

Education

Accountability and assessments. Following the passage of Senate Bill 186 in 2000, legislators continue to work on legislation concerning school reform, student assessment, and school accountability. **Senate Bill 01-098** addresses a variety of reform and accountability issues by:

- using the term "school accountability reports" instead of "school report cards;"
- replacing assignment of letter grades with assignment of ratings of "excellent," "high," "average," "low," and "unsatisfactory;"
- changing school improvement ratings to "significant improvement," "improvement," "stable," "decline," or "significant decline;"
- adding two additional measures, "student enrollment stability" and "students eligible for free lunch," to the accountability reports;
- authorizing financial assistance to "low" and "unsatisfactory" schools if they apply and submit three-year school improvement plans to the State Board of Education;
- providing that a district may lose its accreditation if a failing school does not improve within three years;
- creating an advisory committee to conduct a study of the non-English CSAP exams;
- authorizing the Colorado Department of Education to contract out for a study of the ACT exam; and
- delays by one year the use of ACT scores in school ratings.

Further reform changes were made through **House Bill 01-1348** which revises the manner in which the scores of special education students are utilized in accountability measures. The bill authorizes the State Board of Education to exclude a school from receiving an academic performance grade if more than 95 percent of the students at the school have individual educational programs. In addition, it clarifies that certain students' scores, such as the scores of students taking the CSAP-Alternate, will not be used to calculate a school's academic performance grade. The bill specifies that any student who is not eligible for the alternative assessment for students with disabilities but who has an individual educational program will be assessed at the student's grade level and that the student's scores will be used in calculating the school's academic performance rating.

Amendment 23. In November 2000, voters approved Amendment 23 which increases K-12 base per pupil funding and categorical funding by at least the rate of inflation plus one percent for the next ten years and also establishes the State Education Fund. In 2001, the General Assembly adopted several bills to implement Amendment 23 and to specify how moneys in the State Education Fund will be used.

Three bills set policies to implement Amendment 23. **Senate Bill 01-082** requires each school district to include, within its accreditation contract, a continuous plan for the use of moneys received through Amendment 23. **House Bill 01-1262** establishes the State Education Fund in statute and specifies how the transfers of income tax revenues are to occur and how they are to be reconciled. **Senate Bill 01-204** establishes an annual review and analysis of the state education fund in order to provide the Joint Budget Committee, the General Assembly, and the

Office of State Planning Budgeting with projections related to the solvency of the fund and the state's ability to meet its education funding requirements under Amendment 23 in the future. Based on this analysis, the Joint Budget Committee will prepare a Joint Resolution by March 1 of each year that sets forth recommendations pertaining to spending from the fund.

In addition to the three implementation bills, several other bills specify uses for the increased funding that Amendment 23 will generate for public schools. **House Bill 01-1232** requires certain school districts to use the additional one percent to either reduce class size, raise student achievement, or specify other purposes for the use of the moneys. **Senate Bill 01-089** requires the State Board of Education to study class size and to determine whether class size reduction should or could be implemented. **House Bill 01-1272** increases funding to public schools to purchase new text books. **Senate Bill 01-098** also concerns school improvement plans by authorizing the State Board of Education to provide financial assistance to low-performing schools. **Senate Bill 01-091** creates a full-day kindergarten pilot program.

School finance. This year's school funding bill, **Senate Bill 01-129**, increases by 5 percent the statewide base per pupil funding amount for school finance purposes. With the passage of Amendment 23, the bill implements the constitutional requirement that the General Assembly increase the statewide base by at least the rate of inflation, projected at 4 percent, plus one percentage point. Additional provisions in the bill include:

- increasing the maximum number of available preschool slots in the Colorado Preschool Program from 9,050 to 10,050 and reauthorizing the full-day kindergarten component of the preschool program at 1,000 slots for one year;
- creating a summer school grant program for districts offering summer school literacy programs for eligible third and fourth grade students;
- increasing the minimum per pupil funding level for school districts to \$5,100;
- establishing an appropriation for the state's match for the "National School Lunch Act";
- establishing, for FY 2001-02, a 5.8 percent general fund maintenance of effort for state funding of the school finance act;
- expanding the definition of "at-risk pupil" in the school finance formula to include specified students who are not eligible for free lunch, but whose dominant language is not English, and whose CSAP scores are not included in a school's performance grade or who took the CSAP in a language other than English;
- establishing and funding longitudinal tracking and analysis of CSAP results;
- establishing a two-year school improvement grant program for poorly performing schools;
- providing state education fund moneys to qualified charter schools for capital construction needs and to the school capital construction expenditures reserve; and
- allowing a qualified charter school to receive a portion of bond proceeds from bonds issued by a school district. Funds received will be in proportion to the ratio of the charter school's pupil enrollment at grade levels that are also served by one or more similarly situated noncharter public schools. (**Senate Bill 01-237**, which was subsequently passed by the General Assembly, delays the provision by one year so it applies to bond proceeds from district bonds issued pursuant to voter approval obtained on or after July 1, 2002.)

Teachers and other school personnel. Legislators considered several teacher incentive and assistance measures during the 2001 session. **Senate Bill 01-098** authorizes a teacher loan

forgiveness program for new teachers in the areas of math, science, special education, or linguistically diverse education. **Senate Bill 01-098** also establishes a teacher pay incentive program that would provide grants to poorly performing schools and provides additional grants to these schools if they subsequently receive an academic improvement rating of "significant improvement." The grants are to be used by school boards to give bonuses to teachers at the schools. Specifically, the grants may be used to:

- reward outstanding teacher performance;
- recruit teachers with master teaching certificates or retain teachers who have taught at the school for at least one school year;
- recruit teachers in hard-to-recruit subjects; or
- defray housing costs in a community lacking affordable housing.

Character education and student discipline. Issues pertaining to character education and student discipline were adopted during the 2001 legislative session. **House Bill 01-1292** encourages school districts to establish a character education program to help students with the ability to make wise decisions, strengthen their integrity, and choose a positive life path. The bill requires the Department of Education to annually submit a report to the House and Senate Education Committees summarizing the school district reports on their character education programs. **Senate Bill 01-080** requires each school district to include a specific policy in the district conduct and discipline code concerning bullying prevention and education. The bill defines "bullying" as any written or verbal expression, or physical act or gesture, intended to cause distress upon one or more students in the school, on school grounds, in school vehicles, at a designated school bus stop, or at school activities or sanctioned events.

Higher education. Several higher education measures focus on consistency across Colorado's public institutions of higher education. **House Bill 01-1298** creates a consistent course numbering system for general education courses and **House Bill 01-1263** establishes a common core of courses. The aim of both of these bills is to streamline higher education and assist students in transferring from one institution to another. Having consistency among the public institutions of higher education will also enable the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) to track student success when students transfer from one school to another.

The General Assembly considered three bills, **House Bill 01-1290**, **House Bill 01-1192**, and **House Bill 01-1255**, that would have made changes to higher education governing boards. All three bills were postponed indefinitely. However, legislators did pass a bill, **House Bill 01-1406**, requiring the State Board of Agriculture to work with the University of Southern Colorado (USC) on a report to assess the value to the region served by USC of changing its name and modifying the role and mission of the university. A final report is due to the House and Senate Education committees by December 15, 2001. An additional bill sent to the Governor, **Senate Bill 01-229**, directs the Board of Trustees of the Colorado School of Mines to negotiate performance goals with the CCHE as part of a performance contract through 2011. The bill stipulates that compliance with the performance goals is in lieu of compliance with the statutory quality indicator system, establishes new authority for the Board of Trustees, and initiates a block grant system of state funding for the university.