

The

SMITH HILL REPORT



PUBLISHED BY THE RHODE ISLAND FEDERATION OF TEACHERS & HEALTH PROFESSIONALS/AFT, AFL-CIO

Teacher Evaluation Frequency

On Wednesday, February 26, the House Committee on Health, Education and Welfare heard testimony on [H7096](#) (O'Brien) which addresses the issue of annual evaluations of highly effective teachers.

Representative O'Brien introduced the bill to the committee explaining the rationale of creating a cyclical evaluation process for teachers. He questioned why teachers who have already obtained the rating of "highly effective" or "effective" would need to be evaluated annually. His bill would allow highly effective teachers to be evaluated every four years and effective teachers every three years.

Maureen Martin, RIFTHP Director of Political Activities, testified that the RIFTHP supports high quality teacher evaluation systems that are focused on providing educators with feedback for professional growth, but the current RIDE requirements are overly burdensome and have created a managerial nightmare for districts, especially for principals who bear the primary burden of evaluating teachers. Martin further stated *"We believe all teachers should be evaluated, but teachers who demonstrate effective and highly effective practice should be evaluated less frequently"*.

Providence Teachers Union President Maribeth Calabro and Patricia D'Alfonso, West Warwick Teachers Alliance Vice President were there to testify in support of the O'Brien bill.

D'Alfonso, who testified after 10 PM, introduced herself as the West Warwick i3 Coordinator, K-12 ELA Coach and a Peer Evaluator. She talked about the magnitude and time drain of the annual evaluation process and how extremely time consuming it is for both teachers and evaluators. D'Alfonso said that one benefit that both teachers and evaluators agree is a result of the current system is the dialogue that occurs between the educator and his or her evaluator or among teachers during common planning time. She further said she doesn't believe that teachers will cease having these important conversations simply because they are not in an evaluation cycle year. D'Alfonso said *"Moving to a cyclical process will make the workload manageable and meaningful for administrators, allowing them to be the educational leader in their schools, while also providing them with time to support new teachers and those who may need assistance. Every teacher, every year is simply not necessary"*.

Others speaking in favor of the bill included NEA/RI's Patrick Crowley, South Kingstown Schools Superintendent Kristin Stringfellow, and the RI ACLU.

March 5, 2014

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Speaking against the O'Brien bill were Lisa Foehr, Director of Educator Quality and Certification at RIDE and the RI Association of School Superintendents lobbyist, Tim Ryan among others.

The bill was held for further study.



High Stakes Testing and Graduation Requirements

Also on Wednesday, February 26, the House Committee on Health, Education and Welfare heard testimony on four bills that deal with testing and consequences for students - [H7095](#) (Amore), [H7146](#) (Dickinson), [H7256](#) (Cimini) and [H7327](#) (Naughton).

For purposes of testimony, HEW Committee Chair McNamara grouped the bills related to student assessment and graduation requirements. After the bill sponsors introduced their respective legislation, Education Commissioner Gist addressed the committee for 35 minutes trying to justify her education policies including the use of standardized and other high-stakes tests to determine a student's eligibility to graduate from high school. She defended the adoption of the standards and cautioned the committee that it would be "foolish" to delay testing implementation as was suggested in one of the bills.

High school student activists from the Providence Student Union and Young Voices directly followed the Commissioner's testimony and countered much of what she said particularly her testimony on the use of the NECAP test. One after the other, the students articulated their frustration with high stakes testing, the stress they feel with the uncertainty the current testing policies cause, and how they feel their time is being wasted on test preparation instead of learning. Comments made in testimony by students include *"We are being set up for failure."* and *"Isn't there a better way to spend tax money, like teaching math instead of teaching how to pass a test?"*.

RIFTHP Director of Political Activities Maureen Martin spoke in support of the four testing bills. Martin noted that although the Federation is in support of high standards and assessments that help teachers, students and parents understand students' progress, we believe that a single test should not be used to make high stakes decisions about students, including decisions about graduation, no matter how often a particular test is administered. Martin told the committee that the RIFTHP wholeheartedly supports the 5 year moratorium on using standardized tests as a graduation requirement and any effort to study the impact of using standardized tests for high stakes decision making. Joining Martin in support of the bills was Maribeth Calabro, the new President of the Providence Teachers Union, who is the Providence School Department's i3 Coordinator and an Evaluation Specialist as well as a special education teacher in the summer program.

Alex Lucini, Providence Teachers Union Treasurer and a Music Teacher at Roger Williams Middle School said he was there to testify in support of H7095 because he believed it is a pro-education, pro-student bill. Lucini said he thinks the goals of the Common Core State Standards and the goals of classroom teachers in RI are essentially the same, *"to raise the rigor of teaching and learning in classrooms and to prepare students for college or career"*. He said that H7095 supports these goals and will put us on the path to achieve them. Referring to comments made in previous testimony that this bill would "set us back", Alex said *"Our students should not be subjected to the consequence of our past mistakes but rather a beneficiary of our future success"*.

Legislative Issues
hosted by James Parisi
with Mike Sabitoni and
Scott Duhamel

Building Futures Open
House -Senator Jack
Reed and
Representative David
Cicilline

LaborVision is seen on Cox
Ch. 14 and FioS Ch. 33

Tuesdays @ 7PM

Thursday @ 8PM

Saturday @ 5PM

Testimony in support of the bills was also given by Steve Brown of the the RI ACLU and others, most notably Providence Schools Superintendent Susan Lusi who testified about the adverse effect the NECAP testing has on students when used as a requirement for graduation. Lusi stated that the very students who are already the most disadvantaged, the poor, those with special learning needs, and English Language Learners are being the most disadvantaged by the administration of the NECAP tests. Lusi said "*Removing the NECAP requirement for graduation will not threaten our State's improvement trajectory*" and "*It will restore greater fairness for our State's neediest students and also allow our educators to focus on what is more important – improving teaching and learning...*".

Speaking against the bills were representatives from the RI Manufactures Association, the Association of School Superintendents, along with Patrick Guida from the RI Board of Education among others.

All four bills were held for further study.

Constitutional Convention Forum Being Held

A forum on whether a Constitutional Convention should be held, and if approved, what are the mechanisms for its implementation, on March 29, 2014. The forum will be held at the Hassenfeld Institute for Public Leadership, Bryant University, Unistrukture, Janikies Theater, 1150 Douglas Pike Smithfield, RI 02917. It will take place from 8:30AM to 1:00PM. To register, go to: [Con Con Registration](#).

Bill Introductions

If you would like to read the full text of a bill, just click on the bill number.

Pension Lawsuit Satisfaction

([H7180](#) Guthrie, House Finance)

The RIFTHP supports this bill which would establish a special escrow pension lawsuit satisfaction fund, which would be funded in part by budget surplus revenues.

Student Debt Refinancing

([H7323](#) Marcello, House Finance)

The RIFTHP supports this act which would specifically empower the Rhode Island Student Loan Authority to refinance and consolidate existing eligible loans. It would also authorize the Authority to purchase and invest in its own bonds and notes.

Teacher-Purchased Supplies – Tax Credit

([H7424](#) Morgan, House Finance)

The RIFTHP supports this bill whereby educators shall be allowed a credit, against the Rhode Island personal income tax otherwise due for the taxable year, for any amount spent purchasing supplies and equipment, for use in the performance of their teaching duties. The credit shall not exceed two hundred fifty dollars (\$250).

For-Profit Higher Education

([H7443](#) Morgan, House Health, Education and Welfare)

The RIFTHP opposes this bill which would allow for-profit educational institutions to offer academic degrees.

DD Funding - \$15,000,000 - ADA Compliance

([H7565](#) Guthrie, House Finance)

The RIFTHP supports this resolution which would authorize the appropriation of the sum of \$15,000,000 to the Department of BHDDH, Division of DD for services for the developmentally disabled.

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