

SAM Legislative Tid Bits 3-15-19

Highlights of Week 10 (Mar 11 – Mar 16)

Saturday, March 16 will mark day 54 of the 66th Montana Legislative Session. Administrators will gather in Helena to advocate for MT public education and visit with legislators on Monday, March 18 for the Day of Advocacy. Review [SAMLN19 Legislative Update 10 3-8-19](#) and [Podcast Week 10](#) to find out about the week's activity.

Discussions about early childhood education took place this week with both the Governor's office and legislators interested in legislation for preschool. The MT-PEC partners prepared a memo and sent it to the interested parties in order to ensure clear understanding of where we stand on the issues being discussed. The public education advocates partnering in the MT-PEC appreciate the bipartisan interest in supporting publicly-funded early childhood education in Montana. The memo offers thoughts on what the MT-PEC partners understand to be the evolving plan to fund early childhood education in the 2019 Legislature. The current form of the bill would allow public funding for private education, which is in conflict with SAM Advocacy Priority to Oppose Privatization with Public Funds. Please click [HERE](#) to view the memo in its entirety.

Upcoming Week 11 (March 18-23) Update

[SAM Followed Bills 3-15-19](#) are up to 119 with 260 bill drafts being monitored. [SAM Followed Bills Priority Status 3-15-19](#) describes the status of bills under the SAM advocacy priorities – Support Adequate and Equitable School Funding (21 bills), Support Recruitment and Retention of Quality Educators (5 bills), Oppose Privatization with Public Funds (0 bills), Support Facility and Technology Infrastructure (4 bills), Support School Based Mental Health Services (5 bills), and a new category of Other SAM Followed Bills (35 bills).

Please checkout [SAMLN19 Schedule Week 11 Mar 18-23 Revised 3-14-19](#) to see the schedule of bills and the status of the SAM's - support, opposition or monitoring - during the upcoming committee hearings.

Remember, MT-PEC's Day of Advocacy is in Helena on Monday. This date was specifically chosen to have our members be able to touch base with their legislators during this critical time of the session. It would be great if we could get even more of our members to attend. We know that every person who comes will have made a significant and positive difference for each child in every public school through your advocacy efforts. If you have not yet registered but are planning to come, please email me at samkm@sammt.org.

As I have described, about 90% of the SAM advocacy package has been achieved with the passing of [HB 159](#) K-12 funding bill - inflation, and the remaining 10% is a heavy lift that is underway. We are seeing positive movement on bills we have worked on and support that fit into that 10% of the work remaining category.

- [HB 247](#) has passed the Legislature. Provided that the Governor signs as expected, then starting July 1, 2019, school districts will have new options to obtain loans for major maintenance and will be able to use major maintenance state (NRD payment) and local (levy) resources to service the debt on such loans. This is a major victory for our members interested in maintaining their buildings and was a bill whose idea was born at the SAM Delegate Assembly 2018 and is headed to become law!

- [HB 218](#) CTE bill (by a vote of [89-4](#)); [HB 351](#) Transformational learning bill (by a vote of [68-26](#)) and [HB 387](#) Create advanced opportunity act (by a vote of [77-17](#)), all passed third reading in the House on Thursday. These bills combined will, if passed, increase funding for Montana's public schools over the next four years by just short of \$30 million. Clearing the House with their appropriations intact is a huge positive step in the right direction and increases the likelihood that we will obtain new support for both proficiency-based/personalized learning and career and technical education.
- [HB 638](#), providing an inflationary increase for special education, is likely to pass the House today on third reading after a [92-8](#) passage rate on 2nd reading yesterday. This is not all we want or need in relation to special education but it does meet at least part of our objective to ensure inflationary increases for special education funding. If passed, HB 638 will increase special education funding for Montana's public schools by \$4.4 million over the next four years. Coops are still a priority for us and we are still pursuing funding increases of \$2 million annually. At this point, however, we are gaining no appreciable traction on our advocacy. We will be working on solutions to sustain our cooperatives regardless of what happens in this session and will be focusing on options for using the tuition fund nonvoted levy to help sustain the quality services provided to children throughout Montana while we fight for an increase in state funding during the upcoming interim. This is a good reminder that advocacy is a year-round activity.
- [HB 211](#) Critical educator shortage loan repayment, [HB 420](#) Encourage grow your own programs to address teacher shortage, and [HB 459](#) Provide support for rural school recruitment and retention – are recruitment and retention bills that are still alive and would infuse funds help our schools with recruiting and retaining quality educators.

The tools to follow everything during the legislative session are ready for all SAM members to view and use by clicking on the [2019 Legislative Session](#) under the 'Advocacy' tab on the SAM website (www.sammt.org).