



2008 GLMA Education Wrap Up

The 2008 General Assembly adjourned sine die at midnight on Friday, April 4th with two bangs, first with the Speaker adjourning the House, followed by the Lt. Governor adjourning the Senate four minutes later. Traditionally, the Lt. Governor and Speaker of the House adjourn the session with simultaneous drops of their gavels. This was a move those present until the bitter end should have seen coming, given the many conflicts between the two chambers throughout the session and especially on the final night.

Wednesday, May 14th is the deadline for the Governor to sign or veto legislation. If he takes no action on bills that have passed, they automatically become law without his signature.

Major Education Initiatives

HB 1209 - IE2 - School System Flexibility and Accountability – SIGNED BY THE GOVERNOR ON 4/9/08

At 10:09 p.m. Friday, April 4th, in the final hours of the session, the House and Senate each adopted the Conference Committee Report. There was some confusion the next day when the AJC reported that the measure failed. We were able to call friends and staff in the offices of the House Education Committee Chairman, the House Clerk and the Secretary of the Senate to clarify exactly what happened and report to the Education groups that the measure had indeed passed.

As passed, HB 1209 *allows school systems to enter into a contract* with the State Board of Education, requesting "...increased flexibility from certain state laws, rules, and regulations in exchange for increased accountability and defined consequences..." Systems entering into a contract can request flexibility in the following areas:

1. Class size requirements
2. Expenditure controls and categorical allotment requirements
3. Certification requirements
4. Salary schedule requirements
5. Any other requirements or provisions identified by the local school system and approved by the State Board (**Note:** *In previous versions of the bill, this item was "State curriculum requirements" but was changed by the conference committee*)

The key to this legislation is that the school system must first enter into a contract with the State Board before flexibility in these areas are granted. According to the legislation, "No more than five local school systems in the first calendar year may enter into a contract..." with all other systems notifying the DOE of their intention to request increased flexibility no later than June 30, 2013.

One significant change made by the conference committee includes added language stating that, as of July 1, 2008, the State Board of Education shall not authorize any waivers or variances for 1) Class size requirements; 2) expenditure controls and categorical allotment requirements; 3) certification requirements; or 4) salary schedule requirements.

SB 327 - Return to Work Bill - PASSED

In a swift move on the last night of the session, SB 327 was gutted and replaced with the language in HB 157, authored by Chairman Brooks Coleman (R – Duluth). Chairman Coleman facilitated this strategic move when his bill didn't move out of the Senate Retirement Committee. Surprisingly, Senator Bill Heath, Senate Retirement Committee Chair and author of SB 327, allowed the "return to work" language to remain and it passed both chambers Friday night. ***The bill as passed includes media specialists and counselors.***

HB 905 - Building Resourceful Individuals to Develop Georgia's Economy Act - The BRIDGE Bill - FAILED

Rep. Fran Millar (R - Dunwoody) watered this legislation down throughout the committee process, but the measure died Friday night when it was never called in the Senate for a vote. Some speculate it failed because Speaker Glenn Richardson was the second signer on the bill.

SB 458 - Vouchers to Children in a School that Loses Accreditation or on NI for 7+ Years - FAILED

Authored by President Pro Tempore, Senator Eric Johnson (R-Savannah), SB 458 failed to pass when the House refused to call it for a vote. Senator Johnson was the champion of last years SB 10 - vouchers for special needs children.

FY 2009 Budget

The House and Senate adopted the FY 09 Budget conference committee report on the last night of the session. Highlights include a general increase of 2.5% to the ***state base salary*** schedule for teachers, totaling \$159,018,715; ***\$100 Classroom Cards*** for teachers and media centers; and \$50,000,000 to ***restore austerity reductions.***

Again, the Governor had proposed to redirect funding from the ***elementary foreign language program*** to increase funding for foreign language media materials. As initially proposed by the Governor, this redirect would have increased the K-5 FTE from \$15.31 to \$17.55. Instead, the conference committee decided to redirect the funds - totaling \$1,590,857 - into the austerity cuts restoration.

It is unclear, at this time, whether or not the media FTE will increase as a result of the \$50 million restoration. It is possible the local systems will have a say in how the cuts will be restored.

There is wide spread fear that the Governor will veto line items in the education budget again this year. Meaning that among other items, the \$50 million restoration to austerity cuts could be at risk. We continue to watch and talk with his budget officials about this problem.

Other Legislation

HB 637 - Nationally Norm-Referenced Instruments - PASSED

School systems may now elect to give nationally norm-referenced tests in reading, math, science or social studies "...in grade three, four, or five and in grade six, seven, or eight..." Previously, systems were limited to giving the tests in third, fifth and eighth grades.

HB 948 - Tax Free Holiday - PASSED

The 2008 sales tax holiday runs from Thursday, July 31st through Sunday, August 3rd.

HB 1321 - Alleged Inappropriate Behavior by a Teacher or School Personnel – SIGNED BY THE GOVERNOR ON 5/7/08

HB 1321 requires each student code of conduct now include provisions to address "Falsifying, misrepresenting, omitting, or erroneously reporting information regarding instances of alleged

inappropriate behavior by a teacher, administrator, or other school employee toward a student.”

The PSC will be required to establish a process for students to follow when reporting cases of “alleged inappropriate behavior by a teacher, administrator, or other school employee toward a student”; coordinate a training program on sexual misconduct; and will be authorized to open an investigation on a complaint made by a student against an educator alleging a sexual offense. Investigations of sexual misconduct complaints must be completed within 60 days. If a sanction is found against an educator, he/she can appeal within 90 days of the sanction.

HB 1335 - Program Weights - PASSED

Strictly a "housekeeping bill," HB 1335 increases the program weights to match current spending within the QBE formula.

SB 461 - Bullying Bill - FAILED

After several hours of controversial testimony from the public in favor of passing SB 461, this legislation died in the House Rules Committee. The bill would have expanded the definition of "bullying" and require local boards to change their policies to include students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Current law requires local board bullying policies apply to students in grades 6-12.

Have any questions on the above legislation? Don't see a bill you were following? Let us know and we will send you more detailed information!

Moving On...

We will monitor several study committees during the summer and fall. If you are interested in visiting the Capitol to observe the study committee process, let us know! We can help you plan your visit.

The State Board of Education meets monthly. Let us know if you are interested in attending a Board meeting. We will watch for new rules and regulations, paying close attention to Board action as a result of HB 1209.

The summer is a great time to build relationships with your Senator and Representative. Send them an email with your thoughts on Georgia's education system; offer to volunteer on their campaigns; invite them to visit your school in the fall to watch you in action!

Let us know if you plan to schedule an appointment with your Senator or Representative. Not only can we help you contact your legislators, we would be willing to attend your appointments with you – schedules permitting.

Many Thanks!

Thank you for allowing us to serve you, GLMA and the students of Georgia! We appreciate your phone calls and emails throughout the session. Direct communications are the most effective way for you to let us know what message we should convey on your behalf to the folks under the Gold Dome! We look forward to another exciting and productive year for education in 2009!

Stay tuned...

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