



# 2019 HIGHLIGHTS FROM GEORGIA'S LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The 2019 Georgia Legislative Session was notable for the flurry of education bills introduced that could have had detrimental effects on the state's public education system. GAE and other education advocates played defense at the Capitol this year, working hard to prevent legislation that would further undermine public education. There were moments, however, where GAE was able to work 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 Kemp had until May 12, 2019 to sign or veto these bills; after that date any bills not signed or vetoed automatically became law and went into effect on July 1, 2019 (unless a different date is specified in the legislation). Additionally, this was the first year of Georgia's biennial legislative process, so this summary includes bills that passed both chambers of the Georgia Legislature and also includes bills that did not pass both chambers but are still "alive" for next year's session.

## TEACHER PAY INCREASE

Georgia lawmakers gave final passage to HB 31 the state's \$27.5 billion education budget for the 2020 fiscal year, beginning July 1, 2019. The bulk of the funding increase over the \$26.9 billion amended FY 2019 budget is earmarked for the \$3,000 teacher raises for all certified teachers and public school personnel. HB 31 also provides for a 2 percent pay raise for bus drivers, cafeteria staff and school nurses. The total cost to the state for these educator pay raises is roughly \$530 million in FY 2020. The budget also includes \$133 million for K-12 enrollment growth, \$48 million for charter system grants and State Commission Charter school supplements and \$1.5 million to provide feminine hygiene products in schools to students who cannot afford them.

### **Increasing pay was a top 2019 legislative priority for GAE.**

This is a big win for our members. Governor Kemp ran on the promise to increase pay for educators by \$5,000 and we will continue our work to ensure that he fulfills that commitment next year. We understand that many school districts have budget hurdles due to past austerity cuts but **GAE will advocate for our members to receive pay increases as intended by the Governor and General Assembly.**



GAE President Charlotte Booker meeting with Rep. Sandra Scott.

## SCHOOL SAFETY

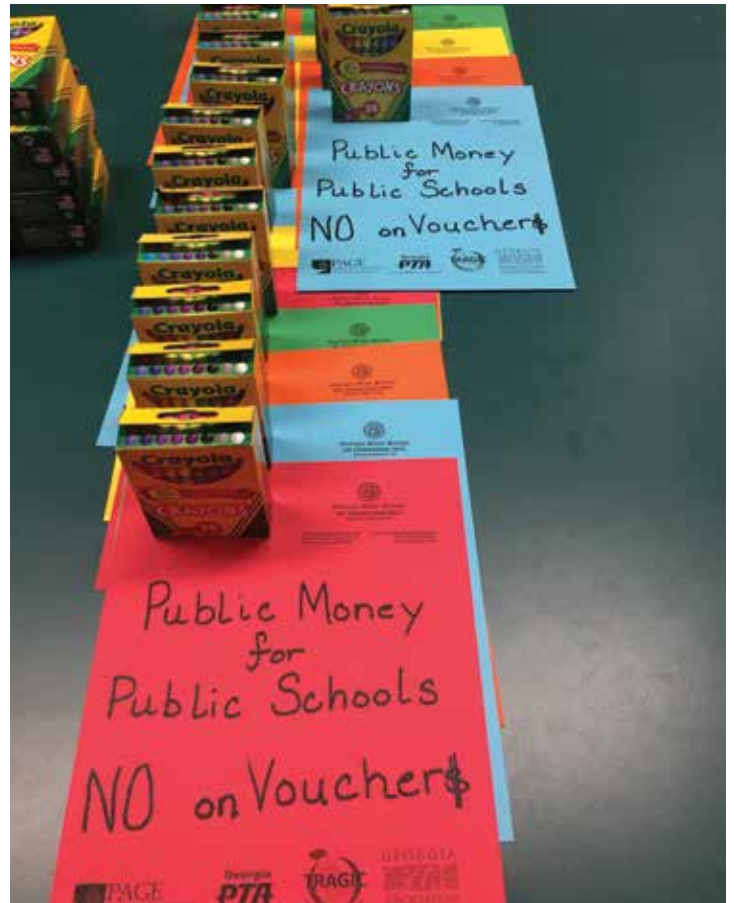
Ensuring public school safety by providing preventative programs was a top legislative priority for GAE. On March 12th, Governor Kemp signed HB 30, the FY 2019 amended budget, into law. The bill includes a \$69 million appropriation for school safety. The plan includes a one-time \$30,000 grant for each of the state's 2,294 public schools to use as they see fit for school security. Additionally, a mental health counselor will be placed in all 343 public high schools to “engage with struggling students and help provide the resources needed to prevent disruptive, aggressive and potentially violent behavior.” Additionally, SB 15 sponsored by Sen. John Albers (R-Alpharetta) which addresses school safety passed the general assembly this session. The bill requires regular threat assessments, safety plan updates and drills in public schools. It also mandates and clarifies coordination between state agencies and local authorities and schools. SB 15 also requires all schools to conduct “mass casualty” safety drills with local law enforcement. **As a result of advocacy by GAE and other education advocacy groups, the two most controversial components of the bill were taken out** – allowing former military/public safety personnel to serve as “safety coaches” and unrestrained data collection on students. (It is important to know that there are still concerns about the bill, particularly “site threat assessments” as leading to heightened policing, racial profiling, and enhanced criminalization of Georgia students.) The bill was vetoed by Governor Kemp.

## VOUCHERS

GAE closely followed SB 173, as well as its “zombie” counterpart HB 68, during this legislative session. **Vouchers can be implemented in numerous ways, such as through tax credits or through what is known as Education Scholarship Accounts (ESAs).** SB 173, legislation sponsored by Sen. Greg Dolezal (R-Cumming) was an ESA voucher bill and was strongly opposed by GAE. Unlike in years past, the Senate Education and Youth Committee was not given the opportunity to hold a hearing or a vote on the bill. Instead, the bill was pushed through the Senate Finance Committee, even though it was an education bill. To add insult to injury, no fiscal note (which is a report that outlines how much a policy will cost to implement) was even attached to the bill. The claim by Sen. Dolezal was that a fiscal note was not needed, because the bill was revenue neutral. Several committee members agreed, stating that the vouchers would actually benefit the public schools because they would get to keep the local AND federal dollars since only state dollars are under consideration. This is a common pro-voucher argument though it is not factually accurate, of course, because federal dollars *disappear* when the student leaves the system!

While a small portion of cost savings can be realized right away when one individual student leaves, other savings are harder to achieve without the loss of a sufficient number of students to justify eliminating a classroom, closing a school, or consolidating a school district.

Had SB 173 been implemented, the following criteria would have been required:



GAE and other education groups make a presentation against vouchers.

- All students must have been in public school the prior year for the two FTE counts
- Students eligible are limited to students with special needs, students from families up to 150% of the poverty limit, children of active duty military parents, students adopted from foster care, and students with a documented case of being bullied.
- Enrollment in the voucher program will be frozen in any year that QBE is not fully funded.
- The voucher amount will be calculated with the five mill share deduction made as well as any other cuts to funding going to districts for their students.
- After graduation, funds rolled over from previous years cannot be used for postsecondary purposes. Unused funds are to be returned to the state general fund.
- The program cap was changed from 5% to 2.5% statewide and a 2.5% cap per district.

SB 173 failed on the floor of the Senate on March 5, but they “resurrected” it on March 20 by adding the voucher language to HB 68. Because of *heavy member action* and GAE leadership advocacy efforts, that bill was not brought up for consideration before Sine Die, despite Lt. Governor Duncan’s best efforts.

**What we are seeing is a national effort to pass ESA legislation with Tennessee being the latest state to adopt the measure. Undoubtedly, we will see this piece of legislation next session. As always, GAE will keep its members informed of this threat to public education.**

## OTHER NOTABLE LEGISLATION THAT PASSED BOTH CHAMBERS

**HB 83 | Quality Basic Education Act; Requires recess for students in kindergarten and grades one through five**  
Primary Sponsor: Rep. Demetrius Douglas (D-Stockbridge)  
GAE Position: Neutral (Bill was vetoed by Gov. Kemp)

**SB 48 | Mandates dyslexia screening in schools and provide for teacher training**  
Primary Sponsor: Sen. P.K. Martin (R-Lawrenceville)  
GAE Position: Neutral

**SB 25 | Clarifies when to stop for a school bus, undoing an “inadvertent” change to the law during the previous session. SB 25 requires oncoming vehicles to stop unless there is a “grass median, unpaved area or physical barrier.**  
Primary Sponsor: Sen. Bill Heath (R-Bremen)  
GAE Position: Support

**SB 83 | Expands options for Bible-related elective courses in high schools**  
Primary Sponsor: Sen. Jeff Mullis (R-Chickamauga)  
GAE Position: Neutral

**SB 108 | Requires computer science courses in middle and high schools**  
Primary Sponsor: Sen. P.K. Martin (R-Lawrenceville)  
GAE Position: Neutral

**SB 9 | Broadens a prohibition on sex between teachers and high school students**  
Primary Sponsor: Sen. Harold Jones (D-Augusta)  
GAE Position: Support

**HB 530 | Requires child protective services to check on students withdrawn from school**  
Primary Sponsor: Rep. Bill Hitchens (R-Rincon)  
GAE Position: Support



GAE President Charlotte Booker addresses the press on GAE issues.

## BILLS OF INTEREST THAT REMAIN ALIVE FOR BIENNIAL YEAR 2

**SB 68 | Strengthens provisions relating to the financial management of local school systems; Provides for training for local board of education members and local school superintendents on financial management; Provides for monthly reporting to the local board of education on the financial stability of the local school system (\*The last iteration of this bill included language from both HB 86 and HB 32.)**  
Primary Sponsor: Sen. Freddie Powell Sims (D-Dawson)  
GAE Position: Support

**HB 444 | Revise the “Move on When Ready Act” and dual credit course. The bill outlines program goals and restrict courses to older high school students. Additionally, it puts credit hour caps in place and limits the number of summer courses that participants can take. A cap is placed on the state general fund contribution and allows for support through the Georgia Lottery.**  
Primary Sponsor: Rep. Bert Reeves (R-Marietta)  
GA Position: Neutral

## ADDITIONAL EDUCATION BILLS OF INTEREST

**HB 53 | Provide for freedom of religious speech for students and faculty members in public schools.**  
Primary Sponsor: Rep. Kasey Carpenter (R-Dalton)  
GAE Position: Neutral

**HB 86 | Provides that teacher performance ratings contained in personnel evaluations are subject to complaint by teachers who accepted a school year contract for the fourth or subsequent consecutive school year. It also allows for appeals hearings to be conducted by independent third parties, while requiring local units of administration to submit copies of their complaint policies to the Department of Education.**  
Primary Sponsor: Rep. Tommy Benton (R-Jefferson)  
GAE Position: Support (Will work to include language that requires appeals to be heard by an independent, third party.)

**HB 109 | The TRS Bill; Alters teacher retirement benefits for educators that begin employment and become Teacher Retirement System (TRS) members ON or AFTER July 1, 2019.**  
Primary Sponsor: Rep. Tommy Benton (R-Jefferson)  
GAE Position: Oppose

**HB 179 | Would prohibit school discipline data from being considered in school climate ratings.**  
Primary Sponsor: Rep. Colton Moore (R-Trenton)  
GAE Position: Support



## WHAT'S NEXT?

Preparation and planning for the 2020 legislative session begins NOW! This is how YOU can HELP.

Both Governor Kemp and Lt. Governor Duncan have shown they are willing to utilize the full force of their political capital to advance voucher legislation here in Georgia. Whether it is SB 173 or HB 301, another unsuccessful voucher bill introduced this session—Vouchers will be on the legislative agenda next session. **GAE members must be prepared to speak with their elected leaders letting them know that vouchers are bad for public education.**

Additionally, it goes without saying that GAE is quite dissatisfied with the distinctions made between and among school personnel, and believe that implementing the raises in this manner effectively creates a two-tiered system with two separate salary schedules. It is untenable and callous to exclude **school support personnel** from the same level of financial increase that the administrators and

teachers who they work right alongside everyday are scheduled to receive. We need you to speak up and OUT about this issue via calls, emails to legislators and hopefully even meetings with legislators when they are back home in their districts this summer and fall.

**Your voice makes a difference in the fight for the students who are served by public education.** For example, if Governor Kemp had not vetoed, but signed the school safety bill SB 15 into law, it would have been up to YOU to inform legislators and other decision makers of the impact that the new policy is having in the public schools. Legislation can always result in unintended consequences once it is actually put into practice, but the only way that lawmakers will know what those effects are is if YOU speak up and out, early and often.

As other issues come to mind, please contact GAE representatives and/or leadership, as it takes all of us working together to protect the integrity of public education.

Please take our post legislative session survey at [www.gae.org/19postlegsurvey](http://www.gae.org/19postlegsurvey)

## 2019 GAE Day at the Capitol

