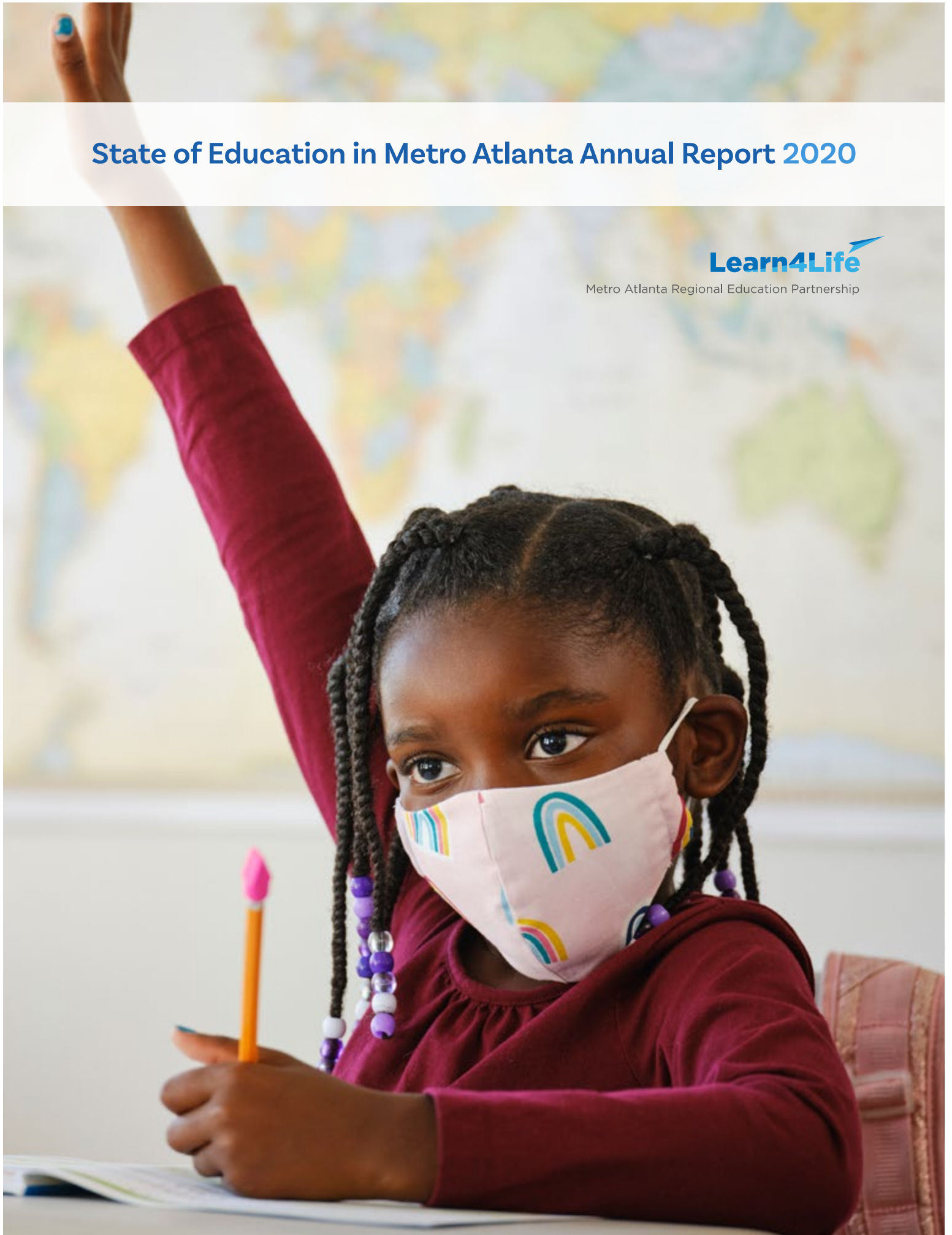# State of Education in Metro Atlanta Annual Report 2020

Learn4Life
Metro Atlanta Regional Education Partnership

Introduction

The events of 2020 have impacted every aspect of our region, and education is no exception. What is the state of education in Atlanta?

Before 2020, education outcomes in Metro Atlanta were improving. This State of Education report shows a steady increase across the key indictors in the cradle-to-career pipeline over the past four years. Inequities still existed, but they were slowly eroding and the region was on a path to narrowing the opportunity gap. That progress was real and did not happen by chance. Students, educators, parents and the community were coming together to support public education.

Learn4Life, true to its mission, supported this growth by lifting up and scaling what is working: now, more children receive free vision tests and glasses, more teachers have access to cutting-edge literacy training, more books are incorporated into pediatric care to encourage families to read and learn together, and additional high school students are receiving the support they need to navigate the challenges of applying for and preparing for postsecondary success.

And then on March 13, COVID 19 upended the school year and student learning.
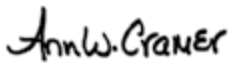
Part of looking forward is taking some time to understand how we got here. This report details the status of the key indicators of progress, the learning loss from COVID-19 school closures, and some bright spots our community has identified which hold promise for a more equitable return to learning.

The COVID-19 pandemic magnifies the economic inequities in our community. Circumstances are demanding isolation, but we are encouraged that the solutions are typically found by learning from each other.

Thanks to everyone, no matter the role, for your contribution in making metro Atlanta a more equitable and prosperous community.

We look forward to your continued partnership.

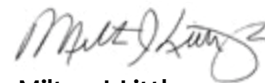## Learn4Life Executive Committee Members

Ann W. Cramer
Consultant,
Coxe Curry & Associates

Douglas R. Hooker
Executive Director,
Atlanta Regional Commission

Milton J. Little
President & CEO,
United Way of Greater Atlanta

Katie Kirkpatrick
President & CEO,
Metro Atlanta Chamber

Frank Fernandez
President & CEO,
Community Foundation
for Greater Atlanta

Ken Zeff, Ed.D.
Executive Director,
Learn4Life

Understanding the Metro Atlanta Region

Atlanta metro is growing quickly, and our demographics are changing. An increasing number of our students experience the adverse impacts of growing up in poverty. They come from diverse backgrounds and are more likely than before to speak different languages at home. To achieve improved results, we must focus relentlessly on strategies that have proven to be successful. This requires an educational framework marked by an emphasis on equity, data-driven decision making and strategic collaboration.

The metro area includes the school districts of:

➤ Atlanta Public Schools
➤ Clayton County Schools
➤ City Schools of Decatur
➤ Cobb County Schools
➤ DeKalb County Schools
➤ Fulton County Schools
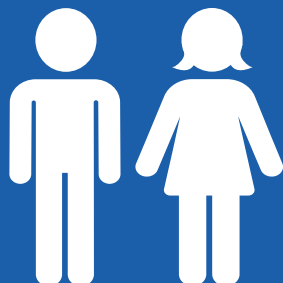➤ Gwinnett County Schools
➤ Marietta City Schools

Five Core Counties

COBB

GWINNETT

FULTON

DEKALB

CLAYTON

K-12 Students

2018-2019

606,974

2010-2011

569,159

Students of Color

78% in 2019
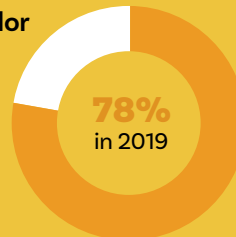
Change in Eight Years, 2011-2019

54,000+

Low-Income

59% in 2019
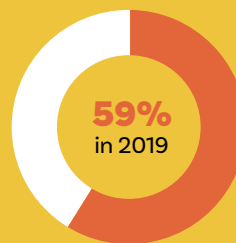
Change in Eight Years, 2011-2019

35,000+

English Learners

16% in 2019
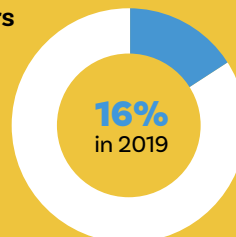
Change in Eight Years, 2011-2019

35,000+

Source: The Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA), 2010-2011 & 2017-2018, Enrollment by Subgroup Programs; Georgia Department of Education, FTE Enrollment by Grade Level(PK-12). Aggregated full-time equivalency (FTE) enrollment counts for school systems.

How We Work

Learn4Life assembles Change Action Networks that focus on improving specific outcomes and key metric indicators. These networks work together to leverage existing resources within our local communities to engage in collective action around a very specific outcome. These teams use data to communicate progress and hold each other accountable, direct action in specific areas of need, and highlight areas of achievement on a wide, metropolitan scale.

THE WORK OF CHANGE ACTION NETWORKS

STEP 1: Convene
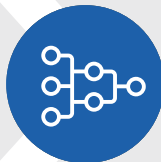Bring together representation from everyone who is invested in these outcomes.

STEP 2: Understand Local Context
Learn about the success and challenges of our region's 600,000 K-12 students and postsecondary students.

STEP 3: Review Data
Outcome and leading indicator data disaggregated by subgroups and correlated with other factors.

STEP 4: Analyze Factors
Review the research on successful strategies, and narrow down to the factors this network can affect and those that will yield strong outcomes.

STEP 5: Identify Bright Spots
Within each factor, there already exist bright spots in our region—practices, strategies, or organizations that are doing 'what works' to get strong results. We find these strategies with the purpose of scaling them so more students receive their benefits.

STEP 6: Develop Action Plans
Once networks identify bright spots, they build, implement, and monitor scaling plans.

Key Indicators for Collective Impact in the Metro Atlanta Region

The Learn4Life Leadership Council identified these six key indicators to continuously measure our students' progress along the cradle-to-career continuum. A common understanding of these data gives our partners the opportunity to measure gains and to support bright spot strategies that are proving uncommon results in each indicator.

Kindergarten Readiness
From ages 0-5, children begin to develop verbal skills that promote kindergarten literacy levels, a determining factor in a child's successful reading comprehension by third grade.[1]

| 2019 | 35% |
| 2017 | 22% |
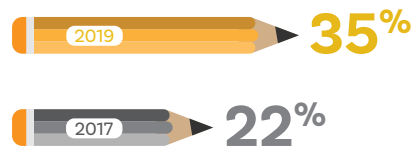
3rd Grade Reading
Children who have not developed reading skills by 3rd grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school.[2]

| 2019 | 44% |
| 2015 | 40% |
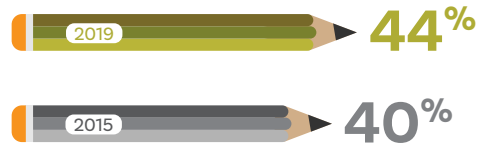
8th Grade Math Proficiency
Mastery of 8th grade pre-algebra predicts success in 9th grade algebra which is the gatekeeper to high school graduation, college readiness and post-secondary completion.[3 & 4]

| 2019 | 45% |
| 2016 | 41% |
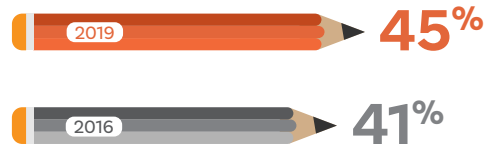
High School Graduation Rate
High school dropouts have higher unemployment rates than high school graduates and are less likely to participate in the workforce.[5]

| 2019 | 81% |
| 2015 | 78% |

Postsecondary Enrollment
By 2025, more than 60 percent of jobs will require some form of postsecondary education.[6]

| 2019 | 73% |
| 2015 | 75% |
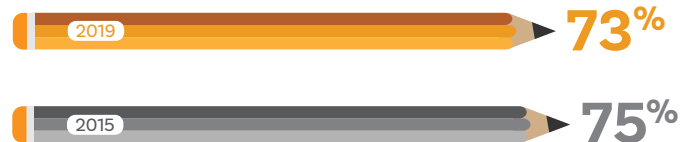
Postsecondary Completion
Postsecondary completers earn 2.5 times more over their lifetime than those with only a high school diploma.[7]

| 2019 | 29% |
| 2015 | 31% |
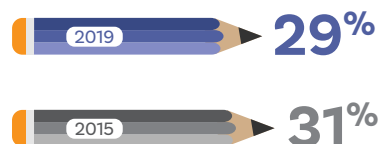
Sources 1-7 can be found here.

Kindergarten Readiness

35% of demand for quality-rated early learning programs could be addressed by current supply.

Core Indicator

Estimated demand and estimated supply as measured by quality-rated early learning programs and school-based Pre-K. This indicator was selected in the absence of a state-wide assessment for kindergarten readiness. Once an assessment is available in Georgia, this core indicator will change. Currently, the estimated demand for early learning programs is 244,019 while estimated supply of quality-rated early learning programs and school-based Pre-K is 85,912.

Impact of the Pandemic

Children who have access to quality early education programs or Pre-K develop cognitive, social and behavioral skills necessar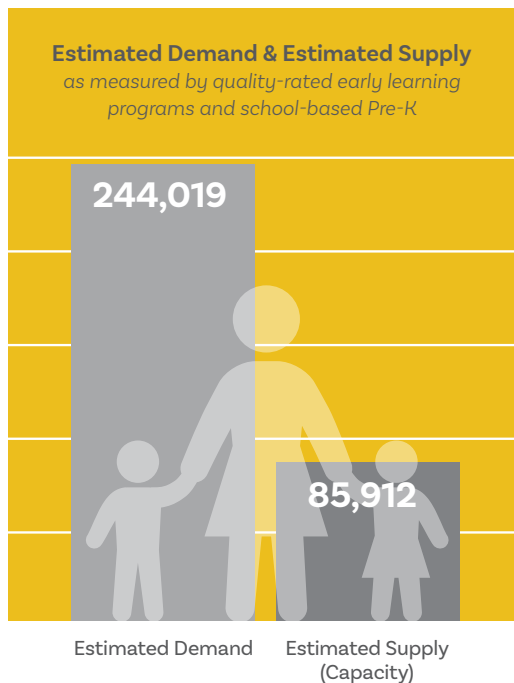y for kindergarten readiness. The pandemic has created more demand, and in some places, less supply, for quality early childhood education seats.

Where Are We Going?

Substantial work is occurring throughout our region to better prepare children for kindergarten. One example is the ATL ACCESS (Atlanta Child Care and Early Learning Supply Status) Map, a new tool to explore the early learning landscape in Metro Atlanta. ATL ACCESS Map models the supply, demand and gaps related to child care in the region. It identifies places where care is most scarce and where investments are most needed.

Estimated Demand & Estimated Supply
as measured by quality-rated early learning programs and school-based Pre-K

244,019 — Estimated Demand

85,912 — Estimated Supply (Capacity)

Georgia Department of Early Childcare and Learning (DECAL) & U.S. Census Bureau 2018 Population Estimates

Gaps in Quality-Rated Child Care

COBB

GWINNETT

DEKALB

FULTON

CLAYTON

- Surplus
- Moderate deficit
- Severe deficit
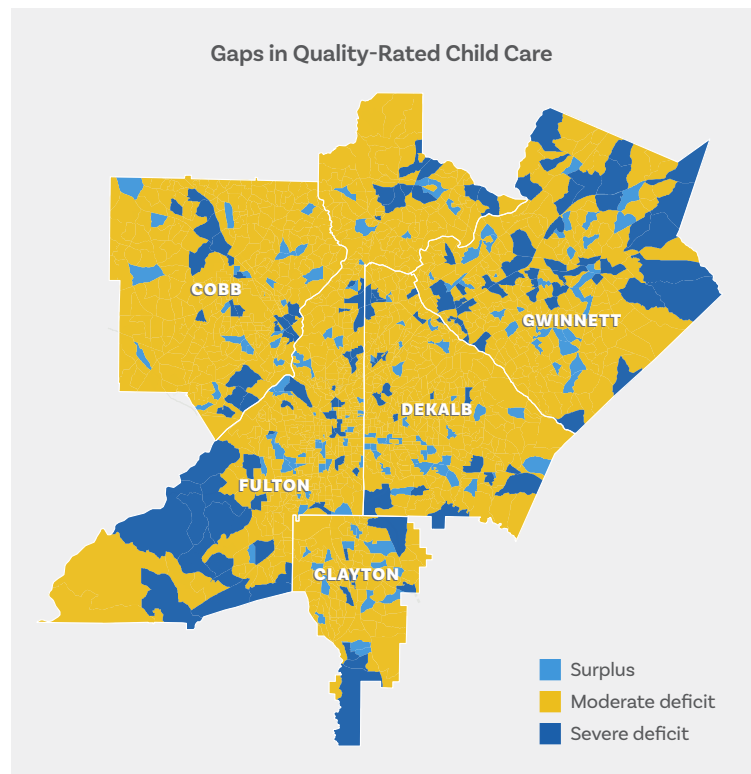
3rd Grade Reading Proficiency

44%
of children are reading proficiently by the end of third grade.

Core Indicator
Percent of 3rd graders passing English Language Arts state standards.

Where Are We?
Approximately 25,410 3rd graders were not reading proficiently by the end of 3rd grade in 2018-2019. Overall proficiency rose from 39% to 44% since last year.

Impact of the Pandemic
At this time, students are making the shift from learning to read to reading to learn. Meeting increased educational demands becomes more 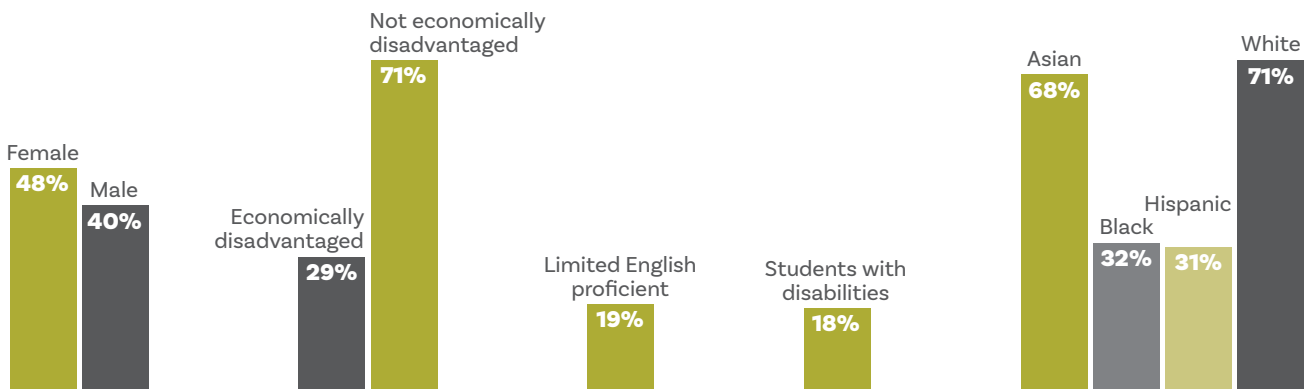difficult for students who struggle to read. Students who do not read at grade level by third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers. Virtual learning, necessitated by the pandemic, makes reading instruction more difficult than in person.

Percent of Students Proficient & Above Grade Level on 3rd Grade Reading

Category	Percent
Female	48%
Male	40%
Economically disadvantaged	29%
Not economically disadvantaged	71%
Limited English proficient	19%
Students with disabilities	18%
Asian	68%
Black	32%
Hispanic	31%
White	71%

Source: GOSA, 2018-2019 Georgia Milestones End-of-Grade (EOG) Assessments (by grade)

3rd grade Reading Factor Analysis
Get Georgia Reading Campaign's research has identified 11 factors that limit a student's ability to read proficiently by 3rd grade. Learn4Life's Change Action Network has identified successful strategies that address three of those factors.

Early Childhood Education	Adult Literacy	Children's Mental Health	Social-emotional Competence
Physical Health	Attendance	Language Development	Summer Learning Loss
Teacher Preparation	Birth Outcomes	School & Classroom Climate	
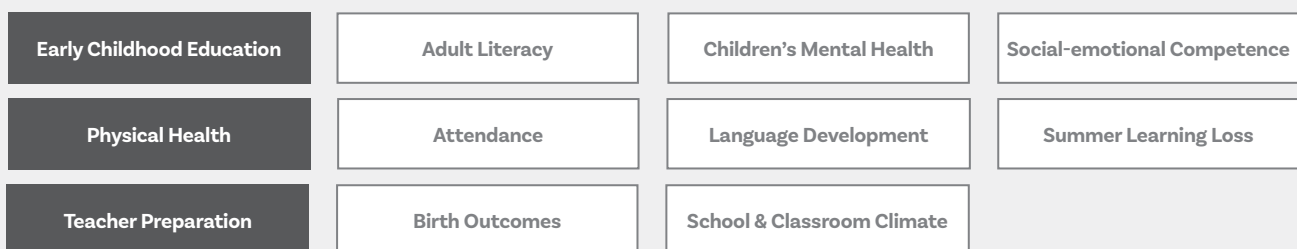
■ Change Action Network focus areas

Eighth Grade Math Proficiency

45%

of children are proficient in math by the end of the 8th grade.

Core Indicator
Percent of 8th graders passing math state standards.

Where Are We?
Approximately 24,706 8th graders were not performing proficiently in math by the end of 8th grade in 2018-2019. Overall proficiency rose from 44% to 45% since last year.

Impact of the Pandemic
To increase the proportion of students graduating from high school prepared for the rigor of postsecondary programs, we must dramatically increa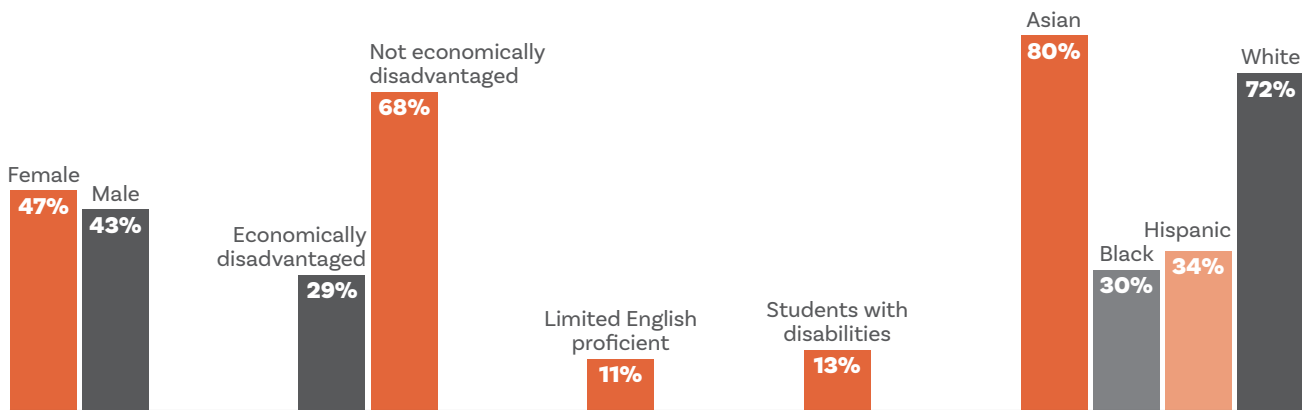se the number of students who achieve proficiency in Algebra — the "gatekeeper" subject — in their middle school or early high school years. Hands-on, experiential learning, which supports mathematical conceptual understanding, was limited in virtual learning.

Percent of Students Proficient in Math by the End of 8th Grade

Female **47%**	Male **43%**		
Economically disadvantaged **29%**	Not economically disadvantaged **68%**		
Limited English proficient **11%**	Students with disabilities **13%**		
Asian **80%**	Black **30%**	Hispanic **34%**	White **72%**

Source: GOSA, 2018-2019 Georgia Milestones EOG + End-of-Course (EOC) Assessments (by grade)

Eighth Grade Math Factor Analysis
L4L's middle school math partners have selected three key factors to focus their work: school culture, interventions for struggling students and teacher effectiveness – all while maintaining the critical lens of racial expectations. The network is now working to identify strategies that are successfully addressing these factors.

Interventions for Struggling Learners	Academic Preparation	Gender Expectations	Racial Expectations
School Culture	Access to Appropriate Technology	Language and Literacy Skills	Relevant Curriculum
Teacher Effectiveness	Access to Rigorous Courses	Math Anxiety	Use of Assessment Data
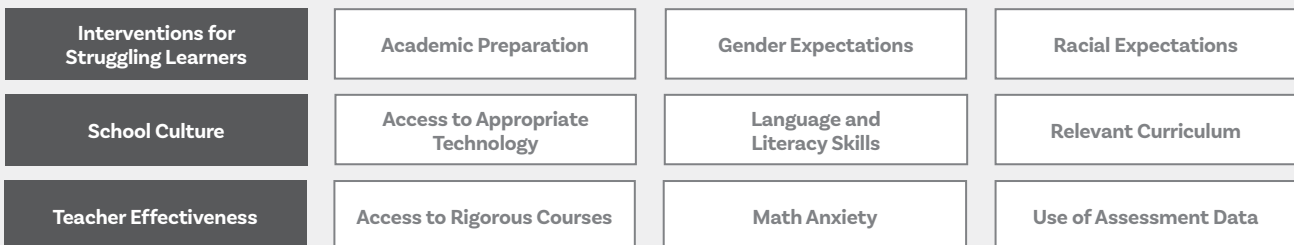
■ Change Action Network focus areas

High School Graduation

81%
of students graduate high school in four years.

Percent of High School Students Graduating in Four Years

Core Indicator
Percent of students graduating in four years.

Where Are We?
The high school graduation remained constant from last year, at 81%. Approximately 8,800 students of the 2019 cohort did not graduate high school in four years.

Impact of the Pandemic
As college education increasingly becomes a necessity for upward mobility, graduating more students from high school is critical. High school graduation is not only a precursor to college enrollment; it is also a major indicator for earnings throughout adulthood. High school graduation has been shown to predict health, mortality, teen childbearing, marital outcomes, and crime. Increasing the educational attainment of one

generation improves the next generation's academic and social outcomes. High school students are heavily motivated by peer interaction and influence, both of which were severely limited by the virtual environment. High school seniors suffered the significant losses of their end of year rituals, including prom and graduation ceremonies.

Where Are We Going?
L4L Districts continue to show progress on this measure by offering additional supports for students and a shared commitment by all stakeholders in the school community. L4L will continue to report on this critical cradle-to-career indicator even though the current strategic plan calls for focusing collective energy on the existing three networks.

Percent of High School Students Graduating in Four Years
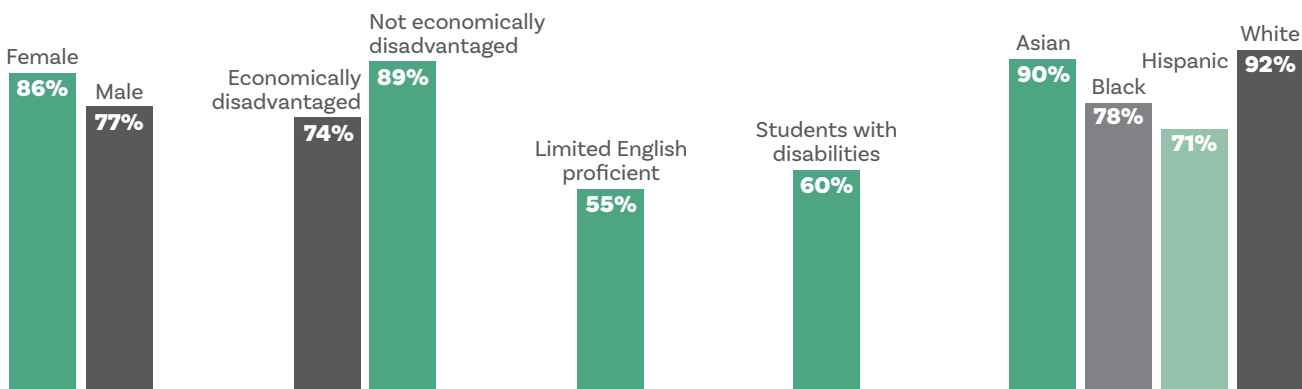
Source: GOSA, 2018-2019 Graduation Rate (4-Year Cohort)

Postsecondary Enrollment

73% of the 2017 graduating class was enrolled in a postsecondary institution within 16 months of graduation.

Core Indicator
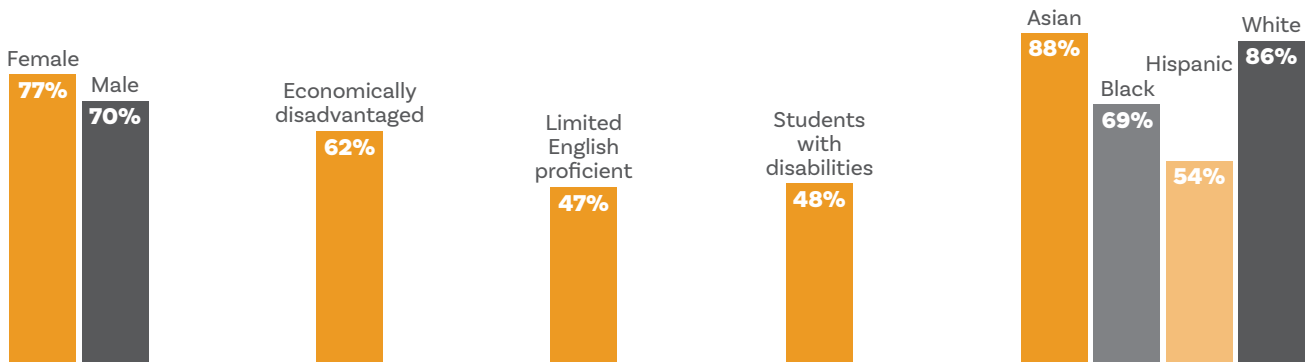Percent of students who enroll in a postsecondary institution within 16 months of graduation.

Where Are We?
73% of the 2017 graduating class was enrolled in a postsecondary institution within 16 months of graduating high school. Roughly 9,824 students who graduated high school in 2017 did not enroll in a postsecondary institution by 2019.

Impact of the Pandemic
As students begin to understand the impact of postsecondary education on their future plans, it is critical to ensure their access to postsecondary program options and financial aid information. Postsecondary credentials are not limited to four-year universities; two-year programs and technical certifications are also valuable in this knowledge-based economy.
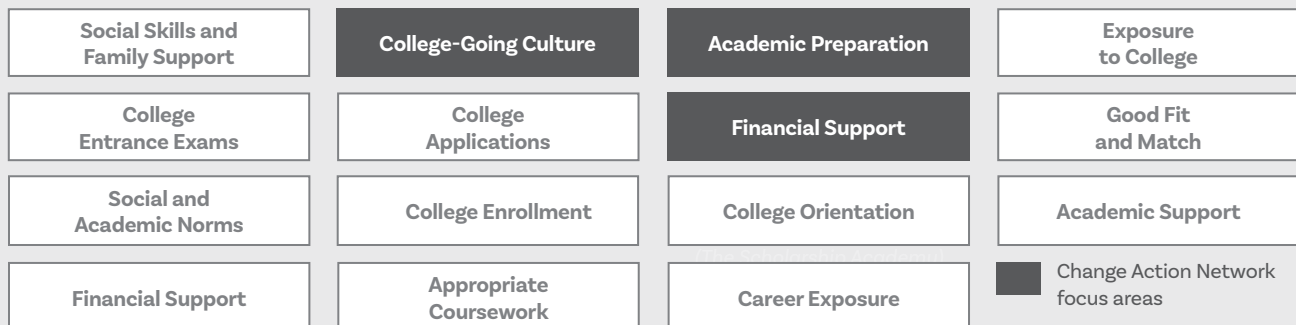
Percent of students who enroll in a postsecondary institution within 16 months of graduation*

Female 77% | Male 70% | Economically disadvantaged 62% | Limited English proficient 47% | Students with disabilities 48% | Asian 88% | Black 69% | Hispanic 54% | White 86%

*Source: GOSA, 2018-2019 Post-Secondary C11 Report; *2017 High School Graduates Enrolled in Post-Secondary Institution within 16 Months of Graduation*

Postsecondary Factor Analysis
Learn4Life's Change Action Network focuses on improving postsecondary success. Strategies in areas highlighted are under way with partners noted. See Postsecondary Bright Spots in the following pages for more information.

Social Skills and Family Support	College-Going Culture	Academic Preparation	Exposure to College
College Entrance Exams	College Applications	Financial Support	Good Fit and Match
Social and Academic Norms	College Enrollment	College Orientation	Academic Support
Financial Support	Appropriate Coursework	Career Exposure	▇ Change Action Network focus areas

Postsecondary Completion

29% of the 2013 graduating class had earned a postsecondary degree or credential by 2018
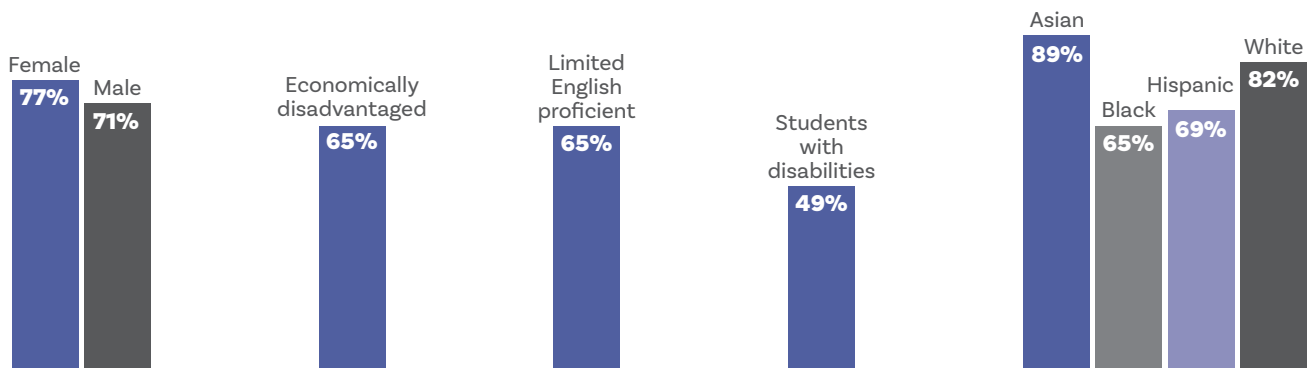
Core Indicator
Percent of students who obtain a postsecondary credential within five years of graduating.

Impact of the Pandemic
By the year 2025, more than 60 percent of jobs will require some form of postsecondary education. Someone with at least a bachelor's degree will earn about two and a half times more over their lifetime than someone with only a high school diploma. Postsecondary attainment, especially for first-generation students, depends heavily on strong interpersonal advising. While many organizations have adapted their advising to virtual models, it is critical that all school districts, college access organizations, and postsecondary institutions find ways to support students virtually in this next school year.

Percent of 2015 graduates that completed one year of credit within 24 months of enrollment

Female 77% | Male 71% | Economically disadvantaged 65% | Limited English proficient 65% | Students with disabilities 49% | Asian 89% | Black 65% | Hispanic 69% | White 82%

*Source: GOSA, 2018-2019 Post-Secondary C12 Report; *2015 High School Graduates that Completed One Year of Credit within 24 Months of Enrollment at a Georgia Institution.*

Learning Loss from Missed Instructional Time

3.6% fewer children are proficient in 3rd grade reading.

Core Indicator

On March 26th, Governor Kemp ordered all schools closed in Georgia as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since milestones assessments were not given in 2020, Learn4Life partnered with redefinED to commission a study to estimate the impact of the lost learning time in 3rd grade English and 8th grade mathematics.

Where Are We?

As a result of lost instruction, about 21,000 fewer students in reading and 29,000 fewer in math are now on track for grade-level proficiency.

Why It Matters

Even with the best efforts provided by districts, schools and teachers, families reported lack of technology and other resources that prohibited some students from participating and engaging in distance learning. Economically disadvantaged students and students of color fell furthest behind. The study projects only three out of ten students from historically underserved groups demonstrated grade-level proficiency at the end of 2019-20, reversing recent gains.

Impact of Pandemic-Related Learning Loss on 3rd Grade Literacy

Indicates percent proficient and above in 3rd grade literacy
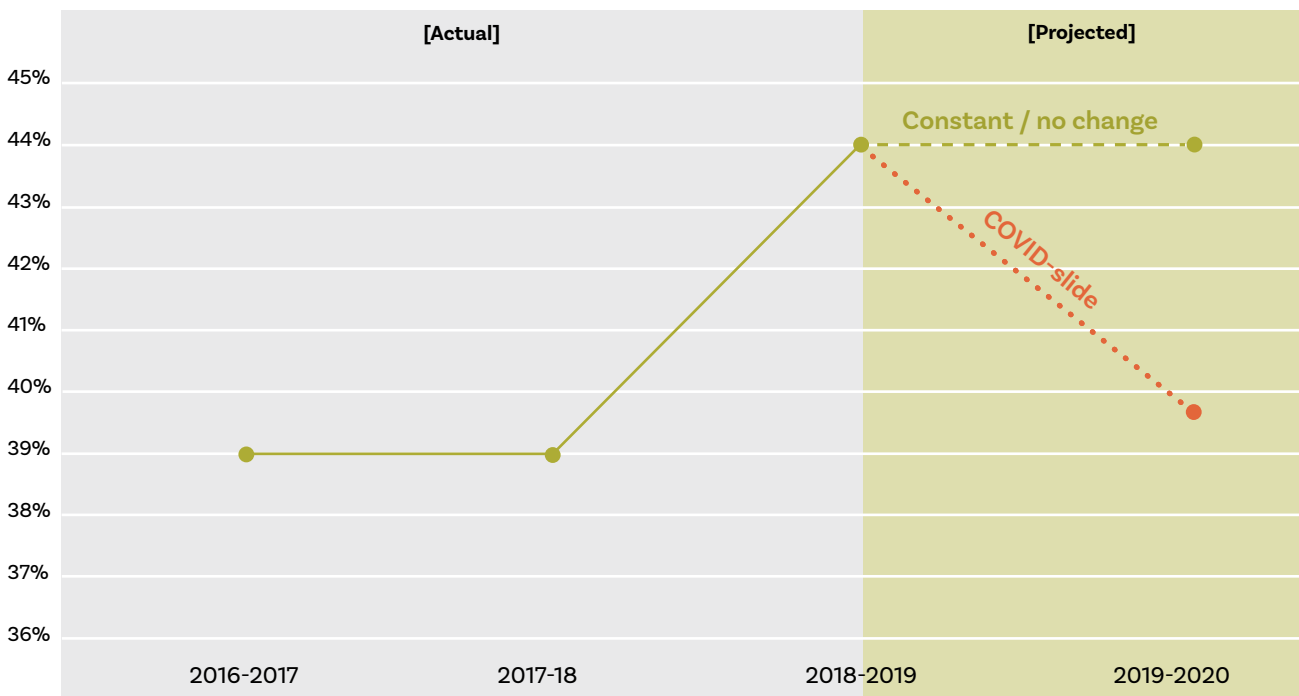
Source: EmpowerK12, 2020. Quantifying the Impact of COVID-19 School Closures on Metro Atlanta School Proficiency.

3rd Grade Reading Bright Spots

Early Childhood Education
Reach Out & Read Georgia

Reach Out and Read Georgia gives young children a foundation for success by incorporating books into pediatric care and encouraging families to read aloud together. ROR GA trains pediatricians to support literacy development in children during well child checkups. Pediatricians discuss and model reading with caregivers, and "prescribe" free books for families to take home. The L4L network is helping to identify financial partners to help scale this work to broaden the program's reach.

COVID shift: *ROR is providing clinics with books that address fears and have themes about feelings and positivity. They have compiled a guide with free online resources including a downloadable parent resource, as well as this Youtube channel of guests reading children's books aloud.*

115,000
Children served in 2019 at more than 160 pediatric clinics across Georgia

Physical Health
Vision to Learn

Vision to Learn provides free vision screenings, eye exams, and glasses to students at their schools. VTL's mobile vision clinics partner with schools with high levels of low-income students to meet this essential need. If students cannot see, they cannot learn to read. L4L is working with a variety of school district and funding partners to support the growth of Vision To Learn throughout the region

COVID shift: *The estimated unmet need for glasses is about 80,000 students in metro Atlanta. VTL has been tirelessly innovating to provide safe screenings during the pandemic.*

5,000+
Pairs of glasses provided to metro Atlanta students

Teacher Effectiveness
Read Right from the Start on the Cox Campus

The Cox Campus offers free, interactive courses and resources based on proven language and literacy practices. The courses present Read Right from the Start brain-based practices, show real teachers using them, and support teachers as they begin to use what they have learned. L4L is facilitating meaningful partnerships with school districts to ensure more teachers benefit from these resources.

COVID shift: *In addition to its online course offerings, Cox Campus has recreated the critical parts of a preschool day – morning songs, story reads, and enrichment activities, and made them available for free online. Each of these is designed to support children's development in empathy, language, and literacy.*

100,000+
Number of educators using

Eighth-grade Math Bright Spots

STEAM Certification
STE(A)M Truck

STE(A)M Truck is a fleet of mobile maker spaces that provides STEM learning to students, and builds capacity in teachers. STE(A)M Truck partners with schools, early childhood learning centers, and after-school programs to provide short and long-term programming.

Of the 8th graders who participate in STE(A)M Truck, 87% show non-cognitive gains, 82% show applied STEM skills improvement, and 70% show improved confidence to choose a STEM career. The L4L network serves as a thought partner and constructive friend as STE(A)M Truck scales their work to more students in metro Atlanta.

COVID shift: *STE(A)M Truck's maker community has come together to support first responders and hospitals by making masks and respirators. Additionally, STE(A)M Truck has shifted its programming to include virtual live and pre-recorded classes, at home STEM activities and resources, and a collaborative educator working group.*

82%
Students show applied STEM skills improvement

STEM Certification
STEM Georgia

STEM/STEAM Certification is the final step of a process in which schools meet rigorous science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics criteria set forth by the Georgia Department of Education. These schools use project or problem-based learning, have strong community partnerships, engage in cross-disciplinary instruction, and students conduct investigative research. The L4L network has identified schools that are in the certification process and is building tools to help them achieve the GaDoE's criteria, especially around business partnerships.

COVID shift: *The GaDOE has shifted the certification process to an all virtual experience for the 2020-21 school year, offering online professional development and learning communities.*

+12-pt
proficiency increase on 8th grade math scores

> **"During these uniquely challenging times, we need to come together as a region and learn from each other's successes. Building community around scaling best practices is at the heart of the work of Learn4Life."**

–Morcease Beasley, Ed.D., Superintendent, Clayton County Public Schools

Postsecondary Bright Spots

College-going Culture
College Advising Corps

College Advising Corps works to increase the rates of college enrollment and completion among low-income, first-generation college and underrepresented high school students. CAC places well-trained, recent college graduates as full-time college advisers in high schools across metro Atlanta. Advisers support students with FAFSA completion, ACT/SAT preparation, and college essays and applications. The L4L network is working to uplift the profile of CAC and identify partners to help accelerate their work.

COVID shift: *CAC has leveraged resources and training from virtual advising teams to share with all of its in-school programs. Similarly, CAC has extended its text-messaging platform for its Parent Engagement Initiative to now include students.*

19%
more likely to be accepted to a college or university when advised by CAC

Academic Preparation
OneGoal

OneGoal's mission is to ensure all students have an opportunity to pursue their highest postsecondary aspirations. OneGoal's in-school, credit-bearing course is delivered daily during junior and senior years of high school, and they provide intensive academic, social, and financial coaching for students during freshman year of college. The L4L network is working to uplift the profile of OneGoal and identify partners to help accelerate their work.

COVID shift: *OneGoal Metro Atlanta is placing a special focus on ensuring continuity of learning and support by helping high school seniors continue financial aid planning, navigating testing and admissions requirements, and ultimately enrolling in college. In addition, OneGoal continues to help current college students leverage resources to stay in school.*

86%
of OneGoal high school graduates enroll in a postsecondary institution

Financial Support
The Scholarship Academy

The Scholarship Academy helps students build full financial plans by teaching them how to negotiate their financial aid packages, manage their financial awards, create scholarship brag projects, and independently navigate the private scholarship market. The L4L network is working to uplift the profile of The Scholarship Academy and identify partners to help accelerate their work.

COVID shift: *The Scholarship Academy has a virtual scholarship platform where students build four-year financial plans, launch their service projects, and research and apply for scholarships. The platform allows school or program staff to monitor students' progress remotely.*

Nearly
$45M
in private scholarship aid awarded to TSA students

Leadership Council

Community
Mindy Binderman, Executive Director,
  GEEARS
Dr. Steve Dolinger, President,
  Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education
Milton Little, President and CEO*,
  United Way of Greater Atlanta

Higher education
Dr. Glen Cannon, President,
  Gwinnett Technical College
Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum
  President Emerita, Spelman College
Dr. Tim Hynes, President,
  Clayton State University
Dr. Timothy Renick, Executive Director,
  National Institute for Student Success,
  Georgia State University
Dr. Claire Sterk, President, Emory University
Dr. David A. Thomas, President, Morehouse College
Dr. Pamela Whitten, President,
  Kennesaw State University

Business
Ann Cramer, Senior Consultant*,
  Coxe Curry & Associates
Kevin Greiner, President and CEO, Gas South
Jenna Kelly, North Georgia Regional President,
  Truist
Anne Kaiser, Vice President, Community and
  Economic Development, Georgia Power
Katie Kirkpatrick, President and CEO*,
  Metro Atlanta Chamber
Keith Parker, President and CEO,
  Goodwill of North Georgia
Sylvia Russell, Former President†, AT&T Georgia
David Scheible, Former President and CEO†,
  Graphic Packaging International
Peter Williams, Director of Business Strategy,
  BlackRock

Pre-K – 12 education
Dr. Morcease J. Beasley, Superintendent,
  Clayton County Public Schools
Dr. David Dude, Superintendent,
  City Schools of Decatur
Dr. Lisa Herring, Superintendent,
  Atlanta Public Schools
Dr. Mike Looney, Superintendent,
  Fulton County Schools
Chris Ragsdale, Superintendent,
  Cobb County School District
Dr. Grant Rivera, Superintendent,
  Marietta City Schools
Cheryl Watson-Harris, Superintendent,
  DeKalb County School District
Alvin Wilbanks, CEO and Superintendent,
  Gwinnett County Schools

Philanthropic
Frank Fernandez, President & CEO*,
  Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta
Dena Kimball, Executive Director,
  The Kendeda Fund
Teresa Rivero, Senior Program Officer,
  Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
Dr. David D. Weitnauer, President,
  R. Howard Dobbs, Jr. Foundation

Government
Doug Hooker, Executive Director*,
  Atlanta Regional Commission
Dennis Lockhart,
  Former President and CEO†,
  Federal Reserve Bank of America

* *Indicates Executive Committee members. The Executive Committee is made up of established nonprofit organizations with a shared commitment to strengthening our region.*

† *Indicates Executive Champions. Executive Champions are senior members of the metro Atlanta business community who bring their leadership and influence to support the Learn4Life vision.*

Support for Learn4Life

Our 2019-2020 Supporters
Our supporters generously provide the resources we need to implement the Learn4Life model.

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United Way of Greater Atlanta
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How You Can Support Learn4Life

| Bring leadership and influence to the effort | Join a Change Action Network | Sign up for our blog at L4LMetroAtlanta.org | Follow us: @L4LMetroAtlanta | Support the work of L4L financially |

"Let's seize this unique opportunity to apply the best of our region's thinking so all our students get the support they deserve to be prepared for the future."

– Cheryl Watson-Harris, Superintendent, DeKalb County School District