



Legislative Update

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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 April 19. For more information and to register for your Capitol Action Day, please visit <https://www.mnea.org/CAD>

SENATE COMMITTEE COMPLETES BUDGET

The Senate Appropriations Committee completed work on the state operating budget bills, HBs 1-13 (Cody Smith), on April 19. The SCS versions were adopted by the committee and will be reported to the floor. The Senate is expected to take up the bills for floor debate next week.

The HCS versions of the bills made several significant cuts from the Governor's recommendations. Those reductions include removing all state funding for public libraries in retaliation for their opposition to book banning policies. The Senate committee version of the bill restores all state funding for public libraries as contained in the Governor's budget.

The Senate committee has restored many cuts made to the Governor's budget by the House and has also added numerous additional funding items. This process is made much easier by the fact that the state currently has an unusually high general revenue fund balance of more than \$5 billion.

The House adopted language amendments to restrict any use of HB 2 (K-12) or HB 3 (higher education) funds for diversity, equity or inclusion programs. The Senate committee version of both those budget bills removes this problematic language.

The Association appreciates the effort and leadership from Senators Hough and Arthur and the rest of the committee in working to create a better state budget that supports public education and other vital services.

HONESTY IN EDUCATION/PARENT INFORMATION ACCESS

The House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee voted to approve an HCS version of SS/SCS/SBs 4, 42 and 89 (Koenig) on April 19. The Association remains concerned that the bill will adversely affect classroom climate and the freedom of teachers to provide the honest education our students deserve and opposes the bill.

The Senate version of the bill requires schools to adopt curricula at least two months prior to the school term, revises and updates the school report card provisions, creates a state transparency portal for all school curricula, textbooks, source materials, and syllabi, and adds regulations regarding school-issued devices.

The HCS version removes the more problematic restrictions on the use of school-issued devices, such as a ban on access to instructionally useful video sites such as YouTube.

The HCS also removes the most concerning portion of the curriculum restrictions that purported to ban "any concept or idea" in a curriculum or unit of study that might be deemed in violation of certain provisions. Those provisions now only apply to instances where a teacher or student would be required to affirm a belief in one of a set of racially biased points of view that would never be part of any normal instructional setting or professional development. Financial penalties for the district and discipline consequences for a teacher could result from the unlikely event that those provisions are ever violated.

The HCS changes the provisions regarding public access to school curricula, textbooks and syllabi, but the bill's House handler, Rep. Phil Christofanelli, acknowledged that there was still more work needed on that language to minimize the burdens and restrictions those provisions will create on teachers and other school staff.

The committee also added a portion of HB 1087 (Tricia Byrnes) regarding school discipline policies and bullying, portions of HB 192 (Ed Lewis) to create a Teacher's Bill of Rights and the provisions of HB 914 (Peggy McGaugh) to allow Kansas City and St. Louis City school boards to fill vacancies in the same manner provided for all other school districts.

OPEN ENROLLMENT

The Senate is expected to debate HCS/HB 253 (Brad Pollitt) soon. The bill is currently the second of only three House bills now on the Senate calendar for debate and approval. The bill primarily allows students to transfer between school districts under certain conditions. The Association opposes the perfected version of the bill.

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 provision in HB 253 that was designed to limit those harmful effects.

TEACHER COMPENSATION

The House gave final approval to HB 471 (John Black) on April 17. The bill authorizes state agencies to offer financial incentives for employee retention and to reward "exemplary achievement". The House approved an amendment to allow similar incentives for teachers. The House also included 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 Association believes decisions regarding extra compensation and salary schedule placement should be a matter for collective bargaining at the local level.

TRANSGENDER ATHLETIC PARTICIPATION

The House gave final approval to HCS/HB 183 (Burger) on April 17. The bill prohibits transgender athletes from participating in competitive girl's or women's events in public or private middle schools, high schools or institutions of higher education.

The bill overrides MSHSAA and NCAA policies on transgender athletic 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.

HOUSE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The committee heard HB 1087 (Tricia Byrnes) on April 19. The bill requires DESE to create a model policy to address bullying and school discipline. Each school district must adopt the policy, and the policy must restrict zero-tolerance disciplinary policies for any student that is a victim of bullying or is defending a victim of bullying. The bill includes staff training requirements designed to educate students who are victims of bullying on techniques to overcome bullying's negative effects. The bill also requires monthly reporting to the school board on acts of bullying and disciplinary referrals. The bill provides immunity for staff who intervene in an act of school violence or bullying under the defense of justification, based on the legal authority granted by the bill.

The committee also approved the following bills:

HB 558 (Mike Haffner) to require DESE to use standardized test scores to give every school district and charter school a single letter grade based on a method dictated by the bill and creates NCLB style punishments for districts with low letter grades. This bill hearkens back to the failed "test, blame and punish" mindset of the former, federal NCLB Act. The Association opposes the bill.

HB 1163 (Tara Peters) to require parental consent for changes to individualized education programs (IEPs).

HB 883 (Scott Cupps) to require DESE to convene a work group to develop academic performance standards for health and family education. The bill also changes the require one-half credit in health education to health and family education.

SENATE EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

The committee heard several bills on April 18:

SB 321 (Angela Mosley) to increase students' access to school meals, regardless of income. Schools will still determine student eligibility for free or reduced price lunch support under the federal lunch program. The bill creates a fund that will be used to reimburse schools for the costs of student meals that are not otherwise reimbursed by federal funds. The Association believes that proper nutrition is essential to student success. For many students, school meals are their primary source of nutrition. The Association supports the bill.

SB 476 (Curtis Trent) to prohibit public employers from requiring an undergraduate degree as a baseline employment requirement. The bill does not appear to affect employment of public school teachers, since a requirement for advanced certification such as a teaching certificate is not affected by the bill.

SB 495 (Karla Eslinger) to expand pre-K funding through the school formula for programs operated by school districts and charter schools. The Association supports the bill.

SB 691 (Greg Razer) to provide for the confidentiality of certain investment information submitted to a public institution of higher education.

The committee also voted to approve SB 508 (Ben Brown). The bill establishes a procedure for school board recall elections. The Association is concerned that the listed reasons for recall are very broad and could allow recall attempts based on little more than disagreeing with prior election results.

SCHOOL SAFETY GRANTS

The House Budget Committee heard HB 1068 (Phil Amato) on April 19. The bill would create a school safety construction grant program for school districts. Subject to appropriation, school districts could apply for state matching funds for certain school safety projects with project cost of \$200,000 or less. Higher per pupil spending districts would have a 50/50 state local match, while lower spending districts would receive up to an 80% state match. The Association believes this is a timely program that could capitalize on the state's current high fund balances to support important local school safety improvements and supports the bill.

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