

AMSC Legislative Update
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Capitol Services, Inc.

School Counselor Legislation

The School Counselor proposal has been introduced! HB 5868, introduced by Rep. Marie Donigan (D – Royal Oak) requires schools to achieve a student to counselor ratio of 250:1 and to implement the comprehensive guidance curriculum. Further, the bill designates that schools must use “qualified school counselors,” as defined under Department of Education rules.

Work can begin in earnest, as many education groups have already contacted AMSC and MSCA lobbyists with offers to “work together” on the legislation. This includes Representative Tim Melton’s (D – Pontiac) offer to look at the bill as a pilot for at-risk school districts (as yet to be defined). The next big step is to get a hearing in the House Education committee on the role of school counselors.

For now, AMSC should send a thank you letter to Rep. Donigan for introducing the bill, and another to Rep. Melton to urge him to support it.

Budgets Begin; School Aid Receives Big Increases

The Senate and House have introduced their budget bills for the FY 08 – 09 season, which must be passed by September 30. Unlike last year, most of the projected budget “holes” will be covered this year (at least at this point) by slightly higher-than-projected revenues.

Highlights of the Governor’s K-12 budget proposal include:

- Increasing the minimum foundation allowance to \$7420, an increase of \$216 per pupil (3%), and the basic foundation allowance to \$8541, an increase of \$108 per pupil (1.3%), with those districts in between receiving between \$108 to \$216 per pupil.
- Moving \$32 million from the Durant settlement, cash payments to which are now ending, to help districts replace large high schools with low academic achievement and high dropout rates with small high schools.
- Renaming the School Readiness Program as the Great Start Readiness Program and adding \$24 million to add around 7000 new slots at a per child allotment of \$3400. These programs target at risk four year olds.
- Maintaining At-Risk funding at \$310,457,000, the current funding level.
- ISD operational funding is increased by \$2.9 million to \$83.8 million. \$1.9 million is earmarked for providing technical assistance related to Michigan Merit curriculum to high schools not achieving AYP.

The School Aid bill begins in the Senate this year, with hearings having taken place before the Senate K-12 Subcommittee, which reported the bill to the full Appropriations Committee on March 13. Although subcommittee members heard remarks about many parts of the budget, including support for the increases in the school readiness program, (given that a number of districts are serving far more at risk four year olds than the state funding will cover), the funding was reduced below the Governor’s recommendation. The Senate subcommittee increased this funding merely by the \$4.7 million that the Governor had already proposed for the current budget year in a supplemental budget bill earlier this year, instead of the full \$24 million. \$4.7

million would increase the per pupil amount from \$3400 to \$3500 but not increase the number of children served.

Other major changes in the bill, which is SB 1107, included:

- Increasing the per pupil allowance increases by \$70 to \$140 per pupil; however, districts with foundation allowances of at least \$8433 per student would get an additional \$30 “cost of living increase”, effectively changing the range to \$110 to \$140 per student.
- Eliminating the provisions for smaller high schools and all day kindergarten but adding \$27 million for per-pupil infrastructure grants that could be used for paying debt, immediate building repairs or deposits into “sinking funds.”
- Eliminating Granholm’s proposed 30% reduction in foundation allowances for districts or public school academies that do not offer high schools.
- Reducing declining enrollment funding by \$5 million to \$15 million.
- Increasing funding for ISD’s by \$81.81 million (rather than \$83.81 million).

The Senate is expected to take up this and other appropriations bills in the full appropriations committee next week (the week of March 17) and possibly also send them over to the House. The House subcommittee may make changes that are more reflective of the Governor’s proposals.

Policymakers Looking at Extending Schooling

State policymakers, including the Governor and a number of legislators, are looking at the amount of education students receive prior to graduation. Early in a child’s education, the Governor is proposing eliminating the longstanding provision that allows districts to gain a full day FTE for a half day of kindergarten. Together with Representative Virgil Smith’s (D-Detroit) HB 4662, which would require children who are age 5 before December 1 to begin school, kindergarten will be essentially mandated. A phased-in version of this bill is expected to be reported out of the House Education Committee shortly. However, the legislation has been drawing opposition from Republican members on the committee, who question the financial impact on school districts as well as the impact on both local school district and parental control.

The Governor, the State Board of Education, and various legislators are still urging a change in the legal drop out age from 16 to 18, as was reported last month. Rep. LaMar Lemmons, Jr. (D-Detroit) has introduced HB 4042, which has been discussed by the House Education Committee. Senator Liz Brater (D-Ann Arbor) has introduced SB 11, which includes more details than HB 4042, including an economic hardship/family need exception and other educational options that could fulfill the requirement. There is general agreement that the current drop out age is most suitable in an agricultural/early industrial economy, rather than to the 21st Century. However, there is also agreement that meeting the needs of the cadre of students who would otherwise have dropped out will be very challenging. Some policymakers are arguing that we should anticipate and meet some of these challenges before changing the age.

Senate Passes Early Intervention Legislation

Senator Nancy Cassis (R-Novi), a former school psychologist, has been a long-time advocate in the legislature for K-3 prevention and intervention. She speaks of her efforts as part of a “SAVE the Children” initiative. Senator Cassis had a significant victory on her initiative recently, having passed SB 1039 through the Senate unanimously.

The legislation amends the School Code to permit intermediate school districts to develop and make available to their school districts and public school academies an early intervention model program for children in kindergarten through third grade. The program would be designed to inform teachers and other staff how to monitor individual pupil learning and how to provide support and learning strategies as soon as possible to avoid inappropriate referrals for special education services.

The model program would have to be research-based and include a support team available to the classroom teacher. Additionally, it would have to include literacy and numeracy supports, sensory motor development, behavioral supports, instructional consultation for teachers, and parent/school learning plans. ISDs that developed model programs under SB 1039 must notify their districts of its availability and inform them of any potential funding.

The bill passed the Senate on February 28, SB 1039 and has been sent to the House of Representatives, where it has been referred to the House Education Committee.

Proposal for New High School Test

A proposal for an additional test for high school students taking the Michigan Merit exam is making the rounds, with significant support from the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals. The “Work Force Readiness Certificate” appears to be that it would be added to the ACT and the Work Keys aspects of the test high school juniors now must take. The test is described as a rigorous assessment of the soft skills employers seek. The legislation, which will soon be introduced by Senator Ron Jelinek (R-Three Oaks) and Senator Mickey Switalski (D-Roseville), would remove some of the writing and math questions now in the Work Keys part of the test to keep it from going beyond the eight hour limit.