COBB COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT × UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA

GEORGIA'S BEST



Year Three Report

ONE TEAM. ONE GOAL. STUDENT SUCCESS.

3 Year



TABLE OF CONTENTS

01 WORDS FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

03 BY THE NUMBERS

05 DOES IT WORK?

06 FOR COBB, BY COBB

07 A TALE OF TWO TEACHERS

08 2 GA-BEST TEACHERS OF THE YEAR

09 HEAR FROM OUR TEAM

10 SPECIAL THANKS

WORDS FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

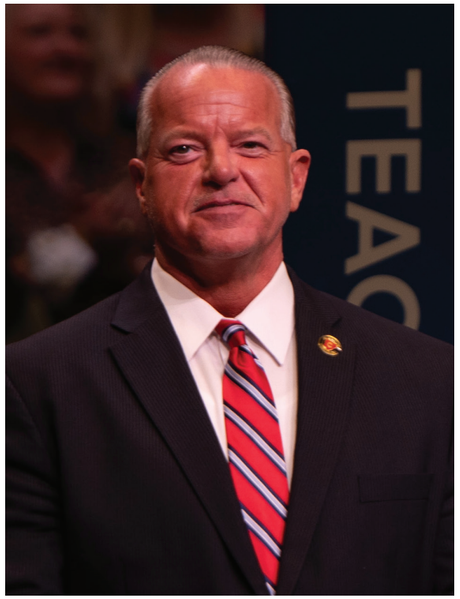
Three years into Georgia's BEST, one thing is clear: ***The strongest investment we can make in our students is in our educators.***

What began as an ambitious partnership between the Cobb County School District and the University of West Georgia has become a proven model for recruiting, developing, and retaining outstanding educators. More than 1,500 Cobb educators have enrolled in graduate programs designed specifically for the needs of our district, and more than 800 have already completed their degrees, all while continuing to serve our students.

Georgia's BEST is different because it was built for Cobb. Every course reflects the knowledge, instructional practices, and leadership skills our educators need today, while maintaining the academic rigor expected from one of Georgia's leading universities. By combining university faculty with experienced Cobb educators in every program, we have created a learning experience that is both research-based and immediately applicable in our classrooms. ***The results speak for themselves. Educators are choosing Cobb because of opportunities like Georgia's BEST. Those already serving in our schools are continuing their professional growth while making a long-term commitment to our district and our students. The data shows that commitment is helping drive student success, from the classroom to graduation and beyond.***

I am grateful to the Cobb County Board of Education, the University of West Georgia, our faculty, district leaders, and every educator who has chosen to invest in their future through Georgia's BEST. ***Together, we are building a stronger workforce and an even stronger future for Cobb students.***

Chris Ragsdale
Superintendent | Cobb County School District



COBB COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT
BEST IN-STATE EMPLOYER
2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025 2026
2026 FORBES®

89.2%
GRADUATION RATE | 2025

#1 IN THE METRO ON 2025 GEORGIA MILESTONES

22 NATIONAL BLUE RIBBON SCHOOLS

56 GEORGIA SCHOOLS OF EXCELLENCE

	CCSD	NATIONAL	GA
ACT SCORES	23.7	19.4	21.4
SAT SCORES	1,116	1,029	1,038

"An $8,000 investment that pays off with 99% retention, 55,000 applications, and higher student performance is a bet we'll make every time.

John Floresta, Chief Strategy and Accountability Officer



EMPLOYMENT

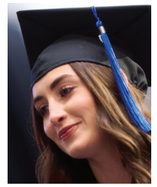
LARGEST EMPLOYER IN COBB COUNTY

17,182 EMPLOYEES

99% RETENTION RATE












1,576

Cobb educators that have pursued advanced degrees through Georgia's BEST.

8
COHORTS





824
GRADUATES

752
ENROLLED



In the third year of the program, Georgia's BEST has proven beneficial not only for educators but also for students. While earning these advanced degrees, Cobb educators are able to advance their careers and share even more knowledge with students.

Since its launch in 2023, 1,576 educators have enrolled in the program. Of those, 824 have graduated and 752 are currently enrolled.

While earning these degrees at no financial cost is a tremendous opportunity for educators, the benefits extend to Cobb Schools as a whole. The numbers speak for themselves: Cobb educators who earn a Georgia's BEST degree are staying in the district and using what they've learned to benefit Cobb Schools and the more than 105,000 students enrolled.

"It's amazing that we have such a wonderful district and superintendent that really cares about helping his teachers be the best that they can be, and he's putting his money where his mouth is. And we really appreciate his support through all of this," said Elisabeth Gibbon, a fifth-grade teacher at Eastside Elementary.

55k
APPLICATIONS SINCE 2023

DOES IT WORK?



With the help of Georgia's BEST, educators enrolled in the program have a 99% retention rate in Cobb Schools. This allows Cobb Schools to be fully staffed with the best educators possible, who continue to grow personally and professionally to help students.

"Now that I have my doctoral degree, it definitely incentivizes me to stay in the district because now I can utilize all the knowledge that I gained on school improvement efforts and actually apply it in the field every day in my position," said Alana Davis, science K-12 learning coordinator for Cobb Schools.

Georgia's BEST allows Cobb to not only recruit outstanding educators but also retain them where they can continue to share their knowledge with others.

When 74 Cobb educators earned their doctoral degrees in July, many immediately looked past their own accomplishment and thought about how this program will help students in the long run.

For these educators with advanced degrees, and all Georgia's BEST students, what they're learning as they get their degrees is directly tied to areas where the Cobb County School District sees opportunities for growth.

In many cases, coursework and research are focused on each educator's area of expertise as they work alongside others in similar roles to come up with creative and innovative solutions to help every student succeed. Whether it's workshopping everyday lesson plans or developing districtwide strategies to meet the needs of every student, no matter the circumstance, Georgia's BEST is truly changing lives through education and professional development.

"One of the great things about this program is that they have educators looking at issues that they are trying to improve. So, we're taking that data and we're making a real difference for the kids in our district," said Lindsay Martin, SLP at Timber Ridge Elementary.

Each teacher, staff member, or administrator who enrolls in the Georgia's BEST program has their own story as to why they do it, but the impact this program has had and will continue to have on students is all the same.

Year three of the program was life-changing for hundreds of teachers, and thousands of students and their families.

FOR COBB BY COBB



"Georgia's BEST is different because **it was built for Cobb.**

Every course reflects the knowledge, instructional practices, and leadership skills our educators need today, while maintaining the academic rigor expected from one of Georgia's leading universities. By combining university faculty with experienced Cobb educators in every program, we have created a learning experience that is both research-based and immediately applicable in our classrooms."

Superintendent Chris Ragsdale

$10,000,000+
in Estimated Savings

99%
GA BEST Educator Retention Rate

100%
Signed GA BEST Teacher Contracts

GEORGIA'S BEST

Replicates the benefits of professional learning ***for one-third the price.***

A TALE OF TWO TEACHERS

TEACHER A

Teacher A (25 years old) takes a federal student loan of $22,000 to fund their advanced degree in education.

After degree completion, Teacher A earns an additional $7,300 annually (net approximately $5,000 or $412 monthly) due to their advanced degree*.

Teacher A begins paying their student loan debt of $285/month ($3,420 annually) for the next ten years. They invest the remaining $127 from their raise each month ($1,524 annually) in a Roth IRA**.

After 10 years, Teacher A will have paid a total of $34,200 in student loans and earned $23,154 by investing their remaining raise after loan payment in a Roth IRA.

Teacher A makes no additional contributions to the Roth IRA after age 37.

At retirement, Teacher A has a Roth IRA balance of

$281,834.70

GA-BEST TEACHER

Teacher B (25 years old) is in the Georgia's BEST program, where their employer pays for their advanced degree in education.

After degree completion, Teacher B will earn an additional $7,300 annually (net approximately $5,000 or $412 monthly) due to their advanced degree*.

Teacher B begins investing their raise ($412 monthly or $5,000 annually) into a Roth IRA**.

After 10 years, Teacher B earns $75,965 by investing their entire raise in a Roth IRA.

Teacher B makes no additional contributions to the Roth IRA after age 37.

At retirement, Teacher B has a Roth IRA balance of

$924,659.81

**Estimated net raise from a bachelor's to a master's degree: $5,000.*
***Assumes the teacher begins the degree at age 25, completes it at age 27, retires at age 67 and earns a 9% annual rate of return.*
Note: All dollar amounts are estimates, calculated using the Roth IRA calculator at https://www.bankrate.com/retirement/roth-ira-plan-calculator/, and serve as an example only. Please consult a certified financial advisor for retirement planning.



KYLIE HARDY
2026-27



AMANDA DILLARD
2025-26

GA-BEST
TEACHERS OF THE YEAR

2 Teachers of the Year have also distinguished themselves as Georgia's BEST students, with both this year's honoree and last year's honoree completing or pursuing advanced degrees through the program. Kylie Hardy and Amanda Dillard demonstrate the value of educators who continue to grow professionally while strengthening their impact on students.

2026-2027 Teacher of the Year Kylie Hardy is in her 12th year teaching and currently teaches English as a Second Language (ESOL) to K-5 students at Mableton Elementary. She's on track to graduate from Georgia's BEST in December 2026. "I appreciate how much they support teachers so that we can support kids," Hardy said. "Georgia's BEST has been huge. It reminded me why I decided to go back to school, and it's been fantastic."

2025-2026 Teacher of the Year Amanda Dillard is now in her 19th year of teaching. At Pope High School she's teaching Special Education and gives students the care and attention they need to succeed. In the summer of 2026, she completed the Georgia's BEST program to earn her advanced degree. "Being a Georgia's BEST teacher and being in the Georgia's BEST program is a huge, huge opportunity for Cobb educators. Teachers can turn around and invest in their students. It's not something I could have done on my own," said Dillard.









HEAR FROM OUR TEAM



"I've always wanted to get my doctorate, but really, I have a daughter. *I'm paying for college, and I was like, it was out of reach. Having this opportunity was huge, and I definitely think I am a greater asset to Cobb now that I've gone through this program."*

Tobie Hendricks | Teacher at Walton HS



"This is the best county ever. *I cannot wait to continue to work, even though I'm a couple years away from retirement. I don't see that happening anytime soon. I have learned so much and I cannot wait to teach my students."*

Heather Cooper | Teacher at Simpson MS



"Cobb County already pays us more and makes us feel appreciated in many ways. *Paying for a degree has been a dream of mine for years, but I did not want to put my family into debt."*

Amanda Lovett | Teacher at Pickett's Mill ES

"I've been an educator for a very long, long time, *and it has helped me change and reshape the way I think about things."*



Theresa Bass | Teacher at Bells Ferry ES

"I'm the first doctor in my family, which was a goal for my grandmother, *so I'm very thankful to have that opportunity through Cobb and West Georgia."*

Kathryn Davies | Teacher at Varner ES



"I wanted to advance and help make a change here *and that requires a little bit more knowledge and continuing to learn."*

Dana Mann | Assistant Principal at Sanders ES





"I'm so grateful to Cobb County for providing this experience. *I've met new colleagues and new friends, and this has been phenomenal."*

Benjamin Green | Academic Coach at Austell ES

SPECIAL THANKS

COBB COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF EDUCATION



RANDY SCAMIHORN
Post 1
BOARD CHAIR

"I hear from our teachers how much Georgia's BEST means to them. It gives them the chance to keep learning and growing without taking on the cost of an advanced degree. That's a real investment in our teachers and in the students they serve.

Board Chair Randy Scamihorn



BECKY SAYLER
Post 2
BOARD MEMBER



LEROY TRE' HUTCHINS
Post 3
BOARD MEMBER



DAVID CHASTAIN
Post 4
BOARD VICE-CHAIR



JOHN CRISTADORO
Post 5
BOARD MEMBER



NICHELLE DAVIS
Post 6
BOARD MEMBER



BRAD WHEELER
Post 7
BOARD MEMBER

COBB COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT













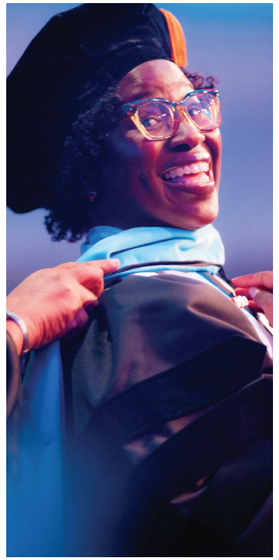


























To Three Years...

...and many more to come...

COBB COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT × UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA

YEAR 3 REPORT

2026

GEORGIA'S BEST

BUILDING EDUCATOR SUCCESS TOGETHER