

Cotter Still Hoping For More Bipartisanship On Education Budget

Gongwer 4-26-16 The House on Tuesday passed its budget for universities, community colleges and K-12 schools with 72 yes votes, but House [Speaker Kevin Cotter](#) said he is hopeful more changes can be made to bring more Democrats into supporting the budget.

Democrats offered several amendments on [HB 5291](#) and all were rejected.

In total, the education budgets are \$16.17 billion with \$12.57 billion from the School Aid Fund and \$1.61 billion from the General Fund.

Last year the education omnibus bill passed with almost 100 votes in support. Mr. Cotter (R-Mount Pleasant) said the current bill is not yet where he would like to see it.

"I think there is a path here, after some of the comments we heard today on the floor, sounded as though with changes that are made in the right direction we could see more votes," he said. "I think there is a path there is just some open questions we have to work out in conference."

Few changes were made to the budget on the floor. Key initiatives include the removal of the M-STEP, a work skills test and the college entrance exam requirements. In the budget, \$22 million from the School Aid Fund and \$6 million in federal funding is included for a contract for a new computer adaptive test.

Democrats opposed the removal of the M-STEP and college entrance exam, especially without having the discussion at the policy level. Democrats also opposed a \$1 million appropriation to private schools for reimbursements of state mandates unrelated to instruction.

Democrats offered amendments to strip the \$1 million appropriation and to restore the M-STEP and college entrance exam, but they were defeated.

Mr. Cotter said he strongly supports the private school funding. He said the parents who choose to send their children to private schools are still paying taxes toward their local, public schools.

"It is something we have to continue to work on. I think it is a really good step in the state's part to provide some level of funding, no matter how miniscule it may be, to offset some of those costs," he said.

Under the two amendments adopted on the House floor, one was a technical and the other would eliminate the cap on at-risk funding and expand it to be available to all at-risk students, even if the school they attend is not at-risk.

The state's universities would also see less funding than what [Governor Rick Snyder](#) recommended. Under the House budget, five universities would not reach the

funding levels of pre-2011 cuts. Mr. Snyder recommended getting all universities back to 2011 levels.

[Rep. Sam Singh](#) (D-East Lansing) criticized the budget for not fully restoring higher education funding.

"The three largest institutions, the three that are doing the most economic development, you have not even brought them back to pre-2011 levels," Mr. Singh said of Michigan State University, the University of Michigan and Wayne State University.

Mr. Singh and [Rep. Sarah Roberts](#) (D-Saint Clair Shores) also criticized the budget providing the full foundation allowance for cyber charter schools. Ms. Roberts offered an amendment to cut the cyber school foundation allowance in half, but it was rejected.

Mr. Cotter said education funding should remain equal across all students.

"I think that as we heard during some of the floor debate that our move should be to move to equality in funding for all students," he said. "We have continued to fund it at the same amount as the lower funded schools in the state. And I think it is important to point out it is the lower amount."

Mr. Singh said there have not been any policy conversations regarding the state's merit exam and the college entrance exam, right now the SAT.

"Today you are asking us to remove the funding for SATs, for people to go to college. ... I think this was a mistake," he said.

But [Rep. Tim Kelly](#) (R-Saginaw Township), chair of the School Aid Subcommittee, said the bill holds a quality budget and is part of the process.

"Nothing is etched in stone," he said. "I've met with a lot of education groups in the state, and believe me when I tell you there is little acrimony expressed on this budget."

The budget also includes the funding for Detroit Public Schools, for when a solution is eventually crafted for the district.

"As I have been saying all along my hope is that we can solve this issue one way or another before the end of June," Mr. Cotter said of the DPS funding. "We do know, under most plans, what the amount the money needed in this budget would be. The contention is really over how many or how few reforms go along with it."

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