

Issue: VA Education

How Republicans Block Educational Reforms Talking Points

Summary

Since 2014, Rep. Steve Landes (R-HD25) has been the chair of the House Education Committee in the Virginia General Assembly. He has been unwilling to let bills come to a vote, mirroring the approach of the Appropriations and Finance Committees. All three have reviewed bills that could have greatly improved the educational system of the Commonwealth—and then let them die.

Bills Killed in 2018

The House Education Committee has systematically killed bills to expand full-day kindergarten availability (**HB109**), limit class sizes for safety reasons (**HB168**), provide mental health professionals for students who need added support (**HB252** and **HB253**), reduce standardized tests that have been proven ineffective at tracking student progress (**HB980**)¹, provide tampons and pads to middle and high school students (**HB1434**), and ensure that home-schooled students would be allowed to participate in interscholastic programs (**HB946**).

School Nurses: Yes, They're Necessary

The 2018 legislative session saw four versions (**HB791**, **HB1046**, **HB1254**, and **SB366**) of a common-sense bill requiring that each school have at least one full-time nurse. The first three iterations died in the House Education Committee. **SB366** made it to the Senate Health and Education Committee (chaired by Steve Newman, R-SD23), where it died.

The reason given for repeatedly killing the bill: a claim it would impose too many mandates and excessive costs on local schools². But mandates to improve student health and safety are important. If a student gets injured, should the parents be told, “We would have helped your child, but the nurse is only here two days a week?” As for the cost, the fiscal statement for **SB366** estimated that it would cost the state \$4 million in 2019. The 2019 operating budget for education in Virginia is \$19.7 billion³; requiring a full-time nurse at all schools would increase that budget by a mere 0.02%.

The Family Life Curriculum

The Family Life Curriculum is the Virginia public school system’s curriculum covering social issues that don’t fit into academic topics. These include understanding the effects of cultural influences, recognizing abusive relationships, and sex ed. Bills proposed to improve the curriculum but were killed by the House Education Committee in 2018 are **HB44**, which included the topic of consent, **HB159**, which included information about STDs including HIV, and **HB1123**, which required discussion of both physical and sexual abuse of children as well as child trafficking.

¹https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2014/08/01/what-do-standardized-tests-actually-test/?utm_term=.4a8c898bfd76

²https://www.richmond.com/news/local/education/districts/va-house-bill-to-put-more-nurses-in-schools-fails/article_57f65081-f884-517c-9847-42e3b69a9037.html

³http://publicreports.dpb.virginia.gov/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=BDOCFinal_FrontPage&Biennium=2018-2020&BudgetRound=Initial

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