

# AFT-NH Legislative Bulletin

2017-23



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“Union of Professionals”*

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The 2017 legislative session is nearly completed, with one more scheduled meeting this coming Thursday, June 22, when the House and Senate will each vote on Committee of Conference reports. These reports concern bills where the House and Senate differed over amendments, appointed a committee to try to iron out the disagreements, and the Committee came to a resolution. The resulting bills can now only be voted up or down, no further amendments.

**Budget Deal** The focus of attention will be on the two-year budget agreement announced yesterday. It is a Republican agreement, providing inadequate funding for battling the state’s opioid crisis, failing to address growing waitlists for mental health treatment, and as usual, generally neglecting to move New Hampshire into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But it does include further business tax cuts, most of which flow to large, out-of-state corporations. Democrats appear to be strongly opposed to this agreement, but the real question is whether far-Right Republicans in the House will again revolt against their party leadership. If they do, the budget may fail, forcing the Governor and the Legislature to vote for funding under a continuing resolution, which doles out monies at the rate of the existing budget, broken into 12 monthly increments, and precludes shifting monies to where most needed. Stay tuned.

**“Kenogarten”** The other headliner of concern to AFT-NH is **SB 191** regarding funding for full-day kindergarten. In this case, NH will lead the nation in innovation, since going forward, kindergarten will now be known in the Granite State as “kenogarten.” Why? Because the amendment adopted in the Committee of Conference will not fully fund full-day kindergarten, and the revenue to provide expanded state support for kindergarten will come from keno, an electronic, lottery-style gambling game. The game is quite common in Massachusetts (many bars there have it though why I know that we will leave to idle speculation), but is only now on the precipice of being legalized here in NH. Therefore, NH will now add keno to the lottery as funding sources for education in our state, and our fair state will continue in its fine tradition of encouraging “sin” as a means of funding state operations. Yes, let’s be proud, New Hampshire—we are already known for our interstate rest areas equipped with state liquor stores, and now we can have “kenogarten!” There are also some observers, most notably Executive Councilor Andru Volinsky,

who question the constitutionality of the funding system proposed in this bill, arguing that the State is required to fully fund kindergarten as part of an “adequate education.”

Furthering the absurdity of “kenogarten,” the bill provides that parents be allowed to have their child attend only a half-day. Ah, choice. Not much thought given to the fact that curriculum planning will revolve around a full day, so that a child leaving halfway through each day will be placed in a difficult situation. But then, many who support such an option just see kindergarten as a waste of time, or as Speaker Jasper stated earlier this year, “the capacity of a six year-old to be attentive for a full day in a classroom is pretty much non-existent.” Perhaps the solution shall be to teach the youngsters the rudiments of keno.

Finally, there is **HB 620**, which began as a proposal to require the State Board of Education to take into account the fiscal impact of rules implementing Federal law but exceeding the minimum Federal requirements. In the Senate, the bill was amended to categorize as proving an “adequate education” any school that has begun seeking accreditation from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). This provision will help clear the way for implementing vouchers for private school education, but the [HB 620 Committee of Conference](#) has now added a further amendment **barring** the State Board of Education from exceeding the minimums of Federal requirements if it leads to any unreimbursed expenditures or administrative burdens upon local districts. This will especially affect recently adopted NH guidelines for special education and have a serious impact on many of the 28,000 NH students with IEPs (individualized education plans). This draconian proposal will not save money but will likely impose future costs, as programs designed by localities to work with disabled and special needs students are curtailed to meet the Federal minimum, thereby reducing graduation rates and future employment prospects. Failing outcomes will then be cited as evidence of the failings of public education by the proponents of vouchers, who will then shout more loudly for public funding to send students to schools now defined as providing an “adequate education” because they have begun to seek accreditation. And so the wheels turn, and public education, one of the signature historical accomplishments of New Hampshire and the United States, is slowly dismantled.

**Your Action Needed** Help us reverse this process. Please contact your State Representative (s) and tell them you support students with special needs and demand that they [Vote No on HB 620 Conference Committee Report](#). Let’s start to turn the tide, and begin protecting and preserving that great equalizer and ladder to economic opportunity, the public school system.

In Solidarity,

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