

Thursday, February 6, 2014

Take Back Our Public Schools NEA-NM & AFT NM Rally at the Round House: February 15, 2014, Santa Fe Plaza and march to State Capitol

Budget Headed to House Floor

The House Appropriations and Finance Committee (HAFC) approved the budget bill, General Appropriations Act, House Bill 2 this morning. Most of the funding in House Bill 3 survived with no merit pay provisions and most funding still "above the line" in the school equalization guarantee (SEG). The measure still has an increase for beginning salaries at each teacher licensure tier of \$2,000. It still has a 3% average salary increase for all school employees and an additional 3% increase for educational assistants. The recommendation to send to the full house was on a straight party-line vote with Republicans arguing for more money below the line with reduced unit value and increased funding for the Public Education Department Secretary-designate to have discretion for her and the governor's pet projects.

Continue efforts to let all House Members know that we support maximum funding "above the line" through the School Equalization Guarantee (not "below the line" in the Governor's pet projects, like merit pay and reading initiatives that aren't available to all school districts, not just those chosen by the secretary-designate in a race-to-the-top-like competition!) and meaningful salary increases. Ask them to resist the Governor and her Republican followers attempts to reduce funding to school districts (and local control)!

Immediately, Ask them to support House Bill 2 as it left the HAFC this morning, this measure could be on the House floor today or tomorrow.

Here is the vote in committee. A yes vote supported our position. Thank those Democrats who stuck with you!

Name	Party	Vote for do-pass on House Bill 2
Chair Henry Kiki Saavedra	D	Yes
Vice-chair Patricia A. Lundstrom	D	Yes
Deputy Chair Luciano "Lucky" Varela	D	Yes
Paul C. Bandy	R	No
Sharon Clahchischilliage	R	No
Doreen Y. Gallegos	D	Yes
Stephanie Garcia Richard	D	Yes
William "Bill" J. Gray	R	No
Jimmie C. Hall	R	No
Larry A. Larrañaga	R	No
Rodolpho "Rudy" S. Martinez	D	Yes
Nick L. Salazar	D	Yes
Tomás E. Salazar	D	Yes
James E. Smith	R	No
Elizabeth "Liz" Thomson	D	Yes
Don L. Tripp	R	No
Christine Trujillo	D	Yes
James P. White	R	No

In a presentation to the Senate Finance Committee yesterday the battle lines were drawn over the school budget were drawn once again as proponents of the Governor's budget (the secretary-designate of public education and high-roller representatives of the business community) pushed for more centralized in the Public Education Department. Representatives of the Education Partners advocated for House Bill 3 and local control as well as across the board salary increases. The committee took no action, but merely heard a report on the status of the House budget bill.

Permanent Fund

Representative Jim Trujillo's House Joint Resolution 3 was temporarily tabled in the House Voters and Elections Committee Tuesday morning.

Call Committee members and ask to take this important measure off the table and pass it on to the next committee!

This amendment will keep distribution to public schools from the permanent fund at the current level of 5.5%. The funding level dropped to 5.5% last year from 5.8% and, unless the amendment passes, will drop to 5.0% in 2016. Some points in support of HJR3:

1. Raising the distribution back to 5.5% will prevent drastic cuts in education funding starting in fiscal year 2017!
2. When the original constitutional amendment was conceived in 2003, it was assumed that support from the general fund would continue to increase; gradually completely replacing the additional funds created by the increased distribution rate and allowing the reduction of the rate to 5% by 2017 since the natural increase in general fund revenues would have more than replaced these funds. No one anticipated that general fund support for the public schools would have three years of steady decline!
3. Should the 5.5% distribution level be allowed to sunset and the fund fail to show a return in the 8.5% range, public school funding from the fund would be greatly reduced and require even heavier commitment from a challenged general fund to avoid precipitous and devastating drop in school funding.
4. If the rate of return is realized, continuing the 5.5% distribution rate would actually move the legislature toward the increase that the 2008 funding formula task force indicated was required to provide sufficient funding of public schools. By 2020 about \$200 million would be added per year, not enough to overcome the years of under-funding, but a good effort nonetheless.
5. Clearly neither the 5.5% nor the previous 5.8% distribution rate has endangered the corpus of the fund; it has continued to increase and is predicted to double by 2020. The amendment would be logical to the voting public. Simply continue current practice of distribution and continue to help grow school funding without increasing taxes. If the amendment fails or is not sent to the public, it is clear that school funding will, in the worst case scenario, decrease or in the best case scenario, increase at a much slower rate in the near term, preventing the movement toward sufficient funding without a major effort from the general fund.
6. We are not asking the public to approve a tax increase, just keep the status quo of current funding levels from the permanent fund. Not passing this measure won't lower taxes, and in the long run will likely require a tax increase to prevent further cuts to public schools.