

CINS 2009 Legislative Agenda for Education
January 14, 2009
Centennial Place Elementary School

Wendy Kavanagh & Janet Kishbaugh, moderating

Attendees:

- Diane Hopkins (Vice President, [Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education](#))
- David Adelman (D-SS 42, david.adelman@senate.ga.gov 404-463-1376)
- Nan Orrock (D-SS 36, nan.orrock@senate.ga.gov 404-463-8054)
- Stacey Abrams (D-SH 084, staceyabrams@gmail.com 404-656-0224)
- Pat Gardner (D-SH 057, pat@patgardner.ord, 404-656-0265)
- Kathy Ashe (D-SH 056, kathyashe56@mindspring.com, 404-656-0116)
- Cecily Harsh-Kinnane (District 3, Atlanta Public Schools Board of Education)

Diane Hopkins introduced the [Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education](#) (GPEE), a non-profit, non-partisan organization which collects and disseminates data about education issues. GPEE sponsors the annual *Bus Trip across Georgia* to highlight schools that are achieving outstanding results. GPEE also provides legislative policy forums for candidates and newly-elected board members and the legislature. Two annual reports GPEE publishes are *Education Policy Primer* which covers education policy in Georgia in great detail, and *Top 10 Issues to Watch 2009*, which gives a thorough evaluation of educational policy in Georgia. Issues include early learning (preschool), teacher quality, school board governance, vouchers, federal initiatives including NCLB, budget, etc. All documents are available on the GPEE website.

Stacey Abrams (D-SH 084) mentioned HR-1 and tax policy. This bill is sponsored by Ed Lindsey with support of the House Republican party and others. HR-1 will freeze property assessment valuation at the 2010 value, then assessment valuation can only increase by the lesser of CPI or 3% (of the last assessment) until a property is sold, at which time the property is valued at fair market value. HR-1 applies to residential and commercial property that is bought/sold by a “person” (but the bill includes no definition of “person” although the IRS definition may apply, e.g., any entity that buys/sells real property). Current tax policy states that taxation should be equitable, which is sometimes adjusted by reassessment. HR 1 takes away the reassessment option for local governments. We currently have a progressive taxation system - individuals in similar circumstances should pay similar taxes. According to Representative Abrams, HR-1 is not predictable, not transparent, not fair unless we change how we collect sales taxes, and if everyone has the same house, income, etc. HR-1 could also depress real estate sales because sales is the trigger for increased property valuation for taxation, and it impacts renters and senior citizens who will be unable to profit from sale.

Nan Orrock (D-SS 36) noted that the tax policy issue continues to affect how the state funds education. There has been a systematic erosion of state dollars for public education. “Austerity cuts” continue to negatively impact schools across the state. The voucher issue continues to be on the docket – there is another voucher bill sponsored by Eric Johnson (SB 90). “Instead of vouchers, we should be fully funding education to address budget shortfalls,” said Senator Orrock.

David Adelman (D-SS 42) noted the Governor's proposed budget was received by legislature this afternoon: it includes performance based pay for principals, increased compensation for science & math teachers, reduced liability for (staff) health care premiums, eliminating school nurse program. Adelman strongly supports reduced class sizes – “research and common sense tell us that smaller classes increases student achievement especially in K-3. The classroom is the fundamental building block of education, contributing not only to student learning but also to retaining teachers and principals.” According to Senator Adelman, the bad news is that the Georgia economy is declining and one reaction in education to deal with declining funds for education has been to increase class sizes to reduce (staffing) costs.

Pat Gardner (D-SH 057) emphasized health care such as expanding the PeachCare program to include more children and families. She noted that the Federal SCHIP program, which funds state 60% Medicaid funds, has passed the U.S. House of Representatives. Gardner is working on a bill to allow families to buy into PeachCare program. She is also hopeful that the proposed Department of Mental Health Services will provide needed support for mental health, and is encouraged that transit options funded by local sales tax is being considered.

Kathy Ashe (D-SH 056) confirmed that money is the major theme this session. There is a shift from state responsibility to local school boards' responsibility. Next year's budget cuts more from Communities in Schools as well as cutting foreign language programs. “We have not restored state funds taken in ‘austerity cuts’ and local school boards continue to suffer. No new school funding formula has been proposed despite discussion of IE² – Investing in Excellence in Education. We need to talk about early learning, early childhood programs. We need to talk about time – scheduling and funding extended year (‘balanced schedule’ or ‘alternative calendar’) and extended day.” The merit pay for principals concept sounds good, but the challenge is in the details – it is based on SAT scores, EOCT, and graduation rates. However, we can't even figure out how to count graduation rates, and it does not identify where/how elementary and middle school principals impacted student education and will benefit. And, how do you quantify “good teachers” who would receive merit pay? Currently there is no measure for student progress (from starting point) other than just test scores. Denver and Chicago are working on a program to measure that. Be suspicious of merit pay proposals. However, Ashe believe that the “glass is half full” because we finally have leadership in Washington that believes in the power of strong public education.

Cecily Harsch-Kinnane – *do you think Washington will recognize that the economic stimulus needs to support public education?* Pat Gardner noted that Governor Perdue said he will not take into account anything coming from Washington. She expects states will see stronger partnering with Washington.

Can lottery funds be shifted from HOPE to early childhood? Kathy Ashe noted the state hasn't funded technology since 1997 – all technology funding was diverted from lottery funds. All attendees agree that early childhood education is critical and there are waiting lists to get into Pre-K. Adelman pointed that out the HOPE Scholarship program is the most popular state program in the history of the state. Lottery and HOPE is a sacred cow.