

Capitol Corner with Matt Gillard – 3rd Grade Reading Bill Heads to Senate

October 20, 2015 -- Third grade reading remains a focus of the Legislature as the House of Representatives passed a third grade reading bill last week. Led by Education Committee Chairwoman Amanda Price, HB 4822 includes a number of intervention measures aimed at ensuring children are reading at grade level by the end of third grade, but still calls for children who are not reading at grade level to be retained in third grade. Michigan's Children has many concerns with the bill, but were glad to see one of our recommendations included in the House-approved bill to ensure that read-at-home plans involved not only parents and guardians but other providers who may assist with children's literacy development including after-school and child care providers.

The retention component is the reason virtually all public school advocates, many educational organizations and some legislators are opposed to HB 4822. While reading at grade level by the fourth grade is critical for all students, substantial data exists indicating that retention of elementary age students is an impediment to their educational success, decreasing their chances of graduating from high school. HB 4822 now heads to the Michigan Senate, where a lively debate is sure to occur.

Educator Evaluation: The state Senate today approved SB 103 that would create Michigan's first statewide educator evaluation and support system. The House took action last week, and now the bill heads to Gov. Rick Snyder for his signature. The bill, which was fiercely debated, includes a provision that requires that 40 percent of a teacher's evaluation be based on student test score data, and gives schools the ability to decide how they're going to evaluate staff.

Road Debate: The never-ending road funding debate appears destined to drag on as negotiations have hit another impasse, according to Governor Snyder and House Speaker Kevin Cotter. As recently as a week ago, there was a lot of optimism at the Capitol that a road deal was imminent as Legislative leaders and the Governor were signaling real progress on movement towards a comprehensive transportation funding package. Insistence on a permanent income tax reduction as a part of the deal by some legislators has apparently led to the breakdown in discussions at this point. This issue will have a long-term impact on Michigan's budget as pressure to devote more general fund dollars for transportation will continue to increase until dedicated funding is passed by the Legislature.

Guns in Schools: As if these issues were not enough for child advocates to be concerned about, a Senate committee last week actually passed a bill that would allow people with a concealed weapons permit to carry weapons into schools, daycare centers, churches, libraries, sporting venues, taverns, and other places where they are currently prohibited. Despite a massive outcry of opposition from school administrators and ordinary citizens, SB 442 and SB 561 both passed out of the Senate Judiciary committee. Governor Snyder vetoed similar legislation shortly after the Sandy Hook tragedy in Connecticut, but legislative supporters appear intent on

presenting another bill allowing more guns in schools and daycare centers to the Governor. There is a contested loophole in current law that allows people with concealed weapon permits to open carry in schools but we should pass a bill to close that loophole and not allow anyone to carry weapons in schools. The latest legislation runs completely contrary to years of state and federal efforts to create safe and nurturing educational environments, and the research does not support arguments that more weapons create safer spaces for children, youth, families and workers.

As these and other Legislative issues relating to children, youth and families unfold, Michigan's Children will continue to monitor developments for our readers and partners.

Matt Gillard is the CEO & President of Michigan's Children.