

Pre-Session Legislative Update, 12.22.16
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I know that many of you have already started your holiday breaks and may not see this until after the new year, but there are a number of updates of importance to our work at the legislature in 2017 that I wanted to share with you now. It seems likely that 2017 will be a challenging year for us at the legislature, so being prepared will be especially important this year. Here are some things you need to know before the gavels fall on Tuesday, January 3.

Changes in Leadership and Committee Memberships.

As you know, both bodies of the legislature will be in the hands of Republicans in 2017-2018. House Republicans increased their majority and Senate Republicans now have a one-vote edge over the Democrats. As a result, committee chairs in both bodies will now be Republicans. There are no changes in House Leadership – Sondra Erickson will continue to chair Education Policy and Innovation, Jennifer Loon will remain as chair of Education Finance, and Bud Nornes will again chair the Higher Education and Policy Finance Committee. The Senate will return to separate education committees for policy and finance, with Eric Pratt chairing Education Policy and Carla Nelson chairing Education Finance. Higher Education and Workforce Development will be chaired by Michelle Fischbach. At the “top,” Kurt Daudt will remain Speaker of the House and Paul Gazelka will become Senate Majority Leader since their previous Senate leader, David Hann, lost his re-election bid. Membership assignments for House and Senate committees have now been announced yesterday. Please check the legislative website to find out if any of your legislators and/or those representing the districts in which your campuses are located are members of these important committees.

Legislative Study Group on Educator Licensing Completes Its Work.

The LSGEL completed its work on Tuesday, 12.20, in a short and anti-climactic meeting. Their only order of business after approving the minutes of their last meeting was to adopt five motions which essentially endorsed the broad recommendations of the report by the Office of the Legislative Auditor plus two general items involving CTE and BOSA. This means that the really substantive issues, like where/how a consolidated licensing function will be located and structured; what specific statutory language changes will be made to make more clear and consistent current language regarding teacher preparation and licensure; and how a new tiered licensure system will be structured will all be resolved during the 2017 session. Because Senate and House Republicans each brought different sets of recommendations to the LSGEL, it is not clear what will emerge in 2017. We will have a great deal of work to do to try to convince legislators about the substance of any legislation brought forward, as well as to seek to influence the Governor about whether to sign relevant bills. You can find more details on the legislative website.

MACTE Moving to Action.

In light of the major challenges facing us in 2017, MEC is proposing that we plan and carry out two “days of action” at the Capitol this year. We are tentatively looking at February 8 and April 5, each the day before the winter and spring MACTE meetings, in order to minimize your travel. Our thinking is that the early date will allow us to inform legislators about key issues before they take action and the latter to inform bills moving toward adoption. Our only concern about these dates is whether it will make it more difficult for you to involve students in our activities, which continues to be very important. Please let us know at your earliest convenience what you think about these two dates.