
The

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Community Schools Initiative

The RIFTHP has initiated legislation to create a funding plan to create community schools in Rhode Island. Around the country, AFT has been working to create public schools that provide expanded services and programs in response to needs of that particular school community. The Pawtucket Teachers' Alliance is currently working to create a model program at the Agnes Little Elementary School.

[S0435](#), which was introduced by Senator Jaime Doyle, would provide a small funding grant to offset the costs of hiring a community schools program coordinator. The bill would also require the Commissioner to develop a plan to expand community schools to other Rhode Island districts, after surveying teachers, parents, administrators and other interested parties. The bill was heard in the Senate Education Committee on Wednesday April 26th.

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn testified in support of the community schools initiative:

"Community Schools are a labor management partnership which organizes and engages a variety of stakeholders and resources to provide an array of opportunities and pathways to life success for students and their families. Community Schools become the heart of the community. They become a place where teachers, students and service providers can come together in a coordinated, purposeful, and results focused partnership."

President Flynn offered several examples in the hearing, including:

- Academic programs such as tutoring, community based learning, or other enrichment activities.
- Medical services like primary, vision, dental, and nutritional services.
- Mental health services like counseling.
- Adult education, such as financial literacy, ELL services, and parenting skills.

Senate Finance Hears RIDE Budget, Education Bills

On Tuesday, April 26th, the Senate Finance Committee took testimony on [Article 18](#), the Education Budget, and several education funding bills. The RIFTHP testified on five bills and initiatives in the committee that evening. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in the Committee in support of Article 18. This Budget Article would make the \$2.5 million additional state funding for English Language Learners (ELL) a permanent feature of the State Budget. Parisi told the committee that the amount of money was inadequate, but it was important for the Assembly to make enhanced ELL funding a permanent feature of the State's education funding stream.

Parisi also voiced support of two bills that would provide for additional state funding in response to charter school expansion. [S0250](#), introduced by Senator Ryan Pearson, would provide state payment for all charter school tuition in districts where the charter school enrollment exceeds 5% of the student body. [S0252](#) would allow districts to withhold a portion of charter tuition attributed to Mayoral Academies that are not participating in the pension system. This compensates for inequities which arise when all other charter schools and regular public school districts are required to participate in ERSRI. The current funding discrepancies cause mayoral academies to be over-funded by about \$900 per student.

The RIFTHP lobbyist also testified against a bill by Senator Lou DiPalma, [S0142](#), which would provide for increased state reimbursement for the construction and renovation of charter schools. Parisi argued that the needs of updating existing public schools, whose average building age is 62 years, will cost the state over \$2 billion, and that it would be wrong to divert state money to recently-created charter schools when the needs of the regular public schools are so great. Parisi testified in support of another DiPalma bill, [S0568](#), that would require cities and towns to increase the local appropriation for education as adjusted by inflation and student growth. The bill is needed because some communities have neglected local school funding for years while facilities crumble and programmatic needs remain unfulfilled.

Guns in Schools

There was a lengthy and sometimes contentious hearing in the House Judiciary Committee on a number of gun related bills. The RIFTHP provided written support for bill, [H5345](#), by Representative Kazarian. The bill would limit the ability of a person with a conceal and carry firearms permit to possess a gun on school grounds unless that person is a police officer. To view a copy of the letter, [click here](#)

RIFTHP Opposes High-Stakes Testing in Civics Bill

The RIFTHP has been a strong proponent for enhanced civics education in Rhode Island. A bill by Representative Newberry would enhance civics education. At a hearing in the House HEW Committee on April 26th, RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi objected to a portion of the bill that would require students to pass a civics test in order to graduate. The bill sponsor of [H5665](#) expressed his agreement with the RIFTHP objection to the high stakes test requirement and informed the Committee that he would work with interested parties to resurrect the State's Civics Education Commission. There was a similar objection to the testing requirement from other witnesses and general agreement that the Commission should be re-established.

Arbitrator Selection Bill Considered

A bill to change the method of appointing arbitrators under the different public employee contract arbitration statutes, was heard by the Senate Labor Committee on Wednesday April 26th. [S0677](#), by Senator Lombardo, would eliminate the American Arbitration Association from the selection process and require that arbitrators be retired Rhode Island judges and magistrates. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi joined IAFF lobbyists Paul Valetta and Derek Silva, and IBPO lobbyist Tony Capezza in objecting to the bill. Parisi told the committee that the current selection process favors neither labor nor management. He argued that the bill eliminates the element of choice with the current system. He also argued that retired judges who escaped the onerous pension cuts in 2011 did not need special legislation for additional work.

Fix Our Schools Now Forum

The RIFTHP is a founding member of the Fix our Schools Now Coalition, formed to advocate for greater state funding of public school construction and renovation. The Fix our Schools Now Coalition is hosting a forum at the Martin Luther King Elementary School in Providence on Wednesday, May 3rd from 7:00- 8:30 PM. [Click here](#) to view the flyer announcing the meeting.

Bill Introductions

Arbitrator Selection Process

[\(H6154\)](#) *Shekarchi, House Labor*

The RIFTHP opposes this act which would replace the American Arbitration Association, as the selector of labor arbitrators, in non-grievance contract matters, with the director of the department of labor and training. The director shall select retired Rhode Island judges and magistrates for firefighter, police, teacher and municipal employee matters.

School Athletics – Required Athletic Trainer or Nurse

[\(S0023\)](#) *Lombardi, Senate Education*)

This bill would refine the law on guidelines for concussions at school and youth programs so that an adult trained in recognizing the symptoms of a concussion is required to be present during all events.

Student Immunization Exemptions – HPV

[\(S0047\)](#) *Raptakis, Senate Health and Human Services*)

The RIFTHP supports this bill which would require the General Treasurer to maintain its transparent treasury initiative to assist the public in accessing information regarding how state pension investments are managed and performing.

State Computer Science Curriculum Requirements

[\(H5049\)](#) *Lombardi, House Health Education and Welfare*)

This bill would direct the council on elementary and secondary education to develop recommendations on a high school curriculum to prepare students for successful postsecondary education and careers in computer science. The act would also direct the commissioner of elementary and secondary education to consider the council's recommendations and develop academic standards for a computer science high school curriculum. The courses in the computer science curriculum should, to the extent academically feasible, enable a student to utilize computer science courses to meet foreign language, mathematics, and science admission requirements at the state's colleges and universities.

Rhode Island Scholarship Fund Study Commission

[\(H5070\)](#) *O'Brien, House Finance*)

This bill would create an eleven (11) member special legislative commission, including one RIFTHP representative, whose purpose would be to make a comprehensive study of all aspects pertaining to the creation of a Rhode Island Scholarship Fund, and who would report back to the Speaker of the House no later than January 29, 2018, and whose life would expire on March 29, 2018.



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