

2011 LEGISLATIVE SESSION BEGINS

Lawmakers returned to Columbia Jan. 11 (with a slight snow delay) to begin the new session in the face of an almost \$830 million budget shortfall. The 119th session will likely be consumed with budget issues and how cuts may impact services to South Carolinians, including the state's public school students and parents, and residents.

State Superintendent of Education Mick Zais met with the House Ways and Means K-12 subcommittee Jan. 19 to outline his recommendations for some \$107 million in cuts from the public schools' budget, including:

- \$1.7 million from the ADEPT program
- \$1.6 million from High Schools that Work and Making Middle Grades Work
- \$10.3 million from the Barnwell Fund for school facilities

Other areas recommended for cuts include technical assistance funds (reduced by half) for schools rated at-risk and below average and suspending the purchase of new textbooks. In addition, Zais recommends 15 percent cuts to Teacher Quality/Teach Recruitment (CERRA), the School Improvement Council, Education Oversight Committee public relations, Student Health and Fitness Education, and the Education and Economic Development Act.

Zais also made recommendations for new funding priorities totaling \$35.9 million, including:

- \$687,500 for teacher positions for the State Virtual Learning Program
- \$25 million for bus transportation costs
- \$10.1 million for National Board Teacher Certification

With nearly 40 percent of the state budget designated for public education, it is anticipated that K-12 schools will see significant cuts in the development of the FY2011-12 spending plan.

CHARTER BILL ADVANCES

A bill to enact significant changes to the state's charter school law ([H.3241](#)) was reported out favorably Jan. 19 by the House Education K-12 subcommittee by a vote of 6-2. The bill will next go to the full House Education Committee.

SCSBA testified to express opposition to several issues including the following:

- The requirement of local school districts to send all of its local funds quarterly to the state charter school district for students who reside in their district and attend a state-sponsored brick-and-mortar or virtual schools (reduced to 75 percent of local funds for students attending virtual charter schools).
- The deletion, offered through an amendment by Rep. Ralph Norman, of a provision allowing local school district sponsors to retain up to 2 percent of total state and local appropriations per charter school for oversight expenses.
- The requirement of local sponsoring districts to allow conversion charter schools to stay in a school building and use resources, equipment and supplies free of charge for the life of the charter.
- The lowering of the vote requirement from parents for a traditional public school to convert to a charter school.
- The requirement that charter school students be allowed to participate in extracurricular activities at their resident school if the activities are not available at the charter school.

The charter school bill also includes provisions to adjust the application process timeline by increasing from 60 to 90

Bills of note

[S.374](#), filed Jan. 18, prohibits synthetic marijuana; [H.3358](#), filed Jan. 19, abolishes county boards of education and devolves authority to local boards; [H.3363](#), filed Jan. 19, the "Education Professional Performance and Pay Accountability Act of 2011"; [S.414](#), the "SC Educational Opportunity Act," filed Jan. 20 (see, [H.3407](#)); and [H.3404](#), filed Jan. 20, joint resolution revising Index of Taxpaying Ability.

days after receipt of the application for the state Charter School Advisory Committee to determine if an application is in compliance and from 30 to 45 days for a local school board to rule on the charter application in a public hearing. Other changes include enrollment priority to students who reside within the former attendance area of a converted school; inclusion of provisions for single gender charter schools; and provision of an appropriate payment timeline for charters with approved incremental and expansion plans.

SELECT COMMITTEE ADOPTS PLAN

The Senate Select Committee on K-12 Funding on Jan. 19 adopted a draft funding proposal making changes to the Education Finance Act that, among other things, will provide new student weightings for poverty (.20); gifted and talented education (.15); limited English proficiency (.20); and for students attending the SC Public Charter School District (2.50). In addition, the committee adopted draft legislation to enact permanent law regarding school district spending flexibility (including transparency), as well as allow the same deregulation for traditional schools that charter schools currently enjoy under state law. Finally, the plan directs the State Board of Education to develop regulations to establish a framework for districts that opt to implement a teacher incentive pay system. The system may include incentives tied to responsibilities, assignments, instructional performances and student achievement results. A bill to incorporate all of these changes has not yet been filed.

BOND REFERENDUMS AT THE GENERAL ELECTION/PRIMARY

The House Judiciary Special Laws Subcommittee on Jan. 19 approved a bill to require that school districts hold bond referenda at the time of the general election or at the time of the primary election (**H.3041**). The bill is set to be in front of the full House Judiciary Committee on Jan. 25.

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