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2022-2023



**Top New Educators Share  
Their Year-One Journey  
from Fear to Fearless**

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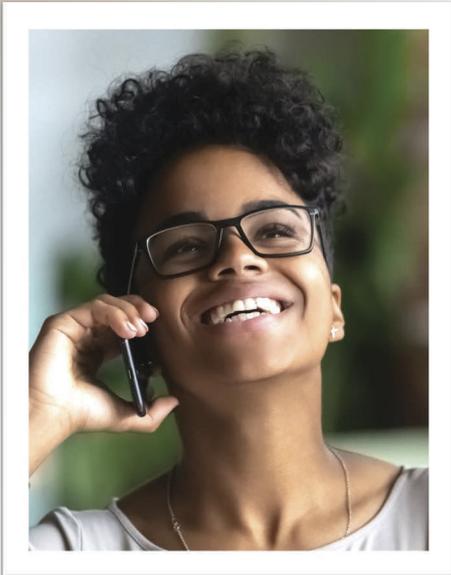


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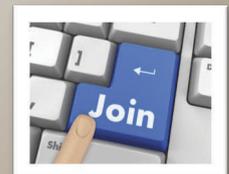
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Craig Harper

By Craig Harper, PAGE Executive Director

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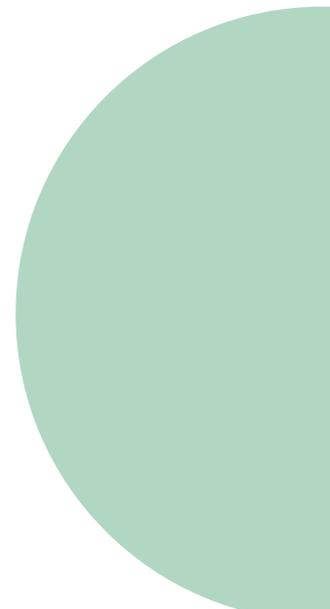




# Top New Educators Share Their Year-One Journey from Fear to Fearless

By Meg Thornton

**B**race yourself. Your first year of teaching will be all-consuming. Everything will be new and will thus require supreme effort. The *PAGE New Teacher Guide* is designed to help make the transition from student to teacher as seamless as possible. In the following profiles, Georgia teachers with just a few years under their belts share how they successfully navigated their first year, and they describe what they learned about teaching — and themselves — along the way.



**‘The hardest part of my job is trying to fill in the gaps in student learning that some students have faced due to COVID.’**



- **Ashlie McWaters**
- 5th Grade Reading/ELA and Social Studies
- Teacher, Lake Park Elementary, Valdosta

Ashlie McWaters, a fifth-grade reading/ELA and social studies teacher at her alma mater — Lake Park Elementary in Valdosta — had just launched her career when COVID struck. As part of the born-with-tech generation, however, teaching virtually did not unnerve her. Instead, differentiation strategies proved trickiest.

“Differentiating is a must so that we can attempt to fill those gaps and still meet the needs of our other students ... but there is only so much one can do behind a computer screen,” she relayed. And even though classroom teaching is back in full swing, the challenge remains. “The hardest part of my job is trying to fill in the gaps in student learning that some students have faced due to COVID. I know fifth grade reading standards like the back of my hand. I know where students should be. But figuring out what instruction they missed in third grade has proven to be a challenge.”

One saving grace has been technology. “Many educational companies were quick to respond to the pandemic, which helped me immensely,” she said. “Companies like Get Epic, Google, Nearpod and Kami (to name a few) were my go-to sites when teaching virtually. I still wanted learning to be interactive and engaging. These companies helped me do that!”

Her students took virtual tours of historical sites in Google Earth and collaborated on lessons via Nearpod and Google Slides. “And when students didn’t have access to books or had read all of their collections at home, Get Epic provided thousands of more titles at their fingertips,” she added.

In addition to her tech prowess, McWaters, a PAGE member, has another natural-born advantage: She hails from a family of educators. Her grandfather is a retired college professor, her father is a principal at Valdosta Middle School, and her sister and brother-in-law also teach at Lake Park, a Title 1 school.

“Not only did I have a lot of great teachers in my family, I also had many wonderful teachers in grade school who inspired my love of education,” she said. “Teaching at the same school I attended as a child is incredibly special to me.”

McWaters’ teaching philosophy is grounded in the wisdom of the best advice she ever received about teaching: Love your students.

“I took this advice a little lightly at first. I thought, loving your students is a must if you get into education!” she said. “But it is such



Ashlie McWaters

great advice and I have learned that it should not be taken lightly at all. My classroom is like a second home for my students. They know in my room they are loved, welcomed and respected. I can’t teach them if they have other worries on their minds.”

That mindset proves especially helpful when teaching her most vulnerable students. “I have learned that challenging students usually have a deeper-rooted issue that we may not be aware of. Whether that be challenges at home, struggling with friendships or something medical; it is so important to have patience with students. Showing them a bit of grace and that you care can establish a level of respect between you and your students that will go a long way. We have to love them first and teach them second.”

McWaters said that when she first entered the profession, the hardest part of her job “was facing the fact that I was not going to physically teach my students at the end of the year and see them off to middle school. Not having a sense of normalcy was a struggle for me. We did get to do a drive-thru celebration to end the school year and I was able to see most of my students and tell them bye in person,” she added.

Not having an in-person connection to



parents was also hard. “We couldn’t have room moms, allow them to eat lunch with their children, and we had to have parent meetings virtually,” among many other restrictions.

“I think parents felt left out of their children’s education in a way. Last year and this year I have increased my parent communication to help alleviate those concerns,” she said. “Even though we can’t meet in person, a phone call goes a long way. I use the Classroom Dojo app so parents can message me instantly and I can keep them updated with any school events, grades, photos and much more instantly.”

As to what happily surprised her the most, McWaters doesn’t hesitate: “How resilient children can be. They have been through so much these past few years due to the pandemic and yet they continue to come to school with smiles on their faces. They continue to give their education their all.”

To protect her own mental health, the Valdosta native follows sage advice. “A retired teacher once told me to never bring school work home. There are days that I do, but I limit them. When I am home, I spend time with my family. When I am at school, my focus is on my students. Keeping the two separate is so important to your mental health.”

Last December, McWaters completed a master’s degree in elementary education from Columbus State University. In 2019, she graduated from the University of Phoenix with a bachelor’s in elementary education.

### ● **Yadira Hernandez**

- 3rd Grade Teacher, Myers Elementary
- School, Gainesville

Although most students who attend Myers Elementary in Hall County are Hispanic, third-grade teacher Yadira Hernandez communicates with them flawlessly. Hernandez, a Gainesville native, is bilingual. She also minored in Spanish and studied abroad as a student teacher in Valencia, Spain.

“I never had a bilingual teacher growing up, which made it difficult for me my first year of school, since Spanish was my first language,” said Hernandez. “Being fluent in both Spanish and English, I knew how much of an impact I could make for students who only spoke Spanish by becoming a teacher.”



Yadira Hernandez

While studying at the University of North Georgia, Hernandez interned for two years at Myers Elementary in her hometown. She never looked back. “I had the opportunity to work with new students from Spanish-speaking countries. Seeing the faces of those students when they realized their ‘teacher’ spoke Spanish and was able to help them — it lit up their spirits and gave them peace knowing someone understood them,” she said. “It allowed them to feel comfortable during the few hours we got to work together.”

Still, when Hernandez took over her own third-grade class at Myers in 2020, she faced common first-year struggles. “What I found to be most challenging in my first year was familiarizing myself with the curriculum and making sure I understood the content before I taught it to my students. I struggled with the idea of creating effective and authentic lesson plans,” she said. Support was found in her grade-level team, however. “We plan collaboratively, which allows us to share and bounce ideas off each other, taking some fear off my shoulders as a new teacher,” she said.

At first, Hernandez also feared not being a “good” and “effective” teacher. “However, I learned that the first year of teaching is a learning experience and you have to adapt. Things do not always go as planned. I’ve had failures and successes, curveballs and opportunities for growth. Now, I just take it one day at a time, take what works, and go with it,” she added.

Another challenge during the historic year of 2020 was teaching remotely. “It is hard to build student-to-teacher relationships through



**‘I never had a bilingual teacher growing up, which made it difficult for me my first year of school, since Spanish was my first language.’**

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a screen,” said Hernandez, who is thankful she only had to teach virtually for part of her first year. “Considering my age, you would think virtual teaching would be easy, but it was not,” she said. Hernandez added that she did not realize how advanced technology was until she had to teach through Zoom. “I now understand the importance of technology and its power.”

The third-grade teacher places high importance on social-emotional learning; her top priority is creating a safe and positive learning environment. “From day one, I establish a family-like relationship with my students. We often take time from our day to have ‘family time,’ in which students share anything with the class. Students love to talk and they especially love to share things that are happening in their lives,” she added. Kindness is the focus of many conversations and activities (such as students creating supportive cards for one another), and each morning, her students proudly exclaim “I am strong! I am brave! I am kind! I can do anything! I love myself and I’m beautiful!”

To help track her students’ well-being, Hernandez has them complete an SEL check-in on their computers weekly. “It allows me to see how they are feeling and opens up conversations with individual students about their worries/fears,” she said.

Learning about student hardships is the hardest part of her job. With challenging students especially, she has learned to be very patient and to love on them. “Often students struggle at school because they may be having difficulties at home that they have no control over. Often, they are seeking attention. It is very important to build trust with students — especially our challenging ones — in order to establish a real and functional student-to-teacher relationship,” she said.

To protect her own mental health, Hernandez practices self-care. “At first, it was difficult because a teacher never really stops working, and when you do, you often feel guilty for taking time to focus on yourself. However, I learned that in order for me to be an effective teacher, I needed to take care of myself by practicing self-care and doing things I enjoy, such as watching Netflix, exercising, grabbing a coffee and going on little adventures.”

When asked what pleasantly surprised her most as a new teacher, Hernandez does not hesitate. “Realizing the true power that one has. Teachers are more than ‘just’ teachers for students,” she said. “Students spend so much time with us that you feel as if they are your own children and you want to love them, teach

them, guide them and protect them. Teachers have power to help students grow to become successful, to challenge them, to believe in them and to push them to be the best that they can be,” she added.

The best advice she ever received about teaching is to “remember my ‘why.’” In high school, when Hernandez thought about becoming a teacher, she was inspired by her teacher and coach. “She would constantly say to me, ‘You are blessed with talent, use it to make a positive difference.’ Through teaching, I have the ability to make a positive difference.”

While at the University of North Georgia, Hernandez was a part of the RISE program, which covered all of her tuition and materials needed to become a teacher. She graduated in May 2020 with a degree in elementary and special education, a reading endorsement and a minor in Spanish.

## ● Tyler Sapp

- 5th Grade Math Teacher, Bleckley County
- Elementary School, Cochran

Tyler Sapp was understandably anxious when he took over his own classroom in January 2021 at Bleckley County Elementary School in his hometown of Cochran and where he had served as a student teacher. “I was most nervous about being a new teacher, starting in the middle of the year, still being in my undergraduate program, and having two weeks of Christmas break to prepare for the rest of the year,” he recalled.

But his mentors buoyed him.

“I overcame my nerves by talking with my education professors at Middle Georgia State University and my mentor teacher at Bleckley County Elementary,” he said. “They reassured me that I would do great things, and they were there to support me in any way.” Sapp also keeps top of mind the words of a veteran teacher who advised him while student teaching. “She said, ‘Your first year will be difficult, and lessons will not go like you planned them, but it will be okay because it will make you a much better teacher. I have told myself this several times and it’s what gets me through the tough times,’” he said.

The next big challenge for the conscientious fifth-grade math teacher was time management.

“When I first began my teaching career, I was arriving at school an hour early, staying several hours after 3:15 p.m., and coming to work on the weekends for several hours. I felt as if I had to so I could get everything accomplished for



**‘I communicate with parents on a daily basis via remind messaging, text, calls, emails, parent teacher meetings and through student agendas. However, I do so much communication, I forget to log it on my parent contact log.’**

each day,” he said. “After my intern year, I quickly realized that if I continued to have that schedule, I would be burned out by year five.”

So last summer, Sapp developed an ambitious yet effective schedule that he sticks to. “This year, I still arrive one hour earlier to school each day. This time allows me to make sure I am ready for the lesson, and to get mentally ready for the day,” he said. “I make sure that when I have a few minutes to work during the day, I work productively for those few minutes. Then at the end of the day, I spend 30 minutes to an hour answering emails, making copies, talking with other teachers, contacting parents, cleaning my room and lesson planning. When I leave, I do not take anything with me. I have figured out that if I leave empty handed, I won’t go home and work for several more hours.” However, each Sunday afternoon, Sapp can still be found deep in thought in his classroom “because it’s a quiet place to reflect on my lesson plans and prepare for the week.”

An avid communicator, Sapp noted that a continuing challenge for him is logging his conversations with parents. “I communicate with parents on a daily basis via remind messaging, text, calls, emails, parent teacher meetings and through student agendas. However, I do so much communication, I forget to log it on my parent contact log,” he said. “I have gotten better about this by just taking a quick note about each contact I make, and laying it on my desk. Then at the end of the week, I will enter them all in on the log.”

A PAGE member, Sapp has profound gratitude for those who have taught him along the way. In fact, he credits a middle school teacher for influencing who he is today: “In the seventh grade, I had an incredible social studies teacher who made learning exciting and who built relationships with all of his students. After having him again in the eighth grade, I knew that teaching was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.”

As to what students need to develop trust and thus work to reach their potential, Sapp unhesitatingly shares his winning formula: “Laugh with them, tell them you love them and play with them. By doing these three things, your students will respect you, and will do anything you ask of them. Building relationships with



your students is the best strategy I have to offer to new teachers. I spend the first two weeks getting to know my students and connecting with them as much as possible. Once the relationship is built, they will run through a brick wall for you, metaphorically speaking ... kind of,” he quipped.

His other advice is to always remember that every single child is different. “When teaching a challenging student, I have to remember that every consequence, or reward, doesn’t work. I have to work with each student on a case-by-case basis to make sure they succeed,” he said.

Even though Sapp has weathered the always-stormy first year of teaching and has successfully found his footing, his heart breaks a little each day. “The hardest part of my job is learning about the difficulties of students at home. When they hurt, I hurt. I care deeply about my students, and any concerns I have go with me beyond the class period and the school doors,” he said. “I have often lost sleep or lost my appetite because I knew that one of my students was struggling at home.”

Due to the kindness of his students, however, Sapp’s days are also filled with joy. “I was most surprised about how caring my students were,” he said. “I was worried that I would have a difficult time making connections with my students because I was coming in the middle of the year and disrupting their lives. However, by building relationships with them and showing them I cared for them, I was able to become their ‘champion.’”

Above his board is a motto that Sapp said his students and he live by. It says “Make Amazing



*Continued on page 12*

Things Happen” (M.A.T.H.). “I encourage my students to M.A.T.H. every single day. I encourage them to work hard and to never give up.”

New to the profession last year, Sapp was largely able to avoid the worst of the COVID lockdown and enjoy in-person teaching. But last year, he provided virtual instruction for students who were exposed to or who contracted COVID. As a Google-certified educator, levels 1 and 2, he was highly capable and efficient.

Sapp earned an associate of science in early childhood education degree from Georgia Military College in 2019. Last year, he graduated from Middle Georgia State University with a bachelor of science in early childhood/special education with a reading endorsement. And this summer he is on track to complete a master of education in curriculum and instruction at Georgia College and State University.

● **Alexis Fuller**

- 4th Grade Teacher, Fountain Elementary
- School, Forest Park

Alexis Fuller dreamed of being a teacher since she was four, but when she first graduated with a degree in early childhood education, she was panic-stricken. “What if I get there and mess it all up?” she thought. She truly believed that by making one mistake, she could jeopardize the future of a student. She also feared being judged

harshly by colleagues if her actions or questions to them revealed that she had a lot to learn about teaching.

“I take being a teacher very seriously, because children are our future. I want to ensure that any student that comes out of my class is set up for greatness, but I feared not being able to provide that for them,” she said.

Once she stepped into her role at Fountain Elementary School in Forest Park, however, her fears abated. “It definitely was a mind thing and I was completely wrong.” What helped her most was believing that God would not give her a failing plan and her strong mentor support. She internalized the words of her mentor, Mrs. June Nelson: “You are the CEO of your classroom! You must love your students and require their respect.” Fuller’s newest mentors, her fourth-grade team members at Fountain Elementary, showered her with support from day one. They helped her set up her classroom, shared valuable insight and were nonjudgmental as Fuller learned the ropes. “They were there every time I started leaning in the wrong direction, and they have yet to lead me wrong,” said Fuller, who often refers to her team members as her “work mom and auntie.”

Fuller bonded with her students quickly. “I gave each of them my heart,” she said. “I instantly became a mom to 25 kids, a therapist, an open-ended diary, an encourager, a hair stylist, a role model, and all of those in between,” she said. “I got to know each student on a case-by-case basis — what they enjoy, what they want to become when they grow up, the challenges that they face, honoring their birthdays, and so much more.”

Knowing her students well allows Fuller to set behavioral as well as academic goals for each of them. For example, she rewards a student who loves to play UNO the chance to play on Fun Fridays. “It motivates her to work hard and behave well,” she said. Fuller also creates a safe space for her students by allowing them to confide in her without the fear of judgment.

The 2020 magna cum laude graduate is humbled by the tremendous influence she has on her students. “I always knew that teachers leave footprints in the lives of their students, but I am surprised at how big that



‘I always knew that teachers leave footprints in the lives of their students, but I am surprised at how big that footprint is.’



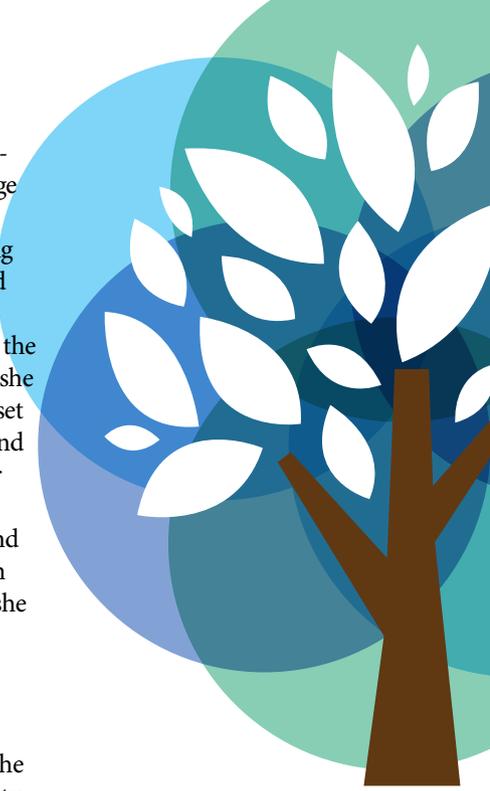
footprint is,” she said. For example, Fuller’s students know full well that their teacher is a proud member of Theta Xi Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority — and now the girls in her charge aspire likewise. “They often exclaim, ‘Oh, I want to be an AKA. Ms. Fuller, can you get me a shirt? Ms. Fuller, I wore pink and green for you today,’” she said. “It is the small and detailed moments that let me know the great impact I have.”

Clayton County’s emphasis on social-emotional learning also helps fuel teacher-student bonds. Mornings start with an SEL-related activity. These practices give Fuller insight into each student’s state of mind. “They are great conversation starters and can help deescalate a situation,” she said. “It’s a tool that I will forever carry in my toolbox.”

However, a troubling aspect of her work at the Title 1 school is the language barrier she faces with her non-English speaking students. It pains Fuller that she cannot communicate as deeply with such students, but she is confident that they feel her love and support. “And it is such a glowing moment when students pick up English,” she added.

Managing her responsibilities without sacrificing her mental health remains a challenge for Fuller, who often attends non-classroom student events, such as Saturday cheerleading competitions. “I overcrowd my schedule and have a hard time saying no, especially to my students,” she said. However, understanding the importance of work/life balance, Fuller said she sets aside Saturdays for hitting the pause/ reset button, spending time with family, friends and of course her line sisters. On Sundays, Fuller completes lesson plans, grades assignments and creates her upcoming week’s agenda. And because she is currently earning a master’s in secondary education, also at Clark Atlanta, she tends to her own studies as well.

A native of LaGrange, Fuller participated in PAGE’s Future Georgia Educators in high school. At Clark Atlanta, she experienced leadership roles and service opportunities. She is grateful for her family, mentors, community and alma mater for molding her into the person she is today. Her favorite verse, and one that helps her overcome daily challenges, small and large — is Clark Atlanta’s motto: Find a Way or Make One!



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# It's About Getting to Know Your Students

By Tom Krause

It is normal for a beginning teacher to ask, “How am I doing?” More experienced teachers, however, learn to be more concerned about “How are my students doing?” To grow as a teacher, the focus must come off oneself and on to the students, and the only true way to know how your students are doing is to get to know them.

## The Teacher/Student Connection

A young teacher was having trouble controlling her classroom. Frustrated to tears, she told a successful co-worker how nothing she had tried worked and that students seemed to be daring her to punish them. The fledgling teacher

dreaded walking into her room each day, and she was already thinking of leaving the profession.

The experienced educator took out a piece of paper and instructed her co-worker to write down everything she knew about each student. The teacher was at a loss for words. Besides the names of the students, she could barely describe anything else about them.

Her colleague then gave the teacher an assignment. She was to interview each student individually to learn as much about them as she could. During the interviews, the new teacher began to make connections with each student. Almost immediately, the atmosphere

in the room changed. The teacher learned that her real source of power does not come from the student discipline code; it comes from her positive connection with the students.

You'll discover that the more you know about each student, the wiser you become as a teacher. Many studies have found that a strong teacher/student connection brings positive results. Test scores increase, discipline referrals decline and the overall atmosphere in the classroom improves. If you have the opportunity, drive by the homes of your students to see the environment from which they come. That could explain why your students may feel your room is the best place they see all day.

President Theodore Roosevelt once said, “People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.” The same applies to students. The personal connection a teacher has with the student is the most influential factor in student success. ■

*Tom Krause is a retired Missouri Public School System educator and an international motivational speaker.*

You'll discover that the more you know about each student, the wiser you become as a teacher.

# Dealing With Teacher Evaluations

By Mary Ruth Ray, PAGE College Services Representative

All professionals expect to be held account-able for the quality of their work, and teach-ers are no exception. The implementation of the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) as Georgia's evaluation system for classroom teachers has generated much hype and uncertainty around teacher evaluations, which can be nerve-wracking if not downright scary. Is your future in the hands of students' decisions and abilities (or inabilities)? Will a single test score determine your pay? While policy-makers are wrestling with such issues, teachers can avoid getting overly anxious about their evaluations by keeping a few pointers in mind.

- **It's rarely as bad as the hype.**

**Humans can be excitable creatures.**

Rumors abound, truths get distorted and well, you know the rest. Do your best to tune out the gossip and distill the truths from the abundance of information floating around. TKES includes a mandatory orientation and familiarity component to introduce you to the process. You should also talk with your principal or immediate supervisor in advance of your first observation. Allow them the opportunity to set your mind at ease. They want you to succeed as much as you do. No administrator wants a “fail- ing” teacher. They will eagerly spell out what they will be looking for and how to demonstrate it.

- **New teachers, in coordination with their administration, establish a Professional Learning Plan as part of the evaluation process.** The plan may include your individual professional goals, school improvement goals, district improvement goals or any other district- or school-identified need.

- **View the evaluation as an opportunity for professional feedback, not a pass/fail exam.** If you have a weak point (and who among us doesn't?), you want that pointed out so that you can take steps to shore up that particular skill. After all, our students are the ultimate beneficiaries of our competencies. If your evaluator identifies an area for improvement, don't panic. Discuss it and ask for advice on how to develop that skill. Ask your supervisor to recommend veteran teachers who have expertise in that area with whom you can observe and confer.



- **Be sure you get credit for everything you do.** TKES allows for teachers to provide evidence of a skill not observed. If an evaluator identifies a “needs improvement” area because they did not see you meet a particular standard, you can provide artifacts after the observation that show that you met it.

- **Keep calm and carry on.** While we certainly must be cognizant of what is required of us and meet those requirements, those who have been in education for decades realize that seasons come and seasons go. Changes come and can be challenging, but at the end of the day, the sky never falls as people predict. Seek the advice of quality mentors, do what is required and enjoy the magic of teaching! ■

Talk with your principal or immediate supervisor in advance of your first observation. They will eagerly spell out what they will be looking for and how to demonstrate it.

# Like a Duck on Water

## The Art of Navigating Smoothly Through Your First Year

By Mary Ruth Ray, PAGE  
College Services Representative

An adage says that the perfect host-ess is like a duck on water: calm on the surface but paddling like heck underneath! I have found that good teaching is the same. Have you ever noticed how excellent teachers make it look so easy? Their feathers aren't ruffled, and their classrooms seem to run themselves without a ripple. How do they do it? They would probably be the first to tell you that despite all appearances of calmness, they are indeed paddling like there's no tomorrow, but there are also some tricks of the trade that can help even novice teachers conduct smoother-running classrooms. Here are a few strategies that I found particularly helpful.

● **Look ready.** During pre-planning, you will be overwhelmed with things to do from lesson planning, meetings and permanent records, to securing textbooks and other materials. Prioritizing is a must.

Standing in the doorway during class changes lets you monitor behavior in the hall and your room at the same time, and you are positioned to curtail a situation before it blossoms into a problem. Furthermore, greeting each student with a warm welcome sets a positive tone for class.

It was most important to me to get my physical environment ready, especially before an open house. When students and parents first meet you, they should observe that you are organized and ready to teach. An unfinished, messy classroom communicates the opposite. They won't know if your permanent records haven't all been filled out, but they will notice the unfinished bulletin board or the fact that you had to scramble to find a copy of your school supply list. As a first-year teacher, you may not "feel" ready for your first day of school, but you can look ready!

● **Keep your classroom organized and tidy, and teach your students to do the same.** A neat, uncluttered environment promotes calmness and security for you and your students. A chaotic environment can have the opposite effect and unintentionally communicate a haphazard approach to learning. Teach students to straighten their desks or chairs and pick up paper off the floor before leaving. Live by the old saying, "a place for everything and everything in its place." My desk would accumulate papers throughout the day and become quite a mess, but each afternoon I cleaned, graded and filed until it was all gone. Before I left, a printed copy of my lesson plans for the next day and all necessary materials were laid out neatly enough that if a substitute had to be called in





If Katelyn is playing at her desk rather than participating in class discussion, inconspicuously drop a note on her desk that reads, “I think you would have some good ideas to share if you will pay attention. Thanks!”

unexpectedly, he or she could walk in and teach my lessons without missing a beat.

● **Assign a seating chart — at least until you know your students’ names.** I always kept the seating chart for each class in front of me so that I could call on stu-

dents by name from day one. This makes the student-teacher interaction more personal and promotes the idea that you know what’s going on and are “in charge.” If you are resistant to the idea of assigning seats to older students, allow them

Train your students to begin working on the warm-up activity without having to be told. This takes advantage of every instructional minute and prevents behavior problems that arise from “down time.” It is also a helpful way to review previously taught skills. To be effective, the warm-up activities need to be meaningful, and students must know they will be held accountable for getting the work done.

to select their own desks on the first day, make a note of the seating arrangement and ask that they stay in those same desks for two weeks until you learn everyone’s name.

● **Create routines that are not dependent on you.** The more you can make the classroom run itself without your direct involvement, the more you are free to teach students. For instance, I took attendance each morning with a shoebox and clothespins. Each student had a clothespin with his or her name on it clipped to the side of the shoebox. As a student arrived in the morning, he or she unclipped that clothespin and dropped it in the box. After class was underway and I had a free moment, I could look at the clothespins left “standing” and easily see who was absent. Other ideas include training students to turn in homework to a specific location as they enter the room and assigning students to water plants or feed the class hamster. One exception to this rule is class dismissal. I recommend establishing that you, not the bell, dismiss the class. Otherwise, you have chaos break out when the bell interrupts you mid-sentence while you are giving important, last-minute homework instructions.

● **Greet your students at the door.** Much misbehavior begins in the hallway and is brought into the classroom. Standing in the doorway during class changes enables you to monitor behavior in both the hall and your room at the same time, and you are positioned to curtail a situation before it blossoms into a behavior problem. Furthermore, greeting each student with a warm welcome sets a positive tone for class.

● **Have a warm-up assignment ready as students enter.** Younger students may have a coloring sheet, while older students may have a math word problem or writing prompt. Train your students to begin

I recommend establishing that you, not the bell, dismiss the class. Otherwise, chaos breaks out when the bell interrupts you while you are giving important, last-minute homework instructions.

working on the warm-up activity without having to be told. This takes advantage of every instructional minute and prevents behavior problems that arise from “down time.” It is also a helpful way to review previously taught skills. Keep in mind that in order to be effective, the warm-up activities need to be meaningful, and students must know they will be held accountable for getting it done.

● **When possible, use low-profile interventions.** All the routines and procedures in the world are not going to completely prevent behavior problems. Prepare ahead of time how you will address inappropriate actions and, when possible, intervene as privately as you can. This gives the student the opportunity to correct his or her behavior rather than feeling the need to “save face” in front of the class. For instance, if Katelyn is playing at her desk rather than participating in class discussion, inconspicuously drop a note on her desk that reads, “I think you would have some good ideas to share if you will pay attention. Thanks!” Keeping the intervention positive and encouraging gives the student every reason to cooperate. More serious or chronic misbehaviors may need stronger intervention, but a private conference after class will be more effective than raising your voice.

● **Learn that “fair” is not always “same.”** Early in my career, I felt trapped by the notion that I should treat all students the same, because I thought this was only fair. In time, however, I came to realize that “fair” is not always “same.”

I used a shoebox and clothespins to take attendance. Each student had a clothespin with his or her name on it clipped to the side of the shoe box. As a student arrived, he or she unclipped that clothespin and dropped it in the box.

Students have individual needs, learning styles and circumstances. You certainly want to have consistent rules and policies and be careful about making exceptions, but allow yourself room for professional judgment. I had a student who was severely hyperactive. Without the help of his medication, he literally could not keep still. He would put one knee in his seat, the other foot on the floor and bounce like a basketball. Furthermore, he was constantly traveling back and forth to the pencil sharpener. No amount of pleading, cajoling or threatening could stop him, or if it did stop him, he was unable to concentrate on his work from concentrating on staying still. So, acting on advice from a veteran educator, I moved his desk to the back of the room right next to the pencil sharpener and gave him carte blanche to bounce and sharpen to his heart’s content. Because he was in the back, his movements were not distracting to his classmates, and his mind was free to concentrate on his work. The system worked beautifully. Of course, it wouldn’t have made sense to allow this freedom to everyone in the class, but for this student it was the fairest thing I could have done.

● **Don’t go it alone.** Before actually having one’s own classroom, it is difficult to realize how isolating teaching can be. For much of the day you are confined to the four walls of your classroom and are often the only adult within them. You will need to be intentional about seeking advice and ideas from your colleagues. Ask your principal for opportunities to observe outstanding teachers and for

them to observe you to give you feedback. Plan lessons collaboratively within your grade level or department. Reflecting on your craft and discussing it with colleagues can be invaluable. However, be

sure to select colleagues who are positive and professional. Planning sessions that morph into gripe sessions are counter-productive and can undermine your effectiveness and personal satisfaction on the job.

● **Give yourself the gift of time.**

A new teacher should understand that despite years of quality preparation, the first year is hard. It is hard and exhausting. You will wonder what you have gotten yourself into, and yes, there will be days when you want to quit. Do not

You will be surprised how much easier your second year is, and your third will be even easier. It never gets easy, but it does get easier. Most new teachers need about five years to really hit their stride and get truly comfortable.

let this alarm you. I shed many tears and made more than my share of mistakes during my first year. So now that you know to expect, what do you do? You keep at it. You will be surprised how much easier your second year is, and your third will be even easier. It never gets easy, but it does get easier. Don’t make a decision to leave the profession before teaching at least three years, but preferably five. Most new teachers need about five years to really hit their stride and get truly comfortable. Don’t walk away before giving yourself adequate time to discover how good you really are. ■

*PAGE College Services Representative Mary Ruth Ray is passionate about mentoring tomorrow’s teachers. An Agnes Scott College honor graduate, Ray was Tattnell County’s Teacher of the Year while at Glennville Elementary. She serves on the Tattnell County Board of Education.*

# The ABCs of ‘Educationese’

One of the challenges with any new career is learning the vernacular of the field, and education is no different. In an effort to help you develop fluency in “Educationese,” PAGE has assembled a reference list of commonly used acronyms — some specific to the field of education and some general.

AASA: American Association of School Administrators	FERPA: Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act	Educationally	QBE: Quality Basic Education
ADA: Americans with Disabilities Act	FFCRA: Families First Coronavirus Response Act	IAP: Individualized Accommodation Plan	REP: Remedial Education Program
ADD: Attention Deficit Disorder	FGE: Future Georgia Educators	IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act	RESA: Regional Educational Service Agency
ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	FICA: Federal Insurance Contributions Act (Social Security Tax)	IEP: Individualized Education Plan	RIF: Reduction in Force
AP: Accommodation Plan (Section 504 Students)	FIP: Formative Instructional Practices	ILT: Instructional Lead Teacher	RTI: Response to Intervention
AP: Advanced Placement	FTE: Full Time Equivalent	ISS: In-School Suspension	SAAC: Student Assessment Advisory Committee
BEOG: Basic Education Opportunity Grant	FY: Fiscal Year	IT: Instructional Teacher	SBD: Severe Behavior Disorder
BST: Basic Skills Test	GACE: Georgia Advisory Council on Education	ITV: Instructional Television	SDD: Significant Developmental Delay
CAP: Corrective Action Plan	GACIS: Georgia Association of Curriculum and Instructional Supervisors	IU: Instructional Unit	SEBD: Severe Emotional Behavior Disorder
CBA: Curriculum-Based Assessment	GACTE: Georgia Association for Career and Technical Education	LAPS: Leader Assessment Performance Standard	SED: Severely Emotionally Disturbed
CCGPS: Common Core Georgia Performance Standards	GACTE: Georgia Association of Colleges for Teacher Education	LBOE: Local Board of Education	SGM: Student Growth Model
CCRPI: College and Career Readiness Performance Index	Gael: Georgia Association of Educational Leaders	LD: Learning Disability	SI: Speech/Language Impairment
CEC: Council for Exceptional Children	GAESP: Georgia Association of Elementary School Principals	LEP: Limited English Proficiency	SIA: Special Instructional Assistance
CEU: Continuing Education Unit	GAMSP: Georgia Association of Middle School Principals	LKES: Leader Keys Effectiveness System	SID: Severe Intellectual Disability
CIEA: Coalition of Independent Education Associations	GASCD: Georgia Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development	LRE: Least Restrictive Environment	SIP: School Improvement Plan
CO: Central Office	GASPA: Georgia Association of School Personnel Administrators	LUA: Local Unit of Administration	SIS: Student Information System
COE: Code of Ethics or College of Education	GASSP: Georgia Association of Secondary School Principals	MEA: Migrant Education Agency	SLD: Specific Learning Disability
CPI: Certified Personnel Information	GaTAPP: Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy	MID: Mildly Intellectually Disabled	SLDS: Student Longitudinal Data System
CRT: Criterion-Referenced Test	GBOE: Georgia Board of Education	MIMH: Mildly Mentally Handicapped	SLO: Student Learning Objective
CTAE: Career, Technical and Agricultural Education	GCASE: Georgia Council of Administrators of Special Education	MOD: Modification	SLP: Speech/Language Pathologist
DFCS: Department of Family and Children Services	GEER: Governor’s Emergency Educational Relief (Fund)	Mold: Moderately Intellectually Disabled	SOE: Schools of Excellence
DOE: Department of Education	GKAP: Georgia Kindergarten Assessment Program	NBPTS: National Board for Professional Teaching Standards	SOP: Standard Operating Procedure
DOL: Department of Labor	GMAS: Georgia Milestones Assessment System	NRT: Norm-referenced Test	SPLOST: Special Local Option Sales Tax
DPH: Department of Public Health	GPEE: Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education	NTE: National Teacher’s Examination	SREB: Southern Regional Education Board
EBD: Emotional/Behavioral Disorders	GPS: Georgia Performance Standards	OCGA: Official Code of Georgia Annotated (state law)	SSI: Supplemental Security Income (Social Security)
ECE: Early Childhood Education	GSSA: Georgia School Superintendents Association	ODD: Oppositional Defiant Disorder	SST: Student Support Team
EIP: Early Intervention Program	GTAPP: Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program	OHI: Other Health Impaired	STAR: Student Teacher Achievement Recognition
ELG: Education, Leadership Georgia	H/H: Hospital/Homebound	PAGE: Professional Association of Georgia Educators	STAR: Student Transition And Recovery
ELL: English Language Learners	HI: Health Insurance	PBIS: Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports	S-T-W: School to Work
EOCT: End of Course Test	HIPAA: Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act	PDP: Professional Development Plan	SY: School Year
EOGT: End of Grade Test	HOPE: Helping Outstanding Pupils	PF: Pay for Performance	TAP: Teaching As a Profession
ESL: English as a Second Language		PL: Public Law	TAPS: Teacher Assessment Performance Standards
ESOL: English to Speakers of Other Languages		PLU: Professional Learning Unit	TESOL: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages
ESSA: Every Student Succeeds Act		PO: Purchase Order	TKES: Teacher Keys Effectiveness System
ESSER: Elementary & Secondary Emergency Education Relief (Funds)		PR: Percentile Rank	TOTY: Teacher of the Year
F & RP: Free and Reduced Price Policy		PSC: Professional Standards Commission	TRS: Teacher Retirement System
F2F: Face to Face (Learning)		PSERS: Public School Employees Retirement System	VAM: Value-Added Model
FAPE: Free Appropriate Public Education		PSRS: Public School Recruitment Services	WFH: Work from Home
FBA: Functional Behavior Assessment		PTA: Parent-Teacher Association	YAP: Youth Apprenticeship Program
		PTO: Parent-Teacher Organization	YTD: Year to Date
		PTSA: Parent-Teacher-Student Association	

# Surviving Year One

## Seven Secrets to Being a Happy Teacher

By Mary Ruth Ray, PAGE College Services Representative

It's here! You've survived years of preparation, satisfied graduation requirements, and passed your certification exam, but now comes the real test: your first year of teaching! And it will be an intense test. Fortunately, you don't have to be miserable during one of the toughest experiences you will ever have. Here are seven secrets to being a happy teacher—even during your first year.

### Mama told me there would be days like this

Why does mama tell us this? Because knowing that “those days” are coming helps us understand that when they hit, it's perfectly normal. When you find yourself crying tears of exhaustion and frustration, know that you are not alone. We've all cried those tears. And we survived. And you will, too. If you find yourself saying, “There's no way I can do this for 30 years,” you're right. And you won't have to because the other 29 years are not nearly as difficult as the first year. So when those days come, don't panic. Remember that this is normal, and it's not permanent.

### The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing

It's easy to be overwhelmed by the challenges of the classroom — piles of paperwork, diverse needs of students, discipline issues, etc. And while we must address those challenges, we need not dwell on them incessantly and allow them to distract us from our real purpose. Remind yourself why you are here — to make a difference in the lives of these students. Focus on them. Get to know them. Enjoy them. Be their biggest cheerleader. Celebrate their successes. Keep a journal of the “light

bulb” moments and reread it often. As the old saying goes, “Love them first. Teach them second.” They are the main thing.

### Watch your mouth!

Believe it or not, the words that come out of your mouth have a powerful effect. I learned this lesson vividly somewhere around my third or fourth year of teaching. Our team of 5th grade teachers had fallen into a poisonous habit of complaining about our students at the lunch table. (I know you've been warned about the teacher's lounge, but the lunch table can be equally as dangerous!) When it dawned on me how much of my lunchtime conversation was consumed with speaking ill of students, I was shocked and ashamed, and I vowed in that instant that I would speak only positively of children in my charge. Naturally, there were times when I had to talk frankly with my colleagues about challenges certain students were facing, but I did so professionally and with the children's best interest in mind.

The result was more astonishing than I dared to dream. There was an inexpli-

Remind yourself why you are here — to make a difference in the lives of these students. Focus on them. Get to know them. Enjoy them. Be their biggest cheerleader. Celebrate their successes.



cable change in the atmosphere of my classroom! Even though these children never heard the complaining words I was speaking, when I stopped those toxic utterances, something changed. Probably in me, but it was tangible. I'm not suggesting that this is a magic cure for all behavior problems, but keeping a careful watch on your words will help your attitude immensely. And your attitude has a huge effect on how your students respond to you.

### Keep your balance

It's critical to keep a healthy balance between your work and your personal life. Don't allow your work to consume you. Be intentional about caring for yourself and your family and friends. Go for a walk, take a bubble bath, read a good book. Have family game night, enjoy dinner together, watch a funny movie. You get the idea. But the point here is don't wait until all your schoolwork is finished before you do these things. Those papers may not get graded until tomorrow, but the world will keep on spinning. Fiercely



guard your time with family and friends as well as your alone time. A happier person is a happier teacher.

### The Marigold Effect

Gardeners know that some plants when planted alongside others help to nurture and protect their neighbors. Other plants do the opposite and can be toxic to those around them. Marigolds are one of the best companion plants because they repel bugs and fungal diseases. The point? Surround yourself with marigolds! Seek out positive, supportive teachers in your building. My daughter, a ten-year veteran teacher, says, “Find a hall buddy that will listen to your vent session and vent with you. But after it’s all off your chest, that same hall buddy will fill your cup with positivity.” When you hit a tough time, be sure to deliberately seek encouragement from a marigold who is a veteran teacher who can not only support you but also offer sage advice.

### I Have to and I Can’t

Years ago I read about a teacher who did

an exercise with her high school students where she gave them two sentence prompts and told them to complete the sentences:

I have to ...

I can’t ...

What followed was a fascinating read, but the gist is that she showed them that they really don’t have to do anything. When they said they “had to” go to school, she countered that there are plenty of dropouts who don’t go to school. They were choosing to go to school to avoid the negative consequences of dropping out. In their first sentence, she had them cross out “have to” and replace with “choose to.”

For the second sentence, one student said he couldn’t get an A in algebra, but when pressed, he finally admitted that if he hired a tutor, stopped playing sports and neglected his other studies, he could get an A. She had them cross out “can’t” and replace with “don’t want to badly enough.”

The lesson here is quite empowering. Try replacing “I have to grade these papers” with “I choose to grade these

papers because I want my students to get feedback on their work” and see what happens! Instead of saying “I can’t get all these essays graded over spring break,” say, “I don’t want to grade all these essays over spring break badly enough to miss out on time with my family.” The results are empowering and freeing!

### Make up your mind

Abraham Lincoln once said, “Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be.” Determine that you will be happy in your classroom. Lessons will flop, technology will fail, students will misbehave. But you don’t have to allow these things to dictate your feelings. If you wait until everything is perfect before you are happy, you’ll have a long wait. Did you know that while driving, if you look over to one side, you naturally steer to car toward that side? Where you focus is where you tend to end up. We often have a natural inclination to dwell on the things that bother us. If there is one student we can’t seem to reach, we forget about the other 24 who are doing well. Be intentional about steering your thoughts toward the good. For example, I hate folding clothes. I mean, I really hate it. While I’m standing at the dryer and I realize I have some “stinking thinking” going on in my head, I will say to myself, “I am so glad I have a family. I grateful for each person who lives in this house and wears these clothes.”

Another tip to deliberately keep your thinking steered in the right direction is to write down positive quotes and place them in your classroom, on your bathroom mirror, etc. Here’s a good one from Martha Washington to get you started: “I am determined to be cheerful and happy in whatever situation I may find myself. For I have learned that the greater part of our misery or unhappiness is determined not by our circumstance but by our disposition.”

Make up your mind that you will control your thoughts rather than them controlling you.

In summary, there’s no escaping the challenges your first year of teaching will bring. But these seven secrets will go a long way toward keeping your sanity and finding joy in the journey. ■

# There's Value in Getting to Know Your PAGE Membership Services Representative

By Nancy Ratcliffe, Retired PAGE Membership Services Representative

As a new teacher years ago, I learned the value of building relationships with school support personnel — secretaries, custodians, cafeteria workers and bus drivers. While teachers and administrators are highly visible in schools, support personnel make the school function smoothly.

Another valuable relationship to build is with your PAGE membership services representative (MSR). We provide Georgia educators with real-time connections to legal, legislative and member services, while fostering professional relationships with every staff member in our schools.

New teacher orientation usually provides the first opportunity to meet your PAGE MSR. Throughout Georgia, 16 MSRs and their consultants attend orientations (often bearing gifts) to welcome new teachers to their systems. During the school year, you'll also likely see your PAGE MSR at a faculty meeting or meet-and-greet session. Please become acquainted with your MSR. He or she always has useful "freebies" as well as important information regarding legislation, the State Health Benefit Plan (SHBP), Professional Standards Commission (PSC), Teachers Retirement System (TRS) and more. You might also see your MSR accompanying a PAGE attorney for a no-cost code of ethics presentation in your system or school. It's also a good idea to have your MSR's contact information handy.

While MSRs don't provide legal advice, we can assist you in contacting one of the six PAGE staff attorneys, or you can always contact the legal department directly. Attorneys are available during business hours; however, if attorneys are speaking with other members, assistants can arrange for your call to be returned after hours. During the legislative session, PAGE lobbyists are the eyes, ears and influential voice of Georgia educators at the Capitol, and they produce the "Capitol Report," a summary of education legislation. Annually, in mid-February, PAGE sponsors PAGE/



PAGE representatives (l-r) Mary Ruth Ray, B.J. Jenkins, Larrell Lewis-Oliver, Nancy Ratcliffe (retired), Gina Tucker, Diane Ray, Shirley Wright

GAEL/GACTE Day on Capitol Hill. This is an opportune time to personally meet with your senator or representative and hear from House and Senate education leaders.

Throughout the year, PAGE also attends meetings of influential groups and reports on salary, retirement, insurance and certification information. PAGE MSRs then forward this information to school building contacts (BCs), who forward it to PAGE members. You may also receive reports directly by signing up at [www.pageinc.org](http://www.pageinc.org).

You may sometimes see a PAGE MSR

teaching a high school class in the Early Childhood Education or Teaching as a Profession pathway. After all, most PAGE MSRs are former classroom teachers.

Finally, in a time when teachers are often taken for granted, PAGE believes that you and your colleagues provide Georgia families with unparalleled services. One of the many ways we like to acknowledge that is with treats. So, if your "chocolate first-aid kit" needs to be restocked, look no further than your PAGE MSR. We know that sometimes chocolate is the best medicine. ■

## Brand New Teacher or in a New System? Upgrade or Update Your Membership

Brand new teachers often ask about upgrading their PAGE student memberships, while transferring teachers inquire about maintaining their PAGE professional coverage in their new systems. Student members, please remember that once you signed your employment contract, you became a teacher. Your PAGE student membership must be upgraded to professional status to maintain liability coverage. PAGE offers a first year, half-price discount to student members upgrading to professional membership, so be sure to take advantage of this opportunity.

If you have moved to a new school system and were previously enrolled via payroll deduction, please be aware that you must complete a new application (online at [www.pageinc.org](http://www.pageinc.org) or on paper) to maintain coverage, including continuous liability protection and access to PAGE staff attorneys. If you pay by credit card, visit [www.pageinc.org](http://www.pageinc.org) to update your system and school information.

Questions? Contact us at [info@pageinc.org](mailto:info@pageinc.org)

# Tips for Heading Off Legal Problems

By Jill Hay, PAGE General Counsel

**A**s the new school year begins, there is always an excitement, especially for new teachers. However, along with the excitement comes some apprehension about the unknown. What if you get a student who occasionally exhibits violent behavior? What if a parent is overly protective of his or her child and would not hesitate to file a lawsuit against you for the slightest slipup on your part? Or, what if you have a new principal who scrutinizes and second-guesses everything you do?

To help you avoid legal problems, follow this advice:

- Report suspected child abuse in writing within 24 hours of the time you first have reason to believe that a student in your care has been abused. Keep a copy of that report for your records. In most Georgia school districts, you are to report the suspected abuse to a designated authority in your school. (However, some districts have you report directly to DFCS.) Check your school's written policy. "Child abuse" means physical injury or death inflicted upon a child by a parent or caretaker by other than accidental means; neglect or exploitation of a child by a parent or caretaker; emotional or sexual abuse of a child; or sexual exploitation of a child.
- Report all incidents of bullying in writing as soon as possible: physical, mental or cyber. Keep a copy of that report for your records.
- Do not permit a student to be alone with you in a closed area. Furthermore, do not drive a student home from an after-school event unless absolutely necessary, and even then, always have another person in the car with you. If at all possible, secure written permission from an administrator.
- Force against a student may not be used unless it is absolutely necessary to defend yourself or protect someone else from injury.
- Do not leave your class unattended, especially if a fight has started between students. In case of such emergencies, have a designated student in your class go to the front office for assistance. Teachers have a duty to exercise proper supervision over students in their classes and reasonable care to prevent injury to them.
- Corporal punishment may only be administered by the principal or the principal's designee and authorized by written policy adopted by the school board. Even if you are authorized to administer corporal punishment, strict guidelines must be followed.
- Do not search a student's body (i.e., "strip search") even if you believe you have probable cause that warrants a search. In almost every case, strip searches of students are found to be a violation of students' Fourth Amendment rights.
- Do not change a young child's underwear or diapers unless another adult is present.
- Follow the chain of command if you have a complaint. First, go to your immediate supervisor, and then move up the chain of command.
- Do not tutor one of your students for compensation or solicit parents or students to purchase goods or services from you.
- Keep accurate records and receipts in the collection and disbursement of school monies (for example, school clubs or athletic events).
- Always maintain a professional relationship with students, even if they may be close to your age. Do not have a relationship with a student outside of school or school activities. This includes contacting students over social media.
- Do not establish electronic relationships with students through email, text or social media that do not relate directly to school. Any use of electronic communication with students should first be approved by your administrator. ■



## ***Code of Ethics for Educators***

# **Handle IEP Documents and Child Abuse Reporting with Extreme Care**

By Matthew M. Pence, PAGE Staff Attorney

One of the most important areas of school law in Georgia is the Professional Standard Commission's implementation and interpretation of the Code of Ethics for Educators. The Code of Ethics defines the required professional behavior of educators. All educators in Georgia, from paraprofessionals to superintendents, hold a license issued to them by the PSC. Failure to follow the Code of Ethics can result in the PSC issuing sanctions against an educator's certificate.

The Code of Ethics consists of 10 standards of conduct. It

is imperative for educators — not those just newly certified — to maintain familiarity with all 10 standards. While some unethical conduct is very clear (i.e., don't become romantically involved with a student), there are seemingly murkier areas where educators often have the right intentions, but those intentions lead to the wrong results. Two areas that pose potential minefields for educators are handling Individualized Education Program documents and mandated reporting of child abuse.



Do not sign an IEP document without having an IEP meeting with everyone in the room at the same time. Sporadic contact, such as phone calls to parents regarding the IEP, emails among faculty members about the IEP, or discussing the case outside of the IEP meeting, does not constitute the actual IEP meeting.

### Individualized Education Program Documents

An IEP document is a federally mandated document for children with special needs and/or learning disabilities. Generally, an IEP document identifies the student and his/her disability, and it includes accommodations that the school must implement in order for the child to be successful. IEPs are governed by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

There are several mistakes in the IEP process that may result in a sanction from the PSC. First, drafting, revising, updating or amending an IEP requires an IEP meeting. This meeting involves the parent(s), student, special education teacher, regular education teacher and administrator. At the end of the meeting, each person involved signs off on the IEP. Do not sign an IEP document without having an IEP meeting with everyone in the room at the same time. Sporadic contact, such as phone calls to parents regarding the IEP, emails among faculty members about the IEP, or discussing the case outside of the IEP meeting, does not constitute the actual IEP meeting.

No educator should sign his/her name unless he/she was actually in the meeting with all of the others present. Such action, in the eyes of the PSC, constitutes dishonest conduct under Standard 4. Moreover — and this should come as no surprise — there is no reason to sign someone else's name to an IEP. This also is considered unethical conduct under Standard 4.

Failure to implement the IEP does not always constitute unethical conduct; however, it could result in the parent filing a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education. For example, if the IEP mandates that a student must have all assessments read aloud to him/her, then this must happen, even if the student indicates that he/she wishes to waive the right. While this may not be considered unethical conduct, it could result in adverse employment action, such as a reprimand, termination or non-renewal.

### Required Reporting of Child Abuse

Georgia law mandates that all school employees are required reporters of child abuse. Ethically, this is codified as Standard 8. If you suspect that a child has been abused, you must report your suspicions in writing within 24 hours. Most school systems in Georgia require that an educator submit this report to someone at the school, such as a school counselor or administrator. Some school systems require educators to report directly to the Department of Family and Children Services. Regardless, it is important for all educators to familiarize themselves with the reporting procedures of their respective district at the beginning of the school year.

Failure to report child abuse often results in the PSC issuing severe sanctions, particularly when a child has been harmed after the educator became aware of the abuse. Because of the criminal component of the reporting statute, several Georgia educators have been arrested for failure to report. Educators who file mandated reports should also keep thorough documentation regarding the report.

All PAGE members confronted with questions about ethics should contact the PAGE Legal Department for guidance. ■

# Legal Rights & Responsibilities of Georgia Educators

By Jill Hay, PAGE General Counsel

## Contracts

Educators must have a signed contract of employment to teach in a Georgia school system. Contracts are binding agreements between an educator and the state or local employer. A contract can be terminated by:

- Mutual agreement, which means by resignation of the employee and acceptance of the resignation by the employer; or
- Dismissal from employment for cause.

Resigning without the employer's consent constitutes breach of contract and abandonment of position. In such cases, the Georgia Professional Standards Commission may sanction one's teaching certificate and the school system may pursue legal action for breach of contract or seek liquidated damages — if permitted by the contract.

## Tenured and Non-tenured Employees

Contracts have a one-year term; there is no guarantee that you will be offered a new contract. That situation changes if the educator has signed four consecutive, full-year, full-time teaching contracts in the same school system; or if the employer has failed to notify the employee of non-renewal of contract for the fourth year by May 15. Once the employee has signed a fourth, full-year, full-time consecutive contract by the same employer, he or she enjoys "tenure," which means that the school system must renew your contract year after year, unless good cause for non-renewal can be shown.

If a tenured employee transfers to a different school system, the time needed to become tenured in the new system is shortened to one year plus the acceptance of a second-consecutive contract; or if the employer failed to notify the employee of nonrenewal of contract for the second-consecutive year by May 15.



A school system can choose to non-renew the contract of a non-tenured teacher by sending written notification of non-renewal by May 15. Upon the request of a non-renewed employee, state law requires local systems give a written explanation for the reasons of non-renewal.

Charter and Strategic Waiver systems/schools can be exempt from the state law that affords an educator tenure. If an educator teaches in one of these districts, he or she should consult their board policies to see if the district still retains the right to tenure.

## Termination and Suspension

An educator may have his or her contract terminated or suspended for the following reasons: incompetency; insubordination; willful neglect of duties; immorality; inciting, encouraging or counseling students to violate any valid state law, municipal ordinance or policy or rule of the local board of education; reducing staff due to loss of students or cancellation of programs; failure to secure and maintain necessary educational training; or any other good and sufficient cause. A suspension without pay

must be preceded by formal charges and a hearing. A temporary relief from duties is always given with pay and occurs when the educator's alleged conduct is of such a nature that his or her continued presence in the classroom or administrative office is indefensible. In the case of temporary relief from duties, a hearing to adjudicate the charges must be made available to the educator within 10 working days after he or she has been relieved from duty.

Insubordination is the willful non-adherence to a reasonable direct order issued by a proper authority. More often than not, insubordination and willful neglect of duty go hand in hand.

## School Board Records

Pursuant to the Georgia Open Records Law, all state, county and municipal records, except exempted records, are open for inspection by any Georgia citizen. The person in charge of the records has up to three business days to determine whether a requested record is accessible under the law.

Records not subject to public disclosure include the following:

- Records that reveal a public school employee's home address, home phone number, Social Security number, insurance or medical information.
- Performance evaluation records. (Performance evaluations shall not be transferred to another employer or potential employer, unless authorized in writing by the person who was evaluated.); and
- Confidential evaluations/references submitted in connection with the hiring of an employee. The right of privacy extends only to freedom from unnecessary public scrutiny. It does not protect a legitimate inquiry into the operation of a government and those employed by it. ■

# Teaching Remotely During COVID

The following Q&A was provided to educators during an earlier stage of the COVID pandemic. As we hopefully move past the pandemic, the following information can be applied to anyone working from home or a remote location.

## **Am I still responsible for keeping student information confidential?**

Yes, to the best of your ability. To ensure that student confidentiality is maintained, it's important to follow your district's guidelines for online teaching. Only use approved systems to administer online content. Do not invite anyone into your class sessions that does not have an educational need to be there. Do not take and share screen shots of your classes for anything other than educational purposes. Can I record my students? Again, follow the districts requirements. Some districts require classes to be recorded while others do not allow classes to be recorded. When in doubt, ask your administrator.

## **Can I get in trouble for something a student, parent or admin sees on my screen?**

Yes, it's important to remember that you are a professional and need to maintain the same professionalism on screen that you would maintain in your classroom. This includes, dressing professionally, controlling the sounds in the background, and controlling what can be seen in the background of your screen.

## **Does my duty to report abuse/neglect extend to things I see online?**

Yes, you are required to report suspected abuse/neglect within 24 hours of any event that causes you to suspect abuse may be occurring. This includes things you may see online with your students.

## **What is the best way to address safety concerns if I believe my district is not doing all it should to protect the employees?**

If you have any concerns about the safety procedures put in place in your school, we recommend that you address these con-



cerns with your principal and suggest specific solutions. Making your administration aware and having an open dialogue is imperative. If you are concerned about retaliation, put your concerns in writing in an email to your principal. Many times, your administration is just as concerned and looking for ideas to keep students and staff safe. If a principal dismisses your concerns without a response, you can then take your concerns up the chain of command.

## **Is it required that students and staff wear masks and follow social distancing guidelines while in the school building?**

There is no state mandate for masks. Each local school system will have rules or procedures about wearing masks and/or face shields as well as procedures about social distancing. Educators who have concerns should wear their face masks and/or face shields and talk with their principals about how this will be handled at their schools.

## **What should I do if my school system or school asks me to sign a waiver regarding the coronavirus?**

Generally, we advise avoiding signing any waiver unless and until you have

discussed the matter with an attorney. We do not believe that a district can require you to sign a waiver nor do we think a waiver would be enforceable if an employer is guilty of gross negligence. In addition, an employer cannot waive its responsibility under workers' compensation laws. If you are asked to sign a waiver, do not sign it. You should be non-committal if you are asked whether you will eventually sign it. Be sure to contact the PAGE Legal Department as soon as possible to discuss the matter with an attorney. You will probably be asked to submit a copy of the waiver to the department for review.

## **Can I be held liable by the parents if a child in my classroom gets coronavirus at school?**

This is highly unlikely. So long as you follow the safety procedures put in place by your district, you will not be liable for resulting infections.

## **Can I be disciplined for being absent at this time?**

Yes, if your absence is unapproved. To avoid this situation, an employee should always seek an approved leave by their supervisor or central office. ■

# A Dozen Documents to Keep

Whether it is a traditional manila file folder or digital files, make sure to keep important personal and professional records. Such documents provide a clear history and proof of your professional experience and development. Your career may span many years in many locations, and in our hectic society, a key document may be difficult to track down when you need it most.

The following are a dozen document types to keep safely on hand:

**1. College transcripts from every college you attended:** K-12 systems often require that universities send an official transcript directly to them, but a student copy can assist you in completing applications and employment-related papers.

**2. GACE, Praxis or Graduate Record Examination scores:** Obtaining copies of test scores later can be time consuming and expensive.

**3. Letters of recommendation:** Letters of recommendation from principals and peer teachers document your on-the-job performance and are important in determining future career opportunities.

**4. Teaching contracts:** A copy of each signed contract is important because it verifies your employment with a school system and your length of service.

**5. Payroll records:** Pay stubs and tax documents issued by your school system record your salary, as well as your tax deductions, retirement plan, Social Security contributions and insurance costs.

**6. Sick leave:** These records show how much remaining sick leave you have available before deductions are taken from your salary. In Georgia schools, two years of sick leave may be accumulated and used toward retirement upon completion of 28 years of service.

**7. Evaluations and professional development plans:** Retain all documents pertaining to your performance evaluations, responsibilities and employment status, including commendations or recommendations. If you have formally disagreed with any part of an evaluation or professional development plan, attach a copy of your written response to the file.

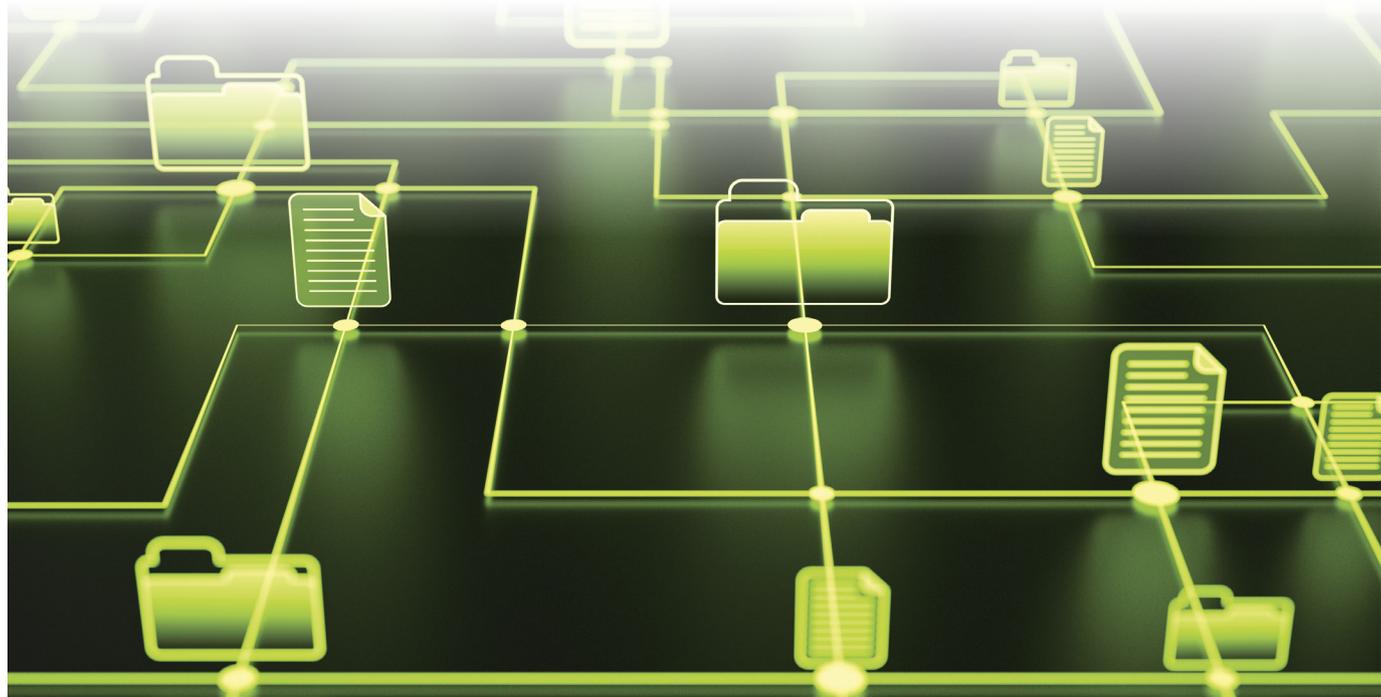
**8. Major correspondence from district administrators:** Letters of appointments to committees, positions of leadership or recognition help build a strong résumé.

**9. Copies (or at least computer screen shots) of conference or workshop programs listing you as a presenter/contributor:** This résumé-boosting documentation will improve your accuracy and confidence in citing your participation.

**10. Activities, accomplishments and awards:** Keep a running list of in-service training, subject specialization, classes/subjects taught, extracurricular responsibilities, special skills and honors/awards. It will make updating your résumé a breeze.

**11. Records of severe student matters:** These records concern any major student problem that involves hearings and/or court proceedings.

**12. PAGE membership:** A current PAGE membership provides you with liability coverage and immediate access to legal advice. ■



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To Be  
Filled

# Lean In, Georgia Educators: Educators Must Be the Most Vocal Advocates of Public Education

By Meg Thornton



Given the massive power and reach of legislation, Georgia teachers must continually take an active role in shaping education policy.

State laws impact all aspects of your work as a Georgia public schools educator — from compensation and benefits, to testing, evaluation, curriculum, class size and rules of conduct. State funding and regulations also determine whether Georgia’s children are afforded an education that fuels lifelong stability and achievement.

Given the massive power and reach of legislation, Georgia educators must continually take an active role in shaping education policy. Lawmakers making education decisions are rarely educators, so they need to hear from us — they need our insight to understand the

impact of their decisions on us and, more importantly, on our students.

People who don’t vote lose their voice in government, yet many educators do not consistently exercise their right to vote or contact elected officials to discuss continued support for Georgia students, schools and educators. It is more important than ever to be politically active.

Furthermore, how can educators who are not even registered to vote encourage students to vote? The best educators practice what they preach.

We cannot simply expect that Georgia K–12 education will be appropriately funded. The state cut billions of dollars



In recent years, Georgia educators have come out in force for the annual PAGE Day on Capitol Hill in partnership with GAEL and GACTE. In fact, educator calls and emails played a major role in convincing lawmakers to increase state funding for schools, improve Georgia's educator evaluation system and scale back plans to divert additional public funds to private schools.



from its education budget over 10 years ago and only recently restored that funding after sustained educator advocacy. Meanwhile, the number of Georgia children living in poverty hovers at about 20 percent.

PAGE brings the message of public education to the General Assembly each and every day, but that alone is not enough. Educators must be the most vocal education advocates. We keep folks informed about what is going on at the Capitol and when it is important to contact your legislator about an important upcoming vote. The bottom line is that it is important for lawmakers to hear from you on key education issues. ■

Lawmakers making education decisions are rarely educators, so they need our insight to understand the impact of their decisions on us and, more importantly, on our students.

## Earn an A+ in Advocacy

Follow these steps to influence policy and make a big difference in Georgia public education:

- Register to vote. It's simple. Register online via the Georgia Secretary of State's office; there's a link on the PAGE website ([pageinc.org](http://pageinc.org)) in the "Legislation" section. You may also register at your local library or when you renew your driver's license.
- Stay abreast of key legislation issues impacting education in Georgia. Visit the "Legislative" tab on the PAGE website at [pageinc.org](http://pageinc.org) to sign up to have the PAGE Capitol Report delivered to your personal email address.
- Learn about the candidates and their positions on education issues. Know if the elected officials serving your area are voting with the best interests of students in mind. Again, PAGE legislative emails are a great starting point.
- Reach out regularly to your representatives. Voice your opinion based on your experience as a Georgia educator. Simply identify yourself, note your role in education, and briefly and professionally state why you oppose or support a bill. Always contact policymakers using personal — not school — email accounts and electronic devices, outside of instructional time.
- Know election dates and be sure to vote. Voting early is easy and convenient. Mark your calendar for early voting dates in your district. PAGE makes this easy by regularly sending voter registration and voter participation announcements.
- Inform others of important education issues, and urge others to register and vote on behalf of students and schools.

# 2022 - 2023 Georgia Department of Education Salary Schedule

FY 2023		STATE SALARY SCHEDULE																		
Proposed		GEORGIA ANNUAL/MONTHLY SALARY SCHEDULE FOR 10 MONTHS EMPLOYMENT																		
		LEVEL OF CERTIFICATION										BASE EQUALS \$39,092.00								
		SCHOOL YEAR 2022 - 2023																		
Years of Creditable Service	Salary Step	T-1		T-2		PROV BT-4		PROV BT-5		PROV T-5		PROV BT-6		PROF T-6		PROF BT-7		PROF T-7		
		94.50% OF T-4	97.25% OF T-4	97.25% OF T-4	99.00% OF T-4	94.50% OF T-4	97.25% OF T-4	94.50% OF T-4	106.50% OF T-4	115.00% OF T-4	113.00% OF T-5	113.00% OF T-5	106.50% OF T-6	106.50% OF T-6	111.00% OF T-6	111.00% OF T-6	106.50% OF T-6	111.00% OF T-6	111.00% OF T-6	
0,1,2	E	\$37,217.00	\$38,154.00	\$38,179.50	\$37,217.00	\$39,092.00	\$41,308.00	\$41,308.00	\$44,206.00	\$44,206.00	\$46,754.00	\$46,754.00	\$49,303.00	\$49,303.00	\$52,183.00	\$52,183.00	\$54,176.00	\$54,176.00	\$54,176.00	\$54,176.00
3	1	\$38,184.00	\$39,149.00	\$39,149.00	\$37,217.00	\$40,115.00	\$42,397.00	\$42,397.00	\$45,382.00	\$45,382.00	\$48,007.00	\$48,007.00	\$50,632.00	\$50,632.00	\$53,598.00	\$53,598.00	\$56,651.00	\$56,651.00	\$56,651.00	\$56,651.00
4	2	\$39,180.00	\$40,173.00	\$40,173.00	\$37,217.00	\$41,168.00	\$43,519.00	\$43,519.00	\$46,593.00	\$46,593.00	\$49,297.00	\$49,297.00	\$52,001.00	\$52,001.00	\$55,056.00	\$55,056.00	\$58,200.00	\$58,200.00	\$58,200.00	\$58,200.00
5	3	\$40,205.00	\$41,228.00	\$41,228.00	\$37,217.00	\$42,253.00	\$44,675.00	\$44,675.00	\$47,841.00	\$47,841.00	\$50,626.00	\$50,626.00	\$53,411.00	\$53,411.00	\$56,558.00	\$56,558.00	\$60,000.00	\$60,000.00	\$60,000.00	\$60,000.00
6	4	\$41,261.00	\$42,315.00	\$42,315.00	\$37,217.00	\$43,743.00	\$46,262.00	\$46,262.00	\$49,555.00	\$49,555.00	\$52,451.00	\$52,451.00	\$55,347.00	\$55,347.00	\$58,620.00	\$58,620.00	\$62,300.00	\$62,300.00	\$62,300.00	\$62,300.00
7	5	\$42,349.00	\$43,434.00	\$43,434.00	\$37,217.00	\$44,905.00	\$47,500.00	\$47,500.00	\$50,892.00	\$50,892.00	\$53,875.00	\$53,875.00	\$56,857.00	\$56,857.00	\$60,229.00	\$60,229.00	\$64,000.00	\$64,000.00	\$64,000.00	\$64,000.00
8	6	\$43,469.00	\$44,587.00	\$44,587.00	\$37,217.00	\$46,701.00	\$49,413.00	\$49,413.00	\$52,957.00	\$52,957.00	\$56,074.00	\$56,074.00	\$59,191.00	\$59,191.00	\$62,714.00	\$62,714.00	\$66,600.00	\$66,600.00	\$66,600.00	\$66,600.00
9,10	7	\$44,623.00	\$45,775.00	\$45,775.00	\$37,217.00	\$47,952.00	\$50,745.00	\$50,745.00	\$54,396.00	\$54,396.00	\$57,606.00	\$57,606.00	\$60,817.00	\$60,817.00	\$64,445.00	\$64,445.00	\$68,400.00	\$68,400.00	\$68,400.00	\$68,400.00
11,12	L1	\$45,812.00	\$46,998.00	\$46,998.00	\$37,217.00	\$49,241.00	\$52,117.00	\$52,117.00	\$55,878.00	\$55,878.00	\$59,184.00	\$59,184.00	\$62,492.00	\$62,492.00	\$66,228.00	\$66,228.00	\$70,300.00	\$70,300.00	\$70,300.00	\$70,300.00
13,14	L2	\$47,036.00	\$48,258.00	\$48,258.00	\$37,217.00	\$50,568.00	\$53,531.00	\$53,531.00	\$57,404.00	\$57,404.00	\$60,810.00	\$60,810.00	\$64,217.00	\$64,217.00	\$68,065.00	\$68,065.00	\$72,200.00	\$72,200.00	\$72,200.00	\$72,200.00
15,16	L3	\$48,297.00	\$49,556.00	\$49,556.00	\$37,217.00	\$51,935.00	\$54,967.00	\$54,967.00	\$58,976.00	\$58,976.00	\$62,484.00	\$62,484.00	\$65,994.00	\$65,994.00	\$69,957.00	\$69,957.00	\$74,200.00	\$74,200.00	\$74,200.00	\$74,200.00
17,18	L4	\$49,596.00	\$50,893.00	\$50,893.00	\$37,217.00	\$53,343.00	\$56,487.00	\$56,487.00	\$60,595.00	\$60,595.00	\$64,209.00	\$64,209.00	\$67,824.00	\$67,824.00	\$71,906.00	\$71,906.00	\$76,300.00	\$76,300.00	\$76,300.00	\$76,300.00
19,20	L5	\$50,934.00	\$52,270.00	\$52,270.00	\$37,217.00	\$54,793.00	\$58,032.00	\$58,032.00	\$62,263.00	\$62,263.00	\$65,985.00	\$65,985.00	\$69,709.00	\$69,709.00	\$73,913.00	\$73,913.00	\$78,400.00	\$78,400.00	\$78,400.00	\$78,400.00
21+	L6	\$52,312.00	\$53,688.00	\$53,688.00	\$37,217.00	\$56,287.00	\$59,623.00	\$59,623.00	\$63,981.00	\$63,981.00	\$67,815.00	\$67,815.00	\$71,650.00	\$71,650.00	\$75,980.00	\$75,980.00	\$80,600.00	\$80,600.00	\$80,600.00	\$80,600.00
		\$4,359.33	\$4,474.00	\$4,474.00	\$3,101.42	\$4,690.58	\$4,968.58	\$4,968.58	\$5,331.75	\$5,331.75	\$5,651.25	\$5,651.25	\$5,970.83	\$5,970.83	\$6,331.67	\$6,331.67	\$6,700.00	\$6,700.00	\$6,700.00	\$6,700.00

## Understanding the Teacher Salary Schedule

Georgia's teacher salary schedule is based on certification levels, education and years of satisfactory experience. Educators with fewer than three years of creditable experience start at Salary Step E. ("E" stands for "entry.")

The state salary schedule represents the minimum that must be paid to teachers. Some school districts add a local supplement set by the local board of education.

Column 1 lists the years of creditable experience. Beginning teachers start at zero.

Column 2 shows the salary steps. Beginning teachers start at Step E.

Columns 3-12 are the state minimum salary for each certification level based on education and experience. The larger figure in each column is the

yearly 10-month salary. The smaller figure is the yearly pay divided by 12 so that teachers receive a paycheck over the summer.

Beginning teachers with a four-year degree who enter the workforce in the fall of 2019 will start at the T-4 level and earn \$37,092 for 10 months (\$3,091.00 per pay period over 12 months).

Teachers who reach Step 7 remain at that level for two years before reaching the L1 step (although

they may receive state or local pay raises). The "L" in steps L1 through L6 stands for longevity. L1 through L5 teachers remain at each salary step for two years before moving to the next step (although they may receive state or local pay increases). L6 educators — those with 21-plus years of experience — receive no step increase, only the state and/or local salary increases.



# READY

## TO ADVANCE YOUR ESOL EDUCATION?

Develop teaching skills and knowledge to better serve the growing culturally and linguistically diverse student population in the state and nation.

Georgia is one of the fastest growing states in the nation, with much of the growth coming from immigrant and non-white communities. Georgia public schools currently educate the eighth-highest number of English learners in the country, with students enrolled in ESOL programs representing more than 6% of the state's K-12 population.

After English, Spanish is the most commonly spoken language in the state. English language learners in Georgia schools are increasingly coming from homes where Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic, and Indian languages are spoken.

*Are you ready to better meet the needs of all your students?*

Upgrade your teaching certificate with our fully online **M.Ed. in Teaching Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students (TCLD/ESOL)**. This degree includes the graduate-level ESOL Endorsement classes embedded in the program as well as six additional courses focused on immigration, educational research, policy, literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy.



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**CHERIE GOLDMAN, '19**

**2022 GEORGIA  
TEACHER OF THE YEAR**

Ed.S. in Teacher Leadership  
ESOL Teacher, Hesse K-8 School  
Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools

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