

February 5, 2021

Action Alert Call for Immediate Action



This was a busy week in education policy, and the normal recap and look forward is provided below. This new section will only be added to a LAN when there is a need for an immediate action by PSTA membership, and this week is one of those moments.

As you have most likely seen in the news, both Governor McMaster and Superintendent Spearman doubled down this week on a push for all schools to offer five-day, face-to-face instruction prior to making teachers eligible for access to the COVID-19 vaccine. **PSTA opposes this path forward.** Instead, PSTA strongly supports [S. 516](#), introduced this week by Senate Majority Leader Shane Massey. S. 516 would:

- Move educators to Phase 1A for the vaccine. This includes all school staff, including non-certified staff and bus drivers.
- Require DHEC to coordinate with the SC Department of Education to ensure vaccine access to all **interested** educators within 30 days of the bill being passed into law (note- it does NOT mandate that educators be vaccinated).
- Reallocate 37,000 doses of the vaccine to educators. These doses are already in the state but have not been used by long-term care facilities.
- All school districts must offer families with a five-day, face-to-face option by March 22, 2021 "**after (educators) have been offered the opportunity to be fully vaccinated.**"
- According to SCDE, there are approximately 72,000 educators that have expressed a desire to be vaccinated. During debate in the Senate, Senator Massey noted that the state could meet this entire need with one week of the allotment of vaccine currently coming into the state.

S. 516 has already been cleared through the Senate Medical Affairs Committee, and it is set for third reading next week on the Senate floor. It looks like the resolution will pass the Senate and then head to the House. Governor McMaster has announced his opposition to the legislation. With this in mind, if you believe educators should have access to the vaccine prior to a requirement for five-day, face-to-face instruction, please do the following this weekend:

1. **Contact your Senator-** You can find the contact information for your state senator by [entering your address at this website](#). **Please tell your Senator that you support passage of S. 516.**
2. **Contact your Representative-** The link above will also show you the contact information for your Representative. **Please contact them now to tell them you hope they will support passage of S. 516 or similar legislation when it comes from the Senate.** PSTA anticipates that passage of this legislation will be far more challenging in the House than in the Senate, so please be ready to tell your member of the House why **YOU** believe this is an important issue based on **YOUR** experience. Since passage in the House is likely to be more challenging, PSTA has also developed this [list of talking point "do's and don'ts"](#) for

conversations. Please use this list to inform your conversation/correspondence, but try not to directly copy and paste. Legislators are more responsive to personal communications than they are to copied materials.

Action now is necessary to ensure S. 516 has the best chance possible to pass into law. We know that educator mobilization can work, as it played a key role in the recent removal of H. 3618 (required standardized testing in 20-21) from a House subcommittee calendar. Similar action is needed on this issue as there are strong political groups and individuals opposed to passage of the legislation.

Legislative Recap

A Look Back at Week 4

Beyond the debate over educator vaccine access, the General Assembly addressed several other important pieces of legislation this week.

In the House of Representatives

- **H. 3609 (teacher step increase)**- received third reading (final approval) and moved to the Senate
- **H. 3613 (Read to Succeed)**- received third reading and moved to the Senate. The version passed by the House included several amendments recommended by PSTA, including amendments to ensure current classroom teachers have slots on the new Reading Panel in the bill and a provision to provide educators with access to required Read to Succeed coursework at "no cost." **However, PSTA still has concerns with the language of this bill and will be advocating for amendments in the Senate.** Of greatest note, PSTA would like to see the requirement in the bill for use of literacy curriculum based on the "science of reading" to be widened to curriculum aligned to "evidence-based strategies."
- **H. 3589 (Schools of Innovation)**- received third reading and moved to the Senate. **PSTA has concerns with the language of this bill and will be advocating for amendments in the Senate.** Specifically, PSTA supports an amendment similar to the one offered by Rep. Wendy Brawley that would prohibit "schools of innovation" within a district from being "managed or operated by a not-for-profit or nonprofit organization, a for-profit corporation, or any other private entity."
- **H. 3796** (LIFE Scholarship Enhancement)- Currently, eligible math and science majors receive a LIFE scholarship enhancement. Under H. 3796, education majors would become eligible for a similar enhancement. Upon graduation, education majors receiving the LIFE Scholarship would receive a one-time \$7500 stipend. **This legislation is part of PSTA's legislative agenda and we strongly support its' passage.**

In the Senate

- **S. 16-** This bill would replace the current half-credit Economics graduation requirement in high school with a half-credit Personal Finance course. **PSTA opposes passage of this bill as it is redundant in light of the 2019 revision of the Economics standards. The new standards address all the components of personal finance listed in S. 16.** PSTA testified against this bill in the Senate Education Subcommittee, and while the subcommittee members forwarded the bill to the full Education Committee for review, all members noted the logic of the argument presented by PSTA.
- **S. 38-** This will would require the addition of the Emancipation Proclamation as a required founding document of American democracy for study in the high school social studies curriculum. **The bill was reported favorably by the Senate Education Subcommittee with the inclusion of an amendment recommended by PSTA.** Existing state code requires students to pass a "satisfactory examination" on the

provisions of the Constitution, Declaration of Independence, and *Federalist Papers* in order to graduate. This is something that has NOT been occurring in South Carolina. As a result, PSTA worked with committee staff to craft an amendment that would replace this testing requirement with a requirement that, in order to graduate, students must pass "a course that includes instruction" in the topics required in the test. This requirement is already satisfied by the existing required US History and US Government courses. Passage of this amendment into law will reduce a testing requirement (albeit, one that has not been followed).

- **S. 201-** this bill, which increases the powers of the state when assuming operations of a school or district deemed to be in an "education state of emergency," received second reading and debate on the full Senate floor on Wednesday and Thursday. However, the debate was never completed, in part due to the high volume of other business conducted by the Senate. The debate will carry forward to next week.
- **S. 203-** this bill increases the power of the Governor to remove local school board members from office that are found guilty for a range of offenses. The bill received a favorable report by subcommittee with limited debate.

Legislative Preview A Look at the Week Ahead



At this time, the education-related legislation scheduled for action for the coming week includes:

In the House of Representatives

- **Tuesday-** the K-12 Subcommittee of the House Education and Public Works Committee will meet to review [H. 3588](#) (LIFE Scholarship Eligibility Requirements), [H. 3610](#) (Technical Assistance and Operations of schools/districts in an "educational state of emergency"- similar to S. 201), and [H. 3332](#) (Media Literacy Integration in Standards).
- **Wednesday-** the full House EPW Committee is scheduled to review the three pieces of legislation that will be reviewed by the K-12 Subcommittee on Tuesday.

In the Senate

- **Tuesday-** The Senate Finance Committee is schedule to review H. 3608 (funding for charter schools) and H. 3609 (teacher step increases). Passage of these bills by the committee on Tuesday would give both bills the chance of being passed by the full Senate before the end of the week. ***In addition, the full Senate is likely to return to debate of S. 516 (or related vaccination legislation) and S. 201.***
- **Wednesday-** The Senate Education Committee is scheduled to review three bills that cleared subcommittee this week- S. 16 (personal finance instruction, S. 38 (civics instruction), and S. 203 (removal of school board members). The full committee will also review two additional bills, one of which has implications for K-12 education. **S. 208** deals with "schools of innovation" and is very similar to H. 3589, which was passed by the full House this week.

Membership Advocacy Suggestions for the Week Ahead



1. **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!
2. **Thank a Senator-** Multiple Senators advocated passionately on the floor of the Senate and in committee this week regarding the need to vaccinate teachers. These include (but are not limited to) Senator Martin, Senator Harpootlian, Senator Hutto, Senator Johnson, Senator Davis, and Senator Hembree. Of special note, Senator Massey introduced S. 516, which now has 23 co-sponsors (half of the Senate); the [list of cosponsors can be found at this link](#). Please consider reaching out this week to tell a Senator (or two!) thank you for their support of our state's educators. You can find the [contact information of Senators at this link](#).
3. **Follow PSTA on Twitter-** Oftentimes, the context of debate on legislation tells a great deal about where legislators stand on education issues. With that in mind, PSTA is trying to "live tweet" as many education-related debates as possible in the General Assembly. If you want to have quick access to a concise record of who said what during debate, please consider following PSTA on Twitter- @PSTANews.