

legislative bulletin

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To: All School Committee Members and Superintendents

From: Stephen J. Finnegan, Esq.

Date: May 29, 2008

Subject: SIGNIFICANT EDUCATION AMENDMENTS TO THE FINAL SENATE VERSION OF THE STATE BUDGET

Debate over S.2600 was concluded on May 23, 2008. Metco funding was increased by Sen. Wilkerson, over the level recommended in S.2600, by \$1 million, thereby raising the total appropriation to \$21.6 million, the same level of funding as recommended by the House. The Pothole account, which provides funding for extraordinary increases in enrollment and minimum local contributions among other matters, was reinstated in the Senate Budget, by Sen. Rosenberg in the amount of \$3.5 million the same appropriation as contained in the House Budget. MASC supported both of these amendments.

MASC successfully sponsored through Sen. Antonioni an amendment to S.2600 which requires that a school committee will receive at least 50 percent of Medicaid reimbursements generated by special education. Another amendment supported by MASC and sponsored by Sen. Augustus requires the establishment of an Education Adequacy Study, which will determine the resources necessary to achieve the Commonwealth's Education Goals.

The final Senate Budget contained \$61.3 million, the same level of funding for regional school transportation as recommended by the House and a \$3 million increase over current reimbursement.

Sen. Tucker offered an amendment, supported by MASC that was not adopted, to mirror House language added to the Special Education Circuit Breaker line item, which added \$2 million for the payment of special needs

transportation through collaborative networks. We will advocate for the Tucker Amendment in Conference Committee. Sen. Rosenberg was successful in amending the Circuit Breaker line item by earmarking \$1 million to identify best practices to address high cost placements.

A series of amendments to S.2600 offered by Sen. Tarr were moderated by MASC and other stakeholders. One of the amendments would have allowed the local appropriating authorities to consolidate school business and custodial services with similar functions offered by the municipality. The redraft requires, in alternating years that the superintendent meet with the chief municipal officer to consider joint procurements, consolidations and cost savings and to issue a report to the school committee and the local legislative authority. Another Tarr amendment gives municipalities greater authority to consolidate services among two or more cities and towns and omits language in current law which protects school budgets. The final Tarr amendment of concern, seeks a methodology to significantly expand Medicaid reimbursements; however, 25 percent of the Medicaid increase would go to 766 approved private schools as opposed to the remainder which go to municipalities. Sen. Tarr has been very receptive to working with MASC on these amendments and they have been significantly modified by him. We intend to watch these amendments and communicate our remaining concerns to the appropriate parties.

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