

Louisiana Federation of Teachers

Weekly Legislative Digest

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Steve Monaghan, President * Les Landon, Editor

2014 Regular Legislative Session

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Special Edition: Wednesday in the House Education Committee

Wednesday, April 9, is shaping up to be a blockbuster day in the House Education Committee. It would be hard to match an agenda as difficult as the House panel faced last week, with its deliberations on Common Core lasting well into the night and next morning. Yet it looks like it is Chairman Steve Carter's fate to confront another grueling series of controversial hearings on April 9.

Explosive issues involving charter schools, electing the state superintendent, vouchers and even more common core bills will be on the agenda.

Here's a list of the bills facing members when the committee meets on Wednesday. Bills marked with an asterisk (*) are included in the [LFT Legislative Agenda](#):

The election of the state superintendent:

HB 125 by Rep. Joe Harrison (R-Gray) is a proposed constitutional amendment, and HB 127 is its companion legislation. Currently, the superintendent is selected by the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education – in practice, it has meant that the governor makes the choice. Rep. Harrison's plan would change the constitution to require the election of the state superintendent.

HB 276 by Rep. Bret Geymann (R-Lake Charles) would also require the election of the state superintendent, but contends that a constitutional amendment is not necessary for the change.

Vouchers:

HB 192 by Rep. Kevin Pearson (R-Slidell) narrows the eligibility of kindergarten students for vouchers, changes the funding formula used to determine the amount allowed for vouchers, allows higher tuition for special education students in voucher schools and requires voucher funding to come from outside the Minimum Foundation Program. Thanks to a lawsuit initially filed by the LFT, the State Supreme Court found that funding vouchers through the MFP is unconstitutional.

*HB 701 by Rep. John Bel Edwards (D-Amite) repeals the section of existing law that allows vouchers for eligible students who are now in schools with a grade of "C." Current law allows vouchers for those students if their public school is graded, "C", "D" or "F"

*HB 702 by Rep. John Bel Edwards (D-Amite): Current law allows eligible students who are entering kindergarten to have vouchers if their local school is graded "C", "D" or "F." This bill would restrict the vouchers to schools graded "D" or "F".

HB 836 by Rep. Joe Harrison (R-Gray) would require the State Department of Education to develop an accountability system for nonpublic schools that accept vouchers, and require compliance with the system by those schools.

HB 100 by Rep. Kirk Talbot (R-River Ridge) adds a new category of students who are eligible for vouchers: children whose parents feel that the local public school is not a safe learning environment.

HB 1228 by Rep. Franklin Foil (R-Baton Rouge) would require nonpublic schools that accept vouchers for students with exceptionalities to identify the special services they provide and explain how those services meet the students' needs.

Charter schools:

HB 89 by Rep. Gregory Miller (R-Norco): Under current law, charter schools receive the same Minimum Foundation Program allotment as other public schools, including an amount intended to fund the Teachers' Retirement System and the School Employees' Retirement System. Some charter schools, however, do not participate in the state retirement systems. This bill would subtract that amount from the MFP money allocated to nonparticipating charter schools.

*HB 101 by Rep. John Bel Edwards (D-Amite) Would require charter schools to meet the same certification standards as other public schools.

*HB 124 by Rep. Patricia Smith (D-Baton Rouge) would require charter schools to hire teachers with a valid Louisiana teaching certificate, subject to availability.

HB 171 by Rep. Kevin Pearson (R-Slidell) would require charter school boards to offer their employees the opportunity to invest part of their income in the state's deferred compensation plan.

HB 184 by Rep. Kenny Havard (R-Jackson) would clarify what happens to the assets of a charter school in case it loses its charter or otherwise ceases to operate. It also prohibits a charter school that is managed by a private firm from leasing that company's property.

*HB 703 by Rep. John Bel Edwards (D-Amite) would prohibit the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education from granting a charter that was previously denied by a school system that has a grade of "A", "B" or "C".

HB 999 by Rep. Alfred Williams (D-Baton Rouge) would prohibit a charter school from paying more than 10 percent of its funding for contracted management fees.

HB 1208 by Rep. Vincent Pierre (D-Lafayette) would require free bus transportation for charter school students in parishes with populations between 195,000 and 225,000.

Common Core:

HB 988 by Rep. John Schroder (R-Covington) would allow local school boards to develop their own curricula in lieu of the content and methodology required by the State Department of Education or BESE.