

PTA Takes Action

Advocating for every child

Georgia PTA's weekly update on legislative activity – Mar. 28, 2010

Welcome to the weekly reporting of legislative activity for the 2010 session. The General Assembly reached Crossover Day, the 30th day, on Mar. 25th. Any bill that did not pass out of one chamber to the other is now considered dead for the rest of the legislative session. The language of a bill may still be appended to another bill (as long as it pertains to the same area of Georgia Code) so it will be very important to watch for substitute language now as bills move. This recap will highlight the bills that crossed over and some of the ones that did not. This week the House Appropriation committees will be meeting briefly for a final look at the FY 11 budget before it is brought to a vote. It is anticipated that the vote will be this week so the Senate can get started on their deliberations. There are only 10 days left in the session.

Common Core State Standard Initiative (CCSSI)

The draft of the Common Core Standards is still open for review and comment. GA PTA urges its members, especially the **teachers** who are familiar with GA's current curriculum, to review the standards and weigh in with their comments and suggestions. It is your input that will help shape those standards as they move towards finalization and adoption. GA PTA supports this voluntary state initiative and encourages its members to read more about it. Public comment will be accepted until April 2. Please forward this information to other parents and to the teachers in your school so they, too, can learn more about this initiative. The standards can be found at www.corestandards.org.

Legislation to Watch

Every week we will report on legislation that we believe is critical to you. Please note, if PTA has an established position, a local unit cannot take an opposing position.

Bills That Passed Over:

SB 308: Concealed guns permitted in bars, public buildings, sporting events, churches and college campus except within 1000 feet of dorms. The bill prohibits guns only from K-12 schools, government buildings, jails, prisons, and mental institutions. Private property owners may determine if guns are allowed on their property. Shifts issuance of weapons permits to the Secretary of State rather than the local probate judge. ***Current law forbids guns at school functions and within the 1000 ft school safety zone around a school.***

SB 299: A student accused of a weapons violation must have a hearing before being detained. Doesn't give schools more flexibility but allows judge to look at intent instead of just applying zero tolerance.

SB 515: LBOE could not furlough educators until they had reduced any unencumbered reserve as of September 1 to 6% or less of the general fund budget. 'Unencumbered' means that which is left over after all contractual obligations, include those of educator contracts, are provided for.

HR 1203: CA, and the enabling legislation, to expand the Educational Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) to be used for educational annual budgets (instead of just Capitol projects as it is now) with equivalent tax millage reduction. This purpose and the expected amount to be applied would be on the project list with all other projects.

SB 496: Creates a new HOPE college opportunity grant for students from low income families if money appropriated from the lottery. Has all the requirements of the current HOPE scholarship except for the B average. About 97% of those receiving PELL grants have family incomes of less than \$40,000; 80% have family incomes of less than \$30,000. GA Student Finance Commission will administer the program, and use the PELL grant process as a basis for evaluating students. As with the other HOPE, students must be a graduate from a GA high school and a legal resident for 12 months, or if not a graduate from a GA high school, they must be a resident for 24 months.

HB 938: No use of wireless communication while operating a vehicle, except for communications with emergency responders. Citizens band radios, citizens band radio hybrids, commercial two-way radio devices, subscription-based emergency communications, in-vehicle security, navigation, and remote diagnostics systems or amateur or ham radio devices are excluded from this prohibition. Drivers license will be suspended if accident caused by driver on the first offense for 90 days or until age 18, whichever occurs first; on the second offense, 6 months or until age 18. Fines are between \$50 and \$100, double if the operator caused an accident. Restoration of the drivers license will be \$60. Those under age 18 also get 2 points on the drivers license

SB 458: Safety belts must be used in all passenger vehicles including pickups for drivers under age 18, and for older drivers if pickups driven on public roads.

HB 1200: Local school boards can solicit and accept donations for field trips and any other educational purpose.

Bills That Did Not Pass:

HB 927: Anti-bullying: Expands the definition of 'bullying' to include electronic bullying that physically harms a person or damages the property of another, has the effect of substantially interfering with a student's education, creates an intimidating or threatening education environment, or substantially disrupts the orderly operation of the school. DOE is required to develop a model policy and make it available on the department's web site for use by local school systems.

SB 319, Money appropriated for 'textbooks' can also be used to purchase computer hardware and software.

HB 281: Students enrolled in a charter school within the school district in grades 6-12 shall be allowed to participate in extracurricular activities of the traditional public school to which each would otherwise be enrolled.

HB 1121 Tampering with state test answer sheets shall be a misdemeanor such as copy a test booklet, make answer keys available, give inappropriate guidance to students taking the test. Superintendents and principals are included if they fail to follow testing procedures established by the state.

HB 39: Increase the tax on cigarettes by \$1/pack. Would raise \$355 M for the general budget.

HR 1: Freeze property taxes at current level until house sold. Similar to California's Proposition 13.

*Key: **HR**- House Resolution, **HB** – House Bill, **SR**– Senate Resolution, **SB**– Senate Bill
CA – Constitutional Amendment*