

# Louisiana Federation of Teachers

# Weekly Legislative Digest

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## No budget progress this week

As the Louisiana Legislature completes the second week of the fiscal session, there has been little to no progress on closing the expected \$440 million budget hole in the coming year's budget, not to mention the \$1.4 billion budget cliff facing lawmakers when last year's temporary taxes expire.

On Monday, the House Ways and Means Committee is expected to begin debate on Gov. John Bel Edwards' controversial commercial activity tax - HB 628 by Rep. Sam Jones (D-Franklin) - which places levies on transactions instead of on profits.

Insiders are skeptical of the plan's chances in the Republican-dominated legislature. A block of GOP legislators are determined that budget cuts, rather than new revenues, are the cure for what ails the state fisc.

Rep. Jones has a backup plan in mind if the CAT fails. His HB 638 would extend the temporary one-cent sales tax past its 2018 sunset all the way to 2023.

## Could dedicated funds be up for grabs?

Louisiana's lawmakers have long been constrained in their spending by the list of funds that are dedicated to specific items and cannot be spent on anything else.

Some dedicated funds, like public education's \$3.4 billion Minimum Foundation Program, are dedicated in the state constitution. Those can't be changed without an amendment that requires a two-thirds vote by the legislature and adoption by voters.

One proposed constitutional amendment, HB 330 by Rep. Cameron Henry (R-Metairie) would allow lawmakers to change the base per-pupil amount in the MFP.

Other funds are protected by statute, and can be changed by the legislature. Just how much money is tied up in dedicated funds? Enough that when tough budget choices must be made, the only places lawmakers could look for cuts have been higher education and health care.

The state's general fund budget is about \$9.4 billion. Subtract the MFP, and lawmakers are left with about \$6 billion to cover many state obligations.

This year, some lawmakers want to take a serious look at the other dedicated funds. Those include:

- \$2.5 billion in 19 constitutionally dedicated funds.
- \$664 million in 124 statutory dedications funded by fees and licenses.

- \$70 million in statutory funds in 97 statutory funds that support local governments.
- \$716 million in 42 statutory funds that support state agencies which would otherwise be supported by the general fund.

[Here is a list of the dedicated funds, courtesy of Jeremy Alford at LaPolitics.com.](#)

## **Instructional time waiver bill passes committee**

A bill aimed at giving school districts affected by natural disaster some relief from instructional time requirements was approved by the House Education Committee.

HB 20 by Rep. Ed Price (D-Gonzales) allows BESE to waive time requirements if schools “cannot meet those requirements because the school temporarily shared facilities with another school due to damages caused by a natural catastrophe or disaster...”

State law requires grades 1-12 to have 360 minutes of instructional time per day in a 177 day school year. Spokesmen for Ascension and Livingston Parishes testified that some of their schools are unable to meet that requirement due to last August’s floods.

The bill was unanimously approved by the committee and sent to the House floor.

## **Computer science may count for graduation requirement**

A resolution approved by the House Education Committee could lead the way for computer science courses to count as science credit for high school graduation requirements.

HCR 14 by Rep. Helena Moreno (D-New Orleans) asks the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to consider along computer science course to count as science credit, and asks for implementation of a plan that states the goals for computer science, strategies for meeting the goals and time lines for implementation.

Such resolutions do not have the force of law, but are taken seriously by BESE when adopting policy.

## **Bill would allow sunscreen use in school**

Concerns about the dangers of exposure to too much sun led Rep. Bernard LeBas (D-Ville Platte) to introduce HB 412, allowing students to use sunscreen at school.

Under current law, sunscreen is considered a medication that can only be applied by a school nurse or medical professional.

Rep. LeBas, a pharmacist, said he filed the bill in hopes of reducing the incidence of skin cancer. “The results of not using are just something we cannot live with,” he said.

The bill would allow students to apply FDA approved sunscreen to be applied at school, on buses and at school-sponsored events like athletic contests and field trips.

The bill was approved with one negative vote, and sent to the House floor.

## **The week ahead...**

**House Education Committee, April 26:** The stage is set for a fight when Rep. Kevin Pearson (R-Slidell) brings HB 556 to the committee. The bill would limit the right of teachers and school employees to receive full pay if they are absent due to assault or battery by students.

Under current law, educators can receive full pay – without loss of leave or benefits - if they are injured or disabled in a student attack. If the injury or disability results from assisting a student to prevent injury or danger to the student, the full pay is limited to one year (90 days for non-teaching employees).

Rep. Pearson's bill would delete provisions for full pay in cases where the educator is disabled or injured, providing full pay only if the educator is disabled.