

THE UNEMPLOYMENT LINE: School superintendent says values tend to become destiny

Dr. Walter Hart, Hickory Public Schools superintendent, agreed to follow up last week's column on how state funding for education has been on the wane over the past few years. In the school board meeting held this past Monday, Hart expressed concern over the N.C. General Assembly's budget proposal for education, which he and others in his administration had not yet reviewed in depth.

"The governor is not particularly friendly to education with regard to the budget," he said to the board.

The state budget is now being deliberated in the N.C. House.

Dr. Walter Hart:

There's an old adage that still applies today: "Your values become your destiny."

For decades, North Carolina has valued the connection between public education, economic development and quality of life. Investments in public education shape our destiny, support economic prosperity and advance the common good.

In last Sunday's HDR, Catawba County Schools superintendent Dr. Dan Brigman did a great job of summarizing funding cuts to public education from 2008 to 2012. Below are some of the main features of the governor's and N.C. Senate's proposed 2013-14 public education budgets.

Points of interest regarding the Senate and governor's budget proposals

Salary Increases:

The governor proposes a 1 percent pay increase for all employees.

The Senate proposes no salary increase, although the Senate does propose a \$500 annual pay increase for teachers opting into a four-year contract based on effectiveness, beginning in 2014-15.

Teacher Assistants:

The governor reduces funding for teacher assistants by \$117 million, thus eliminating 3,500 positions.

The Senate reduces funding for teacher assistants by \$142 million, thus eliminating 4,580 positions.

Discretionary Cuts:

Discretionary cuts represent a portion of a school system's budget that is returned to the state.

The governor's budget does not address the annual "discretionary cut" facing school systems.

The Senate budget exchanges the "discretionary cut" for the following line item cuts (a portion of the cut was already being reverted to the state by local school systems as part of the state "discretionary cut"):

Reducing funding for classroom teachers by \$286 million (5,200 classroom teaching positions)

Reducing funding for instructional support (media specialists/coordinators, school counselors, social workers) by \$17 million (270 positions)

Reducing funding for instructional supplies (textbooks, papers, pens/pencils, classroom equipment, computer technology) by \$7 million

Limited English Proficient Students:

The governor reduces by 3 million due to "declining need."

The Senate budget proposal reduces funding for limited English proficient students by \$6 million with \$3 million due to “declining need” and another \$3 million as a cut to the program.

Education-Based Salary Supplements:

The governor’s budget does not change education-based teacher supplements.

The Senate eliminates salary supplements for teachers with Masters or advanced degrees earned after July 1, 2014. All educators with Masters/Doctorate degrees who are receiving enhanced pay prior to the 2014-15 school year will be grandfathered and their pay will be unchanged by this proposal.

Teaching Fellows Scholarships:

The governor and Senate proposals continue to phase out the Teaching Fellows Scholarship program.

The State Rainy Day (Reserve) Fund:

The governor proposes to increase the “rainy day” (reserve) fund in excess of \$600 million.

The Senate proposes to increase the state’s “rainy day” (reserve) fund in excess of \$300 million.

Excellent Public Schools Act:

The governor proposes \$27 million

The Senate proposes \$18.5 million

Class Size:

The Senate budget proposal allows increased class sizes in grades K-3.

Charter Schools:

The Senate budget includes funding for additional staffing for the Office of Charter Schools.

In addition, public schools face increased costs of employee health insurance, retirement, unemployment insurance as well as the loss of funding due to federal sequestration.

In conclusion

Budgets reflect our values. Let's value public education. Let's build on that commitment and make improvements for students and families.

-- Dr. Walter Hart, Superintendent, Hickory Public Schools

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