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Charting the Capitol Legislative Update - December 2017

Hard Work Ahead

The school board elections from early last month left little doubt that opponents of charter public schools are becoming more sophisticated, organized and outspoken in their opposition. Hundreds of thousands of dollars were spent to denounce and discredit charter schools, and the worst part is - these efforts proved successful. In virtually every significant school board race across the state - from Denver and Aurora to Douglas County, Jeffco and Fort Collins - charter school advocates lost ground.

We've got our work cut out for us in the weeks and months ahead if we don't want these troubling trends to continue. It all starts with ensuring we have another successful legislative session this spring and don't lose any additional ground to the opposition. From there, it means becoming more intentional moving forward about developing a ground game that can match the money, might and misinformation of our opponents.

The League has aggressive efforts in motion on all these fronts, and we strongly encourage you to read on for additional information and ways to get involved. We're counting on you to help launch the grassroots support that will ultimately enable us to succeed.

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2018 Legislative Agenda - Your Feedback Wanted

Over the past few months, the League has been working in close connection with our Governmental Affairs Committee and Board of Directors to develop the following [draft of our 2018 Legislative Priorities](#). Now, we need your feedback to ensure it appropriately reflects the main challenges and opportunities currently confronting your school and the Colorado charter school sector overall.

[Please review the attached priorities](#). If you have any questions, concerns or potential modifications, please direct them to Dan Schaller, Director of Governmental Affairs, **by next Monday, December 11**. He can be reached at dschaller@coloradoleague.org or 303-989-5356 ext. 105. Once approved, we will be sure to circulate the final agenda in conjunction with the start of the legislative session in early January.

Governor's Budget Proposal Includes Good News for Charter Schools

Coming out of the 2017 legislative session, we were consistent in stating that one of the major pieces of "unfinished business" related to House Bill 1375 and the mill-sharing debate was the lack of equalization funding for CSI schools. While HB1375 set up a framework for equalized funding for CSI schools, it did nothing to allocate any actual dollars from the state toward this framework.

As such, we have continued our strong advocacy, alongside CSI, on this topic. We were grateful to see these efforts rewarded when Governor John Hickenlooper released his [proposed 2018-19 state budget earlier this month](#). In that budget, \$5.5 million dollars were set aside for CSI Mill Levy Equalization - state funds that, if adopted into law by the General Assembly this spring, would take significant steps toward leveling the playing field for CSI schools and their more than 17,000 students. Specifically, the Office of State Planning and Budgeting projects that this \$5.5 million would translate into an average investment of \$430 more dollars per student across approximately 30 CSI schools for the next school year.

The Governor's budget proposal is just that - a proposal - and nothing becomes official until the legislature finalizes the budget this spring. However, it's a positive sign that the Governor has chosen to prioritize this funding in his initial request, and we will be fighting hard to ensure it remains there throughout the legislative process.

Beyond CSI, the Governor's proposal also contained good news for public schools in general. For K-12 school finance, the budget requests funding above enrollment and inflation by \$70 million. If adopted, this would mean that per pupil funding for next school year would rise by an average of approximately \$343 per student, or a 4.5 percent increase. While there is still plenty of work to be done, this would certainly represent a step in the right direction for school funding. We will continue to keep you posted as the conversation unfolds over the coming months.

Help Us Organize Your Parents and Families for ACTION

With more than 115,000 families now choosing charter schools in Colorado, our strength is in our numbers. But unless these numbers are organized and ready for action, we will never be able to stand our ground and effectively push back against the lies and misinformation being spread with increasing vigor by charter school opponents.

That's where you come in. We need your help. As charter school leaders and supporters across the state, you are in a unique position to help us activate your communities - the parents, families, staff members and former students that make up your networks. As supporters of your schools, these people trust you. If you ask them to get involved, they will listen.

That's why we're asking you to [send the following message to your community](#) encouraging them to sign-up for our Colorado Charter Advocacy Network (COCAN) today. The Charter Advocacy Network is the vehicle by which we keep charter school supporters and friends informed about pressing issues affecting charter schools. It's also the means by which we distribute action alerts, as necessary, to activate the Colorado charter school community in defense of charter school students and their interests.

Unless we work together to get organized and activated, we will never be able to counter the attacks being leveled by our opposition. Please help us by both [clicking here to sign-up today](#) and by [distributing the following message to your community](#) encouraging them to sign-up as well.

Together, we can accomplish much. Divided, we will fail. We're counting on you to help engage your community and ignite the grassroots support that will ultimately enable us to succeed. Thank you in advance for your support.

Problems with Local Zoning or Land Use Requirements? We Want to Hear from You

We're hearing more and more stories about schools encountering problems with local officials in the areas of permitting, zoning and local land use despite the fact that charter schools are public schools and should be subject to the same local land use exemptions as every other public school in the state.

Does this apply to you? Have you experienced someone trying to tell you that "you can't locate here" or "you need to do x, y, and z before we will let you occupy that location?"

If this describes your situation, please let us know. We're trying to get a sense of just how prominent a problem this is. We'll have a hard time knowing exactly how prevalent this issue has become unless we hear from you. Contact Dan Schaller at dschaller@coloradoleague.org to share the details of your story today.

Make Your Voice Heard! Critical Decisions Still Looming on Federal Tax Reform

Last week, the Senate narrowly passed their version of tax reform legislation. While the Senate version of the bill protects the tax-exempt status of a certain class of bonds critical to charter school financing in Colorado, the House bill passed previously did not. As the two versions now head to conference to settle out their differences, **we need to make sure legislators continue to hear from us.**

Over the years, many Colorado charter schools have relied on so-called private activity bonds (PABs) to finance their facilities needs. As a result of the PAB tax exemption, charter schools in Colorado have been able to save upwards of \$10,000,000 in interest savings per year. This equals \$100s of millions of dollars in savings over the lifetime of Colorado charter schools.

These are invaluable resources that are used to pay for teachers, classroom materials and other critical school needs. Their elimination would seriously hamper every charter school's ability to continue providing innovative and high-quality educational opportunities to students across Colorado.

Please contact your representatives today and tell them NOT to let the loss of this critical tax exemption and other favorable charter financing mechanisms end up in the final bill.

Sincerely,
Dan Schaller
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303-989-5356 x105

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