

2014 Missouri Legislative Session Final Summary Bill of Interest to Special Education

Bills that Passed

HB 2002 – DESE Appropriations

The following are the final appropriation amounts for special education line items of interest:

- Early Childhood Special Education – \$144,660,376 (This is level funding from last year.)
- High Need Fund - \$46,555,141 (This is an increase of 10,400,000 from last year)
- First Steps - \$53,372,710 (This is an \$8,500,000 increase from last year)
- Reimbursements for Publicly Placed Students - \$11,099,337 (level funding)
- Blind Literacy Task Force and Blind Skills Specialists - \$231,953 (slight decrease)
- Readers for the Blind - \$25,000 (level funding)

HB 1614 - Rep Burlison

This bill adds “dyslexia” as a medical diagnosis to the “special needs” definition in Bryce’s Law which established a scholarship program for children birth to 21 who have one of four specific medical diagnoses, autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, Angelman syndrome, and cerebral palsy. The scholarships can be used to attend public or private schools and will be funded through donations. The bill also identifies the C-TOPP as an initial indicator of dyslexia and includes a definition of dyslexia therapy.

SB 492 – Senator Pearce

This bill makes extensive changes to education law including expansive changes to the school transfer provisions. It includes provisions for mandatory retention in certain districts at certain grade levels when students do not score proficient on grade level assessments. It also includes provisions addressing payment of special education costs for students who transfer for an unaccredited district.

Bills that did not pass

SB 657 – Senator Kraus

This act would have prohibited the Administrative Hearing Commission from employing anyone or using the services of any independent contractor or consultant for due process hearings who, within the past five years, has been employed by or performed work as an independent contractor for a school district, an organization engaged in special education advocacy, the State Board of Education, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, or been party to a special education proceeding as an attorney, parent, or child.

SB 984 – Senator Sifton

This bill would have required DESE to hire a dyslexia specialist, who may be a licensed psychologist, licensed psychometrist, or licensed speech-language pathologist who has at least 3 years of experience in screening, identifying and treating dyslexia and related disorders in school districts. “Dyslexia specialist” is defined in the bill as a professional who has completed training and obtained certification in dyslexia therapy from a dyslexia therapy program. “Dyslexia therapy” is defined as systematic, multi-sensory, and research based; offered in small group settings; includes instruction in phonemic awareness, graphophonemic knowledge, morphology, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics, proficiency and fluency with the patterns of language, strategies used for decoding, encoding word recognition, fluency and comprehension. The DESE employed dyslexia specialist is to

provide professional development regarding dyslexia, provide information and support to help districts address the needs of students with dyslexia, and be responsible for creating a dyslexia research/resource guide that can be used by schools and teachers.

HB 1062 - Rep Grisamore

This bill would have required DESE to establish a workgroup to "assess the available resources needed for effective work experiences for youth with disabilities." The goal of the work group would be to evaluate current efforts and available resources and promote the involvement of key stakeholders (students, families, educators, employers and other agencies) in planning and implementing an array of services that will result in successful student transition.

HB 1066 – Rep Grisamore

This bill would have authorized the establishment of an educational savings account, known as a Missouri empowerment account, as an option for the education of a student with a specified disability. The accounts could be used to purchase educational and developmental services from a variety of providers.

HB 1536 – Rep Spencer

This bill would have established rigid differentiated diplomas in Missouri based solely on scoring proficient on standardized tests. Students who scored proficient on specified standardized tests would be eligible for a "high school academic diploma". Students who did not meet this requirement would be given a "diploma of local achievement" instead. Only IDEA eligible students with an IQ of less than 85 would be exempt from this requirement but they would only be eligible for the local achievement diploma.

HB 2089 - Representative Hummel.

This bill would have required all students to receive instruction in Braille "when an assessment demonstrates the need for such instruction". The bill identifies one assessment that can be used for this determination as the National Reading Media Assessment and allows DESE to identify other assessments through rule that can be used for this purpose. It is difficult to fit this requirement into IDEA procedures where determination of program and instruction must be done as part of the IEP process. If the assessment was mandated and provided information to be used by the IEP team, it would probably fit within IDEA -- but if the assessment itself dictates instruction outside of the IEP process, it would appear to be inconsistent with IDEA requirements.

HB 2123 - Representative Wright

This bill provides a right for parents to retain a specific nursing professional (the person) when a school district changes "clinical nursing services providers". The bill seems to assume there is some standard type of "clinical nursing services" and that schools always buy that from an outside provider and never use an employee to provide a "clinical nursing service". It also seems to assume that cost is the only issue that would ever drive a decision to hire someone (either as an employee or contractor) -- which is obviously not the case.