



UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA



COBB COUNTY
SCHOOL DISTRICT

YEAR 1 REPORT

GEORGIA'S **BEST**

BUILDING EDUCATOR
SUCCESS TOGETHER



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

***ELEVATING
EDUCATION***



COBB COUNTY
SCHOOL DISTRICT

**ONE TEAM. ONE GOAL.
STUDENT SUCCESS.**

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WORDS FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

The Georgia's BEST partnership, with the support of the University of West Georgia and our Board, is the most significant commitment a school district has made to support educators, and ultimately benefit students. I am thankful to the Cobb County Board of Education for unanimously approving the costs associated with keeping Cobb as the place where educators from across the state and country want to teach.

One year in, we are incredibly pleased with the results.

Cobb was the first large Georgia school district with a partnership that allows educators to pursue advanced degrees at no cost to them, with specialized curriculum.

More than 5,000 staff members expressed interest in participating in the program, and approximately 500 are currently enrolled. Of those, 100% have already signed contracts to return to Cobb classrooms, even more prepared to teach their students.

The program provides significant financial benefit for those who complete the program and stay in the Cobb County School District for the rest of their careers - more than an additional \$1 million dollars worth!

Georgia's BEST is also helping Cobb recruit and retain teachers while giving them specific training for particular areas of need and specialties within the District. This year, we have already retained 99% of our teachers and have incredible interest from across the country to help us fill those hard-to-find positions in high need areas.

Most importantly, Georgia's BEST benefits our entire team of students, staff, families, and taxpayers, and I could not be happier with the first year of the program.



Chris Ragsdale
Superintendent | Cobb County School District



MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN



In Fall 2022, following the Georgia Department of Education's "Educator Burnout" report, Superintendent Chris Ragsdale and I discussed challenges facing Georgia's educator workforce. These included educator career paths, motivation, retention, advancement – and as all conversations with Superintendent Ragsdale do – educator appreciation and support.

Teacher turnover was financially crippling school districts, between Georgia being among the hardest-hit states and a cost of approximately \$20,000 to fill the average teacher vacancy. We observed Georgia's traditional incentives were insufficient to enter or remain in the teaching profession. I offered this might be a result of the debt educators incurred in earning graduate degrees. The average Georgia educator pursuing a master's degree in the larger state universities left with approximately \$29,000 in student loan debt. As a result, student loan debt negated most of the raise educators received for the decade after earning their degree. We then posed the question: "What if Georgia had a HOPE Scholarship for teachers?"

In that question, Georgia's BEST was born.

There was a great deal of work between that question and February 2023, and we sought partners. Dr. Evan Horton and Coweta County School District became outstanding "founding" partners. Ultimately, what became "Georgia's BEST" represents thousands of hours of time, thought and action from the administrations of 18 school districts, RESA directors, and dozens of university administrators and staff members. We are deeply indebted to the Cobb and Coweta Boards of Education in having the vision and courage to fund this historic project.

Collectively, we had to find an incentive for school districts to accept this significant financial challenge AND a way for universities to reach a price point districts could afford. We also had a number of historic challenges on the proverbial table – such as the mismatch between degrees and certification educators pursued and the areas of greatest need by the districts – and sought to incorporate responses in the program.

We sought to build robust and ongoing partnerships between universities and districts ensuring professional relevance across all aspects of degree and certificate programs. This new model of partnerships allowed synergies to develop not just between institutions, but between professors and distinguished professional educators in a collaborative instructional model. This commitment to collaboration – to "Building Educator Success Together" – created a natural name for the project.

Georgia's BEST is the most ambitious model for educator support and education in our state's history. As you will see from the pages that follow, there has been a great deal done – and a great deal of opportunity remains. However, as Superintendent Ragsdale states, it was always our goal to build a state model, and in the last twelve months, we have seen that idea catch fire, with other districts and universities building partnerships. But none of it would have happened without the vision and leadership of Cobb County School District.

Thank you for letting us join you in this historic endeavor for Georgia.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Dishman".

Mike L. Dishman, J.D., Ed.D.
Professor of Education Policy & Governance
Dean, College of Education
University of West Georgia



BUILDING EDUCATOR SUCCESS TOGETHER

Teacher turnover in Georgia has reached 10.79%, with the Annenberg Foundation for School Reform at Brown University recognizing Georgia as one of four states starting the school year with over 3,000 vacancies. In response, most state and local agencies have tried the same recruitment and retention methods and found the same results. The average Georgia school district began the year with numerous teacher vacancies (e.g., Dekalb County School District vacancies exceeded 400 in AY22), which led to the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education naming teacher recruitment as one of its "Top Ten Issues to Watch in 2024." Georgia's current professional educator workforce (P-12) is approximately 177,000, with approximately 123,210 of those being classroom educators. The statistics further reveal that a significant portion of teacher turnover (77.9%) in Georgia is attributed to resignations. Two

school districts and one university took a decidedly different approach, one that supports staffing needs and quality of education in an innovative way, and after one year, are seeing innovative results.

To further elaborate on educator turnover trends, 14% of the teachers not returning to the profession were teachers in their first five years in the classroom. If providing Georgia students with the very best teachers is an attainable goal, this group of teachers who is most likely to leave the classroom, was a problem that must be solved. Similarly, a significant percentage of Georgia's teacher workforce are nearly retirement age - the average Georgia educator is 44 years old. When coupled with the unsustainable percentage of teachers leaving the profession in the first five years and without non-traditional attempts to solve the recruitment and retention crisis, districts across the state were likely to see traditional results.

The complexity of teacher turnover is significant and underscores the crucial role of higher education, as the "supply" in addressing teacher workforce "demand" in P-12 schools across the state and country. In response to this nationwide challenge, the University of West Georgia's College of Education partnered to create a first-of-its-kind solution to address teacher turnover and ensure teacher stability and excellence in Georgia's schools.

As the leading producer of certified educators for Georgia's schools, UWG is actively addressing the noted teacher and leader employment deficits. Statistics show that 1 out of 5 Georgia educators seeking certification or certificate upgrades in 2023 chose UWG.

Additionally, our programs proudly hold the top position as Georgia's leading provider in 8 out of 20 programs leading to Georgia



I've been a teacher and administrator in schools for a long time, I think teachers come to schools, and stay in classrooms, where they are valued. I have never heard our Team more excited about anything, or feel more valued, in my 30 years in Cobb.

Brad Wheeler | Cobb Schools Board Member Post 7

educator certification. These programs include critical needs areas such as Special Education Adapted Curriculum, Special Education General Curriculum, and Speech and Language Pathology, alongside Educational Leadership Tier 1 and Tier II, Instructional Technology, Literacy Specialist, and Media Specialist.

THE STORY OF GEORGIA'S BEST

In response to Georgia's teacher retention and quality concerns, the College of Education embarked on a groundbreaking strategic initiative with Cobb County School District and Coweta County School District, aiming to achieve something unprecedented in scale and impact. This initiative is known today as Georgia's BEST (Building Educator Success Together). Prior to Georgia's BEST, school districts often partnered with universities and directed their employees to specific programs, yet rarely funded their educational expenses. When funded, it was often critical needs areas such as special education (e.g., paraprofessional to teacher pipelining initiatives), and few in number. This practice, when successful, fulfilled a small need, but with the impact of COVID-19 and a recurring 1% drop in teacher retention across the state between 2021 and 2023, the impact would soon become "dire" if a more aggressive approach was not taken.

"Georgia's BEST is allowing Cobb County Educators to receive a FREE quality education, from experts at West Georgia (ISM's), with curriculum specifically designed for Cobb classrooms. The program allows for educators to receive credit for work that is actually useful in their classrooms."

Dr. Ashley Beasley, Principal at Davis Elementary School, Cobb County School District

In Fall 2022, Cobb Schools Superintendent Chris Ragsdale approached the University of West Georgia to assist in developing an educator retention/education program in which the district would pay some or all of the cost of district educators pursuing graduate degrees. The program targeted a price point superintendents believed would be supported by boards of education while meeting the requirements of USG policy to eliminate the need for educator borrowing. To do so, the University increased efficiencies and eliminated redundancies, which allowed a price point of \$1,000 for six credit hours per semester. Additionally, this price was achieved by focusing on effectiveness in program delivery, requiring a minimum of 100 educators to participate (which avoided the risk of reducing current enrollment), and a minimum class size of 25. The program also relied on blending

part-time and full-time instructors, utilizing district employees meeting accreditation qualifications to teach at the graduate level, partnered with full-time faculty with disciplinary expertise.

On February 16, 2023 and after District staff conducted a strategic workforce analysis to determine its areas of highest needs, the Cobb County Board of Education voted 7-0 to annually support 500 slots for Cobb educators in the program for five years. In support of the program, the District argued the program would be more cost effective than replacing the approximately 200 educators Cobb lost annually, which had an established replacement/onboarding cost of roughly \$4.2 million (i.e., \$21,000 to replace each teacher). The District also noted that if educators did not incur student loan debt, most of their raises would be spent in Cobb County, with a significant fiscal impact on the Cobb community. The District estimated the \$3 million investment required to support degrees for the first 500 would yield a direct positive economic impact of \$3.5 million annually for ten years to Cobb and Georgia (\$35,000,000), with a total direct and indirect economic impact of approximately \$49,000,000. By February 28, 2023, 4,700 Cobb educators completed the process to register their interest in applying for Cobb's Georgia's BEST cohort.

A CALL TO ACTION

On that same day, the Coweta County Board of Education voted 7-0 to annually support 150 slots for Coweta educators in the program for four years. As such, through a collaborative effort, a partnership was formed with UWG, Cobb County Schools, and Coweta County Schools to develop Georgia's BEST.

During Spring 2023, Cobb County School District conducted a workforce analysis and identified special education, STEM, reading, and leadership as areas of key workforce need. The district identified special education, math, science, and instructional technology as its areas of highest needs and prioritized the first 200 seats to offerings which would improve recruitment and retention in those high-need areas. The unique pairing of degree areas, such as Special Education with Educational Leadership and Instructional Technology with Science, ensured future district leaders had an understanding of instructional practices in areas

which will be high-need for the foreseeable future.

In preparation for the launch of the program, UWG leaders and faculty, Cobb County School leaders, and Coweta County Schools leaders spent hundreds of hours during the spring of 2023.

The leadership team's goal was simple yet impossible: make real something that hasn't existed. A relevant higher ed instructional program, co-designed by public districts and co-taught by school district and UWG faculty. To do so, UWG faculty-led instructional teams redesigned existing programs to ensure assignments were relevant to both districts and most importantly, meaningful in teacher classrooms. In other words, actually effective for students, based on real-time feedback from both districts. Similarly, UWG's Graduate School, Registrar's Office, and Billing Services developed processes to streamline admissions, course registration, and district

billing. As the first students began their course during the summer of 2023, the Georgia's BEST program had become a truly customized partnership, built by Districts, to benefit teachers, for students.

"The Georgia's BEST program has reignited my passion for teaching and learning. I have learned so much about the science of reading and have implemented new strategies with my students. I love that it is a personalized experience that gives me practical knowledge I can use now."

Stacy King
M.Ed. Special Education Student

By the beginning of the summer of 2023, approximately 200 students began instruction, by full-time UWG faculty, while the Instructional Support Mentor (ISM) program was launched. Both district and UWG staff used the summer of 2023 to identify, recruit, and develop the part-time faculty teaching model which is in place today.



“
We believe this is a statewide model which solves a recruitment and retention problem and could positively affect every school and community in the state.

Chris Ragsdale

A CALL TO ACTION

Today, UWG faculty serve as mentors to Cobb leaders, serving as primary instructors, who are also currently working in the field which they are teaching.

The Fall 2023 and Spring 2024 semesters saw the addition of another approximately 300 students in the following programs, again as driven by the District in areas of highest need: Ed.S. in Instructional Technology, Ed.S in Special Education, M.Ed. in Instructional Technology, and M.Ed. in Reading Instruction.

The Spring of 2024 welcomed approximately 65 sitting principals and assistant principals who began their Ed.D. in School Improvement. Over the course of the 2023-2024 school year, the program also fully integrated Cobb County School District teachers and leaders serving as part-time faculty and saw further development of the ISM Program, which involves UWG full-time faculty supporting and collaborating with school district part-time faculty.



IMMEDIATE IMPACT

Evidence provided by Cobb County Schools showed that Georgia's BEST had significantly enhanced the District's recruiting and retention efforts, as well as greatly contributed to the morale of the District's educators. As other similarly sized metro Georgia districts began the 2023-2024 school year with 200-400 teacher vacancies, Cobb began with only 24, showcasing a 75% decrease in vacant teaching positions when compared to previous school years.

Additionally, the District received applications from a record number of veteran educators. Of the 700 new teachers hired by the district, most cited Georgia's BEST as one of the reasons they applied to Cobb County Schools. Within the District's applications from outside Georgia, 117 specifically named Georgia's BEST as the factor which made them willing to move across the country, to work in Cobb specifically.

Through its offerings, dedication to excellence, and ingenuity, UWG's College of Education has maintained its focus on addressing teacher and leader quality, staffing, retention, and shaping the future of education practices in Georgia. With unwavering commitment and continuous innovation, UWG remains steadfast in serving Georgia's schools, teachers, and leaders. At UWG, "Excellence is the Expectation!"

Data were retrieved from the TRS Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (AY22), TRS Report of the Actuary of Valuation (AY22), Georgia Department of Education Georgia Insights Dashboard for Educator Pipeline, and GaPSC Epp Rankings for 2023.

— “ —
In 1993, Governor Zell Miller argued Georgia's soundest investment was funding the college education of Georgians. On the thirtieth anniversary of the HOPE Scholarship Program, Georgia's BEST was a fitting tribute to his vision and legacy.

Mike L. Dishman, J.D., Ed.D.

PROGRAM TIMELINE

FEBRUARY 17, 2023

Georgia's BEST Partnership Announced

FEBRUARY 20, 2023

Over 5,000 Cobb County School District Employees completed the Georgia's BEST Program interest survey

MAY 15, 2023

194 Cobb county school district employees were accepted to the Georgia's BEST Alpha Cohort

MAY 30, 2023

Alpha Cohort Began Classes

JULY 11, 2023

251 Cobb County School District employees were accepted to the Georgia's BEST Beta Cohort

AUGUST 9, 2023

Beta cohort began classes

NOVEMBER 28, 2023

66 Cobb County School District employees were accepted to the Georgia's BEST doctorate of education Cohort

JANUARY 6, 2024

Doctorate of education Cohort began classes

JULY 27, 2024

First Georgia's BEST students graduate from the program

PROGRAM DELIVERY

Georgia's BEST operates on a cohort model, with each district contributing a minimum of 100 educators. Emphasizing program delivery efficiency, class sizes are maintained at a minimum of 25, doubling the state's average graduate enrollment. Through this efficiency, Georgia's BEST students receive a world-class education that is specific and immediately applicable to their work in their home school and district.

Students complete six credit hours of coursework each semester. This translates to approximately 240 hours of study each semester. UWG faculty have designed each course to be rigorous yet achievable for full-time teachers.

The program employs a blend of part-time and full-time instructors, featuring experienced district employees teaching alongside full-time UWG mentor faculty. All instructors undergo rigorous credential analysis by UWG prior to hiring to ensure we are in compliance with our accrediting bodies.

Full-time UWG faculty oversee course development and management, while statistical analysis of student performance is conducted each semester by expert program and course coordinators.



David G. Buckman, Ph.D., is Associate Dean for Education Partnerships and an Associate Professor of Educational Leadership in the Department of Leadership, Research, and School Improvement.

PROGRAMS OF STUDY

Summer 2023 Start

- Ed.S. in Special Education with Tier 1 Leadership Certification
- Ed.S. in Special Education
- Ed.S. in Instructional Technology with a Math Emphasis
- Ed.S. in Instructional Technology with a Science Emphasis
- Ed.S. in Instructional Technology with a Special Education Emphasis
- M.Ed. in Special Education

Fall 2023 Start

- Ed.S. in Special Education
- Ed.S. in Instructional Technology with a Math Emphasis
- Ed.S. in Instructional Technology with a Science Emphasis
- Ed.S. in Instructional Technology with an Elementary Education Emphasis
- M.Ed. in Reading Instruction

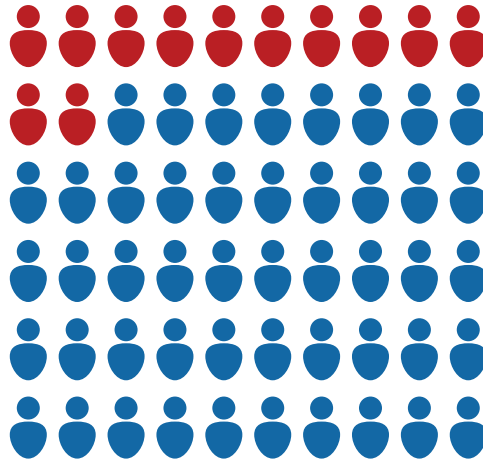
Spring 2024 Start

- Ed.D. in School Improvement

THE UWG COLLEGE OF EDUCATION IS THE #1 CHOICE FOR GEORGIA EDUCATORS

Out of the 4,786 Georgia educators who earned certification or certificate upgrades through universities in 2023

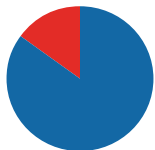
1 in 5
choose UWG.



UWG College of Education is the largest producer of certified educators for Georgia's schools.



6 of the last 12 Georgia Superintendents of the Year are alumni of the UWG COE.

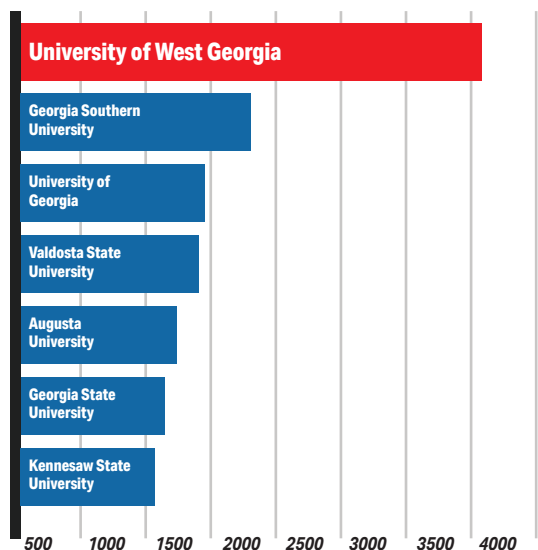


The College of Education is 85% of the graduate student enrollment at UWG.

UWG IS GEORGIA'S #1 PROVIDER IN 8 OF OUR 20 PROGRAMS LEADING TO GEORGIA EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION:

- Educational Leadership Tier I
- Educational Leadership Tier II
- Instructional Technology
- Literacy Specialist
- Media Specialist
- Special Education Adapted Curriculum
- Special Education General Curriculum
- Speech and Language Pathology

UWG IS THE #1 CHOICE FOR GEORGIA EDUCATORS FOR GRADUATE DEGREES.



PROGRAM SUCCESS

BY THE NUMBERS

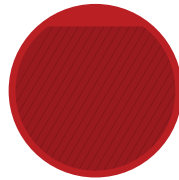
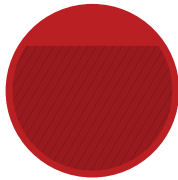
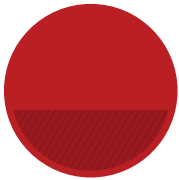
PROGRAM ENROLLMENT TRENDS

SUMMER 2023 FALL 2023 SPRING 2024

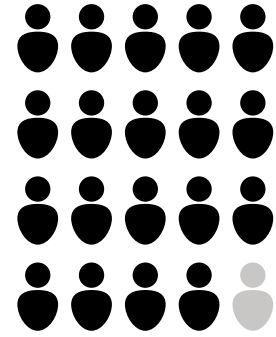
194

443

487



STUDENT
RETENTION
96%



PROGRAM PROGRESSION



74%

Summer 2023 cohorts are making remarkable progress, with 74% completion achieved in their programs.



43%

Fall 2023 cohorts are well underway, marking significant progress with 43% completion of their programs.



10%

The Spring 2024 cohort is on track to achieve significant milestones, anticipating a 10% completion of their degree program this semester.



"One of my favorite parts of the Georgia's BEST program is that it has allowed me to form relationships with colleagues within my district that I may not have met otherwise. We have had opportunities to collaborate on projects, share resources and ideas, and learn from each other, which has been incredibly valuable."

Courtney Aquilino | Ed.S. Instructional Technology Student

FINANCIALS



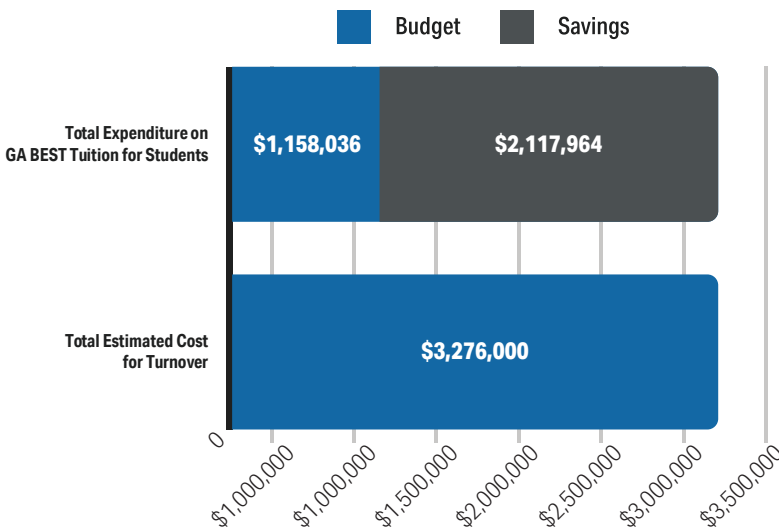
“ Investments of time, dollars, and smart people often take years to evaluate. Georgia’s BEST is already showing unmatched returns for teachers, taxpayers, and most importantly, students.

John Floresta | Chief Strategy Officer, Cobb Schools

GEORGIA’S BEST DISTRICT BENEFITS

\$21,000
EACH

Per Cobb County Schools—Estimated expenses and person-hours related to processing a teacher’s exit, as well as costs to recruit, hire, and train a new teacher.



Teacher Turnover: A Costly Challenge for School Districts. This graph illustrates the financial toll of teacher turnover, revealing the significant expenses incurred by school districts due to the recruitment, hiring, and training of new teachers. The data underscores the importance of identifying innovative retention strategies to mitigate these costs and enhance overall K-12 student learning.

6% Guaranteed retention for 3 years

\$10,500,000 Annual estimated savings due to increased retention

-75% Reduction in teacher vacancies at the beginning of AY24 school year as compared with AY23

100% Percentage of Georgia’s BEST educators who signed and returned their CCSD contracts for AY25

A TALE

OF TWO TEACHERS

TEACHER A

Teacher A (25 years old) takes a federal student loan of \$22,000 to fund their advanced degree in education.

After degree completion, Teacher A earns an additional \$7,300 annually (net approximately \$5,000 or \$412 monthly) due to their advanced degree*.

Teacher A begins paying their student loan debt of \$285/month (\$3,420 annually) for the next ten years. They invest the remaining \$127 from their raise each month (\$1,524 annually) in a Roth IRA**.

After 10 years, Teacher A will have paid a total of \$34,200 in student loans and earned \$23,154 by investing their remaining raise after loan payment in a Roth IRA.

Teacher A makes no additional contributions to the Roth IRA after age 37.

**At retirement, Teacher A
has a Roth IRA balance of**
\$281,834.70

GA BEST TEACHER

Teacher B (25 years old) is in the Georgia's BEST program where their employer pays for their advanced degree in education.

After degree completion, Teacher B will earn an additional \$7,300 (net approximately \$5,000 or \$412 monthly) due to their advanced degree*.

Teacher B begins investing their raise (\$412 monthly or \$5,000 annually) into a Roth IRA**.

After 10 years, Teacher B earns \$75,965 by investing their entire raise in a Roth IRA.

Teacher B makes no additional contributions to the Roth IRA after age 37.

**At retirement, Teacher B
has a Roth IRA balance of**
\$924,659.81

*Net Estimated raise from bachelor's to master's degree \$5,000.

**Age at degree start is 25, age at degree completion is 27, age of retirement is 67, estimating a 9% rate of return.

Note: All dollar amounts are estimates, calculated using the Roth IRA calculator at <https://www.bankrate.com/retirement/roth-ira-plan-calculator/>, and serve as an example only. Please consult a certified financial advisor for retirement planning.

RIGOROUS ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

SPECIAL EDUCATION

The Special Education programs at UWG equip practitioners with the expertise needed to be successful educators and leaders. Our faculty are champions for inclusion, ensuring every student has the tools and opportunities needed to succeed in a diverse and ever-changing world and empowering leaders to be change agents at every level. We developed a new Education Specialist in Special Education and Tier One Education Leadership Certification Track, as well as two embedded endorsements within the M.Ed. Program (Autism Spectrum Disorders Endorsement and Dyslexia Endorsement)

CCSD Georgia's BEST Students

- Demonstrate leadership competency by creating a Special Education Leadership Development plan and designing professional development sessions on the Code of Ethics.
- Evaluate programs, curricula, and P-12 student outcomes.
- Create plans for practice and policy highlighting evidence-based strategies and dive into student data with assessment portfolios and a research implementation project.
- Utilize mixed-reality simulations to practice skills relative to topics selected by CCSD administrators.

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The Educational Leadership programs at UWG provide relevant and rigorous experiences for educational leaders in Georgia, and are highly regarded throughout the state and nation. Highly qualified UWG faculty and Cobb County School District employees' unique partnership allows Cobb County Georgia's BEST students to benefit from learning theory, research, and practical application at the highest level of academia to become change agents in their schools.

CCSD Georgia's BEST Students

- Become immersed in ethical and legal practices as they complete a project to identify, analyze, and apply educational law to a local educational agency's policies and communicate their findings to a CCSD educational leader.
- Interview the person most responsible for facilitating the school's safety planning process. Data are used, in part, to complete a safety evaluation of their school.
- Participate in a group capstone experience, similar to School Improvement teams in school systems. The School Improvement Capstone Experience is an opportunity for doctoral students to design and implement group research to address a specific problem of practice in schools under the direction of a highly qualified instructor.

STUDENT SUCCESS

IN KEY AREAS

INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY

The Instructional Technology Program at UWG is the leader in the state. Our program provides educators and designers with authentic learning experiences, utilizing cutting-edge technology and approaches that they can transfer into their careers. Our coursework focuses on designing, delivering, and evaluating effective instruction in technology-enhanced environments, centered around focus areas in Science, Mathematics, Special Education, and Elementary Education.

CCSD Georgia's BEST Students

- Plan for the diffusion of instructional technology throughout their school to ensure meaningful, sustainable improvement.
- Plan professional development for their teacher teams and schools focused on visual, media, and/or data literacy.
- Design online, virtual, and hybrid learning experiences for their students, leveraging emerging technology tools.
- Diagnose problems within their organizations using a systemic approach, which aims to ensure all causes of problems are addressed, including those that can be solved through technology and those that cannot.
- Develop grants to allow teachers to receive funds to help improve their (and their schools') instructional practices.

READING EDUCATION

The Reading Instruction program at UWG stands out for its emphasis on the latest literacy research, pedagogy, and evidence-based instructional and assessment practices. Candidates master a comprehensive understanding of the science of teaching reading, and enhancing their assessment and instructional strategies. This preparation ensures the implementation of effective, evidence-based practices in reading and writing across various content areas and grade levels.

CCSD Georgia's BEST Students

- Are prepared to meet the new state literacy standards with a focus on the Science of Reading.
- Apply literacy theory, research, and connect assessment and instruction for effective reading and writing best practices across content areas.
- Lead inquisitive learning through technology and culturally responsive instruction to motivate all learners.
- Engage learners in developing critical stances through collaborative interactions during reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing for life-long learning.
- Improve literacy curricula to enhance student literacy achievement.

COBB FACULTY SUCCESS

28 COBB FACULTY HAVE TAUGHT 75 CLASS SECTIONS IN THE GEORGIA'S BEST PROGRAM SINCE SUMMER 2023

Georgia's BEST is a \$1 Million benefit for our staff members that comes at no cost to them and positively impacts the entire Cobb community.



“
Through the Georgia's BEST program I have gained the opportunity to help my colleagues in CCSD on their journey as educators. I have also been helped on my own journey as an educator by the reflections, experiences, and feedback from my students and the ISMs.

Dominique Terens | Supervisor of SPED Compliance, Cobb County & Georgia's BEST Part-Time Faculty

“
As a partner professor, I've benefited from collaborating with teachers across the district. Working alongside West Georgia and Cobb County instructors has enriched my professional expertise and provided a unique platform for shared learning and innovative educational strategies. This experience has enhanced my approach to academic instruction and professional development.

Dr. Starla Townsend | Director of Instructional Technology, Cobb County & Georgia's BEST Part-Time Faculty



“
Being an instructor in the Georgia BEST Program has been immensely rewarding. The emphasis on fostering leadership qualities and enhancing support for students with disabilities reflects a commitment to excellence in inclusive education, making it a fulfilling environment to contribute to the professional development of future special education leaders.

Stephanie Smith | Assistant Director of SPED, Cobb County & Georgia's BEST Part-Time Faculty

“
In my area of expertise, Instructional Technology, I've been able to learn where our teachers are in their own instructional technology understanding and teaching. That has enabled me to tailor my own teaching to meet them where they are and advanced their skills, ultimately increasing student success.

Dr. Holly Frlot | Library Media Specialist of the Year, Library Media Supervisor, Cobb County & Georgia's BEST Part-Time Faculty



UWG FACULTY MENTORING

21 UWG FACULTY HAVE SERVED AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT MENTOR SINCE SUMMER 2023

The Instructional Support Mentor (ISM) is a UWG faculty member responsible for overseeing the instructional content, delivery, and communication for specific courses under the Georgia's BEST partnership model. This faculty member is, ideally, an individual who has taught the course consistently with positive student learning outcomes and feedback and collaborates well with colleagues/partners. ISMs meet weekly with Georgia's BEST part-time faculty to ensure clear communication and curriculum development.



“
I have had the great pleasure to work with two outstanding Cobb County instructors who are dedicated to the partnership and the success of the students they serve. The collaboration is unparalleled, and as a result, the Cobb County participants are able to connect the coursework to their district's practices. Ultimately, GA's BEST is a win for Cobb County students.

**Samantha Fuhrey | 2020 Georgia Superintendent of the Year, Clinical Assistant Professor
UWG Instructional Support Mentor**

“
It is a true pleasure to work with district partners. It is evident that they are passionate about student success and the advancement of the profession, and when done right, it only serves to benefit all parties involved.

Dr. Morris Council | Associate Professor Special Education, UWG Instructional Support Mentor



“
The Georgia's BEST program has been an amazing experience. It has allowed me to collaborate with some of Georgia's top leaders to share experiences and knowledge. The professors have been very supportive to work with and they have provided valuable experiences.

Corey Sanford | Ed.D. School Improvement Student



“
I was thrilled to join the team at UWG and work with the Georgia BEST Program. My Instructional Support Mentor has been a tremendous support throughout this program. She is knowledgeable, approachable, and always available to help.

Dr. Hannah Polk | Principal Hightower Trail Middle School & UWG Part-Time Faculty



SPECIAL THANKS

COBB COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF EDUCATION



RANDY SCAMIHORN

Post 1
BOARD CHAIR

— “ —
Our Board and Superintendent have said our employees are a priority for almost a decade. It is one thing to say so, it is very much another to see innovations like Georgia's BEST prove those words to be true.

Board Chair Randy Scamihorn



BECKY SAYLER

Post 2
BOARD MEMBER



LEROY TRE' HUTCHINS

Post 3
BOARD MEMBER



DAVID CHASTAIN

Post 4
BOARD MEMBER



DAVID BANKS

Post 5
BOARD VICE-CHAIR



NICHELLE DAVIS

Post 6
BOARD MEMBER



BRAD WHEELER

Post 7
BOARD MEMBER

"It's refreshing to have a partner that is actually interested in helping teachers become better for their students - not distracted by issues which should be decided by families."

Board Vice-Chair David Banks

"Investing in and supporting our teachers as they continue their lifelong learning helps our students have access to highly qualified and motivated educators. I'm thrilled that this program is a win for our community."

Board Member Becky Sayler

"Georgia's BEST program allows our teachers to be better for their students and provide for their families in a way that will pay off for decades. Kudos to the University of West Georgia and the Cobb County School District for partnering in this 'blue chip' investment."

Board Member David Chastain

"The University of West Georgia is one of the premier education colleges in the state of Georgia... It's an excellent program. I think this is the way all districts should be looking at this. It's exciting and the fact that we don't have to drive an hour to Carrollton in order to participate in that world class education is going to be critical for our educators."

Board Member Leroy Tre' Hutchins

"I've been a teacher and administrator in schools for a long time. I think teachers come to schools and stay in classrooms where they are valued. I have never heard our Team more excited about anything, or feel more valued, in my 30 years in Cobb."

Board Member Brad Wheeler

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The success of the first year of this partnership would not have been possible without the hard work of many Cobb County School District and University of West Georgia personnel. We would like to acknowledge the following individuals for their contribution to Georgia's BEST.

UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA

Dr. Brendan B. Kelly, President

Dr. Jon Preston, Provost

Dr. Mike L. Dishman, Dean of the College of Education

Dr. Matt Varga, Dean of the Graduate School

Dr. David Buckman, Associate Dean of the College of Education

Dr. Laura Smith, Senior Associate Dean of the College of Education

Dr. Brent Heidorn, Associate Dean of the College of Education

Dr. Jennifer Edelman, COE Director of Data, Assessment, & Institutional Research

Dr. Jennifer Allen

Dr. Logan Arrington

Mr. Antwan Bethea

Ms. Lindsey Buffington

Ms. Angie Brooks

Dr. Ye Chen

Dr. Morris Council

Dr. Lama Farran

Dr. Clifford Davis

Ms. Amy Foster

Dr. Toni Franklin

Ms. Alicia Freed

Ms. Samantha Fuhrey

Ms. Suzanne Garrett

Ms. Lucretia Gibbs

Dr. Katy Green

Dr. Robert Griffin

Ms. Chloe Henderson

Dr. John Hampton

Dr. Kim Huett

Mr. Tommy Jenks

Ms. Kathy Jones

Dr. Laurie Kimbrel

Ms. Charity Langely

Ms. Brooklyn Layton

Dr. Sungwoong Lee

Dr. Brandy Locchetta

Dr. Diana Mindrila

Dr. Tami Ogletree

Dr. John Ponder

Ms. Terrie Ponder

Dr. Elizabeth Pope

Dr. Julie Raschen

Ms. Emily Raymaker

Dr. Jean Ruffin

Dr. James Schwab

Ms. Ally Simmons

Dr. Elizabeth Stewart

Dr. Jessica Thompson

Dr. Allyson Wilcox

Dr. Trina Wood

Dr. Mary Alice Varga

COBB COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Mr. Chris Ragsdale, Superintendent

Mr. John Floresta, Chief Strategy & Accountability Officer

Ms. Keeli Bowen, Chief Human Resource Officer

Dr. Catherine Mallanda, Chief Academic Officer

Dr. Ehsan Kattoula, Assistant Superintendent

Mr. Julian Coca, Director of Content and Marketing

Mr. Daniel Vehar, Assistant Director of Marketing

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Ms. Sandra Murray

Ms. Mary Nelson

Ms. Hannah Odom

Ms. Hannah Polk

Ms. Ginny Smith

Ms. Stephanie Smith

Ms. Meagan Stanfill

Ms. Dominique Terens

Dr. Starla Townsend

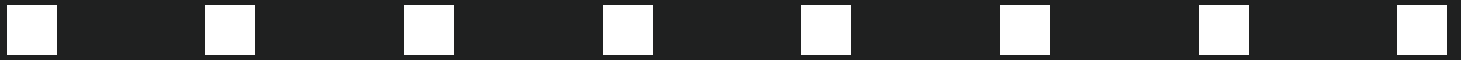
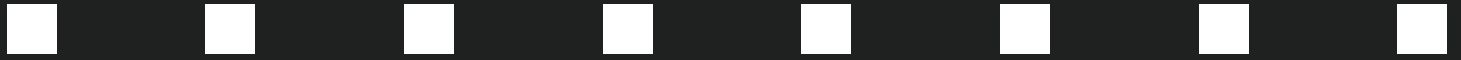
Ms. Cheri Vaniman



UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA



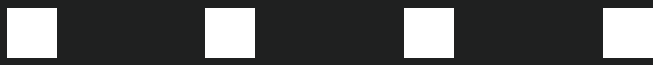
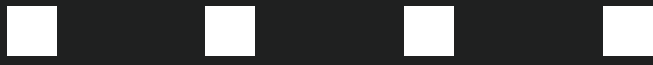
COBB COUNTY
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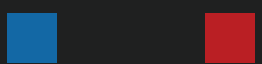
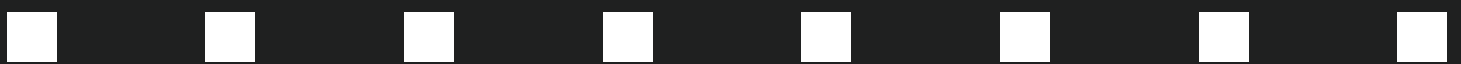
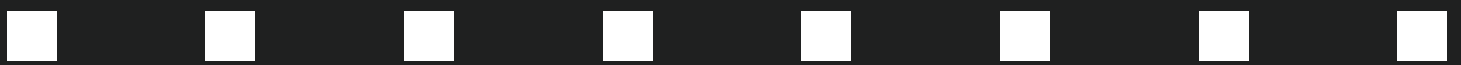
YEAR 1 REPORT



2024



GEORGIA'S
BEST



BUILDING EDUCATOR SUCCESS TOGETHER