



SCHOOL EQUITY CAUCUS

Making a difference for the public school children of Michigan

121 W Allegan • Lansing, Michigan 48933
www.schoolequitycaucus.org
schoolequitycaucus@gmail.com
269-806-6159

March 27, 2019

Dear Colleagues:

I hope this newsletter finds you well, with the prospect of spring weather ahead...and no more snow days! The legislature has already headed out on Spring Break; here's a quick look at some of the latest news:

1. **Welcome, Adam!**

We are very pleased to announce that Adam Zemke is joining our team as a legislative liaison for the School Equity Caucus! Adam is recently "retired" from the Michigan House of Representatives following the completion of three terms representing the Ann Arbor area. For the term most recently completed, he served as the House Democratic Caucus Chair and was the Vice Chair of the House Education Reform Committee.

We are very much looking forward to having someone with Adam's experience and connections work on our behalf as we interact with legislators and the governor's office!

2. **Governor's Budget Proposal Recap**

Governor Gretchen Whitmer released her first budget earlier this month calling for increased state revenue (through a tax on gasoline) and more money dedicated to education. Additionally, the governor's proposal called for implementing certain recommendations from last year's School Finance Research Collaborative report, including additional reimbursement for students receiving special education services and more money for at-risk programs. For a more detailed rundown, please refer to the Caucus Information Alert sent out on March 5.

Both the Senate and House K-12 Appropriations Committees have now begun the process of preparing their own budget proposals. The Senate's will be released first, and is expected out by the end of April. Both committees have also taken the opportunity to hear a detailed presentation from the State Budget Office (representing the governor) and ask questions on many aspects of the governor's plan including the gas tax proposal, the governor's 1.5x foundation allowance increase proposal (instead of 2x), and more.

We will keep you updated as the process moves forward!

3. Educator Evaluation Bills Head to the Senate Floor

The Senate Education Committee has voted two bills out of committee that would address the percentage of student growth and performance measures used in educator evaluations. Under current law, that percentage increases to 40% this year. Sponsored by Sen. Horn, SB 122 (for teachers) and SB 202 (for administrators) would delay the increase in this percentage for one year, keeping the percentage at 25% for the current school year. The House also has similar bills in the works (HB's 4221 and 4222, sponsored by Reps. Alexander and VanSingel, respectively), but the Senate bills have moved farther to this point.

Since the Senate bills have passed out of committee, they now move to the Senate floor. If approved there, they will head over to the House where they must pass through the House Education Committee, the House Ways and Means Committee, and then pass the full House before being sent to the governor.

Obviously, there is a long way still to go before the bills become law, and given where we stand in the calendar, time is short. Therefore, districts should make plans to use the 40% amount in evaluations this year, and then decide whether to make adjustments if and when the 25% option comes through.

4. Snow Day Legislation Also Moving Slowly

With the prospect of more snow days hopefully behind us, there is better clarity on the issues facing many school districts regarding minimum numbers of school days for this year.

HB 4206 (sponsored by Rep. Frederick) would address some of the need for making up days by "excusing" districts from making up those days when the governor had declared a state of emergency (as happened, for instance, at the end of January). Additionally, the bill would drop the minimum percentage for attendance when snow days are made up from 75% to 60% in order for those days to count toward the state-required minimums.

The bill has passed the House Education Committee and is currently sitting in the House Ways and Means Committee. It must also pass out of that committee before it can be considered by the full House. From there, it would also need to go through similar steps (minus the Ways and Means Committee) in the Senate before being able to be presented to the governor.

A similar bill, SB 113 sponsored by Sen. Ananich, has been introduced on the Senate side, and is sitting in the Senate Committee on Education and Career Readiness.

As with the evaluation bills discussed above, it is unclear when – or even if – these bills will be approved. Therefore, districts should make plans to make up the days that exceed the "forgiven" limit (or prepare for the financial impact of reduction in their state aid). If the bill makes it through the legislative process, these plans could be scrapped; however, it is impossible to say at this time with any certainty that the bill will become law.

5. New Ways and Means Process

The two preceding items have both referenced a new committee in the House of Representatives this term – the House Ways and Means Committee. The concept was introduced for this term by the new Speaker of the House, Rep. Lee Chatfield, as part of a new committee process requiring two committees to approve bills before they reach the full House floor.

Under this process, any bill passed from a committee that contains additional spending will also need to pass the House Appropriations Committee. If a bill emerges from a committee that would result in a change in criminal penalties, it will also need to be approved by the House Judiciary Committee. All other bills (save some coming from the Government Operations Committee) will need to pass through the new Ways and Means Committee.

Last week HB 4162 (sponsored by Rep. Reilly) was one of the first to follow this new process. This bill would eliminate the WorkKeys assessment as part of the Michigan Merit Exam and passed the House Education Committee by a comfortable 13-2 vote. However, in a hearing in front of the Ways and Means Committee, new opposition surfaced which had not been raised during the Education Committee's consideration of the bill. This opposition may ultimately spell trouble for the bill's prospects, and illustrates how difficult it can be to move a bill all the way through the legislative process.

6. Other Legislation to Watch

A healthy number of bills have now been introduced through the first three months of the legislative session, but the bills discussed in previous items are the only significant ones that have moved forward out of their initial committee.

Here is brief list of some other bills being watched:

- HB 4075 (sponsored by Rep. Miller) – This bill would expand the permissible uses of sinking funds to include the purchase of school buses. The School Equity Caucus has consistently advocated for this logical extension of the uses of a sinking fund.
- HB 4087 (Hornberger) – This legislation would allow for pre-Labor Day starts, while prohibiting school from being in session on Mondays and Fridays in August. It also preserves the current waiver process for year-round/balanced calendar options.
- HB 4369 (Johnson) – This bill would remove the restriction on pre-Labor Day starts altogether, thereby returning more flexibility to schools in determining their start date.
- HB 4088 (Hornberger) – Mandates the popular election of ISD boards.
- HB 4125 (VanSlingel) – Would undo the lame duck action that reduced the percentage of income tax receipts earmarked for the School Aid Fund, and instead directed these monies to the Michigan Transportation Fund (for roads) and the newly-established Renew Michigan Fund. This is obviously a high-priority piece of legislation for schools in Michigan, but its prospects are unknown with the discussions that are underway on the budget for next year.
- SB 25 (McBroom) – Would provide for regional election of members of the State Board of Education.

Other bills in the hopper span a broad spectrum of topics ranging from evaluation, Michigan Merit Curriculum modifications, dental screening for incoming kindergarteners, and the ability of school staff to carry pepper spray and tasers on school grounds. We will keep you updated as this and other legislation moves forward.

That's all for now! Please be sure to contact us at any time with questions or concerns.

Here's hoping you have a safe and restful Spring Break!



Dirk Weeldreyer
Executive Director
(269) 806-6159
schoolequitycaucus@gmail.com