



## South Carolina Council of Teachers of Mathematics

### Message to Members

Marc Drews, President

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We are on a journey to help communities begin to see mathematics differently. As an organization, we will work to address the systemic issues of access, the achievement gap, agency, authenticity, and advocacy.

Here is the most current legislative update

The Senate began work on H. 4000, the \$9 billion budget, Wednesday morning. They worked late into the night on Wednesday and Thursday giving the bill second reading on Wednesday and third reading on Thursday evening. A total of nearly 100 amendments were offered throughout the two days with some amendments being adopted. Below is a recap of education funding approved in the Senate passed budget.

- \$159 million for a 4% increase in teacher salaries and to increase a beginning teacher's salary to \$35,000.
- \$15 million increase in the Base Student Cost.
- \$65 million for school district capital improvements with a set aside of 25% to be allocated for the consolidation of school districts.
- \$10 million to be used for the hiring of SROs.
- \$19 million for purchase/lease of school buses.
- \$20 million for instructional materials.
- \$49 million for employee health and dental insurance.
- \$35 million for employer share of retirement benefits.

Two provisos of note that were defeated require an explanation for why they did not move forward. Both have great merit but also require substantial funding that would cause a multitude of consequences.

- **Amendment 12** offered by Senator Hembree would have changed the Senate Finance Committee's proposal regarding teacher pay. The Committee's proposal increases the starting pay from \$32,000 to \$35,000 and provides at least a 4% salary increase to all other teachers. In contrast, Senator Hembree's amendment would have reduced the starting teacher salary increase from \$35,000 to \$33,600 and would have raised the percentage salary increase to 5% for all other teachers. The amendment was defeated by a vote of 30 to 15 primarily because the cost for these changes would have placed a huge financial burden on school districts. To pay for his proposal Senator Hembree reduced the Base Student Cost (BSC) allocation of \$15 million to \$7 million. While providing an additional 1% increase in teacher salaries is admirable, reducing the BSC allocation could force districts to seek additional local funds, reduce personnel, services or programs. BSC funds are primarily used to fund the required teacher step increase (approximately 2%), retirement benefits, health benefits, and operational costs. Funding a step increase on a 5% increase in salaries would have required school districts to make hard decisions regarding personnel and programs

- **Amendment 30** offered by Senator Fanning would have required school districts to adhere to class size ratios required by law. While this change is certainly needed because lowering class size ratios is beneficial to both teachers and students, the cost and application of this change would have major repercussions for school districts in a couple of ways. One is the cost. It has been estimated that in order to reach the class size ratios currently in law, the state would have to increase the Base Student Cost approximately \$500 million, which exceeds the total amount of recurring revenue available to the state this year to fund all of state government. This is a cost no school district could take on. Two, possible loss of accreditation for school districts. Our state is in a teacher shortage crisis. Districts are currently employing international teachers and long term substitutes just to fill current vacant positions. Districts that cannot find teachers needed to adhere to the class size ratios could be in jeopardy of losing accreditation. Adopting proposals without providing the needed funding or considering the consequences can exacerbate the problem rather than solve it.

Education provisos of note adopted by the Senate include

- **Amendment 34** offered by Senator Setzler reduces from \$2 million to \$1,935,000 the School Safety Program line. The \$65,000 reduction would be used to fund an SRO at the Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School.
- **Amendment 44** offered by Senator Sheheen suspends social studies testing in grades five and seven and science testing in grade eight for the coming fiscal year.
- **Amendment 14** offered by Senator Massey deleted a new proviso by the House which would require all students to receive cultural sensitivity instruction as a part of Black History instruction.
- **Amendment 51** offered by Senator Climer specified that any school district that is allocated state funds may utilize any fees derived from developmental impact fees to pay debt service on projects included in the capital improvements plan for which fees were imposed.
- **Amendment 83** offered by Senator Bright-Matthews allows the SCDE to allocate up to \$2 million of School Safety Program funds to school districts utilizing the same index of taxpaying ability criteria to hire school psychologists, psychiatrists or mental health counselors.
- **Amendment 90** offered by Senator Hembree creates a SC Workforce Development Artificial Intelligence (AI) Pilot Program (\$900,000) within the Department of Commerce to pilot AI programs in public high schools or career centers in Anderson, Florence and Charleston counties.
- **Amendment 91** offered by Senator Rankin directs the SCDE to develop a one-half credit virtual course in personal finance to be ready for use by June 30, 2020.
- **Amendment 94** offered by Senator Sheheen increases the SCDE Innovation Grants appropriation from \$500,000 to \$3.8 million and provides the Education Oversight Committee \$1.5 million for the After School Pilot Program and the Clemson Forest Initiative.

Three amendments relating to retirement were defeated because they violated a Senate rule (24) which does not allow making permanent changes to state law via proviso.

- **Amendment 32** offered by Senator Fanning would have allowed part-time school cafeteria workers to opt out of the SC Retirement System.
- **Amendment 33** offered by Senator Fanning would have allowed retired state employees to return to work without being subject to the earnings limitation if the employee had a 12-month break in service.
- **Amendment 50** offered by Senator Setzler would have allowed educators to return to work without being subject to the earnings limitation if they were employed in a public school.

Because the House was on spring break and the Senate was debating the budget no education-related bills were debated in subcommittee or full committee. Committee meetings should resume in both the House and the Senate next week.