



Legislative Update

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HONESTY IN EDUCATION

The House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee met on January 11 and heard bills reflecting issues about school boards and instruction concerning race and history.

HB 1747 (Basye) would establish a process for school board member recall elections and allow lawsuits to seek to require school employees and officials to perform actions required by school law. The Association is concerned that this language could subject school employees to frivolous lawsuits and opposes the bill.

HB 1474 (Schroer) defines "curriculum implementing critical race theory", lists specific examples and bans schools and educators from teaching, using, or providing such curriculum or from teaching, affirming, or promoting any of the claims, views, or opinions found in the 1619 Project or the other, targeted curricula. The Association opposes the bill.

HB 1995 (Richey) creates new requirements regarding the teaching of "controversial or divisive" topics. The bill creates mechanisms by which parents can object to instruction and materials based on their beliefs and creates an extensive mandate to put all school curriculum and all source materials. The Association opposes the bill.

The Association believes that curriculum decisions are best made at the local level and opposes both HB 1474 and HB 1995. The Association believes that teachers and students should be able to explore, present and discuss divergent points of view. Controversial issues should be a part of instructional programs when the issues are appropriate to the curriculum and the maturity level of the students. The work of social studies teachers involves engaging students in uncovering sources and evidence and then challenging and weighing that evidence. Both HB 1474 and HB 1995 would interfere with high quality instruction.

CHARTER SCHOOLS

The House Budget Committee heard HB 1552 (Richey) on January 11. The committee met again on January 13 to approve a House committee substitute (HCS) version of the bill. The bill would revise the law specifying payments to charter schools and shift more local school funds to charter schools. The HCS version includes additional changes specific to the St. Louis City district. The Association opposes the bill.

The Senate Education Committee will hear SB 650 (Eigel) on January 18. The bill would allow charter schools to be sponsored by outside entities (other than the local school board) and operate in many districts around the state. The Association opposes the bill.

Missouri NEA 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. School board sponsorship ensures that the board can plan the use of all school funds and implement the services and programs that meet the needs of all students in the community. The Association also believes that all 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.

SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS FOR ESSER III

The legislature faces several tasks with urgent deadlines prior to the end of session in May. These tasks include supplemental appropriations for federal ARP ESSER III funding and Medicaid expansion.

The House Budget Committee heard HB 3014 (Smith), the supplemental budget bill, on January 10. HB 3014 would appropriate the \$1.9 billion in federal ESSER III funding to school districts along with several provisions needed to fund Medicaid expansion this year as approved by voters.

The Association supports those provisions in HB 3014 and appreciates the committee's prompt action to hear the bill so early in the legislative session. Missouri NEA urges the legislature to quickly approve this appropriation measure. The \$1.9 billion in federal ESSER III grant funding was approved by Congress last year and should be appropriated as soon as possible to allow the funds to be used according to district plans to provide a safe return to school, address learning loss and help students recover from the impact of the pandemic.

PERSONAL PROPERTY TAX

The Senate Ways and Means Committee heard SB 649 (Eigel) on January 13. The bill would gradually eliminate the tax on personal property tax by incrementally lowering the assessment percentage from the current 33 1/3% rate over a period of up to fifty years, based on offsetting increases in revenues in each county from taxes on property in other classes. The Association is concerned that the bill would block incremental school revenue growth in proportion to assessed value growth and shift tax burden onto real estate owners. This shift would also create increasing disparities between personal property tax assessments across the state as various counties will see differences in the rate of assessment growth. The Association opposes the bill.

INITIATIVE PETITIONS

The House Elections and Elected Officials Committee heard HJR 79 (Henderson) on January 12. The joint resolution would make it harder for citizens to use the initiative petition process in the future. HJR 79 would require a higher fraction of signatures (10% of voters rather than 8 % per district) in more parts of the state (all eight Congressional districts rather than six) for an initiative that amends the Constitutions. The HJR also would require a two-thirds supermajority vote (rather than the simple majority vote required since Missouri became a state) to pass a Constitutional amendment brought forward by either the legislature or by initiative. The Association opposes this measure and will continue to fight to protect the citizens' initiative petition process.

CONGRESSIONAL REDISTRICTING

The House-Special Committee on Redistricting approved HCS/HB 2117 (Shaul) on January 12. The bill would update Missouri's eight Congressional districts, based upon the 2020 U.S. Census data that was released last year. The HCS includes an emergency clause and revises the map to keep town of Richmond entirely within one district. The original bill had divided the town into two districts.

The committee met again, later in the day, to hear HB 2324 (Quade), another redistricting bill that creates a somewhat different map. The legislature revises Congressional districts every ten years by enacting a bill that specifies those new districts. With candidate filing beginning in late February and ending in late March, candidates will want to know what the district boundaries are before that filing window closes.

HB 2117 is regarded as a "6-2" map, meaning that, like the current map, historical voting performance would maintain a 6-2 split in the Republican and Democratic Party makeup of Missouri's delegation to Congress. Some majority party officials have indicated a preference to create a "7-1" map that would attempt to make an additional minority party seat, such as CD 5 in the Kansas City area, less safe for a minority party candidate. Given that there is not yet consensus on this question, the redistricting bill could occupy a significant amount of time and attention and create additional tension amongst legislators, particularly on the Senate side.

Prompt House action seems likely in the short term. The House approved a temporary rule on January 10 that specifies how the floor debate on the redistricting bill will be handled. Floor debate will be limited to a total of four hours, with equal time allotted to the bill sponsor and the minority floor leader. Maps and other necessary props will be permitted on the House floor for consideration of that bill, and all amendments must be submitted electronically by January 17. The rule change was approved with bipartisan support and little debate.

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