

## WCASD Legislative Action Committee

### Legislative Update – April 26, 2018

#### FEDERAL – Bills to watch

**Vouchers-** The federal push for vouchers is on the agenda for the education committees with consideration of the **Military Education Savings Accounts Act (HR 5199 / S. 2517)**, which would create a private school voucher program for students with an active-duty parent in the military. There are efforts to attach this bill to must-pass legislation that funds the military (**the National Defense Authorization Act**). The bill would use funds designated for the federal Impact Aid program to pay for a new Education Savings Account (ESA) program for military-connected students. Impact Aid provides funding to school districts that have lost local tax revenue due to the presence of federal tax-exempt land, such as military installations, Native American reservations, or national parks. Under the proposed ESA program, a few military-connected students will be eligible for a \$2500 voucher that they can use at a private school, online school, summer camp, afterschool programs or for homeschooling.

#### PENNSYLVANIA – Bills to watch

- 1. School Director Elections-** On April 18, 2016, the House passed **House Bill 638** by a vote of 114-77. This bill would amend the Election Code to eliminate the ability of candidates for school board to cross-file nomination petitions. The sponsor of the bill, Representative Simmons, indicated that “school board members once in office make very important decisions related to a school district's budget, and constituents are increasingly viewing this position as a partisan one. Often, voters are confused when a school board candidate receives the nomination of more than one party on the ballot, and eliminating their ability to cross-file could provide some clarity to voters in school board elections.” The bill now moves to the Senate for consideration.
- 2. Civics Education-** On April 16, 2018, the House passed **House Bill 564** by a vote of 194-1. The bill requires school entities to administer at least once to students during grades 7-12 a locally developed assessment of U.S. History, government and civics. LEAs could use the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Test for this purpose. In addition, the LEA must issue a certificate of recognition to students to pass the assessment. At the end of the 2020-21 school year, the PDE would be required to conduct a survey of LEAs concerning compliance with these requirements, and LEAs would be required to respond no later than November 30, 2021. The PDE would need to make that data public by the following January.
- 3. Sunscreen Applications at School-** On April 16, 2018, the House unanimously passed **House Bill 1228**. This bill allows students to apply a non-aerosol, topical sunscreen without a physician's note or prescription if the student's parent/guardian has provided documentation that the student can apply the product.
- 4. School Safety Tip Line-** On April 24, 2018, the Senate Education Committee unanimously approved **Senate Bill 1142**. This bill would establish the Safe2Say Program that provides for methods of anonymous reporting concerning unsafe, potentially harmful, dangerous, violent or criminal

activities in schools or the threat of the activities. The legislation requires the Attorney General to administer the act and to create procedures:

- for anonymous reporting of unsafe, potentially harmful, dangerous, violent or criminal activities in schools or the threat of the activities;
- to ensure that the identity of the individual making a report remain anonymous to any person, including law enforcement and employees of the Safe2Say Program Office;
- to promptly forward any information received by the program to the appropriate law enforcement agency or school official;
- to train individuals, such as emergency dispatch centers, local law enforcement and school personnel on appropriate awareness and response; and
- to develop education materials and promote program awareness to participating school districts.

5. **Police/LEA Agreements-** On April 23, 2018, the Senate Education Committee unanimously approved **Senate Bill 1136**. This bill amends section 778 of the Public School Code to clarify that a school district can enter into an agreement with a municipal police department to provide part-time police coverage in addition to full time police coverage. These agreements currently are available only for full-time SROs.

6. **Online Private Schools-** On April 23, 2018, the Senate Education Committee approved **House Bill 857** by a vote of 11-1. This bill amends the Private Academic Schools Act to allow online schools to become licensed by the State Board of Private Academic Schools.

7. **Career and Technical Education bills-** On April 16, 2018, the House Education Committee approved a series of Career and Technical Education (CTE) bills. Some key bills include:

**Vocational Instructional Certificates- House Bill 2155** reduces the credit requirements for awarding vocational instructional certificates.

**EITC Funds- House Bill 2156** creates and implements a Career and Technical Education Partnership Tax Credit Program, in which business firms can make donations to public schools, CTCs and institutions of higher education via career and technical education partnership organizations in exchange for a tax credit. The program would begin with a \$15 million limit. *This bill would lower available General Fund revenues for education.*

**Career Information & Recruitment- House Bill 2158** requires school districts to consider all career presenters in the same manner and to provide at least one opportunity during the year to provide career information to all students in grades 4-12 individually or in a group setting.

8. **Property Tax Credit Bill-** The House Finance Committee met on April 16, 2018, to consider and approve **House Bill 2040**. The Committee re-referred this to the House Aging and Older Adult Services Committee. The bill creates a Senior Tax Reduction Incentive Volunteer Exchange Program to allow school districts to establish programs to provide property tax credits to individuals 60 years or older who volunteer in the school district. Basically, the bill would give legal authority to school districts to provide additional property tax relief to senior citizens who volunteer.

9. **Voucher Bill-** On Friday, April 20, 2018, the Senate Education Committee gave notice that **Senate Bill 2**, the voucher bill, would be considered at their April 24 meeting. However, the bill was pulled from the voting agenda on April 23. Indications are that the bill will run in May. Even though part of **Senate Bill 2** affects only those who are in the bottom 15 percent (low-performing schools), **all school districts would be affected**, since **Senate Bill 2** as currently written also provides those grants to students entering kindergarten or first grade AND the grants continue to follow the child, even if the family moves to another district. Once eligible, the Education Savings Account stays with the child with no contingencies.

10. **Graduation Requirements-** Although **Senate Bill 1095** was drafted with input from the education associations to address the graduation requirements; both Senators Eichelberger and Dinniman are not necessarily supportive as they have pushed **Senate Bill 660**.

**Senate Bill 660** would adopt and implement two of the four options presented in the *PDE's Findings and Recommendations Pursuant to Act 1 of 2016* for students to demonstrate postsecondary readiness. These include **Option 3:** Demonstrate competency in standards-based subject matter content through course grades or assessments plus, for students who are identified as Career and Technical Education (CTE) Concentrators, demonstrate evidence of readiness for postsecondary success through National Occupancy Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI)/National Institute for Metalworking Skills (NIMS) Skills assessments or Competency Certificates; and **Option 4:** Demonstrate competency in standards-based subject matter content through course grades or assessments plus evidence related to postsecondary plans that demonstrate readiness to meaningfully engage in those plans.

**Senate Bill 1095** adjusts the requirement that students pass the state-developed Keystone Exams in Literature, Algebra I and Biology in order to graduate, a requirement that was scheduled to become effective during the 2019-20 school year after two legislative delays, and instead creates a system of multiple pathways for students to demonstrate graduation readiness.

Due to the difference of opinion by leadership, there is a lot of discussion going on behind the scenes, with the possibility of some type of "compromise" proposal coming out soon. There is a co-sponsorship memo circulating but no bill language is available yet to review. There are conversations being held in the House to get a companion bill to **Senate Bill 1095** introduced so that movement can happen if the Senate Education Chair does not want to put forth **Senate Bill 1095**. Yet another proposal, from Senator Aument (R- Lancaster), would push the Keystone Exams as a graduation requirement to 2029.

11. **School Safety-** Discussions are moving forward in both chambers. In agreement right now seems to be to allow school security discussions to be held in executive session. Both chambers are still trying to reconcile priorities on the issue and where additional funds will come from, but there is now a widespread awareness that funding must be flexible, that it may be needed for more than physical security (i.e. personnel, student support services).

- 12. PlanCon-** After an impasse, the PlanCon Advisory Committee work group is meeting again. Hopefully this will result in a report and recommendations in the near future. School safety issues are coming into play as part of those discussions, with the thinking that there should be some part of PlanCon reimbursement set aside for school safety measures.
- 13. Property Tax Elimination-** On April 23, 2018, Senator Scavello (R-Monroe) held a press conference to announce his bill, **Senate Bill 1137**, that calls for the elimination of school property taxes on all owner-occupied homes in the state. Utilizing the mechanism established through the Constitutional Amendment for property tax relief through the Homestead Exclusion up to 100 percent of assessed value, the bill shifts the tax burden from homestead properties to an increase in the state personal income tax to 5.05 percent. This “Education Tax” is expected to generate around \$9.3 billion, which will be placed in a separate account specifically for property tax elimination.