

**2011 Legislative Positions
as approved by the 2010 GSBA Delegate Assembly
in Savannah, Georgia on June 11, 2010**

I. GOVERNANCE OF EDUCATION

A. Elections and Appointments

1.A.1 Selection of the Georgia Board of Education and State School Superintendent

GSBA supports the election by popular vote of State Board of Education members by Congressional District to serve a 4-year staggered term. GSBA further supports the appointment of the State School Superintendent by the elected State Board of Education.

1.A.2 Non-Partisan Elections for School Board Members

GSBA supports legislation calling for the non-partisan election of local school board members.

1.A.3 Board Member Vacancies (Amended language for Georgia Code 20-2-54.1)

GSBA urges that the language for Georgia Code 20-2-54.1 be amended as follows: (a) In all instances where local laws applicable to local boards of education do not provide otherwise, a vacancy occurring for any reason on a local board of education shall be filled as follows:

If the vacancy occurs more than 90 days prior to the date of the general election at which the board member's successor will be elected, then such vacancy shall be filled for the full term of office at the general election, and in this case, the remaining members of the board of education shall, by majority vote, select a qualified person to fill the vacancy until the duly elected successor takes office; and

If the vacancy occurs more than 90 days prior to the date of a general election which is not the election at which a successor would ordinarily be elected to a new full term of office, then a special election will be held on the same date as said general election to elect a successor to fill the unexpired term of office; and in this case, the remaining members of the board of education shall, by majority vote, select a qualified person to fill the vacancy until the person elected at such special election takes office; and

If the vacancy occurs within 90 days of the date of a general election which is not the election at which a successor would ordinarily be elected to a new full term of office, then the remaining members of the local board of education shall, by majority vote, select a qualified person to serve for the remainder of the unexpired term.

1.A.4 School Board Member Qualifications

GSBA actively opposes any legislation that infringes on or limits the Constitutional rights of citizens to run for the public office of School Board based on their association or relationship with family members or friends in their district.

B. Local Board Authority

1.B.1 Statutes Limiting School Board Constitutional Authority

GSBA opposes statutory legislative initiatives which would result in or have the effect of limiting authority or revenue potential of local school systems under state constitutional provisions such as local option sales taxes for capital improvements.

1.B.2 Non Public School Students - Access to Activities

GSBA opposes legislation or any State Board of Education rule which mandates access to public school programs, activities, facilities, or funding by non-enrolled students.

1.B.3 Sovereign Immunity

GSBA strongly urges the General Assembly not to pass legislation which would waive sovereign immunity of local school systems.

1.B.4 Parental Rights

GSBA supports existing parental rights as granted by state law, the Georgia constitution and federal statutes. GSBA does not endorse any legislative attempts which contravene the local board's authority and responsibility to manage student educational programs as now authorized by law.

1.B.5 Authority Over Curriculum

GSBA supports the concept that curriculum determination is the domain of state and local boards of education. GSBA thus encourages the General Assembly to resist legislative attempts to mandate curriculum.

1.B.6 Study Committee on Governance Issues

GSBA urges authorization of a legislative study committee to examine governance issues in Georgia public education, particularly concerning the impact of recent legislative and administrative changes upon the status of Georgia's constitutional requirement that "each school system shall be under the management and control of a board of education...."

1.B.7 Local Governance

GSBA urges opposition to legislative measures which would limit authority and autonomy of local school boards over personnel, financial, and facilities authority and management. Site based authority should be granted by the local school board and not legislated.

1.B.8 Authority Over Local Funds

GSBA urges the General Assembly to reject any attempts to usurp the authority of local boards to determine how local funds are allocated, and supports the repeal of the Classrooms First for Georgia Act that requires 65 per cent of federal, state, and local funds to be spent on a narrow definition of classroom instruction. In particular, expenditures for local salary supplements should remain the sole prerogative of local boards of education. Additionally, local boards must be able to accept grants and awards from philanthropic foundations and other organizations that support public education and have the flexibility to expend these funds for the purposes they were awarded.

1.B.9 Instructional Expenditure Control

GSBA supports flexibility and controls at the system level which permit transfer of funds among QBE programs.

1.B.10 Authority Over Furloughing

GSBA opposes any legislation that would put restrictions on school boards based on the level of reserve fund or ending fund balance.

1.B.11 School Councils

GSBA urges the General Assembly to allow school boards the flexibility to give permission for a school council to represent more than one school.

C. Capital Outlay

1.C.1 Uniform School Building Code

GSBA supports the establishment of a state uniform building code for public school facilities construction. Local school construction projects developed in accordance with the state uniform code should be exempt from application of any other state, county, district, or local building codes or ordinances and interpretations of such codes or ordinances; any related building inspection requirements; and any service availability fees claimed by local authorities.

1.C.2 Capital Outlay - Exceptional Growth

GSBA urges funding at the \$150 million level for capital outlay projects developed to accommodate “exceptional growth” needs of Georgia school systems. Exceptional growth is as defined by the General Assembly.

1.C.3 Capital Outlay - Regular Entitlements

GSBA urges continued funding at the \$200 million level for regular entitlement capital projects.

1.C.4 Lease Purchase Program

Many Georgia school districts find it necessary to finance building projects and equipment needs through innovative approaches, and in recognition of these situations, Georgia law authorizes local boards of education to use lease purchase programs for these purposes. GSBA therefore opposes any legislation that would prohibit or further restrict the use of lease purchase programs by local systems.

1.C.5 Pre-K

GSBA urges the State Department of Education, when establishing facility guidelines/regulations which include formulas, to recognize Pre-K classrooms as part of facility needs.

1.C.6 Facility Guidelines

GSBA urges the State Department of Education to revise facility guidelines/regulations to include additional classroom space to accommodate required lower teacher/pupil ratio and current programs including the use of technology. GSBA also urges the Georgia Department of Education to revise facility guidelines to more accurately reflect current building cost per square foot.

1.C.7 Waivers for Acreage

GSBA urges the General Assembly to provide waiver procedures of minimum acreage requirements by recognizing value and availability of property.

1.C.8 Capital Program Flexibility/Funding

GSBA urges revision of capital outlay program policies and funding to accommodate rapidly changing, diverse facility needs of local systems.

1.C.9 Community Housing Planning and Zoning Impact on Community Education

Capabilities/Goals

GSBA urges the General Assembly to enact legislation that would require State and Local governmental planning and zoning offices and boards to consider Local Boards of Educations' current instructional capabilities and facilities expansion plans (based on State funding) as a separate planning and zoning factor in all county/community/city housing development decisions.

1.C.10 Renovation and Modification of Schools

GSBA supports legislation, state board policy and adequate funding that would encourage the renovation and modification of structurally sound school facilities rather than the abandonment of such facilities.

1.C.11 – Capital Outlay for Educational Purposes

GSBA opposes legislation which would redefine statutory requirements for "capital outlay for educational purposes" to include expenditures for non-educationally related projects such as street, bridge, utility and similar improvements.

D. Choice

1.D.1 Public School Choice

GSBA believes that public school choice plans at the local school district level may under specified conditions promote equity, innovation, accountability, increased parental involvement and overall school improvement. Furthermore, GSBA believes that any choice option should include the same accountability requirements for the uniform education of all students. However, GSBA opposes state or federal legislation mandating choice, and feels that decisions regarding choice or alternative school programs involving public schools should be the responsibility of local boards of education.

1.D.2 Vouchers

GSBA is opposed to vouchers, tuition tax credits, or scholarships whose purpose is to allocate public funds to private schools or home study.

E. Contracts

1.E.1 Personnel Contracts for Non-certified Personnel

GSBA strongly opposes legislation which mandates issuing an employment contract to non-certified personnel.

1.E.2 Contracts for School Based Administrators

GSBA supports extending the time for tendering school-based administrators a new contract for the ensuing school year to May 30.

1.E.3 Department of Administrative Services (DOAS) Authority over State Department of Education's RFP's and Contracts

GSBA urges that the General Assembly create a legislative study committee to conduct an in depth study of DOAS state purchasing authority, particularly to determine: need to write legislation providing for an appeals process following a staff decision to void a state contract; cost to state when contracts are voided; impact on education program accountability and student learning; legal liability; and impact upon future vendor response to state RFP's.

F. Personnel

1.F.1 Local School Superintendents Employment

GSBA supports the right of the local board to determine the terms and conditions of employment of the local school superintendent.

1.F.2 Education Employees Salary and Benefits

GSBA recognizes the importance of salary and benefits programs which have the effect of attracting personnel qualified to carry out the various roles necessary to provide a quality education to all of Georgia's students. To that end, GSBA urges the General Assembly to undertake a study to determine the appropriateness of current personnel salaries, benefits such as social security, workers' compensation and Medicare, and retirement programs and other related issues. An important part of the study should be to determine current funding status and a recommended funding partnership between the State and local boards of education.

1.F.3 Annual Evaluation of Certificated Personnel

GSBA supports the requirement of a satisfactory annual written evaluation for all professional certificated personnel as a condition of eligibility for step increases on the state minimum salary schedule.

1.F.4 Minority Teacher Recruitment

GSBA urges legislative funding for new approaches to minority teacher preparation as it relates to teacher certification with educational certification, recruitment, and hiring in order to increase minority representation in the Georgia teaching force.

1.F.5 Teacher Induction and Mentor Programs

GSBA urges the General Assembly to fund teacher induction and mentor programs for first and second year teachers.

1.F.6 Accountability of Professional Leadership Positions

GSBA supports existing laws and Georgia Board of Education policies which enable local boards of education to expect and to require that persons in leadership positions be held accountable for implementing instructional programs and strategies which result in better learning opportunities for all students. Thus, GSBA is opposed to legislative initiatives which would diminish local boards' authority to establish the district's vision, to employ appropriate personnel, to evaluate the superintendent's performance, to require that superintendents implement effective recruitment and evaluation programs for all other personnel, and to discipline, non-renew or terminate during contract those personnel who cannot or will not perform at levels which are in the best interest of students.

1.F.7 Health Coverage For Board Members

GSBA supports the revision of the Georgia Code such that local boards of education can provide group medical insurance coverage for a member of the Board and the spouse and dependents of a member leaving office on or after December 31, 2006 provided that such Board member has served as a local board of education member for at least 12 years and such board member pays the entire cost of such coverage.

1.F.8 Compliance with Maximum Class Size Requirements

GSBA supports legislation that would prohibit the mandatory employment of additional personnel to meet maximum class requirements when:

- The class size did not exceed maximum size requirements on the 20th day of the school year.
- New students assigned to the class after the 20th day of a school year would not result in a class enrollment exceeding maximum class size by the greater of one (1) or 15% of maximum class size.

GSBA supports the use of paraprofessionals to meet maximum class size requirements with one (1) paraprofessional equaling 25% of a teacher.

II. THE STATE/LOCAL FUNDING PARTNERSHIP

A. Taxation

2.A.1 County Digest

GSBA supports legislation to require the revenue commissioner to disapprove county digests calculated at a ratio of less than 40 percent of fair market value.

2.A.2 Alternative Revenue Sources

GSBA supports an amendment to the Georgia Constitution to authorize the General Assembly to enact legislation that would allow local school systems to receive revenues from tax sources other than local property taxes, including but not limited to, a 1% local option sales tax (LOST) for general operations. Due to ever-increasing difficulty in obtaining land for school buildings, GSBA encourages the General Assembly to seek alternative funding formulas for the construction of smaller schools where land constrictions deem necessary.

2.A.3 Property Tax - Basic to Educational Funding

Maintenance of a sound tax structure is necessary to ensure adequate revenue generation to support and improve Georgia's schools. The property tax continues to represent stability in funding schools. GSBA supports retention of the current property taxing authority as the fundamental element in

education finances. However, the existing QBE funding formula, which is based upon the relative “wealth” of the various school districts, must not only consider average real estate property values, but also the average per capita income, percentage of students on free and reduced meals and the number of taxpayers who live near or below poverty income.

2.A.4 Development Impact Fees

GSBA urges the General Assembly to propose a constitutional amendment providing for impact fees for school purposes and to pass enabling legislation. GSBA supports local school boards’ authority to levy and collect development impact fees.

2.A.5 Road and Sales Tax Removal

GSBA urges the General Assembly to exempt local boards of education from paying sales tax on motor fuel.

2.A.6 Tax Commissioners or Tax Collectors Fee

GSBA urges the General Assembly to amend Georgia Code Section 48-5-404 to provide that the county tax commissioner or tax collector shall be entitled to a commission to reimburse the government authority for the cost of collecting school taxes, which shall not exceed the cost of collecting school taxes, as determined by multiplying the total cost of operating the tax commissioner or collector’s office during a calendar year by that percentage obtained when the amount of local school taxes collected during that year is divided by the total amount of local taxes collected. In no event shall the amount of reimbursement to the commissioner or tax collector exceed 2.5 percent of the amount of school taxes actually collected in any calendar year.

2.A.7 Study Committee on Local Five Mill Share

GSBA urges authorization of a legislative study committee to examine the impact of increased cost for the local five-mill share to those school systems experiencing growth in their equalized tax digest. The study should include factors that decrease actual mill revenue in order to calculate an adjustment which would reduce the amount of the local five mill share required to be paid by affected systems through resulting legislation. Such factors that may influence reduction in mill revenue include in part the methodology employed with the sales ratio study and approval of county tax digests at less than 40% of fair market value.

2.A.8 State Tax Policy

The GSBA urges the General Assembly to develop a state tax policy which addresses the continued erosion of the State Revenue Base through passage annually of tax exemptions from the sales and use of tax, income tax and other revenue producing state taxes. GSBA urges the General Assembly to annually publish a Tax Expenditure Report that lists all exemptions or credits currently authorized and their cost in potential revenues. GSBA further urges the General Assembly to place a moratorium upon subsequent introduction and passage of tax legislation which reduces the state revenue base until a tax policy can be adopted which responsibly considers the state’s revenue production potential and the state’s ability to adequately meet its funding obligations to each department of government.

2.A.9 Impact of Tax Legislation

GSBA urges the General Assembly to recognize the impact of proposed tax legislation on the state and local revenue base which may undermine state government services and public education. Specifically, the General Assembly is urged to defeat the following three initiatives should they arise:

1. Any resolution to eliminate local ad valorem property taxes for education and replace them with a sales and use tax.
2. Legislation such as the Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TABOR) which would severely limit the amount of tax revenue that state government could collect and spend.
3. Ad valorem tax assessment limitations - GSBA opposes limiting the rate of increase in the ad valorem tax mill rates and the property value to a certain percentage per year or to the rate of economic inflation or freeze property values at the purchase price.

2.A.10 SPLOST Autonomy

GSBA supports passage of a Constitutional Amendment changing current law requiring joint participation by county and independent school districts within a county for SPLOST authority and collection.

2.A.11 Tax Reform

The Georgia School Boards Association supports tax reform that is done right. GSBA believes that a Commission on Comprehensive Tax Reform should be convened to conduct a complete and open study of the implications of tax reform. Recommendations from the Commission should then in turn be based upon sound data and research that supports reform that will bring about a tax system that yields adequate funding, is fair, is stable, and is transparent.

2.A.12 Preferential Tax Treatment of Forest Land

GSBA urges the enactment of legislation to substantially reduce the amount of preferential tax treatment afforded large timber tracts under the Forest Land Protection Act.

B. Personnel Funding

2.B.1 Funding for Elementary and Middle School Counselors

GSBA supports additional funding for elementary and middle school counselors. Funding should be at a ratio of 1/400 for all grade levels.

2.B.2 Special Education Funding, Speech Pathology, Occupational and Physical Therapy

GSBA urges, through the QBE FTE funding formula, increased state funding for speech-language, occupational and physical therapy services for exceptional students. GSBA furthermore urges the Department of Medical Assistance to continue facilitating the reporting of special education children qualified under Medicaid for special services billable to DMA. The billed funds would be paid to the local board of education's general fund to compensate for locally paid services or to expand services as determined by the local board.

2.B.3 Funding of the School Health Nurse Program

GSBA supports full funding of the school health nurse program including, but not limited to, related costs such as benefits, medical supplies and equipment.

2.B.4 Professional and Staff Development

GSBA urges the General Assembly to fund professional and staff development at a level which will enable certified personnel to participate in approved professional development activities every five years in order to acquire needed job-related skills. GSBA urges all levels of government to recognize the significant role public schools must play in keeping America competitive in a high technology world. To do this, the legislature should allocate sufficient funds so that schools have the needed resources to strengthen math, reading, and science education and technology training.

2.B.5 Administrators

GSBA supports the allotment and funding of administrators at a ratio which ensures efficient, quality leadership for the advancement of education in the State of Georgia.

2.B.6 Sick and Personal Leave

GSBA supports increased funding of sick and personal leave by the state. Mandates of 45-day accumulation of sick leave, transfer of sick leave from system to system, and gross under funding of sick leave by the state annually create an increasing burden for local property tax payers.

2.B.7 Unemployment Compensation

GSBA supports funding of unemployment compensation for local school system employees on a 50-50 percent basis by state and local governments. The Association is also extremely concerned about the inequities in the unemployment compensation law and urges the General Assembly to study the law to determine a solution to the problems these inequities present for local boards.

2.B.8 School Bus Monitors

GSBA urges the General Assembly to fund monitors on school buses. The local school board should be authorized to determine the number of monitors needed and on which buses the monitors will be used.

2.B.9 Funding for Instructional Lead Teachers

GSBA urges the General Assembly to fund an instructional lead teacher program.

2.B.10 Funding for Instructional Technology Specialists

GSBA supports funding for school-based instructional technology specialists.

2.B.11 Additional Contract Days for Professional Development

GSBA urges the General Assembly to provide new state funds through the funding formula to add a minimum of four additional days to teachers' contracts for professional development.

2.B.12 Professional Development for Georgia Performance Standards

GSBA urges the state to fully fund the training and professional development needs associated with implementation of the Georgia Performance Standards. This should be a top state budget priority.

2.B.13 Personnel Funding - Secretaries, Teacher Aides and Accountant Positions

GSBA supports the adjustment of salaries for secretary, teacher aide and accountant positions in the QBE funding formula to more nearly reflect the actual cost of employing these persons.

2.B.14 – Funding for Personnel To Assist With Transitioning To New Curriculum

GSBA urges the General Assembly to enact legislation that would require funding of a “coach” to work directly with teachers for a smooth transition when a new curriculum is introduced.

C. Program Funding

2.C.1 Local Legislation

GSBA supports earlier and more specific notice requirements, including preparation of fiscal notes by appropriate state and local agencies, for introducing local legislation having revenue-significant impact on local school boards.

2.C.2 Weighted FTE Funding Basis

In order to ensure more funding from the state, GSBA supports legislative proposals which appropriate funds needed for a quality basic education on a weighted FTE student cost-basis.

2.C.3 State Lottery

GSBA supports on-going legislative efforts to ensure that lottery funds do not supplant funds that would be appropriated for education were not lottery funds available.

2.C.4 Desegregation Assistance

GSBA urges state support for desegregation efforts of local school systems by providing sufficient funds for these programs through the current state budget process and by identifying such programs as approved applications of monies generated through any future alternative revenue sources for education established by the General Assembly.

2.C.5 Technology Funding, Georgia Network for Educational and Therapeutic Support Services (G-NETS)

GSBA urges that G-NETS centers be included in the state technology grant program.

2.C.6 Funding of Non-Vocational Labs

GSBA supports restoration of the high school non-vocational lab program at a minimum FTE weight of 1.16.

2.C.7 Appropriation of Funds For Educational Resources

GSBA urges that state funds be appropriated in the QBE formula to cover actual costs for consumable materials and supplies, replacement of instructional equipment, textbooks, and media materials.

2.C.8 Middle School Funding

GSBA supports strong programming and funding support for the Middle School Program and Middle Grades Program.

2.C.9 Dual and Joint Enrollment Programs

GSBA urges the General Assembly to provide that a student who is enrolled in a joint enrollment program shall be counted for FTE reimbursement to the local school system for that portion of the day that the student attends the institution providing the program.

2.C.10 Funding for Textbooks

GSBA urges the General Assembly to sufficiently fund the actual cost of textbooks, including texts and instructional materials on-line and/or other electronic formats.

2.C.11 Training and Experience - Mid-Term Adjustment

GSBA urges the General Assembly to enact legislation that would allow for mid-term adjustment on the training and experience factor for calculation of system earnings for the most current year for which data is available. The General Assembly is further urged to enact legislation which provides for school systems to report training and experience on the certified personnel inventory annually in October and December to be calculated for funding in the mid term adjustment.

2.C.12 Georgia Network for Educational and Therapeutic Support Services (G-NETS)

GSBA urges that funding for the Georgia Network for Educational and Therapeutic Support Services (G-NETS) network be changed from a state grant to a per FTE earning formula basis.

2.C.13 Maintenance and Operation Funding

GSBA supports increased funding for maintenance and operation as part of the total cost of education in order that environments conducive to learning may be provided. There now exists a drastic difference in the level of state funding for M&O and actual cost to local school systems. This difference in funding level and cost causes increases in local property taxes, the only source of revenue most local boards have for this purpose.

2.C.14 Legislative Impact Statements

GSBA urges that any legislator or legislative committee proposing a bill in the General Assembly be required to attach a fiscal note detailing how consideration has been given to the bill's possible budgetary impact on local school districts and other governmental entities.

2.C.15 Unfunded State Requirements

GSBA believes that any program, project or requirement mandated by state government should be funded by the state in such a manner that operation or implementation of the mandate does not impose financial or other burdens on local school districts. Any such unfunded mandate proposed by legislation should not become law.

2.C.16 Transportation Reimbursement

GSBA urges the General Assembly to fund transportation costs for all students living one-half mile or more from the school.

2.C.17 QBE Program - Underfunding

GSBA urges necessary statutory and fiscal administrative policy changes be adopted and implemented, including any needed accounting or budget-control adjustments, to protect local school systems from state appropriations shortfalls.

2.C.18 State Appropriations

GSBA urges the General Assembly to restore funds by program in the Supplemental Budget and the General Appropriations Budget, which were reduced by austerity cuts.

2.C.19 Art, Music, Foreign Language and Physical Education

GSBA supports significant increases in state funding for art, music, foreign language and physical education programs in elementary and middle schools.

2.C.20 Alternative School Funding

GSBA urges the General Assembly to substantially increase state funding for alternative schools, especially to address expanded alternative school responsibilities in school reform legislation.

2.C.21 Erosion of Local Tax Base and Local Board Authority

GSBA urges the General Assembly to revisit and amend legislation approved during the 2006 Session of the General Assembly which further erodes local control and negatively impacts local systems' ability with which to comply and fund such mandates. Examples are: the system average maximum class sizes repealed in the Truth in Class Size legislation, the Classrooms First for Georgia Act (65% solution) and virtual charter school legislation (no provision for accurate funding, verification of resident students not home schooled, management company fees, teacher pupil ratio, accountability, etc.).

2.C.22 Withholding Proportional Local Share

GSBA opposes the State and Georgia Charter School Commission withholding QBE state funds from school districts to support "proportional" local share for Charter Schools.

D. Retirement

2.D.1 Health Insurance and Retirement for Non-Certified Employees

GSBA supports state funding for employer's cost of health insurance and retirement funding for non-certified personnel with the QBE FTE formula.

2.D.2 Public School Employees Retirement

GSBA urges the General Assembly to increase Public School Employee Retirement benefits so that they are comparable to the benefits paid by TRS.

2.D.3 Teacher Retirement System

GSBA urges the General Assembly to refrain from passing legislation directing the TRS Board of Directors to adopt high risk investments in their portfolio that may endanger the actuarial soundness of the retirement fund.

III. IMPROVING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

A. Attendance

3.A.1 Maintenance of Minimum Entrance Age

GSBA supports the maintenance of a minimum entrance age for children entering school whereby a child must be age 5 by September 1 to enter kindergarten and must be age 6 by September 1 to enter first grade.

3.A.2 Compulsory Attendance

GSBA supports compulsory enrollment in educational programs for persons ages six years to 17 years who have not graduated from high school.

B. Curriculum/Achievement

3.B.1 At Risk and Remedial Summer School Programs

GSBA urges the General Assembly to fund at risk and remedial summer school programs commensurate with the number of students scoring below grade level as defined by the Office of Student Achievement and those not passing the high school graduation test.

3.B.2 Academic Achievement

GSBA supports legislative initiatives to make improving student academic achievement the top priority of state education policy.

3.B.3 Talented and Gifted Program

GSBA urges increased staff development funding for teachers to enhance their knowledge and skills relating to student identification and placement options under the “multi-criteria” approach of TAG programming. TAG certification endorsement should be available to teachers through local staff development programs.

3.B.4 Early Intervention Program

GSBA supports additional flexibility in program models used to deliver the Early Intervention Program (EIP).

3.B.5 Dropout Prevention

GSBA supports the development of local dropout prevention programs with state and federal assistance based on a uniform definition of dropout. GSBA further supports providing a mechanism for students to be considered graduates who earn both a GED and a workforce development skills certificate (such students are currently considered dropouts).

3.B.6 Twenty Additional Days of Instruction

GSBA supports the continuing emphasis on and support for program improvement for students needing summer school programs.

3.B.7 Collaborative Efforts

GSBA encourages and supports programs to increase collaboration and coalitions among schools and social support services to deal more effectively and cohesively with the many societal and economic problems that interfere with students’ ability to learn.

3.B.8 Testing (Student Assessment)

GSBA is opposed to mandated national testing by the federal government but supports state testing which provides individual student achievement data.

GSBA supports criterion referenced testing aligned with the state approved curriculum including end of course assessments at the secondary level. Promotion tests should be the prerogative of the local board of education at the elementary level.

3.B.9 State Approved Curriculum

GSBA supports the revision of the state approved curriculum every four years. Furthermore, GSBA urges the Georgia Board of Education to initiate this study on a continuing basis in order that changing facts, issues, concepts and processes are updated within the curriculum. GSBA supports the state approved curriculum which enhances our students’ performance on Nationally Standardized Tests.

3.B.10 English to Speakers of Other Languages Program (ESOL)

GSBA recommends that the Georgia Board of Education initiate a study to evaluate its rules and determine program changes commensurate with funding designed to assist students whose native language is not English to develop proficiency in the English language at the appropriate grade level.

3.B.11 English to Speakers of Other Languages Program Testing

GSBA recommends that the Office of Student Achievement (OSA) establish by rule that non-English speaking international students be exempt from all state mandated student tests for the first year they enroll in school. Students that continue after one year in the ESOL program without sufficient English language skills shall continue to be exempt from state testing until determined able to compete in academic work using English. OSA, in cooperation with the Georgia Department of Education, should identify measures to determine when ESOL students are ready to exit the ESOL program.

3.B.12 Testing ESOL Students in Primary Language

GSBA urges the General Assembly to adequately fund this translation for all state required standardized tests used to promote and place non-English speaking international students into those languages representative of the highest percentage categories of international students.

C. Non-traditional Schools

3.C.1 Charter Schools

The Georgia School Boards Association supports the concept of publicly funded charter schools that provide innovative, quality programming provided they are formed with the approval of local boards of education and are under the governance of those local school boards. GSBA further believes that:

- Start-up charter schools must not be fiscally dependent upon the local board beyond what is required by law (“Fiscally dependent” must not be confused with “financially dependent”):
 - Conversion charter schools should be fiscally dependent on the local board from which they developed.
 - The local board should be authorized to withhold a portion of the FTE earnings for each local start-up charter and conversion charter in the district for costs associated with the administration of the charter school program.
- Charter schools must depend upon approval by the local board — without a hearing on the matter — for authorization to continue from one charter (contract) to the next;
- Charter schools must not foster racial, religious, social, or economic segregation or segregation of children with disabilities;
- The local board maintains accountability by determining the criteria and standards of performance that will be used in establishing the charter and in its renewal.

3.C.2 Funding to Support Charter School Regulation Compliance

GSBA urges increased state funding to support local school systems’ compliance with new charter school statutory requirements.

3.C.3 Alternative School Programs

GSBA supports the continuing emphasis on and support for program improvement for students needing alternative schools. GSBA support for program involvement for students needing alternative schools needs to expand to include elementary programs to provide behavioral modification for students exhibiting disruptive behavior tendencies.

D. Records and Reports

3.D.1 Standardized High School Transcripts

GSBA supports the development and implementation of a statewide-standardized high school transcript that will assist post secondary institutions in assessing students for admission.

3.D.2 Statewide Grading System

GSBA supports a statewide standard grading system for high schools to include the weighting of Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and Honors Classes. This system should be developed and regulated by the State Board of Education.

IV. STUDENT SAFETY AND DISCIPLINE

4.1 Corporal Punishment

GSBA supports the principle that local boards of education have the authority to make decisions regarding corporal punishment.

4.2 Student Discipline Flexibility and School Climate

GSBA urges continuation and expansion of state legislative initiatives to allow local school boards increased flexibility in local school and system management and control. In addition, GSBA urges that the General Assembly refrain from adopting additional legislation limiting local school board authority and decision-making concerning discipline, school climate, and classroom management.

4.3 Parental Liability for Violent Acts, Theft, Terroristic Threats and Vandalism

GSBA urges the General Assembly to adopt legislation holding custodial parents and guardians liable for school-age children committing violent acts, theft, terroristic threats or vandalism on school property or during school hours. Liability shall include damages, medical expenses, court costs, police, fire, and EMS costs related to those acts by the child. GSBA further recommends for the purpose of any adopted legislation hereunder, that foster parents, or similar types of caregivers wherein the custody of the child is in an agency such as the Department of Human Resources, be excluded from liability and not be considered a custodial parent or guardian for the purposes set forth above.

4.4 Student Safety

GSBA urges the General Assembly to provide new state funds through the funding formula to enhance the safety of the school environment by equipping each classroom with communication equipment that provides the ability to have immediate voice communication between teachers and school administrators.

4.5 Landfills

GSBA urges the legislature to pass legislation that would prohibit the permitting of a new landfill within two (2) miles of any existing school. This would also apply to any attempt to change a (landfill) permit from local to regional. The legislation should also contain a provision by which the limitation can be waived by majority vote of any one school board after conducting at least two (2) public hearings.

V. FEDERAL ISSUES

5.1 Flexibility in the Use of Federal Funds

GSBA recommends that state statutes, such as the Classrooms First for Georgia Act and the Georgia Department of Education's rules and regulations governing the use of federal funds, not be stricter than federal guidelines so long as their use results in educational benefits for eligible children.

5.2 Educational Program Funding

GSBA recommends that the Georgia Board of Education and the State Department of Education develop a strong working relationship with the U.S. Department of Education in order to influence improvement in funding of existing educational programs which are allocated to local school systems through the State Board of Education. It is further urged that the State Board and State Department resist efforts by the U. S. Congress to reduce or eliminate educational program funding administered by the U. S. Dept. of Education.

5.3 Reform Special Education

- America's school children need real reform in special education law.
- Costs to school districts must be contained to drive more resources to the classroom by reducing unnecessary existing expenses, ensuring interagency cost-sharing, and opposing new unfunded requirements.
- Make a safe, orderly learning environment the top priority.
- Make reasonable reforms to the dispute-resolution process to ensure that scarce educational dollars are used for educational services for our children.
- Fully fund Special Education at the 40% level as mandated by federal law.
- Transfer financial responsibility for non-education "related services" to service providers outside school districts.

5.4 Eliminate Unnecessary Mandates and Regulations

- Schools are forced to spend too much money cutting through red tape and complying with mandates that do not improve education; therefore,
- GSBA urges Congress to support a new Partnership for Children's Education that reduces unnecessary mandates and regulations on schools so that the educational needs of students can be met.

5.5 Support Public Education, Not Tax-Funded Vouchers

- Reallocation of billions of tax dollars into private schools will weaken, not improve, public education.
- Parents are concerned about crime, drugs, and discipline. Vouchers will not solve these problems – parents and communities can.
- Vouchers could send public money into unregulated, ill-qualified or financially unstable private schools with no public accountability.
- GSBA urges Congress to reject vouchers and to work with GSBA to improve the public schools.

5.6 Funding Education for Immigrants

GSBA urges the allocation of federal funds to educate immigrants who qualify for ESOL if school systems cannot determine legal residency.

5.7 Funding of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

GSBA requests that Congress fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

5.8 Fair Share from Federal Government In Place of Ad Valorem Taxes

GSBA urges our congressional delegation to introduce legislation that will require the federal government to pay its fair share in the place of ad valorem taxes for land owned by the government in counties where substantial acreage is government owned.