

BEYOND

2020

REWRITING  
OUR STORY  
TO IMPROVE  
CHILDHOOD  
LITERACY



GET GEORGIA  
READING

CAMPAIN FOR GRADE-LEVEL READING

ALL CHILDREN WILL BE PROFICIENT  
READERS BY THE END OF THIRD GRADE,  
PAVING THE WAY TO IMPROVED OUTCOMES  
THROUGHOUT SCHOOL AND LIFE.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

OUR FOUR-PILLAR FRAMEWORK .....	4
MOVING FORWARD.....	6
LANGUAGE NUTRITION .....	8
ACCESS.....	12
POSITIVE LEARNING CLIMATE.....	16
TEACHER PREPARATION AND EFFECTIVENESS.....	20
BEYOND 2020.....	24
A MESSAGE FROM GOV. BRIAN KEMP.....	26

## A LETTER FROM THE CAMPAIGN DIRECTOR

A fourth grader approaches the first question on a math test—a word problem:

Your class is collecting bottled water for a service project. The goal is to collect 300 bottles. On the first day, Max brings in 3 packs with 6 bottles in each container. Sarah wheels in 6 packs with 6 bottles in each container. How many bottles of water still need to be collected?

He stares at the page, willing the letters and words in front of him to make sense. Defeated, he lays down his pencil.

Right now, we're wrestling with a different kind of word problem in Georgia. More than six out of 10 children completing third grade are not prepared to meet the reading challenges of the next grade level. With 1.3 million children under age 9 living in our state, that has long-term consequences for all Georgians.

Children who grow up without reading skills are more likely to drop out of high school than those who read proficiently. They're also more likely to have poor health and discipline problems and become teen parents. As adults they're more likely to be unemployed, spend time in prison, and contend with shorter life expectancies. That's costly to our state and hinders our ability to compete in a global economy.

Georgia's public and private leaders responded to this crisis in 2013 by coming together to take on third-grade reading—not only as an education issue, but also as an urgent priority for all who care about children's health and well-being.

We're constantly refining our strategy, using data and research to inform our decisions. For example, when we analyzed third-grade reading scores and high school graduation rates of 98,000 Georgians we found that reading proficiency translated into a 30-percent higher graduation rate. The results were consistent regardless of race and ethnicity, gender, poverty, disability, or English-learner status. This tells us that early reading proficiency is the great equalizer.

The pages ahead share what we've learned, our successes, and our challenges—and what we need to do next to ensure that every child in Georgia has access to the services and supports necessary to get on the path to learning to read by third grade. That takes more than good schools, more than great teachers, and more than loving parents. It will take all of us working together to solve this word problem, which will add up for all Georgians.

With gratitude,

*Arianne B. Weldon*

Arianne B. Weldon  
Get Georgia Reading Campaign Director





# THE FOUR PILLARS

Get Georgia Reading Campaign partners rally people, organizations, and communities to apply a shared framework for action. Four research-based pillars define the conditions that must be in place for all children to be on a path, starting from birth, to reading proficiently by the end of third grade.

**ACCESS**

All children and their families have year-round access to, and supportive services for, healthy physical and social-emotional development and success in high-quality early childhood and elementary education.

**LANGUAGE NUTRITION**

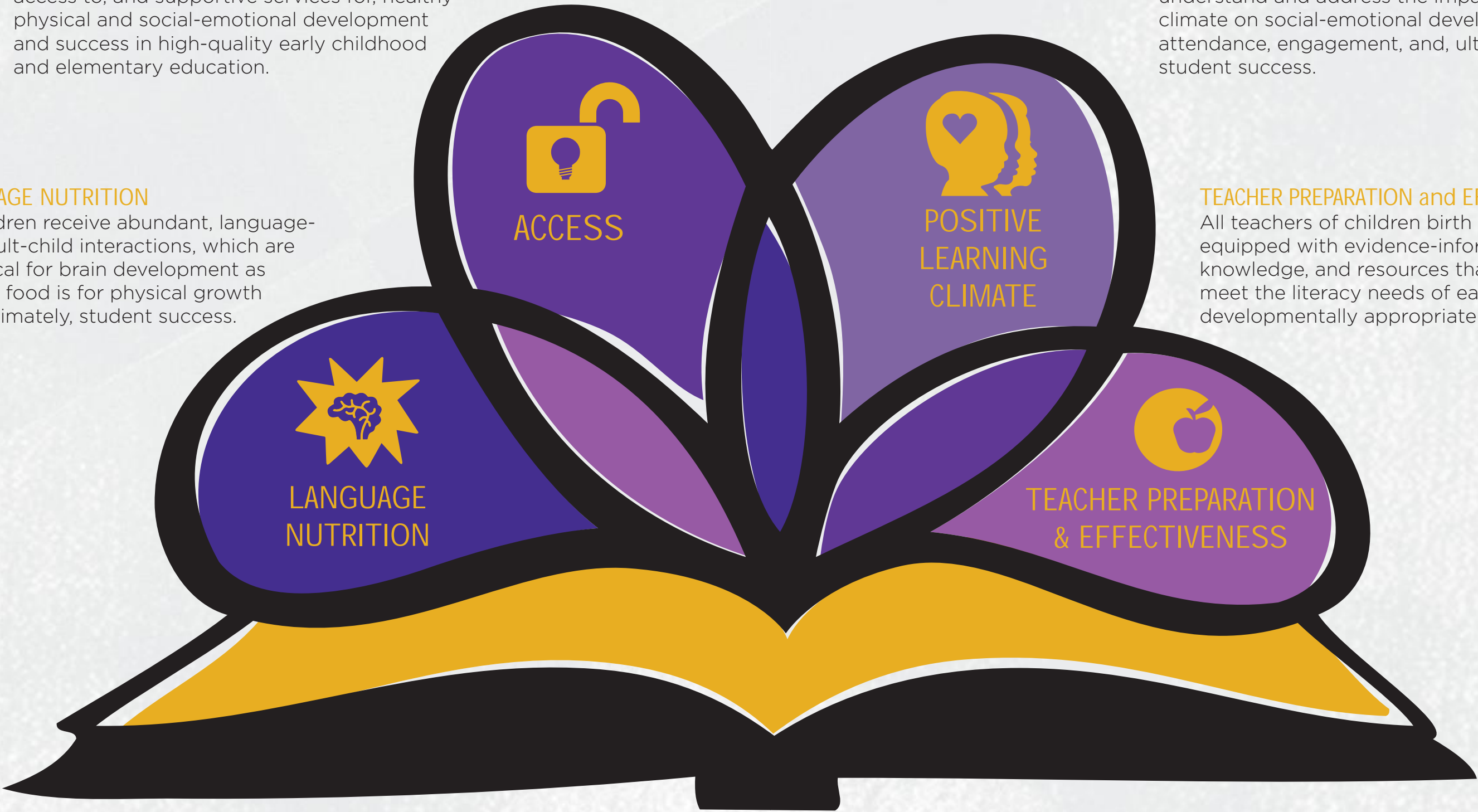
All children receive abundant, language-rich adult-child interactions, which are as critical for brain development as healthy food is for physical growth and, ultimately, student success.

**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 birth through 8 are equipped with evidence-informed skills, knowledge, and resources that effectively meet the literacy needs of each child in a developmentally appropriate manner.





# MOVING FORWARD

## CHANGING THE LANDSCAPE FOR LEARNING

When I first glanced at the Get Georgia Reading Campaign, I assumed this was solely another research-based initiative emphasizing grade-level reading. But now I know it can help change the landscape for learning in Georgia.

Get Georgia Reading approaches literacy through a fascinating epidemiological lens, by addressing the myriad factors that impact learning early in life. This approach has given me confidence that methodologies chosen and partnerships emerging are rooted in science and designed to help all students across the state succeed.

The evidence the Campaign presents excites me as an educator, State Board member, and, most of all, as a parent of two toddlers. Each day I get the opportunity to see how reading accelerates vocabulary, stimulates new ideas, and promotes humanity within my own children.

I'm excited to be part of this coalition of advocates focused on removing barriers to learning and unlocking children's potential. I have great respect for the dedicated designers of this approach and the network of supportive partners for this critical work for all communities.

Far too many of Georgia's children are not skilled readers and often need unique support for learning needs. The good news is that there is hope. We now have a call to action and can contribute to the Get Georgia Reading Campaign.

This report presents a dashboard that shows each of us where we can connect to the mission. The concept of four research-based pillars—Language Nutrition, Access, Positive Learning Climate, and Teacher Preparation and Effectiveness—deeply center the work and promote conversation at the critical junction of public health and education.

Georgia must continue to build this coalition to take focused action on the evidence, and support families facing barriers to reading. The year 2020 can be the start of a designed system to ultimately get all our children on the path to reading proficiently.

**KENNETH MASON**  
GEORGIA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION  
FIFTH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT



## SEEING TOMORROW AND BEYOND

Time-lapse photography fascinates me. In a fraction of the real-time event, we can watch a seed germinate and grow into a plant, a caterpillar spin a cocoon and emerge as a beautiful butterfly, or seasons change as fall colors transform a mountain from green to splashes of red, gold, and orange. Almost like magic, we bring a future event to the present.

With a little imagination, this Get Georgia Reading progress report can allow us to accelerate into the future and see tomorrow and beyond.

Just as an architect lays out a structure and creates conceptual drawings that gradually become reality, Get Georgia Reading has laid out a four-pillar framework to support a solid structure upon which families, schools, communities, and our state can build. This well-designed, data-driven campaign leaves nothing to chance as, step by step, this strategically drawn foundation makes steady progress.

Let your imaginary time lapse bring the year 2020 and beyond into focus. Watch communities come together to appropriately value and develop our greatest resource—our children. Watch the seeds planted in young minds through language nutrition expand from learning to read to reading to learn. Watch nurturing communities wrapping themselves around those needing support to escape the cocoon and fly to freedom. Watch the monotone of hopelessness and despair break into the brilliance of opportunity and success. Look further into this time lapse and gaze on sustainability as these positive changes become the norm.

Get Georgia Reading is unique among literacy efforts because it is comprehensive—providing a road map to success that begins at gestation. The outcome: educated, productive, contributing members of the community.

While time-lapse photography can manipulate time, we can't. Events in our timeline are closer than they appear. This report is a must-read for those who have a vision for better educational outcomes for all children.

**RANDY NIX**  
STATE REPRESENTATIVE







# LANGUAGE NUTRITION

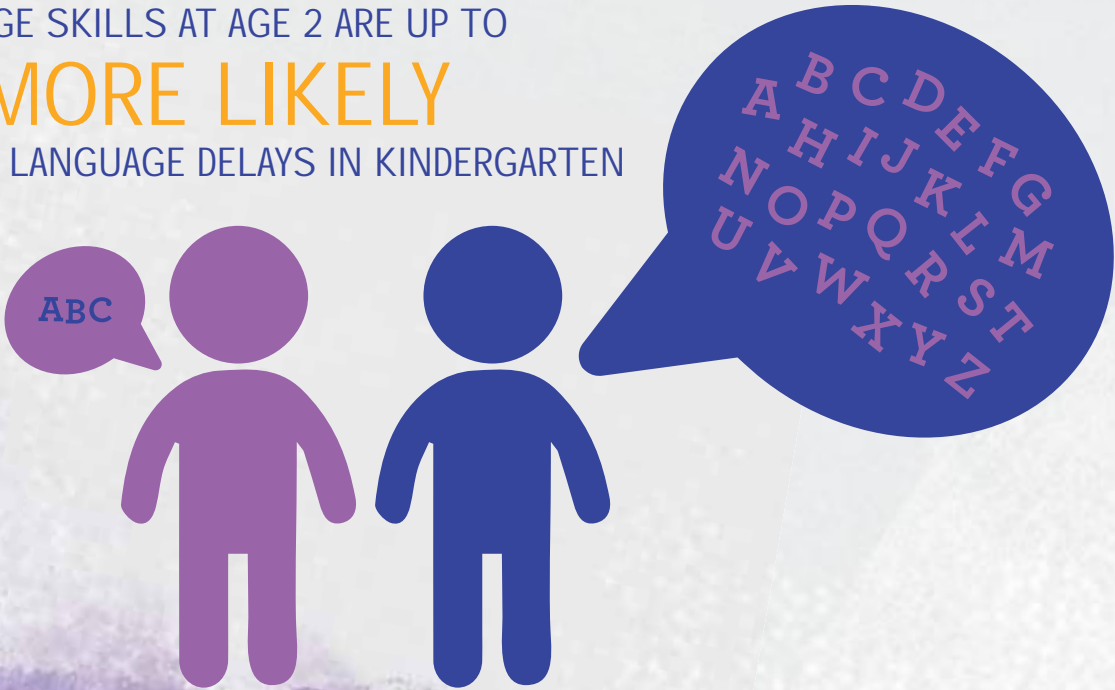
## WHY IT MATTERS

More than 1 million new neural connections are formed every second during the first three years of life, making this a crucial time for brain development. Abundant, language-rich, adult-child interactions provide the building blocks for these neural connections and, ultimately, future learning.

Unfortunately, not all children in Georgia are exposed to these interactions often enough during these critical early years.

Children’s language development depends on the quantity and quality of child-directed language—like engaging questions and positive feedback—that caregivers provide beginning in infancy. Recent studies show that the strongest predictor of reading outcomes in third grade is a child’s language skills at age 5. The language factor is greater than the link to poverty or the level of parental education.

CHILDREN WITH UNDERDEVELOPED  
LANGUAGE SKILLS AT AGE 2 ARE UP TO  
**5X MORE LIKELY**  
TO HAVE LANGUAGE DELAYS IN KINDERGARTEN



## WHAT WE’RE DOING



Campaign partners’ cross-sector approach led to the launch of Talk With Me Baby (TWMB) to engage large-scale workforces and groups that interact with new and expectant parents—nurses and other medical staff, WIC nutritionists, foster parents, and infant-toddler educators—to act as language nutrition coaches. They encourage parents to talk frequently with infants to promote healthy brain development and future success.

United Way of Greater Atlanta provided seed funding to TWMB partners in 2014 so they could develop research-based curricula for these workforces and begin integrating them into public and private systems to achieve population-level scale across the state. Those partners include Marcus Autism Center at Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, Atlanta Speech School, Emory University School of Nursing and Department of Pediatrics, Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH), and Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE).

The Georgia Nursing Leadership Coalition began integrating language nutrition coaching and early brain development concepts into nurse and medical assistant training programs in the University System of Georgia and Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG)

in 2017. Language nutrition also has been incorporated into TCSG’s early learning educator courses. DPH has trained more than 1,000 WIC nutritionists on language nutrition and provides resources to families during WIC visits that encourage “serve and return”—or back-and-forth communication exchange—between infants and parents and other caregivers. The Georgia Division of Family and Child Services tailored a version of the TWMB training for child welfare staff and foster parents. More than 1,300 early learning educators have completed language nutrition-focused coursework through the Atlanta Speech Schools’ free online Cox Campus.

A grant from the James M. Cox Foundation enabled Atlanta’s Grady Hospital to begin piloting TWMB in 2017 for all staff that interact with families, receiving language nutrition training to help them share the benefits of talking with babies from reception through discharge.

Grady’s Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) and the Atlanta-Fulton County Library System launched a shared reading program to ensure that a vulnerable population of babies receive abundant language nutrition to support early brain development in the NICU and later at home.



# 103 DAYS IN THE NICU

## BONDING THROUGH STORYTIME

Lori Bennett was put on bed rest 10 weeks into a high-risk pregnancy. She was unable to work, and then her husband lost his construction job. By the time Mikah arrived 12 weeks early weighing less than 3 pounds, the Bennetts had lost their home and moved in with Lori's mom.

During Mikah's 103-day hospital stay, Lori spent seven hours each day in Grady's NICU in Atlanta. When she saw a flyer for the "Let's Read a Book Today!" shared reading program that provides new books each week for parents to read with their babies, she was grateful for the distraction.

"Instead of just sitting there in silence not really knowing what to say, you have something to do to keep your mind busy," said Bennett, who spent time in the NICU with three of her children. "Whether the child's in the incubator or in your arms while you're reading, it's something that allows you to have personal bonding time and let go of that stress for a while."



### CHANGING MINDSETS TO IMPROVE HABITS

This partnership between Grady's NICU and the Atlanta-Fulton County Public Libraries offers research-based support and encouragement about the benefits of reading and talking with babies, and connects families with local libraries to ensure continued access to books.

"Parents get tons of information, appointments, and referrals. The patient gets lost. It's not a perfect system," said Angela Leon-Hernandez, assistant professor of pediatrics at Emory University School of Medicine. "Neonatologists and NICU nurses have a role to play. I believe that we can change beliefs and habits in a family in four to six months."

Research indicates that babies who are exposed to biological adversity due to prematurity or other medical conditions and require prolonged NICU stays are at high risk for developmental problems, including language delay, learning disabilities, and behavioral and emotional difficulties.

Leon-Hernandez researched strategies to help families cope with stresses they face in the NICU and prevent behavioral issues after discharge. Shared reading programs create increased sense of control, normalcy, intimacy, and a source of comfort for parents—and an increased likelihood of continued shared reading habits for children.

"All parents want to do their best. But if you don't know reading to your newborn is important, you aren't going to do it," said Leon-Hernandez, who assembled a team of neonatologists, psychologists, social workers, and others invested in supporting high-risk children's healthy growth and development.

"You have to share and network," she said. "If I hadn't sent an email to my faculty asking for help, I wouldn't have met Get Georgia Reading Campaign Director Arianne Weldon. And that was the most important connection to help us advance in this process."

### JOINING EFFORTS TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES

The program, which enhances existing efforts like Books for Babies and TWMB, came together through relatively small investments and book donations secured through Campaign connections.

Weldon suggested that the NICU and the Georgia Public Library Service form a partnership, marking the first collaboration of its kind in Georgia. NICU and library staff members and volunteers receive training to work with parents to promote shared reading.

New parents have logged more than 6,000 minutes of NICU reading since the program launched in 2017, and families like the Bennetts continue to record progress after discharge. During weekly library visits, Mikah logged more than 250 books in her first year.

"We read to Mikah every single day," said Lori, who has four children and a stepson. "When we sit down with a book, it doesn't matter if it has pictures in it. She's glued. She will look at the book and look at you as you're reading. She's engaged. She knows people are spending time with her and talking to her."

Leon-Hernandez is planning a landmark study to track data on program graduates and hopes to eventually analyze the program's impact on third grade reading proficiency.

Other regional perinatal centers in Georgia are on board to replicate this low-cost, high-impact

program. Leon-Hernandez's team is working on a standardized plan to prepare families for discharge from day one of their NICU stay. Training and empowering team members who conduct weekly home visits after families leave the NICU is also a priority.

"We see one child who is overcoming and doing so well and another who isn't. We look at the social exposure and it's totally different," said Leon-Hernandez. "We believe there are things we can do in the NICU that can improve outcomes, but what happens after discharge in the first three to five years of life is going to determine the real meaningful outcomes we have to measure."





# ACCESS

## WHY IT MATTERS

Learning to read by the end of third grade is a process that begins before birth. Reaching this milestone requires all families to have early and ongoing access to an array of educational and supportive services.

The basic necessities that form the foundation for literacy development include safe housing, places for outdoor play, healthy food, transportation, high-quality early learning programs, books in the home, and quality health care such as prenatal care for mothers and developmental screenings and services for children.

Simply offering a service doesn't mean it will reach the right child in the right place at the right time—and in the appropriate sequence, dosage, and duration. Gaps in early learning enrollment, health outcomes, access to healthy food, and other critical services hinder vulnerable children on their path to reading proficiency.

For instance, research shows that 25 percent of children have correctable vision impairments—and yet gaps in screening and follow-up mean students struggle with reading because they can't see the text on the page. And children in lower-income households without access to valuable summer learning programs fall further behind more well-off peers when school's out.



## WHAT WE'RE DOING

Campaign partners have reframed the idea of access and are discovering new approaches to increase access to the supports and services children and families need to thrive.

During the summertime, it's crucial that children have access to healthy meals and educational opportunities. That's why GaDOE, Georgia Public Library Service, and Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) joined forces in 2014 to create the Lunch at the Libraries program. More than 100 libraries have become summer meal sites, and the number of federally funded summer meals served has increased by 23 percent.

In 2017, public and private partners from across the state came together to create **GeorgiaSummer.org**, an online toolkit that provides parents and caregivers with a one-stop shop to resources for summer reading, learning, safety, and meals. Clear Channel Outdoor America's Atlanta Division donated billboard space to build public awareness in the metro Atlanta area.

Language deficits often lead to behavioral problems and are common among youth involved in the juvenile justice system—but geography and lack of transportation limit access to speech pathology services. The

Georgia Department of Community Health (DCH) added speech-language pathology as telemedicine services that are eligible for Medicaid reimbursement, increasing access in underserved communities.

The Governor's Office of Student Achievement's **words2reading.com** features curated resources for families, caregivers, and teachers to help develop and sharpen early childhood language and literacy skills. One of those resources, Ready4KGA, is an evidence-based, free text messaging program for parents of newborns and children ages 1 – 5. More than 6,500 parents are using it now that the resource is featured on the website.

When families expressed how difficult it is to navigate public systems, DPH, DECAL, and DCH came together to create easy-to-understand maps to help secure services for children through various stages of development.

DECAL and TCSG also teamed up to increase the graduation rate among women with young children enrolled in Georgia's technical colleges. TCSG connects enrolled parents with high-quality subsidized child care, while DECAL helps parents go back to school to secure credentials that can pave the way to family-supporting wages.

## THE SIX KEYS TO ACCESS



### AWARENESS

Population is informed about services that exist and what they provide



### ACCESSIBLE

Location of supply is geographically within the population's reach



### ACCEPTABLE

Characteristics of service providers and population are receptive to each other



### AFFORDABLE

Cost of services meet population's ability to pay



### AVAILABLE

Size or volume of the supply meets population needs



### ACCOMMODATING

Delivery of services is designed to improve population outcomes



# STUDENT-PARENTS

## STRUGGLING TO MAKE THE GRADE

A young woman stood alone in the center of a busy room bordered by tables stacked high with information about resources and services on registration day at Athens Technical College. When the visibly overwhelmed teenager caught Tim Johnson's attention, the Family Connection of Athens/Communities in Schools executive director approached her to offer some assistance.

"I asked if she was a student," Johnson recalled. "She said, 'I guess so. I just registered.' When I asked if she was a parent, she lit up and said, 'Yes, I have a 9-month-old baby. So I'm not sure I'll be able to do this.' "

That's when Johnson introduced her to Danielle Newsome. A student and single mother herself, Newsome is helping other student-parents. Her work is supported by a Two-Gen Innovation Grant, which connects early learning, postsecondary, and workforce systems to deliver benefits to children and their parents.

### A PARTNER IN THE JOURNEY

"It's not easy navigating the process," said Newsome, 25, who's working toward a degree in health care information technologies. "It takes a lot of patience and you can't be afraid to ask questions."

No stranger to systems, Newsome was placed into foster care at age 3, lived in four homes, and was sexually assaulted before being adopted

at age 7. She became pregnant at 21 and was a victim of domestic violence.

After spending time researching, making phone calls, and asking a lot of questions, Newsome enrolled in Athens Tech and her son, Isaiah, in Early Head Start. Through her work with Family Connection, she is giving parents the help she wished she had throughout that process—from completing school applications and applying for financial aid to sharing information about affordable child care and transportation.

Newsome, who said Isaiah is her motivation to pursue an education, has become a voice and resource for parents and their children.

"Danielle has been able to connect with parents as someone who has been through the experience," said Johnson, who added that there needs to be a more systematic approach to disseminating school-related information and resources to parents.

### BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL TO EMPOWER FAMILIES

DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs said Newsome is an excellent example of the need for social capital for families to be successful.

"Sometimes when we try to determine the best ways to help families succeed, we look only at systems," said Jacobs. "We're good at identifying early learning, postsecondary, workforce skills, and transportation. But the most



effective way to optimize all those systems is to increase families' social capital—connecting people, institutions, and resources."

For the one in every four college students nationwide who is a parent, people like Newsome are not only invaluable now, but in the long term as well. It's predicted that 60 percent of jobs in Georgia by 2025 will require a postsecondary credential.


"Only 40 percent of our working-age population meets that requirement," Jacobs explained. "For Georgia to be economically successful, we must drastically increase the percentage of young families

that have a member of the household with a postsecondary degree."

For single parents, that means overcoming time, money, and child care barriers that working and going to school present. By having more people like Newsome with boots on the ground to recruit, enroll, and provide support, families and communities will undoubtedly thrive.

"Making sure all adults have access to postsecondary credentials is a surefire way to ensure economic health—for families and our state," Jacobs said. "The question is, how can we help families build a network of social connections that encourage and enable mutual success?"





# POSITIVE LEARNING CLIMATE

## WHY IT MATTERS

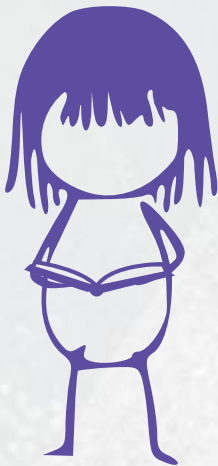
Research tells us that a healthy learning climate where children feel safe, welcomed, and engaged promotes a love of learning and directly impacts attendance, behavior, and academic achievement—including literacy. Positive climates also translate into higher student scores on statewide achievement tests.

Support for the Positive Learning Climate pillar led the state legislature to fund a statewide infrastructure to help schools implement Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). More than 1,300 schools now use this evidence based framework to reduce disciplinary incidents and improve school safety and educational outcomes.

Georgia is one of the first states in the nation to include school climate in its accountability system. The School Climate Star Rating system assesses every public school's climate using student, parent, and school personnel surveys along with data related to student discipline, attendance, and school safety—and provides guidance for improvements.

Schools with the highest climate rating (5 stars) far out-perform schools with the lowest rating (1 star) in third grade reading proficiency. Only 10 percent of third graders in Georgia schools with a 1-star rating were reading proficiently in 2018, compared to 44 percent of third graders in schools with a 5-star rating.

Data show that missing just six days of school a year can cause children to fall behind, so cultivating a culture of attendance that encourages students to show up every day is vital. More than 9 percent of elementary school students in Georgia miss more than 18 days of school each year, and 15,000 children in grades K – 3 receive out-of-school suspensions. Our analysis links early childhood suspension to higher rates of suspensions later on, along with lower scores in reading and math.



## WHAT WE'RE DOING

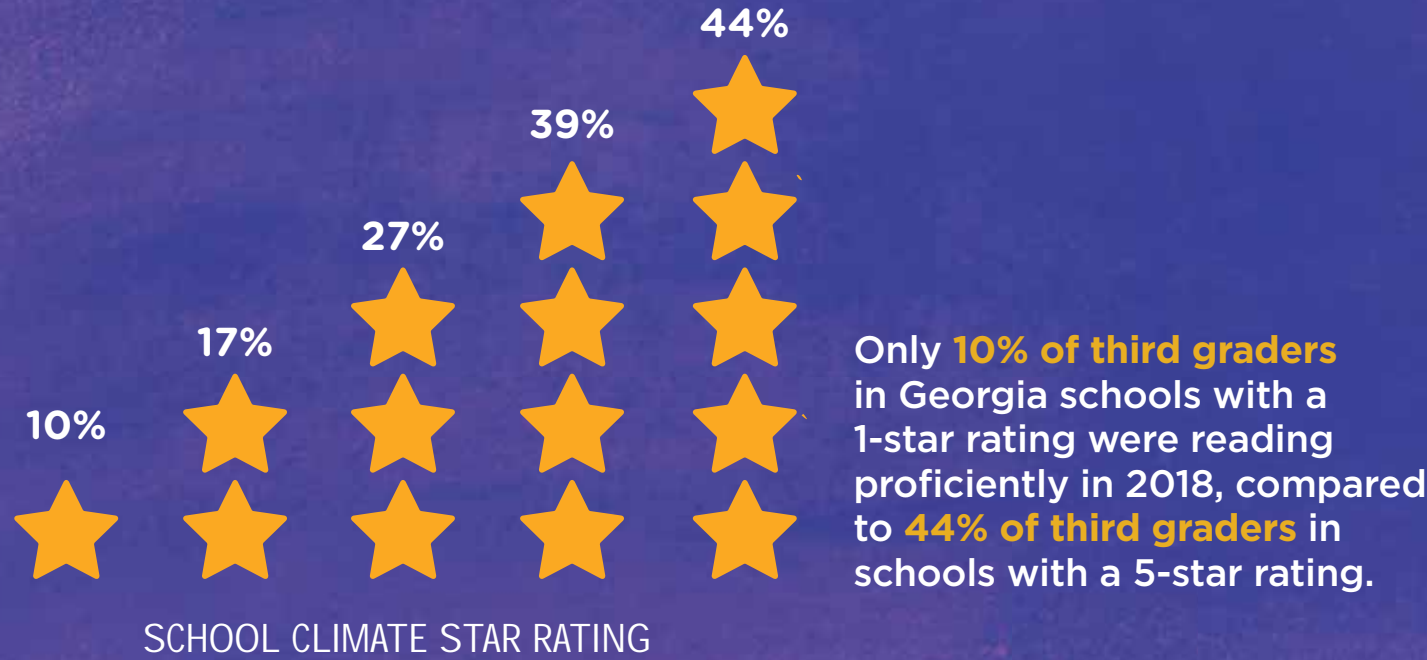
Children transitioning from preschool to elementary school continue to benefit from practices to nurture responsive relationships, promote engagement, create supportive environments, and provide social-emotional supports. Before the Campaign formed, those practices weren't part of the PBIS framework used in K – 12 schools.

Support from the David, Helen and Marian Woodward Fund allowed Campaign partners to launch a project incorporating strategies from the preschool PBIS model into the school-wide K – 12 model—making Georgia the first state to integrate developmentally appropriate supports for K – 12 students.

Our partners produced an online toolkit that includes videos, infographics, and manuals to help schools apply this new model. GaDOE and DECAL have embedded these tools into their statewide training programs and systems while investing in expanding and scaling this approach. They're also co-funding a new early learning PBIS specialist position.

Georgia legislators passed a law in 2018 requiring schools to provide students in preschool through third grade with a multi-tiered system of supports before suspending them for more than five days in one school year. Focusing on issues like suspension rates that have an impact on early literacy influences student achievement from preschool through high school.

## THIRD GRADE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (2018)





# CULTURE CHANGE

## A SUNNY FORECAST FOR GEORGIA SCHOOLS

There's a certain way teachers and staff walk through the halls of Brookview Elementary School. There's also a protocol for how families are greeted and an expectation in the way teachers speak with parents about how their children are doing.

"Culture matters," said Principal Jovita Wallace. "And school culture has to be a vital part of what we develop and work on for school climate to improve. There are systems with positive framing in just about everything we do. And it makes a difference."

Brookview participated in the initiative to integrate a deeper understanding of early childhood behavior and development into classroom practices of the schoolwide PBIS framework.

### FORGING RELATIONSHIPS

The climate at the Fulton County school was uninviting, particularly to parents, when Wallace took over as principal in 2016. That feeling, she

said, trickled down to the nearly 490 students and translated into high instances of misconduct and out-of-school suspensions, which took children out of the classroom and away from valuable learning time.

"If the parents don't want to engage and be part of the learning environment because of their experiences, then how can I expect the students to have a positive relationship with the school or the teachers?" reasoned Wallace.

Implementing PBIS at Brookview has helped decrease suspensions by 50 percent, increase parent involvement, and boost the school's CCRPI by double digits. Research also shows that a positive climate increases teacher retention and is a critical element in how safe students feel at school. The goal is to implement a PBIS system districtwide.

"Brookview is changing, and I'm proud of it," Wallace said. "Think about how much change we will see if it's consistent school to school."



### EXPECTING POSITIVE OUTCOMES

That change, according to Garry McGiboney, deputy superintendent of School Safety and Climate at GaDOE, is apparent in academic outcomes.

"We wanted school climate to become an expectation," said McGiboney. "So we began working with legislators to put school climate into state law."

Schools that have a climate rating of 5 scored 26 percentage points higher on the CCRPI than schools with a rating of 1—and students reading at third grade-level proficiency or above scored 34 percentage points higher in schools with the highest climate rating.

PBIS also is helping to decrease transiency at Brookview. "Our families are constantly displaced whenever there is a rent increase," said Wallace.

"In the past, families didn't think twice about pulling their children out of school if they had to move. Now, despite housing challenges they may face, parents are trying to figure out ways to keep their children in the school. It's a great problem to have that our families want to stay."

McGiboney said Brookview will be a model for establishing PBIS in other elementary schools across the state, because it has been an excellent example of putting the change of the school climate in the hands of the adults, establishing a positive climate in the lower grades, and involving parents in the process.

"We're trying to keep things moving forward," he said. "We know school climate and PBIS are just the beginning."





# TEACHER PREPARATION AND EFFECTIVENESS

## WHY IT MATTERS

Our research has helped uncover factors outside of school that affect literacy development. While ensuring that students learn to read well is an effort that takes all of us working together, we also know having highly skilled and effective teachers in early learning and grade school classrooms remains fundamental.

Teacher preparation programs prepare educators to deliver evidence-informed literacy instruction and effective learning experiences that are rooted in the science of how children learn to read and tailored to the needs of each child.

Helping experienced teachers sustain their ability to support all children’s literacy development requires ongoing professional learning that continues over time and focuses on students rather than on compliance.

How we measure the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs is evolving. Efforts are underway to identify links between preparation programs and student outcomes, focusing on the percentage of well-qualified teachers in the workforce. Innovations in supporting teachers in the classroom, like the Social Emotional Engagement—Knowledge & Skills (SEE-KS) framework, also are being implemented with evaluation plans in place.

“IF LEARNING TO READ IS SO COMPLEX,  
HOW MUCH MORE COMPLEX IT MUST BE  
TO TEACH SOMEONE TO READ.”

MARTHA ANN TODD  
DEPUTY COMMISSIONER, TECHNICAL COLLEGE SYSTEM OF GEORGIA

## WHAT WE'RE DOING

We aim to ensure that all teachers of children from birth through age 8 have the skills, knowledge, and resources they need to effectively meet children’s literacy needs as they grow.

In 2016, GaDOE recruited professors and teacher educators to craft the Literacy for Learning, Living and Leading in Georgia Plan, which features research-proven professional learning opportunities to help current and future teachers promote language, literacy, and social-emotional development. Using federal funds from a competitive grant, GaDOE awarded more than \$57 million to 38 districts to implement this three-year plan using the four-pillar framework. Each funded district was required to become a Campaign community and engage in conversations about how to serve children, both in and out of school.

Former Gov. Nathan Deal and other legislators established the Sandra Dunagan Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy at Georgia College in 2017 to provide research-based professional development for educators and organizations working with young children. The Deal Center collaborates with statewide partners to deliver professional training for educators, focuses on early language and literacy research and best practices, promotes

cross-sector partnerships, and invests in innovative practices and programs.

The Marcus Autism Center and GaDOE promote SEE-KS, which helps educators embed social-emotional engagement strategies into lesson plans and utilizes peer coaching. This makes the approach affordable and sustainable—and blends with efforts to improve the learning climate.

DECAL supports infant and toddler classrooms to implement strong language and literacy instruction for children in the earliest and most critical years of life through the LITTLE (Lifting Infants and Toddlers Through Language-Rich Environments) Project. Grants provide onsite coaching, professional learning, and materials to help teachers and program directors develop and maintain positive and responsive relationships with children, while supporting critical early language and literacy skills.

The Deal Center, GaDOE, Georgia State University, and National Alliance on Mental Illness Georgia co-developed the “Signals” webinar series to help educators and those who support the development of children birth through 12 to recognize and appropriately respond to signals of social-emotional and mental health development.





# TEACHER SEE-KS TO MAKE A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

## INCREASING LITERACY AND ENGAGEMENT IN THE CLASSROOM

When it comes to professional development, veteran educator Amy Kiser has seen it all. When she joined the SEE-KS core team at Mountain View Elementary School in Gilmer County, Kiser went to the training expecting business as usual. She left with a changed philosophy on teaching.

“So many times, teachers are told to just do this, do that. I love SEE-KS because they told us *why*,” said Kiser. “It was eye-opening as a teacher—and as a mother.”

At least 10 percent of children birth through 5 experience social-emotional problems that negatively impact functioning, development, and school readiness.

Emily Rubin, director of Marcus Autism Center’s Educational Outreach Program, and her colleagues co-developed SEE-KS. They studied neuroscience to find ways to increase social-emotional engagement of children with autism—but quickly realized the strategies could foster positive learning climates for all children.

“It’s one of the only approaches I can remember in all my years of teaching that’s been so successful and so easy. It makes my life easier instead of harder,” said Kiser, who credited small changes—like integrating flexible seating and a help box on the chalkboard—with big results.

### EMPOWERING TEACHERS AND THEIR STUDENTS

A 2.4 rating on the SEE-KS Student Engagement Ladder (on a 0 – 4 scale) signifies where engagement impacts academic achievement. Classrooms using SEE-KS in Gilmer moved from

“partially engaged” (2) in Fall 2017 to “mostly engaged” (3) in Spring 2018.

“Our teachers were working hard and so were the kids—but some of our test scores may not be showing that,” said Kiser. “SEE-KS is definitely something we needed. That student engagement makes a world of difference.”

Training is provided to district and school personnel so that sustainable leadership and coaching teams are formed—a model that enables school systems to develop internal capacity for serving children with developmental disabilities. Coaches use an appreciative inquiry approach focused on what’s working in the classroom and what comes next.

“SEE-KS empowers teachers to hone their craft,” said Rubin. “They develop their own sense of self-efficacy to reach all their students: How do I increase my effectiveness? And how do I do so by collaborating with colleagues in a safe environment where I’m appreciated and asked to find opportunities to increase engagement?”

Engagement strategies are tailored to the developmental stages of children who are not yet verbal, beginning to use language, and have reached a conversational stage of discourse.

“Reading is a form of high-level social communication,” said Rubin. “We read to hear what others have to say. We write to share our thoughts with others. It’s all about social interaction. If we fuel children’s love of people and social engagement, we fuel their interest in learning.”



### A SCALABLE APPROACH

Kiser said her students are more independent and emotionally invested in what they’re doing. “Students used to listen to lessons and work quietly at their desks. I thought that was the hallmark of a great teacher,” she said. “But now the classroom is filled with movement, interactions, and excitement. Parents say their kids love the class, and those with kids who have hyperactivity issues say they’ve noticed a big difference.”

SEE-KS is in 26 school districts in Georgia, including pre-K and Head Start classrooms.

“This is largely thanks to grants that allow schools like Mountain View to become completely sustainable in using SEE-KS,” said Rubin. “They

will use this tool and framework for years to come because of philanthropists who said, ‘I want to help that region.’ ”

Rubin’s team is collaborating with the University of West Georgia to incorporate SEE-KS into its pre-service certification program for teachers and speech-language pathologists.

“We’re building multi-tiered systems of support to foster increased literacy and engagement in the classroom—from early childhood all the way through high school,” said Rubin. “Our hope is that SEE-KS will become a scalable approach accessible to all 181 school systems in Georgia.”



# BEYOND 2020

## REWRITING OUR STORY

We made up our minds in 2013 to rewrite the story of Georgia’s approach to language and literacy. And though we already know our story’s climax—every child in Georgia is on the path to literacy—we wake up every day inspired to continue this work that will get us there.

Our network, supported by Georgia Family Connection’s statewide network, has more Campaign communities than any other state in the National Grade-Level Reading Campaign. Ninety-four communities in 88 counties are developing local solutions embedded in our four-pillar framework, and we’re actively expanding support for them as we strive to reach all 159 counties.

The Campaign’s Cabinet, partners, and communities are integrating our four-pillar framework into plans, proposals, funding opportunities, curriculum design, and service strategies.

Cabinet leaders have hosted more than a dozen interactive community-action learning events across the state to bolster engagement. When diverse teams of stakeholders at the events learn about the four pillars, they begin to imagine how to create the conditions essential

for all children to become proficient readers by the end of third grade. Theory evolves into action as leaders engage local partners to help adopt strategies and implement activities.

After listening to families, and to those who are serving them, we collaborated with our partners to build new data tools and resources to help leaders understand and address literacy challenges. We also developed toolkits to help implement PBIS and spark community action.

We’re just beginning to work together in ways we never knew we could as this framework helps form new—and sometimes unexpected—partnerships, both at the local and state levels. We’ve also moved beyond system change to creating a new system to put every child in Georgia on a path to third grade reading proficiency.

Evaluation research has provided promising feedback about Get Georgia Reading Campaign’s strategies to strengthen collective impact. As we take the Campaign beyond 2020, we must remain vigilant—and continue to engage partners and encourage them to be bolder in mobilizing dynamic relationships to strengthen families and improve outcomes for vulnerable children.



# HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO

## 1 INFORM

Use research and data to increase awareness, make sense of factors that start new conversations, inspire action, and affect children’s ability to read:

**BOLSTER** community and state leaders’ efforts to integrate research- and data-informed insights into policy and practice.

**USE** data visualization tools to enhance local decision-making.

**HOST** community action learning events.

**STRENGTHEN** children’s mental health development by demonstrating how language skills impact emotional and behavioral outcomes.

**TRAIN** educators to recognize signs of communication challenges and screen students for potential skill deficits.

## 2 ENGAGE

Align policies, practices, and investments to apply the four-pillar framework:

**PROMOTE** professional development for K – 3 teachers designed to strengthen connections between the early years and early grades.

**ENCOURAGE** schools to connect with vital student supports outside the classroom.

**ALIGN** resources into a seamless system of support for children who have conditions that will lead to developmental delays if left untreated.

**EXPAND** two-generation strategies that link adult and child literacy efforts.

**DEVELOP** and implement strategies to engage parents of children who aren’t in school or enrolled in child care.

## 3 COMMUNICATE

Support decision-makers who are engaged in improving children’s health, development, and literacy skills:

**VISIT** the Community Locator on [getgeorgiareading.org](https://getgeorgiareading.org) to make sure your community is working to Get Georgia Reading.

**SHARE** information about funding, training, and technical assistance to support early language and literacy strategies.

**COMMUNICATE** how and why vulnerable children from birth through age 8 need access to services and supports like home visiting services.

**ADDRESS** language skills as an indicator of child well-being, as we do with vision, hearing, oral health, and nutrition.

**PROVIDE** community-focused training and technical assistance to establish comprehensive strategies that apply the four-pillar framework.



# IT CAN BE DONE

It's a great time to be a Georgian. Our state is experiencing incredible growth and economic opportunity. Georgia is the soon-to-be cyber security capital of the world, and Georgia farmers are feeding millions of people around the globe.

As a builder, I know that laying a solid foundation on stable ground is important to any project. Today in Georgia, we're ready to build. We must expand on our successes, address the challenges ahead, and work hard every day to put Georgians first. And we must remember how we got here—the road traveled and the people who cleared our path.

One critical challenge before us is that two-thirds of Georgia's third graders cannot read proficiently. In 2013, Governor and Mrs. Deal led the charge and came together with Georgia's leaders to take action. They recognized that low achievement in reading is a systemic crisis that calls for innovative solutions to complex issues affecting our economy, safety, and health.


My 30 years of experience in the private sector taught me that building is faster when more people are involved. Get Georgia Reading represents a new way of working together—across sectors, across agencies and organizations, and across the early years and early grades—using data to inform smart decisions.

Through strategic partnerships, we can ensure that every community in our state has access to opportunity, kids can graduate and raise families where they were raised, and every Georgian is equipped with the right tools to succeed.

My mentor, legendary coach Billy Henderson, lived by the motto, "It can be done." His life and career were marked by adversity and countless challenges that molded and inspired him. He, in turn, inspired generations of young Georgians by demonstrating how to turn weakness into opportunity.

We can learn from Coach Henderson about collaboration, momentum, and leadership to take on challenges—even when they seem too big to fix—as Get Georgia Reading focuses on building a brighter future for every Georgian.

My wife, Marty, and I look forward to working with you to help our most vulnerable children reach their potential—and ensure that our best days are always ahead. It can be done.

Sincerely,  
  
Gov. Brian P. Kemp



# OUR CABINET

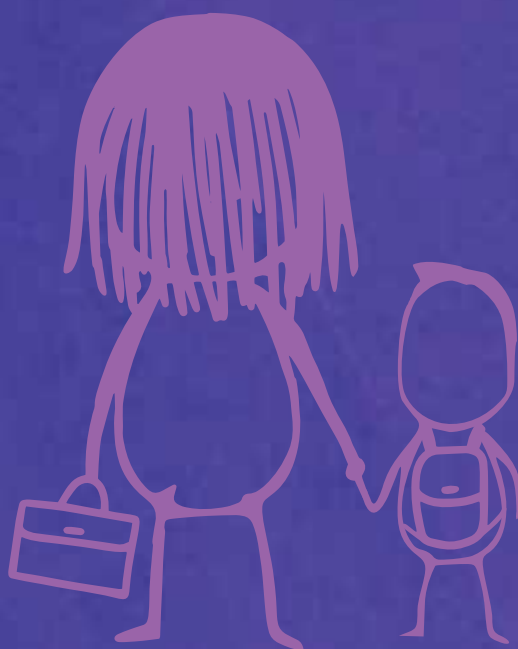
Get Georgia Reading draws its strength from the guiding vision of a group of high-level statewide public and private organization leaders. Cabinet members serve as ambassadors within their sectors and network, leveraging their reach to promote the application of our four-pillar framework to strengthen systems that impact children and families. The Cabinet supports ongoing data resources to help communities identify population needs and track performance, and it provides resources and investment opportunities.

- The Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Atlanta-Fulton Family Connection
- Atlanta Speech School
- Council of Juvenile Court Judges of Georgia
- Georgia Department of Community Affairs
- Georgia Department of Community Health
- Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning
- Georgia Department of Education
- Georgia Department of Public Health
- Georgia Division of Family and Children Services
- Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students—GEEARS
- Georgia Family Connection Partnership
- Georgia Head Start Collaboration Office
- Georgia Lions Lighthouse Foundation
- Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education
- Georgia Professional Standards Commission
- Georgia Public Library Service
- Georgia School Superintendents Association
- Governor's Office of Student Achievement
- Marcus Autism Center at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta
- Office of the Governor
- Office of the Lieutenant Governor
- Polk Family Connection
- Sandra Dunagan Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy
- State Board of Education, Fifth Congressional District
- Technical College System of Georgia
- University System of Georgia
- Voices for Georgia's Children



"CHILDREN WHO LEARN  
TO READ BECOME AUTHORS  
OF THEIR OWN FUTURE."

RALPH SMITH  
Managing Director  
National Campaign for Grade-Level Reading



[getgeorgiareading.org](http://getgeorgiareading.org)  
#GetGARReading