

Overview: 2026 Fiscal Year Budget for the Georgia Department of Education

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Introduction

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) serves Georgia's 180+ kindergarten -12th (K-12) grade public school districts. Led by State School Superintendent Richard Woods, GaDOE develops and governs the K-12 learning standards and currently serves 1.7 million students.¹

Governor Kemp's Amended Fiscal Year (AFY) 2025 budget for the GaDOE totals \$120.8 million, including a \$114 million increase for a midterm adjustment in the funding formula (known as the Quality Basic Education, or QBE) for public schools and a \$50 million increase (\$21,635 per school) for school security grants.

The FY 2026 budget proposal provides Georgia's public schools \$13.6 billion. Some programs saw an increase in funds and others experienced a decrease that led to a net increase of \$404 million. The proposal includes a \$612 million increase for QBE with a notable change to the employer contribution share of the Teachers Retirement System percentage, totaling \$100 million for QBE alone.

Amended Fiscal Year 2025 Budget:

- The Quality Basic Education (QBE) Program provides formula funds to school systems based on full-time equivalent students for the instruction of students in grades K-12. The Governor proposed several changes in the AFY 25 Budget:
 - \$114,935,908 increase in formula funds for a midterm adjustment based on enrollment growth
 - \$12,904,817 increase in formula funds for the State Commission Charter School supplement for a total of \$248,482,930
 - \$12,440,382 increase in funds to reflect growth for the Special Needs Scholarship
- \$50 million increase to security grants, providing an additional \$21,635 per local school system, which totals \$109 million statewide
- \$95,859 increase for the Technology/Career Education program, which is designed to equip students with academic, vocational, technical and leadership skills

Fiscal Year 2026 Budget:

- Quality Basic Education (QBE) Program:
 - \$173 million increase to fund the state share of employer contributions for certified educators who participate in State Health Benefit Plan
 - \$306 million increase for school enrollment growth and training for teachers as calculated through the QBE formula
 - \$34,121,273 increase for the State Charter School Commission supplement
 - \$112 million decrease for QBE Equalization Grants, which provide additional financial assistance to local school systems that rank below the statewide average of per-pupil tax wealth
 - \$5.9 million increase in QBE formula funds for Sparsity Grants to help smaller districts pay for fixed overhead costs
- \$115 million decrease for Local Five Mill Share (LFMS)— a standard deduction from the total QBE earnings. Local school districts are required to cover at least LFMS in property taxes

- \$3 million increase for Information Technology Services to sustain internet speed for all systems through PeachNet (the statewide communication network)
- \$1.25 million increase to train students for high-demand careers outlined by the State Workforce Development Board.
- \$1 million removal of one-time matching grant funds for the Communities in Schools Program, a national organization that supports student success in school and adulthood
- \$10 million increase for pupil transportation formula grants to fund increased bus counts and operating expenses
- \$20 million increase to replace 227 school buses.

Harmful Education Policies are Stifling K-12 Funding

Public education is constitutionally required, therefore it should be protected and preserved, so that all students can have access to a quality education. Investing equitably in K-12 education begins with recognizing that school vouchers are not a comprehensive solution, but an unfair diversion of limited education funding. Despite strong opposition rooted in empirical data, state lawmakers passed SB 233 in the 2024 Legislative Session, which created the Georgia Promise Scholarship Act². This is the largest school voucher bill in the state's history and the FY 26 budget proposes \$141 million approximately 1% of the public-school QBE funding formula. The voucher is set to provide up to \$6,500 to students for students who attend the lowest 25% of schools according to College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) score.³

School vouchers have a long history of draining K-12 public education funding while only benefiting a small number of students. For example, states that passed a voucher bill from 2007 to 2021 decreased their average per-pupil spending by \$2,800.⁴

Georgia's K-12 funding is vulnerable. With the \$141 million reallocation of public-school funds to private schools via voucher funding and the threat of property tax caps, many school districts are bracing for deep financial setbacks.⁵ These education policies erode equity and exacerbate pervasive structural issues for most marginalized students.⁶

Endnotes

¹ *About GaDOE (Who We Are) – Georgia Department of Education.* (2024). Georgia Department of Education. <https://gadoe.org/about/>

² Walker, T. (2024, February 2). *‘No accountability’: Vouchers wreak havoc on states* | NEA. Retrieved February 6, 2025, from <https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/no-accountability-vouchers-wreak-havoc-states>

³ Achievement, G. O. O. S. (2021, April 6). *SSO Low-Performing School Criteria.* The Governor’s Office of Student Achievement. <https://gosa.georgia.gov/accountability/sso-low-performing-school-criteria>

⁴ Wething, H., & Bivens, J. (2024, May 15). *Vouchers undermine efforts to provide an excellent public education for all.* Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved January 29, 2025, from <https://www.epi.org/blog/vouchers-undermine-efforts-to-provide-an-excellent-public-education-for-all/>

⁵ Xu, Meimei. “Metro Atlanta School Districts Plan to Opt out of Homestead Tax Exemption. Here’s a Full List of Public Hearing Dates.” *WABE*, 28 Jan. 2025, www.wabe.org/metro-atlanta-school-districts-plan-to-opt-out-of-homestead-tax-exemption-heres-a-full-list-of-public-hearing-dates/. Accessed 11 Feb. 2025.

⁶ Hinh, I. (2023, March 16). *State Policymakers Should Reject K-12 School Voucher Plans* | *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.* Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/state-policymakers-should-reject-k-12-school-voucher-plans>