



# SKI COUNTRY EDUCATOR

May – June 2007

## Colorado Legislature Provides Additional Funding for K-12

The Colorado Legislature finished in early May almost a week ahead of schedule. Amendment 23 mandates school funding to increase each year at the Consumer Price Index plus 1%. This year CPI was higher than it has been for several years, at 3.6%. This meant a 4.6% increase for K-12 funding in Senate Bill 2007-08, School Finance Formula. The legislature also passed Senate Bill 199. This bill is referred to as the Mill Levy Stabilization bill. It freezes property tax rates at their current level and is intended to bring additional funding to K-12 schools now and in the future. It will also free up money in the state's annual budget to go toward higher education. You will read more about legislation that will have an effect on public schools in the following pages.

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## **Mill Levy Stabilization will benefit Moffat County Schools**

Moffat County schools have been in declining enrollment over the last several years. They are also at the very bottom of all schools in Colorado for Per Pupil Funding from the state. The Mill Levy Stabilization bill will provide Moffat County with an additional \$273,645 in general revenue for the 2007-08 school year.

Representative Al White was instrumental in drafting and passing this legislation. Representative White stood firm in his support for this piece of legislation even though the majority of his own party was in opposition.

## **Other Legislation that effects Public Schools**

HB 1048 – Merrifield/Windels – Longitudinal Analysis of Assessments – requires the development of a new longitudinal growth model and requires CDE to calculate longitudinal growth for each student by July 1 of each year.

**Signed into law 2/6**

HB 1320 – Benefield/Bacon – CDE Data Reporting – streamlines data reporting requirements on school districts.

**Sent to the Governor and will be signed on 5/23**

## **Aspen reaches 40K**

The Aspen Education Association and the Aspen School District have agreed to a salary schedule for the 2007-08 school year that has a beginning salary of \$40,000.

Aspen schools, along with the Westminster school district are the first public schools in Colorado to achieve a starting salary of \$40,000. The highest salary in Aspen is now above \$80,000.

“40 K right away” is part of a mission of CEA and NEA, to achieve a beginning salary for all teachers of \$40,000; also part of the mission is to provide that a teacher, before the end of his or her career, can obtain a salary of \$80,000.

Summit County has also set a goal of reaching the \$40,000 starting salary by 2011. Hopefully the rest of us are not far behind.

## School Funding and Tax Policy

Improving school funding is a constant focus of the education community in Colorado. Numerous successful efforts to increase school funding – Amendment 23, Referendum C, local mill levy elections and de-Brucings – have, at best, only kept our schools from falling further behind. Voters support public education and continue to list it as their top concern and issue of interest. Voters also recognize that our schools are not adequately funded.

What we know is that schools can never be funded adequately under the current tax structure in Colorado. Conflicting constitutional amendments – Gallagher, TABOR, Amendment 23 – plus various legislative actions over the years, have made it nearly impossible to fund public education (PK –16) as well as all the other essential public services that citizens of Colorado need, desire and deserve.

School funding is a concern in every state, so NEA has done a lot of work on the issue. Research shows that education is a significant part of the nation's economy, and that investments in education at all levels have multiplying results for years to come. NEA has established a strategic goal to provide support to its state affiliates on “tax and economic policies and school funding (TEF) that will enable them to develop and implement a plan to increase and stabilize funding for public schools.”

Colorado's TEF project took off with a November 2006 NEA regional conference where approximately 50 Colorado education leaders, elected officials, and policy makers learned about the economic impact of education investment and began talking about how to better fund education, pre-school through higher ed. The three major education organizations – CEA, CASE, and CSAB – are taking the lead in this effort.

These groups are working on a project to provide school employees throughout the state with information about the different skills needed by our students in the future, the funding problems that prevent us from moving forward, and what it will take to make Colorado a top state in all areas. Materials are being developed for a local level education process, which is scheduled for the start of the 2007 school year. In each school district, the association president, the school board president and the superintendent will work together to educate and energize their members and employees. They will also carry the message to local community leaders.

Externally, at the state level, the education coalition is meeting with political leaders, education officials, business leaders and others who recognize the problem and want to find a long-term solution. Conversations about what kinds of changes are needed in Colorado's tax structure and how to make that happen are taking place. The Bell Policy Center is launching an effort to research the problem and propose possible solutions. Ultimately, a broad coalition will emerge and coalesce around a comprehensive solution to the state's fiscal problems.

## Collective Bargaining and Salaries

Election 2006 brought a change in the political environment at the Capitol and provided organized labor with opportunities not seen for many years. Unfortunately, the first labor issue to move through the Legislature – a change in the Labor Peace Act affecting private sector employees – generated a firestorm of reaction from the business community. Governor Ritter, fearing that this polarization could jeopardize his over-all agenda of change for the state, vetoed the bill. The Governor's lobbyists have indicated that the Governor wants to include any further labor legislation, including a collective bargaining bill, in a 2008 package of bills dealing with government efficiency.

CEA and the state's other employee groups are engaged in discussions about a collective bargaining bill, striving to arrive at consensus about the details of such legislation. It is clear that the Legislature and the Governor are looking for a united front from labor and are not interested in multiple, competing bills. CEA will continue to take a lead in the drafting of legislation, insuring that school district employees are provided with additional opportunities at the bargaining table without restricting the master agreements already in place in many districts.

Meanwhile, CEA's Professional Pay Campaign is proceeding with laying the groundwork necessary to achieve its 40K salary goal. Bargaining teams are being trained to analyze their salary schedules and determine how best to compact and improve them. Several ESP locals are in the beginning stages of Living Wage Campaigns to raise their salaries to a higher standard. These campaigns will continue and will be enhanced by the passage of a bargaining bill and a solution to the state's fiscal problems.

