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THE FINAL REPORT OF THE SENATE STUDY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION OUTCOMES

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Senator P.K. Martin, Chair
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Senator Bill Cowsert
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Senator Frank Ginn
District 51

Senator Sally Harrell
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Senator Lindsey Tippins
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Prepared by the Senate Research Office,
2019

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COMMITTEE CREATION, FOCUS, AND DUTIES

The Senate Study Committee on Higher Education Outcomes (the “Committee”) was created by the adoption of Senate Resolution 464, sponsored by Senator Martin of the 9th during the 2019 legislative session. The Committee was charged with studying higher education outcomes by examining the changing nature of work and the economic demands of higher education credentials, and to ensure that students, parents, educators, and policy makers are able to make informed decisions on how to respond to an evolving labor market.

The following individuals were appointed by the President of the Senate to serve as members of this Committee: Senator Bill Cowser of the 44th; Senator Frank Ginn of the 51st; Senator Sally Harrell of the 31st; Senator P.K. Martin of the 9th; Senator Sheikh Rahman of the 5th; Senator Brian Strickland of the 17th; Senator Lindsey Tippins of the 37th; Mr. Matt Arthur, Commissioner, Technical College System of Georgia; and Dr. Tristan Denley, Chief Academic Officer, University System of Georgia.

Senator P.K. Martin, served as the Chair of this Committee. The Committee met four times during the 2019 interim. The meetings were as follows: September 27, 2019 at Gwinnett Technical College; October 17, 2019 at the Georgia State Stadium; November 21, 2019 at University of Georgia; and December 10, 2019 at the Coverdell Legislative Office Building.

During these meetings the Committee heard testimony from the following individuals: Dr. Glen Cannon, President, Gwinnett Technical College; Dr. Jann Joseph, President, Georgia Gwinnett College; Mrs. Daniela Perry, Senior Director of Public Policy, Georgia Chamber of Commerce; Mr. Joe Dan Banker, Deputy Commissioner, Adult and Technical Education, Technical College System of Georgia; Mr. Neil Bitting, Assistant Commissioner, External Affairs & Facilities, Technical College System of Georgia; Dr. Steve Wrigley, Chancellor, University System of Georgia; Ms. Caylee Noggle, President, Georgia Student Finance Commission; Dr. Yarbrah Peeples, Senior Regional Director-East, College Advising Corps; Ms. Tina Fernandez, Executive Director, Achieve Atlanta; Mr. David Evans, Data Warehouse/Business Intelligence Engineer, Governor’s Office of Student Achievement; Dr. Tim Renick, Senior Vice President for Student Success, Georgia State University; Ms. Jennifer Lee, Higher Education Policy Analyst, Georgia Budget and Policy Institute; Mr. Jere Morehead, President, University of Georgia; Dr. Chuck Knapp, President Emeritus, UGA; Ms. Amy Lancaster-King, Metro Atlanta Chamber; and Mr. Kevin Greiner, President and CEO, Gas South.

The following legislative staff members were assigned to this Committee: Ms. Elisabeth Fletcher of the Senate Press Office; Mrs. Laurin Vonada of the Senate Research Office; Mr. Austin Trott of the Senate Budget and Evaluation Office; Mr. Michael Walker of the Office of Legislative Counsel; and Ms. Megan Mowers, Legislative Assistant to Senator Martin.

BACKGROUND

Georgia has been named the top state for business for the past six years by *Area Development* magazine¹ and for the last seven years, *Site Selection* magazine has ranked Georgia number one in the Top State Business Climate Rankings.² Industries in Georgia are evolving and will continue to do so as innovation and technological advances are made. However, Georgia is experiencing a gap in skilled workers in various industries, including education, health care, and information technology. This gap can be attributed to many factors including an aging workforce, a decline in rural populations, and an inefficient talent pipeline.

Complicated transitions from high school to college and beyond weaken the talent pipeline and prevent many capable students from reaching suitable employment. Some of these obstacles include financial barriers to post-secondary education, a complicated and overwhelming college admissions processes, lack of continual support once a student is enrolled in college, and a need for adaption to new skills once employed. The Complete College Georgia Initiative projects that by 2025, 60 percent of the jobs in Georgia will require some form of college education, whether that be a certificate, associate's degree, or bachelor's degree.³ Today, only 47.9 percent of young adults qualify for these jobs. By not meeting this goal, there will be a substantial impact on the economic well-being of Georgia as a whole.

Georgia's economic future depends on developing, sustaining, and growing the talent pipeline. The University System of Georgia (USG) and Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) are more diverse than ever, enrolling the most first generation, underrepresented, and economically disadvantaged students.⁴ While this is a positive shift, there are still some concerns that need to be addressed as students navigate entry into post-secondary education. For students to succeed in post-secondary education, targeted guidance specific to college and career opportunities is vital. Further, once a student is accepted into either a technical college or university, students still need assistance in course selection and financial aid finalization. Without targeted support, students may experience what is often referred to as the "Summer Melt." This is when a student intends to go to college at the time of high school graduation, but for some reason, such as missed registration deadlines, does not continue on to college. According to the U.S. Department of Education, Summer Melt tends to hit low-income and first-generation college students the hardest, with one-third of all students who leave high school with plans to attend college, not attending any college that fall.⁵

After a student has enrolled in a post-secondary institution, there is a need for continual support and advisement to ensure students graduate in a timely manner with the least amount of debt necessary. The USG's Momentum Year initiative, which is a "suite of strategies" to help first-year students stay on a path to achieve their academic goals, aides in helping students succeed and finish their degree. The Momentum Year provides predictive analytics and proactive advising to help students graduate quickly. Further, purposeful decision-making and tailored academic plans provide a more manageable approach to the post-secondary landscape.⁶

¹ Steve Kaelble, *Area Development*, 2019 *Top States for Doing Business: Georgia Ranks #1 Sixth Year in a Row*, (Q3 2019), <https://www.areadevelopment.com/Top-States-for-Doing-Business/Q3-2019/overall-results-georgia-ranked-top-state-by-site-selection-c.shtml>.

²Mark Arend, *Site Selection*, 2019 *Business Climate: Seven Straight*, (Nov. 2019), <https://siteselection.com/digitalEdition/2019/nov/>.

³ The University of Georgia, *Complete College Georgia*, <https://completega.org/>.

⁴ Office of Research and Policy Analysis, University System of Georgia, *Semester Enrollment Report, (Fall 2018)*, https://www.usg.edu/assets/usg/docs/news_files/BOR_USG_Fall_2018_Enrollment_Report_FINAL_Nov_7_2018_*.pdf.

⁵ Patrick O'Connor, HomeRoom: The Official Blog of the U.S. Department of Education, *Summer Melt: Why One Third of College-Bound Students Don't Make It to Campus in the Fall*, (June 4, 2018), <https://blog.ed.gov/2018/06/summer-melt-why-college-bound-students-dont-make-it-in-the-fall/>.

⁶ For more information about the Momentum Year, see: <https://completega.org/momentum-year>.

Disruptions and automation in industries cause jobs to be eliminated. Workers must be equipped with the necessary skills to adapt as the economy evolves. Georgia has identified 17 high demand and critical shortage career fields. These programs of study are taught at TCSG institutions and free tuition is available via the HOPE Career Grant. These programs of study are evaluated often and this evaluation ensures Georgians are investing time and money in areas where jobs are prevalent and growth is possible. Another way that USG has addressed this issue is by the creation of the Nexus Degree, or a specialized degree, with curriculum developed in tandem with industry partners to ensure it aligns with the needs being experienced in the workforce.⁷ The curriculum can evolve to become adaptable to the needs of the industry. Nexus Degrees are 60-credit credentials that currently have limited availability in Blockchain and Cybersecurity, but Georgia is on the forefront to offer these Nexus Degrees. This type of degree provides flexibility and benefits all students, but may be additionally valuable to persons who have a job and want to acquire new skills because of the relatively short length of the program.

Georgia is not unique in these challenges. States across the country are experiencing workforce shortages. Senate Resolution 464 recognizes a need for Georgia to ensure that its workforce has the necessary skills and information to avoid displacement. Georgians could see increased economic mobility and a higher quality of life with the right opportunities, partnerships, and investments,

MEETING TESTIMONY

Meeting 1 – September 27, 2019

The Committee held the first hearing at Gwinnett Technical College in Lawrenceville, Georgia. The focus of this meeting was to provide the Committee with information about the importance of post-secondary education and current programs and initiatives in place to help students overcome barriers to post-secondary education.

Dr. Joseph, President of Gwinnett Technical College, shared initiatives that Gwinnett Tech offers in reducing barriers to education such as open educational resources, remedial education, and updated advisement and registration systems.

Ms. Perry, with the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, provided an overview of the Smart Decisions Coalition (Coalition). The Coalition was made up of institutions, organizations, and business persons with the goal to examine ways to remove barriers to post-secondary success in order to advance the state's workforce. She shared that the aims the Coalition set for this Committee were to: (1) Highlight relevant research, current initiatives and programs; (2) Change the conversation to focus on return on investment of post-secondary education; and (3) Consider out of the box barriers and how to resolve them with out of the box solutions.

Mr. Banker, Deputy Commissioner of Adult and Technical Education at TCSG, spoke about the goals and achievements of TCSG. TCSG touts an 88.1 percent in-field job placement and a 99.3 percent overall job placement or transfer rate. Further, Mr. Banker explained ways that TCSG is working on addressing barriers to education such as new admissions application, HOPE Career grants, and constant curriculum review to ensure that the programs are in alignment with the workforce needs in Georgia.

Mr. Bitting, Assistant Commissioner of External Affairs & Facilities of TCSG, provided information regarding the funding initiative that the TCSG implemented called the "Last-Mile" Grants. These grants provide assistance to TCSG students who owe \$500 or less in direct costs. Mr. Bitting discussed the scalability of these grants to become a statewide grant program for post-secondary students. These

⁷For more information about Nexus Degrees, see:

https://www.usg.edu/news/release/university_system_of_georgia_announces_new_nexus_degree.

grants could be funded through corporate and private giving, as well as lottery reserves or appropriated dollars. Mr. Bitting shared that these grants have helped students complete their degree or certificate, when the same student would have dropped out of a TSCG institution over a couple of hundreds of dollars.

Dr. Wrigley spoke about what USG is doing in regards to addressing the concerns of the Coalition. Dr. Wrigley shared that USG has tried to make college more affordable by (1) not increasing tuition two of the last four years and only approving a 1.7 percent tuition increase over the past five years; (2) offering free textbook for over 10,000 course sections; and (3) requiring students to play more of an active role in the financial aid process by being aware of how much they are borrowing prior to borrowing. Also, Dr. Wrigley spoke about USG's efficiency initiatives and the "Momentum Year" program that helps students make a purposeful choice about what they wish to study, encourages students to increase average course loads, and changes remedial education to boost student success rates.

Ms. Noggle, President of Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC), provided information on FASFA completion rates in Georgia. During the 2019-2020 School Year, 56.1 percent of Georgia's seniors completed the FASFA. Ms. Noggle shared that FASFA completion is important because there is a direct impact on enrollment and correlation to post-secondary degree attainment. This, in turn, increases the talent pipeline. Ms. Noggle shared with the Committee initiatives that GSFC promotes that increase FASFA completion, such as Webinars, live FASFA completion assistance, and FASFA completion events hosted across the state at universities and public libraries.

Dr. Peeples, with College Advising Corps, shared with the Committee the initiative to resolve the lack of counseling by implementing a "college counseling team" approach. Students are advised by a near-peer adviser and their high school counselor on ACT/SAT registration, FASFA completion, and college application submissions. Dr. Peeples told the Committee that 58 percent of seniors advised this way enrolled in a post-secondary institution and 70 percent of those students persisted through at least two years of college. This program has 36 advisors serving 26 high schools in Atlanta Public Schools and six surrounding districts.

Ms. Fernandez spoke about Achieve Atlanta which is a partnership with the Atlanta Public Schools that helps students get to college, pay for college, and succeed in college. Ms. Fernandez shared with the Committee that Atlanta has the unique challenge of social mobility and that children who are born in poverty in the city, stay in poverty. Achieve Atlanta serves approximately 7,500 students and has seen an 11 percent increase in students going to college.

Meeting 2 – October 17, 2019

The second meeting was held at the Georgia State Stadium. The focus of this meeting was on the importance of post-secondary completion.

Dr. Renick presented on programs that Georgia State University (GSU) has piloted to help students succeed on a post-secondary level such as an AI-Chatbot that assists students, wherever they are, with questions from financial aid to parking, and by providing more analytical advising which helps students make informed decisions when choosing a major. Also, a very successful program for GSU and across USG and TCSG is the availability of Panther Grants (similar to the Last-Mile grants mentioned previously) which helps retain students that are at risk of dropping out because of financial burdens. Since GSU has shown significant success with their approach in serving low-income and minority students, these programs are being scaled across the USG.

Ms. Lee, the Higher Education policy analyst at Georgia Budget and Policy Institute (GBPI) presented data on trends of Georgia's higher education students, such as 85 percent more low-income students enroll in USG than ten years ago and 42 percent of Georgia college students say their parents do not help them pay for college. Also, she shared the three most troubling barriers to college success. These

barriers are food insecurity, housing insecurity, and students having to work full-time to support themselves and their families. GBPI suggests more funding to institutions, maximizing financial aid for low-income students, and making Dual Enrollment more sustainable.

Meeting 3 – November 21, 2019

The final meeting, held at the University of Georgia, was concentrated on the skills gap in Georgia and how to address this issue.

President Morehead provided a short presentation about the student demographics at UGA. He shared that 83 percent of the 2018 freshmen class came from Georgia. Also, that although 96 percent of graduates are employed or attain more education upon graduation, only 69 percent of UGA grads stay in Georgia.

Dr. Knapp, President Emeritus of UGA, presented on the economic impact of increased college completion on the State of Georgia. Dr. Knapp shared that by not meeting the 2025 post-secondary attainment goal, Georgia will be foregoing approximately 11.5 billion dollars in economic growth. He discussed the reasons he believes Georgia has a skills gap as follows: (1) Georgia is not educating and training enough students in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM); (2) Not enough students are enrolling in post-secondary institutions; and (3) There is a high growth of black and Hispanic population and these populations are least likely to see post-secondary attainment. Dr. Knapp suggested that the State expand needs based financial aid to tailor to low-income, minority, and rural students to help close the skills gap.

Ms. Lancaster-King, with the Metro Atlanta Chamber, shared statistics about current job openings across metro Atlanta and the supply for these jobs. She recommended state sponsored needs based aid or scaling the Panther grants across the USG and TCSG. Further, she stressed the importance of increasing engagement with businesses to spread awareness to high school students.

Mr. Greiner, President and CEO of Gas South, provided that Georgia is not alone in these challenges. He talked about the need to incentivize employers to help foster employee growth and higher education completion. Mr. Greiner shared some ways that Gas South is doing in regards to helping their employees finish college. Gas South reimburses 75 percent of tuition for enrolled employees, and provides flexible work schedules to ensure students can attend college classes. Also, Gas South has relaxed degree requirements to fill open positions so long as the student is enrolled in such programs. Lastly, Gas South has continual internal training and professional development programs that may encourage employees to return to college.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Increase Post-Secondary Enrollment

The Committee supports a statewide expansion of the College Advising Corps program to ensure Georgia students receive targeted counseling regarding career and post-secondary education options. The Committee recommends the exploration of funding opportunities to interested and in-need districts that would be needed to scale this program.

The Committee recommends promoting increased FAFSA completion by Georgia students. With increased FAFSA completion, the number of low-income students that can access the federal Pell Grant funds will rise. The Committee encourages partnerships between interested persons and the Georgia Student Finance Commission in their efforts to promote FAFSA completion to fulfill this recommendation.

The Committee strongly encourages local school districts to adopt offering the ACT/SAT during the normal school day for high school juniors. The Committee believes that this adoption reduces barriers for students who have jobs, parents who work on the weekends, or are active in student sports and activities. Also, the ability to take the ACT/SAT at the high school allows students to be familiar with the environment which decreases test anxiety. The Committee recognizes that these scores are essential for a student to pursue higher education.

Persist and Progress in Post-Secondary Education

The Committee recommends that the Board of Regents and the Technical College System of Georgia scale the strategic gap and emergency funding for post-secondary students. The Committee encourages the continual support of ongoing efforts at post-secondary institutions across Georgia as they increase and maximize corporate and private giving through foundations for the completion grants already in place.

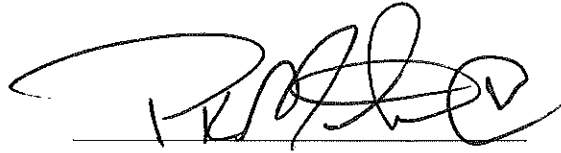
The Committee supports institutions in offering viable pay-as-you-go installment plans for tuition, dining, and housing costs to provide flexibility and ease the burden of up-front costs.

Prepare for the Workforce and Lifelong Learning

The Committee finds that Nexus Degrees are vital in helping address the workforce shortage and promotes the expansion of USG's Nexus Degree program throughout the state.

Respectfully Submitted,

**THE FINAL REPORT OF THE SENATE STUDY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION
OUTCOMES**

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

Honorable P.K. Martin, Chair
Senator, District 9