



## **Colorado Rural Schools Alliance 2016 CO General Assembly Legislative Report**

During the 2016 legislative session of the Colorado General Assembly the Colorado Rural Schools Alliance (“the Alliance”) tracked 72 bills introduced at the Colorado General Assembly. Colorado Chalkbeat described the Alliance’s legislative session by stating, “Colorado’s 144 rural school districts may have been the biggest winners this session . . .”

Working in conjunction with CASE, CEA, CASB, the CO League of Charter Schools, CSI and various school district representatives the Alliance passed, amended or defeated key pieces of legislation during the 2016 session.

### Key Legislation introduced, amended or supported by the Alliance

#### **HB 16-1440, Administrative Flexibility for School Districts and Schools, Rep. Wilson & Rep. Pettersen and Sen. Johnston & Sen. Holbert.**

Over the course of several weeks the Alliance met with a variety of stakeholder groups regarding legislation to reduce reporting requirements and provide additional flexibility to schools and districts related to reporting to CDE. The major provisions of 1440 include an extension of two year UIP reporting to all high performing schools and the ability of the State Board of Education to consider the impact of its rulemaking on rural school districts separate from larger school districts. HB 1440 passed the legislature and is awaiting action by the Governor.

#### **SB 16-072, Increase BEST Annual Lease Purchase Cap, Sen. Johnston & Sen. Sonnenberg and Rep. Garnett & Rep. Wilson.**

The Alliance worked with BEST board member Kathy Gebhardt, CASE, other school representatives and the Governor’s office to pass legislation to increase the lease purchase cap for BEST and allow BEST to review technology purchased requests within tier one. SB 72 passed the legislature and is waiting action by the Governor.

#### **SB 16-104, Incentives to Build Number of Rural Teachers, Sen. Todd & Sen. Sonnenberg and Rep. Becker, J.**

SB 104 establishes in statute the rural education center currently located at Western State Colorado University and provides up to 40 scholarships capped at \$2800 per teacher for additional course work for rural teachers. SB 104 passed the legislature and is waiting action by the Governor.

#### **HB 16-1222, Supplemental On-line Education and Blended Learning Resources, Rep. Rankin and Sen. Todd.**



The Alliance supported legislation to increase funding for supplemental on-line education programs funded through the Mountain BOCES. The bill has passed the legislature and is awaiting action by the Governor.

**HB 16-1422, School Finance Act, Rep. Hamner & Rep. Rankin and Sen. Lambert & Sen. Steadman.**

This year's school finance act was introduced with several provisions that negatively impacted rural school districts. The Alliance, along with several of its partners such as CASE, worked to amend out or change provisions that had negative impacts on rural schools. In the House, the Alliance was successful in amending out of HB 1422 provisions that sought to force consolidation of small rural schools districts, circumventing the current law. In the Senate, the Alliance was successful in amending out a loan program for districts impacted by decreases in natural resources extraction assessed values, replacing the loan with a grant of up to 25% of the negative factor for those districts. The school finance act passed the legislature and is waiting for the Governor's signature.

**HB 16-1354, Debt Free Schools Act, Rep. Mitsch Bush & Rep. Becker and Senator Sonnenberg.**

This bill, which was brought forward by Jason Glass (Eagle), allows school districts to impose an additional mill levy for the purpose of funding capital construction, new technology, existing technology upgrades, and maintenance needs outside the existing mill levy cap without borrowing money for these purposes. The Alliance worked with CASE to identify sponsors and advance the bill through the legislature. HB-1354 has been signed by the Governor.

**SB 16-161, Athletic Trainer Practices Act, Senator Crowder & Rep. Primavera.**

As introduced, the bill required certified athletic trainers at all public and private school athletic events, thereby creating an impossible-and unfunded-mandate for rural schools. The Alliance worked with CHSAA to advance an amendment, adopted by the Senate Finance Committee to exempt public schools from this requirement.

Other noteworthy bills that the Alliance lobbied

**HB 16-1078, Local Government Whistleblower Protection, Rep. Kagan & Sen. Hodge.**

HB 1078, as introduced, created an entirely new area of the law around whistleblower protection for local government and school district employees. The Alliance was successful in lobbying the advocates of the bill to amend the bill so that it mirrored existing state law. The bill failed in the Senate.

**HB 16-1128, Extend Concurrent Enrollment, Rep. Lundeen.**



HB 1128, as introduced, mandated participation in concurrent enrollment programs, set the rate for reimbursement from K12 to participating higher education providers and required K12 to make the programs available to all students. The Alliance worked with Rep. Lundeen to attempt to find amendments to the legislation. Unfortunately, no amendments were found that addressed all issues raised by the legislation. The bill failed in the House Education Committee.

**HB 16-1420, Hospital Provider Fee, Rep. Hullinghorst & Sen. Crowder.**

HB 1420 sought to reclassify the current fee paid by Hospitals to cover Medicaid access as not being subject to TABOR. In turn this would have made additional revenue available to spend within CO's existing TABOR cap. The bill passed the House and failed in the Senate State Affairs Committee.

**SB 16-035, The Public School Fund, Sen. Johnston & Sen. Sonnenberg and Rep. Young & Rep. Rankin.**

SB 35 allows the CO Treasurer to invest funds derived from the state land board trust in a variety of additional investment vehicles that would yield a greater return than current investment requirements. SB 35 also moves up to \$21 million of the proceeds to the state education fund.

**SB 16-208, Funding for Charters that Convert Authorizers, Sen. Hill and Rep. Williams & Rep. Sias.**

SB 208 adjusts that funding formula for at-risk dollars that flow to charter schools that switch from either district authorized to CSI or CSI to district. The Alliance was successful in amending SB 208 to exempt small rural school districts from the provisions of the bill.