

# Paulding County Board of Education 2021 Legislative Priorities

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## Introduction

The Paulding County Board of Education respectfully requests your consideration of the items listed herein during the 2021 session of the Georgia General Assembly. We encourage the General Assembly to prioritize education as a means of sustaining and improving Georgia’s long-term economic viability, as well as the development of future citizens. The items identified are critically important in meeting the educational needs of our students and the operation of the Paulding County School District.

## Priority 1: Funding

Georgia’s plan for funding its public schools should have as its primary objective the promotion of effective instruction and improved student achievement. Therefore, the Paulding County Board of Education supports the following priorities in financial support from the State.

### \* Legislative Action

The Paulding County Board of Education urges your consideration of the following items:

- Approximately 66% of the Paulding County School District’s revenue comes from State funding sources, compared to a statewide average of 52%. This means our District is extremely vulnerable to changes in State funding. Therefore, we request a return to fully funding the Quality Basic Education (QBE) Act formula as soon as possible. Additionally, due to the complexities in State funding, the District would like to be engaged whenever changes in funding methodologies are considered.
- When comparing October 2020 enrollment to October 2019, the district had 29,735 and 30,226, respectively. This reflects a year-over-year decline of 491 students (full-time equivalent), which could result in a significant loss of FY2021 funding. It is important to note that most of the decline was in elementary school, and our expectation is these numbers will normalize once the pandemic is over. This is not unique to PCSD, but an anomaly across many school districts in Georgia. Thankfully, the Governor’s Office is aware that many districts are experiencing a material decline in students, and the subsequent funding challenges. While there is a widespread assumption that districts will be “held harmless” on the FY2021 midterm (and perhaps FY2022) for the declining enrollment, we wanted to make you aware of the anomaly and its potential funding consequences. Please consider supporting a “hold harmless” provision to the FY2021 amended budget and consideration be given regarding the FY2022 budget. It is important to note that a decline in overall enrollment can adversely impact non-QBE funding as well, including Title/Federal programs, Kindergarten Instruction, Free and Reduced Lunch, e-rate, capital outlay, transportation, and other categorical grants.
- As a low wealth school district, Paulding County School District is highly dependent on the State Equalization Grant. As the third largest recipient of equalization funds, this grant accounts for

over 10% of our total annual revenue. Therefore, we support continuation of the Equalization Grant to support low wealth districts.

- As a District, our primary asset is our people. In fact, a quality staff is the single greatest contributor to student achievement. Therefore, in order to attract high quality teachers and administrators, we request that measures be taken to protect and strengthen Georgia's Teacher Retirement System (TRS).
- Require all bills that have an impact on local school districts include a one-year delay in implementation and fiscal note detailing the budgetary impact.

## \* Program Funding

### • State Capital Outlay/Construction

- Increase reimbursement rates for the State Capital Outlay Program to reflect current market construction costs.
- Add "Technology Infrastructure" as an eligible category for State Capital Reimbursement for new construction and modifications.
- Maintain the current regulations regarding the utilization of E-SPLOST funds.

### • Dual Enrollment

- Dual Enrollment provides high school students opportunities to earn technical and academic college credits that promote both career and student post-secondary readiness success. Continue to support funding for and expand Dual Enrollment opportunities for our students.

### • Academic and Career Counseling and Opportunities

- The Paulding County Board of Education believes that academic and career counseling as well as options for post-secondary coursework are important to the success of students beyond graduation. Therefore, we support full funding of counseling services and student opportunities that will impact student graduation as well as student post-secondary decision making and participation. This includes funding **graduation coaches** to positively impact graduation rates, **aptitude tests** such as YouScience to positively guide students in post-secondary guidance.
- The current pandemic impacted student attendance which can cause potential losses in learning. We support additional funding, beyond current allotted dollars, for districts to be able to provide reading and or math intervention to address such losses.
- Removal of the SAT/ACT requirement for the Zell Miller HOPE Scholarship eligibility or identify other state assessments or course requirements that could be used in their place.

### • School Based Instructional Technology Specialists, Infrastructure and Resources

- The Paulding County Board of Education believes that use of instructional technology better prepares students for post-secondary opportunities and the 21st century work force. Therefore, we urge the General Assembly to fund school based instructional technology specialists and technology infrastructure and resources. Sufficient technology resources are critical to support the education of students in our digital age. Technology resources necessary to support our district come with a substantial cost for the appropriate infrastructure including network, hardware, equipment, systems, training, and personnel. Therefore, we urge the General Assembly to include funding for technology budgets, providing for personnel, infrastructure, and equipment considerations, for all state technology-based mandates.

- **School Safety**
  - The Paulding County Board of Education believes safety and security of students is our first priority. Therefore, we urge the General Assembly continue to provide school districts with the appropriate resources to maintain a safe and secure environment for students.
- **Student Transportation**
  - The Paulding County Board of Education urges full funding of the state’s student transportation formula. For FY21, State funding only covered 10% of the cost to transport students to and from schools.
- **Student Physical, Mental and Behavioral Health**
  - The Paulding County Board of Education believes funding is imperative for multiple student support systems, including the funding of appropriate school personnel to provide access to high quality academic, behavioral and mental health supports. Student health, including mental health, is an important factor in academic achievement. Therefore, we support an increase in funding for nursing and mental health. For FY21, State funding only covered 36% of the Paulding County School District’s Nursing Budget.
- **Virtual Education**
  - The Paulding County Board of Education urges funding for the expansion of virtual education, innovative educational opportunities, instructional resources and technology infrastructure for 21<sup>st</sup> century classrooms.
- **Maintaining Highly Qualified Staff**
  - The Paulding County Board of Education supports addressing the long-term shortage of teachers in our classrooms by permitting retired educators to serve children full-time without losing their retirement benefit if they agree to pay a percentage of their salaries to TRS.

## Priority 2: Improvement of Student Achievement

Student learning should be the focus of every initiative to strengthen public education in Georgia. The following issue is critical to the quality of our schools and the improvement of student achievement in our district.

### \* Accountability for Improved Student Learning

Educators should be fully involved in continued refinement of the state’s educational accountability plan. An accountability plan should stress support for system and school initiatives to improve student achievement. Any accountability requirements imposed by the state should be coordinated with criterion-referenced tests that measure appropriate content standards for the K-12 curriculum. The determination of acceptable student performance should not be based on a single measure or indicator; rather, such determination should be made based on multiple measures using a model that will credit both students and their teachers for the students’ academic growth during a school year. Test scores for sub-groups of students, when used to determine school and/or system performance, should be used only when the sample size is large enough to be deemed statistically significant. Growth targets for schools should be determined by utilizing district subgroup numbers vs. school subgroup numbers. These targets should be based on a multiple year average to account for variations in subgroup numbers from year to year. Norm-referenced tests should play no role in a plan of educational accountability.

### **Priority 3: Maintain Local Control of Public Education**

We request that you support the responsibility of local boards of education to govern local public schools, including such matters as setting local millage rates, determining how funds are spent for the education of children, and establishing school calendars. The establishment of the annual school-year calendar, including starting and ending dates and the establishment of the instructional day, should result solely with local boards of education. Given the diverse communities and needs throughout our state, it is our belief that these and other decisions are best made by elected officials closest to the individuals they represent.

The Paulding County School District supports the Vision for Public Education, published by the Georgia School Boards Association and Georgia School Superintendents Association, as a vehicle to raise awareness, address issues and enhance public education in the state of Georgia. A full copy of the Vision for Public Education is available at [www.visionforpubliced.org](http://www.visionforpubliced.org).