

advocate for SCHOOLS



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DURING THE 2020 REGULAR SESSION,
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B.E.S.T. Goal

A Senate committee approved S.243 (Figures) to strengthen and clarify school board member expectations of themselves.

“Building Exceptional School Board Teams” or B.E.S.T. proposes a Task Force recommendation that identified the need to better define expectations and provide enforcement provisions to the current local school governance law.

School Calendar Introduced

H.411 would impose a state mandate restricting the start AND end dates of local school calendars. The book-ends would apply in the 2021-2022 school year.

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March 10 - Districts 1,2,3

April 7 - Districts 4,5,6

**2020 Regular
Legislative Session**

20
days remain

B.E.S.T. Win; State vs Local School Calendar Begins

Schools Need B.E.S.T. Local Boards

The Senate Education Policy Committee Wednesday unanimously approved [S.243](#)

(Figures), the Building Exceptional

School Board Teams (B.E.S.T.) Act. Sen.

Figures said the bill would increase the effectiveness of local school governance and improve the 2012 law addressing school board training, standards and accountability.

Sen. Jim McClendon commended Sen.

Figures for bringing the proposal. He said he contacted his local school board members and learned they were enthusiastic about the proposal to create high expectations for school board members.

Rep. Tracy Estes introduced [H.362](#), the House companion of B.E.S.T. Tuesday.

B.E.S.T. is a task force recommendation following a review of current law regarding school board member roles and expectations. Task force members included school superintendents, administrators, board members and the SDE who identified a need to define terms and increase accountability and enforcement.

B.E.S.T. would recodify the current law as a new chapter of Title 16 with new provisions. The bill would enhance qualifications for office and provide improved enforcement mechanisms for residency, training and attendance requirements. The bill would also define neglect of duty and willful misconduct.

[See B.E.S.T. issue brief for details.](#)

Alleged violations of the Act would first need to be addressed by the local school board. Only after local action, or if the state superintendent determines action is warranted, the bill creates a structure for due pro-

cess and outlines potential penalties. Penalties would include censure, sanction and removal as a remedy for the most egregious violations. Potential removal was added because a change to the state impeachment law appears to no longer apply to local school board members.

The education community supports local public school officials seeking to hold themselves to high expectations, just as they do for school staff and students.

Restricting the School Calendar

Late Thursday, the bill to restrict a school calendar’s start AND end dates was introduced. [H.411 \(Hurst\)](#) would require schools start no sooner than the third Monday in August and end no later than May 31. The bill also includes perfunctory language to give school boards authority they already have to set days within the calendar. If adopted, Alabama would be the first state to impose both a start date and an end date that does not extend into June. Only 14 states have school start date restrictions, and of these, only Maryland and North Carolina also restrict an end date (the second or third week of June).

Summer labor for businesses has been a long-term goal for the bill proponents. Notably, the bill would not apply to community colleges or higher education, but would impact every child in K-12.

School boards want to retain the authority to create a school calendar and make educational decisions to promote student learning for which they are accountable. Each system builds its school calendar as a key instructional component to serve their students.

Educators should note that the sponsors of this legislation are sending a shot across the bow to express frustration that schools are beginning too early in August. They have legitimate questions about the debate and want to hear from constituents. Local authority is a strong argument on this issue, but this debate requires offering your policy priorities, instructional goals and the impact on your students.

The debate in Montgomery should not be decided by lobbyists. It is imperative that school leaders discuss local priorities and explain to lawmakers what instructional decisions you make in building the school calendar. For example, would the proposed dates allow your students to complete the first semester and take exams before the Christmas break?

The decision will be made by local lawmakers and each would have a vote about whether to impose a school calendar mandate. Our job is to make sure your lawmakers are informed about the local impact of that decision. H.411 (Hurst) is pending in the House Ways and Means Education Committee.

Education Bond Issue Increase

A \$1 billion education bond issue grew to \$1.25 billion and was approved by the Senate Finance and Taxation Education Committee Wednesday. Sen. Del Marsh amended the bill to add \$250 million to S.242 (Orr). For K-12 schools, \$912.2 million would be available to invest in and repay debt incurred for capital needs. The potential flow of dollars will help address public schools' real need to upgrade facilities and provide safe and secure schools for staff and students.

Open Records Act Rewrite

The Senate Governmental Affairs Committee has rescheduled its public hearing Tuesday for S.57 (Ward), a rewrite of the Open Records Act. AASB is again ready to speak in opposition to the bill along with numerous entities regarding the proposal's unrealistic expectations, costs and penalties.

A Process for Student Discipline

AASB and other education groups are working collaboratively with the bill sponsor on S.189 (Smitherman) to address school discipline. The sponsor carried the bill over to allow the groups to finalize details for a floor substitute.

The bill would provide a process for when a student is expelled or suspended more than 10 days. The bill would limit pre-K through 5th grade student suspension/expulsion to cases where the physical safety of others is threatened and prohibit a student from being suspended/expelled for truancy or tardiness violations.

Creating a STEM Council

By a 104-0 vote, the House Thursday approved H.293 (Collins/Baker) to create the Alabama STEM Council. It would create the Alabama STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) Council as a separate entity within the Department of Commerce. The new entity would advise, provide guidance and recommend ways to improve STEM-related education, career awareness and workforce development. The bill is now in Senate committee.

Gender Identity for Minors

The Senate Thursday approved S.219 (Shelnutt), the Vulnerable Child Compassion & Protection Act, by a 22-3 vote. The bill would make it illegal for doctors to prescribe puberty blocking medications or opposite gender hormones to minors and provide criminal penalties. The bill no longer includes a Class A misdemeanor for school employees who do not inform a parent regarding their knowledge about a minor's gender self-perception.

COMMITTEE ACTION

H.38 (Collins)/S.77 (Jones) - Competitive bids for local boards - would allow leases and lease/purchase agreements be exempted from the competitive bid law when a national or regional cooperative purchasing agreement. **Approved by respective committees.**

H.214 (Rich) - Teacher Bill of Rights - would enumerate rights to support teachers, substitute clarifies scope and legal liability. **Substituted in House committee.**

H.235 (Gray) - Yoga in schools - would allow K-12 public schools to offer yoga instruction. **Approved by House committee.**

H.341 (Ledbetter) - Mental health service coordinator - would require local school boards to hire mental health service coordinators beginning the 2020-2021 school year, should state funding be provided. **Approved by House committee.**

EDUCATION-RELATED BILLS INTRODUCED

H.368 (Lovvorn) - Student loan repayment - would include computer science teachers in the Alabama Math and Science Teacher Education Program (AMSTEP), to provide student loan repayment for STEM teachers who work in underserved areas of the state.

H.377 (Dismukes) - Double Dipping law - would allow legislators to work as teachers or school administrators.

H.380 (Dismukes)/S.265 (Singleton) - Retiree bonus - would provide a one-time lump sum payment to RSA retirees (three dollars for every month of service).

H.387 (Morris) - Mental health awareness training - would require mental health awareness be included in the annual training for K-12 school employees.

S.269 (Whatley) - Alabama Literacy Act revision - would delete provisions to retain students in third grade if the student does not demonstrate sufficient reading skills; would remove good cause exemptions.

Advocacy 2.0

Join AASB for legislative committee meetings. Attendees must have completed an Advocacy Day to participate.

April 22 - All Districts

May 6 - All Districts