

# Georgia Literacy Commission

Preliminary Review & Analysis  
November 2017



LITERACY  
FOR ALL.  
ALL



GEORGIA PARTNERSHIP  
FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

*A nation's wealth rests not on the value of its land or the gold in its vaults. Wealth is in fact derived from the productive knowledge of its people.*

– Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 1776

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## *Acknowledgements*

The Georgia Chamber of Commerce, the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education and Literacy For All thank all of the Commission and Advisory Committee members for their time and effort dedicated to improving literacy in the State of Georgia. We would like to extend a special thank you to Deloitte for producing the initial study, on a *pro bono* basis, which explained the literacy crisis in Georgia and led to a call of action with the convening of the Georgia Literacy Commission.

## **Executive Summary**

Business, philanthropic and government investments have contributed to Georgia's commendable advancements in education. Despite these improvements, Georgia continues to struggle in developing a literate, competent workforce. Multigenerational low literacy combined with an increasingly technical and complex workplace underlies the crisis facing all Georgians, its business and economy.

To determine the size and severity of this issue, Deloitte conducted a study and produced a report entitled "[The State of Literacy in Georgia: Action Needed for Georgia's Thriving Workforce and Economy.](#)" Created at the behest of Literacy for All (LFA), a donor advised fund of the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, the study revealed a number of alarming facts:

- 65 percent of Georgia's third grade students are not reading at grade level;
- 1.7 million Georgia adults are low literate; and
- By 2018, 88 percent of all jobs in Georgia will require a high school diploma or post-secondary credential and over 820,000 Georgians will not qualify for these jobs.

In June 2017, responding to these facts, the Georgia Chamber of Commerce (GCC), the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (GPEE) and LFA convened a business-led commission, [the Georgia Literacy Commission \(GLC\)](#), comprised of Chief Executive Officers, high-ranking business executives, and government agency heads from across the state. An advisory committee of experienced literacy and education stakeholders provided guidance, input and research to the Commission. Together, the Commission and Advisory Committee conducted 11 public meetings during which state and private experts shared data-driven content relating to every age learner in order to explore the lifecycle of low literacy, understand root causes and motivation for positive change, and identify a blueprint for sustainable, practical, aligned, and actionable solutions that could be executed at the state and local levels.

Thus far, the process has resulted in a framework for ongoing convening and exploration of the topic, as well as immediately actionable recommendations found in this Preliminary Analysis and Review.

During the Commission's discovery process, many important foundational concepts have come to light. These include the following:

## **1. Literacy is a complex issue**

- Literacy spans every age in the life cycle (birth through adult years).
- The role of “educator” is broader than teacher and school; i.e., anyone in the community can become an “educator” with the right training (e.g., volunteers, parents, nurses, coaches, etc.).
- Adult literacy efforts demand unique considerations, such as flexible program hours, proximity to public transportation, customized curricula, and specialized teaching and learning approaches.
- While many organizations and campaigns are actively working to improve literacy in Georgia, their work is often disjointed and/or focused on one age group (e.g., birth to school-age, early school years, middle/high school, adults). Consequently, in many communities, there is a lack of alignment, making it harder to produce sustainable and holistic literacy outcomes.

## **2. Literacy is a multigenerational family issue**

- Low Literacy is a multigenerational issue affecting entire families and can lay hidden for decades.
- Because literacy can be difficult to achieve without family support, adults with low literacy are less likely to engage their children in speaking and reading activities, increasing the chances that the children themselves will be low literate as well.

## **3. Get Georgia Reading's four pillars framework is an effective approach**

- Get Georgia Reading's four pillars conceptual framework is an effective approach to furthering systemic literacy advancements for communities.
- The pillars are:
  - **Language Nutrition:** All children receive abundant, language-rich adult-child interactions, which are critical for brain development.
  - **Access:** All children and their families have access to, and supportive services for, healthy physical and social-emotional development and success in high-quality early childhood and elementary education.
  - **Positive Learning Climate:** All educators, families and policymakers understand and address the impact of learning climate on social-emotional development, attendance, engagement and ultimately student success.
  - **Teacher Preparation and Effectiveness:** All teachers of children ages 0-8 are equipped with evidence-informed skills, knowledge, and resources that effectively meet the literacy needs of each child in a developmentally appropriate manner.

(Note: Though these pillars are slightly different when applied to all parts of the lifecycle, birth through adult, they are conceptually the same and important to all literacy initiatives.)

**4. Preventative investments in literacy restrain future costs<sup>1</sup>**

- Early investments to ensure literacy skills are properly developed, progressed and sustained reduce downstream costs of school remediation programs, incarceration, health care institutions, and social services.
- Additionally, remediation for individuals with literacy challenges becomes more difficult to achieve the longer the problems persist.

**5. Local control and community implementation are key**

- Since no two communities are the same, approaches to addressing low literacy will vary throughout the state.
- The most successful programs are locally developed and implemented.

**6. Digital literacy is essential**

- Proficiency with digital technology and communications are increasingly expected by employers and other societal systems for success at work, school, home, and in the community.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, the Commission considered a number of predictive issues (or root causes) often correlated to low literacy. These include:

- Premature birth
- Parental low literacy, especially maternal education level
- Living in poverty
- Poor school attendance
- Inadequate literacy instruction
- Challenges resulting from poor health, vision, hearing or developmental delays
- Unstable home or family life
- Trauma resulting from Adverse Childhood Experiences<sup>3</sup> (ACEs)
- English as a second language

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.newbernsj.com/20130607/commentary-why-business-should-support-early-childhood-education/306079859>

<sup>2</sup> <https://techboomers.com/blog/importance-of-digital-literacy>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.questia.com/magazine/1G1-421523273/early-adverse-childhood-experiences-linked-to-poor>

- Access to support (e.g., proximity of programs, public transportation, internet access, childcare, etc.)
- Lack of high school completion
- Substance abuse
- Incarceration

When foundational concepts and predictors are looked at together, clearly literacy can and should be “home-grown.” In fact, the Commission found that the most successful adult and family literacy programs tend to be local in origin and organic in nature.

Thus, the Commission’s current (and likely future) recommendations embody this homegrown and multigenerational approach to statewide literacy. They not only amplify and leverage existing successful efforts underway in the literacy space, but also unify various parties to fill in gaps, address missed opportunities, and incubate and implement new ideas to end low literacy of all ages.

A summary of the Commission’s analyses to date is listed below, and fall into three categories:

1. Recommendations for private funding and execution;
2. Priorities for further research and vetting; and
3. Issues supported by the Commission, but not technically within the Commission’s scope of execution.

### Recommendations for Private Funding and Execution

Recommendation	Description
<b>1</b> Expand <b>summer and after school program</b> access and quality.	Provide private funding for additional afterschool programs, and work with existing private programs to improve quality by incorporating literacy into their programming.
<b>2</b> Engage with <b>housing authorities</b> to provide literacy and wrap around services.	Expand the work of current pilots by soliciting partner investors. Investigate Federal Section 8 housing funding incentives.
<b>3</b> Train <b>non-education professionals</b> who work with the low literate population to enhance literacy efforts to incorporate/strengthen language nutrition coaching skills.	Provide private funding to develop and execute a training plan.
<b>4</b> Create <b>awareness about libraries</b> as a resource for literacy and wrap around services.	Provide private funding to develop and execute an awareness campaign targeting community level nonprofit organizations (food donation programs, private literacy programs, etc.).
<b>5</b> Create a <b>public awareness campaign</b> around adult literacy.	Provide private funding to develop and execute campaign.
<b>6</b> Seek private funding for community-based <b>adult education programs</b> .	Working with local chambers of commerce, assess adult education needs and privately fund adult education programming gaps statewide.
<b>7</b> Seek a community partners to implement community based programs and evaluate ways to expand statewide.	Provide private funding to support GGR, CLCP and other community partnership efforts.
<b>8</b> Expand access to <b>health services</b> in childcare centers, schools and other learning environments.	Following Zeist and Learn4Life models, build community partnerships to increase health services in or near places of education.
<b>9</b> Develop an <b>adult education early intervention system</b> .	Develop early intervention systems and pilot in privately funded programs.
<b>10</b> Coordinate statewide literacy activities and programs to ensure implementation of best practices and maximize return on investment.	Ensure statewide alignment of program, goals and measures; develop statewide inventory of programs; consider hotline to increase awareness.

### **Priorities for Further Research and Vetting**

- ***Assess capacity, access and other needs for community-based adult education programs (ASE, ABE, ESOL).***
- ***Consider mechanisms to further support Quality Rated childcare for children from birth - five years old.***
  - Review current and potential resources and services available through the state's Quality Rated initiative to build capacity of child care programs to promote young children's academic, socio-emotional, and physical development.
- ***Support the mission and strategic plan of the Sandra Dunagan Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy.***
- ***Consider the need for formative and interim reading assessments for Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.***
  - Determine if reliable and valid formative (diagnostic) literacy assessments are being utilized in all school systems across Georgia. Also determine whether appropriate remedial action is being taken. Coordinate with the state's Assessment Innovation Task force to vet.
- Review and evaluate current ***tax credits or financial incentives for businesses that sponsor ABE, ASE or ESOL programs on- or off-site for employees and their families.***

### **Issues Supported by the Commission, but Not Within the Commission's Scope of Execution**

- ***Universal broadband access throughout the state***

While school systems throughout the state now have Internet access, there are many areas of the state where families themselves do not, making it difficult for students to complete projects and homework assignments. In fact, often, the families who need online support most have the least access to it. Additionally, adult education programs heavily leverage online tools and programs as well. It is worth noting that even the GED is now offered **only** online.

In the meantime, stop-gap measures such as mobile classrooms, hot spots shared with students by businesses or available for public check out from local libraries, school bus “leave-behind” programs (which leave a school bus with hotspot in a neighborhood for broadband access), and [Everyoneon.com](http://Everyoneon.com) are worthy endeavors and implementation of such has earned the Commission’s support.

- ***Support positive learning climate efforts***

The Commission endorses existing efforts to create and sustain positive learning climates, such as Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports, across early learning centers and K-12 school systems.

- ***Alternative pathways to employment other than the GED***

The Commission recognizes that adults can build workforce readiness skills without earning a GED, and that those skills are valuable and should be recognized. As capacity allows, the Commission will help raise awareness regarding the Metro Atlanta Chamber’s project for workforce development, which works with employers to determine skills and education levels necessary for employment. As appropriate, the Commission will amplify other similar efforts across the state as well.

## *Preliminary Review & Analysis*

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## Introduction

For years, the Georgia business community has engaged and invested in the future of the state by investing in education. The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (GPEE) has led and continues to lead the way, with research and awareness activities, as well as reports such as the annual predictive analysis, “[Top Ten Issues to Watch](#),” and the recently updated release of “[Economics of Education](#).” The latter study notes: “Investing in public education is essential to future economic success for individuals, communities, businesses and the state. Economic prosperity in an increasingly competitive national and global environment depends in large part on Georgia’s educational system.”<sup>4</sup>

In addition, the Georgia Chamber of Commerce (GCC) contributes to workforce development by partnering with local businesses, chambers, communities, state officials and other organizations to ensure that employers have the talent they need to stay competitive. Chamber strategies link education to workforce development in a seamless system, embedding skills-based learning into academic instruction.

While there is no doubt the state has made strides in education with improved high school graduation rates, an array of early learning programs and interventions, as well as a growing “Move on When Ready” dual enrollment program, Georgia’s overall adult and child literacy outcomes are outpaced by growing industry demands.

*“Literacy” is defined as “the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts in order to participate in society, achieve one’s goals and develop one’s knowledge and potential.”<sup>1</sup>*

To define the challenge, Literacy for All (LFA), a donor advised fund of the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, commissioned a study to determine the size and severity of the literacy issue in Georgia. Deloitte, working on a *pro bono* basis, examined the issue and produced a report entitled [“The State of Literacy in Georgia: Action Needed for Georgia’s Thriving Workforce and Economy.”](#) This report illustrates the crisis looming for Georgia’s workforce and economy, should the percentage of citizens with low literacy remain unchanged. Deloitte found:

- 65 percent of Georgia’s third grade students are not reading at grade level;
- 1.7 million Georgia adults are low literate; and

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<sup>4</sup> [The Economics of Education, Fifth Edition, GPEE](#)

- By 2018, 88 percent of all jobs in Georgia will require a high school diploma or post-secondary credential and over 820,000 Georgians do not qualify for these jobs.

Clearly these findings point to a potential crisis in workforce readiness and subsequent instability in the state economy.

In response to this report, the GCC, GPEE and LFA came together in June of 2017, to convene a business-led delegation, “[The Georgia Literacy Commission](#) (Commission).” [The Commission’s purpose was](#) to explore the lifecycle of low literacy, understand root causes and motivation for positive change, and identify a blueprint for sustainable, practical, aligned, and actionable solutions that could be executed at the state and local levels.

The Commission is led by co-chairs, Sandra Deal (First Lady of Georgia), Wendell Dallas (VP, Operations, Atlanta Gas Light), Phil Jacobs (President AT&T Georgia, retired), and Teya Ryan (President/CEO, Georgia Public Broadcasting), and attended by 21 additional members, as well as various private and public stakeholders. To date, five public hearings have been conducted between June and September 2017, taking place in Atlanta, Columbus, Tifton, Milledgeville and Dalton. Eleven individual presentations have been made to the Commission on current research, evidence-based practices, and programs relating to each life cycle (birth through adult years). (See Document Matrix for all presentations) In addition, an advisory committee of education and literacy experts has assisted the Commission with research, issue context, and Commission inquiries.

### **Georgia Literacy Commission Purpose Statement**

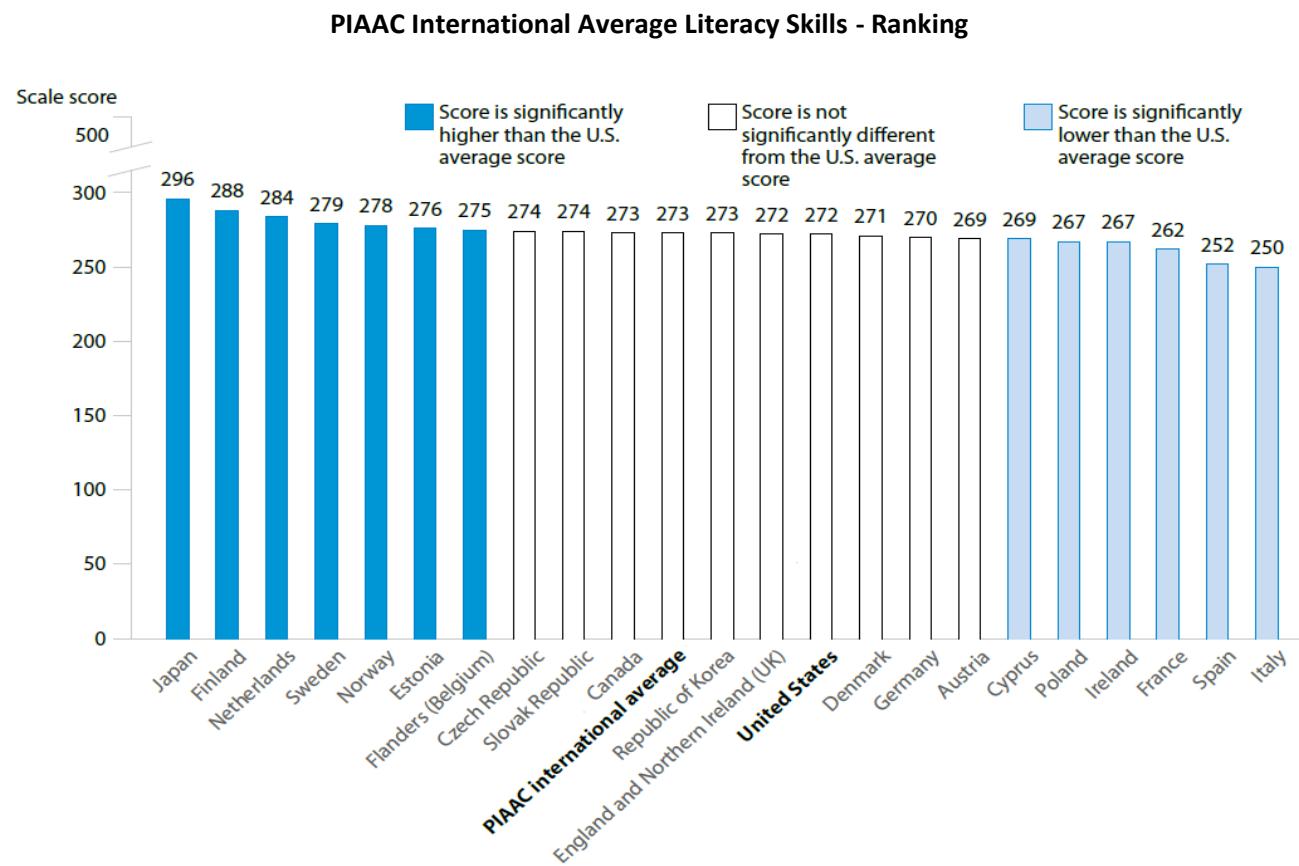
The Commission will:

- Use a data-driven, empirically-based approach to construct the business case for improved literacy in Georgia
- Develop a blueprint for actionable, non-prescriptive recommendations including:
  - Analysis and alignment of current literacy efforts (research, programs, organizations) throughout the life span.
  - Policy revisions and legislation
  - Funding streams (sources and uses)
  - Mapping of literacy-engaged organizations and leadership
  - Communications framing and strategies for various audiences
  - Evaluation and technical support for all elements of the blueprint to ensure best outcomes
- Identify and commit to actions which will catalyze literacy advancement within their spheres of influence
- Evaluate outcomes of its own work and create a vision for the next phase of pro-literacy activity

Thus far, the Commission has considered over 100 recommendations for literacy skills improvements from birth through adult years. The recommendations have been further vetted with stakeholders and initial direction for execution was set, focusing first on privately funded, community-based initiatives, to be followed in the near future by recommendations encompassing possible public and private activities.

## Background

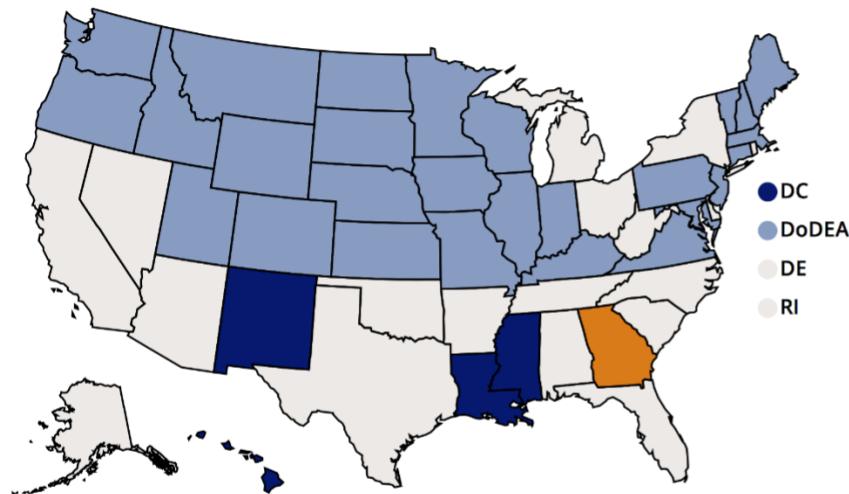
Once a world leader in educational outcomes, the United States has since lost standing in math, science and reading. Focusing on literacy scores alone, the U.S. average Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) score was lower than average, falling behind 12 other countries. In addition, the Survey of Adult Skills by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development shows that despite having higher than average levels of educational attainment, adults in the U.S. have below-average basic literacy skills.<sup>5</sup>



<sup>5</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/>

Within the United States, Georgia ranks in the middle of the pack on the 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) third-grade reading assessment, with 28 states scoring higher in reading than Georgia. For NAEP eighth-grade reading scores, our students fell behind those in 37 other states.<sup>6</sup>

### Compare the Average Score in 2015 to Other States/Jurisdictions

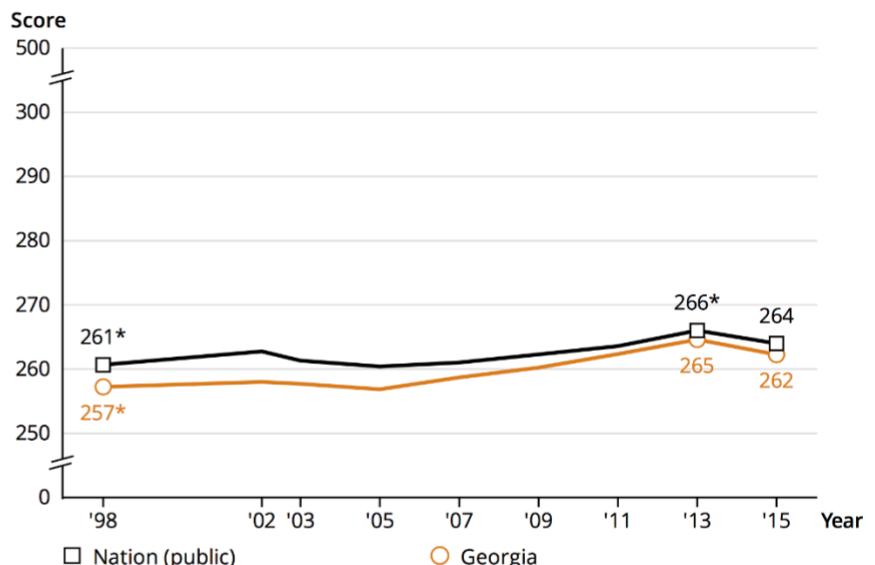


In 2015, the average score in Georgia (262) was

- lower than those in 28 states/jurisdictions
- higher than those in 5 states/jurisdictions
- not significantly different from those in 18 states/jurisdictions

DoDEA = Department of Defense Education Activity (overseas and domestic schools)

### Average Scores for State/Jurisdiction and Nation (public)



Source: <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2015/pdf/2016008GA8.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/profiles/stateprofile?chort=1&sub=RED&sj=AL&sfj=NP&st=MN&year=2015R3>

## The Deloitte Study

["State of Literacy in Georgia: Action Needed for Georgia's Thriving Workforce and Economy,"](#) revealed that **a crisis is looming** for Georgia's business community, which already struggles to identify an educated and literate workforce. Using high school graduation as a proxy for literacy, this report revealed the following:

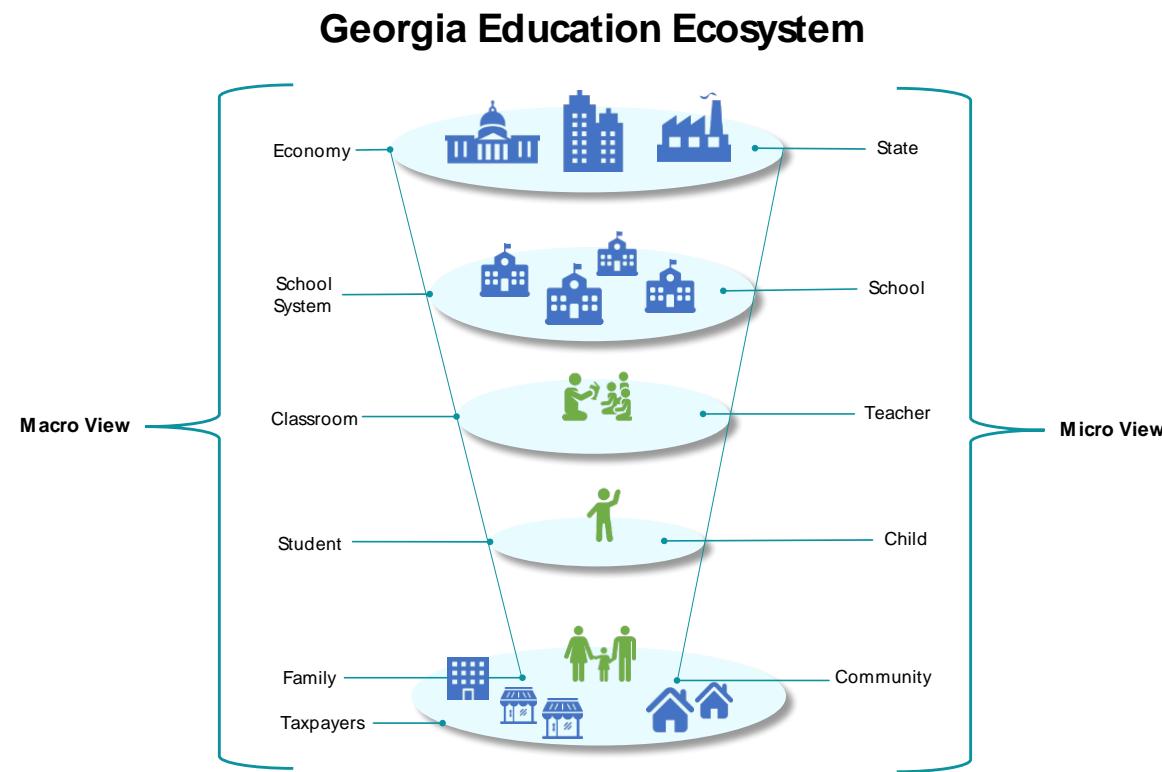
- One in six adult Georgians is low literate, which totals **1.7 million adults**.
  - These adults are statistically more likely to experience poor health, lower wages, unemployment, incarceration and poverty.
  - These adults are less able to help their children achieve literacy, safety, good health and success.
- Children of adults with low literacy are more likely to have language development delays.
  - This most often leads to reading difficulty by the end of third grade.
- 65 percent of Georgia's students are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade.
  - These students are more likely to drop out of high school, have health problems, enter the penal system and live in poverty.
- Low literacy costs the state **\$1.26 billion** annually in social services, incarceration and lost revenue.
- Adults with low literacy earn 30 percent less than adults with a high school diploma.
- By 2018, 88 percent of all jobs in Georgia will require a high school diploma or post-secondary credential.
  - Currently, over **820,000** Georgians will not qualify for these jobs, including the military, for lack of a high school diploma or GED.

Each year, more than half of the state's budget (\$12.3 billion in FY 2018) is spent on education, yet Georgia still has communities where low literacy is at epidemic proportions. (For detailed maps, please see Appendix F.) Despite the state's worthy and effective efforts to improve literacy, advancements, nevertheless, are outpaced by increasing industry demands (skills and education). Georgia has a widening gap between what businesses need to be successful and what this state has to offer in terms of workforce readiness. In fact, low literacy, more often than not, influences business attraction as well as workplace environment:

- Companies and their employees prefer to locate in high performing school districts.
- Consistent quality education statewide allows employee mobility.
- Workplace safety becomes a more serious concern when employees have difficulty reading
- Businesses lose productivity when employees are unhealthy and miss work.
- Businesses want to locate where there is a vibrant and growing economy, and this is dependent upon an educated and skilled community.

As the Deloitte study clearly illustrates, literacy impacts the state's economic vitality. In addition to challenges for employers, low literacy ultimately results in a poor return on investment in that fewer tax dollars move from that population to the state or federal government, yet more dollars move from government to the low literate population to address social services and public safety concerns correlated to low literacy.

This illustration depicts the relationships between taxpayers, families, school systems and the economy.



Source: Georgia Commission on School Board Excellence, 2008

## Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education Report

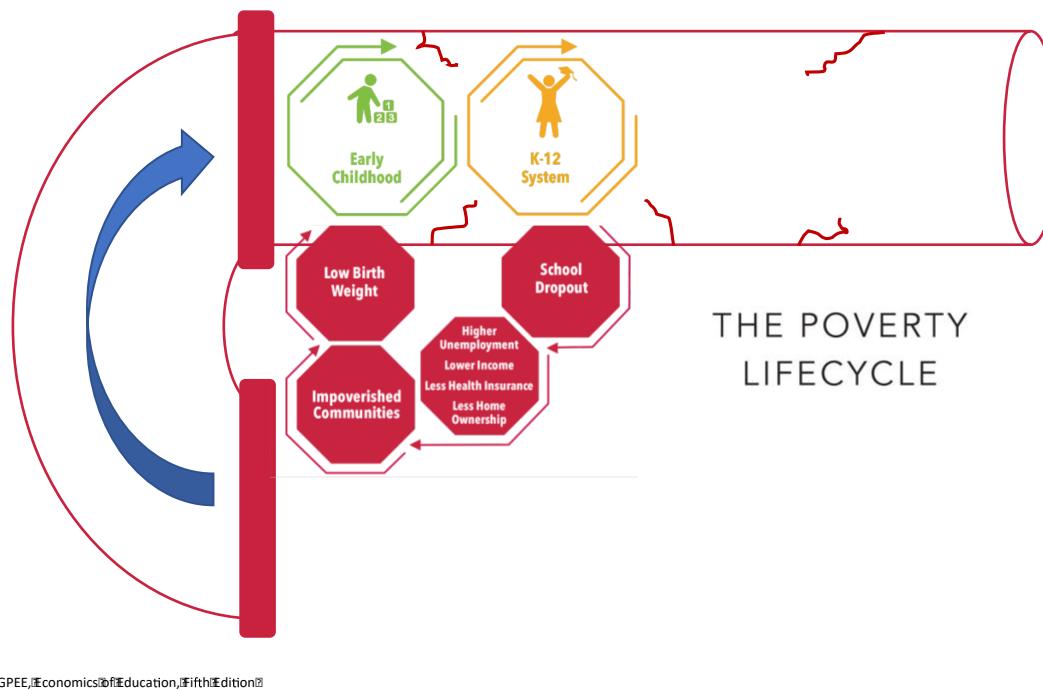
The GPEE recent report, "[Economics of Education](#)," considers "Economic Lifecycle" and literacy's role in it. Strong literacy begins with a healthy birth, followed by the practice of speaking to newborns, infants, and children. From there, literacy and speech are an integral part of preparation for Kindergarten. With continued engagement, children should *learn* to read by third grade, which means they can *read to learn* beyond. In the end, literate and successful adults are better able to build strong families and invest in their communities, increasing the probability that the next generation will continue to build on that success. And while Economic Lifecycle success occurs most often when all sectors and members of a community create a culture of literacy, it is clear, nevertheless, that literacy starts with the family. In a word, literacy is "homegrown."



GPEE, [Economics of Education, Fifth Edition](#)

Poverty, however, can affect an otherwise functioning and healthy economic lifecycle. Consider this: 96 percent of Georgia's low performing schools are also schools located in neighborhoods with the highest concentrations of poverty.<sup>7</sup> In addition, studies have shown that, on average, a child living in poverty hears 30 million fewer words by the age of three than a child living in a higher income home.<sup>8</sup> This lack of language nutrition impacts the child's readiness for school and increases the odds that a child will fail to complete high school.

As mentioned above, when students fail to graduate or build sufficient literacy skills, their own economic trajectory is compromised. When people in an area fall out of the healthy economic cycle, the prosperity of their community and their state are also at risk, creating a cycle of intergenerational poverty/low literacy.



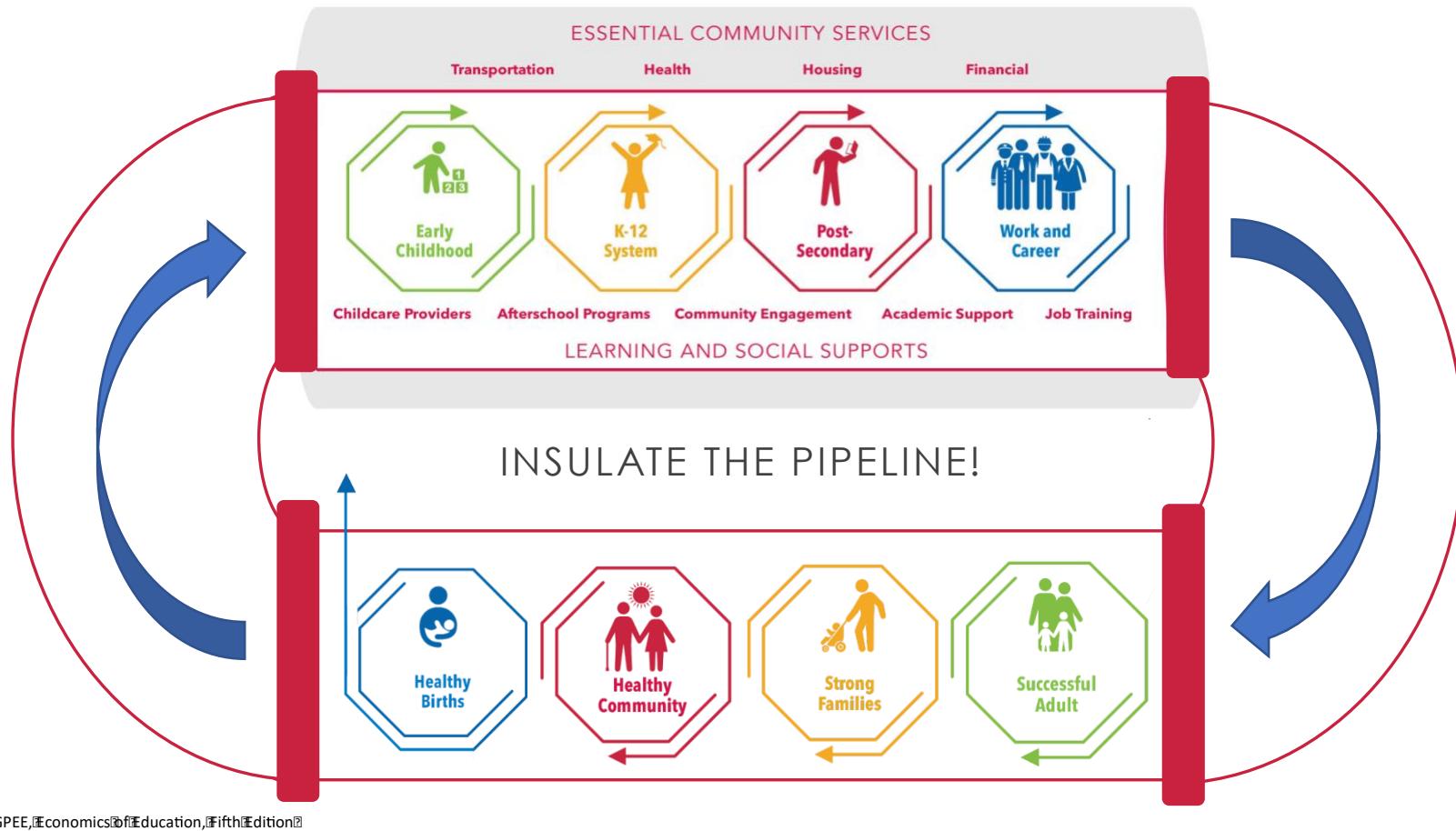
<sup>7</sup> Research Division of AdvancED 2016 Study led by Matt Dawson, Vice President of Research

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.naeyc.org/tyc/article/the-word-gap>

Predictive Issues Often Correlated with Low Literacy

- *Premature birth*
- *Parental low literacy, especially maternal education level*
- *Living in poverty*
- *Poor school attendance*
- *Inadequate literacy instruction*
- *Challenges resulting from poor health, vision, hearing or developmental delays*
- *Unstable home or family life*
- *Trauma resulting from Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)*
- *English as a second language*
- *Access to support (e.g., proximity of programs, public transportation, internet access, childcare, etc.)*
- *Lack of high school completion*
- *Substance abuse*

To strengthen the birth to work pipeline we must insulate each stage with essential community services, learning and social supports, such as quality childcare programs, community engagement activities, academic and career supports, health services, adult education to name a few. Best practice research shows that high performing states and nations all have such essential elements in place that support the birth to work pipeline.<sup>9</sup>



<sup>9</sup> <http://online.anyflip.com/jvnu/onlj/mobile/index.html#p=1>

With an understanding of the background, the Commission and Advisory Committee heard presentations of best practices and successful evidence-based programs. From the presentations key foundational concepts arose that guided the commission to identify and frame recommendations outlined later in this Preliminary Analysis and Review.

## **1. Literacy is a complex issue**

- There are a lot of organizations, large and small, public and private, working on literacy.
- The hierarchy of needs must be met before literacy can be addressed. Wrap-around services are necessary to ensure access to literacy programs from birth through adult education. One needs to have food, shelter, safety and health to develop/improve literacy skills.
- Literacy is not confined to the school system. It extends to the entire community and culture.
- Literacy includes reading, writing, math, verbal and digital communication in order to provide for oneself and one's family.
- Literacy spans the entire life cycle (birth through adult), and while programs may be underway to improve literacy at young ages, there is still a great need for literacy programs at all stages of the life cycle including adults.
- The role of an “educator” is broader than just teachers. Anyone in the community can become an “educator” with the right training (e.g., volunteers, parents, nurses, coaches, etc.). For instance, parents can teach their children; professionals can teach parents; and volunteers can help in school settings, allowing teachers to spend time more effectively with small groups of learners.
- **Adult Education has unique requirements.** Adult education has very different curriculum, progress measures, access considerations, marketing requirements, etc. Foundational to adult education success are:
  - Access – Courses must be offered at various hours and with proximity to MARTA or public transportation. Transportation and childcare are often needed. Internet access is required.
  - Hope – It is critical for adult learners to have hope that they CAN improve.
  - Motivation – Adult learners must be motivated, by job opportunities, the ability to help their children, the ability to understand their own health or financial matters, etc. They need a purpose for learning (most will not learn for the sake of learning), and they need to learn how to learn.
  - Learning approaches and modalities – Adult learners must self-direct their own learning, have opportunities for critical reflection and be able to access their own experiences when learning something new. They also require low vocabulary/high interest books.

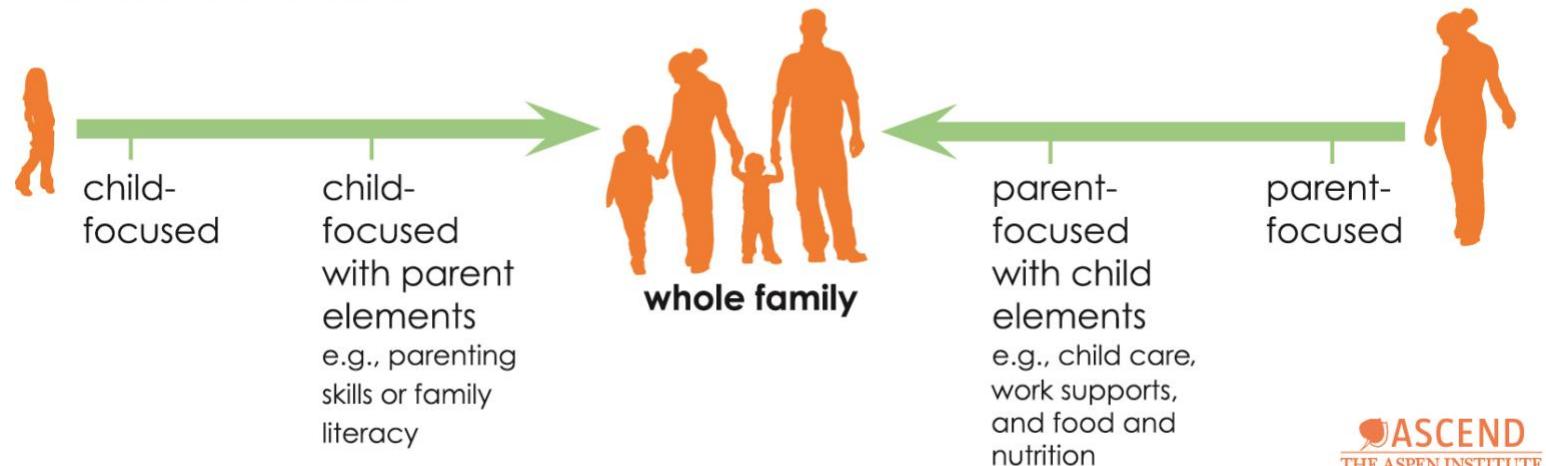
## **2. The Two-Generation Continuum/Multigenerational Continuum**

Literacy is a **multigenerational family** issue. Adults with low literacy skills who cannot support their children’s development are more likely to produce low literate children as it is difficult to succeed without family support. If parents are struggling to stay employed, keep a home, manage family finances and put food on the table, then it is difficult to expect a focused child at school. Parents with low literacy skills are less likely to read and talk to their children from birth on which leads to another generation of low literacy skills. The impacts of low literacy

compound, affecting one's ability to earn a living, thus jeopardizing the vitality and prosperity of his/her community. We have a systemic, problem, and programs that take a multigenerational approach have been very effective breaking this cycle. (See Appendix E.)

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### The Two-Generation Continuum



### 3. The Four Pillars

The [Get Georgia Reading Campaign \(GGR\)](#) partners created a common agenda as a framework for action. While GGR created this common agenda to rally action from birth through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, the Commission chose to embrace the four-pillar framework for recommendations from birth through adult years. The four pillars of the common agenda, as currently applied, include:

- **Language Nutrition:** All children receive abundant, language-rich adult-child interactions, which are as critical for brain development as healthy food is for physical growth.
- **Access:** All children and their families have access to, and supportive services for, healthy physical and social-emotional development and success in high-quality early childhood and elementary education.
- **Positive Learning Climate:** All educators, families and policymakers understand and address the impact of learning climate on social-emotional development, attendance, engagement and ultimately student success.
- **Teacher Preparation and Effectiveness:** All teachers of children ages 0-8 are equipped with evidence-informed skills, knowledge, and resources that effectively meet the literacy needs of each child in a developmentally appropriate manner.

Though these pillars are slightly different when applied to all parts of the lifecycle birth through adult, they are conceptually the same and important to all literacy initiatives. Each recommendation has been mapped to the GGR pillars. (See Appendix.)

### 4. Preventative investments in literacy restrain future costs.<sup>10</sup>

- Investing in birth - three year-old programs ensures children enter PreK with the correct foundation for success. PreK ensures success in Kindergarten – third grade. Reading on grade level at the end of third grade is the foundation for learning content in fourth through twelfth grades. Graduating from high school or obtaining a GED increases chances of an adult being self-sustaining. Early investments to ensure literacy skills are properly developed, progressed and sustained reduce downstream costs of school remediation programs, incarceration, health care institutions, and social services. Additionally, remediation for individuals with literacy challenges becomes more difficult to achieve the longer the problems persist.
- Social promotion without academic support compounds the problems and compromises students' future success, not to mention ends up costing more in the long run.<sup>11</sup>
- Class/ learning group size is such an important factor in teaching literacy as well as identifying literacy problems. Small groups have proven to increase early identification of low literacy as well as significantly reduce remediation time.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.newbernsj.com/20130607/commentary-why-business-should-support-early-childhood-education/306079859>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/social-promotion/index.html>; <https://www.publicschoolreview.com/blog/is-social-promotion-crippling-our-childrens-future-the-debate>

<sup>12</sup> <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/does-class-size-matter>

**5. Local control and community implementation are key.**

Since no two communities are the same, approaches to addressing low literacy will vary throughout the state. The most successful programs are locally developed and implemented.

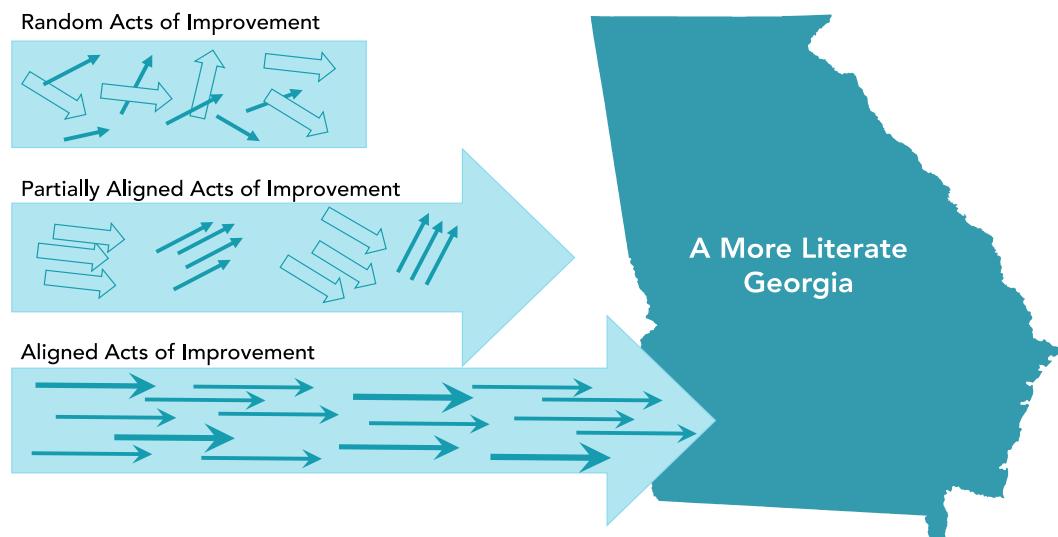
**6. Digital literacy is extremely important as a means of communication.**

Digital literacy is essentially the ability to understand and make use of digital technologies. In the modern world, this is increasingly important, as the Internet and digital technology are slowly becoming an essential component of many people's lives. As time goes on, more and more people are getting online, and utilizing these technologies in their everyday lives, whether for work, or in the home.<sup>13</sup>

Despite all good intentions and excellent work to improve literacy, the state's gains are not keeping pace with the increasing population of adults with low literacy skills and workforce needs. Further strategic alignment and coordination of efforts among business, education, government, social services, and non-profit and philanthropic organizations is needed to change the state's trajectory of low literacy.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://techboomers.com/blog/importance-of-digital-literacy>



## Recommendations

Commission members gained great insight into the issues affecting literacy. In the Preliminary Analysis and Review, these recommendations are just the beginning. After evaluating over 100 recommendations, the following have been identified as the most impactful and actionable.

A summary of the Commission's recommendations is listed below in three categories:

- Recommendations for private funding and execution;
- Priorities for further research and vetting; and
- Issues supported by the Commission, but not technically within the Commission's scope of execution.

Rec #	Recommendation	Description
1	Ensure that funding is available to expand access to <b>afterschool and summer learning programs</b> for youth in need of additional literacy support. Increase the quality of afterschool and summer learning programs through additional professional learning opportunities and literacy curriculum resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Coordinate with community centers, YMCAs, athletic organizations, vacation bible schools, Sunday schools, etc. to provide curriculum and practices to embed literacy into their programs.</li><li>• Consider focusing on counties with low 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading proficiency and/or focus and prioritize schools without access to government funded afterschool and summer programs.</li><li>• Ask business community to partner to offer after school opportunities for students (where they can improve literacy and reading); e.g., <a href="http://www.12forlife.com/">http://www.12forlife.com/</a>.</li><li>• Create awareness of the importance of afterschool programs and look at creating the data that demonstrates the effectiveness of them in long-term outcomes.</li><li>• Increase awareness of the needs of families in crisis and develop a trauma-informed approach to working with these families in after and summer school programs.</li></ul>
2	Support/engage statewide <b>Housing Authorities</b> to provide access to literacy programs, incent individuals to take advantage of literacy programs and provide literacy programs for occupants. Partner with local and statewide affordable housing providers to provide access to literacy programs for subsidized and low-income housing residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Partner with Tri-Star and other housing development companies to provide access to literacy programs at lower income communities.</li><li>• Evaluate the Atlanta Housing Authority Model.</li></ul>

Rec #	Recommendation	Description
3	<p>Targeting <b>professionals</b> who already work with families (e.g., nurses, physicians, WIC nutritionists, SNAP program, infant and toddler teachers, foster parents, social workers, grocery store clerks, cell phone companies, faith-based organization, etc.), support a myriad of efforts to <b>incorporate/strengthen language nutrition coaching skills</b>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support institutions of higher education in integrating the concept of language nutrition coaching in preparation programs for large-scale professions serving children and families, such as nurses, physicians, medical assistants, WIC nutritionists, early childhood educators, K-12 teachers, and social workers, etc.</li> <li>• Seek business partners to fund programs and recruit volunteers to read and talk to premature babies in hospitals (premature babies are more likely to have reading problems in the future).</li> <li>• Train health professionals, including social workers, nurses, pediatricians, etc., to talk to new parents about the importance of reading and talking to babies.</li> <li>• Train public agencies that work with at-risk populations (e.g., SNAP program) to talk with parents about the need to talk and read to their children.</li> <li>• Create awareness about GOSA's app for parents that contains tools for talking to children (<a href="https://gov.georgia.gov/press-releases/2017-07-25/dealannounces-launch-words2reading-website">https://gov.georgia.gov/press-releases/2017-07-25/dealannounces-launch-words2reading-website</a>).</li> <li>• Create awareness among civic organizations and private companies about this issue. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Seek private partners to fund expansion of programs like "<a href="#">Rooted to Rise</a>" to all areas of Georgia.</li> <li>○ Support and expand "<a href="#">Talk with me Baby</a>" campaign.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Consider leveraging Department of Public Health to train trainers.</li> </ul>
4	<p>Create <b>awareness about libraries</b> as a resource for programs, classes, health information and other services to improve literacy skills for patrons of all ages.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leverage library locations for summer literacy and food distribution programs.</li> <li>• Provide parenting classes and reading activities for children in libraries (e.g., Lee County library).</li> <li>• Partner with libraries to host community programs that provide digital access and free books.</li> <li>• Leverage library space to offer ABE, ASE and ESOL classes.</li> <li>• Leverage library locations to offer wrap-around services for children and adults – vision screening, hearing screening, and nutritional education classes.</li> <li>• Connect library and media centers in and out of schools.</li> </ul>

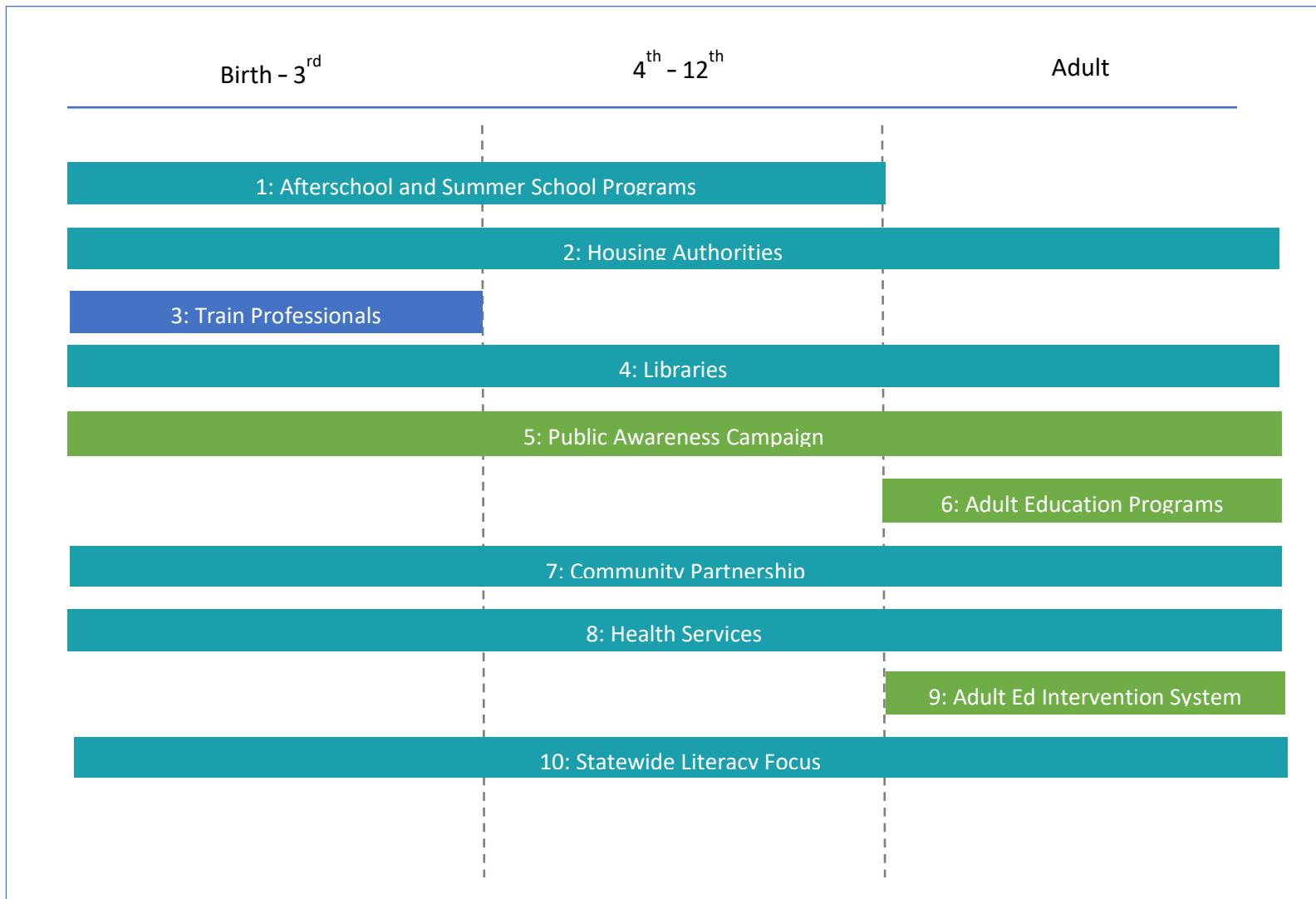
**Recommendations that can be privately funded and executed:**

Rec #	Recommendation	Description
5	Create a multi-pronged <b>public awareness campaign around adult literacy.</b>	<p>The campaign will have multiple audiences with different messaging for each.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One campaign will target the adult low literate population to increase awareness of adult education programs.</li> <li>• Another campaign will target social workers, health professionals and other professionals, training them to identify adults with low literacy and provide them with information about learning opportunities in the area.</li> <li>• A third campaign will target businesses to inform them of the compelling business case of how literacy is the foundation of employment and community wellbeing, the economics of a more literate community/workforce and existing tax credits available to businesses. The campaigns will leverage existing materials and evaluate various different mediums.</li> </ul>
6	Seek private funding for community-based <b>adult education programs.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with local chambers of commerce, assess adult education needs and privately fund adult education programming gaps statewide.</li> </ul>
7	Seek community partnerships to implement community-based programs and evaluate ways to expand statewide.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate current statewide activity.</li> <li>• Conduct needs assessment for local programs.</li> <li>• Work with private funders to support local programming.</li> </ul>

Rec #	Problem	Solution
8	Expand access to <b>health services</b> in schools and various types of learning locations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen efforts to identify and provide language services to children with language impairments before they start kindergarten and during the first few years of elementary school—and carefully monitor and support the reading progress of children with language impairment.</li> <li>• Provide immediate referral to a speech-language pathologist for children with expressive language issues.</li> <li>• Increase awareness and understanding of the relationship between language impairments and behavioral issues.</li> <li>• Provide language screening, assessments, and appropriate interventions for all children with emotional and behavioral disorders.</li> <li>• Leverage the recent addition of Speech-Language Pathologists to the list of Medicaid provider types who may provide services via telemedicine in schools and other settings to identify and treat children with language impairment.</li> <li>• Invest in the continuation and expansion of initiatives like the Georgia Apex Project to provide access to mental health services and support in schools and expand the approach to include childcare centers.</li> <li>• Support the sustainability of Youth Mental Health First Aid training (designed to address needs of 12-18 year-olds) and expand the approach to support needs of early childhood and elementary school-age children.</li> <li>• Invest in handheld vision screeners for districts to provide vision screenings every year for children in Pre-K and K and grades 1, 3, 5, 7, and 10, and follow-up evaluations and supports (glasses, etc.) for children identified as having visual impairment.</li> <li>• Leverage the change in Georgia law that allows licensed dental hygienists to provide preventive dental care in more locations, including Title I schools, Head Start programs, and Georgia's Pre-K program, under supervision of a dentist, but without requiring the dentist to be present.</li> <li>• Provide training for school staff and local health promotion groups to support school districts in adopting Georgia's model Asthma-Friendly School Policy.</li> </ul>

Rec #	Problem	Solution
9	Develop an <b>Adult Education early intervention system</b> for GA. Note: GA would be a leader in this space as no other state has an early intervention system for adults.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Looking to Georgia State University's early intervention system as a model, develop an early intervention system for adults. The goal is to retain learners in programs without interruptions, many of which could be addressed by wrap around services (e.g., childcare, transportation, flexible program schedule, access to internet). Pilot the program in privately funded initiatives.</li> </ul>
10	<b>Coordinate programs statewide</b> to ensure implementation of best practices and maximize return on investment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure statewide alignment of program, goals and measures.</li> <li>• Create an inventory of literacy programs offered throughout the state.</li> <li>• Manage grant awards to LLPs and collecting grantee metrics, statewide, relating to awarded funds.</li> <li>• Consider a statewide literacy campaign, "Literacy is Homegrown," to create awareness about the economic impact of low literacy in the state.</li> <li>• Consider a hotline for both individuals looking to improve their literacy skills as well as businesses or other organizations looking for opportunities to fund or offer literacy programs.</li> </ul>

The above recommendations span the entire life cycle, working towards systemic solutions.



### **Priorities for Further Research and Vetting**

The Commission continues to analyze additional issues that, by their very nature, are complex and require further research and discussion with key stakeholders in upcoming months. These issues include:

- ***Assess capacity, access and other needs for community-based adult education programs (ASE, ABE, ESOL).***
- ***Consider mechanisms to further support Quality Rated childcare for children from birth - five years old.***
  - Review current and potential resources and services available through the state's Quality Rated initiative to build capacity of child care programs to promote young children's academic, socio-emotional, and physical development.
- ***Support the mission and strategic plan of the Sandra Dunagan Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy.***
- ***Consider the need for formative and interim reading assessments for Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.***
  - Do reliable and valid formative (diagnostic) literacy assessments exist and do they work? Work with the state's Assessment Innovation Task force to vet.
- ***Review and evaluate current tax credits or financial incentives for businesses that sponsor ABE, ASE or ESOL programs on- or off-site for employees and their families.***
  - ***Considering access challenges adults face*** with transportation, child care and program hours. Can businesses be incented to offer literacy programs at their place of business, employees and others nearby can more easily attend the programs?

### **Issues Supported by the Commission, but Not Within the Commission's Scope of Execution**

The Commission has considered additional issues impacting literacy that they deemed important to literacy advancement. The Commission has determined however, that while they support the work of other entities in this space, the following are not within scope for the Commission's own execution. These issues include:

- ***Universal broadband access throughout the state***

While school systems throughout the state now have Internet access, there are many areas of the state where families themselves do not, making it difficult for students to complete projects and homework assignments. In fact, often, the families who need online support most have the least access to it. Additionally, adult education programs heavily leverage online tools and programs as well. It is worth noting that even the GED is now offered **only** online.

In the meantime, stop-gap measures such as mobile classrooms, hot spots shared with students by businesses or available for public check out from local libraries, school bus “leave-behind” programs (which leave a school bus with hotspot in a neighborhood for broadband access), and [Everyoneon.com](http://Everyoneon.com) are worthy endeavors and implementation of such has earned the Commission’s support.

- ***Support positive learning climate efforts***

The Commission endorses existing efforts to create and sustain positive learning climates, such as Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports, across early learning centers and K-12 school systems.

- ***Alternative pathways to employment other than the GED***

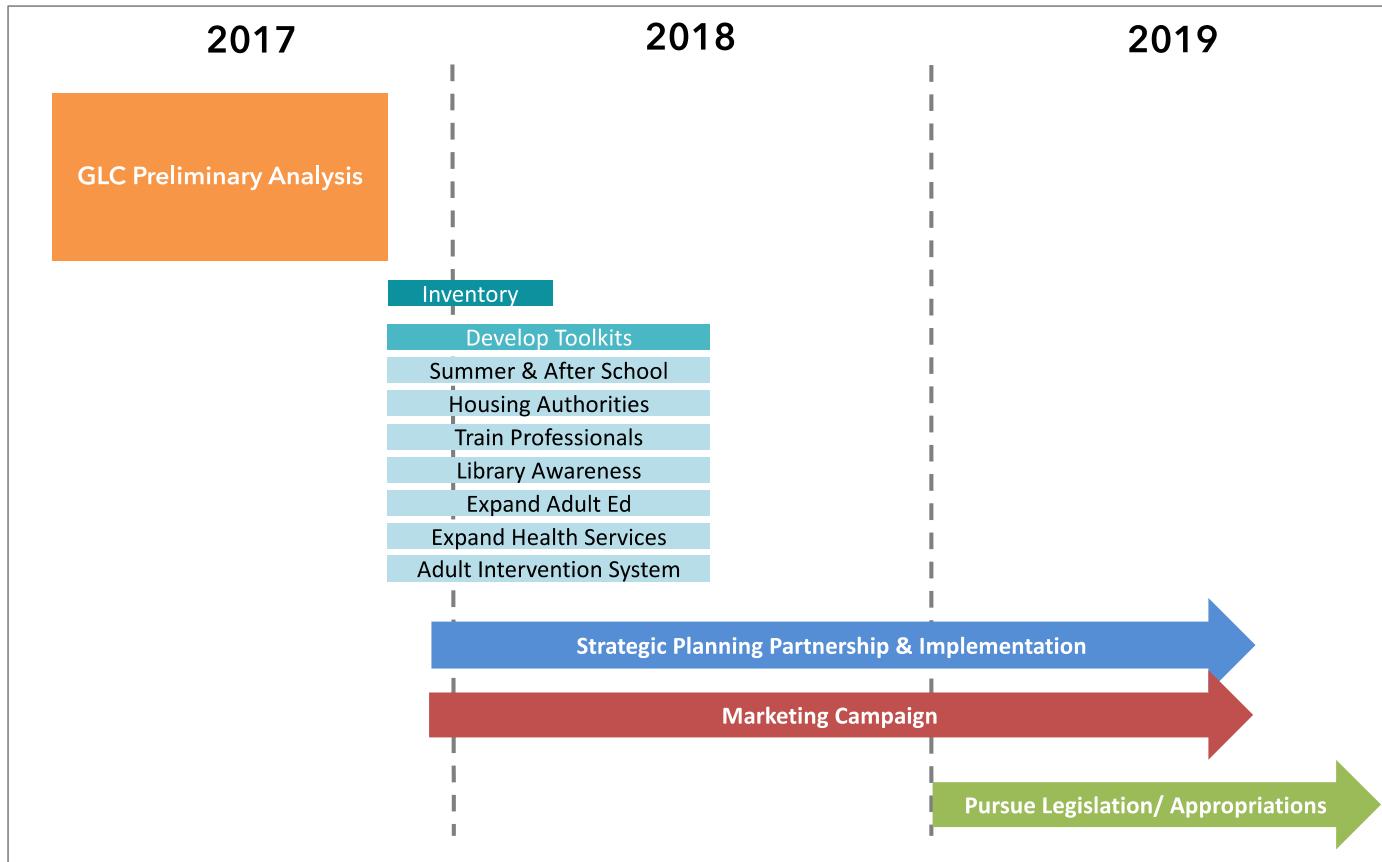
The Commission recognizes that adults can build workforce readiness skills without earning a GED, and that those skills are valuable and should be recognized. As capacity allows, the Commission will help raise awareness regarding the Metro Atlanta Chamber’s project for workforce development, which works with employers to determine skills and education levels necessary for employment. As appropriate, the Commission will amplify other similar efforts across the state as well.

## **Next Steps**

Now that private sector and locally driven literacy recommendations have been created, design and implementation phases can commence. By leveraging existing organizations and programs, the Commission expects widespread impact across the state. Several concurrent work streams are envisioned:

- Develop a toolkit to help local communities for recommendations 1,2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9. Each toolkit is intended as a resource for communities focused on improving literacy. Toolkits could include:
  - Standards
  - Best practices
  - Sample programs
  - Effective and/or creative sources of funding
  - Awareness/ marketing campaigns
- Develop an inventory/resource guide of effective, evidence-based literacy programs with contact information for each, to be included in toolkits.
- Identify organizations currently working with local communities on strategic planning. Ensure that Commission recommendation topics are included in the standard strategic planning process and provide toolkits for each.
- Design and execute a multi-pronged public awareness campaign (recommendation #5) to support all of the state and local efforts to improve literacy in Georgia.
- Continue to convene the Georgia Literacy Commission in tandem with the Advisory Committee to work on exploration of potential public sector recommendations for 2019.

## Next Steps Timeline



## **Conclusion**

Clearly, low literacy is a significant challenge for our state. Thanks to the continued efforts of many in the literacy field, as well as those of the business community, non-profit community, and government entities, the solution is not beyond reach. The proactive step taken by GPEE, GCC and LFA, in response to the potential crisis exposed by the Deloitte study, has the potential to unite many organizations and efforts and raise yet more awareness and collective work to address the root causes of low literacy.

The Georgia Literacy Commission's preliminary recommendations embody a community-driven, multigenerational approach to improve the trajectory of literacy for all Georgians, and thereby, improve the state's economic future. These recommendations not only amplify existing successful efforts underway in the literacy space, but also unify various parties to fill in gaps, address missed opportunities, and incubate and implement new ideas to end low literacy of all ages.

The Commission's next steps are aggressive but practical. Privately funded, local recommendations in this *Preliminary Analysis and Review* are the first order of business, and work streams are being developed to commence immediately. The Commission will continue to explore and vet important issues of impact and work to align private with public sector activities. In addition, as opportunities arise, the Commission will lend its support in varying degrees to an array of initiatives and policies it believes will advance the priorities of the Commission.

By executing these local and privately funded recommendations and aligning future efforts with the public sector, Georgia can not only avert a crisis, but more importantly, can lead the nation in literacy improvements, economic growth and business opportunity.

*Elimination of illiteracy is as serious an issue to our history as the abolition of slavery.*

– Maya Angelou