

Legislative Report – Ms. Filiaggi | January 2016

State Budget Update... Not surprisingly, the budget impasse continued another week with no indications that it was coming to an end. And the weekend snowstorm, with its subsequent cancellation of the voting session on Monday and the Governor's busy schedule did not help. The Senate last week did have a meeting with Governor Wolf, which indicates that at least some of the parties are talking, but the Senate chose to ignore **HB 1327**, the Fiscal Code bill the House amended and passed the week of January 11, 2016. As a recap, the bill includes the following:

PlanCon: adds PlanCon borrowing language; allows for an 18-month moratorium beginning February 15, 2016; creates a PlanCon Advisory Committee to develop a new and streamlined PlanCon program; requires PDE to provide information about each PlanCon project on their website and includes language to allow PDE to prioritize funding for those projects that have submitted required paperwork

Basic Education Funding: undoes the governor's distribution of BEF. The bill requires distribution of any new BEF dollars to be distributed through the formula recommended by the Basic Education Funding Commission.

Ready to Learn Grants: undoes the distribution of the Ready to Learn money to ensure that charter schools get the same funding that they did last year (totaling \$8 million), and the additional \$50 million is distributed to school districts pro rata based upon their share of the Ready to Learn dollars in 2014-15

Special Education: codifies the new special education funding formula that was put into place beginning in the 2014-15 school year. In addition, the bill would divert \$12 million intended to encourage investment in alternative forms of energy to natural gas infrastructure development, bar implementation of new proposed regulations for conventional oil and gas drilling in the commonwealth, and give the legislature more authority in determining how far Pennsylvania would go in complying with new federal regulations designed to limit greenhouse gas emissions.

2016-17 Budget – The governor is scheduled to provide his budget address on the proposed 2016-17 state budget on Tuesday, February 9.

In Other Legislative News...

Legislative Schedule – With only the Senate in Harrisburg last week, and only for two session days, things were pretty quiet on the legislative front.

Keystone Exam Implementation – In a unanimous vote, the Senate last week passed and sent to the Governor **SB 880**. The bill delays the implementation of the Keystone Exams as graduation requirements and the implementation of the project-based assessments until the 2018-19 school year. The bill also requires PDE to provide recommendations regarding alternatives to the Keystones within six months. Gov. Wolf has indicated he will sign the bill.

Other Legislative Action Last Week – In addition to passing SB 880, the Senate took the following actions last week: **Instructional Days: HB 158; amended and passed by the Senate, 49-0.** The bill would grant authority to the Secretary of Education to declare weather-, health- and safety-related emergencies on a local school, countywide or state basis, thereby providing more flexibility in meeting the 180-instructional day requirement without financial penalty. The Senate amended the bill with language that amends section 111 of the School Code to align with Act 153, which requires clearances to be obtained every five years. The bill requires concurrence by the House.

Legislative Schedule – On the Senate Calendar This Week: At this point, the only education-related bill on the Senate calendar this week is **HB 1552**, which likely will be held as a potential School Code vehicle for the eventual budget.

In National News... Child Nutrition Reauthorization – The Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, the latest iteration of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act and the Child Nutrition Act of 1966, has expired, and Congress is finally moving towards reauthorization. The highlights of the new bill include: * Delaying the shift to Target 2 sodium levels until July 1, 2019 and requiring a study to be conducted to determine whether science supports further reductions in sodium levels and if suppliers will be able to provide food that meets the restricted targets. * Reducing the whole grain requirement from 100% to 80%, acknowledging that hardship in finding acceptable products still exists in some areas and providing schools with some flexibility in their grain offerings. * Studying the impact of the a la carte restrictions and provide the USDA with acceptable exceptions to the a la carte restrictions. * Requiring the CDC and USDA to develop guidance for the use and safety of salad bars and sharing tables.

Op-Ed: Measuring Students by Test Scores – In her blog on education, *Washington Post* writer Valerie Strauss republishes a piece on the testing-equals-civil rights issue written by Steven Singer, a veteran Nationally Board Certified Teacher in Pennsylvania teaching near Pittsburgh in a school where 70 percent of students are minority students, and an even higher percentage of students come from low socioeconomic status households. According to Singer, standardized test scores are low, but creativity, passion and critical thinking skills are high. “As a middle school teacher, I’m well aware how our public schools judge our children, and it’s not by the content of their character. It’s by their standardized test scores,” he writes. “High scores mean you’re learning. Low scores mean you’re not. And if you’re not learning, that’s your teachers fault and we’re going to close your school or turn it into a charter. What’s worse, we’re going to do it because that ensures your civil rights. That’s the story anyway.” *Read the rest of the story: “Teacher: Kids Are Judged by Their Test Scores — Not by Their Character”* (from *The Washington Post*, 1/19/16).