

From: Nancy Loomer <nloome@msparentscampaign.org>

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Dear Friend,

The conference report for pre-k through grade 12 appropriations for FY2021 passed both chambers today but was recommitted later in the day for further work by the conference committee.

While most state agencies saw budget cuts that averaged around 5%, lawmakers spared public schools to the extent possible. The conference report, as it passed earlier today, funded the MAEP at about \$37-million, or 1.65%, less than the appropriation for the 2019-2020 year. **The cut to the MAEP was mitigated in part by ending the much-maligned School Recognition Program and pumping those dollars into the MAEP, which funds teachers and classrooms statewide.** The report also provided:

- A \$1.1-million increase for the Early Learning Collaborative program
- Level funding for the school supply fund and the literacy program
- Full funding for the National Board Certified Teacher program
- Reduced funding for the Schools for the Blind and the Deaf, vocational education, and Chickasaw Cession (Chickasaw Cession is fully funded at the reduced level)
- \$3-million for the ESA voucher program (but not the additional \$2-million added in the 2019 session)

All of that is subject to change, as the report has been recommitted.

The House and Senate worked through the weekend to adopt budget bills before Wednesday, the beginning of the next fiscal year, in order to avoid a state agency shut-down. They also are introducing, debating, and passing CARES Act-related bills at a break-neck pace in an effort to help school districts address distance learning and internet access issues before the start of the school year.

Last week, the House passed HB 1786, which creates **a grant program to assist school districts in purchasing computer devices**. The House plan would allocate \$200-million in CARES Act funding for that purpose, to be distributed to school districts based upon need. The Senate plan in SB 3044 would allocate \$150-million in CARES Act funding to a grant program for the purchase of computer devices and other pandemic-related expenses, which would be distributed based upon need and according to average daily attendance. **Though there are many details to be worked out, we support the level of funding in the House plan, and, because both bills require school districts to provide a device for every child, school districts should get funding based upon enrollment, not attendance.**

SB 3046 authorizes CARES Act funding for a statewide broadband access program, and HB 1788 provides \$50-million in CARES Act funds for grants to school districts and private schools in areas without internet service that wish to negotiate access for their own students and teachers.

The pre-k expansion bill, SB 2286, has been assigned to a conference committee but no conference report has been filed.

You can see the real-time status of all the education bills we are following on our web site's [bill tracker](#).

Last Tuesday, the **PERS board rescinded the change it had made to regulation 34, which allowed state retirees to draw state retirement while serving in the Legislature**. The PERS staff opined that a change in state statute would likely be required to obtain a positive private letter ruling from the IRS.

We expect a final conference report on the public school appropriation bill to be filed tomorrow. Stay tuned for more updates. Together, we've got this!

Gratefully,

Nancy