

The

SMITH HILL REPORT



PUBLISHED BY THE RHODE ISLAND FEDERATION OF TEACHERS & HEALTH PROFESSIONALS/AFT, AFL-CIO

March 2, 2026

Back in Session

Following winter recess and the disruption caused by the Blizzard of '26, the General Assembly has resumed full operations and legislative business is moving at a rapid pace. Key education, workforce, and budget proposals are advancing through committee, signaling an important phase of the 2026 session. Although the storm forced us to postpone our planned rally, we are actively coordinating a new date and will be ready to bring our voices back to Smith Hill.

This Week

- On Wednesday, the Senate Education Committee will hear legislation on a constitutional right to an adequate education, media literacy, and fully staffed school libraries.
- On Thursday, the House Labor Committee will consider a bill that allows unemployment benefits for workers who are on strike or are locked out of their workplaces by their employer due to a labor dispute.

Bill Introductions

Charter School Funding Study Commission

([HJR 8131](#), Edwards, House Education)

This joint resolution would create a thirteen (13) member special legislative commission to study Rhode Island's method of funding charter schools and assess administrative costs across charter and traditional school districts. The commission would report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly by April 1, 2027, and would expire on July 1, 2027.

Student Success Factor Increase

([H 8159](#), Casey, House Finance)

This bill would increase the student success factor in the state's education funding formula by raising the poverty weight to fifty percent (50%) of the core instruction per-pupil amount in school districts where more than forty-five percent (45%) of students qualify at or below one hundred eighty-five percent (185%) of the federal poverty guidelines.

Poverty Loss Stabilization Increase

([H 8157](#), Caldwell, House Finance)

This bill would amend the state's school funding formula by increasing the poverty loss stabilization protection from fifty percent (50%) to seventy-five percent (75%) for districts experiencing a decline in their state share ratio, providing additional financial stability when formula-driven aid decreases.

ERSRI CPI COLA Restoration

([H 8147](#), Serpa, House Finance)

This bill would restore annual cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) for retirees in the state pension system by providing compounded adjustments to total retirement benefits beginning January 1, 2026. The restoration would apply prospectively and would sunset in 2035, after which the COLA provision would expire unless further legislative action is taken.

Out-of-District Pre-K Enrollment

([H 8130](#), Giraldo, House Education)

This bill would allow municipalities participating in the state prekindergarten program to enroll students from outside their municipality under specified conditions and would establish a lottery process for enrollment when applications exceed available seats.

No Limitation on Healthcare Benefit Providers in Collective Bargaining Agreements

([H 7967](#), Brien, House Labor)

This bill would repeal the statutory prohibition preventing Collective Bargaining Agreements for state employees, public school teachers, and municipal employees from specifying a particular healthcare provider, thereby allowing healthcare carriers to be negotiated and designated within collective bargaining agreements.

Dyslexia Definition Alignment

([H 7909](#), O'Brien, House Education)

This bill would redefine dyslexia in statute to align with current research, defining it as a specific learning disability characterized by difficulties in word reading and/or spelling involving accuracy, speed, or both, which vary depending on the orthography.

Athletic Trainers at High Schools

([H 7901](#), Baginski, House Education)

This bill would require each school district to designate a certified athletic trainer at every high school within the district to provide athletic health and safety services for student-athletes.

Weapon Detection at Schools

([H 7898](#), DeSimone, House Education)

This bill would require the installation and use of a weapons detection system at every public entrance to school buildings, gymnasiums, school event facilities, sporting event sites, and any location where a school hosts or participates in an event, including off-campus events.

Safe School Technology

([H 7895](#), Caldwell, House Education)

This bill would establish the Safe School Technology Act of 2026, creating certification standards for instructional technology used in Rhode Island schools, imposing privacy and data protection requirements on education technology providers, and setting safety and configuration requirements for school-issued digital devices.

In-District Open Seat Access

([S 2649](#), Famiglietti, Senate Education)

This bill would require that any public school with available seats, after completion of the initial enrollment period, make those open seats available to other students residing within the same school district.

University of Rhode Island Governance and Procurement

([S 2683](#), Sosnowski, Senate Finance)

This bill would enhance and further define the role and authority of the Board of Trustees of the University of Rhode Island and would establish a more efficient procurement process for the University.

Questions

RIFTHP members with questions about the Smith Hill Report or our legislative agenda may reach out to RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer at (401) 273-9800 or at jsencer@rifthp.org.

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