We are now halfway through what continues to be a fast-paced and intense legislative session. CASE is tracking and actively involved in more than 60 pieces of legislation, and we are appreciative of the input we’ve received from members that helps guide our advocacy strategy.

Between now and the end of the session, I will spend an increasing amount of time at the Capitol with CASE Lobbyist Elisabeth Rosen in meetings with legislators and testifying on bills. Some of the most significant pieces of legislation—like full-day kindergarten, the School Finance Act, and changes to the READ Act—will be introduced in the coming weeks, and we will keep you informed on these and other key bills in upcoming communications.

As always, I encourage you to stay engaged in our advocacy work by attending a CASE Legislative Committee meeting. The next meeting is March 22 at 1:30pm at the CASE office and all CASE members are welcome.

Thank you for your involvement in our association.

- Lisa Escárcega, CASE Executive Director

CASE-backed bill on dyslexia clears House Education Committee
As we have shared with you in previous communications, CASE worked with bill sponsors on House Bill 1134 in an effort to address concerns specific to students with dyslexia. The last several years, some very organized parent groups have advocated for legislation that would mandate specific assessments, interventions and curriculum on a statewide basis. CASE has pushed back against these proposals and sought to find compromise through HB 1134, which creates a working group to study the issue, as well as a pilot program to use READ Act assessments for dyslexia screening. The bill also provides for the use of specialized curriculum.

Specific provisions of the legislation include:
- Creation of a working group of parents and education experts charged with studying the work of practitioners and researchers in Colorado and other states in the area of identification and support for students with dyslexia.
- Establishing a pilot program beginning in the 2020-21 school year to develop and pilot screening and intervention strategies for students with dyslexia in kindergarten through third grade.
  - School districts may apply to participate, and up to five can be selected by CDE to use an identification process that utilizes a READ Act assessment.
  - Participating districts would also receive assistance in supporting and providing early intervention to these students using research-based tools and strategies.

The House Education Committee passed HB 1134 unanimously last week, and I am grateful that Falcon 49’s Peter Hilt joined me to justify in support of the bill, along with several CASE members from St. Vrain. We anticipate strong support in the Senate moving forward.

Legislation targeting fingerprinting problems approved by House Education Committee
For well over a year, CASE has been aware of the significant challenges facing school districts related to changes in regulations about fingerprinting job applicants and volunteers. Among the issues is an inconsistent message about whether districts and local enforcement agencies can continue to do fingerprinting, or whether districts must switch over to a vendor approved by the Colorado Bureau of
Investigations (CBI). Rural school districts that do not work with their local law enforcement have been forced to send applicants and/or volunteers to these approved sites that are often well over reasonable distances and routes and have inconsistent service hours.

Adding to the difficulty has been concern from the field that CBI will disallow the use of livescan fingerprinting machines that some districts currently use. CASE has been working closely with partner organizations like the Colorado Rural Alliance in an effort to resolve these challenges and are encouraged that House Bill 1886 addresses the key issues.

This legislation has bi-partisan support and its primary components include:

- Requirement that local law enforcement agencies take the fingerprints of a job or volunteer applicant if the CBI-approved vendor is located 20 miles or greater from a school district.
- Allows school districts to continue using any fingerprinting equipment that meets the current FBI standards of 500 ppi standards.

CASE believes that House Bill 1086 makes critical changes to address the significant difficulties districts have been experiencing related to fingerprinting and were very pleased that the House Education Committee approved it last week. A special thanks to CASE President-elect Ty Valentine for his outstanding testimony in support of the bill in the committee hearing. I also testified in committee and CASE looks forward to continuing to support this important legislative as it moves through the legislative process.

**Upcoming legislation on family and medical leave causes concern for school districts**

Though a bill has not yet been introduced, CASE is aware of upcoming legislation that would create a new Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program in Colorado to provide income replacement for employees on leave from work under certain circumstances.

We have shared the bill draft with CASPA, our human resources administrators department, and they have flagged a number of concerns and issues with the legislation as its currently written. These include:

- A potentially cost-prohibitive increase for both employees and employers to fund the medical leave program, at a time when districts are already seriously underfunded to begin with.
- Paid leave already exists in school districts and is covered by the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Some provisions of this draft legislation appear to be incompatible with FMLA.
- The definition of “family member” is broadened quite significantly as compared to in the FMLA. In this draft legislation, a “family member” would be an immediate family member, domestic partner, and most notably, any person with whom an individual has a personal bond that is like a family relationship.
- Unclear language throughout the bill pertaining to such areas as to whom an individual must submit their claim (a state representative versus district administrator), whether an individual must first use sick leave prior to taking family leave, and the parameters around intermittent leave.

Once a formal bill is introduced, we will update you on its provisions and whether any of our concerns have been addressed.
House approves legislation on executive session negotiations
House Bill 1201 was approved by the House this week and provides greater clarity to school boards regarding the topics they can discuss in executive session. Specifically, the bill states that school boards can hold an executive session for the purpose of developing a strategy related to collective bargaining agreement negotiations or employment contracts.

CASE is very supportive of HB 1201. We believe it’s important that potentially sensitive conversations around employee salaries stay confidential and not extend beyond executive session at a school board’s discretion.

The Senate Education Committee will consider the legislation in the coming weeks and we will keep you posted as it moves through the process.

Coming up in March
The CASE Legislative Committee next meets on March 22 at 1:30pm at CASE, and we hope you are able to join us. Also this month a number of education-related bills will be considered by the House or Senate Education Committees, including:

- March 14: House Bill 1194 (School Discipline for Preschool through Second Grade), House Education Committee
- Introduction of full-day kindergarten bill: exact date to be determined
- Introduction of bills pertaining to READ Act and concurrent enrollment: exact dates to be determined