

## K-12 English Learners Advocacy Table

# 2022 Recommendations and Roadmap for ELL Student Success in Georgia

The K-12 Advocacy Table for English Learners, a group of community advocates and English Language Learners (ELLs) have designed a roadmap/protocol of best practices for English learners in alignment with the 1974 Supreme Court decision in *Lau v. Nichols*, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the U.S. Department of Education's guidelines for English language programs.

Schools have an obligation toward educating ELLs with the same opportunities as their non-ELL peers. That is, they are to be provided access to the same quality of education, the development of an effective curriculum, and appropriate funding to support services to ELLs and Limited English Proficient (LEP) families.

While many local schools have made progress in equal access to education, much remains to be done in critical areas such as providing quality trained teachers and personnel, local services to ELL/LEP families, and addressing accountability and transparency from school systems in regard to ELL services.

The COVID-19 pandemic made the challenges in meeting the standard created by the law more apparent than ever. The COVID-19 crisis does not exclude or exempt schools from their obligation to provide services to ELLs and their families, but in fact, many schools struggled with continuing to provide quality programs and services to ELL students and communicating with their families in a relevant and time-appropriate manner.

Current realities in Georgia, including limited access to technology, digital connectivity and language access lines and support, are the consequence of the discrepancies in serving this growing community of students.

According to the Migration Policy Institute, 21.5% of all children enrolled in Georgia schools are children of immigrants. Immigrants also represent a disproportionate share of parents of young and elementary-school-age children without a high-school diploma or its equivalent. Fifty-three percent of parents of children ages 0 to 4 and 50% of parents of children 5 to 10 without a high school diploma are immigrants, and 30% of all parents with children in K-12 are Limited English Proficient.

Inequities faced by immigrants and ELL students are not new, yet few accountability processes and systems are in place to monitor this. Local school system services are not audited, and self-reporting to various funding sources is the standard with the exception

of federal funding. Our group believes educational institutions need to be accountable and transparent at all levels, from the State Department of Education to every region, district, and every single building and classroom where students are being taught and served.

It is important to note that other critical issues compound to create barriers to the same communities we are focusing this document on. Limited access to healthcare and health information as well as exclusion from various state and federal safety net programs exacerbate the barriers families of ELLs face when accessing public education in Georgia.

As a community-led group, the K-12 Advocacy Table for English Learners presents this document with the intention to share actionable measures towards lifting and engaging ALL our children and ensuring that they receive a quality education in Georgia. We want to note that every single recommendation is connected to obstacles that impact the academic achievement of our students.

In closing, we would like to share that as part of our efforts to gather feedback and signatures from parents and community organizations, we included:

- a) An opportunity for parents to share any other topics of themes they would like to see included in the recommendations.
- b) A space to note if their student had been being spanked or physically punished in school.

The surprising findings are shared in the addendum to this document. You can learn more about discipline student metrics in Georgia by visiting the [Governor's Office of Student Achievement. Use the filters on the left to choose "English Learners" as a sub-group.](#)

*Data sources:*

\* [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19\\_204.20.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_204.20.asp)

\*\* <https://www.georgiaenglishlearners.com/learn>

*Data analysis by LCF Georgia academic & research volunteer Rodriguez-Vila, PhD.*

## Protect lives first. Be courageous.

The data is clear and overwhelming. People of all ages are getting infected with the deadly COVID-19 virus which has long lasting health impacts for many who survive it. Furthermore, English learning communities are often highly susceptible to infection and COVID-related trauma due to cultural, socio-economic, and language barriers. Therefore, it is essential that schools continue to share information about COVID-19 such as health protocols, CDC recommendations and other safety measures, and provide multilingual resources that facilitate effective communication to these linguistically diverse communities.

School districts MUST use their social and reputational capital to:

- Implement mask use as part of the dress code while COVID-19, an infectious diseases rapidly spreading and significantly affecting those with chronic and vulnerable conditions. continues to be categorized as a critical public health issue.
- Facilitate access to vaccination free of charge within the school district.

- Model student behavior by mandating vaccination and mask-wearing for staff and teachers as a tool to protect school community member lives and livelihoods.
- Mandate vaccination for students who are eligible, similar to other vaccine requirements.
- Ensure that students and their families regularly receive in-language reminders on preventative measures.
- Encourage teachers to use visuals, videos, and demonstrations with ELLs on preventive measures like hand washing and check students' understanding of that information.
- Make communication accommodations for different preferences such as phone-calls, text, videos, and social media. Keep in mind that families with lower levels of literacy may not be able to read written materials. Making information available in a variety of forms increases families' access.

## Communications should be designed for the most vulnerable.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, amended in 1970, provides guidance on communication for parents of LEP students, specifically, that communication must be made, distributed, and offered in different mediums and in languages (oral or written) which students' parents can understand.

This legislation was enacted to prevent discrimination and the unequal treatment of individuals.

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) must understand and be mindful of the limitations of the current communication system's ability to reach ELL/LEP parents and must intentionally design communication systems to ensure that ALL messaging reaches the maximum amount of families, including the most vulnerable populations.

Many schools with a high ELL/LEP population (>50%) do not have trained personnel nor language lines to provide interpretations and effectively service a significant portion of the school community. Many rely heavily on volunteers at best, or worse, on students of all ages to translate messages and information.

To ensure that ALL people who live in Georgia have access to relevant, accurate and important information pertaining to student academic success, the Georgia Department of Education should establish a language access policy that sets the standard of service and program delivery for local schools and educators to engage meaningfully with Georgia's diverse student bodies and families.

The determination of Georgia as an English-only state is a significant roadblock for school districts and LEAs working tirelessly to strengthen their partnerships with parents, students and local communities considering no language access policy exists at the state level. Despite this designation, it is important to note that because the state receives federal education funds, it is subject to the federal mandates governing language access. These mandates should be understood as a floor and not a ceiling for educators and policy makers.

The consequence of having limited access to information or tools that allow parents to be engaged, informed, and aligned with their child's education is reduced parental participation, directly impacting student achievement.

While some schools do an excellent job at communicating with their communities, these schools are the exception and not the norm and rely heavily on local parent and educator advocates.

## **Recommendations:**

- *Language access policies should be established at the state board level.*
- *Surveys should be offered in languages spoken at home by students and their parents.*
- *District communications and community outreach information should be sent via text message as this is a key mode of communication and format that LEP parents best understand.*
- *Messages should be written at a third-grade literacy level to ensure a broader reach. Effective translation and interpretation require language that all constituents can clearly understand (for example, idiomatic usage is often lost in translation).*
- *Short, specific and actionable messages are key to providing accurate and timely information for parents.*
- *Good Example: First Day of School: Bring mask, water bottle, a pencil and a big smile. Supplies will be needed later.*
- *Google Translate is never a preferred tool for language access. However, if used as a last and only resource, the feature needs to be verified to ensure accurate translations for newsletters, websites or any other communication platforms or materials. Translation accuracy verification should be a standard procedure in a school's general communication operations.*
- *Use platforms and apps that work in various browsers. Limit and streamline the number of accounts and platforms, particularly those that require multiple steps for parents to access vital student information and engagement opportunities.*
- *Ensure all information is consistent and available on all mediums (print, email, text, social media platforms, phone, etc.)*
- *Ensure processes for school registration (especially pre-K, kindergarten, and "school choice" registration) that do not require online resources, printers, downloading/uploading documents, or the use of special software. Allow in-person registration with assistance for families who cannot complete online forms. Communicate deadlines and procedures in multiple languages with advance notice.*

# Recognize and measure academic gaps or regressions and remediate.

During COVID-19 and the consequent closure of schools to mitigate the virus, many children went without consistent access to schooling due to the lack of adequate equipment.

Limited educational materials, lack of language support and lack of capacity from school districts to adjust quickly to delivering translated information to meet federal standards did not help the situation.

Parents were faced with not only financial, food access and psychological impacts, but also schools not providing legally required ELL services. The academic gap has widened and parents are rightly concerned about the long term effects of their children not meeting academic standards or attaining their dreams for educational success.

Direct communication by the Georgia Program Manager for ESOL and Title III programs confirms that only federal funds are monitored and audited; state funds have no allocation review or audit. Funding discrepancies exist between schools, some with very few ELL students, and these models directly impact resources and programs available to our community of students and parents.

## **Recommendations:**

- *After school programs should be organized around core subjects including ESOL. These programs must include transportation back to the homes.*
- *Saturday enrichment programs, also with transportation, should be made available for families in need of additional academic support.*
- *Highly trained personnel should monitor student progress, which should be shared with parents and students.*
- *Test dates for ESOL programs should be aligned with school registration dates so parents and students can have enough time to verify grades and submit documentation to exit the ESOL program if appropriate.*
- *Establish accountability measures at the school and district levels to ensure both Federal and State Title III funds are used appropriately and equitably and correlated with the number of ELL students in specific schools.*

# Parent engagement is a two-way street. Build trust and relevancy for the community.

As a collaborative body, school districts and local school administration and staff must know the community they serve, how best to engage parents and how to meet them where they are.

In many instances, with the resources and funding schools receive specifically for ELL students, schools need to develop strategies to build trust and provide support and resources so parents and students can be assured that school is a safe, welcoming and positive place.

We have found that many staff in schools with a high percentage of ELLs and LEP students cannot relate to the challenges and limitations of the parents they serve. This is due in part to systems that were not created with ELL parents in mind. Additionally, staff often lack cultural competence and experience working with families from immigrant or ELL backgrounds.

In the past 18 months, some school systems have learned how to engage parents through accessible platforms and meaningful services. Listening, conversations, planning, accountability and transparency need to happen in all local schools and districts.

## **Recommendations:**

- *If the community does not go to the school, the schools must go to the community. There are many reasons why parents do not come to school, from transportation, language barriers, and lack of childcare for younger siblings, to a history of lack of responsiveness and even trauma inflicted on children and parents in the form of bullying, discrimination or mistreatment.*
- *Create community centers or parent centers with translation resources in each local school to provide access to referrals to other social/basic services.*
- *Use additional forms of media and communication in addition to emails and online communication. Many parents cannot access this information.*
- *Track and monitor participation of immigrant parents through various means of communication and adjust as needed. When seeing lack of engagement, ask why and take ownership.*

# Students who exit ELL programs must be monitored. Accountability is key.

All ELL programs, especially at the middle and high school levels, must have an annual plan to monitor student advancement and progress toward exiting the ELL program.

Students taking the annual ACCESS Test, which measures language proficiency, must show a consistent increase of at least 1.5 points to appropriately demonstrate program effectiveness. If there is no improvement in the scores, the school needs to adjust and ensure that quality and relevant instruction, engagement and delivery are in place. If increases in scores are tracked appropriately and consistently, the district-at-large can address and adjust to meet the need for program improvement.

Across districts, the K-12 Advocacy Table for English Learners has identified a shared and terrible reality. Students born in the U.S. are held in programs for more than 7 years, sometimes without appropriate certified English teachers or trained regular classroom teachers. We have advocated for students on numerous occasions; however, by the time the cases come to our attention, the child has often spent years languishing academically in their LEA. These students often have limited and restricted access to advanced courses because of the misconception that ELL students cannot excel or should not access these opportunities.

## **Recommendations:**

- *Students born in the United States of immigrant parents must not stay in the ELL program for more than 5 years. Not only does it create stigma, it is inconsistent with best practices regarding language acquisition.*
- *Parents need to be informed of their rights as well as their children's advancement, challenges and remediation plans.*
- *Parents need also to be aware of their rights and the process of removing a student from the program or having them re-tested.*
- *Establish accountability systems to monitor student progress in the ESOL program and inform parents of remediation strategies if needed in a relevant, timely and simple manner.*
- *LEAs must have a designated point person who will collaborate with faculty, teachers, parent and students; create annual goals; and develop a plan for appropriate services/ classes for ELL students.*
- *ELLs should be monitored for two years after exiting the English program and given appropriate services for academic success.*
- *Access to advanced courses should not be limited by an ELL determination.*
- *Even if a school has just one ELL student, that student should have a fully implemented program with monitoring and tracking of their success.*

## Organizations in support of these recommendations in alphabetical order:

Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta  
Athena's Warehouse (m)  
Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI)  
CivicGeorgia  
Common Cause Georgia  
Corners' Outreach (m)  
Friends of Refugees (m)  
GALEO Impact Fund (m)  
GALEO LCDF  
Georgia Coalition for the Peoples' Agenda  
Georgia Muslim Voter Project  
Latino Community Fund (LCF Georgia)  
Latino Education and Engagement (community advocate) (m)  
Los Niños Primero  
Los Vecinos of Buford Highway (m)  
Migrant Equity Southeast  
New American Pathways  
Poder Latinx  
Ser Familia  
The Center for Pan Asian Community Services (m)  
The Georgia Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (m)  
The Latin American Association (m)  
The Latino Community Fund (LCF Georgia) (m)  
The Southern Policy Law Center (m)  
The Georgia Youth Justice Coalition  
We Love Buford Highway (m)  
Women Watch Afrika (m)  
U-Lead Athens (m)

(m) Members of the Georgia K-12 English Learner Advocacy Table



## Parents and Individuals in support of these recommendations in alphabetical order and corresponding counties when disclosed

<b>Parent name when provided</b>	<b>County / District</b>
Florisela Zaragoza	Dekalb
Gabriela Duran	Dekalb
Raquel torres	Gwinnett
Yanet molina	Gwinnett
Anonymous parent	Clarke
Yolanda Lopez	Dekalb
Jerry Gonzalez	DeKalb
Cristina de la cruz	Dekalb
Maria Aguilar	Dekalb
Anonymous parent	Dekalb
Karen Gutierrez	Dekalb
Antonia sabanilla	Dekalb
Anonymous parent	Dekalb
Margarita Santos Leon	Dekalb
Diana Garcia	Dekalb
Anonymous parent	Gwinnett
Juana melgar reyes	Dekalb
Leticia Peña	Dekalb
Lilian Gonzalez	Dekalb
Veronica Carrasco	Dekalb
María Trejo	Hall
Anonymous parent	Georgia
Lourdes Salgado	Dekalb
Maria Espitia	Cherokee
Diana Velasquez	Undisclosed county
Anonymous parent	Dekalb
Anonymous parent	Emita elementary
Anonymous parent	Gwinnett
Victoria hernandez	Fulton
Anonymous parent	Dekald
Anita Muñoz	Dekalb
Claudia Hernandez	Hall
Petra carrera	Clarke
Milena cabarique	Cobb
Nuvia Gutiérrez	Lowndes
REINA FLORES	Cobb
Ereyzar navarrete	Dekalb
Elia García	Pech county
Nazul Calzada	Spalding
Johan Rivera	Spalding
Anonymous parent	Gordon

Tania Romero	Gwinnett
Anonymous parent	Carroll
Miriam Rodriguez	Gwinnett
Patricia Reyes	Gwinnett
Anonymous parent	Dekalb
Anonymous parent	Gwinnett
Maribel Maldonado	Gwinnett
Monica Sanchez	Dekalb
Anonymous parent	Dekalb
Yolanda Lopez	Dekalb
Valeria Arigon	Clayton\
Guadalupe trejo	Gwinet
Karina Murillo	Hall
Antonella Sanguinetti	Cherokee
Ada Ugarte	Gwinnett
Clara Alfaro	Undisclosed
María Elena Ramírez Lorenzo	Dekalb
Heidy Nieto	Gwinnett
Anonymous parent	Tift county
Anonymous parent	Gwinnett
Ana benitez	Gwinnett
Anonymous parent	Clayton county
Anonymous parent	Gwinnett
Claudia pinzon	Gwinnett
Anonymous parent	Dekalb
Briggite Guzman	Dekalb
Anonymous parent	Dekalb
Anonymous parent	Bibb
Esmeralda Ibarra	Clayton
Syndia ramos	Tift county
Karla Marroquin Mata	Hall
Diana velasquez	Hall
Yanet Navarrete	Gwinnett
Amelia SANCHEZ	Clayton
Anonymous parent	Whitfield
Anonymous parent	Dekalb
Anonymous parent	Fulton
Anonymous parent	Dekalb
Anonymous parent	Cobb
Maria Marcial	Gwinnett
Anonymous parent	Clayton
anggie davalos	Gwinnett
Keyla Pérez	Clayton
Maria Nieto	Cobb
Anonymous parent	Tift
Ingris Elvir	Carroll
Anonymous parent	Forsyth
Alejandra Ortiz	Dekalb

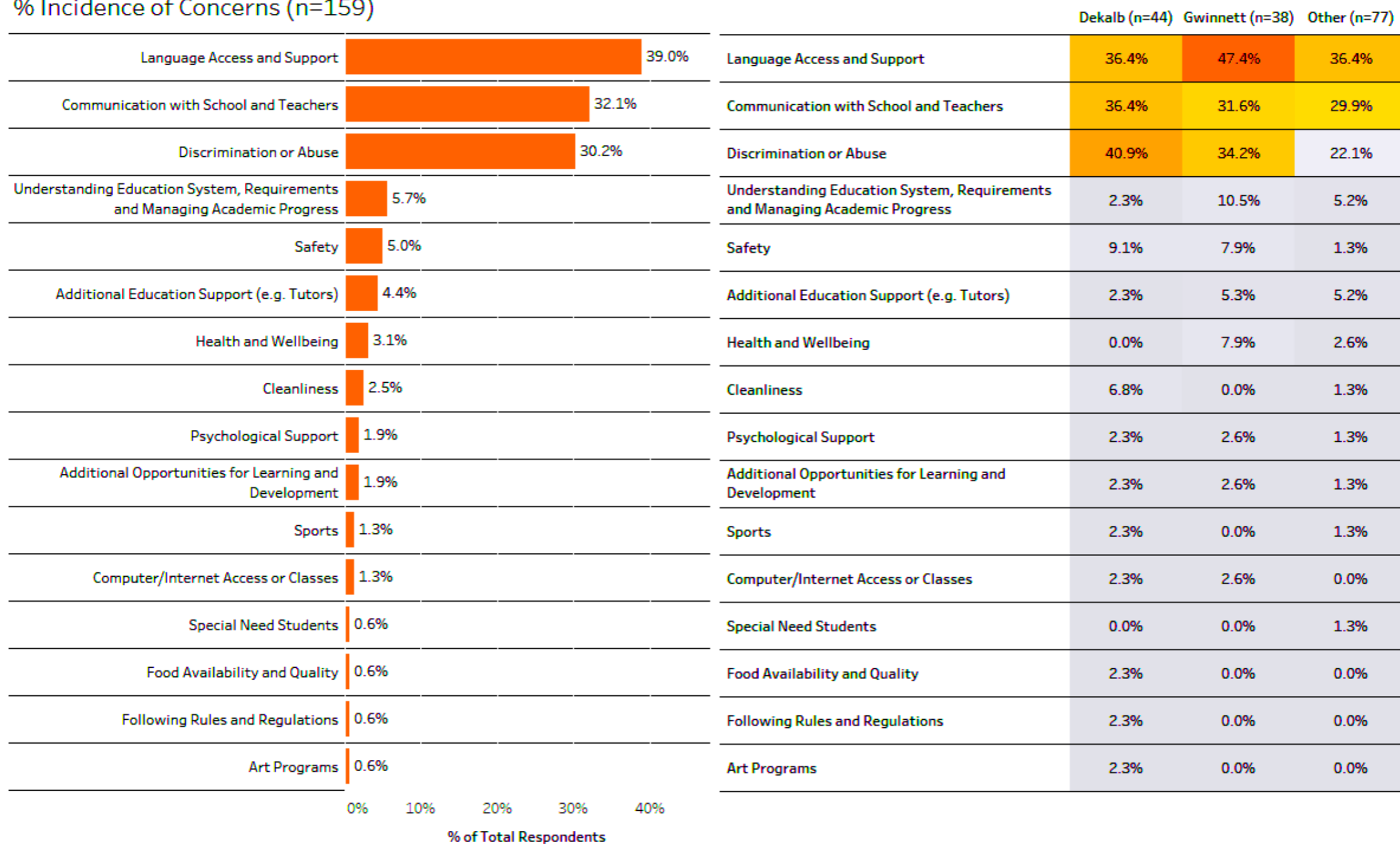
Mariela Peña	Dekalb
Mariana Picos	Gwinnett
Anonymous parent	Dekalb
Ana Herrejon	Gwinnett
Anonymous parent from	Bartow
Anonymous parent	Hall
Anonymous parent	Gwinnett
Ludim Giron	Gwinnett
Andrea Sandoval	Hall
Ivania Realegeño	Dekalb
Lilia Flores	Douglas
Maria Ulloa	Whitfield
Maria Lopez Cifuentes	Gwinnett
Anonymous parent	Dekalb
Cindy Laguan	Clayton
Gisela Contreras	Gwinnett
Anonymous parent	Dekalb
Anonymous parent	Jeffdavis
Erika Delgado	Gwinnett
Ana Catalina Altamirano	Dekalb
Julia Leal	Forsyth
Anonymous parent	Douglas
Anonymous parent	Gwinnett
Anonymous parent	Gwinnett
Marta Padilla	Gwinnett
Zulma Virgen	Gwinnett
Anonymous parent	Gwinnett
María Fraire	Whitfield
Sandra Rivas	Gwinnet
Claudia Estrada	Cobb
Virginia Lopez	Clayton
Eulalia Gaspar Mendez	Blue ridge
Sandy Moreira	Hall
Sindy Amador	Gwinnett
Angie Lopez	Bulloch
Claudia Barrera	Cobb
Jessyca Cabrera	Cobb
Luis Velasco	Gordon
Araceli Galvan	Hall
Olivia López	Fulton
Esmeralda ramos	Hall
Karina Hoyos	Undisclosed
Diana Chilatra	Clayton
Anonymous parent	Dekalb.
Anonymous parent	Dekalb
Luz Restrepo	Gwinnet

Paula Gatica	Dekalb
Adriana Romero	Dekalb
Katia Morales	Muscogee
Vianey Castro	Clayton
Nazul Calzada	Spalding
Anonymous parent	Hall
Katherine Flores	Gwinnett
Araceli Rios	Gwinnett
Anonymous parent	Gwinnett
Leny Cuevas-Morales	Dekalb
Aida Roxana Gonzalez	Whitfield
Leny Cuevas	Dekalb
Anonymous parent	Gwinnett
Fabiola Vega	Clayton
Anonymous parent	Rockdale
Maria Escobar	Whithfield
Christine Ramirez	Chatam
Claudia Pinzon	Gwinnett
Anonymous parent	Gwinnett
Andres Parra	Undisclosed
Eli Velez	Undisclosed
Gigi Pedraza	Dekalb
Jennifer Chow	Undisclosed
Natalie Morales Villa	Hall
Rubí García Manzo	Undisclosed

We are grateful to the members of the K-12 English Learners Advocacy Table that made this document possible, the translation services of Women Watch Afrika, Center for PanAsian Community Services and LCF Georgia that made the document available to the communities they serve in Spanish, French, Vietnamese, Korean, Mandarin and Hindi.

# ADDENDUM

## % Incidence of Concerns (n=159)



## % Reporting Mistreatment

	Dekalb (n=44)	Gwinnett (n=38)	Other (n=77)	Grand Total
My child has been spanked or physically punished	11.4%	10.5%	7.8%	9.4%
My child has been yelled at or treated poorly in school	27.3%	28.9%	13.0%	20.8%