

Under the Gold Dome



District 149 Legislative Update - September 2015



Fall is officially here and with it comes cooler weather, festivals, football and the start to a new school year! Students and Educators alike have taken the last month to settle into class routines and gear up for the year ahead. It is no secret that the General Assembly takes the education of our youth very seriously. In fact, did you know that over half of the state's budget is put towards education? Education is a primary component to the success of Georgia's growth. It is, by far, the best tool we have in recruiting new industry, ensuring that we offer a competitive and prepared work force. Each year, hundreds of bills and ideas are brought up in an effort to improve educational standards in Georgia and 2015 was no exception.

This session, ideas such as "Move When Ready", "Education Reform Commission" and "Opportunity School District" made headlines as we studied numerous education issues. Legislation regarding education is important, and as expected, with any important issue comes many questions and concerns. What is an Opportunity School District? How is the state handling future reform? What is in store for 2016? These are excellent questions and I assure you, we are working on thoughtful policy and solutions for all.

The idea of an Opportunity School District (OSD) has been a hot button topic all year. The OSD, if implemented, will be headed by a superintendent appointed by the governor that would take over the operation of under-performing schools, convert them to charter schools or shut them down. The statewide district would be limited to taking over 20 schools a year and only schools that have seen 3 years of failing results would be eligible for the program. Proponents of the OSD believe that this will be an effective way to hold failing schools accountable. Those against the plan fear loss of "local control" in education. While the debate continues on whether or not this is the best option for the future of education, there is one important catch, and that catch is YOU. Georgia voters will make the final decision regarding the OSD during the 2016 General Elections. Still think your vote doesn't matter? Important measures such as this are exactly why elections matter! I encourage you to research this program so that when you head to the polls, you are prepared to cast your vote.

In January, Governor Deal announced the creation of Georgia's Education Reform Commission. The commission is made up of education experts from across the state, as well as, a number of legislators. The commission will continue to hold meetings for the rest of the year and will eventually offer ideas concerning the state's education system. The commission is looking at a number of issues including the current funding formula, recommendations intended to improve the system, increased access to early learning programs, the recruitment of high-quality instructors and the expansion of school options for Georgia's families. The recommendations that the commission puts forward will determine the legislation we will see regarding education during the 2016 session. If you have thoughts, concerns or ideas regarding education, I encourage you to attend commission meetings or reach out to me directly. I am here to listen to your concerns and present your ideas before the General Assembly. While I am proud of the strides we have made to improve education, we still have our work cut out for us.

As your Representative, I know the importance of our local school systems. I also know that success is much more difficult without adequate support from the state level. In fact, I am pleased to report that in signing this year's budget, Governor Deal has approved Sparsity Grants for two of our District 149 school districts! With hard work, we were able to secure additional funding for the Wheeler and Telfair County school systems. I promise to continue do my best in looking out for the best interests of our students, educators and administrators when considering future legislation. Thank you to all of those that serve in our education sector. It can be a thankless, demanding job but I assure you, your hard work does not go unnoticed. I truly appreciate the impact you make on a daily basis and I encourage you to contact me with your thoughts and input regarding education. It is a true pleasure to serve you and our great district. I sincerely thank each and every one of you for your words of encouragement and support. God bless you and may God continue to bless the great state of Georgia!

