

The Public School Forum's Friday Report

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Budget Talks Go on with Continuing Resolution

With the new fiscal year starting next Wednesday, both houses have passed continuing resolutions to keep state government going beyond the June 30th deadline. Not surprising, lawmakers have been unable to complete a budget on time since 2003.

The Senate has approved an open-ended continuing budget resolution that will keep state government operating after June 30 at 85 percent of spending in the current \$21.3 billion state budget. It would also delay any step pay increases that normally would go to teachers based on seniority. The House's version, approved Thursday, is a temporary spending measure that directs how government agencies will continue operating through July 15. Both chambers must agree on a final continuing resolution and the Governor must sign it before midnight on June 30.

While conferees have made progress this week toward reaching a compromise on a spending plan, the hold-up appears to be the specifics of a tax package that would generate nearly \$1 billion next year. House and Senate Democrats have differing viewpoints on how to find new taxes while Republicans believe the budget gap is lower than reported and new taxes aren't needed.

Central Office Administration Faces Deep Cuts

As legislators wrestle with ways to minimize cuts that would impact the classroom, a new strategy emerged last week that essentially would "rob Peter to pay Paul." A proposal surfaced that would have eliminated 50% of all state funding for school district central offices, representing a cut of \$60 million. By week's end, that number was reduced to 30%, representing a cut of 25% of central office school staff and remains on the table as budget negotiations enter the final stages.

Bill Mc Neal, the Executive Director of the NC Association of School Administrators, was quick to point out that "Any recommendation to cut central office funding doesn't eliminate these services, but actually shifts these responsibilities to teachers and principals. This, we assure you, will adversely impact the classroom, thus student performance."

This proposed cut would be felt most keenly in small and low-wealth counties that have small central office staffs in the best of times. It appears lawmakers are looking for a way to minimize classroom teacher cuts at the expense of those charged with supporting the work of teachers and principals. This issue can be expected to be hotly debated in the weeks ahead.

Summary of Public School Legislation

House Bill 687, Tax Credits for Children with Disabilities - By a vote of 21-26, the House Education Committee this week voted down a bill that would have given a \$6,000 annual tax credit to North Carolina parents who put their special-needs children in private school. Education groups including NCASA, NCSBA, NCDPI and NCAE spoke out against the bill saying it's better to keep investing in public education to help these children.

House Bill 88, Healthy Youth Act – After passing the Senate on Tuesday, HB 88 was given final approval on Thursday by the House and now heads to the Governor's desk. The measure would require all of North Carolina's 115 public school districts to teach a so-called "comprehensive" sex education program which tells students more about contraception and disease prevention than current programs. According to the bill, parents would be allowed to take their children out of the expanded curriculum.

Senate Bill 526, School Violence Prevention – Lawmakers passed a bill Tuesday aimed at protecting students who are harassed for reasons such as race, religion, disabilities and real or perceived sexual orientation. All districts are already required by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to have anti-bullying policies, but the bill's supporters say they are frequently ignored. House Democrats passed the bill in a tight 58-57 vote, including a rare vote by House Speaker Joe Hackney to break a tie. SB 526 now heads to the Governor's desk for her signature.

Greene County – The Future of Learning

Last week the House Education and Labor Committee heard how innovative uses of technology in U.S. classrooms are increasing student achievement and engagement, improving teacher effectiveness and teaching critical thinking and problem-solving skills. These are the first in a series of hearings the committee will hold to explore how technology-based education tools are transforming American education.

Witnesses told the panel that investments in technology in the classroom can help give students a 21st century skill set to prepare them for 21st century jobs, an investment President Obama's has strongly endorsed. Abel Alejandro Real, a sophomore at East Carolina University and graduate from Greene Central High School in Snow Hill, described how technology helped motivate him to continue school and pursue a career in pediatric nursing.

"Since Greene County schools provided change with the one-to-one laptop program, school life is very different than the traditional high school my brothers dropped out of," said Real. "Students work collaboratively in groups, they are challenged by projects and thoughtful questions and the best part is everyone participates and pays attention. In addition to the laptops, students use digital cameras, video cameras, and interactive white boards. Students are being prepared for college and 21st century careers."

Greene County (cont'd)

Real explained to the committee that since the introduction of the one-to-one laptop program in Greene County seven years ago the school's college going rate has increased from 26% to 94%. To view Real's testimony to the committee, click here:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3_O39mTsPw .

EPFP Alum Appointed to National Education Task Force

Dr. Louis Fabrizio, director of Accountability Policy and Communications at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), has been appointed to the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Reauthorization Task Force. Fabrizio will join about a dozen federal government liaisons, state education officials and state education agency staff from across the country in a new effort to review, update and provide recommendations to Congress regarding the ESEA, which was reauthorized in 2001 by President Bush as the No Child Left Behind Act.

Fabrizio also serves on the national Standing Task Force on Assessment and the Assessment Subcommittee of the CCSSO Education Information Management Advisory Consortium. In 2007, he was appointed by U.S Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings to the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) which sets policies for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

NC Receives 21st Century Skills Award

North Carolina has received the 21st Century Skills Practice of the Year Award for its new Writing Instruction System Pilot project. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) developed and piloted the initiative in the fall of 2008 to replace the 4th and 7th grade writing assessments with a more comprehensive K-12 writing system. State Superintendent June Atkinson accepted the award for North Carolina at "Institute.21," an annual event held to showcase the progress states have made in infusing 21st century skills into core subject areas.

In addition to these statewide efforts, students and teachers in 18 selected school districts piloted the centrally-hosted Web-based online portfolio component of the new writing system. In these districts, 7th grade students were required to complete their writing tasks using word processing software. Their writing samples were then stored in an electronic portfolio which teachers could then use to evaluate student work and provide feedback. The Web-based portfolio component of the new writing system will be available to all school districts in the state starting July 20, 2009.

NC Receives 21st Century Skills Award (cont'd)

North Carolina was among seven states to receive the national award from the Partnership for 21st Century Skills. This organization brings together the business community, education leaders and policymakers to define a powerful vision for 21st century education to ensure every child's success as citizens and workers in the 21st century. For more information on the Partnership or the award, visit www.21stcenturyskills.org.

National News...

Supreme Court Rules on Private Tuition Reimbursement Case

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled on Monday that the family of an Oregon high school student could receive a private education at taxpayer's expense without having first received special education services in public schools. The justices ruled that 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) meant to rein in the costs of private school placements did not remove the power of hearing officers and federal judges to order such reimbursements under the proper circumstances.

Under the landmark 1975 special education law (IDEA) school systems must provide a "free appropriate" public education to disabled students. The act permits parents to seek public financing for private schools if they can establish that public schools can't meet their children's needs.

Monday's decision involved a student who attended Oregon's Forest Grove school district from kindergarten through eighth grade. In 2003, after the school system declared the student ineligible for special education services, a private specialist diagnosed him with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). His parents enrolled him in a residential program with tuition of more than \$5,000 a month and hired a lawyer to argue for reimbursement.

While the ruling is winning praise from some advocates for students with disabilities, critics from national groups representing teachers and school boards fear it is actually going to have a tremendous and very adverse impact on the money that public schools receive and on their ability to provide special education services.

Forum News...

Call for EPFP Applications

Applications are now being accepted for the Forum's Education Policy Fellowship Program (EPFP). The ten month seminar program meets weekly on Tuesday night from 5:30 to 8:30 pm from September 15, 2009 to May 11, 2010. The program addresses issues related to policy and leadership development. North Carolina boasts almost 600 EPFP alumni. The program seeks high energy individuals committed to enhancing their professional career through networking and exploring leadership and policy in the "real" world. An application may be obtained at the Forum's website. Go to www.ncforum.org and click on EPFP. The deadline is July 31st. Don't delay. Apply today!

Did You Know...

CMS Makes Strides in Closing Achievement Gap

The End-of-Course and End-of-Grade test results for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools show the district has made progress in 22 of 23 areas tested, district officials said June 24. Science scores are up! Math scores are up! Reading scores are up!

The scores also show the achievement gap narrowing in some subjects. Particularly notable in the district's scores was progress at a group of 14 schools where CMS has employed strategic staffing, putting strong principals and teams of teachers in place to improve school performance. [Click Here for Article](#).

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