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GAE MEMBER ALERT

GAE Government Relations

Friday, March 31, 2023

Session Recap

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INCREDIBLE SESSION FOR GAE!

**VOUCHER BILL DEFEATED,
RAISES AND BONUSES FOR EDUCATORS,
PLANNING TIME FOR K-12 TEACHERS ADOPTED,
IMPROVEMENTS FOR ESPs' RETIREMENT BENEFITS**

The thorough defeat of a massive, radical, and cynical private voucher bill and adoption of legislation to ensure at least one period of planning time for all teachers in grades K-12 capped the final hours of the final day of a highly successful session for public education.

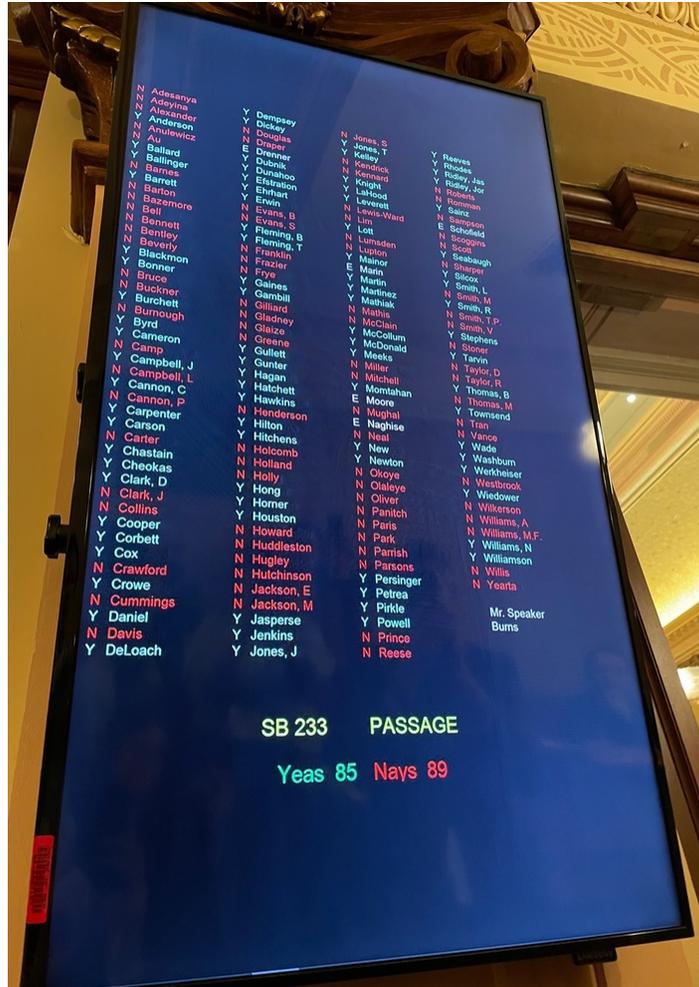
[SB 233](#), a bill to divert state funding from the poorest schools in the state to pay for the private school education of more privileged students, was soundly defeated 85-89. Sixteen Republicans joined Democratic lawmakers to vote against the bill a few minutes before 9 p.m. Wednesday night. The lone Democrat to vote in the favor of the bill was Rep. Meshia Mainor, of Atlanta.

For every tax dollar an "under-performing" public school receives from the state for an enrolled student, two dollars would have been transferred to the private school that enrolls a student with the voucher. Homeschooling costs were also covered by the bill, which are on average six times less than the \$6,500 voucher. There was nothing in any version of the bill that would have provided additional support or funding to schools on the list of the lowest performing public schools in the state, whose students would have been eligible for the voucher.

ONE FINAL REQUEST

Please take 30 seconds to thank those legislators who voted against SB 233.

Click [here](#) to trigger a quick note of appreciation to each of them.



Thirty minutes later, legislators gave final approval to legislation to ensure that all teachers in grades K-12 are afforded one period of planning time each school day. The final version of [HB 340](#) passed the House 171-0 and the Senate 48-4. The new law is effective July 1, 2023. The bill now goes to Gov. Brian Kemp for his signature or veto.

The proposed law states: "Every teacher who is employed in grades kindergarten through 12 for a period of time of more than one-half of the class periods of the regular school day shall be provided a daily planning period. Such planning period shall be included in the number of hours worked, and no local board of education shall increase the number of hours to be worked by an employee as a result of such employee's being granted a planning period ... This planning period shall not be calculated under any circumstances as a part of any daily lunch period or other noninstructional time."

The bill defines "planning period" as "a block of time when a teacher is not responsible for the direct supervision of student safety or conduct or for providing instruction to students ..."

GAE appreciates the hard work of [Rep. John Corbett](#), R-Lake City - the sponsor of the bill - in getting this bill across the line. Please take a moment to send Rep. Corbett a message of appreciation at: john.corbett@house.ga.gov.

Public Education Funding in 2023-2024 State Budget

Also on the final day of the session, lawmakers gave final approval for next year's state budget, which begins July 1, 2023.

The final, approved budget provides, among other things:

- \$2,000 permanent pay raises for state-funded, certified K-12 teachers,
- Bonuses for school custodians of \$1,000,
- 5.1% pay raise to the state-funded part of salaries for cafeteria workers, school bus drivers, and school nurses,
- An increase in monthly pension benefits for cafeteria workers, school bus drivers, custodians, and school maintenance personnel whose retirement is administered by the Public School Employees Retirement System (PSERS),
- \$27 million to provide for additional school counselors based on the population for special education and gifted students,
- Almost \$1 billion to help cover huge increases in the employer portion of costs in the State Health Benefit Plan for certified and non-certified educators, and
- \$6.3 million for reduced priced breakfast and lunch programs.

The budget, which now goes to the governor for his approval, also restores funding for the HOPE Scholarship to include 100% of tuition. During leaner financial times, HOPE Scholarship was cut to fund only 90% of tuition.

In total, the \$33-billion-dollar budget is the largest in state history.

Literacy bill passes

Legislators gave final passage to [HB 538](#), a bill focused on literacy education, which requires the administration of three universal screeners each year in grades K-3, with the initial administration to occur in the first 30 days of the school year. The bill also requires: "tiered reading intervention plans for public school students in kindergarten through third grade who at any time during the school year exhibit a significant reading deficiency." The reading intervention plan can be part of an existing multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) or response to intervention (RTI) plan.

Further, the bill requires all kindergarten through third-grade teachers, by July 1, 2025, complete a literacy training program. HB 538 will not be able to be waived by school systems, including local and state chartered schools and school systems.

Monday, [SB 211](#) was passed, which creates the Georgia Council on Literacy to review the literacy programs in the state and makes recommendations to improve literacy and reading comprehension. Both measures now go to Gov. Brian Kemp for his signature.



GAE's Daniel Sobczak, Lisa Morgan, and Deborah Jones pause for a quick photo on a crazy "sine die," the final day of the legislative session.

ESP retirement bill back for next year

Legislation intended to identify school districts that are not participating in the Social Security System for Education Support Professionals (ESPs) in the Public School Employees Retirement System (PSERS) stalled on the final day of the session, under the weight of numerous amendments made to the bill. The bill was sponsored by Sen. Larry Walker, R-Perry.

[SB 240](#) requires that a list be compiled of school systems that do not participate in the Social Security System for school custodians, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, and maintenance personnel. These employees' pensions are administered by the Public School Employees Retirement System (PSERS). School districts must either participate in Social Security for these employees or offer an equivalent, qualifying plan. PSERS is not considered a qualifying plan.

The executive director of the state Employees' Retirement System (ERS) indicated that a study will be completed anyway even though the legislation did not pass.

Sen. Walker also sponsored [SB 105](#) that passed the Senate Retirement Committee earlier this session. This bill would eliminate the cap on monthly benefits for PSERS participants and increase the minimum multiplier. Under the rules of the General Assembly and the State Constitution, legislation that may have a material financial impact on state-provided retirement plans are two-year bills. They must be sent out for a study of their fiscal impacts before being voted on in the next session. The bill has been referred for an actuarial study and will be eligible for final passage next session.

Please take a second to email Sen. Walker, to thank him for his leadership in improving retirement benefits for ESPs at larry.walker@senate.ga.gov.

Other notes from the Capitol

[HB 51](#), legislation to allow schools to use mini-vans or SUVs to transport up to eight students to events like sporting and scholastic competitions, did not pass before the gavel closed out the 2023

session.

[HB 338](#), a bill that requires internet filters on all school-issued technology to prohibit access to web sites that are deemed "harmful to minors," also did not pass.

Gov. Kemp has 40 days from the point bills that passed are formally transmitted to his office to sign or veto legislation.

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