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School finance reform takes off

After three days of hearings, **Sen. Mike Johnston's** heavily amended school finance reform bill ([SB 13-213](#)) was approved Thursday by the Senate Education Committee on a 5-4 party line vote. The bill will now be subject to scrutiny by the full Senate, though it's not expected to be heard until April 1 at the earliest.

The 174-page bill was first considered by the Education Committee at a special meeting on Tuesday afternoon. The hearing dragged on for more than nine hours and was marked by confusion around the numerous amendments and mixed testimony from dozens of education leaders, some of whom supported the bill while others raised questions about the "winners and losers" created by the new funding formulas.

In her testimony before the committee, **Jane Urschel**, CASB's deputy executive director, likened the bill to the new spy plane the Army contracted for a few years back.

"The design incorporated too many complicated systems, too much wiring and was too heavy to fly. In its current form this bill places too many restrictions on local control and is not equitable in its distribution of revenues. We need to lighten the load so this plane can fly," she said.

Jane told the committee that CASB would be "on board" once the inequities created by the changes to per-pupil funding formula and the state-local funding stabilization provisions were removed from the bill. Jane also spoke to CASB's concern regarding "backpack funding," which sends state dollars directly to building principals, bypassing the districts' budget process.

On Wednesday, the committee approved an amendment brought by Sen. Johnston to provide continued state funding to the 23 districts negatively impacted by the state-local funding stabilization provisions. Another amendment, brought by **Sen. Nancy Todd** on Thursday afternoon, addresses the inequities created by the new funding formula by bringing all districts up to the statewide per-pupil average with a “bonus” payment every year. The amendment will increase the estimated \$950 million cost of the bill by an additional \$220 million a year.

CASB’s Board of Directors will adopt a formal position on the bill at its meeting this weekend and we will continue to work behind the scenes to ensure that the best possible proposal proceeds to the ballot for voter approval in November.

For more in-depth coverage of the rollercoaster education-packed week at the state capitol, read the Ed News articles:

[Finance bill gets a big tweak](#)

[Panel stumbles on finance reform plan](#)

[Funding reform gets first full airing](#)

New ELL bill seeks equitable outcomes for all kids

HB 13-1211, sponsored by **Reps. Buckner** and **Navarro**, is an effort to bring funding and best practices to help districts move their English language learners from language acquisition to proficiency. The bill includes increased accountability to the state for district ELL programs and approximately \$6.5 million additional dollars to support local districts’ work.

The funds are designed to offset the costs incurred in complying with the new requirements in the bill and to help districts expand programs to assist ELL students, including professional development for teachers. The bill also includes approximately \$400,000 to support the additional FTE necessary to allow CDE to “comprehensively monitor” district’s programs.

As of press time, the bill is scheduled to be heard by the **House Education Committee at 1:30 p.m. Monday**. However, critical questions remain regarding the source of the funds and the identification of a formula that will ensure rural districts get their fair share. The hearing may be pushed back to allow more time to address those concerns.

Please contact [Jane Urschel](#) or [Michelle Murphy](#) if you have any concerns and/or insights with regard to the important issues raised by this bill.

[House Education Committee Members & Schedule](#)

[Senate Education Committee Members & Schedule](#)

CASB makes it easy for you to keep track of education bills through our master bills list via [Colorado Capitol Watch](#). Visit the list to learn more about education-related legislation, including the date each bill was introduced and CASB’s position.

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