

Louisiana Federation of Teachers

Weekly Legislative

Digest

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Teachers beat back assault on rights

Big business attack on unions fails in Senate committee

A bill sponsored by big business and so-called “nonpartisan” groups that purported to support teacher rights, but actually did just the opposite, was rejected by the Senate Labor Committee, largely along party lines.

HB 343 by Rep. Steve Carter (R-Baton Rouge) had the backing of the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry, A+PEL, the Council for a Better Louisiana, and other similar organizations.

The bill’s stated intent, to defend teachers from harassment and protect instructional time from interruption, was revealed as yet another effort by anti-union forces to cripple the organizations that represent teachers and school employees.

Speaking against the bill, LFT General Counsel Larry Samuel told the committee that HB 343 is “couched as a bill to grant rights, but in fact is a bill to restrict rights.”

Saying that the bill is “unconstitutional overreach at its worst,” Samuel told the committee that it would put educators at risk if they discuss issues, support political candidates, or ask colleagues to join an organization.

The bill had been unanimously approved by the House Education Committee, with an understanding that its backers and union leaders would meet to resolve issues. Federation Legislative and Political Director Cynthia Posey said that did not happen, forcing opponents to ask for the bill to be rejected.

Opponents questioned the need for a bill like this one to be placed into the Teacher Bill of Rights. Laws already protect teachers from harassment, and no principal worthy of the title will allow disruption of classes.

Opponents of the bill included LFT, LAE, school boards, superintendents, and principals. It was rejected on a 2-4 vote, with Republican members voting for it, and Democrats voting against it.

30 minute recess to be heard in House

The House of Representatives is scheduled to vote Monday on a bill that would guarantee a recess period for all children in grades kindergarten through eight.

Current law requires all public schools to provide 30 minutes per day of “quality moderate to vigorous physical activity for students,” a requirement that is often satisfied by phys ed and health classes.

HB 842 by Rep. Beryl Amedee (R-Houma) would ensure that children get a recess period, “defined as a play environment outside of regular classroom instructional activities where students are allowed to engage in supervised, safe, and active free play.”

The bill is a response to studies that show improved academic performance and discipline when children have a chance to play.

Rep. Amedee told the House Education Committee that, even if students lose 30 minutes of instructional time because of recess, it would be offset by other gains.

The LFT, which adopted a resolution in 2014 calling for adequate recess time for children, will support the bill when it is heard on the House floor. The union stressed that schools should find ways to incorporate recess without adding unpaid days to the calendar for teachers and school employees.

Bill affecting union dues goes to House

A bill that would require teacher unions, but no other vendors, to pay a fee for the payroll deduction of dues was unanimously approved by the House Education Committee and sent to the full House for a vote.

HB 671 by Rep. Nancy Landry (R-Lafayette) would allow school systems to charge unions up to three percent of dues deducted from salaries. School board business agents have said there is virtually no cost for providing the service, which is available for free to dozens of banks, insurance companies, charities and other vendors.

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.

As with other legislation that would impede unions from their mission of representing teachers and school employees, organizations aligned with big business supported HB 671, while supporters of public education opposed it.

Supporters included the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry, A+PEL, and the Council for a Better Louisiana.

Opposing the bill were the LFT, LAE, principals, and the governor’s office.

The bill is slated to be heard on the House floor on Monday, May 7.

House Ed okays timely sharing of student test scores

Without objection, the House Education Committee approved a bill aimed at getting student test scores to teachers no later than June 30 each year.

SB 107 by Sen. Blade Morrish (R-Jennings) originally required a May 31 delivery date, but was amended after the Department of Education said that would be an impossible goal.

Results reported to districts must include, at a minimum, the students' scale and raw scores, an item analysis of each assessment, and longitudinal information on the students' achievement in each subject area, if available.

The information must be presented on a format that is easy to read, clear and understandable.

Currently, Sen. Morrish told the committee, teachers often do not get test results until the next school year has begun in August and September.

Panel approves school score transparency bill

A bill that allows the public to compare school and district performance scores from year to year was unanimously approved by the House Education Committee.

SB 152 by Sen. Blade Morrish (R-Jennings) would make year-to-year comparisons possible, even when the Department of Education changes criteria for determining scores.

The bill says that when BESE makes a change in the criteria used to determine the scores, the release will also show the performance score the school or district would have received had the change not been implemented. The information will be displayed side by side for an easy comparison.

Due to a change in the way performance scores are calculated, educators are expected to see a reduction in the number of "A" rated schools, and an increase in the number of "F" rated schools.

That does not mean the schools are performing worse than they did before, only that the formula for rating schools changed. When parents see the new scores, they have a right to know what that change really means.

The bill now moves to the House floor for a vote.

Concealed carry permits would allow guns in school

People with concealed carry permits – but not teachers or administrators – would be allowed to carry weapons onto school grounds under a bill that has passed the House or Representatives and awaits referral to a Senate committee.

HB 602 by Rep. Blake Miguez (R-Erath) passed the House by 59-36, over the objection of LFT and other education organizations.

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.

A number of bills allowing guns on campus under certain circumstances have been rejected this session; HB 602 is the only one left with a chance of passage.

Membership requirements proposed for Orleans charter boards

Charter school boards in New Orleans would be required to include at least one member who is a parent, legal guardian, grandparent of a student enrolled in the school, or alumnus if SB 89 by

Sen. Wesley Bishop (D-New Orleans) becomes law. That requirement would become effective on October 1 of this year.

The bill also requires charter school boards in New Orleans, other than state-approved Type 2 charters, to have a membership of at least 60 percent residents of the parish. That requirement would take effect in the 2019-2020 school year.

The bill was approved by the House Education Committee without objection, and is awaiting a vote by the full House before final passage. It has already won Senate approval.

Bill would require covered dugouts in school ball fields

A bill aimed at reducing injuries on baseball and softball fields by requiring covers on dugouts was approved without objection by the House Education Committee.

Sen. Jonathan Perry (R-Kaplan) said that more than 100 students are injured every year in the U.S. by overthrown or foul balls. He cited cases in Louisiana which caused permanent injury to children.

Sen. Perry assured the panel that the bill's requirements would be satisfied by installing a simple netting over dugouts, at an approximate cost of between \$100 and \$250.

Bulletproof backpacks bill is close to approval

A bill that would allow students to have bulletproof backpacks has cleared the Senate and the House Education Committee, and awaits only House approval for final passage.

Current law prohibits body armor in schools, but SB 178 by Sen. Mike Walsworth (R-West Monroe) would make an exception for backpacks designed to stop bullets.

Sen. Walsworth said that Kevlar, the material used in military body armor, can be bought for about \$50, and slipped into special backpacks available for between \$60 and \$300.

The week ahead...

Monday, May 7

House of Representatives:

A floor vote will be held on HB 842 by Rep. Beryl Amedee (R-Houma), which would guarantee children in grades K-8 at least 30 minutes per day of recess.

The House will vote on HB 671 by Rep. Nancy Landry (R-Lafayette), which would allow school systems to charge unions up to three percent of dues deducted from salaries.

Tuesday, May 8

House Education Committee: HCR 82 by Rep. Larry Bagley (R-Stonewall) would create the Task Force on Hiring Retired Teachers to Meet Teacher Shortages to research the need for state and local policy changes regarding the rehiring of retired teachers.

SCR 48 by Sen. Blade Morrish (R-Jennings) provides for legislative approval of the 2018-19 Minimum Foundation Program formula

SB 465 by Sen. Wesley Bishop (D-New Orleans) would add members to the Advisory Council on Student Behavior and Discipline, and require it to report its findings, including recommendations for changes to state discipline policy, no later than February 15, 2019.