

Education

Educational issues, particularly K-12 education reform, were among the top issues debated by the 2000 General Assembly. The following is a summary of key education legislation passed by the legislature.

Education reform. K-12 education reform was an important topic during the 2000 legislative session. Senate Bill 00-186, Education Reform, contained the majority of the reforms which were enacted by the General Assembly. Other key bills on education reform were Senate Bill 00-124, Read to Achieve, and Senate Bill 00-133, Safe Schools. The main areas of reform enacted through these bills include:

school report cards - grading schools on performance and improvement in order to let parents know how their children's schools are performing;

Colorado School Awards Program to annually grant monetary awards to Colorado's highest academically performing and most improved schools;

alternative charter schools for high-risk and expelled students;

school safety;

expansion of K-12 statewide diagnostic testing in reading, writing and mathematics through the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP);

emphasis on literacy through Read to Achieve;

transportation tokens to assist low-income families in transporting their children to better schools if their neighborhood schools are failing;

parental approval for children to participate in health education programs that discuss or teach sexuality and human reproduction;

college entrance examinations for all public school eleventh graders;

sophomore assessment exams to be administered at each state-supported institution of higher education; and

teacher development.

Another change affecting K-12 education was House Bill 00-1219, which repealed the current accreditation process in order to enact an accreditation process that is based on student performance and achievement as measured through statewide student achievement tests. House Bill 00-1219 keeps the accreditation process consistent with the changes enacted in Senate Bill 00-186. Overall, the goal of the school reform bills is to ensure that all public Colorado K-12 schools are achieving high standards and are providing safe learning environments for Colorado's children.

School finance. The General Assembly, as it does annually, considered the funding of schools for FY 2000-01. Important determinations in the school finance bill, House Bill 00-1159, included:

a 3.2 percent inflationary increase in per pupil funding (from \$4,995 to \$5,175 per pupil);

adjustments to the size factor formula and the cost of living calculation;

a study of special education funding by the Colorado Department of Education; and

\$500,000 in funding to school districts for students with disabilities who do not have an identifiable school district of residence.

Other school funding proposals passed by the General Assembly this year include Senate Bill 00-49, which increases aid for special education programs by \$1.6 million; and a proposal in Senate Bill 00-004, that will be before the voters in November, asking for authorization to award math and science education grants to school districts out of excess state revenues. Under House Bill 00-1136, a learning improvement grant program will support early elementary literacy programs. House Bill 00-1081, to create a voluntary checkoff on the state income tax form for the support of public education, was postponed indefinitely.

K-12 capital construction. The General Assembly debated various ways to establish a mechanism and identify a revenue stream to assist in funding K-12 capital construction projects. The General Assembly passed Senate Bill 00-181, Funding K-12 Capital Construction Needs, which transfers \$190 million over eleven years from the state's general fund excess to the School Construction and Renovation Fund and to the Capital Construction Expenditures Reserve to be used for K-12 capital construction loans and matching grants. Requests for loans and matching grants will be prioritized by the State Board of Education based on school districts whose relative wealth is lower compared to other school districts in the state and for school districts that have reached 90 percent or more of their bonded indebtedness. The loans and matching grants will be primarily awarded to requests that address safety hazards or health concerns, as well as requests for projects designed to incorporate technology into the educational environment. The Capital Development Committee of the General Assembly will evaluate the prioritized list of requests established by the State Board of Education to determine which

requests will be funded. A similar K-12 capital construction bill, Senate Bill 00-115, was postponed indefinitely by the General Assembly.

Teachers and other school personnel. Legislators considered teacher education and licensure issues during the 2000 session. House Bill 00-1151 eased licensure requirements for experienced teachers from other states, and Senate Bill 00-195 narrowed professional competency requirements to a teacher's subject area. Issues relating to teacher tenure have also been deliberated. A legislative proposal that was debated and subsequently postponed indefinitely, House Bill 00-1244, would have phased out teacher tenure by allowing school districts not to renew the employment contract of a teacher for any reason deemed sufficient by the district. In the area of professional development, House Bill 00-1173 provides teacher development grants in order for teachers to pursue professional development activities relating to instruction in reading, writing, and mathematics.

School waivers. School waivers were another area debated by the General Assembly. House Bill 00-1040, Waivers of State Education Requirements, eases the procedures by which small school districts (districts with pupil enrollments of under 3,000) apply and are granted waivers of certain statutory and regulatory requirements from the State Board of Education. While making exceptions for the "Public School Finance Act of 1994" and the "Exceptional Children's Educational Act," the legislation would specifically allow local school boards to seek waivers of provisions of Title 22.

Higher education. Several measures discussed during the legislative session focused on state institutions of higher education. House Bill 00-1127 prohibits collection of moneys for political organizations as part of student fees without the authorization of the student or parent. Senate Bill 00-183 establishes the nonprofit Colorado Institute of Technology as a public-private partnership between institutions of higher education and businesses. The General Assembly also considered and postponed indefinitely House Bill 00-1382, which would have transferred oversight of the state college system from the Trustees of the State Colleges to the State Board of Agriculture.

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