

advocate for SCHOOLS



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



Open Records Act

Sen. Cam Ward said he may have found the most controversial or unpopular issue since the gas tax, as the public hearing began on [S.237 \(Ward\)](#) Tuesday. The revision places unrealistic time-lines, excessive fines and potential personal liability on employees of local schools, counties, municipalities and state agencies. AASB and other K-12 advocates are working with proponents to highlight the impractical burdens in the bill.

Appoint Superintendents

As the legislative session approaches its half way mark, local school leaders eagerly await action on [S.222 \(Butler\)](#) to enable a complete focus on running schools instead of forcing superintendents to fundraise and campaign. Urge your House member to support transition of remaining elected positions to appointed office.

2019 Regular Legislative Session

17

days remaining

House Unanimously Turns Tide to Attract and Keep Teachers

Thanks to House members for answering the K-12 education family's request to help Alabama compete for teachers to serve students in our classrooms!

Recognizing that Alabama can't ask teachers to work for less and longer before collecting a smaller retirement, House members unanimously approved [H.77 \(Baker\)](#) by a 100-0 vote. Thanks to the many who shared the urgency to attract and keep teachers in Alabama schools. Georgia, Mississippi and Tennessee lure graduates from Alabama's colleges of education, offering better pay over time and better retirement benefits. With a growing national teacher shortage, the revised retirement plan coupled with a pay raise would make the state more competitive.

The bill creates a Tier 3 retirement package where employees bear the greatest portion of the cost. It would provide a stronger retirement benefit, allow retirement at age 62 OR 30 years of service and allow sick leave to accrue to retirement service years. [H.77 \(Baker\)](#) would provide the new plan for new hires, and current employees would have the option to remain in their current plan.

The 2012 goal to address unfunded liability in the teacher retirement system stays on track with a projected savings of \$2.22 billion dollars over the next 30 years. With projected savings nine years ahead of schedule, the timing is right to revisit the retirement benefit.

The next step is for school leaders to share their growing struggle to find classroom teachers with their senators. Once primarily limited to math, science/technology and special education, the problem now impacts nearly every subject and grade level with rural areas hardest hit. **AASB urges senators to vote YES to [H.77 \(Baker\)](#) — the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Act.**

Launch Early Grade Reading Education advocates at Wednesday's public hearing before the House Education Policy Committee clearly agreed with the primary education goal: young students must learn to read so they can read to learn. With that takeaway, [H.388 \(Collins\)](#), the Alabama Literacy Act, was approved. Less clear, however, are some details within the early grade literacy bill.

AASB Executive Director Sally Smith commended the effort and asked all parties to collaborate so the SDE and local school leaders can embrace and implement a vigorous state plan. Issues include securing adequate funding, ensuring measures to prevent unnecessary negative repercussions on students subject to a third-grade retention/promotion policy and clarifying terms to ensure sufficient flexibility and minimizing administrative burdens. Local school leaders support a strong investment and focus on K-3 reading. [H.388 \(Collins\)](#) next moves to the House floor.



Ed Budget to Set Sail in Senate Committee

The governor's budget proposal, [S.199 \(Orr\)](#), includes two items the committee must address:

- **Return \$35M Medicaid program to General Fund**

The CHIPS program, currently housed in the GF, is estimated to cost \$85M next year and to grow rapidly. Moving that program to the education budget when the GF has a \$100M carryover ignores finding a real solution to the state's Medicaid funding problem to the detriment of public education. [Urge your senator to remove the \\$35 M CHIPS program and put it back in the GF.](#)

- **Use \$55M for K-12, not an extra reserve deposit**

Beyond the required statutory payment to the Budget Stabilization Fund, the governor's budget appropriates an additional \$55M bonus payment. School leaders urge lawmakers to appropriate those dollars to the numerous pressing K-12 needs. AASB is wary of dollars being diverted with a potential change to the Rolling Reserve Act.

AASB's [2019 School System Snapshots](#) help local school leaders share budget realities in a user-friendly format. All senators will receive copies of Snapshots for school systems in their districts next week as the education budget starts the legislative process.

School boards and lawmakers must work as a leadership team and ensure state and local budgets work together to address local needs and vision. Real progress occurs when state and local dollars focus on the same priorities.

The FTE Committee will discuss and likely vote on the budget Tuesday at 1:30 p.m. Meanwhile, the committee this week approved [S.192 \(Orr\)](#), the 4 percent teacher pay raise, and [S.196 \(Orr\)](#), the \$128M K-12 supplemental appropriation from the Advancement & Technology Fund for local school systems to use in FY19.

Funding Flow to Charter Schools

AASB initially sounded the alarm last week when [S.311 \(Marsh\)](#) was introduced because language appeared to go after ALL local funding. AASB has since clarified that protections remain for local funding school boards earmark for capital expenditures, debt service or transportation. These protections in the current charter law are critical for local boards and the clarification allowed AASB to be neutral on the bill. The bill does remove the limit of 10 mills for public charter school startups (the amount required to participate in the Foundation program) and would treat all public school students residing in a school system the same for remaining local funding. The Senate Education Policy Committee Wednesday held a public hearing on the bill but no vote was taken.

AASB cautions that the original charter law, at the time hailed as one of the strongest and most accountable in the nation, must be implemented with fidelity. The state's Charter School Commission has released the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) which had been contracted to review applications. AASB is watching the process to ensure public charter schools are accountable and serve students as proposed. It is unfortunate that charter funding legislation

comes as controversial questions surface about proposed charter schools and the approval process.

First Wave of Computer Science for K-12

The House Ways & Means Education Committee Wednesday approved [H.216 \(Faulkner\)](#) to require a phase-in for ALL K-12 public schools to offer computer science courses. Beginning with high schools in the 2020-21 school year, middle schools would follow in 2021-22 and elementary schools in 2022-23. Bill sponsor **Rep. David Faulkner** said the majority of Alabama students do not have access with only 104 of roughly 1,500 public schools in the state currently offering computer science courses.

The bill would require the governor to establish a computer science task force charged with developing a statewide strategic plan. The plan would include a secondary computer science certification pathway for preservice teachers and a computer science endorsement. AASB supports the goal to ensure Alabama's computer science offerings are high quality and adequately funded to ensure sustainability. **Chairman Bill Poole indicated a possible cost of some \$4.1M needs to be addressed before moving forward.**

Code Red Law Gets More Depth

Currently, each local board is required to adopt a comprehensive school safety plan for every school, including a "Code Red" safety plan. [H.385 \(Robertson\)](#) updates the law and would require a four-tier alert system that includes:

1. **Heightened Awareness:** a potential may exist for an unusual situation and all parties should have heightened awareness to react as needed.
2. **Secure Your Area of Responsibility:** a specific incident has occurred, such as a medical emergency or a threat to one's self, and school personnel shall secure their area of responsibility in order to decrease risk of further incidents.
3. **Secure Perimeter:** a potential threat or danger does exist or has occurred within the community or neighborhood, and parties should be aware to react as needed.
4. **Lockdown:** recognition of potential immediate danger. Take immediate action using the safest and best option for survival.

The bill next moves to the House floor.

Testing the Waters on Religious Release-Time [H.291 \(Garrett\)](#) would require the SDE to adopt parameters and give local school boards an option to adopt a policy to offer release time during the school day for students to receive religious instruction off campus. School boards would not be required to adopt a policy. **Rep. Tracy Estes** offered, and the sponsor accepted, an AASB amendment to ensure a school board would not be required to grant course credit should it allow such electives. The bill next moves to the full House.