



Legislative Update

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ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION

The House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee heard two quite different bills relating to assessment and accreditation on February 22:

HB 49 (Paula Brown) would require the State Board of Education to recognize at least two national school accreditation organizations and allow districts to choose to gain accreditation by approval of such a group. The bill also directs the State Board to revise the MAP assessment based on improvements being implemented in other states under ESSA assessment waivers. The bill requires that the assessment system should be student-centered and use assessments across the school year that support teaching, learning, and program improvement so that a summative profile is developed of the students learning. The Association supports the bill.

HB 558 (Haffner) requires 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.

RETIREMENT

The Senate gave final approval to SS/SB 75 (Rusty Black) on February 23. The Association supports the bill. The bill restores the 2.55% benefit factor for 32 or more years of PSRS service credit.

The bill also increases the earnings limit for PSRS retirees working part-time in PEERS positions. This limit is now 60% of the \$25,000 minimum teacher's salary (currently \$15,000). For the first five years, the new limit will be 133% of the Social Security earnings limit for persons under full retirement age (currently \$28,249) and will then be 100% of the Social Security earnings limit thereafter (currently \$21,240).

The bill also extends the critical shortage employment option from two years to four years and increases the allowed number of critical shortage teaching positions in a district to the greater of five or one percent of the number of teaching positions in the district.

The bill also includes the provisions of SB 339 (Greg Razer). This portion of the bill provides a same-sex domestic partner pop-up provision for retirees. The provision has similar documentation requirements to the divorce pop-up provision in current law.

TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION SCHOLARSHIPS

The House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee also heard HB 497 (Ed Lewis). This bill 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 of scholarships to 300 and provides scholarships for students who commit to teach in hard-to-staff schools or hard-to-staff subject areas. The Association supports the bill.

REQUIREMENTS FOR FINGERPRINT BACKGROUND CHECKS

The House Judiciary Committee heard HB 669 (Ron Copeland) on February 22. The bill eliminates the current law that schools and other employers 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 appreciates this helpful change to remove a costly and unneeded burden on school employees and supports the bill.

FULL-TIME VIRTUAL SCHOOLS

The House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee approved HB 827 (Phil Christofanelli) on February 22. 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.

REDUCTION OF PERSONAL PROPERTY TAX

The Senate gave first-round approval to SS/SCS/SB 8 (Eigel) on February 6. The original bill would have permanently eliminated the taxes on personal property. The SS would reduce the assessment ratio for personal property to 31% and depreciate the value of all motor vehicles and farm machinery over a ten-year schedule from the date of manufacture. This will essentially eliminate all property taxes on vehicles over ten years old. The precise impact of the bill on local school revenues is hard to predict. However, this bill would stagnate or reduce local school revenues and local property taxes until such time as assessments and growth in real estate taxes compensate for the initial impact of this change. The Association opposes the bill.

REDUCTION OF REAL ESTATE TAXES

The Senate debated SS/SCS/SB 105 (Cierpiot) on February 22 but did not bring the bill to a first-round vote. The bill would reduce residential property tax assessments statewide by reducing the assessment ratio gradually from the current 19% rate down to 15% over a period of years. The SS version would make this change in 1/2% increments over an eight-year period.

The total impact of this change based on current property values and tax rates would eventually reach over \$750 million per year, but the actual impact on school revenues is harder to assess since school districts must reduce school tax rates each assessment cycle if overall assessments increase by more than one year's CPI. In many districts, overall growth would exceed the effect of the annual reduction in residential assessment ratio and revenues would not be affected. The Association is concerned that this change will reduce needed school revenues in many districts for a number of assessment cycles, particularly if the legislature also approves the reduction of personal property taxes on vehicles contained in SS/SCS/SB 8 (Eigel), a bill the Senate gave first-round approval on February 21.

HIGHER EDUCATION FREE SPEECH ISSUES

The House Higher Education Committee heard HB 136 (Brad Hudson) on February 22. The bill would prevent a public college from limiting recognition to belief-based student associations that require leaders to adhere to its beliefs, practice requirements or standards of conduct, but the bill did not pass. The Association believes that organizations are strengthened by offering memberships on a nondiscriminatory basis. The Association opposes the bill.

OPTIONAL COURSE IN THE BIBLE

The Senate gave first-round approval to SB 34 (Karla May) on February 22. SB 34 is a symbolic bill stating that public schools may offer elective courses in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. Existing state law already provides that books of a religious nature may be used in public schools as part of instruction in elective courses in literature and history, if such books are used in a manner consistent with the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

SENATE EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

The committee heard two bills on February 21:

SB 136 (Karla Eslinger) relating to workforce development in elementary and secondary education. The bill requires students to do career plans in high school and to fill out the FAFSA application for federal student aid.

SB 163 (Mary Elizabeth Coleman) to authorize the Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development to contract with private entities that offer job training to individuals.

The committee also approved the following bills:

SCS/SB 40 (Holly Thompson Rehder) to require school districts to conduct criminal background checks on adult students enrolling in courses taught at public schools.

SB 122 (Karla May) to excuse students from attendance at elementary and secondary schools if the students are unable to attend due to mental or behavioral health concerns.

SCS/SB 175 (Andrew Koenig) to revise youth employment law relating to work certificates and the entertainment industry.

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