

New Hampshire School Boards Association Legislative Bulletin February 16, 2007



This week at the New Hampshire State House

It was another hectic schedule for the legislature this week, with the recent reminder of winter (snow!) causing some re-scheduling. The Governor's Budget Address was the highlight of the week. For educational adequacy grants, he proposes current year funding levels plus a 5% cost of living adjustment for the next two fiscal years: 2008 and 2009. The proposal also fully funds catastrophic special education and building aids, and provides an increase in vocational tuition and transportation aid. See yesterday's Bulletin < http://www.nhsba.org/legb_02_15_07.asp > for more highlights of the budget.

In hearings on legislative proposals, NHSBA supported **HB 451**, a bill addressing our resolution on state catastrophic aid by increasing the state's share of costs for those high-cost severely disabled students. Current law requires a per pupil expenditure of 3.5 times the *state* average, or \$34,210, before even qualifying for aid. **HB 451** would lower the cost to 3 times the *district* average, approximately \$29,000 but varying depending upon local cost. Also supported was **HB 651**, which extends the application of the school building aid grant program to kindergarten construction projects.

Bills opposed by NHSBA include **HB 558**, which would remove any surplus from the education trust fund. This trust fund was created in 1999 by the legislative response to the Claremont case. At that time, several business taxes had revenue dedicated to the fund, and each of these taxes were subject to increases that were acceptable given that they were earmarked for education. This bill would break that promise of being dedicated to education.

NHSBA also opposed **HB 422**, an unconstitutional proposal to allow local communities to grant property tax abatements to homeowners whose children are enrolled in schools other than the local public schools. The bill would allow an abatement of up to \$500 per child off the state education property tax bill and an unlimited amount off the local education property tax. This proposal essentially uses public funds to subsidize individual choices for attendance at a non-public school, placing the cost on local taxpayers to makeup the lost revenue. School board members should voice their concerns with this proposal by contacting members of the committee. A complete list of committee members, with their e-mail address, can be found at < <http://gencourt.state.nh.us/ns/billstatus/commdetails.asp?txtcommcode=H18> >.

Upcoming Activity in the New Hampshire Legislature

Budget: Deliberations and details on the state budget begin next week with the Governor and state agencies making presentations to joint meetings of the House and Senate Finance Committees. The Department of Education is currently scheduled to appear before the Finance Committee on Thursday, March 8.

Adequate Education: The Joint Legislative Task Force on Defining "Adequacy" in Education continues to hold forums to gather public input on the definition of educational adequacy.

Remaining forums are scheduled for 6:30 – 8:00 pm on:

Monday, February 19, Plymouth Regional High School Auditorium
Tuesday, February 20, Manchester Memorial High School Auditorium
Monday, March 5, Dover City Hall Auditorium
Monday, March 12, Claremont Maple Avenue Elementary School

The Task Force is charged with making recommendations for legislation to define a "constitutionally adequate education." The forums will feature professional facilitation, a brief presentation on the state of the law, and a structured public comment period. In addition, NH Public Television will videotape each forum and make them available on its website via streaming video. Written public comment can also be submitted through the taskforce's e-mail address: adequacy@leg.state.nh.us. NHSBA encourages your attendance at any of the forums and suggests reviewing the Association's position statement on guiding principles to consider in defining an adequate education (see NHSBA Statement on Adequacy at <http://www.nhsba.org/focuson.asp> >).

The Senate Education Committee will hold a public hearing next Tuesday morning, beginning at 8:30, on **SB 18**, Governor Lynch's initiative concerning dropouts and raising the age of compulsory attendance from age 16 to 18. The bill requires any child under 18, who has not graduated or achieved an equivalence diploma, to attend school or be granted a waiver. Waivers shall only be granted upon proof that the pupil has an alternative learning plan for obtaining either a high school diploma or its equivalent. Alternative learning plans must include age-appropriate academic rigor and the flexibility to incorporate the pupil's interests and manner of learning. These plans may include, but are not limited to, independent studies, private instruction, performing groups, internships, community service, apprenticeships, and on-line courses. Related to this issue and following the hearing on **SB 18**, the Senate Education Committee will consider **SB 101**, permitting at risk students to attend an alternative education program at a regional vocational education center and requiring the department of education to pay tuition and transportation costs for such attendance.

The House Education Committee will consider a voucher bill, **HB 693**, which would establish a school choice certificate program and make available a certain number of

school choice certificates to be used at participating nonpublic schools. Also scheduled for House Education are several 'Adequacy' bills:

HB 789, providing \$50 million in supplemental education grants for school districts based on an equity index;

HB 870, revising the method for calculating and disbursing adequate education grant amounts and distributing supplemental per pupil aid for certain pupils: the bill also establishes an adequate education and education financing committee;

HB 904, defining an adequate education and relative to calculating the cost of an adequate education and corresponding grants.

The Education Committee will also consider **HB 661**, establishing an executive planning commission on special education. The planning commission would consist of the governor, the commissioners of the departments of education, health and human services, and regional community-technical colleges, and the chancellor of the university system of New Hampshire or respective designees. The commission would develop a plan providing for an improved comprehensive, systemic, and sustained approach for providing special education. Also scheduled for next week is **HB 752**, changing the per pupil state aid for students attending a charter school that bypassed local approval, receiving authorization directly from the state board. These charter schools currently receive approximately \$3,500 for each pupil, increased by a 4-year average rate of inflation. **HB 752** would give the charter school the greater of that amount, or the per pupil adequacy grant amount received by the student's resident district for the municipality in which the pupil resides.

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. HB422, or SB47 (no spaces!), and make sure the Session Year is 2007.

Make sure your local representatives know where their school board stands on important legislative proposals. Keep your legislators informed and aware.

Remember that you, through NHSBA, are the only locally elected officials that "speak" exclusively for public education in NH. Need some help?

Learn how you can be involved in NHSBA'S Legislative Advocacy Network and make your board's voice heard. **Call NHSBA (800-272-0653) or (603-228-2061) today** and be part of the team. For more information or details, or for information on specific legislation, please call Dean Michener at 603-228-2061.

-- Dean Michener, Associate Director
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