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School Board Advocate: April 12, 2016

Volume 27, Number 5



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School Finance Act quietly moves forward

The School Finance Act is bumping along at the legislature. It has passed the House and Senate and now will go back to the Joint Budget Committee for negotiations on a final version.

Surely no one in the education community is happy with the budget numbers, but it is a sign of the times that *not adding to the*

negative factor is perceived as some sort of victory.

Is it that school leaders are resigned to more financial peril? Is it that they feel powerless? Is it that the legislature is mostly going through the motions in an election year?

The answer is at least partly yes to all of the above. But what is certain is that there is no money up for discussion. There was little fighting by interest groups over money this year, because there is virtually no money to fight over. Not even crumbs.

So the School Finance Act ([House Bill 16-1422](#)) appears destined to pass, and it means that K-12 education will be funded at the same rate as last year, with a small adjustment for inflation. Meanwhile, the debt owed to Colorado's schoolchildren from the negative factor will remain at \$830 million.



CASB members make a difference at the capitol

School board members from across Colorado have answered the call to testify during Colorado's legislative session.

- Board members **Tracey Johnson** of Academy District 20 and **Kathy Kipp** of Poudre R-1, along with CASB's **Dr. Jane Urschel**, testified in opposition to [Senate Bill 16-148](#). The bill would have required students to pass a rote-memorization civics test before they could graduate from high school. The bill passed out of the Senate Education Committee but was voted down on the Senate floor on third reading. (Pictured: Kathy Kipp with the bill's sponsor, Sen. Owen Hill, above; and Tracey Johnson and Jane Urschel, below.)
- **Debbie Lammers**, representing St. Vrain Valley RE-1J, gave testimony in support of [House Bill 16-1063](#) to improve the sharing of information to ensure safe schools.
- Adams 12 Board President **Kathy Plomer** testified in opposition to [House Bill 16-1128](#) and gave great insight into how her district is helping students with concurrent enrollment.



The voice of our members is a vital piece of our advocacy efforts at the capitol. The CASB advocacy team is ready to help you and your board in connecting with your representatives and senators.



The CHASE is on for the HPF

Speaker of the House Dickey Lee Hullinghorst, D-Boulder, introduced the Colorado Healthcare Affordability and Sustainability Enterprise (CHASE) on March 28. [House Bill 16-1420](#) would convert the Hospital Provider Fee (HPF) to an enterprise fund. By classifying the HPF as an enterprise, these funds collected by hospitals would be excluded from the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights (TABOR) revenue limits. This would help free up money in the General Fund that could be allocated for higher education, transportation and K-12 education.

The full Colorado House will take up HB 1420 on Friday, April 15. CASB encourages school board members to contact their representatives and senators and ask them to support HB 1420. Many CASB member districts have passed resolutions in support of this important legislation.

Colorado Attorney General Cynthia Coffman has [published her opinion](#) that moving the HPF to a state enterprise fund does not violate the spirit of TABOR. Coffman's opinion and [additional Hospital Provider Fee resources](#) are available on the CASB website.



Dome dealings

- House Bill 16-1058 is down but maybe not out. **Reps. Yeulin Willett**, R-Grand Junction, and **Rhonda Fields**, D-Denver, have been pushing hard for additional legal tools to address teenage “sexting.” In spite of support from district attorneys and the legal community, the House Committee on Public Health Care and Human Services voted [HB 1058](#) down. The committee, however, failed in a vote to PI – postpone indefinitely – the bill, so stay tuned to see if it gets a second chance.
- The much-discussed Student Data Privacy bill was finally introduced. [House Bill 16-1423](#), sponsored by **Reps. Paul Lundeen**, R-Monument, and **Alec Garnett**, D-Denver, makes several proposals to improve the transparency of what student data is collected, how it is used and ensure that it is secure. The CASB Legislative Resolutions Committee voted to support the bill with amendments. The CASB advocacy team is working with the bill’s sponsors in advance of the bill being heard on Monday, April 11.
- As veteran observers of the Colorado Legislature know, the General Assembly is often unpredictable. Case in point is the previously mentioned [SB 16-148](#). The bill would have required every Colorado public school student to pass a civics exam before they could graduate from high school. Colorado currently mandates that students successfully complete a civics class in high school. The Senate Education Committee spent more than four hours over two days debating the bill and proposing amendments before sending the bill to the full Senate. Debate on the Senate floor led to another flurry of amendments and speechifying. When the smoke cleared, SB 148 failed on a 17-18 vote, with several members of the Republican majority voting with Democrats to ensure that another unfunded mandate did not make its way to Colorado schools.



The Dead Zone

The Colorado General Assembly deals with numbers all day long. Three of the most important numbers are 120, 100 and 5. Why these numbers?

- There are 120 days in the session.
- Each member of the 100-member legislature (65 in the House, 35 in the Senate) is allowed to carry 5 bills each.
- If all of the bills were successful, that would mean 500 new laws every year.

Fortunately, most of these bills never become law.

As we head into the final third of the legislative session, here are a few bills that won’t cross the governor’s desk as a result of CASB’s work:

[HB 16-1162](#) – A bill that would have required a public hearing before school boards could grant a salary increase to an administrator at low-performing school.

[SB 16-037](#) – This bill would have required local governments to make information requested under the Colorado Open Records Act available in a digital format.

[SB 16-101](#) – A new commission to hear ethics complaints against members of BOCES, Charter, and District governing boards would have been created.

[HB 16-1128](#) – Would have required school districts to offer concurrent-enrollment classes.

[SB 148](#) – Proposed that every student pass a civics exam before graduating from high school.



CASB files comments regarding State Board of Education Rules

Last month, the State Board of Education revised its rules concerning administration of the [READ Act](#).

CASB, along with several school districts and education organizations, submitted written comments objecting to changes that would increase districts' testing requirements. [See these written comments](#). Despite the numerous written comments the State Board received that opposed the proposed changes, the State Board voted 4-3 to require additional testing. As amended, the READ Act rules now require districts to annually test all students' reading skills in English, even if the district is already using a state-approved reading assessment in Spanish.

On Thursday, the State Board will consider rules for administration of the school bullying prevention and education grant program under C.R.S. 22-93-101 *et seq.* CASB and the Colorado Rural Schools Alliance submitted written comments, objecting to the rules because they inappropriately redefine "bullying" and impose unnecessary and burdensome application requirements on districts. [See these written comments](#).



Join us for CASB's Days at the Capitol

Board members will gather for a breakfast briefing with CASB's advocacy team and then visit the Colorado Legislature to see the House and Senate in action and attend education committee meetings. The next [Day at the Capitol](#) is Wednesday, April 13, and the final Day at the Capitol is Wednesday, April 20. Members are encouraged to attend one of the last two days.

No one can speak for local control of public education like board members – and that means you! If you have never attended, this is a good way to get an introduction to what goes on at the capitol.

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