

To: Council About Parochiaid
From: Cara Marie Dobie
Date: December 4, 2015
Re: Legislative Update

Governor Snyder Signs New Teacher Evaluations into Law

Governor Rick Snyder signed SB 103 (now PA 173) into law on November 5. The bill will take immediate effect and requires school districts to select or develop an evaluation tool that evaluates teachers and administrators based on student growth. When the 2017-2018 school year begins, 25% of teacher evaluations will be based on student growth. By the 2018-2019 school year, that margin will be increased to 40%. The student growth will be measured in two different ways. In grades where students take state assessments, 40% of their growth will be based on their scores from those tests. In grades where students do not take state assessments, 50% of student growth will be based on research-based growth measurements or by recording the scores that students receive on alternative assessments. After factoring student growth into teacher evaluations, teachers will be assigned an effectiveness rating. The ratings are highly effective, effective, minimally effective and ineffective. If a teacher receives three consecutive “ineffective” ratings, then they will be fired. A similar provision exists for school administrators as well.

Update on Detroit Public Schools

Governor Snyder’s plan to pay off the Detroit Public Schools’ (DPS) debt has come under fire recently. Under the governor’s plan, DPS would be split into two districts. The DPS would exist only to pay off the district’s current debt, while the newly formed Detroit Community School District (DCSD) would be for educating the students. The makeup of the legislative package is as follows:

- Creating a new, traditional public school district -- the Detroit Community School District -- to teach students, with the current Detroit Public Schools district existing only to address the debt. All students, employees, contracts, employee benefits and assets will move to the new district, which will be governed by a seven-member board initially appointed by the Governor and the Detroit mayor, switching to elected members. An all-elected board would be in place by 2021.
- Creating a Detroit Education Commission, appointed by the mayor and governor, which engages with the community and hires a chief education officer.

- Driving academic achievement and increasing access to quality schools by allowing the chief education officer to, with community input, hold low-performing schools accountable and reward and increase the number of high-performing schools.
- Calling for the chief education officer to operate a common enrollment system with common forms, enrollment periods and notification dates that will help parents identify and evaluate their school options and choose schools that best fit their children's needs.
- Partnering with the city's current Financial Review Commission to oversee finances until the debt is repaid in full.

Although Governor Snyder maintains that the package is in the best interest of students, there is a widespread opposition to it. On November 19, Tonya Allen, the president and CEO of the Skillman Foundation said that, "a better use of its money would be for student services following a Detroit Public Schools debt solution rather than putting up some of the \$715 million Governor Snyder and others are seeking in state appropriations." This disagreement on the use of state funds has largely stalled the package in the Senate. On December 1st, the governor pulled the bill's introduction to the Senate due to lack of support. Governor Snyder has not ruled out taking funds from other school districts around the state to pay for the debt, angering some Republican legislators.

On the other side of the aisle, the Democrats are calling for the funds to be taken from the U.S. tobacco settlement or the rainy day fund, something Republicans oppose. Many Republican lawmakers do not trust that DPS will handle the funds correctly.

This gridlock has caused the situation in Detroit to deteriorate. On December 1st, three DPS schools were forced to close when teachers refused to show up for class in what is being called a sickout. Students and teachers want to see the DPS remain in operation, fearing that the creation of a new district will perpetuate the resource problem.

Helpful links:

http://www.michigan.gov/snyder/0,4668,7-277-57577_60279-353475--,00.html

<http://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2015/12/01/detroit-teacher-absences-force-school-closures/76618414/>

Third Grade Reading Passes the House

On October 15, 2015, HB 4822, sponsored by Rep. Amanda Price (R-Park Township), was passed in the House by a vote of 57-48. The bill establishes a plan that would aid students who are struggling to meet reading proficiency levels and enable schools to retain students who do not meet the 3rd grade reading proficiency levels. House Democrats were not supportive of the bill because of the retention policy. Representative Christine Greig (D-Farmington Hills), said that the bill needed to include student's parent's voice when a school decides to retain a student. Republicans countered that the retention provision was necessary, seeing as Michigan currently ranks 38th nationally in fourth grade reading levels. Furthermore, they argue that the purpose of the HB 4822 is not to retain children, but to provide schools with the tools necessary to intervene and help students before they reach the third grade.

To ensure passage, five Republican amendments were added. This allowed the Republicans to pass the bill while only receiving support from three Democrats. The Democratic legislators were Rep. Santana (D-Detroit), Rep. Brinks (D-Grand Rapids), and Rep. Schor (D-Lansing). With only three Democrats supporting the bill, Republican leadership voiced their frustration with the Democrats, calling out Rep. Zemke specifically, saying that he had misled the Republicans by claiming to have support for HB 4822 and then opposing it. Only six Republican legislators voted in opposition to the bill.

As the calendar year draws to a close, HB 4822 will soon be presented to the Senate. While some Senators are confident that it will pass, Senator Meekhof believes the bill is being rushed. He says that he would like to see the bill worked on and improved before it is presented to the Senate, claiming that this would be a better course of action than rushing it to the Senate for a vote just because 2015 is coming to an end. Meekhof is comfortable with the bill as is, but he sees no need to rush the vote.

State Board of Education-News

The State Board of Education was opposed to the provision in HB 4822 that required school districts to retain 3rd graders if they did not meet the state's reading standards. Those in opposition argued that the provision be optional instead of mandatory, citing that there is currently little data on how retention affects students. Board member Eileen Lappin Weiser (R-Ann Arbor) is in favor of the mandatory retention. The mandatory retention provision of HB 4822 was the issue that split the board. Despite the split, the board did praise the other strategies for improving reading proficiency.

In other board news, the new standards for science curriculum will be ready for adoption at the next meeting. The new standards for social studies curriculum will not be ready for approval until January. There is a possibility that the board adopts new standards for the preparation of world language teachers at the next meeting as well. The new standards would be in line with the standards laid out by the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages and would include specific elements for teachers in the state of Michigan.

Michigan Cyber Charter Schools Outperform Those in Other States

Nationally, cyber charter schools generally underperform compared to traditional high schools. Its students are, on average, 180 days behind in math and 72 days behind in reading. In Michigan however, this is not the case. A report issued by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University (CREO) stated that students in Michigan's cyber schools were on par with the performance of the state's traditional high schools. In reading, the cyber schools actually outperformed the traditional schools, but it was by a statistically insignificant amount. In math, the cyber schools underperformed, but once again it was by a statistically insignificant amount. Jared Burkhart, executive director of the Michigan Council of Charter Schools Authorizers, said that he hoped the state would continue to support cyber schools in an effort to maintain the high level of standards and performance.

To note, the only other state with similar results was Wisconsin. Its cyber schools outperformed Michigan's in reading, but Michigan's cyber schools outperformed Wisconsin's in math.

M-STEP Test Results

The scores from last spring's Michigan Student Test for Educational Progress (M-STEP) have been released to the public. The M-STEP takes the place of the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP) and is far more rigorous. Only 12% of fourth graders scored proficient in reading, the lowest scoring group in the state. On the other hand, 50% of third graders scored proficient in English language arts, the highest scoring group in the state. While these scores are low, they are not as low as some people expected.

The M-STEP is far more rigorous than the MEAP and moves away from multiple choice questions towards more written responses that are meant to test students' critical thinking ability, resulting in lower scores across the state. In science, 23% of seventh graders and 29% of eleventh graders were proficient. In social studies, 22% of fifth graders, 30% of eighth graders, and 44% of eleventh graders were proficient in the subject area. Venessa Keeler, the deputy superintendent of accountability services for the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), explained that the students in lower grade levels did better in many subject areas, specifically math, than the older students because they have had more exposure to the new system and standards than those above them. While math and reading standards have been raised, science and social studies standards have not. The MDE is in the process of raising science and social studies standards and should have them in place in the near future. This raising of standards draws concern, specifically for science, since the proficiency scores for students came back extremely low, despite having less rigorous standards. Keeler argues, however, that the standards must be raised to ensure student success down the road.

Keeler and others have said that the scores from the first M-STEP should only be looked at in the state-wide context. The scores should not be used to compare districts, something that will happen in 2017 after two test cycles have gone by, but rather to measure how the state of Michigan has done and where it can improve its education system. Being the first set of data, scores should be treated as a baseline and should be used to ensure that teachers and administrators are able to prepare and educate students effectively with the new, higher standards that are now in place.

Aside from M-STEP data, ACT data was also released. The data showed an increase of the average ACT score statewide from 19.8 in 2014 to 20.2 in 2015. Math was the only subject to decrease in the last year, with the average score going from 19.6 in 2014 to 19.5 in 2015. Next year, Michigan will be switching to the SAT as the state-administered exam because it will cut down on testing time.

Special Education Reform

On October 16, it was announced that Governor Snyder has put together a Special Education Reform Task Force (SERTF). The team is comprised of 16 people and is headed by Lieutenant Governor Brian Calley. After touring the state and reporting his findings, Calley concluded that there is a “significant need to revamp the system”. He believes that Special Ed students should no longer be secluded or restrained from interacting with their fellow students. Changes will include structural and legislative reform recommendations. Governor Snyder stipulated that the SERTF must have recommendations by the end of this year.

SB 442 & SB 0561- Veto Threat

On November 13, Governor Snyder threatened to veto SB 442, sponsored by Sen. Mike Green (R-Mayville) and its companion bill SB 0561, sponsored by Sen. Arlan Meekhof (R-West Olive). SB 442 was crafted in response to the increased worry of gun violence in schools. The bill, if enacted, would disallow the open carry of pistols in public schools, but would allow those with a concealed pistol permit (CPL) to carry in schools. Governor Snyder has been opposed to this bill from the start, saying that this kind of decision should be left up to the individual school districts. He argues that because Michigan is such a diverse state, the government should not impose a one size fits all bill, rather the superintendents and school boards should be left to decide whether or not guns, whether concealed or openly carried, can be allowed in their schools.

Senator Mike Green (R-Mayville), the sponsor of the bill disagrees with Governor Snyder, claiming that SB 442 is a compromise. When asked about the governor’s opposition, Sen. Green said that Governor Snyder has yet to try and work with Senate Republicans in altering the bill. Sen. Green and the other supporters of the bill would be open to work with the governor in an effort to craft the bill more to his liking, but Governor Snyder has yet to make an effort to do so.

Two cases have been brought to Michigan circuit courts about guns in schools. One judge ruled that a school district could not ban open carry while the other judge ruled that districts could ban open carry. Both rulings are going to appellate courts for appeal. If Governor Snyder wants to have the issue resolved on a case-by-case basis by the individual school districts, then the issue must be resolved in the courts first.