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## Charting the Capitol Legislative Updates - March 2016

### Charter Legislative Package Begins Circulating

The Colorado Charter Schools Act has been in existence for over two decades and, there are still several fundamental inequities that charter public schools, and their students, face. For one, the typical charter public school student only receives approximately 80 cents on the dollar in public funding compared with his or her traditional public school peer. Additionally, charter public schools still face a distinct disadvantage when it comes to accessing and financing school buildings.

Charter public school students are no less a part of the public school family than any other student in the state, and as such, there is no reason why these inequities should persist. It was with this core principle in mind that the League, in contemplating our 2016 legislative agenda, decided to put together a package that, if adopted, would meaningfully address a number of these key charter challenges. This package began making the rounds at the Capitol last week, and so we wanted to be sure to share with you many of its key components.

It is our sincere hope that in working together with you over the next two months, we can get this important legislation passed and take a significant step forward in leveling the playing field for charter public school students across the state. Read on for further background on the proposal as well as for information on how to get involved in critical upcoming advocacy efforts.

### Charter Omnibus: What Does It Do?

Funding, facilities, and flexibility. These are the three areas we hear consistently from our schools create the most problems for them and present the most significant barriers to their continued success. These are also the three areas we attempted to tackle head-on with our proposal. Here's how:

#### Funding:

- Equal mill sharing
  - The proposal states that, unless a local mill levy override was passed for a specific program and/or grade level that a district-authorized charter public school clearly does not offer, the revenue generated by that mill should be distributed on an equitable, pro-rata basis to children attending charter public schools within that district.
- Framework for CSI mill equalization
  - The proposal sets up the statutory framework for what equalized funding from the state for CSI schools should look like. Given the state's current fiscal reality, it does not obligate legislators to appropriate money to this fund this year, but it does keep the issue front-and-center in lawmakers' minds and reminds them that this is an issue that needs to be addressed.
- Additional itemized accounting detail
  - The proposal specifies that the itemized accounting that districts provide to their charters at the conclusion of each fiscal year must include a listing of the personnel positions involved in providing the associated services (i.e. special education or central administrative overhead).

**Facilities:**

- More equitable access to taxpayer-funded land and facilities
  - The proposal calls on districts to notify their charters on an annual basis of any vacant or underutilized buildings or land in their possession. Charters shall then be allowed to submit proposals for those buildings or land, and districts shall notify their schools in writing and at a public meeting of the district's decision.
- Leveling the BEST playing field
  - The bill repeals certain requirements imposed on charter schools as conditions of applying for the competitive BEST grant program such as the requirement that a charter school be chartered five years before it can apply or the requirement that a charter school submit a letter of intent to its authorizer four months in advance of the actual BEST application deadline.
- Addition of "maintenance" to list of allowable Charter Capital Construction expenses
  - Currently, maintenance of one's facility is not one of the eligible expenses under which a charter can receive capital construction assistance from the state. This proposal would change that.

**Flexibility:**

- Streamlining the Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) process
  - Individual charters that earn the state's highest accountability rating (Performance) would be exempt from needing to submit a Unified Improvement Plan every year. Instead, they could submit a plan once every other year as long as they maintain that Performance rating.
- Charter network financial audit
  - The proposal would enable charter public school networks to complete one financial audit for the entire network each year rather than the very costly and time-consuming campus-by-campus audits required under current law.
- CSI school board open meetings
  - The proposal changes what constitutes an open meeting for purposes of CSI schools' compliance with public meeting requirements, making three the minimum number of meetings required instead of the existing two thus aligning with all other charter public schools in the state.

And there's more. In addition to the above components, the proposal also contains provisions related to strengthened authorizer standards, good faith contract negotiations, and enhanced accountability for chronically underperforming charter public schools. We invite you to read the entire proposal [here](#), and please don't hesitate to follow-up with any additional questions you may have.

**Charter Omnibus: How Can I Help?** Want to get involved in the effort to ensure this important proposal becomes law? Here are some ways you can help:

**Sign up for COCAN (Colorado Charter Advocacy Network)**

Stay connected by receiving updates about the bill as well as email alerts encouraging you to take action on this and other legislation with an impact on charter schools. [Click here to learn more.](#)

**Participate in Charter Advocacy Day on April 7**

Join us for the Colorado League of Charter Schools' Charter School Advocacy Day taking place at the Colorado State Capitol on Thursday, April 7. 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. [Click here to learn more and register.](#)

## Other 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 with particular interest for charters, and we welcome your feedback on how these would impact your school:

- HB16- 1343 - Removal of Automatic Waivers for Charter Schools**  
 Would require charter schools in the future to again submit rationale and replacement plans for certain waivers that had recently been classified as automatic. *The League strongly opposes this proposal and will be working hard to prevent its adoption.* (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, creates an appeals process for students whose college study plans are denied by their districts. *League Position: Monitor* (link to latest proposed language [here](#))
- SB16-148 - Require Civics Test Before Graduate High School**  
 Would require ninth graders to correctly answer 60 questions on the federal naturalization test to graduate from high school. Students could take the test multiple times through 12th grade in order to pass. *League Position: Monitor* (link to full bill text [here](#))

## League Legislative Tracker

Finally, 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 interest 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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