

March 11, 2019

After a fairly slow first half of the 2019 session, legislators returned for the second half this week and advanced several major bills while teeing up some more education-related measures to advance this week.

The House approved its version of tax cuts and the Senate Select Committee on Education Finance recommended approval of Gov. Laura Kelly's inflation adjustment for school finance.

As approved in the House, SB 22 would give corporations a significant tax break, help some individual filers who itemize, reduce the state sales tax on food from 6.5 percent to 5.5 percent and levy sales tax on some internet purchase. It would reduce revenue by approximately \$200 million. As approved in the Senate, the bill contained only the corporate and itemizer proposals.

But the tax cuts face iffy futures. Gov. Laura Kelly has said she wants to allow the budget to recover this year from years of revenue shortfalls before cutting taxes. Kelly also wants to increase school funding and patch up other budget areas. The tax cuts passed in the House 76-43 and in the Senate 26-14. Both margins are short of the two-thirds majorities — 84 in the House and 27 in the Senate — that would be needed to overturn a possible Kelly veto.

On school finance, the select committee OK'd SB 142, which would add \$92 million in the fiscal year that starts July 1 and \$89 million in the fiscal year after that. That's on top of increases enacted in 2018. The measure now goes to the full Senate, but hasn't been scheduled yet for consideration. A

new controversy in the school finance debate erupted when the plaintiff school districts announced opposition to the proposal. Earlier, Schools For Fair Funding supported the plan but later said the measure had a drafting error that shorted the schools by hundreds of millions of dollars.

For this week, the House Education Committee will conduct hearings on two bills that have already been approved by the Senate. On Monday, the committee will consider SB 128, which would require at least nine safety drills to be conducted by schools each year, and on Tuesday it will hear SB 7, which would allow school boards to elect officers in January rather than July. The Senate Education Committee on Thursday will take up HB 2346, which has been approved by the House and changes standards for school-administered vision screenings.

House K-12 Education Budget Committee Chair Kristey Williams, R-Augusta, said the committee will start work on a school finance proposal that will include measures that have been considered in the committee. The committee has held hearings on bills that would increase requirements for schools to stop bullying (HB 2257) and HB 2150, which would allow students who report being bullied or who report an alleged incident to receive vouchers to another public school or private school.

In other news, Kelly signed her first bill, a \$115 million repayment to the Kansas Public Employee Retirement System. She said the measure was “a step in the right direction, and I’m encouraged that lawmakers are now committed to improving the long-term stability and sustainability of our KPERS pension system.”