

**From:** Nancy Looome <nloome@msparentscampaign.org>

**Sent:** Wednesday, July 01, 2020 10:33 PM



Dear Friend,

The Legislature wrapped up its work on general and appropriations bills and has gone home for the time being. They will return as necessary to handle issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The state budget presented more than the typical challenges as lawmakers grappled with less revenue and greater needs - both a result of the pandemic. **Lawmakers used \$55-million from the Rainy Day Fund** (about 10% of the fund) to help plug budget holes and minimize budget cuts.

**The final conference report for HB 1700, the pre-k through grade 12 FY2021 appropriations bill, added \$4.7-million to MDE's general education budget that was omitted in the original report.** Other sections of the report remain the same:

- Funds the MAEP at about \$37-million, or 1.65%, less than the appropriation for the 2019-2020 year
- Underfunds the MAEP by \$250-million
- **Ends the School Recognition Program and uses those dollars to fund the MAEP (classrooms and teacher salaries)**
- Increases funding for the Early Learning Collaborative program by \$1.1-million
- Provides level funding for the teacher supply fund and the literacy program
- Fully funds the National Board Certified Teacher program
- Reduces funding for the Schools for the Blind and the Deaf, vocational education, and Chickasaw Cession
- Allocates \$3-million for the ESA voucher program (but not the additional \$2-million added in the 2019 session)

School districts will have 10 calendar days after the governor signs HB 1700 to notify teachers of nonrenewal.

**We are grateful to both of our Education chairs, Rep. Bennett and Sen. DeBar, who did yeoman's work to protect funding for public schools! While most state agencies saw budget cuts that averaged around 5%, the cut to the MAEP was held to 1.65%.** Please join me in thanking them and vice chairs McCarty and Blount for fighting so hard for our children.

We also recognize the monumental challenges and costs facing public schools as they make their plans for a safe return to school - and contingency plans in case of future school closures - in the wake of budget cuts. Even the generous CARES Act grant programs will not cover all of the costs associated with distance learning, reductions in class size to provide social distancing, PPE for students and teachers, and additional sanitation measures.

The Legislature passed **three bills that address distance learning challenges:**

- SB 3044 uses CARES Act funds to create a **\$150-million grant program for the purchase of computer devices and other distance learning-related expenses**, \$20-million of which will be distributed to school districts based upon schools' needs assessment responses, with the remaining funds distributed according to **average daily membership**; funds that are unobligated on November 1 may be distributed to school districts by application
- SB 3046 authorizes **\$75-million in CARES Act funding for a statewide broadband access program**, a long-term plan to expand service to unserved and underserved areas of the state

- HB 1788 provides an additional **\$50-million in CARES Act funds to MDE to provide short-term internet access solutions**; provides grants to school districts and tribal and private schools that wish to negotiate with providers to gain connectivity for their students and teachers who live in areas without internet service

I know our teachers are disappointed that the **well-deserved teacher pay raise didn't materialize** this year, but I'm sure they also recognize that it simply wasn't possible, given the current economic environment. Had the pay raise passed, school districts would have been forced to cut programs and teachers to afford the higher salary level with reduced MAEP funding.

Likewise, SB 2286, which made changes to the **Early Learning Collaborative** program, was left on the calendar without further action, meaning it will likely die on the July 9 deadline.

#### **The status of other bills we have followed is:**

Signed into law

- HB 1 - Appropriation to fully fund the 2019 teacher pay raise
- HB 1647 - Paid leave for teachers and school district employees during the pandemic
- SB 2511 - Amendments to teacher education program qualifications to address the teacher shortage
- SB 2594 - Amendments to add accountability measures to the ESA voucher program and restrict eligible schools

Dead

- HB 989 - Limits local control/school board authority
- HB 1139 - Community schools
- HB 1165 - Mandates computer science curriculum

You can see the details of all these bills on our web site's [bill tracker](#).

This has been a whopper of a legislative session, one that will no doubt be recalled in history books. It's been tough - and remarkable.

**I am grateful to the leadership, to our education chairs and vice chairs, and to all legislators who have stood strong for public schools and worked tirelessly to move Mississippi forward. Please be sure to thank them.**

**And I am overwhelmed with admiration for you.** Mississippi children who cannot speak up for themselves rely on us to be their voices. And you come through for them every time. Thank you for standing in the gap to give thousands of Mississippi children, most of whom you will never know, a real shot at a bright future. What a blessing!

Gratefully,

Nancy