

2015 Legislative Summary

52nd Legislature – 1st regular session, 2015

The Arizona State Legislature adjourned their 52nd Regular Session Sine Die April 3, 2015 at 3:37 a.m. All laws become effective on July 3, 2015, unless the bill contains an emergency clause or delayed effective date. The session lasted 81 days, which is the shortest session in nearly 50 years. Lawmakers introduced 1,163 bills and 89 memorials & resolutions, and 345 bills received final passage, with Governor Doug Ducey vetoing some of those final bills.

This session, the Association pursued its most active legislative agenda in the history of the Charter Association. With six priority bills, four were signed by the Governor. The state budget is always our focus as charter students are solely funded from the state's General Fund. This session saw a major shift in school finance with the elimination of the charter school small weight for certain types of schools. The Association and its active members and support community were able to move the two-year 50% cut to a three-year 33% cut and tighten and narrow the language.

The budget also provided funding increases for charter students through additional assistance and base level funding, a one-time base-level increase in light of the pending K-12 litigation, and \$25 million for a new Achievement District.

Bills: We had quite a few victories to share this session as the Association worked with the legislators to move forward the following bills to benefit charter students, including:

- [SB1074](#) - This bill would prohibit school districts from excluding charter schools in bidding on leased or vacant district property if the district decides to sell or lease unused facilities. This bill was signed by the Governor on April 1. Sen. Kelli Ward sponsored this legislation.
- [HB2208](#) - This bill requires someone who wants to file a claim against a public school to take action within 180 days after the action occurs. This will save charter schools time, money and litigation expenses. This bill was signed by Governor on April 10.
- [SB1193](#) - This statute initially required a charter school that leases its property to be classified the same as district schools for purposes of zoning. During session, Attorney General Mark Brnovich's recent opinion clarified this issue by saying, "A municipality cannot impose any zoning restriction on a charter school that leases its property that it could not impose on a district school or on a charter school that owns its property." [Find the opinion here](#). Senator Kelli Ward made this bill a strike everything bill that addressed Arizona receiving federal funds through the Charter Schools Program. This bill is a striker that requires charter school sponsors to consider progress towards academic performance expectations as one of the most important factors in determining charter renewal and publish an annual report. It also contains the technical language for the charter small school weight cut. This bill was signed by Governor on April 10.
- [HB2478](#) - This bill would allow Joint Technical Education Districts to offer career and technical education courses on charter school campuses. This bill was signed by Governor on April 10.

Some bills also did not make it to law including:

- [HB1131](#) - This bill would have required online charter schools to pay a "reasonable fee" to district schools for a student to participate in interscholastic activities. This bill passed the Senate, but failed in the House. The Association opposed the bill, as it could have had an impact on charter school funding and school choice in the future. We believe it would've set a troubling precedent.

- [SB1286](#) - This bill would've allowed private colleges and universities to authorize charter schools. The Association supported this bill that passed the Senate, but failed in the House. Sen. Kimberly Yee sponsored this legislation.
- [HB2537](#) - This equity bill would've provided charter school teachers with access to teacher experience index funding and to additional teacher compensation. The Association supported this bill, but when the budget passed, this bill died. Rep. Paul Boyer sponsored this bill.

Here is other work done by the Association:

- The State Board of Education voted to seek legislative changes that would allow them the flexibility to postpone issuing A-F letter grades for two years during the transition from AIMS to AzMERIT. This vote was directly aligned with what the Association has advocated for within the past year in our A-F Accountability policy statement, during public comments at the Board meetings and in conversations with individual members. [Click here to view the statement.](#)
- The Association served as a key advisor to the State Board of Education's A-F subcommittee and directly impacted the development of the principles. The A-F School Accountability Committee established and revised their Principles of Agreement, which will be used as the basis for developing the next generation of the A-F letter grade accountability system. The new principles call for the letter grades to reflect the results of multiple tests instead of a single assessment, recognize student academic growth throughout the school year, and provide schools with data and accompanying technical documents so schools can replicate and validate the findings. The Principles are consistent with the Association's research on A-F accountability and our policy positions for multiple assessments and measures of growth.
- The Association advocated on behalf of charter schools and provided technical assistance and support to the Arizona Department of Education in the drafting of the proposed Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) accountability criteria and timeline. Additionally, the Center's research on the A-F accountability system was used by the Department in the waiver application to justify the need for the transition to a new statewide accountability system. [Read the draft here.](#)
- The Association continues to serve as a member on the Arizona Department of Education's Accountability Advisory Group; this working group is assisting the Department in the development of other components of the accountability system, i.e., 95% tested and Full Academic Year (FAY).
- We worked to exempt charter schools from records reporting to the Library, Archives and Public Records division. The Library had requested essential records be submitted every five years by Dec. 31 of each year. Through our advocacy it was determined that charters don't have to submit any records. The only records you must "permanently" maintain are student records. [You can find out how to comply on page three of this memo.](#)
- The Association played a critical role in the development of the Arizona State Board for Charter School's Conditional Renewal process. The option for Conditional Renewal didn't exist prior to the Association's advocacy for schools that received a C rating (or better) but didn't meet the Board's expectations. With this option, schools now have a choice at renewal that allows them to enter into a Performance Management Plan with the Board.
- Due to elevating our charter voice at the legislature to protect funding for our students, the funding gap narrowed. We've analyzed per pupil funding from the recently released FY 14 Superintendent of Public Instruction's Annual Report. On average, charter students received \$1,179.12 less than their average district peer in the 2013-14 school year.

The Arizona Charter Schools Association is committed to improving the political and regulatory landscape for charter students, families and operators at the local, state, and federal levels. [Click here for the legislations monitored by the Association.](#)