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Senate discusses National Board Certified Teacher program

The budget shortfall is going to impact most programs and National Board Teacher Certification Program is not exempt. As you recall, the Legislature passed the prorated reduction of the mentoring bonus when funds are not sufficient. It is a high likelihood that prorating will occur this year.

This week, the Senate Education PreK-12 Appropriations Committee reviewed the National Board Certification program. Before the presentation by DOE, committee chairman Steve Wise (R-Jacksonville) said that, contrary to news reports in which he was directly quoted questioning its effectiveness, he indeed supports the program.

The DOE walked the committee through the history of the program and its growth over the last 10 years. This year, DOE will request an appropriation of \$110.7 million, a \$22.7 million increase over the adjusted 2007-08 appropriation. FEA is encouraged by the DOE budget proposal for 2008-09, but funding increases for any program is going to be difficult.

Kathy Corder, a Leon National Board Certified Teacher, explained to the committee the mentoring activities that Leon teachers performed to earn the mentoring bonus. FEA lobbyist Marshall Ogletree told the committee of FEA's longtime support and the importance NBCTs play in supporting new teachers.

Wise spoke toward developing greater standardization of how NBCTs earn the mentoring bonus. Some of the committee seemed to be concerned that the bonus could be earned for just 12 extra days, but they did not discuss this in any further detail.

2007-08 NBCT bonus payout pushed back due to start date

This year's state mandated later school start date has had an impact on the schedule for NBCT bonus payout. The Dale Hickam Excellent Teaching Program requires that teachers work the "majority" of the time before receiving the bonus. The Department of Education defined "majority" as 99 days or more than half a 180 day regular school calendar year. Since schools are starting later, the schedule for NBPTS bonuses also changed. The DOE will not open the window for districts to submit their qualifying teachers until February 11. Another two to three weeks of processing will occur before the districts receive funding from the state. NBCTs should receive their qualifying bonus sometime in March, with the mentoring bonus coming later in the year.

Legislative forecast: high probability of economic downturn

This week, the House Policy and Budget Council met to begin work on the 2008-09 state budget. As you well know, general revenue collections continue to come in below the forecast, even though that forecast has been lowered for each of the last three estimating conferences. Reasons for the downturn include continued slowdown in the housing market, rising unemployment, high energy prices, turmoil in the credit market and the increasing probability there will be a national recession.

In a memo to House members, Speaker-designate Ray Sansom (R-Fort Walton Beach) suggested "guiding principles" for the House to follow as they develop the 2008-09 budget:

- 1) Cut about \$2 billion from the base budget.
- 2) Should not balance the budget by using one-time (nonrecurring) monies for recurring purposes.
- 3) Should not use additional bonding as a method to fund new or existing initiatives.
- 4) Explore new and innovative ways to stimulate Florida's economy.

Veteran FEA lobbyist Marshall Ogletree said, "Lobbying in 2008 for issues that are budget driven is going to be harder than anytime I can remember."