

## **Weighting Considerations**

In a student-based funding formula, a base funding amount would be assigned to every K-12 student regardless of the student's grade, special needs or characteristics. This base funding amount would consist of a collapse of the current QBE categories outlined in the proposal detailed in the summary document and as finally determined by the committee. There are student characteristics and/or state initiatives that would require additional funding to meet the needs of the student. These characteristics or initiatives that have been discussed by the committee include ensuring literacy by grade three; providing additional funding to meet the needs of students with disabilities; providing services to English speakers of other languages; and providing resources for advanced coursework and pathways for high school students. This document provides the reasoning behind the weighting for these particular characteristics and initiatives.

**Grades K-3:** There are several elements specific to K-3 education that make this a grade band which should be considered for weighting in order to provide additional funding above the base amount. The most pressing issue is the importance of having every child reading on grade level by the end of grade 3. This accomplishment increases the chances of future success for the child. Weighted funding at this level provide districts with resources to purchase materials, supplies, and implement proven programs that are successful in meeting this goal. The weighted funding would also support teacher training in the early grades to ensure that the most effective pedagogy is in place to teach reading.

With children ages 5 – 8, additional adults, typically in the form of paraprofessionals, are needed to support both the physical and instructional needs of the child. Currently, districts are required to provide paraprofessional support to kindergarten classes; however, districts need the flexibility to place the additional supports in the most critical situations based on the needs of their students. Weighted funding for this grade span would allow districts to add additional support at their discretion, allowing the teacher to use small group instruction to teach, remediate, and enrich student learning, as well as providing an additional adult to assist in the physical needs of young children.

Research on class size<sup>1</sup> has determined that smaller class sizes during early childhood education is a factor in improving student achievement. Providing weighted funding for this grade span supports districts in maintaining smaller class sizes as necessary for academic success.

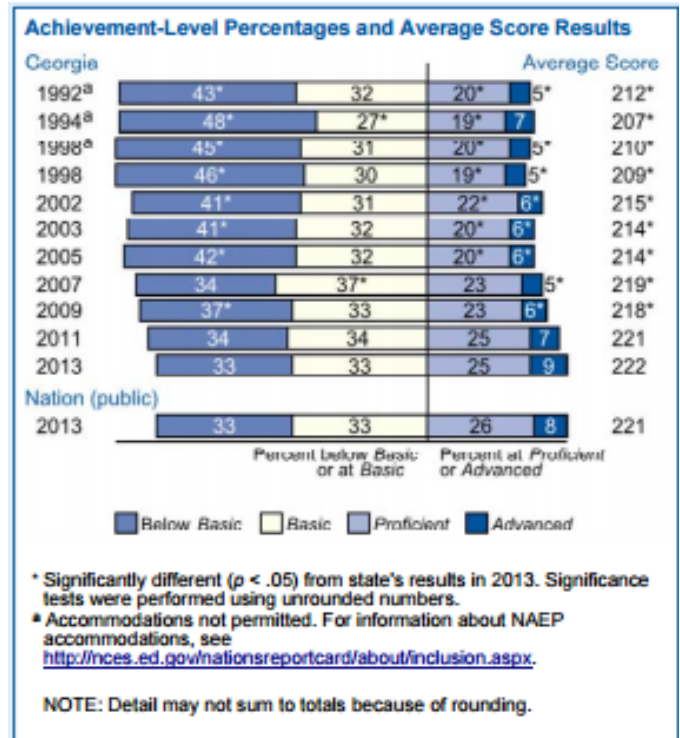
Many of the supplies and textbooks used in early childhood classes are consumable and must be replaced annually, which increases the cost of materials, supplies, and textbooks for this grade band. Young children must feel, touch, and manipulate items in a sensory way to maximize

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Organizing-a-school/Class-size-and-student-achievement-At-a-glance/Class-size-and-student-achievement-Research-review.html>

learning, and weighted funding will support the additional costs of providing the appropriate supplies for these experiences.

Georgia’s 2013 4<sup>th</sup> grade NAEP scores indicate the necessity to focus on this initiative. Only 9% of Georgia’s 4<sup>th</sup> graders scored at the Advanced level and only 34% scored at the Proficient level. The chart at right from Georgia’s 2013 NAEP State Snapshot Report on 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading performance shows Georgia’s progress over the last twenty years.<sup>2</sup> The improvement is incremental, still nearly two thirds of Georgia students are performing at Below Basic and Basic levels (NAEP has four performance levels: Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced.).



**Grades 4 – 8:** Although there are unique characteristics of students in grades 4-8, these students are mature enough to take care of their own physical needs without the assistance of paraprofessionals. The students are able to work more independently and, although reasonable class sizes are necessary due to space restrictions and manageability, extremely small classes aren’t necessary for effective instruction to occur. Although it is noted that middle school CTAE classes are more expensive than core classes, due to the necessity for labs and specific equipment, the expenditures for educating this grade band are generally less than the K-3 band or the 9-12 grade band, making it reasonable to assign the base weight to grades 4-8.

**Grades 9 – 12:** As students mature and enter high school, they begin to hone their interests in careers. High schools have the huge responsibility of fine-tuning students’ preparation for work and/or post-secondary institutions. The options high schools currently use to provide a variety of experiences for students, based on need and ability, include providing virtual courses, International Baccalaureate Programs, Advanced Placement courses, and as many CTAE pathways as the district can afford. Dual enrollment options are also encouraged. Providing these necessary options for students is more expensive per student than for grades 4-8. Increased expenditures are driven by the necessity of providing labs with modern equipment, continued professional development for teachers, specialized materials and supplies, specialized tests for some courses, and, in some cases, transportation between the high schools and post-secondary institutions.

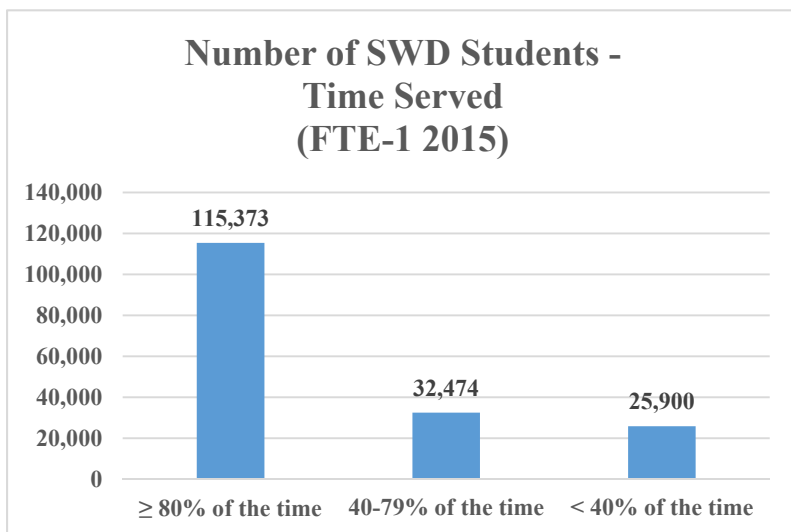
<sup>2</sup> <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2013/pdf/2014464ga4.pdf>

**Exceptional Students:** A category of exceptional students could be a student characteristic for weighted funding. This category could account for the additional costs necessary to educate students with disabilities and students who engage in advanced programs and courses. The costs associated with providing services to both of these sub-groups of students are greater than the costs of a typical students.

The cost to educate a student with disabilities is driven by several factors. These include the area of educational disability, level of severity of the disability, and the requirement to provide an education in the least restrictive environment required to access the general curriculum.

Additional expenditures over the base amount include those for assistive technology, additional teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staff with specialized training (occupational therapists, speech therapists, psychologists, etc.). The range of environments can be broad, from instruction in a typical classroom setting to residential treatment and many scenarios in between. Districts struggle to have the necessary resources to provide resources for students with disabilities and the cost to provide proper services continue to increase.

The cost to educate a student who participates in advanced coursework includes additional staff to provide classes for gifted students at the elementary level and advanced courses at the middle school level. Providing Advanced Placement courses and/or International Baccalaureate Programs require specific and costly teacher training and student assessment, as well as district costs associated with participation in each of these programs. Students who participate in these programs may or may not be eligible to participate in the State’s gifted education program as currently defined, but they are motivated and capable of succeeding in more rigorous coursework. Incentivizing this level of expectation and challenge through funding student participation in advanced coursework would enhance a district’s efforts to prepare students for work or post-secondary institutions.



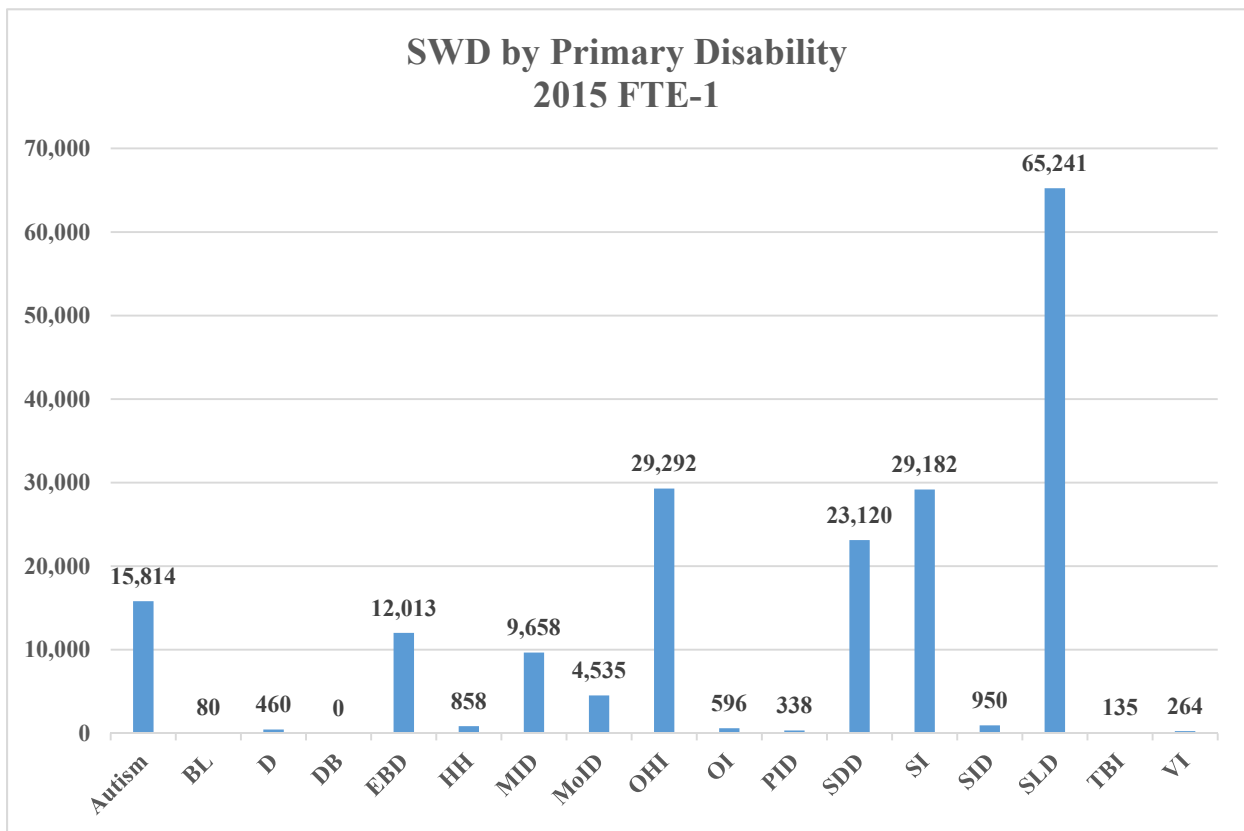
One way to determine the appropriate weighting for each student in this category could be by the percentage of time during the school day or year during which the special services are provided. Possible categories could be determined by classifying exceptional students as served less than 40% of the time, as served 40-80% of the time, or as served more than 80% of the time.

Using the percent of time served as weighting categories limits the effect of the wide-ranging spectrum of services needed by students with autism and specific learning disabilities. Those

services, as are all SWD services, are driven by the students' needs but they range the spectrum from minimal support to extensive support. Including students with those two primary disabilities in a weighting category defined by disability would effectively skew the funding to be either an overpayment or an underpayment.

Students with autism vary widely in their abilities and behavior. The term of autism may also include students who have been diagnosed with Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Asperger's Disorder, Rett's Disorder, or Childhood Disintegrative Disorder provided the student's educational performance is adversely affected and the student meets the eligibility and placement requirements. Autism may exist concurrently with other areas of disability.<sup>3</sup>

Specific learning disability is defined as a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasia. The term does not apply to students who have learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing or motor disabilities, intellectual disabilities, emotional or behavioral disorders or environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.<sup>4</sup>

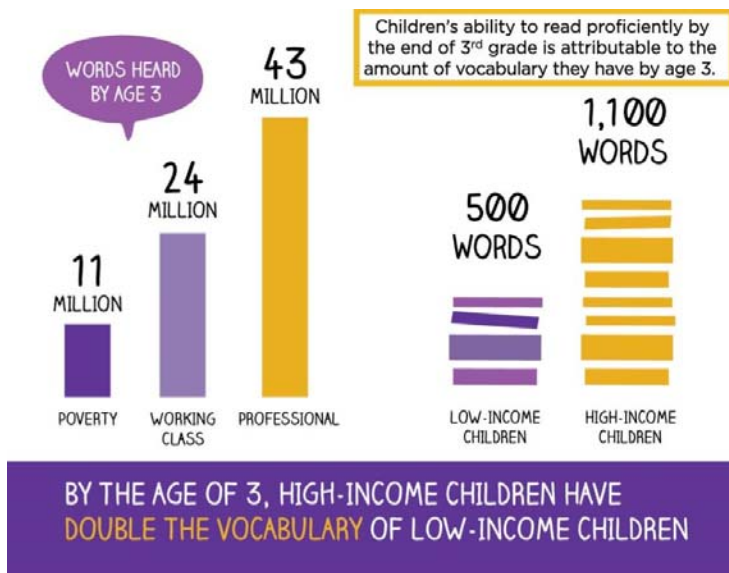


<sup>3</sup> <http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Pages/Autism.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Pages/Specific-Learning-Disability.aspx>

**Legend<sup>5</sup>**

Autism	Autism Spectrum
BL	Blind
D	Deaf
DB	Deaf and Blind
EBD	Emotional & Behavioral Disorder
HH	Hard of Hearing
MID	Mild Intellectual Disability
MoID	Moderate Intellectual Disability
OHI	Other Health Impairment
OI	Orthopedic Impairment
PID	Profound Intellectual Disability
SDD	Significant Developmental Delay
SID	Severe Intellectual Disability
SLD	Specific Learning Disability
TBI	Traumatic Brain Injury
VI	Visual Impairment

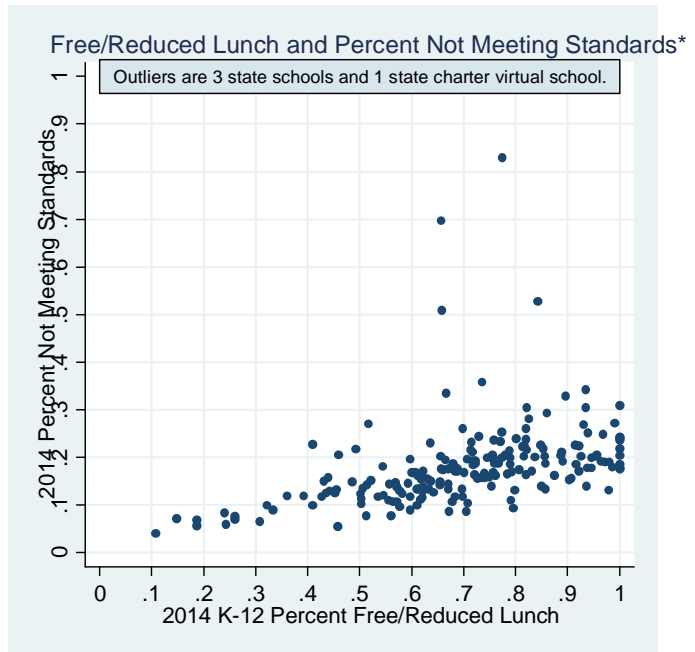


**Economically Disadvantaged:** When poverty is introduced as a factor in any of these grade bands, the actions and time needed to meet the educational objectives increase. With research<sup>6</sup> indicating that a middle class child is exposed to 13 million more words by age 3 than a child in poverty, it is easy to see the gap that exists from the first day the child enters public schools. Oral language and vocabulary are integrally connected to reading, and closing the language gap is critical to having all students reading on grade level at the end of third grade – as well as being college and career ready.

<sup>5</sup> [https://app3.doe.k12.ga.us/ows-bin/owa/fte\\_pack\\_sw\\_d\\_enroll\\_pub.entry\\_form](https://app3.doe.k12.ga.us/ows-bin/owa/fte_pack_sw_d_enroll_pub.entry_form)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/TheEarlyCatastrophe.pdf> and <http://www.getgeorgiareading.org/>

The percentage of free/reduced price lunch (FRL) students is highly correlated with the percentage of students not meeting standards on state assessments in reading and math, as seen in the figure at right. The percentage of students Remedial Education (REP) and Early Intervention Programs (EIP), which are current weights in the QBE formula, are also highly correlated with the percentage of FRL students. However, the relationship is not as tight due to program eligibility flexibility at the district level. Including a weight for poverty will allow systems to target additional supports to students of all ages who are most likely to need additional help. Commission staff are analyzing several measures of poverty and will present the pros and cons of each option at the April 28 Funding Committee meeting.



**English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL):** Students who are not fluent in English face many challenges beyond learning a new language, including cultural, emotional, and academic adjustments. School districts must support the needs of the whole child, requiring additional teachers, counselors, instructional materials, software, and different approaches to assessment. Different approaches to assessment are required to determine what the student has actually learned when communication with the student and the parent is a challenge. The district must also determine ways to communicate with the families of the children, requiring additional parent involvement support. In some districts, there are enough ESOL students in a school to warrant a full-time teacher assigned to a specific school. However, in many districts, the ESOL teachers are itinerant, requiring the district to pay travel expenses for the teacher during the day and increasing the number of teachers needed to serve the students.