

# 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

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

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

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

*\*You may sign up to participate for  
either date if unable to attend on  
your district's designated  
day. However, please do not  
double register. For more infor-  
mation or any questions, please  
contact [Tracey Meyer](#)*

## Did You Attend Advocacy Day?

If you attended Advocacy  
Day on Feb. 27, please  
take a moment to fill out  
this brief survey. Your  
feedback helps AASB  
provide members with  
informative, high-quality  
programs such as this.

[TAKE SURVEY.](#)

## CHOOSE Act Vote

To see how your  
legislators voted for this  
ESA bill in the House,  
[CLICK HERE.](#)

## 2024 Regular Legislative Session

18 Days Remain



## House CHOOSEs to Approve School Voucher Bill

After four hours of spirited discussion from opponents of the bill, the House voted 69 to 34 Tuesday to approve the **Creating Hope & Opportunity for Our Students' Education (CHOOSE) Act (H.129)** - an expansive education savings account (ESA) program which would be open to ALL students in the 2027-2028 school year.

As passed by the House, the CHOOSE Act does include an additional financial check, but that measure still does not prevent potential negative long-term negative impact on the Education Trust Fund (ETF) Budget.

The bill's sponsor, **House Ways and Means Education (HWME) Chair Rep. Danny Garrett**, told fellow House members, "...this bill does not gut or adversely impact the education budget. Initial funding [\$100 million] will be set aside from supplemental appropriations for FY24 and FY25 that are not available for appropriation in the (ETF). Thereafter, expected growth in revenue coupled with spending limitations already in effect will be sufficient to fund any future growth of the program."

Despite the reassurance, **AASB remains concerned about the impact the CHOOSE Act would have on future ETF budgets** when the bill reaches "universal school choice" in year three of implementation. Higher demand for ESAs and a weak economy could hurt public school funding.

Addressing neither financial, nor academic accountability, one "friendly" amendment adopted on the House floor clarifies students participating in the ESA program must adhere to current athletic eligibility requirements of the Alabama High School Athletic Association (AHSAA).

**AASB has created an updated chart comparing the CHOOSE Act as originally introduced and as passed by the House.**  
[Click here for chart.](#)

The bill now goes to the Senate, where has been assigned to the **Senate Finance and Taxation Education Committee**. If the Senate passes the CHOOSE Act in its current (engrossed) version, the bill would require the state annually appropriate at least \$100 million from the ETF if the previous year's ESA participation rate is at 90% or more.

**Many members continue to contact AASB with concerns about the bill and provisions they would like to see. At this juncture, any concerns, ideas or suggested language needs to be shared directly with Senate lawmakers.**

## Legislative Landscape

The Legislature already is one-third of the way through the 2024 regular legislative session. It has been a fast-paced schedule full of high-stakes bills such as the CHOOSE Act, gambling and a state ethics law rewrite moving through the House. The Senate has been taking a much more measured approach. We will likely see the House's pace slow as it looks to see what the Senate will do with gambling and other key bills. The governor's office continues to push for final passage of the CHOOSE Act to happen sooner, rather than later. The ESA bill could be in Senate committee sometime next week. Stay tuned...

## No Action on ETF Budget

This year, the \$9.35 billion education budget starts in the House, but is not expected to move until after the Legislature takes its official spring break March 25-29. However, lawmakers also will take an "in-district" work week March 11-15.

## Protecting Local Education Funding

A public hearing was held in the **House Ways and Means General Fund (HWMGF) Committee** on (H.73 Pettus), a bill to cap

the amount a property tax appraisal would be able to increase from the previous year.

This bill would limit the amount of local revenue available from annual property tax growth at 3% for Class 3 properties and 5% for Class 2 properties, which would disproportionately and negatively impact schools in high-growth communities. According to a recent Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama (PARCA) report on [How Alabama Taxes Compare](#), our state's ad valorem property taxes are already the lowest in the nation.

**AASB** joined several groups speaking in opposition to the bill, including the Association of County Commissions of Alabama; Alabama League of Municipalities; superintendents from both Auburn and Opelika City Schools; and the Shelby County manager. As just one example, Shelby County would lose almost \$9 million in revenue from estimated property tax growth if this bill went into effect. "If this bill went into effect, it would cost us about \$2 million per year," testified **Opelika City Schools Superintendent Farrell Seymore**. "I have never seen a successful business model that put a cap on the amount of revenue or income to be collected that did not put a cap on the number of students that could be served or the needs of the students who might come....if this had been passed six years ago, this would have been an exact loss of \$31 million to Auburn City Schools," added **Auburn City Schools Superintendent Cristen Herring**.

**AASB** and partner education groups signed a [position letter](#) in opposition to any legislation capping property tax appraisals. **HWMGF Committee Chair Rep. Rex Reynolds** requested opponents of the bill work together with the sponsor on a compromise to be ready by next week's committee meeting.

### Teacher Bill of Rights

**Senate Finance and Taxation Education (SFTE) Chair Sen. Arthur Orr** filed [S.157](#), a bill dubbed the "Teacher Bill of Rights," which creates additional procedures for teachers and principals to remove students from the classroom for behavior. The bill moved quickly and has already received a favorable report from the **Senate Education Policy Committee** Wednesday, with the sponsor acknowledging additional work needed and a commitment to work with **AASB**. The bill is modeled after legislation passed in Kentucky, Minnesota and Nevada. **AASB** met with **Sen. Orr** and discussed changes to the bill to ensure alignment with board-approved local codes of conduct, existing due process requirements and local policies on discipline, as well as incorporating other components of school support services and data review addressing student discipline. **AASB** emphasized the need for increased assistant principal units at the 1:250 ratio. The role of assistant principal is critical as it serves to support principals, teachers and students across many areas, including discipline and classroom management.

☛ **NOTE:** The governor's recommended FY25 ETF budget ([H.145 Garrett](#)) does not include funds for additional assistant principal units.

[Click here for FY25 ETF Gov. Rec. Spreadsheet](#)

### Student Discipline Due Process

A public hearing was held Wednesday on [H.188](#), a bill that would create a uniform process for suspension and expulsion for public school students, sponsored by **Rep. Terri Collins**. **AASB** worked with Collins on an agreed-upon amendment with the sponsor to address minor issues around the age of students impacted and to ensure schools are able to retain authority to suspend or expel students for violation of the code of conduct or state law. **AASB is working on another amendment** to share with the bill's sponsor to address in-school suspension and alternative school. **Sen. Rodger Smitherman**, who has been championing this issue for several years, introduced the companion bill in the Senate ([S.165](#)) the same day as the House public hearing. **A vote on the House bill will take place in the House Education Policy Committee Wednesday.**

### Career Tech Bills Introduced

#### CTE Graduation Requirement

A bill ([S.176](#)) that would add **two new** high school graduation requirements has been introduced by **Senate Education Policy Chair Sen. Donnie Chesteen**. These additional requirements would be developed by the Alabama Community College System (ACCS), specifically a new career readiness module, the "Career RoadMap Postsecondary Opportunity," coupled with a minimum of 10 hours of instruction time. Completion of at least one module would be required beginning with the 2028-2029 graduating class. Local boards would be required to create policies to administer these new graduation requirements. **AASB has concerns about the impact on local boards** as well as imposing additional graduation requirements [to the list approved by the State Board of Education](#) which already includes a recently added College and Career Readiness Indicator. **This bill is on the Senate Education Policy Committee agenda for Wednesday.**

#### Home School Participation in CTE

In the House, **Rep. Susan DuBose** has filed [H.278](#), a bill that would allow home school students to register for participation in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs in public schools. A home school student would be defined as a student instructed by a private tutor or who is taught at home and is enrolled in a private or church school. **One of [AASB's 2024 Legislative and Policy Agenda priorities](#) addresses boards receiving partial or prorated ADM or reimbursement for non-public school enrollment in CTE courses.**

### Board Compensation Increase

#### AASB Priority Legislation

[S.175](#), introduced Thursday by **Sen. Donnie Chesteen**, is the Senate companion to [H.83](#) sponsored by **Rep. Tracy Estes**. These bills would increase the maximum monthly compensation rate for board members - which has not been increased in two decades - and would also incent compliance with training hours already required by state law. **S.175 is on the Senate Education Policy Committee agenda for Wednesday.**

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