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Spring forward – session likely to end March 12

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As mentioned in the last report, this week was expected to be fast and furious and it didn't disappoint. March 6 was the deadline for most bills to pass the opposite chamber; the main exceptions are budget bills, bills necessary to implement the budget, and tax bills. And amid all the legislation, \$100 million is expected to be pulled from state reserves to help with the COVID-19 outbreak.

The House and Senate worked long hours to get a lot of major legislation off the floor before the Friday cutoff. On March 4, following a dinner break, the House reconvened for more than six hours of debate on [ESSB 5395](#), the comprehensive sexual health education bill. It passed the House 56-40. The two chambers also worked on issues such as affordable housing, preventing gun violence, authorizing sports wagering at tribal casinos, and bills related to climate change.

Both chambers worked Saturday, March 7. The House took action on a few new bills, then moved to concurrence and dispute. The Senate also worked on concurrence and dispute, where the comprehensive sex health education was the focus, with debate on concurrence in the Senate lasting about three hours.

Overall, for K-12 education, there is little to point to this session that addresses major issues such as levies, LEA, school staffing, school employee health care (SEBB), or special education. Budget negotiators will meet this weekend to adjust appropriations in the final budget. Both budgets included a hold harmless on LEA to meet a higher-than-anticipated assessed valuation that resulted in less LEA. Both budgets also included funding for four days of paraeducator training, starting in the 2021-22 school year.

The biggest differences in K-12 are over special education and school staffing. The House budget would fund a 0.5 school counselor per high-poverty prototypical school for about \$40 million, while the Senate budget would invest about \$20 million in special education - \$9.6 million for the increase in multiplier for students spending 80% or more of their time in general education classes and \$11 million for the safety net.

The House budget also included \$811,000 for dyslexia funding (not funded in the Senate budget) and more funding for the Education Ombuds. Hopefully the House will prevail, and funding will be provided in the final budget.

Next steps: As the clock springs forward, the Legislature continues its quick pace to adjournment March 12. Barring any unforeseen obstacles, they are expected to leave Olympia on time again this year.

WSPTA Legislative Priorities (all bills may be accessed [here](#))

Policy

- [Preventing Gun Violence](#). There are some wins and some losses in this priority. Passing both chambers are:
 - E2SHB 2467 would establish a centralized single point of contact background check system for firearms transfers. The bill was not changed in the Senate so will be sent to the Governor's desk.
 - SHB 2555 would require a licensed firearm dealer to conduct a background check on applicants for the purchase or transfer of a firearm frame or receiver once a state firearms background check system is established within the Washington State Patrol. This is a loophole that was discovered and could have been serious if not addressed this session. The bill will be sent to the Governor without further delay.
 - SHB 2622 would establish compliance hearing processes with contempt of court procedures for orders to surrender and extreme risk protection orders. The bill was amended in the Senate so it returns to the House for concurrence.
- [Screening for Highly Capable Students](#).
 - No bills.
- Protecting students from immigration issues (Resolution 18.25)
 - SB 5834 failed to pass out of the House Education Committee due to lack of time. Washington State PTA spearheaded an effort to get funding in the budget for WSSDA to create a model policy as defined in the bill. WSPTA circulated a letter to get other state organizations on board in support of the budget request, which was sent to Senate and House budget writers.

Budget

- [Paraeducator funding, \\$26 million](#). Funding was provided in both budgets for the four days of foundational training.
- Dyslexia funding (Resolution 18.32). Washington State PTA sent a letter to budget writers requesting the Senate include the funding needed to prepare for universal screening in the final conference budget.
- [LEA funding](#) Waiting to see a final list, but it's expected that about 120 school districts with levies that were stagnant but had higher than expected assessed value will receive funding for Calendar Year 2020 to fill the gap in less LEA.
- [Student safety and well-being](#) and support for a behavioral health specialist at each Educational Service District (ESD). Both supplemental operating budgets included funding to support one behavioral health specialist per ESD (aligned with HB 1216, 2019 session).
- Strategic investments in K-12 Education to Close Gaps:
 - The Senate supplemental operating budget includes \$9.6 million for an increase in the special education multiplier and \$11 million more for the safety net, which supports very high-cost students.

- The House supplemental operating budget includes 0.5 of a school counselor for high-poverty schools (50% or higher students qualify for free and reduced price meals) and elementary schools with at least 600 students and a 45 FRPM eligibility. This is embedded in the prototypical school funding formula, so would carry forward. The Senate does not include this funding in its budget proposal, but we hope the final conference budget will include the funding as a down payment on school staffing improvements.
- [Capital budget: seismic retrofits](#) The capital budgets include \$15 million for seismic studies.

Other bills of interest still moving:

- HB 1182 would allow Learning Assistance Program (LAP) funds to be used to support a school-wide behavioral health system of supports and interventions, including hiring social workers, counselors, instructional aids, and other school-based health professionals, and removes the requirement to use LAP first on literacy in grades K-4. The bill was changed in the Senate and returned to the House for concurrence. On March 7, the House refused to concur and asked the Senate to recede from its amendments. This could be a bill to watch that goes back and forth until someone blinks.
- HB 2660 would require districts with 62.5% of “identified students” to provide meals at no cost to all students through the federal Community Eligibility Provision. The bill was changed in committee so returns to the House for concurrence (expected).
- SB 6141 would require school districts to offer a financial aid assistance planning day in high school. The bill passed the House and the Senate concurred with amendments. It is now headed to the Governor’s desk.
- SB 6521 would create a pilot program for mastery-based education (i.e., tying advancement to knowledge and not seat time, and removing the funding disincentive). The bill passed the House without amendment so will be sent to the Governor’s desk.

Bills that are dead at the March 6 cutoff:

- SHB 1010 would have allowed the Washington State Patrol to destroy confiscated weapons.
- HB 1272 would have required OSPI to designate six public elementary schools as demonstration sites to ensure students have a seated lunch duration of at least 20 minutes and would direct WSSDA to update model policies and procedures. The bill passed out of the policy and budget committees only to die on the Senate floor calendar. However, funding was included in the 2019-21 biennial budget and six pilot projects are under way.
- EHB 2623 would have made possessing a firearm unlawful if a person has a prior conviction for, or is found not guilty by reason of insanity of, unlawful aiming or discharge of a firearm or dangerous weapon, or animal cruelty in the second degree.
- HB 2947 would have banned the manufacture, possession or distribution of large capacity magazines (15 or more rounds) and would mandate the Washington State Patrol establish a magazine buy-back program.
- SB 5389 would have authorized four telehealth pilots in school districts. The bill passed the House Education committee and is in the House Appropriations Committee.
- SB 6117 would have increased the special education multiplier for students who are in general education classrooms 80% or more of their time. The bill is dead but the funding and bill concepts may live on in budget language and funding.