

Nebraska Federation of Catholic School Parents

Parent Advocate

Significant Formula Revisions

LEGISLATURE MODIFIES PUBLIC SCHOOL FINANCING

During its 2008 session, the Nebraska Legislature passed several bills that affect elementary and secondary education. The most significant of these is **LB 988**, which modifies in a major way the formula used to determine state financial aid for public school districts.

The combination of formula and process governing state aid is commonly known as TEEOSA: the Tax Equity and Educational Opportunities Support Act.

TEEOSA attempts to match each school district's needs with the fiscal resources available locally and from the state. While the overall formula is quite complicated, its fundamental premise is that Needs minus locally available Resources equals State Aid. Local resources include such items as property taxes, certain fines and licenses as directed by the State Constitution, miscellaneous receipts from other sources and investment interest. "Needs" stem from counting and educating the students.

State aid is the amount appropriated by the Legislature and paid to each individual school district in accord with the formula.

LB 988 primarily reconfigures the needs calculation. First, it compares school districts of similar size to determine a basic funding level. Thereupon, consideration is given to factors such as remote elementary sites, elementary class sizes, poverty, limited English proficiency, focus schools and programs, special receipts, transportation costs, distance education and telecommunications, teacher education levels, new school buildings, student growth, instructional time, summer school programs, size ranges with below-average costs and cost sharing between the state and school districts that have fewer than 390 students and are not located in sparsely populated areas.

Corresponding to the new needs calculation is a new limit on a school district's budget authority: 120 percent of the calculation, excluding special education.

In the short term, the changes made by LB 988 actually reduce aggregate state aid spending by \$62 million for school fiscal year 2008-2009, from \$901 million, the amount previously certified under the "old" formula, to \$839 million. There is still a substantial increase in state aid over the current period, but the rate of increase drops from the previously anticipated 17 percent to nine percent. The changes impose a shift to larger-sized school districts with higher numbers of economically and educationally disadvantaged students.

The long-term fiscal impact of these changes in the state aid formula is less certain. Already, it is estimated that within the next two years, the amount of state funds distributed to public school districts will exceed \$1 billion per year.

TEEOSA: What Should You Know? Why Should You Care? - See Page Three

NFCSP Welcomes New Board Members

The new year brought change to leadership of the Nebraska Federation of Catholic School Parents (NFCSP) with the addition of three new governing members and a new President.

Jim Stolze of Omaha, Kent Bieker of Falls City, and Connie Munguia of Raymond recently took office as new NFCSP board members. Each will serve a first term of three years.

Congratulations to Jeff Wilmes, representing Fremont Bergan Junior/Senior High School; he's the newly elected Board President, succeeding Jackie Ridder in January of this year.

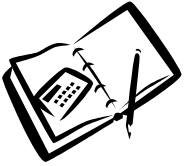
NFCSP extends sincerest thanks and appreciation to Mrs. Ridder for her strong, dedicated leadership and six years of service that defended the NFCSP mission and purpose! NFCSP also bids farewell to Kelly Nikkila and Carol O'Keefe, both of Hastings and thanks them for their service.



NFCSP Leadership

Front Row: (Left to Right) Jim Stolze, Fr. Tom Ryan, Kathleen Hranac, and Jeff Wilmes. Back Row: Msgr. John Perkinson, Frank Keller, Msgr. James Gilg, and Kent Bieker. (Not pictured are Connie Munguia, Nicole Neesen and Amy Owen.)

STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT/TESTING BILL PASSES



The Legislature passed and the Governor signed **LB 1157**, a bill requiring statewide assessment and testing in all public school districts in three new subject areas (science, math, and reading). Statewide reading tests begin in 2009-2010, math the next year, and science in 2011-12. Uniform statewide testing becomes the new governing standard for public school districts, replacing the district-based, local assessment approach that the State Board of Education and the NDE have maintained for several years. Nebraska's difficulty in obtaining federal No-Child-Left-Behind (NCLB) approval from the U.S. Department of Education influenced senators to support this bill. Nebraska was the lone state

requiring local assessments for school districts in lieu of a state-based, statewide approach (with the exception of the statewide writing test).

The bill did not change the testing and assessment requirements for Catholic (and other private) schools. Testing and assessment for these schools remains a local decision. Pursuant to NDE Rule 10, governing accredited schools, local academic standards approved by the local governing body are used to test students in reading, math, writing, science, social studies, and history. Pursuant to NDE Rule 14, governing approved schools, local checklists, benchmarks of progress, or portfolios are used to assess students in reading, writing, and math.

Nebraska Department of Education and State Board of Education News

NDE COMMISSIONER DOUG CHRISTENSEN RESIGNS

Doug Christensen has resigned as Nebraska Commissioner of Education, effective July 15, 2008. He has served as Commissioner since 1994. His position became increasingly controversial as Nebraska struggled to obtain NCLB approval from the federal government in the area of statewide assessment and testing of students. The State Board of Education has begun a national search for a replacement and will hire a successor as soon as possible, possibly in time for the August 2008 State Board meeting.

FOUR STATE BOARD POSITIONS AT STAKE IN ELECTION 2008

State Board member Carol Woods Harris (District 4) is not seeking re-election, creating a vacancy on the board. Candidates for this position are Tim Heller and Rebecca Valdez, both of Omaha.

Jim Scheer (District 3) is running for re-election. Board members Bob Evnen (District 1) and Kerry Winterer (District 2), both gubernatorially appointed, are seeking election to retain their positions. All three of these members are running unopposed.

SPECIAL EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD BILL PASSES

The Legislature passed and the Governor signed **LB 1153**, a bill dealing with special education and early childhood education. The bill requires public school districts to allow all special education students over 17 years of age, who have not completed their Individualized Education Plan, to receive a participation certificate. This allows a student to benefit from the experience

of a graduation ceremony with his/her classmates without forfeiting his/her future right to receive special education under state law. Some public school districts had either denied special education students this privilege of participating in a graduation ceremony and receiving a certificate or, if the privilege was granted, special education services were ended on the grounds

that the student had "graduated" and thus chosen to forfeit any right to future special education services.

The bill also made minor changes in investments of the Early Childhood Education Trust, including setting aside up to 10 percent (5 percent currently) of the trust for programs for birth to age 3.



A Catholic school is worthy of everyone's support to ensure that it not only survives, but thrives. The Catholic school is important, because of the first and greatest commission that Jesus gave his followers; to make disciples of all nations, teaching them everything he commanded. A Catholic school holds pride of place among the ways to learn and teach about Jesus. It has the greatest potential to form future disciples most effectively, at least if it is Catholic more than in name only.

— Bishop Michael O. Jackels

WHAT IS TEEOSA? WHY SHOULD YOU BE INFORMED?

TEEOSA is codified in the Nebraska statutes. It establishes and governs a system of state financing for public school districts.

TEEOSA provides a foundational support level for every school district that has greater financial needs than it can provide for from its property-tax base and other local resources. TEEOSA also seeks to ensure a greater level of equity in both educational opportunities for students and property tax rates.

Most of Nebraska's school districts, approximately 200 out of 257, receive state aid. State-aid spending for all school districts statewide for 2008-09 is anticipated to be \$839 million. That figure is expected to exceed \$1 billion by school year 2010-11.

Basically, state aid makes up the difference between a school district's formula needs and its local resources, which consist of property taxes and miscellaneous local receipts. Generally, needs are based upon student enrollment and costs to educate.

One might ask: are students who attend Catholic (and other non-governmental) schools "counted" in determining state aid to public school districts? Generally, the answer is "no," with two exceptions.

First, there is another, much less significant component of state aid known as apportionment. A certain collection of funds (e.g., certain fines, penalties, fees and a portion of the insurance premium tax) is distributed annually by census to all school districts proportionate to the number of school-aged children residing in each school district. The second exception stems from "dual enrollment." When students for whom the Catholic school is their school of regular attendance take one or more courses at the local public school, they are "counted" on a percentage basis in the needs formula.

Why should parents of Catholic school students be informed about public-school financing, particularly TEEOSA? Every Nebraska resident is not only a resident of a public school

district, which levies property taxes to pay for the costs of providing education, but also a state-level taxpayer, paying income and sales taxes that fund TEEOSA.

When you receive your annual property tax statement look for the school district levy. Remember that the amount is most likely supplemented by state tax dollars as well.

State aid to public school districts makes a large claim on the state's budget. For NFCSP families, this claim hinders reasonable consideration of policy options such as tax credits, vouchers and more adequate funding for the textbook-loan program. It's the "numbers" aspect of the inequitable policy of taxing those who choose other-than-public education for their children, while also denying them support in their educational choice. Knowledge and understanding of the current financing mechanism can only help in advocating for greater educational justice.

School Bus Bill Halted; Returning Next Year



LB 1092, proposing to mandate that all Nebraska public school districts have three-point, lap-shoulder belts on all school buses purchased new after Jan. 1, 2010, was considered during the 2008 session of the Nebraska

Legislature, but ultimately was bracketed by its sponsor, Senator John Harms of Scottsbluff.

After hearing other senators raise concerns about the potential costs involved with compliance and liability issues, and the bill's nature as an unfunded mandate for school districts, Sen. Harms decided to hold it back from further consideration, while indicating his intention to introduce similar legislation in 2009.

During the first-round of floor debate, Senator Russ Karpisek introduced an amendment proposing to apply the mandate to private and parochial schools. That amendment was narrowly defeated, by a margin of two votes.

Both the Diocesan Superintendents of Catholic schools and the NFCSP board discussed this bill and the numerous issues it raised. Two of the Superintendents and represen-

tatives of the Nebraska Catholic Conference met with Senator Harms regarding these issues.

Concerns about passenger safety are foremost, but most studies show that the current school buses, most of which are not equipped with seat belts, have a remarkable safety record relative to miles traveled and are the safest mode of school transportation.

Currently in Nebraska, equipment and safety standards, operation, maintenance and driver qualifications applicable to school buses operated by or for elementary and secondary schools, private as well as public schools, are regulated by rules of the N.D.E. **Buses operated by Catholic schools are subject to, and in compliance with, these rules and regulations.**

The Diocesan Superintendents and the NFCSP board will continue to gather and review information about seat belts on school buses and remain open to further dialogue with Senator Harms, whose firm view is that requiring three-point, lap-shoulder belts is a necessary safety enhancement for school buses.

CATHOLIC

Congratulations to Archbishop Elden Francis Curtiss for receiving the Pope John XXIII Award from Roncalli Catholic High School in Omaha! The award is given to an individual who demonstrates dedication to Catholic education and to the mission, values and program of Roncalli High School.

Archbishop Curtiss was a co-founder of the Nebraska Federation of Catholic School Parents in 1993.

EDUCATION

Nebraska City Lourdes Central Catholic won the Nebraska State Academic Decathlon in February.



Cassie Goodman of Lourdes won several individual medals. Last year Lourdes placed fifth nationally in the small school Academic Decathlon division.

Lourdes again will compete in national competitions in April.

EXCELLENCE

Children's Scholarship Fund honored six students for their leadership and for making a difference in the Archdiocese of Omaha:

Lucas Seger, St. Joseph's School, Atkinson, NE; Taylor Dugger, Holy Ghost School, Omaha; Tianna Bankhead, St. Richard's School, Omaha; Gracie McDonnell, St. Thomas More School, Omaha; and Alex Kerwin, Blessed Sacrament School; Omaha.

CHOICE TIDBITS

In April, the Georgia Senate approved a bill that would provide state tax credits for individual or corporate donations to qualifying, private-sector tuition-scholarship programs. The Georgia House approved the bill in March. Governor Sonny Perdue has until mid-May to decide whether or not to sign the bill. If so, Georgia will become the sixth state to have such an incentive program.

Similarly, in Maryland, the state Senate approved legislation to provide up to \$5 million worth of tax credits for corporations that donate to qualifying charitable organizations that support students

and teachers in public or private schools.

In Louisiana, Gov. Bobby Jindal signed a bill that provides a tax deduction—of up to \$5000 per elementary or secondary student—for tuition and educational expenditures connected with public education, private education or home schooling.

In Florida, the Taxation and Budget Reform Commission, is considering a ballot vote on a proposed constitutional amendment that would repeal the state's "Blaine Amendment," which currently prohibits the use of state revenue "directly or indirectly in aid of any...sectarian institution." Previously, a limited state voucher program was struck down as unconstitutional by virtue of that provision.

Nebraska Federation of Catholic School Parents

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