

Catholic School Legislative Bulletin – 2016, No. 6
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Special Session Concludes

*After a 20-day special session, the 2016 legislative session adjourned on March 29. The House passed the supplemental operating budget 78-17 and a few hours later the Senate did so by a 27-17 vote. The budget deal includes about \$191 million in new spending from general revenues as well as \$190 million from the “rainy day” fund to pay for costs stemming from last year’s wildfires. Among the new spending in the supplemental operating budget for schools is \$1 million for homeless student stability grants (see below **HB 1682**), \$500,000 to address the teacher shortage (see below **HB 6455**), and \$1.75 million for professional development for paraeducators.*

While some legislation concerning schools passed, relatively little progress was made regarding the needs of the state’s education system. As for the most pressing issue of funding basic education (i.e., McCleary decision), it was postponed until the 2017 legislative session when it will have to be resolved.

Now that the 2016 legislative session is over, the following is a summary of the bills WSCC has included in the Legislative Bulletin.

Bills that Passed

Early Learning Exemption: [SB 6371](#) will remove the Department of Early Learning (DEL) licensing requirement for both private and public schools that offer before and after school programs for their own students in their own facilities. However, if the program accepts state subsidies for children, it must be licensed by DEL. Because of its great interest for Catholic schools, **SB 6371** was a priority bill for WSCC. **SB 6371** was signed into law by the Governor on April 1.

Homeless Students: [HB 1682](#) creates a competitive grant process to evaluate and award state-funded three-year grants to school districts to increase identification of homeless students and to assess the capacity of the districts to provide support. The bill also establishes a grant program that links homeless children with stable housing. **HB 1682** passed the Legislature and the Governor signed it on April 1.

180-Day School Year Waiver: [HB 2476](#) ends a pilot program that had authorized the State Board of Education to grant waivers from the minimum 180-day school year requirement to

small school districts to enable them to operate on a flexible school calendar. The bill passed both the House and the Senate, and was signed by the Governor on March 31.

Inclusion of Sexual Abuse in Emotional or Behavioral Distress Plans: [HB 2597](#) requires school districts to include sexual abuse as a topic in their mandated student emotional or behavioral distress plans. In addition to recognizing, screening, and responding to emotional or behavioral distress in students for possible substance abuse, violence, and youth suicide, the plans must also include provisions for indicators of possible sexual abuse. The House passed the bill 97-0. The Senate unanimously passed **HB 2597** and the Governor signed it on March 29.

Charter Schools: [SB 6194](#) reestablishes a charter schools system in state law, with charter schools created separately from the common school system. In a 2015 ruling, the Washington Supreme Court invalidated charter schools by concluding that they were not common schools. The Court also ruled that the Legislature may not appropriate funding for charter schools from sources that are constitutionally dedicated to common schools. **SB 6194** authorizes that funding for charter schools be taken from the Washington Opportunity Pathways Account. The bill passed both the Senate and the House. The bill became law without the Governor's signature.

Basic Education Obligations: [SB 6195](#) creates the Education Funding Task Force (EFTF) to continue the work of the Governor's informal educational work group. The Taskforce is to make recommendations to the Legislature regarding actions necessary to bring the state into compliance with the *McCleary* decision. The recommendations need to include (among other requirements):

- state funding for all-day kindergarten and K-3 class size reduction;
- competitive salaries and benefits that are sufficient to hire and retain competent staff; and
- sources of state revenue to support the state's statutory program of basic education.

SB 6195 passed the Senate and the House, and it was signed by the Governor in February.

Teacher & Substitute Shortage: [SB 6455](#) addresses the shortage of teachers and substitutes by offering incentives to recruit teachers and attract substitutes. Among the bill's provisions, state universities and community colleges are allowed to grant tuition waivers to paraeducators (among others) who are employed at K-12 public schools when their coursework is relevant to their work assignment. The bill passed the House and the Senate. **SB 6455** was signed by the Governor on April 1.

Bills that Died

Breakfast After the Bell: [HB 1295](#) would have required each high-needs school to offer breakfast after the bell to qualified students. **HB 1295** passed the House in January by a 69-28 margin but it did not pass the Senate. In the last few days of the special session, a version of this bill ([HB 3009](#)) was introduced. It would have allowed schools to voluntarily offer a morning food program but it did not come up for a vote.

Paraeducator Certification: [HB 1293](#) would have established new criteria and certification requirements for paraeducators. The bill was heard in the House, but no vote was taken.

Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB): [HB 1771](#) would have clarified that data exchanged between educator preparation programs and PESB are protected under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The House heard **HB 1771** but it did not come up for a vote.

Graduation Requirements: [HB 1855](#) would have required school districts to help facilitate high school graduation for homeless children, at-risk youth, and children in need of services in the same manner as for children who are dependent according to specific court-determined findings. **HB 1855** passed the House unanimously but it was not heard in the Senate.

Curriculum for the Prevention of Sexual Abuse for Grades K-12: [HB 2183](#) would have established Erin's Law Task Force for the purpose of creating and implementing a prevention of sexual abuse curriculum for students in grades K-12. **HB 2183** was heard in the House but no vote was taken.

School-Age Child Care Definition: School-age child care currently serves children beginning at age 5 until they reach their twelfth birthday. [HB 2389](#) would have modified the definition of "school-age child" to include children through 12 years of age for the purposes of school-age child care. The House heard **HB 2389** but the bill did not come up for a vote.

High School Student Assessments: [HB 2214](#) would have increased academic rigor and streamlined assessment requirements for high school students. The bill would have changed the high school graduation assessment requirements in science, ELA, and mathematics. **HB 2214** passed the House by a vote of 87-10 but it died in the Senate.

Standards for Paraeducators: [SB 6408](#) would have specified the minimum employment standards for paraeducators who work in special education programs, basic education programs, learning assistance programs, federal disadvantaged programs, and English language learner programs. **SB 6408** passed the Senate by a 43-5 margin. The bill was heard in the House, but it did not pass.

Later School Day Start Times: [SB 6429](#) would have required all public schools to start one hour later. The bill was heard in the Senate but it did not pass.

Toll Exemption for School Buses: [SB 6643](#) would have required the Transportation Commission to provide an exemption from all tolled facilities for school buses, regardless of whether the school bus was traveling on a regularly scheduled route. The bill was heard in the Senate but no further action was taken.

The Washington State Catholic Conference (WSCC) is the public policy voice of the Catholic Bishops of Washington State.