

SAMLN19 Legislative Update 17 4-16-19 11:30 AM

Update on happenings on Legislative Day 80 (4-16-19) ...

As follow up to the update on Preschool sent to you in Update 16 last night, the following is further information of what has transpired this morning with details of the actions over the weekend, yesterday and today. Simply put, on behalf of SAM, I believe that the push this session to provide a preschool bill that meets the needs of our communities and starts public preschool in our state, has morphed into being more about privatization with public funds than preschool. SAM, based on our positions, resolutions and advocacy priorities cannot support what this has become, and we will hope that it just goes away rather than becoming a final day deal cut in this 66th legislative session. Read the details below ...

Update on Early Childhood Education Discussions

Staff from the Governor's Office and legislators from both parties (Reps Moore, Jones, Schreiner, Bishop) recently asked the public education advocacy groups partnering in the Montana Public Education Center to further discuss the issue of early childhood education with an eye toward resolving our differences and finding common ground.

We worked extensively over the weekend, brainstorming on places where we could move in pursuit of consensus/compromise without sacrificing core values. The [Preschool Bill Draft](#) reflects the consensus, even what you might call the "final stand" of all partners in MT-PEC with the exception of the Montana Rural Education Association (MREA). MREA has been involved in the discussions but has a stated position in favor of other priorities, a position that we all understand and respect.

The attached draft reflects substantial movement by the MT-PEC groups. If this proposal were advanced during the remaining days of the 2019 Legislature, we (with the exception of MREA) would strongly support and help pass this bill into law.

The [Preschool Bill Draft](#) includes the following:

1. Bridge funding for Stars to Quality Pre-K and Federal Development Grants in FY20, consistent with HB 755.
2. Funding for nonsectarian head start programs providing pre-k, at 40% of Max ANB for the first ANB (which is consistent with the formula for private schools under HB 755).
3. A process for public schools to apply to offer preschool that mirrors the processes in other bills upon which we have successfully collaborated in this session, including both HB 351, transformational learning and HB 387, advanced opportunity CTE. The elected board must lead the process. A strategic plan with measurable objectives and planned strategies is required, focused on:
 1. Social and emotional development;
 2. Creation of an academic foundation for school readiness;
 3. Development of cognitive functioning necessary for school success.
4. A biennial report by the Board of Public Education to the Legislature.

In a significant move toward the interests we had heard from state policymakers, we proposed to include a process for private nonsectarian charter preschools to become chartered to operate by the elected board of trustees, consistent with the current process in Board of Public Education rule authorizing public schools to become charter schools. This language, reflected in section 2 would create new opportunities for private pre-k

providers to collaborate with public schools in which the pre-k is operating, while retaining authority over the charter in the hands of the school district and volunteer trustees elected in each community.

1. Approved by the elected board through public and private partnership.
2. Variances to standards of the board of public education subject to approval of the board of public education.
3. Documentation of a process for stakeholder engagement.
4. Chartered every two years (to coincide with biennial legislative sessions).

We also offered coinciding amendments to current law as needed to authorize pre-k:

1. Definition of pupil in 20-1-101 – to provide for ½ time ANB. We gave up on our earlier assertion that ANB should be available at ¼ time. The range of hours of aggregate instruction authorized and funded under the bill as we wrote it would be 360-539.
2. Removal of the prohibition on use of foundation aid for pre-k under 20-7-117, MCA. We also provided a means by which the first year of funding could be provided, based on pre-k pupils registered as of June 1.
3. Removal of the prohibition on counting pre-k pupils in ANB under 20-9-311, MCA. We specified the 360 hours of aggregate instruction as the minimum required here.
4. Inclusion of pre-k pupils as eligible transportees.

Finally, we included a section encouraging the board of public education to revisit its preschool standards.

The appropriation as we proposed it included:

1. \$2 million in FY20 for Stars to Quality Pre-k to create a bridge to the new program.
2. \$3 million in FY20 for federal preschool development grants to create a bridge to the new program.
3. \$9 million to schools and private charter schools starting in FY21 through distribution of Base Aid.
4. \$2 million to head start programs starting in FY21 through the 40% of max elementary ANB.

With time remaining in the session being as short as it is, we wanted to provide state policymakers with language and a proposal upon which they could unequivocally rely in moving forward. We have done so with the [Preschool Bill Draft](#).

So far, unfortunately, the reception to our proposal has been less than enthusiastic and with scarce days left in the session, we do not anticipate finding common ground. We have concluded that we have a fundamental, irresolvable difference of opinion with state policy makers regarding not just the wisdom but the legality of incorporating a separately-supervised privatization structure that funds public education outside of the general supervision of the board of public education and outside the supervision and control of elected school boards and their communities. We will not give on this issue and it appears that without giving, our other suggestions are unacceptable.

The compromises on our end in the [Preschool Bill Draft](#) were thoroughly discussed among MT-PEC partners and those groups committed to the proposal have expressed our intent to do whatever is within our power to see this language passed into law. Contact me if you have questions.

Kirk