



Shaping Tomorrow Today

Public Education

Volume 22/Issue #2

A Community Newsletter of the Jefferson County Education Association

October/2008

Jeffco: swing county in swing state!

As Jefferson County goes, so goes the nation



by Kerrie Dallman,
JCEA President

You've heard the presidential election phrase: "As Maine goes, so goes the nation."

As a teacher of American government, for many years I taught that Maine was a bell-weather state; its voters consistently picked the winning presidential candidate.

In recent years, however, our nation has been closely divided, and the winner of the popular vote has not necessarily been elected, as we saw in 2000 with the election of George W. Bush.

As a result, the attention of teachers like me has now turned to the so-called "battleground" states because of their impact on the Electoral College. In the last few elections those battleground states included Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Florida. **Now we can move our state, Colorado, to the top of that list.**

Logically, there are also battleground *counties* in these states. Our county, Jefferson, is one of those. Jeffco has traditionally been a red county that is now trending purple. Most pundits see Jeffco voters moving to a more moderate, middle-ground position and away from the political extremism of the past. Jeffco's political moderation reflects what's been going on across the state.

Generally, Colorado's politics—notwithstanding the antics of the ultra-right, Golden-based Independence Institute—have moderated in recent years. The anti-tax, ratchet-down-government crowd have largely lost their clout because they were just too extreme for most Coloradans.

When political scientists write the history of this moderating change in Colorado's political climate, they will note the important role teachers and like-minded citizens played. And, it started here in Jeffco!

Teachers acting through their Association have proudly stood up to the "too extreme" individuals and groups to defend public schools, even when that was unpopular and sometimes misunderstood. We have worked to build effective state and local coalitions and have been highly successful in electing moderate, pro-public school officials at all levels of government.

The Association is neither Democratic or Republican. We

recommend pro-public school candidates, through an open bipartisan process, from both parties.

Success comes with a price

Unfortunately, that success has come with a price. Teachers and their Association—along with other public employee organizations representing firemen, nurses and police officers—are increasingly in the gun sights of the Independence Institute and like minded individuals.

The reason is simple. The "too extreme" for Colorado crowd have lost their clout in the legislature and on most school boards. Now their primary method of moving their pro-voucher, privatization schemes are through the initiative process. Fueled by out-of state money, they write proposals and hire signature gatherers to secure a place on the November ballot. (Contrast that with the work of thousands of CEA and PTA members who crisscrossed the state to gather signatures for the SAFE initiative, #59.)

"The cumulative goal of the Triple Threat (Amendments 47, 49, 54) is to silence the collective voices of Colorado's teachers. It's that simple."

Amendments 47, 49, and 54, are this year's examples. We call them the **Triple Threat**. Numbers 49 and 54 are strategically targeted directly at teachers and JCEA/CEA,

while 47 attacks the rights of all workers, including teachers, who are organized through labor unions.

The cumulative goal of the Triple Threat (Amendments 47, 49, 54) is to silence the collective voices of Colorado's teachers. It's that simple.

How can you help?

JCEA urges you to think about the negative impact 47, 49, and 54 would have on public debate in this county and state. Is it in the state's best interest to:

- **Silence teachers' voices** in how best to educate your children, or
- **Silence firemen's voices** in the how best to fight a fire, or
- **Silence nurses' voices** in how best to care for their patients?

We hope you agree that our state and public institutions benefit when employees' voices are heard in the market place of public debate.

As you read this newsletter, we ask that you think about the importance of this election and the tone it will set for many years to come. We ask that you consider the recommendations we are making on several ballot issues and know that they are sincerely driven by our belief that America, Colorado, and Jeffco must support great public schools for every child.

JCEA says goodbye to Kathy McMahon

For ten years Kathy McMahon has been the architect of Jeffco's move away from political extremism toward moderation. In her capacity as JCEA's Director of Political Action she has worked with many parents and community leaders to promote the cause of public school education. She has also been the driving force behind JCEA's unprecedented membership growth, now at a record high of nearly 4,300.

McMahon is not going far, however. She has joined the staff at CEA, where they will take full advantage of her considerable talents and skills.

JCEA Executive Director Lisa Elliott said, "Both our members and this community will miss Kathy's enthusiasm and can-do spirit. She was a tireless worker for kids and public schools."

JCEA has hired Lee Berg who joined the staff on September 29. Berg is a veteran staff member having previously worked in NEA's Department of Human and Civil rights. He too has had extensive experience in political organizing.



JCEA's Director of Political Action, Kathy McMahon, was honored during a JCEA Council meeting in September.

CEA takes positions on key ballot issues

The Board of Directors of the Colorado Education Association has taken positions on several critical ballot issues that will appear on the General Election ballot.

YES on 59, "SAFE" — Savings Account for Education (SAFE) is a serious effort to untangle the complex web of tax measures in Colorado's Constitution. It moves us closer to the goal of Believe in a Better Colorado. It preserves a citizen's right to vote on tax increases while protecting schools from cuts without squeezing out funding for other essential public services such as higher education, health care and transportation. For more information go to: www.coloradosafe.org.

NO on 47 — We call this the "right to work for less" measure because it attacks Colorado workers—including teachers—and their wages, health care, and retirement benefits. We cannot recruit and retain high quality teachers if we cannot provide competitive compensation packages.

NO on 49 — This measure intrudes on public employees'—teachers, firemen, nurses, police officers—ability to make individual choices about the use of their salaries and paycheck deductions. We believe this decision is best made at the local

NO on 46 & 'Triple Threat': 47, 49, & 54!

YES on 3A & 3B, 58, 59 & 'O'!

level, not by a statewide vote.

NO on 54 — It prevents teacher associations, like JCEA, with collective bargaining agreements (called "sole source contracts") from participating in the political process by banning our political contributions. **We believe this violates our free speech rights.**

Amendments 47, 49 and 54 are all elements of the "too extreme for Colorado" cadre's efforts to eliminate organizations who have opposed their radical agenda in the state legislature and on the ballot. We call it the Triple Threat. For more information go to www.protectcoloradosfuture.org.

CEA also **supports 58** (increases severance tax on energy companies), and **Referendum "O"** (measure redefining how to get Constitutional Statutory issues on the ballot), and **opposes 46** (adds undefined, anti-affirmative action language to the Constitution).

JCEA welcomes new readers

JCEA is continually updating the mailing list for **Shaping Tomorrow Today**. If you are a new reader, welcome!

Obviously, this is a newsletter that reflects the thinking of the 5,000 teaching professionals in Jefferson County. We hope you find the information in this newsletter helpful and at times provocative. We want you to be able to trust the information you read in this newsletter and know that it reflects the integrity of both our profession and JCEA.



Shaping Tomorrow Today

Shaping Tomorrow Today is the community newsletter of the Jefferson County Education Association (JCEA) and is published periodically throughout the year. Comments may be mailed to: JCEA, 1447 Nelson St., Lakewood, CO 80215. Our phone number is 303-232-6405; our FAX number is 303-238-2215. Visit our web site at www.jcea-cea.org.

President: Kerrie Dallman

Executive Director: Lisa Elliott

Director of Political Action: Lee Berg

Director of Communications/Editor: Dexter Meyer

Mill levy override, bond issue on ballot

The Jeffco Board of Education has placed a mill levy override and bond issue on the November 2008 ballot.

To keep JPS moving forward and avoid painful cuts, JCEA recommends a "YES" vote for both 3A and 3B!

Mill Levy Override - 3A

JPS has been strategic with funds focusing on our students' learning and academic achievement. It has invested in classrooms and teachers. In fact, Jeffco's daily payroll shows where the funds are invested:

- \$1,546,000 per day or 76% of the payroll for teachers,
- \$397,000 per day or 19% of the payroll for support staff (secretaries, bus drivers, custodial staff, paraprofessionals, etc), and
- \$157,000 per day or 7% of the payroll for administrative staff (principals, assistant principals, central administrators, etc.).

Between 2002 and 2004, JPS reduced its budget by \$24 million. The majority of those cuts were never restored. The good news is that over the last five years Jeffco has not been forced to make budget cuts that negatively impact the classroom. The bad news is that after the 2008-2009 school year JPS may not be able to avoid such cuts.

Without additional funds, Jeffco will begin reducing budgets next year. Between 2009 and 2012, Jeffco will decrease the budget by an additional \$35 million because cost increases—like fuel and energy costs—will not match state funding for K-12 education.

The mill levy override could provide approximately \$36 million to continue to provide and maintain current staffing and funding to schools and classrooms. In addition, if the mill levy passes the district would also be able to consider the following (the list is tentative and not all inclusive).

- Continue to reduce class size in elementary grades.
- Add teachers to middle school and senior high to expand electives and world languages.
- Raise the bar for our senior high school students and increase the requirements for senior high graduation in math, science, and world languages. All students, including seniors, would be required to take a full load of courses every year.
- Increase funds to schools for updated materials, textbooks, and technology.
- Stop any reductions in school based staff and provide funds to increase staffing in schools with the most at-risk students.
- Expansion of Warren Tech option.

If this mill levy does not pass, budget reductions will follow, resulting in a decrease in resources for schools and classrooms. What this could mean:

- Increased elementary class sizes.
- Reduction in art, music, physical education, and career development choices in middle schools and senior high schools.
- Reductions in clinic aides, paraprofessionals, and other support staff.
- Reductions in instructional funding to schools for textbooks and technology.
- Reductions in teacher training.
- Reductions in campus supervisors and assistant principals reducing safety and security.
- Loss of one school day.
- Possible consideration of school closings.
- Increases in student fees.



What's it cost the homeowner? \$3.35 per month or \$40.18 per year on every \$100,000 of market value.

Bond Issue - 3B

JPS takes pride in offering students a superb education that prepares them for college or the workforce. Jeffco's children are growing up in a world that is more interconnected and interdependent every day, and JPS is committed to preparing students for success in a knowledge-based global economy. **But we can't ask our students to learn 21st century skills using 20th century tools and facilities.**

Only 26% of our school buildings meet the 21st century educational specifications of the district.

Only 6% meet the 21st century technology standards of the district. The last building program of \$423 million in 2004 helped the district invest in schools in older neighborhoods.

The bond issue would be between \$323 and \$350 million. **That amount can be issued without raising the mill levy for homeowners.**

The district would add capital reserve funds and interest earnings increasing the total amount of the 2008 building and improvement program to over \$400 million.

The bond program is being finalized. The current thinking is that major improvements would be undertaken in nine high schools and four middle schools in established neighborhoods.

The funds would allow major renovations or minor improvements in nearly 70 elementary schools. Technology would be upgraded in hundreds of classrooms. Two new elementary schools would support major housing developments in the central and north part of the county. Jeffco would also like to expand high demand career education like Warren Tech to other parts of the district.

There are two other important facts to consider. First, better school buildings are better for property values! Second, construction programs provide jobs and an economic stimulus for both Jeffco and Colorado. For more information, go to: www.jeffcoschoolyes.com

For Your Information

Attend Helping Kids Thrive (HKT)

This year's free parenting conference, **Parenting... You have the job, we have the tools!**, is on Thursday, November 11, at Lakewood HS; 5:30-9 p.m. Registration, resource tables and snacks will open at 5:30.



Each parenting conference provides positive, practical, empowering support for parents to help children reach their full potential.

HKT is presented by Jefferson Center for Mental Health. JCEA provides major funding and is proud of the continuous leadership it has provided in this area

since 1985.

Look for information in elementary school Friday folders and on secondary school websites.

For information and on-line registration, please go to: www.jeffersonmentalhealth.org/index.cfm or call 303-432-5156.

Join us for the Great Pumpkin Rally

Our traditional GPR provides an wonderful opportunity for teachers and community members to work together to support JCEA/CEA recommended pro-public school candidates and ballot issues.



It will be held on **October 11 at Lakewood HS** starting at 8:00 am. All you need is your walking shoes and about two or three hours. For information, call 303-232-6405.

Join your PTA , today!

The Jeffco Council PTA represents ten of thousands of parents and is a valued member of the Jeffco education family. Their mission is three-fold:

- To support and speak on behalf of children and youth in the schools, in the community and before governmental bodies and other organizations that make decisions affecting children;
- To assist parents in developing the skills they need to raise and protect their children; and
- To encourage parent and public involvement in the public schools of this nation.



Though many school PTAs play a vital role in helping schools meet the needs of their students through fund-raising activities, as you see by their mission, PTAs play a much larger—and many would argue—

more important role.

Research on student achievement reminds us that parental involvement is very important, and the Jeffco Council PTA is very active in promoting parental involvement in our schools. Parent involvement doesn't just mean volunteering at school, though that is very important. It also means playing an active role in the parenting of your child from kindergarten through high school.

Several Jeffco schools are recognized by the National PTA in their Schools of Excellence program. To find out more; go to: www.jeffcopta.org

Our Mission Statement: *The Jefferson County Education Association exists to empower educators to promote professional rights, responsibilities and practices to achieve educational excellence within a changing society."*



Shaping Tomorrow Today

Public Education

A Community Newsletter from the JCEA

Jefferson County Education Association
1447 Nelson Street.
Lakewood, Colorado 80215