

Capitol Contact

Virginia General Assembly

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Friday, April 24, 2017

Governor vetoes education bills opposed by VACo

Governor Terry McAuliffe vetoed education bills on March 23 that would have diverted public funds away from public schools or limited local decision-making authority. Last month, VACo sent the Governor a letter urging him to veto [HB 2342 \(Landes\)/SB 1283 \(Obenshain\)](#) and [HB 1605 \(LaRock\)](#). VACo's overarching legislative priority position during the 2017 General Assembly Session was increased education funding.

The Governor vetoed HB 2342/SB 1283, which would have sought to enable the establishment of regional charter schools. Although the bills are narrowly tailored, the regional school boards that the bill would authorize the Board of Education to create would be heavily weighted toward state appointees, with eight members appointed by the state Board and up to three appointed by the governing bodies of the localities encompassed by the regional school division. These regional school boards would be empowered to approve applications to establish regional charter schools; the composition of the boards essentially places this decision at the state level, a situation that runs counter to VACo's longstanding position in support of local decision-making authority in this arena.

“In establishing regional governing school boards that remove authority from local school boards and their members, this legislation proposes a governance model that is in conflict with the Constitution of Virginia,” Governor McAuliffe wrote in a press release. “Public charter school arrangements are already available to divisions at the discretion of the local school board, which makes the ultimate decisions about the establishment, renewal and dissolution of charter schools within its division.

“We should always consider new and innovative ways to provide a world class education to all of our students, but this particular governance framework is not viable within the parameters of Virginia's constitutional structure,” he added.

The Governor also vetoed HB 1605, which would have allowed the transfer of 90 percent of state Standards of Quality funds to parents of eligible students to be used for a variety of educational purposes. The eligibility criteria for this bill have been narrowed from its introduced form, but the list of allowable uses for these funds, including transportation and tuition at sectarian schools, is broad.

“HB 1605 raises constitutional concerns, diverts funds from public schools, and creates an inequitable system across different school divisions,” Governor McAuliffe wrote. “It fails to support the goal of using state resources to strengthen and improve public education throughout the Commonwealth.”

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16 CTE programs to receive \$37,500 each for new equipment and improvements

The Governor issued a press release on March 23 to announce that 16 high schools and technical centers will share \$600,000 in grants to upgrade equipment for their career and technical education programs (CTE). Each school will receive \$37,500 to purchase new equipment and make other necessary improvements.

The awards, by school division, are as follows:

- **Albemarle County** – Monticello Governor's Health Sciences Academy (diagnostic virtual modelling)
- **Bedford County** – Bedford County Governor's Health Sciences Academy (biotechnology and forensics) and Staunton River High School (technology education and engineering)
- **Botetourt County** – Botetourt Technical Education Center (mechanical, electrical and computer engineering)
- **Cumberland County** – Cumberland County High School (architectural design and construction)
- **Dickenson County** – Riverview High School (cybersecurity)

- **Fredrick County** – Dowell J. Howard Center (nursing, automotive technology, technology education and engineering)
- **Giles County** – Giles County Technology Center (precision machine technology)
- **Hampton** – Hampton High School (computer science, game design, cybersecurity and modeling/simulation)
- **Henrico County** – Hermitage High School (precision machining)
- **Madison County** – Madison County High School (simulated workplace environment)
- **Page County** – Page County Technical Center (information technology and cybersecurity)
- **Rockbridge County** – Rockbridge County High School (renewable energy)
- **Suffolk** – Governor's STEM Academy at the Pruden Center for Industry and Technology (information technology and cybersecurity, computer network software operations and mechatronics)
- **Warren County** – Blue Ridge Technical Center (simulated design and advanced manufacturing)
- **Wythe County** – Wythe County Technology Center (machinery and welding)

According to the press release, the grant program gives priority to challenged schools, Governor's STEM Academies and Governor's Health Science Academies. A second round of awards will be announced in early 2018.

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