

Under the Gold Dome



District 149 — Education Update — 2018



It is hard to believe that Summer break has come to close and our Georgia students are heading back to school. As your Representative, I have always worked hard in protection and support of Georgia's educational systems. It is imperative that they receive the support they need from the state level. Education is a primary component to the success of Georgia's growth. It is, by far, the best tool we have in recruiting new industry, ensuring that we offer a competitive and prepared work force.

While many enjoyed the slower pace that Summer brings, Georgia government has been in full swing. July 1 brought the start of our new Fiscal Year and also marks the day when most laws passed in the previous session go into effect. Although we review hundreds of bills, education is always a top priority for the General Assembly. Over the last few years, we have seen bills go into effect which revised teacher evaluations, incentivized STEM courses for students, lessened state mandated testing requirements, and a bill which eased the process for the creation of college and career academies.

This year, efforts to improve our school systems remained at the forefront of session, as once again we allocated over half the state's budget towards education initiatives. See below a quick review of bills aimed towards the improvement of our Georgia school systems!

Quality Basic Education Funding

For the first time in over a decade, the Quality Basic Education (QBE) was fully funded. The QBE Act establishes a formula to determine the cost per student for each of 19 general programs, based on the type of instruction for each student. The cost of each program is calculated through a series of "building blocks" for the various components of the total cost, such as the salary and benefits for the classroom teacher; the cost of textbooks and instructional materials; the cost of utilities and maintenance; and allocations for specialists, instructional support, and administrative expenses at the school and system levels.

Student Scholarship Organization Tax Credit

House Bill 217 raises the annual cap on state income tax credits for donations to an approved student scholarship organization from \$58 million to \$100 million. The program allows taxpayers to receive a dollar for dollar tax credit on their state income tax return.

Charter Schools and Needs-Based Scholarships

House Bill 787 provides additional funding and flexibility for our state charter schools. State supplements provided to charter schools will be changed from a calculation based on the lowest five school systems, to the state-wide average of all school systems. The bill also establishes a grant program, that will be used to replicate high-performing state charter schools. Grants would primarily be provided for schools serving rural areas, special needs students and economically-disadvantaged students.

Free Speech Policy

Senate Bill 339 requires the Board of Regents to develop a free speech policy to be implemented across the University System of Georgia. This bill outlines seven principles that the board shall address when adopting policies regarding free speech. The bill also requires the board to establish disciplinary sanctions for anyone under the jurisdiction of any state institution who has violated the board's policies on free speech.

School Security Study Committee

House Resolution 1414 was introduced in response to the number of recent school shootings across the nation. This resolution creates a study committee to explore what is needed to provide more school security while facilitating life-saving procedure responses. The committee will continue to meet for the remainder of the year, turning in their full report to the General Assembly for review in December. This committee will also determine what legislation, if any, will be brought forward regarding mandated school security procedures moving forward.

As your Representative, I will continue to support policies to protect the interests of our Georgia school systems. Thank you to all who serve in education and the valuable role you play in making sure our Georgia students are prepared for the future. Our state's economic health is a direct result by the difference and sacrifice you make daily! As always, if you have questions or concerns regarding education legislation or anything at all- please reach out at any time. Thank you for allowing me to serve as your voice under the Gold Dome as it is my absolute pleasure to do so. May God bless each of you and may he continue to bless the great state of Georgia!