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Positive Progress on Funding in Jeopardy From Appropriations Committee Actions

The version of House Bill 3 created in the House Education Committee Tuesday morning was changed greatly in the House Appropriations and Finance Committee Budget Bill, House Bill 2, the General Appropriations Act. Funds have been restored for many of the Governor's pet projects, including a merit pay pilot, early reading intervention money that will be completely controlled by Secretary Skandera and the Public Education Department, and funding to implement the Governor's new teacher evaluation program. Contact All House Members now with this message:

Pass a General Appropriations Act that funds increased salaries and benefits (including the necessary district health insurance increases) and put maximum funding "above the line" in the School Equalization Guarantee, not "below the line" in the Governor's or the Legislative Finance Committee's pet projects (like merit pay, funding formula changes, and third grade retention)! Fund the required increase in retirement contributions to support House bill 64 and Senate Bill 115.

Teacher Evaluation Bill to Be Heard tomorrow!

House Bill 589 introduced by Representative Rick Miera and Senate Bill 588 introduced by Senator Howie Morales were introduced in both houses of the legislature earlier this week. These bills represent NEA- New Mexico and AFT New Mexico's best thinking on a teacher evaluation system for the state. We believe the evaluation system should be established by legislation as we have long advocated, not by rule. We will continue working with legislators to produce an evaluation system that is embedded in statute and therefore protected against any arbitrary changes.

House Bill 589 will be heard in the House Labor Committee tomorrow afternoon. Call Committee members to voice your support.

Both bills also extend the timeline for creating the system. We believe that the current rule proposed by the public education department needs to provide a pilot year and therefore rushes a system that should not be rushed. All experts have told us that introducing a new teacher evaluation system requires time. Members on New Mexico Teach, the Secretary Designee's Advisory Council for the evaluation system, have stated this often at their meetings.

NEA New Mexico has supported working collaboratively to create a system that doesn't harm current statutory due process rights for teachers. We continue to advocate for more local control over the student achievement portion of the evaluation system. While we know that the U.S. Department of Education requires that student achievement be a significant portion of the evaluation system, we also know that they don't require any particular percentage based on student achievement or any particular percentage based on test scores.

We worked with Secretary-Designee Skandera to try to influence the current rule as much as possible. We believe we made some good changes. We believe that the rule now provides professional development for teachers to improve once they've been found to be ineffective and maintains all protections under our current due process statutes.

We have advocated from the beginning of the rule-making process that 35% based on New Mexico's assessment system gives too much weight to standardized test scores. We've also advocated that too many top-down mandates destroy the concept of collaboration at the local level. We have consistently advocated for maximum flexibility for school districts and their employees to determine what will be counted for student achievement.

The proposed evaluation bills provide this flexibility at the local level. We also believe that the current teacher evaluation rule does not provide enough transparency around how the value-added methodology will be used to calculate student achievement scores. That's why we believe that local school districts and their employees should determine what will be counted as student achievement in the new teacher evaluation system. This is very firmly embedded in the legislation we are supporting.
