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Legislative Update: April 12, 2017



With clock ticking, big education bills remain undecided

The Colorado legislature has about 30 days remaining on its 120-day calendar – fewer if you exclude weekends – and almost every significant education measure remains in play.

It hasn't been a highly active session for education, but a few key bills could have important impacts on districts, and they bear watching.

The only significant measure that's on a glide path to the governor's desk seems to be [HB17-1181](#), the bill that would replace current ninth-grade language arts and math tests with a version of the PSAT test. In contrast to the dramatic testing debates of past sessions, this bill slipped easily through the House and the Senate Education Committees and needs only approval in Senate Appropriations and on the floor.

Another, if less important, measure has passed both chambers. [HB17-1184](#) would require that elements of information and communications technology be incorporated into state academic standards.

One more issue of moderate interest, [SB17-123](#), has been signed by the governor. It will allow districts to include bi-literacy endorsements on high school diplomas.

The biggest outstanding issue, of course, is school finance and the overall state budget. This is one issue that will be decided because the state constitution requires passage of a budget every year.

The current budget package moving through the legislature includes overall increases in K-12 funding – but also includes an increase of the negative factor from \$831 million to about \$880 million. The exact amount of the negative factor will be set by the yet-to-be-introduced school finance bill. Also in play is the fate of the Hospital Provider Fee and what happens to [SB17-267](#), a sprawling measure that touches on education, transportation and health care and would remove the provider fee from calculation of the annual state spending ceiling and also funnel extra funding to rural districts. The bill now is in Senate Appropriations after 4-

1 approval by the Finance Committee.

Beyond the budget, [SB17-061](#) is the biggest education issue looming on the horizon. This is the measure that would require all districts to share mill levy override revenues with charter schools. It passed the Senate with bipartisan support, but it has yet to be formally introduced in the House or assigned to a committee. Speaker Crisanta Duran, D-Denver, has expressed reservations about the bill.

Halfway to the finish line

Here's a quick list of bills that have passed one house and await their second rounds:

- [HB17-1160](#) – This would allow districts to choose whether to give READ Act tests in English or Spanish. There's a lot of legislative support for this, but State Board of Education members have been resisting it.
- [HB17-1003](#) – The measure would require a study of teacher shortages.
- [HB17-1176](#) – This is the bill that would make it easier for PERA retirees to work in rural districts and retain their pensions.
- [HB17-1201](#) – Under this measure, students could earn STEM endorsements on their high school diplomas.
- [SB17-068](#) – Schools at all levels, not just secondary, would be able to apply for Colorado Counselor Corps grants under this bill.

Prospects look dim

School discipline looked to be a significant issue this session, but prospects are fading for these bills. A measure to prohibit corporal punishment in schools and child-care centers ([HB17-1038](#)) already has died. And [HB17-1210](#), which would limit use of suspension and expulsion for students in early grades, has been assigned to a Senate "kill committee," in peril because of districts' concerns about lack of flexibility. And a bill to limit use of physical restraints in schools, [HB17-1276](#), is expected to suffer a similar fate.

In the Senate, [SB17-200](#) proposes to provide additional funding to districts with high academic achievement – and trim funding for every other district. Consider it dead on arrival once it gets to the House.

Late entrants

Even though it's late in the session, lawmakers keep introducing new bills, including education measures.

[HB 17-1287](#) would establish a series of committees to develop a "vision" for the future of education in Colorado. It's awaiting its first House committee hearing, with most education interest groups lukewarm about the idea.

[HB17-1256](#) would increase the setback distance between oil and gas drilling sites and school property lines. It has passed the House but probably won't survive the Republican-controlled Senate.

Done for this session

Even if passage of bills has been slow, lawmakers already have dispatched a big stack of education bills, including measures to allow carrying guns at schools, state funding for full-day kindergarten, a variety of other testing bills, tax credits for private school tuition, allowing rural districts to hire non-licensed teachers, changing the rules for teacher evaluations, capping employer contributions to PERA and changing the accountability system.

Check on all of this session's education bills in [CASB's bill tracker](#).

~ Todd Engdahl
Capitol Editorial Services

Address **Colorado Association of School Boards**
2253 S. Oneida St., Ste. 300
Denver, CO 80224

Phone
303-832-1000 or 800-530-8430

Fax
303-832-1086

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