

MACTE Weekly Legislative Report, 4.10.16
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The Calm Before the Storm. Although this last week ended with the second committee deadline, it was a relatively quiet week for policy issues, and most funding issues heard were for programs or initiatives specific to institutions or districts. In short, while it was another busy week at the capitol, there weren't many discussions of general interest to MACTE. The one exception was how to address issues being faced by Montessori teachers with Montessori-specific credentials but no license. It appears that a temporary solution, shaped with input from the Board of Teaching, Education Minnesota, and MACTE, will be to enable the BOT to give them waivers until a full framework is provided via the widely anticipated development of a tiered licensure system.

We did begin to get a picture of the parameters of the big fight ahead to finish up bills, particularly regarding funding. As you have likely read, there is a significant projected budget surplus, though the total amount was slightly less in the February forecast than had previously been expected. Although this is a broad generalization, on the Democratic side of the aisle, the preference seems to be to spend much of the surplus to address foundational and infrastructure needs that the party feels have been left unaddressed during recent years of more limited resources. On the Republican side of the aisle, there is a belief that the taxpayers have paid more than their fair share already and that spending should be held to current levels and dollars returned to the taxpayers in one form or another (likely tax cuts).

Last week, the Governor released his supplemental budget request. Of particular interest to MACTE are large amounts of funding to address the teacher shortage, both in the form of financial aid and support to students via grants to colleges and universities with approved teacher preparation programs and for programs helping paraprofessionals become licensed teachers. You can see the Governor's full package by checking out HF 3858 (initially identified as HF 3813) and SF 3482.

We will learn soon how leaders in both the House and Senate will propose changing the Governor's proposal when they release their omnibus bills. The House is scheduled for a first hearing on their omnibus P-12 bill (which will combine policy and funding provisions) on Tuesday, April 12. To date, the Senate has not announced when it will begin to take up its omnibus funding bill (and we continue to hear that the Senate will maintain separate policy and funding bills). On the higher education side, the House will take up its omnibus bill on Tuesday, April 12 and hopes to complete its work on this bill on Wednesday, April 13. Senate Higher Ed will begin its work with a discussion on Wednesday, April 13 of supplemental budget recommendations. No further plans have been announced yet in the Senate.

The next deadline is Thursday, April 21, by which committees must pass major appropriations and finance bills. Unless further action is required by other committees, bills then move to the floor of each body, and it appears that legislators hope they will be ready to take this step immediately following a short break for Passover on Friday, April 22 through the weekend. The final step involves the always unpredictable conference committees. This is the time when emergency calls for action may be necessary, so please watch for these in May.