

Legislation Alert and Update

Call your legislator today and urge them to vote NO on HR 1162!

Thank you to all of you who have taken the time to contact your legislator and urged him or her to vote NO on HR 1162. PTA's voice is being heard due to your advocacy efforts. Keep up the great work spreading the word about why this constitutional amendment should be voted down. HR 1162 would allow a state appointed commission to authorize charter schools that local school systems rejected and then siphon off your local property taxes to pay for them. HR 1162 may come up for a vote again this week so we need you to continue to call your legislators and urge them to vote NO.

To those who ask why we advocate, including Tony Roberts, President of the Georgia Charter Schools Association who thinks PTA is just for "chili suppers, school festival days, cookies for parties, and apples for teachers" the answer is: PTA was founded as a child advocacy organization. Without PTA's advocacy there would be no hot lunches at schools, no free kindergarten for all and no child labor laws. We advocate for all children not just a select few. HR 1162 would adversely affect public education, the school option available for every child, and would undermine local control. That is why we have spoken up against this resolution and will continue to fight it.

HB 1162 is taxation without representation. Local property taxes paid by local taxpayers to fund local public schools managed by locally elected officials would now be controlled by a state appointed commission answerable to no one, especially not taxpayers. There is no accountability. Proponents claim local dollars won't be used but then refuse to state how these schools would be funded.

The details of how this constitutional amendment would be enacted remain hidden. In the normal process, when a constitutional amendment is introduced so is the enabling legislation that provides the details of its implementation. The details are conspicuously missing leading the casual observer to wonder if it's intentional. Legislators are being asked to buy something sight unseen. Where's the transparency?

Proponents claim that without this resolution the state cannot be involved in education yet if that is what they truly believe why are they busy passing legislation about equalization, career pathways, curriculum, digital learning and even what should be stocked in the school vending machines?

HR 1162 creates another unfunded mandate. To create a charter school costs the local school system dollars. Often schools systems deny a charter because the system can't afford it (especially given the \$1 billion in continued austerity cuts) and this fiscal responsibility is now viewed by the state as anti-charter. In reality 135 charters have been approved so parents do have choices.

The wording on the ballot question is intentionally misleading. It reads "Shall the Constitution of Georgia be amended to allow state or local approval of public charter schools upon the request of local communities?". The Constitution does not need to be amended to allow local approval and the state already has the ability to authorize special schools to meet the needs of those not already served by public schools. This amendment sets no limits on what the state can do.

Start up charter schools are often run by for profit companies. When a school is about making a profit can education be the top priority?

Georgia PTA strongly supports charter schools and parent choice. Every parent has the right and responsibility to choose the best education environment that will meet the needs of their individual child. But PTA also believes in local control and the idea that the school board that you elect must be answerable to you on the way they spend the property tax dollars they raise from you to provide education to all of the community's children.

Now is the time for PTA members to take action one more time! Call your elected state officials and leave a message urging them to vote NO!

Legislation Update:

HB 713:

Delays the required implementation of the career pathways, courses related to a specific trade or vocation, in the high school curriculum by one year, to fall 2013. A minimum course of study for college and career readiness shall be available K-12. A post secondary readiness assessment to be done in grade 11, rather than the grade 10 specified in the original pathways bill. Passed House. Passed Sen. Ed.

SR 640: Non-binding resolution urging local boards to offer quality digital learning opportunities. Passed: Senate Ed

SR 590: Urges the Georgia Department of Education to implement cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) classes in the public schools and to install automated external defibrillators. Passed: Senate Ed.

HR 1325: Constitutional Amendment to permit the state to create charter schools but to forbid the state from taking any money from the local school districts from which those students come. An alternative to HR 1162.

SB 403/HB 935: School nurses are to be included in the QBE formula for funding and use the FTE student counts in calculation of the grant to go to school districts (1:750 elementary, 1:1500 for middle and high). Provides money for clinic supplies, heretofore never funded. Funds a state wide coordinator in DOE.

HR 1277: Creates a 5 member House Study Committee on Expulsion School Creation to study providing a way for expelled students for non violent offenses to continue to receive educational services. Report due 12-31-12.

SB 364:

Bans use of standards based grading in grades 4-12. SBOE cannot waive this prohibition. Effective in the 2012-2013 school year.

HB 843: The Agriculture Department shall develop a farm to school program to promote the sale of Georgia-grown farm products to county and independent school districts in this state. The SBOE shall provide a program to encourage and solicit county and independent school districts to purchase Georgia-grown farm products.

Schedule for Next Week:

The General Assembly reconvenes on Wednesday, Feb. 15.

Call today to make sure the parents voices, the constituent voices, the taxpayer voices are heard by your elected officials.

Your Legislators:

Congress - Phil Gingrey (R-11)

State Senate - Lindsey Tippins (R-37)

State House - Earl Ehrhart (R-036)