
The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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Trauma Informed Education Bill Heard

On Wednesday, January 26, 2022 the House Education Committee heard testimony on four bills. One of the bills was introduced by Representative Marcia Ranglin-Vassell, a Providence teacher whose representative district is in Providence. Her bill, [H6667](#), would require the Commissioner of Education to establish and disseminate professional practices related to traumatic experiences. The bill also includes provisions related to including all school staff in the planning of education around trauma-informed practices.

The RIFTHP offered written testimony in support of the bill. RIFTHP President Frank Flynn wrote *"The unfortunate reality is that many of Rhode Island's students have experienced or been exposed to incidents of trauma in their daily lives. Over the past two years the pandemic has exacerbated that situation. Our teachers, administrators, social workers, psychologists, guidance counselors and other school personnel deal with the impact trauma has had on their students every day."* To view President Flynn's letter, [click here](#).

Other supporters of the legislation included the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), Kids Count, and the NEA/RI.

The House Education Committee also listened to testimony on legislation to provide high speed internet to students, legislation to prohibit higher education institutions from withholding a transcript if the student owes the institution money, and a bill to develop alternative learning plans for students with an extended absence due to COVID. All of the bills were held for further study.

More RIFTHP Initiatives Introduced

The RIFTHP is putting together a series of bills that it will work on this session. Among the initiatives of the RIFTHP are several bills that were introduced in prior years and a few new ideas. Two RIFTHP initiatives were introduced last week and three of our bills were submitted this week.

Right to Read Act Extension, Revisions

In 2019, legislation was enacted that required RIDE to develop a program to ensure that all teachers had an

awareness of scientific reading instruction and certain teachers demonstrated proficiency in scientific reading and structured reading beginning in the 2023-2024 school year. RIDE had not yet developed formal regulations on this law, but they have issued guidance that is very cumbersome to elementary school teachers and others impacted by the law. Legislation had been introduced to extend the time limit to comply with this section of law for 2 years. The bill would declare certain individuals as having met the requirement if they had a Master's Degree in Reading, 15 or more years of teaching experience, had been previously trained in scientific reading instruction and other detailed exemptions. For all others, compliance with the law could be done by attending no more than 24 hours of training to be offered by the Districts. The legislation, [H7164](#), was introduced by **Representative William O'Brien**, a Providence teacher. The bill was introduced on January 26th and has been referred to the House Education Committee. Co-sponsors of the legislation are Representatives Craven, Hawkins, McNamara, Corvese, Serpa, McEntee, Biah, Slater and Ranglin-Vassell.

Pension Eligibility – Rule of 90

Last week, the SHR reported on a House bill by Rep. Deborah Fellela that would permit teachers, state workers and municipal workers in MERS to retire if they were at least 60 years old and had thirty years of credit. Currently ERSRI members can retire if their age and years of service total 95, provided that the member is at least 62 years old. This week, the Senate version of the legislation was introduced by **Senator Frank Lombardi**, who served on the Cranston School Committee before being elected to his Senate seat. His bill, [S2058](#), was introduced on January 25th and has been referred to the Senate Finance Committee. Co-sponsors of the legislation are Senators Lombardo, DiMario, Burke and Ciccone.

Teacher Professional Development Fund

Legislation has been reintroduced this year to create a permanent state funding stream dedicated to teacher professional development. The fund would be in the amount of \$200 per student, or about \$30 million per year. This funding would be allocated by a committee in each school district composed of three teachers appointed by the union and two members appointed by the Superintendent. **Senator Melissa Murray** introduced [S2035](#) on January 25th. The bill has been referred to the Senate Education Committee. Co-sponsors of the legislation are Senators Cano, DiMario and Kallman.

Labor Movement Supports Voting Rights

The Rhode Island AFL-CIO joined a coalition of community organizations in an effort to enact laws to expand voting in Rhode Island. The package of bills being supported by the Let RI Vote coalition would remove barriers to early voting and voting by mail, such as eliminating the requirement that a notary or two witnesses sign off on a ballot that the voter has to sign. The coalition is also supporting a change to the RI Constitution to allow same day voter registration. To get more information or to join the effort, [click here](#).

Bill Introductions

Virtual Education - Snow Days

([S2033](#) *Picard, Senate Education*)

This bill would repeal the requirement that the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) establish a policy allowing a school district to submit a detailed plan to conduct instruction through virtual education when schools have been closed due to inclement weather or other emergency, and amend the statutory law to allow, upon approval by the local school committee, a school district to conduct instruction through virtual education for up to five (5) days when schools have been closed due to inclement weather, emergency or any nonscheduled school closing. The plan submitted to the school committee for approval shall meet specified criteria as set forth in the statute.

School Technology - Student Privacy

([S2036](#) *Seveney, Senate Education*)

This bill would establish certain student privacy rights in regard to take-home technology devices from school. The act would limit the ability of school officials to monitor and search a student's take-home technology device and would establish the process and criteria which school officials must follow to access a student's take-home technology device.

Student Success Factor Review

([S2037](#) *Murray, Senate Education*)

This bill would require a review by the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) of the student success factor, the formula components used to compute the aid needed to support high need students that are part of the state's education funding formula.

Full Funding of Categorical Education Aid

([S2038](#) *Murray, Senate Education*)

This bill would remove the language that requires the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) to prorate funds available for distribution among school districts if the total approved costs of sought after reimbursement exceeds the amount of funding appropriated in any fiscal year.

Climate Literacy Act

([S2039](#) *Lawson, Senate Education*)

This bill would require that the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) implement a plan to ensure that all students enrolled in public schools or other schools managed and controlled by the state in grades kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) become environmentally and climate literate by the time they graduate from high school.

Seizure Safe Schools Act

([S2040](#) *DiPalma, Senate Education*)

This bill would require the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) and the department of health to adopt policies, rules and regulations for the administration of seizure rescue medications for children who have been medically identified as having epilepsy/seizure disorder.

Education Funding – Incentives

([S2041](#) *Seveney, Senate Education*)

This bill would require that benchmarks specific to each Local Education Authority (LEA) be developed by the Rhode Island Department of Education to improve cost controls, efficiencies and program effectiveness. Further, this act would require that the department propose an incentive fund structure to provide for the state to share in an LEA's non-core costs.

Restriction on Education Aid Reduction

([S2042](#) *Rogers, Senate Education*)

This bill would prohibit total education aid paid to any Local Education Agency from being reduced by more than one percent (1%) of the municipal education appropriation in the previous year.

Teacher Evaluation Review Process

([S2043](#) *Seveney, Senate Education*)

This bill would direct the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education to regularly review the assessment and evaluation system that applies to both teachers and administrators and is aligned with the state's standards.

Constitutional Amendment - Right to Adequate Education

([S2095](#) *Picard, Senate Education*)

This amendment to the Constitution of the State, if approved, would provide that it would be the paramount duty of the General Assembly, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), and other government agencies to provide Rhode Island residents with equal opportunities to receive an education that is adequate, equitable and meaningful.

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