



GEORGIA GOVERNOR'S RACE: Responses to PAGE from Stacey Abrams

1. What policies do you propose to help students recover from lost learning time due to COVID-19?

COVID-19 has been difficult for everyone, especially our educators, children, and their parents. In addition to fully funding public education and increasing teacher pay, I will ensure students have access to mental health services through expanding Medicaid and utilizing federal funds to allow schools to maximize Medicaid reimbursements for mental health services. The American School Counselor Association recommends a minimum of one counselor per 250 students. Georgia's ratio is currently 1 counselor per 432 students, a ratio far too high.

2. What school security and safety enhancements should be made in Georgia schools and how would you fund these?

Guns are the leading cause of death among Georgia's kids and teens. Georgia ranks 9th in the nation for gun violence, and at least 80 percent of homicides in Georgia are committed with guns. As governor, I will work to repeal criminal carry, campus carry, "guns everywhere" laws, and close the gun show and domestic violence loopholes to protect our children.

3. Teacher Burnout in Georgia, a recent report from the Georgia Department of Education, highlighted challenges making it more difficult to recruit and retain teachers, issues PAGE members have repeatedly raised. How can the state attract more individuals to the teaching profession and encourage those educators to stay?

Georgia has a teacher recruitment crisis. The number of college students choosing to teach has dropped significantly with only 3,800 people completing a teaching degree in Georgia in 2019. We need long-term, meaningful investments in teachers and their recruitment and retention to get the best results for students. As governor, I will develop a rural teacher pipeline project, create partnerships between K-12 schools and state colleges and universities to serve as centers of teacher education, recruitment and education innovation all over the state, scale "grow your own" models that help interested paraprofessionals pursue teaching, and initiate new teacher preparation programs to expand access to teaching. I am also committed to increasing the state base salary for teachers from \$39,092 to \$50,000 and raising the current average of \$62,500 to an average of \$73,500, shifting Georgia from 21st in the nation in teacher salaries to the top 10.

4. Principals have a significant effect on teacher retention and, in turn, on student outcomes. How should the state recruit and support principals and assistant principals to improve their retention?

As governor, I will establish the Georgia Educator Pipeline Project which will invest in leadership development for our schools' administrators and facilitate the creation of a robust

pipeline of teachers who are ready to work in every part of the state. We will build these pipelines in partnership with our state's colleges offering degrees in education and provide incentives like student loan repayment programs for those willing to educate children in underserved areas. I will expand resources for the Governor's School Leadership Academy to enhance its ability to provide a comprehensive and equitable system of support and build capacity for Georgia educators.

5. How can the state attract and retain school staff who provide critical support to schools including paraprofessionals, bus drivers, and school nutrition workers?

One of the ways we attract and retain school staff is by ensuring they make a living wage in the state of Georgia. As governor, I will ensure a living wage for education support professionals, as well as professional development that will aid them in advancing in the education workforce.

6. Students have greater mental health needs in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Do you support funding school counselors for all students, including special education and gifted students?

Yes.

7. What changes do you believe should be made to the state's formula for funding public schools?

The QBE formula has not been revised to meet the changing needs of students, families and communities. Georgia must adopt a comprehensive education funding formula that not only pays our teachers well but must address new realities: directly addresses the correlation between poverty and poor educational outcomes, invests in student transportation to ensure safety and access, provides resources for crucial positions like nurses, counselors and substitute teachers, and invests in technology to enable our children to compete in the 21st Century.

8. How would you use the FY23 budget state budget surplus, currently estimated between \$5-\$6 billion?

A budget reflects our values through a set of priorities and choices combined with sound reasoning and finance decisions. As Governor, the state's budget would demonstrate my commitment to building a better Georgia through investing in healthcare, teachers, safety, small businesses and agriculture.

9. Are there particular issues for which the state should set policy for local school districts? If so, what are they?

Generally, I believe localities are closest to their communities' wants and needs. I am interested in the waiver system that allows local districts to waive certain aspects of the OCGA (Official Code of Georgia). As governor, I will re-examine these waivers to ensure we are putting students and teachers' needs first, while being responsive to local needs.

10. How should Georgia measure academic outcomes for students in state-supported private school choice programs, including the SSO/tax-credit private school scholarship program? Do you support collecting comprehensive demographic information on students who participate in state-supported private school choice programs?

I do not support tax dollars benefitting private schools. Thus, as governor, I would oppose the SSO/tax-credit private school scholarship. However, with the current program in place, entities receiving public funds should be required to participate in data submission and general state oversight, including state testing.

11. Do you have additional education priorities that were not addressed in the preceding questions?

We must reject attempts to teach children misinformation in the public school system. Our children deserve a complete and honest education without threats to school funding. Some topics like slavery, segregation or the Trail of Tears are difficult, but our children must be given age-appropriate lessons and context. Parents and teachers should take part in these conversations; however, no school should face sanctions for teaching an accurate history of this nation or for preparing our children for the diverse world in which they live. As governor, I will oppose policies that drive a wedge between educators and families, and I will support programs that build trust and increase collaboration between those who are most engaged in our children's success.