

# MSTA ACTION

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



## MSTA testifies before the school safety task force

In March, Gov. Mike Parson created the Missouri School Safety Task Force. Since then, the task force has traveled the state as part of a listening tour to gather information concerning school safety.

In their final meeting in Jefferson City, MSTA provided preliminary results from a safety survey that was sent to MSTA members. The goal of the survey is to provide the task force with real up-to-date information that teachers experience every day in their classrooms.

The task force is led by Lt. Governor Mike Kehoe and includes leaders of Missouri's departments of Public Safety, Mental Health and Elementary and Secondary Education as well as the executive director of the Missouri School Boards' Association and the senior policy advisor to the Center for Education Safety.

The task force is studying the federal government's school safety report commissioned in the wake of the 2018 deadly school shootings in Parkland, Florida. It is working to identify gaps and shortfalls or suggested policy changes so all schools in Missouri can be given frameworks to identify resources for addressing school safety issues.

Once the MSTA school safety survey is completed and results can be summarized, the results of the report will be made available to the task force. The survey includes questions if teachers feel safe in their classroom, is there a problem with verbal or physical assaults against teachers, and if teachers have ever considered leaving the profession because of safety concerns.

Finally, the survey asked teachers what they wanted the task force to know about school safety. So far, there have been over 3,000 responses, and the task force was given a printout of each response. Without having a teacher representative on the task force, this is a way to ensure that the voices and views of teachers are heard and understood. MSTA will continue to work with the Lt. Governor's office and appointed members of the task force to ensure educators have input in the final report.

The task force is expected to issue a final report by the end of July.

## State Board of Education addresses variety of issues

The State Board of Education heard updates on the newest generation of the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) 6.

After several delays, and additional input from stakeholders, the SBOE approved beginning the rulemaking process for MSIP 6. DESE began the development of MSIP 6 in 2015, the goals of the proposed standards are to emphasize a balanced approach to leading and lagging indicators with consideration to local context. The rulemaking process will take months and will allow all stakeholders to make additional comments before they are adopted by the department.

Responding to legislation that was passed in 2018, the SBOE also adopted Computer Science Academic Standards. The work group standards were approved by DESE for use in the 2019-2020 school year. The legislation that was passed allows students to fulfill one unit of academic credit in mathematics, science or practical arts with a computer science course.

Assistant Commissioner Dr. Paul Katnik delivered an update to the SBOE on the Teacher Workforce Outreach Plan. He reported on data collected from more than 6,000 educators that included the MSTA survey of members from across the state regarding retention and recruitment issues. In an effort to address teacher shortages in particular content areas and geographic locations as well as increasing retention rates of teachers currently working, DESE has established a teacher workforce outreach plan. The board was updated on phase one of the plan: collecting data from teachers and administrators about recruitment challenges and reasons why teachers leave the profession. The initial survey results are clear that low pay is the number one reason teachers are leaving the classroom, followed by a lack of support.

The department will continue work on phase two, which will focus on the formulation of strategies based on issues as evidenced by the data collected in phase one. This will include engagement with key stakeholder groups to review themes, develop possible solutions, and then prioritize strategies to address recruitment and retention issues. The solutions will be based on practical and realistic considerations.

Phase three is where implementation will take place. The goal is to empower a broad group of key stakeholders to review, discuss and engage in the strategies outlined in phase two. This is where recommendations will be made to the SBOE, and roles will be outlined for key stakeholders in order to implement the strategies.

The initial timeline was to have a plan in place by January 2020. SBOE President Charlie Shields pressed the department to move that forward, as any possible legislative recommendations would need to go to elected officials prior to the start of session in January.

## Harmful education bills failed to gain traction again this session

Bills that would drastically change public education in Missouri struggled to pass either chamber this session. Through MSTA Capitol Visits and active engagement on important issues, MSTA members made their voices heard and built on strong relationships with their elected officials.

Similar to previous years, bills to expand charter schools, create a harmful tax credit voucher program, and drastic changes to the Public School Retirement System were filed in both chambers of the legislature, but neither the House nor the Senate passed these measures.

MSTA members made a difference this session and continue to be a strong respected voice for students, education professionals and communities.

## MSTA Campaign School

The MSTA Campaign School will be held on Monday, June 17 at the MSTA headquarters in Columbia. The day-long course will introduce members to the inner workings of successful political campaigns. The course covers topics such as campaign planning, fundraising, vote modeling, building coalitions and structuring a successful get-out-the-vote effort. The course is appropriate for state legislative candidates, school board candidates and those who would like more information on how to help a campaign. Past attendees have also found the information and strategies presented helpful in growing and retaining members in their local CTA. The class starts at 10 a.m. with lunch provided. To RSVP, please contact MSTA Governmental Relations Secretary Suzanne Conner at 573-442-3127 or by email [sconner@msta.org](mailto:sconner@msta.org).



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## Education omnibus bill includes alternative methods of instruction language

Last week, the legislature appropriated an additional \$61 million to fully fund the school foundation formula and budgeted an additional \$5 million increase for school transportation costs. In the final week of session, a substantial education omnibus bill was passed.

**HB604 (Henderson)** was truly agreed and finally passed. The underlying language of the bill requires the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to establish school turnaround programs to assist public and charter schools in need of intervention. The bill grew into a large omnibus K-12 education bill that covered a wide variety of issues.

MSTA priority language was included in the bill that was drafted in response to an Adopted Resolution from the 2018 MSTTA Assembly of Delegates. Missouri school districts will have an option to use a DESE-approved alternative instruction plan for up to 36 hours for classes that would normally be canceled due to inclement weather or a contagious disease outbreak.

A plan submitted to DESE must include the following:

- The way the district intends to strengthen and reinforce instructional content while supporting student learning outside the classroom environment;
- The process the district intends to use to communicate to students and parents the decision to implement alternative methods of instruction on any day of a closure;
- The manner in which the district intends to communicate the purpose and expectations for a day in which alternative methods of instruction will be implemented to students and parents;
- The assignments and materials to be used within the district for days in which alternative methods of instruction will be implemented to effectively facilitate teaching and support learning for the benefit of the students;
- The way student attendance will be determined for a day in which alternative methods of instruction will be implemented. The method chosen shall be linked to completion of lessons and activities;
- The instructional methods, which shall include instruction through electronic means and instruction through other means for students who have no access to internet services or a computer;
- Instructional plans for students with individualized education programs; and
- The role and responsibility of certified personnel to be available to communicate with students.

The Department of Economic Development and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will adopt requirements for certified teacher externships along with an equivalency schedule to allow externship hours to be considered for increases similar to graduate-level coursework on the salary schedule for districts before July 1, 2020.

Language scaled back from previous sessions that address the transfer of students from unaccredited districts is included in the bill. SBOE intervention powers, tuition mechanisms, and transportation of students are outlined in the legislation as well as clear instructions on how the transfer of students would operate and the duties and responsibilities of DESE and local school districts.

Two sections that impact charter schools in the state would expand the eligibility of children between the age of 3 and 5 to qualify for a district's or charter school's calculation of average daily attendance if they attend an early childhood education program under contract with a school and modifications to the enrollment of charter schools, allowing them to give preference for admission to students who will be eligible for the free and reduced price lunch program.

The bill creates two pilot programs for elementary schools, one relating to social and emotional health education, and the other relating to agricultural education in elementary schools. School districts may apply to DESE to be selected for either program. The department will select a minimum of 16 schools that will agree to include the program for three years. Upon completion of the pilot programs, DESE will provide an evaluation on the success and impact and report their findings back to the legislature.

Starting with the 2020-2021, each school district is required to provide trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate sexual abuse training to students in grades 7-12. DESE will provide guidance and training materials that districts may use in coordination with the Task Force on the Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Children. Local school districts must now also conduct criminal background checks on any person who assists a school by providing uncompensated service and may be left alone with a student or have access to student records. Other school safety language that was included addresses training for school board members, increasing the initial orientation and training requirements to include instruction on up-to-date and reliable information on identifying signs of sexual abuse in children and danger signals of potentially abusive relationships between children and adults. Districts must also adopt a policy on the information that is provided about former employees to other public schools. Districts are required to disclose to another public school any information regarding

any violation of the published school board regulations of the district if the violation was related to sexual misconduct with a student and was determined to be an actual violation after a contested due process hearing.

Changes to the A+ program will allow qualified students to utilize the scholarship program to earn credits toward a college degree while in high school. The Department of Higher Education will establish a procedure for the reimbursement of the cost of tuition and fees for any dual-credit or dual-enrollment course offered to a student in high school in association with a qualified institution of higher education or vocational or technical school.

There are many positive and beneficial issues addressed in the large omnibus bill, but as with many bills that include multiple topics, there is language that was included that was not supported by MSTTA. The final version of **HB604** includes restrictions on the school start date. The bill would prohibit school districts from setting a start date more than 14 calendar days before Labor Day. The legislation will take effect for the 2020-21 school year. Missouri is one of 16 states that place restrictions on school start dates.

## Divorce pop-up passes in final day

The underlying language in **SB17 (Romine)** has already been signed by Gov. Parson (**HB77 R. Black**) and relates to work after retirement changes for retirees working for Missouri Community Colleges. Under current law, any person retired from the Public School Retirement System of Missouri (PSRS) may be employed by an employer included in the retirement system in a position that does not normally require a Missouri teacher certification. Such a person may earn up to 60% of the statutory minimum teacher salary without a discontinuance of the person's retirement allowance. If any such person is employed in excess of the limitations, the person shall not be eligible to receive the person's retirement allowance for any month during which the person is employed.

Added to the bill and now sent to the governor's desk includes the language from **HB723 (Pike)** which would allow a retired member of the Public School or Public Education Employees Retirement System who has elected a reduced retirement allowance to provide for survivor benefits for his or her spouse to have the retirement allowance increased to the single life annuity amount, with no survivor benefits, if the member and his or her spouse became divorced prior to Sept. 1, 2017 or if they get a modified dissolution decree that provides for sole retention by the retired person of all rights in the retirement allowance after Sept. 1, 2017.