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Charting the Capitol Legislative Updates - February 8, 2016

Session Gathers Steam

The first weeks of any legislative session tend to be filled with both fanfare and formality. This year has been no exception. But in recent days, conversations have picked up and the number of bills introduced has inched upward. The League has been monitoring the start of the session closely and, as you'll see below, is engaging in ways beneficial to charter public schools. Read on for further details and please don't hesitate to reach out to any members of our team (contact information included below) should you have questions or concerns related to these topics.

School Finance and School Safety Dominate the Legislature's Early Days

A lot has been made of the state's difficult fiscal situation in recent months, and while much of what has been said is still true, it didn't prevent the Joint Budget Committee (JBC) from making decisions last week that offer some modest silver linings to the ongoing school finance conversation. Specifically, JBC members agreed to a mid-year budget adjustment that will increase the statewide per-pupil average for the current school year by \$18 per student. While that certainly isn't much, it's far better than the cuts some feared could happen as a result of lower-than-expected statewide enrollment. [Click here for a district-by-district breakdown](#) of how that \$18 average plays out in within your district.

JBC members also voted to introduce a bill later this session that would hold the [negative factor](#) level for the next school year. While a lot needs to happen between now and when a proposal like this might actually become law, the mere suggestion of it is a far cry from the Governor's fall budget proposal. His proposal projected a \$50 million dollar increase in the negative factor next year in order to balance the rest of the state's budget. We'll be sure to keep you updated as these conversations continue to unfold in the weeks and months ahead.

At the same time that school finance was being discussed, the issue of school safety took center stage with the release of three reports authored by school safety and research organizations outlining the factors that contributed to the tragic shooting death of Claire Davis at Arapahoe High School in 2013. That shooting led to passage of legislation in the 2015 session that expanded liability for school districts and charter public schools in the aftermath of acts of school violence. It also created a legislative committee tasked with the ongoing study of school safety issues. These three reports were presented in front of this committee on January 22. It remains to be seen what additional school safety legislation may result from the release of these reports and in response to last year's controversial [SB15-213](#). We continue to closely engage in these conversations and will update you as any concrete proposals surface. In the meantime, [click here](#) to read the Arapahoe High School shooting reports.

League Efforts Advance BEST Equity Provisions

Equalizing access to the state's [Building Excellent Schools Today \(BEST\) competitive grant program](#) is one of the facilities initiatives that the League is pursuing this session. Eligibility provisions that require charter public schools to be open at least five years before a school can apply or that require a charter public school to notify its authorizer of its intent to apply months in advance of the actual application deadline create needless barriers for charter public schools that do not apply to district BEST applicants. These barriers create unnecessary hurdles for charter public schools to access

this grant program.

Thus, when a bill ([SB16-072](#)) was brought forth this session to increase the certificates of participation (COP) limit on the BEST program thereby enabling more schools to benefit from its funding, the League stood ready to use its leverage in the Senate Education Committee to add amendments to the proposal addressing some of these inequities. With a 9-0 vote last Thursday, the bill advanced out of Senate Ed with all [League amendments](#) attached. While this is only one stage of a long journey through the statehouse, it is an important first step and one that positions the League and charter public schools well to ultimately eliminate these long-standing barriers.

Other Early Legislation of Note

A number of education-related bills have been introduced thus far, but we don't have the space to address them all here (see "League Legislative Tracker" below for further details). Instead, we've highlighted several proposals below that we thought may be of interest to you:

- **HB16-1016 - Using Multiple Measures Of Student Academic Growth**
Would create a \$20 million state grant program to help districts and schools develop multiple measures of student academic success to be used in measuring district performance and evaluating teachers. (link to full bill text [here](#))
- **HB16-1128 - Extending Concurrent Enrollment Statewide**
Seeks to expand concurrent enrollment of high school students in college classes by requiring all school districts and colleges to offer concurrent enrollment. Also, proposes a new, standard system for school districts to pay colleges and creates an appeals process for students whose college study plans are denied by their districts. (link to full bill text [here](#))
- **SB16-052 - Authorizer Certification In Connection With Multi-District Online Schools**
Changes the current system of certifying multi-district online schools. Instead of certifying such schools, the Department of Education would certify the districts or other entities that authorize those schools. (link to full bill text [here](#)).

Grassroots Advocacy

Join us for the **League's Charter School Advocacy Day** taking place at the Capitol on **Thursday, April 7**. The Advocacy Day will replace the Colorado Charter Schools Rally that the League has held in the past in hopes of increasing direct contact with elected officials. During this all-day event, you will learn about the legislative process, garner helpful tips about effective advocacy, understand current education bills that will impact charter public schools, and visit the Capitol to meet elected officials and share your own personal story about the importance of charter public schools and how they benefit our educational landscape.

In addition to parents and other charter advocates, we encourage **staff and students** to get involved in this day, too! After all, who makes a better advocate than the students currently attending charter public schools? We encourage middle school and high school teachers and a small group (10 maximum) of their students to participate. It promises to be an exciting day and a worthwhile civics lesson for all involved. Please contact Dan Schaller at dschaller@coloradoleague.org to learn more about this opportunity or [click here to sign-up today](#).

Another way to get involved is by joining the **Charter Advocacy Corps**. As a member of the Charter Advocacy Corps, you will be part of a grassroots initiative working with like-minded individuals including charter school parents, teachers, principals, board members, and concerned citizens to influence positive change for charter public schools across Colorado. The Charter Advocacy Corps meets quarterly by phone to discuss a variety of topics. Please be sure to join our next call that will take place on **Thursday, February 18 from 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM at 1.800.977.8002 (access code: 577658#)**. Our discussion will focus on effective legislative advocacy as well as the League's Charter Advocacy Day.

League Legislative Tracker

As in previous years, if you're looking for details on other education-related legislation not highlighted here, be sure to check out our [Legislative Tracker](#) for information on all current education bills. If you'd like more background on any of this legislation, please don't hesitate to reach out and we'd be happy to provide further context.

We welcome feedback on these and any other areas of concern you might have, and invite you to send responses to any of the team members below.

Sincerely,

The League Policy and Advocacy Team

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