

BUDGET TO DOMINATE 2009 SESSION

With a state budget that has been cut nearly \$1 billion since being enacted July 1, lawmakers will be scrambling this year to meet even the most basic of state needs, including education and health care. Public education has been cut \$334 million – including a \$253 million general fund reduction and \$81 million in Education Improvement Act funding.

The House Ways and Means K-12 subcommittee has started work on the budget, but is not yet discussing numbers. The State Department of Education and the Education Oversight Committee have presented budget proposals to the subcommittee. From SDE, State Superintendent Jim Rex asked subcommittee members to consider the following:

- Restoration of Education Finance Act (EFA) funds cut from this year's budget totaling some \$209 million.
- A House/Senate joint resolution to provide local school districts and SDE flexibility to suspend state mandates that exceed federal ones, to transfer funds between line-item accounts and co-mingle funds regardless of source.
- Temporarily freezing state funding for teacher salaries at FY 2009 levels by suspending next year's state cost-of-living raise for teachers. Automatic step

increases in pay based on teacher longevity would not be affected, and local raises would remain a local decision.

The SDE and EOC are recommending significant changes to proviso 1A.39 concerning technical assistance under the Education Accountability Act. SDE is adding language to provide for the development of a system of leveled technical assistance to below average and at-risk schools. New language also allows SDE to identify priority schools based on the severity of not meeting report card criteria and provides a specific amount for working with schools identified as priority. Finally, SDE calls for the department-supervised reconstitution of schools identified as most severely underperforming.

The EOC's recommended technical assistance changes focus on "persistently underperforming schools" requiring, among other things, that SDE determine if a state of emergency exists for such a school and allowing a student at a persistently underperforming school to transfer to another school within or without the district and the local revenue of the sending district (equal to local revenue of receiving district) must follow the student.

LOCAL DISTRICT FLEXIBILITY

SCSBA's membership at the December Delegate Assembly adopted a resolution for prompt legislative action in 2009 to provide school districts with maximum funding and program flexibility in the current budget year in order to manage and protect from further erosion core instructional and operational services to students. SCSBA is working with SDE, education groups and the House leadership for a joint resolution to provide maximum flexibility to districts in the current budget year. SCSBA will provide more details as this effort progresses. In the meantime, it is important that districts share with their legislators

the need for flexibility as well as examples of where it would be useful in the current year. Contact SCSBA if your district would like a sample flexibility board resolution to adopt and share with its delegation.

EDUCATION COMMITTEES

On the heels of the November General Election and with numerous new faces in the House and Senate, each body's respective Education Committee has undergone significant changes. In the House, Rep. Phil Owens is the new Education Committee chairman,

Continued on back of page

Continued from front of page

and committee members include Reps. Rita Allison, Mike Anthony, Don Bowen, Lester Branham, Robert Brown, Joseph Daning, Jerry Govan, Carl Gullick, Nikki Haley, Harold Mitchell, Jimmy Neal, Ted Pitts, B.R. Skelton, Don Smith, Jim Stewart, Bill Whitmire (K-12 subcommittee chair) and Bill Wylie.

In the Senate, Sen. John Courson continues as Education Committee chairman, and members include Senators Ralph Anderson, Tom Davis, Mike Fair, Larry Grooms, Wes Hayes, Darrell Jackson, Phil Leventis, Joel Lourie, Gerald Malloy, Larry Martin, Shane Massey, John Matthews, Harvey Peeler, Luke Rankin, Greg Ryberg and Nikki Setzler.

BILLS OF NOTE

In November and December, House and Senate members pre-filed bills dealing with a number of education-related issues. See SCSBA's legislative website at www.scsba.org for all legislation in 2009 impacting on public schools.

Education issues will include funding and program flexibility to school districts to deal with current budget cuts (a legislative priority for SCSBA), education funding reform (another SCSBA priority), comprehensive tax reform, consolidation, and school choice including charter schools, vouchers and tuition tax credits.

As a brief preview of pre- and recently filed legislation, **H.3107** would establish a \$200 per child income tax credit for books and supplies for families who send their children to private schools or who home school. **H.3102** would

require a per-district minimum 10,000-student membership in order to receive state funding. **H.3180** would give districts flexibility to go to a four-day school week. **S.143** establishes the SC School Facilities Infrastructure Act. **S.249** would compel city and county planning commissions to work with local school districts in determining whether a planned land development project will impact on the schools' ability to provide services to the additional student population. **S.240** amends current impact fee laws to include public education facilities within the definition of "public facilities." **H.3146**, **S.12** and **S.182** involved comprehensive tax reform. **H.3181** amends the Education Finance Act, combining the numerous current funding lines and requiring that all funds "follow the child" to the school level.

Finally, both the House and Senate have announced that they will be on unpaid furlough during the week of January 19.



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