

K12 Education Omnibus Bill Process and Timelines

July 2019

Overview

In Minnesota, the K12 bill is usually an omnibus bill combining education finance and education policy provisions for prekindergarten through 12th grade pupils. The combined omnibus bill is relatively modest in size—250 pages or less most years. The bill funds and sets policy for Minnesota’s school systems. The bill does not generally include higher education provisions, but at times funds specific dual enrollment and small grants for higher education programs, including certain teacher preparation programs. The omnibus bills usually begin with and include a number of the Governor’s education policy and finance provisions.

Bill Variations

- Infrequently, the House or Senate sends off its floor a separate omnibus policy bill as a stand-alone bill.
- Most years only a few K12 education items are enacted as individual bills—often for timing reasons (e.g. the 2019 snow days bill).
- Occasionally (mainly in some even-numbered years), K12 education provisions are included in an omnibus appropriations bill.
- In some years, prekindergarten finance and policy provisions are sent separately in their own bill.

In the K12 area, House and Senate committee structures and the type of bills that pass may differ. Leadership from the House and Senate determine which provisions from other bills passed by at least one body (early education, education policy, etc.) end up in the K12 conference committee.

Timelines

Most school funding proposals are based on data collected from school districts by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). This data is used both for the November and February Forecasts, and for the Governor’s budget recommendations. School Funding formulas are primarily based on student counts (general education revenue) and previous program spending (special education revenue).

School districts report their data to MDE. The data for the November Forecast is much less solid than the data for the February Forecast. This is because:

- November election cycle—nearly all school operating Referendum Elections are held in early November as are many of the school building bond elections.
- The levy cycle is such that final levies are not certified for the upcoming fiscal year until after the November Forecast is completed (usually districts certify these amounts in mid-December and MDE has good data on the levies by mid-January).

- Pupil counts are much better for the February Forecast than for the November Forecast. Schools have more recent pupil unit data—with better error checking and more certainty for the current year—and enrollment data for things like compensatory revenue (based on the fall free and reduced-price lunch counts) are not finalized till early January.

Data

The Executive branch, House, and Senate agree to use the same underlying school data for all simulations during session. This data ties out to the Forecast amounts and House, Senate, and MDE all model alternatives based upon the agreed-upon underlying data. Some modeling is done only by MDE (e.g. special education data). This agreed upon data base is made available to House and Senate nonpartisan staff a few weeks before the Forecasts are released, but is not shared with legislators, partisan staff, or the public until the Forecast is released.

Fiscal Notes

The K12 area relies less on fiscal notes than many state budget areas. Most of the costs of K12 finance program changes can be simulated by House/Senate and MDE staff without going through the fiscal note process. In the K12 area, fiscal notes are rarely an impediment to completing the bill.

Summary

The time constraints for the K12 bill occur because the Forecast comes at the very end of February, targets are set a few weeks later, and the K12 bill needs to pass through both the taxes committee and the ways and means committee on the way to the floor in order to meet the deadlines.