

OPINION

JIM KELLY

Education commission should support an Education Opportunity System

As someone who has been working on K-12 education reform issues for two decades, I appreciate the efforts of Gov. Nathan Deal's Education Reform Commission. As the Commission considers its education reform options, the recent session of the Georgia General Assembly revealed that lawmakers are pursuing four alternatives for the delivery of K-12 education in Georgia: an Education Operating System, an Education Oversight System, an Education Orchestration System, and an Education Opportunity System.

In an Education Operating System, the state adopts national Common Core (or Common Core-inspired) standards that drive curriculum choices, facilitate student testing, assessment, and comparison across state lines, and program students for workforce integration

In an Education Oversight System,



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reflected by Gov. Deal's proposed Opportunity School District, the state assumes responsibility for operating local public schools that the Governor's Office of Student Achievement determines are failing to adequately educate students. The Georgia law requiring local public school districts to choose

from among an Investing in Educational Excellence School (IE2) System, Charter System, or Status Quo School System also evidences the Education Oversight System.

In an Education Orchestration System, reflected by SB 124, local public schools would partner with community-based organizations to orchestrate community school programming.

In an Education Opportunity System, evidenced by the Georgia Education Expense Credit program, the state provides Georgia income tax credits to individual and corporate taxpayers who contribute to qualified student scholarship organizations that award scholarships primarily to students seeking to transfer from public schools to the non-public schools of their parents' choice. Likewise, under a proposed Education Savings Account ("ESA") Act, the state would provide grants to parents to use

for tuition at non-public schools, private tutoring, and non-public online learning.

One key factor distinguishing the first three K-12 education systems from an Education Opportunity System is that they are operated by the government and can be coercive in nature. Unless families have the financial means to opt-out of an Education Operating System, Education Oversight System, or Education Orchestration System, their children are forced to remain in a school environment that may not be meeting their needs.

By significantly expanding the annual \$58 million cap on Education Expense Credits, which, on Jan. 1, taxpayers exceeded by \$33.5 million, and supporting ESAs, the Commission can promote real educational opportunities and build stronger communities throughout Georgia.