

Members of the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (The Commission), My name is Darian Burns, and I am a proud member of the Georgia Coalition for Education Justice and the Legislative and Public Policy Analyst for the [Southern Education Foundation](#) (SEF). Founded in 1867, SEF is the nation's longest-standing education justice organization. Since then, it has been SEF's mission to advance education justice policies in the South that will result in every student, regardless of background, attaining a high-quality education that propels them toward the opportunity-rich life they deserve. I am writing today on behalf of SEF to urge you all to reject the proposed changes to the education preparation rules that eliminate all language and references to diversity, equity, inclusion, and culturally responsive practices and pedagogy for the following reasons.

The recently proposed amendments do not uphold the Commission's primary responsibility, as stated on its website, to "... assure the citizens of Georgia that public school educators meet high standards and are well-prepared to teach in the classrooms of this state." Despite this obligation, the proposed changes to the educator preparation rules do not ensure that our future educators will be well-prepared to lead in Georgia's classrooms, where nearly 60% of the student population are students of color and 9% are English language learners.<sup>1</sup> Eliminating references to inclusive values that equip our educators with the understanding to apply principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion and culturally responsive pedagogy to serve the academic and social needs of Georgia's diverse student body, are not actions that best support our educators nor uphold the Commission's duty. Current and future Georgia educators are going to be leading in dynamic environments with students from various backgrounds, experiences, and cultures, and we need to ensure they know how to support and connect with

---

<sup>1</sup> Quick Facts on Georgia Education 2021-2022, 2022. <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Pages/Quick-Facts-on-Georgia-Education.aspx>.

*all* of their students, including those living in rural communities or are children of active military personnel. Should the Commission adopt its proposed rule changes, they would be significantly lowering the standards by which we hold our educators accountable to serve, educate and meet the needs of *all* of our students.

The proposed amendments, if adopted, will deny the opportunity for all of Georgia's students to attain a high-quality education by an educator workforce prepared to teach in Georgia's diverse classrooms. Students, regardless of background, learn best in environments where they feel safe, valued, and are encouraged to take intellectual risks.<sup>2</sup> An inclusive classroom environment where students feel supported in learning about complex issues benefits *all* students and fosters a sense of belonging for students from all backgrounds.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, we should encourage our educators to both understand and apply the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and culturally responsive practices to their teaching so that our students can have the best opportunities to thrive in their classroom environments.

In closing, we strongly urge the Commission to reject the proposed amendments as these standards do not uphold its primary responsibility "...to assure the residents of Georgia that our educators are well-prepared to lead all our students in classrooms across the state." The suggested language does not reflect the needs of our current and future educators or our students. Georgia is already struggling to address the educator shortage, and the Commission should instead implement policies that invite a diversity of viewpoints, experiences, and backgrounds into the profession. Georgia should strive for continuous improvement in our education system to remain a top state to conduct business, boast a high-quality educator

---

<sup>2</sup> Central, CAO, Daniel Buck, Meredith Coffey, and Katrina Boone. "Children Learn Best When They Feel Safe and Valued." The Thomas B. Fordham Institute, June 7, 2023. <https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/commentary/children-learn-best-when-they-feel-safe-and-valued>.

<sup>3</sup> "Inclusive Classroom Climate." Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning, June 30, 2021. <https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/ClassClimates>.

workforce, and maintain a strong, educated population. We should take actions that continue to build upon our tremendous, rich legacy of civil rights and progress, not actions that take us backward.

SEF supports the work of the Commission and urges its continued legacy of developing and certifying our emerging educator workforce but to do so in a way that accurately reflects the needs of our workforce and, most importantly, serves *all* of our students. We request that you hold a public hearing on **Thursday, July 13th, 2023**, to hear from Georgia residents, educators, students, parents, and advocates who want to see our future educator workforce thrive in this state's diverse classrooms.

**Comments Submitted By:**

**Darian Burns**

Legislative and Public Policy Analyst

Southern Education Foundation

[dburns@southerneducation.org](mailto:dburns@southerneducation.org)