

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE
Emergent Design and Development
AUGUST 8, 2006

Welcome back to school! Throughout the summer, we have been monitoring the progress of the bills as they have been delivered to the Governor.

The 2006 Legislative session was considered by most observers, to be a very good one for education. Some are predicting that we will not be as successful in the next session, although the next two years will still good to education.

All 60 bills relating to Education have been sent to the Governor. He has acted on each of these bills. He vetoed one bill (SB 1438), signed into law fifty-eight bills, and allowed one bill (HB 1559) to become law without his signature.

In a recent speech, Representative Joe Pickens stated that the K-20 budget approached \$ 31.7 billion which is more that the total state budget 10 years ago.

The Governor vetoed 60 items worth over \$56 million dollars of education appropriations. These items were identified as "turkeys" or were items that he did not agree with. Many of these items were not in his initial recommended budget.

Looking back upon the 2006 session, I have identified several highlights, both good and bad:

1. The proposal to send the class-size issue back to the voters failed to gather the Legislative support. (More on this issue later in the newsletter.)
2. Municipalities, Universities, Community Colleges, and Educational Consortia may co-sponsor Charter Schools, by working with new Commission which was established by the Legislature. (The Florida Schools of Excellence Commission.)
3. High School and Middle School reform was addressed in House Bill 7087. This Bill was explained in depth in May newsletter (promotion requirements, remediation requirements, accelerated courses, many accountability issues, and personnel issues were included).
4. House Bill 772 also covered a multitude of issues. This Bill was also covered in depth in the May newsletter (school attendance, business and community program, school progress, professional academies, SES, and school wellness programs).

5. The voucher issue, created as a result of the Supreme Court ruling, was not solved by the Legislature, as they were unable to gather the votes necessary to send this issue back to the voters. Some predict further challenges to vouchers, including a challenge of the McKay Scholarship.
6. School construction received a huge increase in funding, with the addition of \$1.1 billion for relief caused by the class-size amendment. Even with this increase, districts will still face a major shortfall in space for students, especially when we begin to count class-size at the classroom level.
7. The effort to force School Districts to expend 65% of revenue at the classroom level failed to gather enough support to become law.
8. House Bill 7103 addressed many accountability issues related to charter schools. This Bill also establishes timelines in law.
9. School Districts are facing huge increases in cost, with lower coverage, for property/casualty insurance. Districts had hoped for Legislature would find a way to allow the use of certain construction funds for this purpose. (This did not happen.)
10. When Governor Bush leaves office, it is estimated that the State of Florida will have a surplus in excess of \$6 billion dollars. This will be the largest surplus ever left by an outgoing governor.

HOT ITEMS IN EDUCATION DISCUSSIONS IN TALLAHASSEE

1. The Florida Legislature is expected to make citizen initiated Constitutional amendments harder to pass. This would probably be accomplished by increasing the necessary passing rate to 60% instead of the current 50% plus one.
2. The educator shortage will continue to grow in numbers and in the concern of Legislators. Given the shortage of 31,000 teachers reported by the DOE this year, imagine the shortage in three years when class size must be calculated at the classroom level. This change could increase the shortage by as much as an additional 20,000 educators. Add to these concerns the growing number of retirements, the growth rate of Florida, teacher drop-outs, and DROP participants and the need for a quick solution grows and grows.
3. Vocational education, apprenticeship programs, work study programs, etc. will once again be on the front burner in Tallahassee. What is the solution for

students that do not choose to graduate under current programs or do not choose to continue education under current options?

4. With a new governor coming on board (whether Democrat or Republican), I believe that we can expect to see the Legislature flex its muscle. Governor Bush enjoyed an era when the Legislature did most of what he desired. Those days may be over for the next Governor of Florida.

5. " USA Today" carried an article in the July 12th issue concerning the College Board's Center for Innovative Thought. This article unveiled a nation-wide effort to increase teacher salaries by 20% to 50%. I have seen no reaction to this in Tallahassee.

6. The Florida educator merit pay plan (STAR) will stay and the dollars will increase so that more teachers are eligible to receive this bonus. There is continued concern regarding assessments for subjects not covered in FCAT exams.

7. With more and more research being reported regarding the importance of staff development programs for educators, it is hoped that more money will be allocated for this activity. I would expect that increased PD funding will result in tighter regulations regarding the type of activities which will be allowed. (This year staff development and technology dollars were rolled into the FEFP formula.)

8. Educators can expect to see continued concern over the Florida graduation rate. Florida requires 24 credits to graduate, as does Alabama, South Carolina, and West Virginia). This is the highest credit requirement of all states in the U.S.

9. It appears that Legislative Committee meetings will start much later than they did this year. This is normal in an election year when many Legislators and the Governor's office are involved in the election process. Committee meetings are likely to begin in November. As soon as Committee Chairman and the Committee calendar are set, we will send them to you.

Over-all it was a great year .. best of luck with the 2006-07 school year!