

2010 GSSA REPORT FROM THE CAPITOL

BUDGET NOTES FROM FY2010 AMENDED AND FY2011

BUDGETS:

Angst over declining state revenues (and, thus, their impact on all facets of the state budget) was the primary reason for the extraordinary length of the 2010 session of the Georgia General Assembly. In the end, even when lawmakers adjourned in late April, there was fear that neither the FY2010 Amended Budget nor the FY2011 Budget could be funded at the levels they had approved. That fear proved to be accurate, as adjustments to both budgets continued right up until the June 30, 2010, end of the fiscal year, and more changes appear to be on the horizon.

Massive cuts to some programs (and, the total elimination of others) were the order of the day in both budget documents. In the FY2010 Amended Budget, the following occurred:

- Funds in virtually all categories were reduced to reflect the six furlough days for educators that had been recommended by the Governor. [Editor's note: Even though the money for the furlough days was not openly mentioned in the FY2011 Budget, the cut was still present.]
- Many line item programs in the Department of Education portion of the budget were reduced across the board by 4% (e.g., Agriculture Education, DOE Central Office, Communities in Schools, RESA's, etc.), while some were spared (e.g., Charter Schools).
- Monies for many formula grants (e.g., sparsity, Georgia Special Needs Scholarships, Residential Treatment Centers) were reduced.
- Bus replacement funds were completely eliminated from the state's transportation formula, and \$25 million in bond funds were substituted in both the FY2010 Amended and the FY2011 budgets.
- The already underfunded equalization grant program was targeted by the Governor for an additional mid-year cut of \$17 million, but the General Assembly disagreed and restored the money. [Editor's note: Continued attempts by the Governor to alter the method of calculation of the grants associated with this program were rebuffed by the General Assembly.]
- The amount deducted for local five mill share was allowed to remain static, even though the amount exceeded the statutory limit of 20%.
- Some \$92 million was actually *added* to the budget to cover enrollment growth in the state, but that amount was dwarfed by additional austerity cuts. By June 30, 2010, austerity cuts for the year totaled \$1.355 **BILLION** and were offset by some \$630 **MILLION** in federal ARRA funds. [Editor's note: These figures do not match those included in the FY2010 Amended Budget documents. Rather, they are final figures calculated after the Governor moved additional ARRA funds into the FY2010 Budget to handle state cash flow problems at the end of the fiscal year.]

In the FY2011 Budget, the cuts to various programs became clearer. In that bill, the following actions were taken:

- Funding for RESA's, which had been recommended by Governor Perdue for complete elimination, were partially restored (approximately 48%) by using funds from a variety of sources (math mentors, school improvement, etc.). In addition, the functions of the ETC's were "folded" into RESA's.
- Money for a number of activities (Spelling Bee, Science Olympiad, Academic Decathlon) was completely eliminated.
- Additional cuts were made to Communities in Schools, the Georgia Youth Science and Technology program, and the National Science Center Foundation.
- The popular Governor's Honors Program was continued, but only as a four-week activity (had formerly been a six-week session).
- The General Assembly recommended adding 1,700 slots to the Georgia Virtual School, but provided no additional funds and urged the use of "existing resources" to accomplish this task. In addition, the school improvement line in the budget was reduced by \$2.5 million.
- Funding for some testing was eliminated (1st and 2nd grade CRCT's, 3rd and 5th grade writing), and funding for other tests was reduced (AP and PSAT now only funded for students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunches).
- All monies previously appropriated to pay salary supplements to teachers who had earned the National Board certification were eliminated.
- Funds for the alternative sparsity grants were eliminated (approximately \$3 million spread over 170 systems), but the basic sparsity grant and migrant education programs were kept and funded.
- The Pupil Transportation line item was cut by an additional \$5 million, and the school nurse line was slashed by \$1.6 million, effectively transferring more of the responsibility of paying for those programs to local taxpayers.
- As in the FY2010 Amended Budget, this budget kept the local five mill share amount static (exceeding the statutory limit of 20%).
- \$100 million was added to the budget (applied against austerity cuts), but the total austerity line for FY2011 still exceeded **\$1.082 BILLION**. And, since the Governor had been forced to move some ARRA funds into FY2010 that had originally been slated for use in FY2011, only \$126 MILLION of that money remained to soften the blow.

The budget picture for FY2010 and for FY2011 can only be described as "horrible," and unless state revenues make a miraculous recovery (or, new revenue sources are found), the future for funding of public education (and, other government services) remains dim. When revenues do begin to recover, state lawmakers will be faced with many, many pressures from all corners of state government, and decisions about which state services to fund first will be difficult. As local school systems continue to face shorter school years, teacher furloughs, reduced services, etc., it becomes more and more difficult to see a light at the end of the budget tunnel. Perhaps the massive turnover in state leadership, both in the Governor's office and in the General Assembly will allow for the prospect of some "new thinking" and new ideas on how to handle the crisis.

LEGISLATION

HOUSE BILLS PASSED BY HOUSE AND SENATE AND NOT VETOED:

HB 23: Prohibit Use of Wireless Devices While Driving

SUMMARY: This bill amends Title 40 of the O.C.G.A. to prohibit the use of wireless telecommunication devices by persons under 18 years old while operating a motor vehicle.

HB 400: Building Resourceful Individuals to Develop Georgia's Economy Act (BRIDGE)

SUMMARY: This bill aims to improve the high school graduation rate and to improve preparedness for postsecondary education and careers by requiring individual graduation plans, providing a reform grant program (subject to appropriations) that will have requirements for participating school systems. It also provides for exemptions from certain portions of the GHSGT and EOCT's.

REQUIREMENTS:

- A score of advanced proficiency/honors on the GHSGT or EOCT's will be recognized as:
 - Meeting postsecondary entrance test requirements, and
 - Qualifying students to enroll in postsecondary course work offered by SBOE, the Board of Regents and the State Board of Technical and Adult Education.
- Credit can be awarded to such students for articulated or dual enrollment courses.
- Starting in the fall of 2010, 6-8 students must be provided a career education program and information to assist them in evaluating their academic skills and interests.
- By the end of 8th grade, an individualized graduation plan must be in place, written in conjunction with parents/guardians. The plans will be updated annually. They must include:
 - Rigorous core subjects, focused math and science courses, humanities, fine arts and foreign language or sequenced career pathway course work;
 - Incorporation of IEP, if applicable;
 - Aligned educational and broad career goals and student's course of study;
 - Reflection of student's selected academic and career focus as approved by parent/guardian;
 - Experience-based activities which may include internships, apprenticeships, mentoring, co-op education and service learning;
 - Opportunities for postsecondary studies through articulation, dual enrollment, and joint enrollment;
 - Flexibility for changes, but structure to meet graduation requirements and qualification to enter postsecondary education;
 - Approval of student and parent/guardian with counselor's or advisor's guidance.

- Subject to approval of the General Assembly, the SBOE will be required to establish a competitive grant program to reform chronically low-performing high schools. It must include programs and curricula that have proven to be effective for at-risk students and must focus on:
 - Identification of students at-risk for promotion or dropping out;
 - Keeping 9th graders in school with fewer failures;
 - Increasing reading and math skills by the end of 9th grade;
 - Assisting students and parents in preparing the graduation and career focused program of study;
 - Improving learning and applying study skills, coping skills, and other skills needed for successful adulthood.
- The at-risk model program must include:
 - Diagnostic academic assessments;
 - Process for identifying at-risk students that ensures no group is disproportionately represented;
 - An evaluation component.
- The at-risk model *may* include components aimed at successful ninth grade experiences:
 - Flexible schedules to allow more time studying reading and math;
 - Student-teacher ratios no higher than any other high school grade level;
 - Using experienced and effective teachers as leaders in teams;
 - Assigning students teacher mentors;
 - Utilizing mini-projects.
- The SBOE must pass rules and regulations for chronically low-performing high schools receiving a reform grant to focus on:
 - Setting high expectations for all;
 - Personalizing graduation plans for students;
 - Developing small learning communities or career academies;
 - Using project-based instruction;
 - Fostering collaboration among academic and career/tech teachers;
 - Implementing nontraditional scheduling for 9th graders behind in their grade level;
 - Promoting parental involvement;
 - Training teachers to work with at-risk students and their parents/guardians.

NOTE: There was no appropriation for the reform grants. The only portion of the law that will require immediate action is the career education program and individual graduation plans for students by the end of their 8th grade year.

HB 651: Sexual Offender Information from SDOE to LEA's

SUMMARY: This bill amends Code Section 42-1-12 of the O.C.G.A. to revise the requirement for the SDOE to send sex offender lists to each school system so that the department now simply provides *access* to the information for each system.

HB 905: QBE Capital Outlay Sunset Extension

SUMMARY: This bill amended Part 10 of Article 6 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 to embed and extend the sunset dates for the advanced funding, exceptional growth, and low-wealth capital outlay grants to June 30, 2015.

HB 906: Temporary Extension of Contract Deadlines

SUMMARY: This bill amended 20-2-211 of the GA Code to extend the deadline for notification of extension or non-renewal of elementary and secondary educators' contract to May 15 of school years 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013. The provisions of the bill will sunset at the end of the 2012-2013 school year.

HB 908: Temporary Suspension of Expenditure Controls, Class Sizes, Extra Instructional Days, and Salary Schedules with Sunset

SUMMARY: This bill amends Article 6 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 to temporarily waive expenditure controls relating to direct instruction, media center costs, staff and professional development costs and additional days of instruction. It also provides for temporary system average maximum class sizes in grades K-8 and blanket waivers for class size.

REQUIREMENTS:

- For 2009-2010, 2010-2011, 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 only, expenditure controls would be waived for direction instructional costs, media center costs, staff and professional development costs and additional days of instruction costs.
- Local school systems would have to report to the DOE their budgets and expenditures as a part of the fall and spring FTE counts.
- The preceding two items would expire July 1, 2013.
- For 2010-2011, 2011-2012, 2012-2013 the system average maximum class size would be the same as the individual maximum class size, and only the system average class size would have to be met if a SBOE blanket waiver were in effect.
- The SBOE could pass a blanket waiver on class size, but no individual class size waivers would be allowed.

HB 910: Gender Equity

SUMMARY: This bill amends 20-2-315 of the GA Code to require the SDOE to publish an annual report of local school systems to include expenditures and participation rates for each gender and other such information as the department would deem relevant (removes the requirement that DOE send the report to the General Assembly).

HB 923: Leadership Degree and Salary Schedule

SUMMARY: This bill amends Code Section 20-2-212 under QBE to revise the provision passed during the 2009 session that would prohibit educators who hold leadership degrees from being paid for that degree unless they are serving in a leadership position. It would add to the "grandfather" ranks:

- An educator with leadership degree earned prior to July 1, 2010, or

- An educator who *was enrolled in a leadership degree program on or before April 1, 2009* and who possessed:
 - A masters level leadership degree prior to July 1, 2012;
 - An education specialist level leadership degree prior to July 1, 2013; or
 - A doctoral level leadership degree prior to July 1, 2014.

HB 936: Refurbishing Buses

SUMMARY: This bill amends Code Section 20-2-188 to allow the replacement allowance to be spent to refurbish existing school buses. Any refurbished bus would be subject to all safety and maintenance requirements, and the refurbishing must be done by a school bus dealer or manufacturer.

HB 963: Returns of Taxable Real Property

SUMMARY: This bill amends Chapter 5 of Title 48 of the O.C.G.A. to remove the option of filing the return by mail. It must be filed by the owner or his/her agent or attorney. It also amends the section on elderly homeowner exemptions to change the eligibility to *net* income of the owner *and spouse*, and no longer includes the income of anyone else living in the house.

HB 977: QBE No State Money Used for Administrator Salary Increases

SUMMARY: This bill amends Article 6 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 to prohibit use of state dollars to provide a salary increase for a local superintendent or administrators during a year of education furloughs, and to require public hearings if local or private funds are to be used for such salary increases.

HB980: Boards and Bail Bond Business

SUMMARY: This bill amends Chapter 11 of Title 45 to remove any exceptions to board of education members and other elected officials operating bail bonds businesses.

HB 1013: Sales Tax for Education Revision

SUMMARY: This bill amends Part 2 of Article 3 of Chapter 8 of the O.C.G.A. to clarify language regarding the requirements of Section 48-8-122 to publish an annual report both in a newspaper of general circulation and on the Department of Audits' searchable web site regarding any 1% sales tax projects' status and any corrective actions, if needed.

HB 1079: Payment of Certification Fees

SUMMARY: This bill amends Code Section 20-2-200 of the O.C.G.A to allow payment for teacher certification fees by credit or debit cards.

HB 1086: Exempt Teacher Records from Open Records

SUMMARY: This bill would amend Code Section 50-19-72 of the O.C.G.A. to provide that certain personal information about teachers and employees of public and private schools would be exempt from disclosure.

REQUIREMENTS:

- Home e-mail addresses would be added to the list that already includes home address, home telephone number, social security number, and insurance or medical information.
- Public disclosure would also not be required regarding any information included in testing by the Professional Standards Commission that could impact the security of the test.

HB 1200: Donations for Field Trips

SUMMARY: This bill amends Article 3 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the O.C.G.A. to allow local boards of education to solicit and accept donations and gifts for the purposes of field trips and other educational purposes.

HB 1307: Temporarily Suspend PLU Requirements

SUMMARY: This bill amends Code Section 20-2-200 of the O.C.G.A. to temporarily suspend PLU requirements for certification renewal from July 1, 2010 through July 1, 2015. It also made adjustments to the requirement that educators demonstrate competency in using computers, an issue that has now been addressed more specifically by the Professional Standards Commission.

HB 1309: Synthetic Marijuana

SUMMARY: This bill amends Code Section 16-13-25 of the O.C.G.A. to add synthetic cannabinoids (synthetic marijuana) to the Schedule I controlled substances list.

HB 1405: Special Council on Tax Reform

SUMMARY: This bill would amend Title 28 of the O.C.G.A. to create the 2010 Special Council on Tax Reform and Fairness for Georgians and the Special Joint Committee on Georgia Revenue Structure.

REQUIREMENTS:

- The Special Council would conduct a thorough study of the state's current revenue structure and made a report of its findings and recommendations for legislation by January 10, 2011.
- The Special Joint Committee would be required to introduce legislation recommended by the Special Council without significant changes with the bill(s) going directly to the special joint committee.
- If a "do-pass" results, the bill(s) or resolution(s) would be considered only by the House as reported directly from the floor with no amendments.
- If passed by the House, the bill(s) or resolution(s) would go through the same process in the Senate.

SENATE BILLS PASSED BY THE SENATE AND HOUSE AND NOT VETOED:

SB 84: Provisions Regarding Local Boards of Education

SUMMARY: This bill amends Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the O.C.G.A. to address eligibility for election to local boards of education, to limit the size of local boards, to provide rules relating to per diem and expenses of LBOE members, to revise provisions regarding the secretary of the local board, to address a code of ethics for LBOE members, to provide for removal of LBOE members under certain circumstances, to address eligibility for appointment as a school superintendent, and to revise provisions for board training.

REQUIREMENTS:

- The bill added a requirement that a member who moves out of the district he/she represents, the member must provide notice of the move to the secretary of the LBOE and the election superintendent within 10 days of the move.
- It allows people who are employed by a private K-12 education institution to serve on a local board, but it retains the prohibition of a person to serve who is on a governing body of a private institution.
- It makes a person ineligible to serve on a local board or as the superintendent, or as a principal, assistant principal or central office staff member if that person has an immediate family member sitting on the LBOE. The exception is for those whose employment began on or after January 1, 2010 and LBOE members appointed or elected after July 1, 2009.
- The SBOE can grant waivers to school systems less than 2,800 FTE's in the fall of 2009 with certain public hearing and other requirements.
- It adds eligibility requirements for election to a LBOE:
 - Reading and understanding the code of ethics and conflict of interest provisions and agreeing to abide by them;
 - Disclosing annually compliance with required training, compliance with the code of ethics of the local board, and compliance with the conflict of interest provisions of the law.
- Candidates offering for election, or being appointed, on or after July 1, 2010, must file an affidavit to affirm compliance to the above requirements.
- LBOE's are limited to no more than 7 members, unless there is a local constitutional amendment or federal court order in effect prior to July 1, 2010. Should those conditions change, the law would then apply.
- Board members elected prior to July 1, 2010 receive a per diem of \$50.00 for attendance at meetings of the board and while meeting and traveling within or outside the state as a member of a committee of the board on official business authorized by the board, plus reimbursement for actual expenses. An exception is for boards who serve independent systems with an FTE of less than 4,000 and for whom no local act is passed. They may receive a per diem of no less than \$50 and no more than \$100.00.
- All such expenditures must be paid from local funds.

- Board members elected on or after July 1, 2010 will receive a per diem of \$50.00 for each day of attendance at a meeting plus reimbursement for actual expenses incurred in connection with the meeting. Board members of independent systems of less than 4,000 FTE's without local legislation may receive not less than \$50 and not more than \$100.00 per diem plus expenses incurred. The accounts for such service must be submitted to the superintendent and must be paid with local funds.
- The superintendent must serve as the secretary of the board and is responsible for having all official proceedings of the board recorded in a book open to public record.
- LBOE's are prohibited from micromanaging the superintendent in executing his/her duties; they may hold the superintendent accountable.
- LBOE members are prohibited from acting individually and are expected to operate as a team.
- No LBOE can delegate its policy-making functions.
- No LBOE member can use his/her position to secure privileges, advantages, or employment for him/herself or any family members.
- LBOE members must abstain from action on matters involving his/her financial interests or those of an immediate family member or a business in which he/she has an interest.
- No LBOE member can solicit or accept a gift or promise of employment for him/herself or family member or business interest in return for influencing the board's actions.
- No LBOE member can use his official position for securing financial gain for him/herself or family members or any business organization with which he/she is associated.
- No LBOE member or business organization with which he/she is associated can represent any person or party other than the LBOE or local system in connection with any cause, proceeding, application or other matter pending before the system.
- LBOE members can make inquiries on behalf of a constituent if no fee, reward, or anything else of value is promised or given to him/herself or a family member.
- No LBOE member can disclose or discuss any information which is subject to attorney-client privilege belonging to the LBOE except to other board members, the board attorney, the superintendent, or designees of the superintendent unless the privilege has been waived by a majority vote of the whole board.
- No LBOE member can also be an officer of any organization that sells goods or services to that system, except as provided by law and excluding nonprofits.
- No LBOE member will be held liable if by reason of his/her participation in any matter requiring a vote if no material or monetary gain accrues to him/her as a member of any profession, occupation or group beyond what is normally expected.
- A LBOE can sanction a member elected or appointed after July 1, 2010 who violates the conflict of interest position outlined above under specified conditions.
- The SBOE is required to adopt a model code of ethics for members of a LBOE by October 1, 2010, to include appropriate consequences for violation.
- All LBOE's must adopt a code of ethics that includes as a minimum the contents of the SBOE model within 3 months of the SBOE's adoption.

- On or after July 1, 2010, if a local system or school is placed on the level of accreditation immediately preceding loss of accreditation for school board governance reasons, the SBOE must conduct a hearing within 30 days and recommend to the Governor whether or not to suspend all eligible members of the LBOE with pay. The Governor could suspend all members and, in consultation with the SBOE, appoint temporary replacements.
- A replaced LBOE member could petition the Governor for reinstatement after 30 days have passed and before 60 days. If no petition is filed within the time limit, the temporary appointment becomes permanent for the remainder of the term.
- Upon petition for replacement, the Governor will hold a hearing with required procedures and make a decision regarding further service of the petitioner.
- The SBOE must adopt a training program for members of LBOE's by July 1, 2011, and within 3 months of its adoption, all LBOE's must adopt a training program to include at a minimum the SBOE's program to include per diem and expenses paid for participation.

SB 250: Disruption of Schools and Bullying

SUMMARY: This bill amends Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the O.C.G.A. to clarify the definition of "bullying" and to add requirements.

REQUIREMENTS:

- "Bullying" is to include "an act which occurs on school property, on school vehicles, at designated school bus stops, or a school related functions or activities" and adds digital actions to the definition.
- It adds references to the code regarding substantial physical harm or visible bodily harm.
- It includes having an "effect of substantially interfering with a student's education", and
- It includes an act that is so "severe, persistent or pervasive that it creates an intimidating or threatening educational environment", or
- It has the effect of substantially disrupting the orderly operation of the school.
- All LBOE's must adopt a policy to prohibit bullying in grade K-12, not just 6-12, and that policy must be in the student conduct code for all grades.
- As determined by a hearing officer or tribunal, upon a student's 3rd offense for bullying in grades 6-12, he/she must be assigned to an alternative school setting.
- Every LBOE must have a procedure for informing a parent/guardian that a student has committed or been a victim of bullying.
- Notification of the prohibiting of bullying must be posted at each school and included in student and parent handbooks.
- By January 1, 2011 the DOE must develop a model policy regarding bullying and post it on their web site to include:
 - A statement prohibiting bullying;
 - A requirement for employees to report bullying immediately to the principal;
 - A requirement for immediate investigation to determine if bullying occurred;
 - An age-appropriate range of consequences;
 - A procedure for bullying to be reported in person or anonymously; and,

- A statement prohibiting retaliation for reporting;
- The DOE must post on its website information regarding anti-bullying training and materials.
- A reporter of bullying will be immune from civil liability.
- LEA's will not have to provide transportation to a student transferred to another school as a result of bullying.
- The bill also adds "knowingly, intentionally, or recklessly" to the prohibition of interfering with the operation of any school, school bus, or public school bus stop.

SB 299: Zero Tolerance on Weapons Policies

SUMMARY: This bill would amend Parts 5 and 7 of Article I of Chapter 11 of Title 15 to remove the carrying or possession of a weapon by a child 13 to 17 years of age as a designated felony unless it is a second or subsequent incident, or is a first violation if it also occurs in an assault and includes firearms as defined in the law, as well as machine guns. [Note: Passage of this bill was thought by some to be a prohibition against "zero tolerance" policies in schools. In fact, the bill only addresses the juvenile code and provides direction for juvenile judges. Its passage may ultimately *influence* the aforementioned school policies, but it has not direct statutory effect.]

SB 308: Firearms

SUMMARY: This bill would amend Title 16 to, among other things, allow schools the authority to permit certain persons to possess a handgun under certain conditions and to allow handguns in parks, historical sites or recreational areas (where school children often visit on field trips).

REQUIREMENTS:

- A person who carries a handgun inside a school would be guilty of a misdemeanor.
- Weapons are allowed for exhibits in a legal proceeding [no mention of disciplinary hearings].
- Weapons in a locked compartment of a motor vehicle or in a locked container or a locked firearms rack on a motor vehicle in a school's parking lot are allowed.
- Weapons in a vehicle passing through a designated school zone are allowed.
- A School Safety Zone is limited to the campus itself, and the 1,000 foot perimeter currently in the law would be eliminated.
- A person has to be 21 years old and meet specific requirements to get a license, and possession of a weapon without a license is an automatic violation if the license is not on the person at the time the weapon is carried.

SB 319: Textbook Definition to Include Software/Hardware

SUMMARY: This bill amends Article 19 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the O.C.G.A. to provide that the definition of "textbook" include computer hardware, software and technical equipment necessary to support such material. It also designates to the SBOE the authority to allow local superintendents to choose between textbooks and digital content.

SB 340: Reporting System for HOPE Eligibility

SUMMARY: This bill would amend Part 3 of Article 6 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the O.C.G.A. to require public and private high schools to adopt a prescribed reporting system for 9th—11th graders to determine HOPE eligibility. The law will go into effect for the school year beginning after May 1, 2011.

REQUIREMENTS:

- An electronic transcript for *every student* that includes the total record of his/her high school career, including all test grades would have to be submitted to the GA Student Finance Commission
- The GSFC would calculate the GPA for a potential HOPE by the actual grade earned with no weighting or addition of points by the school.
- The GSFC would be responsible for notifying the students of their eligibility for the HOPE scholarships.

SB 341: GED HOPE Voucher for GA Residents Only

SUMMARY: This bill would amend Part 7 of Article 7 of Chapter 3 of Title 20 of the O.C.G.A. to require a person to be a Georgia resident to be eligible for a GED HOPE voucher when they complete a GED at a Georgia technical college.

SB 346: Comprehensive Revision of Ad Valorem Taxes

SUMMARY: This bill amends Title 48 of the O.C.G.A. to radically change ad valorem tax procedures.

REQUIREMENTS:

- If the Board of Assessors makes corrections or changes to a taxpayer's returns, they have to give him/her annual written notice of the changes.
- The notice adds to the existing requirements a note of any changes or corrections, including valuation increases or decreases or equalization.
- The notice can be delivered by electronic means, if the taxpayer so requests.
- It must include a statement that the data used to make the change is available to the taxpayer and must identify the person to contact for the information.
- It changes the time limit for an appeal from 30 days to 45 days.
- Within 10 business days of the notice, the taxpayer may request and will receive all documents used in making the assessment, the address and parcel ID number, and all factors considered in establishing the new assessment.
- A form for appeal must go out with the notice of changes with an estimate of the current year's taxes for all levying authorities.
- The notice must also contain the following statement in bold print: ***"The estimate of your ad valorem tax bill for the current year is based on the previous year's millage rate and the fair market value contained in this notice. The actual tax bill you receive may be more or less than this estimate. This estimate may not include all eligible exemptions."***
- The notice must be mailed by July 1 unless it is sent to correct errors or map changes.

- If returned as non-deliverable, the notice must be posted on the courthouse door or on the county web site.
- The state commissioner will establish by rules and regulations a uniform appeal form, and a taxpayer may file an appeal electronically if the board of tax assessors has a written policy to allow it.
- If at any point of an appeal an agreement of valuation is signed by the tax assessors' board and the taxpayer, the appeal is terminated.
- At the time of filing for an appeal, the taxpayer must select an option for superior court, arbitration, or a hearing officer for non-homestead property valued greater than \$1M.
- Uniform state-wide dates to send out the notices will be set by the state tax commissioner.
- Governments of 2 or more counties are allowed to establish regional boards of equalization to operate in the same manner as county boards.
- The Board of Equalization must render its decision at the conclusion of the hearing.
- The taxpayer or the board of tax assessors may appeal the case to the superior court.
- An oath in writing is required from each member of the Board of Assessors.
- The clerk of the superior court has oversight over and supervision of all boards of equalization of the county and hearing officers.
- If the final determination comes after August 1 and values the property lower than it appears on the notice, the taxpayers' subsequent tax bill will be reduced by that amount. If it is higher, the amount will be added to the next bill. If it is settled before August 1, the amounts are due as revised.
- Numerous provisions are cited related to the process for filing an appeal and the subsequent procedures of the board(s) in question.
- Annual training (online) is required for all new tax officials, and veteran officials have to be updated once every 5 years. No person is eligible to hear an appeal after January 1, 2011, unless the 40 hours of training is complete.
- The assessor cannot include value of any intangible assets used by a business.
- **Boards of education are added to the list of entities responsible for paying approved refunds.**
- The governing authority of each county or municipality may elect to receive any form of payment for ad valorem taxes.
- It specifies that the calculation of the "roll back rate" is the responsibility of the county tax commissioner or by the collecting officer of a municipality.
- It adds to the required publication at least one week prior to a hearing on a property tax increase:
 - Notice of all public hearings' date time and place;
 - The proposed millage rate;
 - The amount of increase;
 - A statement of what the millage rate would be at the roll back rate; and,
 - The proposed tax increase for an average home from the previous digest, as well as an average non homestead property.
- It specifies the size of the advertisement as no less than 30 square inches.
- It allows reasons for or explanations of the proposed tax increase.
- If the state tax commissioner determines that the levying authority has set a millage rate in excess of the rollback rate and has not fully complied with the law, the bill allows the commissioner to reject the digest and to refuse to issue an order to collect taxes.

SB 360: Caleb's Law/Prohibiting Texting While Driving

SUMMARY: This bill amends Title 40 of the O.C.G.A. to establish penalties for drivers under the age of 18 for “writing, sending, or reading a text based communication” or using a wireless communication device while operating a motor vehicle. Drivers 18 or older who hold a Class C license cannot use a wireless device to text. It allows the use of a ham radio or the use of other devices for communication through a headset.

SB 387: Career Counseling, 6-12

SUMMARY: This bill would amend Part 15 of Article 6 of Chapter 2 of the O.C.G.A., beginning in 2010-2011, to require the GSFC to provide career counseling and advisement for students in grades 6-12. It would also require a web-based resource for students in grades 8-12 to develop a graduation plan that would detail courses required for graduation and to transition to postsecondary education and the work force

SB 392: Certified Common Carriers

SUMMARY: This bill would amend Article 1 of Chapter 1 of Title 20 of the O.C.G.A. to require educational institutions to verify that motor or common or contract carriers are properly certified before contracting for the transportation of students. It would also amend Article 1 of Chapter 7 of Title 46 of the O.C.G.A. to require carriers transporting passengers for hire to provide proof of certification and insurance.

SB 427: Georgia Public Education Foundation

SUMMARY: This bill would amend Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the O.C.G.A. to establish the Georgia Foundation for Public Education.

SB: 457: Charter Clusters

SUMMARY: This bill would amend Code Section 20-2-2064 of the O.C.G.A. to allow local boards of education to act on a petition for a conversion charter school for a high school cluster, if approved by 60 percent of faculty and parents

SB 518: Study of Pledge of Allegiance

SUMMARY: This bill would amend Part 2 of Article 6 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the O.C.G.A. to require a study of the pledge of allegiance to the flag of the United States and Georgia flag as a part of required curriculum