

January 15, 2021

## Legislative Recap A Look Back at Week 1



The General Assembly convened for their 124th session on Tuesday, January 12th. While the first week of a session is often filled with largely ceremonial activities, this year's General Assembly has already taken several significant legislative actions. PSTA is actively monitoring the progress of more than 115 pieces of education-related legislation that have been filed in the House or Senate. Two of those pieces of legislation have already received committee action:

- H. 3608- this bill appropriates \$9 million from the state's Contingency Reserve Fund to meet funding shortfalls for the state's public charter schools during the 2020-2021 school year.
- H. 3609- this bill appropriates up to \$50 million from the state's Contingency Reserve Fund to retroactively fund salary steps for eligible teachers for the 2020-2021 school year.

Both pieces of legislation were unanimously passed by the House Public Education and Special Schools Ways and Means Subcommittee and by the full House Ways and Means Committee. The bills will next receive consideration by the full House, most likely during the week of January 25th. These bills are NOT part of the 2021-2022 budget package, meaning they are moving through the legislative process far more quickly than ordinary spending legislation. A few special notes on H. 3609 (step increases):

- The legislation retroactively funds all steps on the state minimum salary schedule. This schedule extends up to 23 years of experience. Many districts extend their salary schedules beyond 23 years, but passage of H. 3609 into law would not automatically award those steps. That action would (and could) be taken by local school boards.
- H. 3609 only applies to steps awarded to individuals paid under the state's salary schedule for certified teaching staff. As a result, it does not provide a step increase for classified staff or all certified staff. Step increases for staff that are not employed under the state salary schedule are passed by local school boards.
- If signed into law by the Governor (who has already stated his support for the legislation), the step increase would be retroactively awarded as a one-time lump sum. The exact date is dependent on when the Governor signs the bill and on local district action, but the legislation requires the step to be paid no later than June 15, 2021.
- H. 3609 deals only with step increases for the 2020-2021 school year. Step increases for NEXT school year (2021-2022) are dependent on the regular budget process in the General Assembly. However, Ways and Means Chairman Murrell Smith stated during this week's committee meeting that he is committed to funding step increases for next school through the ordinary budget process "absent (state revenue) falling off a cliff" as a result of the continued economic impact of the pandemic.

# Legislative Preview A Look at the Week Ahead



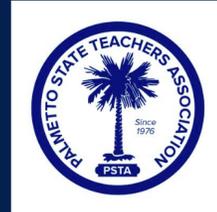
Next week, neither the House or Senate will be meeting in full session, largely in response to law enforcement reports of threats of violent protests at state houses across the country. However, the members of the General Assembly will be working virtually in committee.

The K-12 Subcommittee of the House Education and Public Works Subcommittee is set to meet on Wednesday, January 20th to review the following the legislation (bill sponsors in parentheses, hyperlink to full text of bill):

- [H. 3465](#) (Gilliam, B. Newton, Atkinson, Long, McCravy, and Forrest)- This legislation would allow any individual with a professional certificate and at least 20 years of experience to renew their certificate annually by participating in required district professional development. It would waive all other certificate renewal requirements. PSTA supports this legislation with suggested amendments
- [H. 3589](#) (Allison and Lucas)- This legislation would allow districts to create "schools of innovation" that would be eligible for exemption from some (but not all) state statutes and regulations. To form a "school of innovation," district administrators would have to identify the state statutes/regulations for exemption and then receive approval from 2/3 of the local school board AND 2/3 of the State Board of Education. If approved, the "school of innovation" designation is good for four years and can be renewed. PSTA supports this legislation
- [H. 3612 \(Lucas and Allison\)](#)- The "South Carolina Computer Science Education Initiative Act" seeks to expand and enhance computer science education in grades K-12 through steps including: establishing a statewide computer science plan, conducting cyclical reviews of grade appropriate standards, requiring each public high school to offer at least one computer science course by 2022-2023, requiring the Department of Education to develop and offer PD opportunities in computer science for teachers, and requiring the State Board of Education to develop criteria for teacher preparation programs and certification pathways in computer science. PSTA supports this legislation
- [H. 3618](#) (Lucas and Allison)- This legislation would require the administration during the 2020-2021 school year of SC READY and SCPASS, with exceptions for SCPASS social studies in grades 5 and 7 and SCPASS science in grade 8. The legislation would also exempt administration of high school End of Course exams and high school "college entrance and career readiness" exams (note- the legislation does not address the fact that many high school students have, or will soon have, taken high school EOCs for first semester courses). This legislation, if passed, would require administration of these tests even if the U.S. Department of Education grants the waiver from federal testing requirements requested by Superintendent Spearman. If SC READY and SCPASS can not be administered to all students, then the Department of Education is required to ensure administration to a "statistically significant sample of students" to provide "state-level

data by subgroup." The legislation further requires the publication of of school and district report cards for 2020-2021, but it waives the requirement for school and district performance ratings (a step already taken by the Education Oversight Committee). PSTA opposes this legislation

## Membership Advocacy Suggestions for the Week Ahead



1. **Contact and Thank Members of the House Ways and Means Committee-** The passage of the step increase legislation by the House Ways and Means Committee this week is a significant action of support for our state's educators. In fact, in an [interview with \*The State\*](#), Chairman Smith specifically noted that this legislative action was taken to honor "the commitment made to the Palmetto State Teachers Association" last fall. ***As a result, please consider contacting members of the Ways and Means Committee to thank them for honoring this commitment as their first official legislative business for the 124th legislative session.*** You can find the [members of the committee here](#), and you can find contact information by clicking on the name of each member of the committee. The committee admittedly has a lot of members, so you can also use [this form to send a message](#) to the full committee if you don't have time to reach out to individual members. The step increase legislation also had two initial sponsors that aren't on the Ways and Means Committee- Speaker Jay Lucas and Rep. Rita Allison. You can find contact information for these members by [clicking on their name on this website](#).
2. **Contact Members of the House K-12 Subcommittee of the Education and Public Works Committee-** If you have thoughts or opinions on any of the four pieces of legislation scheduled for review by the K-12 subcommittee, consider reaching out to members prior to their meeting on Wednesday. You can find the [membership of the full Education and Public Works Committee by clicking here](#). The K-12 Subcommittee members are Rep. Felder (Chair), Rep. T. Alexander, Rep. Bennett, Rep. Gatch, Rep. Brittain, and Rep. Rivers. You can contact each member individually by clicking on their name on the page for the full Education and Public Works Committee.



