

## EDUCATION

# Teacher organizations say teacher shortage will cause burnout, more resignations

BY TIANA ALLEN

Georgia educators face a potentially stressful new school year as what felt like a mass exodus of teachers during the pandemic caused an even steeper teacher shortage in public schools.

According to The National Center for Education Statistics 44% of public schools will report teaching vacancies at the start of the year and more than half of those were resignations resulting in thousands of teaching vacancies across the country.

To fill the vacancies, Georgia Governor Brian Kemp enacted Georgia House Bill 385 earlier this year. The bill permits retired teachers to return to the classroom, still be paid full-time while receiving their pensions. For a retiree to return to work, they must have had a full 30 years of teaching experience.

Georgia Association of Educators president Lisa Morgan shared what she believes are the limitations of this bill saying, “Unfortunately, there has not been a great impact from that bill because the average retiree in Georgia has less than 26 years of work experience.”

Verdailia Turner, president of the Georgia Federation of Teachers, weighed in, referring to HB 385 as a “band-aid approach” to the shortage.

“Although this bill was somewhat helpful, we are not surprised about this teacher shortage. The pandemic caused many teachers to either stop out or die out,” she said.

As teachers continue to leave the profession in unprecedented numbers, school districts have chosen the path to be under Strategic Waiver School System (SWSS) Partnership Contracts which ac-

ording to the Georgia Department of Education, “is a local school district that operates under the terms of an SWSS contract between The State and Local Board of Education. The system receives flexibility in the form of waivers of certain state laws, rules and guidelines in exchange for greater accountability for increased school performance.”

With this power, Morgan states, “Many districts chose to waive the teaching certification requirement for those applying for teaching positions. Now we have non-educators in our profession, and no one has dared to look at the learning outcomes of students from this decision.”

Turner added, “Hiring unqualified teachers to teach is a market driven, political money grab, they are just trying to get warm bodies in the classrooms. School districts

are giving incentives up to \$5,000 in teaching bonuses, but I’ve not seen much else. Teachers need to take a stand and say ‘Hell no, we are not going to take this anymore’. If we don’t stand up for this profession, we are going to continue to have these problems.”

“There is a lack of respect for teachers” Morgan mentions. “Teaching is a very important profession and educators aren’t being seen as experts in the field. They aren’t paid as such either.”

“This along with the amount of non-instructional duties that are expected each week like filling out 6-7-page templates for grading, is causing burnout and it’s only going to get worse,” added Morgan.

To resolve this, it is going to take a culture change in some way, she suggests. “Educators were considered ‘superheroes’ during the pandemic. “Now we are ‘super zeros’

and told to ‘shut up and teach,’” said Morgan.

“If I could wave a magic wand to resolve this teacher shortage,” Turner stated. “Teachers would have negotiated contracts with school districts that are mutually agreed upon and address all concerns. Additionally, we can use more trained teacher’s aides, have seasoned teachers’ mentor newer teachers that come into the profession, have more unified teaching organizations that are making a difference politically, cultivate kinder communities that communicate, I’d even like to see churches adopt schools and expose children to life skills.”

Overall, “teachers are afterthoughts,” said Turner, “At some point we must ask, is this truly the best we can do for our students?”

## ECONOMY

# 53-year low in national unemployment bodes well for Black workers

BY DONNELL SUGGS

Black employment numbers are looking up, or rather, looking down after rising as high as 16.8% in May 2020 (compared to 14.7% overall unemployment during the same period), early in the pandemic.

The overall employment numbers in Georgia are also doing quite well. In fact the 2.8% unemployment rate (through July) is a historical low for the state.

The country’s overall employment rate of 3.5% is a 53-year low.

An August 24 report titled, “Pandemic shifts in Black employment and wages” projected positive upgrades for Blacks pursuing jobs in several industries. The 2022 labor market can be described as being in the middle of a high labor demand, according to the report. When that happens Blacks are most often likely to reap the benefits of the availability of employment, says Jared Bernstein, a member Council of Economic Advisors to the President. “If you give Black workers the opportunity, which is at the core of Biden-nomics, they will take big time advantage of it,” he said.



Photo Credit: iStock

The type of work that has become more readily available during the pandemic -transportation, utility sector jobs, and professional and business services- are in abundance in metro Atlanta.

This time of steady raises in salary and job status can’t be looked at through a crystal ball as how things are going to remain going forward, but Bernstein believes the efforts by many, the White House included, are a result of effort. “It’s not just about a historically strong labor market, it’s about a bunch of people working really hard to take advantage of a strong market,” he said.

The recent student low debt relief legislation (\$10,000 of debt cancellation for non-Pell Grant recipients and \$20,000 for Pell Grant recipients) will help to further the stretch of people’s checks.

Again, Black workers will feel a bit of an advantage from the student loan debt cancellation due to the amount of Pell Grant recipients since the student financial aid program was created in 1972. More than 70% of Black student loan borrowers received Pell Grants, according to the U.S. Department of Labor Statistics.