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Hi, just a reminder that you're receiving this email because you have expressed an interest in Colorado League of Charter Schools. Don't forget to add [srader@coloradoleague.org](mailto:srader@coloradoleague.org) to your address book so we'll be sure to land in your inbox!

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## Charting the Capitol Legislative Updates - March 5, 2015

### Calm before the Storm

We've nearly reached the halfway point of this year's legislative session, and while a number of education-related bills have been introduced, the real action is still to come. That's because two top priorities - testing and school finance - have yet to take center stage. With just two months to go, however, that should all start to change soon as legislators get down to business and begin to hash out details on final compromise packages. The League will be actively involved in these discussions on behalf of charters every step of the way, so stay tuned for updates as these conversations unfold (we'll need your input!). In the meantime, read on for further details on other League priorities and additional legislative news of note.

And as always, please don't hesitate to reach out to Dan Schaller at [dschaller@coloradoleague.org](mailto:dschaller@coloradoleague.org) or Jessica Johnson at [jmjohnson@coloradoleague.org](mailto:jmjohnson@coloradoleague.org) should you have questions or concerns related to any of these topics.

### Networks Bill Heads to Senate

One of the priorities the League is pursuing this session is codification of the charter school network concept in statute. While charter school networks - or the existence of multiple charter schools overseen by a single charter operator - have existed in practice in Colorado for a number of years, they have yet to be formally recognized in law.

[House Bill 15-1184](#) seeks to address this by both defining the concept of charter school networks in statute and outlining some of the common practices in which they engage. With the League advocating strongly on its behalf, the bill just completed a smooth and successful passage through the House. It now heads to the Senate, where we're optimistic that an equally smooth and successful journey will occur.

Thank you to **Dom DiFelice**, Superintendent of The New America School network, and **Whitney Bride**, Chief Operating Officer with STRIVE Preparatory Schools, for taking time out of their busy schedules to join us at the Capitol last Wednesday and providing compelling testimony in support of this important legislation.

[Click here](#) for a one-page overview of what the bill does, and [here](#) for the latest version of the bill itself.

### Charters and School Finance

Many of you have asked what's likely in store for school finance this year and how charters will fit into the equation. The short answer is we don't know yet. Legislators still need to have a number of conversations about how much money they are willing and able to give to K-12 education next year.

That said, with revenues on the rise, we're hopeful that there will be some additional funding for K-12. If so, we will be fighting hard to ensure that charters get their fair share.

Depending on how much money there is to go around, there are two specific areas we're prioritizing:

1. **State mill equalization for students attending schools authorized by the Charter School Institute (CSI)**
  - Of all the funding disparities Colorado charter schools face, the biggest is in the area of local tax revenue. Nowhere is this more acute than with the 34 schools currently authorized by CSI, which have no means of levying local tax dollars. The League - working in conjunction with CSI - is exploring opportunities to secure state mill equalization funds for students enrolled in CSI schools, a proposal that would cost approximately \$12-13 million.
2. **Greater facilities funding**
  - While the \$6.5 million secured last year for charter capital construction for 2015-16 was an important step forward, the reality is that the typical charter school must still devote considerable per-pupil operating revenue to facilities expenses. Depending on whether the price tag for CSI mill equalization simply becomes too steep, the League may alternately pursue additional funding for the Charter Schools Capital Construction Grant Program above and beyond the \$6.5 million that is already coming our way.

Regardless of the exact path we are able to pursue, we are optimistic that - if there are additional dollars to go around - we can rally our legislative supporters to the cause to ensure that some sort of charter carve-out is included.

In the meantime, if you are interested in some of what the per-pupil funding conversation has looked like thus far, follow [this link](#) to a story from *Chalkbeat Colorado* on what Governor Hickenlooper and his team were proposing when they released their 2015-16 budget proposal in the fall.

## Testing Latest

In case you missed it, the Colorado Standards and Assessments Task Force - created by last year's House Bill 1202 - released its [testing recommendations](#) a little over a month ago. The group was comprised of a broad cross-section of interests and individuals from across the state, and with the current Colorado legislature being split the way it is (Democrats control the House, Republicans the Senate), many expect that the final testing compromise that emerges out of the General Assembly will have much in common with the compromise reached by the task force.

The League supports the recommendations of the task force, not because we think they close the book on the conversation, but rather because - given the limitations of certain current federal requirements - they are the right steps for right now. Looking ahead, we welcome and encourage continued conversations on the subject aimed at bringing the system even further into balance in the future.

In brief, some of the task force's short-term recommendations are to:

- Eliminate state-required tests in 12th grade.
- Eliminate state-required tests in 11th grade except for a college entrance exam like ACT.
- Reduce the overall amount of READ Act assessments that must be administered.
- Make available a pencil and paper option for all tests beginning in 2015-16.
- Create a newly-established advisory board to work on long-term recommendations out of acknowledgement that there are limits to what can currently be done given existing federal funding and legislative constraints.

[Click here for a copy of the task force's full report](#), and please keep in mind that, at least for now, these recommendations are just that - recommendations. It will require action by the legislature for these proposals to take official effect. Additionally, please follow [this link](#) to a spreadsheet created by the League to assist in understanding the various details of the different testing legislation that has been introduced thus far.

We welcome your thoughts and feedback on any of these proposals, which can be sent to [dschaller@coloradoleague.org](mailto:dschaller@coloradoleague.org).

## We Need YOU!

We said it last month, and we'll say it again - we absolutely need your help if we hope to accomplish the ambitious goals we've set this session, not all of which have yet to surface ([click here for a complete rundown of our 2015 legislative agenda](#)). Unless the charter community comes out in force on many of these issues, we have little chance of getting them across the finish line. So please, if you are interested in helping with our advocacy efforts at the Capitol, contact us so we can discuss the best opportunities for you to engage. Colorado CAN (the Colorado Charter Advocacy Network) is one way that we distribute information and that allows charter supporters to have a voice. If you and your staff and families have yet to sign up for Colorado CAN, [please do so today by clicking here](#) so we can be sure to have you in the system when the time comes for immediate and forceful action.

## Join Us for the Charter Schools Rally on April 16

Join hundreds of charter school students, parents, teachers, principals and other supporters at the 2015 Colorado Charter Schools Rally on Thursday, April 16, at noon on the Capitol West Steps. Hear from state legislators who support choice and innovation in education as well as school leaders and students. Also, see your fellow charter schools perform on stage, and cheer for the winners of the [Charter School Student Art Contest](#). [Click here](#) for more information and to RSVP today and to reserve your spot on one of a select number of Capitol tours. Let's come out in force so that legislators know how strong and united the charter community is!

## League Legislative Tracker

Finally, if you're looking for details on other education-related legislation not highlighted in this newsletter, be sure to check out our [Legislative Tracker](#) for information on all current education bills. And if you have questions or would like more background on any of this legislation, please don't hesitate to reach out. We'd be happy to provide further context, and invite you to send responses to [dschaller@coloradoleague.org](mailto:dschaller@coloradoleague.org) or call 303-989-5356, ext. 105.

Sincerely,

The League Policy and Advocacy Team

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