



Fund Georgia's Future

For Immediate Release

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(GEORGIA: June 4, 2021) On Thursday, May 20, 2021, Governor Kemp released a letter to the Georgia state Board of Education urging them to take, "...immediate steps to ensure that Critical Race Theory and its dangerous ideology do not take root in our state standards and curriculum." Governor Kemp joins a growing chorus of elected leaders attacking "critical race theory," the educational concept that seeks to highlight how historical inequities and racism still shape public policy and cultural conditions. As a consequence, The Georgia Board of Education adopted a resolution on Thursday, June 3rd, 2021, asserting that the state and country are not racist and that there should be guardrails around classroom discussions about race and controversial events.

Furthermore, Governor Kemp stated that "[w]e must instead focus on our goal of providing the highest quality education to every child in Georgia, without partisan bias or political influence," adding that taxpayer funds should not be used to promote a "blatantly partisan agenda."

At Fund Georgia's Future, we completely agree with the goal of providing all students with the highest quality education, as our coalition is dedicated to creating a just educational system by procuring fair and full funding, committing to inclusivity, maintenance, and growth, and dismantling historical systems of marginalization. However, Governor Kemp stands directly on a record and legacy of Georgia schools being systematically underfunded, impeding progress toward Georgia's equitable educational future. Over \$10 billion has been cut from K-12 education simply in the last two decades alone. Georgia currently stands \$383 million behind in meeting minimal educational funding at the writing of this letter. Broad complaints to the State Board condemning an academic movement to better understand the role of white supremacy in legal order serve as a distraction from the real problem facing our schools: a state that is unwilling to provide a high-quality public education. One glaring example is that Governor Kemp is sitting on a \$2.7 billion "rainy day" fund while our public schools face yearly cuts.

If we are to be fully honest about the deepest threats that our education system faces at this moment, it is the deep lack of equitable funding for our schools, with the most disproportionate

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effects and consequences landing on Black and Brown communities, communities facing impoverishment, and rural communities that are far too often left behind. Inequitably funded schools historically have higher incidents of exclusionary discipline and higher dropout rates than more adequately funded schools. The Georgia K-12 public education system has a long way to go toward providing truly equitable student experiences and outcomes for students — ones that prepare them to thrive in schools, communities, and beyond.

We also know that in order to create equitable learning environments we must aspire to a number of key characteristics for schools — including culturally affirming curriculums, safe and empowering climates, and flexible designs that meet the needs of all learners. It is also well known that without resources that are *adequate and distributed equitably*, it is nearly impossible to achieve a quality learning experience for every child. Unfortunately, the reality of the public education system is that funding has long been tragically inadequate and inequitable, with the schools serving high-need students often receiving the least opportunities. Instead of working to fund Georgia's public schools the past few years, state leaders have attempted to erode the entire system by funneling public dollars to private schools.

Critical Race Theory has become a convenient ideological boogeyman, and opposition to it serves as a distraction from addressing the pressing equity issues directly affecting Georgia's children and families. The assertions that classroom lessons about race and racism divide students and teach students to see themselves as victims or oppressors are not only false, but also represent a baseless attempt to erase the struggles faced by Black and Brown communities. They ring as an obvious strategy to stir up a radical voting base that has aligned itself with the tenants of white supremacy and remain firm on upholding the nation's status quo where injustice continues to permeate every facet of life for marginalized populations. Prohibiting discussion of racism and systemic oppression will not make racism and its effects disappear; in fact, these efforts will only serve to exacerbate the inequities that have historically and currently define Georgia's system of public education. Furthermore, this puts instructional personnel (teachers of color) in a difficult situation if asked about racism, forcing teachers to second guess whether to discuss racism if asked by a student during a critical time in our nation. This would be an opportunity for you to incentivize school districts to hire teachers of color so that history doesn't repeat itself. Studies have proven that students of color tend to perform better in schools when taught by a black teacher.

Simply put, until the Governor puts forth a good faith effort to actually adequately fund our schools, we simply reject any position he may take on the nature of what is taught within those same schools.

Lastly, we urge school leaders, teachers, parents, students, and all who are vested in the education Georgia deserves to vigorously resist cheaper efforts to maintain the status quo, and instead, press state leadership on fulfilling the promise to all Georgians to equitably and adequately fund our K-12 schools. It is critical that elected leaders and policymakers are intentionally viewing resource decisions through an equity lens, being mindful of the disproportionate impact their decisions could have on the most vulnerable communities and students. The realized impact of these decisions could mean less money in communities who need it the most, and lesser educational opportunities for a generation of young people. We

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simply have no place in Georgia for regressive funding that is then shielded from accountability by pointing a finger at something completely different. It is the responsibility of those holding the levers of power to ensure they become a reality — and a first step is through ensuring adequate and equitable funding.

Together, **we can** do better and do right by a generation of students — but only if we keep these principles in mind now when it matters most.

