

# Shaping Tomorrow Today

## Public Education

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A Community Newsletter of the Jefferson County Education Association

Spring/2010

### We respectfully disagree

## Controversial SB 191 says teachers are the problem

Teachers want to be held accountable for what we do, not what *others* do.

If a lawyer advises his client to tell the truth during a trial, but the client chooses not to and is convicted of perjury, is the lawyer disbarred?

If a doctor advises a patient that he needs to moderate his diet and change his exercise regimen, but the patient declines his advice and has a stroke, does the doctor lose his license to practice medicine?

If as a parent, you have a deep conversation with your teenager about the use of drugs and alcohol, but your child gets caught up in peer pressure and raids your liquor cabinet, do you lose custody of your child?

Most would say, no! Generally speaking, we do not hold people responsible for the actions, choices, decisions made by others. Yet, Sen. Michael Johnston's SB 191 says that a teacher's compensation and career are to be determined, not by their own performance, but by the performance of students on tests.

We understand why SB 191 is popular with the media and politicians. Both are looking for someone to blame, and they are looking for yet another cheap, silver-bullet fix, like the unfunded mandate of "No Child Left Behind."

**We believe SB 191 will be harmful to public schools because the premise is wrong.** Teachers are not the problem! In fact, teachers are the answer! The problems in some public schools lie much deeper than "bad" teachers. Ironically, if SB 191 were passed and implemented, it might make some legislators feel better, but it would not reform

or "fix" public schools.

We believe student performance on tests is, or can be, an important indicator of student success, but it is not necessarily an indicator of effective teaching.

For example, if students' performance is consistently low, that gives cause for the school—and the community it serves—to ask deep and probing questions to find out why.

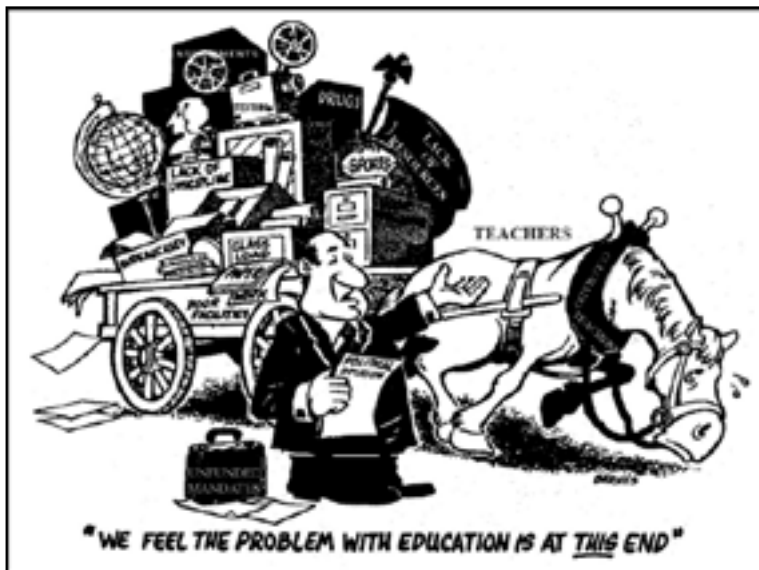
Those questions should be based on the research conducted by the New Teacher Center. It strongly supports the belief that "teaching and learning conditions" such as time, school leadership, teacher empowerment and professional development have a direct and immediate impact on student learning and teacher retention. They are essential to adequate teaching and learning conditions. You simply cannot have consistent, effective teaching if these other necessary factors

are not in place. Yet SB 191 does nothing to address that reality. It ignores this research and puts the blame solely on ineffective teachers.

Our Association is not afraid of accountability or evaluation; we've proven that over and over. But, both must be authentic, reliable, valid, and not mean spirited. In some few instances the lack of student learning may be because the teacher is, in fact, ineffective. If a teacher is unable or unwilling to improve, he/she should be

removed. That's not idle rhetoric; that is our practice.

Reforming schools is a complex problem, which is made worse by chronic under-funding. Fixing the funding problem and returning to a practice of teaching children (not to a test) will do more to repair the damage done to schools than the short sighted approaches of SB 191.



## President's corner

# Doing what's right is not always popular, and that's OK!

by Kerrie Dallman,  
JCEA President

I really look forward to having an opportunity to share my thoughts and those of JCEA with you. Today's title sums up everything I want to say to you today.

As a government teacher at Pomona High School, I often had conversations with my students about standing up for their values and beliefs, even if others—their peers—challenged them. That standing up for what they believed to be right was OK, even when unpopular or going against the crowd. In fact, in many ways taking the unpopular yet values-based position may cause others to rethink their positions.

It is my hope, and that of JCEA, that you will take a second look at SB 191—the “teachers are the problem” bill. We know our position of strong opposition has been characterized as being resistant to reform and big unionism at its worst. I have to admit that hurts, but it is wrong. Absolutely wrong.

Part of the problem with the media and legislators is that both are responding to the dreary situation in the Denver Public Schools. Obviously, we have our point of view on all of that (which might be the inspiration of a future President's Corner), but suffice it to say that it took two parties to create this mess. Our problem is that people read about that situation in Denver and believe that it is the same in Jeffco and throughout Colorado. It is not!

For example, the infamous “dance of the lemons” is an administrative practice in DPS that allows principals to transfer poor performing teachers from a building, thus avoiding the hard work of properly evaluating them. Each year, those teachers have to be placed, and they tend to be placed in highly impacted schools.

Jeffco does not do that! In fact, our contract states that teachers who are performing below standard cannot even be involuntarily transferred. The same standard holds for a teacher seeking a voluntary transfer. He/she must meet or exceed all performance standards. There is no “dance of the lemons” in Jeffco.

Yet SB 191 attempts to make all of Colorado school districts change their practices in order to force DPS to act differently. That just doesn't make sense to me.

Our process works and works well in Jeffco, and we do not want to be forced to change it because of decisions made in DPS.

We have other issues with the bill, as you read on page 1. We know we are swimming up stream on this one, but that does not make us wrong.

Again, as a government teacher, I taught my students that

the majority is not always right. At one time the majority of Americans supported slavery. A majority of Americans believed a woman should not have the right to vote. A majority of Americans believed in prohibition.



As a professional Association we have a duty and obligation to stay true to our values and beliefs. I believe we are doing that with our stand against SB 191.

JCEA has also taken on another unusual position in our criticism of newly elected school board member Laura Boggs. I documented her erratic behavior at the school board meeting on March 25. You can read my complete comments @ [www.jcea-cea.org/Documents/dallmanspeech3.25.10.pdf](http://www.jcea-cea.org/Documents/dallmanspeech3.25.10.pdf)

To summarize, according to witnesses, Boggs entered a high school English class that was studying the use of acronyms. She asked questions, said “OK teach me; you can teach now,” and disrupted the class. She then approached the white board and wrote the word “school” as if it were an acronym. Then, next to the letter “S,” she added the word “stupid.”

I am dumbfounded that a board member would interrupt a class in this manner. To top it off, this was during CSAP testing when teachers across the district are working hard to focus student attention and review needed materials. To say that the 10th graders at Green Mountain were perplexed is to put it mildly.

In an blog by **Westword** reporter J David McSwane, Boggs denied writing “stupid” on the board: “I don't know. Honest to God, I have no idea where that came from.”

Well Mrs. Boggs, there is a classroom full of students, a teacher, a principal, and a community superintendent who can refresh your memory.

We asked the board to hold her accountable, but apparently they have decided not to do so. While we are disappointed by their decision, we believe Jeffco deserves better, and we will continue our efforts to hold Mrs. Boggs accountable.

### **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 our profession and JCEA.

# Budget cuts make negotiations complicated, difficult

Jeffco Public Schools is in the process of cutting \$50 million more from its budget. That makes setting priorities important, and it makes the current round of negotiations with JCEA more difficult.

The problem, as we hope you know, is that TABOR and other governmental constitutional restraints have tied the fiscal hands of the legislature. As a result, public schools and other necessary public services and programs—like higher education, highways, and Medicaid—are being drastically cut. Making matters worse is the "great recession" which led to reduced state revenues and even more legislative cuts, this time specifically targeted on public schools.

How these cuts are managed and what priorities or set, have an impact on negotiations. JCEA has spent a great deal of time studying this situation and have developed five criteria that impact not only the budget cuts but also our contract talks with the school district.

On February 23 the JCEA Board of Directors adopted the following principles:

- Budget cuts must be shared and visible;
  - Step and level movement on the salary schedule — deferred compensation — must be a given;
  - The district should not expand programs at a time when it is slashing the budget; i.e., JPS should maintain the current graduation requirements;
  - The district should spend down the projected (as of June 2010) \$141 million reserves now to keep budget cuts as far away from classroom as possible; and
  - The district should run a mill levy override in fall 2011.
- JCEA President Kerrie Dallman explained that once

again teachers are placed in a position of making unpopular choices. For example, we believe that all cuts must be "shared and visible." That means there must be some equity in this process and that the impact must be observable. For instance, while we believe in neighborhood schools, we know that we have excess building capacity and JPS can save money by closing schools.



Do we like closing schools? No, but when we are faced with choosing between increasing class sizes, and reducing teacher librarians and school counselors, closing schools is a painful, but reasonable alternative. Unfortunately, after months of transparent, collaborative study the school board voted to ignore the recommendations of the study committee and chose to close only one school.

The second part of the "shared and visible" equation is equally important to us. Cuts must be visible to the public! We know this position will be unpopular, and we wish that was not the case. But the truth is that in a democratic society voters cannot fix what they are not aware of. That is why JCEA supports furlough days as one of the solutions, if teacher compensation must be reduced. Furloughs are public, visible manifestations of the budget crisis.

JCEA has made it clear to JPS negotiators: JCEA will not agree to balancing this budget solely on the backs of teachers. We will not ask our members to subsidize schools by freezing salaries or reducing benefits. To do so would be like placing a special tax on teachers so schools could be funded at a level neither Jeffco nor the state have been willing to tax.

Ultimately, this teacher-tax is unsustainable and self-defeating. That is why we believe that the public must see the impact of the budget crisis. Not because we want to inconvenience them, but because it is necessary to bring about awareness and change.

JCEA has repeatedly said that teachers are willing to be part of a budgetary solution, but we are not willing to be *the* solution — to subsidize the quality of this school district by reducing salaries and/or benefits.

Negotiations began on March 10, and the teams are meeting on an established schedule. The teams are not using a traditional bargaining format. Instead, they chose a more collaborative format using a facilitated process called Interest-Based Bargaining. The parties hope to complete talks by the end of the school year, but the issues are many and complex. The current contract expires August 31, 2010.



*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 website: [jcea-cea.org](http://jcea-cea.org).

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## It's time to 'DECIDE'

On March 24, the Great Futures Colorado Campaign (GFCC) unveiled a proposed referred ballot measure called "Decide: Education Cuts or Invest in our Democracy and Economy": **DECIDE**.

The GFCC website states that the legislature has only one primary tool left to balance the state budget: slashing education funding. The resulting cuts are doing lasting damage to our kids and our future. That's why inaction is no longer an option.

Introduced in the Colorado State House as HCR 10-1002 by Jeffco Rep. Debbie Benefield, **DECIDE** would let Colorado voters give legislators the ability to balance the state budget without dismantling our education system.

The bill passed out of the House Ed Committee on April 19, 2010 after four hours of testimony from parents, students, clergy, business people, educators, grandparents, and others.

To place this measure on the ballot as a referred item, the bill must ultimately be passed by a 2/3 majority in each chamber of the legislature.

If you think Colorado should do more investing in our public schools and less cutting, GFCC would like you to endorse **DECIDE**. To add your support, just go to their website @ <http://www.greateducation.org>

## TELL survey public

HB 08-1384 authorized the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) to conduct a biennial survey of teaching and learning conditions. The bill states that "these conditions must be systematically studied and addressed for Colorado to develop a critical mass of teachers who are well prepared to teach and who will remain in the hardest-to-staff schools long enough to make a significant difference for students and their families."

The TELL Colorado initiative (Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning) was created with this mission in mind. The goal was to survey every school-based licensed educator so that valuable information about their perceptions of teaching and learning conditions could be compiled, analyzed and utilized at the school, local, and state levels.

The CDE formed a partnership of educators, policy makers and stakeholders to sponsor the initiative, which included: Governor Bill Ritter, Commissioner of Education Dwight D. Jones, Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB) Colorado Association of School Executives (CASE), Colorado Education Association (CEA), Colorado League of Charter Schools (CLCS), and Colorado Department of Education (CDE).

JCEA invites—and in fact encourages—the community to view the results @ <http://tellcolorado.org/reports>

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



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