Cherokee County School District

Agenda Request Form

Meeting Date	Agenda Item Number
November 16, 2023	I-1

Title

2024 Legislative Partnership Priorities

Requested Action

School Board Consideration of Superintendent's Recommendation for Approval of 2024 Legislative Partnership Priorities

Summary Explanation and Background

Based upon discussion, feedback and input during the October 19, 2023 Superintendent/School Board Strategic Work Session, the Superintendent recommends the attached 2024 Legislative Partnership Priorities for the School Board's consideration and approval.

Priority Area

Organizational and Operational Effectiveness

Financial Impact

N/A

Exhibits: (List)

2024 Legislative Partnership Priorities

Source of Additional Information

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Cherokee County School District

2024 LEGISLATIVE PARTNERSHIP PRIORITIES

ENHANCE EDUCATIONAL & WORKFORCE OPPORTUNITIES and FORTIFY LOCAL CONTROL & GOVERNANCE

- Provide high school students with diploma choices
- Support legislative initiatives which promote local control
- Eliminate schools as polling places
- Oppose efforts to eliminate sovereign immunity
- Allow additional flexibility for retirees to return to work

PRIORITIZE EDUCATION FUNDING and STRENGTHEN TEACHER PIPELINE

- Support local legislation to call for a referendum to modify the school district senior property tax initiative
- Support expansion of existing and emerging statewide teacher pipeline initiatives
- Modify the QBE to allow for safety/security funding, lower counselor/student ratios, additional transportation funds, etc.
- Increase teacher compensation, allowing local monies to offset State-required employer health premium increases
- Establish academic and fiscal accountability structures for existing and future voucher programs
- Preserve continued investment in TRS

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2024 LEGISLATIVE PARTNERSHIP PRIORITIES

ENHANCE EDUCATIONAL & WORKFORCE OPPORTUNITIES

- Provide high school graduates choices in Georgia with an alternative diploma option in the area of Career/Technical Preparation . . . thereby further ensuring students' workforce readiness skills and preparation for transitions directly into careers or secondary-level career educational opportunities, thus positively impacting Georgia's emerging workforce.

FORTIFY LOCAL CONTROL & GOVERNANCE

- Ensure proposed legislative initiatives strengthen provisions for the local control and management of schools (including the ability for a School Board to select its own delivery model and incorporate locally-endorsed curricular programs and materials, etc.) . . . thereby empowering local School Boards to fulfill their Constitutional mandate and corresponding responsibility to engage their local constituency, develop locally-derived educational policy and oversee continued performance improvements among their students.

- Eliminate State-mandated use of schools as public polling locations during regular school days . . . thereby increasing safety and security for students, staff and buildings.

- Oppose any effort to eliminate limited sovereign and official immunity . . . thereby protecting K-12 public school districts from lawsuits over day-today school operations (e.g., grades, discipline, classroom placements, etc.).

- Allow additional flexibility to local school districts within Teacher Retirement System (TRS) of Georgia compensation rules when establishing parameters for retiree return to work eligibility requirements.

PRIORITIZE EDUCATION FUNDING & STRENGTHEN TEACHER PIPELINE

- Support modification of the school district senior property tax exemption to assist senior property owners, while mitigating the loss of resources for schools. Options could include removal of the cap, inclusion of residency requirements, and/or verification that no school-age children reside at the property.

- Support expansion of existing and emerging statewide teacher pipeline initiatives.

- Make public education in the State of Georgia a priority by permanently ending State "austerity reductions" of the Quality Basic Education (QBE) Act and allocating to local school districts all funding earned under the statutorily required formula.

- Consider modifications and update of the QBE formula to accurately reflect inflation, true costs of transportation; and, to include a funding weight/poverty index for economically disadvantaged students, funding for safety and security and increased allocations for counselors, social workers, psychologists and nurses . . . thereby providing support for critically-needed student services functions.

- Provide State funding to decrease reliance on local funding for safety/security. CCSD will expend over $4.5M for safety/security in SY2023-24 ($2.5M salaries/benefits and over $2M for security operations).

- Provide State funding to decrease the school counselor to student ratio from 1:450 to 1:250 (Georgia DOE model).

- Significantly increase the base teacher compensation within the State teacher salary schedule . . . thereby communicating the State's long-term commitment to providing competitive compensation for the purposes of attracting and retaining teachers in the State and allowing local school districts to concentrate local revenues on offsetting State-required employer rate increases in health care premiums, local share of retirement plan contributions and locally-determined benefit plans (e.g., disability, life, dental, etc.).

- Until such time as equitable accountability measures are ensured, oppose the continuation and/or expansion of existing programs that directly or indirectly use public funds to pay private school tuition for students or provide tax incentives for their parents . . . thereby

Continued

ensuring a solid revenue base for state funding of public education. Establish and implement a fiscal and academic accountability structure for existing and future voucher programs that is analogous to that which public school districts must adhere.

• Preserve continued investment in Georgia's Teacher's Retirement System (TRS) in order to ensure the longevity of the defined benefit plan. Georgia's retirement system is the State's best benefit for teachers!

STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

• The formula for determining QBE allocations for student transportation is out of date and in need of revision. CCSD will receive $2.4M in QBE funds for student transportation for FY23. The total budgeted cost for student transportation during this budget cycle is $29.2M. Comparatively, in FY2010, CCSD was allocated $2.5M in QBE funds for student transportation . . . but had 4,955 fewer students to serve.

• Looking statewide, in 1991 the State provided 54% of the total cost of providing transportation. By 2001 the amount was down to 39%. In 2021, the amount provided by the QBE formula had decreased to less than 12% of the actual cost.

EMPLOYEE RETIREMENT

• The Teacher Retirement System of Georgia, a defined benefit plan and the State's best benefit for teachers, has increased the employer (CCSD) contribution rate from 14.27% (FY17) to an expected 19.98% in FY24. CCSD's annual payment to TRS on behalf of its employees for FY24 is expected to exceed $57.8M ($10.9M paid via local funds).

• Due to the vision and commitment of Georgia leaders over the decades, TRS:

◊ Ranks in the top third of pension systems in the U.S., is actuarially sound, and has a proven record of sustainability.

◊ Provides a compelling recruitment and retention incentive for the education industry, supporting a life-long career path for high-quality teachers in Georgia schools.

◊ Positively impacts Georgia's economy and the economic success of our state, as pensions for over 148,000 TRS retirees are reinvested in local communities across the state each year.

◊ Affords a defined benefit plan as the last, best benefit for Georgia's dedicated teachers, who are diligently preparing the next generation of Georgia citizens.

As Georgia is recognized to be the #1 place to do business for the 10th consecutive year, it must also seek to be the #1 place to teach. Supporting TRS today ensures success for Georgia tomorrow.

EMPLOYEE HEALTH INSURANCE

• Beginning in FY08, the State's contribution for noncertified employee health insurance premiums was reduced and then eliminated by FY12 (from over $500M statewide to $0), requiring local school districts to fully absorb the additional costs since that time. CCSD's employer contribution toward the annual cost of providing health insurance for a non-certified employee has risen from $2,000 in FY10 to $12,840 in FY24 ... this cost, nearing $1,100 per month/per participating employee, represents a 542% increase.

• CCSD's health insurance costs for non-certified employees are projected to be $18.6M for FY24 far exceeding and more than doubling the $7.5M cost in FY14. The extraordinary financial impact of continuing exorbitant employer contributions rates for State mandated benefits without corresponding State funding continues to be of great concern. As such, CCSD continues to privatize custodial and grounds services and increase the use of part-time/temporary workers for non-certified staffing as cost-reduction measures.