



Supportive Learning Environments

Issue Definition

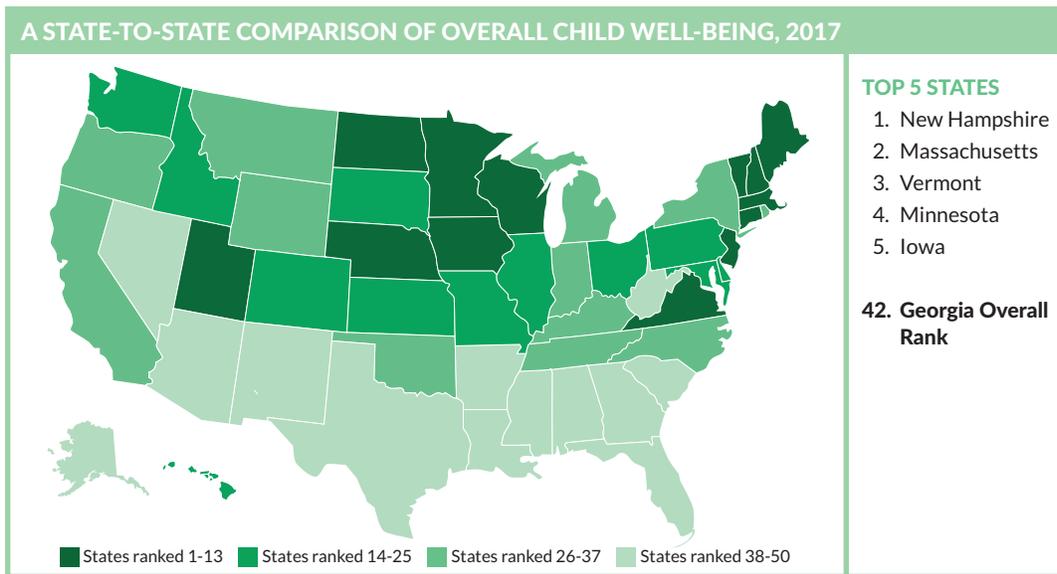
Many factors affect a student’s ability to succeed in school. Some of these are directly related to academic instruction; others, like the safety and health of the environments in which students learn and grow, are instrumental to student performance. Supportive learning environments provide safe and healthy spaces where individuals can respond to the needs of students.

Elements of an Effective System

Countries whose students show the highest levels of academic performance provide strong supports for children and their families that go beyond the instruction students receive in classrooms. To perform best, children must come to school healthy, eager to learn, and ready to profit from instruction. Students require four main categories of supports from schools and communities in order to succeed:

- 1. **positive conditions for learning**
- 2. **physical and mental health supports**
- 3. **specialized school supports**
- 4. **out-of-school time options**

Georgia Supportive Learning Environments Data – By the Numbers



| KIDS COUNT HEALTH INDICATORS | GEORGIA | U.S |
|--|---------|-------|
| Low-birthweight babies | 9.5% | 8.1% |
| Children without health insurance | 7% | 5% |
| Births to women receiving late or no prenatal care | 8% | 6% |
| Children with one or more emotional, behavioral or developmental condition | 17% | 17% |
| Households that are food insecure | 14.9% | 13.7% |

8% of Georgia’s children are estimated to have a **serious emotional disorder**.
93% of those children are not receiving support or treatment.

24% of children in Georgia under 18 are living in homes with incomes **at or below the federal poverty level** as of 2015.

Opportunities

Research shows that students must feel safe, welcomed, and respected at school and in communities. They must be given opportunities to learn, engage, interact, mature, and grow in order to reach their academic potential, develop emotionally, and learn positive social lessons. Students need support to succeed, and many families need support to thrive. With nearly 25% of Georgia's children living in poverty, it is imperative to address the policies needed to ensure all children have access to supportive learning environments.

ALERT! POLICY MISSING OR NEEDS IMMEDIATE ACTION

Supports for homeless and foster youth must be strengthened.

- Address the needs of homeless and foster youth in the Georgia Department of Education's Every Student Succeeds Act plan.
- Promote partnerships, especially for very young children in foster care, to provide early interventions for foster youth and homeless children.

Georgia must take steps to increase the mental health workforce.

- Nearly half of all Georgia counties do not have a licensed psychologist, and over one-third of counties do not have a licensed social worker.

YIELD! PROCEED WITH CAUTION, MORE WORK TO BE DONE

Governor Deal's Commission on Children's Mental Health is a positive step in planning further supports for vulnerable, underserved children.

- The commission was recently established, so assessing the impact of its work will take time.
- So far, the declared intent of this group has not included examining the deficiency in the state's mental health workforce, which is a crucial part of serving students' mental health needs.

Health supports should be expanded and made available for all Georgia students in the areas of physical health, mental health, and nutrition, and programs like telemedicine and school-based health centers.

- Access to health services through school and community partnerships, especially for low-income and rural children, is severely lacking across the state and must be increased.
- Expanded access to telehealth in all counties in Georgia could help bridge access issues given the statewide shortage of healthcare professionals.

Georgia should increase support for out-of-school time programs.

- Access is an issue for many students in Georgia. Sixty-two of Georgia's 159 counties have no state-funded afterschool programs.
- Greater state investment is needed to expand access to and improve the quality of Georgia's out of school programs -- including before and after school as well as summer.

GO! KEEP MOVING FORWARD: STRONG POLICIES IN PLACE

GaDOE's School Climate Rating system and PBIS program provide strong, ongoing supports for students.

- Georgia is a leader in the United States in developing a School Climate Rating and including it in the state education accountability system. The state must continue to support this program, which has been correlated with improved academic performance where implemented.

Governor Deal's Childhood Obesity Initiative, Georgia Shape, continues to make statewide progress in improving the physical health and nutritional wellness of children from birth to age 18.

- This multi-agency initiative features diverse partnerships and innovative programming in various settings, including birthing hospitals, early care environments, schools, and afterschool programs.