

**THE COMMONWEALTH EDUCATIONAL POLICY INSTITUTE**

AN INSTITUTE IN THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY

2016 General Assembly
K-12 Education Update**February 19, 2016**

The 2016 General Assembly session gaveled to order on Wednesday, January 13. The session runs 60 days and is scheduled to end on March 12. During the session, legislators will consider more than 2,500 bills and hundreds of resolutions. A two-year state budget for fiscal years 2017 and 2018 also will be developed. "Cross-over day," the last day for each house to act on its own bills, was February 16. House and Senate versions of the FY17/18 budget will be released on February 21.

The House Education Committee is scheduled to meet on Mondays and Wednesdays during the session at 8:30 a.m. in House Room D. The Senate Education and Health Committee will meet on Thursdays at 8:30 a.m. in Senate Room B. Sub-committees will meet periodically throughout the session. Click [here](#) for the schedule of weekly meetings.

During the course of the session, legislative updates will be available weekly on the CEPI website at [General Assembly Updates](#). Specific information about the General Assembly session, action on bills and resolutions, committee and subcommittee meetings, and information about legislators can be found at [2016 Session](#). If you have a question about a legislative issue during the session, contact David Blount, CEPI Policy Associate, at dcblount2@vcu.edu.

Overview/Budget Issues

General Assembly money committees are poised to release their proposed amendments to the introduced budget this coming weekend. The House Appropriations and Senate Finance committees have been busy this past week crafting the spending plans they will propose. The committees will outline their recommendations on Sunday; line item amendments should be available by Tuesday and floor votes on the respective plans are expected next Thursday.

House and Senate leaders confirmed this past week, to no one's surprise, that they will reject the governor's Medicaid expansion plan and the cost items linked to the projected savings. Additionally, House leaders previewed their coming budget announcement late in the week. Among their proposals will be a plan to accelerate the \$189.5 million repayment to the VRS for the contribution rate deferrals from 2010. Pay raises for state employees would be targeted for the first year of the biennium. Teacher salary increases were not specifically mentioned, but recall that the governor's introduced budget included the state share of a 2% teacher pay hike in FY18.

Click [here](#) for additional information about Governor McAuliffe's proposed changes to the public education budget for the remainder of FY16; and [here](#) for the proposed FY17/FY18 education budget.

Education Legislation

This past week, several education bills received significant debate as each chamber cleared its docket of its own bills. After a long debate the previous week on [HB 565](#), the House defeated the bill on a 53 to 46 vote on Monday. The measure would have revised the existing charter school law to correspond to legislation that calls for a voter referendum at the November election on whether to grant the Board of Education (BOE) the authority to establish charter schools within local school divisions. Recall that the House approved its referendum legislation the week before. However, on the Senate side, its voter referendum bills, [SJ 6](#) and [SB 588](#), were defeated on close votes on Monday. The same day, the Senate debated [SB 734](#), its counterpart to HB 565. In an unusual twist, that bill was approved on a party-line 21 to 19 vote.

Also as the session wrapped up its first half, the House failed to pass [HB 1134](#), which stipulated that a student cannot be guilty of disorderly conduct, if the disorderly conduct occurred on school property, on a school bus or at a school-sponsored activity. Opponents argued that the bill made an exception that takes away a tool from local school divisions.

After considerable debate, the Senate passed (25 to 14), [SB 740](#), which prohibits school boards from requiring the use of any electronic textbooks in grades six through 12, unless it adopts a plan to ensure that students have access to computers that can support such textbooks and the relevant school has adequate connectivity.

The Senate also approved [SB 364](#), which allows the state to develop a plan, under the local option health insurance plan, for employees and retirees of localities and school divisions, with benefits similar to those in the state employee health insurance plan.

In the latter part of the session, the House and Senate Education Committees will focus on legislation approved by the other chamber. The committees got down to business quickly this past week, pushing through legislation that is identical or similar to bills already approved. The workload is heavier in the Senate, which receives a larger number of approved House bills.

Perennial legislation to allow local school boards to be responsible for setting the school calendar and determining the opening day of the school year has met its usual fate in the General Assembly. The Senate Education and Health Committee dispatched [HB 571](#) and [HB 753](#) on identical 9 to 6 votes. Since the mid 1980's, state law has required schools to open prior to Labor Day unless a waiver is received from the Department of Education (DOE). Dozens of local school divisions presently have a waiver, most for weather-related reasons.

On Wednesday, the House Education Committee, with little fanfare, approved [SB 612](#), the so-called "Tebow bill" that allows homeschoolers to participate in public school activities under the Virginia High School League. It later was approved by the full House on a 58 to 40 vote. The Senate Education and Health Committee approved the House version of the bill, [HB 131](#), at its meeting on Thursday, also on a 9 to 6 vote.

Also in House Education, the Committee enthusiastically endorsed [SB 336](#), which removes existing provisions related to standard and advanced studies diplomas and standard and verified units of credit, and requires establishment of a "Profile of a Virginia Graduate" that

identifies the knowledge and skills that students should attain during high school. A number of statewide organizations and local school divisions supported the bill. The Committee did add a provision directing the BOE to submit a report by September, 2017, on the graduation requirements established pursuant to the legislation. The House counterpart, pending in the Senate Education and Health Committee, is [HB 895](#).

Finally, it appears likely that a joint committee of House and Senate Education Committee members will be meeting in between legislative sessions to examine ongoing and future education issues, including a look at possible revisions to Standards of Quality. This is the thrust of [HJ 112](#) and [SJ 85](#), which call for the review. At this point, the bills differ in the makeup of the joint committee.

E-mail Response

Questions or seeking more information? Please [contact CEPI](#) if you have any questions or need additional information about the 2016 General Assembly.