

2004 Report on Education Legislation

Introduction

The 2004 Short Session convened on May 10, 2004, and adjourned *sine die* as the sun came up on Sunday, July 18, 2004. Although the fiscal year ended with a small surplus, items not funded in the continuation budget (salary increases for teachers and state employees, enrollment increases for the university system and community colleges, ABCs bonuses, funds for repairs and renovations, and money for the “rainy day” fund) meant another tight year for the Governor and for budget writers in the General Assembly. And, after losing more than 100,000 jobs in North Carolina in the past year, economic recovery was the top priority of legislators. As a result, monies were appropriated to attract new industry to North Carolina, to expand training programs at North Carolina’s Community Colleges, to build a cancer center at UNC and a heart center at ECU, to establish a pharmacy school at Elizabeth City State University, and establish a new public health program at UNC-Asheville, in addition to several other new university-based programs.

Governor Easley’s priority for public schools was reduction of class size in grade 3, a logical step after previous reductions in Kindergarten and grades 1 and 2. This year’s reduction was the most costly at \$50 million, because a larger reduction in the formula was necessary to achieve the allotment ratio of 1:18 for grade 3.

\$108 million was set aside for ABCs bonus payments, teachers and school administrators saw increases to their respective salary schedules and moved up a step, and other school employees received salary increases of the greater of 2.5% or \$1000, the first significant increase in 3 years for public school personnel other than teachers and principals. Vocational education funds cut last year were restored, and new school nurse positions were provided in the Health and Human Services budget.

In the end, funds for other items were tightly squeezed, and public schools saw reductions in materials and supplies, textbooks, and replacement school buses. When agreement could not be reached on where to make additional cuts, a second non-recurring discretionary reduction of \$27.6 million was added to the \$44.3 million reduction already in the continuation budget, bringing the total discretionary reduction for public schools to \$72.9 million.

One of the most controversial issues to confront the 2004 General Assembly was the school calendar. Legislation was introduced that prohibits students starting school prior to August 25 and requires that students be out by June 10. It reduces the number of teacher workdays to 15. The legislation was supported by many parents, teachers, and the tourism industry but was opposed by most administrators and school boards. The legislation passed in the wee hours of the morning on Sunday, July 18, just prior to adjournment, and becomes effective beginning with the 2005-2006 school year.

This *2004 Report on Education Legislation* includes summaries and, in the appendix, the full text of all legislation affecting public schools from the 2004 short session of the 2003 General

Assembly. The DPI website, www.ncpublicschools.org, has an extensive section on the legislature including archives of daily reports on the 2004 session. For additional information on the actions of the General Assembly, please contact the State Board of Education Legislative Office, Education Building, 301 N. Wilmington Street, Raleigh, NC 27601-2825.