

February 12, 2021

Legislative Recap

A Look Back at Week 5

Both chambers of the General Assembly devoted a significant portion of their time to education policy this week.

Senate

In the Senate, nearly the entirety of floor debate on Tuesday was devoted to discussion of S. 516, with the discussion carrying well into the evening. Numerous amendments were offered, ranging from a proposal from Sen. Davis for a "teacher vaccination week" beginning March 15th to an amendment offered by Sen. Gustafson that would have required all districts to offer five day, face-to-face instruction on March 28th without providing any priority access to vaccination for educators (this proposal was defeated by a vote of 40-1). The [final version of S. 516](#) passed by the Senate to the House does the following:

- Moves educators and daycare workers to Phase 1A of vaccine distribution (note- this does NOT require educators to take the vaccine; only to have immediate access to register if they want to receive the vaccine)
- Requires all districts to offer a five day, face-to-face instructional option starting on the Monday after the scheduled spring break
- Raises the earnings limitation for retired workers in public school districts from \$10,000 to \$50,000 through June 30, 2024 (part of the PSTA legislative agenda)

In addition, the full Senate spent large portions of their floor time on Wednesday and Thursday on [S. 201](#), which increases and defines the powers of the state superintendent of education when a school or district is declared to be in an "education state of emergency." While numerous amendments were offered, the bill passed with only minimal alterations and now heads to the House.

The K-12 Education Subcommittee of the Finance Committee reviewed and gave a favorable report to H. 3608 (funding for charter schools) and H. 3609 (teacher step increases). Both bills are likely to receive full committee review (and possibly full Senate review) in the coming week.

The Senate Education Committee met on Wednesday and reviewed several pieces of legislation:

- [S. 208](#)- amends existing state code concerning the creation of "schools of innovation" by local school districts. The bill was reported favorably by the committee to the Senate, with the addition of an amendment recommended to committee by PSTA- ***"Nothing in this section permits a local school district board of trustees to relinquish control or oversight of the schools created pursuant to this section, and the local school district board must ensure transparent and timely reporting of fiscal and academic performance for each school of innovation."***
- S. 38- this legislation addresses instruction in foundations of American democracy in high schools and colleges/universities. The bill includes a provision to reduce a testing requirement at the high school level that was offered by PSTA. The bill was "carried forward" by committee (meaning- scheduled for further discussion) due to disagreements

between members on some of the language concerning instruction in colleges/universities.

- [S. 16](#)- this legislation would require the replacement of the existing graduation requirement of passing a course in Economics and Personal Finance with a course in Personal Finance. PSTA testified against this bill in subcommittee on the grounds that the legislation is unnecessary due to updates to the Economics standards in 2019. The bill was given a favorable report by the full committee and now heads to the full Senate.
- S. 203- this legislation clarifies the capacity of the Governor to remove school board members for various legal situations. The bill received a favorable report and will head to the full Senate.

House

The House did not address any education-related issues during floor debate. However, PSTA was actively advocating in the House in anticipation of House action on educator vaccinations. This included a meeting on Tuesday with Speaker Jay Lucas and House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Murrell Smith where PSTA staff had the opportunity to make the case for why educator access to the COVID-19 vaccine must be a priority in South Carolina.

The House Education and Public Works Committee reviewed three bills in both subcommittee and committee:

- [H. 3588](#)- this legislation would require students to earn one credit in English as well as a credit in either math OR computer science during their senior year in order to be eligible for the LIFE Scholarship. PSTA testified in support of this measure in subcommittee, and the bill received favorable reports from the subcommittee and full committee and now heads to the full House.
- [H. 3610](#)- this is the House companion to S. 201. It received favorable reports from subcommittee and full committee and now heads to the full House.
- [H. 3332](#)- this bill was heavily amended in subcommittee and would require the infusion of "media literacy" into standards in grades K-12. The bill sparked a great deal of debate in full committee and was "carried forward" to allow for additional amendments. (NOTE- the subcommittee version of the bill has yet to be posted online at the time of this email)

The 3M Committee (Medical Affairs) was scheduled to review [H. 3336](#), which would allow trained "volunteer school personnel" to administer insulin shots for students. The committee "carried forward" the bill to a future meeting, largely due to technical problems for some of the individuals scheduled to testify remotely this week. PSTA submitted written feedback to the committee joining the South Carolina Association of School Nurses in opposition to passage of H. 3336.

Legislative Preview A Look at the Week Ahead



As of the time of this email, here is the education-related agenda for the coming week in the General Assembly:

Tuesday

- The Senate Finance Committee will meet to review H. 3608 and H. 3609 (teacher step increases). Passage by the full committee could result in the legislation passing the full Senate on Thursday. Since Governor McMaster has said he will sign this legislation, passage by the Senate this week could result in H. 3609 being signed into law before the weekend.
- The House Ways and Means Healthcare Subcommittee will meet to review S. 516 (teacher vaccine access) and related legislation introduced in the House in the past week.

Wednesday

- The Education Regulations Subcommittee will review multiple proposed revisions to state regulations, including regulations for the LIFE and HOPE Scholarships and the Palmetto Fellows programs as well as proposed regulation changes by the State Board of Education concerning student transfers, withdrawals, and minimum standards for student conduct.

Thursday

- The House Education and Public Works Subcommittee of the Regulations and Administrative Procedures Committee will meet to discuss proposed revisions to state regulations, including regulations for the LIFE and HOPE Scholarships and the Palmetto Fellows programs.

Membership Advocacy Suggestions for the Week Ahead



1. Contact House Regarding Teacher Vaccinations- If you have not already done so, please consider immediately contacting your member of the House of Representatives in support of S. 516 (and related House legislation that would prioritize educator access to the COVID-19 vaccine). You can find the [contact information of your Representative by entering your address at this link](#). In communicating with your Representative, please [consider using these talking points](#) to inform your advocacy. **Advocacy on this issue is time sensitive as legislative action needs to occur soon in order to give educators vaccine access prior to a potential statewide mandate for five day, face-to-face instructional options.**
2. Contact Senators Regarding Step Increases- There is a strong possibility that the full Senate will review H. 3609 this week, which would retroactively award the full step increase for the 2020-2021 school year to eligible educators. While there appears to be strong consensus to pass this legislation, nothing can be assumed until the measure is signed into law. Please find the contact information for your [Senator by entering your address at this link](#).
3. Provide Feedback to PSTA- Throughout the legislative session, PSTA staff will be providing testimony whenever possible for committee review of education-related legislation. In order to ensure that testimony is aligned to the experiences and concerns of our members, we have created a [feedback form for membership](#) to share their thoughts on upcoming legislation. PSTA staff would love to hear from you!
4. Follow PSTA on Twitter- For quick access to a concise record of who said what during debate in the General Assembly, please consider following PSTA on Twitter- [@PSTANews](#).