

## Weekly Legislative Update: **Education**

Issue Team Chair: Catherine Ahl

Contact: [cahl@lwvwa.org](mailto:cahl@lwvwa.org) or 360-697-7924

**March 6, 2022**

We made progress on our bills this week, but there is an **alert** on one of the bills we opposed:

**HB 1591 Provides access to local enrichment funding for charter schools.** This bill never received a hearing but was inserted into both budgets. These are some of the reasons we oppose giving extra money to charter schools.

Since charter schools were first authorized, six have closed, two were investigated for violating special education laws, and several had some financial problems. Also, average total salary for charter school instructional staff is substantially lower than the salary allocation from the state. At least four of the closed schools had been awarded grants of over \$1 million from the federal charter schools' program, and we have been unable to find out how much total state funding went to these closed schools or if any of it was returned to the state.

Last year Impact Charter Schools received approximately \$339,872 and Summit Charter Schools received over \$1.5 million from the Paycheck Protection Program. None of our 295 school districts received this funding from the PPP. Yet charter schools complain about lack of levy and facilities funding. It would seem wise to pause for a year and request a performance and financial audit of all the funding received from all sources of the charter school program and its accountability before extra funding is given them.

### **Bills That Have Passed Both Houses**

**HB 1630 Makes it unlawful to carry a firearm onto facilities being used for official meetings of a school board, other governmental public meetings, and election facilities.** A substitute bill, including the issues addressed in HB 1618 regarding elections facilities, was passed by the House Civil Rights & Judiciary Committee and by the House 57-41. The Senate Law & Justice Committee passed the bill as did the Senate 28-20. The Senate approved two amendments, so the bill will have to go back to the House for concurrence or rejection.

**HB 1664 Increases prototypical school formulas for physical, social, and emotional support in schools** by increasing the number of school nurses, social workers, psychologists, and counselors in the prototypical school funding model over three school years, beginning in the 2022-23 school. It passed the House 73-23 and the Senate 45-2. Since it was amended by the Senate, it will go back to the House for concurrence or rejection.

**[HB 1153](#) Increasing language access in public schools.** Requires all public school districts to have a language access program that includes spoken language and sign language interpreters working in public schools, to interpret for students' families, students, and communities in educational settings outside the classroom. Passed the House 83-13, and the Senate 43- 5. It was amended in the Senate so will have to go back to the House for concurrence or rejection.

**[HB 1723](#) Closes the digital equity divide** by increasing the accessibility and affordability of telecommunication services, devices, and training. It was passed by the House 68 -30 and the Senate 27-20. It was amended by the Senate, so it will go back to the House for concurrence or rejection.

**[HB 1590](#) Enrollment stabilization funding for local schools to address enrollment declines due to the COVID-19 pandemic.** Passed House 77-18, and the Senate 28-21 with an amendment, so it will go back to the House for concurrence or rejection.

**[SB 5497](#) Extends voting authority to student members on the state board of education.** The Senate Early Learning & K-12 Committee passed a substitute, which passed the Senate 28-21 and the House 68-31 and is on its way to the Governor for his signature.

**[SB 5933](#) Establishing a school seismic safety grant program.** Establishes a school seismic safety grant program for remediation of seismic or tsunami hazards in qualifying school buildings. This bill passed the Senate 49-0 and is part of the proposed Senate Operations and Capital Budgets. The bill passed the House 98-0 and should be on its way to the Governor soon.

## Bills We Support That Didn't Pass

**[HB 1611](#) Advancing equity in programs for highly capable students.** Universal screening is required to increase the participation of students who are traditionally underrepresented in the highly capable program. This bill passed the House 96-0, and the Senate Early Learning & K-12 Education Committee passed it on to the Rules Committee. It has not moved out of Rules.

**[SB 5581](#) Addressing pupil transportation allocations.** Requires 100 percent reimbursement of school district costs for transporting qualifying students with disabilities, who are homeless, and in foster care. Passed the Senate 49-0 and was referred to the House Appropriations Committee, but no hearing was held.

**[SB 5537](#) Changes compulsory school attendance to include children five, six, and seven years of age.** Washington is the only state that requires school attendance beginning with children who are eight years of age. LWVWA has supported this change for many years. The Senate Early Learning & K-12 Committee passed a substitute, which just includes six and seven years old, on Jan. 28 and sent it to the Ways & Means Committee, which never held a hearing.

**[SB 5630](#) Expands the program of basic education to include early learning.** Early learning would be phased in for three and four year-olds starting in the 2026-27 school year and making it an entitlement by the 2029-30 school year. LWVWA has had a position that basic education should include birth to five years. This is a start, but it never received a hearing.

## Bills we're Watching

**[HJR 4200](#) Amending the Constitution to allow a simple majority of voters voting to authorize school district bonds.** LWVWA has no position on school bonds, only levies, but I know a lot of our members are interested in this issue. The House Education Committee passed the resolution to the Capital Budget Committee, which didn't hold a vote.

## Bills We Oppose

**[HB 1591](#) Provides access to local enrichment funding for charter schools.** Funding for school districts is provided through levies approved by the voters, which doesn't include extra state funding for charter schools. It is in the House Appropriations Committee but not scheduled for a hearing. It still could slip into the House budget as was done last year before it was taken out during negotiations with the Senate. [See the beginning of this Update.](#)

## How You Can Be Involved

- During the legislative session we will send Action Alerts in the [Legislative Newsletter](#). Please respond to these, which will direct you to an application to facilitate communicating with your legislators on an important vote in committees or on the chamber floor.
- Local Leagues in Washington have action chairs who coordinate action teams. Some local Leagues have education teams to take action locally. Contact your local League action chair to find out and join.
- You may also express your opinion on legislation with the LWVWA issue chairs. We will take your perspectives under considerations as we determine our support for legislation and prepare testimony. Catherine Ahl, Education Issue Chair, [cahl@lwvwa.org](mailto:cahl@lwvwa.org), 360-697-7924