

MACTE Weekly Legislative Report, 4.22.16
Prepared by Cyndy Crist, MACTE Legislative and Policy Liaison

Four Weeks to Finish and Still Far Apart. The legislature is taking a long week-end in recognition of Passover and will return on Monday, April 25 for the final four weeks of the 2016 legislative session. Much remains to be done since the Senate and House are far apart on not only the ends but also the means to the ends. More specifically, the House set “zero” targets for spending, meaning that any bills passed by the House must be at the same funding level as in 2015, while the Senate approved increases in spending for each division. Given this environment, it is difficult to see how they will reach compromises on the many issues taken up this session. And, unlike in a major budget year, the 2016 legislature does not have to enact any new bills before adjourning on Monday, May 23, so the calendar will exert no pressure to find compromises in order to leave on time. Here’s a quick look at where things stand relative to education:

The **House Higher Education committee** achieved its no new funding goal by simply not including any funding provisions in its omnibus bill. As a result, its omnibus bill, **HF 3237**, contained only policy language. The **House Education Finance committee** made cuts in some programs in order to fund other, newer provisions while also including an array of policy/language changes in its omnibus bill, **HF 3858**. The **House Ways and Means committee** took up both bills this week and rolled them into a single, comprehensive E-12 and higher education omnibus bill, **HF 2749**, which is scheduled for a first reading by the full House on Monday, April 25.

By contrast, in the Senate, there will be three bills moving forward addressing education. Education policy is addressed in two separate bills – the higher education policy bill (**SF 3028**) and the E-12 policy bill (**SF 1935**). The funding provisions from both E-12 and higher education omnibus policy bills will become articles within a single, comprehensive Senate finance bill (no bill number published yet), which was scheduled to be completed yesterday evening.

As a result, narrowing the great distances between the House and Senate on the overall budget, funding for specific projects and programs, and policy issues will be further complicated by how differently each body’s bills have been constructed. At the same time, both parties and both bodies have clearly sought this year to respond to public demands to address critical state needs, which include not only education but many other issues (including transportation and bonding) as well. This means that inaction is not an attractive option.

Although we have not yet carefully vetted the final versions of the education bills, at this point in time it doesn’t appear that there will be many, or perhaps any, provisions requiring our urgent attention in the final weeks of the session. As final versions of bills become available on-line, we’ll look for any trouble spots and be in touch if we think it will be important to mobilize our members for action.