

*The*

SMITH HILL REPORT



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Commissioner Talks Education

On Thursday, January 30, 2014, Deborah Gist, the Commissioner of Education, gave a speech before a joint session of the House of Representatives and the Senate. Formal education addresses, which began with former Commissioner McWalters, have been given regularly to highlight education issues before our state elected officials.

Commissioner Gist's speech was largely upbeat. She credited school success stories and recognized many hard-working creative educators from around the State. Ironically, her talk coincided with a well-attended school choice event at the State House where hundreds of parents, students and activists highlighted the impact of private school education. The school choice advocates are looking for taxpayer subsidies for private school education.

Commissioner Gist did not offer many new initiatives in her talk, although she did advocate for school districts to provide dual language instruction to our students starting in elementary schools. A text of her speech can be viewed by [clicking here](#).

Her talk was given a day before the statewide results of the annual standardized testing were released to the public. The press release announcing the results can be [viewed here](#), and a summary of those test results can be [viewed here](#). Approximately 4,000 students had been notified that they would not be eligible to graduate high school in 2014 because of their test scores on NECAP last year. Over 3,000 of those students were re-tested and **1,800 high school seniors are still not eligible to graduate because of scores on a standardized test**. Those students remain at risk if the Assembly fails to enact a moratorium or a cessation of using standardized tests as a graduation requirement.

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn said *"It is tragic that almost two thousand seniors will not be eligible to graduate this year based on results of tests that were explicitly developed not to be used to determine individual student graduation eligibility. Both the system and the process are flawed. This decision will be particularly devastating to students with IEP's, students who are English Language Learners, and students in poverty. Over ninety percent of the students who are ineligible to graduate fall in one or more of these demographics. We will make it a priority to seek legislative relief for these students."*

Budget Article Hearings

The House and Senate Finance Committees are poised to begin public

February 3, 2014

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hearings on proposed statutory changes promoted by Governor Chafee in the form of budget articles. Last week's [Smith Hill Report](#) highlighted a number of budget articles important to the RIFTHP membership. In addition to budget articles, the Finance Committees will also hold public hearings on all state departments and agencies.

The following budget hearings have been scheduled.

Tuesday February 4, 2:30PM

Senate Finance

- [Article 9](#) – FICA Alternative Retirement Plan

Tuesday February 4, Rise

House Finance

- [Article 2](#) – Municipal Aid Program
- [Article 28](#) – Education (Private School Textbooks, School Breakfast funding)

Wednesday February 5, Rise

House Finance

- [Article 9](#) – FICA Alternative Retirement Plan
- [Article 12](#) – Revenue – State Worker Wage Garnishment
- [Article 17](#) – Pension Funding
- [Article 17](#) – State Worker Direct Deposit

Thursday February 6, 2:30

Senate Finance

- [Article 2](#) – Municipal Aid Incentive Program
- [Article 28](#) – Education (Private School Textbooks, School Breakfast funding)

Tuesday February 11, Rise

House Finance

- [Article 20](#) – Board of Education Reorganization



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

Tuesdays @ 7PM

Thursday @ 8PM

Saturday @ 5PM

Bill Introductions

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

Locally-Administered Pensions - ARC Requirement

([H7122](#) Shekarchi, House Finance)

([S2049](#) Pearson, Senate Finance)

The RIFTHP supports these bills which would authorize the General Treasurer to withhold money due to a municipality (other than education aid) that does not fully fund the annual required contribution (ARC) to its locally administered pension plan.

STEM Higher Education Tax Credit

([H7183](#) *Blazejewski, House Finance*)

The RIFTHP supports this bill which would establish the "Job Creation through Educational Opportunity Program Act of 2014." The purpose of this program would be to create incentives for individual residents of this State to pursue higher education in science, technology, engineering, and design, and to remain within this State after attaining a post-secondary degree. One of the key components of this program would be an educational opportunity tax credit which could be claimed for certain expenses associated with post-secondary education, as calculated by the mechanisms provided in this chapter.

Layoff Notification Date - Definition of Seniority

([H7193](#) *Guthrie, House Labor*)

The RIFTHP supports this bill which would expand the circumstances whereby a school board could layoff teachers.

Pay it Forward

([H7201](#) *Fox, House Health, Education and Welfare*)

The RIFTHP opposes this bill which would establish a pay it forward, pay it back pilot program whereby students enrolled in RI colleges/universities in lieu of paying fees sign a binding contract with the State whereby they pay a percentage of their annual adjusted gross income for a number of years.

Mayoral Academy Staff - Pension Participation

([H7212](#) *Fellela, House Finance*)

The RIFTHP supports this bill which would require Mayoral Academy staff to participate in the State Teachers' Retirement System.

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