

advocate for SCHOOLS



TO SEE A LIST OF BILLS BEING TRACKED BY AASB DURING THE 2019 REGULAR SESSION, CLICK BELOW.



Education Budget

The House WME Committee will discuss its substitute Tuesday for the education budget, [S.199 \(Orr\)](#). Expect changes from the Senate-approved version as it moves through the House. Upon approval, a joint conference committee will work on differences before each Chamber concurs and it is sent to the governor for signature.

Anticipated Schedule

May 21: Public hearing
May 22: Committee vote
May 28: House floor

State Lottery

The House Tuesday will consider [S.220 \(Albritton\)](#) to propose a constitutional amendment that, if approved by voters, would authorize Alabama to participate in a paper lottery. An estimated \$167 million would be split with 75 percent going to the General Fund and 25 percent to the Education Trust Fund.

2019 Regular Legislative Session

9

days remaining



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Alabama Literacy Act Focuses on Reading by 3rd Grade

With a 92-3 vote, the House Thursday approved a proposal to concentrate efforts on early grade literacy and target reading on grade-level by 3rd grade.

The Alabama Literacy Act [H.388 \(Collins\)](#) would take effect in 2020 and includes strategies, incentives and interventions specific to the science of reading for grades K-3.

The proposal refocuses and intensifies the goals of the Alabama Reading Initiative and would direct the program's proposed \$47.5 million funding in the pending budget. The Senate-approved budget includes an additional \$7.5 million to add 25 reading specialists to the 15 already in place statewide. The House sponsor, Chairman of Ways and Means Education Committee and State Department of Education continue to work on any further costs of implementation.

A cornerstone of the proposal, and perhaps most controversial, is the provision that 3rd grade students not reading at grade level would be retained beginning in 2021-22. Bill sponsor, Rep. Terri Collins, said there are multiple exceptions that prevent a single assessment from being the decisive factor. She said states with similar laws found the intense focus on literacy in early grades actually decreased the number of students retained in K-3.

The proposal aims to screen and identify students with reading challenges early and then provide intensive interventions. The bill outlines rigorous requirements to fill the position of a reading specialist, and regional and local reading spe-

cialists would be tasked to work in schools. Schools performing in the lowest five percent would receive greater resources.

The bill requires colleges of education to revamp and strengthen reading preparation. The law would require three rigorous reading science classes for teacher education programs which now only require one. The proposal also would focus on teacher professional development for literacy. The state department would be required to develop and adopt a dyslexia therapist certification endorsement by Dec. 2019.

A task force would recommend a comprehensive core reading program and interventions, teacher training and various assessments available for use by local school boards. Collins said the task force brings accountability to the program as do the mandatory reporting and notice requirements.

Extend Emergency Certificates

The bill extending the duration of an emergency teaching certificate is pending final passage in the Senate. [H.506 \(Estes\)](#) would provide a two-year emergency certificate that could be renewed once for a maximum of four years. That certificate currently only is available for one year and may not be renewed.

These changes would give immediate relief to local school systems struggling to find teachers. The requirement remains that an emergency certificate be issued ONLY when a certified teacher is unavailable. The individual must have a bachelor's degree and is subject to a background check. **School leaders urge passage of [H.506](#)**

(Estes).

Appoint School Superintendents

S.222 (Butler)/H.387 (McMillan) would transition the remaining 37 of 137 elected superintendent positions to appointed offices.

Having to fundraise and campaign limits potential leaders who do not want to run for “political office.” Practically speaking, potential candidates are restricted to those living close to the district, denying the system from recruiting experienced leaders elsewhere with skills to advance identified system goals and vision. The model also can divide loyalties of staff and the community, leaving the elected superintendent with political fallout when leading schools requires unity and team-building.

The proposal is not directed at any individual or group of elected superintendents, but aims for best practice in local governance used in every state except Florida. The bill purposefully provides a generous transition timeline. Currently elected superintendents/boards could execute a contract following bill passage OR the individual may opt to complete his/her current term and then run for another four-year term of office. The position would become appointed upon vacancy or completion of the second term to provide ample time for the change. **Urge your House member to vote YES to S.222 (Butler)/H.387 (McMillan) for final passage.**

Appointed K-12 State Commission

By a 30-0 vote, the Senate this week approved a state constitutional amendment that, if approved by voters in the March 2020 primary election, would change the elected State Board of Education to a governor-appointed Commission of Elementary and Secondary Education. **S.397 (Marsh)** based the governance structure on the 2016 changes for the Alabama Community College System.

The bill would require the governor to appoint nine commissioners to serve staggered six-year terms for a maximum two terms. One commissioner would be appointed from each congressional district and two commissioners would be appointed at-large. The Commission would appoint a Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education in lieu of a state superintendent and set the terms and tenure by contract. All of the positions are subject to confirmation by the Senate.

The Senate approved **S.398 (Marsh)** to require the governor to consult with the House and Senate minority caucuses when appointing minority Commission members.

Time is Short: TRS Revision Needed

The Senate Finance & Taxation Education Committee has yet to schedule H.77 (Baker), a bill to help recruit and retain teachers, on its agenda. With only nine potential legislative days remaining, school leaders are eager for lawmakers to improve the retirement benefit package so schools can better recruit new teachers.

Local schools are experiencing a teacher shortage as Alabama’s teacher graduates accept jobs in other states. The 2012 change to educator’s retirement plan tied Pennsylvania for the largest benefit cut (20 percent)

in the nation and has proved to be an overcorrection in the effort to address the retirement system’s unfunded liability. **H.77 (Baker)** tweaks the changes to continue the savings that are already nine year’s ahead of schedule, but improves the benefits to tackle absenteeism, high costs of substitutes and to improve teacher pay/benefits. The bill would require new teachers to bear most of the cost for higher benefits, an option to retire after 30 years (or age 62) and reinstates the ability to apply accrued sick leave toward retirement service credit. **Call Senate FTE committee members and ask they request H.77 (Baker) committee action ASAP.**

Mandatory Kindergarten

H.423 (Warren) would require children who turn age 5 by Sept. 1 to enroll in kindergarten beginning in 2020. After multiple education groups expressed concern about it being developmentally inappropriate for 4, 5 and 6-year-olds to be in the same class, the sponsor agreed to make enrollment for a child turning 5 by Dec. 31 permissive, based solely on local policy and on a space-available basis. The State Department of Education said approximately 93 percent of 5-year-olds already enroll in kindergarten. The state has no way to determine how many others already attend private school or are homeschooled which leaves the potential number and cost of new kindergarten students difficult to estimate.

Bills of Interest

H.72 (McC Campbell) - Failing Schools - would change “failing schools” to “challenged schools” in the Alabama Accountability Act. Pending House action.

H.159 (Lee) - Stadium Bathrooms - would reduce stringent code requirements and prohibitive costs for number of bathrooms in K-12 athletic facilities. Pending Senate.

H.209 (Pettus) – School Security - would allow retired law enforcement to serve as school security; may be armed if APOST certified. Approved by House.

H.216 (Faulkner) - Computer Science - would phase-in K-12 computer science courses. Pending final passage.

H.291 (Garrett) - Religious Release Time - would enable school board policies to allow students to receive religious instruction off campus. Pending Senate.

H.339 (Ledbetter) - Pledge of Allegiance - requires the Pledge of Allegiance at the beginning of each K-12 public school day. Sent to Governor.

H.462 (Easterbrook) – CTE Facilities – would authorize local school boards to use better-suited facilities, notwithstanding building codes. House approved.

H. 566 (Kitchens) – School Nutrition – would allow K-12 schools to donate surplus food to non-profit organizations to redistribute to eligible students for consumption on or off school grounds. Pending Senate committee.

S.411 (Reed) - Advertising on School Buses - would allow sale of advertising on school buses. Introduced.

H.625 (Hanes) - Repeal Standards [C/A] - a constitutional amendment that would repeal current standards and immediately default to 2011 math and 2012 ELA standards until new standards adopted. Introduced.