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**Education Policy Center Newsletter**

**From The Independence Institute**

**May 12, 2015**

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**Legislature Crosses the 2015 Finish Line**

This year’s legislative session got heated when it came to education issues. Education Policy Analyst Ross Izard spent a great deal of time at the Capitol attempting to track the 119 introduced education-related bills, building relationships with legislators, and working to educate Colorado leaders on the importance of two of the Education Policy Center’s biggest priorities: School choice and accountability.

Nowhere were those efforts more important than in this year’s testing debate. As Ross pointed out in a [*Greeley Tribune* op-ed](http://www.greeleytribune.com/news/14827826-113/izard-colorados-k-12-testing-debate-what-should-stay-and) early in the session, reductions in testing were necessary. The debate grew progressively uglier and more convoluted in the weeks that followed, prompting Ross to author a detailed [Complete Colorado article](http://completecolorado.com/pagetwo/2015/03/17/strange-bedfellows-teachers-unions-conservatives-and-tenure-reform/) about the dangers of strange conservative-union alliances as the testing debate progressed. He followed the article with an [appearance](http://dancaplis.podbean.com/e/the-dan-caplis-show-mar-19-2015-hr-2/) on the Dan Caplis Show on 710 KNUS. Education Policy Center Director Pam Benigno also lent her experienced voice to the conversation by presenting on the history and current state of Colorado assessments to a citizen’s group in Franktown.

As the session neared its end and the hope for a compromise began to dim, Senior Education Policy Analyst Ben DeGrow joined Ross in co-authoring a column, published by both the [Colorado Springs *Gazette*](http://gazette.com/guest-column-education-goal-should-be-less-testing-better-accountability/article/1550607) and the [*Greeley Tribune*](http://www.greeleytribune.com/news/16120468-113/izard-degrow-in-colorados-student-testing-debate), that called for a smart compromise between the final two pieces of testing legislation: Senate Bill 257 and House Bill 1323. Against all odds, Colorado’s legislators eventually came to a nearly literal last-minute compromise on the testing issue. You can read the final compromise bill [here](http://www.leg.state.co.us/CLICS/CLICS2015A/csl.nsf/fsbillcont3/D16656BA90D54F3787257DDD0064A563?Open&file=1323_rer.pdf).

**More from Ed is Watching**

[Whichever Way You Look, Colorado Seems to be Stuck in a Testing Rut](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/04/whichever-way-you-look-colorado-seems-to-be-stuck-in-a-testing-rut/)

[High-Stakes Game of Legislative Testing Chicken Nears Point of No Return](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/04/high-stakes-game-of-legislative-testing-chicken-nears-point-of-no-return/)

[Drumroll, Please: The Great Testing Debate of 2015 Nears Conclusion](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/05/drumroll-please-the-great-testing-debate-of-2015-nears-conclusion/)

**No Love Lost in Loveland Union Negotiations**

As the legislative fight over testing swirled around the statehouse, another fight was brewing in Thompson School District, located north of Denver in Loveland. In that district, a group of four reform-minded school board members have taken a stand against entrenched union power despite heavy resistance. Most recently, they [shot down a tentative agreement](http://completecolorado.com/pagetwo/2015/05/07/thompson-school-board-shoots-down-union-contract-proposal/) that would have decreased transparency and further solidified union privileges. Complete Colorado’s new education reporter Sherrie Peif has busily covered the angles no one else will, [highlighting the Colorado Education Association’s involvement](http://completecolorado.com/pagetwo/2015/04/21/state-union-leaders-behind-petition-to-thompson-school-board/) in the district’s debate and the fact that the board’s reformers were [escorted from a recent meeting by police](http://completecolorado.com/pagetwo/2015/04/27/thompson-conservative-majority-needs-police-escorts-out-of-meeting/).

Education Policy Analyst Ross Izard offered his thoughts on the [implications of CEA’s stealthy entrance](http://completecolorado.com/pagetwo/2015/04/22/cea-involvement-means-thompson-negotiations-about-to-get-uglier/) and the [district’s tentative agreement](http://completecolorado.com/pagetwo/2015/04/29/thompson-reformers-face-resistance-from-bureaucrats-union-leaders/) in two articles for Complete Colorado. Senior Education Policy Analyst Ben DeGrow also joined the conversation by [discussing the issue](http://1310kfka.com/audio/stacy050515hr2.mp3) on AM 1310 KFKA’s Stacy Petty Show. The Education Policy Center will be watching Thompson School District as it approaches a May 15 deadline for negotiations to end.

**More from Ed is Watching**

[If You Want Something Done Right: CEA Steps into Thompson’s Union Negotiations](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/04/if-you-want-something-done-right-cea-steps-into-thompsons-union-negotiations/)

[How Not to Negotiate: Thompson’s Tepid Tentative Agreement](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/04/how-not-to-negotiate-thompsons-tepid-tentative-agreement/)

**Independence Institute Stands up to Jeffco Bullies**

In Jefferson County School District, ugly attacks against reform-minded board members and new administrators were [beginning to get out of hand](http://completecolorado.com/pagetwo/2015/04/02/mean-girls-attack-jeffco-board-officials-on-twitter/). Never ones to tolerate bullies, the Independence Institute stepped in. Using the Twitter hashtag #MeanGirlz, the Institute put the nastiest Tweets on [very public display](http://meangirlz.org/) and called out the bullies for their disrespectful behavior. The effort was [covered by Colorado Peak Politics](http://coloradopeakpolitics.com/2015/04/03/outed-jeffco-bullies-outed-by-new-meangirlz-website-union-on-defense/) and [*Westword*](http://www.westword.com/news/meangirlzorg-calls-out-tweeters-hating-on-jeffco-school-board-members-6634764), and quickly earned the ire of anti-reform folks even outside of Jeffco. When you’re taking flak, you know you’re over the target.

**Ed Center Keeps Eye on School Choice Ball**

Despite their other hijinks, the Education Policy Center team has not lost sight of its truest passion: School choice. Ben DeGrow was recently in Lafayette speaking to a group of 50 about the past, present, and future of educational choice in Colorado. Additionally, Pam Benigno carried the torch both to Colorado Springs and Loveland, where she spoke about the need to expand school choice opportunities for low-income students.

Not satisfied with mere drivable distances, Ben also traveled to a major conference in North Carolina to give a presentation on the education reforms enacted by Douglas County School District over the last several years.

**More from Ed is Watching**

[Middle-Income Families Have Long Track Record in Building Colorado Charters](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/04/middle-income-families-have-long-track-record-in-building-colorado-charters/)

[New CTBA Report on School Choice Smells Like Bologna](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/04/new-ctba-report-on-school-choice-smells-like-bologna/)

**Little Eddie Stays Busy**

As always, Little Eddie has kept himself *very* busy with a variety of topics. Here are just a few of his recent highlights, including an April Fools’ post about the Independence Institute’s attempt at unionization:

[Unity is Strength: Independence Institute Staff Take the Plunge and Unionize](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/04/unity-is-strength-independence-institute-staff-take-the-plunge-and-unionize/)

[NEA: Colorado Falls from 21st to 22nd in Per-Pupil Spending – Sound the Alarms!](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/03/nea-colorado-falls-from-21st-to-22nd-in-per-pupil-spending-sound-the-alarms/)

[Compared with Real Samples, Dougco Union Survey Proves a Major Flop](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/04/compared-with-real-samples-dougco-union-survey-proves-a-major-flop/)

[NEA President Reminds Us That Education Policy Belongs in Legislatures, Not Courts](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/05/nea-president-reminds-us-that-education-policy-belongs-in-legislatures-not-courts/)

[Broad Brush “Limited Impact” Claim Vindicates Progress of Prop 104](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/05/broad-brush-limited-impact-claim-vindicates-progress-of-prop-104/)

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