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Education overhaul advances

Senate panel gives OK, but details yet to be worked out

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A plan to overhaul the state's education system passed its first hurdle Thursday, winning unanimous approval in the Senate Education Committee.

But some education leaders warned that the measure, billed as the most sweeping reform package in years, could be costly and may be hard to implement.

"There is an awareness that as beneficial as these things are, it does cost money," agreed Sen. Sue Windels, D-Arvada, education committee chairwoman.

Exactly how the new system will look is unclear because SB 212 leaves key details of the reforms to the state Board of Education and the Colorado Commission on Higher Education.

Gov. Bill Ritter, the most prominent supporter of the measure, wants it that way.

He noted last week that previous school reform efforts stalled amid arguments among legislators.

Details to be worked out by the Board of Education include the new look of the achievement tests administered under the Colorado Student Assessment Program.

It will be revised to reflect a new curriculum and different teaching methods, Board of Education member Randy DeHoff told the committee.

That could mean assessment through class projects and more short diagnostic tests to determine where students are having problems or projects.

“We don’t know what it will look like, other than it’s not going to look like what we’re doing today,” DeHoff said.

The bill calls for all students to meet similar academic goals, such as knowing math.

But varying kinds of instruction may be offered to meet the different interests of students.

“We’re not going to be delivering this education system in six, 45-minute periods a day for 180 days,” DeHoff said.

Sen. Chris Romer, D-Denver, said the end result will be a diploma that is better aligned with the skills students need to succeed in college or on the job.

“When you get a diploma, it really will matter. You’ll know what you have in your hand is a ticket to the good life,” said Romer, a prime sponsor of the bill with Sen. Josh Penry, R-Fruita.

Thursday’s vote sends the bill to the Senate Appropriations Committee, where it will remain until members of several state agencies can estimate the possible cost of the measure.

Penry said he doubts the cost will be so high that the bill would not be approved in appropriations. But several witnesses said the proposed reforms won’t work without funding.

For example, teachers will need retraining to operate, said Beverly Ingle, president of the Colorado Education Association. Ingle said the teachers union has not yet taken a position on the bill.

Denver Post

Friday, March 28, 2008

Schools on beef recall list declared

Not all kids may have eaten the targeted food, USDA says. Lawmakers call for more disclosure.

By The Associated Press

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LOS ANGELES — The U.S. Department of Agriculture released a list Thursday of all school districts nationwide that received beef included in last month's recall of 143 million pounds from a California slaughterhouse.

The 226-page document listed "school food authorities" — the rough equivalent of school districts — that received the meat. The list included dozens of Colorado school districts, private schools and child-care centers. Among them were Denver, Aurora, Cherry Creek and Boulder Valley school districts.

The list was released after pressure from federal lawmakers, including Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn.

DeLauro called the list a victory for children's health but said the USDA should also release a complete list of retail stores that received the recalled beef.

"There is no reason other than the (meat) industry holding back the USDA," she said in a phone interview. "There is no reason why we shouldn't get that information."

A USDA spokeswoman did not immediately return an e-mail requesting comment.

The agency issued the largest beef recall in U.S. history last month after the Humane Society of the United States released undercover video showing workers at Chino-based Hallmark/Westland Meat Co. forcing sick cows to stand with forklifts, electric prods and high-pressure water hoses.

The slaughterhouse was a major supplier of ground beef to the National School Lunch Program.

Many state and local agencies and school districts had previously told the public which schools had received recalled meat, but Thursday's list was the first complete disclosure by the USDA.

A cover sheet accompanying the list said that the USDA had compiled it by relying on state lists. The memo also noted that because the recall covered two years, students at any one school on the list may not have consumed potentially tainted beef.

The memo also noted that the inclusion of a school food authority in the list didn't necessarily mean that all schools within that district had received the beef.

Where beef went

Among the Colorado school districts that received beef included in last month's recall of 143 million pounds from a California slaughterhouse:

- Aurora
- Boulder Valley

- Cherry Creek

- Denver