



A Georgia KIDS COUNT Issue Brief on Education Trends

Georgia Family Connection Partnership
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Georgia Shows Steady Improvement in Educational Achievement, but Catching Up to the Rest of the Nation Requires Vigilance in Closing Achievement Gaps

Since releasing the 2014 education trends snapshot, Georgia's high-school graduation rate has significantly improved, narrowing the achievement gaps between white students and students of color. The rise in graduation rates is credited to the elimination of the high-school graduation test and more emphasis on personalized learning, according to the Georgia Department of Education. Wider disparities continue to exist in earlier milestones, such as fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math. As Georgia undergoes significant demographic shifts over the next two decades, we need to close achievement gaps to make sure we are giving opportunities to—and harnessing the potential of—all children in Georgia.

Georgia's future prosperity depends on our children, and education is what will drive them—and our state—toward economic security. This issue brief shares education 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 thrive in today's society.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's national 2015 KIDS COUNT Data Book shows that Georgia continues to make progress in education, 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, Georgia has seen these improvements:

- 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.

While preschool enrollment remains steady, more than 50 percent of Georgia's 3- to 4-year-olds do not attend preschool. Even with these improvements, Georgia still trails the rest of the nation in math proficiency and on-time graduation.

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. According to Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS), 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 and early learning are more likely to graduate from high school, attend college, and succeed in the workforce.

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

- From 2011 – 2013, 52 percent of Georgia’s children did not attend preschool, the same rate as 2005 – 2007.
- During that time, the number of children living in poverty increased by more than 30 percent. The latest data show that 647,000 Georgia children are living in poverty.
- Since 2005, more than 50 percent of low-income children have been enrolled in Georgia Pre-K.



Georgia is committed to addressing issues surrounding quality of—and access to—child care, and, in 2012, launched Quality Rated, a voluntary tiered quality rating and improvement system for childcare facilities across the state. Created 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 childcare centers. The centers also receive professional development opportunities for staff to create a more qualified childcare workforce. Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP) is working with DECAL and GEEARS to distribute incentive packages and to coordinate a statewide network of volunteers.

Georgia received federal support through the Race to the Top Early Reading Challenge in 2014. Since then, DECAL has built Early Education Empowerment Zones (E3Zs) to target children with high needs and align them with customized early-learning programs and services. It is expected that these E3Zs will begin to close achievement gaps, and help school performance and educational attainment improve.

Preparing Students to Succeed in the Workforce

Current trends show that Georgia’s 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 attract corporate attention. Even with recent improvements, Georgia continues to lag behind the national average. 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.

“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

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

- In 2015, 21.2 percent of students failed to graduate from high school on time, according to new data from the Georgia Department of Education.
- Although achievement gaps are improving, racial and income disparities as well as language-learner status continue to ~~SXXXWf~~ on-time high-school graduation:
 - In 2015, 72 percent of Hispanic or Latino students and 75.2 percent of black students graduated on time, compared to 82.8 percent of white students. These numbers represent significant improvement over 2012 rates, when 60 percent of Hispanic or Latino students and 62 percent of black students graduated on time.

- 74.5 percent of lower-income students graduated on time in the 2014-2015 school year, compared to the overall rate of 78.8 percent.
- 56.4 percent of English Language Learners graduated on time, a 25-percent increase over just the previous year.



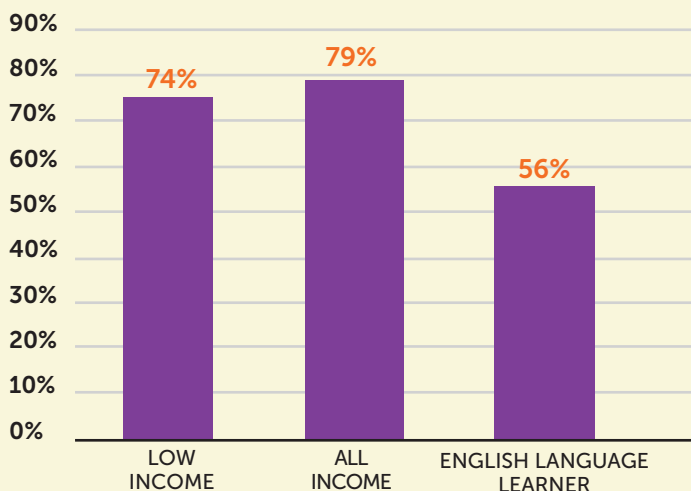
that status,” said Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education Policy and Research Director Dana Rickman. “While Georgia has improved in key indicators, the recent data tell us we must continue to do better in key areas such as high-school graduation and post-secondary attendance and completion.”

According to Rickman, Georgia is projected to add 1.5 million new jobs by 2020. Nearly 60 percent of those new jobs will require post-secondary education, and only 38 percent of Georgia’s population ages 25 to 34

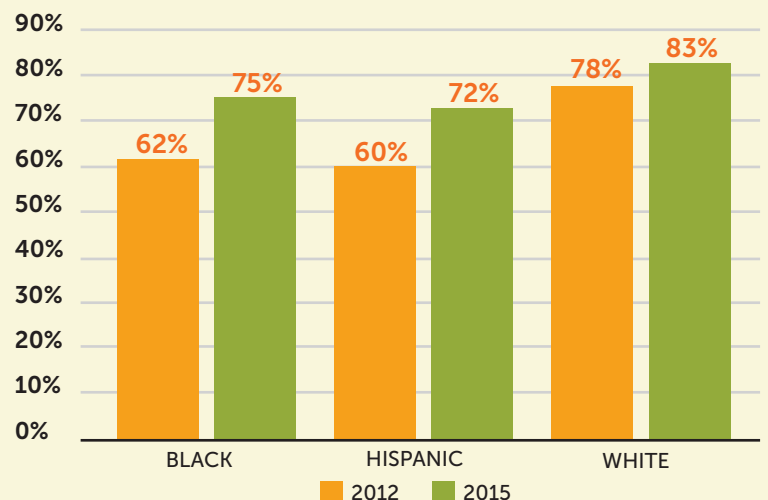
has an associate’s degree or higher, compared with the national rate of 42 percent.

“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.”

2014-15 Graduation Rates by Income and English Proficiency



Two-Year Comparison of High-School Graduation Rates by Race/Ethnicity



Reading is a Key Indicator of Future Success

The ability to read proficiently by the end of third grade enables children to master the skills they need to succeed in school and in the workforce. Most children who fail to reach this critical milestone never catch up to their 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 higher risk of being unemployed, living in poverty, and being turned away from military service. They are also more likely to be involved in the juvenile and adult justice systems, and to receive public assistance.

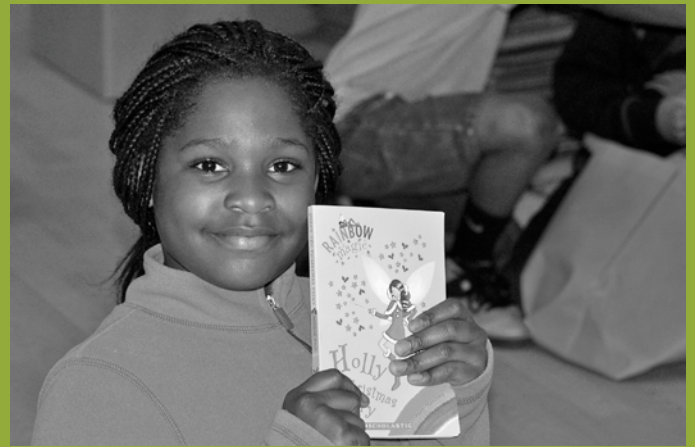
Georgia reading proficiency is on par with the national average for fourth graders.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) measures student reading proficiency beginning in fourth grade. Based on the NAEP in 2005, 74 percent (nearly three out of four fourth graders) in Georgia did not read at a proficient level. By 2015, that rate had improved to 66 percent (more than three out of five students).

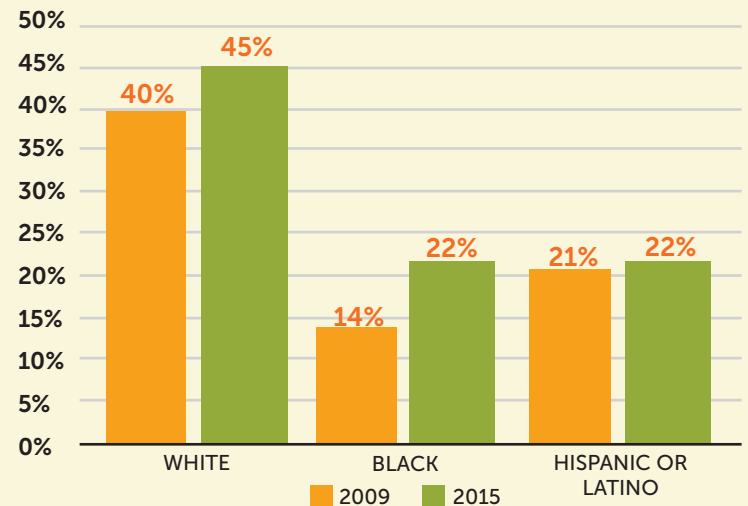
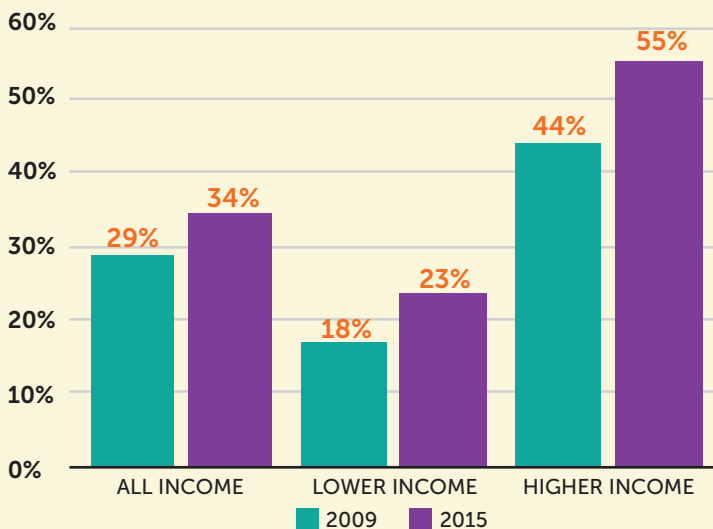
Get Georgia Reading—Campaign for Grade-Level Reading is a platform for connecting people, organizations, disciplines, and communities around

Georgia public school students perform on par in reading with students in the other states, but patterns of family income and racial disparity among Georgia fourth graders are evident in the 2015 NAEP reading scores.

- Only 22 percent of black students and 22 percent of Hispanic or Latino students scored proficient or above in reading, compared with 45 percent of white students.
- Only 23 percent of economically disadvantaged students in Georgia scored proficient or above, compared with 55 percent of students from higher-income families.



NAEP Fourth-Grade Reading Scores—Proficient or Above



a shared expectation that all children in Georgia will be on a path to third-grade reading proficiency by 2020. To meet this expectation, partners in the Campaign share a common agenda through four pillars: language nutrition, access, positive learning climate, and teacher preparation and effectiveness.

The Georgia Department of Education also implemented a new testing system during the 2014-2015 academic year to replace the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCTs). The new testing system—the Georgia Milestones Assessment System (Georgia Milestones)—offers a consistent program across grades 3 – 12, and aligns more closely with national educational achievement measures. It is a move toward more rigorous standards for Georgia’s children.

“At the state level, we’re committed to supporting districts in that work by producing better resources for teachers, fully vetting any new standards and initiatives, and providing greater flexibility so schools have room to innovate,” said State School Superintendent Richard Woods.

Math Skills are Critical for Our Technological Future

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 of our 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 rates 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 2015, that percentage had dipped to 72 percent.

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

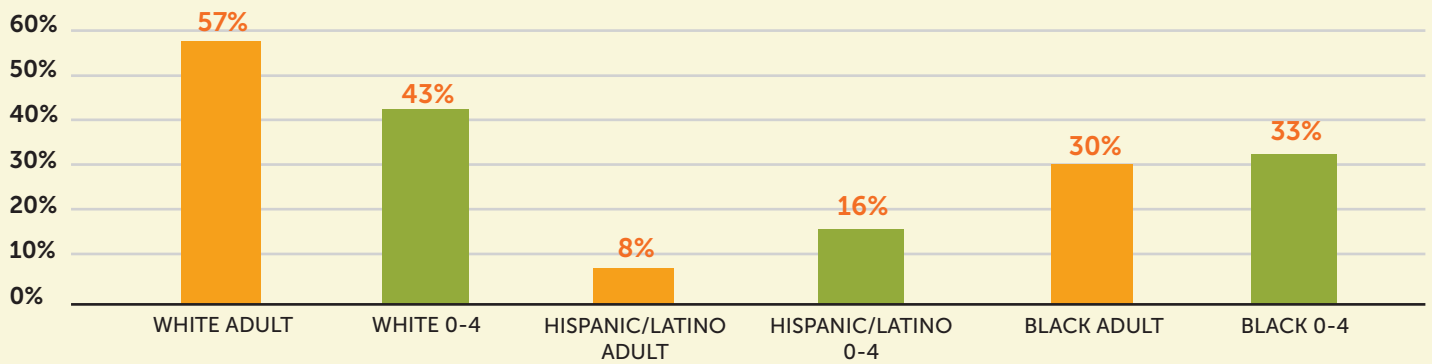
Racial and income disparities in math achievement persist in Georgia and across the nation.

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 students who struggle with math early on, these students can receive the personalized and timely academic support they

Patterns of disparity among Georgia eighth graders are evident in the 2015 NAEP math scores.

Only 13 percent of black students and 19 percent of Hispanic or Latino students scored at or above proficient, compared with 41 percent of white students.

2014 Census Population by Age and Race/Ethnicity



need. All Georgia's children deserve the chance to be ready for school and to succeed when they get there. Closing these gaps is essential to Georgia's future prosperity.

Keeping up with demographic changes in the education sector—and closing achievement gaps—are key to building our economy and workforce

Current trends show that Georgia's education scores are improving. Yet too many 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 continue to work to ensure that all communities receive the supports they need so our children can excel in school and enter the workforce equipped with 21st-century skills.

"Never before have we seen a demographic shift of this magnitude in Georgia," said GaFCP Executive Director Gaye Smith. "We are growing increasingly diverse and, most importantly, increasingly poor. The fastest-growing populations within our public school systems are children living in poverty and those who speak English as a second language.

These two populations have significantly lower high-school graduation rates. This raises real concerns as Georgia sees large numbers of retirements from the baby boomer generation. Employers face replacing those workers from a growing population of students who traditionally have not achieved at internationally competitive levels."

Closing achievement gaps between children of color and white children is critical for our state. As census population trends shift toward children of color, Georgia's future success depends upon ensuring that all children have the opportunity to be successful in school and beyond.

"You count what matters to you," said 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, and 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 (x0488). For interactive statewide data, visit Georgia KIDS COUNT at gafcp.org/kidscount.

Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP) is a public-private partnership created by the State of Georgia and investors 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 affect 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.