The legislative session continues to be fast paced with over 70 bills that CASE is currently lobbying or tracking. Some potential big-ticket pieces of legislation have yet to be introduced, including a uniform mill levy bill (more on that below), and possibly a bill related to student bullying. A number of the K-12 bills we’ve seen this year would be supported by grant-funding, including the teacher pay raise bill (Senate Bill 89) and some of the school safety legislation. That isn’t surprising given our constricted funding environment, but it does raise questions about the long-term sustainability of some of the bills if they are solely dependent on grant funds.

Our next CASE Legislative Committee meeting is on February 28 and I encourage you to attend to stay in the loop on our advocacy efforts and to provide your thoughts about current legislation. To see the complete list of bills CASE is working on and tracking, please click [here](#); this list is updated in real time throughout the legislative session.

As always, please don’t hesitate to contact me with any questions at lescarcega@co-case.org. Thank you for your involvement in CASE.

- Lisa Escárcega, CASE Executive Director

**CASE working with Rural Alliance to amend assessment bill**

CASE is opposed to House Bill 1135 as it’s currently written; it would eliminate the requirement that high school students take the state assessment in social studies and instead require that high school students take the U.S. Citizenship Test the year they are expected to graduate. The bill would go into effect beginning the 2021-22 school year.

Together with the Colorado Rural Alliance, we are working to amend House Bill 1135 such that it still eliminates the high school social studies assessment requirement but does not replace that requirement with the citizenship test. We’re very appreciative of Representative Buck’s work to carry forward the amendment. The legislation will be heard tomorrow in the House Education Committee and we believe our amendment has the votes to pass.

**Legislation to lower voting age in school district elections faces opposition**

House Bill 1149 lowers the minimum voting age in school district elections to sixteen and would allow sixteen-year-olds to vote in elections for the State Board of Education, local district board of education, and local mill levy or property tax measures.

CASE, CASB, and the Colorado Clerks Association oppose this legislation and are concerned that many sixteen-year-olds lack the maturity and life experience to make an informed vote in a local district election. Additionally, because they would still be in school in the district, it’s likely that there could be self-interest or bias impacting their decision. It would be incredibly costly for schools to have an election every time the district does and at least potentially, some adults working on local district campaigns might also seek to get votes from these younger potential voters by promising changes or benefits at that students’ school or within the district. The potential negative implications of this bill are concerning and potentially far-reaching.

House Bill 1149 is scheduled to be heard in the House Education Committee next week.
**Bill would ease requirements for rural districts, allow automatic waiver of certain K-12 laws**

Legislation aiming to reduce the number of state laws that rural districts are required to follow is supported by CASE and the Colorado Rural Alliance. Senate Bill 149 would require the State Board of Education to identify public education statutes for which rural districts could automatically invoke a waiver for either the entire district or an individual school(s). Local boards of education in rural districts would adopt a resolution for each waiver, which would be shared with CDE and be effective indefinitely or until the district revoked it.

For every waiver of state law, the district would need to post on its website the rationale behind it as well as contact information for the district employee who can provide additional information and context. Senate Bill 149 specifies what laws cannot be waived, including those related to teacher evaluation, competitive bidding requirements, and other statutes pertaining to employment and personnel.

In its discussion about this bill, the CASE Legislative Committee noted that many state laws were written with larger, metro districts in mind and don’t apply in the same way to rural districts. We support any opportunity to reduce legal requirements that aren’t applicable to certain districts, recognizing too that rural districts have far less staff and resources than larger districts to begin with, which can make difficult the implementation and administration of many laws.

**Conversations about uniform mill levy legislation continue, no official bill yet**

As we have shared with you in previous communications, CASE has been involved for months in discussions about legislation that would set a uniform mill levy rate for school districts. The intent is to address the imbalance of school and state contributions to K-12 funding, as well as the variance in those contributions across districts.

Although legislation has not officially been introduced, a draft bill has been in circulation for several weeks that would set mill levies at a uniform rate of 27 mills or the number of mills that would result in enough property tax revenue to fully fund a district’s total program—whichever is less. A school district required to increase their mills based on this legislation would need to get voter approval and would not be required to increase by more than one mill each year, and could opt to phase in the increase over multiple years. The draft legislation requires that the state share of total program funding must increase each year by inflation and student enrollment and that additional monies coming in from mill levies would be used to buy down the budget stabilization factor.

In addition to the draft bill language, CASE has received more information about the potential financial impact of legislation, which you can review below:

a. Uniform mill levy legislation summary
b. School finance funding comparison with current law: First year implementation with 1 mill increase
c. School finance funding comparison with current law: BSF buy-down only
d. Mill levy override state matching amounts

One of CASE’s greatest challenges with a bill like this is that there is no clear consensus among our members about the impact—some superintendents and CFOs support the uniform mill levy concept, while others are very concerned about the negative consequences their district would face. CASE does
not take positions on bills until they are formally introduced, and at the last meeting of the CASE Legislative Committee, there was conversation about the need to get additional feedback from our members once a bill has been introduced.

Overview of other bills CASE is following or working on
Below is a summary of some of the key pieces of legislation that CASE is monitoring and/or involved in:

- **Human sexuality education bill killed in Senate committee**: Senate Bill 72 would have required schools to electronically notify parents that they have the option to excuse their child from participating in human sexuality education. It additionally would have required districts to make available for viewing all curriculum materials that would be used, at least 90 days before it was taught. It was defeated by the Senate State and Veterans Affairs Committee.

- **CASE testifying against Senate Bill 15**: CASE Executive Director Lisa Escárcega is testifying against a bill next week that would allow a district to provide transportation to a student from another district, without getting the home district’s consent. This would apply to instances in which the student has special needs or qualifies for free-and-reduced lunch and is very similar to the issue that CASE and other partner organizations addressed in a lawsuit in 2018 that was found in our favor.

- **CASE opposes transportation grant program**: Senate Bill 111 is up today in the Senate State and Veteran Affairs Committee. This bill would create a grant program of up to $5 million that districts for which districts could apply to get funds to assist them in providing transportation services.

- **Teacher pay raise bill passes out of committee**: As we’ve shared in other communications, Senate Bill 89 would create a new state program to support districts in raising teacher salaries to a required minimum amount, with priority given to the highest need districts. Applying for these funds would be optional and the program would be implemented by CDE. This is one of CEA’s highest-priority bills and CASE is in a monitor position.

Join us at a CASE Legislative Committee meeting
All CASE members are invited and encouraged to attend our Legislative Committee meetings. They provide an excellent opportunity to stay updated about what’s happening at the Capitol, and to participate in conversation about legislation we are working on or monitoring. Save the below dates for these upcoming Legislative Committee meetings, and if you would like to participate remotely, please email CASE Director of Communications Melissa Gibson at mgibson@co-case.org.

- **February 28, 2020 – 1:30 PM to 4:00 PM, CASE**
- **March 20, 2020 – 1:30 PM to 4:00 PM, CASE**
- **April 17, 2020 – 1:30 PM to 4:00 PM, CASE**