

GEORGIA

OVERALL RANK: 45TH¹
TIER 5 (WEAKEST)

STRONGER
←
→
 WEAKER

OVERALL					45
1. RESOURCES AND MEMBERSHIP				35	
2. INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS				36	
3. SCOPE OF BARGAINING					48
4. STATE POLICIES			26		
5. PERCEIVED INFLUENCE					45

AREA 1: RESOURCES AND MEMBERSHIP TIED FOR 35TH

Georgia’s two state-level teacher associations (one affiliated with the NEA, the other with the AFT) have limited financial and membership resources. Collective bargaining is prohibited in the state, and just 54.8 percent of its teachers belong to teacher associations (41st of 51 jurisdictions). They bring in \$87 per Georgia teacher annually (49th, ahead of just Texas and South Carolina). On the other hand, Georgia spends a relatively large portion of its state budget on K-12 education (24.4 percent, placing it 9th). Total per-pupil spending is on the low side of the middle (\$9,827 per year; 38th), but a relatively high proportion of those dollars goes to teacher salaries and benefits (57.5 percent; 7th).

AREA 2: INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS² TIED FOR 36TH

Compared to teacher unions in other states, Georgia’s associations are not particularly involved in state politics. In the past decade, just 0.33 percent of contributions to candidates for state office came from them (34th); these donations made up only 2.9 percent of the funds contributed by the ten highest-giving sectors in the state (37th). In addition, the associations gave only 0.34 percent of the contributions to state political parties (42nd). Finally, 13.4 percent of Georgia’s delegates to the Democratic and Republican national conventions identified as teacher union members (25th).³

*AREA 3: SCOPE OF BARGAINING
TIED FOR 48TH; LAST PLACE*

Georgia is one of only five states that explicitly prohibit collective bargaining. Although teachers can opt to join local and/or state professional associations, those entities may not automatically collect agency fees from non-members who work in districts they represent (a limitation that contributes to the low association revenues noted in Area 1). The state also prohibits teacher strikes.

*AREA 4: STATE POLICIES
26TH*

While some Georgia policies, particularly those dealing with teacher employment, align with traditional union interests, others do not. Teachers earn tenure after three years (the national norm), and student learning is not considered in tenure decisions. Although teacher evaluations must include evidence of student learning, state law lets districts decide how learning is defined and measured and how much weight it carries among all evaluation criteria. On the other hand, unions typically do not support charter schools, and Georgia law encourages charter expansion and autonomy—it does not cap the number of charters, and it allows start-ups, conversions, and virtual schools. While not automatically exempt, charters can apply for exemptions to state laws (including teacher certification requirements) and district regulations.

*AREA 5: PERCEIVED INFLUENCE
45TH*

Georgia stakeholders describe teacher associations that are comparatively weaker

than those in nearly every other state. Survey respondents rank them as less influential than the state school boards association, the state charter school association, and education advocacy groups. They note that state education leaders only sometimes align with teacher association positions and that the associations are not effective in protecting dollars for education. Further, they report that policies both proposed by the governor and those actually enacted during the latest legislative session were generally not in line with teacher association priorities.⁴

*OVERALL
45TH*

Georgia's teacher associations are weak across the board, not surprising in a state in which collective bargaining is prohibited—and whose politics are fairly conservative. They have few resources and a weak reputation. While teacher employment policies are somewhat union-favorable, charter laws are not, and the associations stayed out of the way when lawmakers enacted reforms en route to receiving a Race to the Top award (see sidebar).

**WINNERS NEVER CHEAT,
CHEATERS NEVER WIN**

The NEA-affiliated Georgia Association of Educators (GAE) has kept a fairly low profile in the Peach State. When in 2010 state leaders required districts to design and implement teacher evaluation systems based on student growth—to meet the requirements of their successful Race to the Top application—the GAE did not vociferously object (although the GAE did express dismay that the system was punitive, lacked teacher input, and would be implemented inconsistently).^{5,6} It did successfully lobby to kill SB 469, a 2012 proposal that would prohibit automatic payroll deductions of member dues—but only with the help of an array of strange bedfellows, including the Tea Party, the Occupy movement, civil rights activists, and religious leaders.⁷

The GAE is also keeping a relatively low profile on a constitutional amendment allowing the state to authorize charter schools. Voters will decide on the issue in November 2012, but so far the union has limited its activities to issuing press releases and fundraising.⁸ The charter conflict began in 2009 when the legislature established the Georgia Charter Schools Commission and granted it power to approve and fund new charters, just as local districts could.⁹ In May 2011, however, the Georgia Supreme Court held that the Commission violated the constitutionally protected authority of local districts and revoked the charters of the seventeen Commission-authorized schools (out of a total of 127 charters in the state), affecting 16,000 students.¹⁰ Pro-reform lawmakers responded with the pending constitutional amendment, which drove a rift between Governor Nathan Deal, who supports it, and State Superintendent John Barge, a former rural superintendent who broke with fellow Republicans to come out staunchly against it. Barge stated that the amendment is unnecessary, redundant, and would cost district schools \$430 million over the next five years: “Until all of our public school students are in school for a full 180-day school year, until essential services like student transportation and student support can return to effective levels, and until teachers regain jobs with full pay for a full school year, we should not redirect one more dollar away from Georgia’s local school districts.”¹¹ The GAE applauded Barge, stating, “His announcement shows he fully understands the negative ramifications for our public school children.”¹²

September 2012 polls show voters are divided: half support the amendment, one-quarter oppose it, and one-quarter are undecided. To date, the GAE hasn’t begun advertising or otherwise campaigning in earnest.¹³ Given that Deal’s endorsement helped two candidates narrowly win their tight primary races in August, and that teacher unions are embroiled in a public-relations nightmare (despite negative public opinion statewide, the GAE and AFT publicly defended the rights of 178 Atlanta teachers caught in the biggest testing scandal in history), the union could find it has little support from voters come November.^{14,15}

GEORGIA RANKINGS BY AREA AND INDICATOR

OVERALL RANK: 45TH

Area and Rank ^a	General Indicator	Sub-Indicator	Sub-Indicator Rank/Status ^b
AREA 1: RESOURCES & MEMBERSHIP 35*	Membership	By rank, what percentage of public-school teachers in the state are union members?	41st
	Revenue	By rank, what is the total yearly revenue (per teacher in the state) of the state-level NEA and/or AFT affiliate(s)?	49th
	Spending on education	By rank, what percentage of state expenditures (of state general funds, state restricted funds, state bonds, and federal "pass-through" funds) is directed to K-12 education?	9th
		By rank, what is the total annual per-pupil expenditure (of funds from federal, state, and local sources) in the state?	38th
		By rank, what percentage of total annual per-pupil expenditures is directed to teacher salaries and benefits?	7th
AREA 2: INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS 36*	Contributions to candidates and political parties	By rank, what percentage of the total contributions to state candidates was donated by teacher unions?	34th
		By rank, what percentage of the total contributions to state-level political parties was donated by teacher unions?	42nd
	Industry influence	By rank, what percent of the contributions to state candidates from the ten highest-giving sectors was donated by teacher unions?	37th
	Status of delegates	By rank, what percentage of the state's delegates to the Democratic and Republican conventions were members of teacher unions?	25th
AREA 3: SCOPE OF BARGAINING 48*	Legal scope of bargaining	What is the legal status of collective bargaining?	Prohibited
		By rank, how broad is the scope of collective bargaining?	47th*
	Automatic revenue streams	What is the unions' legal right to automatically collect agency fees from non-members and/or collect member dues via automatic payroll deductions?	Bargaining is not allowed
	Right to strike	What is the legal status of teacher strikes?	Prohibited
AREA 4: STATE POLICIES 26	Performance pay	Does the state support performance pay for teachers?	Available to all teachers
	Retirement	By rank, what is the employer- versus employee-contribution rate to the teacher pension system?	20th
	Evaluations	What is the maximum potential consequence for veteran teachers who receive unsatisfactory evaluation(s)?	Teacher improvement plan
		Is classroom effectiveness included in teacher evaluations? If so, how is it weighted?	Evidence of student "learning" required
	Terms of employment	How long before a teacher earns tenure?	Three years
		Is student/teacher performance considered in tenure decisions? If so, how is it weighted?	Not included
		Is seniority considered in teacher layoff decisions? If so, how is it weighted?	Required; Considered among other factors
		Is teacher performance included in teacher layoff decisions? If so, how is it weighted?	Not required
		By rank, what percentage of the teaching workforce was dismissed due to poor performance?	18th
Class size	Is class size restricted for grades 1-3? If so, is the restriction higher or lower than the national average (20)?	Yes; Higher	

Area and Rank	General Indicator	Sub-Indicator	Sub-Indicator Rank/Status
AREA 4: STATE POLICIES 26 (cont.)	Charter school structural limitations	Is there a cap (limit) placed on the number of charter schools that can operate in the state (or other jurisdiction) and/or on the number of students who can attend charter schools?	No state cap
		Does the state allow a variety of charter schools: start-ups, conversions, and virtual schools?	Yes
		How many charter authorizing options exist? How active are those authorizers?	Single option; Some activity
	Charter school exemptions	Are all charter schools automatically exempt from state laws and state/district regulations (except those that safeguard students and fiscal accountability)? If not, are they eligible for exemptions?	No; Schools can apply for exemptions
		Are all charter schools automatically exempt from state teacher-certification requirements? If not, are they eligible for exemptions?	No; Schools can apply for exemptions
		Are all charter schools automatically exempt from collective bargaining agreements (CBAs)? If not, are they eligible for exemptions?	Yes

AREA 5: PERCEIVED INFLUENCE^c 45	Relative influence of teacher unions	How do you rank the influence of teacher unions on education policy compared with other influential entities?	Fourth-most influential
	Influence over campaigns	On a scale from always to never, how often do Democratic candidates need teacher-union support to get elected?	Sometimes/Often
		On a scale from always to never, how often do Republican candidates need teacher-union support to get elected?	Rarely
	Influence over spending	To what extent, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, do you agree that even in times of cutbacks, teacher unions are effective in protecting dollars for education?	Disagree
		Given recent budgetary constraints, would you say that teacher unions generally make concessions to prevent reductions in pay and benefits or fight hard to prevent those reductions?	Generally fight
	Influence over policy	To what extent, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, do you agree that teacher unions ward off proposals in your state with which they disagree?	Neutral
		On a scale from always to never, how often do existing state education policies reflect teacher-union priorities?	Rarely
		To what extent, from totally in line to not at all in line, were state education policies proposed by the governor during your state's latest legislative session in line with teacher-union priorities?	Mostly not in line/ Somewhat in line
		To what extent, from totally in line to not at all in line, were legislative outcomes of your state's latest legislative session in line with teacher-union priorities?	Mostly not in line/ Somewhat in line
	Influence over key stakeholders	On a scale from always to never, how often have the priorities of state education leaders aligned with teacher-union positions in the past three years?	Rarely/Sometimes
		Would you say that teacher unions typically compromise with policymakers to ensure that their preferred policies are enacted, or typically need not make concessions?	Compromise

* Tied with another state

^a Area ranks are calculated using a weighted average of sub-indicators. For a more detailed description, see Appendix A.

^b Where possible, we report a state's rank as compared to other states on a given metric. For example, out of 51 states, Georgia has the 41st-highest percentage of teachers who are union members. Otherwise, we report a status: In Georgia, collective bargaining is prohibited, and teacher strikes are also prohibited. For a more detailed description of our metrics and methodology, see Appendix A. To request the raw data for your state, send an email to uniondata@edexcellence.net.

^c For all survey questions, stakeholders were asked specifically about teacher unions, candidates, policies, and leaders in their state. In addition, we asked about unions and policies in the "current legislative session," but because legislative calendars vary from state to state, responses refer to policies proposed and enacted within the 2010-11 window.

ENDNOTES

¹ A state's overall rank is calculated as follows: First, we score it on multiple sub-indicators (sub-indicator data and scores for Georgia are shown in the table, *Georgia Rankings by Area and Indicator*). Second, we take a weighted average of the sub-indicators in each of five areas. In each area, we use that average to place the states in rank order: For example, in Area 1: Resources and Membership, Georgia is ranked 35th of 51 based on the weighted average of its sub-indicators. To generate the state's overall rank, we average the five area ranks together, then re-order the states. For a more detailed description of data sources and methodology, see Appendix A.

² Readers should note that these figures include only direct donations from unions and union-connected PACs, but not their spending on electioneering/advertising, mobilizing the union's own membership, lobbying, or advocacy. A recent *Wall Street Journal* report found that donations and lobbying activities account for a small share of union political spending compared with their expenditures on member mobilization and advocacy. Even the AFT agreed, making the argument that since its mission is organizing and activism, it will naturally spend significant amounts on these activities. Thus, the percentages we report here are extremely conservative representations of what unions actually spend on politics. For more information, see Appendix A, Area 2; Tom McGinty and Brody Mullins, "Political Spending by Unions Far Exceeds Direct Donations," *Wall Street Journal*, July 10, 2012; and Jeff Hauser, "Wall Street Journal Compares Union Political Spending to Corporate Donations," AFL-CIO, July 10, 2012.

³ At the time of publication, the 2000 conventions were the most recent for which such detailed data were available in forms that met rigorous standards. However, 2008 data provided by the Democratic National Convention were highly correlated with the reliable figures from 2000.

⁴ We asked stakeholders about unions and policies in the "current legislative session," but because legislative calendars vary from state to state, responses refer to policies proposed and enacted within the 2010-11 window.

⁵ Jaime Sarrio, "Teachers To Be Graded On Student Test Scores," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, January 2, 2011, <http://www.ajc.com/news/news/local/teachers-to-be-graded-on-student-test-scores/nQpLG/>.

⁶ "Evaluations and Peer Review" and "GAE Emphasizes That New RT3 Teacher Evaluation Instrument Must Be Implemented Uniformly," Georgia Association of Educators, accessed August 31, 2012, <http://gae2.org/content.asp?contentid=736> and <http://gae2.org/content.asp?ContentId=1555>.

⁷ Gloria Tatum, "Occupy Atlanta, Tea Party Patriots Defeat SB 469," *Atlanta Progressive News*, March 30, 2012, <http://www.atlantaprogressivenews.com/interspire/news/2012/03/30/occupy-atlanta-tea-party-patriots-defeat-sb-469.html>.

⁸ Walter Jones, "Half Of Polled Voters Favor Charter School Amendment," *Morris News Service*, September 11, 2012, http://www.cedartownstd.com/view/full_story/20114157/article-Half-of-polled-voters-favor-charter-school-amendment?instance=home_news_lead_story.

⁹ D. Aileen Dodd, "Georgia Charter School Ruling To Reverberate Across Nation," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, March 21, 2011, <http://www.ajc.com/news/news/local/georgia-charter-school-ruling-to-reverberate-across-nQrm6/>. HB 881, the legislation creating the Commission (<http://gcsc.georgia.gov/gcsc/HB881/hb881.pdf>), granted it permission to authorize (§20-2-2081) and fund (§20-2-2090) "commission charter schools" as "special schools" allowable by Article VIII, Section V, Paragraph VII(a) of the Georgia constitution. House Bill 881 also provides that commission charter schools receive extra state funding equal to the local funding they would miss by not being chartered by a local district. When it created and funded commission charter schools, the Commission was operating within the power given to it by HB 881. However, the May 2011 Supreme Court ruling found HB 881 unconstitutional, saying that the constitution did not intend for "special schools" to supersede local district's exclusive control over K-12 education. The state could authorize special schools but could not give them additional money, because that money was taken from the students' original district's share of state funding.

¹⁰ Ibid.; "Georgia Charter Schools Weigh Options After State Court Declines To Revisit Decision," *HuffingtonPost.com*, June 14, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/06/14/georgia-charter-schools_n_877014.html. The commission charter schools can reapply as special schools but would receive direct state and federal funds only, without the state-matched local funds.

¹¹ Dave Williams, "Georgia Schools Chief Opposes Charter School Amendment," *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, August 14, 2012, <http://www.bizjournals.com/atlanta/news/2012/08/14/georgia-schools-chief-opposes-charter.html>.

¹² Deanna Allen (ed.), "GAE Lauds State Superintendent's Stance Against Charter School Constitutional Amendment," *Patch Network*, August 15, 2012, <http://barrow.patch.com/announcements/gae-lauds-state-superintendents-stance-against-charter-school-constitutional-amendment>.

¹³ Jones.

¹⁴ Greg Toppo, "AFT teachers Union To Defend Educators In Cheating Scandals," *USA Today*, July 12, 2011, http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2011-07-11-teachers-union-cheating_n.htm.

¹⁵ "GAE pleased To See Fair Dismissal Process Working," Georgia Association of Educators, June 28, 2012, <http://gae2.org/content.asp?contentid=1649>.