

MSTA ACTION

THE LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN OF THE MISSOURI STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION • PLEASE POST



House Passes State Budget

The House of Representatives gave approval to 13 budget bills to make up the \$45 billion state budget. The House spent nearly four hours on **HB2 (Smith)**, the budget bill that funds public education and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, with 31 total amendments.

The budget passed by the House fully funds the foundation formula and K-12 transportation reimbursement. It also continues the efforts made last year to improve salaries by continuing the teacher baseline salary grant program, paying for 70% of the costs to raise the minimum teacher salary to \$38,000. There are currently 356 districts participating in the program with more than 6,000 impacted teachers now making \$38,000. Also included in **HB2** is an increase of \$31 million for the Career Ladder Program, which was re-instituted for the current school year. In 2023, there are nearly 140 districts participating with 11,000 teachers completing extra work for the additional pay.

Other issues discussed during the budget debate include \$50 million for school safety grants, as well as a decrease of \$15.7 million in Federal Title funding distributed to schools. Language was inserted into budget bills, including **HB2**, that would ban state government spending on diversity, equity and inclusion.

"No funds shall be expended for staffing, vendors, consultants, or programs associated with "Diversity, Equity, Inclusion," or "Diversity, Inclusion, Belonging," or any other initiative which similarly promotes: 1) the preferential treatment of any individual or group of individuals based upon race, color, religion, sex, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, national origin, or ancestry; 2) the concept that disparities are necessarily tied to oppression; 3) collective guilt ideologies; 4) intersectional or divisive identity activism; or, 5) the limiting of freedom of conscience, thought, or speech. This does not prohibit the department from following federal and state employment and anti-discrimination laws."

An amendment was offered, and defeated, which would have given every teacher in Missouri a raise of \$5,000. A second amendment was also defeated and would have given every teacher a \$1,000 raise. (See online story for link to vote.)

A proposal to reinstate \$4.5 million for Missouri libraries was also defeated, as well as another amendment that would have reinstated \$20 million of federal funds to help with student mental health issues and social/emotional learning. Finally, \$56 million was included in the formula to start the process of providing Pre-Kindergarten programs to all low-income children. Under the plan, 50% of all families with Pre-K students will be able to enroll their children in expanded programs through their local school district at no cost.

The budget now moves to the Senate Appropriations Committee where they will begin crafting their own version before sending it to the full Senate and then on to a conference committee to work out any differences between the two chambers. The legislature must approve the state budget by May 5th.

Open Enrollment Bill to be Heard in Senate Committee

The Senate Education and Workforce Development Committee has scheduled a hearing on Tuesday, April 4th at 8:00 a.m. for **HB253 (Pollitt)**, the legislation that would create open enrollment in Missouri public schools. **MSTA remains opposed to HB253 based on MSTAdopted Resolutions.** **HB253** would allow students enrolled in a public school to attend a nonresident public district participating in the open enrollment program. Districts must declare participation in the open enrollment program by December 1st for the following school year. While accepting transfer students would be optional, districts could only limit the students that are allowed to transfer out of a district to 3% of the previous year's enrollment. Each school district is required to adopt a model policy for open enrollment from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education or an entity skilled in policy development, even if the district is not going to participate, creating state intrusion and increased bureaucracy.

Students who participate in open enrollment in high school may not participate in varsity sports during the first 365 days of enrollment in a nonresident district, with some exceptions. Parents will be responsible for transportation to the nonresident school or to an existing bus stop location in the nonresident district. Students qualifying for free and reduced meals or who have transportation as **a related service on an IEP, must be**

a related service on an IEP, must be offered transportation services by a nonresident district sharing a border with the student's resident district and may have transportation expenses reimbursed by the parent public school choice fund.

The legislation allows districts and parents to receive funding from the creation of a new \$80 million Parent Public School Choice Fund for special education services and for transportation costs. If the Parent Public School Choice Fund is not funded, then that money would come from the foundation formula and the K-12 transportation reimbursement, further impacting all districts to pay for services that are already being provided by school districts. MSTA opposes these bills based on MSTAdopted Resolutions, with the following concerns:

School Consolidation: open enrollment will lead to school consolidation; this legislation could leave districts unable to support all students in the community. Students remaining in community schools that have been consolidated will be forced to endure longer bus rides while districts that remain open will struggle to maintain the educational programs they already offer such as FFA, choir, band and athletic programs. In many Missouri communities, these kinds of tough decisions have already been made due to a lack of funding and will increase the difficulty of recruiting and retaining education staff.

Special Education: allows districts to deny students based on special education status if the transfer district determines they cannot meet the special education student's needs, allowing districts to discriminate against special needs students.

Financial Implications/anti-collaboration: will pit schools against one another to compete for students and the funding associated with them. Funding that would normally go toward student learning would be spent on recruiting students and competing with neighboring districts. Creates competition for the sake of competition, districts are not in the same situations are forced to devote time and treasure to recruiting students while still attempting to provide a quality education to all the students that remain in the district.

Increased state influence: mandates that schools adopt a model policy developed by DESE or "another entity skilled in policy development" to determine the number of transfers available. This policy must be adopted by schools even if they decide

not to participate in the open enrollment program.

House Gives Initial Approval for Teacher Recruitment and Retention Bill

An amendment to increase the minimum teacher salary in state law was added to **HB497 (E. Lewis)** on the House floor this week, which would raise Missouri's minimum teacher salary to \$38,000 and the Master's plus ten minimum to \$46,000 beginning in the 2024-25 school year. The amendment places into law the Teacher Baseline Salary Grant Fund created in the state budget by the legislature to fund 70% of the costs to raise the minimum teacher salary into law. The grant program would remain in place until the 2027-28 school year.

HB497 (E. Lewis) began as a bill that would create the Teacher Recruitment and Retention State Scholarship Program, modifying and expanding the Urban Flight and Rural Needs Scholarship Program that was already in state law. This scholarship was designed to support those pursuing teaching and education who are committed to teaching at-risk students at a Missouri public school. On the floor of the House, the scholarship was also expanded to include certificated teaching positions for students who are blind or deaf. In committee, a large number of bills were combined with **HB497** to create an education omnibus bill. Other bills that were added in committee include:

HB190 (E. Lewis) to allow school districts to identify hard-to-staff schools and hard-to-staff subject areas and designate a higher placement on the salary schedule when hiring such teachers.

HB496 (E. Lewis) to enact several school retirement provisions, including a 2.55% benefit factor for 32 or more years of PSRS service, extending the term of teacher critical shortage work after retirement to a maximum of four years, and modifying the earnings limit for a PSRS retiree who goes back to work in a PEERS position. **HB116 (Shields)** to require bleeding control kits available in high-traffic areas of schools.

HB70 (Dinkins) to allow school staff other than teachers and administrators to serve as school protection officers.

HB809 (O'Donnell) to require DESE to convene a work group to develop academic performance standards for the half credit course in personal finance required for high school graduation. **HB483 (Baker)** to create an extended learning policy, allowing students to receive credit for participation in out-of-classroom learning experiences as approved by the State Board of Education, a school board or a charter school.

Retirement Language Continues to Advance

Legislation that would benefit the PSRS/PEERS retirement systems and work to support efforts to address teacher recruitment and retention continues to advance in both chambers in the legislature. The House Pensions Committee gave approval to a bill that would increase benefits for retirees and strengthen the Public School and Education Employee Retirement Systems. **HB257 (Pollitt)** includes three different provisions, including the reinstatement of the 2.55 factor for working 32 or more years of service. The bill increases the current annual earnings limit for any retired member of PSRS employed in a position covered under PEERS without stopping their retirement benefit and would increase the usage of critical shortage from two years to four years. The bill is similar to **HB496 (E. Lewis)** and **SB75 (Black)**. In the Senate, language from **SB75** (which is substantially similar to **HB257**), was included in **SB247 (J. Brown)** which gained approval by the Senate and was sent to the House.

Bill Summaries

House

Elementary and Secondary Education

HB633 (A. Kelley) modifies the currently required training that school employees must receive annually. The bill requires that newly hired employees receive instruction on a variety of topics after being hired including: school discipline, seclusion and restraint, school bullying, employee-student communications, mandatory reporting, dyslexia and related disorders, youth suicide awareness and prevention, and active shooter and intruder response training. All other employees may be provided with training and education as determined by the school district based on the specific needs of the district and employee instead of annually. **MSTA testified in support of this bill.**

HB883 (Cupps) defines "health and family education" and requires that the current one-half credit hour of health education be renamed "Health and Family Education" for the 2024-25 school year. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is required to convene a work group to develop academic performance standards, which will include educators, representatives from DESE and nonprofit organizations with a focus on public health, parenting and social services. The State Board of Education is required to adopt and implement the performance standards relating to health education for the 2024-25 school year.

Executive Session

HB482 (Baker) would create a parents' bill of rights. The bill is similar to other legislation that has been proposed but was modified in committee and does not include a state database. Curriculum required for disclosure by educators would include the written curriculum adopted by local boards of education. **Voted do pass with substitute.**

HB627 (Christofanelli) also creates a parents' bill of rights. This version requires that all materials available to parents, including curricula such as the title of each textbook, course outlines and reading lists be made placed on the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website or on a platform developed by the department as well as district financials and student test information. **Voted do pass with substitute.**

HB529 (Black) modifies the current funding calculation for state aid for public schools and would allow for further growth of the state adequacy target. **Voted do pass with substitute.**

HB159 (Mackey) requires school districts and charter schools to document school suspensions and begin reporting this information to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education annually. The bill requires school districts to include removal of pupils with disabilities and expulsions on the annual report card data related to school discipline, including in school and out of school suspensions. For each type of disciplinary offense, aggregate data must be provided. The bill also requires school boards to consider reasonable alternative measures to suspension, and prohibits the suspension of students for truancy, absences or prior offenses. Schools are prohibited from suspending students in preschool to 3rd grade. **Voted do pass with substitute.**

Senate

Education and Workforce Dev.

SB166 (Carter) would prohibit any city or county from dictating or interfering with the curriculum, concepts, topics or practices taught by any public, private or home school within the boundaries of the city or county. Also, no city or county would be allowed to dictate or interfere with the employment decisions or policies of public, private or home schools.



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P.O. Box 458, Columbia, MO 65205
(800) 392-0532 > www.msta.org

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