

# A Leg Up

The Weekly Legislative Update for the Clark County School District

May 18, 2013

Since Friday, May 17 was another major deadline for the Nevada State Legislature, the past week featured many committee meetings starting early in the morning and working late into the evening to complete hearings on bills and to finesse amendment language that would render a bill acceptable to a majority of the committee members. For citizens trying to listen to hearings on the Internet, the week proved somewhat frustrating because normal meeting times were constantly adjusted. It is common during these hectic weeks to see agendas announcing a particular committee will begin “upon adjournment” of another committee. The only way to ensure you don’t miss the hearing you want is to monitor the progress of the other committee. However, trying to monitor the other committee may find you with another notice, indicating that committee will also begin “upon adjournment” of yet another committee. It reminds me of planes waiting in line on the runway – one cannot take off until the plane ahead of it takes off, even with everyone on board and ready to go.

Six bills on our tracking list died on Friday for failing to meet the deadline to pass through the committee of the second house: Assembly Bills 251, 357, and 403; and Senate Bills 2, 59, and 144. SB 59 was CCSD’s bill that would have allowed the Board of Trustees to determine if and when public school facilities could be used by charter schools. The loss of SB 59 is especially disappointing because Assembly Education Chairman Elliot Anderson refused to hold a hearing on the bill, stating he was told it would lead to CCSD converting large amounts of public schools into charter schools during negotiations, which is baffling. Ironically, in an unnoticed and hurriedly-called late-afternoon meeting of Assembly Education on Friday (less than an hour after the chair had adjourned the regular committee), Chairman Anderson quickly passed SB311, a Parent Trigger bill which includes language that is dependent upon the use of school facilities for charter schools, usage that is not allowed by Nevada law but could have been rectified with SB59. Only a couple of us were in the hearing because most of those who regularly attend education meetings had gone home, believing the work of the committee was done.

Also on Friday, the budget closing for the School Distributive Account (DSA) took place. School officials were disappointed to learn of a “technical adjustment” in the budget that decreased DSA funding by \$87 per student. This “adjustment,” removes \$75.8 million from school district budgets over the biennium, creating serious challenges for local school boards not only because of the loss of dollars, but also because their tentative budgets were approved by May 15, as required by law, and this information was revealed on May 17. It is still unknown how the Joint Committee will distribute the newly-found \$75.8 million, but the potential for it being used to fund new programs exists, even as it creates a hole in local budgets supporting existing programs. Stay tuned on this one.

Although the work of the education committees is largely completed, meetings will still take place as needed. The “money committees” (Senate Finance and Assembly Ways and Means) have dockets stacked high with bills that were declared “exempt” because of the fiscal notes attached to them or because of their potential impact on the State budget. As these committees work their way through these bills, many of the other committees will reconvene as the bills are sent to them. As a result, it is difficult for committee secretaries to provide much advance notice for hearings and it’s essential for interested followers to check the website frequently for postings. This is the time it is really helpful to receive emails from the personal legislative bill tracking system to keep you informed.

## Here's a Tidbit

**What is a conference committee?** Recall that the process a bill goes through on its way to become law is that it starts out in one house, and then must be approved by the second house. The bill is often amended in the second house, sometimes with minor tweaks, but sometimes substantially. Following passage in the second house, the bills return to their house of origin. If the bill has been amended, the original house can concur with the amendments and approve the bill with its new language, or they can disagree with the changes that were made. When there is a disagreement, a “conference committee” is appointed to meet and to find common ground.

This description of conference committees comes from the 2013 Legislative Manual: *Another particularly important type of committee is the conference committee. Whenever a bill is passed by both houses in differing forms because of amendments added by one of the houses, and the two houses cannot agree on identical language for the bill in question, each house appoints a number of conferees to meet with conferees of the other house to seek a resolution of the differences existing in the two versions of the bill. In a conference committee, the conferees of one house may agree to amendments adopted in the other house or recede from the amendments adopted by their chamber. Conferees may also decide that new amendments or even new bills are necessary to reach accord. A conference committee may consider the whole subject matter of a bill without restriction to the points in dispute and may make any changes it deems appropriate. Once the conferees reach an agreement, they report back to their respective houses with their recommendations. The report of a conference committee may be adopted by acclamation, and such action is considered equivalent to the final passage voting requirement of the bill as recommended in the report. Conference reports themselves are not subject to amendment.*

*The 2011 Joint Rules of the Senate and Assembly require that there be no more than one conference committee on any bill or resolution. The rules also require that a majority of the members from each house on a committee be members who voted for passage of the measure. If agreement cannot be reached by the conference committee, the bill or resolution dies.*

The final two weeks of the legislature will see many conference committee meetings. This part of the process can be particularly frustrating for those trying to follow specific legislation, because conference committees are often difficult to schedule and sometimes take place with very little notice. If you're following a specific bill and want to be aware of when conference committee meetings are held, it might help to contact the committee secretary (name and contact number can be found on the NELIS page for the committee in which the bill is located) and ask them to keep you informed.