

Greetings North Dakota ASPIRE Members,

I sent out a Legislative Update last Friday, the 27th but there was an error and not everyone received it. Hopefully, it will work this time.

The 2009 Legislative Session is now back in session after its break from 2/20 to 2/25. In this update I will focus on several bills and a constitutional amendment that passed either in the House or the Senate and are now being considered by the opposite body.

HB 1400 passed by a wide margin in the House and is now being considered by the Senate Education Committee. This bill incorporates recommendations by the Governor's Commission on Education Improvement. It contains a large increase in the state's contribution to local school districts. In addition, it contains several significant reform features. Some of those include money to tutor at-risk students, higher graduation requirements, "a three-tiered diploma system", a requirement that most students take the ACT, SAT, or WorkKeys exam, and an appropriation for merit-based scholarships.

HB 1400 would increase the number of courses that schools are required to offer in order to be approved by the ND Department of Public Instruction. The biggest change here would be to increase the number of math, and science units that a school must offer from the current 2 to 4. Graduation requirements would also be raised. The number of math units would be raised from 2 to 3; required science units raised from 2 to 3; 3 units of either a foreign language, Native American language, fine arts, or career and technical education (currently 1); social studies stays at 3 units, total credits raised from 21 to 22.

One of the most significant changes would be the establishment of a three-tiered diploma system; a diploma with academic honors, a diploma with technical honors, and an optional curriculum for students who are at-risk of failure. Students who meet the requirements for either the academic, or technical scholarships would be eligible to receive a \$750 per semester postsecondary scholarship. Those students who meet the academic honors requirements would also be eligible for an Opportunity Grant. As I interpret the text, students who are taking either the academic or technical honors curriculum would still be able to graduate if they do not meet the GPA, or certain scores on the ACT, SAT or WorkKeys tests, as long as they successfully complete the required curriculum. However, they would not be eligible for a postsecondary scholarship. **Students who are performing poorly after two years of high school could elect to take a less rigorous optional curriculum by agreement of the student, the student's parents, and a guidance counselor, and/or a school administrator.**

For a further description of these three different types of diplomas, see the attached file or look up the bill on the ND Legislative website. Sections 9-14 contain the changes in high school graduation requirements, and descriptions of the academic, technical and optional diplomas. Here is the link to the text of HB 1400: <http://www.legis.nd.gov/assembly/61-2009/bill-text/JARF0500.pdf>

Two other bills to watch are the Higher Education Funding bill, SB 2003, and SB 2062. SB 2003 provides a small increase for the North Dakota State Grant, but SB 2062 appropriates \$20 Million in additional needs-based aid. It also creates the Opportunity Grant with eligibility for this merit-aid specified in HB 1400. Four million dollars is appropriated for the Opportunity Grant Program. Under the Opportunity Grant provisions, students who graduate with an academic honors diploma, or a technical honors diploma are eligible to receive additional aid during the undergraduate years. This bill is currently in the House Education Committee.

Finally, SCR4090, whose primary sponsor is Senator Connie Triplett of Grand Forks district 18, would set aside 25% of oil tax revenues in a trust fund with earnings from the fund to be used only to supplement education funding, including elementary, secondary, higher education, and higher education scholarships. This is currently in the Senate Finance and Taxation Committee. Since this is a constitutional amendment, the Legislature must pass it, and then it goes on the ballot for ND voters to consider. Wyoming used its oil revenue in a similar way to provide money for their Hathaway Higher Education Scholarship program.

Please contact your legislators and ask them to support the need-based aid provisions in the Higher Education bill, SB 2003, and SB 2062. For a list of members of House Education, House Appropriations, Senate Education, Senate Appropriations, and Senate Finance and Taxation committees, visit the Legislative Action page at <http://www.ndaspire.org/>. You can also go to the 2009 Legislative website, click on Senate or House, and then the links to "Standing Committees". Here is the link to that website: <http://www.legis.nd.gov/assembly/61-2009/leginfo/index.html> (<http://www.legis.nd.gov/assembly/61-2009/bill-text/JARF0500.pdf>)

Have a great week!
Mary