



A Georgia KIDS COUNT Data Snapshot on Education Trends

By Georgia Family Connection Partnership

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CLOSING GEORGIA'S EDUCATION GAP will Keep Georgia Competitive

Georgia's future economic prosperity rests on our children, and education is what will drive our state toward economic security. This Georgia KIDS COUNT Data Snapshot shares some educational trends over the past decade, along with the strategic investments that Georgia is making to spur innovation and create opportunities for all children to access quality education—from preschool through post-secondary—and enter the workforce equipped with the 21st century skills they need to prosper in today's technological society.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's national *2014 KIDS COUNT Data Book* shows that Georgia continues to make progress in education. Each year, *KIDS COUNT* gives Georgia an education rank based on four indicators:

1. **Children not attending preschool**
2. **Fourth graders not proficient in reading**
3. **Eighth graders not proficient in math**
4. **High-school students not graduating on time**

Since 2005:

- the rate of teens not graduating from high school on time has dropped by more than 20 percent,
- fourth-grade reading proficiency has improved by more than 10 percent,
- eighth-grade math scores have improved by 8 percent, and
- pre-school enrollment has remained steady even as the poverty rate soared.

However, Georgia still lags behind most of the country in educational achievement, and ranks 40th in the nation in the education domain.

Early Learning Affects Grade-Level Milestones, High-School Graduation, and Workforce Success

High-quality early learning is critical to school readiness and future academic success. Low-income children are much less likely to have access to high-quality child care than their more affluent peers. Nevertheless, children from all economic backgrounds who receive high-quality child care are more likely to graduate from high school, attend college, and succeed in the workforce, according to the Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS).

In 2012, Georgia launched a voluntary tiered quality rating and improvement system called Quality Rated for child-care facilities across the state. Created and implemented by Bright from the Start: Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), Quality Rated assigns a quality rating—one, two, or three stars—to early education and school-age care programs that meet a set of defined program standards beyond what licensing requires. In addition to receiving a star rating, the facilities receive incentive packages that provide educational materials to child-care centers, as well as professional development opportunities to staff. Georgia Family Connection Partnership is working with DECAL to distribute incentive packages and to coordinate a statewide network of volunteers.

Early in 2014, Georgia received federal support through the Race to the Top Early Reading Challenge. A key component of the plan is to create Early Education Empowerment Zones (E3Zs) as a vehicle to reduce the achievement gap between children with high needs and their peers. This innovative strategy will identify geographic areas where large numbers of children have high needs and align them with customized early-learning programs and services. It is expected that these E3Zs will see achievement gaps begin to close, and educational attainment and school performance levels improve.

Georgia is making gains in education, but preschool enrollment remains flat.

- From 2010 to 2012, 52 percent of Georgia's children did not attend preschool—the same rate from 2005 to 2007.
- During that time, the number of children living in poverty increased by 35 percent. The latest data show that 672,000 Georgia children are living in poverty.
- As poverty has risen, so has the percentage of low-income children enrolled in Georgia Pre-K. The rate of low-income kids in Pre-K increased by 10 percent (53 percent in 2008 to 58 percent in 2012).

On-Time Graduation—a Key Component of a Prepared Workforce

Students who graduate from high school on time are more likely to succeed in the workplace, and states with high rates of on-time graduation are more likely to have an adequate workforce. Georgia is falling behind, with nearly a third of students not graduating on time. At the same time, Georgia is transitioning its economy away from low-skill jobs, which are predicted to increase at a much slower rate than high-skill jobs over the next two decades, and will likely not return to pre-recession levels.

“Georgia has a reputation for being a work friendly state, but we must ensure that we have a highly qualified workforce if we are to maintain that title,” said Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (GPEE) Policy and Research Director Dana Rickman. “While Georgia has improved in key indicators, the data in the 2014 KIDS COUNT report tell us we must do better in key areas such as high-school graduation and post-secondary attendance and completion.”

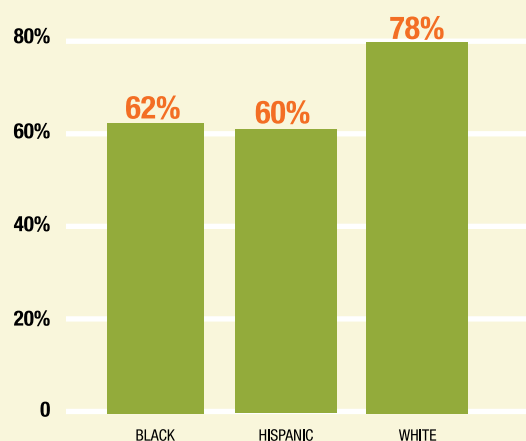
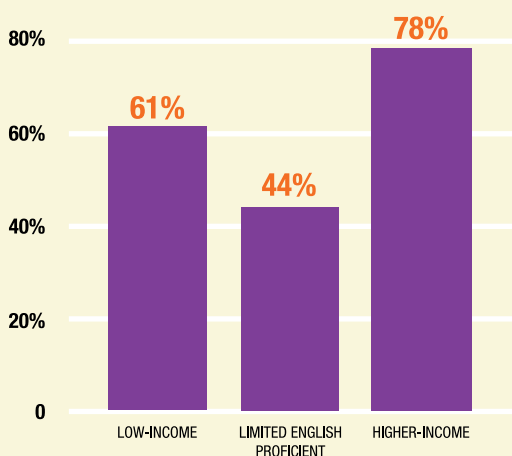
Georgia has made big improvements in graduation, but continues to trail the rest of the country.

- 30 percent of students are failing to graduate from high school on time.
- Despite a 27-percent improvement since 2005, Georgia still ranks 48th in the nation for on-time graduation.
- Income and racial disparities have an impact on on-time high-school graduation:
 - 78 percent of higher-income students graduate on time, compared with just 61 percent of their low-income peers.
 - 60 percent of Hispanic students and 62 percent of black students graduate on time, in comparison with 78 percent of white students.
- GPEE translates this failure into 44,000 students who entered ninth grade and did not graduate with a diploma four years later.

According to Rickman, who has written extensively about the economics of education, Georgia is predicted to add 1.5 million new jobs by 2020. Nearly 60 percent of those new jobs will require a post-secondary education, and only 42 percent of Georgia's current adult population has education beyond the high-school level.

“Georgia is moving forward and has made many improvements over the past several years with several education reforms, but we can't let that momentum slow,” she said. “These numbers tell us we have work to do throughout our education pipeline if we are to create and maintain economic prosperity for our citizens and state.”

Graduation Rates by Other Subgroup



Reading Is a Key Indicator of Future Success

The ability to read proficiently by the end of third grade is fundamental for any child to master the skills and attain the knowledge they need to succeed in school and in the workforce. Most children who fall behind in reading are likely to never catch up to their grade-level peers. Further, as the reading and achievement gap widens over time, poor readers are four times more likely to drop out of school. When youth drop out of school, they are at a high risk of being unemployed, living in poverty, and being turned away from military service for failing to meet minimum requirements. They are also more likely to be involved in the juvenile and adult justice systems, and to receive public assistance.

Georgia reading proficiency scores are on par with the national average for fourth graders.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) measures student reading proficiency beginning in fourth grade. Based on the NAEP in 2005, nearly 3 in 4 fourth-grade students (74 percent) in Georgia did not read at a proficient level. By 2013, that percentage had fallen to more than 3 in 5 students (or 66 percent), an improvement of 11 percent.

Get Georgia Reading—Campaign for Grade-Level Reading is fostering unprecedented public-private partnerships to keep all kids on track to read by third grade by ensuring that they have books, as well as access to food, vaccines, high-quality learning environments, parent engagement, and effective teachers.

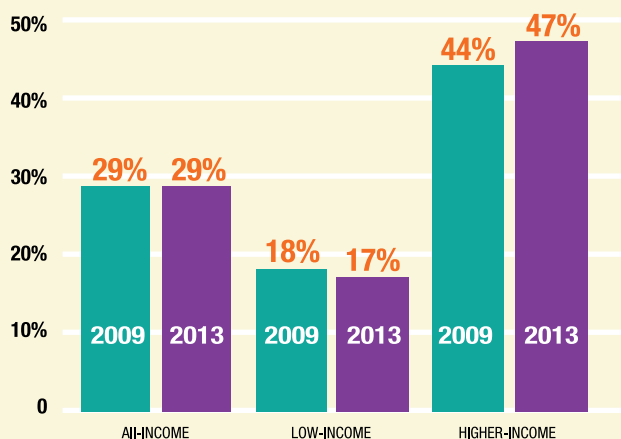
Georgia students perform on par in reading with other public-school students in the United States. Patterns of family income and racial disparity among Georgia fourth graders are evident in the 2013 NAEP reading scores:

- Only 24 percent of economically disadvantaged students in Georgia scored proficient or above, compared with 70 percent of students from higher-income families.
- Only 23 percent of black students scored proficient or better, and their average score was 24 points lower than their white peers.
- Georgia's Hispanic students had an average score 20 points lower than white students.

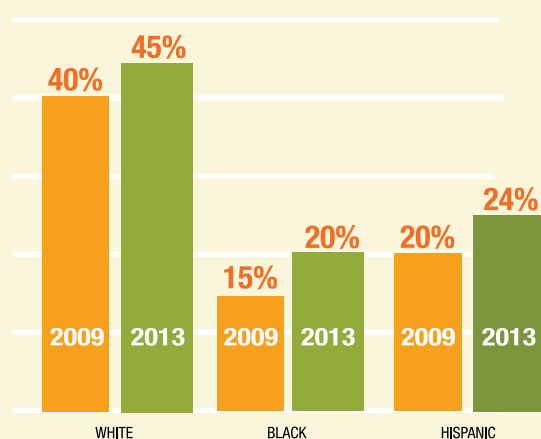
The Georgia Department of Education is also implementing a new testing system during the 2014-2015 academic year to replace the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT). The new testing system—the Georgia Milestones Assessment System (Georgia Milestones)—offers a consistent program across grades 3-12, and will align more closely with national educational achievement measures. It is a move toward more rigorous standards for Georgia's children, and early numbers may be lower than previous CRCT scores.

“We need to know that students are being prepared,” said State School Superintendent John Barge, “not at a minimum-competency level, but with rigorous, relevant education, to enter college, the workforce, or the military at a level that makes them competitive with students of other states.”

NAEP Fourth-Grade Reading Proficiency Data



Economic and Racial Disparities in Reading Proficiency



Math Skills Are Critical for Today's Technological World

Strong math skills predict higher college attendance and success rates, and increase students' employability. Improving education in the STEM disciplines—science, technology, engineering, and math—can spur innovation and competitiveness, and ensure that the state and nation have qualified workers for the growing STEM industries.

Seeing the importance of STEM to Georgia's future prosperity, Gov. Nathan Deal is working to encourage more young Georgians to pursue STEM careers; to improve the knowledge and skills of the state's K – 12 STEM teaching workforce; and to build partnerships between the public and private sectors, as well as between institutes of higher education and K-12 schools.

Georgia's math proficiency scores lag behind the nation for eighth graders.

Based on NAEP scores, Georgia's eighth-grade math proficiency has improved significantly over time. In 2005, 77 percent of eighth graders scored below a proficient level in math. By 2013, that percentage had dipped to 71 percent.

Georgia students score below their national public school peers in math. The average math score of Georgia eighth graders was five points lower than the average score for the rest of the nation.

These patterns of disparity among Georgia eighth graders are evident in the 2013 NAEP math scores:

- Only 19 percent of economically disadvantaged students scored proficient or above compared with 61 percent of Georgia students from higher-income families.
- Only 14 percent of black students scored proficient or better, compared to 53 percent of white students, and their average score was 29 points lower than their white peers.
- Georgia's Hispanic students had an average score 16 points lower than white students.

Racial and income disparities in math achievement persist in Georgia and across the nation.

Achieving math proficiency for all students requires that improvements be made in curriculum, instructional materials, assessments, classroom practice, teacher preparation, and professional development. By identifying those students who struggle with math early on, these students can receive the personalized and timely academic support they need.

Georgia Shows Steady Improvement in Educational Achievement—Catching Up to Nation Requires Vigilance

Current trends show the educational status of Georgia's children is improving. Yet, too many Georgia children continue to struggle when they grow up in low-income families or unsafe neighborhoods. If Georgia is to achieve a strong workforce and economy, we must work even harder to ensure that all children receive access to quality early education, quality teaching, and the support they need to excel in school and to enter the workforce equipped with 21st century skills.

"You count what matters to you," said Georgia Family Connection Partnership Executive Director Gaye Smith. "Corporations have long known this and we—who care about the future of our state's children—know it, too. Our experience informing local decision-making and seeking solutions through collaboration can pay off if we stay vigilant with our current vision, with strategic public and private investments.



For more information, email Rebecca Rice, Georgia KIDS COUNT coordinator, at rebecca@gafcp.org, or call 404-527-7394 (x103). For interactive statewide data, visit [Georgia KIDS COUNT at \[gafcp.org/kidscount\]\(http://GeorgiaKIDSCOUNT.org\)](http://GeorgiaKIDSCOUNT.org).

Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP) is a public-private partnership created by the State of Georgia and funders from the private sector to assist communities in addressing the serious challenges facing children and families. GaFCP also serves as a resource to state agencies across Georgia that work to improve the conditions of children and families. Georgia KIDS COUNT provides policymakers and citizens with current data they need to make informed decisions regarding priorities, services, and resources that impact Georgia's children, youth, families, and communities. Georgia KIDS COUNT is funded, in part, through a grant from The Annie E. Casey Foundation, a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States.