

Louisiana Federation of Teachers

Weekly Legislative Digest

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Take action! Save salaries for disabled educators

Imagine being attacked by a student, and getting beaten so savagely that you are permanently disabled. Under current law, you are entitled to full pay for injury or disability caused by a student or if you're helping a student or other person.

But a bill that is headed to the House of Representatives would limit your pay to workers' compensation. That's just about two-thirds of your salary. In most cases, full pay would be limited to one year.

You might never be able to return to the classroom, or to hold any other job.

That doesn't matter to the lawmakers who passed HB 165 by Rep. Kevin Pearson (R-Slidell) out of the House Education Committee. They believe that because disability pay is sometimes abused, the dozen or so teachers who are severely injured each year should all be punished.

This is just one more mean-spirited attack on teachers who have already been cruelly assaulted.

We can stop this bill on the floor of the House, but only if you let lawmakers know how wrong it is to threaten the livelihood of educators who have already suffered enough. [Please click here and send a message to your representative, and tell them to vote NO on HB 165.](#)

Public school choice bill heads to floor

A bill that would allow parents to send their children to any school in their public school district was approved by the House Education Committee over the objection of LFT, LAE, school officials and others.

Under current law, only students who attend schools graded "D" or "F" have a choice to move to another school. HB 1101 by Rep. Stuart Bishop (R-Lafayette) would extend that ability to students in all schools.

Administrators are rightly concerned that the bill would lead to chaos in staffing and resourcing schools. Even so, the committee approved the bill on a 74 vote.

Bill to elect school board president deferred

A plan allowing voters to elect a chief executive officer for school boards was voluntarily deferred by its author.

HB 416 by Rep. Sam Jones (D-Franklin) would have created the office of school board president, who would be elected as an executive officer. The president would appoint the superintendent with the consent of the board.

Rep. Jones said that his plan would modernize school systems, making them operate more like contemporary parish governments and less like the former police jury system.

Opponents said that plan would be an expensive duplication of effort, with both the president and superintendent having similar authority.

After a lengthy debate, Rep. Jones voluntarily deferred his bill.

Bill changing letter grades put on hold

A bill that would have banned the state from labeling schools as “A” or “B” districts if any of the individual schools in the district are labeled “D” or “F” was voluntarily deferred by the author.

The effect of HB 1075 by Rep. Steve Carter (R-Baton Rouge) would have been to lower the letter grades of several districts without there being any change in the grades of schools in the district.

Rep. Carter was the chairman of the House Education Committee during the Jindal years, and was the floor leader for legislation seen as anti-public education. This year, Rep. Carter has been unsuccessful in efforts to move the Jindal agenda even further.

Prior to the meeting of the House Education Committee, critics pointed out that his bill would unfairly impact school districts with alternative schools. Without debate, Rep. Carter voluntarily deferred his bill this week.

Senate panel kills sex survey bill

After successfully navigating the House of Representatives, a bill allowing high school students to take part in a national survey on teen sexual risks was spiked by the Senate Education Committee.

HB 402 by Rep. Patricia Smith (D-Baton Rouge) involves a survey developed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and is intended to help design strategies that will help curb teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

Rep. Smith told the committee that Louisiana has a high incidence of both, and said that the voluntary survey is a necessary tool to safeguard student health. Opponents complained that the questions are invasive and might not lead to appositve result.

The panel denied the bill on a 2-4 vote.

Purchasing contracts bill proceeds

A bill requiring school officials to conform to district purchasing policy was approved by the House Education Committee.

SB 355 by Sen. Page Cortez (R-Lafayette) says that beginning on August 1, any purchases made on behalf of schools or districts must comply with policies and procedures in effect at the time the contract is executed.

The bill was approved by the Senate, and now moves to the House floor for action.

\$26 billion budget moves to Senate

The House of Representatives approved a \$26 billion state operating budget on Friday and sent it to the Senate, where it will surely face major changes.

When the House received the proposed budget, HB 1 by Rep. Cameron Henry (R-Metairie), from the Appropriations Committee, it included full funding for the Taylor Opportunity Program Scholarship, but had major cuts to health and hospitals.

The full House reversed that, putting more money into health care and leaving TOPS \$72 million short of full funding.

The House plan also cuts some \$50 million from public education, including money dedicated for the past couple of years to teacher pay raises. If those raises have been granted as one-time stipends and not added to the teacher salary schedule, teachers may lose the money in the coming year.

Gov. John Bel Edwards has called for a special session to begin when the current session ends on June 6. That special session could raise \$600 million to fully fund items omitted from the proposed budget. The new money would probably come from reducing or eliminating tax breaks given to businesses.

Revenue Estimating Conference: No change in shortfall

The expert panel that estimates how much revenue the state can expect met this week, and reported that there has been no change in the anticipated budget shortfall.

Optimists in Baton Rouge had hoped that the Revenue Estimating Conference would agree that income will be larger than expected, but they were disappointed. According to the REC, the \$26 billion budget winding its way through the legislature is \$600 million short of being fully funded.