



Weekly Legislative Narrative January 13-15, 2010

General Overview

The highly anticipated 2010 legislation session started off with a flurry of activity on January 13th. Party leaders in both chambers began the session by outlining their goals for the upcoming 120 days. Speaker of the House, Terrance Carroll, stressed the financial burden being put on the education systems this year. On the other hand, he also stressed the legislature's commitment to children and building a strong workforce. President of the Senate, Brandon Shaffer, echoed those concepts, stating that education is a main priority for the legislature.

On Thursday, Governor Bill Ritter delivered his fourth and final 'State of the State' Address to a packed House chamber. Governor Ritter highlighted some of the education reforms that have been passed during his term, including a new set of rigorous curriculum standards, efforts to put programs in place to reduce cut the drop out rate in half, continuing work on a new state assessment system, and keeping higher education affordable. The Governor also discussed Colorado's Federal Race to the Top grant application, and the benefits and positioning the state has from implementing cutting edge reform. He concluded his remarks about education by reminding the legislature that the key to addressing poverty, unlocking the door to opportunity, and the best economic development strategy is a strong education strategy.

Bills Continue to be Introduced

To date the legislature has introduced 208 bills with many more on their way. Important introduction deadlines include:

- Tuesday, January 19, 2010 – Deadline for introduction of remainder of first round of bills and requests for remaining bill drafts
- Wednesday, February 3, 2010—Deadline for introduction of remaining bills

First Bill of the Session Signed into Law

Introduced the first day of session in the senate chamber was SB10-036 Program Results for Educator Preparation, a higher education data collection bill sponsored by freshman Senator Michael Johnston and House Education Committee Chair Representative Michael Merrifield. The bill was on an aggressive passage timeline in order to be included in Colorado's Race to the Top grant application, which is due Jan. 19. Any program intending to be funded with Race to the Top funds must be included in the state's grant application. In the first three days of session, the bill passed through the both chambers with small amendments during both rounds of debate. The bill was amended to include all teacher prep programs including alternative educator preparation programs, alter the language to remain consistent with the state's emphasis on longitudinal growth, and a safety clause was inserted to make the bill effective immediately upon the Governor's signature that occurred Friday afternoon at 2pm.

K-12 09-10 Budget Cuts Half-Way Through the Process

On Friday, the Senate passed through Appropriations Committee and 2nd Reading SB10-065, a bill that will cut state aid to schools by almost \$130 million. The bill fails to fund the \$19.8M supplemental requested by CDE in order to fully-fund the pupil and at-risk count. The remaining \$110M was a potential cut created in the 2009 School Finance Act by the legislature with action required by January 29th if the state intended to rescind the funds. The bill also adjusts state aid to state schools by \$67 million due to higher-than-anticipated local tax collections. This cut has come at a time of extreme financial uncertainty for education, as cuts in state aid for K-12 continue to grow for 2010-11.

PERA

The much anticipated PERA solution has been introduced and given the coveted 'Senate Bill 1' bill number. This bill number is reserved for a priority bill by Senate Leadership. The bill as introduced represents discussions between the PERA board and Senate sponsor President Shaffer. The Colorado Coalition for Retirement Security, with steering committee membership including CO Association of School Executives, CO Education Association, Friends of PERA, State Troopers, CO Wins State Employee Union, has been working for months with PERA and Leadership to try to find an amicable solution. Conversations continue around 3 key areas: age of retirement, adjustment to the current retirees' cost-of-living, and language inserted by Sen. Brophy to expand the number of days a retiree could work in a school district. The bill is scheduled to be heard in Senate Finance Committee on January 26 at 130pm in SCR 354.

Department of Education Oversight Hearing

On Thursday January 14th the Joint Education Committee held its annual oversight hearing with the Colorado Department of Education. Commissioner Dwight Jones discussed the measures that CDE has taken over the past year to increase student academic growth, implement new programs, and streamline departmental functions. The Commissioner also discussed CDE's large role in applying for the Race to the Top grant. Deputy Commissioner Jo O'Brien also discussed the slowed progress, due to budget constraints, regarding designing and implementing a new state assessment system.

Sidenote: State Board of Education Activities

On Wednesday January 13th, the State Board of Education unanimously adopted the proposed rules for the administration of Individual Career and Academic Plans (iCAPs), which language was passed in the 2009 School Finance Act. Members of the board expressed support for the rules. Board member Marcia Neal also emphasized that iCAP's will support necessary student success and growth in the areas of science and math.

Important Upcoming Dates

- Thursday January 21, 2010 1:30 p.m. Room 0112 - House Education Committee
 - HB 1028 Benefield--Early Childhood Universal Application
 - HB 1034 Massey--School Speech-language Pathology Assistant
 - HB 1037 Massey--Extend Supplemental On-line
 - HB 1036 Scanlan and Massey--Pub School Transparency Financial Information
- Day at the Capitol - Wednesday February 3, 2010
 - Legislators/Officials that have already committed to attending:
 - Senator Pat Steadman, Representative Karen Middleton, State Board of Education Member Elaine Gantz-Berman