

# Lawmakers telegraph priorities for student cellphone bans, tax cuts and education

By Mark Niesse  
Capitol Beat News Service

From school cellphone bans to tax cuts, some of this year's most consequential proposals for new Georgia laws have been in the works for months.

State legislators laid the groundwork last year for bills that will be considered during the General Assembly's session that began this month. About 20 study committees held public meetings across Georgia to set an initial agenda of the state's top issues.

Now that lawmakers reviewed Gov. Brian Kemp's budget proposals last week, bills will soon be lined up for debates and votes.

Both Republicans and Democrats support limiting student cellphone use in public high schools.

A Senate study committee recommended a "bell-to-bell" personal communication device ban in high schools, along with stronger parental consent laws, AI restrictions and limits on targeted advertising.

"We are putting this report forward knowing that the giant technology companies don't want this. The Senate will be going into battle together to pass bipartisan legislation," said state Sen. Shawn Still, R-Suwanee. "There has to be a balance between profit and responsibility to protect

our children."

Lawmakers are also focused on lowering tax burdens on Georgians, highlighted by a Senate committee that sought to eliminate income taxes on the first \$50,000 of income for individuals and \$100,000 for couples starting in 2027.

"For the average family, eliminating the income tax is the equivalent of a little more than a 5% raise. That's real money that helps cover necessities today and creates a little breathing room tomorrow," said state Sen. Blake Tillery, R-Vidalia.

Here's a look at recommendations of several study committees:

Provide funding to

college students based on financial need. The Senate Study Committee on Higher Education Affordability said need-based financial aid is essential for students who meet the academic requirements to attend college but lack enough money to pay for it. Kemp subsequently proposed \$325 million for a scholarship program for students with limited means.

Upgrade 911 services to accommodate the rise of cellphones and decline of landlines. The House Study Committee on Funding for Next Generation 911 recommended creating a statewide fee for 911 services, replacing local

fees, to help fund technology that would allow Georgians to contact emergency services using voice, text and data.

Make students ineligible for sports if they miss too many days of school. The Senate Study Committee on Combatting Chronic Absenteeism in Schools also proposed suspending driver's licenses of students who were chronically absent, meaning they had missed at least 10% of the school year. And the committee recommended less punitive interventions to help students, such as hearing and vision screenings.

Improve the process for biological fathers

with limited financial resources to establish a legal relationship with their children. The House Study Committee on Affordability and Accessibility of Georgia's Legitimation Process suggested several ways to improve the court system by publishing standardized legitimized forms on court websites and clearing backlogs.

These proposals could be introduced as bills that would then be considered by the state House and Senate.

For a bill to become a law, it must be passed by both chambers by the end of this year's legislative session April 2 and then approved by Kemp.

## Basketball brawl

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"During last night's Atkinson County basketball game, an altercation occurred among spectators during halftime in the heat of the game. Swift and immediate action was taken by the Atkinson County Sheriff's Office, Atkinson County School Resource Officers, and school staff. As a

precautionary measure, the gymnasium was cleared of all spectators to ensure the safety of everyone in attendance, and the game was able to safely resume. At this time, there are no reported injuries.

"While we are proud of our passionate fan base and competitive spirit, Atkinson County

Schools does not tolerate inappropriate or disruptive behavior from spectators or athletes. Actions that compromise the safety and integrity of our events will be addressed swiftly and seriously. Video footage from the event is currently being reviewed, and criminal charges may be pursued if

warranted. Disciplinary action will also be taken in accordance with school system policies and athletic guidelines."

Monday, Clinch Schools Superintendent Dr. Lori James said, "We are working with Atkinson County during their investigation of the incident at Friday night's game. We have also

independently reviewed video footage and will take any necessary action. We are committed

to ensuring all school events are safe places for our students and for our community."

## School board meeting

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• Approved the school activity accounts for fiscal year 2026 quarter two.

• Approved two days of vacation leave for Superintendent Dr. Lori James Friday, March 27 and Mon-

day, March 30.

• Approved the 2026 baseball schedule.

• Heard from Dr. James about board training on February 5 at 5 p.m., and that they will need to schedule additional training in the Spring.

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