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Low-Performing Schools, Medical Marijuana Bills Proceed from House to Senate

March 3 was Crossover Day, marking the 28th of 40 legislative days—and the final opportunity for legislation to cross out of one chamber into the other to be eligible for passage this year. The Senate considered 32 bills over the course of Crossover Day, while the House had 69 bills on its original calendar and then two supplemental calendars later in the day.

This newsletter covers the activity that took place during the 25th-27th legislative days. A comprehensive Crossover Day report will be released later this week.

Low-Performing Schools

The House continued work on [HB 338](#) (Rep. Kevin Tanner, 9th), which addresses low-performing schools, on March 1. The bill is now assigned to the Senate Education and Youth Committee.

Details of the bill include:

- The bill creates the position of chief turnaround officer (CTO) within the Georgia Department of Education, who will be responsible for managing and overseeing a system of supports and assistance for low-performing schools.
- The CTO will report directly to the State Board of Education, and must meet certain education and experience qualifications laid out by the bill.

- The CTO is authorized to recommend other individuals, in consultation with the state school superintendent, as turnaround coaches.
- The CTO will prioritize low-performing schools based on the greatest need of assistance.
- With the assistance of the local regional education services agency (RESA), the CTO will have 90 days from the date of entering a contract with a district to complete a comprehensive on-site evaluation to determine the cause of the school's low performance or lack of progress.
- Possible interventions laid out by the bill include reallocating resources and technical assistance; professional learning for staff focused on student achievement; instructional strategies based on scientifically based research; extended instruction time for low-performing students; and other actions approved by the State Board of Education.
- Based on the evaluation and recommendations from the CTO, turnaround coaches, and the local RESA, the school will develop an intensive school improvement plan. If the school isn't improving after two years, the CTO must require additional intervention. This can include appointing a schoolmaster or management team, removing school personnel, reconstituting the school, or having another successful school system or private nonprofit entity operate the school.
- Before any interventions are put into place, the local board of education may request a hearing before the State Board of Education, which will make the final decision.
- The Governor's Office of Student Achievement is authorized to provide grants, subject to the availability of funds, to schools working with the CTO. [HB 237](#) (Rep. Brooks Coleman, 97th) creates the Public Education Innovation Fund Foundation, which is authorized to receive private donations for such grants. HB 237 also passed the House and is assigned to the Senate Finance Committee.

Medical Marijuana

The House passed [HB 65](#) (Rep. Allen Peake, 141st) on March 1, and it is now assigned to the Senate Health and Human Services Committee.

The bill expands the conditions treatable with cannabis oil to include Tourette's syndrome, autism spectrum disorder, epidermolysis bullosa, Alzheimer's disease, HIV, AIDS, and peripheral neuropathy. The bill also states that cancer and other currently covered diseases may be treated beyond just the end stages, and it removes the requirement that a patient be a Georgia resident for one year to be eligible for treatment.

Budget

The Senate Appropriations Committee does not currently have any meetings scheduled. However, appropriations subcommittees are expected to complete their recommendations this week, and the full Senate Appropriations Committee is expected to meet this week or early next week to pass its version of the FY18 budget.

Schedule

Legislators met Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday last week to complete 28 of 40 legislative days. They are scheduled to be in session Monday, Thursday, and Friday this week.

The House and Senate previously adopted an [adjournment resolution](#) that sets the calendar for the remainder of the 2017 session, with the final legislative day scheduled for Thursday, March 30.

Legislation

The following bills related to children and families have been introduced this session.



HEALTHY CHILDREN

HB 65 (Rep. Allen Peake, 141st) expands the number of diagnoses that legally can be treated with cannabis oil to include Tourette's syndrome, autism spectrum disorder, epidermolysis bullosa, Alzheimer's disease, HIV, AIDS, and peripheral neuropathy. The bill also states that cancer and other currently covered diseases may be treated beyond just the end stages.

Status: The House passed the bill on March 1, and it is now assigned to the Senate Health and Human Services Committee.

HB 241 (Rep. Lee Hawkins, 27th) adds Krabbe disease to the list of metabolic and genetic conditions for which newborns may be screened. Krabbe disease is a rare, often fatal, degenerative disorder that affects the myelin sheath of the nervous system. Under the bill, screening for Krabbe disease will be conducted separately at the option of—and paid for by—the parents.

Status: The House passed the bill on Feb. 24, and it is now assigned to the Senate Health and Human Services Committee.

HR 446 (Rep. William Boddie, 62nd) creates the Johnny Tolbert III House Study Committee on Heatstroke. The bill is named for a 12-year-old who died from heatstroke during football practice in 2016.

Status: The resolution is assigned to the House Health and Human Services Committee.



CHILDREN SUCCEEDING IN SCHOOL

HB 237 (Rep. Brooks Coleman, 97th) authorizes the Public Education Innovation Fund Foundation to receive private donations used for public-school grants for the implementation of academic and organizational innovations to improve student achievement.

Status: The House passed the bill on Feb. 24, and it is assigned to the Senate Finance Committee.

HB 338 (Rep. Kevin Tanner, 9th) provides a comprehensive intervention strategy for chronically underperforming schools and offers an alternative to the Opportunity School District plan that Georgia voters didn't approve in Nov. 2016.

Status: The House passed the bill on March 1, and it is now assigned to the Senate Education and Youth Committee.

SB 5 (Sen. Bill Cowsert, 46th) clarifies the percentage of lottery proceeds to be transferred each year to the Lottery for Education Account, so that net proceeds must equal at least 26.5 percent of lottery proceeds in 2018; at least 27.5 percent in 2019; and 28.5 percent in 2020.

Status: The Senate passed a substitute version of the bill, amending the required lottery proceeds targets, on Feb. 28. The bill is now assigned to the House Appropriations Committee.

SB 152 (Sen. Emanuel Jones, 10th) amends mandatory student attendance policy by precluding students from being suspended or expelled without being assigned to an alternative education program and by setting a two-semester maximum for assignment to alternative programs. The bill provides an exception to the two-semester maximum for serious offenses, which include physical assault or battery of school personnel or students, bullying, and unlawful use or possession of illegal drugs or alcohol.

Status: The Senate passed a substitute version of the bill on March 1, clarifying that the new policy will apply to all students except those guilty of serious offenses, including physical assault or battery of school personnel or other students. The bill is now assigned to the House Education Committee.



STABLE, SELF-SUFFICIENT, PRODUCTIVE FAMILIES

HB 124 (Rep. David Clark, 98th) revises Georgia law related to fraud in obtaining public assistance, food stamps, or Medicaid to include those who knowingly or intentionally aid or abet a recipient in obtaining or attempting to obtain a benefit to which he or she is not entitled.

Status: The House passed the bill on March 1, and it is now assigned to the Senate Health and Human Services Committee.

HB 330 (Rep. Stacey Evans, 89th) adds regional Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) caseworkers as well as county and district DFCS directors as contact names in notices sent to adult relatives of a child removed from parental custody to explain options a relative has to participate in the care and placement of the child. The notices must also include information about financial assistance options for the relative.

Status: The House passed the bill on March 1, and it is now assigned to the Senate Health and Human Services Committee.

HB 331 (Rep. Stacey Evans, 89th) authorizes a kinship caregiver, on behalf of a child residing with the caregiver, to give legal consent for the child to receive educational and medical services and to participate in school activities.

Status: The House passed the bill on March 1, and it is now assigned to the Senate Health and Human Services Committee.

HB 521 (Rep. Erica Thomas, 39th) increases the state minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$10.10. **HB 315** (Rep. Dewey McClain, 100th) and **SB 28** (Sen. Vincent Fort, 39th) are similar bills that increase the minimum wage to \$15.

Status of HB 315: The bill is assigned to the House Industry and Labor Committee.

Status of HB 521: The bill is assigned to the House Industry and Labor Committee.

Status of SB 28: The bill is assigned to the Senate Insurance and Labor Committee.

SB 201 (Sen. Butch Miller, 49th) requires employers to allow employees who earn sick leave to use up to five days of accrued leave to care for immediate family members—including an employee’s child, spouse, grandchild, grandparent, or parent.

Status: The Senate passed the bill on Feb. 27, and it is now assigned to the House Industry and Labor Committee.



THRIVING COMMUNITIES

HB 32 (Rep. Joyce Chandler, 105th) amends the definition of sexual assault to include sexual contact between an employee or agent of a school with a student enrolled in the same school. Current law only applies to teachers, principals, assistant principals, or other administrators in a school. The bill also expands the definition to include sexual contact between employees or agents of a correctional facility, juvenile detention facility, facility providing services to a person with a disability, or facility providing child welfare and youth services and a person in custody of any such facility. The law currently only applies to employees and agents of the specific facility in which the person is in custody.

Status: The bill is assigned to the House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee. Representatives of the Professional Standards Commission and the Professional Association of Educators testified in support of the bill in subcommittee, but concerns were raised that the language is too broad. The full committee passed the bill on March 1.

HB 116 (Rep. Bert Reeves, 34th) adds aggravated assault with a firearm to the list of juvenile offenses (ages 13 to 17) for which superior courts have original jurisdiction.

Status: The House passed the bill on Feb. 27, and it is now assigned to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

HB 293 (Rep. Deborah Silcox, 52nd) allows a court to admit hearsay evidence from a child under 17 years old that describes sexual contact or physical abuse, provided that notice is given to the accused prior to trial and the child testifies at the trial.

Status: The House passed the bill on Feb. 27, and it is now assigned to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

HB 494 (Rep. Katie Dempsey, 13th) expands the definition of “crimes” to be included in background checks of early care and learning center employees to include battery of an unborn child, assault by an HIV- or hepatitis-infected person upon a minor, cruelty to children, sexual exploitation of children, and driving while under the influence of alcohol or drugs and endangering a child. The bill also clarifies that previous records checks will be invalid if they are more than 12 months old or if the person has been separated from employment with an early care and education program for more than 180 days.

Status: The bill is assigned to the House Education Committee.

HB 513 (Rep. Pam Dickerson, 113th) requires the Department of Community Health to develop a sign to be posted at all medical facilities to inform the public that such facilities are authorized locations to leave a newborn child.

Status: The bill is assigned to the House Health and Human Services Committee.