

advocate for SCHOOLS



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



Legislative & Policy Agenda

AASB helps local education leaders improve student achievement through advocacy for Alabama's public schools.

The association's more than 800 school board members represent every public school board in the state. [AASB's legislative and policy agenda](#) represents their collective voice.

Advocacy Days

A big THANK YOU to all school board members, CSFOs and superintendents who traveled to Montgomery to take part in AASB's Advocacy Days.

Legislative Webinar [REGISTER NOW](#)

Join us **Monday, May 1** from noon to 1 p.m. for a free webinar featuring **House Ways and Means Education Committee Chair Rep. Danny Garrett**, who will discuss Alabama's tax structure and offer a deeper understanding of how Alabama compares to other states.

2023 Regular Legislative Session

17 Days Remain



ALABAMA
ASSOCIATION OF
SCHOOL BOARDS

Up Next: PRICE Act, Another Voucher Bill Introduced

The **Parental Rights in Children's Education (PRICE) Act (S.202)**, introduced in the Senate last week by **Sen. Larry Stutts**, is already scheduled for a public hearing before the Senate Education Policy Committee next Wednesday. A member of the committee, Stutts is wasting no time getting his bill in front of members. AASB and others in the public education community will speak as opponents on this reckless school voucher bill that could drain a staggering \$600 million from the Education Trust Fund (ETF).

Of major concern is the PRICE Act's broad interpretation of qualifying expenses, stripping away essential ETF dollars from school systems at \$6,900 per eligible student to an Education Savings Account (ESA). These ESAs allow usage of funds for discretionary and questionable purposes such as exclusive summer programs, specialized language institutions or lavish educational excursions. As public funds are siphoned off and ESAs follow students to private schools, operational and fixed costs remain, exacerbating the strain on public school resources.

Your Voice Matters

You play a critical role in protecting public education funding and ensuring equal opportunities for all students. [Senators need to hear from you](#) about the negative implications passing the PRICE Act will have on our public schools. Emphasize to lawmakers that ETF dollars are designated for public education, not for subsidizing middle class families who already can afford private and religious school tuition.

Members of the **Senate Education Policy Committee** are Senators Donnie Chesteen (Chair), Shay Shelnett (Vice Chair), Rodger Smitherman (Ranking Minority Member), Tom Butler, Vivian Davis Figures, Garlan Gudger, Kirk Hatcher, Jay Hovey, Randy Price and Larry Stutts.

AASB urges lawmakers to reject this legislation and prevent the state from being burdened with funding two education systems—one public and one private.

'Here Comes the SUN'...Voucher Bill
Reps. Danny Garrett and Terri Collins are co-sponsoring [\(H.334\)](#), the Students with Unique Needs (SUN) Education Scholarship Account Act, another school voucher bill.

What does the Bill do?

Beginning in 2024-25, SUN would provide parents with financial resources to develop personalized education programs for children with unique needs including children of military parents, students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 accommodation, foster children or homeless children.

Under the Act, money in an ESA could be used to fund:

- Tuition and fees at a private school
- Textbooks required by private school
- Payments for private tutoring
- Payments for curriculum
- Tuition and fee for an approved nonpublic online learning program
- Fees for statewide assessments and exams related to college or university admission
- Education services for students with disabilities from a licensed or accredited practitioner or education service provider
- Contracted services provided by public school district including specific classroom instruction

Who Would Be Eligible?

The SUN program would allow up to 500 eligible students to participate in 2024-25, with an additional 500 students permitted to enroll each subsequent year. Eligibility would require students to be under age 19 and have attended a K-12 public school in the previous year, unless certain exceptions are met.

AASB Concerns

While the \$4 million first-year cost of the SUN program pales in comparison to the PRICE Act, this voucher program also would divert public education funds from the ETF. Moreover, this program could potentially represent the first step toward legislation ultimately providing funding for all students attending private, religious or home-school programs, causing irreparable damage to public education.

First-Grade Readiness Bill Advances

The House of Representatives Tuesday approved [\(H.43\)](#), a bill sponsored by **Rep. Pebblin Warren** that would require children **who are six years old on or before December 31** to be first-grade ready either by completing kindergarten or passing a first-grade readiness assessment approved by the State Board of Education (SBOE).

The bill lacked wording to make clear Warren's intent that if a child is deemed not to be first-grade ready, the child must complete kindergarten. **Rep. Terri Collins** successfully offered a floor amendment to clarify the sponsor's intent, stating if the child does not meet first-grade readiness on the SBOE approved assessment, the child shall enroll in kindergarten.

Another provision in the bill would allow local boards to enroll four-year-olds in kindergarten who turn five by December 31 on a space-available basis, provided the child completes an assessment and satisfies certain criteria as established by the local board. This "underage" provision for kindergarteners still is a cause of concern for some lawmakers. **The bill has been assigned to the Senate Education Policy Committee**

Charter School Law Revisions

[H.363](#) sponsored by **Rep. Terri Collins** makes revisions to the current charter school law that would:

- Clarify funding for start-up charters and conversion charters
- Allow for geographical preference for at-risk students
- Modify the appointment process for the Charter School Commission and provide for the employment of administrative and clerical staff
- Require reapplication for school board authorizers every five years

In the past, attempted modifications to the law focused on charter schools receiving a share of local funding. "This bill does not impact local funding. It only makes governance changes to help charter schools be more accountable, better trained, more effective and a tool to help our students be more successful," **Collins** said. **H.363 will be before the House Education Policy Committee Wednesday**

Modified School Calendar Grants

Rep. Danny Garrett has introduced [H.333](#), also known as the Alabama Modified School Calendar Grant Program. This bill would offer school boards the option to voluntarily extend their school calendar by 30 instructional days, with the goal of enhancing student achievement. The bill would establish a grant program administered by the State Department of Education to financially support

the extended school year, ensuring schools could effectively implement the changes.

Garrett told AASB the bill aims to benefit underperforming schools by providing additional opportunities to improve student outcomes. **H.333 will be before the House Education Policy Committee Wednesday**

Committee Action

[S.56 \(Orr\)](#) - **Special Ed Classroom Cameras** - would mandate the installation of cameras in certain special education classrooms, contingent on available funding. As originally written, the bill only permitted access to video recordings when an employee has been accused of abuse or neglect but did not address other inappropriate behavior. **Sen. Arthur Orr** worked with AASB to address school board members' concerns, and an amendment was adopted in the **House Education Policy Committee** which clearly states recordings can be used for any allegation of abuse, neglect or inappropriate behavior. **The bill now goes to full House for final passage.**

Floor Action

These bills passed in the House this week:

[H.30 \(McCampbell\)](#) - **Failing Schools Designation** - for purposes of school grading under the Alabama Accountability Act, would change the term failing school to "lowest sixth percent school" and nonfailing school to "highest 94th percent school." **Bill goes to Senate Committee**

[H.164 \(Whitt\)](#) - **Financial Literacy** - would require students to complete a personal financial literacy and money management course and exam before graduation. **Bill goes to Senate committee**

Select Bill Introductions

[H.354 \(Butler\)](#) - **Age Appropriate Instruction** - would require school boards to adjust policies and procedures for age-appropriate compliance to ensure topics such as gender identity and sexual orientation are not discussed with students in kindergarten through 8th grade (currently through 5th grade).

Other Education Bills in Committee

[H.364 \(Hurst\)](#) - **School sporting events payment options** - would require public schools to accept all forms of payment, including cash, for admission to school-sponsored sporting events. **In House Education Policy Committee Wednesday**

Public Hearing

AASB has called a public hearing before the **Senate Education Policy Committee Wednesday** on [S.181 \(Smitherman\)](#), a bill to provide a uniform system of procedural due process protections for students facing suspension or expulsion for violating student code of conduct or state law. AASB has been working with the sponsor in good faith to amend the bill. AASB believes a one-size-fits-all student discipline mandate removes the local board's responsibility and accountability for these decisions.

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