



FOLLOW-UP REVIEW • REPORT NUMBER 23-02 • APRIL 2023

Remedial Education Program

Evaluation planned to help ensure best practices

Greg S. Griffin | State Auditor

Lisa Kieffer | Director



DOAA

Georgia Department
of Audits & Accounts



Performance Audit Division

Greg S. Griffin, State Auditor
Lisa Kieffer, Director

Why we did this review

This follow-up review was conducted to determine the extent to which the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and the General Assembly have addressed recommendations presented in our April 2021 performance audit (Report #19-30).

The performance audit examined the cost of the Remedial Education Program (REP) and whether the funding aligned with the intent of the Quality Basic Education (QBE) funding formula. Additionally, the audit determined which students are served in REP and reviewed the extent to which REP instructional services aligned with best practices.

About REP

As the agency that oversees K-12 education in the state, GaDOE oversees REP. REP is one of 18 instructional programs funded by the state's QBE funding formula. Students in grades 6 through 12 who meet eligibility requirements specified in state law receive individualized basic skills instruction in reading, writing, or mathematics.

Local school systems report the instructional programs for each student, and program funding is based on full-time equivalent (FTE) students. In fiscal year 2022, approximately 36,000 FTEs were served in REP, generating \$190 million, or 2% of total QBE earnings.

Remedial Education Program

Evaluation planned to help ensure best practices

What we found

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) has taken steps to evaluate the Remedial Education Program (REP). However, GaDOE has not yet issued additional program guidance or reviewed school systems' delivery methods, though such changes could result from the evaluation. In addition, the General Assembly has not amended state law to address funding barriers impacting systems' ability to implement REP.

Evaluation of REP

As recommended in our audit, GaDOE indicated it is planning to evaluate the effectiveness of REP on student outcomes. The evaluation will be conducted by SERVE, a federally funded regional center that provides technical assistance and program evaluation to state departments of education. Because the evaluation is still in the planning stage, its scope and timeline have not yet been determined. However, the SERVE evaluation should provide recommendations for improvements that may address various findings from our audit. For example, GaDOE indicated it would use the evaluation results to develop or revise guidance on topics such as exit criteria and professional development. GaDOE also plans to review data collections and evaluation mechanisms for REP based on SERVE's findings and recommendations.

Management of REP

GaDOE has made organizational changes in response to our audit. These changes include assigning dedicated staff to REP to improve support for local school systems. The dedicated staff can provide support and oversight in a manner similar to other QBE programs like Gifted and the Early Intervention Program (EIP). GaDOE also restructured its pre-existing teams that provide guidance on the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework and Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) into one office. GaDOE indicated that it had realigned the teams to provide

recommended clarity for systems on the relationship between MTSS, PBIS, and REP.

However, GaDOE has continued to provide minimal direct oversight of REP. For example, GaDOE has not yet provided additional guidance on REP best practices or begun monitoring how systems deliver REP services. As noted above, GaDOE is planning to utilize the SERVE evaluation to help address these recommendations. Additionally, GaDOE has not determined whether it could provide specific guidance to assist virtual charter schools. For example, our original audit identified very large class sizes at one virtual charter school, which the guidelines did not address.

Legislative Action

GaDOE staff indicated that REP was discussed during conversations with the General Assembly, but no legislative changes were made to address funding barriers. Our original report recommended the General Assembly consider whether systems should be provided with more resources to implement MTSS and whether the funding class size requirement should be removed to ensure systems can participate in REP. During our original audit, some systems indicated that the funding class size (at least 15 REP students) prevented them from serving students through REP.

Additionally, no changes were made to REP's funding eligibility cap, which is unique among the state's QBE-funded instructional programs. State law limits funding for REP full-time equivalents (FTEs) to 25% of the total FTEs for the student population when less than half of FTEs qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. State Board of Education regulation sets the cap at 35% when more than half of FTEs qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. Our original audit identified 64 FTEs across seven rural, less wealthy systems that were not funded for REP because of the funding cap. However, neither the 25% cap nor the 35% cap have been modified or eliminated.

GaDOE's Response: *GaDOE expressed no concerns with the current statuses as stated in the report.*

The following table summarizes the findings and recommendations in our 2021 report and actions taken to address them. A copy of the 2021 performance audit report (#19-30) may be accessed at [Remedial Education Program Performance Audit Report](#).

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Status: 7 Findings			
Substantially Addressed:	Partially Addressed:	Not Addressed:	No Recommendation:
0	3	4	0

Finding 1: Due to changes from system flexibility, the effectiveness of REP should be evaluated to determine whether the program should continue in its current form.

Partially Addressed – GaDOE has hired a vendor to evaluate the effectiveness of REP.

Original Recommendations	Action Taken
<p>1.1 GaDOE should evaluate the effectiveness of REP on student outcomes, which may require additional expertise to design evaluation methods and inform data collection. Based on the outcome of the evaluation, GaDOE – in consultation with the General Assembly – should determine whether REP should continue to be provided and funded in its current form.</p>	<p>Partially Implemented – GaDOE has started working with SERVE, a federally funded regional comprehensive center, to create an evaluation design for REP. The scope and timeline of the project have not yet been determined.</p>

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Finding 2: GaDOE should take additional steps to manage REP.

Partially Addressed – GaDOE has restructured its organization to assign dedicated staff to REP. However, it has not established an annual REP evaluation process or additional program guidance.

Original Recommendations	Action Taken
2.1 In addition to the outcome study discussed in Finding 1, GaDOE should annually evaluate REP as required by state law and use the results to determine whether program improvements are needed.	Not Implemented – While GaDOE has an evaluation planned, it does not fulfill the statutory requirement for annual evaluations of REP. GaDOE indicated it does not have funding for a staff person to conduct annual evaluations, and it has not determined how often REP will be evaluated in the future.
2.2 GaDOE should develop and disseminate additional guidance related to REP, including guidance on topics such as exit criteria, professional development, and other resources, as it does for the Gifted and EIP programs.	Not Implemented – Additional guidance has not been developed for exit criteria, professional development, or other resources. However, GaDOE indicated it would revise or develop additional guidance based on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation conducted by SERVE.
2.3 GaDOE should consider dedicating staff to provide additional support and oversight of systems’ REP efforts, as it provides for the Gifted, ESOL, and EIP programs.	Fully Implemented – GaDOE created two dedicated REP positions by reassigning staff. GaDOE stated the staff members provide guidance, information, and technical assistance about REP to schools and school systems.

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Finding 3: Local school systems can serve REP students in a variety of ways. While most systems provide services that align with best practices or GaDOE guidance, some do not.

Not Addressed – GaDOE does not monitor local school systems to determine whether REP services align with guidance or best practices.

Original Recommendations	Action Taken
<p>3.1 GaDOE should periodically review how local school systems across the state provide REP services to students. This should include a review of delivery models, class sizes, and teacher certifications.</p>	<p>Not Implemented – GaDOE indicated it would review REP data collections based on findings and recommendations from SERVE’s evaluation “to determine the best data factors for assisting, evaluating, and supporting REP services for students.”</p>
<p>3.2 GaDOE should evaluate school systems’ method of delivering REP services to determine whether they are aligned with best practices and/or the intent of REP.</p> <p>In addition, school systems should work to ensure REP classes are taught by certified teachers and do not exceed class sizes recommended in the guidelines, or as required by law for Title 20 systems.</p>	<p>Not Implemented - GaDOE does not compare systems’ delivery methods (e.g., class sizes, teacher certifications) to best practices. However, GaDOE said it would review evaluation mechanisms based on findings and recommendations from SERVE’s evaluation.</p> <p>GaDOE was unaware of any additional steps taken by individual school systems to ensure delivery methods are consistent with best practices.</p>
<p>3.3 GaDOE should review its guidelines and determine areas in which guidance related to virtual charter schools may be appropriate (e.g., class size).</p>	<p>Not Implemented – GaDOE has not determined whether specific guidance is needed for virtual charter schools.</p>

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Finding 4: REP students likely need additional support for their non-academic needs; however, the extent to which those needs are addressed varies.

Partially Addressed – GaDOE revised its guidance and organizational structure to improve clarity and support for school systems seeking assistance. However, the General Assembly has not provided additional funding for MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Support).

Original Recommendations	Action Taken
4.1 GaDOE should provide more guidance and information to systems on how to simultaneously address both the academic and non-academic needs of REP students, beginning with clarifying the relationship between MTSS, PBIS (Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports), and REP in the program guidelines.	Fully Implemented – GaDOE indicated it restructured the MTSS and PBIS teams under one office to align and provide clarity between the programs. Additionally, the REP guidebook now directs users to online resources for information about the MTSS framework and PBIS.
4.2 The General Assembly could assess whether systems should be provided with more resources to implement MTSS.	Not Implemented – The General Assembly has not provided additional funding to school systems for the purpose of implementing MTSS.

Finding 5: Local school systems’ exit criteria vary throughout the state.

Not Addressed – GaDOE has not established exit criteria to improve consistency between school systems.

Original Recommendations	Action Taken
5.1 To ensure consistency, GaDOE should establish exit criteria for REP, as it has for EIP. If necessary, the General Assembly should consider amending O.C.G.A. § 20-2-154 to require GaDOE to establish exit criteria.	Not Implemented – GaDOE has not established exit criteria for REP but indicated it would consult with the General Assembly on this issue. The General Assembly has not amended O.C.G.A. § 20-2-154.

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<p>Finding 6: REP is the only QBE-funded instructional program with a funding cap.</p> <p>Not Addressed – Eligibility caps for REP have not been modified or removed.</p>	
Original Recommendations	Action Taken
6.1 The General Assembly should assess whether the 25% REP eligibility cap is still needed, given that it disproportionately impacts some schools/systems that may need the funding to serve students.	Not Implemented – No legislation has been introduced to alter or eliminate the eligibility cap.
6.2 The State Board of Education (SBOE) should reconsider the 35% eligibility cap for schools that have more than 50% of the student population on free and reduced-price lunches.	Not Implemented – SBOE has not considered changing the 35% eligibility cap.
<p>Finding 7: Five systems serve students performing below grade level without participating in REP.</p> <p>Not Addressed – The General Assembly has not modified or removed the REP funding class size requirement.</p>	
Original Recommendations	Action Taken
7.1 Given that the funding class size impacts some systems’ ability to receive funding for services delivered to students who would be eligible for REP, the General Assembly could consider removing the funding class size to ensure that all systems can participate in REP.	Not Implemented – The General Assembly has not modified or removed the funding class size requirement for REP.

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