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REACH program expands to 25 new school systems, launches pilot program for foster children

The Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC) and Governor Nathan Deal today announced an additional 25 school systems have been added to the Realizing Educational Achievement Can Happen (REACH) program for the 2016-2017 academic school year, bringing the total number of participating school systems to 66. The REACH program expansion will also include a new pilot program aimed at providing REACH program funding and support to 30 foster children.

“The aim of the REACH program is not only to provide access to higher education for Georgia’s low-income, academically promising students but to prepare these young men and women for the rigors of the world beyond the classroom,” said Deal. “It is also meant to prepare them for the challenges of adulthood, and for the success that each of them can enjoy if they have the right support and work ethic. With a shared commitment from the state, our communities, our school systems, our students and our mentors, we can help children reach their full potential and earn a postsecondary credential. I believe that this pilot program, along with the 25 additional school systems, will benefit not only the students and surrounding communities but our state as a whole.”

The new REACH school systems for the 2016-2017 school year include:

Bibb County	McIntosh County
Bleckley County	Meriwether County
Calhoun County	Murray County
Clay County	Muscogee County
Dalton City Schools	Putnam County
Dougherty County	Randolph County
Elbert County	Stewart County
Gainesville City Schools	Tattall County
Gordon County	Union County
Hall County	Valdosta City Schools
Irwin County	Wayne County
Jasper County	White County
Jefferson County	

“By 2020 our goal is to be in all 180 Georgia school districts and supporting 2,800 REACH Scholars in graduating from high school and succeeding in college,” said Georgia Student Finance Commission President Tricia Chastain. “With continued support from our local communities, private corporations and the Georgia General Assembly, we will achieve this goal. We appreciate Governor Deal’s continued support of the REACH program and look forward to launching the new pilot program for foster youth in the coming school year.”

The REACH pilot program aimed at foster children is a result of Deal’s FY 2017 budget. The new pilot program will provide REACH program funding and support to 30 foster students in existing REACH school systems. More information on the pilot program will be available in the coming weeks.

“We look forward to serving foster students through this new pilot program and are pleased with the growth of REACH over the past four years,” said REACH Executive Director Marjie Dickey. “The program started small with five school systems and 35 Scholars participating in the first two years. With the selection of these additional school systems, REACH will have a total of 66 school systems and over 700 Scholars participating next school year,” added Dickey.

Deal launched the original two-year REACH pilot program with five school systems in 2012 as a key initiative of Complete College Georgia. REACH school systems identify low-income, academically promising middle school students who are then selected at the local level by community members and school personnel to become REACH Scholars. Qualifying students earn a \$10,000 scholarship (\$2,500/year for up to four years) towards the educational costs at a University System of Georgia, Technical College System of Georgia, or eligible private postsecondary institution. The students are also provided with a mentor and academic coach, as well as given additional college-related support.

About the Georgia Student Finance Commission

The REACH program is administered by the Georgia Student Finance Authority (GSFA), a companion student finance entity of the Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC). GSFC is the state agency that administers the HOPE Scholarship and Grant Program as well as other state- and lottery- funded financial aid programs. GSFC also manages the career and college preparation website, Gacollege411.org and provides educational services such as free financial aid consultation, default management and financial literacy to elementary, middle and high schools, and postsecondary institutions across the state. Additional information about GSFC products and services is available at www.gsfc.org or www.Gacollege411.org or 800.505.GSFC (4732).