



The Decision-Making Begins

Major decisions loom as JFC begins state budget deliberations

Thank you to all the school board members and other school leaders who testified at the Joint Finance Committee (JFC) hearings on the state budget. The strong showing of support by public education advocates for the governor's school aid increases bodes well for those increases as the budget process moves forward. However, those proposed increases are still a long way from the finish line. Continued advocacy is needed. Contact your legislators, attend their listening sessions and express your support for public education funding in the budget.

Now that the JFC hearings on the proposed state budget have been completed, the decision-making begins.

Throughout the month of May, the JFC will go through the budget, item by item, and vote on whether to accept, modify or delete the governor's recommendations. From there, the budget bill goes first to the state Assembly, and then to the state Senate. Each house can, and likely will, make changes to the budget bill. Once the two houses agree on a final version, the budget then goes to the governor for his signature. The governor can also veto provisions in whole or in part. If all goes smoothly, this process will be done by July 1.

Whether the process will, in fact, be smooth is hard to predict. While the JFC's decision to use the governor's budget as the beginning point for their votes, except for transportation — where the JFC will disregard the governor's proposal and work from current funding levels — is a positive sign, it does not guarantee all the governor's recommendations to devote new spending to schools will make it into law.

Those recommendations face a number of hurdles, not the least of which is the strong desire of many lawmakers to increase spending for

road construction and maintenance above the level recommended by the governor. Taking the unusual step of setting aside the governor's recommendations regarding the Department of Transportation (DOT) budget is a clear signal of lawmakers' intentions to boost transportation spending. Where the additional money to fund more transportation spending will come from is the unanswered question.

The governor's recent announcement that lower than expected costs for some road projects and a bump in forecasted transportation revenues will free up more than \$100 million for the DOT budget in the 2017-19 budget cycle is a step toward bringing the sides closer together, but the sides are still far apart. And that impasse could impact school funding.

■ Boosting Transportation, Paring Back K-12?

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos (R-Rochester) has advocated boosting transportation revenue (e.g., vehicle registration fees and/or gas taxes) to fund additional transportation projects, including an expansion of I-94 in southeast Wisconsin. Vos appears to have backing among his Assembly Republican colleagues; however, Gov. Walker

has threatened to veto any tax or fee increases for roads. (As this issue was going to print, the governor signaled that he was more open to increasing registration fees.)

Decisions on major spending items in the budget, such as transportation spending, Medicaid spending, or increased aid for schools, are generally not made until after a new set of revenue projections has been completed. This typically occurs in early to mid-May, allowing these estimates to take into account state income tax returns filed by the mid-April deadline.

A strong uptick in projected revenues could allow some lawmakers who are wary of adding so much additional school spending to feel more comfortable approving the governor's recommendations.

The governor proposes to increase per-pupil categorical aid payments from the current \$250 per pupil to \$450 per pupil in 2017-18 and \$654 in 2018-19. However, two significant issues related to the increases are yet to be resolved.

■ Employee Health Insurance Issues

One issue is the requirement that each school district certify that its employees will be required to pay at

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least 12 percent of all costs and payments associated with employee health coverage plans in that year in order to receive the proposed increase in per-pupil aid payments.

Key members of the JFC are looking for ways to eliminate this proposed requirement, something the WASB supports. They argue that the requirement intrudes into local control and looks too narrowly at the range of personnel savings schools have been able to achieve using the flexibilities provide by Act 10. *[To boost efforts to scrap these provisions, the WASB has attempted to survey districts about whether they currently meet this proposed requirement or might be denied increases in aid if the requirement goes into effect. If your district hasn't responded, please do so as soon as possible.]*

Another issue is that, as proposed by the governor, a portion of the proposed increases in per-pupil categorical aid is contingent on the state achieving savings by restructuring the program that provides health insurance for state employees. (The restructuring has not been popular among legislative leaders and if that change is not implemented, the increase in per-pupil aid could be reduced.)

Some Assembly leaders have discussed targeting aid increases to lower spending districts but, to this point, we have not heard any specifics for how that idea would be implemented.

On the bright side, the targeted funding for rural schools (sparsity aid

and high-cost transportation aid) and school mental health proposals in the budget seem to have solid support from lawmakers.

Changes to other budget items are still being negotiated, including the governor's proposals to eliminate the revenue limit exemption for energy efficiency projects, to return to lifetime licensure for teachers and administrators, and to merge the Course Options and Youth Options programs into a new Early College Credit Program. Depending on how they are resolved, each of these items could have significant implications for school districts.

Remember that things can change quickly at the capitol. We encourage you to watch for our *Legislative Update* emails to stay on top of changes and developments.

■ Update on Other Bills of Note

If you keep up with our *Legislative Update* blog, you know legislators are working on a slate of anti-local control bills relating to restricting school referenda in various ways. As of this writing, the bills had not yet been introduced; consequently, they have not yet been given bill numbers. How these might play into the final budget deliberations is unclear, but, it is possible that these proposals could come into play given the way items have been added at the last minute in previous budgets. The WASB will keep you updated on the latest developments.

Senate Bill 169/Assembly Bill 247

Two "Right to Carry" bills would create a new concealed carry license that does not require firearm training (the current license does). These identical companion bills would also repeal the state Gun Free School Zone law. The federal Gun Free School Zone law would remain in place as the state Legislature can't change federal law. That federal law, subject to certain exceptions, generally prohibits persons who do not possess a concealed carry (CCW) license from going armed in a school zone, (i.e., in school buildings, on the grounds of a school, and within 1,000 feet of the grounds of a school.)

These bills would allow school boards to post their school buildings and grounds as gun-free, but the penalties for violating the prohibition would be greatly reduced from what they are under current state law. Significantly, under the bills, an individual who holds a concealed carry license would be able to carry a firearm while picking up or dropping off children from school as long as the weapon does not leave the vehicle. Based on our resolutions, the WASB opposes these bills.

Assembly Bill 70/Senate Bill 42

These bills eliminate a legislative mandate that certain school boards pay to publish the proceedings of their board meetings in the local newspaper. The governor had a similar provision in his budget but it was removed as non-fiscal policy. That makes these bills, which the WASB worked to develop based on a Delegate Assembly resolution, even more important. Both bills have received public hearings in their respective houses and await committee votes.

Thank you again for your advocacy efforts so far on the state budget and other bills. ■

Dan Rossmiller is the WASB Government Relations director. Chris Kulow is the WASB Government Relations Specialist.

VoterVoice The WASB has launched a new online advocacy tool called VoterVoice that will make it easier for you to contact your lawmakers. The first time you use it, you will have to confirm your contact information (for your protection) but you will only have to do that once. Your information is not shared outside of the WASB and the elected officials you contact through the system. We hope you will take the time to take action in response to our call to action emails. Please offer any feedback on the new system to Dan Rossmiller or Chris Kulow at the WASB.