

2016 MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATIVE SESSION



The 2016 Regular Session of the Mississippi Legislature convenes at 12:00 noon on Tuesday, January 5, 2016. MPE encourages its members to stay updated as to legislation under consideration at the capitol throughout the session. MPE provides regular updates via email and social media to keep its members informed as to the status of this legislation so that members may in turn contact their respective legislators with their thoughts and support or concerns on particular issues or pieces of legislation. We offer the following for our members' reference during the 2016 Legislative Session.

Legislators to be in Session for Four Months

As this is the first year of a new four-year term, the 2016 session will be four months in length, as compared to the three-month sessions held in the second, third and fourth years of a term. The first year of a new four-year term provides this extra month as a learning period for new legislators, as well as for time necessary for housekeeping items such as appointment of committees.

One of the first orders of business for the House of Representatives will be the election of the Speaker of the House. While it was anticipated earlier this fall that current Speaker Philip Gunn may not be reelected, I do not think that will be the case given the Republicans' results in legislative races on November 3. Thus, the vote will be a formality. While the Lieutenant Governor presides over the Senate, members of that chamber will elect a new President Pro Tem. The President Pro Tem presides over the Senate in the Lt. Governor's absence.

Committee Chairmen Play Significant Role

The Speaker and the Lt. Governor will appoint committee chairmen, as well as members of each legislative committee, during the first few weeks of the session. Education committees generally consider over 200 bills each session and committee chairmen have a significant voice in decid-

ing which bills will or will not be considered by their respective committees. MPE will share the names and contact information for education and university committee chairmen, as well as appropriations chairmen, via email, as well as on our website, as soon as those appointments are announced.

Timetable for Processing Legislation

The timetable for processing legislation includes the following significant legislative deadlines:

- March 8: Deadline for committees to report general bills originating in own house
- March 17: Deadline for original floor action on general bills originating in own house
- April 5: Deadline for committees to report general bills originating in other house
- April 13: Deadline for original floor action on general bills originating in other house
- April 28: Deadline to concur or not concur in amendments from other house to general bills
- April 30: Deadline for conference reports on appropriation bills to be filed
- May 2: Deadline for adoption of appropriation conference reports and for conference reports on general bills to be filed
- May 4: Deadline for first consideration of conference reports on general bills
- May 8: Sine Die (Adjourning sine die comes from the Latin "without day" and it refers to adjourning without assigning a day for a further meeting. Members adjourn sine die only on the last day of the session.)

Education Expected to be a Hot Topic

Education is expected to once again be a hot topic during the upcoming 2016 legislative session. Among other education policy issues most likely to be considered, there could be further debate as to Mississippi's College and Career Readiness Standards. The Lt. Governor and the Governor have both alluded to possibly changing the law to allow students living in other districts to cross district lines to attend charter schools. It is likely that legislators will consider additional vouchers, tuition tax credits, or other diversions of state funds to nonpublic schools, home schools or virtual schools. There will also most likely be a strong push for the appointment of all school district superintendents, as well. Initiative 42's vote on November 3 sent a clear message that Mississippians want MAEP fully funded; the question is how that will be accomplished, so education funding should continue to be a significant topic at the capitol.

Let Your Voice be Heard

As in years past, MPE will keep its members updated throughout the 2016 Mississippi Legislative Session via our weekly email updates, as well as Facebook and Twitter, as to developments at the capitol throughout the session. You may check the status of a particular piece of legislation by visiting <http://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us>. In addition, once the March 8 deadline passes for committees to report general bills originating in each chamber, MPE staff will develop our bill tracking spreadsheet of the critical pieces of legislation we will be monitoring throughout the session. We will update our bill tracking spreadsheet each Friday and post it in the "MPE News" section of our website, which may be accessed via the "Resources for Educators" tab at the top of our webpage (www.mpe.org).

Educators have a right to let their voices be heard at the state capitol. Every educator has the right to contact his or her respective representative and/or senator to share thoughts/support/concerns regarding legislation being considered. You should not use school resources (i.e., computer, email) to contact your legislator or statewide officials. It is imperative that legislators hear from their constituents regarding particular bills being considered, especially as it relates to education bills – those pieces of legislation that will impact schools and classrooms throughout our state. Legislators need to know that their constituents back home are watching their votes at the capitol and will hold them accountable for those votes.

The legislature's homepage (www.legislature.ms.gov) contains contact information for legislators in the form of House and Senate rosters, as well as legislators' respective web pages. Once the House and Senate rosters are released, MPE will also provide contact information via the "Quick Links" menu that runs down the left side of our homepage (www.mpe.org). In addition to emailing your representative or senator, you may leave phone messages for members with the capitol switchboard at 601-359-3770.

Finally, be engaged with your legislators beyond the legislative session. Encourage your principal to invite your

representative and/or senator to visit your school. Help to form a committee of concerned educators, parents and community leaders to meet with your legislators on a regular, monthly basis throughout the year. Not only will this let your legislators know that you care about public education and that you are watching their votes at the capitol, it will give them a trusted group of constituents to contact for feedback. It is in the best interest of our students and our state that we all work together to advance our schools.

