

Legislative Changes Proposed for Education

In addition to passing a state budget, the General Assembly is moving legislative changes to the state's Public School Code and other education-related changes before the end of session. Below is a summary of the education changes.

Charter School Expansion

Governor Tom Corbett wanted to shift authorization authority for charter schools from local school districts to the state. Final legislation preserves the ability of local school districts to authorize charters but will replace the current Charter School Appeals Board with a charter school administrative entity that would have authority for cyber charters, multi-site charters and regional charters. Local districts would have authority to authorize charters, but charters that are denied at the local level would be able to appeal and, if successful, would remain under the authority of the state charter entity.

Legislative changes to the charter school funding formula were postponed. A new statewide funding reform committee will be established to recommend changes to the formula and funding structure.

Charter school ethics rules would be somewhat improved, with board members and employees covered under state Ethics Laws. The bill also requires charters to conduct and make public annual audits.

Expansion of Tax Credits for Private School Scholarships

Legislation will raise the annual cost of the Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) from \$75 million this year to \$100 million in 2012-13. In addition, a new tax credit program for students in low-achieving districts will be established, funded at \$50 million in 2012-13. (Low-achieving districts are defined as the lowest 15% of elementary and secondary schools, based on combined math and reading scores for the prior school year.)

Both programs offer tax credits to businesses that make donations to (1) Scholarship Organizations, offering scholarships to middle- and lower-income students attending private or religious schools; (2) Educational Improvement Organizations, providing grants to nonprofits that provide innovative education programs to public school students; and (3) Pre-K Scholarship Organizations that offer scholarships for prekindergarten programs. The per business cap on donations eligible for a tax credit will increase from the current \$300,000 to \$400,000 in 2012-13 and up to \$750,000 after that.

Families with incomes up to \$75,000 (plus \$12,000 per child) will qualify for scholarships through both programs. In the new tax credit program for low-achieving schools, priority for scholarships will be given to students from households with income up to 185% of the Federal Poverty Index, but scholarships would not be limited to low-income students.

Children who opt for a private school will still be counted in the Average Daily Membership for the resident school district for a year.

Funding for Distressed Schools

The budget included \$39 million for 16 distressed schools, including:

Distressed School District Allocations 2012-13		
School District	County	Amount
Chester-Upland	Delaware	\$9,708,322
York City SD	York	\$5,429,723
Allentown City SD	Lehigh	\$4,009,915
Reading City SD	Berks	\$3,732,241
Erie City	Erie	\$2,930,774
Lancaster City	Lancaster	\$2,410,858
Upper Darby	Delaware	\$2,000,000
Pocono Mountain SD	Monroe	\$2,000,000
Harrisburg City	Dauphin	\$1,732,162
Stroudsburg Area SD	Monroe	\$1,500,000
Coatsville SD	Chester	\$1,000,000
Lebanon SD	Lebanon	\$994,965
Steel Valley SD	Allegheny	\$559,026
Sto-Rox SD	Allegheny	\$440,974
Westmont Hilltop SD	Cambria	\$300,000
Jeannette City SD	Westmoreland	\$250,000

No additional funding is provided to the Philadelphia School District. The districts receiving the additional aid will also be given tools to reduce costs, similar to those already available to Philadelphia.

New Teacher Evaluations

Finally, the Legislature is poised to approve new methods for evaluating public school teachers. Evaluations will be based on multiple measures, including classroom activities, tests, quizzes, projects and a variety of standardized test scores. Observations of a teacher’s performance in the classroom will count for half of the overall evaluation. Teachers and (starting in 2014-15) principals will be evaluated and receive a rating of distinguished, proficient, needs improvement or failing. Read more from the Pennsylvania State Education Association: <http://www.psea.org/general.aspx?id=9558>.

Other Changes

Read more about the above mentioned policy changes and other technical and policy changes included in omnibus amendment to the Public School Code at http://pennbpc.org/sites/pennbpc.org/files/School_Code_Summaries.pdf.

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