

Louisiana Federation of Teachers

Weekly Legislative Digest

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2016 Regular Legislative Session

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One week later, we have a budget

Exhausted legislators slinked out of Baton Rouge on June 16 having passed a budget that should have been completed a week earlier, at the regularly scheduled end of the 2017 fiscal session.

Lawmakers balked at passing a \$28 billion budget as the regular session wound down, forcing Gov. John Bel Edwards to call a special session that cost the state about \$60,000 a day. Last Friday, they finally adopted a budget almost exactly like the one they rejected a week earlier.

It marked the first time in 17 years that the legislature could not agree on a budget during the regular session.

The budget fully funds TOPS, does not cut higher education, provides a small pay raise for some 38,000 state employees, and funds public education's \$3.4 billion Minimum Foundation Program without an increase.

The budget cuts mental health services, shortchanges the state's hospitals, and calls on agency heads to hold back \$60 million in case revenue projections come up short.

Lawmakers fled Baton Rouge with one big piece of unfinished business on their plate. Temporary sales taxes imposed during the 2016 session will expire next year, leaving the state to face a \$1.8 billion shortfall referred to as the "fiscal cliff."

There is wide agreement that yet another special session will be required to deal with that looming shortfall.

What passed, what didn't...

Here is a list of bills that were monitored by the LFT lobbying team during the 2017 Regular Legislative Session:

HB 4 by Rep. Blake Miguez (R-Erath) authorizes a retiree in the Teachers' Retirement System of Louisiana to return to work as a school nurse and continue to collect a benefit check, subject to an earnings limitation of 25% of the benefit amount. Supported by LFT. Signed by Gov. Edwards as Act 15.

HB 20 by Rep. Edward Price (D-Burnside) allows BESE to waive instructional time requirements for schools impacted by last August's floods. Supported by LFT. Awaiting Gov. Edwards' signature.

HB 31 by Rep. Frank Hoffman (R-West Monroe) adds school psychologists to the list of retirees who may return to work in critical shortage areas without reduction of benefits. Supported by LFT. Signed by Gov. Edwards as Act 120.

HB 79 by Rep. Franklin Foil (R-Baton Rouge) prohibits corporal punishment on students with exceptionalities (except for gifted and talented), and defines corporal; punishment. Supported by LFT. Signed by Gov. Edwards as Act 266.

HB 90 by Rep. Mike Danahay (D-Sulphur) allows public servants to accept contributions of up to \$25,000 for disaster relief or to offset economic losses due to a declared disaster or emergency. LFT supported. Signed by Gov. Edwards as Act 30.

HB 122 (became HB 688) by Rep. Vincent Pierre (D-Lafayette) prohibits postsecondary institutions from inquiring about a prospective student's criminal history on an initial application or at any time during the admissions process, except for convictions for stalking, cyberstalking, rape and sexual battery. Supported by LFT. Signed by Gov. Edwards as Act 276.

HB 130 by Rep. Phillip DeVillier (R-Eunice) defines economically disadvantaged students and provides specific requirements for enrollment of those students in Type 1 and Type 2 charter schools created as new schools, Type 2 charters created as a result of a conversion, Type 3, and Type 4 charters. Supported by LFT. Signed by Gov. Edwards as Act 136.

HB 141 by Rep. Greg Miller (R-Norco) would have made certain juvenile records available to administrative officials of the school where a child is enrolled. Supported by LFT. Voluntarily deferred by the author.

HB 157 by Rep. Randall Gaines (D-LaPlace) would have authorized a civil penalty for arbitrarily or capriciously withholding a public record. Supported by LFT. Voluntarily deferred by the author.

HB 202 by Rep. Mark Abraham (R-Lake Charles) would have repealed the elementary and secondary school income tax deduction and educational expenses income tax credit. Supported by LFT. Voluntarily deferred by the author.

HB 203 by Rep. Larry Bagley (R-Stonewall) would have required the Department of Education to give teachers test result information on a timelier basis. Supported by LFT. Voluntarily deferred by the author.

HB 208 by Rep. Steve Carter (R-Baton Rouge) would have required healthier snacks to be sold at certain times during the school day. Opposed by LFT. Involuntarily deferred.

HB 222 by Rep. Helena Moreno (D-New Orleans) would have prohibited employers from retaliating against employees who discussed wage information. Supported by LFT. Failed in committee.

HB 236 by Rep. Rob Shadoin (R-Ruston) was a proposed constitutional amendment to eliminate dedication of certain funds, including the MFP. Opposed by LFT. Returned to the calendar in the House.

HB 239 by Rep. Joseph Bouie (D-New Orleans) would have prohibited authorizing charter schools without certification that the schools would meet certain criteria. Supported by LFT. Involuntarily deferred.

HB 303 by Rep. Bob Hensgens (R-Abbeville) would have allowed certain tax credits for educators who spend their own money on school supplies. Supported by LFT. Left on the House Ways and Means Committee calendar.

HB 330 by Rep. Cameron Henry (R-Metairie) was a proposed constitutional amendment that would have allowed the legislature to change the base per-pupil cost in the MFP. Opposed by LFT. Left on the House Education Committee calendar.

HB 390 by Rep. Gary Carter (D-New Orleans) would have reduced the amount of TOPS awards. Supported by LFT. Left on the House Education Committee calendar.

HB 434 by Rep. Patricia Smith (D-Baton Rouge) would have reduced the amount of the rebate for taxpayer donations to school tuition organizations. Supported by LFT. Left on the House Ways and Means Committee calendar.

HB 452 by Rep. Neil Abramson (D-New Orleans) makes suicide prevention inservice training applicable to nonpublic and charter school teachers. Supported by LFT. Signed by Gov. Edwards as Act 86.

HB 456 by Rep. Neil Abramson (D-New Orleans) would have called for a constitutional convention. Opposed by LFT. Returned to the House calendar.

HB 517 by Rep. Gary Carter (D-New Orleans) requires the state superintendent of education to provide written reports to the House and Senate education committees with information on every school, including charters. Supported by LFT. Signed by Gov. Edwards as Act 224.

HB 518 by Rep. Rick Edmonds (R-Baton Rouge) would have required a review of dedicated funds and recommendations with respect to continuing or terminating them. Opposed by LFT. Failed on the House floor.

HB 531 by Rep. Frank Hoffman (R-West Monroe) prohibits tobacco use on school property. Supported by LFT. Awaiting governor's signature.

HB 532 by Rep. Frank Hoffman would have removed the requirement of a value-added assessment model for school and district accountability and teacher evaluations. Opposed by LFT. Left on the House Education Committee calendar.

HB 538 by Rep. Steve Carter (R-Baton Rouge) would have required school board members to have at least a high school diploma. Supported by LFT. Voluntarily deferred by the author.

HB 541 by Rep. Steve Carter (R-Baton Rouge) would have required MFP funds left over when students graduate high school early to be used for scholarships and early childhood programs. Opposed by LFT. Died in the Senate Finance Committee.

HB 543 by Rep. Beryl Amedee (R-Houma) would have prevented payroll deduction of teacher union dues. Opposed by LFT. Voluntarily deferred by the author.

HB 545 by Rep. Ted James (D-Baton Rouge) would have prohibited assigning school letter grades to schools or districts impacted by a natural disaster. Supported by LFT. Left on the House Education Committee calendar.

HB 556 by Rep. Kevin Pearson (R-Slidell) clarifies the use of disability leave for teachers and school employees who are attacked by students. Supported by LFT. Signed by Gov. Edwards as Act 227.

HB 557 by Rep. Alan Seabaugh (R-Shreveport) calls for criminal background checks of employees in early learning centers. Supported by LFT. Awaiting signature by the governor.

HB 567 by Rep. Nancy Landry (R-Lafayette) would have expanded a law allowing students to attend any school of their choice. Opposed by LFT. Voluntarily deferred by the author.

HB 569 by Rep. Nancy Landry (R-Lafayette) would have repealed obsolete provisions of law dealing with the LA Competency Based Education Program and the LA Educational Assessment Program. Supported by LFT. Left on the House Education Committee calendar.

HB 572 by Rep. Bernard LeBas (D-Ville Platte) would have reduced the number of state-mandated tests. Supported by LFT. Voluntarily deferred by the author.

HB 575 by Rep. Nancy Landry (R-Lafayette) would have required school boards to get legislative approval to retain general counsel. Opposed by LFT. Voluntarily deferred by the author.

HB 584 by Rep. Walt Leger (D-New Orleans) creates a special funds for early childhood education. Supported by LFT. Awaiting signature by the governor.

HB 616 by Rep. Polly Thomas (R-Baton Rouge) limits testing time on standards-bases assessments to two percent of instructional time; does not affect accommodations required by law. Supported by LFT. Awaiting governor's signature.

HB 660 by Rep. Gary Carter (D-New Orleans) requires identification lettering on all school buses in Orleans Parish. Supported by LFT. Signed by Gov. Edwards as Act 230.

HCR 7 by Rep. Nancy Landry (R-Lafayette) approves the \$3.4 billion MFP. No position by LFT. Passed and sent to the Secretary of State.

HCR 14 by Rep. Helena Moreno requests BESE to allow instruction in computer science to count toward high school graduation requirements. Supported by LFT. Passed and sent to the Secretary of State.

HR 158 by Rep. Frank Hoffman (R-West Monroe) requests BESE to examine and report information relative to the validity of value-added data. Supported by LFT. Passed and sent to the Secretary of State.

HR 183 by Rep. Patricia Smith (D-Baton Rouge) requests governing authorities of public and nonpublic schools that accept vouchers to adopt policies regarding student fees. Supported by LFT. Passed and sent to the Secretary of State.

HR 190 by Rep. Ed Price (D-Gonzales) requests BESE to convene a Minimum Foundation Program task Force to determine the actual cost of a public education. Supported by LFT. Passed and sent to the Secretary of State.

HR 199 by Rep. Beryl Amedee (R-Houma) requests collaboration among education stakeholders to ensure equal access in union and nonunion organizations. No position by LFT. Passed and sent to the Secretary of State.

SB 2 by Sen. Jean-Paul Morrell (D-New Orleans) would have provided that the Louisiana Equal Pay Act be applicable to men and private employers and requires government contractors to verify equal pay practices. Supported by LFT. Left on the Senate calendar.

SB 11 by Sen. Barrow Peacock (R-Shreveport) would have merged the Teachers and School Employees retirement Systems. Opposed by LFT. Left on the Senate calendar.

SB 13 by Sen. Blade Morrish (R-Jennings) would have reined in the voucher program for kindergarten students. Supported by LFT. Failed in the Senate Education Committee.

SB 25 by Sen. Jean-Paul Morrell (D-New Orleans) sunsets the individual income tax education credit. Supported by LFT. Awaiting signature by the governor.

SB 26 by Sen. Jean-Paul Morrell (D-New Orleans) was a proposed constitutional amendment prohibiting industrial property tax exemptions relating to school funding. Supported by LFT. Left on the Senate calendar.

SBB 82 by Sen. Conrad Appell (R-Metairie) would have required local school districts to pay the cost of remedial postsecondary courses for high school graduates. Opposed by LFT. Voluntarily deferred by the author.

SB 87 by Sen. Blade Morrish (R-Jennings) would have required BESE to appropriate MFP funds for the unfunded accrued liability of the Teachers' retirement System of Louisiana. Supported by LFT. Failed in the Senate Education Committee.

SB 95 by Sen. Blade Morrish (R-Jennings) changes the rebate for donations to school tuition organizations to a nonrefundable income tax credit. Supported by LFT. Awaiting signature by the governor.

SB 140 by Sen. Mike Walsworth (R-West Monroe) is a proposed constitutional amendment to exempt ad valorem taxation from certain property delivered to a construction site. Opposed by LFT. Sent to the Secretary of State.

SB 150 by Sen. Troy Carter (D-New Orleans) would have increased the state minimum wage. Supported by LFT. Failed in the Senate Finance Committee.

SB 170 by Sen. Regina barrow (D-Baton Rouge) requires BESE to make allowances for declared disasters when calculating school and district performance scores, and to report results to the joint education committees. Supported by LFT. Awaiting signature by the governor.

SB 190 by Sen. Francis Thompson (D-Delhi) requires each school board to identify high school seniors who do not meet college readiness standards, and to provide appropriate professional development for teachers of transition courses. Supported by LFT. Signed by Gov. Edwards as Act 250.

SB 209 by Sen. Mike Walsworth (R-West Monroe) would have required local school boards to pay the costs of dual enrollment. Opposed by LFT. Left on the Senate calendar.

SB 215 by Sen. Greg Tarver (D-Shreveport) allows charter schools to directly enroll children of faculty members if the children satisfy admission requirements. Supported by LFT. Signed by Gov. Edwards as Act 253.

SB 225 by Sen. Sharon Hewitt (R-Slidell) creates the Louisiana Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics advisory council. Supported by LFT. Awaiting signature by the governor.

SCR 22 by Sen. Beth Mizell (R-Franklinton) memorializes Congress to consider eliminating the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and Government Pension Offset (GPO) Social Security benefit reductions. Supported by LFT. Passed and sent to the Secretary of State.

SCR 110 by Sen. Blade Morrish (R-Jennings) creates a task force to study the TOPS program. Supported by LFT. Passed and sent to the Secretary of State.

SR 68 by Sen. Wesley Bishop (D-New Orleans) requests each charter school governing board to include at least one parent or guardian of a student in its membership. Supported by LFT. Passed and sent to the Secretary of State.

SR 171 by Sen. Neil Riser (R-Columbia) Requests the legislative auditor to study the feasibility and possible savings created if the state were to purchase a traditional, fully insured health insurance plan for state employees. Opposed by LFT. Passed and sent to the Secretary of State.

SR 179 by Sen. Blade Morrish (R-Jennings) requests BESE to reconvene the MFP Task Force. Supported by LFT. Passed and sent to the Secretary of State.