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Charting the Capitol Remain Engaged with Us Throughout the Legislative Session

One of the primary tasks the League is regularly engaged in at the Capitol is protecting against infringements on core charter autonomies. In many respects, it's these autonomies in areas such as hiring and curriculum that provide charter schools with the flexibility needed to best serve students with innovative educational programs. Already this year there has been one challenge to this autonomy that the League has fended off, and there's another on the horizon that will require additional defense.

It's for this reason that we are frequently asking you to remain engaged in the legislative process. Without your involvement and support, we diminish our ability to influence legislative outcomes to our collective advantage. Unless you're informed and up-to-speed on legislative developments, it becomes that much harder to pivot and respond when necessary. **Therefore, if you haven't already, please take 30 seconds today and sign up for the Colorado Charter Advocacy Network (COCAN) [here](#).** Encourage other members of your school community to sign up by using the email template available [here](#). Join us for our weekly "[Legislative Lunch](#)" calls on Fridays at noon. Attend our [Charter School Advocacy Day at the Capitol](#) on Tuesday, March 13. These are a number of ways to remain informed and involved. Don't sit on the sidelines. If you do, we won't be ready to respond when the moment requires it.

Read on for further details related to these engagement opportunities along with additional information about some of the bills currently in motion with potential impacts on charter schools.

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League Helps Fend Off Challenge to School Model Diversity

One of the early pieces of legislation introduced this session was a bill ([Senate Bill 18-008](#)) that attempted to add access to arts courses to the state's school accountability framework. While we have nothing against arts education, our concern was with trying to add something like this to the framework by which all schools in the state are evaluated. While arts education is certainly valuable, it may not be the central focus of every school's mission and model. You may, for example, have one school focused on STEM, another on health and wellness, yet another on language immersion - to name just a few. Indeed, diversity of school models is a core part of what makes charter schools unique. However, we felt like adding this one component to the state's school performance framework could easily undermine those charter schools who have elected not to make arts programming a central tenet of their model.

For this reason, we testified against the bill when it came up in committee (Senate Education) on Thursday, January 25. Due to our testimony, along with that of several others, we were able to successfully defeat this measure that could have easily had an adverse impact on charter school innovation and diversity.

Bill Surfaces That Threatens Charter School Appeals Process

Last week another bill ([Senate Bill 18-118](#)) was introduced that, if passed, would significantly alter the existing charter school appeals process. Under current law, if a school district denies an

application for a charter school or revokes or refuses to renew an existing charter, the charter applicant or charter school can appeal the decision to the State Board of Education. If the State Board remands the decision for reconsideration and the local school board confirms its prior decision, the charter applicant or charter school can appeal to the State Board again, and the State Board may order the local school board to grant the charter application or to reinstate or renew the existing charter.

SB18-118 seeks to change this by removing the second appeal. In other words, if the State Board remands a decision back to the district for reconsideration after the first appeal, this bill says that whatever the school district then decides would stand as final and not subject to any further appeal. Clearly, this represents a serious threat to ongoing charter operations, and it's not something we will allow to go unchallenged. Look for us to push back strongly when the bill surfaces for its committee hearing in Senate Education that's currently scheduled for next Thursday afternoon, February 15.

League Sponsors Legislation to Clarify Charter Autonomy on Teacher Development Programs

For the better part of the past two decades, charter schools in Colorado have been able to operate independent induction programs and take advantage of alternative licensure pathways. Despite these opportunities being commonplace in charter schools and not encountering any problems in the past, a recent statutory scan revealed that the law does not technically call out charter schools by name as authorized entities for these programs. As such, one of the pieces of proactive legislation that the League is pursuing this session is a bill to clean up statute to reflect current reality. That bill - [Senate Bill 18-160](#) - was introduced yesterday with bipartisan sponsorship, and since it is a technical clean up tied to existing practice, our hope is that it should not encounter significant resistance throughout the legislative process. That said, we will likely need testimony from schools currently operating their own induction programs and benefiting from alternative licensure when the bill comes up for a hearing in committee. If this describes you and you'd be willing to testify in support of the proposed legislation at the Capitol, please contact Dan Schaller at dschaller@coloradoleague.org to indicate your interest.

In the meantime, if you currently operate an induction program, you should've received an email from the Colorado Department of Education last week describing a transition timeline that they are implementing for current operators. Under this timeline, schools with induction programs will be able to continue operating them as is for the next three years. If, after that time, we've been unable to update statute in the way described above, schools would have to begin going through their authorizers for official certificates of induction program completion. But again, we're hopeful that we can get this issue addressed legislatively well in advance of that time frame.

Various Funding Conversations Continue

Whether it be per-pupil funding in general or CSI or facilities funding in particular, the League has its eye on a number of conversations related to revenue this session. These conversations tend to take longer to solidify since the budget isn't finalized until April or May, but please know that we are monitoring them closely and advocating for enhanced funding wherever reasonable opportunities present themselves.

On the per-pupil funding front, the only concrete number that has been proposed was the \$100 million buy-down of the budget stabilization factor (formerly the negative factor) put forward by the Governor as part of his budget proposal back in December. If adopted, this would translate into an over 4.5% increase in per-pupil funding heading into next school year. What remains to be seen is whether the Joint Budget Committee and the rest of the legislature will agree with this amount or seek to modify it one way or the other as the budget process plays out over the coming weeks. Stay tuned.

Also included in the Governor's proposed budget was \$5.5 million toward equalization funding for CSI schools. This money was incorporated in the proposal out of recognition that children attending CSI schools currently have no access to local mill levy override revenue, resulting in a deficit of over \$1000 per child relative to other students attending schools in these same geographic areas. Alongside CSI, we continue to engage with legislators on the importance of retaining this funding in the final budget. We'll be sure to inform you if any further developments occur.

Finally in the realm of funding, a bill was recently introduced ([House Bill 18-1070](#)) that could provide some much-needed additional facilities support to charter schools. Under current law, 12.5% of the first \$40 million from marijuana excise tax revenue that flows to school construction goes specifically to the state's [Charter School Capital Construction Fund](#). Since the actual amount of marijuana excise tax revenue currently coming in is well in excess of \$40 million, HB18-1070 seeks

to divert most of this excess funding to the same school construction channels. This means if HB18-1070 is adopted, 12.5% of the additional funds would also make its way to charter schools. Again, there's still a long way to go in the process before anything like this would be formally adopted into law, but it's an encouraging sign that this opportunity for additional facilities funding exists. We will continue to keep you updated as the debate related to this measure continues.

Join Us for Friday "Legislative Lunch" Calls

Returning this year, the League is hosting weekly conference calls with up-to-the-minute details on the preceding week's legislative developments. These calls take place over the lunch hour starting at noon on Fridays and can be accessed by dialing 1-800-977-8002 and inserting access code 9299699#. Legislative Lunch calls started on Friday, January 19, and will continue every Friday through May 11. **Please join us for this week's call on Friday, February 9, at noon.**

There's Still Time: Sign Up TODAY for Charter School Advocacy Day (March 13)

Don't forget to sign up your school for Charter School Advocacy Day at the Capitol on Tuesday, March 13! Charter middle and high schools from across the state are encouraged to bring a group of students to participate in this important day. Attendees will learn about the legislative process, garner helpful tips about effective advocacy, understand current education bills with likely impacts on charter schools, and visit the Capitol to engage with elected officials. Charter school parents, teachers, board members and supporters are also welcome and encouraged to sign up. [Click here to register.](#)

Questions? Contact Dan Schaller at dschaller@coloradoleague.org.

Other News Of Note

ICYMI: Colorado Charter School Law Ranked #2 in the Nation

Colorado's charter public school law is now ranked among the top in the nation according to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools' new report, *Measuring Up To The Model - A Ranking Of State Public Charter School Laws*. All the hard work by legislators and public officials on both sides of the aisle is paying off. With their leadership, we are improving funding equity, safeguarding operating autonomy, strengthening authorizing practices, and creating space for flexibility and innovation. What does this ranking signify for Colorado's families who have a growing diversity of needs and deserve access to many distinctive, high-quality options? It means that a strong charter school law is an essential component in providing ALL of our children with the public education options they deserve in communities throughout our great state. [Read the full report here](#) and see stories from 9News and Chalkbeat Colorado [here](#) and [here](#).

Complete List of Education Legislation

Our partners at Chalkbeat Colorado still maintain one of the most comprehensive lists of current education legislation available. If interested, check out their 2018 database [here](#). Please don't hesitate to email or call me at the contact information provided below should you have any questions about specific bills under consideration.

Sincerely,
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