

**FINAL
FISCAL NOTE**

Drafting Number: LLS 15-0616
Prime Sponsor(s): Sen. Donovan
Rep. Wilson

Date: July 13, 2015
Bill Status: Signed into Law
Fiscal Analyst: Josh Abram (303-866-3561)

BILL TOPIC: ASCENT PROGRAM FUNDING**Summary of Legislation**

This bill clarifies the way state funding for ASCENT students is distributed to those school districts that include ASCENT students in their funded pupil count under the School Finance Act.

A school district may spend the ASCENT program funding on behalf of participating students in the applicable budget year. The district may also reserve ASCENT funding for students who are admitted to an institution of higher education by the end of the applicable budget year, but enroll and participate as an ASCENT student in the following budget year. A district must remit any funding not expended in the applicable budget year, or encumbered for the following budget year, to the State Public School Fund.

Background

The ASCENT program allows a student who has completed at least 12 credit hours of postsecondary courses prior to completing his or her senior year in high school to remain enrolled in high school for one additional year and to concurrently enroll in an institution of higher education. In FY 2014-15, school districts received per-pupil funding of \$6,424 for each eligible ASCENT student, and used the funding to pay the student's college tuition at the resident community college rate. Students receive their high-school diplomas at the end of their ASCENT year. Funding for ASCENT students is provided in the annual School Finance Act.

The FY 2014-15 annual appropriations act (the Long Bill) authorized the CDE to allocate about \$4.5 million of the school finance appropriation to support 708 student FTE. In the supplemental school finance bill, Senate Bill 15-166, this amount was reduced to about \$2.7 million supporting 423.5 student FTE.

Assessment

Each year, the General Assembly determines the number of students who can participate in ASCENT, and the per-pupil funding amount for those students. This is used to calculate a portion of the total school finance appropriation.

This bill permits school districts and charter schools with ASCENT students to retain that portion of the ASCENT funding allocated specifically for that district or school, and pay the enrollment cost for participating students at the time that students actually enroll in institutions of higher education, typically during February and March for matriculation in the following academic year beginning in August. Senate Bill 15-138, as amended, permits school districts and charter schools to use ASCENT funds at any time during the fiscal year, either for current fifth year students, or those preparing to transition into the ASCENT program in the following academic year.

The bill does not change the total number of students participating in the program, or the amount of per-pupil funding the General Assembly will provide in any fiscal year. These decisions remain at the discretion of the legislature. Since the bill does not change the cost of school finance, creates no workload changes at the Colorado Department of Education, and will not impact the revenue or expenditures of the state or school districts, the bill is assessed as having no fiscal impact.

Effective Date

The bill was signed into law by the Governor and took effect on May 13, 2015.

State and Local Government Contacts

Education Higher Education