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Charting the Capitol Interim Report - October 2014

Gearing Up for 2015

The Colorado League of Charter Schools' Policy & Advocacy Team has been hard at work since the legislative session ended in the spring. Now that the school year is in full swing (and the 2015 General Assembly is just two months away), we wanted to provide an update on our legislative activity since May.

We will return to regular distribution of this newsletter in January. In the meantime, please don't hesitate to reach out to Dan Schaller, Director of Advocacy, at dschaller@coloradoleague.org should you have any questions or concerns.

2015 Policy Agenda: We Want to Hear from You

We finished 2014 with some [significant victories for charters](#), but our work is far from over. In order to build on 2014's successes, we need to hear from you!

- What are the main challenges that continue to confront your school?
- What are the major issues that continue to plague the charter sector as a whole?
- What legislative priorities should the League focus on in 2015?

We welcome feedback on these and any other areas of concern you might have, and invite you to send responses to dschaller@coloradoleague.org or call 303.989.5356 x105.

League Governmental Affairs Committee

The League has once again established a Governmental Affairs Committee to help us prepare for and navigate the 2015 legislative session. It is comprised of charter school representatives from across the state as well as other community leaders. The group met for the first time in early October and will continue to meet over the coming months to help us map out our 2015 policy agenda. Stay tuned for further details on this agenda, and [click here to see who is serving on this year's committee](#).

Call for Parent Advocates

One of the League's objectives for this school year is to build out a corps of parents who are committed advocates for charter school issues. These are individuals that we will train and then look to for support when it comes to attending public meetings, speaking with policymakers, testifying at the Capitol, and more. If you have parents at your school who you think would fill this role well, please let us know by sending an email to dschaller@coloradoleague.org.

Additionally, we're always looking for interested school leaders that fit this bill as well. If that's you,

please don't hesitate to reach out and let us know.

Testing, Testing, Testing

Perhaps not surprisingly, testing has remained a hot topic across the state since the legislature adjourned in the spring. The League continues to actively engage in conversations focused on workable solutions for many of the testing implementation challenges charter schools face.

Here are some recent highlights from many of the testing conversations currently taking place:

- [The Colorado Standards and Assessments Task Force](#) - established by House Bill 14-1202 and charged with studying the implications of the statewide assessment system and preparing a report of findings, including legislative recommendations, by January 31, 2015 - continues to solicit feedback from the public. There are three ways to make your voice heard on the important topic of testing:
 - [Click here to participate in a survey developed by the Task Force](#). Survey responses are due October 27.
 - Attend an upcoming roundtable discussion ([full schedule available here](#)).
 - Submit written feedback at any time to 1202taskforcefeedback@gmail.com.
- In both September and October, CDE issued guidance on several important updates related to assessments. [Click here for the full text of their September letter](#) and [here for the full text of their October letter](#), but two updates of particular note are the following:
 - Charter schools can seek a waiver from the state-approved school readiness assessments administered at the kindergarten level.
 - The option for paper-based assessments for math in all grades, for English language arts in third grade, and for any student who requires the paper-based form due to accommodation needs has been made available for the 2014-15 school year. Charter schools must make requests for paper-based assessments to their authorizers by mid-November, which is when authorizers are required to notify CDE as to the number of paper-based assessments they plan to administer.
- Finally, in response to inquiries from the State Board of Education, CDE solicited guidance from the U.S. Department of Education in August on a number of questions related to federal testing requirements. That guidance came through in early October. [The full text of it can be viewed here](#), and it offers some interesting context on the likely limits of state action in this hotly contested realm.

Funding for English Language Learners

One of the additional sources of funding secured last legislative session ([HB 14-1298](#)) was more money for English language learner (ELL) instruction. At the October State Board meeting, CDE released 2014-15 district-by-district allocations. [Click here for a breakdown of these allocations](#) and note that *districts are statutorily required to distribute to each charter school 100 percent of the Professional Development and Student Support Program funds they receive on behalf of the English language learners enrolled in each charter school.*

Investigating SPED Costs and Services

Access to special education (SPED) funding and quality service offerings is critical to charter schools and their students. The League continues to hear from charter schools regarding the administrative, funding and service barriers that are present in SPED delivery. As a result, the League has made a priority out of investigating these issues closely over the course of the 2014-2015 school year.

We've secured funding to hire a nationally recognized consulting firm to assist in the process. That group will begin in November with the goal of identifying concrete solutions to the many SPED challenges charter schools face. Specifically, we've worked with this group to outline the following

objectives:

- Identify current legal and technical barriers to efficient and effective delivery of special education services in Colorado's charter schools.
- Review other state models for delivery of special education services in charter schools and provide an analysis of laws that offer greater flexibility while exploring what legal issues these laws may pose for Colorado charters.
- Provide an analysis and policy recommendations on legal and regulatory changes that the League can support that will enhance Colorado's charter schools' ability to serve a greater number of SPED students, while allowing charters increased flexibility in serving students.

We will provide further details on this project as it unfolds over the course of the year. If you have any particular SPED challenges you would like to share with us in the meantime, please send them to Jessica Johnson at jmjohnson@coloradoleague.org.

Legislator Outreach

The League meets regularly with elected officials to promote the charter cause, but far more effective is when those same elected officials hear from you! Following the November 4th election will be an optimal time for charter school leaders to reach out to the elected officials in your school's area to introduce yourself, invite them for a tour of your schools, and begin to build ongoing relationships.

[Click here to find your elected officials and how to contact them.](#) Please keep us posted on any successful connections you make. We are always happy to assist in this process, so please contact us if you have any questions or need any support.

Thanks for reading, and we look forward to another successful year working together!

Sincerely,

The League Policy and Advocacy Team

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