

Alliance *News Flash*

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ALLIANCE for High Quality Education

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Quality Profile 2015

Budget Update

When the Senate finished its work on the budget, and the House rejected the Senate's multitude of changes, the stage was set for a conference committee to resolve the many differences between the two versions. Following long established tradition, the conferees are the Finance chair, Vice-Chair and ranking minority member of the two chambers: for the Senate, Senators Oelslager, Coley and Skindell; for the House, Representatives Ryan Smith, Schuring and Driehaus.

The committee met last Friday and, for the next several days, the conferees and leadership of both chambers will indulge in a concentrated period of horse trading, during which time they will attempt to determine which priorities to insist upon, which to sacrifice and which to compromise. All the while, members of the various caucuses will be lobbying their leaders and the conference committee members in a last ditch effort to effect desired changes and preserve coveted existing language, and appropriations dollars.

In some instances, the budget versions may support similar goals, but differ in how to reach those goals. In other cases, supporting language may be similar, but new information, new doubts, availability of additional resources, or simply the discovery of a new approach to a problem may produce a result that differs significantly from both initial versions.

Such may be the case with tangible personal property reimbursements in this budget. The Governor wanted to reduce TPP payments to districts up to a maximum of 2% of total state and local resources available to the district in each year of the biennium. The House rejected this idea and established a "hold harmless" provision that would guarantee every school district that it would receive no less money in FY2016 and FY2017 than it did in formula funding and TPP payments in FY2015. The Senate version is virtually identical, but several ideas have been floated that would accelerate the process, and insert the hold harmless concept into permanent law, in hopes

that it would be retained in future budgets.

In the end, the conference committee will produce a report to be sent separately to the two chambers for acceptance. Based upon that acceptance, a new budget plan will be put in place that will guide the spending of a combined \$70+ billion dollars of federal and state money over the two year period beginning July 1st.

In the past 96 hours, a persistent rumor has suggested that the two chambers are attempting to reach agreement on a change to state testing policy that would go well beyond the language of both versions. It calls for current state testing to be scrapped and for the Iowa Test of Basic Skills to be substituted in the budget for the current PARCC and AIR exams.

It is no secret that this year's tests have precipitated complaints about content, platform, question format, length of tests, etc., and many discussions among educators, legislators, ODE, etc., have resulted, with no consensus emerging. However, one thing is certain, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills was seldom mentioned, if ever. Hopefully, rational deliberation will prevail, and that rumor will not materialize. (Contact Barb Adams if you would like a copy of the 11 recommendations developed by the Alliance Accountability Task Group, in conjunction with members of House Education Chair Bill Hayes's Education Advisory Committee.)

We knew the budget was a potential landing place for changes in state testing policy, especially because the education community had not been able to reach a consensus. This latest development deserves our attention in these last few days, because the Iowa test has very little support among educators.

So, what can we do now?

As the budget debate approached, the Alliance had several major goals:

- ▶ Maintain the concept of guarantees (which the administration wants to eliminate, but both the House and Senate versions retain).



CALENDAR

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|---------------------------------|--|
| Wednesday,
June 24th | Executive Committee
9:30 a.m., BASA
Conference Room |
| Wednesday,
July 15th | Accountability Task Group
9:30 a.m. (TBD) |
| Wednesday,
July 22nd | Executive Committee
11:30 a.m., Brio's at Polaris
Carrera Room; 11:30 |

- ▶ Maintain the basic concepts involved in the FY2014, 2015 school funding formula; and fully fund it.

(Fully funding may never happen, but both the House and Senate versions reject the administration's original proposal and more closely resemble current law.)

- ▶ Continue TPP reimbursements, but look for an acceptable long term solution.

The House and Senate versions provide a hold harmless clause for TPP, but in temporary law. The Governor's permanent law proposal needs to be replaced with the House and Senate's concept.

- ▶ Establish the principle that no school district should receive less per pupil in state aid than chartered non-public schools receive from the combined totals for auxiliary services and administrative reimbursements. The concept is included in both versions, but the phase-in is more rapid in the House plan.

In your conversations with your legislators, we suggest you thank them for their efforts regarding the basic funding formula (as a means of providing consistency), retaining guarantees, pursuing a solution for TPP and establishing the hold harmless concept (while asking for permanent language), and support for the minimum per pupil amount (while preferring the House's more rapid phase-in).

Regarding testing, we ask that you get familiar with the list of recommendations and discuss the last two, specifically.

Of course, given that most conferees and legislative leaders have few, if any, Alliance members in their districts, we ask that you again attempt to make your legislators lobbyists and encourage them to advocate these positions with their colleagues.



Quality Profile – Fall 2015 Release

As the budget talks mercifully come to a close this month, our thoughts need to shift to the beginning of a new school year, and the second release of the Alliance's statewide "Quality Profile" project. Because there will be no state report card in September this year, we have an opportunity to use the profile as the focus of discussion in our communities.

We want to target the week of 9/14 for our statewide release and will, as we did last year, contact the major newspaper in your area announcing the statewide program. While we are suggesting the week of 9/14, you certainly can tailor the release to your district's needs.

We also will be participating in the annual fall Falton statewide survey as we have done in the past. While we have not yet finalized our questions for the survey, we want to address the profile in greater detail, and to

attempt to gauge the public's current attitudes toward testing and possible remedies.

Please let us know if you have any questions.

Tony and Jim

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