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# *The* SMITH HILL REPORT

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## Thank You Again

Thanks to the actions of over 1,400 RIFTHP members, every Rhode Island House of Representatives member is receiving a copy of a petition to oppose the Governor's Empowerment Schools proposal. Her proposal would create a school choice option that could drain local school funds without local approval. The current proposal has other defects, such as language infringing on collective bargaining rights and excessive authority granted to school principals that could impact transfer rights of teachers at other schools.

## Adjunct Faculty Medical Insurance Resolution

The RIFTHP has worked for several years to provide medical insurance benefits to adjunct faculty who work at least 50% of the workload required of full-time faculty members. While the legislation has been stalled, Senator Joshua Miller submitted a Senate resolution to ask the Commissioner of Postsecondary Education to "provide recommendations regarding the financial and programmatic impacts of providing health insurance benefits to adjunct faculty members at our public colleges and universities". RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi offered brief testimony in support of the resolution, thanking Senator Miller for keeping the issue alive. Michael Walker-Jones, representing the Commissioner, also spoke in favor of the resolution, [S3054](#) at the Senate Health and Human Services Committee hearing on June 2nd. The resolution passed the Committee and is expected to be adopted by the Senate next week.

## **Budget Watch**

The highly anticipated vote on a state budget by the House Finance Committee is expected to be scheduled next week. Among some of the important issues the RIFTHP is working on that are contained within the budget are:

- The Governor's desire to create Empowerment Schools through an amendment to budget Article 11 – related to Education Aid.
- The RIFTHP's effort to reduce mayoral academy charter school tuition payments based on their non-participation in the state's retirement plan.
- The education aid changes supported by Governor Raimondo to reduce charter school tuition payments for certain expenses and to provide additional payments to districts with more than 5% of students attending charter schools.
- Additional funding for English Language Learners proposed by the Governor.
- Additional state funding to support Direct Service Professional pay increases for those working with the developmentally disabled.

## **Bills on the Move**

The following bills were passed by either the House or Senate and have now been transferred to their respective opposite Chamber:

### **Student Eligibility – End of School Year upon Age 21**

([H7050](#) Azzinaro, *Senate Education*)

This bill would provide that where a child with a disability is enrolled in a post-secondary or transitional education program as part of the services provided to the child by the school committee or local educational agency, and such child reaches age 21 during a school or program year, then the school committee or LEA would pay for such child's schooling through to the conclusion of the school or program's academic year. The bill passed the House on 3/10 on a vote of 68-0-7. It was then transferred to the Senate Education Committee on 3/10.

### **Screening for Reading Disabilities**

([H7054](#) Lombardi, *Senate Education*)

This bill would require school districts to conduct screening for dyslexia and other reading disabilities of school children who have exhibited one or more potential indicators using certain

screening methods selected by the Commissioner of Education. This bill would take effect upon passage and would be implemented at the commencement of the 2016-2017 school year. The bill passed the House on 2/3 on a vote of 71-0-4. It was then transferred to the Senate Education Committee on 2/25 where it was heard on 5/18 and held for further study.

### **Student Suspensions**

([H7056](#) *Diaz, Senate Education*)

This bill would direct all school superintendents to review discipline data for their school district, to decide whether there is an unequal impact on students based on race, ethnicity, or disability status, and to respond to any disparity. Every school district would submit a report to the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education describing any action taken on the disparity. All such reports shall be public records. Also, student suspensions would not be served out of school unless the student's conduct meets certain standards or the student represents a demonstrable threat to students, teachers or administrators. The bill passed the House on 5/4 on a vote of 66-0-8. It was then transferred to the Senate Education Committee on 5/10 where it was heard and passed on 5/18 and awaits being sent to the Senate Floor.

### **Genocide Education**

([H7488A](#) *Kazarian, Senate Education*)

This bill would require the inclusion of instruction on holocaust and genocide studies in the curriculum for all middle and high school students. The Sub A passed the House on 5/5 on a vote of 71-0-4. It was then transferred to the Senate Education Committee on 5/10.

### **Compulsory Attendance – Kindergarten**

([S2022](#) *Picard, House Health, Education and Welfare*)

This bill would broaden the law on compulsory school attendance so that it would apply to all children enrolled in kindergarten. The bill passed the Senate on 5/3 on a vote of 35-0-3. It was then transferred to the House Health, Education and Welfare Committee on 5/4.



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