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Fwd: Capitol Watch: Nearly 700 Bills Filed that Directly Impact Public Education

1 message

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March board meeting

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **IASA** <iasa@iasaedu.org>
Date: Thu, Mar 4, 2021 at 1:18 PM
Subject: Capitol Watch: Nearly 700 Bills Filed that Directly Impact Public Education
To: <jbauer@panaschools.com>



**Let the Games Begin: Nearly 700 Bills
Filed that Directly Impact Public Education**

After last spring's abbreviated legislative session, it was inevitable the levee would break and a tidal wave of bills would be filed during the 102nd Illinois General Assembly.

Let the games begin! On March 4, we currently sit at more than 4,000 bills filed in the House and more than 2,700 bills filed in the Senate.

As of today, IASA is closely monitoring nearly 700 bills in the House and Senate that directly impact public education. Not surprisingly, there is a mixed bag of proposals that raise concerns and others we feel would be a step in the right direction.

The list includes another ill-advised push for forced school consolidation and a requirement for all high schools to offer home economics. There are also measures we support, such as loosening pension restrictions on substitute teachers and providing more flexibility on teacher evaluations for those rated excellent or proficient.

It's definitely gearing up to be another interesting legislative session, which will be accentuated by how the General Assembly grapples with a budget deficit, rising pension costs and recovery efforts from the pandemic. There is no shortage of issues.

Right now, it's still fairly early in the process, and the General Assembly is in the midst of holding a series of virtual committee hearings to flush out the details of bills and set the stage for amendments to be filed. I expect the committee hearings to continue virtually throughout the month of March. The deadline for bills to pass out of committee in the

House and Senate is March 26. Of course, it's Illinois, and any idea can be revived down the road.

Remember, there are some major wrinkles this legislative session. The hearings are being conducted remotely, meaning a limited number of witnesses will be able to testify virtually. The heightened safety precautions will limit access to the capitol, meaning your voice will be even more crucial in helping keep unintended consequences out of schools.

In this Capitol Watch, I want to spotlight certain pieces of legislation that were posted or heard in committees that superintendents need to be aware of and should consider discussing with your local legislators. Many other bills have surfaced, and we will keep you updated on the proposals in Capitol Watch.

Forced School Consolidation

HB 7, Rep. Rita Mayfield (D-Waukegan); SB 1722, Sen. Emil Jones III (D-Chicago)

HB 7 and SB 1722 are identical and in line with proposals we have seen before. The bills propose creating a 20-person task force that will make recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly on the number of school districts in the state, the optimal amount of enrollment for a school district and where reorganization and realignment of school districts would be beneficial. The goal of the initiative is to reduce the statewide total number of school districts by no less than 25% through the reorganization of school districts into unit districts.

Eleven of the 20 members of the task force would have to approve the recommendations for it to proceed and be put to local voters at the ballot for a referendum.

IASA is not opposed to districts consolidating, but it has to be a community-initiated plan that is supported by incentives offered by the state. Otherwise, any proposal will lead to a significant increase in costs at the local level. The primary driver of that is the merging of salary schedules but increased transportation costs and additional facility needs can also arise.

Rep. Mayfield did not call HB 7 when the Elementary Education and Secondary Education Committee met this week, but she could still call it before the March 26 deadline.

Home Economics Requirement

HB 8, Rep. Mayfield (D-Waukegan)

The legislation is short and says, the "school board of a school district that maintains grades 9 through 12 shall offer home economics as an elective high school course not required for graduation.

We are naturally concerned about this proposal because it could be a costly unfunded mandate for some school districts, if they would need to update facilities or hire an additional teacher to comply with the law.

Furthermore, it's unclear if there is demand from students to take home economics as an elective. Whether to offer this class should remain a local decision.

Teacher Evaluations

HB 18, Rep. Sue Scherer (D-Decatur)

There's a good chance any education bill that has the support of school administrators and labor groups will go the distance.

HB 18 provides more flexibility for school districts with teacher evaluations by giving districts the option for each teachers whose performance is rated as either "excellent" or "proficient" to be evaluated at least once in the course of the three school years after receipt of the rating (rather than at least once in the course of every two school years), and establish an informal teacher evaluation plan that ensures that each teacher in contractual continued service whose performance is rated as either "excellent" or "proficient" is informally evaluated at least once in the course of the two school years after receipt of the rating.

Districts would have until September 1, 2022 to implement their new teacher evaluation plan.

Substitute Teachers

HB 21, Rep. Scherer (D-Decatur)

HB 21 provides some relief for school districts experiencing a shortage of substitute teachers. The bill allows a Teacher Retirement System annuitant to substitute teach without restriction in school districts that have been granted a waiver of the days and hours restrictions.

The bill provides that a school district may apply for a waiver by providing sufficient evidence there is a substitute teacher shortage in the school district and an estimate of the number of paid hours in the school year that the annuitant will work.

Isolated Time Out and Student Restraint

HB 219, Rep. Jonathan Carroll (D-Northbrook)

The legislation would prohibit the use of "prone restraint," in which a person is held face-down on the floor or other surface while pressure is applied to the student's body to keep him or her in that position, as well as mechanical and chemical restraint.

The bill also provides that timeouts, isolated timeouts and other forms of physical restraint could only be used when the student's behavior poses an "imminent danger of serious physical harm to the student or to others," and it would direct the Illinois State Board of Education to develop a plan for greatly reducing the use of those practices over the next three years.

The bill was heard during a committee hearing Wednesday and there will be further conversations about if there could be any exceptions allowing the use of prone restraint, if a parent or guardian consents to its use.

Special Education Age

HB 40, Rep. Frances Hurley (D-Chicago)

HB 40 would allow special needs students to receive special education services through the end of the school year that they turn 22 years of age. The current law says students are eligible for special education services until the day before his or her 22nd birthday.

Two major concerns are the cost and impact on staffing levels. At a committee hearing Wednesday, one estimate said the bill could cost up to \$20 million more than the status quo for the state and school districts.

The bill passed the committee with one vote against from Rep. Tom Demmer, R-Dixon, who cited concerns over funding.

Sexting Education

HB 24, Rep. Maurice West (D-Rockford)

HB 24 is one of many curriculum mandate proposals that will surface this session.

The legislation would require sex education courses to include information on the long-term social, legal and academic consequences of sharing or forwarding suggestive photos, videos or messages, commonly known as sexting. The proposal would not make sex education mandatory for schools. If signed into law, the requirement would only affect schools already teaching sex education courses.

HB 24 was approved unanimously in the Elementary Education and Secondary Education Committee on Wednesday.

Make Our Voices Heard

To close, these are just a few of the legislative proposals that have surfaced that will directly impact public education in Illinois.

If you haven't already, we encourage you to have a dialogue with your local legislators on these important topics. We will continue to provide Capitol Watch updates and alerts to help keep you informed and be a stronger advocate!

Sincerely,

Diane Hendren
Director of Governmental Relations
Illinois Association of School Administrators

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