

January 22, 2021

## **Legislative Recap**

### **A Look Back at Week 2**

The General Assembly had a limited number of meetings last week. The full House did not meet, and the Senate only met in full session for a brief time on Thursday morning. However, there were a few legislative actions of note for education.

The most significant legislative action occurred on Wednesday in a virtual meeting of the K-12 Subcommittee of the House Education and Public Works (EPW) Subcommittee. The committee debated two pieces of legislation:

- [H. 3612](#)- The "South Carolina Computer Science Education Initiative Act." This legislation received unanimous support in a vote by the subcommittee and has been forwarded to the full EPW Committee for review.
- [H. 3589](#)- 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. This legislation was discussed by the subcommittee, but it did not receive a vote due to time constraints and technical problems for some committee members. The subcommittee adjourned debate and will revisit the legislation in their next meeting.

Two other bills were on the Subcommittee agenda but were not discussed: H. 3465 and H. 3618. The failure of the committee to discuss H. 3618 was especially notable as this is the legislation that would require the state to administer SCREADY, SC PASS, and high school EOCs. PSTA is aware that the subcommittee members received a significant amount of feedback from the public in opposition to the legislation.

Since the full House did not meet this week, there was no additional movement on H. 3609, which would reinstitute teacher step increases for 2020-2021.

The Senate did not address any education-specific legislation during the week, but during Thursday's floor debate, there was significant conversation around distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine in South Carolina. Senators Goldfinch and Cromer both went on the record strongly supporting providing educators to priority access to the vaccine. Over the past two weeks, Senator Goldfinch, Superintendent Spearman, and Representative Chris Wooten have all sent letters to Governor McMaster supporting priority vaccine access for educators. PSTA strongly supports this action, and on Friday, PSTA delivered a joint letter with The SCEA to Governor McMaster asking for the Governor to act accordingly. You can view the [letter by clicking here](#).

# Legislative Preview A Look at the Week Ahead



Next week, the General Assembly will be back to normal operations with a full calendar of committee meetings and floor debates.

In the House, the K-12 Subcommittee of the EPW Committee is scheduled to meet in the afternoon on Tuesday, January 26th to discuss the following pieces of legislation (hyperlink to bill text, bill sponsors in parentheses):

- [H. 3465](#) (Gilliam, B. Newton, Atkinson, Long, McCravy, Forrest, and Caskey)- 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. 3613](#) (Lucas and Allison)- This legislation seeks to amend and revise several different pieces of existing state statute related to literacy instruction, including core components of the Read to Succeed Act. This large and comprehensive piece of legislation would require actions including: administration of a "literacy and numeracy screening assessment" at least once per year in grades K-3 (note- this would NOT require any additional testing from the state), creation of a "SC Reading Panel" to "provide support and assistance" to the state Department of Education (note- the Panel membership includes three classroom teachers), expansion of summer reading camps (currently available to 3rd graders) to students in 1st and 2nd grade, amending the requirements for a "portfolio" as a tool for promotion from 3rd grade, amending the role and assignment of reading coaches, removing the cost of Read to Succeed coursework required for recertification for elementary educators. PSTA supports this legislation with amendment (including removing the cost of Read to Succeed coursework for middle and high educators)

The full EPW Committee is also scheduled to meet on Wednesday, January 27th. The committee will review the three bills scheduled for review on Tuesday in the K-12 Subcommittee as well as H. 3612 (which was passed by the K-12 Subcommittee this week).

In the Senate, the Education Subcommittee is scheduled to meet on Wednesday, January 27th in the afternoon. Currently the subcommittee is scheduled to discuss one bill:

- [S. 38](#) (Grooms, Rice, and Hembree)- The "REACH Act" addresses instruction on the constitutional foundations of the United States in public high schools and universities. The vast majority of the legislation is focused on higher education. The section addressing high schools would amend existing state code to include the Emancipation Proclamation as a required document of study alongside the Constitution, Declaration of Independence, and *Federalist Papers*. PSTA supports the K-12 provisions of this legislation.

The full Senate Education Committee will meet on January 27th and 28th to discuss two bills:

- [S. 201](#) (Hembree)- this legislation would amend sections of the Education Accountability Act related to school and district turnaround plans as well as provisions regarding the authority of the State Superintendent of Education to assume operational control of a school or district through declaration of a state-of-education emergency. PSTA is still reviewing this legislation.
- [S. 16](#) (Rankin, Hembree, Malloy, Fanning)- This bill would replace economics with completion of a one-half credit course in personal finance as a requirement for graduation in South Carolina. PSTA believes this legislation is unnecessary as the revised 2019 Economics standards achieve most of the goals of the legislation regarding instruction in personal finance.

While it has not been announced, there is a strong possibility that H. 3609 (teacher step increases) will be debated on the floor of the House. PSTA will make members aware when this occurs.

## Membership Advocacy Suggestions for the Week Ahead



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!

1. **Contact Members of the House and Senate Subcommittees-** If you have concerns or thoughts about the legislation scheduled for review in subcommittee, please consider reaching out to those members. The membership of the House Education and Public Works Committee can be [found by clicking here](#). The members of the K-12 Education Subcommittee are Rep. Felder, Rep. T. Alexander, Rep. L. Bennett, Rep. Gatch, Rep. Brittain, and Rep. Rivers. The membership of the Senate Education Committee can be

[found by clicking here](#). The Education Subcommittee members are Senator Talley, Senator Rice, and Senator Jackson.

2. Contact your Member of the House Concerning H. 3609- In the near future, the full House will consider H. 3609, which would retroactively award step increases to eligible individuals under the state salary schedule for the 2020-21 school year. Please reach out now to let *your* representative know that you support passage of this legislation. You can find your representative by entering your [home address on this page](#). In communicating your support for the legislation, make sure to include two things. First, provide *your personal experience/perspective* on why passage of this legislation is important. Second, make sure to explicitly *ask your member to vote in favor of H. 3609 when it comes to the House floor for debate*.