georgia Standards of Excellence is crucial to maximizing student achievement gains.

4.2 Teacher preparation programs

GSSA believes well-prepared teachers are crucial to the success of school improvement efforts and increased student success in schools. Effective preparation programs for persons seeking to enter the teaching profession are essential if school improvement goals are to be realized. GSSA encourages its membership to participate in, and help guide, the teacher education committees of the University system of Georgia that are preparing teachers in the State of Georgia.

4.3 Appropriate support for personnel salaries and associated benefits

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The state's method of funding public education should recognize all essential costs associated with compensation of school personnel.

- Employer contributions for Social Security (and for alternative benefits paid in lieu of Social Security) represent a massive and increasing expenditure of local property taxes. These costs should be covered on all state-earned salaries through the state funding formula. The goal should be to increase state funding to reflect the actual cost of the benefits for state-earned salaries. The cost is currently estimated to be over \$250 million.
- The establishment of a state minimum salary schedule for which funds have not been appropriated by the state represents an unprecedented and fiscally unsound action by the state.
- **GSSA urges** immediate appropriation of funds needed by local school systems to pay the salaries required by the current state board rule.
- Personnel in some positions received no funds through the QBE Formula for salary increases in most state appropriations during the 1990s. This problem was not addressed in the FY 2000 through FY 2017 budgets.
- **GSSA urges** that salary increases be provided for those classified employees identified in the funding formula as secretaries and accountants. Raises for maintenance personnel must also be funded with local dollars unless an adequate amount is appropriated through the facility maintenance and operation component of the QBE Formula (see the statement 7.1 on facility maintenance and operation).
- Earnings for sick leave in the QBE Formula have not been adjusted for over 25 years and do not reflect the actual cost of compensating substitute teachers.
- The employer contribution for Medicare is recognized in the QBE Formula for earned certificated personnel, but local taxes must be used to cover this cost for classified positions. QBE earnings for unemployment compensation and workers' compensation represent only a small fraction of actual costs; such earnings have not been adjusted for 30 years.

The responsibility for all personnel benefits that involve mandatory employer costs should be reflected in the state funding formula.

GSSA supports a cost-of-living adjustment in the salaries of all classifications of local school system employees identified in the state funding formula.

School systems employ more teachers than are earned in the QBE Formula. These locally funded teachers are considered essential by their systems. Since their positions are not earned in the state formula, local boards of education are burdened with additional local costs for their compensation and benefits when the state does not maintain adequate levels of funding for personnel and other costs that are included in the formula.

4.4 Compensation for training and experience of certificated personnel

GSSA supports an amendment to state law to provide for a mid-term adjustment for training and experience (T&E) based on all certificated professional personnel who were employed by a local school system as of the most recent month for which data are available.

State funding lags behind a full year. The cost to local school systems is over \$50 million. The problem is compounded by the fact that many teachers' certificates have not been issued by the Professional Standards Commission (PSC) in October, making those teachers ineligible to earn T&E funds for two years.

4.5 Support personnel

GSSA supports full funding for support personnel in the FTE formula for students in grades K-12.

4.6 The superintendency

GSSA believes the local school superintendency is the pivotal educational leadership position in each school system in our state and should be occupied by only highly qualified individuals. Such individuals should have completed an approved professional preparation program, be professionally certificated, and have acquired employment experience in the education profession to be fully prepared for the superintendency.

4.7 Leadership capacity building: professional learning opportunities for school system leadership

GSSA supports and offers the continued development and implementation of an effective professional learning program for local school superintendents and those who aspire to the superintendency (SPDP). This program should include:

- Orientation for new superintendents designed to familiarize new leaders with the roles and responsibilities of the position, and
- Workshops, institutes, and conferences designed to provide in-depth training in essential tasks of the superintendency and to provide opportunities for dialogue on critical and emerging educational issues.

4.8 Compensation for leadership personnel

GSSA supports state funding of progressive levels of compensation for all educational leadership personnel to reflect their leadership responsibilities. Such compensation should be commensurate with experience, leadership training, certification, and level of responsibility.

Georgia is experiencing a shortage of qualified leadership personnel. A partnership with strong educational leaders is essential in assuring success as Georgia implements state and federal reform initiatives. It is imperative that the state recognize the critical role of school leaders in its compensation plan.

4.9 Retirement

GSSA supports the high quality of the current structure of the retirement program developed by the Board of Directors of the Teachers' Retirement System of Georgia that will encourage educators to enter and remain in the profession.

GSSA recommends that Public School Employees Retirement System (PSERS) benefits be significantly improved by providing a formalized procedure for allocation of employer contributions to the system from state appropriations.

4.10 Compensation of classified employees

GSSA opposes state-mandated employment contracts or state-imposed salary schedules for classified employees.

V. Enhancing Governance of Quality Public Education

GSSA believes student success is enhanced when local community, educators and school system leadership are entrusted with the authority to make decisions about effective strategies for educational outcomes. We believe the state has a proper role in identifying broad standards and the parameters for ensuring that those standards are available to students statewide. The state should provide considerable discretion to local boards of education and educators in determining the most effective means of meeting and exceeding the state standards.

5.1 Authority of local boards of education

GSSA urges the General Assembly to fully support the constitutional authority of local boards of education to control and manage the schools in their systems. The mandate which undermine or otherwise compromise this authority is not in the best interest of Georgia's public school students. **The Association believes** that public school choice may be a useful tool when developed at the local district level and when designed for accountability, parental involvement, and academic improvement.

5.2 Flexibility for local school systems

GSSA believes local school districts should use the flexibility they now have to make decisions about the educational improvements for which they will be held accountable.

- The permanent establishment of a single, overall system-wide expenditure control test for earnings in the category of "direct instruction" in the state funding formula will ensure funds are spent for that purpose. This will allow flexibility to professional educators on decisions about the most effective ways to allocate resources within their systems and schools.
- The Association supports** a permanent revision of all state rule so as to provide the flexibility that comes with Charter School districts and Strategic Waiver Schools agreements, accompanied by adequate funding for the state's plan of investing in educational excellence.

5.3 Curriculum decisions

GSSA supports that the responsibility for establishment and implementation of curriculum should reside with the state and local boards of education.

5.4 Collective bargaining

GSSA is opposed to collective bargaining or professional negotiations as a vehicle for establishing, modifying or maintaining employer-employee relations. The present employer-employee relationship in our state continues to serve all of our interests better than the alternative of collective bargaining or professional negotiations.

5.5 Privatization of services

GSSA strongly urges that the General Assembly enact no laws either requiring or prohibiting privatization of services provided through local school systems. Local boards of education should continue to have the prerogative to determine the feasibility of privatizing services when it is in the best interests of their community.

5.6 Selection of the State Board of Education and State School Superintendent

GSSA recommends that the Constitution be amended to provide for the election of the State Board of Education by Congressional districts on a non-partisan basis and for the appointment of the State Superintendent of Schools by the elected State Board of Education.

5.7 Selection of Local Board of Education Superintendent

GSSA strongly supports the appointment of the local school Superintendent by the elected local Board of Education.

5.8 Students not enrolled in public schools

GSSA opposes the establishment of any state mandate regarding the involvement of non-public school students in public school extracurricular activities.

5.9 Other state agencies

GSSA encourages continued communication, collaboration, and cooperation among agencies having an involvement in educational issues or funding. These agencies include the Department of Education, The Governor's Office of School Accountability, Board of Regents, Department of Technical and Adult Education, Department of Early Care and Learning, Professional Standards Commission, Teacher Retirement System and Department of Community Health.

GSSA opposes any unilateral actions by any state agency that would have the effect of increasing the tax burden of local boards of education.

VI. Providing High-Quality Instructional and Support Programs

GSSA believes that the success of all students is dependent upon the effective implementation of the Georgia Performance Standards, recognizing that the success of all students is dependent on the ability of districts and schools to meet the varying needs of students. The local board and leadership need to have the flexibility to develop and support new and creative programs, such as move on when ready programs, early literacy programs, and alternative/non-traditional school programs.

6.1 Special education

School system costs for special education greatly exceed state QBE Formula earnings. The funding ratio of teachers to students in the QBE Formula does not allow for the incidence of students with varying disabilities and their distribution among schools and systems. As a result, the formula prevents school systems from earning full salary and benefits for the number of special education teachers needed.

- The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was established with a pledge to provide 40 percent of the average per child cost of meeting the needs of disabled students. The failure of the federal government to provide less than one-half of the authorized amounts for the cost of complying with federal mandates to provide special education services has strained the ability of local boards of education to meet the educational needs of these students. A shortage of state funding exacerbates this problem and causes special education to be among the most severely-under funded programs.

GSSA supports the modification in the current Medicaid regulations to allow for reimbursements to local boards of education for telepractice in school speech, language, and occupational therapy.

GSSA supports a modification to the Maintenance of Effort (MOE) rule for special education to reflect a proportionate pro rata reduction of the local maintenance of effort to be equal to the total state reduction including the formula adjustment as demonstrating satisfaction of the financial obligations for all students in the district.

6.2 Intervention programs for under-achieving students

GSSA believes effective intervention programs for under-achieving and at-risk students are of critical importance in enabling these students to experience academic success. A commitment to serving the needs of these students must be made. A comprehensive review of strategies for effective intervention programs at all grade levels should be done.

6.3 Extension of instructional time

GSSA supports opportunities for extended instructional time for students who need additional academic assistance. Students in all programs, including special education, should earn funds for instructional extension services.

6.4 High school completion initiatives

GSSA supports the establishment of effective dropout prevention initiatives and programs to reduce absenteeism, and seeks the appropriation of adequate state and federal funds for the purpose. Greater emphasis should be placed at the early childhood level and on effective non-traditional school programs. Evaluation of the effectiveness of dropout prevention programs must be based on a uniform definition of dropouts and at-risk students.

- GSSA supports** efforts currently under way in Georgia to increase the rate at which high school students' graduate from school. When information on this crucial issue is reported to the public, it is essential that it be reported in a fair, accurate, and consistent manner.
- GSSA urges** the definition of "high school graduation rate" be broad enough to allow schools to receive public recognition and credit for assisting students in completing their high school studies within a reasonable time frame.
- Further, **GSSA supports** the inclusion of the special education diploma (through the IEP goals being satisfied) on any list of recognized completion credentials.

6.5 Non-Traditional programs

GSSA endorses a thorough examination of resources needed for the operation of effective non-traditional school programs. An understandable formula for distributing non-traditional program funds should reflect all costs that are determined to contribute to successful non-traditional schools, and greater flexibility should be provided to permit successful non-traditional program models to be eligible for state funding

- Funding for special education students in non-traditional programs is especially inadequate.
- The expenditure control test for the non-traditional program is too rigid and prevents schools and systems from making appropriate decisions about effective allocation of limited financial resources.
- The practice of funding non-traditional programs on the basis of 2.5 percent of enrolled FTE students in grades six through twelve should be replaced only when an accurate accounting of students participating in non-traditional programs becomes available to the Georgia Department of Education.
- Non-traditional programs should be eligible to earn funds through the state capital outlay formula. Non-traditional program students, like all other students, are best educated in appropriate school facilities.

6.6 Elementary and middle grades art, music, foreign language, and physical education programs

GSSA supports a significant increase in earnings for art, music, foreign language, college and career readiness including CTAE, and physical education instruction in grades K-8. Since the value of all of these instructional offerings is recognized in state legislation, the level of funding should make possible implementation of all four programs.

- Only one of the above positions is currently allocated for each 345 students in grades 1-8. By increasing the number of positions earned at an appropriate ratio, and by adding kindergarten, an appropriate curriculum can be implemented in art, music, foreign language, and physical education at these grade levels. Implementation of this recommendation would provide critical personnel as well as allow planning time for K-5 teachers.
- Since our students will be expected to compete in a global economy, it should be a goal of the State of Georgia that all students leave school fluent in more than one language. Foreign language instruction should be provided for all grades through additional funding in the state's core formula.
- Kindergarten should be added to the grades that are currently funded in the QBE formula for art, music, foreign language, and physical education specialists. Elementary and middle grade students in special education and gifted programs should also earn funds for these subject specialists.

6.7 School nurse services

Promotion and protection of student health is an important factor in enhancing potential for academic achievement. The amount earned per student for school nurse services, which has actually decreased in recent years, should be increased annually as a part of the FTE formula allocation to account for higher costs.

6.8 Pre-kindergarten and Early Childhood Education programs

GSSA Strongly supports early learning as a key component of a comprehensive approach to educating our young people. Recognizing that the first five years of life are critical to a child's lifelong development and that young children's earliest experiences and environments set the stage for future development and success in school and life, it is crucial that policy makers join parents and educators in recognizing the value of early childhood education and take steps to address the educational needs of children in this age group.

GSSA supports full funding of the pre-kindergarten program for all eligible children. A mechanism to fund space for the pre-k program from the state is needed. Pre-k programs space need should be included in the district capital outlay plan.

GSSA supports that Pre K staff follow the local District Salary Schedule. The lack of increase for training and experience create a constant high teacher turnover rate which is a barrier in establishing an effective program.

GSSA urges the collaborative efforts of the Early Childhood Education programs and Local districts to maximize the success of all students at an early age.

6.9 Regional services

GSSA urges a detailed review of the formula for determining allocation of state funds to Regional Education Service Agencies and supports a funding level that recognizes the expanded role that RESA's are expected to fill in supporting the state's school improvement initiatives.

VII. Providing Essential Support Services

GSSA believes that public school services that are specifically designed to support student instruction are essential to the total operation of the school system. Additionally, districts need funding flexibility for alternative and new instructional programs.

7.1 Facility maintenance and operation

GSSA recognizes the critical need for annual increases in the state funding formula for facility maintenance and operation (M&O) to cover the continuing increase in local costs. The QBE Act should be amended so as to establish a formula based on FTE that reflects actual costs for each sub-component of facility M&O expenditures.

- Significant increases in energy costs are causing this gap to become wider. Local boards of education are forced to cover the shortfall through property taxation.
- GSSA urges** the earned amount for facility M&O must be spread over a variety of essential expenditures. These include salaries and benefits for custodians, maintenance and repair workers, energy costs, water and sewer, communications, equipment used in cleaning and maintaining buildings and grounds, cleaning supplies and materials, building insurance, and repair costs.

7.2 Student transportation

GSSA urges full funding of the state's student transportation formula. In FY 2010 and continues as of FY 2017, the appropriation for the transportation formula was more than \$168 million below the level that would be needed for full funding, and is now at the 18 percent level of total transportation costs. Even when fully funded, the state transportation formula only provides about forty percent of the total transportation expenses of local school systems.

- GSSA supports** amending current law to provide state funding for the cost of transporting all students who live more than one-half mile from school. The dramatic increases in fuel costs, exacerbated by alternative fuel mandates and the requisite retrofits of buses, have further impacted the local expense.

- The state’s practice of providing funding for school buses through the sale of bonds has the potential for alleviating a portion of the serious shortfall in funding of the current transportation formula. It should become an annual component of the appropriations process and be funded at an adequate level.

7.3 Capital outlay

GSSA recognizes and supports the positive changes in the capital outlay program approved by the General Assembly and signed by the Governor during the 2012 session. The Governor and General Assembly have made the commitment to the goal of adequately housing all students by authorizing the regular capital outlay entitlement program at the \$300 million level. However, the passage of local option sales taxes for school construction projects does not reduce the need for state capital outlay appropriations.

Funding for construction of pre-kindergarten classrooms in public schools should be accepted as a responsibility of the state. Georgia has made significant progress in providing appropriate facilities for K-12 education through state capital outlay funds and local school bond elections. By maintaining state funding for capital outlay programs at the full authorized entitlement levels

7.4 School Safety and Security

GSSA urges an appropriation of funds from dedicated sources for school safety programs as an ongoing cost component of the state funding formula endorsed by the Georgia Emergency Management Agency. Funds would be used for equipment, personnel (i.e. school resource officers), or training as needs are identified by local school systems to enhance a safe school environment. **GSSA strongly recommends** that the state seriously consider a matching grant that will provide funds to local school boards and local government authorities for resource offices in schools.

GSSA urges state level changes to allow school district to receive funds from the state bonds for the rehabilitation of existing building for safety and security purposes.

The funding formula for student transportation should be modified to include funds to enhance a safe environment on school buses. Such funds could be utilized by school systems for school bus monitors, cameras, establishment of separate routes for different age groups, or other measures to promote safety on school buses.

VIII. Federal overreach into State and Local School Jurisdiction

GSSA believes that the federal government should play a role in supporting the efforts of states and local jurisdictions as they perform the critical task of educating the nation’s children. That role has expanded in recent years in a manner that has caused the federal arm to reach far beyond the “support” level.

8.1 Passing of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

GSSA recommends that the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) be used to return the law to the intent of its original goal, which was to promote equal educational opportunity. **GSSA supports** the position of the American Association of School Administrators, which is to urge Congress to provide a continuum of services to school systems, giving highest priority to systems with large concentrations of poor children and special populations. Furthermore, **GSSA joins organizations and school systems across the country in objecting** to the use of competitive grants to make decisions about the distribution of federal funds to local school systems; as such a process will inevitably lead to inequality for the districts that need the most assistance.