

Funding Opportunity: Replacing Georgia’s Early Intervention and Remedial Programs with Funding for Low-Income Students

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Georgia is one of only eight states that does not provide additional funding to students in poverty through the state’s funding formula. Students from households and communities in poverty are more likely to need additional supports to succeed in school. Specific funding targeted to low-income students is crucial to improve their educational opportunities and outcomes.

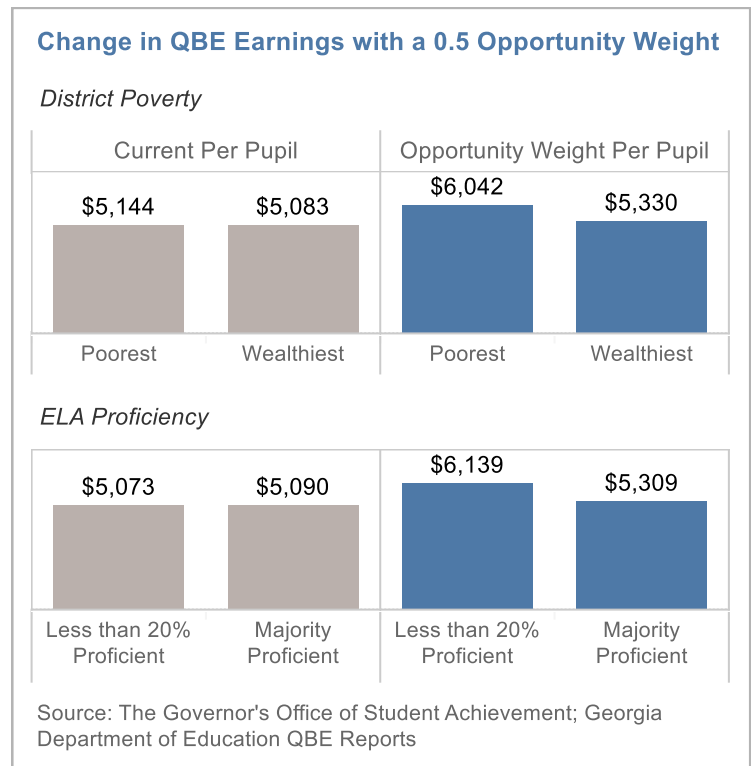
The Georgia funding formula – Quality Basic Education or QBE -- is based on school programming. “Weights” are multiplied by the student count to generate more per pupil funding for specific programs. The QBE formula does not take student poverty into account. Instead, the QBE provides extra funds for academically struggling students – largely based on their performance on Georgia’s English Language Arts (ELA) and/or Mathematics assessments – through the early intervention program (EIP) in kindergarten through grade 5 and the remedial education program (REP) in grades 6 –12.

Education Law Center (ELC) analyzed the funding provided through the EIP and REP programs and found serious flaws in their design and implementation, including not serving an estimated 700,000 academically struggling students in need of remedial support.

ELC recommends a three-step process to change the EIP/REP funding to address these basic flaws.

1. Revise the QBE funding formula by adding an “opportunity weight” based on student poverty levels.

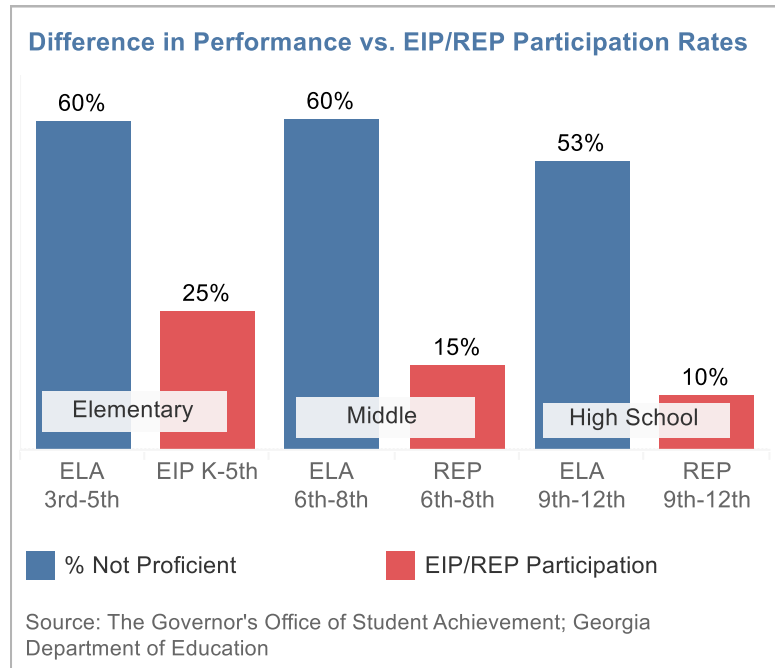
An “opportunity weight” incorporated into Georgia’s QBE formula would allocate additional per pupil funding to districts based on student poverty. If an opportunity weight of 0.5 were added to the QBE in place of current EIP and REP funds, per-pupil funding levels for at-risk students would increase by 50% over current levels. On average, funding in the poorest districts would increase by \$898 per pupil, along with a \$247 per pupil increase in the wealthiest districts. By applying the 0.5 opportunity weight, districts with English language arts (ELA) proficiency rates below 20% would see an average increase of \$1,066 per pupil. An opportunity weight of 0.5 would require a total investment of approximately \$1.1 billion in state funds, but \$306 million of this amount could come from current EIP and REP allocations. The resulting cost would be \$798 million, a 9% increase in state funding.



To determine an opportunity weight appropriate for Georgia’s low-income students, ELC recommends the Legislature commission an independent cost study using accepted research methodology to identify the resources essential to provide students with the in- and out-of-class supports necessary for academic achievement. An effective weight requires using accepted education “costing-out” methods, rather than budgetary considerations. Numerous states have followed this approach in recent years, including [Kansas](#), [Maryland](#), [Massachusetts](#), [Michigan](#) and [Wyoming](#).

2. Reallocate current funding from the Early Intervention and Remedial Education Programs.

Though well-intentioned, the EIP and REP programs drastically underserve low-achieving students. In 2017-18, while most Georgia students were not proficient on ELA and math tests, only 25% of elementary school students participated in the EIP, 15% of middle schoolers participated in the REP, and only 10% of high schoolers participated in the REP. The result is that school districts are not receiving additional funding for the approximately 700,000 students who need additional academic supports every year. In addition, districts with lower proficiency rates do not necessarily have higher EIP/REP participation rates. And because the funding for additional EIP/REP services is conditioned on students remaining below proficiency levels, EIP/REP programs lose money when they are successful. The program design simply ignores the need for the continued support to keep students on track even when their proficiency levels rise.



3. Include an accountability framework to ensure districts use opportunity weight funding effectively and efficiently.

Adoption of an opportunity weight in the QBE should be accompanied by accountability framework to ensure the opportunity funding is put to effective use at the district and school levels. The framework should give district parameters for spending the opportunity weight funds, with sufficient flexibility to implement interventions and services responsive to local student need. Guidance and technical assistance to districts on planning and best practices will be crucial, requiring investment in the Georgia Department of Education. [California](#) provides a recent example of how a carefully designed, state accountability framework is a key component of successfully delivering resources to students, particularly in districts with high at-risk enrollments.