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**Education Policy Center Newsletter**

**From The Independence Institute**

**December 18, 2014**

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**Friday TV Alert: The Transformative Power of K-12 Scholarships**

The chance to attend a private school can make life-changing differences for kids. This **Friday, December 19, at 8:30 p.m.,** Education Policy Center Director Pam Benigno will appear on [*The Devil’s Advocate* with Jon Caldara](http://education.i2i.org/2014/12/devils-advocate-colorado-teachers-can-get-a-refund/). She and Jon will be speaking with Jamilla Dennis, a college student at Howard University whose life was forever changed by a scholarship from the Colorado-based [Challenge Foundation](http://thechallengefoundation.org/). If you can’t make the Friday showing, the episode will re-air **Sunday, December 21, at 11:30 a.m.**, and **Monday, December 22, at 12:30 p.m**.

**Dougco Gets Its Day in Court**

After spending more than three years tangled up in the Colorado courts, [Douglas County’s Choice Scholarship Program](http://education.i2i.org/douglas-county-vouchers/) (CSP) finally had its day before the Colorado Supreme Court on December 10. Lawyers on both sides of the case argued their points before the justices in front of a near-capacity audience, fielding some tough questions in the process. Peppered in the audience were members of the Education Policy Center team, all of whom watched the proceedings with rapt attention.

Oral arguments in the CSP case were more than just a fun field trip to a (very) shiny building. The ultimate fate of the program carries huge implications for school choice in Colorado and around the country. That’s why Ben DeGrow and Ross Izard, everyone’s favorite education policy analyst duo, stepped in to help set the stage for the arguments. Drawing on the research they conducted for their [Choice Scholarship Program amicus brief](https://www.dcsdk12.org/sites/default/files/choicescholarshiplegalfund/%5BSC%5D%20Brief%20of%20Amici%20Curiae%20II%20and%20Friedman%20Foundation%20in%20support%20of%20Respondents.PDF), the two worked with Great Choice Douglas County to gather and educate a group of Douglas County citizens on the finer points of the policy debate surrounding the CSP.

The Ed Center’s efforts bore fruit. A [*Denver Post* op-ed](http://www.denverpost.com/opinion/ci_27077601/parents-view-choice-education) written by Aaron Johnson, a Douglas County graduate and father of four, highlighted the importance of school choice from a parent’s perspective ahead of the arguments. The day of the hearing, a group of Douglas County citizens led by Charcie Russell made the case for choice at a pre-hearing press conference, landing themselves a [video spot](http://denver.cbslocal.com/2014/12/10/colorados-high-court-hears-school-voucher-case/) on CBS 4. And to make sure everyone was on the right page the day after oral arguments, CSP parent Don Wilson [chatted with Mandy Connell](http://www.iheart.com/show/139-Mandy-Connell/) on December 11.

Meanwhile, little Eddie has also been tooting the Dougco horn on [Ed is Watching](http://www.ediswatching.org/). Not only did good ol’ Eddie cover the [court proceedings themselves](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/12/cant-contain-my-excitement-dougco-case-reaches-supreme-court-today/), he also wrote about Dougco’s [recent district accreditation upgrade](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/11/dougco-shakes-it-up-again-by-earning-states-top-accreditation-rating/) after Ben DeGrow [spoke to Dougco’s school board president](http://education.i2i.org/2014/11/amy-oliver-show-dougco-regains-states-top-education-rating/), Kevin Larsen, about the accomplishment on the air. To round out the Dougco song, Eddie highlighted the district’s new [school choice tools for parents](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/10/tools-of-choice-dougcos-press-for-informed-parental-decisions/) and offered a [brief explanation](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/11/sticky-numbers-making-sense-of-dougcos-pay-system-and-its-outcomes/) of the numbers behind Douglas County’s strategic compensation plan.

**Santa Gives Teachers More Christmas Money**

Douglas County is huge, but the Ed Center also has a whole lot of other irons in the fire. Proudly carrying the flag of teacher freedom up the battle-scarred hill of teacher freedom once again, senior education policy analyst Ben DeGrow let teachers across the state know that they don’t have to unwillingly support political candidates or causes with their dues money.

An email to teachers reminded them of the December 15 EMO (the portion of state and local union dues dedicated to political advocacy) refund deadline. To drive the point home, Ben also made [an appearance on *The Devil’s Advocate* with Jon Caldara](http://education.i2i.org/2014/12/devils-advocate-colorado-teachers-can-get-a-refund/)*.* The Ed Center is always happy to help teachers to put their hard-earned cash toward something more useful, like Christmas presents!

**Center Keeps Watchful Eye on Jeffco**

When it comes to Jeffco these days, it’s quiet. Too quiet. Though the district has dropped off the media’s radar, little Eddie reminds us that a handful of dedicated protesters continue to press the board majority over their [eminently reasonable restructuring](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/11/despite-satisfactory-resolution-jeffco-currciculum-controversy-limps-on/) of the district’s curriculum review committees. Complete Colorado has also [covered some continuing angst](http://completecolorado.com/pagetwo/2014/12/12/some-jeffco-board-members-hostile-to-performance-based-teacher-pay-plan/) surrounding the district’s new strategic compensation plan.

To balance the darker sides of the situation, Eddie also highlighted some [positive efforts in Edgewater](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/11/positive-movement-in-jeffco-a-welcome-change/), one of Jeffco’s neediest areas. He even paused to spotlight [an Edgewater elementary school](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/12/among-new-school-awards-jeffcos-edgewater-elementary-stands-out/) for making this year’s list of Colorado school awards.

Meanwhile, the gears of turmoil continue to grind behind the scenes. Rest assured, the Ed Center has its finger on the pulse of Jeffco’s ongoing troubles. The Jefferson County Education Association has promised a big fight in January, and the Ed Center team stands ready to join the battle for meaningful reform when “the shot heard round the state” rings out. It will be gloriously messy.

**Eddie Gives Teachers Some Attention**

Little Eddie has many interests. After Ben DeGrow and Luke Ragland of Colorado Succeeds [had a fascinating radio discussion](http://education.i2i.org/2014/10/amy-oliver-show-union-takes-another-crack-at-tenure-lawsuit/) about the teachers union’s ongoing tenure lawsuit, Eddie found himself looking into issues related to teacher preparation, tenure, and SB 191.

Our trusty policy explorer began the conversation with a [look at teacher preparation programs](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/11/for-more-educational-freedom-ill-give-up-figurative-ed-school-explosions/) and quickly followed up by [examining the convoluted intersection](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/11/teacher-training-licensure-evaluation-pay-fix-em-all-and-do-it-right/) of teacher training, licensure, and evaluation. He even delved into some less-than-complimentary [research on teacher preparation in Colorado](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/12/nctq-slaps-down-colorado-on-teacher-preparation-will-we-ever-learn/).

After a brief detour to write about the seemingly unending [delays behind SB 191’s achievement data provision](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/11/one-more-year-districts-take-different-paths-as-191-close-in/), Little Eddie turned his attention to the often-ignored [subject of teacher choice](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/12/its-good-to-let-teachers-choose-too-because-one-size-doesnt-fit-all/). To follow up on Ben’s radio interview and keep everyone current, he also provided a [quick update](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/12/justices-slow-turning-wheel-ceas-opening-tenure-appeal-argument/) on the most recent goings-on in the legal fight over SB 191’s mutual-consent provision.

If all that isn’t enough Eddie for you, make sure to check out his other research adventures:

[CRPE’s Latest Report Reminds Me That We Still Need More Choice](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/12/crpes-latest-report-reminds-me-that-we-still-need-more-choice/)

[The Death of Snow Days](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/12/the-death-of-snow-days/)

[Customized Success: New Study Hints at the Power of Personalized Learning](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/11/customized-success-new-study-hints-at-the-power-of-personalized-learning/)

[It’s Not What You Think: “The End of School Choice” Means Something Better](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/11/its-not-what-you-think-the-end-of-school-choice-means-something-better/)

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