

MONDAY LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

APRIL 17, 2017

BUDGET

HOUSE:

- The House budget increases K-12 education funding by only \$251 million statewide.
- The local funding increase of \$93 million statewide is provided by allowing the local discretionary .748 mills to capture the increase in the tax rolls.
- By using the rolled back rate in the RLE, the House does not take advantage of a potential for an increase of \$535 million statewide for public schools.
- Under the House Bill, **Pinellas would receive a decrease in funding of \$762,886.** This reflects a projected loss of 172 students next year.
- The BSA **decreases** by \$27.04
- The budget contains **\$200 million for Hope Schools and another \$200 million for Best and Brightest.**

SENATE:

- The Senate budget increases K-12 education funding by \$790 million statewide, largely by allowing funding through maintaining the Required Local Effort (RLE) at last year's level. It also allows districts to capture the increased funding from the .748 discretionary mills.
- Under the Senate Bill, **Pinellas would receive an increase of \$19.7 million.**
- The BSA **increases** by \$134.22.
- No funding is yet provided for Hope Schools or Best and Brightest. However, several lead Senators have said they are open for compromise on both issues. This will be part of the Conference Committee negotiations.

OUTCOME?: The Speaker of the House has said consistently that the House would never raise taxes. He considers the Senate position on the RLE to be a tax increase. Without the \$535 million in the Senate RLE position, the budgets are about the same in total dollars in the FEFP. The Senate budget provides only \$162 million in new state dollars. The House provides \$158 million in new state dollars.

If the House prevails on the RLE issue, negotiators will have to scramble to find funding to get to a true one or two percent per student funding increase.

Negotiations begin this week, but they become serious next week and even over the weekend of April 29 and 30^t. The budget has to be agreed upon and printed by May 2 for the session to end on time on May 5.

TREND: One theme running through the potential 2017-18 budget is distributing funding directly to employees or entities rather than through school board budget processes or collective bargaining. This is more prevalent in the House budget than the Senate, but the Senate appears to be open to the concept. Examples include the \$200 million dollars for an expansion of the Best and Brightest program in the House and another \$200 million for the new Schools of Hope.

SHARING OF 1.5 MILLS: (SB 376 and HB 5103) Both sides have proposals to mandate that school boards share local capital outlay millage with charter schools. The Senate bill is slightly better but neither restores the 1.5 to 2.0 mills. The House provides \$100 million in its budget for charter school capital outlay; the Senate provides \$75 million. By formula, the state funds would be provided before calculating the amount that districts would be required to distribute to charter schools. The House also allows districts to subtract debt before a dollar figure for distribution would be finalized. Of course, Pinellas has little or no debt which would in effect penalize the district for its historical conservative pay-as-you go policy.

TESTING BILLS: (SB 926 and HB 773) Neither side has passed a testing reform bill. The Senate Bill would make significant changes supported by school superintendents and school boards. It would make VAM optional, eliminate several state mandated end-of-course exams, allow for pencil and paper tests, provide for a study of using the SAT and /or the ACT in lieu of the state FSA, and shorten the testing window. The House bill does very little and has not moved very far into the process. It is possible that no testing reform bill will pass, or that it will become part of the negotiated final deal.

BEST AND BRIGHTEST: The House has funding and policy in its budget and legislation. The Senate is open to the House issues and has a similar bill on its Education Appropriations Subcommittee on Tuesday. Both expand the program to include principals. Details may be worked out in conference.

HOPE SCHOOLS: The House has the bill that mandates using high performing charter school companies to create charter schools within five miles of a school in an emergency situation. The House seeks immediate implementation of this program. The charter schools would compete with existing schools as the “failing” schools would remain open.

OTHER BILLS:

RECESS: (SB 78 and 67) The Senate has passed its version of the “recess” bill that mandates 20 minutes a day of recess outside of the Physical Education, (PE) mandate for grades K-5. The House version has not yet gotten to the floor for a vote, but it requires 20 minutes a day through the time allotted to PE or other time. It would affect grades K-3 only.

FINANCIAL LITERACY: (HB 955 and SB 392) Bills that would require a one-half credit for financial literacy as a high school graduation requirement are moving on both sides. If passed, it would lower the student electives from 8 to 7.5 credits.

MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDY: (HB 293 and 360) Both sides have advanced bills creating a national study of middle school requirements and performance.

FLORIDA RETIREMENT SYSTEM: Proposed House legislation would mandate that all new employees enroll in the defined contribution plan eliminating the option of enrolling in the FRS defined benefit plan. The Senate appears to prefer leaving the enrollment options as there are. There will be an increase in the employer contribution to keep the system actuarially sound.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: (SB 436 and HB 303) Both sides have moved legislation to expand religious expression in schools and at school functions. The House bill has been substituted for the Senate Bill and is going back to the Senate. School Board attorney David Koperski has been following the issue and will provide an analysis of any bill that passes.

CHARTER SCHOOLS: Several bills friendly to charter schools are moving. No consensus has been reached but they are watching them closely.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS: (HB 989 and SB 1210) Both sides are moving legislation that would expand the opportunity for the public to challenge instructional materials adopted by school boards.

ANNUAL CONTRACTS FOR TEACHERS: The House has passed HB 373 that clarifies that school districts may not issue automatic renewals of annual contracts. The Senate has SB 856 moving through the process.

VIRTUAL INSTRUCTION: HB 833 is moving forward. The Senate has similar legislation. It does two positive things:

- The bill removes eligibility restrictions allowing choice to all students for their virtual education options.
- It includes blended learning for students who struggle in the online only environment and will allow for the facilitation of learning how to be successful in future online courses.

POST SECONDARY: HB 929 includes a governance study looking at the State College and district run Technical and Career centers. The study would be completed by October 2017. The Senate has passed SB 374, which is similar.

EDUCATION TRAINS: Each year, many bills are put together in one bill creating an education “trains”. This has not yet happened, but there is talk of this strategy being implemented again this year.