New money for K-12 in School Finance Act

The School Finance Act (SFA) was introduced in the Senate on Tuesday night, and as we had expected and hoped, it contains some significant wins for public schools. Like we’ve shared with you in previous communications, introduction of this bill each year comes after the state budget—called the Long Bill—has been introduced. The SFA sets funding for the 2019-20 budget year and highlights of this year’s Act (Senate Bill 246) include:

- Statewide base per pupil funding increased by $182.76, which results in a base per pupil funding amount of $6,951.53.
- $25 million in additional money to buy down the budget stabilization factor (formerly known as the negative factor), for a total $102 million reduction year over year.
- $25 million in one-time funds for rural school districts. The SFA specifies that rural districts receiving the funds must only spend them on non-recurring expenses that would improve student learning and the overall educational environment. Areas of spending could include, but aren’t limited to, efforts to recruit and retain teachers, professional learning, technology investments, and loan forgiveness for school and district staff.
- $5 million in one-time funds for districts to use to enhance their behavioral supports. CDE will distribute the funds (beginning with an allocation of $20,000 per district), which must be used for non-recurring expenses like staff and student supports, bullying prevention initiatives, and peer mentors.

Senator Rachel Zenzinger (D) will offer an amendment to the bill that would add $25 million in additional funds to the School Finance Act to help fund Tier B special education students. Tier B students include those with more complex disabilities like autism spectrum disorders, intellectual disabilities, serious emotional disabilities, and five other disability categories. This new money would be included in the special education categorical, so there would be an increase in funding of the Tier B line item by $25 million each year.

CASE has taken a support position on the School Finance Act. At the Legislative Committee meeting last week, committee members identified the top desired components of this year’s SFA, and the current version of the legislation includes each one the committee identified. At this point, we are not aware of other upcoming changes to the SFA and are hopeful that it passes out of both the Senate and House in its current form, with the addition of the Tier B funding amendment from Senator Zenzinger. Watch for updates from CASE in the coming days.

Full-day kindergarten initiative inches closer to the finish line

House Bill 1262, which would fund full-day kindergarten in Colorado, has already been approved by the House and passed yesterday out of the Senate Education Committee unanimously. Typically, CASE is cautious when speculating about the outcome of high-profile bills like this one, but this is a rare instance in which we can confidently say that we fully anticipate the full Senate approving HB 1262 and sending it to the Governor for his signature.

Funding for full-day kindergarten has been a top priority of both Governor Polis and legislative leadership, and CASE has been proud to be a vocal advocate of the initiative.
De-brucing legislation advances; we need your help
Earlier this month, we shared with you about two pieces of legislation, House Bills 1257 and 1258, that would refer a measure to voters this fall asking approval for the state to keep and spend all revenue collected after June 30, 2018. In layman’s terms, state spending restrictions imposed by TABOR require state and local governments to return all tax dollars that are collected above a certain amount (this amount is set by a formula based on population and inflation rates). If voters give the green light to the measure spelled out in House Bills 1257 and 1258, this spending cap would be lifted.

The legislation clearly identifies the priority spending areas toward which additional funds would be directed: K-12 public education, higher education, and transportation. The total dollar amount that the state would be able to keep each year should the measure pass would vary based on economic conditions, so funds could not be committed to any recurring expenses.

House Speaker KC Becker is the primary sponsor of House Bill 1257 and 1258, and CASE strongly supports this legislation. We are asking our members to please contact their local senators to ask for their “yes” vote on these bills (the House has already approved them).

Legislators value your input and often hearing from constituents helps sway their vote. Thank you for your help in doing this important outreach!

Changes made to READ Act legislation that allay CASE concerns
Senate Bill 199 proposes changes to the READ Act and for the last month, CASE has been in conversations with the bill sponsors about our concerns regarding the legislation. Although we appreciate the intent of the bill, as it was introduced it placed new requirements on districts related to specific components of READ Plans, minimum time requirements for intervention reading services, and a limited list of approved core and intervention programs. Perhaps most significantly, the implementation funding that districts currently receive would have been markedly reduced.

Earlier this week, amendments were made to SB 199 that addressed our concerns, and CASE Executive Director Lisa Escárcega testified in support of the legislation as amended. The approved amendments lessen the restrictions included in the original bill language and provide districts more latitude and decision-making related to intervention reading services. The amended language also specifies that districts will receive 85-90% of current per pupil intervention monies, and the amount received each year will be dependent in on the previous years’ count. We anticipate legislative support for Senate Bill 199 moving forward based on the changes approved by lawmakers.

Legislation restricting outside services contracts for districts is defeated
In our most recent BriefCASE, we covered House Bill 1249, which proposed concerning new requirements and restrictions on school districts for any outside professional services contract in the amount of $200,000 or higher. CASE was opposed to this legislation and are pleased that the legislation was defeated last week. Thank you again to our business services and CFO members for weighing in on the negative ramifications of the bill.

New bill would make changes to educator evaluation
Legislation was introduced this week that would change some elements of the current educator evaluation system, as well as create a working group to study Colorado’s evaluation systems and
recommend potential changes. Senate Bill 247 would require at least 30% of a teacher’s evaluation to be based on student academic growth, a reduction from the currently-required 50%. A minimum of 20% of the evaluation would be based on measures to be determined by every school district.

SB 247 would also create a temporary work group to study evaluation systems in the state and assess whether changes should be made to current law and regulations. Membership would include the Commissioner of Education, teachers, administrators, parents, students, education policy experts and legislators. The Governor would appoint the members, who would be charged with completing a report on their findings and recommendations no later than November 1, 2019.

Although we have not taken an official position on SB 247, CASE is concerned that this legislation could weaken the educator evaluation systems put in place through Senate Bill 191. Providing every district with the latitude to individually determine what 20% of a teacher evaluation is based on would also reduce the consistency across districts that was a key intent in Senate Bill 191.

There is not widespread support for making changes at this time to the educator evaluation systems put in place after the passage of Senate Bill 191. CASE doesn’t anticipate that this legislation will pass out of the Senate Education Committee when it is considered there next week.