

GEORGIA ASSOCIATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Serving secondary school administrators across Georgia
Weekly Legislative Update-January 23, 2009



THIS WEEK

1. The Budget
2. Recently introduced Education
3. Hot Buttons

The !@#\$%&#! Budget

Financial issues continue to take precedence over others issues as the 2009 Legislature completed its second week of activity. The second week of each session is traditionally reserved for joint budget hearings as was the case this year. Wednesday was a long day as the Governor and the State School Superintendent testified before the appropriations committees of the House and Senate as well as others involved in financial decision making. The Governor's message was bleak, downscaled revenues that are mandating significant cuts in the FY09 and FY10 budgets. Superintendent Kathy Cox pleaded for relief but also identified where the cuts would have to be made. High school principals need to know how the financial dilemma will most impact them. Based on experience and study of the proposals, here are the places you can expect to see the most impact:

1. **Homestead Exemption Grant removal**—the failure to fund the \$428 Million grants to counties and school systems will result in counties and cities having to send out tax bills for

the additional tax in April or May and then collect the would-be grant monies again in December. ***It will be the largest tax increase in Georgia history.*** Unfortunately it will significantly impact every local system's ability to levy taxes and will most certainly rouse many disgruntled and disgusted tax payers that don't feel like they have the money for the extra taxes. It will put schools and school systems in a negative public relations position and will no doubt impact future ELOST elections and cause increased criticism over the use of local taxes in areas such as teaching and coaching supplements.

2. Elimination of funding for school nurses—there is not a high school in this state that does not rely heavily on the work of school nurses. There will be no state funding for nurses in FY10 and if they are continued it will be a local system expense. Funding nurses will mean not funding something else. This will be a most difficult local decision.

3. Reduction in Graduation Coach funding—Graduation Coaches have had a major impact in every school in Georgia. Schools with graduation rates at 85% and above stand to lose their coaches—not a positive step. Once again it will fall on local system to fund these most important positions.

4. \$275 million in Austerity Cuts for FY10—Taking \$275 million off the bottom line of school system budgets will result in local school systems having to significantly raise local property taxes and/or significantly reduce local expenditures by reducing such items as local supplements including athletic supplements. This cut comes on top of the \$150 million austerity cut for FY09—money that many think that we will never get back. It is important that every building level administrator have a plan that deals with the severest budget cuts in the history of public education in Georgia. One of the early casualties in the budget disaster may be the RESAs. RESA funding has been moved to the QBE portion of the budget which means that school systems will have to decide whether to fund their RESA, obviously at the expense of some local programs.

Legislation introduced this week

HB 99 Prohibits state retirement systems from investing in companies that do business with the Republic of Sudan.

HB 103 Establishes a Confederate Heritage and History Month.

HB 120 Reauthorizes the tax free holidays for school supplies, computers, energy products, etc. for 2009.

HB 122 Requires government units (including BOEs) that have an annual budget of over \$ 1 million to place financial information regarding budget a searchable website. Contracts exceeding \$1000, compensation, travel expenses, and all other expenses over \$5000 must be listed on the website.

SB 27 Establishes a Confederate Heritage and History Month.

SB 36 Requires Boards of Education to establish a Code of Ethics and to annually review same.

Hot Buttons

- 1. HB 33, mandating religious freedom via student speakers at all school events in which students speak, saw no movement this week.**
- 2. The *Bridge Bill*, which mandates certain CTAE programs and responsibilities is now on the board. Some analysts indicate it is the same bill that finished the legislature last year and is permissive in nature and not required of all systems. More information as it comes available.**

- 3. HB 103/SB 27 which establishes a Confederate Heritage and History Month will without doubt bring considerable response from minority groups.**
- 4. HB 3 which creates a school holiday on Veteran's Day is opposed by GASSP. A survey indicated that a great many of our schools have Veteran's Day observances and declaring it a school holiday would mean that only a small percentage of our students would participate in a Veteran's Day observance.**

Responses should be directed to Jimmy C. Stokes at stokes30650@bellsouth.net