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A policy and advocacy update from the Iowa Department of Education * Ted Stilwill, Director

NCLB Update

We still await USDE approval of our NCLB plan. As of this writing, only 17 state plans have been approved. The USDE has set early to mid-June as their target date for action on all state plans. We continue productive discussions with policy and legal staff from USDE, and they recognize we have support from our education organizations and from local educators. Our congressional offices have been in regular contact with USDE officials as well to express their support for our position, and the State Board of Education has agreed on a position statement in support of our proposed accountability plan. Finally, Governor Vilsack met with Secretary Rod Paige in April and received a positive report on our efforts to work toward approval.

We also are gaining a better understanding of the complexity of the work faced by USDE when they must examine and assess the different approaches taken by each state. I remain optimistic about the outcome of these discussions, although the timeline of approval will effect all of our work in reporting this summer.

Preliminary Legislative Update

Although the Legislature adjourned last week, a Special Session is set for May 29 to address key issues that remain unresolved. Some of these, particularly legislation to create the Iowa Values Fund (HF 683), are of high interest to us because of their impact on education. The Iowa Values Fund includes \$250 million for school infrastructure, but perhaps even more significant is the overall big picture - an economic stimulus that would give this state a decided advantage when it comes to attracting businesses that are innovative and pay well, and emerging industries that develop from Iowa's existing industries. A healthy economy and quality schools go hand-in-hand; they depend on and profit from each other.

Please note that because of the Special Session, I need to issue a strong caution that any or all of the issues highlighted below could be affected by future votes in that special session.

Highlights of education legislation completed during the regular session include:

Quality Teaching

- Funding of \$44.3 million to continue the current level of minimum salaries, mentoring and induction, professional development and evaluator training. (HF 662)
- Reinstatement of Team Based Variable Pay and funding of \$500,000 to allow for further study via pilot programs. (HF 549)
- Elimination of the remaining Phase III (professional development) funding. (HF 549)
- Local boards or administrators must report to Board of Educational Examiners when a licensed employee is terminated or resigns as a result of misconduct. (HF 549)

Classroom Instruction

- Funding of \$30 million to continue the class-size reduction and early intervention initiatives. (SF 458)
- Creation and funding of \$200,000 (as part of the Team-Based Variable Pay appropriation) to develop a reading pilot that tests the effectiveness of phonics instruction. (HF 549)

School administration

- Continue reorganization incentives to districts. (HF 549)
- Creation of a comprehensive information management system by the DE for the purpose of establishing standardized electronic data collections and reporting protocols that facilitate compliance with state and federal reporting requirements, improve school-to-school and district-to-district information exchanges, and maintain the confidentiality of individual student and staff data. In addition to meeting the requirements for NCLB, the DE must develop and implement a statewide program of educational assessment reporting, and must develop and maintain an internet site that includes ITBS and ITED scores for each district; grade equivalent scores and several other measures of progress listed in the bill. (HF 549)
- Creation of a special fund for the collection and distribution of local option sales taxes. NOTE: This is linked with the legislation that establishes the Iowa Values Fund, which has not passed. We are waiting for clarification about whether the funds go directly to school infrastructure or if the first priority must be given to reduce debt (property tax). (SF 445)
- Authorization for Charter Schools. (SF 172)
- The State Board of Education must adopt rules to clarify criteria and review of district voluntary desegregation plans. (HF 549)
- Maintain Sept. 1 as the official school start date. (HF 549)

Other

- Reinvention Government bill cuts \$10 million from FY04 AEA funding, requires AEAs to revert \$10 million in FY03 special education support service balances, and makes the \$7.5 million cut from the last two years permanent. It also calls for a study to consider the delivery of AEA services. (SF 453)
- \$3 million in funding to pay for education of kids in state institutions (Eldora, Toledo, Independence and Cherokee) is shifted from DHS to schools by taking it off the top of state foundation aid. (SF 453)

To get the text or history of any 2003 legislation, please visit <http://www.legis.state.ia.us/Bills.html>
 Iowa Education Leader will be distributed periodically from Iowa Department of Education Director Ted Stilwill. To send comments or receive a faxed copy, please contact editor Kathi Slaughter, 515/281-5651, kathi.slaughter@ed.state.ia.us.

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