

House, Senate pass two key education bills before summer recess

The Ohio Senate and House of Representatives made the passage of two key bills – H.B. 87 and S.B. 216 – a priority on their last day in session before the General Assembly’s summer recess.

House Bill 87 became the legislative vehicle for swift changes impacting e-schools as proposed in other legislation (H.B. 707 – introduced in June). The bill was originally written to provide guidance to the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) for crediting funds returned to the state as the result of the Auditor of State’s charter school findings for recovery. Under the new law, ODE must credit the returned funds to the public school district’s state education aid from which the money was originally deducted.

The bill was expanded to address issues of concern raised as a result of the mid-year closure of the Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT). Under the provisions of H.B. 87, the superintendent of public instruction is charged with establishing standards for learning management software to be used by e-schools.

The legislation also provides protection for schools and districts whose enrollments increased significantly (20 percent or more) with displaced students, with limited exception (including closure for charter schools whose scores would subject it to closure under current law if the scores of the displaced students were removed from the calculations).

House Bill 87 also specifies that ODE and the Auditor of State, in their joint roles, may not require districts or schools to submit five-year forecast projections prior to November 30 of any fiscal year.

Both chambers of the Ohio General Assembly also approved S.B. 216, formally entitled the “Ohio Public School Deregulation Act.” As previously reported, the bill addresses a wide range of issues, including teacher evaluations, education licensure, state achievement assessments, College Credit Plus and reporting of student performance data on state report cards.

Charter-specific provisions of S.B. 216 include: clarification that the terms “operator” and “management company” are synonymous; **reducing from 105 to 72 the number of consecutive hours of learning opportunities a charter school student must fail to participate in before being automatically withdrawn from the school**; and, creating a legislative committee to study and report recommendations on a competency-based payment structure for e-schools and the categories of expenses for which operators must provide a detailed accounting under current law.

