

# advocate for SCHOOLS



TO SEE A LIST OF BILLS TRACKED BY AASB  
DURING THE 2025 REGULAR SESSION,  
CLICK ON BILL TRACKER BELOW:



## 2025 Advocacy Days Are Almost Over

Many local board members and CSFOs from across the state have already participated in Advocacy Days for 2025 but it's not too late to join AASB's governmental relations team for the final Advocacy Day, **Wednesday, April 30.**

This year's Advocacy Days are being held on legislative committee days, offering an insider's glimpse of this key phase of the legislative process. Attendees will earn two training hours and participation fulfills the Advocacy Day requirement for the Master Honor Roll designation.

This all-day event (8 a.m. to 3 p.m.) is open to board members, superintendents and CSFOs from all districts. Lunch will be provided. Claim your spot before capacity is reached.

[REGISTER NOW](#)

## Session End: Sooner Rather Than Later?

We're hearing lawmakers may wrap up the legislative session before Mother's Day. Stay tuned...

## 2025 Regular Legislative Session

7 Days Remain

## ETF Budget Still In Play; Local Boards Awaiting Funding Info

With remaining days dwindling and the 2024-25 school year coming to a close, local school boards are eagerly awaiting final budget numbers as they prepare for next year. Adding to their anticipation is the proposed new funding model under the RAISE Act and the financial impact it will have for school systems. The next step is for the House Ways and Means Education Committee, which has not yet scheduled a meeting, to address the FY26 Education Trust Fund (ETF) budget, education-related appropriation bills and priority funding legislation.

🔊 **Lawmakers have been briefed on the Senate-passed RAISE Act, which would implement a new hybrid approach to student funding in the FY26 ETF Budget, but have not been given system allocations.**

### Religious Release Mandate: School Board Concerns "Aren't Valid"

The Senate Education Policy Committee voted 8 to 1 to approve [S.278](#) by Sen. Shay Shelnutt that would mandate religious release time, despite senators telling local school leaders they do not like the bill. A statement by Lt. Gov. Will Ainsworth, who is leading Senate efforts to push this out-of-state vendor bill, was read by Shelnutt to committee members, "I've not heard a single valid concern from superintendents or school board members." Shelnutt added that school board members and superintendents are "mistaken" in their understanding of how local policy works and listed several school systems that have already adopted local policy for religious release time under the current law.

Sen. Kirk Hatcher, the lone "no" vote in opposition to [S.278](#), noted the examples provided by the bill sponsor were school systems already providing religious release time without complaint, indicating there is no need to change the current law.

Shelnutt mistakenly argued the bill would enable school boards to adopt any local policy they want, failing to recognize that local policy must still meet the state law's restrictions and constitutional requirements. "If the policy they implement is super narrow, because this does not work in their district in any way, then so be it...so they can do what they want to," said Shelnutt. **Forcing school boards to adopt a policy is not flexibility.**

Committee members voting in support of religious release mandate ([S.278](#)): Senators Shay Shelnutt, Donnie Chesteen, Randy Price, Larry Stutts, Jay Hovey, Wes Kitchens, Tom Butler and Rodger Smitherman (who indicated his vote was only to get the bill out of committee). The bill now moves to the full Senate for consideration.

The House companion bill, [H.342](#) by Rep. Susan DuBose, failed to pass the House Education Policy Committee earlier this month on a 9-4 vote.

**Pledge, Prayer and Penalties**  
[H.231](#), sponsored by Rep. Reed Ingram, is a proposed constitutional amendment, which if approved by voters, would require all public K-12 schools begin the day with the Pledge of Allegiance and would require each local board, within 90 days of ratification of this amendment, to vote whether to adopt a policy allowing employees and students to voluntarily participate in daily prayer and reading of the Bible or other religious text. If a local board fails to hold the vote to adopt a policy within 90 days, this may be reported to the State Superintendent and financial penalties could follow.

This is Ingram's second draft of the bill, which appears to be an effort to address significant constitutional concerns poised by the bill as introduced. A substitute was adopted by the House Education Policy Committee Wednesday. If a board votes to adopt a policy, it would require each participant to submit a "prayer permission slip" to the local board

in order to participate in voluntary prayer, and force school boards to regulate and monitor voluntary prayer, raising new Establishment Clause concerns.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ACTION

House Education Policy

► Pronouns, Cell Phones, Co-Dual Enrollment

**H.246 (Stadthagen) - Student Pronouns** - the “Free to Speak Act” would prohibit public school employees from knowingly and intentionally using pronouns for a student that do not align with the student’s sex at birth unless written permission is obtained from a student’s parent or guardian. **SUBSTITUTE: Clarifies pronoun usage could not be “patently inconsistent” with a student’s sex. Favorable report as substituted**

**S.92 (Chesteen) - Student Cell Phone Ban** - would require a “bell-to-bell ban” on wireless communication devices. Local boards would have to develop and implement a policy limiting student use and access during the instructional day, with some exceptions. Both the House and Senate versions of this bill are now in position for final passage. **Favorable report**

**S.196 (Orr) - Move on When Ready** - would allow qualifying junior and senior high school students to fully co-enroll in a higher education institution for the completion of their 11-12th grade courses and fulfill their high school graduation requirements by completing all coursework at the higher education institution and receive high school credit and a diploma upon successful completion.

**AMENDMENT: Clarifies high school students in the program would not participate in any extracurriculars or athletics and a student’s participation would not count against a school’s accountability on the state report card. Favorable report as amended**

☛ **OF NOTE:** While this bill is based on a statewide program in Georgia, there has not been significant demand for a similar program in Alabama. Last year, just four students completed this program in one Alabama school system. School leaders still have unanswered questions should the bill become law:

- Will there be enough courses and credits offered, in sequential order, for both years in order to meet all high school graduation requirements?
- How is attendance and participation counted for the school’s report card?
- How will high schools know of participating students’ grades and coursework since it’s being completed at another institution?
- How does this duplicate or conflict with existing acceleration plans for students on track to graduate early?

SENATE COMMITTEE ACTION

Senate Education Policy

► Career Tech for Nonpublic School Students

**H.61 (DuBose) - CTE for Nonpublic School Students** - would authorize nonpublic school students to enroll in public school career and technical education (CTE) programs, and for schools to receive Average Daily Membership (ADM) for these students. **Favorable report**

HOUSE FLOOR ACTION

The House passed several politically-charged, controversial bills Thursday:

✍ **Ten Commandments: H.178 (Gidley)** - would require K-12 schools to display the Ten Commandments in common areas and history classrooms. The Senate companion S.166 (Kelley) was approved by the Senate Education Policy Committee last week. **This is a priority bill for the governor.**

✍ **Public School Chaplains: H.179 (Gidley)** - would allow local boards to vote on whether to permit chaplains to assist teachers on a volunteer basis, after passing a background check and showing credentials from a chaplaincy program. **AASB worked with the bill sponsor to ensure this is permissive and not mandatory.**

✍ **Drag Shows: H.67 (Stadthagen)** - would prohibit public schools and libraries from hosting drag performances in the presence of children without parental consent.

✍ **Don’t Say Gay: H.244 (Butler)** - would expand the existing prohibitions currently in K-5 schools regarding classroom discussions of gender identity or sexual orientation to pre-K-12th grade. The legislation also prohibits the display of pride flags and insignia in the classroom.

Passed by the House Tuesday:

**H.447 (Garrett) - Local Board Transportation Policy** - would repeal existing law requiring public school buses provide transportation to community college students and clarifies transportation is for enrolled K-12 students only.

SENATE FLOOR ACTION

The Senate passed the following:

**S.13 (Allen) - Star Spangled Banner [C/A]** - proposes a statewide constitutional amendment which if approved by voters, would require K-12 schools to broadcast/perform the Star Spangled Banner at least once during the school week and at school-sanctioned sporting events.

SELECT BILL INTRODUCTIONS

**H.582 (Butler) - Social Emotional Learning** - would prohibit the use of social emotional learning for the training of teachers or the training, instruction or education of students.

**H.580 (Butler) - School Food Ban** - would define and ban ultra processed foods at K-12 public schools participating in a federally funded or assisted meal program.

GONE TO GOVERNOR

The following bill has been transmitted to the governor for signature:

**S.1 (Givhan) - Education Employee Workers’ Comp** - would create a new benefit program, new fund and new administrative board for on-the-job injury claims from education employees, with an accompanying \$15.6 million in the proposed FY26 ETF budget.

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