



GEORGIA STATE SENATE

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THE FINAL REPORT OF THE SENATE STUDY COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Senator P.K. Martin – Committee Chairman
District 9

Senator Emanuel Jones – Committee Vice-Chair
District 10

Senator Matt Brass
District 28

Senator Lindsey Tippins
District 37

Senator Nan Orrock
District 36

Prepared by the Senate Research Office
2019

COMMITTEE FOCUS, CREATION, AND DUTIES

The Senate Study Committee on Community Schools (Committee) was created by Senate Resolution 353 to study the operation and impact of community schools and examine the potential for further state involvement in community school development. The core of a community school is a focus on the entire child, realizing that academic success relies upon the basic need of the child being met. A community school collaborates with community stakeholders to develop and implement programs that provide educational options tailored to fit individual needs.¹

Senator P.K. Martin of the 9th served as Chair of the Study Committee with Senator Emanuel Jones of the 10th, author of the original legislation, served as Vice-Chair. The other Senate members included:

- Senator Matt Brass of the 28th;
- Senator Lindsey Tippins of the 37th; and
- Senator Nan Orrock of the 36th.

The following legislative staff members were assigned to this Committee: Elisabeth Fletcher of the Senate Press Office; Ryan Bowersox of the Senate Research Office; Megan Mowers, Legislative Assistant to Senators Martin, and Michael Walker of the Office of Legislative Counsel.

BACKGROUND

A community school is both a physical place and a concept describing partnerships between a school and the surrounding community. A community school utilizes community resources to work to improve both student learning, and support families and communities. While every community school is different, most share a common set of characteristics. Community schools operate as a community hub, bringing together students, educators, teachers, and interested community members to provide educational support and services. Personnel within the school, often an additional in-school coordinator, work to build and maintain a partnership between the school and community. Using community resources, a community school can work to provide expanded learning opportunities, and health and social supports and services to ensure all of a child's needs are met. In addition to providing unique curriculum emphasizing real-world problem solving and career focused learning, a community school may offer external supports such as mental health counseling, feeding programs, and substance abuse prevention. The school itself will often open its facilities to the community to operate as a community center for all to utilize. Above all, a community school focuses on the individual children and community, knowing that each will have unique needs requiring distinct problem solving. When operated correctly, a community school will result in physically, socially, and emotionally healthy students that are present and engaged in school.²

While community schools currently exist throughout Georgia, these were developed without a State regulatory scheme. Individual schools and counties in Georgia have worked to adopt the characteristics of a community school model individually,³ while many schools have partnered with the organization Communities in Schools to provide community school resources.⁴ With growing interest in community schools there have been several bills considered by the Georgia General Assembly in recent years focused on developing a state-wide approach to community schools in

¹ <http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20192020/SR/353>.

² Information on community schools provided from the Coalition for Community Schools a division of the Institute for Educational Leadership. More information is available through the Coalition for Community School's website at <http://www.communityschools.org/>.

³ See e.g., Gwinnett County Public Schools <https://publish.gwinnett.k12.ga.us/gcps/home/public/community/content/row3/publications-n-services/community-schools>; Marietta Student Life Center <https://mariettaschoolsfoundation.com/student-life-center/>.

⁴ More information on Communities in Schools of Georgia available at: <https://cisga.org/>.

Georgia.⁵ Additionally, Georgia's Department of Education has placed increased importance on "Educating the Whole Child," similar to a theme pursued by many community schools. The Department of Education has worked to provide resources to assist schools and educators in this effort.⁶

COMMITTEE FINDINGS

The Committee held two meetings at the Capitol on September 26th and November 14th, and one meeting at Osborne High School on October 2nd. The Committee heard testimony from the following individuals: Carol Lewis, President and CEO of Communities in Schools (CIS) of Georgia; Robert "Trey" Ragsdale, Chairman of the State CIS Georgia Board; Jamie Jackson, CIS of Georgia in Troup County Advisory Council Member; Cindy Morley, CIS Director of External Relations/Communications; Kyle Serrette, Senior Policy Analyst at National Education Association; Ashley Harris, Director of Whole Child Supports and Strategic Partnerships, Georgia Department of Education, and Mr. Joshua Morreale, Principal of Osbourne High School.

The Committee heard testimony from representatives of the organization, Communities in Schools which works to implement a model of the concept of a community school nationwide.⁷ CIS works to provide student support services and dropout prevention targeted to at-risk students. According to CIS, in Georgia more than 20,000 kids a year drop out of school due to various barriers to their education. These barriers may be readily apparent but are often more subtle obstacles to a student's education. CIS site coordinators, based inside individual schools, work directly with students to identify and assist with these academic barriers. CIS relies on community support to provide the necessary resources to fit student specific needs.

CIS currently operates within 161 schools and 7 community sites across the State of Georgia, working to ensure at risk students stay in school to reach academic success. Site coordinators placed directly in schools work with the in school personnel to develop services fit for the individual student. CIS has identified four pillars that appear in most community schools to support a high-quality school. These pillars include: integrated student supports, expanded learning time and opportunities, family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership and practice. In Georgia, CIS currently serves 97,317 students, with 8,629 considered case-managed students. Of CIS case-managed students 93.2 percent of high school seniors graduated, 70.2 percent saw improved attendance, and 96.2 percent of elementary and middle school students were promoted.

The Georgia Department of Education (DOE) addressed the Committee regarding current work on community schools within the State. DOE is working to provide a state recognized, school-level "Community Schools" certification. DOE sets clear and common uniform expectations for a community school while providing multiple pathways to obtain this certification. The work of DOE concerning community schools has been part of a larger focus on meeting the needs of the whole child. DOE is working to develop a framework across the agency to organize tools, resources, best practices, and plans to meet the needs of the whole child.

The National Education Association (NEA) provided testimony regarding community schools nationwide, highlighting the success of community school programming in specific areas across the country. Examples of the positive impact of community school programming in various schools and cities across the country was presented to the Committee. Notably, Reagan High School in Austin, Texas saw its graduation rate rise from 48 percent in 2009 to 90 percent in 2019 with community

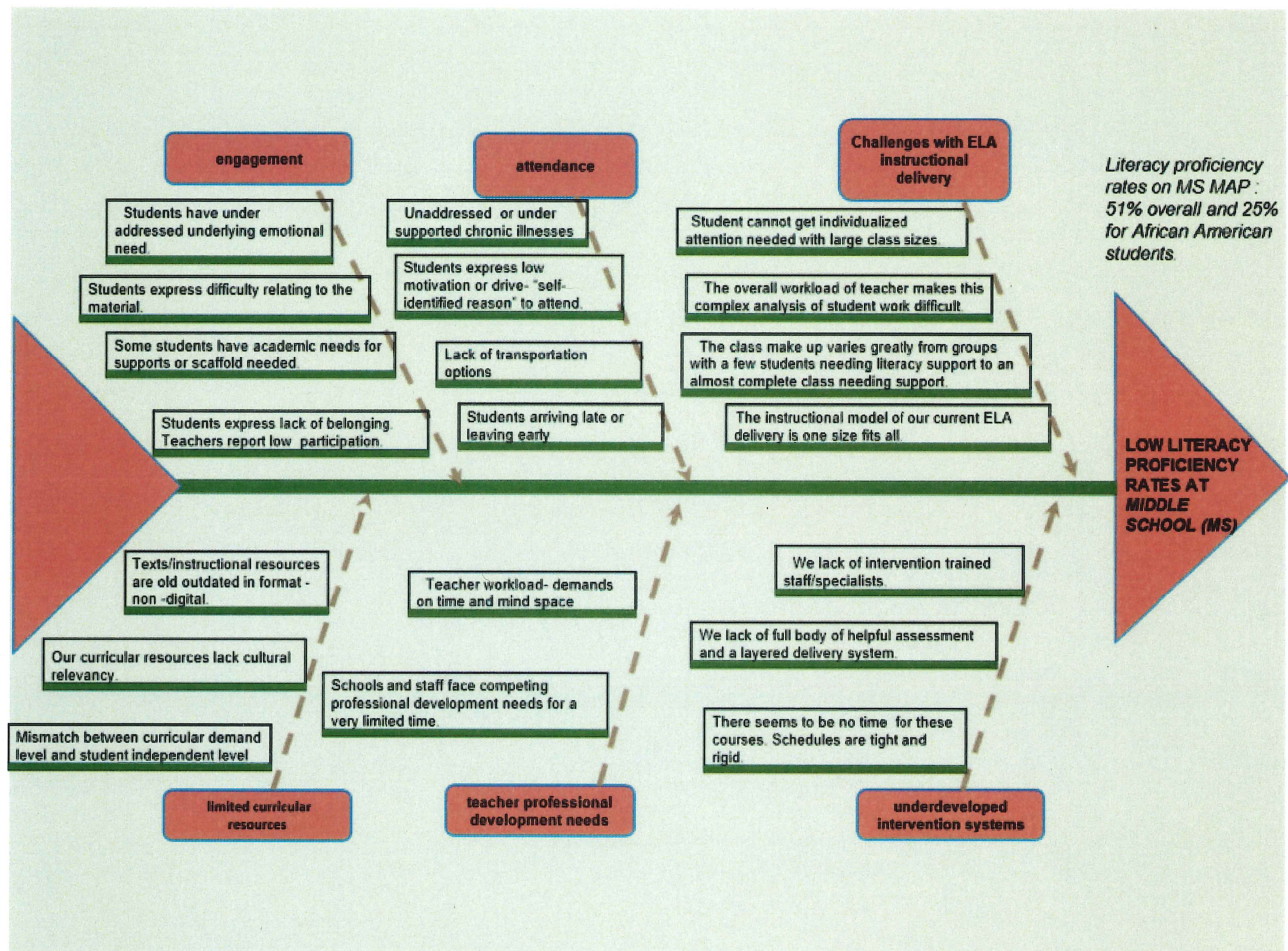
⁵ See, Senate Bill 124 (2015); Senate Bill 30 (2017); and Senate Bill 102 (2019).

⁶ <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/wholechild.aspx>.

⁷ Communities in Schools refers to a specific organization which works to implement the broader idea of a community school. More information on Communities in Schools is available from the organizations website at <https://www.communitiesinschools.org/>.

school programming. In 2006, the City of Cincinnati had no community schools compared to 2019 when 42 out of the 65 schools within the City are considered community schools. During this time period, the graduation rate rose from 51 percent to 84 percent.

The NEA's testimony characterized community schools as fully understanding the larger system a school operates within to develop a holistic vision for the school and community, and specific problem solving for the system to achieve the desired vision. When a community school identifies a problem, it works to solve the underlying causes of a problem opposed to merely addressing the symptoms of the problem. By identifying the underlying causes of a problem, community schools are more effective in providing a solution. The chart below illustrates the layers of underlying issues that can collectively contribute into a negative academic result.



Source: National Education Association Testimony (9/26/19)

The Committee met at Osborne High School in Marietta, Georgia to observe an example of community school programming. Principal Josh Morreale testified on efforts made to improve educational outcomes and graduation rates at Osborne High School, including the work with CIS. The Osborne High School CIS site coordinator and student ambassador shared their experiences and personalized impact of programming. The graduation rate at Osborne High School for seniors has grown from 37 percent in 2011 to 71.2 percent in 2019. The graduation rate for students who attend all four years at Osborne High School is 97 percent.

Following testimony, Committee members were provided a tour of the Osborne High School campus. As an active community school Osborne High School included: a school food pantry providing donated food and clothing supplies to families of students in need, an Intensive English Language

Program class for new English learners to transition to mainstream curriculum, and a 3DE class that uses a case methodology approach to develop real world knowledge and skills.

COMMITTEE CONCLUSIONS

The Committee was tasked with studying the operation and impact of community schools, including an analysis of the existence and growth of community schools already in Georgia. Through the Committee's process, hearing expert testimony and studying numerous examples of community schools inside and outside the State, the Committee found that community school programming can have an extremely positive effect when implemented correctly, under strong leadership. While not a necessity for every school, many schools can benefit from the additional focus and programs of a community school. The Committee found that community schools have substantially developed within Georgia. Many community schools are already operating in different capacities and under different structures across Georgia, and experiencing positive results for the students impacted. Furthermore, the Department of Education has made significant progress in developing a "Community Schools" certification, and in providing resources to assist schools and faculty across Georgia in the goals of a community school. The Georgia State Senate should continue to monitor the development of community schools across the State, and the progress of the Department of Education.

Respectfully Submitted,

**THE FINAL REPORT OF THE SENATE STUDY COMMITTEE ON
COMMUNITY SCHOOLS**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P.K. Martin", written over a horizontal line.

Senator P.K. Martin – Committee Chairman
District 9