



SMITH HILL REPORT

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Funding Formula Considered

Three proposals to create an education funding formula were heard in the House Finance Committee on Thursday, May 13. The Senate Finance Committee will consider a funding formula bill (**S2770 Gallo**) next Tuesday, May 18.

H7123 sponsored by **Representative Corvese**, is supported by the RIFTHP and other organizations under the coalition of Funding our Future. This bill holds school districts harmless of a loss of money with the implementation of a formula and weights State education aid for student rates of poverty, English Language Learners (ELL) and special education needs. Over time, Rep. Corvese's bill would provide a significant increase in State aid to education to relieve the over-reliance on property taxes to fund schools.

Representative Ajello's legislation **H7555** re-distributes the existing amount of State aid to education using a formula creating winners and losers. Her proposal also weights education aid on student poverty, ELL status and special education needs. **Representative Costantino's** bill **H8094** is based on Commissioner Gist's formula. It would require some districts to lose funds while creating a formula that is weighted only based on poverty.

Rhode Island's State share to education hovers around 37%, one of the lowest rates in the country. For that reason, school funding relies heavily on local property taxes and not broad-based State taxes.

Bills on the Move

- **Age of School Attendance – Kindergarten**
(**H7180A Ucci, Senate Education**)
This act would authorize school departments to admit children into their kindergarten programs even though those children have not reached age 5 by September 1 of the school year. Such admissions would be made in accordance with guidelines promulgated by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The bill passed the House on April 6 and was transferred to the Senate Education Committee on April 13.
- **Pension Contribution Deferral – June 15**
(**H8063 Constantino, Passed**)
(**S2818 DaPonte, Passed**)
This act defers the employer's contribution to the State Retirement System from the effective date of this act to June 15, 2010. Both bills passed the House and Senate and were signed into law by the Governor on May 1.
- **Katharine Gibbs – Associates Degree**
(**S2264 Gallo, House Health, Education and Welfare**)
This act would repeal section 16-40-10.1 which authorizes the Katharine Gibbs School to grant associate degrees. With the approval of the Board of Governors for Higher Education, the Katharine Gibbs School, currently a degree-granting proprietary (for-profit) institution, has acted to change its business name and operating status to Sanford-Brown Institute, a non-degree granting proprietary school, which would offer only certificate programs. The bill passed the Senate on March 10 and was transferred to the House Health, Education and Welfare Committee on March 11.

Bill Introductions

Senate Bills

- **NRIC District Eligibility for Davies**
(**S2015** *Maselli, Senate Finance*)
This act would allow school districts that participate in the Northern Rhode Island Education Collaborative and do not have their own vocational technical program to send students to William E. Davies Vocational High School.
- **Electronic Posting of School Committee Meeting Notices**
(**S2159** *Gallo, Senate Judiciary*)
(**S2216** *Raptakis, Senate Judiciary*)
These acts would amend the open meetings law by permitting school committees to satisfy the publication requirements regarding their meetings through publication on a website maintained by the school committee or by publication in a newspaper.
- **Mandatory Full-Day Kindergarten**
(**S2263** *DeVall, Senate Education*)
This act would provide an increase in the hours per day kindergarten students would be required to attend class.
- **Education Collaborative Revisions**
(**S2266** *Felag, Senate Education*)
This act would define the mission of the educational collaboratives in this State.
- **Term Limits**
(**S2390** *Pinga, Senate Constitutional and Regulatory Issues*)
This resolution would provide for a referendum to be submitted to the electors of the State at the general election in November, 2010, which would provide that representatives and senators would not serve for more than five (5), two (2) year terms.
- **Private School Textbooks**
(**S2405** *O'Neill, E, Senate Education*)
This act would require the Commissioner of Education to establish a textbook list specifying two (2) textbooks for each grade in each subject and require that the procurement of all textbooks be done by the Department of Education.
- **South Kingstown Unfunded Mandate Resolution**
(**S2463** *Sosnowski, Senate Constitutional and Regulatory Issues*)
This Senate resolution supports legislation that provides the Town of South Kingstown immediate relief from specific unfunded State mandates.
- **School Budget Dispute Resolution**
(**S2480** *Levesque, Senate Education*)
This act would repeal the provisions of the General Laws permitting school committees to seek additional appropriations by bringing an action in the Rhode Island Superior Court. Instead, school committees would be able to appeal to the Commissioner of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.
- **Universal School Breakfast Program**
(**S2490** *Levesque, Senate Finance*)
(**S2526** *Levesque, Senate Finance*)
These acts would establish a Universal Breakfast Program for all Rhode Island school students regardless of family income.
- **Council Representation on School Negotiations Committee**
(**S2733** *Walaska, Senate Education*)
This act would provide that a city or town council member would be included in any contract negotiations that a school committee is involved in.
- **Student Records of Military Children**
(**S2738** *DiPalma, Senate Finance*)
This act would make Rhode Island a member of an interstate commission which would deal with issues related to the education of the children of military personnel.
- **Consolidation of School and Municipal Departments**
(**S2741** *DaPonte, Senate Finance*)
This act would mandate that every town and city consolidate certain functions by July 1, 2012.