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STATE UPDATE

Monday, December 21, 2009

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Education reform was the focus in Lansing last week as the Legislature worked overtime to pass major policy changes that are required to be eligible for federal "Race to the Top" funds. The Obama Administration created the program and has indicated that only 7-10 states will be awarded grants in the first round of allocation, which will total \$3.5 billion. State applications will be judged based upon the criteria established by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and in order to be competitive, Michigan had to enact several major policy changes. Despite strong objections from the teacher unions and the public school administration organizations, the Legislature was able to reach a compromise on all of the major elements of the reform package and the bills were finally passed by both chambers late Saturday afternoon. House Education Committee chair Tim Melton, Speaker of the House Andy Dillon, Senate Education Committee Chair Wayne Kuipers, and Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop all deserve a great deal of credit for accomplishing what at times appeared to be an impossible task.

The full impact of these reforms will not be realized for years, but in one week the Legislature enacted more progressive policy changes to Michigan's public education system than had been accomplished in the past thirty years. With the "Race to the Top" application deadline of January 19th on the horizon, the pressure now switches to state Superintendent of Public Schools Mike Flanagan and his team to submit a competitive application. The prospect of \$400-\$500 million in additional federal money is incredibly appealing as local school districts continue to look for areas to cut as the state School Aid Fund remains underfunded. Regardless of whether Michigan is awarded a "Race to the Top" grant, the reforms will undoubtedly improve Michigan's public education system.

There were some efforts made to increase state education funding this past week as public school interest groups tried to reduce the state aid cuts that local districts are facing. While progress was made and at times it appeared there would be an agreement on additional state revenues to fund education,

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ultimately the Legislature was unable to reach an agreement and the cuts will remain in effect. Look for these discussions to start back up as soon as the Legislature returns from their Holiday break.