



**Letter to the editor from**  
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**For Immediate Release**

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**Tax Proposals in the Upcoming Legislative Session**

This legislative year, there will be numerous tax plans proposed in the Georgia General Assembly promising tax reform. Be leery of the six second sound bite, which may be enticing, but at a closer look may be seriously and fatally flawed.

In some instances, what may appear as a tax cut is actually a tax shift. For some elderly who are already exempt from school taxes, some proposals would actually mean a tax increase.

The Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA) is on record as supporting comprehensive tax reform. GSBA supports the creation of a commission to truly study tax reform done right - thoughtfully and openly. Recommendations from the commission must be made with a clear and unbiased understanding of the economic and governance impact new or revised taxes could have on local communities.

We have made suggestions on tax reform to legislative study committees, including but not limited to, creating a sunset committee to review tax exemptions and freezing any new exemptions. We have met frequently with those state leaders who would listen and have attempted to meet with those who would not.

The 1.6 million children of Georgia currently enrolled in our public schools cannot vote but their voices must be heard. If we all remain silent or passive, then surely they will be short changed and we will be negligent in our responsibility to provide them with the best education possible.

For years, school systems have been faced with cuts in state funding, unfunded mandates at the State and Federal level, and underfunding of basic education program expenses.

To cite just a very few:

- Since local school systems have received no state funding for technology since 2002, local property taxes have paid for any local technology initiatives.

- The State has provided 28% of the cost of textbooks. Local property taxes pay for 72% of all textbooks used by students in our school systems. Some systems have delayed the purchase of textbooks because of lack of funds.
- The cost of purchasing buses, the fuel, drivers, etc., is funded primarily by local property taxes. The State pays only 28 % of these expenses; local communities pay 72%.

Many of the proposed tax initiatives aggravate an already dire situation where the proportion of State funds is shrinking and local dollars must make up the shortfall, or pay for needed programs. Some of these initiatives also threaten the way local dollars are used. For example, local dollars help pay for programs such as elementary art, music, foreign language and physical education and all teacher salary supplements and local professional development.

Finally, several years ago, Governor Perdue established a Task Force (IE2) under the capable leadership of businessman Dean Alford to define what excellence in public education looks like and how much should it cost. The Task Force is in the process of completing its work. How can there be serious discussion concerning funding public education and taxation until the General Assembly receives the funding recommendations from the Task Force?

If the ability to fund schools at the local level did not exist, and state and federal unfunded mandates continue as well as underfunding of programs, what course of action would local officials face when shortfalls in funding occur?

It is critical that you pay attention to what is being said and seriously study the issues. It is also important that you encourage your legislators to make wise decisions that could impact the education of Georgia's children for years to come.

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