



Testimony on Senate Resolution 468  
November 7, 2019

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Thank you, Senators, for allowing me to come before you and speak on Senate Resolution 468 today.

Let me first say that we applaud Senators Davenport, Butler, Anderson, James, Tate and others on their effort to focus attention on the plight of African-American students in our public schools.

Indeed, GAE is the product of a merger between the Black educator organization, Georgia Teacher & Education Association, and the white educator organization, the Georgia Education Association. Today, GAE carries the historical advocacy for black school children first sparked by leaders like Dr., and later Senator, Horace Tate, GAE's first executive director.

GAE supports any and all efforts that bring needed attention and subsequently needed resources to all of our student populations throughout Georgia to fulfill the mandate of Brown v. Board of Education.

However, the specific focus of SR 468 speaks to a student community that is disproportionately negatively-impacted by societal forces and official education policy. Georgia's constitution guarantees that students are entitled to an "adequate education." What is "adequate" should not depend on the zip code; however, funding inadequacies are baked into the system. According to FundEd, Georgia is one of only eight (8) states that does not provide increased funding for students from low-income households or for districts based on the concentrations of low-income students they serve.

(See, FundEd web site

<http://funded.edbuild.org/national#poverty>)

As we all remember, during the Opportunity School District vote that was defeated by the citizens of Georgia, over ninety percent of the communities being impacted by that effort were predominantly African-American. From that experience we learned that African-American school children did not need yet another public school system. Today we have traditional school systems; start-up charter schools; conversion charter schools; strategic waiver school systems; charter school systems; and State Charter Commission schools.

And while the State Department of Education has created its Chief Turnaround Officer position to address the concerns of our lowest performing schools, you can never have enough efforts to uncover challenges and obstacles to learning and success.

To that point, the Turnaround Office is seemingly redundant as the State Department has a strikingly similar School Improvement Divisions where high-poverty schools receive school improvement grants (SIG) and a proven track record of success if properly implemented.

Be that as it may, GAE sees SR 468 as another opportunity to address a critical need. We hope that the data culled from this effort is utilized to enhance the state's overall endeavor to address this vital issue.

In addition, GAE has supported, and looks to the Community Schools model, to also help improve low-performing schools. As the committee to be formed by SR 468 starts its work, we hope that the challenges that directly and indirectly impact all, but primarily African-American students' ability to function at a level where they are ready to learn, are taken into account.

These could very easily be essential services that many of us take for granted, such as having enough food to eat, having a place to wash clothes, providing day care assistance, being able to access social worker, mental health or general health services, hence the community schools model.

These challenges will not go away with the wave of a magic wand. These are generational challenges that are ingrained in some of our communities and reinforced by official government policy. But challenges that impact our students must be met with continual resolve. SR 468 is another welcomed attempt to address those challenges.

In closing GAE can recommend:

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

Again, thank you for this opportunity to express our views on this important issue.

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