More than other recent legislative sessions, this year’s is particularly fast-moving with a high volume of bills pertaining to K-12 education. As a point of comparison, at this time last year, CASE was working on and tracking about 50 bills as opposed to the more than 70 pieces of legislation we’re currently focused on. Public education continues to be a prime area of focus for lawmakers, and in an election year like this one, negotiation and conversation are more heated than they might be in non-election years.

Below are highlights about what’s happening at the Capitol related to K-12. A newsworthy development this past week was the announcement that family leave legislation will not be moving forward this year as planned—the FAMLI bill was one of the most controversial last year and lawmakers had planned to introduce it again in 2020 but could not reach consensus on a few key elements.

I hope to see many of you at the next meeting of our CASE Legislative Committee this Friday, February 28, at 1:30pm at CASE. 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

**New legislation would require audit of state accountability and accreditation systems**

A group of superintendents has initiated House Bill 1295, which would require a complete independent audit of Colorado’s accountability and accreditation systems. It has been over a decade since the passage of the Education Accountability Act of 2009 and the Preschool to Postsecondary Education Alignment Act, and since then, there have been significant adjustments in the areas of both accountability and accreditation. These changes have impacted the performance indicators, Colorado growth model, performance targets, academic standards and statewide assessments.

The goal of the audit is to understand whether the state’s accountability and accreditation systems are working as they are intended to, whether they are complimentary to one another, and importantly, whether they are measuring the most critical elements of Colorado’s public education system.

CASE will take an official position on House Bill 1295 on Friday when our Legislative Committee meets, but we anticipate that we’ll support the bill. Given the changes to state law, a thorough and independent review would be helpful in identifying any issues within our existing accountability and accreditation systems that should be addressed. The bill will be considered by the House Education Committee on March 10.

**Assessment legislation modifies requirements for student transcripts**

Senate Bill 175 was introduced last week and would remove the statutory requirement that a student’s assessment score not be included on their high school transcript, unless they indicate that they want it included. Although CASE has not yet taken a position on the bill, we are working with the bill sponsors on an amendment that essentially remove this “opt in” feature—meaning that assessment scores will not be included in any circumstance on a student’s transcript.

An ongoing priority of CASE is to address administrative burdens for schools and districts. Removing the requirement for districts to manually enter assessment scores if a student opts in, would support this priority, and we will discuss the bill in greater detail at our CASE Legislative Committee meeting on Friday.
Vaccination legislation would tighten nonmedical exemptions

Senate Bill 163, introduced earlier this month, has garnered quite a bit of controversy around its proposed requirements to strengthen the criteria for parents to receive exemptions to opt their children out of vaccines. Although the legislation would not eliminate nonmedical exemptions, it would create a standardized form for medical providers to sign approving vaccine exemptions, or parents would have to take an online course about vaccines and provide that certificate of completion along with the exemption form. Senate Bill 163 would additionally move the immunization rate data from every Colorado school into one system housed at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, and information would be available to schools and parents.

Over 600 people attended the first hearing for the bill last week before the Senate Committee on Health & Human Services. Although it passed out of the committee on party lines, both Republican committee members and a number of witnesses spoke about their concerns related to data privacy as well as the broad definition for nonmedical exemption that would include both religions and personal belief exemptions.

Central to much of the debate about Senate Bill 163 is the tension between personal beliefs and freedoms as it relates to public health. Proponents for the legislation cite the importance of boosting Colorado’s immunization rates—which are among the lowest in the United States—as well as the need to prevent public health issues that can be addressed with vaccines. Those opposed to the bill question the safety and science behind many vaccines and are concerned that if it passes, it further erodes parental rights related to exemptions.

CASE worked with the sponsors of Senate Bill 163 prior to its introduction to reduce the administrative burden that would have been placed on districts in earlier bill drafts. We additionally worked to strengthen the provisions stating that immunization rates are community based and not school specific. We appreciate the outreach from bill sponsors and their interest in getting our input during the drafting process.

The CASE Legislative Committee will discuss the bill at our meeting on Friday; historically, we have taken a monitor position on legislation like this.

Looking ahead to CDE figure-setting

On March 2, the Joint Budget Committee will meet to have conversations about funding for the upcoming year, based on CDE’s budget request. Below is summary of key items from CDE’s budget request for 2020-21; some of which we knew from Governor Polis’ November 2019 budget proposal.

- Increase of $122.6 million year over year for total program funding. Would include $219.83 increase in statewide average per pupil funding and a $52 million buy-down of the Budget Stabilization Factor (from $572.4 million in 2019-20 to $520.4 million in 2020-21).
- Increase in funding for categorical programs by $5.7 million (from State Education Fund).
- $27.6 million to add 6,515 half-day slots to the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP).
- $10 million from B.E.S.T program to fund improvement and development of early childhood education facilities.
- Increase of $5 million for School Transformation Grant program.
$539,190 to create a concurrent enrollment pilot program for future educators to try and help address the teacher shortage. The program would be based on a model in Cherry Creek in which participating students would enroll in the program in tenth grade; earn a paraprofessional credential while in high school; and then be able to earn a teaching credential in the three semesters following high school.

$499,745 to improve data quality, accessibility and transparency in SchoolView (the state’s school and district data dashboard).

$500,000 to provide educator evaluator training and support.

One-time transfer of $12 million in General Fund dollars to the State Educator Fund to increase the total balance of the Fund.

CASE has been working with our superintendent and CFO members to get feedback about these items, which we will share with the Joint Budget Committee. Watch for more information about figure-setting and school funding in the weeks ahead.

**Assessment bill amended to eliminate social studies test requirement**

In the last issue of BriefCASE, we shared with you that together with the Colorado Rural Alliance, CASE was working to amend House Bill 1135. As it was introduced, this legislation would have eliminated the requirement that high school students take the state assessment in social studies and instead required that high school students take the U.S. Citizenship Test the year they are expected to graduate. Our amendment eliminates the social studies assessment requirement but does not replace it with the citizenship test, or any other test.

We’re very appreciative Representative Buckner’s work on the amendment, which was approved by the House Education Committee. We anticipate strong support in the House as a whole as well.

**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