

GEORGIA ASSOCIATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Serving secondary school administrators across Georgia
Weekly Legislative Update-January 30, 2009



THIS WEEK

1. The NEW Bridge Bill
2. News on the Budget
3. New Legislation
4. Hot Buttons

The NEW Bridge Bill

While it has not been officially dropped, the NEW Bridge Bill has made the rounds at the Capitol and Twin Towers. Education reviews find the NEW Bridge bill to be quite supportive of secondary education and offers some promise for enriching the CTAE efforts at low performing high schools. The bill's principal aim is to make grants available to "low performing high schools", defined as those having completion rates of less than 60%. Schools that receive the grants must: 1. Provide CTAE programs that have been approved by the State Board of Education (very little difference from what we currently have in place); 2. Implement a teacher as advisor program; 3. Provide students in grades 8-12 with information on careers (not much difference from our current workplace readiness requirements); 4. Require students beginning with grade 10 to declare a "major" which can be math and science; humanities, fine arts, foreign language or a career pathway. There must be an annual conference with the student, parents, and advisor to consider an "individual graduation

plan". There are 7 specifications for the individual graduation plan. Students that pass SBOE approved end of course assessments in CTAE or who pass approved industry certification exams will be excused from all high school graduation tests except reading, writing, math, and English. All of this applies only to schools that receive the low performing high school improvement grants. Representative Fran Millar, author of the bill, has been soliciting input from a number of education sources and promises that additional changes and improvements will be made in the bill before it is officially dropped. It is certainly advantageous to GASSP members to support this legislation—it is permissive and most certainly can assist schools that need additional resources.

News on the Budgets

The Ways and Means Committee of the House continues to hold hearings on various aspects of the budget. The Appropriations Subcommittee on Education met on Thursday and discussed various elements of the FY09 and FY10 education department budgets. No one is willing to make anything approaching a commitment on changes to the Governor's proposal but the following are observations of note:

1. The Georgia Association of School Nurses marched on the Capitol in mass on Tuesday and many legislators "promised" to restore school nurses to the Budget. When they confronted the Governor he abdicated for his spokesperson who offered that the Governor had offered school systems more *flexibility* by allowing them to determine if they wanted to continue to fund nurses out of local funds—*How much more flexibility can we stand?*

2. RESAs continue to politic legislators to return the funding for RESAs to a line item in the education budget but there is no perceivable movement on the issue. The truth is the Governor took the money allocated to RESAs and applied it to reduce the \$275 million austerity cut. If local systems

continue to fund RESAs it appears the funding will be at the expense of other QBE programs or at local expense.

3. A number of legislators have expressed sympathy for the National Certification supplements for teachers but no one has come forward with a concrete proposal as to how to fund them.

4. The bottom line to all of the budget talk is that there is no money. If money is crafted out of the Governor's budget to fund nurses, RESAs, National Certification supplements, or whatever, it will have to come from somewhere else in the overall budget. Unfortunately, if money is allocated to fund one of the non-funded or under funded education areas, it will be mean an increase to the austerity cut and local systems will then bear the responsibility to decide what gets cut from the budget. There is very little or any chance of money being cut from outside education and being transferred to education. *These are the times that try men's and women's souls!*

Education Legislation introduced this week **Reported by Skip Yow**

HB 143 Addresses Homeowner Tax Relief Grant by *funding the grant for FY09* (\$425 million) and then specifies that future funding for the HTRG will be done through the supplemental budget and will be funded only if revenues have increased by 3 percent or more, adjusted for inflation.

Passed the House on Friday, January 30, 2009

HB 149 Introduces the "move on when ready" legislation from the Governor's Tough Choices, Tough Times Taskforce.

HB 161 Requires the GHSA to make exception for schools that have to travel more than 200 miles round trip to region contests. (Impacts **one** high school)

HB 165 Permits TRS to count *out-of-state* private school experience toward teacher retirement.

- HB 172** **Modifies requirements for physical examinations required for disability benefits. (Limited to ERS retirees)**
- HB 175** **Repeals tax credit for private school scholarship organizations.**
- HB 193/198** **Revises definitions of 180 day school year, establishes new guidelines for pay scales for nutrition employees, and sets full day kindergarten day at a minimum of 4.5 hours. (Bill allows local system to adopt a calendar that has 240 six hour days, or 144 ten hour days, all one school year)**
- HB 201** **Requires seat belts for buses purchased after July 1, 2009. Belts must be used by all students over the age of four.**
- HB 213** **Outlaws street gang activity within a school zone adding additional penalties for same.**
- HB 215** **Establishes three diploma options (college prep, tech prep, and general) for high school students.**
- HB 229** **The 2009 SHAPE bill that requires physical fitness assessments in all physical education courses, grades 4-12, along with reporting requirements.**
- HR 138** **Constitutional amendment that requires the Governor to call a Special Session of the Legislature whenever revenues decline by 3 percent or more.**
- SB 44** **Gives Georgia producers priority in the purchase of goods for school systems.**
- SB 60** **Authorizes local boards of education to determine the maximum age of mandatory education from 16 to 18 for its local school system.**
- SR 90** **Constitutional amendment that levies a 1 percent sales tax dedicated to transportation.**

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. HB 103/SB 27 which establishes a Confederate Heritage and History Month will without doubt bring considerable response from minority groups saw no movement this week.**
- 3. 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. The bill will be discussed at the Defense and Veteran's Affairs Committee meeting on Monday, February 2, 2009.**
- 4. HB 215 moves Georgia back to 1990 with the return to a three diploma program, each of which does not prepare students for admission to the University System or Technical College System.**

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