

advocate for SCHOOLS



TO SEE A LIST OF BILLS TRACKED BY AASB
DURING THE 2021 REGULAR SESSION,
CLICK BELOW



Legislative Schedule

March 22: Spring break
March 29: 2-day week
April 5: 3-day week

Lottery Bill

After an ambitious gaming proposal including a lottery and other gambling options failed to pass the Senate, a simple lottery bill is moving.

The constitutional amendment, if approved by voters statewide, would authorize a state lottery and allows participation in multi-state lotteries.

S.319 would split lottery revenue between the ETF and General Fund. Sponsored by **Sen. Jim McClendon**, the bill was approved by Senate committee this week.

Tech Staff Funding

Despite the tremendous advancements and demand for school technology and remote learning, the Senate-passed budget still funds only ONE tech staff position for each school system.

Ask your lawmakers to fund a network administrator to provide essential tech services on the front lines.

2021 Regular Legislative Session

14 days remain



ETF Budget: Pay Raise, Salary Adjustments & TEAMS Act

The Senate Thursday approved its version of the Education Trust Fund budget S.189 (Orr) to fund a multi-pronged approach to invest in classroom teachers. The budget includes the 2% pay raise, an adjustment to increase salaries for teachers with nine or more years' experience and a program that would provide up to a \$15,000 per-year salary increase for qualified math and science teachers.

Education Budget Highlights

The \$7.67 billion Education Trust Fund budget for FY22 includes a \$455 million increase. Senate FTE Chairman Arthur Orr said much work was done to align the one-time use of federal COVID relief dollars and state revenue. Among the Senate-passed budget increases:

- \$21 million to fund a 2 percent pay raise for education employees; **S.188 (Orr)**
- \$30 million to fund a minimum 2% bump in the periodic step increases classroom teachers earn over time on the salary schedule; **See adjusted salary matrix.**
- \$50 million toward funding a new program for math and science teachers that offers a different employment structure with higher salaries (see TEAMS Act story); and
- \$95 million for a one-time Teacher Stabilization program to protect some 900 teacher units that otherwise would be lost due to COVID-related student enrollment decline this year.

State Foundation Program:

- Other Current Expense increased \$32 million of which \$12 million funds a 2% pay raise (\$19,808/unit to \$20,704/unit);

- Classroom materials and supplies increased \$600/unit to \$1,000/unit;
- Technology increased \$350/unit to \$400/unit;
- School nurses increased \$6 million;
- Transportation increased \$6 million, of which \$4.5 million covers a 2% pay raise;
- Fleet Renewal increased \$1.4 million (due to more qualifying buses, per bus amount slightly decreased from \$7,739/bus to \$7,581/bus); and
- Career tech O&M increased \$2 million.

See Budget Spreadsheet.

Advancement & Technology Fund

Healthy FY20 state revenue provided a deposit on top of the reserve available in the ATF to bring the balance to \$499.6 million. By virtue of the Rolling Reserve budgeting process, lawmakers already know no new revenues will flow to the ATF next year, so the Senate directed an additional \$65 million to the ATF, and like last year, released only half of the ATF funding for FY21. The other half should be released in FY22. Each school system's ATF allotment is listed in the legislation **S.193 (Orr)** as are allowable uses for the funds.

New K-12 Incentive

for Math & Science: TEAMS Act

In record speed, the Senate passed a bill proposing a new career path for math and science teachers. The Teacher Excellence and Accountability for Mathematics and Science (TEAMS) salary schedule program would provide up to \$15,000 in additional salary for teachers who apply and are accepted to the program. The program requires

teachers to have certain certifications and participate in specified professional development annually. In exchange, tenured teachers who opt into the program would essentially freeze their continuing service status and move to a three-year contract (teachers with 20 years of service are eligible for a five-year contract). New teachers would enter one-year contracts as they pursue credentials on a non-tenure track. The \$110 million program is being funded through a \$50 million direct ETF budget appropriation and a \$50 million FY21 supplemental appropriation. More details on this new career path to come.

[S.327 \(Chesteen\)](#) is now in House W&ME Committee.

Proposed TEAMS Act salary schedule [HERE](#).

Tier 2 Sick Leave

Senate FTE Chairman Arthur Orr signaled he would advance a bill to allow Tier 2 education employees to accrue and convert sick leave to retirement service credit. A multi-year effort by the education community to strengthen teacher retirement benefits and to keep teachers in the classroom. A Senate joint resolution appeared to put a full stop to the original Tier 2 proposal that would also adjust the timeframe for teachers to be eligible to retire. Look for [H.93 \(Baker\)](#) to receive action after spring break. Thanks to sponsors **Rep. Alan Baker** and **Sen. Donnie Chesteen** for continuing to champion this cause.

Creating an Education Retiree Trust Fund

The Senate Thursday approved a bill to create an irrevocable trust, the Education Retirees' Trust Fund, as a vehicle to provide periodic bonus checks to education retirees. [S.61 \(Chesteen\)](#) does not provide funding but sets up a mechanism where investments or other future revenue sources (i.e., potential lottery proceeds) may be deposited. The Teachers Retirement System would be required to certify that the trust fund assets exceed \$100 million and are sufficient before funding periodic bonus checks. The bill stipulates that the legislature may not fund the trust from direct ETF appropriations. The sponsor, **Sen. Donnie Chesteen**, explained the legislation is necessary as a first step toward providing future bonus payments for retirees.

Virtual Open Meetings

[H.558 \(Robbins\)](#) would provide that government entities, including local school boards, may meet virtually post pandemic. The bill specifies that the meetings, other than executive sessions, would be accessible to the public.

Government entities are currently holding meetings electronically by virtue of the governor's emergency order which expires May 7. The pandemic-induced provision allowed a practical alternative when necessary to conduct business, and AASB supports [H.558 \(Robbins\)](#) to codify that alternative.

Legislative Activity

[H.97 \(Morris\)](#) - **Mental awareness training** - would require annual mental health awareness training for all public K-12 employees. Passed House.

[H.175 \(Lovvorn\)](#) - **Student loan repayment** - would include computer science teachers in the Alabama Math and Science Teacher Education Program (AMSTEP) to provide student loan repayment for STEM teachers who work in underserved areas. Approved by House committee.

[H.208 \(Warren\)](#) - **Kindergarten bill** - would require a child to successfully complete kindergarten or demonstrate first grade readiness before being enrolled in first grade. Carried over in Senate committee.

[H.385 \(Hall\)](#) - **Sex education** - would revise content, course materials and instruction in public schools regarding sex education or the human reproductive process. Approved by Senate committee.

[H.391 \(Stadthagen\)](#) - **Gender of Athletes** - would prohibit public K-12 schools from allowing student athletes to compete against different biological birth genders unless a coed team. Passed House.

[H.552 \(Moore\)](#) - **TRS full-time employment** - would allow a retiree to be employed full-time as a K-12 teacher, for one academic year at a time, without limit on compensation or suspension of retirement allowance. Introduced.

[H.559 \(Meadows\)](#) - **AAA Scholarships** - would allow a taxpayer to claim a tax credit of up to 75 percent, not to exceed \$75,000 per taxpayer or a cumulative \$30 million annually. All Scholarship Granting Organizations would be required to expend funds on scholarships within three calendar years. Introduced.

[S.10 \(Shelnutt\)](#) - **Vulnerable Child Compassion and Protection Act** - would make it illegal for doctors to prescribe hormone medication or perform surgery on minors who self-identify as transgender. Approved as amended by House committee. [See amendments.](#)

[S.92 \(Smitherman\)](#) - **K-12 student mental health program** - would require the SDE to develop a program to address the mental health of public K-12 students. Passed Senate.

[S.93 \(Smitherman\)](#) - **Mental health service coordinators** - would establish qualifications and duties of mental health coordinator and require each local board to employ a coordinator subject to state funding. Approved by Senate committee.

[S.217 \(Melson\)](#) - **State textbook committee** - would revise current statute and specify criteria. Passed Senate.

[S.342 \(Butler\)/H.4 \(Allen\)](#) - **ASHAA audits** - would require the Examiners of Public Accounts to audit the Alabama High School Athletic Association. Introduced.

[S.343 \(Butler\)](#) - **ASHAA use of state facilities** - would prohibit any athletic association that imposes athletic eligibility rules on public K-12 student athletes, without certain procedures for reviewing or appealing official rulings of the association, from using any facility that receives state funding. Introduced.