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## School Board Advocate: Feb. 16, 2015

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**School Board Advocate** (formerly *BillBoard*), CASB's semimonthly newsletter on our advocacy efforts and the latest developments at the state capitol that impact K–12 education. During the legislative session, we share this newsletter with school board members, superintendents, legislators, the governor's office, various statewide organizations, BOCES executive directors and the Colorado Council of School Board Attorneys.

### In this issue ...

- CASB members in Washington, D.C.
- State Board Update
- Winter Legislative Conference

## CASB members sharpen their advocacy skills in Washington, D.C.



Jane Urschel and a group of nine CASB members had a productive and action-packed weekend in Washington, D.C at the NSBA Advocacy Institute, held Feb. 1-3, 2015. The group included CASB board members Jim O'Brien, president, Jan Tanner, past president, Tom Balchak, Jill Fellman and Linda Van Matre; school board members Cathy Wildman, Nancy Tellez, David Trask, along with Pat Richardson, lawyer from Academy 20.

"I loved being part of the CASB team—learning from my colleagues and the experts in



David Trask, Jill Fellman, Jane Urschel and Jim O'Brien at the 2015 Advocacy Institute

NSBA was gratifying," CASB Director Jill Fellman said. "The amount of information shared with us was extensive, and yet, we were able to understand it because of the thoughtfulness and variety of experiences we all brought to the table."

The message the CASB group came to deliver to legislators was that CASB members want to get back to local control. The issues covered while they were there included:

- Reauthorization of ESEA (NCLB)
- Reauthorization of IDEA
- The Child Nutrition Act, which is also being re-authorized

Urschel said that as the members prepared to go to the hill, they decided they would not pontificate and just present the "ask." With ESEA, they asked for more local control and flexibility for local districts. With IDEA, they asked that lawmakers meet their promise of 40 years ago to enact the full funding act. With the Child Nutrition Act, they "want them to get their fingers off our food" and away from unreasonable mandates on how much sodium and what kind of wheat and how much each serving weighs. In other words, restore local control.

Tom Balchak said that while sitting in on a Senate Ed committee meeting, chaired by Lamar Alexander, on the topic of ESEA, "I realized how well prepared we were for our advocacy visit and felt any of our Colorado delegation could have testified on topics covered."

Tom noticed that the talking points he heard on whether to test every student every year as a necessary component of the bill clearly revealed a partisan divide: Democrats saying that annual testing is a civil rights issue and Republicans arguing for greater parental choice and district local control.

"My own take, despite understanding the rationale, is that insisting on this testing approach undermines local control and has become a fool's errand," Balchak said.

Since no rural board members were present, the team started each meeting by acknowledging the needs of rural districts. They specifically discussed Secure Rural Schools, which gives money to school districts to compensate for losses due to federal lands being in their districts.

"I was excited that visits were scheduled with all of the Colorado delegation and that they were timed so we could make all of the appointments. It was especially great to meet with Sen. Bennet and Sen. Gardner," Tanner said.



Sen. Bennett spent nearly 40 minutes with the group. When he left to go to the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) committee, Urschel asked if they could go with him and he said "yes." HELP was discussing reauthorization of Title 1 resources with Sen. Alexander, Sen. Franken and other notables. At one point, Sen. Bennett said, "We must not forget our rural friends and their needs!"

The group found that Senator Gardner, not surprisingly, was well versed in rural issues. The group also met with Reps. Polis, Perlmutter and Buck and the staffs of Reps. Coffman, Lamborn, Tipton and DeGette.

"We were a great team on the authorization of ESEA and the Nutrition act," said Jim O'Brien. "It is critical now that local school board members keep up our communication with Sen. Bennett, Sen. Gardner and their staffs because that is where ESEA will come to fruition or not."

Though the group said they were well received, they were disappointed that they didn't get any "commitments." Urschel said there is no way this early in the process the legislators could give us any commitments. Everybody believes there is a big divide between the House and Senate and the President on all of these issues. According to Urschel, "I think we stand in a good light with the members and in our work with them. In my experience this was one of the best visits CASB has ever made to the Hill!"

## State Board of Education Update

### Assessments

The Attorney General has issued a formal opinion concluding that the State Board did not have authority to direct the Commissioner to grant districts waivers of the first part of the PARCC assessment. This opinion does not come as a surprise and we will wait to see how the State Board responds at its meeting this Wednesday, February 18 when it considers the waiver requests filed by 12 school districts. [Check out Chalk Beat's](#)

### Board President's Resolution

All Board Presidents and Superintendents should have received an email and a draft resolution from Wendy Mellott, president of the Del Norte school board. The resolution, which

[detailed coverage of the AG's opinion.](#)

### Graduation Guidelines

Also on the State Board's agenda is an update on the state's graduation guidelines scheduled for Thursday, February 19. We expect an interesting discussion and debate as the Board receives an update on the activity of the various work groups convened to study the current guidelines and make recommendations regarding implementation.

You can see the Board's [full agenda](#) or if you can't make the meeting, [you can listen online.](#)

was drafted with help from Michael Lobato, president of the Center school board, calls on the legislature to prioritize the payback of the Negative Factor. We applaud Wendy's and Michael's advocacy efforts and have already received 13 resolutions from school boards around the state. If you haven't received the email or the resolution, you can contact Wendy directly at [wmellott@del-norte.k12.co.us](mailto:wmellott@del-norte.k12.co.us).



## See you next week!

CASB's 2015 Winter Legislative Conference is Feb. 26-27 at the Brown Palace Hotel and Holiday Inn Express. Click [here](#) for a complete list of our speakers and panels. It's going to be a great opportunity to learn more and discuss issues of importance to you and your communities.

For more information or to register, click [here](#).

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