

advocate for SCHOOLS



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



Advocacy Days

This session's first Advocacy Day on April 4 was a huge success. Don't miss your chance to participate with your district. Board members will receive 2 hrs. of training credit for participating in this free event.

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.*

Not So Fast

Regular sessions are comprised of 30 legislative days within 105 calendar days. In-session days are Tuesdays and Thursdays with committee days on Wednesdays. The last calendar day lawmakers can meet for this session is June 19. However, there has been talk the legislative session may be on a fast track to complete its work by Memorial Day. Senate leadership has already weighed in and indicated ending the session in May is not doable.

**2023 Regular
Legislative Session**

23 Days Remain



Pressure is Mounting: Step Up Supplemental for Education

Public debate continues to mount since Gov. Kay Ivey submitted her recommendations for a supplemental appropriation allocating \$2.8 billion in excess receipts to the Education Trust Fund (ETF). As highlighted in [last week's Advocate](#), the governor's supplemental bill ([S.87 Orr](#)) designates more than half of the \$2.8 billion appropriation to non-education expenditures.

AASB firmly believes that education funds must be exclusively reserved for education initiatives. We are calling on school boards to reach out to their lawmakers and ask for reallocating supplemental dollars to ensure public education funds are utilized in alignment with their original goal—supporting public education.

Uncertainty Surrounds EAT Supplemental

The Education Advancement and Technology (EAT) Supplemental was noticeably missing from the governor's slate of education appropriation bills. This supplemental, separate and apart from the Governor's \$2.8 million supplemental, appropriates excess ETF revenues deposited into the EAT fund.

Since FY18, school systems have relied heavily on EAT allocations for essential, non-recurring expenses in schools such as repairs, deferred maintenance, capital outlay, classroom instructional support, insuring facilities, technology, transportation and school security. For the last three years, close to \$600 million in EAT funds have been allocated to school boards.

According to FY22 information submitted by school systems to the State Department of Education (SDE), EAT funds were allocated as follows:

- Maintenance-33%
- School security-16%
- Technology-14%

[Click here for a closer look at what your system received from the EAT fund in FY20, FY21 and FY22](#)

Without this supplemental funding being provided to help cover these areas, school systems may be forced to tap into local funds to make up the shortfall.

Legislative leadership is signaling they may not allocate the EAT supplemental this year, choosing instead to explore legislation that sets aside a portion of the surplus ETF revenue into a savings account for a slowing economy. This approach would secure funds for numeracy and literacy initiatives and cost-of-living adjustments in leaner years.

AASB urges lawmakers to give priority consideration to increasing capital improvement funds in the absence of an EAT supplemental appropriation for FY 23. These funds are critical for various capital improvement projects, especially given unprecedented market conditions. With rising costs, school systems could significantly benefit from increasing the initial \$510 million for K-12 capital improvements proposed by the governor in her supplemental appropriation.

First-Grade-Readiness Bill Not Quite 'Ready' for Some Lawmakers

[H.43](#), a bill that would require students to be first-grade-ready upon enrollment, either by completing kindergarten or passing a first grade readiness assessment, was approved **as substituted** by the House Education Policy committee Wednesday.

The bill, sponsored by **Rep. Pebblin Warren**, a retired educator, garnered much discussion among committee members. While committee members seemed to agree on the readiness requirement for those entering first grade, several lawmakers voiced concerns over provisions in the bill allowing for children under the age of five or six to attend

public school who are not of age at time of enrollment for kindergarten or first grade. Specifically, **Representatives Frances Holk-Jones, Mark Gidley and Van Smith** took issue with the bill's potential to mix younger students with older students, especially in kindergarten. **Rep. Warren** responded that such decisions depend on a child's ability and would involve both the school system and parents.

House Education Policy Committee Chair Rep. Terri Collins clarified the legislation does not impose mandatory kindergarten but does insist on students being first-grade-ready. "Students who don't meet the standard would attend kindergarten to catch up," Collins said.

Vice-Chair Rep. Alan Baker also weighed in, noting parents have alternative options for preparing their children for first grade if they forgo kindergarten. Collins reminded committee members **the substitute bill** helps to "clean up" wording and clarifies intent. **The bill now goes to full House for vote.**

Financial Literacy Before Graduation

Sponsored by **Rep. Andy Whitt, H.164**, aimed at improving essential financial literacy skills for high schoolers, would require students to complete a course on personal financial literacy and take a standardized assessment on specific skills before high school graduation.

Rep. Whitt, a community banker, told the **House Education Policy Committee** he worked with **State Treasurer Young Boozer, Lt. Governor Will Ainsworth** and the **SDE** to construct a bill to address what he feels is a declining knowledge of basic financial skills. He said the bill does not impose a fiscal mandate or necessitate additional staff. Instead, it would integrate financial literacy into existing curriculum such as the career preparedness course, already mandated by the state, with a financial literacy unit as part of the curriculum.

Beginning with the 2024-25 school year, Whitt proposes the following basic financial skills be taught and assessed, with results reported to the SDE:

- Types of bank accounts offered, opening and managing a bank account and assessing the quality of services provided by a depository institution
- Balancing a checking account
- Basic principles of money management such as spending, credit, credit scores, and managing debt, including retail and credit card debt
- Evaluating loans types
- Basic principles of personal insurance policies
- Understanding percentages as related to taxation
- Computing interest rates by various mechanisms
- Simple contracts
- Types of savings and investments

Committee member **Rep. Van Smith**, a retired educator, voiced concerns about overburdening teachers with tasks that detract from math instruction and questioned whether a potential SDE-approved financial literacy course should fulfill a mathematics course requirement, as presented in the bill. **The bill now goes to full House for vote.**

Student Discipline Bill Returns

Sen. Rodger Smitherman is once again sponsoring a student discipline bill (**S.181**), with **Rep. Terri Collins** sponsoring the companion bill in the House (**H.269**). The legislation seeks to establish a uniform statewide system of procedural due process protections for students facing suspensions or expulsions for violating the student code of conduct or state law.

The bill stipulates proposed disciplinary hearings be conducted by either the local board, which many school systems currently practice and find acceptable, or concerningly, a neutral designee agreed upon by both parties. The neutral designee cannot be a school board employee. This raises concern because larger school systems utilize a school disciplinary hearing committee to administer expulsions and suspension-related hearings. The bill's requirement to have a neutral designee act as judge or referee could impose significant costs and burdensome regulations to identify individuals to conduct student discipline hearings.

AASB collaborated with Sen. Smitherman last year to address many key concerns for school boards, although the legislation hit an impasse when it got to the House committee. We are committed to continue working with both sponsors to address concerns. Stay tuned...

SPED Camera Bill Needs Work

AASB is working closely with **Sen. Orr** to amend **S.56** which would mandate the installation of cameras in certain special education classrooms, contingent on available funding.

AASB is seeking an amendment that would clearly state that recordings can be used for any allegation of abuse, neglect or inappropriate behavior. Currently, the bill only permits access to recordings when an employee has been accused of abuse or neglect and furthermore, does not address other inappropriate behavior.

In Committee Next Week...Divisive Concepts

The **House State Government Committee** will be taking up **Divisive Concepts, H.7 (Oliver)**, a bill that would prohibit local boards from promoting, endorsing or requiring affirmation of certain divisive concepts relating to race, sex or religion. Concerns about divisive concepts are related to critical race theory (CRT), a college-level academic concept based on the premise that race isn't biological, but rather a social construct embedded in society within systems and institutions that play a role in racial inequality.

AASB has provided committee members a letter affirming divisive concepts are not being taught in Alabama K-12 schools. Educators are well versed in the **Alabama Educator Code of Ethics** and the high expectations placed upon them. Educators are professionals and understand consequences would follow from teaching ideologies and espousing beliefs, especially those against the code of ethics, that promote one race, sex or religion over another.

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