



Legislative Update

Wisconsin Educational Media and Technology Association Board of Directors Meeting February 5, 2011

2011-12 Legislative Session Begins

The new legislature began its work in Madison in early January, with Republicans controlling the Assembly, 60-38-1, and the Senate, 19-14. Much of the activity so far has been guided by new Republican Governor Scott Walker, who called a special session on job creation hours after being sworn into office. Several of his proposals have already been enacted into law or are moving quickly through the legislative process.

I have attached several detailed committee lists to help in our work with the 2011-12 Wisconsin Legislature. They are:

- Joint Finance
- Assembly Education
- Assembly Colleges and Universities
- Senate Education
- Senate Public Health, Human Services and Revenue

Budget Release Date Set

Governor Walker has announced that he will release his budget proposal on February 22 and will deliver his budget address to the Legislature that night at 7 p.m. The next state budget biennium begins on July 1, 2011 and ends on June 30, 2013.

Fiscal Bureau Releases Updated Revenue Figures

Each year, the Legislative Fiscal Bureau (LFB) prepares its analysis of general fund revenue and expenditure projections. In odd-numbered years, the Legislature uses the analysis as it takes action on the state budget. This year's document was released on January 31 and contains both good and bad news.

The good news is that the closing balance for the current fiscal year is expected to be \$54 million higher than the Doyle Administration calculated in November and December reports. The LFB says the state will end the current fiscal year with a gross balance of \$121.4 million, which amounts to a net balance of \$56.4 million if the required statutory balance of \$65 million is subtracted. But, the newly calculated balance does not take into account shortfalls in Medicaid and a couple of other appropriations totaling about \$178 million. Nor does it include the \$200 million (plus interest) that the state needs to pay back to the medical malpractice fund, or the \$58.7 million (plus interest) that Wisconsin owes to Minnesota after termination of their income tax reciprocity agreement.

It is because of these shortfalls and debts that were not subtracted from the balance that the Governor will introduce a budget repair bill in the near future to balance the current year's budget that ends on June 30. This bill will make adjustments to the current budget to fill the shortfall explained above.

Looking forward to the next biennium, revenue is projected to be about \$203 million less than was estimated in a December Department of Administration report (which had raised revenue estimates). More than half of the latest reduction is due to the fiscal impact of three special session bills approved recently, which have a combined cost of \$117 million.

In total, the state faces a deficit of well over \$3 billion in the next biennium. The Fiscal Bureau has not updated that figure, but it appears that the magnitude of the problem did not change very much with the new Fiscal Bureau analysis.

Link to the report here: http://legis.wisconsin.gov/lfb/Misc/2011_01_31Vos&Darling.pdf

Governor Delivers State of State Address

Governor Walker delivered his first State of the State Tuesday night under a Capitol Dome illuminated Green and Gold and with a blizzard raging outside. He touted early legislative accomplishments in the young session and spoke in sweeping terms of the difficult choices ahead and his plans to get the State's fiscal house in order. He said his budget would look to public employee benefits as an area to cut by asking employees to pay 5% toward their pensions and 12% (up from 6%) for health insurance premiums. He claimed this would save more than \$30 million over three months. He said, "Government benefits have grown while so many others in the private sector have seen their benefits adjusted in order to protect jobs."

The Governor did not give many specifics about the upcoming state budget. He did confirm that there will be a budget repair bill to fill the shortfall in the current fiscal year. The words "education" and "school" did not appear in the speech.

Special Session Bills Focus on Jobs, Economy

After declaring that "Wisconsin is open for business," Governor Walker called the Legislature into a special session to focus on the economy and job creation and introduced 10 of his own bills. The bills range from tax incentives for businesses that relocate to Wisconsin, to modest income tax reductions for small businesses that create new jobs, to tax deductibility for contributions to health savings accounts and tort reform. Governor Walker and legislative leaders said repeatedly that these bills are only the beginning of a larger strategy that will likely play out in the state budget and other bills.

One of the special session bills may be of particular interest to WEMTA. SS-AB-5 and its companion, SS-SB-5 would require a two-thirds supermajority in each house to pass any increase to the income, sales or franchise tax (i.e., corporate income tax). Proponents plan to follow-up this bill with a proposed constitutional amendment along the same lines. The Assembly passed SS-AB-5 by a vote of 57-36 on January 25, and it is available for scheduling on the Senate floor.

Bill history for SS-AB-5: <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/2011/data/jr1AB5hst.html>

Bill history for SS-SB-5: <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/2011/data/jr1SB5hst.html>

Open Enrollment System Modified Under SB 2

The only bill introduced so far this session that is directly related to education is Senate Bill 2, which deals with the timing of the application process under the Open Enrollment Program. Introduced by Senator Luther Olsen (R-Ripon), the bill is designed to make it easier for families to move their children to different school systems by extending the time families could apply for a change in school districts for their K-12 pupils. Under current law, parents have two-and-a-half weeks in February to apply for Open Enrollment. The new legislation would extend the application period from February until the end of April.

On February 2, the Senate passed SB 2 by a vote of 20-11 and sent it to the Assembly for further action.

Bill history: <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/2011/data/SB2hst.html>

Library Legislative Day

Library Legislative Day is just around the corner. It will be on February 22 at the Concourse Hotel, with registration beginning at 7:45 a.m. (program starts at 8:00). Jointly sponsored by WEMTA and the Wisconsin Library Association, this year's theme is "Building a Common Agenda." The focus will be on three areas: education, jobs and economic development, and information access and technology. Here are links to briefing papers for these issues and other information.

Building a Common Agenda: <http://www.wla.lib.wi.us/legis/day/documents/Advocacy101.pdf>

Who We Are: <http://www.wla.lib.wi.us/legis/documents/Who%20we%20are.pdf>

Education: <http://www.wla.lib.wi.us/legis/documents/Edcard.pdf>

Jobs and Economic Development: <http://www.wla.lib.wi.us/legis/documents/Jobscard.pdf>

Information Access and Technology: <http://www.wla.lib.wi.us/legis/documents/InfoCard.pdf>

Common School Fund Amounts Announced

In mid-January, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and the Board of Commissioners of Public Lands (BCPL) announced the funding levels for 2010-11 Common School Fund distributions. The amount per census student rate is \$27.29, which is up from \$25.85 last year but down from \$28.37 the year before that. Payments to districts will be made on Monday, April 25, 2011. Also be sure to check out the attached storyboard, recently developed by the Board of Commissioners of Public Lands, which does a nice job summarizing the CSF. BCPL is currently producing corresponding brochures which will be available at the WEMTA conference in March.

Link to the Common School Fund amounts for the current school year:
<http://www.dpi.wi.gov/sfs/comsch.html>.

If you would like more information about the BCPL their website is: <http://bcpl.wisconsin.gov>.

WASB Votes Down CSF Proposal

On January 19, the Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB) Delegate Assembly voted to not support “Resolution 11-08: Common School Fund,” which was opposed by WEMTA. The resolution would have put WASB on record in support of allowing local districts discretion to use up to 50 percent of their allotment of Common School Fund library aid “to preserve or increase the number of certified librarians.” WEMTA’s letter in opposition to the resolution was read during the Delegate Assembly debate on the measure. WASB’s website calls the debate “vigorous” and “spirited” and the vote was very close. WEMTA played an important role on this issue under the leadership of Sandy Heiden, Allison Kaplan and Kathy Sanders. Thanks goes out to all who played a role.

WEMTA Convenes CSF Stakeholders

WEMTA has gathered a group of organizations that have a special interest in the Common School Fund in order to strategize on protecting the Fund during the 2011-12 legislative session. A special thanks goes out to early participants, the School Administrators Alliance, Wisconsin Education Association Council and the Wisconsin Association of School Boards. We look forward to building relationships with other stakeholders to work on issues, such as the WASB vote above, and protecting the CSF into the future. We also continue to work closely BCPL and DPI toward this goal.

Wauwatosa Chooses Language Program Over Librarians

On January 24, the Wauwatosa School Board approved a new world language program and will eliminate most full-time elementary school librarian positions to afford hiring Spanish teachers. The [controversial proposal](#), which passed in a 4-3 vote, drew standing-room only crowds of parents at meetings, many of whom supported language instruction but didn’t want to give up full-time library media specialist positions in exchange. The district proposed moving librarians into teaching roles, except for one full-time position that would oversee part-time aides in the elementary school libraries.

Concealed Carry on Horizon

Most Capitol observers agree that legislation to allow the concealed carry of weapons is a virtual certainty this session. The only question is who will be allowed to carry and what, if any, exceptions will there be to where someone can carry. Will a permit be required? If so, how easy will it be to obtain one? Will anyone be prohibited from carrying? Will government buildings, schools, places of worship, and other sensitive places be exempt from the law? These questions will be central to the debate when it comes up sometime later this session.