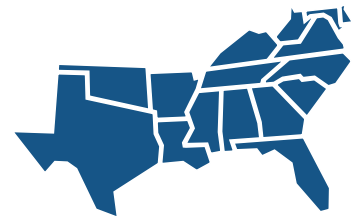


Legislative Report #5 | July 2015

Final actions in Alabama, Delaware, Florida, Louisiana, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Texas

Notes from other SREB states



SREB

Legislative Report

Final legislative and budget actions

Alabama (<http://www.legislature.state.al.us/>)

The Education Trust Fund (ETF) budget, which funds all levels of education and education-related expenses, totals \$6 billion in state funds for 2015-16, up 1 percent over 2014-15. The ETF budget devotes \$343.1 million to the two-year college system, a 2.8 percent increase that includes \$10.3 million for dual enrollment in technical programs (up 106 percent). Funding to state universities increases 1.5 percent to \$1.1 billion.

The K-12 Foundation Program receives \$3.8 billion, up 0.7 percent, including \$3.5 billion in formula funding, up 0.3 percent. State funds for the state Department of Education increase 6.3 percent, totaling \$196.6 million. Department funding includes \$12.4 million for statewide student assessment (up 93.8 percent) and nearly \$4 million for career and technical education initiatives (up 21.5 percent). The Alabama Math Science and Technology Initiative is funded at the 2014-15 level with \$29 million, while the budget provides \$3.3 million for Advanced Placement, down 23.4 percent.

At the conclusion of the regular legislative session, the governor vetoed House Bill 135, a 2015-16 general fund budget (which supports all state operations except education) that was, at passage, \$200 million less than the original 2014-15 appropriation. Legislators returned in July to begin a special session to address the budget for the fiscal year that begins in October; legislators met for one day and will return in August to complete their work.

In 2013, the Legislature passed the Alabama Accountability Act that provides tax credits to individuals who donate to organizations granting scholarships for low- and middle-income students to attend private school; students zoned to failing schools are given priority for scholarships. Senate Bill 71 clarifies that the act's intent is to increase educational choice, and raises the annual cap on state income tax credits under the program from \$25 million to \$30 million. A scholar-

ship recipient's family income cannot exceed 185 percent of the federal poverty limit. Annual scholarship amounts cannot exceed \$6,000 for elementary school, \$8,000 for middle grades and \$10,000 for high school.

The bill redefines a "failing school" as one listed in the lowest 6 percent of public schools based on state assessment scores, or designated as "failing" by the state superintendent of education. Nonpublic schools serving scholarship recipients must administer the state assessments or nationally recognized norm-referenced tests, and the state Department of Revenue must select an independent research organization to analyze the test results to measure the academic performance of scholarship recipients.

Legislators passed Senate Bill 45, the School Choice and Opportunity Act, allowing for charter schools. Local school boards may authorize conversion public charter schools and start-up public charter schools, while the newly created Alabama Public Charter School Commission can hear appeals from applicants rejected by local boards and may approve start-up charter schools in a school district whose board has chosen not to act as an authorizer. The Act limits the number of start-up charter schools per authorizer to 10 schools per fiscal year for five years. Public charter schools will receive all federal and state per-pupil funding, as well as local funds, but local school system authorizers may charge an administrative fee of up to three percent of a school's annual per student state allocations.

The five-year charter school contract must include performance measures to guide a board or the Commission's evaluation of the school. An authorizer may not renew a charter contract if the school does not meet minimum state standards for public charters. The state Department of Education may revoke a local school board's authorizing capacity if schools authorized by the board show chronic underperformance.

Senate Bill 191 establishes the independent Alabama Community College System governed by a Board of Trustees (board), dedicated solely to the governance of community and technical colleges. Previously, the Department of Postsecondary Education under the state Board of Education governed two-year postsecondary institutions. The board also may operate technical and workforce development programs as needed. The bill establishes the Alabama Aviation College, formerly the Alabama Aviation Center at Enterprise State Community College, as a separate institution within the system.

Senate Bill 72 requires every local board of education to offer virtual school options to high school students by 2016-17. Students enrolled in a virtual program will count as attending their local school for funding and other purposes; local systems also will set student eligibility criteria. A legislative task force will review and make recommendations to realign the state Department of Education's Alabama Connecting Classrooms, Educators, and Students program to aid the implementation of virtual education.

Other legislation

HB 197 creates a 13-member Governor's Task Force on Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Children to adopt guidelines for age-appropriate curriculum to use in classrooms and requires all K-12 public schools to provide sexual abuse prevention instruction to students.

SB 157 creates the Fostering Hope Scholarship program in the Department of Human Resources to pay tuition and mandatory fees for current and former foster children to attend public postsecondary colleges or universities or obtain job training and certifications.

Delaware (<http://legis.delaware.gov/>)

The Delaware Legislature completed the regular legislative session early July with the passage of a \$456 million capital spending plan. Legislators also passed a \$3.9 billion 2015-16 budget (up 2.6 percent over 2014-15).

K-12 education receives \$1.3 billion, a 3 percent increase, with \$1.1 billion dedicated to school district operations, a 2.7 percent increase. The budget directs \$15.3 million toward maintaining class sizes and \$11.7 million to step increases for school employees and increased paraprofessional pay. Funding for student transportation increases 0.7 percent to \$88.4 million, while funding for block grants and other pass-through programs rises 10.2 percent to \$94.8 million.

Higher education general funds increase 1.5 percent to \$230 million. The University of Delaware receives \$118.6 million (up 2.6 percent), Delaware State University receives \$34.6 million (no increase), and Delaware Technical and Community College receives \$76.6 million (up 0.6 percent). The merit-based SEED Scholarship program for students at the University of Delaware and Delaware Technical and Community College receives funding at the 2014-15 level with \$4.6 million. The merit-based Inspire Scholarship program for students at Delaware State University receives \$1.6 million, a 0.2 percent increase.

The University of Delaware announced a 1.4 percent increase for in-state undergraduate tuition and mandatory fees for 2015-16. Delaware State University increased tuition and fees by 3 percent after no increases for two years, and Delaware Technical and Community College raised tuition and fees by 2.8 percent.

To improve the creation of individualized education plans (IEPs) for students with disabilities, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 33, which implements the recommendations of the IEP Improvement Task Force. The bill makes the IEP creation process more collaborative; calls for schools to give parents more information on their children's rights in the IEP process; requires school districts to facilitate the creation of parent councils to provide support and advocacy for students with disabilities and their parents; and requires the state Department of Education to conduct an annual survey of children with IEPs and their parents to ensure school compliance with regulations.

Senate Bill 79, the Student Data Privacy Protection Act, requires the state Department of Education to develop a detailed security plan and establish policies that protect student data. The bill prohibits schools and school districts from reporting to the department juvenile delinquency records, criminal records or health records, and from collecting data regarding the political affiliation, voting history, religious affiliation or income of a student or his or her family (except as required by law or for purposes of qualifying a family as low-income). It also prohibits providers of digital education services and software from using student data to engage in targeted advertising or amass student profiles for noneducational purposes, or selling or disclosing student data.

To help maximize the amount of classroom time spent delivering instruction, the Legislature approved Senate Joint Resolution 2, which directs the state Department of Education to compile an inventory of all assessments mandated at the school, district and statewide levels. The legislation also directs the department to convene a panel that will provide detailed recommendations on which assessments should be consolidated or eliminated.

Other legislation

HB 56 places a moratorium on the establishment of new charter schools until June 30, 2018 or until the state Board of Education develops a strategic plan for the number of public schools in the state.

HB 90 requires public schools to provide their employees with 90 minutes of training on suicide prevention each year and requires each local education agency to establish a suicide prevention policy by September 2016.

HB 146 establishes a one-time \$100 fee for first-time educator licensure in Delaware to be paid by the applicant.

HB 148 creates the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission to assist in improving the quality of and access to education in Wilmington and improving education in all schools serving at-risk students. The commission will monitor the implementation of policies recommended by the Wilmington Education Advisory Committee to promote the continuous improvement of public education.

Florida (<http://leg.state.fl.us/>)

The House of Representatives adjourned Sine Die three days ahead of the expected conclusion of the 2015 regular session and without approving a budget for 2015-16. As a result, the Legislature reconvened in early June to approve a statewide general fund budget for 2015-16 that, after governor's vetoes, totals \$28.8 billion, up 3.4 percent over 2014-15.

General funds for Florida colleges are up 5 percent to \$937 million, while funding for state universities is up 6.7 percent to less than \$2.4 billion. General funds for student financial aid are up 8 percent to \$111.9 million. This amount includes \$8.4 million — nearly triple the 2014-15 appropriation — for the National Merit Scholars Incentive Program, which provides awards that supplement Bright Futures merit-based scholarships to National Merit Scholar and National Achievement Scholar students who attend public or private colleges and universities in Florida. General funds for private colleges and universities decline 10.3 percent to \$142.4 million.

Direct state general funding for K-12 education totals over \$10.3 billion (up 4.3 percent), including \$7.5 billion (up 5.7 percent) for the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) formula and over \$2.8 billion (up 1 percent) for class-size reduction.

The budget provides \$55 million (nearly triple the 2014-15 amount) for Personal Learning Scholarship Accounts for students with disabilities, which may be used to pay for instructional materials, curriculum, specialized services or assessments specified in a student's Individualized Education Program, or the costs of enrolling the student in a private school, postsecondary institution or online course of instruction. The budget also establishes two new programs: the \$44 million Florida Best and Brightest Teacher Scholarship Program, which provides up to \$10,000 for each teacher who earned a rating of "highly effective" and obtained an SAT or ACT score in the 80th percentile or higher at the time he or she took the assessment; and the \$10 million Standard Student Attire Incentive Fund, which will provide \$10 per kindergarten through grade eight student to each school district that implements a district-wide standard student attire policy to promote safe and supportive learning environments and improve school safety and discipline.

Lottery funding is projected to decline 4.5 percent to less than \$1.7 billion. Lottery funding reductions include decreases of 9.9 percent (to \$239.8 million) for Bright Futures scholarships, 9.5 percent (to \$219.4 million) for FEFP support, 4.4 percent (to \$245.3 million) for universities and 3.9 percent (to \$244.9 million) for

colleges. Lottery funds for class size reduction and the School Recognition Program are level at \$103.8 million and \$134.6 million, respectively.

During the regular session, legislators approved House Bill 7069, making multiple changes to K-12 student testing. Among its many provisions, the bill reduces to 33 percent (from 50 percent) the minimum amount of a teacher's evaluation that must be based on student testing data. It caps the number of school hours that districts may schedule for administering state- and district-required student assessments. It also requires independent verification of the validity of statewide student assessments before they may be used for school grades or teacher and administrator evaluations. The state Department of Education, school districts and local schools will have to publish a uniform calendar of student assessments, and districts must provide assessment scores and results within 30 days of a test's administration.

Senate Bill 954 requires all public schools to immediately notify a student's parent, guardian or caregiver if the student is removed from school, school transportation or a school-sponsored activity for an involuntary mental health examination. A facility that is involuntarily holding a student for purposes of administering the examination also must immediately give notice of the student's whereabouts to that student's parent, guardian or caregiver.

Other legislation

HB 153 establishes the five-year Literacy Jump Start Pilot Project to provide speech- and language-development instruction to low-income, at-risk children in St. Lucie County who are two or three years of age.

Louisiana (<http://www.legis.la.gov/>)

Lawmakers raised taxes, reduced the amount of some tax breaks and subsidies, and eliminated others to close a \$1.6 billion shortfall for 2015-16. By the Legislature's early June adjournment, legislators passed a \$24.5 billion state operating budget, down 3.8 percent from 2014-15. Measures to raise revenue include House Bill 119, increasing the cigarette tax from 36 cents to 86 cents and levying a tax on vapor products to raise \$106.4 million; House Bill 829, which caps film credit payouts for three years at \$180 million and raises \$77 million; and House Bill 624, which raises \$122 million by reducing exclusions and deductions from corporate gross income by 28 percent. A tax credit to families of students attending public postsecondary institutions approved through Senate Bill 93 creates the Student Assessment for a Valuable Education (SAVE) plan to provide revenue for higher education. The bill levies a fee against postsecondary educational students and provides a tax credit in an equal amount. The Department of Revenue will transfer directly to the Louisiana Board of Regents tax credits granted under the program; the total amount of tax credits may not exceed \$350 million in any year.

K-12 education receives \$3.5 billion in general funds, up 0.4 percent, including \$3.4 billion for the Minimum Foundation Program (MFP) that provides school support (up 2 percent). Higher education receives \$939.7 million (up 0.5 percent).

The Legislature passed three bills relating to the state's academic standards. House Bill 373 requires the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) to develop statewide content standards (previously, the state Department of Education was charged with responsibility for developing state standards). BESE began reviewing and developing state content standards in English and mathematics in July 2015 and must post the standards online by February 2016 and adopt them by March 2016.

To address rules and oversight, Senate Bill 43 subjects rules adopted by BESE to the Administrative Procedure Act. The board will submit each proposed rule regarding state content standards to the House and Senate education committees for review. The governor or the Legislature may only suspend or repeal a rule concerning the standards in its entirety.

House Bill 542 applies only to the 2015-16 school year and requires the state Department of Education to enter into a one-year contract for English and mathematics assessments in grades three through eight. The assessments must base less than 50 percent of the questions on Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers consortium intellectual property and may not base any questions on any property developed by a consortium of states funded predominantly by political advocacy organizations.

Granting public postsecondary education management boards more authority, House Bill 152 allows them to establish new fees for the 2015-16 and 2016-17 academic years. Boards may assess the fees per credit or by program and may charge prorated fees to summer and part-time students. Five percent of revenues from the new fees must go toward need-based financial assistance to students eligible for the Pell Grant. While the GRAD Act, established in 2010, allows certain fee increases if an institution meets performance goals established in an agreement with the Board of Regents, fees assessed under the bill are exempt from performance goal requirements established in the GRAD Act.

In 2012, the Legislature required BESE to create a uniform assessment and accountability system for publicly funded early childhood education programs, including letter grades to indicate student performance, and to create a network for managing all programs providing early childhood care or educational services that receive state or federal resources. House Bill 844 requires BESE to designate the 2015-16 school year an academic learning year. It must provide under its accountability system a practice performance profile to each program and network based on a three-tier rating system that does not use letter grades. BESE may not use the ratings for consequences and must report the results to the Legislature before the 2016 session.

As part of a nationwide effort to address sexual assault on college campuses, Senate Bill 255 requires each public postsecondary institution to administer an annual, anonymous sexual assault climate survey to students and enter into a memorandum of understanding with local law enforcement on combating sexual assault. The Board of Regents must establish uniform policies and best practices on preventing and responding to campus sexual assault and providing aid to alleging victims. The plan must include the use of a confidential advisor to assist alleging victims through the process and require communication between institutions regarding transfer students with disciplinary action as a result of violations regarding sexual assault.

Other legislation

HB 446 allows local school boards to provide firearm accident prevention instruction to elementary school students.

HB 718 loosens state restrictions on the collection and sharing of student information to allow schools and agencies to contract with public entities with conditional access to student data, fulfill federal obligations and respond to financial audits.

HB 734 provides for the regulation and registration of family child care providers and in-home providers that don't qualify as early learning centers.

HB 838 requires recipients of the merit-based TOPS-Tech awards who graduate from high school in 2016-17 or after to enroll in programs aligned with state workforce priorities.

HCR 126 requests that BESE consult with the Board of Regents and K-12 governing authorities to study educator preparation programs and submit a report to the Legislature before the 2016 legislative session.

SB 129 allows a local school board that oversees one or more low-performing schools to enter into agreements with the board of a better-performing school system to manage and operate any or all of the low-performing schools.

SB 267 requires charter schools to enroll students who require special education services in proportion to the percentage of such students enrolled in the local school district. Beginning July 1, 2016, the state will allocate per-pupil-formula funding to charter schools (except those authorized by BESE) according to student weights for other schools in the same district.

SR 132 requests the Board of Regents to re-examine the state's public postsecondary education system and make recommendations to the legislature before the 2016 regular session regarding the appropriate role, scope and mission for each institution to ensure the system is coordinated, comprehensive, and meets the needs of students as well as the state's economic and workforce needs.

Oklahoma (<http://oklegislature.gov>)

After working through a projected \$611 million 2015-16 budget shortfall, the Oklahoma Legislature adjourned its 2015 session early with a \$7.1 billion general fund budget, up 0.2 percent over the initial 2014-15 budget. Legislators closed the gap with one-time funds from the state's "rainy day" and agency savings accounts. The budget reduces funding for most agencies between 1 percent and 7.25 percent.

Common education funding is at 2014-15 levels, with general funds totaling \$2.5 billion. General funds for the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability decrease 5.1 percent, down to \$1.8 million.

Support to the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education declines 2.5 percent, to \$963.4 million. The budget reduces funding to the State Board of Career and Technology Education, which also supports state adult education programs, by 3.6 percent to \$133.9 million.

Senate Bill 782 removes the previous population threshold that limited which school districts could authorize charter schools and allows districts to convert traditional public schools to charter schools (previous law only permitted startup charter schools). State colleges, universities and community colleges may now authorize charter schools, and the state Board of Education (BOE) may approve a charter school whose application was denied by a local board.

Other changes in the bill include requiring applicants to provide more information in both their application and the charter contract; adding accountability measures for schools, including requiring their contracts to include a clear framework of academic and operational performance to guide evaluation; providing processes for the revocation and renewal of charters; and prohibiting the renewal of charters for schools whose student academic performance is in the bottom 5 percent of public schools.

To boost student safety in public schools, the Legislature enacted House Bill 2014, the Special Reserve School Resource Officer Act. Under the bill, local boards of education may designate certain personnel as authorized to carry a handgun on school property. Designees must be either licensed armed security guards or certified reserve peace officers.

Senate Bill 711 requires a district superintendent to forward to the state Board of Education (BOE) any recommendations to dismiss or not re-employ a teacher that include grounds that could lead to charges of a sexual nature. The BOE must keep such recommendations confidential, except from school districts considering the employment of a teacher, and must notify the teacher of any such requests.

Under House Bill 1684, school districts must offer an annual professional development program that includes training on child sexual abuse recognition, reporting and available resources. Public schools may implement an annual age-appropriate abuse prevention program for students, but students may not be required to participate in the program.

Senate Bill 706 delays the full implementation of the Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Evaluation System (TLE) until 2016-17. The state will not use the TLE for employment decisions until 2017-18. School districts will evaluate teachers and administrators in 2014-15 and 2015-16 using the quantitative component of the TLE to establish baseline data, but will base their evaluation rating on the qualitative component. The TLE Commission must recommend various methods for quantitatively evaluating teachers in grades and subjects with no state-mandated test; the BOE must approve a list of measures by February 2016.

Other legislation

HB 1034 allows federally recognized Native American tribes to sponsor charter schools located on the former reservation or treaty area of the tribe. Prior statute only allowed such tribes to sponsor a charter school if the school primarily conducted instruction in the tribe's native language.

HB 1685 enacts the 24/7 Tobacco-free Schools Act, prohibiting the use of tobacco products in or on a prekindergarten or K-12 school property or facility, at a school-sanctioned event, or in a school vehicle.

HB 1691 permits the boards of the school districts in Oklahoma City and Tulsa to contract with nonsecular entities to provide educational or administrative services for the district; a service provider will have the same flexibility from state statutes and rules as charter schools.

SB 20 allows the BOE to certify a teacher who has obtained out-of-state certification.

SB 136 requires the Statewide Virtual Charter School Board to provide a list of high-quality and standards-aligned supplemental online courses, with emphasis on STEM (science, technology, engineering and math), foreign language, and Advanced Placement classes, and to negotiate contracts with supplemental course providers.

SB 285 requires the BOE to align its forthcoming standards for early childhood education with the subject-matter standards that will be adopted by 2016.

SB 630 requires individualized remediation programs for first- and second-grade students not reading at grade-level proficiency and retains students in the third grade scoring below proficient on the reading portion of the state student assessment.

South Carolina (<http://www.scstatehouse.gov>)

Legislators adjourned the main portion of their regular legislative session in early June without approving a budget for 2015-16, but began the reconvened session in mid-June to complete the work on the budget as well as to consider any governor's vetoes. The general fund budget for 2015-16 totals \$6.9 billion, up 3.5 percent over 2014-15.

K-12 education operates with \$2.6 billion in general funds, up 6.1 percent; this includes over \$2.4 billion in aid to school districts (up 5.8 percent). Education Improvement Act (EIA) funding, from an earmarked 1 percent sales tax, is up 5.4 percent to \$682.7 million. This includes \$69.6 million for the statewide public charter school district (up 23.7 percent), \$10.4 million for teacher professional development (up 62.6 percent) and \$12.3 million for school district technology spending (up 20.6 percent). It also includes nearly \$5 million in EIA funding for reading coaches and \$1.5 million for summer reading camps; general funds for both programs remain level at \$29.5 million and \$6 million, respectively.

General funds to universities are up 5.8 percent to \$365.5 million, and for comprehensive and technical education, funding rises 7.2 percent to \$132.6 million.

Lottery funds are projected to decline 8.4 percent to \$315.9 million. The budget eliminates lottery funding previously provided for the math, science and social studies program. However, \$18.9 million in new lottery funding is provided for the state Department of Education's K-12 Technology Initiative, under which school districts will receive funding to improve their educational computer connectivity.

Combined general and lottery funds are up 3.5 percent for the merit-based LIFE Scholarship to \$196.2 million; up 1 percent for the merit-based HOPE Scholarship to \$8.8 million; and up 2.3 percent for the merit-based Palmetto Fellows Scholarship to \$47.1 million.

To allow the First Steps Study Committee (established in 2014 to perform a review of the state's First Steps early childhood education initiative) to complete its work, the Legislature approved House Joint Resolution 3843, which extended the deadline for the committee to complete and present its review from March 15, 2015 to January 1, 2016.

House Bill 3890 addresses school days missed due to weather-related and other disruptions that require school closings. The bill permits a local school district to waive up to three missed days of instruction from the requirement that all missed days be made up within the same school year. In addition, at the request of a local board of education, the state Board of Education may waive an additional three days.

Other legislation

HB 3882 requires that the physical examinations administered to public school bus drivers at the time of their hiring and every two years afterward meet Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations requirements.

HB 4084 specifies that charter school board members and employees are subject to ethics and government accountability requirements under state law, and that charter school employees are considered public employees.

SJR 364 delayed, from February 1, 2015 to June 15, 2015, the deadline for the state Board of Education to approve the state reading proficiency plan required under the South Carolina Read to Succeed Act, which was approved in 2014.

Texas (<http://www.capitol.state.tx.us>)

Meeting in their biennial session, legislators approved a \$114.1 billion statewide general fund budget for the 2016-17 biennium, up 12.5 percent from the original 2014-15 biennial budget. General funds for K-12 education are up 9.9 percent to \$41.2 billion, and for higher education are up 10.4 percent to \$17.4 billion. The budget provides \$35.5 billion for Foundation School Program formula funding, up 12.3 percent; the increase offsets \$3.8 billion in local tax relief, including a \$1.2 billion reduction in school district property taxes and \$2.6 billion in franchise tax reductions.

The governor identified prekindergarten education as a priority for the legislative session. Legislators responded by passing House Bill 4, establishing the high-quality prekindergarten grant program. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) will provide up to \$130 million in grants over the 2016-17 biennium to school districts enacting prekindergarten curricula that meet TEA guidelines, measure the progress of students in meeting recommended learning outcomes and do not use Common Core State Standards curriculum standards. A school district receiving a grant must employ certified prekindergarten teachers, implement a family-engagement plan and evaluate the district's prekindergarten program by measuring student progress. The agency may provide up to \$1,500 in grant funding per eligible student, must establish a prekindergarten teacher training course and must report, beginning in 2018, on the effectiveness of grant funding under the program.

Legislators approved House Bill 2804 to require the commissioner of education to adopt performance indicators for the quality of student learning and achievement. The bill extends, beginning with the 2015-16 school year, the A-F rating system to individual school campuses (previously, only school districts received such ratings). The bill also establishes the Texas Commission on Next Generation Assessments and Accountability to make recommendations on new student assessment and public school accountability systems.

House Bill 743 requires TEA to determine the validity and reliability of any assessments that it adopts which are designed to measure essential knowledge and skills of students in reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, and science. The administration of such an assessment may take no longer than eight hours and must occur on a single day. The bill requires the state Board of Education to determine the number of required assessments administered in grades three through eight, and to evaluate how well assessments measure student achievement relative to the standards.

House Bill 1842 allows a local school board to adopt the district of innovation designation for its district in order to enact a local innovation plan. The plan must include a comprehensive educational program that may include alternative approaches to curriculum, scheduling, campus governance, parental involvement, budgetary matters and program funding, or may establish assessment measures that exceed current state and federal requirements. Under the bill, a school that obtains an unacceptable academic performance rating for two consecutive years must submit, to the commissioner of education, a campus turnaround plan for restructuring, reforming or reconstituting the school. If the commissioner determines that the turnaround plan will not result in satisfactory student performance within two years, he or she must appoint a board of managers to govern the school district, order alternative management of the campus by an outside entity, or close the school.

House Bill 2205 makes multiple changes related to teacher preparation programs. The bill lowers, from 2.75 to 2.5, the required undergraduate grade point average for an individual entering a teacher preparation program, but also requires an overall grade point average of at least 3.0 for each incoming teacher preparation program class. The State Board for Educator Certification must develop rules that establish standards for the approval and renewal of educator preparation programs and that establish risk factors for assessing the risk level of each educator preparation program in the state.

Other legislation

HB 505 prohibits TEA from adopting rules that place any limits on the number of dual credit courses or hours for which a high school student may enroll, or any limits on the grade levels in which a high school student is eligible for dual enrollment.

HB 1170 specifies that an open-enrollment charter school is considered a local government entity for purposes of entering into interlocal cooperation contracts, establishing a self-insurance fund, or providing group benefits, and that it may extend workers' compensation benefits to its employees in the same manner as other political subdivisions of the state.

HB 1171 specifies that an open-enrollment charter school and its charter holder, employees, volunteers and board members are immune from liability and lawsuits in the same manner as a school district and its employees, volunteers and board members.

HB 2610 requires each school district to provide 75,600 minutes of instruction per school year.

SB 149 requires a high school to establish an individual high school graduation committee for any student who fails one or two end-of-course assessments; the committee will conduct a review and determine if the student should be awarded a high school diploma.

SB 632 establishes the Governor's University Research Initiative within the Office of the Governor's Texas Economic Development and Tourism Office to award matching grants for state universities to recruit distinguished researchers; the bill also repeals the Emerging Technology Fund.

SB 925 establishes teacher literacy achievement academies to provide training for teachers who provide reading instruction to students in kindergarten through grade three.

SB 934 establishes teacher mathematics achievement academies for teachers who provide mathematics instruction to students in kindergarten through grade three.

SB 972 establishes reading-to-learn academies for teachers who provide reading comprehension instruction to students in grades four or five.

Notes from other SREB states

The governor in Virginia announced in mid-July that the state had completed the 2014-15 fiscal year with a \$553.3 million surplus. As a result, state employees and faculty at state institutions of higher education will receive 2 percent salary increases while the state will provide its share of a 1.5 percent pay increase for public school teachers and staff.

In late June, legislators in North Carolina approved a measure to continue expenditures into the 2015-16 fiscal year at the 2014-15 level while they continue work on a budget for the 2015-17 biennium. The new fiscal year began July 1, 2015.

Information on final actions in North Carolina and all other SREB states will appear in the final 2015 edition of *Legislative Report*.

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