



THE COMMONWEALTH EDUCATIONAL POLICY INSTITUTE

CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY - L. DOUGLAS WILDER SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

2014 General Assembly K-12 Education Update

February 14, 2014

The 2014 General Assembly session began Wednesday, January 8, 2014. The session runs 60 days and is scheduled to end on March 8. House and Senate versions of the two-year budget for fiscal years 2015 and 2016 will be released on February 16.

The House Education Committee is scheduled to meet on Mondays and Wednesdays at 8:30 a.m. in House Room D. The Senate Education and Health Committee will meet on Thursdays at 8:30 a.m. in Senate Room B. Sub-committees will meet periodically throughout the session. Click [here](#) for the schedule of weekly meetings.

Budget Issues

The clock is ticking for General Assembly money committees to release their proposed amendments to the introduced budget. The House Appropriations and Senate Finance committees have been busy figuring out ways to pay for the spending plans they will propose. The committees will announce their recommendations this coming Sunday; line item amendments should be available by Tuesday and floor votes on the respective plans are expected next Thursday.

House leaders previewed their coming budget announcement on the House floor late this past week. Specifically, they offered that they will pump an additional \$47 million into improving the state's mental health system, will improve services for victims of domestic violence, and will include \$26 million intended to minimize tuition increases at the state's colleges and universities. For its part, the Senate is expected to include some form of Medicaid expansion/closing the health insurance coverage gap in its budget.

State officials have released the latest revenue report for January. It showed that total state general fund revenue collections fell 5.9 percent for the month, with declines in all major revenue sources except corporate income tax. On a year-to-date basis, total revenue collections have fallen one-half percent from the previous year, lagging the annual forecast of 1.7 percent growth. Though state officials said last month that the FY14 revenue forecast likely will be met, Governor Terry McAuliffe has offered several budget solutions that would reduce revenue estimates by \$125 million in FY14 and \$15 million in FY15. These include eliminating the FY 2016 estimated payment to the "Rainy Day" fund, using additional lottery revenues, capturing uncommitted balances across the budget and reducing the unappropriated balance contained in the introduced budget from \$51 million to \$11 million.

Education Legislation

In the latter part of the session, the House and Senate Education Committees will focus on legislation approved by the other chamber. The workload will be heavier in the Senate, which receives a larger number of approved House bills. Following are some of the top issues that will be considered.

There always is spirited debate in Senate Education and Health Committee on the post-Labor Day school opening issue, though bills to return control of the school calendar to the local level typically have not survived on the Senate side. Recall that the House passed three bills, [HB 577](#); [HB 610](#) and [HB 333](#), which propose different options for giving some control of the calendar back to local school divisions. This past week, the Senate defeated [SB 131](#) that would have codified language contained in the budget that extends waivers to the school opening law granted for the 2011-2012 school year. The bill squeaked out of Committee, and as expected, faced more opposition on the Senate floor. It was referred back to Committee and thus was defeated for the session.

For the past several years, bills to allow homeschool students to participate in public school interscholastic activities have narrowly been defeated on a largely party line vote in the Education and Health Committee. This year's House-approved measure is [HB 63](#), which prohibits public schools from joining the Virginia High School League if the organization does not allow participation by qualifying home school students in interscholastic activities.

The House and Senate have passed bills that take similar approaches to reducing the number of required Standards of Learning (SOL) tests at the elementary school level. These bills will be considered in the education committees of the opposite chamber. The House omnibus bill is [HB 930](#), which reduces the number of SOL tests in grades 3-8 from 22 to 17 and requires local school divisions to give assessments for SOL subject areas no longer tested by the state. The primary Senate bill is [SB 636](#), which directs the Board of Education (BOE) to review the SOL tests and to develop a plan to reduce, by the 2015-2016 school year, the number of such assessments by at least 25 percent (from the number administered in the current school year). The Senate also passed bills to allow certain waivers from the science or history SOL testing requirement for third grade students ([SB 325](#)); that limit the number of SOL tests in grades 3, 5 and 6 ([SB 306](#)); and to require that only English and mathematics SOL tests be administered in third grade ([SB 270](#)).

Both the House and Senate want to delay implementation of the A to F grading system for reporting individual school performance, slated to be in place this October. Each chamber will consider the different approach offered by the other, which may lead to an end-of-session conference committee of legislators to iron out differences. The House supports a one year delay in the program, as proposed in [HB 1229](#). The Senate-approved [SB 324](#), which delays the assignment of letter grades to schools for three years, to October 2017. It also would have school performance graded by taking into account a variety of factors.

The House Education Committee will take up [SB 236](#), which requires school divisions to adopt a policy that creates a limited public forum at all school events at which a student is permitted to speak publicly. The bill prohibits a school division from regulating voluntary expression of a religious viewpoint. A similar, but narrower, bill was defeated earlier this session in the House Courts of Justice Committee. It also will consider [SB 499](#), which delays the initial transfer of supervision of certain schools from local school boards to the Opportunity Educational Institution

(OEI) by one year, from after the 2013-14 school year to after the 2014-15 school year. Earlier, the House defeated its bills that delayed or altered the OEI.

Finally, CEPI Executive Director Dr. William C. Boshier, Jr., presented the results of the 2013-14 Commonwealth Education Poll to both the House Education Committee and Senate Education and Health Committee this past week. Legislators on both Committees engaged in a lively question-and-answer session following the respective presentations and indicated the desire to receive an annual presentation on the Poll results.

E-mail Response

Questions or seeking more information? Please [contact CEPI](#) if you have any questions or need additional information about the 2014 General Assembly.