



# Legislative Update

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## LEGISLATURE LEAVES FOR SPRING BREAK

The legislature left after the conclusion of session on March 14 for a one-week Spring Break and will reconvene on March 25. A total of eight session weeks remain before the conclusion of session on May 17.

## HOUSE CHARTER SCHOOL BILL STALLS

The House was again expected to take up HCS/HB 581 (Roeber) on March 13, but the bill was not debated. Thus far, Missouri NEA and other public education advocates have been successful in lobbying against passage of the statewide expansion of charter schools in HCS/HB 581.

The attempt to target only districts in St. Louis County for charter school expansion did not help gain votes or advance the bill. There are indications that House leaders and charter proponents now regard the bill as stalled, perhaps for the rest of this session. SCS/SB 292 (Eigel) remains on the Senate calendar but was not taken up by the Senate on March 13.

Both bills would allow charter schools to be sponsored by outside entities (other than the local school board) and operate in other parts of the state. The Association strongly opposes both SCS/SB 292 and HCS/HB 581.

**IF YOU HAVE ALREADY CONTACTED YOUR STATE SENATOR OR STATE REPRESENTATIVE** and they have indicated that they are supporting the Association's position and oppose the charter school expansion bills, the legislative spring break is an excellent time to continue the conversation and thank them for their support.

**IF YOU HAVEN'T ALREADY DONE SO**, please call, write or use the link below to send an e-mail to urge your State Senator and State Representative to oppose the charter school expansion bills. The message can be edited, and your message will have GREATER IMPACT if you add your own comments.

Charter school policy is an unfamiliar issue for many legislators, particularly those who were recently elected, so the Association hopes that many of these advocacy messages will serve as the beginning of a dialog that helps legislators fully understand the Association's position and guidance.

[https://actionnetwork.org/letters/hcshb-581-charter-school-campaign-feb-2019?source=direct\\_link&](https://actionnetwork.org/letters/hcshb-581-charter-school-campaign-feb-2019?source=direct_link&)

The Association's position statement on charter schools can be found here:

[https://www.mnea.org/Uploads/Public/Documents/News/Positions/CharterSchools\\_PositionPaper\\_2017.pdf](https://www.mnea.org/Uploads/Public/Documents/News/Positions/CharterSchools_PositionPaper_2017.pdf)

## **CAPITOL ACTION DAYS**

MNEA Capitol Action Days allow planned, face-to-face contact with legislators throughout the session. Capitol Action Days continued March 13 when members from Governance Districts 4 & 5 visited the Capitol. Capitol Action Days will continue through the end of session in May.

**PLEASE NOTE THE LOCATION CHANGE: MEET AT MNEA HEADQUARTERS AT 10 A.M. FOR THE BRIEFING!**

For details and contact information, please visit:

<http://www.mnea.org/Missouri/CapitolActionDays.aspx>

## **TURNAROUND SCHOOLS BILL CAUGHT UP IN CHARTER RETALIATION**

The House debated HCS/HB 604 (Henderson) on March 13, but did not bring the bill to a vote. The bill would authorize appropriations to fund consultants that would help support instructional improvements in a set of schools identified for improvement. This program could overlap with DESE identification of schools in need of comprehensive or targeted intervention as required under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

The bill's sponsor has been clear in his opposition to HB 581, the charter expansion bill, and HB 604 appears to have been blocked by purposefully controversial amendments. The bill was laid over with HA 1 (Mary Elizabeth Coleman) pending. HA 1 would prevent any school district or charter school from paying an administrator more than the annual salary of the Governor, which is currently \$133,821 according to the Missouri official manual. A second amendment filed by Rep. Jared Taylor, but not yet offered, purports to outlaw school employee deductions for association membership dues while allowing deductions for all other purposes.

## **BUDGET**

The House Budget Committee completed committee action for the operating budget bills, HBs 1-13 (Smith) and approved HCS versions on March 11. The committee bills are now on the House calendar for upcoming floor debate. Floor action will probably take place during the week that the House returns from Spring Break. The committee markup sheets remove \$100M in general revenue funds from various parts of the budget and moved the funding to the State Road Fund to fund road and bridge work. Among the reductions made to support this transfer was a \$5M reduction to pupil transportation, reducing the Governor's proposed \$10M increase to \$5M.

## **TAX CREDIT VOUCHERS**

The Senate debated SS/SCS/SB 160 (Koenig) on March 13, but did not bring the bill to a vote. SB 160 is a tax credit voucher proposal. The bill would create a tax credit for contributions to largely unaccountable third-party funding organizations that would hand out scholarships that allow a student to attend a private or home school or pay tuition to a different school district or a charter school. The

Association continues to vigorously oppose diversion of public funds to unaccountable third-party bureaucracies or to private and home schools that are not subject to public school standards.

## **RELIGION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

The House gave first round approval to HB 267 (Baker) on March 13. The bill states that school districts may offer elective social studies courses on the Bible, which is already permissible under existing law. The House debated an amendment offered by Rep. Dogan to further allow elective courses on the Quran and Hindu scriptures. The House changed that amendment to remove those additional scripture references and Rep. Dogan withdrew his amendment. Regardless of any provision of state law, public school instruction about religion must adhere to U.S. Supreme Court case law regarding the separation of church and state under the First Amendment. The Association believes that schools should teach the rights and responsibilities associated with the freedom of religion, the religious heritage and diversity of the United States, respect for the beliefs of others and the historical and cultural influences of various world religions.

## **ABSENTEE AND EARLY VOTING**

The House Elections Committee heard HB 992 (Price) and HB 994 (Price) on March 13. HB 992 allows voters to vote by absentee ballot without giving a reason. HB 994 creates a structure for early voting. The Association supports early voting options and the "no-fault" approach to absentee voting and believes that both bills will help encourage and support voter participation.

## **STATE DEMOGRAPHER**

The Senate gave first round approval to SS/SB 213 (Hegeman) on March 13. The bill requires the nonpartisan state demographer to establish the Redistricting Public Comment Portal for the purpose of publicly accepting any comments, records, documents, maps, data files, communication, or information of any kind relating to the redistricting process. Any such submissions shall be accompanied by a disclosure that indicates whether the person making the submission was responsible in whole or in part for the submission or another person contributed money that was intended to fund preparation of the submission and, if so, the disclosure shall additionally identify each such contributor.

## **PROFESSIONAL LICENSES**

The House gave final approval to HCS/HB 564 (Grier) on March 14 by a vote of 151-1. The bill provides that state licensing authorities may only disqualify a person from a professional license for a prior conviction of a crime if the crime for which the person was convicted directly relates to the duties and responsibilities for the licensed occupation. Licensing boards could no longer use vague and general terms such as "moral turpitude" for disqualification, and disqualification for an offense shall not last longer than five years, except for violent or sexual offenses. The bill appears to pertain primarily to occupations and professions regulated by the Division of Professional Registration. The Association believes this policy could benefit teacher recruitment and retention.

## **STEM DIPLOMA ENDORSEMENT**

The House gave first round approval to HCS/HB 456 (Neely) on March 13. The bill creates an advisory committee that is tasked with making recommendations for standards for a high school diploma endorsement in the subjects of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

## **INTERNET SAFETY AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

The House gave first round approval to HCS/HB 169 (Gannon) on March 13. The bill requires public schools to teach students appropriate online behavior. The Association believes school districts should have policies in place to address this important subject.

## **HOUSE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

The committee heard three bills on March 12:

HB 342 (Washington) to require schools to adopt and implement a policy for prefilled auto syringes of epinephrine. The school nurse or designee would be required to keep track of the supply.

HB 594 (Swan) to include students in the attendance calculation for the school funding formula if they attend an early childhood education program that is under contract with a district or charter school and that meets standards established by the State Board of Education.

HB 1024 (Dogan) to create a work group to do academic performance standards on workforce development and workplace skills.

The committee also voted to approve HB 606 (Basye) on March 12 by a party-line vote of 9-4. The bill would allow school districts to contract with municipal bus programs to transport pupils.

## **HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON STUDENT ACCOUNTABILITY**

The committee heard four bills on March 12:

HB 132 (Carter) and HB 309 (Walker) both require certain high poverty public schools to offer "breakfast after the bell." The Association supports this effort to ensure that all students are in school and ready to learn.

HB 464 (Kelley) to revise existing laws regarding reading intervention programs and establish a new reading intervention program for students in kindergarten to fourth grade. The hearing was continued from last week. The Association believes that key decisions about assessment, placement, additional instruction and advancement should remain at the local level with district, employee, parent and student input.

HB 534 (Swan) to allow and support school-community partnerships created by school districts and charter schools. The Association supports the bill.

The committee also voted to approve HCS/HBs 281 and 570 (Kelley) on March 12. The bill would allow school districts to implement alternative instruction plans to avoid make-up days.

## **SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

The committee heard two bills on March 12:

SB 365 (Hoskins) to authorize appropriations to fund consultants that would help support instructional improvements in a set of schools identified for improvement. This program could overlap with DESE identification of schools in need of comprehensive or targeted intervention as required under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

SB 407 (Wallingford) to include students in the attendance calculation for the school funding formula if they attend an early childhood education program that is under contract with a district or charter school and that meets standards established by the State Board of Education.

The committee also voted to approve four bills:

SCS/SB 205 (Arthur) to allow A+ Schools scholarship to cover dual credit or dual enrollment for qualifying high schoolers. The SCS will make the high school scholarship portion needs-based. Eligible A+ students may receive reimbursement for the cost of tuition, books, and fees for any dual-credit or dual-enrollment course offered in association with a public community college or vocational or technical school. The bill adds a requirement that participating high schools demonstrate a commitment to ensure that all students earn credits towards any type of college degree while in high school. The Association supports the bill.

SB 314 (Burlison) to prohibit institutions of higher learning from discriminating against a religious student organization.

SB 358 (Sater) to revise the Health Professional Student Loan Repayment Program. The Association believes the bill will help create additional capacity of mental health service providers in areas of critical need around the state and supports the bill.

SCS/SB 272 (Emery) to exclude special education high needs funds from the district average per pupil spending that determines the threshold for those funds. The bill would increase high needs funding eligibility for all districts receiving the funds, especially for small districts with students with very high needs.

### **Legislative Update 2019**

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