

Legislative Update by OAESA/OASSA Advocacy Specialist Barbara Shaner October 1, 2019

Legislature Back in Session After Summer Recess

The General Assembly passed a state budget bill in July (albeit 17 days past the deadline) and then recessed for the summer. While talks continued behind the scenes on issues like Academic Distress Commissions and school funding, there were no hearings or floor sessions until mid-September.

Additionally, education topics such as report card reform and dyslexia screening have received attention. The budget bill (HB 166) included a requirement that a report card committee be established to review the current report card and make recommendations for change. Made up of legislators, the state superintendent and three school superintendents appointed by BASA, the committee's report is due to the legislature December 15, 2019. The House has made its appointments to the group. It's likely the Senate will wait until the bill goes effective (October 17th; 90 days after the governor's signature).

Meanwhile, stakeholders are weighing in on what they want to see in report card reform. Over the past year, there have been multiple proposals circulated. HB 591, a bill sponsored by Representative Mike Duffey in the last General Assembly (during 2018) had a significant amount of support from the education community, but time ran out before it gained enough traction in the legislature to pass. The State Board of Education had its own recommendations, as did the Fordham Foundation. BASA has a report card committee which also developed a position paper on proposed changes (three members of the BASA committee will be appointed to the legislative report card group).

Dyslexia Screening

This topic is gaining momentum with two related bills in the Senate (SB 102 & SB 200) and one soon to be introduced in the House. OAESA members would be affected by the screening requirements in these proposals and the ongoing requirement to serve the identified students, including the requisite training for staff. We will continue to monitor the progress of these initiatives.

Academic Distress Commissions

The Ohio House of Representatives approved HB 154 last Spring and then added the bill to its version of the budget bill (HB 166). Current law governing Academic Distress Commissions (ADCs) would have been repealed and replaced with new requirements for districts with an overall "F" on the district report card.

The Senate did not agree that the House proposal on ADCs went far enough, and removed the provisions from HB 154 from the budget bill. The Senate Education Committee held special hearings on the issue during the budget deliberations, but could not come to agreement on what should be included. Instead, the final version of HB 166 called for a moratorium on the appointment of any new ADCs until October 2020.

Talks continued over the summer resulting in the Senate Education Committee accepting a new substitute version of HB 154 at its hearing on September 10th. Several changes to the original bill were included in the substitute version. Generally, the Senate wants to see some type of state takeover after a period of local effort to turn around the district's "failing" school buildings. Also, the Senate version would provide funds for districts to use in contracting with turnaround experts/organizations.

Additional changes were made to the September 10 version of the substitute bill; three new drafts were released over a three-week period and a second hearing took place on the 17th. However, after no agreement could be reached among committee members, the September 24th scheduled Senate Education Committee Meeting (and expected vote) was cancelled. Critics from both sides of the aisle have expressed opposition to this legislation, but for widely varying reasons.

If no agreement can be reached, the affected districts will continue to be under state control. While the moratorium on any new ADCs is in place until next year, if no changes are made soon, more districts could become subject to a state takeover.