

advocate for SCHOOLS



TO SEE A LIST OF BILLS TRACKED BY AASB
DURING THE 2021 REGULAR SESSION,
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Next Week

The education budget will start in the Senate FTE Committee Wednesday.

The General Fund budget will be on the House floor Tuesday.

The Senate will discuss gambling legislation Tuesday.

K-12 Assessments

A House joint resolution expressing legislative intent would relieve K-12 schools from any accountability consequences related to state assessments this school year. [HJR 72](#)

Legislative Schedule

March 8: 2-day week
March 15: 2-day week
March 22: Spring break

School System Snapshots

See yours [HERE](#).

2021 Regular Legislative Session

18 days remain

Budgets start before spring break; Tier 2 detour ahead

Lawmakers plan to get education and general fund budgets halfway through the process before taking spring break the week of March 22. Expect the Senate FTE Committee to consider the \$7.6 billion education budget Wednesday to pave the way for full Senate consideration the following week. The budget will go to the House where the process repeats. A joint conference committee will work out differences before sending the education budget to the governor for signature.

Education Budget: \$440 M Increase
Despite the pandemic, the FY21 Education Trust Fund budget is sound and the FY22 budget will have a \$440 million increase. The growth is thanks to healthy state revenue, conservative budgeting last year and Rolling Reserve Act savings.

The Senate FTE committee will discuss its education budget priorities and offer a substitute to the governor's \$7.6 billion proposal Wednesday. The budget discussion will also address:

S.188 (Orr): 2% teacher pay raise. The pay raise is included in the governor's budget and should remain.

S.193 (Orr): \$364 million ATF Funds. Lawmakers can provide a supplemental appropriation to use this fiscal year (FY 21) from the balance in the Advancement & Technology Fund as part of the Rolling Reserve Act budget process. Last year, lawmakers appropriated only half of available funding due to financial uncertainties. With no expectation of revenues to flow this year to the ATF fund, lawmakers may choose to

withhold all or part of the ATF funds for future budget needs.

Local school leaders support the pay raise and priorities outlined in the SDE budget request. Click [HERE](#).

Detour for Tier 2 Proposal

A Senate Joint Resolution would send the Tier 2 proposal and any legislation regarding public employee compensation and benefits to a study commission. [SJR 55 \(Albritton\)](#) creates a State Employee and Teacher Compensation Joint Interim Study Commission to review and report findings by Jan. 1, 2022. This strategy would effectively bring the Tier 2 effort to a full stop this session. House and Senate sponsors, **Rep. Alan Baker** and **Sen. Donnie Chesteen**, have worked tirelessly to help local schools be competitive when hiring and retaining teachers. This year, the bill, [H.93 \(Baker\)](#), is limited to sick leave accrual and retirement eligibility to save costs. Nonetheless, the two Senate budget chairmen are sending a clear message by sponsoring the SJR to divert the bill.

Network Administrators Needed

The pandemic forced every school system to adapt immediately to remote learning. Most school systems were unprepared to support the critical demand for technology services that required managing existing and new devices, multiple software adds, new state programming and providing real-time support to all users. The increased number of users and devices also exposed school systems to greater vulnerability to cyber-crimes. State funding for school technology

has not kept up with demand and growing costs. More than half of local school systems do not have a network administrator to manage and maintain network operations and security and provide support to staff, students and their families.

A Cybersecurity Task Force, convened before the pandemic, outlined critical needs as cyber threats to school systems intensified nationwide. Kudos to lawmakers who last year gave supplemental funds to provide training for all education employees on cyber safety. The next immediate need is state funding to provide a system network administrator for each of Alabama's local school systems. A baseline amount of \$68,000 per school system is a conservative estimate to provide each system funding for a network administrator salary plus benefits.

Please ask lawmakers to fund a network administrator as essential staff to manage and safeguard local school technology in every school system.

K-12 Assessments & Accountability

A House joint resolution would address mounting concerns about expected Covid-related student learning loss. In addition to commending teachers for their work during the pandemic, **HJR 72 (Collins)** would:

- Commend K-12 teachers;
- Encourage the SDE to implement and each school system to participate in state assessments; and
- Encourage the SDE to waive state accountability indicators tied to state assessments for 2021.

Local school leaders, educators, students and families welcome relief from potential penalties associated with low student performance on state assessments. The resolution emphasizes the need for assessment data so educators can identify in which grades, subjects and to what extent there is learning loss and to develop appropriate intervention strategies.

Alabama Literacy Act: 3rd Grade Retention

The Senate Education Policy Committee approved **S.94 (Smitherman), a bill that would postpone implementation of the third grade retention requirement until the 2024-25 school year.** The Alabama Literacy Act would otherwise trigger the retention piece next spring in the 2021-22 school year. AASB agrees with lawmakers and the SDE that the ongoing hard work to implement the Act must continue; however, AASB believes a one-year or longer delay may be appropriate, especially after the assessment data is collected. See al.com.

Firearms on School Property

Discharging a firearm into a school building is already a felony, but the law does not address discharging a firearm on school property. **H.354 (Robertson)** would make it unlawful to discharge a firearm on school property during or after school hours. The House Judiciary Committee approved the bill after adding an **amendment** to ensure any activity approved by the board or on land leased by the board was excluded. The

amendment addressed concern that the bill would unintentionally impact schools' 16th Section lands.

Committee Activity

H.240 (Shaver) - Obscene material - would make it illegal for a teacher to solicit a student to send obscene material to a teacher. Approved by House committee.

H.305 (Hall) - Drugs near schools - would prohibit sale of drug paraphernalia within three miles of school. Approved as **substituted** by House committee.

S.40 (Givhan) - Special schools tax exemption - would exempt the foundations of the Alabama Schools of Fine Arts, Mathematics & Science and Cyber Technology & Engineering from state, county and municipal sales and use taxes. Approved by House committee.

S.203 (Smitherman) - Student discipline process - would remove local school boards from student expulsion and long-term suspension decisions and require every school system to use a hearing officer. Approved by Senate committee.

S.217 (Melson) - State textbook committee - would revise current statute and specify criteria for textbook selection. Approved as substituted by Senate committee.

Floor Action

H.385 (Hall) - Sex education - would revise content, course materials and instruction in public schools regarding sex education. Passed House.

S.10 (Shelnutt) - Vulnerable Child Compassion and Protection Act - would prohibit medical procedures, puberty-blocking medications and gender-changing hormones for minors. The bill would prohibit school employees from withholding information about a student's self-perception about conflicting gender identification from their parents. Passed Senate, in House committee.

S.16 (Jones) - Alternative teaching certificates for military - would authorize an alternative teaching certificate for qualified members of the U.S. Armed Forces. Passed House, as **amended**.

S.103 (Barfoot) - Charter schools for military bases - would amend the Alabama School Choice & Opportunity Act to allow a charter school on or near military installations to serve military family dependents. The Senate unanimously approved the bill Thursday. Passed House, as **amended**.

Selected Bill Introductions

H.486 (Scott) - Extended Learning Opportunities Act - would provide a process for public K-12 students to participate in and receive credit for extended learning opportunities outside of the school.

H.487 (Collins)/S.297 (Chambliss) - Charter school law revisions - would revise the manner of appointing members to the Charter School Commission and revise the local share of operational funding to charter schools.

H.498 (Collins) - Alabama Credential and Transparency Act - would provide a free searchable database for all educational and occupational credentials, competencies and workforce programs.