



Agenda Request Form

Meeting Date		Agenda Item Number	
November 21, 2024		Action Item 1	
Title			
2025 Legislative Priorities			
Requested Action			
School Board Consideration of Superintendent's Recommendation for Approval of 2025 Legislative Priorities			
Summary Explanation and Background			
<p>Based upon discussion, feedback and input during the October 17, 2024 School Board Work Session, the Superintendent recommends the attached 2025 Legislative Partnership Priorities for the School Board's consideration and approval.</p> <p>The Priorities include: Enhancing Academics and Accountability and Educational Workforce Opportunities; Fortifying Local Control and Governance; Prioritizing Educational Funding and Strengthening the Teacher Pipeline.</p>			
Financial Impact			
N/A			
Exhibits: (List)			
2025 Legislative Priorities			
Source of Additional Information			
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Cherokee
County
School
District



Mary Elizabeth Davis, Superintendent

ENHANCE ACADEMICS & ACCOUNTABILITY, EDUCATIONAL & WORKFORCE OPPORTUNITIES, and FORTIFY LOCAL CONTROL & GOVERNANCE

- Maintain strong accountability systems for effective schools and refrain from requiring additional unfunded academic investments at the local level
- Provide high school students with diploma choices and allow completion special schools to admit students under the age of 18
- Support legislative initiatives which promote local control
- Eliminate schools as polling places
- Oppose efforts to eliminate sovereign immunity
- Encourage stronger criminal penalties for those who make threats against schools, students or school personnel

PRIORITIZE EDUCATION FUNDING and STRENGTHEN TEACHER PIPELINE

- Modify the QBE to include safety/security funding, lower counselor/student ratios, additional transportation funds, and funding for strengthening cybersecurity
- Support expansion of existing and emerging statewide teacher pipeline initiatives and preserve continued investment in TRS to attract and retain high quality teachers in Georgia
- Increase teacher compensation, allowing local revenue to offset State-required employer health premium increases
- Maintain local School Board control/authority as denoted in the State Constitution (e.g., establishing appropriate millage rates)
- Establish academic and fiscal accountability structures for existing and future voucher programs
- Maintain existing requirements relative to Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) expenditures

Table I. Summary of categorical gaps in State funding vs. cost to deliver services FY2024

CATEGORY	STATE FUNDS	LOCAL FUNDS	TOTAL
Student Transportation	2,483,834	27,274,581	29,758,415
School Nurses	967,825*	2,277,879*	3,245,704*
Safety and Security	1,914,477	4,511,758	6,426,235
Teacher Compensation	134,836,242*	63,452,349*	198,288,591*
Kindergarten Paraprofessionals	2,180,627*	1,648,715*	3,829,342*
Pre-K	2,765,597	3,847,965	6,613,562
Benefits	81,377,566	67,600,423	148,977,989
Special Education	48,220,967	28,241,339	76,462,306
Technology/Hardware/Software	2,166,898	15,071,647	17,238,545
TOTALS	\$276,914,033	\$213,926,656	\$490,840,689

* Does not include benefits, training or materials. Salary figures only are represented.

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ENHANCE ACADEMICS and ACCOUNTABILITY

- Refrain from additional modification of existing accountability systems to allow for consistency in delivering positive student achievement outcomes and requiring additional unfunded academic investments (e.g., universal screeners, prescriptive literacy training, etc.)

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.
- Allow completion special schools such as Mountain Education to admit students under the age of 18 into its program.

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 academic 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-to-day school operations (e.g., grades, discipline, classroom placements, etc.).

PRIORITIZE EDUCATION FUNDING & STRENGTHEN TEACHER PIPELINE

- Support expansion of existing and emerging statewide teacher pipeline initiatives which would attract more candidates to the teaching profession.
- 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 to strengthen cybersecurity initiatives, 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 through the QBE formula rather than grants to decrease reliance on local funding for safety/security. CCSD will expend over \$7M for safety/security in SY2024-25 (\$3.3M salaries/benefits and over \$3.7M in facility and system upgrades for security).
- Maintain existing requirements for allocation of Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) funding to exclude general fund expenditures. Presently those funds may only be utilized for capital outlay, technology and bonded indebtedness expenditures.
- 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.).

- Oppose additional 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 ensuring a solid revenue base for state funding of public education. Establish and implement a fiscal and academic accountability structure for existing voucher programs that is analogous to that which public school districts must adhere. For example, require schools that participate to adhere to the same educational mandates, be held to the same accountability system (CCRPI), and be audited in the same manner/cycle as public school districts.
 - 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!
 - Avoid legislating annual inflation tax cap opt-out hearings in addition to millage rate hearings.
- ◇ TRS' funding ratio ranks above average 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 11th consecutive year, it must also seek to be the #1 place to teach. Supporting TRS today ensures success for Georgia tomorrow.

STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

- The formula for determining QBE allocations for student transportation is out of date and in need of further revision. CCSD will receive \$9.9M in QBE funds for student transportation for FY 25, a significant and appreciated increase from FY24. However, the total budgeted cost for student transportation during this budget cycle is \$32.2M.
- 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 20.78% in FY25. CCSD's annual payment to TRS on behalf of its employees for FY25 is expected to exceed \$60.1M (\$11.3M paid via local funds).
- Due to the vision and commitment of Georgia leaders over the decades, TRS:

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 \$15,840 in FY25 ... this cost of \$1,320 per month, /per participating employee, represents a 792% increase.
- CCSD's health insurance costs for non-certified employees are projected to be \$22.9M for FY25 far exceeding and more than tripling 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.