

advocate for SCHOOLS



TO SEE A LIST OF BILLS TRACKED BY AASB
DURING THE 2021 REGULAR SESSION,
CLICK BELOW



Coming Up

The Senate FTE committee plans to consider a substitute to the governor's education budget proposal Tuesday. The full Senate should vote on the budget Thursday before lawmakers leave for spring break.

Lottery Bill Fails

By two votes, the Senate failed to approve S. 214 (Marsh), a constitutional amendment to allow voters to decide whether to authorize a lottery, casinos and sports betting.

Communicate priorities

Local school boards must discuss local budget priorities for students and schools. Help lawmakers know what state funding will most help support their school communities.

School System Snapshots

See yours [HERE](#).

Legislative Schedule

March 15: 2-day week
March 22: Spring break
April 5: Session resumes

2021 Regular Legislative Session

16 days remain

Cyber Tech Staff, Charter Funding & Sports Broadcasting

As the legislative session reaches its half-way mark, local school boards are communicating their schools' most pressing budget needs as they navigate through the pandemic. Senate FTE Chairman **Sen. Arthur Orr** this week shared in an AASB webinar that the committee will consider the ETF budget next Tuesday and it should be on the Senate floor Thursday. Meanwhile, lawmakers discussed local funding for charter schools and broadcasting rights for school sports.

State-Funded Technology Staff Still one per system: 2006 - 2021

Technology in K-12 schools today bears little resemblance to 2006, when the education budget first funded a technology director for each local school system.

School systems now have multiple wide area networks, thousands of devices, web-interface programs and software and access by nearly all employees and students. Yet the state still funds only a single technology position for each school system. Because the pandemic forced every school system to immediately rely on remote learning, the situation is overwhelming.

On average, two schools experience cybersecurity breaches each day across the country according to [Edweek](#). Public schools have become a target for cyber-crimes and the state provides no funding for a network administrator position to operate, manage, maintain and safeguard school system technology and sensitive data. Less than half of Alabama's school systems can afford a network administrator.

Thanks to a \$2.5 million supplemental appropriation last year, education employees have access to cybersecurity training. The next immediate need is a state-funded position to ensure each school system can afford a network administrator. School leaders request a minimum \$68,000 per system investment to provide starting salary and benefits for this critical position. Funding would allow a system to either hire staff or retain current staff being lured to private sector jobs. Network administrators must be in place to operate, manage and protect frontline technology. See more [here](#).

Funding Charter Schools

[H.487 \(Collins\)](#) would revise state funding for charter schools and allow limited local funding to follow students who reside within the county where the charter is located. Only local funds above the minimum 10-mill match required for the Foundation Program and funds not pledged to debt service would flow to the charter school. For example, a county school system with only 10 mills in local revenue would have no local funds follow the student. For a school system with 15 local mills, five mills would be in play. But if three mills are pledged to bond debt service, only the proportionate share of two mills would follow the student—and then only if the charter school is located in the county the student resides. Finally, the amount is capped and may not exceed the local revenue the local school system receives per student.

The bill also provides monthly state funding instead of quarterly disbursements and aligns state funding for a start-

up charter school to be consistent with traditional schools. Funding would be based on projected enrollment (with a claw-back provision to recoup funding to reflect true enrollment). In addition, the bill would increase charter school commissioners' terms from two years to four years; remove the state Board of Education from the commissioner appointment process and authorize the commission to hire staff. The House Ways & Means Committee approved the bill.

K-12 Sports Broadcasting Rights

House and Senate Education Policy committees debated a proposal intended to ensure broadcasters for K-12 sports negotiate directly with schools to cover sports events. Lawmakers' discussion on [H.248 \(Rich\)](#) and [S.127 \(Scofield\)](#) reflected confusion about this issue. The bill sponsors accepted amendments to specify the school retains sole authority to decide who covers its sporting events on school property during the regular season. Both bills were approved by committee, as amended. [Senate/House](#) amendments.

Math & Science Teacher Proposal

Creates Differentiated Salary/Hiring Structure Legislation to establish the Teacher Excellence and Accountability for Mathematics and Science (TEAMS) salary schedule program was introduced late Thursday. [S.327 \(Chesteen\)/H.537 \(Baker\)](#) address the challenge to incent and recruit teacher candidates to the fields of mathematics and science.

The program would provide a separate, higher salary schedule for teachers who meet specified criteria and obtain credentials. The TEAMS program and salary schedule would be administered by the state Department of Education, as would assigning hard-to-staff school designations. It creates a TEAMS Fund in the state treasury to fund the differential pay and salary supplements. It codifies another provision so teachers who work in hard-to-staff schools receive an additional \$5,000 supplement

Teachers who participate in the program would relinquish tenure under the Students First Act and work under contract similar to the law governing contract principals. AASB supports the concept but has identified procedural concerns and will work with sponsors to correct the legislation as it moves forward. Look for more details and analysis soon.

B.E.S.T. Getting Better

By voice vote, the House Education Policy Committee Wednesday approved the senate version of the Building Exceptional School Board Teams (B.E.S.T.) Act. The Senate strengthened S.170 (Figures)/H.338 (Estes) by adding amendments added on the Senate floor to address lawmakers' concerns. Senate sponsor **Sen. Vivian Figures** emphasized the bill's high expectations and enforcement mechanisms are sought by local school boards seeking to hold themselves accountable.

House sponsor **Rep. Tracy Estes** offered to continue work with lawmakers as he prepares the bill for final passage on the House floor. Urge lawmakers to support B.E.S.T.

Allowing Yoga Elective in Schools

By a 73-25 vote, the House Thursday approved a bill to remove the prohibition against the instruction of yoga in K-12 schools. [H.246 \(Gray\)](#) would authorize local school boards to offer yoga as an elective activity. The bill requires students be able to opt-out of the elective. The instruction would be limited to poses and stretching and only English descriptive names could be used. Mantras, chanting and namaste greetings would be expressly prohibited. The bill moves to the Senate.

Gender Identity for Minors

A bill to make it illegal for doctors to prescribe hormone medication or perform surgery on minors who self-identify as transgender is one step away from House final passage. [S.10 \(Shelnutt\)](#), the Vulnerable Child Compassion & Protection Act, only relates to schools in the stipulation that school employees may not withhold, nor encourage or coerce a minor to withhold, information that the minor's gender perception is inconsistent with his or her sex.

Education-related bill activity

[H.447 \(Kiel\)](#) - **School closures** - would require local board approval if a public K-12 school is to be closed for more than 10 days. Approved by House committee.

[H.486 \(Scott\)](#) - **Extended Learning Opportunities Act** - would provide a process for public K-12 students to participate in and receive elective credit for extended learning opportunities outside of the school. Approved as [amended](#) by House committee.

[H.494 \(England\)](#) - **Non-disparagement agreements** - would create the Alabama Non-Disparagement Obligations Act. Approved by House committee.

[H.498 \(Collins\)](#) - **Alabama Credential and Transparency Act** - would provide a free searchable database for education and occupation credentials, competencies and workforce programs. Approved by House committee.

[H.526 \(Gray\)](#) - **Water bottle filling stations** - would require water bottle filling stations in newly constructed and renovated public K-12 school buildings. Introduced.

[H.527 \(Gray\)](#) - **School drinking fountains** - would require drinking fountains, water coolers or bottle filling stations in public K-12 school buildings. Introduced.

[S.165 \(Orr\)](#) - **Open Records Act** - would revise the Public Records Act for government entities, including public schools. Carried-over by Senate Judiciary Committee. AASB opposes.

[HJR 72 \(Collins\)](#) - **Waive accountability for state assessments** - would waive the penalties and failing designations that normally follow state assessments for the 2021 school year. Awaits the governor's signature.