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# **Rocky Mountain News Friday, March 7, 2008**

## **Educators' eyes fixed on Colorado**

**School-reform measure could have 'vast' impact**

By Katie Kerwin McCrimmon, Rocky Mountain News (Contact)

Originally published 12:30 a.m., March 8, 2008

Updated 02:43 a.m., March 8, 2008

Text messages kept flashing on cell phones as education experts testified about a proposed bill at the Colorado legislature last month.

Around the country, education reformers kept checking to see if Colorado would become a leader in giving public schools more flexibility in hiring and scheduling.

The Innovation Schools Act of 2008, Senate Bill 130, passed unanimously in the Senate Education Committee last month and Friday in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Driving the change is an unlikely duo, Democratic Senate President Peter Groff, a young father with a first-grader in Denver Public Schools and a daughter soon to enroll in elementary school, and Republican Nancy Spence, a former Cherry Creek Schools Board member, who has been tangling with the teachers unions for nearly a decade as she has pushed for waivers to allow education reform.

Their bill would allow teachers and principals to get waivers from state laws and provide more freedom from union and district rules.

Colorado would be the first state to allow schools to remain a part of a district but gain freedoms in hiring, staffing and scheduling that, until now, meant becoming a charter school.

Groff hopes, with union support, the bill will pass the full Senate soon, then head to the House for approval.

"The impact it will have on generations is vast," said Groff. "We have some ingenious teachers and principals. All kids don't learn the same way."

The bill would allow teachers and principals to create zones of innovation that could link schools with thematic learning concepts. For example, a high school that offers an International Baccalaureate program could link with a middle school and elementary school to offer a seamless path for students.

Groff became interested in the concept last year and held meetings with union members and educational experts all summer. Eventually, union leaders at the Colorado Education Association (CEA) signed on.

"We are not against school reform. We never have been. We believe in making sure our members provide a great school for every kid in Colorado," said Jeanne Beyer, communications director for the CEA.

Beyer said the union objected, at first, because the waivers were automatic. The CEA supported waivers if a majority of teachers in a school wanted them. They also fought for accountability reviews of innovation schools.

Beyer said many teachers want the freedom to request waivers from instructional mandates that don't work.

"We think the bill will empower teachers to make changes in their schools in terms of curriculum and instruction and possibly student assessment," she said.

## **Monday, March 10, 2008**

### **State funds to target learning gap**

**Education chief says money will be starting point**

By Berny Morson, Rocky Mountain News (Contact)

Originally published 04:05 p.m., March 9, 2008

Updated 01:43 a.m., March 10, 2008

Dwight Jones says test data can help focus on needs of students.

State Education Commissioner Dwight Jones soon will get the funding he sought to start closing the learning gap between low-income and middle-class students.

The state spending bill that will emerge from the Joint Budget Committee on March 24 will include more than \$2 million to address a problem bemoaned by educators for years. Closing the gap is among Gov. Bill Ritter's priorities.

The money proposed in the budget bill won't end the problem immediately, Jones said.

"It is not enough," he said. "But what I've been saying is, let's partner with some of the districts and schools that have the worst achievement gap - let's prove that what we're proposing, we can actually do.

"Then, I think, that's when we ask for additional support," he said.

The JBC, which drafts the annual budget bill, approved \$1.8 million this month to address the achievement gap. The bill also creates five staff positions at an initial cost of \$441,000, including one to help school districts work on the achievement gap.

The other four positions will go to experts in teaching math, science, social studies and the arts - areas in which many school superintendents have asked for state help.

The JBC's funding recommendations must survive lengthy debate and votes in the House and Senate.

JBC members have been critical of the state Board of Education over travel and entertainment expenses charged to the state. But that spat did not affect the lawmakers' views on the need to fund an effort to boost student achievement, said Rep. Bernie Buescher, D-Grand Junction, the JBC chairman.

"We have an achievement gap. We know that we have way too many youngsters who are not graduating from high school," Buescher said. "We have too many who are not fully prepared to do college work, and the emphasis that (Jones) is talking about and the governor is talking about, I think the JBC very much supported."

Jones believes teachers can help failing students by using test data to zero in on the areas where they need help.

The education department recently unveiled a new program that allows teachers and principals to do detailed analyses of the annual state achievement tests. But using the system will require training, officials said.

"It's one thing to have the data," Jones said. "But one thing I've learned is, we still have a lot of teachers who are not sure what to do with the data."

The achievement gap occurs in most districts between low-income and middle-class students. It also occurs between black and Hispanic students, on one hand, and Anglo and Asian students on the other.

Jones showed some success in closing that gap in his previous job as head of the Fountain School District in El Paso County. It was part of the reason the state board of education hired him as commissioner last year.

The additional funding is significant for the education department, which has not seen a major raise in decades.

The department has fewer staff members today than during the 1984-85 budget year, according to a JBC staff analysis.

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# Denver Post

## Monday, March 10, 2008

### Push to fix CSAP begins

**A group of lawmakers hopes to shift statewide exams to focus more on college preparation.**

*By Jennifer Brown The Denver Post*

While kids across Colorado pencil in bubbles on statewide exams this month, lawmakers are calling for the next evolution in standardized testing — an extensive overhaul to make exams more relevant to life after high school.

A bipartisan coalition of legislators is ready to dump the once-a-year CSAP in favor of end-of-course tests more closely tied to curriculum and college-entrance requirements.

“We’re in a new century, and it’s time for our thinking to evolve,” said Rep. Rob Witwer, R-Genesee. “This could be the end of CSAP and the beginning of something much better. It really is an evolution.”

Lawmakers have debated the relevance of the Colorado Student Assessment Program for a decade. But momentum to change it is mounting this year as Gov. Bill Ritter pushes a revamping of course-content standards and testing from preschool to college.

It’s typically Republicans — demanding accountability of the education system — who stick up for CSAP. Yet Witwer and Sen. Josh Penry, R-Grand Junction, are leading the fight for a new age in exams.

“This emphatically isn’t a step backward on assessments,” said Penry, who is sponsoring legislation on Ritter’s education initiative. “What we’re talking about is the living, breathing evolution and modernization of CSAP.”

Despite a growing block of bipartisan supporters, there is some dissension about what should replace the annual statewide tests.

Some lawmakers are eyeing the ACT, typically taken in 11th and 12th grades and used by college admissions offices. The

company also makes tests for eighth, ninth and 10th grades, showing students if they're on track to get into college.

Colleges — even those in Colorado — couldn't care less about CSAP scores, and, taking their lead, neither could students, said Rep. Christine Scanlan, D-Dillon.

“Kids don't really care about the 10th-grade CSAP, but they step it up for the ACT,” said Scanlan, a Summit County school-board member.

Others would rather let school districts choose what exams to give students.

“I don't think we should move from one mandated, one-size-fits-all testing system to another one,” said Rep. Michael Merrifield, a Colorado Springs Democrat who chairs the House Education Committee.

The former music teacher is pushing for flexibility in the initiative — what he calls “a smorgasbord of options” from which districts could choose.

He prefers evaluations, like a panel of teachers rating a musical performance, writing samples or even the way a student solved math problems.

No matter what route Colorado chooses, the state would have to get approval from the federal government to stay compliant with No Child Left Behind requirements. Other states already have waivers to try new testing techniques.

Several schools in Colorado already use the ACT in addition to CSAP.

ACT scores in Adams 12 Five Star Schools, which includes Northglenn, Thornton and other north-of-Denver suburbs, have crept half a point higher since the district began testing eighth-, ninth- and 10th-graders three years ago.

“College readiness equates to work readiness or military-service readiness or start-your own-business readiness — not ‘I just barely skimmed through at the minimum requirement, and I’m glad that’s over,’ ” said Stan Hesting, an assistant superintendent.

Another testing reform up for debate this legislative session would give the highest-scoring students up to six college credits. And the students who score lowest on statewide tests would have to take an 11th-grade “diagnostic exam” so educators and parents could map out course work to get them on track.

Under the current system, there is no follow-up for 10th-graders who bomb the test, said Sen. Mike Kopp, a Littleton Republican introducing the proposal.

“They just walk off a plank, and we just shrug our shoulders,” he said.

Ritter’s three-year reform plan calls for a panel of curriculum and testing experts to specify by grade which skills a student must master. The state’s curriculum standards, developed more than a decade ago, do not include grades below third or above 10th.

Ritter’s initiative would then focus on modernizing exams to test for those standards and create a tiered-diploma system for high school graduates, the top diploma coming with guaranteed college admission.

The state's \$16 million annual contract for CSAP expires in 2011. The education department and the governor's office said they are discussing testing options but likely will not decide how to revamp tests until the new requirements are in place.

# **North Denver News**

**Friday, March 7, 2008**

## **Revitalization at five years: Remington, Brown and Skinner**

Written by Guerin Lee Green

Thursday, 06 March 2008

Five years after Denver voters gave Denver Public Schools \$2.3 million yearly to revitalize failing schools, the results in North Denver are decidedly mixed. Three schools received revitalization funds in the first go round: Brown and Remington Elementaries, and Skinner Middle School. Remington is closing next year, the most glaring failure, and almost a total write-off of taxpayer investment. Skinner Middle has turned away from its revitalization program, and represents the mixed bag so often characteristic of school reform. Brown, once the poorest performing school in the area, now has one of the best track records of improving student performance in North Denver.

Brown has shown the most success post-revitalization, with improving test scores and strong parent support for the school's International Baccalaureate (IB) program. Brown was controversial early, with every teacher at the school initially fired. New leadership transformed the school, and families choiced into the school in substantial numbers.

But alarm bells went off in the Brown parent community last month when funding for the expensive IB program was at risk. Brown did not receive a school improvement grant for the 2008-2009 school year, and funding for an IB coordinator and a foreign language teacher, both part of the requirements to stay in the six-year long hunt for the IB certification, couldn't be found in Brown's regular budget. While Brown has been accepted into the IB Primary Years accreditation program, it has not yet completed the course.

Suzanne Loughran, Brown's principal, says that Brown has received a "long-term commitment from the district" to fund IB, citing a letter of support from Superintendent Michael Bennet. But Loughran does not know the source of the dollars. "I look forward to getting a better understanding of why we were not funded as a Beacon school." Brown's funding needs for International Baccalaureate are estimated to be in excess of \$130,000 each year, including a \$4,500 application fee paid yearly to the IB umbrella organization. Whether the means or the political will exist within DPS to maintain that funding for the long term is an open question, given the constantly shifting sands of school reform funding. Brown has been successful in attracting foundation grant dollars to support professional development for teachers, a key ingredient in improving student achievement and meeting IB goals.

Councilman Rick Garcia said that he was told by DPS Community liaison Happy Haynes that money for IB would be found and restored. The foundation for success at Brown has been preserved, at least for another year. More importantly, DPS has kept the faith with parents who have choiced into Brown, as much as two-thirds of Brown's entering students, using Loughran estimation.

"DPS has stated that they are going to continue to fund the IB program at Brown," says Tony Curcio, a parent at Brown. "We're looking for a commitment for Brown, Lake (middle school) and a future Northwest Denver Diploma (high school) program."

The Brown funding issue points out just how difficult funding reform is. Change and programming require funding, dollars that are just not contemplated in DPS' standard budgeting system. Those dollars also raise questions of funding equity — schools in line for revitalization money (now called Beacon Schools) receive more money per student than other schools. Revitalization was supposed to be the foundation for sustainable change, but that has not been the reality.

The lessons at Brown, one of DPS's Beacon Schools, may be equally difficult to replicate. Involved parents and prepared students are critical ingredients to school success. Parents most engaged are most likely to choose into schools showing success — a causal conundrum that administrators and think tanks don't want to admit, at least in public discussion of school success.

At Skinner, after a contentious community process, the Integrated Arts model was adopted, and funded at the cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars. But a change of principal meant the model was partially abandoned, leaving observers questioning DPS's commitment to community input in school reform.

At Skinner today, vestiges of revitalization remain. The AVID program, which both helps to organize students, provides them with learning skills, and structures the classroom environment, remains, trademark binders and all. AVID is a fourth- through twelfth-grade system to prepare students in the academic middle for four-year college eligibility. And Integrated Arts lives on, in the form of professional development, and many Skinner teachers have been trained in a Denver University program that teaches them to use the arts to enliven the classroom and leverage learning.

Despite student achievement problems and declining enrollment, the level of instruction in two classrooms visited at Skinner is high. The school has three Teach for America teachers this year, benefiting from the national program that seeks to put graduates from America's elite universities in urban classrooms. That has added to Skinner's teaching corps, without a budget drain. But the beat goes on, as the declining enrollment means the middle school will be cutting teachers again next year.

DPS has inaugurated a new budgeting approach, which, within limits, puts students at the core of the funding process. But the dollars are still too fragmented, too restricted and ultimately, too few, to make meaningful changes in programming sustainable, successful propositions. Programs, particularly computer-assisted learning interventions, are too expensive to be within the reach of many schools. Further complicating the picture is the high cost of personnel. DPS' budgeting requires that each teacher cost a school over \$62,000- even though teachers with full benefits often make much less. So a school that is able to find \$35,000 in its budget to pay for a reading specialist or a program coordinator is still unavailable to hire a full-time teacher for the role. Those limits constrain innovation and student achievement by placing bureaucratic rules ahead of student progress. The DPS Budget Guidance Manual for 2008 runs 55 pages, complete with clip-

art from 1989. Almost every page contains restrictions on how schools can spend dollars, and admonitions that deviations have to be approved at the highest level of DPS administration. The result is a central planning document that may stifle finding new solutions. The words “flexible” and “innovate” are not to be found even once in the document.

For taxpayers and parents, DPS’ mixed record of success suggests both the difficulties and the potential for transforming struggling schools. But DPS still has yet to fully integrate the reality of school choice into an institutional perspective that gives students the best chance at success.

# **New York Times**

## **Monday, March 10, 2008**

Op-Ed Contributor

### **Teaching Change**

**By ANDREW J. ROTHERHAM**

**Published: March 10, 2008**

WHEN teachers at two Denver public schools demanded more control over their work days, they ran into opposition from a seemingly odd place: their union. The teachers wanted to be able to make decisions about how time was used, hiring and even pay. But this ran afoul of the teachers’ contract. After a fight, last month the union backed down — but not before the episode put a spotlight on the biggest challenge and opportunity facing teachers’ unions today.

While laws like No Child Left Behind take the rhetorical punches for being a straitjacket on schools, it is actually union contracts that have the greatest effect over what teachers can and cannot do. These contracts can cover everything from big-ticket items like pay and health care coverage to the amount of time that teachers can spend on various activities.

Reformers have long argued that this is an impediment to effective schools. Now, increasingly, they are joined by a powerful ally: frustrated teachers. In addition to Denver, in the past year teachers in Los Angeles also sought more control at the school level, and found themselves at odds with their union.

Most contracts are throwbacks to when nascent teacher unionism modeled itself on industrial unionism. Then, that approach made sense and resulted in better pay, working conditions and an organized voice. Yet schools are not factories. The work is not interchangeable and it takes more than one kind of school to meet all students' needs. If teachers' unions want to stay relevant, they must embrace more than one kind of contract.

New York City is moving in this direction. In addition to the regular United Federation of Teachers contract, more than 170 schools are participating in a pilot "pay for performance" program. Meanwhile, several charter schools in the city have alternative contracts with the city, including one with a much longer school day. And Randi Weingarten, the teachers' union president, has invited Green Dot — a unionized public school operator in Los Angeles — to open a school in New York, which would add still another contract to the mix.

Where this leads is not toward the abolition of unions, as some in their ranks fear and their most rabid critics want. Instead, creating a portfolio of contracts to match a portfolio of schools will give parents better options and re-energize teachers' unions as an agent of progress.

*Andrew J. Rotherham is a co-director of Education Sector, a nonprofit policy group, and a member of Virginia's Board of Education. He writes the blog [Eduwonk.com](http://Eduwonk.com).*

## **9 News**

### **Saturday, March 8, 2008**

# Teacher under investigation: students claim abuse

DENVER – A teacher from Morey Middle School is on paid administrative leave as the district and police investigate allegations of misconduct against a student made last Tuesday.

Some say this isn't the first time this has happened with this teacher.

"I was scared cause he seemed pretty mad, so I wasn't sure if he was going to hit us again," said eighth grader Marcus Harris. Harris is a former student at Morey Middle School.

Since the investigation into the most recent allegation is ongoing by the district and by police, 9NEWS has chosen not to name the teacher in question. But, Harris and his mother claim the teacher has abused four other students throughout the school year before the allegation on Tuesday.

Harris says during his first few weeks at Morey, he enjoyed it.

"I was doing good, having good grades, making good communications with my teachers," he said.

But, in early September, he says his friend tripped while going into a classroom and Harris and others accidentally fell on top of him. That's when Harris says a teacher got angry at him and his friend.

"The teacher kicked him upside the head and tell him to get up now," said Harris. "He was like, he was like, 'You don't want to move!' and then he snatched me by my collar and threw me into the wall and told me to stand up."

Harris says he and his mother complained to school and district officials, but they say nothing happened. Instead, they both claim Harris was then ridiculed by staff at Morey Middle School.

"I felt as though I was being picked on, as though I was being targeted," said Harris. His mother LaQuanda Alexander then enrolled him in another school.

"I wrote a letter to the board of education, one to school staff and Mike Bennet," said Alexander. Michael Bennet is superintendent of Denver Schools. "I want no other children to have to suffer, no other children."

Alexander says she is representing the four students and their parents who are now speaking with an attorney. They say they want justice for Harris and for the other alleged victims.

"Not only has he done it once. Not only did he do it twice, he's done it five times," said Alexander.

Attorney Derek Cole says the families are considering filing a lawsuit and he's working to find out what happened to the investigations into the previous allegations.

"I've been an attorney for many, many years. It doesn't appear that these kids sat down and all figured this out just to go after this particular teacher," said Cole. "So, when you put the picture together, there's a problem here."

Alexander thinks the teacher should be banned from the classroom and charged with a crime.

"The teacher should not be attacking these children, that is wrong – verbally or physically," said Alexander.

DPS Spokesperson Alex Sanchez issued a statement saying, "The safety and wellbeing of our students is top priority for Morey Middle School and Denver Public Schools. We take every allegation very seriously. We contact the appropriate authorities when required or deemed necessary. I can confirm that there was an incident at Morey Middle School this past Tuesday alleging misconduct by a teacher with a student. We contacted the Denver Police Department and our safety and security office. An internal investigation is ongoing. We have pretty strict policies around discipline for students as well as the adults taking care of the students and if the internal investigation concludes that the alleged behavior was inappropriate, then we will follow our policies."

9NEWS contacted the teacher in question. The teacher did not want to comment.

Harris says something should be done.

"They brung him back into the school like as if it wasn't true and it happens again," said Harris. "What else can we do? He did it again."

9NEWS learned about this story from a viewer. If you have a story idea, [click here](#):

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# **CBS 4**

## **Saturday, March 8, 2008**

### **Councilman Upset About Assault Reporting In DPS**

DENVER (AP) — Children as young as 5-years-old who were caught kissing at school have been referred to law enforcement from Denver Public Schools after a principal was charged with failing to report an alleged sexual assault.

Referrals to Human Services from the school district jumped from an average of 142 a month to 251 in February, according to spokeswoman Benilda Samuels.

In January, prosecutors served a misdemeanor summons on Skinner Middle School principal Nicole Veltze for allegedly failing to report an unlawful sexual contact. Veltze was investigating the case, but the girl's mom notified police, said Veltze's attorney, Rich Caschette.

Caschette said his client was being prosecuted unfairly to be made an example of because prosecutors believe the district is underreporting such offenses.

After issuing the summons, Chief Deputy District Attorney Lamar Sims spoke with DPS principals, informed them about reporting requirements, and prompted them to over-report, Denver Councilman Doug Linkhart said.

"It's just getting to the point of ridiculousness where we're prosecuting kids for kissing," said Linkhart, who chairs a City Council committee which conducted a hearing Wednesday about the issue.

He said incidents that used to be mediated at school are now being mediated by police.

A message left by The Associated Press after business hours for Denver District Attorney spokeswoman Lynn Kimbrough was not immediately returned.

At Wednesday's hearing, Linkhart heard about the case involving the 5-year-olds and another case involving 6-year-olds where one child said to the other, "You have a sexy booty."

Names of the children were not released because of privacy laws.

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