

Thursday, February 20, 2014(Late Wednesday)

Budget Passes Senate and House/ Urge the Governor to Sign!

A Senate Finance Committee substitute bill for Senate Bill 313, the Senate version of the General Appropriations Act, passed the Senate early yesterday evening and the House early Wednesday evening. For the most part the bill kept the best parts of stalled House Bill 2. It increases beginning salaries for each teacher licensure tier by \$2,000. It includes a requirement for an "average" 3% salary increase for all school employees and a 6% increase for educational assistants. That language is here:

"The general fund appropriation to the state equalization guarantee distribution includes sufficient funds to provide a three percent average salary increase for all teachers, other instructional staff and other licensed and unlicensed staff effective the first full pay period after July 1, 2014. This amount does not include and is in addition to salary increases due to licensure advancement pursuant to the School Personnel Act. Prior to the approval of each school district's or charter school's budget, the secretary of public education shall verify that the school district or charter school is providing a three percent average salary increase for all teachers and other licensed school employees and a three percent average salary increase for all unlicensed school employees."

The measure increases funding "above the line" by a small amount, starts the process of returning to statutory class sizes limits within three years, helps small school districts no longer be dependent on emergency funding, pays the district share of insurance, keeps local control in place, and makes the last installment of the state's commitment to employer share of retirement.

Our only concern is an item of \$7.25 million to the Public Education Department entitled "Teacher and school leader programs and supports for training, preparation, recruitment and retention." Many construe this as an opportunity for the Secretary-designate to create a pilot merit plan; however, a floor amendment limited the PED's spending power to no more than 75% on any one program. Thus, the most that could be expended on such a pilot program would be \$5.43 million. Additionally the measure contains the following language regarding this item:

School districts with established collective bargaining units may utilize the appropriation in any compensation initiative implemented by the department, subject to collective bargaining. School districts that do not have established collective bargaining units shall not be required to collectively bargain in order to participate in any compensation initiative implemented by the department with this appropriation."

So, we need to be vigilant and make sure any such proposals are completely subject to collective bargaining. The "average salary" language also means that collective bargaining is more important than ever, since that "average" could be applied to salary schedules in many different ways. If your district doesn't have bargaining or is weak due to low membership, you might just get a merit pay plan you don't want. We need to plan for spring bargaining and membership recruitment now!

However, on the whole, we support this budget and need to urge the Governor not to veto any parts of it.

Please ask the Governor to sign the budget.

Constitutional Amendment to Raise Minimum Wage Dies on House Floor

Senate Joint Resolution 13 to raise the minimum wage based on inflation starting in 2015 was killed early Wednesday Evening. All Democrats supported it except Representative Irwin, who voted no and Representative Jeff who did not vote. All Republicans opposed it, except Representatives Hamilton, Fajardo, Gallegos, Baldonado, and Tripp, all of whom were absent. The measure now moves to the House Calendar. Those House members who voted no or did not vote did not deny the lowest paid members paid New Mexicans a 30 cents an hour wage, but rather denied New Mexico's voters the right to decide whether or not to increase the wage.

Amendment to Save \$65 Million in School Funding Being Debated as this is Written

SJR 4, LAND GRANT FUND CARE & INVESTMENTS, CA has an amendment that Speaker Martinez attached in House Voters and Elections that allows the distribution from the permanent fund to remain at 5.5% instead of dropping to 5% in 2016. It would allow the state investment to make a decision about whether or not the fund could afford the additional distribution of .5% each year. Republicans are trying to strip the amendment. If the sunset of the .5% occurs it will mean a \$65 million dollar to school funding in 2016!

Education Employees and Supporters March on the Capitol to Take Back Public Education.

NEA Executive Committee Member and former NEA president for Tennessee Earl Wiman told thousands of Educators and supporters in the Capitol Rotunda on Saturday, "We are in a war for the very soul of the students we teach. It must be a fight true to our moral values." NEA-New President Betty Patterson and other NEA and AFT leaders also addressed the crowd along with supportive legislators.