

Louisiana Federation of Teachers

Weekly Legislative

Digest

April 27, 2018

Larry Carter, President * Les Landon, Editor

2018 Regular Legislative Session

Now available on the Web at <http://la.aft.org>

Special session planned for mid-may

Lawmakers are scurrying to complete their regular legislative session agenda ahead of a special session that could begin as early as May 14.

Faced with a \$648 million budget shortfall, it is expected that the legislature will cut the regular session short, and enter a special session to seek a resolution to the looming deficit.

Governor John Bel Edwards says he wants to start the special session on May 14 so that lawmakers can conclude by the scheduled *sine die* on June 4, and not cost taxpayers more to extend the session past that date.

Some Republican lawmakers, though, believe they may not be able to clear pending legislation by May 14, and are considering a date between May 18 and May 21 to enter a special session.

Concealed carry in schools bill proceeds; LFT objects

A bill that would allow anyone with a concealed carry permit to enter school grounds with a gun was narrowly approved by a House committee, and is headed to the floor for a vote.

Over LFT objections, the House Criminal Justice Committee approved HB 602 by Rep. Blake Miguez (R-Erath) on a 9-8 vote.

LFT Legislative and Political Director Cynthia Posey pointed out the obvious pitfalls in the bill.

“The fact that, under this law, a person could enter school grounds with a firearm is intimidating in itself,” she said. “Imagine the confusion and fear that could result if a student, teacher or administrator sees a person carrying a weapon in a school.

“They may not know that the person has a permit,” Posey said. “The correct response would be to call law enforcement and activate school safety procedures, including a lockdown of the entire campus. That would disrupt an entire day of learning.”

The bill would allow concealed carry permit holders to have guns at public and private schools and universities. Currently, only law enforcement officers are allowed to have weapons in schools. Others must leave them locked in their cars.

The state gun free zone laws were established to give law enforcement a tool to ensure that something can be done about a person wielding a gun on or near a school, even before violence can occur. For that reason, legislators overwhelmingly supported gun free zone laws when they were passed. LFT believes the gun free zones exist for a good reason, and we support them.

LFT will continue its effort to defeat this bill on the House floor.

True intent of bogus “teacher rights” bill revealed

A bill that purports to protect teachers from “harassment and intimidation,” but instead restricts their rights, was approved by the House Education Committee and referred to the Labor and Industrial Relations Committee for further action.

Educators were perplexed that business and industry lobbyists strongly supported HB 343 by Rep. Steve Carter (R-Baton Rouge). Those interests fiercely fought bills that would really benefit teachers by easing restrictions on earning tenure, strengthening due process rights, and reducing the unfair and inaccurate Value Added portion of teacher evaluations.

When a right-wing columnist attacked unions for opposing the bill, it became obvious that the bill was yet another effort by business and industry to silence the voices of teachers, school employees and the organizations they choose to represent them.

Far from protecting educators, the bill would restrict the rights of educators to discuss issues, support political candidates, ask colleagues to join an organization, and otherwise chill the free speech guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution.

LFT will continue our opposition to the bill in the Senate labor committee.

Author defers bill affecting payroll deduction of union dues

A bill that could require teacher unions, but no other approved vendors, to charge a fee for deducting dues from members was voluntarily delayed until next week by its author.

Under HB 671 by Rep. Nancy Landry (R-Lafayette), school systems could charge unions up to three percent for deducting dues from salaries. School board business agents have said there is virtually no cost for providing the service. The fee is intended to make unions less effective in providing services to members.

Additionally, the bill would interfere with collective bargaining agreements in which employees have voted for exclusive representation by a union, rendering the contracts void if school boards do not comply with the proposed law.

If a majority of educators votes for exclusive representation, it should not be the role of government to second guess that decision and to make laws that have the effect of overruling their choice.

Would recess bill add days without pay for educators?

The LFT expressed concerns about a bill aimed at ensuring public school students in grades K-8 have at least 30 minutes of recess a day, arguing that it could mean additional work for teachers and school employees with no increase in pay.

HB 842 by Rep. Beryl Amedee (R-Houma) was approved on an 8-5 vote by the House Education Committee.

Supporters said that studies show students can achieve more when they get a break from academic work.

Some school systems in Louisiana have eliminated recess altogether because of the state's emphasis on standardized testing. Current law requires 30 minutes a day of physical activity, a requirement often satisfied by phys ed classes.

Debra Schum, executive director of the principals' association, said that administrators already have a hard time fitting mandated activities into schools' 360 minute day. Unless the recess period could be considered instructional time – an idea that education officials said would not be legal – the only other option would be to lengthen the school day.

LFT Legislative and Political Director Cynthia Posey noted that adding 30 minutes to the school day would amount to 15 more days of work per year, without additional pay for teachers and school employees.

The bill does not require charter schools to allow the recess period. A proposed amendment to add charter schools to the mandate was rejected on a 4-9 vote.

Panel okays deaf education task force

Without objection, the Senate Education Committee approved a bill creating the Language Equality and Acquisition for Deaf kids (LEAD-K) Task Force.

The 14 members of the task force would develop a resource for parents to monitor deaf and hearing impaired children's expressive and receptive language acquisition, and develop a framework for assessing those children to determine their competencies in language and literacy skills. The aim is to ensure that children are ready for kindergarten.

The bill has passed the House, and awaits action by the full Senate.

Community school resolution proceeds

A resolution urging the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to consider the Community Schools Model as a reform strategy was approved by the Senate Education Committee.

The Community Schools Model partners schools with nonprofits, faith-based institutions, and government agencies to offer health care and other supports that students require to be successful. The model would be applied to schools that need comprehensive support and improvement.

If the full Senate approves SR 133 by Sen. Gerald Boudreaux (D-Lafayette), the resolution will be forwarded to BESE for consideration.

The week ahead...

Monday, April 30

Senate Finance Committee: SCR 48 by Sen. Blade Morrish (R-Jennings) provides for legislative approval of public education's Minimum Foundation Program, with a base per-pupil amount of \$3,961, unchanged from the current school year.

Tuesday, May 1

House Education Committee: HB 671 by Rep. Nancy Landry (R-Lafayette) could require teacher unions, but no other approved vendors, to charge a fee for deducting dues from members' paychecks.

HR 136 by Rep. Frank Hoffman (R-West Monroe) requests BESE to consider lowering the performance rating required for teachers to be granted tenure or reacquire tenure, and report findings to the House Education Committee prior to the 2016 legislative session.

HCR 11 by Rep. Barbara Norton (D-Shreveport) requests the Department of Education to include school-level and system-level data in annual reports of health and physical education in public schools.

HCR 63 by Rep. Patricia Smith (D-baton Rouge) creates a task force to study the assessment of student fees and submit a written report to the House and Senate education committees no later than January 1, 2019.

Wednesday, May 2

House Education Committee: SB 178 by Sen. Mike Walsworth (R-West Monroe) would allow students to wear bullet proof backpacks.