



Legislative Link

A Publication for the Members of the N.C. Association of School Administrators

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Budget Panel Hears Request for K-12 Schools

The Joint Appropriations Subcommittee on Education this week received the 2008-2009 expansion funding requests prioritized by the State Board of Education for the operation of the state's public schools. State Superintendent of Public Instruction June Atkinson presented the budget request, which totals \$385.7 million in requested new funds for public schools and reflects a 5 percent increase over the current year's public school budget.

Atkinson said the highest priorities from the funding request can be summarized in the following order:

- 1. Mentors** – \$37.8 million to fund a full-time mentor for every 15 newly hired teachers in their first through third year and for every 15 first- and second-year instructional support personnel.
- 2. Technology** – An additional \$12 million for full funding of the \$24 million statewide connectivity initiative for public schools that began in the 2007-08 year.
- 3. Comprehensive Support** – \$8 million to add 47 positions at the Department of Public Instruction (with several other positions being re-purposed) to implement comprehensive support services to all school districts, including initiatives in specific low-performing districts.
- 4. Resources for Special Populations** – Includes the following three separate but equally weighted funding requests:
 - **Academically & Intellectually Gifted** – Provide a 20 percent increase in the per-student funding factor at a cost of \$12.8 million.
 - **Disadvantaged Student Supplemental Fund** – \$86 million to reduce allotment ratios by two and thereby increase this funding for at-risk students statewide. Also would continue to hold harmless the 16 districts initially funded.
 - **Children with Disabilities** – \$40 million to expand services by moving toward funding these students at 230 percent of regular ADM funding.
- 5. Child Nutrition** – Provide \$20 million to cover the anticipated higher operational costs of implementing the state-mandated nutritional standards in elementary schools for 2008-09. Current estimates show that the future phase-in of new nutrition standards for middle and high schools each will cost an additional \$20 million as well.

The complete 2008-09 expansion budget request that the State Board has sent to both the Governor and the General Assembly may be viewed on NCASA's website at: <http://ncasa.net/associations/2410/files/SBESupplementalRequestFinal2008-09.xls>.

Atkinson said some items that are not in that budget request but are also high priorities for the State Board are efforts to move teacher salaries to the national average, as well as paying all school personnel appropriately, and providing the estimated \$107 million needed for ABC bonuses in 2008-2009. All salary issues usually are handled separately from other requests for expansion funding submitted by the State Board and other educational entities.

After hearing the SBE's main priorities, legislators on the committee asked several questions of Atkinson and Associate State Superintendent Philip Price. The questions included the following:

- Will the \$25.9 million requested for the increased cost of fuel and bus tires be adequate given that \$25 million or more in DPI reversion funds are being tapped to fund fuel costs in the current school year? Committee Co-Chairman Rep. Rick Glazier, D-Cumberland, asked that DPI provide a more up-to-date cost analysis of school transportation needs so that school districts will not be short-changed in funds needed to operate school buses.
- Where is the request to reinstate the public school sales tax refund, which took \$33.3 million away from school districts in 2006-07 and has resulted in similar losses for school districts each year since that time? This issue is the top budget priority for both the N.C. Association of School Administrators and the N.C. School Boards Association for 2008-09
- Why is \$3 million in expansion funding requested for Learn and Earn Online, since the program has a \$5.5 million reserve and has spent only roughly \$2.7 million to date to serve less than half the 20,000 students the program expected to serve in the 2007-08?
- Where will school districts find the proposed new teacher mentors, since the state faces an ongoing teacher shortage of 10,000 to 11,000 positions per year?

These and other questions will be part of the budget committee's deliberations as the House and Senate members work in the coming weeks to develop the education portion of the state budget proposal for 2008-09. This budget work is expected to move quickly once the legislative session convenes May 13. Governor Mike Easley is scheduled to unveil his proposal for the 2008-09 state budget during that first week of General Assembly activity.

Dropout Commission OKs Revised Legislative Proposals

The Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation this week met and finalized its recommendations to the 2008 General Assembly. The commission's 10 preliminary findings and recommendations, which were outlined in the April 18 edition of NCASA's *Legislative Link* newsletter, were revised into 11 recommendations that include four individual proposals for legislation to be introduced later this month. The major changes from the commission's preliminary recommendations and the ones it ultimately adopted this week, include the following:

- Eliminates the earlier proposed legislation directing the State Board of Education and the State Board of Community Colleges to develop a system for sharing information about students who have dropped out of public schools prior to high school graduation and who have enrolled in a community college GED, adult high school or adult basic education program.
- **Legislative Proposal 1: Communities in Schools Funds** – Revamps the earlier proposal on funding “graduation coaches” in high schools that fail to attain a 65-percent four-year cohort graduation rate for the 2006-07 school year. Instead of funding those graduation coaches as school personnel through the Department of Public Instruction, the new proposal calls for providing \$6,024,091 in recurring funds to Communities in Schools of North Carolina to provide 100 or more graduation coaches across the state in 2008-09.

- **Legislative Proposal 2: Study Raising the Compulsory Attendance Age** – Revised this proposal to require that the UNC Board of Governors study the impact of raising the public school compulsory attendance age from 16 to either 17 or 18 and report its findings by Nov. 15, 2008. The earlier proposal had encouraged the Department of Public Instruction to conduct this study.
- **Legislative Proposal 3: Re-Establish Commission on Dropout Prevention/Funds** – Combines several earlier legislative proposals into one that calls for re-establishing the Committee on Dropout Prevention to award \$5.5 million for 40 additional dropout prevention grants from among the initial grant applicants that were not funded this year and to fund a consultant to staff the committee and provide technical assistance to grant recipients.
- **Legislative Proposal 4: Continue the Dropout Prevention Commission** – Proposes extending the term of the current Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation so it may present an additional interim report by May 1, 2010 and final findings and recommendations before the convening of the 2011 General Assembly.

Recommendations Postponed on Charter School Facility Funding

The chairman of the House Select Committee on the Legal Aspects of Using Lottery Proceeds for Charter Schools announced this week that his committee will not meet again until the 2008 General Assembly session is completed and, therefore, will not send forward any recommendations for 2008 legislative action.

The committee has met twice this year and is beginning to delve into the legalities of providing state funds for lottery school facilities, in addition to the operational funds the charters now receive.

“The legal snare as I see it is how is the state’s interest protected when we put state money into a building that’s owned by a charter school,” Committee Chairman Rep. Winkie Wilkins, D-Person, was quoted as saying after this week’s meeting.

Currently, the state provides limited facility funding from the state lottery and the corporate income tax only to traditional public schools that are owned and operated by local boards of education, which are a legal subdivision of the state. Most charter schools are owned and operated by private, non-profit entities.

Arts Education Committee to Resume Work after Legislative Session

The Joint Select Committee on Arts Education is another committee that announced this week that it would not meet again until after the conclusion of the 2008 General Assembly session. The committee has started a comprehensive review of arts education in the state and is considering whether to recommend that arts education be required in the core curriculum for high school graduation rather than be offered only as an elective.

Future work by the committee will involve reports from superintendents, principals, teachers and others on how arts education is currently integrated into public schools and feedback from the arts community on their interaction with arts education in public schools.

For more information on issues contained in this newsletter or on other education policy matters, contact NCASA Assistant Executive Director Katherine W. Joyce at 919-828-1426 or kjoyce@ncasa.net.