

Legislative News

**** 2006 Legislative Session Recap ****

May 22, 2006

Following are legislative actions - most are still awaiting action by the governor.

ALLOWABLE GROWTH

Funding for schools comes from state money, local property taxes, and a small amount of federal money. A formula is used to determine the cost per student. Then funds are distributed to school districts based on the number of students in the district multiplied by the cost per student. The increase in the cost per student is set by the legislature each year and is called "allowable growth." The ratio of state money and property taxes varies from district to district according to the funding formula.

The legislature sets the allowable growth one year ahead. This year the legislature set the allowable growth rate for the 2007-2008 school year at four percent. From 1981 to 2005, Iowa slipped from 17th in the nation in per pupil spending to 37th. Iowa PTA will continue to advocate for at least six percent allowable growth in future legislative sessions to help schools recover from years of inadequate funding.

PROPERTY TAX EQUITY

Some school districts are "property poor" while others are "property rich." Property poor districts must tax property owners in their area at a higher rate to achieve the same level of funding as a property rich district. This year the legislature made a four-year commitment toward achieving more equitable distribution of funding between property rich and property poor districts.

TEACHER PAY AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In 2001, Iowa ranked 29th in teacher pay but is now 41st in the nation. The legislature approved \$210 million for higher teacher salaries over the next three years:

- \$35 million increase for 2006-2007
- \$70 million increase for 2007-2008
- \$105 million increase for 2008-2009

Providing teachers with the tools they need to engage every student requires professional development outside of instructional time. The legislature has committed additional funding for professional development. Adequate teacher pay and professional development opportunities are critical to providing a quality classroom experience for every student.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT POLICY

A parent involvement policy bill passed the House with a 69-29 vote. It did not get out of the education subcommittee in the Senate. The legislature did approve a small amount of money for a parent involvement liaison to assist school districts in improving parent involvement. More information will be provided as it becomes available.

PRESCHOOL

The legislature approved \$10 million to the state empowerment board for early childhood in 2006-07 and \$15 million each in 2007-08 and 2008-09.

AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

The legislature appropriated a small amount of money for before- and after-school programs within the Healthy Iowans Tobacco Trust. The bill allocates \$150,000 in new funding for a pilot program offering grants to school districts. Iowa ranks FIRST in the nation in the number of families with both (or the only) parent working. Consequently, afterschool programs are extremely important for Iowa. Iowa PTA is affiliated with the Iowa Afterschool Alliance (IAA) and the Iowa Community Education Association (ICEA) to promote afterschool programs in Iowa.

STATEWIDE GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

The legislature has set a goal to have 80 percent of the students in each graduating class complete four years of English and three years EACH of math, science and social studies with the core curriculum recommended by ACT. The new rule will first apply to the graduating class of 2010-2011. School districts will be required to report in their comprehensive school improvement plan what they will do to increase the number of students completing the core curriculum.

PTAs should help parents to understand the importance of these requirements and assist them in helping their high school students to make good choices regarding career exploration, planning and preparation. For information, visit **PTA Goes to Work** at www.pta.org

CHILD HEALTH AND NUTRITION

The legislature passed a bill directing the Department of Education and the Iowa Department of Public Health to convene a Healthy Children Task Force to assess current policies and laws relating to physical activity, physical education, nutrition and nutrition education. Another initiative will expand a pilot program that promotes community interventions for preventing obesity in elementary school children through nutrition and physical activity.

IOWA SAFE SURFACING INITIATIVE (ISSI)

ISSI is a state-funded program that offsets the costs of new, safe playgrounds around the state. Safety tiles reduce serious injuries in children by 55%, according to a study funded by the state of Iowa. For the fourth consecutive year, the legislature has allocated monies for safe playground surfacing. Public elementary schools and Head Start programs are eligible to apply for funding.

EXEMPTION FROM HEALTH CARE

Iowa law provides parents with a religious defense to felony child endangerment and manslaughter. Iowa is one of only three states with a religious defense to manslaughter when a child is kept from medical treatment. A bill making it a duty for parents to get necessary health care for their children failed to make it out of committee.

LIBRARIANS AND COUNSELORS

An agreement was reached to require each district to employ a certified librarian. Up to two districts may share a librarian. A requirement for each district to employ certified guidance counselors was NOT included in the agreement.

KEG REGISTRATION

Legislation to reduce underage drinking by registering beer kegs failed. However, a bill did pass concerning the ability to sue adults who provide alcohol to minors. (Of course, the keg registration would have been helpful in proving that an adult provided alcohol to minors.)

THANK YOUR LEGISLATORS

Take time to thank your senator and representative for their public service. Express your appreciation if they supported your position. If they were in opposition, tell them you are sorry they felt they could not support such important legislation. It is important for them to know that we are grateful for their service and pay attention to what they do.

**** GOVERNOR'S VETO NEEDED ****

The legislature approved a tax credit for donations to private school foundations that give tuition grants to attend qualified private schools. The legislation is unfair because the tax credit is NOT available for donations to public school foundations. Public education is under-funded and this legislation redirects resources to nonpublic schools.

Please contact Governor Vilsack and urge him to veto SF2409 because it is unfair to public schools and those who contribute to public school foundations.

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Thank you for being an advocate for children!