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THE FINAL REPORT OF THE SENATE STUDY COMMITTEE ON THE EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN IN THE STATE OF GEORGIA

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Senator Gail Davenport, Chair
District 44

Senator Harold Jones
District 22

Senator Kay Kirkpatrick
District 32

Senator Randy Robertson
District 29

Senator Nikema Williams
District 39

Prepared by the Senate Research Office, 2019

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COMMITTEE CREATION, FOCUS, AND DUTIES

Pursuant to the adoption of Senate Resolution 468, the Senate Study Committee on the Educational Development of African American Children in the State of Georgia (the “Committee”) was created. Senate Resolution 468 was sponsored by Senator Gail Davenport of the 44th during the 2019 legislative session. The Committee was charged with examining and determining any needed adjustments in educational resources and strategies for communities having the greatest impact on African American children.

The following individuals were appointed by the President of the Senate to serve as members of this Committee:

- Senator Gail Davenport of the 44th;
- Senator Harold Jones of the 22nd;
- Senator Kay Kirpatrick of the 32nd;
- Senator Randy Robertson of the 29th; and
- Senator Nikema Williams of the 39th.

Senator Gail Davenport served as the Chair of this Committee. The Committee met four times during the 2019 legislative interim. The meetings were held on the following dates:

1. September 18, 2019 at the Georgia State Capitol in Atlanta, Georgia;
2. October 15, 2019 at Clayton State University in Morrow, Georgia;
3. November 7, 2019 at the Georgia State Capitol in Atlanta, Georgia; and
4. November 19, 2019 at the Georgia State Capitol in Atlanta, Georgia.

The Committee heard expert testimony from various persons in the field of education, namely early childhood educators, administrators, superintendents, advocacy groups, policy researchers, and community stakeholders. Testimony was given from the following individuals: Tiffany Taylor, Deputy Superintendent, Policy & External Affairs at Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE); Dr. James Young, Professor at Clark Atlanta University; Dr. Stephen Green, DeKalb County School District Superintendent; Dr. Morcease Beasley, Clayton County School District Superintendent; Ms. Carol Massey, Ms. Brunessa Drayton, and Ms. Monica Brown, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority; Mr. Raymond Pierce, President of Southern Education Foundation; Dr. Mary Kay Bacallo, College of Education Professor at Mercer University; Dr. Stephen Owens, Senior Education Policy Analyst at Georgia Budget and Policy Institute (GBPI); Dr. Gloria Duncan, Director of Professional Learning at Clayton County Public Schools; Ms. Charlotte Booker, President of Georgia Association of Educators (GAE); and Ms. Margaret Ciccarelli, Director of Legislative Affairs at Professional Association of Georgia Educators (PAGE).

The following legislative staff members were assigned to this Committee; Ms. Kessarín Horvath of the Senate Press Office; Mrs. Laurin Vonada of the Senate Research Office; Mr. Stuart Morelli of the Office of Legislative Counsel; and Ms. Cyndi West, Legislative Assistant to Senator Davenport.

BACKGROUND

Over the past 150 years, millions of students, of various races, have been educated in Georgia's public schools. However, in practice, the way these students have been educated has not always looked the same. Prior to Brown v. Board of Education, racial segregation was legal in schools which caused years of systemic differences that schools around the State are still felt today. With the elimination of racial segregation in schools, the State is continually looking for ways to improve the way all students are educated. Over the past several years the State has seen significant improvements in the education of all students. This is displayed in the steady increase of the graduation rate for all students which has improved from 69.7 percent in 2012 to 82 percent for the 2018-2019 school year and the continual above average ACT and SAT test scores.

While Georgia has shown continual progress in the education of all students, there are areas concerning African American student education that can be improved upon. One area is the disproportionate number of disciplinary incidents by black students. During the 2018-2019 school year, according to the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA), 60.2 percent of the disciplinary incidents were committed by black students compared to 39.8 percent of incidents committed by White, Hispanic, and other race/ethnicities.¹

Another area for potential improvement is the increased recruitment and retention of African American teachers. Having a black teacher makes black students more likely to graduate high school and significantly more likely to enroll in college.² Based on 2017 data, Georgia's teacher workforce was made up 20.8 percent of black educators and 43.3 percent of those black teachers worked in a high-poverty school.³ Teachers in high-poverty schools are more likely to leave the profession which breeds instability in schools and can undermine student-teacher relationships.⁴

Finally, over the past three years Georgia has seen a significant increase in the rural-student population to a total approaching half a million students.⁵ Schools in Georgia's rural districts tend to be extremely racially diverse, and poverty is prevalent in rural students' households and communities.⁶ According to the Southern Education Foundation, roughly 29 percent of the 37 percent of African American children are from low-income families. Rural districts across the state spend about \$700 less than the national average, and student achievement in rural areas is well below the performance in non-rural areas. According to the Rural School and Community Trust, students in rural Georgia show "dire college-readiness results" because of the low percentage of high school students enrolled and successfully completing Dual Credit and Advanced Placement courses.⁷

¹ See <https://public.gosa.ga.gov/noauth/extensions/DisciplineDASHV1/DisciplineDASHV1.html>.

² See <https://hub.jhu.edu/2018/11/12/black-students-black-teachers-college-gap/>.

³ For the full report, see: Governor's Office of Student Achievement. 2017 K-12 Teacher and Leader Workforce Report.

⁴ Id.

⁵ For the full report, see: <http://www.ruraledu.org/WhyRuralMatters.pdf>.

⁶ Id.

⁷ Id.

MEETING TESTIMONY

Meeting #1 – September 18, 2019

The Committee met at the Georgia State Capitol on September 18, 2019 to examine educational programs, funding, and supports in place across the State that benefit African American students.

The following individuals provided testimony:

- Tiffany Taylor, Deputy Superintendent, Policy & External Affairs at Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE); and
- Dr. James Young, Professor at Clark Atlanta University.

Chairwoman Davenport provided introductory remarks and stated that the goal of the Committee is to make sure that the needs of every child in the state of Georgia are being met. Further, she wants the Committee to review disparities among the education of African American students and examine the reasons behind these disparities such as poverty, discrimination, and regulation. Chairwoman Davenport wanted the Committee to consider the whole child's physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and educational state.

Ms. Taylor presented an overview of the K-12 outlook on the education of African American youth and discussed the general landscape of this subgroup. Ms. Taylor described access and opportunity gaps that African American students may face and shared that GaDOE has implemented initiatives to address the issues that arise from the lack of access to quality teachers and positive school climates. The GaDOE has concentrated on the issue of school climate and has dispatched a School Climate Specialist at every Regional Education Service Agency (RESA). The School Climate Specialist's main purpose is to foster and support the district level personnel in improving school climate.⁸ Ms. Taylor further addressed programs that the GaDOE has implemented to address the opportunity gaps across the state in rural and low-poverty areas, such as offering virtual high-level courses and supporting educator recruitment efforts.

Ms. Taylor suggested more examination of the following areas: over-representation in discipline; over-representation in low academic achievement; over-identification in special education; under-representation in the educator workforce; and under-representation in pathway completion, Advanced Placement courses, and post-secondary matriculation.

Dr. James Young presented on how to enhance the education of black youth in Georgia by examining ways to close the achievement gap and revisiting the issue of early suspension. Dr. Young believes the following four characteristics make a high-quality school culture: set high standards for teachers, encourage students to be problem solvers, use daily feedback, and foster opportunities for students to acquire a deeper content knowledge. Dr. Young stressed the importance of having a positive school culture, which encourages students to want to learn. Dr. Young further testified to the need to revisit regulations and laws that ensure teachers have the latitude to make decisions to better student productivity, achievement, and success.

Meeting #2 – October 15, 2019

⁸ For more information regarding School Climate Specialists, see: <https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Pages/School-Climate-Specialists-Clipboard.aspx>.

The Committee met on October 15, 2019 on the campus of Clayton State University in Morrow, Georgia. The Committee heard from a variety of community leaders and advocates on the need for additional supports for African American students.

The following individuals presented testimony:

- Dr. Stephen Green, DeKalb County School District Superintendent;
- Dr. Morcease Beasley, Clayton County School District Superintendent;
- Ms. Carol Massey, Ms. Brunessa Drayton, and Ms. Monica Brown, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority;
- Mr. Raymond Pierce, President of Southern Education Foundation; and
- Dr. Mary Kay Bacallo, College of Education Professor at Mercer University.

Dr. Green shared statistical progress for African American students in DeKalb County public schools. He shared four targeted areas for improvement; (1) grade appropriate assignments; (2) strong instruction; (3) deep and meaningful engagement; and (4) holding teachers to high standards. Dr. Green's concerns are centered on access to early childhood education and hiring and retaining high quality educators. Dr. Green reiterated that there should be no difference in course rigor for college, technical, or military tracts.

Dr. Beasley shared with the Committee that there is no difference in how black and white students are to be educated, but the importance of addressing the different set of outcomes of the two demographics. Dr. Beasley discussed the need for increased funding for early childhood education and equitable access to quality teachers and resources.

Ms. Massey, Drayton, and Brown presented on the need for culturally responsive educational policies and disciplinary reform to ensure a more consistent application across race and the state.

Ms. Massey, Drayton and Brown, on behalf of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority submitted the following recommendations:

- Re-consider and revise zero-tolerance policies to ensure more consistent application across the state and within school districts;
- Review of the role of law enforcement/school resource officers in experience of African American students;
- Require school resource officers to complete training on child development to differentiate their interaction with children in the school setting vs adults in the general population and in judicial settings;
- Inclusion of cultural competence, implicit bias, critical incident training in classroom management curriculum in teacher preparation programs;
- Incentives for school districts and school sites that develop and implement annual professional development opportunities for administrators and staff in cultural competence and recognizing implicit bias;
- Incentivize the implementation of Restorative Justice policies and practices in school districts; and
- Implement Continuous Quality Improvement strategies aimed at the reduction of the disproportionate rates of suspensions and expulsions of African American students.

Mr. Pierce provided a historical overview of education in the South. He shared two areas that can be improved upon to help nurture the continual improvement the education of African American

students as: (1) increased funding for historically disadvantaged populations; and (2) streamlined wrap-around services for economically disadvantaged schools.

Mr. Pierce, on behalf of SEF, provided the following recommendations:

- Increase Funding for Historically Disadvantaged Populations;
 - Update the Quality Basic Education funding formula to what it costs to educate low-income students;
 - Provide additional funding to districts for educating low-income students, such as an “Opportunity Weight” suggested by GBPI;
 - Defund all school vouchers and tax-credit scholarship programs; and
- Streamline Wraparound Services to Meet Academic and Non-Academic Needs – Community Schools. (Services are to be determined at the community level).

Dr. Bacallo encouraged the Committee to look at education of African Americans specially the mental health stigmas that surround African-American children. She suggested that the Committee fill the gaps between the Federal legislation and state code relating to mental health diagnosis and parental/students’ rights.

Dr. Bacallo proposed the following recommendation:

- Address the issue that the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) does not strictly require parents to be involved in the design and implementation of mental health services, by adopting the Tennessee model.

Meeting #3 – November 9, 2019

The Committee met at the Georgia State Capitol on November 7, 2019 to continue the discussion of the effects of past and present education programs for African American students in Georgia.

The following individuals provided testimony:

- Dr. Stephen Owens, Senior Education Policy Analyst at Georgia Budget and Policy Institute (GBPI);
- Dr. Gloria Duncan, Director of Professional Learning at Clayton County Public Schools;
- Ms. Charlotte Booker, President of Georgia Association of Educators (GAE); and
- Ms. Margaret Ciccarelli, Director of Legislative Affairs at Professional Association of Georgia Educators (PAGE).

Dr. Owens provided an overview of education in Georgia’s Black Belt.⁹ Dr. Owens explained the history of Georgia’s Black Belt and shared statistics regarding availability of Advanced Placement Courses, HOPE Scholarship recipients, and high-quality teachers in this defined area. He shared the following policy recommendations, which address the disparities among rural and urban districts: (1) Create an opportunity weight to serve students living in poverty as Georgia is one of eight states that does not provide funding in this area; (2) Revise the Equalization and Sparsity Grants to better address district-specific needs; and (3) Reinvest in Pre-Kindergarten to improve the educational outcomes of all students.

Dr. Owens, on behalf of GBPI, provided the following recommendations:

⁹ Black Belt is loosely defined as the region from Columbus to Augusta that has a majority-Black population or where the majority of persons live in poverty. For the full definition, see: <https://cdn.gbpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/EducationInGAsBlackBelt-v4.pdf>.

- Create an “Opportunity Weight” which provides additional funding to districts for the education of low-income students;
- Revise Equalization and Sparsity Grants to better address district-specific needs; and
- Reinvest in Pre-Kindergarten education to improve educational outcomes.

Dr. Duncan presented on the history of race in education in the State of Georgia. She emphasized that the lowest-performing students need the best teachers, and this is not typically the case as rural and low-poverty areas have a harder time recruiting and retaining teachers. Dr. Duncan presented on the importance of pre-Kindergarten, expanded pathways to military and the Technical College System of Georgia, and reduced testing to all students.

Ms. Booker stated that GAE supports any and all efforts that bring needed attention and subsequently needed resources to all student populations to fulfill the mandate Brown v. Board of Education. GAE provided recommendations that address additional funding for Pre-Kindergarten, limiting class size, and expanding and fully funding community schools. She also stated her concerns of private and charter schools taking public funds from the community.

Ms. Booker, on behalf of GAE, submitted the following recommendations:

- Expand and fully fund community schools that build sustainable bridges between public schools and their local communities;
- Increase funding for pre-Kindergarten including increasing staff funding;
- Eliminate the ability of local boards of education to waive class size limits;
- Eliminate the ability of for-profit charter schools to manage public schools;
- Cap the number of charter schools; and
- Require greater transparency of private education management companies under the non-profit tax code.

Ms. Ciccarelli presented the statistics of the African American teacher demographics in Georgia. She stressed the importance of recruiting and retaining black teachers in an effort to close the achievement gap.

Ms. Ciccarelli, on behalf of PAGE provided the following recommendations:

- Focus on keeping the great teachers we have in Georgia and recruiting and retaining more teachers of color;
- Georgia must grow its own teachers and mentor new teachers. Teachers can attract future teachers, and efforts to do so must start early; and
- Georgia must give teachers autonomy and professional respect to prevent churn. To do so, continue to move away from overly scripted curriculum and deemphasize standardized tests.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the foregoing testimony, the Committee makes the following recommendations:

1. Fully fund education by updating the Quality Basic Education funding formula to include what it costs to educate all students, including those that are from low-income households.

This could be done through an Opportunity Weight which provides additional funding to districts that serve students from low-income households.

2. Allow and encourage retired teachers to return to the classroom.
3. Look for ways to expand high-quality access to teachers and availability of advanced courses for students in rural Georgia.
4. Continual review of the educational programs in the State of Georgia to ensure that disparities among African American students are eliminated.
5. Further examination of different pathways a student may take after high school (i.e. college, technical, or enlist in the military) and the required curricula for each.
6. Reinvest in Pre-Kindergarten education to improve educational outcomes.

Respectfully Submitted,

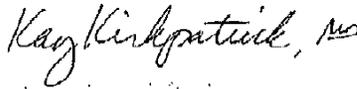
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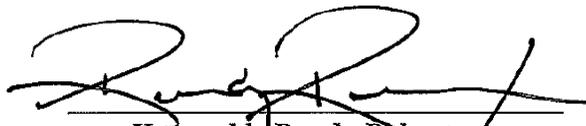
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