

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE APRIL 22, 2005

As of April 21st there have been 46 bills which have passed both the House and Senate. Of these bills, 26 have been approved by the Governor. With three more weeks left in regular session, we will undoubtedly see this number rise; however this session may not see the typically large number of bills passed as in previous years.

The only Education bill of interest which has passed both Chambers is Representative Sansom's, HB 281 - Relating to School Districts/Paperwork Reduction. This bill establishes a Paper Reduction Task Force to make recommendations to minimize the paperwork burden placed on school districts and school district personnel. The bill establishes the membership of the task force and requires a report to the Legislature.

The House of Representatives and the Senate have both passed initial budgets. While it is hard to compare these budgets side by side, some items are appropriated at the same level in both budgets. The total budgets differ, however. Some major differences are :

- * Sparsity--9 million more in the House
- * Equalization of discretionary funds--House has increased from \$50 to \$100
- * Base Student Allocation, \$3,732.50 in Senate \$3,739.54 in House
- * Program weights for certain ESE students are higher in the House
- * Safe School Allocation is more in the House
- * Instructional Materials is funded higher in the Senate
- * Class Size Reduction is funded higher in the Senate
- * The House has less total money in the budget

Other budget items of interest:

- * A huge increase in available money--4B at start and added 2.2B
- * The budget funds 62,000 new students
- * Math/Science commission funded in the Senate at \$495,000.
- * Professional development funded at \$ 135,246,540.
- * Class size reduction requires \$1,529,168,295.
- * Reading instruction (43m in Senate, 74m in House, Governor requested 112m)
- * Bright Futures Scholarships \$318,189,784. (stabilized)

The major Legislative issues continue to be:

- * Teacher salary--\$35,000. tied to Class size reduction at district average not actual classroom. A special election expected. (Feb. or June)
- * School Reform new bills for Middle school and High school reform. Most of changes deal with reading. High School legislation may not pass.
- * Pre-K concerns over both the number of students that have registered and the number of potential providers. This has caused a change in the requirement that districts which do not meet the Class Size requirement cannot provide regular school Pre-K services. All but 8 districts may now offer regular year

Pre-K.

- * FCAT modifications--Parents ability to see questions, delay administration as late in the school year as possible, allow ACT or SAT to be used in place of the FCAT, and concerns over finding an alternative exam for ESOL students.
- * Expansion of choice--A new voucher program for students in low performing schools which could effect 170,000 students.
- * Principal Leadership--New programs for Principals and Asst. Principals for both training and rewards. A++ Leadership Program.
- * Obesity- Physical Education- School Lunch- Summer Nutrition Programs are losing steam and may just result in studies.
- * Veterans Day--Mandates **Nov. 11** as a school holiday--prohibits holding any classes on that day. Some districts must renegotiate the school calendar.
- * Paper Work Reduction--Formation of a task force to form recommendations to reduce the paper work required of education employees.
- * Accountability concerns regarding Charter Schools and certain scholarship programs
- * Law requiring districts to implement an indoor air quality program.
- * The possibility that all extra-curricular activities will have the same type of eligibility requirements that interscholastic programs currently have.
- * The Teacher Sunshine Connection Technology initiative is proceeding
- * Laptop technology is receiving interest and some pilots may result.

Late last week, the House Speaker and Senate President announced Budget Conferees. The members of the various conference committees are schedule to meet over the next week to resolve the remaining difference in the Appropriations bills. Below is the membership of the Education subcommittee:

Senate Education Conferees

Sen. JD Alexander, Chair
Sen. Larcenia Bullard
Sen. Lee Constantine
Sen. Jim King
Sen. Ron Klein
Sen. Evelyn Lynn
Sen. Les Miller
Sen. Stephen Wise

House Education Conferees

Rep. Joe Pickens, Chair
Rep. David Rivera
Rep. Frank Attkisson
Rep. Dennis Baxley
Rep. Anitere Flores