

**New Hampshire School Boards Association
Legislative Bulletin
November 27, 2007**



We hope you enjoyed a relaxing and bountiful Thanksgiving Holiday! Here is a brief update on some legislative activity from this past Fall.

Education Adequacy Commission

The *Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Costing an Adequate Education* has been meeting weekly on their charge to determine the cost of an adequate education. Work has focused on a review of costs associated with four specific content policy areas: teacher costs (salary, benefits, etc.), non-teacher costs (administration, guidance, etc.), special populations (special education, gifted & talented), and transition assistance for eleven districts that currently do not offer kindergarten. The committee will recommend that the state fully fund the placement of portable classrooms needed to offer kindergarten for the next three years, as well as extending the incentive program for kindergarten construction aid at 75% beyond the current expiration date of July 2008. (NHSBA offered comments concerning the Associations resolutions in support of kindergarten and the state's need to fully fund any requirements placed on districts as a result of mandating kindergarten – see <http://www.nhsba.org/110507TestimonyonKindergarten.asp>) The committee must complete its work and report findings and recommendations by February 1, 2008. The legislature then has until June 30, 2008 to make final determination of the cost of an adequate education.

Special Education: Retained Bills in House Education

The House Education Committee retained five bills that seek to establish new requirements in the special education statutes. Sub-committee work from the summer was reviewed by the Education Committee, which has amended two bills (HB 679 and HB 766) to incorporate all the provisions to be recommended from the original five bills. While much compromise and needed updates to language was accomplished, several provisions still remain a concern to NHSBA. These provisions represent new requirements for school districts that would expand their financial obligation beyond what is currently required. Language in the two amended bills include parental reimbursement for the cost of expert witness fees, requiring specific, intermediate objectives (short-term benchmarks) for all IEPs (unless the team determines them unnecessary), and provision for directives to school districts being made on specific cases during the process of a program monitoring review.

Retirement Commission

The *Commission to Make Recommendations to Ensure the Long-Term Viability of the NH Retirement System* has been meeting regularly and struggling with issues related to the financial status of NHRS. Four sub-committees have been established (Finance, Investments, Benefits and Operations) to make specific recommendation within various subject areas. While agreement exists on “doing better” on investment returns, efforts to recommend a change in the composition of the Board of Trustees, specifically that the Board composition be reduced and that a majority of members not be participants in the NHRS, failed to be brought forward. There appears to be much resistance to change. NHSBA is concerned that there doesn't seem to be much regard over the insertion of a NEW additional employer rate to fund the medical health subsidy that was originally intended to come from excess earnings and not be a cost to employers. In addition, employers will be covering the entire unfunded liability of \$2.7 billion (over 30 years), this deficit arguably a result of poor Board oversight, yet there is no willingness to consider changes in Board composition. The overall funding status of NHRS has significant financial issues and local government employers are recommending changes in benefit levels to help shore up the basic fund dedicated to providing pension benefits. Unfortunately, the only movement by employees on sharing in costs, such as an increase in employee rates, is in consideration of NEW benefits (COLAs). The Commission is scheduled to report findings by December 1, but current indications are that more time is needed to finish its work.

For the complete text of any bill, go to <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/ns/billstatus/quickbill.html> and enter the bill number, e.g. HB927 (no spaces!).

For more information on specific legislation, please call Dean Michener, NHSBA Director of Governmental Affairs at 603-228-2061, or email: deanm@nhsba.org.