

advocate for SCHOOLS



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



AASB Advocacy Days

Alabama's legislative session is underway!

It's not too late join us in Montgomery for AASB Advocacy Days.*

Tuesday, February 27
[REGISTER NOW](#)
Dist. 6, 7, 8, 9 & CSFOs

Tuesday, April 2
[REGISTER NOW](#)
Dist. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & CSFOs

Wednesday, April 17
[REGISTER NOW](#)
Committee Day
All Districts & CSFOs

**You may sign up to participate for any of the dates if unable to attend on your district's designated day. However, please do not double register. For more information or any questions, please contact [Tracey Meyer](#)*

CHOOSE ACT Myths or Facts

Check out AASB's Q & A about the CHOOSE Act. This resource breaks down the myths and facts about the bill as currently written. [Click here for Q & A .pdf](#)

2024 Regular Legislative Session

24 Days Remain

Fast Tracking the CHOOSE Act School Voucher Bill

As expected, the Creating Hope & Opportunity for Our Students' Education (CHOOSE) Act ([S.61](#)) took center stage Wednesday during the Senate Finance and Taxation Education (SFTE) Committee where proponents and opponents of the bill packed the room for a public hearing.

AASB and partner education organizations School Superintendents of Alabama (SSA), Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools (CLAS) and the Alabama Education Association (AEA) met this week with both the House and Senate bill sponsors (**Rep. Danny Garrett** and **Sen. Arthur Orr**) to discuss concerns about the CHOOSE Act.

Several issues were raised such as the lack of academic program safeguards and minimal accountability, but the lack of financial safeguards topped the list.

Speaking in opposition at the public hearing, the "education family" dispelled misinformation about the bill, including a financial "cap". The fact is the CHOOSE Act Fund created in the bill would require the legislature to appropriate **at least \$100 million annually**.

AASB Executive Director Sally Smith made clear in her remarks to the committee there is no funding cap or "ceiling" to prevent the legislature from appropriating **more than \$100 million annually** for private school vouchers/education savings accounts (ESAs). "This sets us up for a budget battle every year," **Smith** said.

Watch a recording of the Senate public hearing on the CHOOSE Act [here](#). **Smith's** testimony begins at the 58:15 mark.

Legislative Fiscal Office Deputy Director Kirk Fulford stated that appropriations for the CHOOSE Act ESAs would come from available funds in the Education Trust Fund (ETF) and any left over monies would not revert back to the ETF but instead remain in the CHOOSE Act Fund.

Orr acknowledged opponents' concerns about the lack of a funding cap or ceiling on the annual appropriation to the CHOOSE Act Fund but did not commit to adding this safeguard to the legislation. He told committee members after the public hearing, he will bring a substitute bill for consideration and vote next week, meaning the bill could go before the full body as early as Thursday for Senate passage.

In the meantime, AASB has been working in collaboration with education partners on language for a substitute bill and has given those suggestions to the Governor's Office which is spearheading this piece of legislation.

OF NOTE: Since the CHOOSE Act is a bill that proposes increasing revenue, it must originate in the House according to the Alabama Constitution. The House bill, ([H.129 Garrett](#)), is scheduled for public hearing before the **House Ways and Means Education (HWME) Committee** Wednesday. AASB and other education groups will be speaking again in opposition.

Myths or Facts, You Choose

AASB has developed a Q & A resource with information about the CHOOSE Act to help school board members have conversations with lawmakers about the potential negative impact this bill could have on public education funding and our local school systems.

One of the myths is the CHOOSE Act would provide universal school choice for **ALL** students, inferring public school families would rather their children attend private schools. [However, many Alabama communities have few private school options.](#)

The facts are most Alabama children will remain in public schools, and bills like the CHOOSE Act primarily benefit families with children already in private schools to access public school dollars.



House Gambles and Wins

A two-bill gambling “package” won House passage Thursday 70 to 32, exceeding the 63-vote threshold needed for a constitutional amendment to be approved. The first bill, [\(H.151 Blackshear\)](#), is the proposed constitutional amendment to 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 second bill, [\(H.152 Blackshear\)](#), is the enabling legislation detailing the operations, locations and regulations of gambling.

According to the fiscal note, the net revenue generated from the lottery into the to-be-created Lottery for Education Fund (LEF) is an estimated \$305.6 million to \$379.4 million annually. The proceeds in the LEF shall be annually appropriated through a supplemental bill for non-recurring education expenses. These non-recurring expenses would include:

- Scholarships for two-year community and technical colleges;
- Dual enrollment;
- K-12 capital outlay;
- Other nonrecurring expenses; and
- School security, including the hiring of SROs and purchase of security doors.

The bill package now heads to Senate committee where it’s rumored it won’t be easy rolling.

Bills on the Move

With gambling legislation taking up the entire legislative week in the House, other bills did not move through the lower chamber. Because of this, multiple bills were filed on Thursday after gambling legislation passed the House. Be sure to check out [AASB’s Tracking Page](#) to follow bills being tracked during the session.

School Discipline Bill Back Again

House Education Policy Chair Rep. Terri Collins filed [H.188](#), which would create a uniform statewide system of procedural due process for public school students facing suspension or expulsion. The reintroduction of this bill should come as no surprise to local boards as it has surfaced each legislative session for the past several years. AASB is closely reviewing the legislation and wants to ensure school boards retain local governance authority. Existing law already requires boards annually adopt and distribute a code of student conduct that details the policy and procedures for student disciplinary actions, including suspension and expulsion.

Committee Action

The **Senate Children and Youth Health Committee** Thursday favorably reported a bill, [\(S.53 Orr\)](#), that would eliminate the form school administrators fill out to allow 14- and 15-year-olds to work. **Bill now goes to full Senate for vote.**

Bills in Committee Next Week SENATE

Senate Education Policy will be taking up several bills Wednesday, including a bill that would create a new

school security inspection and grant program and a first grade readiness bill.

The **school security grant and inspection** bill sponsored by **Sen. Arthur Orr**, [\(S.98\)](#), would establish a new school security program within the State Department of Education (SDE) and would require school safety inspections at least once every five years. The State Board of Education (SBOE) would be responsible for establishing the criteria for school security inspections, upon which each local board would be graded A-F based on compliance. Boards would then be eligible to apply for grants to seek compliance with the school security criteria based on their letter grade. Priority for grant funding would be given to boards scoring a D-F and to boards that have completed a facilities assessment through the SDE regional school safety training program.

The bill also would create a school mapping data program within the Alabama State Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA) to provide accurate mapping for each public school in the state. This mapping data would then be available to law enforcement and public safety agencies. There is a corresponding \$100 million appropriation in the governor’s recommended ETF supplemental [\(H.144 Garrett\)](#) for this school security grant program.

Sen. Donnie Chesteen’s first-grade readiness bill, [\(S.76\)](#), is identical to last year’s version sponsored by **Rep. Pebblin Warren** and is the same as her companion bill this session, [\(H.113\)](#). If enacted, it would allow a 4-year-old to enroll in kindergarten if the child successfully demonstrated school readiness based on criteria the local board may adopt to assess school readiness. It also would allow a 6-year-old to enroll in first grade without completing kindergarten if the child demonstrates “first-grade entry readiness” on an assessment to be created by the SDE and approved by the SBOE.

Concerns by many in the education community regarding this legislation have centered around complications that could arise by having 4-, 5- and 6-year olds in the same classroom, with some possibly never having had any school experience. Interestingly, this issue also has been cause for concern for many lawmakers who have blocked the bill’s passage over the years. However, there seems to be a meeting of the minds this session - at least with some legislators - evidenced by the Senate Education Policy Committee Chair signing on as lead sponsor of the Senate bill. This appears to be signaling bipartisan support for the legislation.

Historical note: Rep. Warren has championed this bill in some form or fashion for close to two decades.

Bills in Committee Next Week HOUSE

The **House Education Policy Committee** has two bills on the calendar for Wednesday. [H.95](#), sponsored by **Rep. Stubbs** would allow for the virtual administration of state assessments. [H.113](#), sponsored by **Rep. Warren** is the first-grade readiness bill, House companion to [S.76](#).

AASB LEGISLATIVE TEAM



Sally Smith, J.D.
Executive Director

ssmith@AlabamaSchoolBoards.org



Ada Katherine van Wyhe, MPA
Director of Governmental Relations

akwyhe@AlabamaSchoolBoards.org



Tracey Meyer
Governmental Relations Coordinator

tmeyer@AlabamaSchoolBoards.org