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PAGE Statement on HB 338

PAGE is Georgia's largest education organization representing over 92,000 educators. We neither support nor oppose HB 338 at this time. We have worked with Chairman Tanner extensively on the legislation and will continue to work with him and other legislators on this important bill. We are pleased that Chairman Tanner and legislative leaders from both parties have sought out and incorporated feedback from PAGE and practicing Georgia educators about how to best help struggling schools.

The current version of the legislation contains elements demonstrating a good-faith effort to support schools in need, but there are still two significant issues which require further attention. The first and greatest concern for Georgia's educators are the unspecified accountability measures which are to be determined by another agency outside of the Georgia Department of Education. The second is the line authority of the Chief Turnaround Authority to the state Board of Education rather than the elected state school superintendent.

HB 338 includes several provisions that PAGE strongly supports. Significantly, unlike OSD, this bill recognizes the conditions which affect student achievement and seeks to influence those factors through a partnership among the school district, the Department of Education, the turnaround officer and other agencies. Further, in recognition of the issues, most of the schools to be identified for supports, HB 338 refers to low-performing and struggling schools rather than "failing" schools. Additionally, HB 338 develops a process of analysis, support and collaboration rather than identify, label and takeover.

PAGE appreciates the collaborative work that has gone into HB 338 and the leadership of Chairman Tanner in drafting this bill. He has made every effort to develop a process to provide much needed and appropriate supports for struggling schools and communities. Tanner's model of cooperation by reaching out to PAGE and other teacher and education advocacy groups ensures that those who must actually implement mandated changes are involved in the design of what works best for Georgia's students and educators. In particular, we appreciate Chairman Tanner's removal of provisions creating private school vouchers for students in targeted schools. The inclusion of controversial vouchers, which have a poor demonstrable track record of lifting student achievement, would have shut down effective collaboration between supporters of HB 338 and most Georgia educators and education organizations.

In today's polarized political climate, it is refreshing to work effectively with a bipartisan group of Georgia legislators in service of our state's most important resource—Georgia's children. Let's keep up this difficult but critical work.