

# Education of the Whole Child

## BACKGROUND

The Education of the Whole Child working group has placed an emphasis on a “well-rounded education,” defined as courses, activities, and programming that give all students access to an enriched curriculum and educational experiences.

The working group has discussed ways to address students’ well-being in the learning process, and new ways to provide an excellent, relevant, and meaningful education to all students, recognizing that all children learn at different rates and have individual needs. Addressing the whole child not only empowers districts and schools to address non-academic factors that impact student achievement but also maximizes educational opportunities for students — preparing them for life.

## WHAT WAS THE MAKE-UP OF THIS WORKGROUP?

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) has been committed to a plan development process that is truly stakeholder driven. Each of Georgia’s ESSA workgroups were made up of a cross-section of twenty individuals with five members representing different areas of GaDOE and fifteen members representing stakeholders. Each workgroup was chaired by a GaDOE leader and key stakeholder.

- *Chairs:* Deputy Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, Georgia Department of Education; Assistant Commissioner for Pre-K and Instructional Support, Georgia Department of Early CARE & Learning
- *Representatives* for counselors, fine arts, STEM/STEAM, world languages, school nurses, library media, civics, and Health and P.E.  
*Organizations represented:* Boys and Girls Clubs, United Way, Southern Education Foundation, Get Georgia Reading, Georgia Council for the Arts, and Regional Educational Services Agencies (RESAs)

GaDOE will keep these workgroups intact in order to provide on-going feedback on the implementation of Georgia’s Plan.

## HOW WAS FEEDBACK FROM GEORGIANS GATHERED?

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) held eight feedback sessions across the state. These were opportunities for parents, students, educators, business and industry, and community members to share their thoughts and concerns. Feedback was compiled, analyzed, and summarized by a third party so participants could engage in candid conversations.

## WHAT IS ESSA?

The *Every Student Succeeds Act*, commonly referred to as ESSA, earned bi-partisan approval in 2015.

States were freed from their *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) waiver agreements and given the responsibility to develop state plans to support education.

ESSA significantly scaled back the authority of the Secretary of Education and U.S. Department of Education. Though ESSA gave states additional authority and flexibility over their education system, wholesale flexibility was not granted and statutory requirements vary in specificity from issue-to-issue.

Georgia has sought out maximum flexibility while creating a cohesive and aligned plan that is responsive to stakeholder feedback and supports our vision of *offering a holistic education to each and every child in the state.*

To learn more about Georgia’s plan development process visit:

[GaDOE.org/ESSA](http://GaDOE.org/ESSA)



## HOW WAS FEEDBACK FROM GEORGIANS GATHERED? (CONT.)

Feedback sessions were also held with each of the State School Superintendent's advisory councils, representing middle and high school students, parents, teachers, and district superintendents. Business and industry, as well as civil rights organizations, were also engaged.

GaDOE utilized social media, a dedicated ESSA email address for comments, as well as public surveys to gather feedback.

## WHAT DID GEORGIANS SAY?

Common themes that emerged around the work of Education of the Whole Child were:

1. Current education system over-values English and mathematics academic outcomes to the detriment of access to additional opportunities (i.e. Fine Arts, CTAE).
2. Children's physical health and emotional well-being are directly related to their academic learning.
3. Students do not have adequate access to counseling, diagnostic testing, psychological services, and school health services.
4. Schools are not equipped to provide all of the necessary wrap-around services; need to engage community partners.
5. Not enough professional learning around school climate or child development.
6. Not enough support for media centers and library services.
7. Expenditures of federal funds are too narrowly focused.

The full feedback summary report can be found at: [GaDOE.org/ESSAFeedback](https://GaDOE.org/ESSAFeedback).

This report was compiled through a third party evaluator. Feedback themes, along with the response to each of those themes, are embedded within Georgia's State ESSA Plan.

Though state law has offered broad flexibility, GaDOE is strongly committed to providing support and guidance for districts and schools on how to ensure a well-rounded education for each and every child in our state. Additional transparency will ensure local decision-making matches the local priorities of students, parents, business and industry, and community members.

## AREAS OF FOCUS

- Personalized-learning
- Literacy
- Strong foundation in the early grades
- Media Centers and libraries
- Well-being
- Arts, languages, Health & P.E.
- School Climate
- Expanding educational opportunities
- Well-rounded education
- Preparing students for life

## OUR PROGRESS

- **Developed a shared improvement framework** with 'Whole Child' at the center
- **Organizing a digital toolbox of evidence-based practices** for districts and schools to utilize to support the whole child
- **Coordinating with Federal Programs work group to develop topic-specific guidance** so districts and schools can leverage federal funds to address identified whole child needs
- **Recognized and defined a multifaceted approach** to supporting the well-being of children so they are ready to learn and ready for life
- **Engaging other state agencies and organizations**, as well as non-profit and civic groups, to identify and leverage existing resources
- **Coordinated with the Accountability work group to develop a *Beyond the Core* indicator** that will reward student access to and participation in arts, world languages, career technical and agricultural education, and health and physical education coursework

