The First Priority Act (HB338) was voted into legislation in 2017. The legislation created the state’s first Chief Turnaround Officer. The purpose of this legislation is to improve chronically low-performing schools in Georgia. The overarching role of the Chief Turnaround Officer is to 1) manage and oversee a system of supports for a subset of schools identified as being in the lowest 5% of schools statewide and 2) leverage the learning from engaging with those schools to inform practices more broadly.

After a year of planning and implementation, enhancements to the legislation have been proposed. Those enhancements involve four areas:

- **Rename “Turnaround Coaches” to “Transformation Specialists.”** The concept of school turnaround became a national mantra nearly 10 years ago under federal efforts such as Race to the Top and School Improvement Grants. The concept often involved replacing principals and large-scale replacement of teachers. By definition, turnaround suggests a single action or a reversal. Transformation implies something new, a metamorphosis, and acknowledges that such change takes time. Although marginally symbolic, words matter. Such adjustment in language reinforces the positive and ongoing nature of transformation.

- **Strengthen language that highlights the legislation’s intent on creating innovations and prototypes to inform practices statewide.** Initial language in the First Priority Act mentions identifying best practices. The intent was to pilot innovative practices in a small set of schools to learn, refine, and eventually scale those practices more broadly. This more strategic approach creates a greater return on any investment and lays the vision of transforming low-performing schools statewide.

- **Develop a “Georgia Turnaround Collaborative” (a team of individuals that represent state agencies, non-profits, etc.) that will increase collaboration, coordination, and coherence of multiple efforts to support at-risk students.** A host of state agencies and non-profit organizations throughout Georgia seek to improve outcomes for at-risk children as a primary focus of their work. The Collaborative creates a strategic approach to align resources, share ideas, and strengthen coordination of efforts. These efforts offer coherence and collective impact of addressing common challenges.

- **Provide funding for schools partnering with the Turnaround Office to offer $7,500 stipends to recruit and retain highly effective teachers.** Stipends will be funded by a 2:1 state/local partnership ($5,000 state funds and $2,500 local funds). Pervasive research argues that an effective teacher is the most critical school-based variable to improve student learning. Based on such research, and efforts across the country, it’s unlikely Georgia’s low-performing schools will be transformed without an intentional strategy to select, recruit, develop, and retain high-quality teachers. Various states and districts have leveraged teacher stipends, embedded in a comprehensive talent management effort, to successfully attract and retain effective teachers.