

advocate for SCHOOLS



TO SEE A LIST OF BILLS TRACKED BY AASB
DURING THE 2024 REGULAR SESSION,
CLICK ON BILL TRACKER BELOW:



School System Snapshots

AASB has released the 2024 edition (FY22 data) of the School System Snapshots, which provides an individualized look at each Alabama school system's state and local resources - funding and spending.

Fast-paced Legislative Days

The legislature already has kicked into high gear with a fast-moving calendar. Typically, lawmakers are in session two days a week, with one committee day. In an effort to move bills quickly and tackle controversial issues head-on (i.e., vouchers and gambling), the legislature plans to meet three legislative days per week for the first five weeks which would put both bodies at the halfway mark before spring break.

Still no word yet as to whether lawmakers will deal with the Education Budget during these first few weeks or wait until after the break. Stay tuned...

2024 Regular Legislative Session

27 Days Remain



Will School Systems Lose if Lawmakers 'CHOOSE' ?

Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) are at the top of Governor Kay Ivey's priority list this legislative session. "Passing an education savings account bill...is my number one legislative priority," Ivey announced Tuesday in her [State of the State address](#).

True to her word, the **Creating Hope & Opportunity for Our Students' Education (CHOOSE) Act**, sponsored by education budget chairmen **Sen. Arthur Orr (S.61)** and **Rep. Danny Garrett (H.129)**, was introduced on the first legislative day.

As filed, the CHOOSE Act would require the legislature to appropriate **at least \$100 million** annually to a newly created CHOOSE Act Fund. The governor's supplemental budget includes \$50 million for the fund.

The bill would direct the Department of Revenue to establish ESAs for parents to access funds to pay for private school tuition, homeschooling and other educational expenses. The CHOOSE Act would provide up to \$7,000 per student enrolled at an accredited, participating private or public school through an ESA funded by a new refundable income tax credit. Families who choose homeschooling would receive up to \$2,000 per homeschooler, with a \$4,000-cap for families with more than one homeschooler.

The first 500 tax credits would be reserved for special-needs students. For the first two years, families whose household incomes do not exceed 300% of the federal poverty level (approx. \$93,000 for a family of four) would qualify for the program. In year three, the program would become universal and available to all students.

AASB is still carefully reviewing the bill, and while it appears to take a more measured approach to vouchers, school boards are concerned about the impact this legislation could have on public school funding, especially for rural schools and poor and special-needs students who may not benefit.

The PRICE is Still Wrong

Rep. Ernie Yarbrough has introduced an ESA bill similar to last year's **Parental Rights In Children's Education (PRICE) Act**. The **True School Choice in Alabama Act (H.88)** would create and fund ESAs at \$6,900 per student and divert up to \$400 million from the ETF.

While the governor and legislative leadership have strongly voiced support for the CHOOSE Act, advocates for a more expansive voucher program are backing **Yarbrough's** proposal.

ETF Budget Outlook

Budget presentations were held prior to the start of the legislative session. Legislative Services Agency - Fiscal Division Deputy Director **Kirk Fulford** and State Finance Director **Bill Poole** addressed lawmakers in a joint budget hearing on the state's financial condition of the state.

Fulford stressed the importance of being prepared as economic growth continues to slow down, with the ETF now at -0.69% growth, as both taxes and revenue are returning to pre-pandemic levels. The 2023 year-end balance in the ETF is \$2.5 billion, and of that amount, \$651 million is the maximum available for a supplemental. This is significantly lower than last year's \$2.8 billion supplemental appropriation. The majority of the \$2.5 billion surplus automatically goes into three Rolling Reserve savings accounts: Budget Stabilization Fund; Education Advancement and Technology Fund (EAT); and the new Educational Opportunities Reserve Fund created by **Act 2023-390**.

Poole also highlighted the robust status of these three ETF rolling reserve savings accounts, which do not contribute to the revenues available to the ETF budget for appropriation to K-12 and higher education. The FY25 ETF cap is \$9.3 billion, which is the full amount available by law for the legislature to

appropriate. In addition to ESAs, the governor’s top FY25 ETF budget priorities are school security, computer device replacements, turnaround schools, targeted funding for implementation of the Literacy and Numeracy Acts and afterschool/summer programs.

- [LSA Budget Presentation](#)
- [State Finance Budget Presentation](#)

Another Record Year for ETF

As required by law on the second legislative day, the governor transmitted her state budget proposals including a \$9.35 billion ETF budget. Traditionally, the governor’s recommendations serve as a placeholder while the House and Senate ETF budget committees hash out their changes and appropriations are finalized. The budget ([H.145 Garrett](#)), pay raise ([H.146 Garrett](#)) and ETF supplemental appropriation ([H.144 Garrett](#)) will begin in the House this year.

Of note, the budget package **does include** an **Education Advancement & Technology (EAT)** supplemental appropriation ([H.147 Garrett](#)) of **\$508.4 million** to be allocated to local boards of education. This bill is a welcome sight for school systems after lawmakers last session chose not to introduce an EAT supplemental despite a record \$2.9 billion ending ETF balance which in part funneled into the EAT Fund.

Governor’s ETF Budget

The governor unveiled her FY25 ETF budget proposal with a \$550 million (6.25%) increase over last year. Increases include:

- 2% pay raise for education employees estimated to cost - **\$88 million**
- Transportation - **\$6.2 million**
- Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) - **\$48 million**
- Alabama Numeracy Act - **\$28 million**
- English Language Learners - **\$1.3 million**
- Advanced Placement - **\$2 million**
- Turnaround Schools - **\$1 million**
- Special Education Preschool - **\$1 million**
- Alabama Teacher Mentor Program - **\$1 million**
- Gifted Students - **\$1 million**
- Career Coaches - **\$2.5 million**
- Jobs for AL Graduates (JAG) - **\$2 million**
- Principal Leadership & Mentoring Act - **\$30 million** to fund implementation of [Act 2023-340](#)

- [Governor’s FY25 ETF Spreadsheet](#)
- [FY25 Foundation Program Totals \(Gov. Rec\)](#)

Supplemental Appropriation

Gov. Ivey’s ETF supplemental ([H.144 Garrett](#)) allocates **\$651.2 million**, of which **\$227 million** goes to the State Department of Education (SDE) for one-time expenses.

- School Safety Grants - **\$100 million**
- CHOOSE Act Fund for school vouchers - **\$50 million**
- CHOOSE Act Fund Administrative Costs - **\$1 million**
- Computer Device Replacements - **\$35 million**
- Summer Reading Camps - **\$15 million**
- College and Career Readiness Grants - **\$17 million**

- New Buses - **\$50 million**
- Alabama Student Information Management System (ASIMS) - **\$13.8 million**
- Teacher’s Liability Trust Fund - **\$7.5 million**
- Ed Farm - **\$2.5 million**
- Adds clarifying language that the previous year’s ETF appropriation for school nurse salary matrix applies only for years of public-school nurse experience.

Lawmakers Ready to Roll the Dice

The Legislature filed two companion bills in the House this week which would create a state lottery, allow in-person and virtual sports betting and authorize up to 10 casino sites with table games and slot machines. The first bill, ([H.151 Blackshear](#)), is a proposed amendment to the Alabama Constitution to allow gambling, and the second bill, ([H.152 Blackshear](#)) is the “enabling” legislation detailing the operations, locations and regulations of gambling. It would generate an estimated \$800 million in annual revenue, although the Legislative Services Agency has not published the official revenue estimate. The gambling proposal would establish a new state trust fund - the Lottery Education Fund - which would fund non-recurring education expenses through lottery revenues, including: two-year community and technical college scholarships, dual enrollment, higher education research, **non-recurring capital expense for public K-12 schools and school security (including the hiring of SROs).**

Parents’ Right to Know

Senate Pro Tem Greg Reed introduced a “Parents’ Right to Know” bill, ([S.48](#)), that would require public schools to publicly post classroom curricula online. It also would establish a review and a complaint process for parents who have objections to any classroom instructional or supplemental materials. **Reed** wasted no time getting the bill before the Senate Education Policy Committee Wednesday for a favorable report and then to the full Senate Thursday where it was amended to give teachers the ability to address parental concerns with curriculum via email and would transfer the matter to the local board of education if a parent requests further information. **The bill passed the Senate unanimously and now is assigned to the House Education Policy Committee.**

Committee Action

The Senate Education Policy Committee gave a favorable report to [S.33](#) sponsored by **Sen. Chris Elliott** which would allow assistant superintendents, assistant chief school finance officers and assistant principals to be employed on the same contractual basis as principals. **Bill now goes to full Senate for a vote.**

AASB’s Tracking Tool

Don’t forget to look at AASB’s tracking page where you can check the status of bills being monitored by AASB during the session. Just click on the red bill tracker icon on the top right of the Advocate header.

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