

# advocate for SCHOOLS



TO SEE A LIST OF BILLS TRACKED BY AASB  
DURING THE 2023 REGULAR SESSION,  
CLICK ON BILL TRACKER BELOW:



## AASB Advocacy Days

You are invited to join us in Montgomery for \*AASB Advocacy Days. This year we have expanded participation to include CSFOs and are having an Advocacy Day specifically tailored for new board members and those who are first-time attendees. All attendees will receive 2 hrs. of training credit for participating in this free event.

**Apr. 4 - REGISTER NOW**  
Districts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & CSFOs

**Apr. 18 - REGISTER NOW**  
Districts 6, 7, 8, 9 & CSFOs

**May 2 - REGISTER NOW**  
New Board Members & First-time Attendees

*\*You may sign up to participate for any of the dates if unable to attend on your designated district day. For more information or any questions, please contact AASB.*

## 2023 Special Session

0 Days Remain

The Regular Session will reconvene March 21.

## 2023 Regular Legislative Session

29 Days Remain

## Special Session Complete, What's Next?

Alabama lawmakers gave final approval Thursday to a spending plan ([H.1 Reynolds](#)) for the state's \$1.06 billion in federal pandemic relief as part of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The plan directs these supplemental funds be used for water and sewer infrastructure, broadband expansion, healthcare reimbursements and other projects.

Senate Finance and Taxation Education Committee Chair Arthur Orr voted against the bill after advocating to fully cover unreimbursed eligible expenses linked to the pandemic for the Public Education Employees' Health Insurance Plan (PEEHIP). The final amount approved as part of the spending plan is \$55 million short of what is needed to cover these costs.

In addition to the ARPA bill, the Legislature approved [S.1](#) by Sen. Albritton to repay the final \$60 million owed to the Alabama Trust Fund (ATF). In 2012, the Legislature borrowed \$437 million to balance the state's General Fund budget for fiscal years 2013-2015. The borrowed amount was to be repaid in full by 2033. Approval of [S.1](#) allows the state to fulfill its obligation a decade earlier than required.

Both bills were transmitted to the governor's office and signed into law.

### Governor's Budget Bills

When lawmakers return next week, Gov. Ivey will introduce both the Education Trust Fund (ETF) and the General Fund budgets.

As noted in last week's [Advocate](#), the ETF has an ending balance for FY22 of \$2.9 billion.

Before the regular session convened, AASB presented a proposal to Ivey's office requesting the establishment of a Capital Improvement Savings Fund to alleviate inflationary challenges school systems are facing

with a minimum balance of \$1 billion from the surplus to allow school systems to:

- **Draw down funds** as needed for capital improvement
- **Avoid additional** cost increases as a consequence of injecting \$1 billion into the state's economy
- **Pay down debt** to leverage additional borrowing power, if needed
- **Earn interest** to expand impact

School board members and architects have expressed concerns with common issues including:

- **Shelved projects:** Many school systems are shelving shovel-ready projects due to projects coming in over budget.
- **Escalating costs:** Construction costs per square foot rose from \$175-\$200 to \$350-\$375. In October 2021, a gymnasium project was awarded at \$5.5 million; one year later, another gymnasium of the same size came in at \$7.7 million.
- **Scaled-down projects:** School systems are having to reduce scope due to budget constraints and/or dig deeper into local funds to complete projects.
- **No bid situations:** Many school systems are experiencing projects where no one is submitting bids.
- **Contributing factors include** a shortage of workers driving up costs, increased labor wages, contractors "cherry picking" projects, and choosing new construction over renovation and inflation. Rural school systems face even greater costs due to distance and delivery.

### What can you do to help?

[Contact your legislators](#) to discuss your capital needs and ask him/her to support significant capital improvement funds for school systems using the \$2.9 billion surplus.

## Wasting No Time

Lawmakers are expected to kick things into high gear Tuesday when they return to reconvene the regular session. It is anticipated to be a three-day legislative work week in order to get a few bills before the House and Senate for vote prior to the Legislative Spring Break.

### Education Bills on the Move

Several committees are taking up bills next week. **Sen. Arthur Orr** is sponsoring three bills before the **Senate Education Policy Committee**:

**S.46 (Orr) - Interstate Teacher Mobility Compact** - would authorize state licensing authorities in compact states to help identify and facilitate the mobility of P-12 teachers across state lines.

**S.52 (Orr) - Alabama Safe at Schools Act** - would amend the act to provide comparable care for students with adrenal insufficiency as those with diabetes. It also would require training for certain school personnel to administer injectable adrenal medication.

**S.56 (Orr) - Special Ed Classroom Cameras** - would require local boards to provide for the use and maintenance of video cameras in public K-12 classrooms in which at least half of the regularly attending students receive special education services.

Supporters of the bill argue this would increase transparency and accountability in the classroom, ultimately enhancing student protection from abuse and neglect. However, opponents have raised concerns about privacy and potential legal liabilities. Also, the question of who would bear the cost still remains.

### House State Government Committee:

**H.49 (Ingram) - Local Gov't Investment Program** - would create a program within State Treasurer's Office to provide one or more investment pools for state and local

public entities to deposit monies for investment.

Local school boards would be eligible to participate in the program if they had surplus funds to invest. This bill has the potential to provide a secure and profitable investment option for local governments in Alabama.

Members of the **House Education Policy Committee** will be addressing:

**H.109 (Collins) - Alabama Credential Quality and Transparency Act** - would provide a free searchable database for all educational and occupational credentials, competencies and workforce programs.

**H.73 (Garrett) - Open Enrollment** - would require each local board and charter school to adopt and implement an intra- and inter-district enrollment policy to be posted on a school system's website.

This bill as introduced has raised concerns among school board members, prompting AASB to work with the bill's sponsor to clarify language and intent of the legislation. The sponsor said his intent is to allow each board to determine its policy, including prohibiting accepting out of zone/district students.

## Legislative Landscape

This legislative quadrennium (2023-2026) brings with it many new faces. In the House, there are 30 freshman lawmakers as well as one former representative. In the Senate, there are four freshman lawmakers and one who moved from the House to the Senate. In total, close to one-third of the Legislature are in their rookie season.

**So who are these new folks?** Over the past few months, [Alabama Daily News](#) conducted interviews with all but one of the freshman lawmakers in both chambers. AASB has compiled a list of these new lawmakers and the [links to their profiles](#).

House Ways & Means Education	House Education Policy	Senate Finance & Taxation Ed	Senate Education Policy
Danny Garrett, Chair	Terri Collins, Chair	Arthur Orr, Chair	Donnie Chesteen, Chair
Jamie Kiel, Vice Chair	Alan Baker, Vice Chair	Gerald Allen, Vice Chair	Shay Shelnett, Vice Chair
Barbara Drummond, RMM*	Barbara Drummond, RMM*	Rodger Smitherman, RMM*	Rodger Smitherman, RMM*
Cynthia Almond	Anthony Daniels	Greg Albritton	Tom Butler
Alan Baker	Susan DuBose	Tom Butler	Vivian Davis Figures
Prince Chestnut	Tracy Estes	Donnie Chesteen	Garlan Gudger
Terri Collins	Bob Fincher	Vivian Davis Figures	Kirk Hatcher
Brock Colvin	Mark Gidley	Garlan Gudger	Jay Hovey
Anthony Daniels	Jeremy Gray	Kirk Hatcher	Randy Price
Corley Ellis	Frances Holk-Jones	Jay Hovey	Larry Stutts
David Faulkner	TaShina Morris	Tim Melson	<i>* Ranking Minority Member</i>
Kelvin Lawrence	Marcus Paramore	Dan Roberts	
Joe Lovvorn	Kenneth Paschal	Clay Scofield	
Troy Stubbs	Van Smith	David Sessions	
Debbie Wood	Matt Woods	Bobby Singleton	
<i>* Ranking Minority Member</i>	<i>* Ranking Minority Member</i>	Jabo Waggoner	
		<i>* Ranking Minority Member</i>	

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