STATE OF THE STATE ANALYSIS: UPDATE

In addition to the Advocacy Alert provided earlier, the governor’s “policy book” that accompanies his State of the State Message contained proposals for public education unmentioned in the address itself. The address contained almost no mention of public education, beyond indicating that more state aid should flow to financially challenged school districts. The extensive policy paper (more than 400 pages) merely indicates an intent to “expand access to quality educational programming.”

Not mentioned in the speech (but included in the policy book) were several proposals with the potential to help our rural schools. The degree to which they would help is in question however, given that they are all grant programs that by definition are limited to only certain districts (and they are generally of modest amounts.) That said, the governor has offered the following program and policy changes for public education in the coming year:

1. Using the Community School model, an additional $250,000 in student mental health support would be provided. Any funding obtained could also be used to combat violence and curtail bullying. Given the small pool, additional work in this area is likely to be limited and would come with questions of sustainability.

2. $1 million is being proposed to support additional Master Teachers in high need districts. The funding would be used to enhance salaries, encouraging the recruitment and retention of Master Teachers in these districts.

3. The governor suggests continuing the existing Mentoring Program.

4. An additional $10 million in grant funding would be provided to support after school programming with a focus on high risk areas and student homelessness.

5. The governor’s plan.

6. The 2018 State of the State includes a new Smart Start program to bring computer science to grades K-8 in high need districts.

7. $2 million is included to offset the student cost of taking the Advanced Placement (AP) examination. This program is targeted to rural schools, as is an additional $500,000 for districts needing help initiating AP courses.

8. The governor also proposed increasing fines for those who pass a stopped school bus.

REACTION

At this stage, the governor has only offered ideas on new initiatives in our schools. The funding behind the programs is minimal and there is no indication if other areas might be cut to pay for the programs. The governor is continuing his penchant for grant programs, rather than formulaic funding. Unfortunately, this severely limits the ability of fiscally strapped districts to participate; even for programs aimed specifically at high need school districts (as these districts don’t have the staff or the data-keeping capacity to successfully compete for the funding.) As always, State of the State proposals must await the presentation of the Executive Budget for schools to
determine the impact on both their academic programming and their finances. The age old question of whether the new programs would “supplement or supplant” existing programs and funding lurks in upcoming state budget negotiations. Will these new programs be offered in an environment of a healthy Operating (Foundation) Aid increase or an across the board cut to education funding? The only thing not in doubt at this point is that this is a year when advocacy will be of paramount importance.