

### **Arise legislative update 4-10-13**

## **Alabama House approves education budget with money for private school tuition subsidies, K-12 teacher pay raises**

The Alabama House [voted 84-16](#) Wednesday night for an Education Trust Fund (ETF) budget that would provide slight funding increases for K-12 and higher education next year. The \$5.7 billion spending plan would fund 2 percent pay raises for K-12 teachers and support staff – their first since 2008 – and set aside up to \$66 million for [income tax credits that could subsidize private school tuition](#) for students zoned for “failing schools.” The budget now moves to the Senate.

K-12 schools would receive 2.6 percent more support next year under the House’s ETF budget, while higher education would get 2.1 percent more. Those comparatively minor upticks would not offset Alabama’s state funding cuts to K-12 ([21.7 percent](#)) and higher education ([39.6 percent](#)) since 2008.

### **More for pre-K, less for the Alabama Reading Initiative**

Pre-kindergarten would receive \$12.5 million, or 65.5 percent, more next year under the House budget. The increase would allow 2,600 more children to participate in Alabama’s highly rated voluntary pre-K program, said Rep. Jay Love, R-Montgomery, who chairs the House’s education budget committee.

The Alabama Reading Initiative would take a \$10 million hit under the House plan, a 17.2 percent decrease that Gov. Robert Bentley recommended. Other programs that would receive less funding next year include adult education, prison education and the High Hopes program to reduce high school exit exam failure. Funding levels for distance education and the Alabama Math, Science and Technology Initiative (AMSTI) would stay the same. The budget would shift \$16 million of mental health spending from the perennially ailing General Fund to the ETF.

The House budget would make up to \$66 million available for income tax credits to help parents of children zoned for “failing schools” pay for private school tuition or a transfer to a non-failing public school under a new law enacted last month. Any unused portion of that money could help Alabama offset federal funding losses under automatic budget cuts known as sequestration, Love said.

### **Lawmakers approve liability insurance plan, reject amendments to increase AP funding**

Alabama would devote \$5 million to providing liability insurance for K-12 teachers next year under the House budget. Several Democratic lawmakers criticized the state-funded insurance program, which the House [approved 86-13](#) Wednesday night in a bill that also authorized a 2 percent teacher pay raise, as an attack on the Alabama Education Association, which provides such insurance for many teachers. Love said the program is meant to give teachers the same protection that other state employees have.

The House's ETF spending plan is little different from [the one that cleared the House's education budget committee](#) Tuesday. Lawmakers voted 61-37 against a proposal by Rep. Craig Ford, D-Gadsden, to increase K-12 teachers' pay raise to 5 percent. Representatives also rejected a pair of amendments proposed by Reps. Marcel Black, D-Tuscumbia, and Ken Johnson, R-Moulton, that would have boosted state support for Advanced Placement (AP) courses by shifting money from the liability insurance or High Hopes programs, respectively.

House members approved the ETF budget and related bills after more than six hours of debate. The Legislature will return Thursday for its 20th of 30 allowable meeting days during the 2013 regular session.

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