



Supporting Public Schools is the Best Way to Create Boundless Opportunities for Students

IDRA Testimony submitted to the House Education Subcommittee on Policy Subcommittee in opposition to House Bill 1221, February 20, 2024

Dear Chairman Hilton and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Terrence Wilson, J.D., and I am the Regional Policy and Community Engagement Director at IDRA, an independent, non-partisan non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

IDRA opposes HB 1221 because it does not serve students with limited economic resources and because it places undue financial burden on schools that need additional resources and support.

HB 1221 does not serve the large number of students and families in Georgia who are experiencing poverty.

In current law, transfers between school districts are already available to students and families who both have the resources to provide transportation and can afford the cost of tuition, which can range from several hundred to several thousand dollars. In 2022, 17% of Georgia's children were living in poverty, and those numbers are even higher for Black and Latino students. This number is concentrated in certain geographic areas as well, as the percentage of students living in poverty in large portions of the state range between 40% to above 80% (GOSA, 2024a).

HB 1221 does not solve this problem, even by requiring tuition costs to be shared with the home school district, because it does not solve the underlying problem: Georgia is not currently funding schools at a level that covers the costs of educating students, including additional costs that could be addressed by an opportunity weight. For many families experiencing poverty, a transfer out of the district is not an option, nor should it have to be. These families should not be asked to shoulder the tuition and transportation costs of moving to a new school district when the state is not meeting its obligations to ensure all students – including those living in poverty – have access to excellent and equitably-funded schools in their own communities.

HB 1221 would put under-resourced schools at further disadvantage by charging them for students who leave their school district.

HB 1221 would require school districts with the lowest ratings to pay half the tuition for the students who transfer out. This creates several problems. First, the criteria that the bill would use to designate the bottom 25% of schools has not been reported fully since 2019 (as CCRPI scores factor into these grades and the GADOE did not calculate those scores in the 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years) (GOSA, 2024b).

Second, even if a sufficient list could be identified, scores on these kinds of assessments reflect the need for the state to sufficiently fund and support low-performing schools instead of shifting much-needed resources away from them through HB 1221 and similar bills. Looking at 2019 CCRPI and direct certification data, the data picture is clear that schools with lower levels of poverty get higher scores and better grades than schools with higher levels of poverty. This is not an indication of intelligence or desire, but a reflection of the state's priorities with regard to supporting these schools.

Recommendations

Instead of focusing on strategies that may only impact small portions of students and families, IDRA recommends that the committee instead consider strategies that will serve the majority of students, particularly those in the most challenging academic and economic environments. Some of these recommendations are to:

- Increase investment in under-resourced schools by adding an opportunity weight to the funding formula that would serve students living in poverty. Georgia is one of six states that currently does not have this consideration in its school formula.
- Focus on community-based, collaborative strategies that serve all of the needs of students and their families so that their schools can excel.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Terrence Wilson, J.D., at terrence.wilson@idra.org.

Resources

Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2023), Kids Count Data Center Report using PRB analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Census Supplementary Survey & [American Community Survey table](#) C17001.

GOSA. (2024a). Direct Certification: Measuring Student Poverty. Governor's Office of Student Achievement. <https://gosa.georgia.gov/directcert>

GOSA. (2024b). Georgia School Grades Report FAQ. Governor's Office of Student Achievement. <https://public.gosa.ga.gov/noauth/extensions/SchoolGrades-Georgia/SchoolGrades-Georgia.html>

IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.