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# Education provisions weakened at 11th hour

**Niki Kelly** | The Journal Gazette

INDIANAPOLIS – Rushing to avoid a state shutdown last week, legislators weakened several major education policy shifts in the final hours of the budget session.

The Journal Gazette chronicled two major changes in a Page One story in Sunday's editions but has found lawmakers removed some provisions before the vote Tuesday evening.

The two provisions would have:

- Encouraged school districts to join the state health insurance plan and made employees make up the difference if schools choose to stay with an outside provider at a higher expense.
- Repealed a long-standing ban on using ISTEP+ scores to evaluate teacher performance.

These policy shifts are in the just-passed state budget. But at the end of the bill, lawmakers inserted wording to delete or modify those provisions.

The Indiana State Teachers Association is circulating an e-mail memo to its members in an attempt to clear up confusion.

It says that after legislators were made aware of ISTA objections, the budget conferees agreed to remove the language. To avoid having to reprint the 400-page bill, the original wording was left in and a "fix" was tacked on at the end.

Reprinting the budget bill would have taken at least four hours, and legislators were coming up against a midnight deadline in which non-essential state services would have been shut down. Using this method, staffers had to print only a few additional pages.

But a summary of the budget bill includes the original language.

And several people interviewed last week were unaware of the changes.

Gov. Mitch Daniels even congratulated lawmakers Wednesday for getting rid of the "ridiculous prohibition" against using test scores in teacher evaluations.

In the end, though, the bill does not repeal the general ban. Instead, it carves out a specific exception that applies only when the federal government requires educators be evaluated by student test scores as a condition to qualify for a particular grant, according to ISTA.

And the altered health insurance provision opens up the state health plan as an option for school districts. It does not force school employees to make up the difference if the option is declined.

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