

# Louisiana Federation of Teachers

# Weekly Legislative Digest

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2016 Regular Legislative Session

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## **[Thank the Senate Labor and Industrial Relations Committee!](#)**

The Senate Labor and Industrial Relations Committee showed us on Thursday that they appreciate the dangers that teachers sometimes face as they serve our children.

HB 165 by Rep. Kevin Pearson (R-Slidell) would have changed the current law that entitles teachers who are injured by students to their full salary while they are disabled or recuperating.

The bill was approved by the House Education Committee and the House of Representatives, but after hearing our arguments against the bill, members of the Senate Labor and Industrial Relations Committee voted unanimously to defer it. That means it will not proceed any further this session.

Thanks to this committee, teachers who are injured by students will continue to receive their full pay, and not have to rely on workers' compensation.

[Please click here and thank members of the committee for standing tall for teachers who have been injured on the job!](#)

## **Edwards' order sets advisory council for ESSA implementation**

Gov. John Bel Edwards signed an executive order Thursday establishing an advisory council to help the state align its education program with the federal Every Student Succeeds Act.

Formerly known as No Child Left Behind, this version of the federal education law does away with federal mandates on everything from student assessment to teacher evaluation, leaving it up to individual states to determine how the new law will be implemented.

Members of the governor's commission will:

- Conduct an extensive review of the ESSA.
- Make recommendations on specific actions necessary for implementation of the ESSA in Louisiana.
- Submit to the Governor an initial and final report outlining the requirements and recommendations for implementation of the ESSA in Louisiana.

The 15-member council, comprising highly qualified educators, will be appointed by the governor. It will include members of both the LFT and LAE. The commission will make initial recommendations to the governor by December 31, 2016, and a final report on or before March 1, 2017.

## **Education compromise bills pass the House**

After winning approval by the Senate and the House Education Committee, two bills that constitute a compromise on teacher evaluation and the implementation of new standards sailed through the House of Representatives without a dissenting vote.

SB 477 by Sen. Gerald Boudreaux (D-Lafayette) reduces the emphasis on the Value Added Model in teacher evaluations from 50% to 35%. Other indications of student growth will make up the remaining 15%.

The second bill, SB 262 by Sen. Blade Morrish (R-Jennings), ensures that there will be another year's moratorium on linking test results based on state standards to consequences for teachers, school letter grades and the promotion of fourth grade students.

Governor John Bel Edwards is expected to sign both bills into law. They are the result of a compromise engineered by Gov. Edwards. The governor asked stakeholders including LFT, LAE, the Louisiana School Boards Association, Association of School Superintendents, Louisiana Association of Business and Industry, Council for a Better Louisiana and Stand for Children to hammer out an agreement that all could live with.

## **Bill curbing charter growth passes**

Gov. John Bel Edwards scored a legislative win with passage of SB 260 by Sen. Blade Morrish (R-Jennings). The bill removes so-called Local Charter Authorizers from Act 2 of 2012.

The original law allowed the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to approve as many as 40 local charter authorizers in the state's 11 Regional Labor Markets. With minimal oversight, the LSAs would each be required to authorize at least five charter schools, which if successful could then each create two more charter schools without further approval. There could eventually be more than 600 of the Type 1B charter schools operating without authority from either BESE or local school boards.

Opponents, including the governor, said that LCAs are unnecessary because BESE and local school boards already have the ability to authorize charter schools.

A House bill that mirrored SB 260 was deferred by the House Education Committee earlier in the session, but members of that committee did an about-face when Sen. Morrish's bill was heard last week.

After winning approval by the House committee, the bill was approved by the full House on a 78-12 vote, and awaits the governor's signature.

## **Cursive writing bill passes legislature**

A bill mandating schools to add cursive writing to the curriculum has been approved by the House of Representatives on an 88-1 vote and awaits the governor's signature to become law.

SB 275 by Sen. Beth Mizell (R-Franklinton) requires cursive writing to be taught in all public schools, including charter schools. It will have to be introduced no later than third grade, and incorporated into the curriculum in grades 4 through 12.

Sen. Mizell said that she introduced the bill after being told by surveyors that young employees are unable to read handwritten notes on legal documents. Many of our nation's foundational documents, including the Declaration of Independence and Constitution, were written in cursive hand, she said.

## **Bill mandating recitation of Declaration stalls on House floor**

A bill that would have required students to recite a passage from the Declaration of Independence every morning was shelved by its author in the House of Representatives after being approved by the House Education Committee.

HB 1035 by Rep. Valarie Hodges (R-Denham Springs) would have had students in grades four through six repeat the part of the Declaration that says, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

The bill ran into heavy opposition from African-American members of the legislature, who said that reciting the Declaration from memory had been one of the literacy tests required of Black citizens who tried to vote in the Jim Crow era.

Members loaded the bill with amendments. Rep. Ed Price (D-Gonzales) added an amendment to the bill requiring recitation of selections from Dr. Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech. Rep. Patricia Smith (D-Baton Rouge) proposed an amendment requiring students to recite part of the Declaration of Sentiments from the Women’s Rights Conference of 1848. Rep. Barbara Norton (D-Shreveport) brought an amendment requiring students to recite the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution, which guarantees citizenship to anyone born in the United States.

Each of those, proponents said, are important documents that are part of the fabric of American history and should be familiar to students.

Rep. Hodges “chose something that she felt was adequate,” Rep. Smith said, “but there was so much more that could have been looked at.”

Faced with those amendments, Rep. Hodges withdrew the bill from consideration. There is probably not enough time left in the session to hear the bill again.

## **Hearing held on new state standards**

Acting on a request by the Louisiana School Boards Association, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education held a hearing on Friday to gather public input on proposed new standards that will replace the state’s Common Core State Standards.

LSBA Executive Director Scott Richard said he wanted a chance to stress the importance of providing adequate resources to implement the new standards.

“There will be costs to local school boards to implement these new standards,” Richard said.

The budget under consideration in the state capitol eliminates some \$44 million in education funding, money that Richard said is necessary to properly implement the new standards.

The new standards were written by panels of teachers over the past year. They have been received by BESE, and await action by the Senate and House Education Committees and approval by the governor before they go into effect.

## **Correction...**

Last week’s edition of the LFT Weekly Legislative Digest incorrectly identified Rep. Barbara Norton (D-Shreveport) as a Republican. She is a Democrat. We regret the error.