



2016 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

GAE'S HIGHLIGHTS FROM GEORGIA'S LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The 2016 Georgia Legislative Session was notable for the passage of several bills supporting public education. Often, advocates find themselves in the position of having to play defense at the Capitol, working hard to prevent legislation that would further undermine public education. This Session was refreshing as GAE worked with legislators and other education advocates to advance the interests of students, teachers, education support professionals, and administrators.

Below is a summary of the most important education pieces to pass the Legislature this Session. Governor Deal has until May 3, 2016 to sign or veto these bills; after that date any bills not signed or vetoed automatically become law and go into effect on July 1, 2016 (unless a different date is specified in the legislation).



TESTING AND EVALUATION

Testing and evaluation were primary focuses of the education community this session with GAE taking a major role in fighting for members by working with stakeholders, bill sponsors and lobbying members. Senator Lindsey Tippins, Chair of the Senate Education and Youth Committee, introduced **SB 364** to address widespread concerns regarding the role and weight of testing with regards to Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES). In the House, Representative Tom Dickson also introduced a bill (**HB 1061**) dealing with many of these same issues. Through the legislative committee process, and a healthy negotiation between the chambers, a substitute **SB 364** emerged, which included some components of **HB 1061**. **GAE members responded tremendously to the several Calls to Action to make our TKES Campaign successful.**

As passed, **SB 364** reduces the weight of testing in the evaluation process for both teachers and leaders. For teachers, student growth will now account for 30% of an evaluation (vs. the current 50%); for principals and assistant principals, it will be 40% (down from the current 70%). For teachers, the remaining 70% will be comprised of professional growth (20%) and observations (50%). For leaders, the remaining portions will be school climate (10%), observations (30%), and a combination of achievement gap closure, Beat the Odds, and CCRPI data as the final 20% of evaluation measures. Senator Tippins made particular note of the fact that he sees this bill as promoting flexibility for districts in the measurement tools used to reach these percentages.

Under **SB 364** Georgia Milestones testing is eliminated in science and social studies in Grades 3, 4, 6 and 7, thus reducing the number of state-required tests from 32 to 24. Subject to state funding, local districts are to administer math and reading formative assessments in

Grades 1 and 2. This bill also requires that all state-adopted or developed assessments must be verified for reliability and validity.

Finally, four other aspects of **SB 364** are of importance:

1. This legislation mandates that only the scores of students enrolled for 90% of the term (vs current 65%) will be used for evaluative purposes;
2. It rejects performance evaluation quotas;
3. It encourages districts to move the testing window to the end of a term; and
4. The bill allows districts to develop tiered observation systems and to reduce the number of observations of highly-rated, veteran teachers.

This bill was sent to Governor Deal on April 1 and awaits his signature. GAE President Dr. Sid Chapman sent a letter to the Governor encouraging him to sign this much needed legislation. **GAE members responded to the Call to Action** by also contacting Governor Deal.

SB 355 was the other "testing bill" this session. Entitled the "Student Protection Act," it codifies existing standardized testing opt-out guidance provided by the Georgia DOE. Tests must now be administered in pencil-and-paper format, upon request. The bill also requires the State School Superintendent and State Board to develop policies around opting out and to create appropriate alternatives to testing. In this vein, it prohibits punitive policies, such as "sit-and-stare," for non-testing students. During the last hours of session, a provision was added that would restrict teachers' first amendment rights regarding talking to students and parents about testing. **GAE fought vigilantly in those final hours alongside other advocates to have this provision successfully eliminated.**



EDUCATION REFORM COMMISSION

Governor Deal's Education Reform Commission (ERC) presented a slate of recommendations to radically change the very face of public education in Georgia. Many expected to see corresponding legislation to these recommendations in the 2016 Session. GAE was very vocal about the ERC's proposals and the need to slow the implementation process for further vetting. Additionally, GAE expressed concerns that the Commission membership did not include an active educator. Governor Deal postponed these efforts until 2017 and announced the creation of a Teacher Advisory Committee.

The voices of GAE members were heard.



BUDGET AND PAY INCREASE

Final legislative approval was giving to a \$23.7 billion state budget. The highlight of the K-12 budget is \$300 million allocated to eliminate teacher furloughs, increase instructional days, and increase teacher salaries – amounting to a 3% increase. Additional funding was added to cover bus drivers, lunchroom workers and school nurses.

Increasing pay was a top 2016 legislative priority for GAE. The additional funding for salary increases is a big win for our members. Governor Deal and legislative leaders spoke frequently about the need to increase pay for educators because they heard the voices of our members loud and clear. We understand that many school districts have budget hurdles due to past austerity cuts but **GAE will be advocating for our members to receive pay increases as intended by the Governor and General Assembly.**

▶ OTHER PASSING LEGISLATION

HB 65 | requires that local school districts and charter schools hold two open meetings regarding their proposed budgets and post their budgets electronically.

GAE Position: Supported

HB 614 | permits the Department of Education to establish a pilot program for video cameras in special education classrooms.

GAE Position: Supported

HB 659 | requires school systems, school boards, and schools to provide transparency of financial information to the greatest extent practicable, including school level budget and expenditure data, and to provide certain information on their websites. It also includes a requirement that state officials and agencies notify the General Assembly's Education Committees when applying for a competitive grant of \$20 million or more.

GAE Position: Supported

HB 739 | makes state approval of school instructional material and content optional.

GAE Position: Opposed

HB 777 | allows school bus drivers to use a cell phone like a two-way radio for communication with school or public safety officials.

GAE Position: Neutral

HB 879 | allows for a seal of bi-literacy on high-school diplomas.

GAE Position: Supported

HB 959 | was this year's "Title 20 Cleanup Bill" and addresses a variety of issues. It includes a provision regarding school board members' First Amendment rights. It also exempts students scoring above a certain level on AP, IB, and in dual enrollment courses from corresponding End of Course Tests. It contains provisions regarding career academies and dual enrollment. In addition, it authorizes data sharing for certain program evaluation purposes and allows the Georgia Department of Education to create unique identifiers to track children of military families for purposes of data disaggregation. Finally, it eliminates a current restriction on the Governor's Office of Student Achievement's authority to establish a nonprofit corporation.

GAE Position: Neutral

HR 1342 | requests more recess time for school children. Because this is only an "urging resolution" (as opposed to a constitutional amendment), it needs no further approval.

GAE Position: Supported

SB 309 | states that high schools receiving state funding cannot participate in an athletic association which prohibits religious expression on the clothing of student athletes or which prohibits member schools from organizing and playing scrimmage matches, games, or other athletic competitions with nonmember schools.

GAE Position: Neutral

▶ WHAT FAILED?

The 2016 Session marked the end of a biennial legislative cycle, so bills that did not pass this session are totally "dead." Certainly, these bills may be reintroduced in an upcoming session, but they have to start at the beginning of the legislative process. For that reason, it is important to note what did not pass this year.

Because education spending accounts for more than half of the state budget, proposals to cut income taxes pose real threats to public education. This year, two such proposals were introduced but defeated, in large part due to coordinated advocacy efforts by stakeholders including GAE. These were **HB 238** and **SR 756**.

Two voucher bills were introduced this session. HB 865 attempted to create a voucher for low-income students through the use of a tax credit for corporate donors. Like income tax cuts, tax credits threaten the public coffers and, thus, funding for public education. School choice opponents rallied in opposition to **HB 865** and this bill did not make it out of committee. This session also saw the introduction of **SR 388**, an attempt to amend the constitution to allow for vouchers. Working together, education advocates including GAE were able to amend this resolution to specifically prohibit vouchers for public education. Ultimately, the resolution did not make it out of committee.

▶ WHAT'S NEXT?

Finally, as afore mentioned, Governor Deal's Education Reform Commission presented a slate of recommendations for changes to public education and many expected to see corresponding legislation in the 2016 session. Governor Deal postponed these efforts until 2017 and, at this point, specifics of the strategy and legislation are unknown. Stay tuned for legislative updates by email.

Contact your GAE representatives to join our advocacy efforts.

Your voice makes a difference in the fight for the students who are served by public education.



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