



## GENERAL SESSION

February 5, 2014

### ***Program Topic: Education Bills on the Horizon***

**Presented by: Education Committee**

**Director: Chris Bray**

**Co-Chairs: Donna Murphy and Laurel Price**

**Speakers: *Sen. Karen Mayne (D)* Dist. 5 Salt Lake County (West Valley)  
– sponsor, SB98 Para-educator Funding**

***Rep. Angela Romero (D)* Dist. 26, Salt Lake County  
– sponsor, HB286 Child Sexual Abuse Prevention  
– sponsor, (as yet unnumbered) Professional Development  
in Public Schools**

***Rep. Greg Hughes (R)* Dist. 51 Salt Lake County  
– sponsor HB96 Utah School Readiness Initiative**

***Rep. Brad Last (R)* Dist. 71 Iron, Washington Counties  
– summary of HB298, HB286, HB96**

**Sen. Mayne** lamented the fact that federal funding is being lost for Advanced Placement (AP) testing for low-income students. These students can still take AP classes but cannot receive college credit for them. Her bill, **SB140**, would allocate a one-time \$100,000 for the board of education. It also contains a formula for statewide distribution. School councilors would apply for funding on behalf of qualifying students, and the program would be evaluated after one year.

She next spoke about **SB98** for Para-educator funding. Para-educators would be required to have either a two-year college degree or equivalently skilled training. They must be highly qualified in reading and math programs. They would provide one-on-one daily assistance for at-risk children. Last year, the legislature appropriated \$300,000 in ongoing money for Para-educator training for failing districts. Children with language issues, **Sen. Mayne** stressed, really need this help.

**SB98** also requests \$400,000 in additional ongoing money. Sen. Mayne said the state school board and some districts would prefer this money to be added to “one large statewide pot.” However, the bill would require it to be separately accounted for and monitored. This being an experimental program, she said she will be happy to take responsibility for its success or failure.

Sen. Mayne noted that her district is the most diverse in the state. Using Granger High School, the largest in the state, as an example, she said not one student body officer is Anglo. The student body president is a Sikh youth, complete with beard and turban. Forty-one languages are spoken in the school, and it is designated as a “failing” high school. The senator believes that is a problem inherent with its wide diversity. Kearns is also listed as a “failing” high school. She believes that is because of the flawed grading formula.

Sen. Mayne also expressed a concern regarding the unwed mothers in Utah’s high schools. There are only eight programs throughout the state addressing this demographic. They are handled by the school districts, which decide which programs to use and at what capacity. We need to educate these young women so they can become financially independent. Sen. Mayne is running bills aimed at this issue but didn’t have time to discuss them.

**Reported by Stuart Gygi**

**Rep. Romero**, speaking to her bill **HB286 Child Sexual Abuse Prevention**, said it is crafted to be age appropriate for grades K-12. It is modeled after Illinois’s “Errin’s Law,” (which mandates a sexual abuse prevention curriculum in schools, and has been successfully passed in several states). Basically, it will teach students how to protect themselves.

She explained the bill would adopt certain recommendations patterned after the Erin’s Law Task Force. This would require a school district or charter school to provide training and instruction on child sexual abuse prevention & awareness to elementary school personnel, students, and parents or guardians. It would also require the State Board of Education to adopt model materials for training and instruction on child sexual abuse prevention & awareness.

Rep. Romero said all the schools in her district are Title 1 schools. They serve a large working poor population, which is also one of the most diverse communities in the state. She hopes to help close the achievement gap by addressing the disparities of marginalized students. To this end, she is also working on an as yet unnumbered bill with the working title Professional Development in Public Schools.

**Reported by Pam Grange**

**Rep. Hughes** said he was house sponsor last year for a bill put forward by Sen. Osmond much like **HB90**. That bill wasn’t successful. So he is particularly pleased to sponsor this new version, **HB96 Utah School Readiness Initiative**. He feels the original bill fell prey to bad optics. That is, it was perceived as an attempt to exercise undue control over young children’s thinking. Utah Eagle Forum was one of the groups who opposed it.

The bill creates the School Readiness Board, which provides grants to certain early childhood education programs, and may enter into certain contracts with private entities to provide funding for early childhood education programs for at-risk (as opposed to “special needs”) students.

The Board would decide which children qualify, and would also offer a loose “proof of concepts” curriculum and standard

evaluations. Pre-school children enrolled in pre-school or daycare would access the program. It would also be available to those children whose parents prefer to have them at home until they begin kindergarten. **HB96**, he stressed, would not *impose* curriculum. In other words, no parent would have to accept it.

Rep. Hughes anticipates **HB96** would provide an entirely new results-based method for the state to fund education. The bill would allow private investors to negotiate with a governmental board, helping fund our public schools. The state would pay back the private investors if (and only if) positive results have been found in the related schools over time.

When children fall significantly behind in school, he continued, they disengage. Later, social costs begin to accrue. Early intervention can often lead to significant cost-avoidance for public education.

Responding to questions, Rep. Hughes clarified that the program would be partially funded by the state, and partially by private foundations. After verification, the state would repay the private funding received, only upon the successful delivery of the pre-K programs. He emphasized that money used by the state for re-payment would come out of the general fund, rather than the education fund.

He acknowledged the data indicating the academic gain of some pre-school programs (such as Head Start) dissipates by third grade. However, he believes **HB96** would create a much more accountable measuring standard to deliver lasting results.

#### **Reported by Pam Grange**

**Rep. Last** is co-chairman of the Public Education Appropriations Committee. The committee has to prioritize approximately

\$300M in requests for public education money, and decide which bills will best meet our goals for public education. Many worthy education interests compete for finite funds. The committee has just begun its work, so no priorities have been set at this time.

To illustrate, Rep. Last discussed three bills now before the committee. The first bill is **HB96**, sponsored by Rep. Greg Hughes. The bill asks \$5M for a small pilot project that would provide high quality pre-kindergarten education for high-risk children who often do not perform well when they begin kindergarten. They require special help during the K-6 grade years.

The program would be initially funded by outside entities, such as United Way and Goldman Sachs. If the students don't require special education through the sixth grade, the state money appropriated with this bill will be used to reimburse the outside entities. If the students don't meet the required standard, there will be no reimbursement needed.

Rep. Last sees this as an exciting new concept. Sen. Osmond is working again on a similar bill. The concern about the bill is that if it is successful there may not be money in future years to scale up the program to include all qualifying students.

The second bill is **HB286** sponsored by Rep. Angela Romero. The fiscal note is \$55,000. It would provide sexual abuse prevention training for elementary school children. Rep. Last believes this is a relatively small and reasonable investment. Bills with smaller fiscal notes tend to have the best chance of passage

At the end of every session, both political parties are allotted a certain amount of money and will prioritize their requests for that money. Rep. Last predicted the Democrats might well choose to give Rep. Romero's bill a high priority. Again, there

are many equally meaningful bills competing for limited funds, so choosing between them is challenging.

The third bill is **SB98**, sponsored by Sen. Karen Mayne. It is also a “small money” bill and will probably be prioritized in the same way. Its fiscal note is \$400,000. It would set up a pilot program to train more Para-educators to work in Title I schools.

Para-educators are workers who are not certified, but have a significant amount of classroom experience. They may not teach concepts, but would assist (mentor) individual students. They are an important

part of the system. Some feel the only way to lower our schools’ pupil/teacher ration is to include Para-educators in the count of certified teachers.

Rep Last noted that bills are introduced each year to reduce class size. He believes the state simply cannot afford the money to achieve the recommended pupil/teacher ratio with innovative ideas. He believes the addition of more Para-educators into classrooms, would effectively reduce class size in a much more affordable way.

**Reported by Stuart Gygi**

NOTE: A Resolution on Particle Pollution, also known as Particulate Matter (PM) was put forward by the *Energy/Natural Resources/Agriculture & Environment Committee*. **The Resolution failed.**

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**President:** Kari Malkovich  
**Advisor:** Skip Reese  
**Editor:** Pam Grange  
**Assist. Editor:** Eileen Hallet Stone

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