



Legislative Update

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LEGISLATURE LEAVES FOR SPRING BREAK

The legislature will be on spring break next week and return to session on March 20. This spring break represents an approximate midpoint in the session after completing ten out of eighteen total session weeks. The session will end on May 12.

Thus far, the House has passed three bills relating to education: HB 253 (Pollitt) on public school open enrollment, HB 70 (Dinkins) on school protection officers and HB 827 (Christofanelli) regarding virtual schools. The Senate has also passed three bills relating to education: SB 4 (Koenig) regarding parent access, curriculum, instruction and other issues, SB 34 (May) to allow public schools to offer elective social studies courses on the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament and SB 75 (Black) regarding public school retirement.

CAPITOL ACTION DAYS

Capitol Action Days are part of the Association's plan to promote positive policy for public education. MNEA's Capitol Action Days occur regularly on Wednesdays during legislative session and continued this week on March 8th. For more information and to register for your Capitol Action Day, please visit <https://www.mnea.org/CAD>

HOUSE PASSES OPEN ENROLLMENT

The House gave final approval to HCS/HB 253 (Brad Pollitt) on March 8 by a vote of 85-69. The bill primarily allows students to transfer between school districts under certain conditions.

The Association believes that public school choice plans with state funding may harm students and our public schools unless essential criteria are in place for implementing, monitoring, and evaluating their effectiveness. Interdistrict choice laws in other states have tended to increase racial, ethnic and socioeconomic segregation of school communities, and the House removed a key provision in HB 253 that was designed to limit those harmful effects. The Association opposes the perfected version of the bill.

HOUSE COMMITTEE CREATES OMNIBUS EDUCATION BILL

The House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee approved an omnibus version of HB 497 (Ed Lewis) on March 8.

HB 497 renames and revises the existing "Urban Flight and Rural Needs Scholarship Program". This program was created in the late 1990s but was defunded in the early 2000s. The bill increases the maximum number scholarships to 300 and provides scholarships for students who commit to teach in hard to staff schools or hard to staff subject areas.

The HCS also includes the provisions of several other bills:

HB 190 (Ed Lewis) to allow school districts to identify hard-to-staff schools and hard-to-staff subject areas and designate a higher placement on the salary schedule when hiring such teachers. The HCS clarifies that the teacher salary schedule remains applicable to all teachers.

HB 496 (Ed Lewis) to enact several school retirement provisions, including a 2.55% benefit factor for 32 or more years of PSRS service and extending the term of teacher critical shortage work after retirement to a maximum of four years.

HB 116 (Brenda Shields) to require schools to have bleeding control kits available in high-traffic areas of schools.

HB 70 (Chris Dinkins) to allow school staff other than teachers and administrators to serve as school protection officers.

HB 809 (Michael O'Donnell) to require DESE to convene a work group to develop academic performance standards for the half credit course in personal finance required for high school graduation.

HB 483 (Ben Baker) create a policy that would allow students to receive credit for participation in out-of-classroom learning experiences as approved by the State Board of Education, a school board, or a charter school.

HB 669 (Ron Copeland) to eliminate the requirement that schools using the Rap Back program for notifications of law violations must require all employees to undergo an additional fingerprint background check every six years.

The Association supports the provisions for teacher recruitment scholarships, school retirement and background checks. The provision regarding salary schedule placement should be a matter for collective bargaining at the local level.

FULL-TIME VIRTUAL SCHOOLS

The House approved HB 827 (Phil Christofanelli) on March 8 by a vote of 136-0. The bill makes minor revisions to the new structure of accountability, enrollment, participation and finance created for full-time virtual schools last session in SS/HCS/HB 1552 (Richey). The bill includes additional clarifying language regarding attendance and payment provisions and enrollment policies. The Association supports the bill.

HONESTY IN EDUCATION

The House Elementary And Secondary Education Committee heard two bills relating to curriculum and instruction on March 8. HB 482 (Ben Baker) and HB 627 (Christofanelli) each create new provisions concerning instruction, access to information about school finance and curriculum and parent information access. The Association is concerned that some of these provisions may adversely affect the freedom of teachers to provide the honest education our students deserve and opposes both bills.

TRANSGENDER ATHLETIC PARTICIPATION

The Senate did not hold debate this week on SB 39 (Holly Thompson-Rehder). The bill would prevent transgender athletic participation in competitive girl's or women's events in public middle schools or high schools.

There was some indication that the bill might be combined with one of the bills pertaining to restrictions on gender-affirming care for minors. Many senators were occupied in negotiations on the bill on gender affirming care this week, and the Senate eventually adjourned for spring break after meeting in caucus on the issue on March 8.

HB 39 would override MSHSAA policies on transgender participation that seek to balance fairness and inclusion for athletes. The Association believes that educators should continue to establish the policies and procedures that govern the activities of Missouri students who participate in school activities and opposes the bill.

RESTRICTING DIVERSITY AND EQUITY POLICIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The House-Special Committee on Government Accountability heard HB 1196 (Doug Richey) on March 6. The bill is the creation of an out-of-state think tank, the Cicero Institute from Austin, Texas. The bill seeks to ban certain policies in public college admissions, contracting, hiring and promotions. The Association believes that school recruitment policies should seek to recruit and retain culturally diverse education professionals. The Association is concerned that the broad definitions and wording in the bill may prohibit schools from assessing and revising employment policies and practices to improve opportunities and increase applications from underrepresented groups. The Association opposes the bill.

CURSIVE WRITING

The House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee also heard HB 232 (Gretchen Bangert) on March 8. The bill would require school districts and charter schools to provide instruction in cursive writing by the end of the fifth grade, including a proficiency test of competency in reading and writing cursive.

RETIREMENT

The House Pensions Committee heard HB 257 (Brad Pollitt) on March 7. The bill extends the critical shortage employment option from two years to four years. The Association supports the bill.

PROP C SALES TAX ON GROCERIES

The Senate reconsidered the approval of SS/SB 131 (Brattin) on March 6. The previous version of the bill included the language of SB 161 (Mary Elizabeth Coleman) to remove the one cent of Prop C sales tax for schools currently applied to groceries. The previous version of the bill also eliminated all local sales taxes on groceries. The bill was reconsidered due to the enormous revenue reduction that it would cause for schools and other local governments. The sponsor offered a new SS version of the bill that did not include those sales tax exemptions. Several amendments were offered to reinstate those exemptions and the bill was laid over without being brought to another perfection vote.

SENATE-EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

The committee heard four bills on March 7:

SB 226 (Schroer) to create a 100% tax credit for all tuition expenses for attending private K-12 schools or a non-resident school district. The Association believes that state-mandated parental option plans compromise free, equitable, universal and quality public education for every student and opposes the bill.

SB 234 (Ben Brown) to move school board elections to the November general election. The bill also allows school board candidates to also file for and be elected to serve in other elective offices.

SB 230 (Jill Carter) and SB 411 (Ben Brown) are intended to allow home school students to participate in public school activities. SB 230 provides that districts may not prohibit home school students from trying out or auditioning for membership in an activity, while SB 411 prohibits a district from being part of an association that prohibits home school participation in activities. The Association believes that educators should continue to establish the policies and procedures that govern school activities.

The committee also voted to approve three bills:

SCS/SB 255 (Rick Brattin) to create a new program to use appropriated state funds to pay for private school costs for income-qualified students. The Association believes that state-mandated parental option plans compromise free, equitable, universal and quality public education for every student and opposes the bill.

SB 304 (Eigel) to 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. 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.

SCS/SB 360 (Koenig) to revise the existing tax credit voucher program enacted in 2021 by HB 349. The bill would expand the program by removing the cap on the maximum total of tax credits, increasing funding per student and removing the family income limitation. The Association opposes the bill.

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