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**Education Policy Center Newsletter**

**From The Independence Institute**

**August 20, 2015**

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**Back-to-School Week Brings Drama, Politics in Jeffco**

As kids head back to school in Jefferson County, a recall election is now officially underway to dislodge the three reform-minded majority members of the Jefferson County Board of Education.

While students prepare to hit the books, Complete Colorado education reporter Sherrie Peif has hit the pavement, working hard to give Jeffco residents the facts they need to make good decisions. Her “[Know Before You Go](http://completecolorado.com/pagetwo/2015/07/06/know-before-you-go-complete-colorado-will-explore-reasons-behind-jeffco-recall/)” series on the Jeffco recall has already shed light on the issues of the [superintendent’s salary](http://completecolorado.com/pagetwo/2015/07/08/jeffco-superintendent-states-largest-school-boss-making-less-than-10-of-his-cohorts-15000-more-than-predecessor/), the [supposed teacher exodus](http://completecolorado.com/pagetwo/2015/07/15/jeffco-teacher-exodus-vastly-overstated-exaggerated/) from Jeffco schools, and [claims of bullying](http://completecolorado.com/pagetwo/2015/08/04/investigation-dismisses-claims-of-bullying-against-jeffco-board/) against board members.

Meanwhile, a brave Jeffco mom thanked the board for working to help students in a [new Independence Institute Freedom Minute](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k-rnZapQYnI), and a [*Denver Post* column](http://www.denverpost.com/opinion/ci_28603524/guest-commentary-u-s-history-course-now-more) by education policy analyst Ross Izard examined what changes to the Advanced Placement U.S. History (APUSH) tell us about last year’s “censorship” controversy in Jeffco. Ross also filmed a [Freedom Minute](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tSPZ2zlQ5b0) on the topic, while Sherrie joined host Jon Caldara and Chalkbeat education reporter Nic Garcia [to discuss the APUSH issue on *Devil’s Advocate*](http://education.i2i.org/2015/08/devils-advocate-jeffco-board-vindicated-on-ap-u-s-history-framework/).

More from Ed Is Watching:

[Fact-Challenged (or Math-Challenged?) Jeffco Recallers Send Wrong Messages](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/07/fact-challenged-or-math-challenged-jeffco-recallers-send-wrong-messages/)

[Jeffco Mom Speaks Truth, Thanks School Board](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/07/jeffco-mom-speaks-truth-thanks-school-board/)

[A(New)PUSH for Truth in American History](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/07/anewpush-for-truth-in-american-history/)

[Union Complaints Obscure Need for Fair, Level Playing Field](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/08/union-complaints-obscure-need-for-fair-level-playing-field/)

**A(nother) Fight for the Future of Colorado Education Reform**

Jeffco isn’t the only district where both alarm bells and class bells are ringing this week. Thompson School District has been embroiled in an ugly fight with its local teachers union over the district’s collective bargaining contract. Most recently, the district was dragged into non-binding arbitration to decide, among other things, whether the board has the authority to reject a bad contract. Little Eddie [chimed in on the debate](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/07/a-tale-of-two-standards-who-can-reject-a-proposed-union-contract/), and education reporter Sherrie Peif [covered the arbitration hearing](http://completecolorado.com/pagetwo/2015/07/24/thompson-education-disputes-heard-in-non-binding-arbitration/) in detail.

The arbitration report is back, and its findings are not friendly to the board. Not that this result should be surprising; the arbitrator was selected by the union for his strong pro-labor record in the Colorado Court of Appeals. Education policy analysts Ben DeGrow and Ross Izard discussed the arbitration report, Thompson’s ongoing struggle, and the significance of both Thompson and Jeffco on the August 18 [*Stacy Petty Show* on 1310 KFKA](http://www.1310kfka.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=82&Itemid=177).

The Thompson school board will now need to vote on whether to accept or reject the report, possibly setting up a union-led lawsuit that could ultimately decide whether locally elected school boards across have the authority to reject contracts with which they disagree. The vote will happen the night before school starts.

The Ed Center team will be carefully watching this incredibly important process, and will continue actively supporting school boards’ right to make determinations in the best interests of their districts.

More from Ed is Watching:

[Thompson, Jeffco, and the Battle for the Soul of Colorado Education](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/08/thompson-jeffco-and-the-battle-for-the-soul-of-colorado-education/)

[Jeffco Leads the Way on Sensible Union Contract Changes](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/08/jeffco-leads-the-way-on-sensible-union-contract-changes/)

**New Paper Shows Colorado Student-Based Budgeting on the Rise**

Senior education policy analyst Ben DeGrow’s [new paper on student-based budgeting](http://education.i2i.org/2015/08/colorado-student-based-budgeting-on-the-rise/) takes a detailed look at one the most promising ways to push more decision-making authority down to the school level. Colorado is at the leading edge of the move toward student-based budgeting, and many districts have already undertaken this large but important project. Ben’s paper provides a one-of-a-kind look at what the districts have done, the challenges they’ve faced, and how other districts could follow suit.

**Institute Celebrates Third Annual Employee Freedom Week**

August 16-22 is the third annual [National Employee Freedom Week](http://employeefreedomweek.com/), an event designed “to inform union employees about the freedoms they have to opt out of union membership and let them make the decision that’s best for them.” As one of 99 participating groups, the Independence Institute sent out a [media release](http://education.i2i.org/2015/08/many-workers-dont-know-union-member-rights/), and our own Ben DeGrow wrote [a brand-new op-ed](http://www.greeleytribune.com/news/17771334-113/degrow-colorado-teachers-should-know-their-rights-to) for the *Greeley Tribune*. For the rest of the week you can join the conversation on Twitter under the hash tag [#EmployeeFreedom](https://twitter.com/search?q=%23EmployeeFreedom&src=tyah).

More from Ed Is Watching:

[SCOTUS to Hear Friedrichs Case: Big Moment for Educational Freedom?](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/07/scotus-to-hear-friedrichs-case-big-moment-for-educational-freedom/)

**Educational Choice Marches On**

In addition to everything else, the Education Policy Center team continues pushing forward for more choice in Colorado education. Ben and Ross have been hard at work on some exciting policy prospects, and director Pam Benigno recently carried the positive message of educational choice to school leaders and families in Longmont.

Meanwhile, Little Eddie has been busy following important research and educational choice stories like these:

[New York Charter Success: You Know How to Spell It](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/08/new-york-charter-success-you-know-how-to-spell-it/)

[Let Me Repeat Myself Once Again: Colorado Needs Course Choice](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/08/let-me-repeat-myself-once-again-colorado-needs-course-choice/)

[New Study Highlights Success in New Orleans](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/08/new-study-highlights-success-in-new-orleans/)

[A Worthy Celebration of Instant Gratification: NC Court Upholds Choice](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/07/a-worthy-celebration-of-instant-gratification-nc-court-upholds-choice/)

Eddie has been warming up for the return of school with another batch of great posts on a variety of other K-12 issues here in Colorado and abroad:

[On Pay for Performance and Using the Right Yardstick](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/07/on-pay-for-performance-and-using-the-right-yardstick/)

[Catching Up on Testing, Transparency, Accountability, Innovation… and More](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/07/catching-up-on-testing-transparency-accountability-innovation-and-more/)

[NEA’s Push for “Ethnic Studies” Raises Questions](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/07/neas-push-for-ethnic-studies-raises-questions/)

[Senate Passes Bipartisan NCLB Rewrite](http://www.ediswatching.org/2015/07/senate-passes-bipartisan-nclb-rewrite/)

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