



LEGISLATIVE INSIDER

SHELBY COUNTY SCHOOLS LEGISLATIVE UPDATE NEWSLETTER



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District 5

SCS 2021 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

The SCS Board met for its regular business meeting on December 1, 2020 and unanimously approved a series of legislative priorities to guide the District’s advocacy efforts during the 112th legislative session. Built upon purposeful and collaborative dialogue, the approved 2021 legislative priorities sets out the Board’s official position on a wide range of legislative issues that impact the District’s mission, vision and core beliefs.

Streamlined into six (6) key areas, Board approved legislative priorities are specific to Covid-19 Relief, Students/Instruction, Employment, Facilities/Safety, Charter Schools, and Medicaid. Select items of emphasis include urging the Tennessee General Assembly to pass legislation to

- allow flexibility in background check requirements
- address existing opportunity gaps and provide funding to meet the recommended staff to student ratios for School Psychologists, Social Workers, and Counselors and Nurses
- improve ventilation systems to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and other pathogens in school facilities
- give teachers and school staff a high priority for receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, when available, to help ensure schools can operate effectively with in-person education

A copy of the approved SCS 2021 legislative priorities can be accessed online at scsk12.org/board or by clicking [here](#).

The identified priorities should not be viewed as an exhaustive list and may be amended as issues arise or evolve.

112TH TENNESSEE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

As the clock struck noon on January 12, 2021, the Speakers of the House and Senate wielded their gavels giving the green light for the new legislative session to begin. A day set aside for organization included the first annual legislator roll call and provided time for caucuses from the Senate and the House to adopt rules, elect leadership and appoint officers. As legislators filed into the chambers, some donning face masks and adhering to protective protocols, one could only imagine if opening day was a prophetic glimpse into the year ahead, one filled with physical and political distancing over dueling agendas. Only time will tell if this was the calm before the storm.

The 112th session welcomed new legislators, two Senators and ten House Representatives (view profiles by clicking [here](#), credits to UT). Notably missing this year, however, were a few familiar faces.



Sen. Dolores Gresham (R -Somerville)

Retired after serving a combined 18 years in the House (02-08) and Senate (08-20). Gresham served in many capacities during her tenure but most notably as the Chair of the Senate Education Committee, a position she acquired as a freshman senator.



Rep. Bill Dunn (R – Knox)

Announced that he would not seek reelection after 26 years in office. Dunn once held the position of House Speaker Pro Tempore and now serves with the TN Department of Education as a senior advisor to the Commissioner of Education.



Sen. Steve Dickerson (R -Nashville)

Best known as being the moderate voice. Dickerson served two terms in the General Assembly and during the 2020 election was endorsed by the Tennessee Education Association (TEA) due to his record of being a fervent opponent of vouchers and strong advocate for educators. Dickerson was defeated by Democrat Heidi Campbell.



Rep. John DeBerry (I-Memphis)

Unseated by Torrey Harris after holding the District 90 House seat for 26 years. Life-long democrat, DeBerry ran in the 2020 election as an Independent after the Tennessee Democratic Party's State Executive Committee voted to remove him from the ballot because of his voting record. A former member of the Education Committee and Curriculum, Testing & Innovation Subcommittee, DeBerry will continue to have an influence in lawmaking in his new role with the governor's Executive Leadership Team as a special adviser.



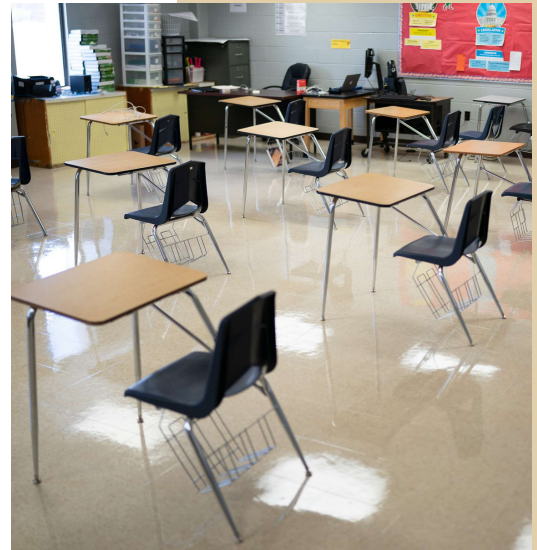
Rep. Jim Cooley (R-Bartlett)

After devoting 13 years in the General Assembly retired after being diagnosed with early stage dementia. Rep. Cooley served as chairman of the higher education subcommittee and spent many of his years in the Assembly fighting against human trafficking.

SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Governor Lee called for the Tennessee General Assembly to convene for a special legislative session in which he tasked legislators to consider several primary education bills he described as being "urgent issues facing Tennessee students and schools in the 2021-22 school year". At the conclusion of a whirlwind 4-day special session, legislators managed to pass the Governor's package of bills to address accountability, learning loss, literacy, and teacher pay.

Highlights of the bills are provided below.



SB7001/HB7003 - Accountability Bill

SB7001/HB7003 as passed requires standardized testing this school year to assess student learning and learning loss due to pandemic-related school disruptions. However, the bill ensures that educators (teachers and principals) will be held harmless from use of students' test scores. In addition to hold harmless provisions for educators, student assessment data will not be used to assign schools to the Achievement School District, designate a school to the priority school list or give an A-F letter grade to a school. However, this requires 80% or more of 3-12 grade students enrolled in the district to take the TCAP test in person. The Commissioner of Education has authority to waive the 80% participation requirements. The bill also provides school districts flexibility in assigning the percentage (0-25%) that TCAP scores will count towards a student's final grade.

SB7002/HB7004 - Learning Loss and Student Acceleration Act

SB7002/HB7004 as passed requires school districts and public charter schools to implement after-school learning mini-camps, learning loss bridge camps, and summer learning camps to remediate student learning loss. Student participation in the learning camps is not required under the bill, but can be mandated by a school board through policy. Additionally, SB7002/HB7004 amends 3rd grade retention requirements for students who do not test "on track" or "mastered" on the ELA portion of the TCAP.

SB7003/HB7002 - Tennessee Literacy Success Act

SB7003/HB7002 as passed requires school districts to use phonics-based teaching methods in K-3 grade. Universal reading screeners will be used to identify students in need of help and reading interventions and supports must be provided for students identified as having a significant reading deficiency. Parents will be provided with reports regarding their child's progress as well as interventions to assist them at home. Kindergarten through fifth-grade teachers will be required to complete a professional development course in phonics-based instructional training.

SB7009/HB7020 - Appropriations Bill

SB7009/HB7020 as passed provides non-recurring funding to implement the Learning Loss and Student Remediation Act as well as to give a bonus to teachers and certified personnel, effective for the second half of the current fiscal year (Jan. 1, 2021 – Jun 30, 2021).