



Legislative Update

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SENATE MAY RETURN TO NEW SUBSTITUTE VERSION OF SB 55 ON VOUCHERS, CHARTERS AND VIRTUAL SCHOOLS

The Senate may return to debate on SB 55 (O'Laughlin) next week. The adoption of SS#2 for SCS/SBs 55, 23 and 25 (O'Laughlin) was reconsidered back on March 1. Sen. Rowden is expected to withdraw SS#2 and offer a new substitute next week. The Association opposes the bill.

Senate Substitute #2 removed the provisions relating to full-time virtual schools but added several other provisions, including the "back door" charter expansion language of HB 942 (Haffner). SS#2 also contains tax credit style vouchers, charter school expansion, requirements for gifted education programs, revised provisions for reading interventions, increased diversion of district funds to charter schools and home school student participation in MSHSAA activities.

HOUSE PASSES CHARTER SCHOOL FUNDING BILL

The House approved HCS/HB 137 (Richey) on April 15 by a vote of 86-66. The bill would revise the law specifying payments to charter schools and shift more local school funds to charter schools. The Association opposes the bill.

The Association urges the legislature to provide an appropriate allowance in the calculation of charter school funding for maintaining district capacity to serve all students. Even charter school students rely on the district to remain capable to serve all students, especially in the case that one or more charter or district schools close. The House adopted language that would allocate a small, 1/4% share of funds for district administrative capacity. Funding should also be provided to maintain the other functions needed at the district level and within district schools.

District schools typically have higher enrollments and higher costs for special education and transportation. The House adopted language to distribute special education funding based upon actual expenditures for special education but rejected an amendment that would distribute transportation funds based upon actual transportation expenditures.

More broadly, the Association believes that charter schools should be sponsored by and accountable to the local community through the elected school board and approved only after an impact study is conducted by the district to consider the proposal. Charter schools should be subject to the same standards of accountability, transparency and respect for the rights of students, parents and staff as are applicable to traditional public schools.

HOUSE DEBATES ALTERNATIVE TEACHER CERTIFICATION

The House perfected HB 439 (Davidson) on April 15. The bill would allow school districts to issue school district-specific teaching permits for persons without a certificate of license to teach granted by the state board of education. The Association believes this additional certification path is not needed. The Association is also concerned that the bill would lower the basic standards for teachers and opposes the bill as filed.

The House adopted an amendment to require the State Board to ratify the district permit, so that the teacher can legally participate in the appropriate public retirement system. House amendments also limit a district to using the district permit for 15% of teachers, require a candidate to have a bachelor's degree and require a participating district to establish training on classroom management and provide mentoring for the district permit teachers. With the amendments, the district permits still lower certification standards by not requiring adequate preparation on how to teach and would limit the permit recipients to teach in the district offering the permit without the portability of a statewide teaching certificate.

HOUSE APPROVES COMPUTER SCIENCE BILL

The House gave final approval to HCS/HB 320 (Fitzwater) on April 15. The bill would require computer science courses or imbedded instruction in elementary and secondary schools. The House approved an amendment offered by Rep. Basye to create a process where voters of a school district could file a petition to require the school board to place a requested item on the next meeting's agenda and shall take a vote on the petitioned item. Petitions could seek to address board policy, administrative actions, curriculum, instruction or the school calendar. The re-perfection process removed an amendment and shortened the timeline to require the school board to place the requested item on the agenda for the next board meeting. The House also added an amendment to add HB 478 (Christofanelli) to rename the state's 529 education savings program to be the Missouri Education Program and include all eligible educational institutions allowed under federal law.

SCHOOL BOARD AND MUNICIPAL ELECTION DATE

The House perfected HB 920 (Baker) on April 13. The bill changes the general municipal election for schools and local governments from April to November. This change would likely make it harder for school board candidates and school issues to receive as much attention during the November election cycle when attention will be taken up by partisan contests for federal, statewide and legislative offices and statewide ballot issues.

SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS

The House perfected HB 253 (Fishel) on April 12. The bill changes school board elections for Springfield school district from seven at-large board members to two at-large members and five subdistrict members. The House approved an amendment to add HB 164 (Veit) to allow school districts to change from at-large to subdistrict school board elections. The bill has been referred to Fiscal Review Committee and must be approved by that committee before it can be taken up for final passage.

SCHOOL BUS CROSSING ARM ENFORCEMENT

The House Special Committee on Urban Issues heard HB 1425 (Hicks) on April 12. The bill allows school districts to enter into intergovernmental agreements with the local law enforcement agency to issue violations regarding school bus crossing arms using an automated system. The vendor for the automated system would incur the costs to install and maintain the system and supply the video evidence to local law enforcement. The net proceeds of the civil fines for violations would be paid to the school district.

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The committee heard four bills on April 13:

HB 543 (Pollitt) to create a public school open enrollment program. The House voted to remove the transfer of local funds from the sending district and clarify that the bill does not authorize transfers to charter schools or to full-time virtual schools. School districts would have the option to specify the number of transfer students they are willing to receive. A district may adopt a diversity plan that could limit student transfers out of the district for transfers that would work against the diversity plan. The Association remains concerned that some students may be left behind in such a transfer plan, particularly if funding is not provided to support participation of students with special needs and at-risk students. Ongoing appropriations to the state fund created to support those transportation and special education expenses will be needed to implement the bill.

HB 627 (Patterson) to create a children's savings account program for children born in 2022 and thereafter.

SB 515 (Gannon) to modify provisions relating to continuing education in youth suicide awareness and prevention for teachers. The bill provides that the optional, professional development training in youth suicide awareness and prevention shall contain a unit relating to stress management strategies for students and faculty. The Association supports the bill.

SB 566 (Moon) to create an office of public policy events at each public institution of higher education. The office would be required to organize debates, group forums, and individual lectures representing opposing sides of public policy issues. The legislature may provide funds to establish these offices, but the Association is concerned the bill requires the institution to fund the mandated office if the legislature fails to fund the program.

HOUSE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The committee heard several bills on April 13:

HB 421 (Proudie) to create subdistricts within certain school districts in St. Louis County. The fiscal note from similar previous legislation indicates that the St. Louis County Board of Election Commissioners believes that the language of the bill could require this board election change to apply to Riverview Gardens, Hazelwood, Ferguson-Florissant, Normandy, Ritenour, University City, Pattonville, and Ladue school districts.

SB 86 (Hegeman) to create new provisions prohibiting the use of public funds by an officer, employee, or agent of any school district to influence elections for public office or ballot measures. Any purposeful violation of this bill is punishable as a class four election offense.

SB 152 (Hoskins) to enact several provisions related to education. The bill contains a variety of provisions concerning the state's 529 education savings program, gifted education, the governing board of Missouri Western State University, community college annexations, competency-based education, Montessori schools, DESE reporting of reports from federal agencies and healthcare plans for students with seizure disorders. The Association supports the portions of the bill pertaining to competency-based education.

The committee voted to approve three bills on April 13:

HB 254 (Brown) to require school districts to implement policies requiring accommodations for breast-feeding mothers. The Association supports the bill.

HCS/HB 368 (Gregory) pertaining to reading intervention in schools. The bill repeals retention in grade requirements for struggling readers, requires assessment and intervention beginning in kindergarten and requires systematic and explicit interventions for students with characteristics of dyslexia. The HCS clarifies that teacher professional development in reading intervention shall be provided at district expense. The HCS also clarifies that schools will not be required to use curriculum and materials approved by DESE. The Association believes that reading instruction, with appropriate evidence-based reading intervention, especially in the early grades, is essential for learning and achieving high standards in all content areas.

HB 743 (Wiemann) to require trauma-informed schools to keep incident records and provide notice of certain incidents.

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