

Legislative Report for March, 2009

The legislature has been busy as of late since any bill to be acted upon this session had to be heard in a Senate or House committee by March 27th. Bills need to be heard in both a Senate and House committee by April 7th.

This week, March 30th, the omnibus House and Senate K-12 education bills are being finalized. Last week a bill was introduced in the House Education Policy and Oversight Committee which would have added one licensed non-classroom professional to the Board of Teaching. This could have been a school psychologist, school social worker, school nurse, school counselor, speech-language clinician or licensed career and technical education accommodation specialist for children with disabilities. The bill was withdrawn after committee members were informed that the bill had not been discussed with a representative from the Board of Teaching.

Last year a bill was passed which allowed school districts to levy three dollars per student under the Safe Schools Levy which would be mandated to go to enhancing student support services. This year there is a strong movement afoot to eliminate as many mandates on schools as possible for financial reasons. One proposal is to set aside the mandate mentioned above for two years. This is reflected in Senate File 1045, The chief author is Senator Lynch. When this bill was heard in the Senate E-12 Education Committee last week Senator Wiger moved to keep the student support services mandate in place. I spoke to do the same. However, it was defeated. Further discussion will no doubt take place in conference committee when the House and Senate versions of the K-12 education bills are discussed. I thanked Senator Wiger for his efforts and it would be helpful if some of you could do the same. His e-mail address is sen.chuck.wiger@senate.mn You might also want to check to see if your school district levied the three dollars for student support services and, if so, how it was spent.

There is another bill, HF 501/SF405 which would allow students enrolled in grade 8 in any school year from the 2005-2006 school year to the 2009-2010 school year who do not pass the reading or math graduation-required assessment for diploma to receive a diploma if they have passed all their

coursework, have taken the test/s two times unsuccessfully and have been involved in remediation in an attempt to pass the test/s. I have testified twice to date on this piece of legislation. My testimony has been in opposition to high stakes exit exams in general. You no doubt remember that approximately two-thirds of the juniors last spring failed the math test which is currently in place for students to pass in 2010 to receive a diploma. As a footnote, I have done some checking and found that approximately two-thirds of the students in 2007 who did not receive a diploma because of not passing one or more of the basic skills tests were on free or reduced-priced meals. Also, the current drop out rate in Minnesota is 14.1 percent.

I will be sending out shortly in a separate report a list of bills which you may be interested in looking at further.

Ralph D. Maves

MSPA Lobbyist

P.S. Please keep in contact with your senator and representative on issues important to you, including education and school psychology issues.