



GEORGIA SCHOOL CHOICE SOLUTIONS

September 20, 2023

School closures during the COVID-19 pandemic had devastating effects on the educational progress of American schoolchildren, revealed deep inadequacies of the public-school monopoly, and left families feeling powerless about setting the direction of their children's education. Thankfully, Georgia has a history of supporting school choice. Unfortunately, though, its lawmakers recently failed to pass [SB 233—The Georgia Promise Scholarship Act](#). However, the America First Policy Institute (AFPI) and America First Works (AFW) remain committed to ensuring that each Georgia family has the freedom to choose the best-suited school for their children. Among other efforts, AFW has issued letters of support to House Education Committee members in Georgia.

National test results for 2022 show that school closures during the Covid-19 pandemic had a harmful effect on American schoolchildren. For the first time in the history of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), scores in reading and math fell by the largest margin in more than 30 years and students in Georgia were no exception. See *Chart on page 2*.

In 2022, according to the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) in Georgia:

The **reading level of 4th grade students** who performed at or above the NAEP Proficient in was only **39%**.

Black 4th grade students had an average reading score that was **30 points** lower than that for White students.



Hispanic 4th grade students had an average reading score that was **21 points** lower than that for White students.

Low-income 4th grade students had an average reading score that was **23 points** lower than that for students from middle and high income families.

These test scores can have powerful consequences for a generation of children. Reversing these achievement losses will need aggressive action over the next several years. Parents need the ability to leave their government-mandated schools if necessary to help ensure their children have better academic opportunities. School choice is also shown to improve public schools by increasing accountability, fostering competitiveness, and boosting student outcomes. When parents can choose which option best fits their child's needs, whether that means opting to switch or not, students reap the benefits.

Currently, most Georgia students attend public school. However, passionate efforts have led to expanded options for families. The number of charter schools in Georgia has grown from three to 115 over the past couple decades. Additionally, Georgia offers two private school choice programs—the Qualified Education Expense Tax Credit and the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship program, which provides vouchers for students with

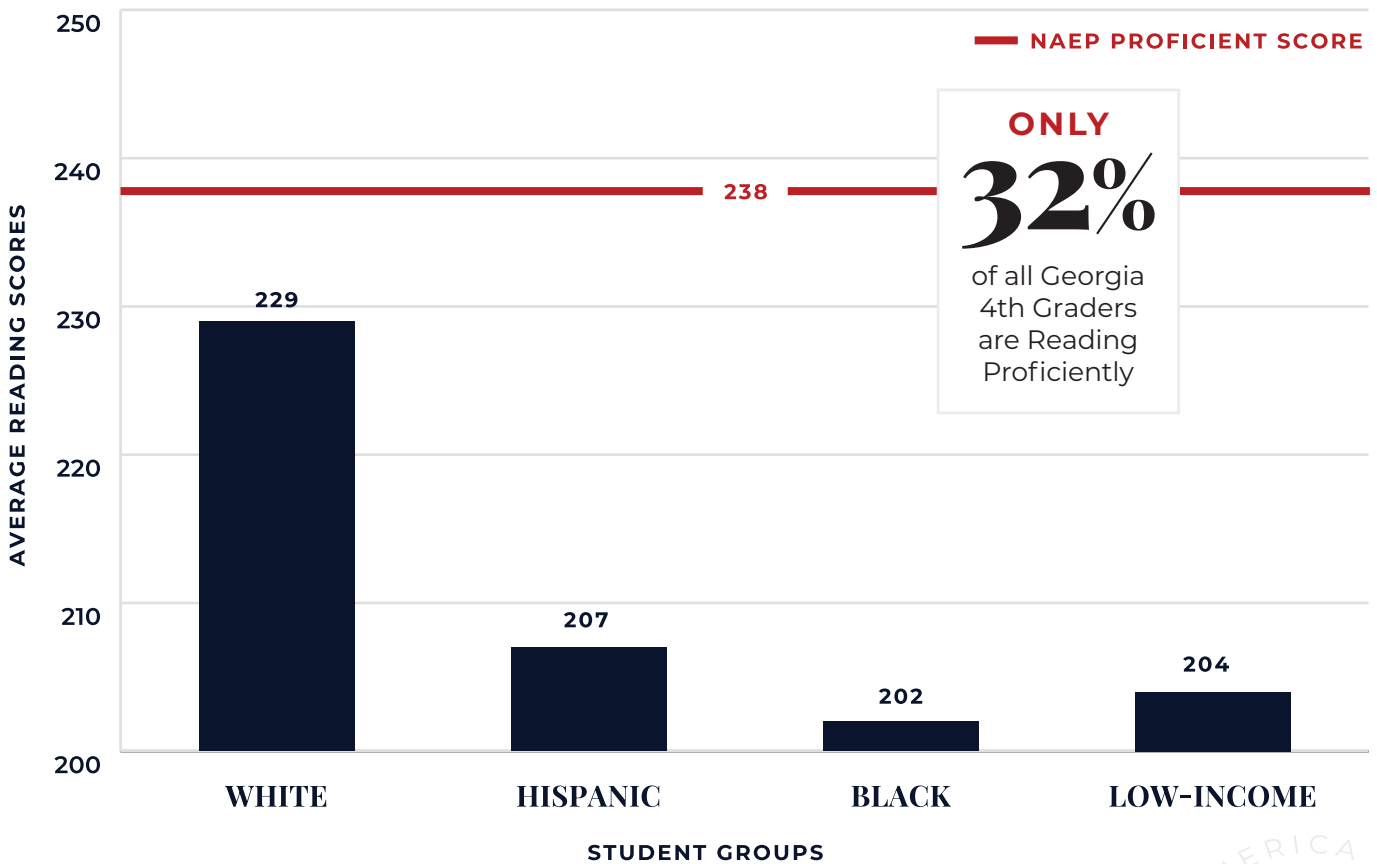
special needs to attend private school. While these programs are prospering, it is important that options and accessibility continue to expand. Accordingly, it is crucial to reignite support for SB 233, and AFPI will continue to inform House Education Committee members in Georgia.

As the AFPI Center for Education Opportunity, Chairman Scott Turner repeatedly states, “No one knows the needs and interests of a child more than their parent or guardian.”

“ At AFPI, we believe that the purpose of education is to prepare Americans for the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. ”

School choice is representative of two core American values—freedom and opportunity. As support continues to grow, students across the nation will have access to education that meets personal needs. Parents will be empowered to have a louder, stronger voice in the conversation about their child’s education. Because of AFPI’s deep commitment to the school choice mission, the number of states passing universal ESA programs has increased from zero to seven in under 2 years. At the Center for Education Opportunity at AFPI, our goal is to make universal school choice a reality in Georgia.

Georgia 4th Grade Reading Scores



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2022 Reading Assessments.

