

advocate for SCHOOLS



TO SEE A LIST OF BILLS TRACKED BY AASB
DURING THE 2025 REGULAR SESSION,
CLICK ON BILL TRACKER BELOW:



Have You Signed Up?

AASB Advocacy Committee Days

This year, all AASB Advocacy Days will be held on legislative committee days, offering an insider's glimpse of this key phase of the legislative process.

This is an all-day event from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. and lunch will be provided.

Advocacy Committee Days are not district specific. The dates listed are open to board members, superintendents and CSFOs. Register early — space is **extremely limited** and registration will close once capacity is reached.

Wednesday, April 9
Wednesday, April 16
Wednesday, April 30

[REGISTER HERE](#)

Hit Pause

After a busy three-day legislative week, lawmakers have scheduled an “in-district” work week March 10-14.

The session will reconvene March 18.

2025 Regular Legislative Session

17 Days Remain



Out-of-State Push for Mandatory Religious Release Time

LifeWise, an Ohio-based Christian education program, is seeking to mandate religious release time in Alabama’s public schools. Advocating nationwide for state legislation to require course credit for religious instruction during the public school day, this \$35 million nonprofit has teamed up with **Rep. Susan DuBose**, House sponsor of [H.342](#). The Senate companion bill, [S.229](#), is sponsored by **Sen. Shay Shelton**.

Currently, 12 Alabama schools in seven systems use LifeWise for religious release time. There also are other private religious groups working directly with local boards and school systems to adopt policies to best meet the needs of parents, students and their communities.

WHAT DOES THE BILL DO? The bill would change the current state law, enacted in 2019, allowing school boards to adopt local policy for students to be excused from school during elective course time to attend religious instruction off-campus. Currently, the law is permissive, allowing local boards to decide whether to have a religious release program and whether to grant course credit for these electives. [H.342](#) would **mandate** local boards adopt a policy allowing students to participate in religious instruction **AND mandate** schools award elective course credit for religious instruction.

Requiring elective credit for religious instruction by any sponsoring entity that meets nominal state standards, with no oversight, undermines state and local efforts to educate public school students and is unfair to students taking rigorous electives for credit.

In a public hearing before the **House Education Policy Committee** Wednesday, proponents and opponents addressed the bill. Speaking in opposition, AASB President-elect **Scott Suttle** testified school boards do not oppose religious release time, but are in opposition to removing local control through government overreach. “We are opposed to yet another government mandate and taking

away a community’s choice and voice – the choice on whether to award credit if we do allow release time,” **Suttle** said. He also asked how school boards can be held responsible for student performance when students can miss up to six hours of school per week.

Local boards can have rational and compelling reasons for choosing not to offer religious release time, and those reasons should be respected by the Legislature. For example, school officials would have no input whether or not students with poor academic records should be allowed to participate.

LifeWise proponents argued this bill will shield school boards from making difficult decisions. **This bill is not shielding school boards from anything.** If the state were to require local boards to hold this policy, a school board would not be able to choose a permissible program. However, this is not about LifeWise. Mandating religious release time would apply to **ANY** religious program offered by **ANY** group and that is very concerning to AASB and local school boards.

[CHECK OUT THE FACTS ABOUT RELIGIOUS RELEASE TIME](#)

House Proposes \$192M in Tax Cuts

A four-bill tax cut package was introduced by **House Ways and Means Education Chairman Rep. Danny Garrett** Wednesday, and all were approved during a specially called committee meeting the next day. This legislative package is a priority for **House Speaker Rep. Nathaniel Ledbetter** and Republican leadership.

The tax cut package would reduce revenues to the Education Trust Fund (ETF) budget by an estimated \$186 million

This move coincides with legislative efforts to non-renew the overtime income tax exemption, which already is scheduled to sunset in June and has cost the state more than

\$300 million. Removing the overtime tax exemption would bring those revenues back into the ETF, potentially offsetting the negative fiscal impact of the proposed tax cuts on the education budget.

- **H.386:** State Grocery Tax Reduction
- **H.387:** Local Grocery Tax Reduction
- **H.388:** Increase Retiree Income Tax Exemption
- **H.389:** Increase Income Tax Deduction

The Legislature approved a 1% tax cut on groceries in 2023 bringing its sales tax rate to 3%. That legislation allowed for another 1% decrease in 2024 if revenue growth in the ETF was expected to be 3.5% or more in future budget years. Since revenue growth has flattened, the growth threshold has not yet been met. **H.386** would accelerate the grocery sales tax reduction by removing the revenue growth requirement, **Garrett** explained. ***The bill package will voted on by the full House when the Legislature reconvenes March 18***

HOUSE COMMITTEE ACTION

House Ways and Means Education

▶ CTE for Nonpublic School Students

H.61 (DuBose) - CTE for Nonpublic School Students - would grant nonpublic school students, such as home-school or private schools students, access to public school career and technical education (CTE) programs. The bill would also enable schools to receive average daily membership (ADM) for these non-traditional students. ***Favorable Report as amended***

House Education Policy

▶ High School Athletics

H.298 (Colvin) - High School Athletics and ELL - would restrict certain ELL students from being included in the average daily membership (ADM) of public K-12 schools for purposes of classifying a school for athletic competition. ***A public hearing was held on the bill. A committee vote will occur when lawmakers return from break.***

House County & Municipal Government

▶ Public Meeting Recordings

H.362 (Sells) - BOE Meetings - would require each local board of education and local governing body to record and publish open and public meetings. **AMENDMENT: Defined a meeting as the regularly scheduled business session of the local governing body or any special or emergency meeting which is authorized by law. It also requires the audio and video recording be available to view online no later than two business days after the adjournment of the meeting. Favorable Report as amended**

SENATE COMMITTEE ACTION

Senate Education Policy

▶ Vaccines, REACH Act

S.85 (Orr) - Child Vaccination Exemption - would specify a parent or guardian's written declaration to the local board is sufficient documentation for religious exemption from vaccine requirements. ***Favorable Report***

H.266 (Woods) - REACH Act - would codify an existing program between the State Department of Education (SDE) and the Alabama Community College System (ACCS) to offer a nontraditional high school diploma as an additional pathway for students 18 years or older who withdraw/drop out. A student withdrawing from high school and enrolling in a nontraditional high school diploma option program within one year would not be counted as a dropout in the graduation rate calculations of his or her high school on the State Report Card. ***Favorable Report***

HOUSE FLOOR ACTION

This bill received passage in the House:

H.96 (Robertson) - High School Signing Day - would require high schools to excuse students from class who participate in organized National Signing Day activities related to the acceptance of athletic scholarships, post-secondary school educational commitments, apprenticeship programs and military enlistments. The bill would require high schools to provide reasonable accommodations for those activities.

SENATE FLOOR ACTION

This bill received passage in the Senate:

S.199 (Figures) - Paid Parental Leave - Alabama K-12 Public School and State Employee Paid Parental Leave Act of 2025 would establish paid parental leave for both education and state employees. Female employees would be eligible for up to eight weeks and male employees up to two weeks of paid leave for their child's birth, stillbirth or miscarriage. Both male and female employees would be eligible for up to eight weeks of paid leave for the adoption of a child under three years old.

GONE TO GOVERNOR

The following bills have been transmitted and await signature:

S.59 (Chesteen) - Military Records for Proof of Immunization - would allow active duty military personnel to substitute military medical records of dependents as evidence of age-appropriate immunizations instead of the "Blue Card" at a public or private school.

H.102 (Ross) - Dual enrollment - would mandate dual enrollment courses, offered by community colleges and approved for dual credit by the SDE, be accessible to all eligible high school students through every local education agency.

Select Bill Introductions

S.211 (Hatcher) - School Bus Crimes - would require the local school superintendent or designee to report and pursue appropriate legal action through law enforcement relating to alleged school bus crimes and violations.

H.416 (Oliver) - Automatic External Defibrillators (AED) - would require AEDs be placed in school athletic venues and school-sponsored athletic events or practices.

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