

# MSTA ACTION



THE LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN OF THE MISSOURI STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION • PLEASE POST

## Open Enrollment Bill Placed on House Calendar

**HB253 (Pollitt)** is now the second bill on the House calendar, meaning it could soon come up for debate and vote. **MSTA remains strongly opposed to HB253 based on MSTAs Adopted Resolutions.** The vote on this bill could be very close and every email, phone call and individual conversation with your legislator could make the difference. **If you haven't contacted your legislators, it isn't too late.** You can still use the MSTAs Rapid Response platform, or you may contact your state legislator via email or phone. It is still not known when these bills will come up for debate. For more information, and the ability to email your legislator quickly, visit <https://p2a.co/whEUCp9>.

**HB253 (Pollitt)** and **SB5 (Koenig)** will create open enrollment of public school students throughout Missouri, allowing students to enroll in nonresident public schools. The legislation claims to create a "voluntary" system, yet it is only voluntary as to whether a district accepts students. If a transfer student decides at any time to return to the resident district, the resident district is again responsible for the education of that student.

Open enrollment would negatively impact teachers across the state, leading to school consolidation and the closings, and limiting the ability of students to receive an education in their local community. MSTAs other concerns regarding the legislation include the financial implications and an anti-collaboration effect that would pit districts against each other. **HB253** would allow districts to discriminate against special education students.

**MSTA opposes open enrollment based on MSTAs Adopted Resolutions, with the following concerns:**

**School Consolidation:** Open enrollment will lead to school consolidation. This legislation could leave districts unable to support all students in the community. Students remaining in community schools that have been consolidated will be forced to endure longer bus rides, while districts that remain open will struggle to maintain the educational programs already offered such as FFA, choir, band and athletics. In many Missouri communities, these kinds of tough decisions have already been made due to a lack of funding and increased difficulty in recruiting and retaining education staff.

**Special Education:** This legislation allows districts to deny students based on special education status if the transfer district determines they cannot meet the special education student's needs, allowing districts to discriminate against special needs students.

**Financial Implications/Anti-Collaboration:** Open enrollment will pit schools against one another to compete for students and the funding associated with them. Funding that would normally go toward student learning would be spent on recruiting students and competing with neighboring districts. This creates competition for the sake of competition; districts that are not in the same situation are forced to devote time and treasure to recruiting students while still attempting to provide a quality education to all the students that remain in the district.

**Increased State Influence:** It will be mandated that schools adopt a model policy developed by DESE or "another entity skilled in policy development" to determine the number of transfers available. This policy must be adopted by schools even if they decide not to participate in the open enrollment program.

**MSTA Adopted Resolutions support each local school district developing a written policy for transfer and assignment of students within a district and to any other school district. MSTAs opposes legislative actions involving the concept of inter-district choice and open enrollment.**

## Senate Passes 2.55 Factor Retirement Bill

The Senate passed **SB75 (Black)** and the bill will now head to the House for consideration. The bill makes several positive modifications to the PSRS/PEERS retirement system. This marks a big step this session for the legislation. In previous sessions, bills relating to the 2.55 factor have passed the House, but not the Senate.

**MSTA supports these enhanced benefits to PSRS/PEERS members in SB75 based on MSTAs Adopted Resolutions. MSTAs supports reinstating of the 2.55 factor for 31 or more years of service, if actuarially sound.**

Currently, the PSRS retiree benefit calculation is based on the benefit factor (2.5%) x Final Average Salary (monthly average of your three highest consecutive

years of PSRS-covered salary including employer-paid health, dental and vision insurance premiums) x years of service. **SB75** would increase the benefit factor to 2.55% as long as that educator has thirty-two years or more of service. According to an analysis conducted by the PSRS/PEERS actuary, reinstating the 2.55% factor would cause a very slight increase to the funded status of the system, increasing the system's fiscal health.

Currently, retirees may earn up to 60% of the minimum teacher's salary (\$15,000) working as a PSRS retiree in a PEERS position. **SB75** would allow those retirees to earn up to 133% of the annual earnings limit applicable to a Social Security recipient (currently \$28,250).

The bill would allow districts a new limit on critical shortage of the greater of 1% of the total of teacher and non-certified staff for that school district, or five teachers. This would also allow those hired under the critical shortage provision to work full-time for up to four years. **SB75** will also address an issue for retirees with a same-sex domestic partner beneficiary allowance, allowing them a change similar to the divorce pop up that was passed several years ago.

## Substitute Teaching Retirees May Need to Check Status

Last session when the legislature passed **SB681 (O'Laughlin)**, a section was included in the bill that removed the work after retirement limits until June 30, 2025 for PSRS/PEERS members who are working as substitute teachers. Any time there are changes, miscommunications regarding reporting of work after retirement limits can come up. If you are receiving a retirement benefit and question how your time is being reported, please follow the instructions from the Public School & Education Employee Retirement Systems of Missouri below.

Work limits on post-retirement substitute teaching for PSRS/PEERS retirees have been waived through June 30, 2025. For working after retirement purposes, PSRS/PEERS has defined substitute teaching as follows: "To instruct or guide the studies of students in a teaching position which requires a DESE-issued certificate in place of a regularly employed teacher who is temporarily unavailable." As a retiree of PSRS/PEERS, if you feel the school district you are working for is incorrectly

reporting your work to the Systems, we ask that you first contact the district to confirm two things:

- They are utilizing the Substitute Teaching Working After Retirement Waiver.
- They are reporting this time under the correct wage type.

If you are unsure of how the hours are being reported by your employer you can log into your Web Member Services account at any time at [www.psr-peers.org](http://www.psr-peers.org) under Member Log In. Any hours and salary that are being reported against the limits by an employer will be displayed under the Working After Retirement tab. The hours and salary earned under the waiver will not show on your online account. If you cannot access your account, you can call the PSRS office at (800) 392-6848 and speak to a trained Information Center Specialist who can assist you. We recognize as with anything new there is a learning curve, so we recommend that the school district reach out to the PSRS/PEERS Employer Services Department with any questions they may have regarding the Substitute Teaching Working After Retirement Waiver or the correct reporting of retirees working after retirement.

## MSTA Supports Bill that Would Make Changes to Student Assessments

MSTA went on record in support of changes to the statewide student assessment systems that are included in **HB49 (P. Brown)**. The bill modifies language relating to the statewide assessment system by requiring that the State Board of Education make the system student-centered and use assessments across the school year that support teaching, learning and program improvement so that a summative profile is developed of the student's learning.

The bill replaces current language with an updated specified list describing what the assessment system should be comprised of, including but not limited to: criterion-referenced and aligned to state standards; access to national norms, measuring growth during and across years; and providing multiple opportunities for students to show proficiency.

The bill additionally removes existing language relating to exemplary levels and the "Outstanding School Waivers." It also requires the State Board of Education to identify and recognize a minimum of two national school accreditation agencies and allow for districts that have an accreditation from either of the national agencies to be considered fully accredited for state purposes.

## Teaching Scholarship Bill Heard in House Committee

The House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee heard **HB497 (E. Lewis)**, which is designed to help with the current teacher shortage by reviving a currently unfunded scholarship program. The bill modifies the existing "Urban Flight and Rural Needs Scholarship Program" by changing the name to the "Teacher Recruitment and Retention State Scholarship Program."

Provisions of the existing program are modified including increasing the maximum number of two-year scholarships from 100 in the 2024 academic year to 300 such scholarships by the 2029-30 school term. Scholarships for 100% of eligible tuition and fees are to be awarded to "eligible students" who agree to teach in "hard to staff schools" or "hard to staff subject areas" for two years for every year the scholarship is received. The repayment rate of the scholarships for a failure to fulfill is 1% over the prevailing prime rate in effect on January 1st with annual adjustments.

**MSTA testified in support of the bill.** This is also a recommendation of the Blue-Ribbon Commission on Teacher Recruitment and Retention that met this past year to make recommendations to help with teacher shortages.

## Workforce Development Bill Heard in Senate Committee

This week, the Senate Education and Workforce Development Committee conducted a hearing on a bill designed to help students plan for what they will do once they graduate high school.

Under the language included in **SB136 (Eslinger)**, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is required to establish a process by which each student prior to freshman year of high school will develop an individual career and academic plan, with help from the student's parent or guardian and the school's counselors.

Before a student finishes 12th grade, the student is required to declare their postsecondary plans as part of the student's individual career and academic plan. Beginning July 1, 2024, each school district is required to establish a process for students to complete and submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

## Senate Expands Elective Social Studies Courses That Districts May Offer

The Senate gave initial approval to **SB34 (May)**, which would allow the teachings of Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament of the Bible, or the New Testament of the Bible as an elective social studies course.

The course will include the contents, history, literary style and structure, and influences on society. No requirement shall be made by the district on the text translation students must use. **SB34** requires that any course offered shall follow applicable laws maintaining religious neutrality, and shall not endorse, favor, promote, or show hostility to any particular religion, nonreligious faith, or religious perspective. The bill will need one more vote in the Senate before it is sent to the House for consideration.



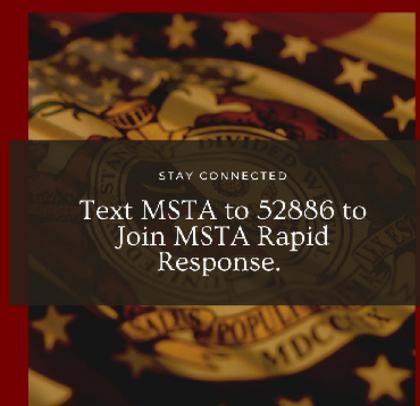
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