



Reporter

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SCHOOLS FOR QUALITY EDUCATION, INC.

Public Relations Message

The 2009 legislative session was exhausting for everyone in the state; active players and observers alike. Legislators knew early on they would have to find ways to make up for hundreds of millions of dollars in budgetary shortfalls. Policymakers spent much of their time waiting for Senate Ways & Means and the House Appropriations committees to bring forward budget adjustments for their consideration.

This year saw many education oriented bills worked in Ways & Means and Appropriations or their subcommittees, although education issues are generally worked in the education committees in both houses. This made it more difficult to be sure committee members thoroughly understood the issues at hand, since they were not as well versed on the challenges of K-12 and higher education.

The availability of federal stimulus money was designed to maintain quality education and keep teachers in the classroom, but the guidelines were and to some extent are still being interrupted in different ways by those setting policy. The idea that funding has to be at the 2006 level and brought up to the 2008 or 2009 (whichever was greater) seemed clear enough, but in the final weeks of the session, a number of proposals were considered that didn't come remotely close to those levels of funding. Although the states had received the guidelines, they didn't have the regulations yet from the federal Department of Education. Dale Dennis told many gatherings that the one thing he was sure of was the regulations would require a huge amount of paperwork.

From the beginning days of the session it felt like the final days. We worked budgets, worked budgets, and worked budgets. Governor Sebelius had told agency heads to prepare for cuts prior to the

beginning of the session. Ways & Means and Appropriations worked the first few weeks to come up with bills for the House and Senate to consider. The Senate approved more conservative reductions for K-12, while the House planned for deeper cuts. In conference committee, the Senate conferees caved into the House position. Then Governor Sebelius had recommended a \$22 cut to BSAPP. She line item vetoed the Legislatures' education funding cuts and authorized a reduction of \$33 on the base, lowering it from \$4,433 to \$4,400.

As the legislature started working the 2010 budget, there were again big differences in the extent of the purposed cuts to K-12. The Senate Ways & Means brought a 2.5% across-the-board cut to the floor for debate. It increased to 2.75% during floor debate. The House Appropriations Committee struggled, attempting to balance the budget without revenue enhancements. There were days and days when they convened in the morning only to recess, and return to recess again. In the final hours of the session, to everyone's surprise, the unheard of happened. The House concurred with the Senate's budget bill which funds K-12 education at \$4,280 BSAPP. Special education funding was reduced by \$4.5 million in state aid. It also eliminates capital outlay funding for one year (\$3 million). They then concurred with the Senate's funding bill that pulled money from tax credits, gambling, and delays with previously scheduled gradual tax cuts.

One thing that had an overall impact on education funding was a part of the federal stimulus bill that tied the level of K-12 funding to higher education funding. Reductions in one was directly linked to reductions in the other. This worked in favor for both groups as there were legislators who were very concerned about funding one or both.

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Early in the session, before any budget bills had gained approval or the federal stimulus money was absolute, a few school funding “assistance” bills were introduced in the House and Senate education committees. Even though many had passed out of one committee or another, only a few had been passed by both houses. The first three below were passed in the final hours of the session.

Bills that will help districts address funding issues include:

SB84 has several components that help school districts. It allows them to calculate their LOB for the next three years on this year’s \$4,433 BSAPP. It also provides for an exception to the current cash basis law so school districts are not held liable when the state is late for general and supplemental state aid.

SB161 enabled school districts to increase the level of their contingency reserves fund from 6% to 10%.

Of concern to small districts considering merging with more than one neighboring district, SB41 provides a financial incentive by allocating the state financial aid of the disorganized district to the districts receiving the territory of the former district. It would be allocated proportionate to the assessed valuation of the territory attached that each district bears to the assessed valuation of the entire disorganized district.

Other bills that will affect our schools:

HB2072 KPERS bill closes the door on special status for third party contractors leveling the playing field with school districts hiring retirees. It does expand the break-in-service time from 30 to 60 days but an amendment in the school law provision does allow licensed professionals to retire before June 30th of any calendar year. It also eliminates the \$20,000 salary cap for three years. The KPERS surcharge for the next three years will be based on a special employer contribution rate of the employer actuarial rate plus 8%. This would make the FY 2010 rate 20.7% rather than the current 16.07%.

HB2373 takes \$50,000 from the Children’s Initiative Fund to provide training for the diagnosis of autism.

HCR5015 resolution directs the State Board of Education to ensure there is early screening to identify children with reading disabilities, check to be sure partnerships are in place to ensure reading diagnostic assessments are used in pre-K through 2nd grade, review how effectively best practice instruction is being utilized in keeping with the multi-tiered system of support, oversee teacher prepa-

ration courses to be sure these models are being taught, and work to ensure parents have access to all information in this regard.

HB2354 a part of the Mega funding bill eliminating funding that would reimburse districts for their National Board Certified teachers.

HB2008 authorizes any person to administer epinephrine in an emergency if a student or staff member appears to be in anaphylactic shock. The bill allows districts to maintain an epinephrine kit that has been authorized by a physician (in writing) and is checked periodically by a licensed pharmacist.

SB339 as part of the comprehensive energy bill, net metering authority allows school districts to sell back excess power produced through wind, solar or bio-fuels.



Val DeFever
Public Relations Representative

Study Finds that Students Benefit From Depth, Rather than Breadth, in High School Science Courses

A recent study reports that high school students who study fewer science topics, but study them in greater depth, have an advantage in college science classes over their peers who study more topics and spend less time on each.

Robert Tai, associate professor at the University of Virginia’s Curry School of Education, worked with Marc S. Schwartz of the University of Texas at Arlington and Philip M. Sadler and Gerhard Sonnert of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics to conduct the study and produce the report.

“Depth Versus Breadth: How Content Coverage in High School Courses Relates to Later Success in College Science Coursework” relates the amount of content covered on a particular topic in high school classes with students’ performance in college-level science classes. The study appears in the July 2009 print edition of *Science Education* and is currently available as an online pre-print from the journal.

“As a former high school teacher, I always worried about whether it was better to teach less in greater depth or more with no real depth. This study offers evidence that teaching fewer topics in greater depth is a better way to prepare students for success in college science,” Tai said. “These results are based

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on the performance of thousands of college science students from across the United States.”

The 8,310 students in the study were enrolled in introductory biology, chemistry or physics in randomly selected four-year colleges and universities. Those who spent one month or more studying one major topic in-depth in high school earned higher grades in college science than their peers who studied more topics in the same period of time.

The study revealed that students in courses that focused on mastering a particular topic were impacted twice as much as those in courses that touched on every major topic.

The study explored differences between science disciplines, teacher decisions about classroom activities, and out-of-class projects and homework. The researchers carefully controlled for differences in student backgrounds.

The study also points out that standardized testing, which seeks to measure overall knowledge in an entire discipline, may not capture a student’s high level of mastery in a few key science topics. Teachers who “teach to the test” may not be optimizing their students’ chance of success in college science courses, Tai noted.

“President Obama has challenged the nation to become the most educated in the world by having the largest proportion of college graduates among its citizens in the coming decade,” Tai said. “To meet this challenge, it is imperative that we use the research to inform our educational practice.”

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National Rural Education Policy Statements

A series of five policy statements on rural perspectives including: community revitalization, school finance, student success, environment, and curriculum instruction are available for review and public comment at the following site: www.nrepa.blogspot.com.

These are being developed by the Rural School and Community Trust Rural Education Working Group.

President's Message

Dear Members:

The crisis in education has never been more apparent than in the previous legislative session. A valiant battle was waged for our schools. Through difficult times, we often find strength in our faith, families and friends. The family of rural and small schools is close knit. We sometimes disagree on issues, but are united for our children and communities. The family will not be divided. The united effort has never been more evident than this year. We were a very strong voice for rural education.

Although this year was very difficult for our schools, it could have been so much worse. We are fortunate to have a family of schools who are willing to do whatever it takes for their children. It is great to have Val lobby for us, but without the network of administrators, board members, and friends of education we would not accomplish as much. Not any one entity can do it alone. It takes every member of the family to be successful.

There could have been even deeper cuts for our schools this year, if we had not all been united. The renewed effort by board members along with our administrators and their advisory groups helped to make our voice stronger. Sometimes it takes a crisis to motivate us. A larger number of board members contacted legislators this year, while in the past some board members relied solely on their superintendent and the association.

We are still dealing with the cuts in funding for this year and next year, but the future looms ahead with even more shortfalls to funding. We have seen the success of our efforts, but we must work even harder for our schools. The job is not over, far from it. We have much work to do. Our children are relying on us to keep up the pressure for proper funding for their education. We must keep the faith and remain united while we wage the battle for our children, our future!

Darlene Jones
SQE President
USD #270- Plainville



Mark Your Calendar

October 9-11, 2009
101st Annual NREA Convention
and Rural Research Symposium
Cincinnati, Ohio
Contact: 765-494-0086



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