

TEA – Education’s Voice on Capitol Hill!

The 2010 legislative session saw progress on education issues even in an economic environment that was dismal at best. During the January Special Session, the General Assembly passed the Tennessee First to the Top Act which allowed Tennessee to qualify for \$501 million in much needed federal funding for education. While many of the details relating to implementation of Race to the Top are still being finalized at the local level, this is a great opportunity for LEAs to be creative in addressing many issues for improving student achievement in Tennessee’s public schools. Even after the Race to the Top legislation became law, many other education issues were debated during the regular session which did not end until June 9. **Here are some highlights from the session:**

- **Education funding:** Thanks to the efforts of Governor Bredesen and the General Assembly, funding for the Basic Education Program was protected. Unlike other states, when thousands of teaching and education support positions are in jeopardy, public school employees in Tennessee should not lose their positions due to state budget cuts. In order to fund the BEP, the legislature had to appropriate approximately \$31 million. In addition to funding the BEP growth, the legislature appropriated over \$43 million to keep the retirement system actuarially sound and over \$8 million to provide for increases in health insurance premiums.
- **Salaries:** While there will not be a general salary increase this year, the legislature approved a one-time salary adjustment *which will occur only if revenues increase significantly prior to October*. The Department of Education estimates the stipend to be approximately \$400. While the one-time increase is contingent upon the economy improving, it is still a significant “win” for TEA’s lobbying efforts.

Several other bills of significance to TEA passed during the regular session. These include:

- **Student Accountability:** Legislation which will place more accountability on students during TCAP testing. Each LEA must develop a policy by which students’ TCAP test scores for grades three through eight will comprise 15 to 25 percent of the student’s final grade for the spring semester in the subject areas of mathematics, reading/language arts, science and social studies. (HB 3545/SB 3427)
- **Personal Leave:** Legislation which requires approval by the director of schools or the director’s designee will be required for a teacher to take personal leave on days when professional development, in-service training, or parent-teacher conferences are scheduled, according to a school calendar adopted by the local board of education prior to the commencement of the school year. (HB 3107/SB 2630)



- **ESP Insurance:** Legislation which will phase in a requirement for LEAs to pass on BEP funding for education support personnel's health insurance. Implementation was delayed to 2012 in order to lessen the fiscal impact on local governments. (HB 3193/SB 3125)
- **Student Drug Testing:** Legislation to authorize random drug testing of students who participate in extracurricular activities. (HB 3200/SB 2621)
- **Teacher Non-Renewal Notification:** Legislation which changes the date to notify teachers of non-renewal from April 15 to May 15. (HB 2772/SB 3067)
- **TEA Code of Ethics:** Legislation which codifies the TEA Code of Ethics in the Teacher Tenure Law. (HB 3130/SB 2416)

TEA was successful in **STOPPING** several bills which would have negatively impacted education in Tennessee. These include:

- **Vouchers:** Legislation to provide vouchers which rob millions of dollars from public schools and siphon funding to private and parochial schools. (HB 3688/SB 2741)
- **Charter Schools:** Legislation which would even further expand student eligibility to attend charter schools. (HB 3819/SB 3253)
- **For-Profit Management:** Legislation which would allow for-profit companies to manage schools in the newly created Achievement School District. (HB 3118/SB 3029)
- **“Physical Activity” Requirements:** Legislation which would significantly expand “physical activity” requirements by requiring 30 minutes of non-specified physical activity per day. (HB 836/SB 1774)
- **Home Schools – Extracurricular Activities:** Legislation which would require public schools to permit home-schoolers to participate in extracurricular activities. (HB 3745/SB 3485)

It should be very clear that once again – even in a very tough economic environment – **TEA has “weathered the storm” and been a strong voice for our members.** With the many challenges facing public schools, it is even more critical that every member – and potential member – be informed of our Association's success. With a strong, committed TEA membership we will always be up to the challenges of the future.

For additional information on any of the bills referenced above, go to the state legislative website at www.legislature.state.tn.us

