

Louisiana Federation of Teachers

Weekly Legislative Digest

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Steve Monaghan, President * Les Landon, Editor

2013 Regular Legislative Session

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Funding increase is major news for education

After a four-year drought, educators are pleased that the legislature is including a 2.75% inflation factor – about \$69 million – in the education budget for 2013-14, according to Louisiana Federation of Teachers President Steve Monaghan.

Inclusion of the growth factor is major news for public education this year. For the past four years, the failure to recognize the need for increased funding has cost public school children hundreds of millions in lost revenues. At the same time, costs have escalated and funding for programs that assist student achievement has been cut.

“Dedicating one-half of the growth factor to a stipend for certificated personnel not subject to COMPASS is a step in the right direction for teachers who have struggled to improve academic achievement in deteriorating teaching and learning conditions,” said LFT President Steve Monaghan

The money will be distributed to all teachers equally as a one-time stipend that will not be part of the teacher salary schedules adopted by school districts.

While that money cannot be included in the Minimum Foundation Program this year, the LFT is encouraged that Gov. Bobby Jindal has pledged to memorialize the growth factor in the education formula to be written in 2014-15, Monaghan said.

“We are hopeful that school boards across the state will consider using a portion of the increase to fund a stipend for the non-certificated education employees who have not seen a pay raise, despite their dedication to the children of Louisiana,” he added.

Serious challenges remain for supporters of public education. The state has increased funding for tuition for vouchers at private and religious schools, even though there is no research showing that those schools outperform their public counterparts. In fact, there is a wealth of evidence that many voucher schools lack appropriate curricula, staff and facilities to provide an excellent education for children.

“In the months and years to come,” Monaghan said, “the state needs to take a hard look at this new entitlement program. The question that needs to be asked is: are vouchers truly in the interest of children?”

It would be inappropriate to celebrate the increase in K-12 funding without mentioning that higher education has also suffered the loss of nearly half a billion dollars over the past few years, Monaghan said. The state’s only solution to fill that gap has been an increase in student tuition and fees. Even that has not been enough to stanch the bleeding of faculty and programs from our colleges and universities.

“There is no doubt that this year’s budget reflects a welcome turn from the ill-advised adventures of the past few years,” Monaghan said. “Even so, we still have a long way to go before we can claim that Louisiana is on the right path toward a brighter future.”

“The 2013 session provides some needed hope that we are emerging from a dark tunnel,” he concluded. “However, a world of questions must still be answered, and we are still faced with innumerable challenges.”

New law would strengthen parental rights

A bill that would allow parents to have a say in whether or not schools seized by the state should be returned to local control was passed by the legislature and awaits Gov. Bobby Jindal’s signature.

HB 115 by Rep. Ted James (D-Baton Rouge) will allow parents of children whose schools have been seized by the State Recovery School District to ask that their schools be returned to their local school system if they have not performed better than a D or F for three consecutive years.

Testing bills for students with exceptionalities passed

Two bills that deal with a basic unfairness in Gov. Jindal’s agenda were approved by the legislature and await the governor’s signature.

Both HB 343 by Rep. John Bel Edwards (D-Amite) and SB 127 by Sen. Gary Smith (D-Norco) specify that students who are not pursuing a regular diploma may not be required to take the ACT test, depending on their individual education plans.

Two national certification stipend bills pass

Two bills dealing with stipends for nationally certified educators were approved by the legislature and await the governor’s signature.

HB 540 by Rep. Sam Jones (D-Franklin) clarifies a current law calling for teachers, counselors and school psychologists who earn national certification to be paid a \$5,000 annual stipend for their achievement. But the law’s sunset clause says that those who become certified after July 1 of this year will not receive the stipend. This bill repeals the current provision and ensures that educators who earn national certification will continue to receive the stipend.

HB 618 by Rep. Chris Leopold (R-Belle Chasse) provides a \$5,000 stipend to educational diagnosticians who hold a valid Louisiana teaching certificate, are certified as educational diagnosticians by the State Department of Education, and hold a Nationally Certified Educational Diagnostician credential issued by the National Certification for Educational Diagnosticians' Board.

Nursing mother bill signed by governor

The first bill in LFT’s legislative agenda to be signed into law by Gov. Jindal is Act 87 of 2013, which provides teachers who have babies with a secure, private location to express breast milk without embarrassment or interruption.

What started as HB 635 by Rep. Patrick Williams (D-Shreveport) requires schools to provide a location other than a rest room for the purpose, and to give teachers a reasonable amount of time to express breast milk for up to a year after the birth of the child.

Charter school funding bill passes

Under current law, the Orleans Parish School Board has the responsibility to manage certain charter schools, but funding for those schools is diverted to a separate management entity. HB 661 by Rep. Wesley Bishop (D-New Orleans) directs the funding directly to the schools that are managed by the OPSB.

The bill was approved by lawmakers, and awaits Gov. Jindal’s signature.

Baton Rouge school breakaway fails

A proposed constitutional amendment allowing parts of East Baton Rouge Parish to secede and create a new school district failed when its author, Sen. Bodi White (R-Central) did not ask the House of Representatives to vote on it.

An enabling act that accompanied the bill, SB 199, had been approved by simple majorities in both the House and Senate. But the proposed amendment would have required a two-thirds vote in the House, and it was apparent that those votes simply were not there.

See how the LFT's legislative agenda fared

Check out the LFT's updated bill chart [here](#) for the final disposition of bills that the LFT had an interest in.