

Step into the Light, School Boards

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State-mandated transparency requirements set for all public school governing authorities

BATON ROUGE, La. – Pending website transparency requirements may soon place boards that govern public schools under greater scrutiny. The School Authority Transparency Act, [HB 559](#), awaits floor debate and final vote tomorrow in the Louisiana House of Representatives, with Rep. Rosalind Jones (D – Monroe) as prime sponsor.

HB 559 would mandate publication of a wide variety of information, including school disciplinary procedures, detailed event calendars, and all board policies and procedures. It even goes so far as to include school dress codes, grade change processes, and strategies for bullying prevention.

A school governing authority in theory carries out the wishes of the citizens of that jurisdiction. However, Rep. Jones says constituents have brought their difficulties to her attention – that nominally public information has been difficult to obtain, even requiring legal counsel.

“So I thought to provide some sunshine, some transparency to school board policy and procedure... If the school boards have a website, they should be able to publish all their policies and procedures on the website, along with other pertinent information for parents.”

However, opponents contend that this law places greater top-down burdens on the public school system. Leslie Jacobs, a New Orleans-based education reform advocate and founder of Educate Now!, believes websites can provide valuable information for parents and community, but she cautions legislators that they “not continue to build layers of compliance that take financial and human resources away from the classroom.”

The new law’s requirements also apply to charter schools, which were initiated to be more independent – “[overwhelmingly publicly funded, predominantly privately run](#),” as superintendent of the Recovery School District, Paul Vallas, has described. The proposed law, however, does not distinguish between charter schools and conventional public schools, except that it requires an additional list of charter schools.

“With respect to charter schools,” says Jacobs. “HB 559 is particularly burdensome... Charter schools do not have a central office, nor do they have the staff to constantly update their websites. This requirement will be costly.”

Andrew J. Coulson of the Cato Institute has [observed](#) that the “pattern in publicly funded education, both domestically and internationally, has always been one of increasing regulation over time... That same pattern is playing out in the charter school sector.”

Rep. Jones says she has observed little push-back to HB 559, including the governor’s office, suggesting she is confident of its passage.