

LEGISLATION AND POLICY REPORT

May 21, 2009

(Courtesy of Tasha Heidenrich, Steck IPPC Rep)

LOCAL AND MUNICIPAL

204 Teacher Contract Renewed

At their April 13 meeting, the school board approved a one-year teacher contract in a 6-1 vote to raise salaries 3.87% for the coming school year. Some residents disagreed with raises in such tough economic times, especially since salaries are paid primarily from property taxes, which are expected to fall dramatically. (Property taxes are increased based on inflation, and 2008 inflation was nearly 0%. Many expect the same in 2009.) In fact, that is why board member Christine Vickers voted against the raise. However, the board, led by Mark Metzger on the decision, noted that raise is less than the 2009 taxes the board has to work with, due to the lag in the way property taxes are paid. (In 2009, residents pay 2008 property taxes that are determined by the 2007 inflation rate, which was 4.1%.) Metzger also added the raise is less than what comparative districts are giving their teachers this year. He said the decreased taxes may affect teacher contracts in future years, though, as lower inflation rates begin to hurt property tax revenues.

Deficit Reduced

While the 4% increase helps the budget, the district still faces a \$900,000 deficit for this coming school year. Just a couple of months ago, however, the projection for the deficit was at \$6 million. Officials said they were able to trim the looming deficit by:

- Joining the National School Lunch Program which is expected to provide \$1 million.
- Locking in low utility rates to save another \$500,000.
- Rebidding its custodial contract: saving the district \$350,000, as well as an additional \$350,000 by having schools buy materials in bulk instead of as needed.
- Purchasing diesel fuel directly rather than through its transportation contractor to save \$100,000.
- A new teacher contract that provides for staffing pattern changes that will save almost \$450,000. It also saves \$170,000 in substitute teacher pay, as teachers will be meeting for professional development before school rather than during the day when a substitute would need to stand in for them.
- An infusion of federal stimulus money also will trim \$1.5 million to \$1.8 million off that original deficit projection.
- A 1% to 2% percent, across-the-board reduction in all non-labor line items, building and technology project deferrals, departmental restructuring and administrative position eliminations are expected to combine to save about \$1.36 million.

These efforts aside, Holm noted that the district is still staring at an \$8 million deficit at the end of Fiscal Year 2011. He emphasized that the district will continue to look for innovative ways to trim the budget.

Update on Canadian National acquisition of EJ&E

Becky Barnhart, Peterson PTA Vice President, contacted IPPC (Indian Prairie Parents Council) for assistance regarding idling CN trains near Peterson. In early May, Becky Barnhart and Robin Church held a joint conference call with Mike Pedersen, District 204 Director of Building Operations, to discuss the issue and suggest that the district work with CN to limit idling time near schools given the well-documented hazards of diesel emissions.

STATE

SB 1885

Rep. Darlene Senger is sponsoring a second form of her bill, now HB 640, which allows school districts the option of transferring students charged with a felony to an alternative school. Rep. Senger's bill was drafted in response to an incidence of alleged sexual assault between Gregory students that occurred off school grounds, which Indian Prairie School District 204 officials say left them with limited legal options.

Although her first bill failed to pass, a similar bill, SB 1885, was passed in the Senate as a joint effort between Representative Senger and Senator Randy Hultgren. SB 1885 is currently in the House and is assigned to the Rules Committee for further consideration.

HB 4044

On March 9, Indian Prairie Project Arrow PTA issued a call to action for its members to urge their state representatives to support HB 4044, which requests that 10 million dollars be appropriated from general revenue to the State Board of Education for gifted education. This money would help rebuild gifted programs by providing funds for training in gifted education for teachers and administrators.

OTHER STATE LEGISLATION

A Bill list as of April 3 can be found at

<http://www.illinoispta.org/user/BL40309%5B1%5D.pdf> , describing each bill and listing the IL PTA's position on each one (Support, Oppose, or Information). Especially relevant bills being watched by IL PTA are in **bold**.

FEDERAL

Budget Resolution in Progress

In early April, both the House and Senate passed slightly different versions of the Congressional Budget Resolution for fiscal year 2010 (which begins October 1, 2009). The new budget continues to build on the increases for education funding we saw in both the stimulus bill and in the recently passed FY 2009 Appropriations bill. Congress will be on recess from April 6-17 and members will be home districts. When Congress returns to Washington, the House and Senate budgets will go to a "conference committee" to work out differences and then the House and Senate will vote on a final budget agreement.

Stimulus Bill Funds for Schools

On April 1, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced that \$44 billion for states and schools is now available under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 (the “Economic Stimulus Bill.”) Two-thirds of the total dollars will go to a State Stabilization Fund that will be released as soon as possible. Federal officials say Illinois will receive about \$3 billion for education in economic stimulus money. According to District 204 officials, they anticipate the district may be able to use \$1.5 to \$1.8 million from the stimulus package to reduce expenditures next year. A second round of stabilization funds to be released later in the year will allow states to apply for the last third of the stabilization funds. A third round of funding, the Race to the Top competitive grant program will reward \$5 billion to states that have made the most progress.