



Ski Country Educator

January – February 2011

New Legislative Session to Begin January 12th

The 2011 Colorado Legislature is set to convene on January 12th. With the current state of the economy and the current political climate of cutting spending, cutting taxes, and the bashing of teachers and their unions, what is on the horizon could be quite scary for public education and public school employees.

Ski Country educators will have three new legislators representing their interests. Millie Hamner of Summit County will be replacing Christine Scanlan in House District 56. Christine has been asked to serve in Governor Hickenlooper's administration. Roger Wilson of Garfield County is replacing Kathleen Curry in House District 61. Kathleen lost her bid as a write in candidate to retain her seat. And in Senate District 8 Jean White will replace Al White. Al has also been asked to serve in the Hickenlooper administration. Jean is Senator White's wife.

These three freshman legislators have close ties to education and have all expressed support for public education and education employees. In fact, representative Hamner is currently the Superintendent of Schools in Summit County.

Please follow the legislature throughout the session and participate when your local leaders ask you to contact your legislator on behalf of public education. Our lives and the lives of our students are greatly affected by the decisions of the legislature. We must insist that our voices be heard in the process.

... Dennis Carlson, Unit Director

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Later this month, we'll have the opportunity to say whether we have the positive teaching and learning conditions in our schools that research shows are important to student achievement and teacher retention.

We'll be able to provide this information via an easy, online survey called "TELL Colorado." Each of us can complete this anonymous online survey any time during a window **from Monday, January 31, through Friday, February 25.**

Our Association is a partner in making the TELL Survey, first offered two years ago, available to teachers. CEA is working with the New Teacher Center, CDE, CASE, CASB, and the League of Charter Schools on the survey. Our Association Representatives (ARs) and principals will get individual letters for all teachers with the personal security codes needed to complete the survey online, at work or home or anywhere with internet access.

The TELL Survey takes about 30 minutes. It records your perceptions of your work environment and the important issues of time, empowerment, leadership, resources, student conduct, community engagement, professional development, and mentoring.

During the four-week survey window, there will be a Help Center our ARs can contact by phone or email if you have questions.

After the survey is completed, The New Teacher Center will analyze data from all the schools that had sufficient participation for a written report. Through this analysis, each school will have its own data to use in school improvement planning. The initial data will be available starting in April.

We hope that all the teachers in our district will participate. We're providing advance information and training for our Association Reps so they'll be knowledgeable, helpful, and ready to give you your confidential access code by January 31, the first day of the survey window.

Please check out the survey online right now at tellcolorado.org. You can see the actual survey and even read the results from 2009, plus see how many teachers in your school participated two years ago. Across Colorado in 2009 only 37% of all teachers participated (# in your district) and we want to improve our participation this year – because we can all use the information from the survey to make our work lives better.

Amazing Ski Country Members

Congratulations to the **Aspen** and **Steamboat Springs** educational support staff, teachers, and administrators for being noticed as “Accreditation with Distinction” by the Colorado Department of Education. Only fourteen schools in Colorado were awarded this distinction and it is very exciting that two of those schools are right here in Ski Country.

Recently the **Steamboat Springs Education Association** through their Collaborative Bargaining Team convinced their Board of Education to approve a step increase for all employees. The steps had been frozen due to budget rescissions from last year. Because of increased enrollment the district experienced increased revenues. The School Board was reluctant to approve the steps because of possible rescissions in the future. The recognition from CDE played a factor in the Board’s decision to approve the step movement. It’s satisfying to see that the School Board in Steamboat Springs appreciates and is willing to award their employees for outstanding performance.



What is in Store for the Future

The following is an excerpt from a communication from Chuck Agerstrand – president of the National Staff Organization, the union for NEA staff. It outlines attacks on public employees including public school employees across the nation. It shows a trend both nationally and state by state of efforts to balance budgets on the backs of public employees.

CEA is concerned that we will see similar attacks here in Colorado. You may recall two years ago when we had to fight ballot issues 47, 49, and 54 which would have taken away our abilities to organize and make our voices heard in the political process. We successfully defeated 47 and 49 by a significant margin. Amendment 54 passed but was eventually ruled unconstitutional by the Colorado Supreme Court. Initiative 47 was the so called “right to work” initiative that would have made it more difficult to form labor

unions in Colorado. Initiative 49 would have barred union members from paying dues through payroll deduction. And Amendment 54 would have limited public employee involvement in the political process. Even though we defeated these measures it's very likely we will see them again.

The steady stream of anti-public employee and anti-union sentiment never ends, and is why we must remain strong as a professional organization.

... We will begin to see attacks on Social Security and Medicare and, more challenging, the attack on public education, NEA and state education associations. There is a large group of anti-public education forces that seem to be embarking on a coordinated national effort of threatening the rights of public school employees and seeking to silence or kill the organizations that fight for their rights.

In Alabama, under the guise of "ethics reform," the State Senate and House passed a bill this week that will prevent the Alabama Association of Educators from collecting dues through payroll deduction. This bill will make it illegal under penalty of imprisonment and fines for education employees who have payroll deduction for dues to engage in any political activity at the association's direction. Political activity consists of things such as making phone calls from home for any political purpose, mentioning the name of a political candidate, conducting public opinion polls about any issue, distributing any type of political literature, or supporting a candidate. Local associations could not even support the continuation of a school tax or hold political forums where candidates appear.

In Wisconsin, the Governor-elect has called for rescinding the right of public employees to collectively bargain. And in Minnesota, the governor published an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal calling for bringing public employee compensation back in line with the private sector.

It appears that the strategy is to use the budget crisis states are experiencing to push a reform agenda that is anti-union and anti-public education.

The list of attacks includes: Right to Work initiatives, Elimination of PAC payroll deduction, Elimination of dues payroll deduction, Elimination of tenure, Implementing a minimum 20% premium sharing of health insurance, Limiting bargaining rights to wages and benefits IF unable to completely rescind bargaining rights, Moving all pensions to defined contribution from defined benefit, bringing public employees compensation in line with private sector employees, reducing wages by 5% across the board, and attacking individual rights in addition to tenure, such as evaluations using student test scores, etc.

Here in Michigan, the Board of State Canvassers at their upcoming meeting will be considering the following three initiative petitions submitted by the Committee to Transform Michigan:

- *A petition that would amend the State Constitution to ban collective bargaining for state employees, require the Civil Service Commission to set pay rates for all positions at the market rate and cancel all current employment agreements with state employees.*
- *A petition that would amend the State Constitution to eliminate the need to pay union dues as a condition of employment.*
- *A petition that would amend the State Constitution to repeal the Public Employment Relations Act, PA 336 of 1947.*

...Chuck Agerstrand, President - NSO

FROM CEA'S LOBBYISTS ON THE STATE'S BUDGET FORECAST

On December 20th the Legislative Council and the Governor's Office of State Planning and Budgeting presented the December 2010 revenue forecast. The forecast provides information on the amount of revenue being generated by taxes and other sources, the impact on the budget for the current fiscal year (2010-11), and implications for next year's budget (2011-12). The briefing included information about state funding for schools.

2010-11 Budget: Overall, we are on track to fund the current state budget for FY 2010-11. There is a shortfall in revenue from what was initially forecast, but the budget balancing plans offered by Governor Ritter in August, October, and November -- which reduced state funding for many programs including K-12 -- resulted in a smaller shortfall than the Governor had proposed to reduce.

However, K-12 is facing additional revenue issues in the current year. As you may know, K-12 Total Program is a combination of funding from the state AND from local property and specific ownership taxes. Anticipated revenue from local property and specific ownership taxes has declined by \$23 million less than expected. Under the K-12 School Finance Act, the state must offset the difference and, therefore, find \$23 million in the General Fund to fund K-12 at the current level. The Legislature will deal with this issue when it returns in January, but it could mean a mid-year rescission if the funding is not available.

2011-12 Budget: As already stated, Colorado faces a \$1 billion shortfall for the 2011-12 budget year. This is because of the loss of revenue to fund current law, the loss of one-time federal money such as the ARRA funds, the loss of many cash funds the Legislature used to fill previous budget holes, and increases in caseloads for programs such as Medicaid. The actual size of the budget shortfall will depend on legislative actions in the coming year.

K-12 is also facing another year of funding issues. Because of an anticipated decline in the local share of Total Program and the declining funds in the State Education Fund, the

state will need \$157 million to level fund K-12 (i.e., provide the same amount of funding for 2011-12 as for 2010-11). Legislators have a few options to address this issue, such as spending \$157 million out of the General Fund (and therefore adding \$157 million to the \$1 billion shortfall); reducing funding for programs paid out of the State Education Fund; reducing the required reserve for the State Education Fund; levy an overall reduction to K-12; or a combination of these. This will be the big debate for the 2011-12 School Finance Act next spring.

More to come in what will be a very active and intense legislative session!

