

advocate for SCHOOLS



TO SEE A LIST OF BILLS TRACKED BY AASB
DURING THE 2020 REGULAR SESSION,
CLICK BELOW



School Calendar

No hearings have been scheduled on [H.411 \(Hurst\)](#), the proposed school calendar bill. But lawmakers are talking about the proposal to mandate school start/end dates statewide.

Legislators are developing their positions and must hear from you. During spring break, share how student instruction and learning impacts your school calendar decision.

Read lawmakers' comments on the calendar bill and a story about a proposal to change the Alabama Literacy Act in the [Alabama Daily News](#).

[Corona Virus
ALSDE Resources](#)

[School System Guide](#)

[Parent Guide](#)

The Legislature is on Spring Break and will reconvene Tuesday, March 31

[2020 Regular
Legislative Session](#)

18
days remain

Legislative Spring Break, Then Real Work Begins

Lawmakers hit the pause button and will return to tackle budgets and multiple competing priorities following a two-week Spring Break. Spring break came as colleges were closing and moving to remote classes due to the coronavirus threat. Alabama's public K-12 schools had not yet decided but as of publication, at least nine states had closed public schools statewide as each considers the possibility. Thursday the Legislature sent the Governor a bill to appropriate \$5 million in state funds to the Department of Public Health to prepare for the coronavirus.

School Leaders Seek B.E.S.T.

The momentum continues as [H.362 \(Estes\)](#), the Building Exceptional School Board Teams (B.E.S.T.) Act, passed unanimously in House Education Policy Committee Wednesday. Bill sponsor, Rep. Tracy Estes, commended local school board members for seeking legislation to set high expectations and accountability. Estes, a former school board member himself, said it is critical that school leaders model behavior they expect of their school staff and students.

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 define neglect of duty and willful misconduct and create a structure for due process with potential penalties. [H.362 \(Estes\)](#) and [S.243 \(Figures\)](#) are poised for floor consideration. See additional details: [B.E.S.T. issue brief](#).

Retirement Changes Needed

[H.76 \(Baker\)](#), the Education Workforce Investment Act, awaits action in the Senate having passed the House unanimously for the second year. The Tier 3 proposal would improve the educator retirement package to make Alabama's salary and benefit package competitive for new hires. Employees would contribute more for an increased retirement benefit. Unused sick leave would accrue to retirement service. And employees would have the option to retire after 30-years of service or age 62.

Thursday, a plan was introduced in the Senate that would modify the Tier 2 retirement package. [S.302 \(Chesteen\)](#) would add the 30-year service retirement option and allow the conversion of sick leave into creditable retirement service.

This year is the optimal timeframe to revise the retirement system for education employees. Every year, the cost to make the benefit competitive will increase. School systems must have a more attractive retirement benefit as a proactive measure to recruit and retain school teachers and staff. The shortfall isn't coming. It is here.

Threat to School Discipline Authority

Despite good faith efforts by AASB, school superintendents, administrators and the state Department of Education, the student discipline bill passed by the Senate is unworkable for schools. The sponsor quickly called up [S.189](#), which had been carried over last week so AASB and others could work on a reasonable compromise, and moved for passage without time

for senators to learn from education groups whether a compromise had been reached. [S.189 \(Smitherman\)](#) would impose a one-size-fits-all process for school discipline that requires every school system to appoint independent hearing officers when a student may be expelled or suspended for more than 10 days. It would immediately elevate nearly every discipline decision to a legal dispute with witnesses, formal evidence and transcripts. Proponents overzealous effort would create mini-courts that reflect a structure suited to a juvenile criminal system, not K-12 school systems.

[S.189](#) would derail a school's discipline process. A hearing officer could overrule decisions by principals and superintendents, and ultimately school boards, on critical disciplinary matters. An independent hearing officer does not answer to a school community. The bill also would require the hearing officer to apply an impossible standard: long-term suspensions or expulsions must be "in the best interest of the education of the student."

Expulsion and suspension are last resorts for educators held accountable for the safety and learning environment for students and staff. Each system already provides due process to students. The bill would handcuff every school system, disrupt educator's discipline authority and gut efforts to effectively run schools by mandating an unworkable process for all systems. School leaders oppose [S.189 \(Smitherman\)](#).

Mental Health Supports in Schools

By a 102 to 0 vote, the House approved [H.341 \(Ledbetter\)](#) to provide a mental health service coordinator in each school system beginning with the 2021-2022 school year. The requirement would only be triggered if state funding is provided. School leaders urge passage of a first line approach to provide much-needed supports for teachers and staff to address student mental health needs. Support [H.341 \(Ledbetter\)](#).

Open Records Act Rewrite

AASB General Counsel Jayne Harrell Williams testified in opposition of [S.57 \(Ward\)](#), a bill to rewrite the Open Records Act. This bill does not balance the public's right to access information with the practical need for schools to function. See [AASB comments](#). Chair of Senate Governmental Affairs Senator Jimmy Holley asked the sponsor of the bill to work with stakeholders over the break. No vote was taken.

Enumerating Teacher Rights

By a 80 to 17 vote, the House approved [H.214 \(Rich\)](#), a bill to create the Teacher Bill of Rights. The intent of the bill is to support teachers in the classroom and enumerate rights teachers should have. The practical impact is less clear with aspirational language that would require funding or programmatic support to implement. Changes were made to help lessen potential conflict between teachers and administrators and to mitigate the lawsuits this law may trigger.

Yoga Moves

By a 84 to 17 vote, the House approved [H.235 \(Gray\)](#) to allow K-12 public schools to offer yoga instruction. Currently, yoga practice is prohibited in K-12 schools due to state regulations.

County School Board Terms

No public hearing was held in the House Education Policy Committee when the sponsor agreed to carry over [H.15 \(Whitt\)](#) Tuesday. The bill would decrease county school board member terms from six years to four years.

COMMITTEE ACTION

[H.368 \(Lovvorn\)](#) - **Student loan repayment** - would include computer science teachers in the Alabama Math and Science Teacher Education Program (AMSTEP) which provides student loan repayment for public high school math and science teachers who serve in underserved areas. Approved by House committee.

[H.385 \(Jackson\)](#) - **Seizure Safe Schools Act** - would permit the parent/guardian of a student with a seizure disorder to allow the administration of seizure medication at school/school-sponsored activities by trained unlicensed medication assistants as provided in an individualized health plan. Approved by House committee.

[H.387 \(Morris\)](#) - **Mental health awareness training** - would require mental health awareness to be included in the annual school emergency training session for K-12 school employees. Approved by House committee.

EDUCATION-RELATED BILLS INTRODUCED

[H.414 \(Chestnut\)](#) - **Life skills elective** - would allow local boards to offer, in grades six through 12, instruction in personal finance literacy, personal rights, and good citizenship.

[H.440 \(Warren\)](#) - **Mandatory Kindergarten** - would require a child who is five years old on or before September 1 to enroll in kindergarten. It would also allow for an underage child, upon local board approval, to be enrolled under certain circumstances.

[H.446 \(Lovvorn\)](#) - **Education Retirees' Trust Fund Funding Act** - would establish the Education Retirees' Trust Fund, to serve as resource for periodic bonus checks.

[S.303 \(Allen\)](#) - **Overtaking School Bus** - would make unlawfully overtaking a school or church bus a criminal offense and increase fines, require community service and suspend a driver's license for 90 days.

[S.316 \(Elliott\)](#) - **Student Growth Funding** - would amend the Foundation Program to provide an allowance for student growth.

[S.318 \(Chesteen\)](#) - **Water Bottles** - would require K-12 schools to install water bottle filling stations.