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# Rocky Mountain News

**Wednesday, January 16, 2008**

## **SPEAKOUT: More tests are not the answer**

**Giving schools leeway to set own approaches to learning is**

## **By Don Batt**

Gov. Bill Ritter is proposing a revolution in education by designing new tests to assess the readiness of students for college and the work place. Unfortunately, the No Child Left Behind Act and the Colorado Student Assessment Program have demonstrated that trying to improve education through testing does not, for the most part, work.

Colorado already has a set of standards that address most of what schools should teach and students should learn. The CSAP tests themselves, at least from my experience as an English teacher, do a middling to adequate job of assessing those standards.

Students, however, seldom learn from testing; therefore, the more we test, the less time students have for learning.

One might argue that taking a week for state tests is not excessive, but in reality, schools devote weeks, if not months, designing, preparing and administering standardized tests.

During these mind-numbing experiences, all students learn is to dread school. This is the end result of a series of coercive practices. The feds coerce the state, the state coerces the districts, the districts coerce the schools, the schools coerce the teachers, and the teachers coerce the students.

This "all assessment, all the time" approach was conceived by politicians to give the appearance of reform while costing little.

What has developed over the years is (with apologies to Dwight D. Eisenhower) a corporate-educational complex - a testing lobby, composed of publishers, that profits from the fears of school districts by providing material that claims to increase test scores.

Schools are urged to buy packaged curriculum. As a result, curricula and pedagogy have become more and more homogenized, leaving little room to individualize instruction. Given the diversity of our population, it defies logic that there would be a correlation between instructional uniformity and increased student understanding.

We have had in this country a variety of business models for education, all, unfortunately, drifting toward uniformity.

In the mid-20th century, there were factory schools, supplying the same curricula to everyone, and leveling for the "college bound." In spite of restructuring, this model has persisted. Superintendents now call parents "clients," as if families are

nothing more than consumers, and teachers salesmen.

But there is a better way.

A truly entrepreneurial model would include students and teachers deciding how best to achieve educational goals.

Magnet and expeditionary schools, as well as the Bruce Randolph School's proposal, are examples of this type of approach.

But this idea is, in fact, not new. It's called site-based management and proposes the revolutionary idea that schools and teachers have the ability to assess and meet their students' needs.

The key to successful education does not rest with policy, coercion or uniformity. It depends upon engagement from the students and teachers, and the method of providing engagement is the same for both groups: Give them the authority of educational self-determinism.

Let teachers and students decide how to best achieve the goal of learning the skills necessary for success in college and the workplace.

This approach - giving authority and responsibility back to teachers and students - would indeed be revolutionary.

*Don Batt is an English teacher at Grandview High School. He is a resident of Denver.*

# Denver Post

## Wednesday, January 16, 2008

### Group lets DPS board know more is expected

By Jeremy P. Meyer  
*The Denver Post*

Article Last Updated: 01/16/2008 02:27:24 AM MST

A community group Tuesday used humor, fast pacing and piercing questions to school leaders to emphasize problems in Denver's schools.

The overall message from members of Metro Organizations for People during the meeting at Manual High with school board members and Superintendent Michael Bennet was that the district had let its students down.

"We know the district has not delivered," said board president Theresa Peña. "We are this close to getting there."

The group presented a lock-step plan to move the district further — proposing weighted, student-based funding for poor students and English-language learners, a new high school program in northeast Denver for students affected by closures and autonomy agreements for three schools.

Group members presented a skit on school funding and testimonials about school woes, including one by Vanessa Quintana, 16, a student at Cole Middle School and Manual High — both schools that closed.

Quintana said after Manual closed, she bounced around to other schools and wished there was a neighborhood program.

She attends night classes at Colorado High School Charter.

"It has been hard, but it's never too late," she said.

Parent Jennifer Gonzalez said her daughter wakes up at 5 a.m. to catch a 6 a.m. bus to George Washington High School, far from home.

"This angers and frustrates me," she said. "I demand the same quality as families of higher classes."

Bennet praised the group and tried as best he could to answer questions.

Some proposals, he said, need board approval and other problems are too complex for simple, one-minute responses.

"Not a single person, if they had a blank piece of paper, would design this system the way it is today," he said. "Nobody can figure out how to get back to that blank sheet."

Bennet blamed a pension program that takes \$800 from each child and costs the district \$50 million a year.

The district is mulling refinancing the pension to generate \$15 million to \$18 million in savings — of which \$6.3 million would be directly channeled to low-income students.

The group said they appreciated the efforts and the presence of board members Peña, Michelle Moss and Jeanne Kaplan. But they said they expect more and hope for a continued conversation with the district.

"I'm glad they are open to discussion so we can come to a compromise that is fair for everybody," Gonzalez said. "We'll just keep pushing."

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# Orlando Sentinel

## Wednesday, January 16, 2008

### Pregnant teens want maternity leave from school

posted by Tanya Caldwell on Jan 16, 2008 6:52:00 AM

School officials in Colorado are trying to figure out what to do with their pregnant teenagers.

Last month, two counselors and a pregnant student asked the school board for a maternity leave policy that would grant four to six weeks of excused absences after students' babies are born.

Denver Public Schools doesn't have a policy on student maternity leave. Some schools expect students back in class the day after they leave the hospital, according to ***The Denver Post***

<[http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci\\_7899096](http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci_7899096)>, which supports maternity leave for the students:

"The further these women go in pursuing an education, the better off their children – and taxpayers – will be," the *Post* **wrote in an editorial**

<[http://www.denverpost.com/opinion/ci\\_7924695](http://www.denverpost.com/opinion/ci_7924695)> .

Next month, the board will consider making birth control available in schools, the Post

reported.

Do you think students deserve maternity leave to bond with their babies? Or will this policy only encourage more minors to make babies out of wedlock?