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**Education Policy Center Newsletter**

**From The Independence Institute**

**October 23, 2014**

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**Center Tells Real Story behind Jeffco Showdown**

If that headline makes you imagine a duel at the O.K. Corral with old-timey Western music in the background, you’re on the right track. As Jefferson County pressed ahead on sensible reforms like [pay-for-performance](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/09/onward-and-upward-jeffco-presses-ahead-with-new-pay-model/), the district [was already on its way](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/09/jeffco-teacher-sickout-has-me-feeling-sick-and-confused/) to becoming ground zero for Colorado’s next big education battle. When a manufactured narrative about censorship pushed Jeffco schools into chaos, however, the Education Policy Center stepped in to set the record straight.

Ben DeGrow and Ross Izard, the Education Policy Center’s dynamic policy analyst duo, have been [working hard](http://education.i2i.org/2014/10/degrow-questions-union-role-in-jeffco-student-walkouts/) to tell the [real story of politics and union pressure](http://completecolorado.com/pagetwo/2014/09/29/jeffco-union-rewrites-history-fuels-protests/) in Jefferson County. Along the way, they’ve been cited by national news outlets like [Breitbart](http://www.breitbart.com/Big-Government/2014/09/30/Watch-What-Colorado-Students-Are-Saying-About-Why-They-re-Protesting) and [Reuters](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/10/03/us-usa-education-colorado-approval-idUSKCN0HS0AF20141003). The pair also [took to the airwaves](http://education.i2i.org/2014/10/amy-oliver-show-whats-really-behind-jeffco-co) to spread the truth on the Amy Oliver Show, following an on-air discussion with [Jeffco Students First’s Sheila Atwell](http://education.i2i.org/2014/10/amy-oliver-show-breaking-down-jeffco-myths/). On October 1, the Independence Institute’s Todd Shepherd broke the not-so-surprising news that union representatives were [emailing teachers about sick-outs](http://completecolorado.com/pagetwo/2014/10/01/emails-show-union-school-representative-organizing-sick-outs/) long before the protests kicked off in earnest. Meanwhile, school board president Ken Witt [told the rest of the story](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1VTr0MEZLg&list=UUzX8jVtWl2D4PxI3EQf1Wkw) in a one-on-one interview with Jon Caldara on *Devil’s Advocate*.

The Education Policy Center will continue following the situation in Jefferson County very carefully. In the wake of [a decision on curriculum review in the district](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/10/a-show-in-jeffco-last-weeks-meeting-and-what-lies-ahead/), some are talking about recall efforts against the Jefferson County Board of Education’s conservative majority. The fight is far from over. Fortunately, the Education Policy Center brought its intellectual boxing gloves.

**Despite Challenges, School Choice Presses Ahead**

Along with the Friedman Foundation, the Education Policy Center recently advanced the cause of school choice by filing an amicus brief in support of [Douglas County’s Choice Scholarship Program](http://education.i2i.org/douglas-county-vouchers/), which will have its day before the Colorado Supreme Court on December 10 of this year. Ross made his TV debut alongside Ben on a [September edition of *Devil’s Advocate* with Jon Caldara](http://education.i2i.org/2014/09/devils-advocate-tackling-douglas-county-school-choice-lawsuit/) to discuss the arguments made in the amicus brief.

As the Douglas County voucher case works its way through the system, scholarship tax credits, another type of school choice program, have fallen under attack. Ben DeGrow fought back in a [piece published in the *Greeley Tribune*](http://www.greeleytribune.com/news/12964706-113/scholarship-tax-private-choice), arguing that Colorado should not be deterred in its quest for more educational freedom. The Cato Institute’s Jason Bedrick [shed more light on the court challenges against scholarship tax credits](http://education.i2i.org/2014/09/amy-oliver-show-scholarship-tax-credits-win-in-courts/) during one of Ben’s weekly radio chats. Little Eddie, everyone’s favorite five-year-old policy expert, also chimed in on the conversation, highlighting [New Hampshire’s recent ruling](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/08/new-hampshire-ruling-for-kids-tax-credits-makes-me-smile-wider/) in favor of scholarship tax credits and the [ongoing fight](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/09/empire-strikes-back-against-school-choice-in-courts-dont-give-up/) over Florida’s massive—and massively popular—program.

But it’s not all struggle and strife; choice advocates in Colorado also have some good reasons to smile. As less-than-spectacular TCAP scores rolled in from across the state, Liberty Common High School, a charter school in Fort Collins, [smashed the state’s record for ACT scores](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/08/liberty-common-shatters-act-test-record-state-tcaps-less-inspiring/). Shortly thereafter, LCHS principal Bob Schaffer and senior Jesse Zuniga joined Ben on air to [celebrate the school’s success](http://education.i2i.org/2014/08/amy-oliver-show-liberty-common-hs-breaks-state-act-record/). To round out the charter love, Eddie [discussed the amazing success of a charter network in New York](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/08/what-can-colorado-learn-from-nyc-charter-networks-amazing-success/) and what that success can teach Colorado.

**Elections Loom Large in Colorado**

It’s hard to forget while being pelted by all the constant political media, but the Education Policy Center reminds you that this year’s election is a-looming. If the ballot is looking a little intimidating and you’re looking for more information on education-related races and propositions, [this article from Chalkbeat](http://co.chalkbeat.org/2014/10/14/an-education-voters-guide-to-the-2014-election/#.VEZ1cPl4pcQ) may be a good place to start. For State Board of Education races, check out [this related article](http://co.chalkbeat.org/2014/10/09/testing-issue-follows-candidates-on-campaign-trail/#.VEf2M_l4pcQ). Eddie also has a thing or two to say [about the current “silly season”](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/10/silly-season-wont-last-so-find-out-candidate-stances-on-key-k-12-issues/) and the need for citizens to stay engaged on education issues.

One issue that’s been looming in the background is the role of new standardized assessments. State Board of Education chair Paul Lundeen discussed his desire to create more testing flexibility while preserving accountability, in [a radio interview Ben hosted](http://education.i2i.org/2014/08/amy-oliver-show-can-colorado-have-testing-flexibility-and-accountability/). Eddie later broke the challenging news that the Feds and their tight purse strings [aren’t too terribly fond of the idea](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/10/news-from-the-mothership-usdoes-response-to-co-testing-questions/).

**Eddie Stands Up for Fair and Responsible Retirement Benefits**

To round out a busy couple of months, little Eddie set out to partially tackle one of the wildest, wooliest beasts in Colorado education: the Public Employees Retirement Association, or PERA. He [applauded initial efforts](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/10/the-unfair-pera-chute-new-group-pushes-for-pension-reform/) by groups like the [Colorado Pension Project](http://coloradopensionproject.com/) to make the system more financially sound and fairer to new employees. In the same vein, little Eddie also [highlighted](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/10/cola-wars-yesterdays-colorado-supreme-court-ruling-on-pera/) a recent Colorado Supreme Court ruling on PERA’s yearly cost-of-living adjustments.

As you can tell, Eddie has been a busy young man. The above articles represent only a small fraction of his musings since our last newsletter. Be sure not to miss these other highlights:

[Education Reform Times May Be A-Changin’, But Not for All](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/10/education-reform-times-may-be-a-changin-but-not-for-all/)

[Serious Discussion: Common Core Missteps Demand a Smarter Response](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/10/serious-discussion-common-core-missteps-demand-a-smarter-response/)

Power to the Parents: Colorado [Comes](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/10/power-to-the-parents-colorado-comes-in-12th-in-cer-report/) in 12th in CER Report

[The No-Longer-Invisible Achievement Gap: Challenges for Foster Kids in Colorado](http://www.ediswatching.org/2014/09/the-no-longer-invisible-achievement-gap-challenges-for-foster-kids-in-colorado/)

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