

Louisiana Federation of Teachers

Weekly Legislative Digest

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Steve Monaghan, President * Les Landon, Editor

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Governor protects higher education from cuts

MFP still facing \$12 million shortfall this year

Governor John Bel Edwards announced on Thursday that the \$70 million shortfall in this year's budget will be resolved by a combination of cuts and savings from the Department of Health and Hospitals. That will spare Louisiana's colleges and universities, which have already suffered a \$28 million reduction in TOPS funding this year, from further cuts.

Reductions to DHH include \$30 million in savings from expenditures coming in lower than expected, \$10 million in efficiencies implemented since the Edwards administration took office, and \$30 million in end-of-year cuts to programs, services and contracts.

Left hanging is a \$12 million hole in the public education's Minimum Foundation Program. The cost of the MFP rose because the February student count came in higher than expected. Asked if the administration has a plan to deal with the MFP shortfall, Commissioner of Administration Jay Dardenne simply replied, "No."

On Monday, an education subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee is slated to discuss the Department of Education's budget for the coming fiscal year. It's not known whether or not the \$12 million shortfall will be part of the discussion.

Senate Ed chair calls stakeholder summit

A package of bills aimed at implementing the new state education standards was introduced to stakeholders at a meeting called Tuesday by Senate Education Committee Chairman Sen. Blade Morrish (R-Lake Charles).

Sen. Morrish told a group that included unions, school boards, superintendents, business, charter interests and others that his package would "soften the blow" of implementing the new standards. He reminded the group that new standards during the Jindal regime were "implemented horribly," and that when lawmakers tried to slow down the implementation, Jindal vetoed the bill.

A key piece of the senator's package, SB 262, will "move the process forward, but not push down as hard," he said. The bill extends the moratorium on use of value added scores for another year. In 2018-19, the state may begin using new assessment data for evaluating school and district accountability performance.

Other bills in the package, HB 723 by Rep. Ed Price (D-Gonzales), SB 279 by Sen. Wesley Bishop (D-New Orleans) and SB 342 by Sen. Gerald Boudreaux (D-Lafayette) delete references to value added data in determining teacher certification and recertification.

They specify that teacher and administrator evaluations must include multiple measures of student achievement, and that VAM cannot constitute more than 50% of the quantitative portion of the evaluation. They align provisions for evaluating charter school teachers with those for teachers in traditional public schools. As the bills proceed, LFT, LAE, school boards and superintendents will push to remove VAM completely from the evaluation measures.

Sen. Morrish handed out a timeline for approval of the new standards. In April, the new standards will be promulgated according to the Administrative Procedures Act, opening a window for public comment. Between May 25 and May 30, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education can hold public hearings on the new standards.

BESE will submit a summary report to the joint House and Senate Education Committees on May 28, and the joint committee will decide whether to approve the new standards on June 2. If approved, BESE will submit the final rule to the Louisiana Register on July 10, and it will be published on July 20.

Governor John Bel Edwards will have until August 19 to have the final say over whether the new standards go into effect.

Bill would prohibit membership in LA High School Athletic Association

An intramural squabble in the high school athletic community consumed more than two hours of testimony in the House Education Committee this week.

HB863 by Rep. Kirk Talbot (R-River Ridge) would require public schools to quit the Louisiana High School Athletic Association because of a controversial decision to split selective and non-selective schools into different divisions for athletic playoff competitions.

Supporters of the LHSAA rule say that it's unfair for high-power private and religious schools to recruit and grant scholarships to superior athletes, while public schools must compete with athletes who come from within their attendance zones.

Rep. Talbot said it's discriminatory against selective schools to deny them the right to compete for trophies with public schools. "It hurts the integrity of the system," he said.

Two years ago, the LHSAA voted to split football playoffs into selective and non-selective categories. Last January, LHSAA members voted narrowly to expand the rule to include baseball and basketball playoffs.

The rule has roiled the coaching community, with the head coach of Christian Life High School in Baton Rouge threatening to start a rival athletic association.

Rep. Talbot said the intent of his bill is to force LHSAA, a private organization, to change its rule in order to survive.

Several spokesmen for private and religious schools testified on behalf of the bill. Surprisingly, no one spoke against it.

LHSAA Executive Director Eddie Bonine was in the room, but declined to speak until asked to take the table by Rep. Gene Reynolds (D-Minden). Bonine spoke neither for nor against the bill, saying only that he hoped it would spark a conversation that will end in a compromise.

The bill was approved by the committee on a seven-to-five vote, and goes to the full House for further action.

"Shaken Baby Syndrome" bill progresses

A bill requiring early childhood center employees to learn the signs of shaken baby syndrome was approved by the House Education Committee.

Rep. Stephanie Hilferty (R-Metairie) said that her HB 175 can save the lives of babies manhandled by parents or guardians who lose their temper and physically abuse crying babies. The bill won unanimous approval of the committee.

Child abuse hotline bills deferred

The authors of two bills requiring schools to post the state child abuse hotline phone number voluntarily deferred their bills in the House Education Committee.

Rep. Pat Smith (D-Baton Rouge) with HB 97 and Rep. Beryl Amedee (R-Houma) with HB 86 both said their instruments need to be refined before they will be brought back for action. Among the roadblocks: what should the signs look like, and how can schools deal with student pranksters once the abuse hotline numbers are posted.

Smoking ban on school properties moves ahead

A bill prohibiting the use of any tobacco products – smoked, snorted, chewed or absorbed – on school property was unanimously approved by the House Education Committee after the bill's author agreed to bring amendments before the bill goes to the House floor.

Rep. Frank Hoffman (R-West Monroe) said that HB 218 is intended to prevent any tobacco use on any school property. He said that he will come up with amendments to clarify that it applies to the Claiborne Building in Baton Rouge, home of the Department of Education, and to all local school board administrative offices.

He agreed with Rep. Beryl Amedee (R-Houma) that a prohibition on “absorbed” nicotine could ban people who are trying to quit smoking by using patches from school property, and promised to fix that issue.

Electronic cigarettes will be included in the ban.

Bill allows assigning Orleans students to charter schools

A bill allowing the Orleans Parish School Board to assign students to charter schools was unanimously approved by the House Education Committee.

Rep. Walt Leger (D-New Orleans) said that stakeholders including the Recovery School District and charter organizations are all in accord with the intent of his HB 562.

Current law prohibits local school boards from assigning students to charter schools. But 93 percent of Orleans Parish students attend charter schools, and nearly all of the schools in New Orleans are charters.

Rep. Leger's bill makes it legal for the district to assign students who apply through the city's One App process to one of the city's charter schools.

Fourth graders propose ban on mandatory uniforms

A bill that would forbid school boards from requiring students to wear uniforms caused a stir at the capitol until the author explained that the bill is an exercise in civics education.

Rep. Chris Broadwater (R-Hammond) said that his HB 428 was devised by fourth grade students at Hammond Eastside Elementary Magnet School to help them learn how government works.

The students were asked to vote on legislation they would like to see passed in Baton Rouge, and they came up with a prohibition on mandatory uniforms, Rep. Broadwater said.

As the Hammond students watched on an Internet stream, Rep. Broadwater walked through the process of introducing the bill to the Education Committee.

To the relief of school superintendents and school board members in the audience, Rep. Broadwater then voluntarily deferred his bill.

Governor Edwards lists his education priorities

Governor John Bel Edwards has released his legislative agenda for the 2016 regular session. Here are the education bills the governor is sponsoring in the session that is slated to close on June 6:

SB 79 by Sen. Dan “Blade” Morrish (R-Jennings), SB 174 by Sen. Jack Donohue (R-Mandeville) and HB 390 by Rep. Nancy Landry (R-Lafayette) freeze TOPS awards amounts at the 2016-17 level unless the legislature, by law, increases the award amounts.

SB 170 by Sen. Morrish prohibits the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education from overriding a local school board’s decision to deny a charter school application in an “A” or “B” district. In “C”, “D” or “F” districts, BESE must prepare and publish on its Web site an academic and fiscal needs assessment relative to the proposed charter school.

SB 260 by Sen. Morrish and HB 98 by Rep. Pat Smith (D-Baton Rouge) remove BESE’s authority to certify groups as authorizers of Type 1B charters, limiting the establishment of charter schools top local school boards and BESE.

SB 279 by Sen. Wesley Bishop (D-New Orleans), SB 342 by Sen. Gerald Boudreaux (D-Lafayette), and HB 723 by Reps. Ed Price (D-Gonzales) and Jeff Hall (D-Alexandria) call for multiple measures of student achievement in teacher evaluations, deletes “value added data” from certification and recertification of teachers, limits the role that value added data can play in evaluations, and aligns provisions for evaluating charter school teachers with those for teachers in traditional public schools.

SB 361 by Sen. Morrish and HB 550 by Rep. Patrick Jefferson (D-Homer) limit eligibility for vouchers to students who attend a “D” or “F” school. It limits vouchers for kindergarten students to those who would attend a “D” or “F” school, has a sibling already attending a voucher school, or is enrolled in a Nonpublic Schools Early Childhood Development program at the school in which they are entering kindergarten.

HB 879 by Rep. Joseph Bouie (D-New Orleans) prohibits a charter school from contracting with a for-profit entity to manage or operate a charter school. The measure would apply prospectively to any new contracts or renewals or extensions of an existing contract entered into on or after July 1, 2016.

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- Thursday, April 7: In this timely session, hear from José Luis Vilson on how [race and class have an impact on education](#) and students today.

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