

advocate for SCHOOLS



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



Advocacy Committee Days

A big **THANK YOU** to all school board members, CSFOs and superintendents who traveled to Montgomery to take part in AASB's Advocacy Committee Days. This year, meetings were held on legislative committee days, which offered a front row seat to this key phase of the legislative process.

Lawmakers are moving at a quicker pace than expected, leading to an earlier session conclusion. Regretfully, we have made the decision to cancel the Advocacy Committee Day on Wednesday, April 30. Our regularly scheduled Advocacy Days will be back when the legislature kicks off their next legislative session in January.

Grocery Tax Reduction In Limbo

The Senate has still not addressed the House-approved grocery tax bill (**H.386**), which would reduce the statewide sales tax on groceries from 3% to 2%. With few days remaining, its future remains uncertain.

2025 Regular Legislative Session

5 Days Remain

ETF Budget, RAISE Act Clear House With Clock Winding Down

The House passed a **\$9.9 billion FY26 Education Trust Fund (ETF) budget Thursday, a 6% increase over the current year - \$561 million. House Ways & Means Education (HWME) Chair Rep. Danny Garrett** told members the substitute budget, (**S.112**), adopted earlier by the HWME Committee and brought to the House, fully funds Teachers Retirement System (TRS) and Public Education Employees Health Insurance Program (PEEHIP) requested rate increases and contains additional dollars for K-12:

- Foundation Program - **\$143.6 million**
- PEEHIP Increase - **\$99 million**
- Other Current Expense (OCE) - **\$72 million**
- Transportation - **\$40 million**
- TRS Increase - **\$40 million**
- Alabama Math, Science and Technology Initiative (AMSTI) - **\$32 million**
- Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) - **\$9 million**

Garrett also highlighted K-12 increases for career technology and education (CTE), reading coaches, technology directors and school nurses.

Two newly enacted education employee benefit programs were added to the budget, earmarking **\$15.6 million** for an on-the-job injury compensation program and an additional **\$9.6 million** for paid parental leave. The ETF budget now goes back to Senate for concurrence.

OF NOTE: Since FY22, education employees have received a total of 10% in pay increases. No pay raise has been included for educators in the FY26 ETF Budget.

RAISE Act Redistribution

The ETF includes a new **\$58 million** line item which consolidates existing State Department of Education (SDE) budget line items previously earmarked for English language learners (ELL), gifted and at-risk programs. These funds will be coupled with **\$108 million** from the **Educational Opportunities Reserve Fund (EORF) - \$166 million total** - redistributed to systems through

a new student-weighted funding formula created in the **Renewing Alabama's Investment in Student Excellence "RAISE" Act (S.305)**. Sponsored by **Senate Finance and Taxation Education Committee Chair Sen. Arthur Orr**, the RAISE Act received unanimous final passage Thursday and system allocations were made available for lawmakers. It now goes to the governor for signature.

 **To see your individual school system allocations under the RAISE Act, [CLICK HERE.](#)**

The House also approved (**S.111**) that would provide an additional **\$375 million** in one-time funding from the **EORF** to help implement the **RAISE Act** over the next three years. Any additional amount of funding will eventually have to be absorbed into the ETF as a permanent source of student-weighted funding.

Two supplemental appropriations passed by the House would provide one-time funding for the current fiscal year (FY25). The **Education Advancement and Technology (EAT) supplemental appropriation (S.114)** provides **\$807.8 million** for local school boards to use for repairs and maintenance, classroom instructional support, insurance for facilities, transportation, technology, capital outlay and school safety. It also reallocates **\$35 million** from last year's EAT that went unexpended by school systems, reverting back to the fund. The EAT also would create a new \$100 million grant program within the SDE for regional CTE centers.

The second bill, an **ETF supplemental appropriation (S.113)**, allocates **\$524 million** in one-time revenue for various initiatives and education agencies, of which just **\$162.6 million** is allocated for K-12. The School Security Grant Program is allocated **\$15 million** and **\$21.2 million** is earmarked for vendors or pass-through line items. The

supplemental also includes **\$50 million** for CHOOSE Act Fund education savings accounts (ESAs) for private and homeschool vouchers. Summer and afterschool programs will receive a **\$14 million** increase in the ETF with an additional **\$30 million** in one-time supplemental funds.

More Public Funds for Private Schools

In addition to \$101 million appropriated in the ETF, the CHOOSE Act fund would receive an additional one-time allocation of \$80 million from the **Educational Opportunities Reserve Fund (S.111)**. This means the starting budget for the CHOOSE Act Fund now totals **\$181 million** that is being diverted from public education for non-public education purposes.

According to the Alabama Department of Revenue (ADOR), the agency charged with overseeing implementation of the CHOOSE Act, nearly 37,000 students have applied for ESAs. Of those, **an overwhelming majority already are enrolled in private or home school** - 24,506 students, almost 70% of all applications. ADOR estimates \$100 million will fund ESAs for eligible students in the upcoming school year. Qualifying students in the first two years of the program are those under 300% Federal Poverty Level, with the first 500 slots reserved for special education. In the 2027-2028 school year, the program becomes universal with no eligibility requirements.



The budgetary demands of full implementation of the CHOOSE Act and RAISE Act, combined with inflation and pressure to reduce taxes, is concerning to school leaders.

Senate Ignores School Leaders, Pushes Religious Release Mandate

To avoid facing continued pressure from local school leaders against the bill, the full Senate quickly passed **S.278** by **Sen. Shay Shelnett** Tuesday which would impose an unnecessary government mandate requiring all boards adopt a religious release time policy. The bill sponsor attempted to discredit school board opposition by stating a mandatory policy could be as restrictive as a board wants. "It does not impose any rigid mandates," said **Shelnett**. School boards know there would be little flexibility under the mandate because state law, regulations and constitutional requirements still must be followed. Forcing school boards to follow a state mandate removes local control. **Sen. Vivian Davis Figures** spoke against the bill, saying she'd been contacted by school board members and superintendents from across the state who oppose changing current law which is permissive for religious release time policies.

The bill was amended on the Senate floor that if enacted, any existing religious release time policies by local boards would remain in place. **This amendment is meaningless.**

The House companion bill, **H.342** by **Rep. Susan DuBose**, failed to pass the **House Education Policy Committee** earlier this month on a bipartisan 9-4 vote. Because of that bill's overwhelming defeat, and continued

advocacy by AASB members against the bill, the Senate sponsor knows it will be an uphill battle to try and get **S.278** across the finish line in the House. **S.278** has not yet been placed on an agenda for the **House Education Policy Committee**. **AASB has called a public hearing.**

HOUSE COMMITTEE ACTION

House Health

► **Medical Age of Consent, Food Additives S.101 (Stutts) - Medical Age of Consent** - would raise the age of consent from 14 to 16 for all medical, dental, and mental health services. It would require parental permission for a student under the age of consent to receive school counseling services. This opt-in for parents is already required for other mental health services provided in school. **SUBSTITUTE: School counselors and healthcare providers can provide services in a crisis, emergency or when abuse/neglect is suspected.**

Favorable report as substituted

H.491 (Ingram) - Food Additives in Schools - would prohibit public K-12 schools from selling, allowing the sale of or providing food items containing certain additives. **AASB is working on an amendment to ensure the bill would apply only to foods provided through a school's child nutrition program (CNP) and not fundraising or concession sales items.**

SENATE COMMITTEE ACTION

Senate Finance & Taxation Education

► **Adult Learners**

H.271 (Collins) - ReEngage Grant Program - would decrease the minimum age from 25 to 22 for students returning to higher education to complete an associates or baccalaureate degree. *Favorable report*

SELECT BILL INTRODUCTIONS

S.336 (Chambliss) - Charter School Districts - would allow a local school board to serve as an authorizer for the conversion of two or more traditional public schools into conversion charter schools as part of a newly created conversion charter school district.

HOUSE FLOOR ACTION

The House passed the following:

S.303 (Orr) - Principals Act Stipends - would remove community eligibility as an option for defining a high-needs school for additional stipends under the Principals Act. **Administrators in approximately 600 schools would not be eligible to receive the additional stipend.**

ENACTED

Act 2025-223 (Givhan) - Education Employee Workers' Comp - creates a new benefit program, new fund and new administrative board for education employees on-the-job injury claims. *Effective immediately, but the program shall not begin accepting claims until the board sets an implementation date, not later than Oct. 1, 2026.*

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