HCS SB 1351 -- URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS

SPONSOR: Nicola

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Special Committee on Intergovernmental Affairs by a vote of 12 to 2.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for SB 1351.

INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY AND CURSIVE WRITING (Sections 160.068, 186.085 & 186.095)

This bill creates the "Student Screen-Time Standards Act" and provides definitions for "instructional technology" and before the end of the 2027-28 school year, requires that school districts and charter schools have a policy on screen time and the use of instructional technology for students in grades Kindergarten through five.

The bill requires that schools limit the use of screen time and the use of instructional technology both during school hours and as assignments or on school devices after the school day. The policy must provide a process for parents to request information about limits on their child's screen time and instructional technology use and districts must use research, evidence, and information to develop the policy based on best practices.

This bill requires parental notification of the policy annually and schools must publish the board policy relating to the use of screen time and instructional technology on the district website.

The bill exempts virtual instruction programs from the requirements of this section.

This bill directs the Literacy Advisory Council under Section 186.080, RSMo, to provide school districts and the State Board of Education advice on the inclusion of instruction and assessment of cursive writing and reading including the development of a model policy on cursive.

The bill directs the Commissioner of Education to establish the "Framework on Classroom Use of Screens Council" or "FOCUS Council" with membership specified in the bill. The Council is directed to meet four times a year in the initial year and at least two times annually after that with the purpose of reviewing

best practices regarding screen use and the use of technology in instruction and providing related policy provisions.

The bill outlines best practices and policies that must be included and directs the council to submit a report containing the Council's actions and policy proposals to the State Board of Education, the Governor, and the Joint Committee on Education on or before July 1, 2027 and updated every two years annually after that.

These provisions are similar to HCS HBs 2230 & 2978.

SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT CARDS (Section 160.524)

This bill requires the State Board of Education to develop an annual school accountability report card for each public school, and public charter school, in the State, designed to inform the public regarding school performance and to satisfy applicable federal reporting requirements concerning students, staff, finances, and related data. Each report card must be presented in a standardized, clear, and accessible format and include a summary for parents explaining the school's performance level and underlying indicators, identifying strengths and areas for improvement, highlighting year-to-year progress and student academic growth, and describing opportunities for family engagement.

The State Board of Education can assign duties specified in the bill to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) or contract with a third party under state law. An embargoed version of each report card must be provided to districts and schools by September 15th annually, subject to an appeals process to be provided by the State Board of Education, and each district and school must publish its report card on its website by October 31st.

The State Board of Education must assign each district and school a letter grade of "A" through "F" based on a 0-100 scale and derived from multiple performance measures, with an "A" reflecting excellent student outcomes benchmarked as the top decile of composite scores of certain specified measures. Assessment participation rates below 95% must be separately reported but must not automatically reduce a school's rating.

The bill establishes the "Show Me Success Program", subject to appropriation, to provide performance-based funding to public schools and charter schools demonstrating strong academic growth,

sustained improvement over multiple years, significant improvement among historically underserved student groups, high levels of postsecondary readiness, or improvement in early literacy outcomes, with funds distributed to classroom incidental funds for teacher recruitment and retention. DESE must develop a criterion-referenced growth measure termed "growth to proficiency", evaluating whether students are on a trajectory to reach or exceed grade level within a specified timeframe, in addition to an existing value-added growth measure.

School and district ratings must be based on specified factors, including student proficiency levels on statewide assessments in English language arts, mathematics, and science; academic growth for all students and the lowest-performing quartile; and, for high schools, the four-year graduation rate and a "Success-Ready Graduate" measure incorporating advanced coursework, industry-recognized credentials, dual enrollment, and degree completion.

The bill prescribes weighted components for elementary, middle, and high school ratings; mandates annual reporting of post-graduation outcomes for high schools; and requires district-level ratings to be calculated using the same methodology as school-level ratings, as provided in the bill.

The State Board of Education must also issue a statewide report card detailing the percentage of students attending schools in each letter-grade category and comparing state assessment performance with results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, with the objective of alignment in proficiency rates.

The annual report card requirements established in the bill do not apply to special school districts or state-operated schools serving exclusively students with disabilities.

This provision is similar to SCS HCS HB 2710; and HB 2539 (2026).

MEDIA LITERACY AND CRITICAL THINKING ACT (Section 161.355)

The bill establishes the "Media Literacy and Critical Thinking Act" and defines "media literacy" to include concepts such as, but not limited to: an individual's ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and participate with all forms of media, including news in print and social media content, and recognize bias and stereotypes in media, and Internet safety.

This bill requires the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to establish the "Media Literacy and Critical Thinking Pilot Program" for the 2027-28 and 2028-29 school years. Between five and seven diverse schools will be selected by DESE to participate in the Pilot Program as specified in the bill.

The Program will address media literacy, develop strategies for student learning in classroom curricula, and demonstrate various literacy strategies used.

Pilot Program schools must provide a report to DESE before August 1, 2029, and before January 1, 2030, DESE must compile and submit a summary report to the General Assembly.

The Pilot Program terminates June 30, 2029. This section expires December 31, 2029.

This provision is similar to HB 1792 (2026).

SCHOOL DISTRICT AND CHARTER SCHOOL FINANCIAL INFORMATION (Section 162.192)

Under this bill, each school district and charter school must maintain a searchable, publicly accessible database on its website setting forth all financial transactions conducted with school district or charter school funds. The financial ledger must be available without login credentials, registration, or fees, and must be downloadable and exportable in formats specified in the bill.

The financial ledger must record transactions using codes set forth in the Missouri Financial Accounting Manual published by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), as applicable. Certain data fields must be included in the financial ledger including the transaction date, transaction amount, revenue or expenditure designation, fund code, function code, object code, vendor or payee name, and a description or memo field.

The homepage of each public or charter school's website must include a direct link to the financial ledger of the school district or charter school. The link must make the financial ledger accessible within one click, and must be functional and mobile-responsive. DESE can provide standardized language or icons that public and charter schools can use for this purpose.

A school district's or charter school's financial ledger must be updated at least monthly. Details of each calendar month's financial transactions must be posted no later than 45 days after the close of that calendar month. For record keeping purposes, a school district or charter school must maintain at least five fiscal years of historical data on its financial ledger. Protected personal information can be redacted only to the extent required by applicable law.

Vendor names, amounts, and accounting codes must not be redacted. Payroll data can be presented in aggregated form where disclosure of individual information is restricted. Debt obligations must be posted in a separate section of the financial ledger, with disclosure of outstanding debt balances, issuance dates, repayment schedules, annual debt service amounts, and debt service as a percentage of total expenditures.

DESE can provide or approve standardized templates or platforms school districts and charter schools can use for their financial ledgers. DESE can additionally provide guidance to assist school districts and charter schools with compliance.

DESE must promulgate rules establishing procedures and timelines for school districts and charter schools to certify compliance annually. A school district or charter school that violates any provision of this bill can be subject to the withholding of up to 5% of that school year's state aid entitlement for the school district or charter school. DESE must establish a process for members of the public to file complaints if they believe a school district or charter school has violated any provision of the bill. DESE can also establish a public compliance dashboard on DESE's website to enable members of the public to check whether a particular school district or charter school is certified as in compliance.

SCHOOL BOARD TERMS (Section 162.481)

This bill changes the term of office for members of the Independence School District school board from six years to three years.

SCHOOL DISTRICT AND CHARTER SCHOOL LEGAL EXPENSES (Section 162.821)

The bill requires school districts and charter schools to include the amount expended for legal services in their Annual Secretary of the Board Report. If the report does not include the amount

expended for legal services, then the Attorney General can bring a civil action, including an action for injunctive relief, against the school district or charter school. Such action must be brought in the county where the school district or charter school is located.

STUDENT ATTENDANCE AT SCHEDULED ELECTIONS (Section 167.1001)

This bill provides that a student enrolled in a public school governed by an urban school district must not be considered absent for the time such student spends attending a scheduled primary, general, or special election with his or her parent, legal guardian, or person standing in loco parentis to the student. A student can receive only one excused absence during each scheduled election. Upon his or her return to school, the student must be encouraged by school officials to demonstrate his or her attendance at the election by wearing an official sticker, badge, or other item indicating that he or she attended the election.

DRIVER EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS (Section 170.027)

This bill creates the "Missouri Integrated Safe Driving Program" and provides that the Program will inform pupils about requirements for obtaining driving permits, emphasis on the knowledge, attitudes, habits, and skills necessary to safely operate a vehicle, instruct on distracted driving and traffic stops, and provide data on driver safety and risky behavior. The Program will also provide instructions on safety concerns relating to pedestrians, commercial motor vehicles, motorcycles and potentially hazardous encounters on the road.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will receive and vet lessons from districts and professional organizations that will integrate the tenants of the safe driving program into courses that students are taking.

Beginning in the 2027-28 school year districts can adopt a plan to implement and use lessons. The instruction does not require physical operation of a vehicle and the bill does not prohibit schools from offering additional driver education courses.

This provision is similar to HCS HB 2195; and HS HCS HBs 3068 & 3049 (2026).

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the Senate perfected version of the bill.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that Independence is the only district in the state with a 6-year term. This bill will reduce the terms to match the other schools in the State. The bill also provides accountability and accessibility in school governance for students and families. Many people struggle to make a six-year commitment to a position on the school board. This is supported by current members.

Testifying in person for the bill were Senator Nicola; Missouri NEA; and Arnie C. Dienoff.

OPPONENTS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony and witnesses testifying online can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.