

Excerpted from Public Schools Forum Weekly Wrap UP
April 30, 2017

Crossover Week is over. This means that there is a relatively “closed universe” of free-standing bills that can stay alive over the course of this 2017 Long Session – these bills have passed at least one Chamber of the General Assembly. There are some exceptions to this rule, of course, but generally no new education policy bills (without finance or appropriations components) are allowed, unless the policy is written into the Budget bill (which, by the way, always happens).

Aside from the big House Bill 13 compromise which the Governor signed on Thursday night, the other less-reported yet important public education bills that survived Crossover this week include:

House Bill 514 Permit Municipal Charter School/Certain Towns

- Authorizes the towns of Mint Hill and Matthews (close to Charlotte) to start their own local municipal charter schools.
- These would be new schools operated by their local town council separate from Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.
- The towns have indicated they would hire a for-profit charter school management company to run the schools.

House Bill 600 School Construction Flexibility

- Allows a private developer to enter into an operating lease for new school construction with a local board of education.
- A local school system’s capital outlay fund would include lease payments for leases under the permitted list of appropriations.
- Revises the Qualified Zone Academy Bonds procedures in school construction funding.

House Bill 704 Divide School Systems/Study Committee

- Creates a 10-member (legislators only) committee that would study “the Division of Local School Administrative Units” that must submit its final report by May 1, 2018.
- Requires studying the following:
 - The feasibility of permitting LEAs, that are now the result of merged school systems, to be divided into separate school systems again.
 - The best ways to divide such a school system.
 - Whether to require a vote of that county’s voters.

House Bill 779 Charter School Changes

- One of the most controversial charter school law bills of the Session.
- Decreases the number of charters that must seek a “material revision” approval from the State Board of Education (and therefore would loosen state oversight on charter schools).
- Redefines “material revision” requirement to include:
 - A charter school that is not “low-performing” and has enrollment growth of greater than 30% (current law sets the bar at 20%);
 - A charter school that is “low-performing” and has enrollment growth of greater than 20%.
- Allows charter schools to seek to offer Pre-K classes.
- Expands priority enrollment to a student who had previously been enrolled in any charter school in the state.
- Grants a “modular unit tax exemption” for schools: public, nonprofit privates, and community colleges.

House Bill 800 Various Changes to Charter School Laws

- Allows up to 50% of a school's total enrollment to be made up by children of either school employees or of a "charter partner."
- A "charter partner" is defined as a NC business that has donated property, building(s), major renovations (including technology) valued at or above \$50,000.

House Bill 826 Modify Low-Performing School Definition

- Changes state law for both traditional public schools and charter schools.
- Rewrites state law to define a "low-performing school".
- Schools that "meet growth" would no longer be designated as "low-performing".

Senate Bill 531 School Boards Can't Sue Counties

- Removes from current state statute any local school board's remedy to file a legal action against its local board of county commissioners in the event the county commissioners do not adequately fund their local school system.
- Further removes the formal mediation procedure from statute.
- Declares, as a matter of law, the decision of the county commissioners as final, if a joint meeting (not a formal mediation) conducted by a court-selected mediator fails.

HB13

The deal to ease reductions required for elementary school class sizes won final legislative approval on Thursday as lawmakers sought to save art and physical education classes.

The House voted 112-3 on House Bill 13. Gov. Roy Cooper signed it soon after it passed.

A public education advocacy group, Public Schools First NC, wanted the House to reject the bill to get a promise of future state funding for art and P.E., but no serious objection materialized among House members.

Some school districts were having trouble meeting a requirement to lower maximum class sizes in kindergarten through third grade from 24 students to between 19 and 21 students beginning this fall. The limits were written into the budget. Some districts were preparing to lay off art and P.E. teachers so they could hire more classroom teachers.

Cooper said in a statement that ...

"While this legislation addresses immediate concerns, the failure of legislative Republicans to properly fund our schools has risked the jobs of educators and jeopardized our children's future," Cooper said. "It's imperative that we quit kicking the can down the road."

The House wanted to continue to allow larger classes, but Senate Republicans are suspicious of how districts are spending money intended to help lower class sizes.

The deal announced Monday requires smaller classes this fall, but not as small as originally intended.

To continue reading the complete article, click [here](#).

Excerpt from:

[Bonner, L. "Governor signs reprieve on smaller class sizes." The News & Observer. 4/27/17.](#)