

April 21, 2008

First off, welcome to spring! How wonderful it feels to come out of this long winter into such spectacular weather.

Now that the Legislature has passed the "Crossover" deadline, the House is holding hearings (and voting) on bills that originated in the Senate. Some of the noteworthy debates in the House recently have been about SB 539, relative to the cost of an adequate education, and HR 24, the petition to the U.S. Congress to commence impeachment proceedings. I wanted to share detailed information on SB 539 this month (borrowing most of the detail from the "blurb" that was written in the House Record).

SB 539, relative to the cost of an adequate education and provision of fiscal capacity disparity aid, fulfills the state's constitutional obligation to *cost* an adequate education. It does not, however, resolve *funding* for it - the bill will now go to the Finance Committee, which will take up that task.

SB 539 applied the recommendations of the Joint Legislative Committee on Costing an Adequate Education's final report to arrive at a costing methodology. Using the school approval standards to define an adequate education, the bill establishes a universal cost of \$3,450 per pupil per year, plus differential aid for special education students, English language learners, and students in schools with higher concentrations of low income students. The universal cost is based on an analysis of the costs of delivering instruction in nine subject areas, including an average student-teacher ratio of about 22 students; teachers with a BA at level 3 (the end of the probationary period), principal, guidance counselor, librarian, technology and coordinator, custodian (to provide a clean, safe school), curriculum materials, professional development, facilities operation and maintenance, and transportation (K-8, as required). The Education Committee recommended substituting a reading specialist at the K-8 level for the administrative assistant recommended in the report.

Because different students need different resources to receive the opportunity for an adequate education, differential aid includes \$1,856 per special education student and \$675 per English language learner, both based on average student loads per teacher. Based on a large body of research indicating that students from low income backgrounds (as identified by the federal free and reduced lunch, FRL, program) face greater educational challenges, that schools with higher concentrations of low income students have fewer resources to meet those challenges, and that these impacts affect all students in the school, the bill allots additional funds per FRL student at various FRL concentrations. The average per student total adequacy grant is \$4,685.

As unanimously endorsed by the Joint Committee, the bill includes a provision that FRL funds be used for evidenced-based enhancement programs such as pre- and full-day kindergarten, extended learning time, class size reduction, parental involvement, principal incentive programs, or curriculum enrichment, and that schools report on the

use of these funds. Applying recommendations of educators and economists, the bill states that districts will direct differentiated aid to the schools for which it is allocated.

In addition to adequacy aid, which constitutionally is based only on educational need, the bill addresses a district's fiscal capacity to raise local education money and allots additional money per pupil in municipalities (including state-approved charter schools) ranked in the bottom of equalized valuation per pupil and below the state average median family income. The bill also allots transition money for two years to municipalities which meet certain property value and income levels and receive 85% or less of their 2009 adequacy grants.

There will be more news about SB 539 to come, as the Finance Committee addresses funding of this costing determination. So please stay tuned.

As always, I'm happy to talk about this or any other bills you would like to discuss.

Regards,

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