

July 19, 2017

Representative Alec Garnett, Chair

Legislative Interim Committee on School Finance

200 E. Colfax, Room 307

Denver, CO 80203

Dear Representative Garnett,

On behalf of the nearly 1,000 locally elected school board members who make up the membership of the Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB), I am writing to express our strong support of the work the Interim Committee on School Finance is about to undertake. We are encouraged by the depth of education knowledge the committee members bring to the table. We believe the committee has the right collection of legislators to study the future funding of Colorado public education.

Colorado’s 178 school districts cover the gamut from rural schools with fewer than 100 students to large front range districts that have almost 100,000 students. Across all of these unique school districts, there is a common denominator. Property taxes, the local contribution to school finance, are equitable neither for school districts, nor for local taxpayers. Moreover, as these property tax inequities have developed over the last 25 years, the state has had to sharply increase its contributions to school finance, putting additional pressure on other parts of the state’s budget. These problems were explained well by the Joint Budget Committee staff in the December 2016 budget briefing, available [HERE](https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/fy2017-18_edubrf_2.pdf). CASB members strongly believe that any reform of school finance must address this crucial issue.

Education is highly regulated. All those regulations were well-intended when adopted, and many remain important. Nevertheless, over the course of the past 25 years, the nearly unending tide of local, state and federal mandates has reached a point where school districts must devote considerable funds to the administration of these mandates. These are dollars which, if available in the classroom, could provide better academic outcomes for our students. Eliminating or reducing the regulatory burden on teachers and principals would allow these education professionals to do what they do best, educate students.

One of the largest unfunded mandates impacts students who need special education. State and federal funding for special education has never adequately funded the local commitment to educate all children while the number of students who require these services has increased. The impact on school budgets has been drastic. In order to meet the goal of a quality education for all students, the state must provide the funds to address the needs of these special students.

As Colorado prepares for its 141-year anniversary of statehood this August, Colorado is educating many students in school buildings that are nearly as old. The prospect of new school construction or renovation is unattainable for many communities. The ability to meet facility needs is still completely dependent on local property wealth. While programs like Building Excellent Schools Today (BEST) have certainly helped, they have not fully addressed the critical need for modern and safe facilities, and much needed repairs to an aging infrastructure. CASB members believe it will be important for school construction costs to be a key discussion point as the committee goes about its work.

Colorado schools have continued to attain great outcomes for students through the tireless efforts of its teachers, administrators and families. Even with the budgetary shortfalls in Colorado K-12 funding slowing the progress, Colorado educators and students have continued to move the achievement needle in a positive direction. Imagine what our students could achieve under a system of school funding that takes into account the total cost to educate every student, regardless of circumstance!

The CASB membership looks forward to the results of the committee’s work. Furthermore, we want to assist you with this work. There is no substitute for experience of locally elected school board members. We encourage you to seek advice and information from these dedicated board members. If I or the CASB staff can be of assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Carrie Warren-Gully

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President

Board of Directors

Colorado Association of School Boards