



Senate Unveils Proposed Budget

April 7, 2009

The Senate unveiled their proposed budget Monday with votes expected this morning by the Senate Appropriations Committee. It is expected to face Senate floor votes Wednesday and Thursday.

The \$20.5 billion Senate budget proposal would make deep cuts in public education and would increase the average class size of public school classrooms by two students through the 2010-11 school year, at a savings of \$322 million annually.

"As a former teacher I will tell you this is a tough decision for me to make," said Sen. Linda Garrou, D-Forsyth, co-chairwoman of the Senate Appropriations Committee in a statement released by the Associated Press Monday.

Gov. Beverly Perdue has said she opposes such an idea, which would reverse several years of efforts to lower class sizes.

"The Senate made some good investments in what we know of its budget so far, but at this point in time Governor Perdue is troubled by the proposed increase in class size," said Perdue spokesman David Kochman in an Apr. 6 story by the News & Observer.

The Senate's proposed average increase of two students per class would mean the elimination of 6,200 teaching positions and a reduction in "the amount of individual attention our kids receive in the classroom," Kochman said.

According to the article, Garrou said the proposal is intended to be a temporary fix for the state's budget problems. Fewer teachers would be needed and she said those losses would likely occur through attrition.

The plan proposed by the Senate would order \$615 million in K-12 spending reductions, with \$60.5 million in the 2009-10 school year and \$64.5 million for 2010-11 cut from the Public School Building Capital Fund and shifted to school operational funding. The LEA flexibility cut of \$144 million in the Governor's proposal is reduced to \$9.4 million in the Senate's proposed budget, which includes language to allow more flexibility within public school funding allotments to help offset the cut.

The State would fund only one school system per county beginning in 2010-11 for annual savings of 11.4 million as part of the Senate's budget. An amendment to delete this proposal that could force the elimination of 15 city school districts is expected to be attempted on the Senate floor on Wednesday.

The Senate budget would enable state agencies and school districts to furlough employees and cut hundreds of state jobs; the plan would mean the layoff of 712 state workers and keeping another 910 positions vacant for the fiscal year starting July 1. The cuts would include 100 positions from N.C.'s Department of Public Instruction (DPI) in 2009-10 with another 200 jobs to be cut in 2010-11.

Gov. Perdue's proposed freeze on longevity payments is not in the Senate proposal, but the Senate did include her proposal for a salary step increase for teachers and principals. The proposed Senate budget eliminates ABC bonuses for the 2009-10 school year.

On a positive note, the Senate proposes \$200,000 for a new leadership academy for superintendents and principals, and their budget also calls for no pay decrease for teachers who become assistant principals as of July 1, 2009.