



AT ISSUE STATE EDITION



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to assist in any way it can.

On June 26, the 2020 Legislative Session of the Georgia General Assembly concluded a rather unusual year, marked by the emergence of COVID-19. However, even when presented with the complexities of a socially distant session, the General Assembly rose to the challenge and made progress on a number of legislative priorities – most notably passing a balanced budget for the 2021 Fiscal Year, even when accounting for the economic impact of COVID-19. I could not be more proud of how our body carried out its business and we look forward to returning next year to pick up right where we left off.

COVID-19 has upended the way we conduct our everyday lives. From how we shop for groceries, to how our students receive their education, we have witnessed industries across the state adopt new protocols and procedures to better ensure the safety of their employees and customers. Some of these changes have been easier to adapt to than others and there will certainly be additional speed bumps along the way. However, Georgia's leadership has done an excellent job in maintaining a business-friendly environment and introducing proactive policies to address many of the issues resulting from the pandemic. I am encouraged with the direction we are currently heading and the Senate stands ready

COVID-19 has also impacted the way our elections will be conducted and, importantly, has affected our poll worker capacity. Poll workers are an essential part of the elections process and with many citizens using our new voting machines for the first time and with enhanced safety protocols at polling places, the role of a poll worker is more important than ever before. If you are interested in serving your state as a poll worker, contact the Secretary of State's Office at securevote.ga.com/pollworkerrecruitment.

This edition of At Issue highlights a few of the policy areas most heavily effected by COVID-19: job creation, education and rural broadband. Each of these areas has taken a hit in recent months, but will be critical in ensuring Georgia can weather this storm. Also highlighted below are the study committees that will meet throughout the interim. These study committees will allow Senate members and relevant industry experts to hold in-depth discussions on a certain topic and present recommendations to determine if legislative action is necessary. If you have any questions about the information presented in this document or if there are any issues you would like for us to cover in future editions, please do not hesitate to reach out to my office.

Butch Miller
President Pro Tempore, Georgia Senate
butch.miller@senate.ga.gov

Insurance and Labor

Data Tells the Story of a State in Economic Recovery, but Challenges Remain

James Beal, Senior Policy Analyst
Senate Research Office
james.beal@senate.ga.gov

With more than 76,000 restaurant and retail business closures in the United States and drops in employment across most sectors, we have witnessed an economy resembling the Great Depression. One glaring distinction between unemployment occurring after the Crash of 1929 and today's pandemic is its source—market manipulation and over speculation led to the Great Depression while government edicts and forced closures now result in shuttered business and jobs lost. Georgia did not escape unharmed and continues with its own struggles; however, data points to the benefits of reopening the economy, and giving businesses and workers the flexibility to operate. People are working to provide for themselves and their families again, tax collections are higher than expected, nearly all sectors are experiencing rapid improvement in employment, and the state is moving back towards the record position in which it started 2020.

Employment by the Numbers

With the exception of Alabama, Missouri, and West Virginia, every state has experienced its own record high unemployment in 2020. Our state experienced a whopping 12.6 percent unemployment in April—the highest rate in Georgia history—translating to 614,000 jobs in non-farm sectors.

This is coming off the heels of having started the year at 3.1 percent unemployment—our lowest rate in history. Particularly hard hit are industries classified as Leisure and Hospitality, which includes the arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food service sectors. According to figures released by the Georgia Department of Labor for the month of June 2020 in Leisure and Hospitality, employment saw an 18.6 percent drop, or 92,800 jobs less compared to June 2019, up from a 42.8 percent drop in April 2020 compared to April 2019. The subcategory of arts, entertainment, and recreation experienced a 30 percent drop compared to June 2019. These jobs include those in the film industry, a field that, for the last decade, has broken from its mecca on the west coast as businesses and workers came to realize that other states were too heavy-handed in regulation and taxation.

Nearly all employment sectors in Georgia are performing better since the April dip, whereas other states are actually seeing higher unemployment now than when economic shutdowns peaked. For example, more than half of New England states [continue to see double digit unemployment rates](#). The culprit: prolonged economic shutdowns leading to unsustainable losses by businesses, forcing permanent closures. [Data for non-farm jobs paint Georgia as a state in recovery](#): construction has gained back 7,000 jobs; manufacturing has gained back 27,000 jobs; the trade, transportation, and utilities sector has recovered 26,000 jobs; in financial activities 7,000 jobs have been recovered; the professionals and business services sector, while still suffering from 50,000 fewer jobs than in June 2019, recovered 29,000 jobs; education and health services gained back roughly 26,000 jobs; and finally, leisure and hospitality—one of the hardest hit sectors—has recovered more than 120,000 jobs since April. The only sector seeing lower employed individuals is in government which is roughly 8,600 fewer jobs than in April, including local, state, and federal jobs. This is likely due to retirements and increased cuts to budgets from the top down in response to heavily contracted tax collections.

Continued Recovery, Continued Struggles

Depending on an individual's preferred national news source, policymakers are seeing one of two headlines—either the nation is on a path to recovery or on a path to ruin. The true takeaway is somewhere in the middle and trending towards recovery if you look at the numbers. As of June 2020, employment in Georgia is still down 281,800 jobs under February's historic high. Sector-specific data for July is not available at the time of this writing; however, national data trends indicate continued recovery with 1.8 million non-farm jobs added, giving the country a third straight month of gains. If there is any good economic news to takeaway, then jobs-added shows a light at the end of this tunnel.

June data evinces continued recovery in most sectors, with of our hardest hit—arts, entertainment, recreation, and food services—seeing more than 20 percent in job gains. This points to film studios reopening, Georgia-lensed productions restarting, and restaurants expanding their operations. Georgia Department of Labor statistics on unemployment insurance (“UI”) illustrates improvement in the job market as well—more than 228,000 less claims were filed for UI in June than in May 2020.

Role of Unemployment Insurance in the Economy

Georgia's UI system is administered by the Department of Labor under the direction of elected Labor Commissioner Mark Butler. Contrary to popular belief, the unemployment rate is not determined by the number of UI claims filed, but instead is determined by community surveys. UI claims filed, continuing, and as final payments serve as indicators of the health of the economy and labor market. At its peak, Georgia saw [1,353,948 million initial claims](#) for UI filed in April 2020 with 447,682 as first payments to filers. In May, that number fell to 836,060 initial claims and 207,520 as first payments. The numbers fell again in June, with 607,851 initial claims, of which, 112,472 were first payments. “[Initial claims](#)” are any notices of unemployment filed (1) to request a determination of entitlement to and eligibility for compensation; or (2) to begin a second or subsequent period of eligibility within a benefit year or period of eligibility. “[First Payments](#)” are the number of first time beneficiaries within a period of eligibility.

Decreasing UI claims indicate a labor market that is getting back to work. Complete monthly July data is not available at the time of this writing; however, numbers by benefit week indicate a potentially fluctuating picture. The number of initial claims [have dropped each week](#) since the first week of May except in July where UI initial claims increased from 105,160 the week ending June 27 to 138,452 in the week ending July 4. Since then, the number of claims have continued to drop with the week ending July 25 seeing 73,931 initial claims.

In addition to the health of the economy, tracking UI claims is vital to forecasting the solvency of UI payments' source—the Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund. As of August 11, 2020, the Georgia Trust Fund stands at \$385,365,324, [down 85 percent](#) from the March 24 balance of \$2,547,476,454. Employers pay into the Trust Fund via a UI tax, so when businesses close the source for an employee's safety net dwindles.

Action by the General Assembly

During the 2020 Legislative Session, the General Assembly took steps to help the state's UI system and the people who may need its assistance. Senator Strickland of the 17th sponsored [Senate Bill 408](#), providing the Department of Labor with more flexibility in responding to declared states of emergency. The Labor Commissioner now has the authority to adopt temporary emergency rules to relieve otherwise burdensome filing deadlines, charges, claims processing procedures, and work search requirements.

While in normal times requiring claimants to meet certain requirements helps to ensure the program's accountability and encourage independency, in an emergency where there are no jobs or there is a deluge of claims, waivers may be appropriate.

Furthermore, Senate Bill 408 amended the framework for determining an amount a claimant may earn in deductible earnings. Where before a claimant earning any more than \$50.00 a week would see that amount reduced from their UI, this bill gives the Labor Commissioner the authority to establish an amount between \$50.00 and \$300.00. Doing so means a claimant could possibly earn up to \$300.00 taking on a temporary job while laid off and still receive full UI assistance. Because the bill allows a sliding amount as established by the Labor Commissioner, deductible earnings could increase or decrease depending on the state of the economy whereas before the amount was rigidly set.

Owing to the importance of these measures in helping Georgians through the COVID-19 period of economic uncertainty, the General Assembly also passed [House Bill 1090](#), carried by Senator Kirkpatrick of the 32nd, which included the exact same language. Both bills were signed into law by Governor Brian Kemp.

Recovery is moving along by sheer force of will, both politically and emotionally. People have made many sacrifices to safeguard themselves, their families, and their businesses against a pandemic that is unprecedented in the modern era. COVID-19 struck at the same time as a presidential election year, adding fuel to a fire that has been burning since the previous election. While there is much work to be done in navigating the crisis, such as in voting, education, and testing priorities, when it comes to the economy and our state's labor force, data points to policies that are helping to get people back to their jobs. Allowing businesses to operate and employees to work once again means money moving throughout the economy, tax collections, safety net programs replenishing, growth, and opportunities for all Georgians. - JB

Education and Youth

Georgia Deserves High Marks for Tackling High-Stakes Standardized Tests

Laurin Vonada, Senior Policy Analyst
Senate Research Office

laurin.vonada@senate.ga.gov

During the mid-1800s, schools in and around Boston switched from the traditional oral examination format to a more formal written examination after Horace Mann, a school reformer and Secretary of the Massachusetts State Board of Education, spent time in Europe evaluating the school systems abroad.¹ Mann believed that using a common written exam was an effective way to provide a “single standard by which to judge and compare the output of each school.”² This change in the way the testing occurred gave rise to the use of standardized tests nationwide to determine how well students were prepared for college. Over time, these tests have evolved into what is seen in the American education system today: multiple choice or short answer exams which require test takers of all grades to answer the same question or set of questions in the same way. Standardized tests are scored in a consistent manner, which makes it possible to compare the relative performance of individual students or groups of students. Typically, these tests are completed on a computer and are administered annually towards the end of the school year.

[Georgia law](#) provides for the State Board of Education (SBOE) to adopt a student assessment program consisting of instruments, procedures and policies necessary to implement the program. Further, Georgia law provides what high-stakes standardized tests are to be taken and when. According to the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE), the purpose of the [Georgia Student Assessment Program](#), which includes customized summative criterion tests at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, is to measure student achievement of the state-adopted content standards and inform efforts to improve teaching and learning. A fundamental aspect to the Georgia Assessment Program is the [Georgia Milestones Assessment System](#), which spans grades three through 12. Students take end-of-grade assessments in grades three through eight and end-of-course (EOC) assessments from classes taken during grades nine through 12. Georgia Milestones measures students' knowledge and skills outlined in the state-adopted content standards in English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. Further, Georgia Milestones provides students with information about their individual achievement and their readiness for the next level of learning.

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In 2015, a [survey](#) was completed by GaDOE on why some teachers have opted to leave the profession. The most predominant reason Georgia educators gave for what they believed attributed to the high attrition rate was mandated tests. Those surveyed cited the following reasons as to why they thought mandated tests were causing teachers to leave the classroom: (1) the time spent on implementing tests took time away from teaching; (2) their students endured too much stress because of the tests; and (3) the tests may not be an appropriate method to determining how much a student actually knows. Since this survey, the Georgia General Assembly has worked to strengthen the instruction of students in grades K through 12 and retain teachers. One way that this has been addressed is by the reduction in the number of high-stakes standardized tests. In 2016, Senator Lindsey Tippins of the 37th district sponsored [Senate Bill 364](#), which among other things, eliminated eight mandatory high-stakes standardized tests, bringing the number of Georgia Milestones tests down from 32 to 24. At the time, this piece of legislation was [considered](#) to be a “huge win for teachers, students, families, and communities.”

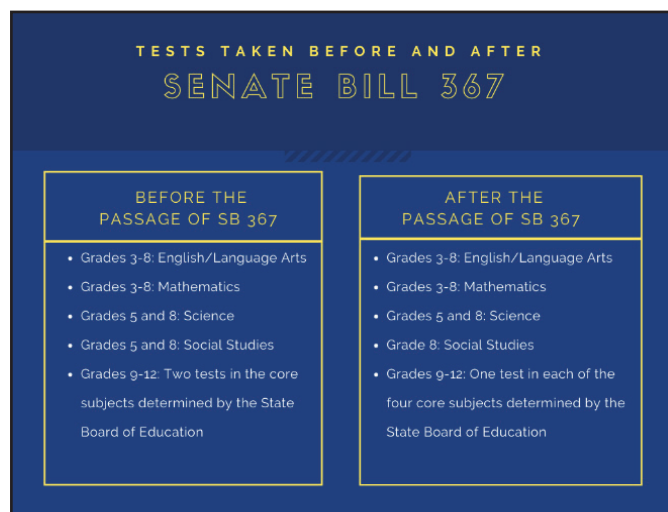
After the passage of Senate Bill 364, the SBOE approved a [recommendation](#) from State Superintendent Richard Woods to eliminate EOC assessments for students in most dual enrollment courses, so long as the student passes the course and receives college credit. This rule change does not apply to EOC assessments that are required by federal law for courses such as Ninth Grade Literature and Composition, Algebra, and Biology. Another issue recently addressed by the SBOE and GaDOE is the double-testing of Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) students. The SBOE adopted a [recommendation](#) in November 2019 from Superintendent Woods to eliminate EOC assessments for AP and IB courses, so long as the student receives a passing grade in a core-related subject. GaDOE estimates that this could eliminate close to 58,000 high-stakes assessments taken by students across the state.

Senate Bill 367

The Georgia General Assembly took further actions to evaluate and strengthen the efficacy of education in the state with the passage of [Senate Bill 367](#) during the 2020 legislative session. The primary objective of Senate Bill 367 is to reduce the number of high-stakes standardized tests that students in Georgia take prior to graduation. In an effort to align Georgia’s requirements with the federal requirements, the legislation reduces the number of tests from 24 to 19. The federal government requires students to take 17 high-stakes standardized tests. The two tests that Georgia requires above the federal requirements are a history examination in both eighth grade and a history examination taken during high school. Prior to the enactment of Senate Bill 367, Georgia high school students were mandated to take two tests in mathematics, science, social studies and English/Language Arts. This legislation requires only one test in the four core subjects in high school as determined by the SBOE. Likewise, the legislation removed the fifth grade social studies examination. Also noteworthy is the legislation’s enactment of a testing window at the end of the school year with the aim to maximize classroom instruction time which may help reduce the time teachers “teach to the test.” Senate Bill 367 also requires GaDOE to publish an annual report of aggregated data from local schools and local school systems that compares performance to other states using the same data. The report can be used to further fortify Georgia’s education system.

Senator P.K. Martin of the 9th district, who serves as Chairman of the Senate Education and Youth Committee, sponsored Senate Bill 367 through the legislative process. Senator Martin testified on Senate Bill 367 at the February 4, 2020 Senate Education and Youth Committee and shared that over the past year he had participated in discussions with parents, educators, and administrators regarding important issues in education. The group had overwhelmingly voiced concerns with him regarding the amount of high-stakes standardized tests Georgia students take. Senator Martin discussed the importance of high-stakes standardized tests, but he stated that knew he wanted to address this issue legislatively after hearing their concerns. Many education advocates spoke in favor of the piece of legislation including the Professional Association of Georgia (PAGE) and the Georgia Association of Education Leaders (GAEL). Senate Bill 367 received bipartisan support in both chambers and was signed into law on July 22, 2020.

Senate Bill 367 received early support from both Governor Brian Kemp and Superintendent Woods after the two men participated in a [teacher listening tour](#) across the state of Georgia during 2019. At these listening sessions, teachers and counselors shared ideas for improving school climate and education. According to a [summary](#) of the listening tour completed by GaDOE, “[e]ducational leaders are concerned about the time dedicated to high-stakes testing, the impact of those tests on students, and the degree to which curriculum and classroom behavior are being driven by assessments.” Governor Kemp expressed his support for teachers and students in a [news conference](#) and said, “When you look at the big picture its clear, Georgia simply tests too much.” For State Superintendent Woods, the passage of Senate Bill 367 was a “response to the persistent and urgent concerns” raised every year. State Superintendent Woods also addressed concerns that may arise when a test is eliminated and [stated](#) that he has faith in the teachers of the state of Georgia to keep covering state standards even if a subject was no longer tested.



A comparison of tests administered to Georgia students before and after the passage of Senate Bill 367.

Chart Prepared by: Senate Research Office

Innovative Assessment Program

There have been continual efforts by both state and federal leaders to advance student and school growth with standardized tests since their introduction. In 1965, the [Elementary and Secondary Education Act](#) was enacted by Lyndon B. Johnson, which included testing and accountability provisions in an effort to raise standards and make education more equitable. With the passage of the federal [No Child Left Behind Act](#) in 2002, annual standardized testing was mandated as a means to assess a school's adequate yearly progress based on student population as a whole and subgroups. The [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#) of 2015 reauthorized annual standardized tests, but provided for flexibility and innovation in regards to these tests. Along with assessing current policies regarding high-stakes standardized tests, the Georgia General Assembly has pursued maximum flexibility as permitted by ESSA.

ESSA introduced the [Innovation Assessment Demonstration Authority \(IADA\)](#) which allows up to seven states to establish and operate an innovative assessment program in public schools for a demonstration period of no more than five years. IADA is intended to provide flexibility and give local education agencies more input in how student testing is conducted by starting a new assessment on a smaller scale and ultimately scaling up the innovative assessment statewide. Georgia began the process to seek maximum flexibility for state and local assessments under ESSA in 2017 with the passage of [Senate Bill 211](#). The legislation required the existing ESSA assessment workgroup apply for the IADA. The Georgia General Assembly passed [Senate Bill 362](#) in 2018 which established the innovation assessment pilot program that allowed to 10 school districts or groups to develop alternative assessment and accountability systems with state academic content standards. In 2019, Georgia became the fourth state to be [approved](#) by the U.S. Department of Education to participate in the IADA. This demonstration period will run through the 2023-2024 school year and GaDOE must determine at that time if an approved alternative assessment should be administered statewide.

Coronavirus Implications

The Coronavirus pandemic has no doubt caused major disruptions to all aspects of daily life, especially in the world of education. Although Senate Bill 367 became effective on August 1, 2020, the effect of the legislation may not be fully realized until the next school year. Georgia was one of the first states to seek a [waiver](#) from the U.S. Department of Education to suspend standardized testing for the 2019-2020 school year. The request was granted and Governor Kemp and State Superintendent Richard Woods have sought a waiver for the 2020-2021 school year as well. In a joint [statement](#), the men stated that “we believe schools’ focus should be on remediation, growth, and the safety of students, rather than high-stakes testing” this school year. In addition to seeking waivers to suspend these tests, Georgia is also seeking a waiver to suspend the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) school and district rating from the U.S. Department of Education. GaDOE has suspended the teacher evaluation (TKES) summative rating for the 2020-21 school year effective immediately.

Georgia's commitment to learning what works best for the students and teachers is evidenced by the continual evaluations of what is being tested and the adaptations of innovative designs on how it is tested. For these reasons, Georgia deserves high marks for tackling high-stakes standardized tests. - LV

Regulated Industries and Utilities

Mapping a Plan for Broadband in Georgia

Katherine Russell, Senior Policy Analyst

Senate Research Office

katherine.russell@senate.ga.gov

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for fast, reliable internet access for all Georgians has become glaringly obvious. As citizens try to adapt to the new normal, their ability to adjust to using distance communication for vital necessities such as doctor's visits, school, and work has underscored the disparity between individuals with and without broadband internet access. As [Governor Brian Kemp](#) noted in a press release on July 1, 2020, “more than a million Georgians lack access to reliable high-speed internet service.” Lawmakers have been grappling with how to address this disparity for years, but the pandemic of 2020 has amplified both the awareness of and need for fast, reliable broadband across Georgia.

In a timely happenstance, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs released a [map of broadband coverage in Georgia](#) on June 30. This map was commissioned by the Georgia General Assembly back in 2018 through [Senate Bill 402](#), otherwise known as the Achieving Connectivity Everywhere Act (the “ACE Act”), and has been in development for the past few years.

Mapping broadband access is considered extremely important because it provides a tool for communities who do not have adequate access to broadband to show a greater need when they apply for federal funding and grant opportunities. According to Eric McRae of the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia, mapping “opens up [a] population to having access.”¹

(continued on page 6)

I. ACE Act and Georgia Broadband Deployment Initiative

The ACE Act, which was sponsored by Senator Steve Gooch of the 51st and others, encompassed many initiatives to help deploy broadband to unserved and underserved areas of the state. To be considered served, internet speeds must meet a minimum of twenty-five megabits (Mbps) per second download and three Mbps per second upload or 25/3 Mbps.²

The legislation established the Georgia Broadband Deployment Initiative (“GBDI”). The GBDI is a collaboration among five state agencies: (1) the Department of Community Affairs; (2) the Department of Economic Development; (3) the Georgia Department of Transportation; (4) the Georgia Technology Authority; and (5) the State Properties Commission.³ The GBDI’s intended purpose calls for the promotion and deployment of broadband services to unserved areas to increase economic, education, and social opportunities for citizens and businesses.⁴ The five agencies, now also known as the Inter-Agency Team, implemented a governance framework to facilitate communication and project management coordination in a way that engages stakeholders and leverages their expertise while balancing various interests.⁵ This framework allows stakeholders to have a voice for participation and feedback on methods, processes, and regulations. Additional initiatives established by the ACE Act require the Department of Community Affairs to oversee and coordinate efforts for distribution of public and private grants, programs, designations, and other resources. The Georgia Technology Authority is also required to conduct periodic analysis of state owned broadband assets and prepare an annual report on the policies and programs implemented.

The ACE Act called for the Department of Community Affairs to develop and publish on its website a map showing the unserved areas in the state. In a departure from how other entities define “unserved areas,” as discussed below, the Georgia legislature chose to define an unserved area as a census block where broadband services are not available to 20 percent or more of the locations.⁶

II. Mapping Techniques

At the time the ACE Act was passed, lawmakers were aware of the maps produced by the Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”) but felt that they did not accurately depict how dire some circumstances were in rural Georgia. As a result, the methodology for producing the GBDI map is significantly more detailed and produced a much different looking map.

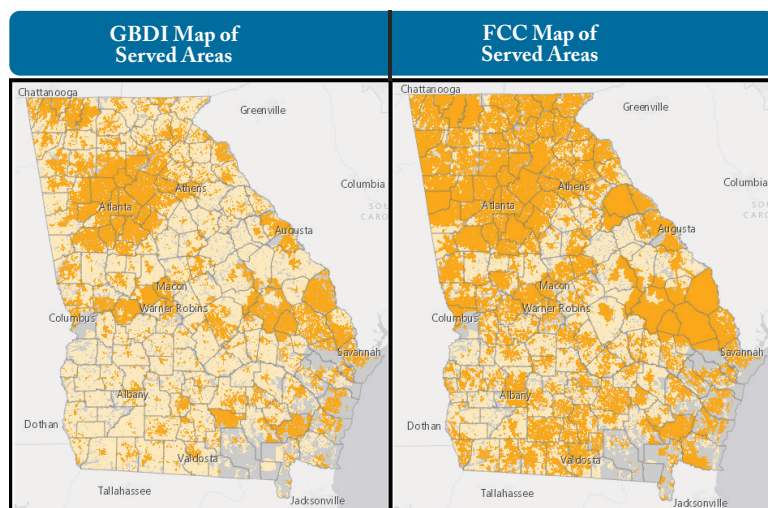
[FCC Broadband Connectivity Map](#)

The FCC mapping model was based on FCC Form 477 which focused on access at a census block level, as a result the FCC model was inherently set at census block resolution. It considered an entire census block served if even one location had access to the internet. This largely underestimated the extent of broadband deficiencies. Additionally, many believe that the FCC overstated internet speeds. A separate analysis found that speeds were averaging about one-fourth as fast as what was reported by the FCC. This average was only about 6.3 Mbps per second.

[Georgia Department of Community Affairs Map](#)

The Georgia Broadband Map methodology created by the Department of Community Affairs, in cooperation with Georgia Technology Authority and the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia, represents a location-level specificity that “precisely maps the availability of broadband services to every home and business in the State.”⁷ This methodology focuses on every potential serviceable location instead of an entire census block, making it a far more accurate representation. Additionally, the GBDI map only recorded connections with a minimum threshold of 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload speed.

The GBDI map identified about 255,000 homes and businesses which were previously presumed to be in served areas.⁸



Source Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Georgia Broadband

III. Recent and Future Deployments of Internet in Rural Georgia

In a recent press release on July 1, Governor Brian Kemp announced that internet providers who were encouraged by the recent mapping initiative have announced several infrastructure investments. These investments, mostly occurring through public-private partnerships involving federal funds and local commitments, total nearly \$38.2 million and are projected to serve more than 23,000 locations.

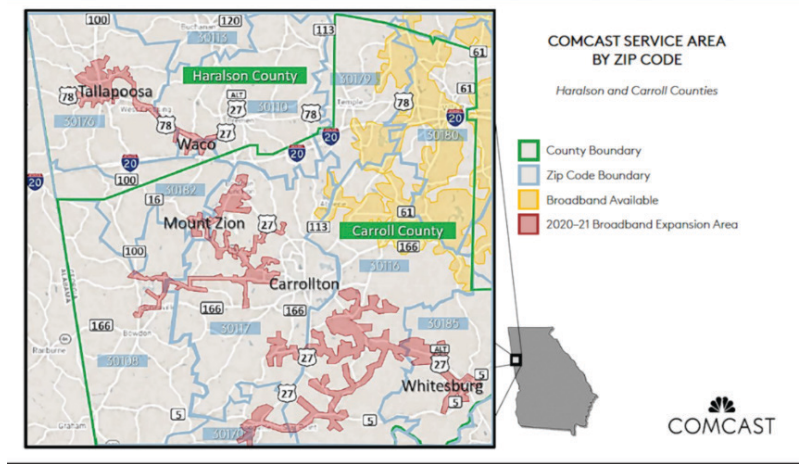
As noted in the Governor’s press release, the new map signifies where high-speed internet service is available, but it does not indicate where Georgians are subscribing to internet services. That information is held by the private providers who have service offerings in various areas. Several providers have openly shared their plans for expanding their networks throughout rural Georgia, as discussed below.

Comcast

Internet provider [Comcast Corporation](#) announced that it has started work to enhance and expand the reach of its network into rural west Georgia as part of a nearly \$9 million investment. The company plans to add internet service options in Tallapoosa, Mount Zion, Waco, and Whitesburg within the next year. This expansion will reach almost 8,000 previously unserved homes and businesses.

AT&T

Internet provider [AT&T](#) announced that through its participation in the FCC's Connect America Fund subsidization program, it has recently brought high speed internet service to 54,000 new locations in 70 counties across Georgia. The [Connect America Fund](#) is a FCC program designed to expand access to voice and broadband services for areas where they are unavailable. The funding is allotted to service providers to subsidize the cost of building new network infrastructure or performing network upgrades to provide voice and broadband service in areas where it is lacking.



Source: [Atlanta Business Chronicle](#)

Additionally, AT&T plans to continue its expansion of internet service through its Fixed Wireless Internet services. The company's stated goal is to deliver access to more than 13,000 additional locations by the end of this year.

U. S. Department of Agriculture's ("USDA") ReConnect Program

The U. S. Department of Agriculture's [ReConnect](#) program provides grants, loans, and combination funds enabling the federal government to partner with the private sector and rural communities to build out a modern broadband infrastructure in areas with insufficient internet service.⁹

The [USDA](#) announced that federal grant money awarded through the ReConnect Pilot Program will be awarded to the Ellijay Telephone Company in Gilmer County amounting to \$4.4 million. The investment comes from the first round of awards and will support 90 miles of fiber-optic infrastructure which will service over 2,100 households, and 74 businesses, farms, and community facilities. Additionally, the [USDA](#) announced that Round Two of the ReConnect Program will award \$12.5 million to DoveTel Communications, LLC (dba SyncGlobal Telecom) to deploy a fiber-to-the-premises (FTTP) network to connect 7,348 people, 121 farms, 15 businesses, four fire stations, and one elementary school to high-speed broadband internet in Heard, Troup, and Carroll counties.

Conclusion

Georgia's nationally recognized methodology for surveying broadband access has certainly put the state in a position of preparedness. State agencies and private stakeholders have worked together to help rural Georgians get connected. However, while we wait for broadband expansion to reach all Georgians, the Department of Community Affairs has provided a [map for free public WiFi locations](#) throughout the state. - KR

Recent Appointments to Interim Committees and Commissions

Of the legislation creating study committees adopted during the 2020 legislative session, the following appointments have been made:

[SR 470 – Senate Study Committee on Music Workforce Development](#)

Members: Senator Mullis of the 53rd (Chair), Senator Cowser of the 46th, Senate Harper of the 7th, Senator Lucas of the 26th, Senator Miller of the 49th, and Senator Powell-Sims of the 12th.

[SR 981 – Senate Study Committee on Surgical Smoke Evacuation Systems](#)

Members: Senator Butler of the 55th (Chair), Senator Harbin of the 51st, Senator Hufstetler of the 52nd, Senator Orrock of the 36th, and Senator Rahman of the 5th.

[SR 1007 – Senate Law Enforcement Reform Study Committee](#)

Members: Senator Cowser of the 46th, Senator Albers of the 56th, Senator Davenport of the 44th, Senator H. Jones of the 22nd, Senator Stone of the 23rd, and Senator Robertson of the 29th (Ex-Officio).

[SR 1024 – Senate Coin Operated Amusement Machines Study Committee](#)

Members: Senator Kennedy of the 18th (Chair); Senator Beach of the 8th, Senator Harbison of the 15th, Senator Strickland of the 17th, Senator Walker of the 20th, Ms. Gretchen Corbin, Mr. Nick Damani, Mr. John Douglas, Mr. Dhaval “Bunty” Doshi, Mr. Jamie Boyden, and Mr. Chuck Brooks (Ex-Officio).

[SR 1035 – Senate Educating Adult Students Study Committee](#)

Members: Senator Martin of the 9th (Chair), Senator T. Anderson of the 43rd, Senator Jackson of the 2nd (Sponsor), Senator Tippins of the 37th, Commissioner Greg Dozier, Ms. Lauren Holcomb, and Ms. Kerry Pritchard.

[HR 935 – Georgia Commission on Freight and Logistics](#)

Senate Appointments: Senator Beach of the 21st (Co-chair), Senator Gooch of the 51st, Senator B. Jones of the 25th, Ms. Rebecca Brewster, Mr. George Powers, Ms. Stephanie Smith, Ms. Felicia Moore, and Commissioner Mark Wisenbaker, Jr.

For additional study committee information including video archives, presentations, and documents, please visit the Senate website: <http://www.senate.ga.gov/committees/en-US/2020StudyCommittees.aspx>.

Endnotes

Georgia Deserves High Marks for Tackling High-Stakes Standardized Tests

1 U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, Testing in American Schools: Asking the Right Questions, (February 1992), <http://www.princeton.edu/~ota/disk1/1992/9236/923606.PDF>.

2 Id.

Mapping a Plan for Broadband in Georgia

1 Mark Niese, Gaping Internet Holes Exposed in Georgia Amid Coronavirus, ATLANTA JOURNAL CONSTITUTION, July 17, 2020, <https://www.ajc.com/politics/gaping-internet-holes-exposed-in-georgia-amid-coronavirus/5AJRZFG6EZACPOAL56AZACRXY/> (last accessed Aug. 18, 2020).

2 According to [Broadbandnow.com](#), a household with 25mpb download speed could support one to two devices streaming Netflix in high definition. More devices or a higher definition (such as 4K) would require a faster download speed.

3 Georgia Broadband Deployment Initiative Plan, <https://broadband.georgia.gov/about> (select “State of Georgia Broadband Plan” from the “Resources” drop down menu) (last accessed Aug. 18, 2020).

4 Press Release, Office of Governor Brian P. Kemp, State Launches Broadband Availability Map (July 1, 2020) <https://madmimi.com/p/fa47f01?fact=995533-159049578-12833163079-6bd896ece6847a2813d9e4f7ca2cd41af927d26f>

5 Georgia Broadband Deployment Initiative, About, <https://broadband.georgia.gov/about> (last visited Aug. 18, 2020).

6 This is to be determined by the Department of Community affairs in compliance with other provisions of the law, as was outlined in SB 402.

7 Georgia Broadband Deployment Initiative, Broadband Mapping, <https://broadband.georgia.gov/maps> (last visited Aug. 18, 2020).

8 Mark Niese, Gaping Internet Holes Exposed in Georgia Amid Coronavirus, ATLANTA JOURNAL CONSTITUTION, July 17, 2020, <https://www.ajc.com/politics/gaping-internet-holes-exposed-in-georgia-amid-coronavirus/5AJRZFG6EZACPOAL56AZACRXY/> (last accessed Aug. 18, 2020).

9 “Insufficient service” for the ReConnect program is defined as connection speeds of less than 10 Mbps download and 1 Mbps upload, as can be found in a brief summary in the USDA’s press release addressing the Gilmer County ReConnect award.

Senate Research Office

Elizabeth Holcomb, Director

elizabeth.holcomb@senate.ga.gov

204 Coverdell Legislative Office Building
404.656.0015

Senate Budget and Evaluation Office

Melody DeBussey, Director

melody.debussey@senate.ga.gov

208 Coverdell Legislative Office Building
404.463.1970

Senate Press Office

Andrew Allison, Acting Director

andrew.allison@senate.ga.gov

201 Coverdell Legislative Office Building
404.656.0028

Edited by:

Steve Tippins, Chief of Staff

Senate President Pro Tempore Office

steve.tippins@senate.ga.gov

321 State Capitol Building
404.656.6578