

## 5. Local Control and Flexibility

Our Board supports local control and flexibility versus the state controlling educational programs through targeted funding allocations and rules. Please oppose attempts to pass statutes that limit the constitutional authority of school boards. Align legislative initiatives, such as the Governor's proposed Opportunity School District Constitutional Amendment, with State Constitutional provisions regarding management of public schools, rather than usurping locally-elected Boards' authority. Arbitrary expenditure rules inhibit best practices in budgeting based on student achievement needs.

## 6. Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM) Education

Our schools are infusing Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM) into our classrooms. Two of our schools were the first in central Georgia to earn Georgia Department of Education STEM certification after working for three years toward this goal. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the 10 fastest growing occupations are all STEM careers, and 65% of students in today's classrooms will work in jobs that are not yet created! Home to Robins Air Force Base, we are proud to partner with Robins to grow our own future engineers and computer scientists. On a global scale, the U.S. must nurture and provide STEM professionals to strengthen our competitive edge and to fuel our own economy. Please advocate for STEM education at every opportunity.

*Support of these important issues would be greatly appreciated. By working together, we can achieve a common goal of making Georgia's public schools the best possible.*



### Houston County Legislative Delegation

Senator John F. Kennedy  
Senator David Lucas  
Senator Larry Walker, III  
Representative Shaw Blackmon  
Representative Heath Clark  
Representative Robert Dickey  
Representative Bubber Epps  
Representative Buddy Harden



## 2016 Legislative Priorities

- ★ Funding
- ★ Support for Public Education, Not Tax-Funded Vouchers
- ★ Pay & Evaluation of Educators
- ★ Testing
- ★ Local Control & Flexibility
- ★ Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM) Education

### Houston County Board of Education

Fred Wilson, Chairman, Post 4  
Helen Hughes, Vice Chairman, Post 5  
Dr. Rick Unruh, Post 1  
Lori Johnson, Post 2  
Dave Crockett, Post 3  
Hoke Morrow, Post 6  
Bryan Upshaw, Post 7  
Dr. Mark Scott, Superintendent of Schools



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Our mission is to produce high-achieving students.

Our vision is that our system will be world class.

## HCBOE 2016 Legislative Priorities

### 1. Funding

Of all the issues that impact education, **funding** is the most critical. To maintain the quality of education our students deserve, state funding cuts must be absorbed by our reserves and overcome by reduced expenditures. Local funds are severely strained not only by state cuts, but also by increasing costs, placing an even greater burden on local taxpayers. For example, classified employees' benefits are paid entirely with local funds; since November 2010, healthcare premiums have skyrocketed and the Board's portion has increased 458.7 percent or \$7,002 per employee! With Governor Deal's proposed additional \$100 per month as of January 2017, our costs would increase to \$8,202 per year per employee - a staggering 520 percent increase since November 2010. This results in our district spending an additional 1.2 million per year for classified employees. The cumulative effect is an additional expense of more than \$8.6 million each year! This equates to 20 percent of the local property tax dollars.

We are thankful to be able to give our teachers a 3 percent increase this year! Although we appreciate the restoration of \$300 million dollars statewide in austerity cuts to fund this raise for teachers, we are concerned that this raise is not tied to the state salary schedule. This makes it a one-time bonus vs. a true year-to-year increase. Please ensure that the state salary schedule reflects this 3 percent increase.

Our austerity reduction is currently more than \$8 million. A 3 percent raise for all of our employees will cost our district \$4.7 million. Once we pay retirement (14.27 percent) and social security (7.65 percent) on top of the 3 percent raise, our cost escalates to \$5.8 million. The state may view the funds for the raise as a reduction in austerity, but the facts are that our district will have to find \$2 million in local funds to fund this raise and the classified health insurance increase.

School district reserves have been depleted to precarious levels. Please stand firm and refuse legislation that has an additional negative fiscal impact on public education.

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### 2. Support for Public Education, Not Tax-Funded Vouchers

The HCBOE is opposed to vouchers, tuition tax credits, or scholarships which divert K-12 public school funding to private schools or home study. Reallocating tax dollars into private schools weaken - not improve - public education. Although we do not support allocating public funds to private schools, if done so, private schools should have the same accountability measures as public schools.

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### 3. Pay and Evaluation of Educators

The current pay system for educators, which is based on their education and years of service, works well and we encourage its continuation. Merit pay has many unresolved issues such as identifying appropriate performance evaluations. A poor choice is to base pay on tests scores which measure student knowledge, not teacher competency. Instead we encourage allowing local Boards to design flexible educator evaluation tools to include observation by professionally trained administrators. Funding is also an issue; if merit pay is approved, how would it be funded?

A recent survey of Georgia educators revealed that 44 percent of our state's new teachers leave the profession within five years. Teachers ranked the evaluation method as the second primary reason they change careers. Added to the exodus is the fact that Georgia has 16 percent fewer teacher candidates enrolling in our state's teacher preparation programs. We must be able to attract and retain a sufficient number of highly-qualified teachers - our students deserve no less. Please help turn the tide on this hiring and retention crisis by addressing the evaluation method. Reduce the overemphasis on testing in Georgia's teacher evaluation system. Give our teachers the flexibility to use proficiency in place of student growth. Schools with a large number of high-achieving students are negatively impacted by the focus on student growth. In some cases our honor students are being labeled as "low growth" students because they begin with a high average which they maintain. Teachers should be able to choose the indicator which best demonstrates their students' performance. Professional learning could be part of the evaluation, resulting in better trained teachers and helping to ensure high-quality teachers. In addition, students need to be in class more days in order to count toward a teacher's performance. Currently a student may miss up to 63 days and their test scores still count toward a teacher's performance measure! If test scores are going to be used, attendance should be significantly increased.

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### 4. Testing

The number one reason that teachers leave the profession is the number of state mandated tests. The overemphasis on testing takes away valuable time and resources that would be better spent on teaching and learning. Georgia's students are tested well above the federal minimum requirement for standardized testing. Please realign state testing requirements to correlate with the new federal testing requirements.