

# State of Education in Metro Atlanta Annual Report 2022



# Executive Summary

The ultimate mission of Learn4Life is to improve meaningful life outcomes across the cradle to career continuum for students historically underserved by education systems in metro Atlanta. To achieve our aim, we identify and address opportunity gaps, and illuminate the impact of systemic inequities on educational outcomes, especially for low-income and BIPOC students. By identifying and accelerating “bright spots” across metro Atlanta, we inform and inspire stakeholders to create opportunities for all underrepresented students in our region to achieve their true potential.

## 1 Interrupted Learning from the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic forced school districts into virtual and hybrid learning for more than a year. Teaching and learning in these environments was challenging, especially for building relationships and fostering engagement. The educational gains our region was making in the years leading up to the pandemic were essentially erased.

## 2 School Districts Need Our Support

Public education is a common good. As schools are asked to do increasingly more to support not only students’ academic progress, but their social, emotional, mental, and physical needs, it is our collective responsibility to support our school districts. L4L facilitates these connections in a variety of ways, detailed in this report.

## 3 Take a Cradle to Career View

The educational progress of our region should be considered along the cradle to career continuum. This report shares progress in early childhood education, early literacy, 8th grade mathematics, high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment, and post-secondary completion. Each of these milestones builds upon success in earlier stages.

## 4 Bright Spots Exist and Need Amplification

Across metro Atlanta, there are examples of incredible services and programs that are improving outcomes for students. Our goal at L4L is to identify and uplift these ‘Bright Spots’ so they reach more students. Our Change Action Networks are addressing barriers to scaling strategies that improve literacy, increase student engagement, provide postsecondary supports, and more.

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### Learn4Life Executive Committee Members

**Ann W. Cramer**  
Consultant,  
Coxe Curry & Associates

**Frank Fernandez**  
President & CEO,  
Community Foundation  
for Greater Atlanta

**Katie Kirkpatrick**  
President & CEO,  
Metro Atlanta Chamber

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

**Anna Roach**  
Executive Director,  
Atlanta Regional Commission

**Ken Zeff, Ed.D.**  
Executive Director,  
Learn4Life





# Understanding the Metro Atlanta Region

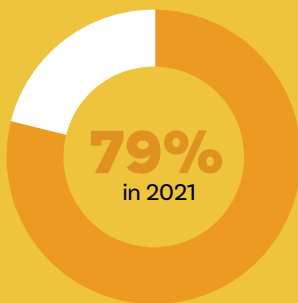
Atlanta metro's demographics are changing. An increasing number of our students experience the adverse impacts of growing up in poverty. They come from diverse backgrounds and are more likely than before to speak different languages at home. To achieve improved results, we must focus relentlessly on 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 Public Schools  
Cobb County School District  
City Schools of Decatur  
DeKalb County School District  
Fulton County Schools  
Gwinnett County Public Schools  
Marietta City Schools



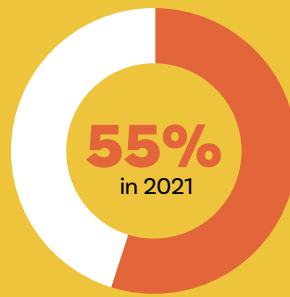
## Students of Color



Change in Nine Years, 2012-2021

**+45,437**

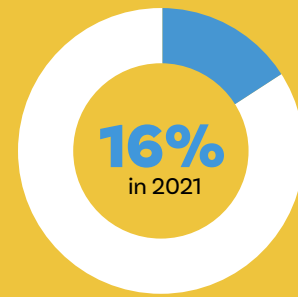
## Low-income



Change in Nine Years, 2012-2021

**-8,664**

## English Learners



Change in Nine Years, 2012-2021

**+47,129**

## Total Enrollment



2021  
**587,035**  
2010-2011  
**569,159**



Sources for this report can be found [here](#).

# 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. The pandemic erased the growth our region was experiencing leading up to the 2019-2020 school year. Our collective goal is to accelerate student learning in these recovery years.

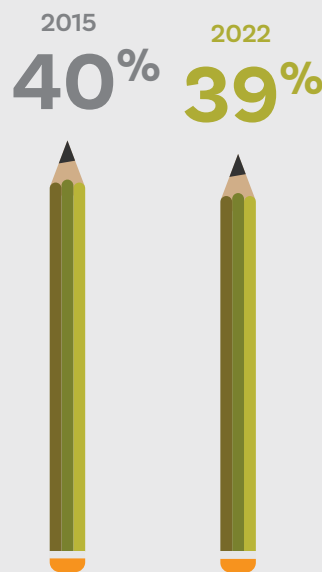
Quality-rated early  
childhood education capacity



Kindergarten Readiness

40% of the maximum estimated demand for child care and early learning for children under 5 is accounted for in the capacity of either Quality Rated child care programs or school-based Pre-K.

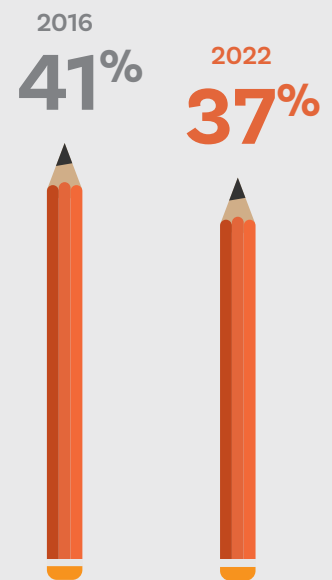
3rd graders  
proficient in reading



3rd Grade Reading

Children who have not developed reading skills by 3rd grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school.

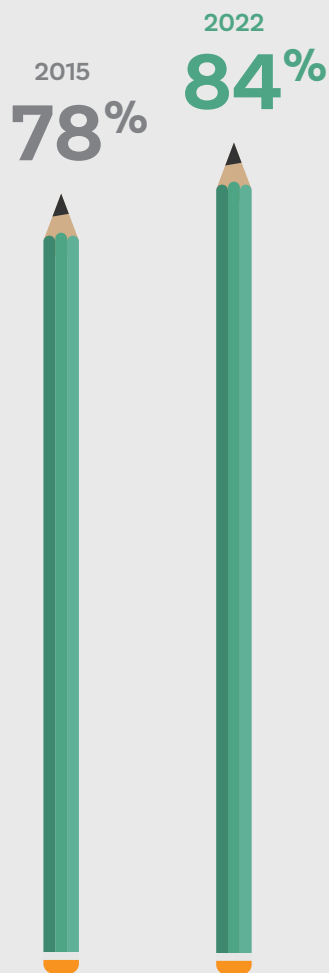
8th graders  
proficient in math



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 postsecondary completion.

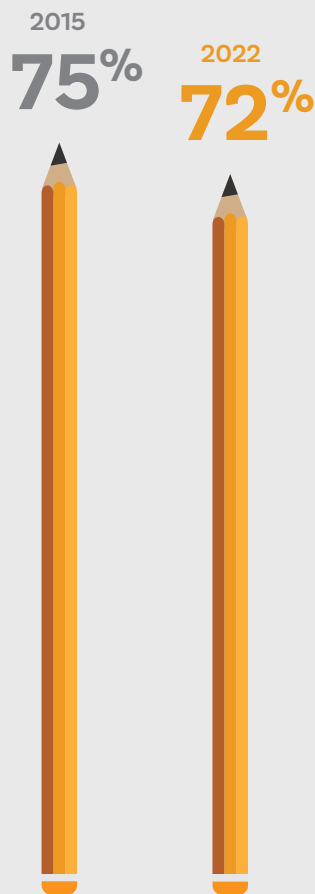
### High school graduation rate



### High School Graduation Rate

High school dropouts have higher unemployment rates than high school graduates and are less likely to participate in the workforce.

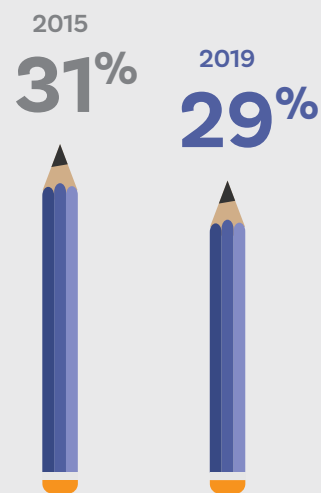
### High school graduates enrolled in a post-secondary institution



### Postsecondary Enrollment

By 2025, more than 60 percent of jobs will require some form of postsecondary education.

### High school graduates who earned a credential or degree



### Postsecondary Completion

Postsecondary completers earn 2.5 times more over their lifetime than those with only a high school diploma.

# 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 to 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.



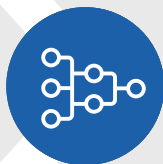
### STEP 2: Understand Local Context

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.



*Look for Bright Spots throughout this report!*



### STEP 6: Develop Action Plans

Once networks identify bright spots, they build, implement, and monitor scaling plans.

# Factor Analyses

L4L's Change Action Networks review the research factors that are most predictive of student success in each indicator. Selected factors must meet two criteria: strong evidence of improving student outcomes, and something the network can influence. Each of L4L's networks has conducted factor analyses as detailed below. These factors then allow us to identify Bright Spots that are working to support students in each area.



## **Early Literacy**

Research from the Get Georgia Reading Campaign identified 11 factors that indicate a student's ability to read proficiently by the end of 3rd grade. L4L's Change Action Network identified successful strategies that address three of those factors. During the pandemic, the network conducted a second round of factor analysis and added 'student engagement' and 'children's mental health' as critical factors.

## **Strategies that impact student success**

*Change Action Network focus areas highlighted*

**Children's Mental Health**  
**Early Childhood Education**  
**Physical Health**  
**Student Engagement**  
**Teacher Preparation**

Adult Literacy  
Attendance  
Birth Outcomes  
Language Development  
School & Classroom Climate  
Social-emotional Competence  
Summer Learning Loss



## **Eighth Grade Math**

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.

**Interventions for Struggling Learners**  
**School Culture**  
**Racial Expectations**  
**Teacher Effectiveness**

Academic Preparation  
Access to Appropriate Technology  
Access to Rigorous Courses  
Gender Expectations  
Language and Literacy Skills  
Math Anxiety  
Relevant Curriculum  
Use of Assessment Data



## **Postsecondary Success**

L4L's Change Action Network focuses on improving postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and completion. The network prioritized academic preparation, college-going culture, and financial preparation, and has identified Bright Spots that support young people in these areas.

**Academic Preparation**  
**College-going Culture**  
**Financial Support**  
Social Skills and Family Support  
College Entrance Exams  
Social and Academic Norms  
College Applications  
College Enrollment  
Appropriate Coursework  
College Orientation  
Career Exposure  
Exposure to College  
Good Fit and Match  
Academic Support

# Early Literacy

Early literacy is critical in laying the foundation for a life of self-determination and economic mobility. Children who have not developed reading skills by the end of 3rd grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school. This network is working to scale five Bright Spots that are showing how it's possible to ensure all children can read.



## **ArtsNOW Learning**

ArtsNOW is the leading professional learning organization for resourceful and innovative approaches which engage students, equip educators, and grow school communities for meaningful impact on the future.

**“Over the past ten years, ArtsNOW has been a valued partner who has served our community in a capacity that taught our scholars to love academics through the arts.”**

*– Dr. Monika Wiley, Director of Fine Arts/School Choice/Strategic Planning, Clayton County Public Schools*



# 40,000+

educators supported in arts integration



## **SEE-KS**

Social Emotional Knowledge and Skills (SEE-KS) is a professional learning approach designed to empower all who support children to create environments where social connection is the fuel for learning.

**“When I was the administrator at Glennwood Elementary, our teachers learned how to measure and enhance learner engagement as well as how to support one another through SEE-KS mentorship. This learning reminded the teachers that engagement is the foundation for learning and that mentoring one another is a way to stay inspired as educators.”**

*– Kristy Beam, Ed.D, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, City Schools of Decatur*

## **Research confirms**

that teachers who engaged in SEE-KS had increased self-efficacy and decreased levels of burnout



## **Reach Out & Read Georgia**

Reach Out and Read gives young children a foundation for success by incorporating books into pediatric care and encouraging families to read aloud together. They work to improve emergent literacy and social-emotional health during the span of rapid brain growth and development between birth and age five, particularly in economically disadvantaged families who are at risk for adverse outcomes.



## **Vision To Learn**

Vision To Learn (VTL) provides eye exams and glasses to kids in underserved communities to help them succeed in school and life. Receiving glasses provides the equivalent of 2-6 months of additional learning and can help prevent dropout and juvenile delinquency. Since their launch, VTL has provided over 15,000 glasses to metro Atlanta students free of charge.





## Literacy and Justice for All

Literacy and Justice for All (LJFA) is an initiative to bring the science of reading to children in our community, prenatal through third grade, through the adults who serve them. Made possible with support provided by the Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation to the United Way, LJFA began as a partnership between Marietta City Schools and the Rollins Center for Language & Literacy, United Way, Learn4Life, Cobb Collaborative, Quality Care for Children, Kennesaw State University, and Wellstar Kennestone Hospital. The LJFA initiative has since expanded to Atlanta, through partnerships with Atlanta Public Schools and KIPP Metro Atlanta Schools.



### The Science of Reading

Our brains are wired for communication and language, but not for reading. Reading must be explicitly and systematically taught if children are to become deep readers. Since the National Reading Panel commissioned by the U.S. Congress in the late 1990s, the “science of reading” – a vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing – has been an area of focus for many educators and school districts. L4L’s Bright Spot, Cox Campus, breaks down the science of teaching reading into practical applications through their free, internationally-accredited online courses and resources.

#### Cox Campus



Cox Campus turns to science to learn what actions adults can take to help develop a child’s reading brain. The science of reading is grounded in language-rich and healthy environments, positive experiences, and explicit and systematic reading instruction. Recognizing that every child has the right to literacy, the Cox Campus offers free, online courses for teachers, families, school leaders, and healthcare workers in the science of reading – so every child can learn to read.

**\$15M**

of coursework made free  
for teachers through the  
Cox Campus



**99,000**

courses completed in  
Cox Campus in 2021



#### Literacy and Justice for All - Locations

##### HOSPITALS

Wellstar-Kennestone has implemented Talk with Me Baby with advice from Grady Hospital. Talk With Me Baby is a partnership that is committed to ensuring that every newborn in Georgia receives essential language nutrition.

##### ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Implementing the science of reading in nine schools.

##### KIPP METRO ATLANTA SCHOOLS

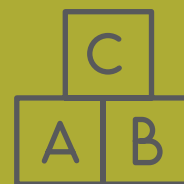
Implementing the science of reading in grades K-4 in all their elementary schools.

##### MARIETTA CITY SCHOOLS

Implementing the science of reading in its early learning center in grades K-3 and in collaboration with community partners.

**800+**

children were impacted by Birth-5  
strategies



**32%**



**80%**

In Marietta City Schools, Kindergarteners increased their test average in letter sounds from 32% at the beginning of this year to 80% in the middle of the year

# Eighth 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 postsecondary completion.



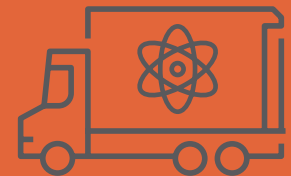
## **STE(A)M Truck**

STE(A)M Truck immerses students in grades 3-8 with hands-on STEAM content through high tech and low tech tools, unleashing their creativity to ensure that they can design the lives and future communities of their dreams.



# 96%

of teachers say that STE(A)M Truck enhanced their understanding of how to integrate STEAM instruction into the classroom



**“I love when STE(A)M Truck pulls up to our school for teacher support. I know we will leave with actionable strategies that we can use with students the next day!”**

*—Mr. Williams, 7th Grade Math Teacher, Mundy’s Mill MS, Clayton County Public Schools*



## **STEM/STEAM Certification**

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 guide students in conducting 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 around business partnerships.

# 12%

average increase in 8th grade math scores when middle schools become STEM certified



# Teacher Retention

Teachers are leaving the profession at high rates, entering at low rates, and many metro Atlanta school districts are struggling to fill open positions. Teachers have the single largest in-school effect on students' academic outcomes, and play a significant role in students' development in other areas, such as growth mindset.



Teachers experience 2x as much job-related stress as the overall workforce



Only about 1/2 of Georgia's teachers plan to continue teaching for five more years



Math teaching positions are among the hardest to staff

## Learn4Life's Response



L4L's middle grade math network is working to support teacher retention as a critical lever to improve math proficiency. The network learned from school district HR leaders about our region's challenges and ongoing district initiatives to retain teachers. In the coming months, L4L will partner with districts to select one of these strategies for

regional collaboration. As an asset-based organization, we believe we can accomplish more by working together and by amplifying strategies that are already showing promise. In this critical moment in public education, we need to show up and support our teachers like they do each day for our students.

## Promising Strategies to Retain Teachers



### Developing career and leadership pathways

– transparency about growth and advancement opportunities is common in most sectors, and only emerging within education.



### Wellness initiatives

– honoring teachers as whole people who benefit from support structures and celebration is one component of retention.



### Reducing workload and offering flexibility

– this includes hiring additional support staff to cover non-instructional time and developing innovative schedules that give teachers more time.



### School-based plans

delivered by conducting frequent “pulse-check” surveys provide data for school administrators to respond to proactively.

# Postsecondary Success

Postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and completion are fundamental to establishing a skilled and educated workforce and a thriving local economy. L4L continues to engage partners, analyze data, and review current research to understand the factors that influence postsecondary success, and to identify Bright Spots. Currently, L4L collaborates with the following three Bright Spot organizations who are improving postsecondary outcomes for students throughout our region.



## **College Advising Corps (CAC)**

College Advising Corps works to increase the number of low-income, first-generation college, and underrepresented high school students who enter and complete higher education.

**“I worked with a student who missed significant amounts of school due to an obligation to work and support their family. In the span of three weeks, I supported the student in completing an application to Atlanta Technical College to pursue a career in nursing and they completed the FAFSA so they could begin classes in the fall of 2022.”**

– Isis Owusu, College Adviser, D.M. Therrell High School

# 86%

of CAC students in Atlanta Public Schools completed at least one college application in 2021-2022



## **OneGoal**

OneGoal's mission to close the degree divide in America. They bring intensive postsecondary advising to schools and students so that every young person can have an equitable opportunity to attain their highest postsecondary aspiration.

**“OneGoal helps students in the middle, who often get overlooked by other interventions, but who do need support to pursue their postsecondary plan.”**

– Jill Stewart, AP, North Atlanta High School



# 84%

of OneGoal High School graduates enroll in a postsecondary institution



## **The Scholarship Academy**

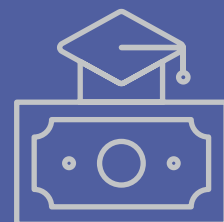
The Scholarship Academy's mission is to help low-income students secure resources to pursue higher education opportunities with minimum debt to create a healthier financial aid culture in the communities we serve.

**“The cost of college workshop allowed our seniors to crunch the numbers for themselves and see the difference in costs between a 2-year and a 4-year college degree and make the connection with how completing the FAFSA will let them know if they qualify for Pell Grant/free money towards their postsecondary education.”**

– Candace Dixon, Counselor, Creekside High School

# \$13.5K

average student loan debt reduction rate



# FAFSA Completion

A prerequisite to obtaining an affordable or even debt free degree, the FAFSA is a form students and families must complete to access need-based and merit-based scholarships, and to secure part of the more than \$120 billion in financial aid the government provides annually to pay for college. Yet, in the 2021-22 school year only 49.9% of high school seniors nationwide completed the FAFSA, with even lower completion rates for students who would most benefit from financial aid.

Why are low-income, first-generation, and students of color not cashing in on this opportunity? Individual reasons vary, but research suggests that the most common challenges are limited knowledge about what the FAFSA is and how and when to apply; feelings that the application is too cumbersome; and for undocumented students and families, concerns about the potential of revealing their status to the government. These issues discourage them from completing the FAFSA in spite of financial need, and account for some of the inequities in postsecondary enrollment that exist nationwide.

## +84%

Students who complete the FAFSA are 84% more likely to enroll in college directly from high school

## \$1,000 = +1.2%

An additional \$1,000 of grant aid increases year-to-year persistence by 1.2 percentage points

## +\$36,000

Bachelor's degree holders earn, on average, \$36,000 more per year than those with just a high school diploma

### Learn4Life's Response



To help increase postsecondary enrollment throughout metro Atlanta, Learn4Life joined forces with [United Way's College Bound Program](#) and [The Scholarship Academy](#). Together, we are harnessing the power of collective impact to provide a comprehensive suite of supports at partner schools, including free FAFSA training for staff and community volunteers, in-person FAFSA completion

events, virtual office hours, marketing materials, and incentives. The latest additions to these supports include a dedicated AmeriCorps member on-campus weekly, targeted events for specialized groups, and the inclusion of a Cost of College workshop to help students learn how to calculate the financial aid gap for their desired 2-year or 4-year institution.

### College Bound FAFSA Initiative 2021-2022 Highlights

## 10

Title I  
high schools

## 4

districts

## 22

events

## 121

parents  
engaged

## 751

students  
engaged

## 437

FAFSAs  
completed





# Leadership Council

## Community

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



## Higher education

Dr. Glen Cannon, President,  
Gwinnett Technical College  
Dr. Timothy Renick, Executive Director,  
National Institute for Student Success,  
Georgia State University  
Dr. Victoria Seals, President,  
Atlanta Technical College  
Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum, President, Emerita,  
Spelman College  
Dr. David Thomas, President, Morehouse College



## Business

Dr. Kamau Bobb, Director,  
STEM Education Strategy, Google and  
Director, Constellations Center for Equity in  
Computing, Georgia Tech  
Ann Cramer, Senior Consultant\*,  
Coxe Curry & Associates  
Raj Gazula, Head of Treasury Solutions, Truist  
Kevin Greiner, President and CEO, Gas South  
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  
Lisa Smith, Vice President of Community and  
Economic Development, Georgia Power



## Pre-K – 12 education

Dr. Morcease J. Beasley, Superintendent,  
Clayton County Public Schools  
Dr. Maggie Fehrman, Superintendent,  
City Schools of Decatur  
Dr. Lisa Herring, Superintendent,  
Atlanta Public Schools  
Dr. Mike Looney, Superintendent,  
Fulton County Schools  
Chris Ragsdale, Superintendent,  
Cobb County District  
Dr. Grant Rivera, Superintendent,  
Marietta City Schools  
Dr. Vasanne Tinsley, Interim Superintendent,  
DeKalb County School District  
Dr. Calvin Watts, Superintendent,  
Gwinnett County School District



## Philanthropic

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



## Government

Dennis Lockhart,  
Former President and CEO†,  
Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta  
Anna Roach, Executive Director\*,  
Atlanta Regional Commission



\* 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 supporters generously provide the resources we need to implement the Learn4Life model.**

Annie E. Casey Foundation  
Atlanta Regional Commission  
The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation  
Betty and Davis Fitzgerald Foundation  
BlackRock  
Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta  
Gas South  
Georgia Power  
Graphic Packaging International  
The Kendeda Fund  
Metro Atlanta Chamber

R. Howard Dobbs Jr. Foundation  
The Sartain Lanier Family Foundation, Inc.  
Southern Education Foundation  
State Farm  
StriveTogether  
Tegna Foundation  
Truist  
Tull Charitable Foundation  
United Way of Greater Atlanta  
WestRock  
The Zeist Foundation, Inc.

## How You Can Support Learn4Life



Join a Change Action Network  
[l4lmetroatlanta.org/#enroll](https://l4lmetroatlanta.org/#enroll)



Sign up for our blog at  
[L4LMetroAtlanta.org](https://L4LMetroAtlanta.org)



Follow us at  
[@L4LMetroAtlanta](https://twitter.com/L4LMetroAtlanta)

## Core Team Members

Cori Cain, Associate Vice President,  
United Way of Greater Atlanta

Tim Cairl, Senior Director of Educated Workforce,  
Metro Atlanta Chamber

Mike Carnathan, Researcher,  
Atlanta Regional Commission

Ayana Gabriel, Vice President of Community Impact,  
Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta

Dr. Robert Gaines II, Director of External Affairs, GPEE

Dr. Hanah Goldberg, Director of Research & Policy, GEEARS

Tommy Pearce, Executive Director,  
Neighborhood Nexus

Dr. Jennie Welch, Vice President of Strategy & Finance,  
Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement



## Meet the L4L Team!

(L-R) Dr. Ken Zeff, Executive Director; Yolanda Marroquin, Project Manager; Jordan Johnson, Program Associate; Damian Ramsey, Community Engagement Manager; Dr. Rebecca Parshall, Director of Strategy

Sources for this report can be found [here](#).



Metro Atlanta Regional Education Partnership

