



Washington State  
School Directors' Association

# Legislative Update

March 26, 2015

By [Deb Merle](#)

## Little cut-off, Big cut-off, Sine Die, Special Session

Wednesday, April 1<sup>st</sup>, is the last day for bills that crossed over from the opposite house to be voted out of policy committees. The following Tuesday, April 7<sup>th</sup>, is the deadline for bills with a fiscal impact to get out of the money committees (Ways and Means, Appropriations, Capital, and Transportation). A small fraction of the bills dropped this session will clear those hurdles.

Tax Day, April 15<sup>th</sup>, is the final cut-off for any bills that are still moving. Bills that do not receive a majority vote on the floor of the opposite house by then are pretty much dead for this session. Exceptions include: budgets and bills necessary to implement budgets; bills in conference committees; and, initiatives and alternatives to initiatives. "Necessary to implement the budget" (NTIB) is a higher standard at this point in the session because the rough outlines of the budget are apparent - proposals from the governor and both houses will all be public.

April 26<sup>th</sup>, is the last day of the "regular" session this year. The vast majority of bills introduced this session (the first year of the biennium) will not pass. Instead, they'll hibernate until next year when both houses reintroduce them all on the first day of session. At that time, bills that did not get out of their originating house this session will revert to their last position in the committee hearing process.

Bills that got out one house but not the other this year will go back to the Rules committee in their originating house next year. They will have to pass on the floor of that house again, but won't have to go through the whole policy and fiscal committee process.

It's hard to imagine a scenario in which the budget talks are finished by April 26th. If the House budget is heard and voted out of the Appropriations committee this week as

planned, that leaves four weeks for the Senate to release a budget and for the five corners (governor and leadership of the four caucuses) to hammer out a deal.

That's a tall order.

If a "special" session is required, it can be called by the governor or a majority of both houses. Usually it's the governor's call. Special sessions are 30 days in duration and typically begin the day after the regular session ends, though sometimes they take a break. The two houses generally agree to limit the subject to the budgets and "trailing bills" (those that really truly are necessary to implement the budgets). Sometimes though, there are lingering policy issues that are part of the deal to amass the requisite majority to pass the budgets. And, sometimes they need more than one special session to get the job done. Let's hope this isn't one of those years.

### **What's next for the budget talks?**

The governor's proposed budgets have been out since December, as required by law. Friday, March 27<sup>th</sup>, the House will release its operating budget. The appropriations committee will hear testimony on it that day and plan to vote it out of committee on Saturday. Senate leaders say they are ready to release their proposal shortly after. (By tradition, the House and Senate take turns being the first to release their proposed operating budgets. This biennium the House goes first in both years.)

### **"50, 25 and 1"**

Once all three operating budgets are in play, the real fun begins. The governor proposed big increases for early learning and K-12 and offered up a new capital gains tax and some loophole closures to pay for it. The House budget will likely include similar education investments and revenue sources. The more interesting proposal will come from the Senate where budget writers have promised to manage the state's fiscal imperatives without raising taxes. Both houses and the governor need to agree on a budget that they can pass and he won't veto.

### **Stalled but not forgotten**

The last bill the Senate voted out before the March 11<sup>th</sup> opposite house bill cut-off was ESSB 5748. This bill requires evaluations of principals, and teachers of subjects in grades with mandated assessments, to include student test scores as one measure of effectiveness. An amendment on the Senate floor put the requirement off until 2017-18 and allows unions to bargain the methodology for using test scores. The floor amendment also precluded the use of test data until OSPI and TPEP's steering committee

deem the assessments valid and reliable, and certify that using the data will strengthen the existing evaluation system.

Senator Litzow, prime sponsor of ESSB 5748, chairs the Senate Early Learning and K-12 Education committee. That committee has stopped hearing or voting on house education bills unless ESSB 5748 is voted out of the House Education committee. The bill is currently scheduled for a hearing, but not a vote, in House Education on March 30<sup>th</sup>. There's only one more hearing after that in each of the Education committees before the April 1<sup>st</sup> cut-off, so a lot of education bills could get caught in the crossfire again this year.

Another bill, sponsored by Senators Litzow and Kaiser, promises to be around at the end even though it isn't moving now. SSB 5976 would establish a School Employees' Benefits Board (SEBB) to bargain health benefits statewide, modeled after the Public Employees' Benefits Board (PEBB). There seems to be bipartisan agreement on this one so, even if it doesn't move in the regular session, this bill could be part of the final budget deal in April, or May, or June.

See the WSSDA [Bill Watch List](#) and annotated [Hearing Schedule](#) for a complete list of bills we're tracking and committee meetings of particular interest next week.

Have fun next week!

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