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## Heath: A Paradigm Shift in Education

By Sen. Bill Heath



What if we could improve education in Georgia by tracking each child's education success from kindergarten all the way through graduation? What if each child received the extra help or the individual challenges they need to achieve that success? And what if teachers were also rewarded for their contributions to each child's success even long after the student has left their class? After all, many educators have had a positive influence on the educational attainment of a student at the early stages of learning. Right now we have an exciting opportunity to make a paradigm shift to improve education by measuring the positive impact on individual students. Incentivizing teachers through enhanced compensation for their contribution in each child's academic success is a win-win for everyone.

Senate Bill 386 will pay teachers for their positive impact on individual students' success in education. This is an effort to begin a shift in educational policy that focuses on greater achievement for students and Georgia's education system. The goal is to create a system that rewards educators for doing what they do best and inspires them to succeed in their career. In every work environment I have ever been involved with, I've seen how low morale feeds negatively on itself. Teachers are not exempt from this; they receive blame for many issues beyond their control. Reward systems improve morale, self-esteem and produce positive results. Imagine our teachers receiving all of those benefits with the additional benefit of bigger paychecks. I want our educators to help us design a new compensation system that rewards those who are doing their job well and create a path that incentivizes educators to get into positions that they can enjoy and excel.

Ultimately, this proposal is about innovation in education through a focus on individual student success. This proposal is about pursuing ways we can add value to the education of every single student in Georgia. We can improve education without increasing teacher work load or stress if we work together. What we can't do is wait around until somebody somewhere in the world develops the perfect education system and *then* adopt it. Instead, Georgia has the opportunity to be at the forefront of that innovation and to consider a structure that rewards performance.

I realize teachers have concerns about mandating more standardized tests, how special needs children will be included in the success scale, if they will be mandated to participate in this system and even a

concern of a mass migration of teachers into other areas. I want to stress that SB 386 ensures that current teachers will have the option of participating in a performance-based program but will not be required to do so. There's no catch—no current teacher will be required to participate in this program.

I also want to stress that the intent of this legislation is not to simply mandate even more standardized tests. Too much time is already occupied by mandated tests. That being said, developing alternative methods of measuring teacher performance is not going to be possible without educators' willingness to provide input. It is the intent of this legislation to engage educators and administrators in developing a method of appraisal that can define and measure what test scores can't.

We can all agree that every student in Georgia can achieve their highest potential with the help of the right teacher. There are teachers who can reach children who have learning disabilities and connect with them in a way that adds value to their education. Other teachers interact well with advanced placement students to push them to advance even further. Performance incentives make it possible to reward both types of exceptional teachers and to reward them for teaching the students they are most apt to enrich. There should not be any mass migration of teachers to one area of teaching over another. Rather, our educators will have the opportunity to work in areas where they excel and get rewarded for it. By allowing employees to utilize their unique talents, everyone succeeds. This is the same in education. Therefore, the proposed legislation also rewards the school system's leadership with incentives to place teachers where they have the most positive effect on the students.

I am committed to achieving the goal of rewarding Georgia's great teachers. I have offered to meet with several groups of teachers to further this discussion. I have contacted all six school systems in the 31<sup>st</sup> Senate District in the hopes of meeting with them in the near future. To that end, if you are willing to participate in this process and you agree that effective teachers should be rewarded, please let me know. If you are an educator from the 31<sup>st</sup> Senate District, I would love the opportunity to participate in a teacher town hall meeting with you. I value the opinions of our teachers, education leaders and parents. I look forward to your input and further conversation of how we can improve education by implementing a positive reward system for our students and our educators.

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*Sen. Bill Heath serves as Chairman of the Retirement Committee and Governor Sonny Perdue's Floor Leader in the Senate. He represents the 31<sup>st</sup> Senate District which consists of Haralson and Polk counties and portions of Bartow and Paulding counties. He may be reached at 404.651.7738 or by email at [billheath@billheath.net](mailto:billheath@billheath.net).*