



Week 1: January 9-11, 2024



The SCEA Lobbyist John Brisini and Members of The SCEA-Retired with Senator Darrell Jackson (D-Richland) at a Senate Education Committee hearing on Wednesday, January 10, as part of our Day of Action to kick off the legislative session.

Introduction

Welcome back to Members Matter, The SCEA's weekly newsletter for legislative updates and advocacy actions! Since the legislature gavelled back in this week, our regular updates have resumed and will continue through the

spring until the 125th Session of the General Assembly ends in May.

This year is the second of a two-year session; this means that legislation that did not get passed last year retains its place in the legislative process and has the potential to be passed this year. This includes several bills we monitored last session, including H.3728 (censorship), S.285 (vouchers), and H.4280 (Educator Assistance Act).

[H.3728 – Transparency and Integrity in Education Act](#)

As a reminder, supporters claim this bill's intention is to encourage transparent and fact-based school lessons on complex topics; however, this bill is part of a national agenda to inject political censorship into classrooms.

Other states with similar legislation have illustrated how the impact of this measure goes far beyond the stated intent and we anticipate that could happen in South Carolina as well.

This bill was passed by both the South Carolina House and the Senate; but each chamber passed a slightly different version of the bill. It is currently awaiting a hearing in a conference committee.

[S.285 – Providing Academic Choice in Education Act](#)

This is another voucher bill that would strengthen an existing program by providing a tax credit of up to \$10,000 to companies or institutions that donate to private-school scholarship funds.

As with other vouchers measures, we feel that our state constitution is clear that public funds should not go to private schools. If South Carolina has money to send to private schools, then they have money to invest in public education.

This bill has passed the Senate but is currently in the House Education & Public Works Committee.

[H.4280 – Educator Assistance Act](#)

This bill would ensure that professional certificates issued by the State Board of Education are permanent unless revoked or suspended; professional certificates would not be subject to renewal. The bill passed the House on May 4 and was referred to the Senate Education Committee.



H.4624: Gender Identity

On Tuesday, the House Committee on Medical, Military, Public and Municipal Affairs heard public testimony on [H.4624](#).

Most of this bill pertains to medical care, except for a section that would have prevented public school employees from “withholding from a minor’s parent or legal guardian information related to the minor’s perception that [their] gender is inconsistent with [their] sex.”

It would also have required educators to inform parents/legal guardians if they “have reason to believe or know that a student suffers from gender dysphoria or other...conditions that result in a person identifying with a gender different than that of their sex.” Fortunately, this provision was removed by an amendment during committee debate.

This bill is nearly identical in language to S.627, which The SCEA opposed last year. We were fearful that this bill would strip educators of their privacy and prevent a safe environment for them to effectively communicate with students.

It would also have made teachers the arbiters of appropriate gender behavior/expression and would have forced educators to out transgender and nonbinary students, even if doing so put the student in danger.

The SCEA wrote a letter opposing some of the language that was ultimately removed from the bill, which you can read at the link below. Please send all feedback on this letter and this bill to President Sherry East at seast@thescea.org.

This bill now moves on to the full House for debate and a vote.

[Click Here to Read Our Letter](#)

S.905: Read to Succeed

On Wednesday, The Senate Education Committee gave a first reading to [S.905](#), which would eliminate Read to Succeed requirements for educators who are not directly involved in teaching early literacy. It also directs educators to use the "Science of Reading" approach to teach literacy and reading, requires that third graders who cannot demonstrate reading proficiency be held back, and extends summer reading camps so they start earlier than third grade.

This bill is very similar to S.418, which was introduced last year but did not make it through the legislative process. We will continue to monitor this bill and S.418 as they move through the legislature.

State Board of Education Regulation 43170

On Nov. 8, the State Board of Education (SBE) released a proposed change to the regulations regarding selection of instructional materials.

Historically, the SBE oversees the selection of textbooks, but local policies have guided the selection of additional instructional materials, such as library books and other classroom materials.

The draft regulation released on Wednesday would take control away from schools and districts and place it in the hands of the SBE.

This proposed regulation establishes two main guidelines for instructional materials:

- Age and developmentally appropriate: materials must be "suitable to particular age groups...based on developing cognitive, and behavioral capacity typical for the age group." The proposal also states that a material is not age appropriate if it contains visual depictions or descriptions of "sexual conduct" as defined in state statute or if it is considered "indecent" or "obscene" under the broadcast guidelines for the Federal Communications Commission.
- Educationally suitable: the material must be aligned with the "instructional program of the school and district," which means it must be connected to the standards laid out in the Profile of a South Carolina Graduate.

Under this definition, classic works of literature such as Romeo and Juliet, The Odyssey, The Scarlet Letter, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, and others would be prohibited materials.

A public hearing will be held on this regulation at 1:00pm on February 13th at the Rutledge Conference Center in Columbia.

We are asking members to contact the State Board of Education and ask them to vote against this regulation change. You can click the link below to send an email through our Action Center, or you can email your State Board of Education member individually if you would rather write your own. You can find your SBE member [here](#). **Written comments must be provided by January 22, 2024.**

[Click Here to Send Your Email](#)

South Carolina High School League

At an Ad Hoc Committee meeting in November, House Education & Public Works Committee Chairwoman Shannon Erickson unveiled a draft proposal that would abolish the South Carolina High School League (which has overseen high school sports for over 100 years) and replace it with a state agency called the South Carolina High School Sports Association.

The 11-member board of the South Carolina High School Sports Association would be appointed by the Governor and legislative leaders, and the State Superintendent would name the chair of the board. If this proposal moves forward, South Carolina will become only the second state in the nation whose public-school sports association is run by the government.

The SCEA has a few concerns about this proposal:

- It could lead to politicization of high school sports;
- It could result in inexperienced, unqualified appointed officials overseeing high school sports.

This proposal has not yet been introduced as a bill, but we will continue to monitor it if and when it moves forward.

You can read the draft proposal [here](#) and send any feedback to President Sherry East, seast@thescea.org.

Voucher Lawsuit Update

In October, The SCEA, along with public school parents and other partner organizations, filed a lawsuit against the newly-instituted voucher program that establishes the Education Scholarship Trust, which will provide eligible

families up to \$6,000 to send their child to a private school.

On December 12, the South Carolina Supreme Court announced that they had granted our request for a hearing to seek declaratory and injunctive relief on a recently enacted voucher scheme. Our lawsuit will move forward, and oral arguments will begin in March.

Learn more about our effort to stop voucher schemes [here](#).

Governor's Executive Budget

Earlier this month, Governor McMaster released his proposed state budget. This budget does not hold any weight, it is designed to indicate the Governor's priorities. The General Assembly can take some, all, or none of these requests into consideration when putting together the budget for next fiscal year.

The Governor's budget includes the following items related to education:

- Increasing the starting teacher salary to \$45,000;
- Extending the state minimum teacher salary schedule from 23 to 30 years (Governor McMaster noted his goal is a minimum starting salary of at least \$50,000 by 2026);
- Funding to support a state average student-teacher ratio of 11.4 students per teacher;
- Funding to establish an average teacher salary, including fringe benefits, of \$79,536;
- Increasing State Aid to Classrooms by \$250 million;
- Additional funding for statewide 4K program (\$21.1 million);
- \$30 million for Education Scholarship Trust Fund (vouchers);
- Restructure base salary schedule by establishing two pay columns: one for a bachelor's degree and one for a master's degree. This would eliminate pay increases for PhDs and NBCT;
- This would establish pay bands that provide salary schedule movement every three years (this would replace the current yearly movement).

You can read the full budget [here](#). Please send feedback on these proposals to President Sherry East at seast@thescea.org.

State Department of Education Budget Requests

The South Carolina Department of Education submitted its budget requests in November. This request included a \$1,500 increase in the base salary

schedule, along with a proposal to add five days of paid “high-quality professional learning” that would increase an educator’s contracted days from 190 to 195. Teachers in districts that implemented the additional five days would add an additional \$1,500 to their salary.

It is important to note that these are requests, and there is no guarantee the legislature will adopt them.

You can view the budget requests [here](#). Please send feedback on these requests (specifically the proposed extra teacher workdays) to President Sherry East at seast@thescea.org.

South Carolina Women in Leadership Training and Networking Events

South Carolina Women in Leadership (WIL), one of The SCEA’s coalition partners, is hosting several training and networking events for women interested in learning more about running for office or getting politically involved.

You can view the full list of training and networking events [here](#).

Special Elections

Earlier this week, two new Senators were sworn into the South Carolina Senate.

Deon Tedder (D-42), a former House member, won a special election in November to replace Senator Marlon Kimpson. Earlier this month, Tameika Isaac Devine (D-19) won a special senate election to replace the late Senator John Scott.

Devine’s swearing-in brings the total number of women in the South Carolina Senate up to six.

There will be a special election in House District 109 to replace Sen. Tedder — the primary will be on January 30, with early voting opening January 16. The general election will be on April 2, with early voting opening March 18. You can find more information about the special election [here](#).

2024 Pre-filed Bills

There have been several new bills pre-filed ahead of this legislative session that pertain to education. Pre-filed bills are pieces of legislation that elected

officials propose ahead of the start of legislative session. They still must go through the full committee and floor vote process and may or may not make it to the Governor's desk.

You can view all of the pre-filed bills that relate to education at the link below.

[Click Here to See the Full List of Pre-Filed Legislation](#)

Elections and Voter Registration Information

There are two Presidential Primaries happening in February:

- The first is the Democratic Presidential Primary on Saturday, February 3. The voter registration deadline for that election was on Thursday, January 4.
- The second is the Republican Presidential Primary on Saturday, February 24. The voter registration deadline for that election is Thursday, January 25.

Additionally, 17-year-olds who will be 18 by the time of the election are allowed to pre-register to vote. In order to vote in an election, you must be registered to vote at least 30 days prior to the election.

You can check your voter registration and find more information on registration [here](#).

Upcoming Meetings of Interest

Below are meetings scheduled for next week on bills of interest to you. You can click on the date link to view the agenda and the bill number to see the legislation.

- [Wed 1/17 10:30 AM in Blatt Room 433](#): [S 245](#) (Booster Clubs); [H 3309](#) (Seizure Safe Schools Act)
- [Thu 1/18 9:00 AM in Blatt Room 516](#): [H 4700](#) (South Carolina Social Media Regulation Act)

