

DeKalb Schools Legislative Update for School Board Meeting on May 11, 2026

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Dear DeKalb School Board:

The Governor has until May 12, 2026 to either sign or veto legislation passed by the General Assembly in this year's session. With two days to go, here is what we know so far as of Friday, May 8th.

General Background

The DeKalb School Board prior to 2026 General Assembly Session listed the following six priorities: **QBE funding and possible formula reform; CTAE funding; Mental Health funding; Early childhood literacy; School Safety and Security; and Expansion of the TRS retirement program** to include non-instructional staff.

In addition, the General Assembly considered multiple issues that affect K-12 education statewide this year. The most serious being **property tax reform**, originally a move to exempt some or all homestead property from local property taxes or restrict. There are others issues as well including sales tax holidays for school supplies, vaccination requirements, mandatory core mathematical instruction, mandatory instruction in cursive writing, enrollment procedures for foster care students.

Finally, there were three potential pieces of local DeKalb County focused pieces of legislation dealing with the makeup of the DeKalb School Board and its search for a permanent school superintendent.

Education Budget/Literacy/QBE/CTAE/Mental Health and Counseling Funding

FY27 Budget

The final FY27 budget includes the following key elements in education funding:

- The FY 2027 budget provides nearly \$100 million to support a statewide literacy initiative to improve reading outcomes for students in kindergarten through third grade. The budget includes \$70.4 million in newly appropriated funds for elementary school-based literacy coaches and \$18.4 million to realign Regional Education Service Agencies (RESA)-based literacy coaches to align with the purpose set forth the 'Georgia Early Literacy Act of 2026.'
- To improve student outcomes, the budget for the Department of Education also includes \$2.7 million to provide a onetime grant of \$15,000 to each school system to purchase vision and auditory screening equipment in order to provide annual screenings for students in kindergarten through third grade.
- HB 974 increases funds for the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) to carry out the requirements pursuant to the 'Georgia Early Literacy Act of 2026.' The \$2.4 million in new funds will support the review and recommendations of universal reading screeners; recommend high-quality instructional literacy materials in Pre-K through third grade; provide professional learning and development for current teachers, literacy coaches, and administrators; and establish a new director of literacy. HB 974 also provides \$527,966 for the Professional Standards Commission (PSC) to hire four additional program specialists to support the responsibilities outlined in the Act.
- The Fiscal Year 2027 budget fully funds the Quality Basic Education (QBE) program, totaling \$14.9 billion in state funds. HB 974 includes \$11.7 million to provide for enrollment changes and training and experience, \$40.3 million for growth in the State Commission Charter School supplements, \$500,000 to begin planning the next State Completion Special School in middle Georgia, and an additional \$5.5 million for the Special Needs Scholarship.

- The budget appropriates \$1 million to the Department of Education Nutrition program and \$1 million to the Department of Human Services to begin the implementation of SUN Bucks, a new summer nutrition program for economically disadvantaged students. This total funding of \$2 million will allow the state to draw down significant matching funds from the United States Department of Agriculture to help with administrative costs of the program. This effort is in addition to the Happy Helpings program administered by the Department of Early Care and Learning that works with organizations to provide meals and snacks for eligible children over the summer.
- HB 974 includes \$38.2 million in additional funding for pupil transportation based on updated buses and mileage, an 10% increase over FY 2026 funding. The budget also recognizes \$26 million in unutilized funds from the Amended Fiscal Year 2022 budget and Volkswagen Settlement funds to replace 262 out-of-cycle buses and retrofit 943 out-of-cycle diesel buses with a filtration system to promote interior air-quality mitigation. The total pupil transportation funding for operations is \$402.2 million in FY 2027.
- The Fiscal Year 2027 budget increases funds for mental health support grants by \$1.3 million to properly reflect school counts and increases social worker grants by \$1.6 million to help underserved districts who do not have a social worker, bringing the total funding to \$4 million. The General Assembly also adds an additional \$2.5 million to the BOOST 2.0 program for statewide and community grantees to provide after school and summer programming, bringing the total appropriation to \$15 million.
- The Non-Quality Basic Education program includes \$1.4 million for sparsity grants for 141 qualified schools based on updated survey data. Schools that receive sparsity grants have a student population below the base school size, and do not generate an adequate amount of funds through QBE for proper staffing and operating ratios.
- HB 974 includes \$2.1 million in new funding in Agriculture Education to support extended day and extended year programs, revitalize and repair FFA and youth camps, and fund support staff for direct student services.
- In the Technology and Career Education program, the FY 2027 budget includes \$1.6 million for high-demand equipment and heavy equipment grants for new and expanding career and technical education labs to support high demand careers, as well as \$1 million for an artificial intelligence and coding literacy program.
- HB 974 includes an additional \$500,000 to meet the annual need for college preparatory exams based on increased utilization. Currently, the state funds PSAT exams for all tenth-grade students, one AP/IB exam for free and reduced-price lunch students, and one AP/IB STEM exam for any student. On average, 180,000 students take an AP or PSAT exam each year.
- The FY 2027 budget includes three new positions within the Department of Education's Business and Finance Administration and Central Office programs. These positions will help staff deal with increased workloads, support financial health of districts, and support districts in reducing the issue of chronic absenteeism.
- HB 974 reduces the governor's recommended increase for the State Health Benefit Plan (SHBP) employer contribution per-member-per-month (PMPM) rate from \$2,028 to \$1,935. The Conference Committee increase of \$50 PMPM, rather than \$143 PMPM, in addition to a direct appropriation of \$31 million in the Department of Community Health SHBP program helps the plan address the unfunded liability of future retirees, while putting less strain on local school system budgets.
- The FY 2027 budget provides \$9.7 million to the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) to support the expansion of the extended day program for the Pre-K priority group. This addition fully funds extended day services with lottery funds, providing aftercare and school holiday care for 2,448 Pre-K students. This budget transaction frees up \$9.7 million in federal funds to expand the Child and Parent Services (CAPS) program to an additional 1,288 children.

- In addition, HB 974 includes \$700,000 for DECAL, along with the recognition of \$881,000 in existing funds to expand the rising Pre-K program by adding 50 new classes.
- The Fiscal Year 2027 budget also includes nearly \$4 million in new funds and \$5.7 million in existing funds to provide five days of leave for Pre-K lead and assistant teachers.

Status: The Governor is expected to sign the FY27 budget by May 12th and he may exercise his ability to line item veto certain appropriations; however, he is unlikely to veto issues dealing with public education.

Amending the QBE formula

A proposal to set up a study committee to review revising the out of date QBE formula failed to pass in the closing ours of the General Assembly. However, House Education Chair Chris Erwin has vowed to work on an overhaul as part of his standing committee. Stay tuned.

Early Childhood and Literacy

As noted above, the FY27 Budget includes significant funding for an expanded student literacy program at the K-3 level. The following bill is the enabling legislation for the literacy issue:

HB 1193 – Georgia Early Literacy Act of 2026 -- sponsored by Chairman Chris Erwin, Speaker Jon Burns, and Appropriations Chair Matt Hatchett was filed this past week. It is a continuation of Speaker Burn's initiative on early education and literacy. The bill does the following:

- Reduces the age for assessing student literacy from seven to five years
- Mandates full day kindergarten for all students unless the student is assessed to be ready to move up to first grade
- All children will be assessed for readiness to move up to first grade and if a student is assessed to be at risk for attaining grade level reading proficiency, the school shall develop a tiered reading education plan for the student
- Creates funding for literacy coaches in all Georgia K-3 school programs. Each K-3 elementary school shall be entitled to one full time literacy coach

Status: Bill has been signed by the Governor.

School Safety and Security

HB 1023, was originally sponsored by House Majority Leader Chuck Efstration, Speaker Jon Burns, and House Education Chair Chris Erwin, it provided for the following:

- Requires the use by all schools of weapon detection systems at points of entry for everyone entering a school.
- This bill would have gone into effect on July 1, 2027.

Outcome: Failed to Pass. The bill passed the House before Crossover Day but faced concerns in the Senate over issues of funding and practical implementation. It was tabled in the Senate on March 31st but the language in the bill was then attached to **HB 1396** on the last day in the session. It narrowly passed the House but was not taken up again in the Senate in the closing ours. Therefore, it is dead for another year.

Expansion of TRS Retirement Program

SB 209, Sponsored by Republican Sen. Russ Goodman, would have permitted Public School Employees Retirement System (PSERS) employees to make a one-time irrevocable decision to join TRS. For employees to have this option, the local school district had to “opt in” to the program.

Outcome: Failed to Pass. The Senate Retirement Committee voted the bill out on Tuesday, March 3rd and the Rules Committee voted to allow it to be considered on Crossover Day. Unfortunately, however, SB209 was one of about two dozen Senate bills that were eligible but not brought up for a vote and faced some opposition from Senate Finance Chair Chuck Huffstetler. We have, however, talked with both the bill sponsor and Senate Retirement Chair Rick Williams and they are willing to help with passage next session.

Other Legislation

Tax and Revenue Issues

This year’s fight for property tax reform championed by Speaker Jon Burns took a very tortured path to final passage and there remains serious legal and constitutional questions moving forward.

HR 1114, HB 1116, SB 382, and – finally -- SB33. The two-House measures – **HR 1114 and HB 1116** -- were sponsored by House Ways and Means Chair Shaw Blackmon and Speaker Jon Burn, originally would have eliminated homestead property taxes in Georgia by 2032. The lost revenue would have been replaced by school districts with up to an additional 2% sales tax that could be utilized. A preliminary rough estimate by the DeKalb School District’s Office of the Chief Financial Officer Byron Schueneman, however, estimated that this could result in a revenue shortfall for the school district of between a \$100 to 150 million per year if not adjusted.

Due to these concerns from DeKalb Schools and other local governments, HB 1116 was rolled out on Crossover Day evening with a scaled back proposal. It merely sought to restrain rather than eliminate property taxes. It capped annual increases at the greater of 3% or the rate of inflation under the federal Consumer Price Index. Since it is a bill and not a constitutional amendment, it passed the House with a 98-68 margin. In the Senate, it was watered down further before passage, but the House rejected the Senate version and failed to pass.

SB 382, originally sponsored by Senator Chuck Huffstetler and most of the Senate Republican Caucus, initially removed from local governments the ability to opt out of the statewide property tax caps passed in 2024 by preventing local governments from opting out of the assessment limits. While it passed the Senate intact, it was stripped out in the House Ways and Means and replaced with the House version. In the end, it did not reach the House floor and died.

SB 33, sponsored by Senator Kay Kirkpatrick, was originally a bill dealing with hemp regulation in Georgia, and it passed both the Senate and the House in that form. However, after the House passed a slightly different version of the bill and it was returned to the Senate, the Senate in the last hour of Day 40, stripped out the hemp language entirely and replaced it with compromise property tax reform language. The final version of the bill opts all local governments into HB 541 from the 2024 session, establishing a property tax cap of 3% or CPI for all local governments including school boards. The bill includes some provisions that are more favorable to schools such as raising the maximum allowable balance in reserve funds from 15% to 25%.

Status: While HB 1116 and SB 382 did not pass, SB 33 Passed. The Governor's office has announced that he will sign the bill before May 12th; however, there is a serious constitutional question because in the final back and forth on the last day of the session, SB 33 originated in the Senate and under the state constitution, revenue and tax bills are required to originate in the House.

Miscellaneous Education Bills That Have Passed both Chambers and have been sent to the Governor for his consideration.

HB 907, sponsored by Speaker Pro Tem Jan Jones, concerns special completion schools and requires certain local school systems to either be a party to a collaborative operating agreement with a completion special school or provide certain education programs and services to students in grades nine through 12. The bill requires local school systems to provide to completion special schools the contact information for students who stop attending or withdraw from the local school system, subject to conditions and exceptions.

Status: Signed by the Governor.

HB 1123, Sponsored by Speaker Pro Tem Jan Jones, requires schools that offer after-school programs to make such programs available to pre-kindergarten students on the same basis as the school's other students.

Status: Signed by the Governor.

HB 1293, sponsored by House Speaker Pro Tem Jan Jones, revises Georgia's Dual Achievement Program by establishing "completion special schools" that allow eligible 16- and 17-year-old students in designated attendance zones to pursue a high school diploma while completing technical college coursework and workforce credentials. The bill also requires the State Board of Education to develop policies supporting student re-enrollment and wraparound services and directs the creation of a new funding formula beginning in FY 2028 to support the program and participating students.

Status: Signed by the Governor.

HB 1009, Sponsored by Representative Scott Hilton, extends the ban of cell phones to grades 9-12.

Status: Signed by the Governor.

HB 1030, sponsored by Republican Rep. Sandy Donatucci and co-sponsored by Speaker Pro Tem Jan Jones and House Education Chair Chris Erwin, would require mandatory core mathematical instructional time each week of at least 300 minutes for all students in grades four and five and offer advanced mathematic courses for middle and high school. To give the State Department of Education time to formulate the necessary regulations, the effective date is July 1, 2027.

Status: Signed by the Governor.

SB 523, sponsored by Senator Russ Goodman, requires the Department of Education to establish a state-wide K-12 Title VI Coordinator and authorizes withholding of funds for noncompliance. The bill in its present form covers any discrimination in law. The bill allows local school districts to use their local policy

to govern the complaint process. This would allow the complainant to use the process at the district level, state level, and federal level. If a school does not comply, then the State Board of Education can take corrective action, including withholding a portion of state funds.

Status: Signed by the Governor.

HB 1164, sponsored by Representative Will Wade. The Georgia School Board Association provided the following summary: [The bill] “requires the State Board of Education to establish an audit committee; mandates annual audits for all school systems and state charter schools; requires superintendents, chief financial officers, and school board chairs to certify that payments to the State Health Benefits Plan, the Teachers Retirement System of Georgia, the Georgia Public School Employees Retirement System, and the Department of Labor are current; and instructs the Department of Audits and Accounts (DOAA) to implement a progress monitoring and intervention program for local school systems and state charter schools, including a four-tier risk assessment model. Tier 1 is for “fiscally sound,” Tier 2 is for “fiscal watch,” Tier 3 is for “fiscal distress,” and Tier 4 is for “critical fiscal emergency.” The State Board may amend or revoke flexibility contracts under the progress monitoring and intervention program. “

Status: Pending. It has not been signed by the Governor.

SB 472, sponsored by Senate Education Chair Billy Hickman, provide for the suspension of members of local boards of education following certain audit findings or findings by the state auditor of financial mismanagement or misconduct.

Status: Pending. It has not been signed by the Governor.

HB 1284, Sponsored by Representative Deborah Silcox, provides for the awarding of high school diplomas to high school students who are at the end of life.

Status: Signed by the Governor.

SB 431, sponsored by Republican senator Kay Kirkpatrick, would require a foster care student be enrolled within two days of a request by the parent, foster parent, or legal guardian of the student.

Status: Pending. It has not been signed by the Governor.

SB 552, sponsored by Senator Ben Watson, is known as the “True Patriotism and Universal Student Access (TPUSA) Act,” allows students in Georgia public schools to participate in political and philosophical activities during noninstructional time and to form both partisan and nonpartisan student groups with equal access to school facilities. The bill also prohibits schools from discriminating against students based on the content of their speech in limited open forums while allowing political expression through clothing and accessories, provided it does not disrupt school operations, with the law taking effect July 1, 2026.

Status: Pending. It has not been signed by the Governor.

SB 589, sponsored by Senate Rules Chair Matt Brass and Co-Sponsored by Senate Education Chair Billy Hickman, revises eligibility for Georgia’s voluntary pre-kindergarten program by allowing any child who turns four or five years old by September 1 to enroll if requested by a parent or guardian. The bill also

clarifies that children may only participate in the program for one year and requires that four- and five-year-old applicants be treated equally when seats are allocated beginning with the 2026–2027 school year.

Status: Pending. It has not been signed by the Governor.

HB 651, sponsored by Representative Alan Powell in the House and Senator Randy Robertson in the Senate, deals with speed cameras in school zones and is the subject to a tug of war between the House and the Senate. Both versions set out times that the speed cameras may operate and proper notice to drivers, but the Senate version also requires a referendum taking place before they can be utilized.

Status: Pending. It has not been signed by the Governor.

HB 1409, Sponsored by Representative Beth Camp, requires the creation of a secure web site by the Georgia Department of Family and Children Services for mandatory reporters to report child abuse. The effective date is July 1, 2027.

Status: Pending. It has not been signed by the Governor.

SB 150, Sponsored by Senate Education Committee Chair Billy Hickman, permits retired teachers in high demand skill areas to return to work without endangering their retirement benefits.

Status: Signed the Governor.

HB 328, sponsored by Representative Kasey Carpenter was amended by the House on Day 40 to include several bills, including but not limited to HB 1220 and HB 1259. It increases the cap for tax credits for donations to Student Scholarship Organizations from \$120 million to \$150 million, expands the eligibility for students scholarships with special needs, limits the ability of virtual schools to accept students from out of district, and increases the cap for the Peach State Tax Credit to \$25 million.

Status: Pending. It has not been signed by the Governor.

Local Legislation

General Background

Local legislation is legislation that only applies to one local jurisdiction in the state – county, municipal, or school board. For it to be considered, it must have the support of the local delegations in both the House and Senate. In addition, unlike measures that have a statewide impact, local legislation is not subject to the Crossover Day Rule mentioned previously.

Local Legislation

Senator Emanuel Jones is in his last legislation session and is also running for Congress. Nevertheless, he filed two pieces of local legislation that impact the DeKalb School System.

SB 578 is a proposed remaking of the DeKalb School Board. The bill proposes a DeKalb School Board made up of six District Board Members and a Board Chair elected countywide.

Outcome: Failed to Pass.

SB 560 creates “guardrails” in terms of transparency and due diligence requirements for the Board to follow in its selection of a new permanent School Superintendent.

Outcome: Failed to Pass.

HB 1561, sponsored by Rep. Karla Drenner, statutorily requires an independent investigation by a third party that includes a “comprehensive background” investigation with criminal background checks, independent verification of all education and employment history, professional licenses, and certificates, consumer background check, review all complaints, and review of the candidate’s social media.

Outcome: Failed to Pass. Rep. Drenner has indicated that her bill is intended to open a dialogue between the Board and the Delegation with the hope that the Board will voluntarily agree to many of the requirements in HB 1561.

If you have any specific questions or concerns. Please let us know.

Edward Lindsey & Thurbert Baker

