

# From Ruin to REVOLUTION COLORADO'S EDUCATION STORY

By Angela Engel

In 1997, I was in the first cohort of fourth grade teachers to administer the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) the state-wide standardized test. It was after I administered the test and especially after my students test results were returned that I began questioning CSAP: how was it developed, who was grading the answers, and what were the motives behind using a single measurement tool to make important judgments about schools, students, and teachers.

- The testing contract with McGraw Hill, CSAP and TCAP publisher was a closed contract and completely concealed from the public. Meaning McGraw Hill would be holding public schools accountable while having no transparency or public accountability.
- Since the test was first administered in 1997, CSAP or TCAP has never been independently audited or evaluated for validity or reliability. There is absolutely no evidence to support these tests as valid.
- The results of CSAP/TCAP dramatically conflict with the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), a national test that has been administered since 1969 to a statistically significant sample of students in every state. NAEP is administered by the National Council for Education Statistics (NCES) and is not-for-profit.
- Grading of CSAP/TCAP is contracted through temporary service agencies. Graders receive an evening of training. No education experience or certification is required of these graders and they grade hundreds of student responses over the course of a shift. Their inexperienced evaluation of a single sampling of a student's work under high pressure conditions, carries more weight than a body of evidence, collected over the course of a school year, and evaluated by a professional educator.
- McGraw Hill sold the McGraw-Hill Education business to investment funds affiliated with Apollo Global Management, LLC in early 2013 for \$2.5 billion. Months later the department of Justice filed fraud charges against McGraw Hill Financial.
- Testing was promised to close the achievement gap and better prepare students for college and careers. Since high-stakes testing began, the outcomes have been disastrous as reflected in college remediation rates, increases of at-risk students, and the growing opportunity divide between wealthy and low-income students.

Despite these negative outcomes, nearly every year the Colorado Legislature and the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) have expanded testing, reordered the shaded bubbles and re-written the standards. Since high-stakes testing "reform" began Colorado has adopted three versions of standards (HB98-1267, SB09-212, and Common Core); three different states tests (CSAP, TCAP, and beginning next year PARCC) and the stakes associated with these tests are constantly being increased.

## **Legislation Expanding Testing and Raising the Stakes**

### **2012 Colorado Read Act House Bill 1238**

Passed in 2012 this bill required multiple standardized assessments and suggested retention for third graders who do not score proficient. This mandate was unfunded. At the time this bill was passed 8,000 eligible children were denied access to preschool due to limited funding.

### **2012 Multi-State Student Assessments SB12-172**

Replaced TCAP with the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) scheduled for 2014-2015. PARCC is aligned to the Common Core. Senator Johnston claimed that a national assessment would allow Colorado to compare across states. States have been compared by the [National Assessment for Education Progress \(NAEP\)](#) since 1969.

### **2010 Teacher Effectiveness Senate Bill 191**

Sponsored by Senator Johnston (D) this bill narrowed the criteria for teacher success. Despite the fact that students socio-economic status is the highest correlation to test scores, one-half of the teacher's evaluation will be based on a standardized test. This was an unfunded mandate.

### **2010 State Board of Education Adopts the Common Core**

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics. Common Core forces American education in a uniform ideological direction controlled by private interests.

### **2009 CAP4K Senate Bill 212**

Estimated at over \$400 million for two out of three phases, this bill expanded standards and testing to preschool through second grade. The Colorado Department of Education spent more than a year re-writing the standards and tests for P-20 alignment; meaning every grade beginning in preschool is geared towards "college readiness and college placement." These revised standards were replaced by the Common Core Curriculum the following year again wasting millions of dollars. The mandate is unfunded.

### **1999 SB 99-186**

School Accountability Reports – were developed as part of statewide legislation to rate schools based on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) scores. SAR's were later eliminated in SB09-163. While the bill removed the labels and expanded the data, school performance frameworks are still tied to test scores.

2009 Senate Bill SB09-163

### **The Power Brokers on Both Sides of the Aisle**

In 1998 when Governor Owens introduced his Education Reform Plan, SB186, it was heavily promoted by the Colorado Business Education Coalition. Members of the business coalition included [Ed McVaney](#), Founder of ACE, [Steve Schuck](#), and [John Saeman](#) all substantial contributors to the 1998 failed Amendment 17 and leaders in promoting vouchers.

[Cinamon Watson](#) at the time was the Colorado spokesperson for the Texas Governor and Presidential Candidate, George W. Bush. Today she is the Community Relations officer for Douglas County School District (DCSD). The DCSC school board, without the vote of the public, passed a voucher policy that would have directed public dollars to private schools without public oversight.

[Stand for Children](#) established a Colorado Chapter in 2010 in order to push legislation that tied teacher evaluations to test scores. Their investors include The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Walton Family Foundation, and New Profit Inc. - a "national venture philanthropy fund."

[Democrats for Education Reform, DFER](#) promotes charter schools, alternative certification training, replacing locally elected school boards with mayoral control, and performance pay. **Senator Michael Bennet**, DFER "Reformer of the Month" and recipient of nearly \$500,000 in DFER campaign contributions, sponsored the GREAT Act, which called for taxpayer dollars to fund private revenue generating alternative certification models. In a "Statement of Principles to fix the Elementary Secondary Education Act," the Senator stated, "We also must support programs like Teach for America..." Colorado **Senator Mike Johnston**, also DFER "Reformer," sponsored Colorado's Performance Pay legislation (SB-191) and is responsible for PARCC, the new state standardized test tied to Common Core.

### **Following the Money:**

**Publishers (Pearson and McGraw-Hill)** - Both corporations actively lobby for Federal and State policies that institute high-stakes standardized tests ensuring that what gets measured gets taught. Products (tests, study guides, text books and software) are "aligned" creating a monopoly for test publishers. Pearson has already begun to reap billions from the adoption of Common Core. [Pearson](#) sales were up [5 percent](#) in 2012 to **\$9.21 billion**, Operating profit in 2012 was \$1.4 billion.

### **McGraw Hill Profits**

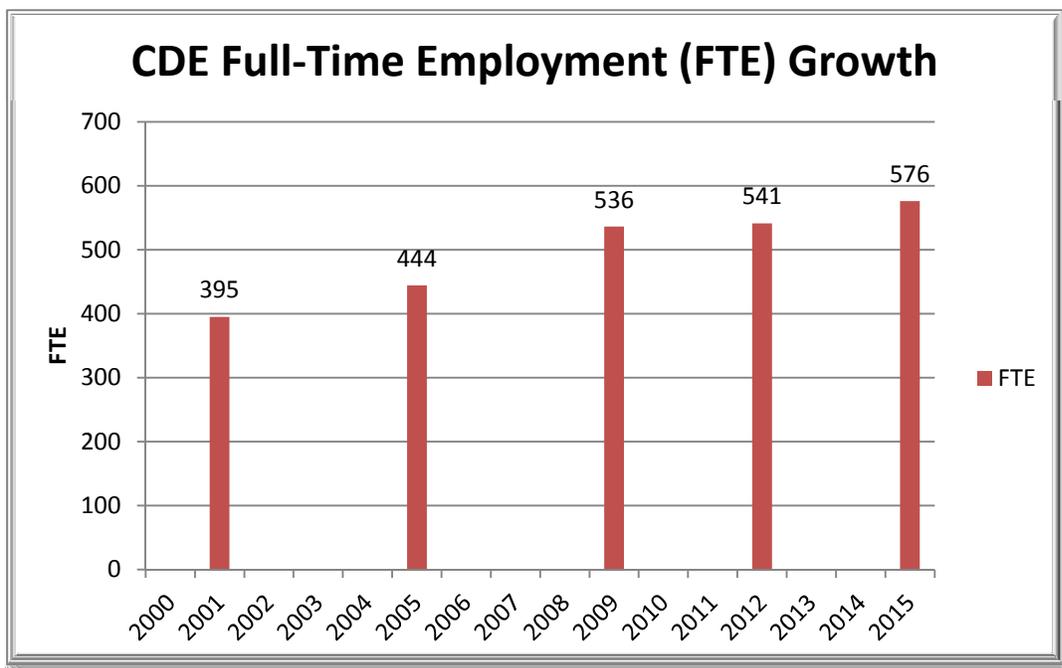
McGraw-Hill is the publisher of CSAP/TCAP, for the past sixteen years. They also held the test contract in twenty-six other states. McGraw-Hill Education was sold to Apollo Global Management, LLC in early 2013 for **\$2.5 billion**. Months later The United States Government filed a **\$5 billion dollar fraud lawsuit** against McGraw Hill Financial. The corporation's total revenues in 2012 were nearly **\$4.5 billion**.

**Consultants** - "In Colorado — one of the few states willing to tally such spending — consultants are taking home **35 percent**, or **\$9.4 million**, of the \$26.6 million that came to the state from the U.S. Department of Education in the past two years."

**Private charters and online schools** – "New tax credits" and **Education Management Organizations, EMO's**, have provided ample opportunity to profit from taxpayer dollars and financially benefit from the dollars intended to serve the educational needs of children. These **Education Management Organizations** co-opt community schools or aggressively market for online students. **COVA, Colorado Virtual Academy** managed by the Virginia based company K12 projected growth in excess of 100 million dollars in 2011. Colorado policy makers have created a double standard favoring charter schools. Ed News Colorado reported that nearly half of online student enrollments leave before finishing the year. The majority of programs are low performing and operating outside of the accountability mandates required of public schools. For example, online and charter schools can hire non-licensed and non-certified instructors.

**Alternative Licensing Programs** - have become big business. **Teach for America (TFA)**, reported earnings in 2009 of more than \$269 million dollars. Their tax documents list their net assets at 261.5 million dollars. This past July the Walton Family Foundation committed 49.5 million dollars to double the number of Teach for America candidates throughout the United States; \$3.1 million was designated for Colorado. TFA prepares college graduates in a five-week summer training program. While their results are mediocre at best, TFA candidates are attractive to budget strapped districts. The majority of candidates do not last and the two year revolving door of cheap labor keeps costs associated with salaries and benefits low. The two year contracts and building transfers allow TFA candidates to maneuver around teacher effectiveness mandates and the accountability required of real teachers.

**Colorado Department of Education** – has nearly **doubled** their budget since high-stakes testing was adopted in Colorado. While they have experienced enormous expansion, districts throughout the state have suffered dramatic cuts. As funds are redirected to private companies and bigger bureaucracies, schools are cutting teachers, services, programs, and course offerings.



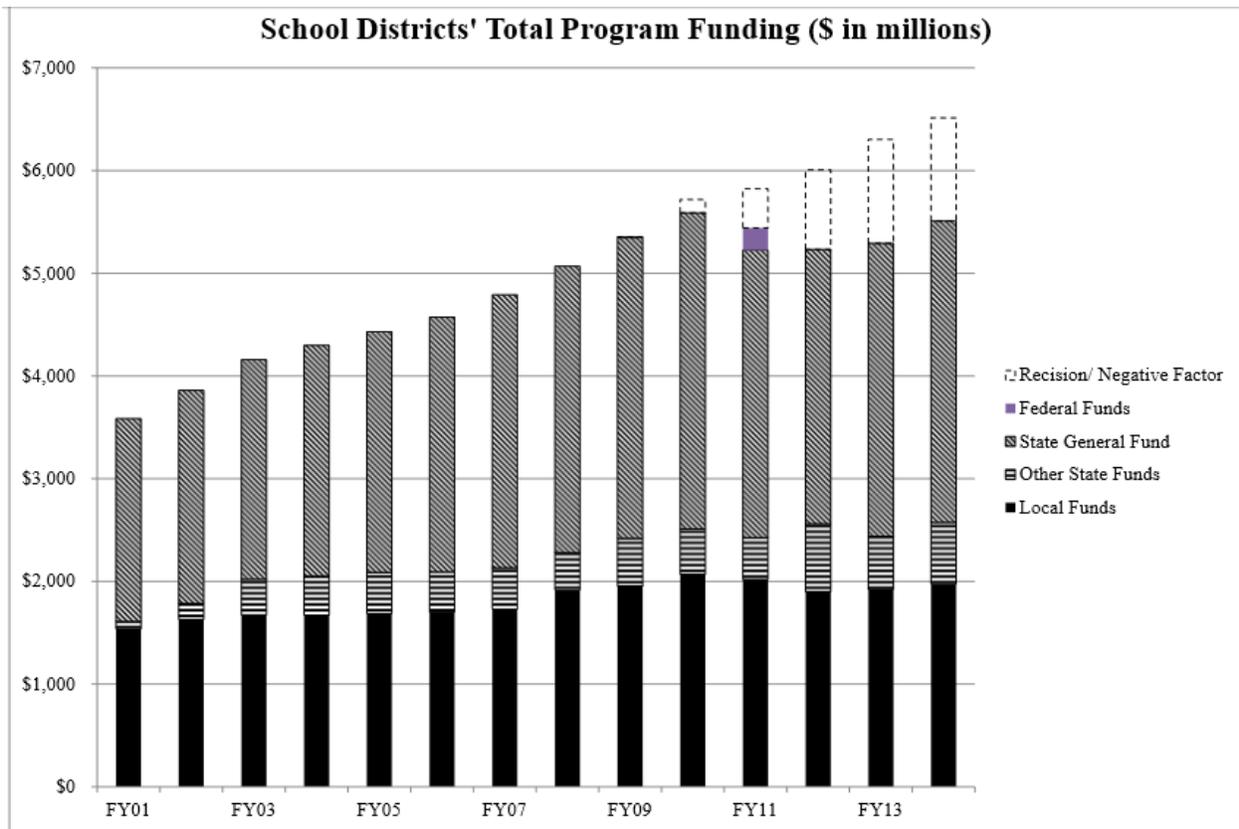
## CDE budget

Since the beginning of high-stakes testing in Colorado the Colorado Department of Education has nearly doubled their budget (an increase of 95%). The number of full-time employees has grown by more than 45%.

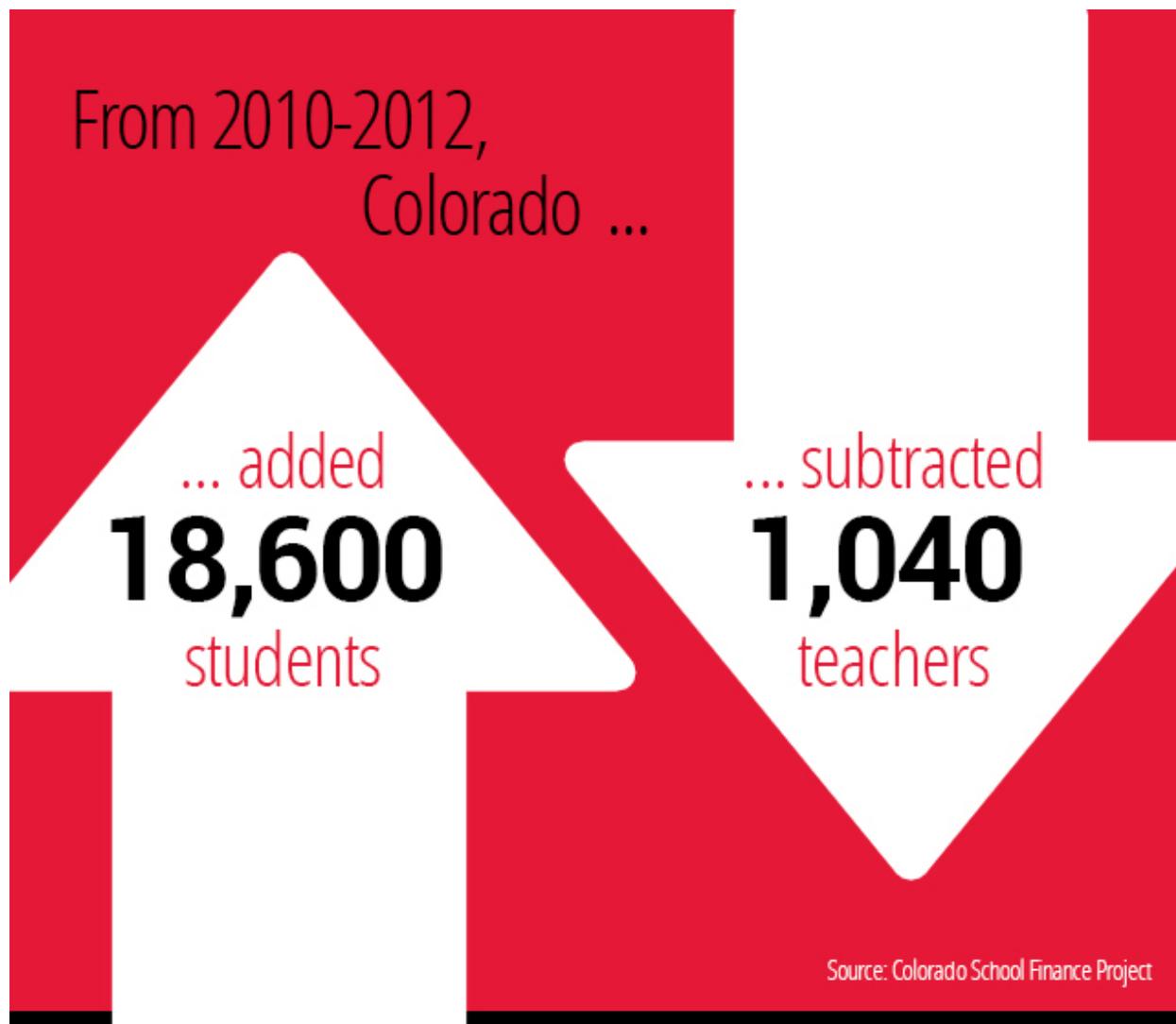
|                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| \$2,518,388,992 | \$3,727,484,358 | \$4,725,438,549 | \$4,336,043,821 | \$4,908,003,753 |
| 2000 -2001      | 2005-2006       | 2008-2009       | 2011-2012       | 2014-2015       |

### More Testing, Less Teaching

More money is spent on micromanaging the system than supporting the students.



## Measuring the Failures of High-stakes Testing and Standardization



<http://www.greateducation.org/statistics-faqs/statistics/>

**Risking Students, Raising Test Scores:**

In 2000 163,052 children were identified as at-risk

In 2013 305,261 children are at-risk

There was a 55% increase in the proportion of at-risk students in the student population.

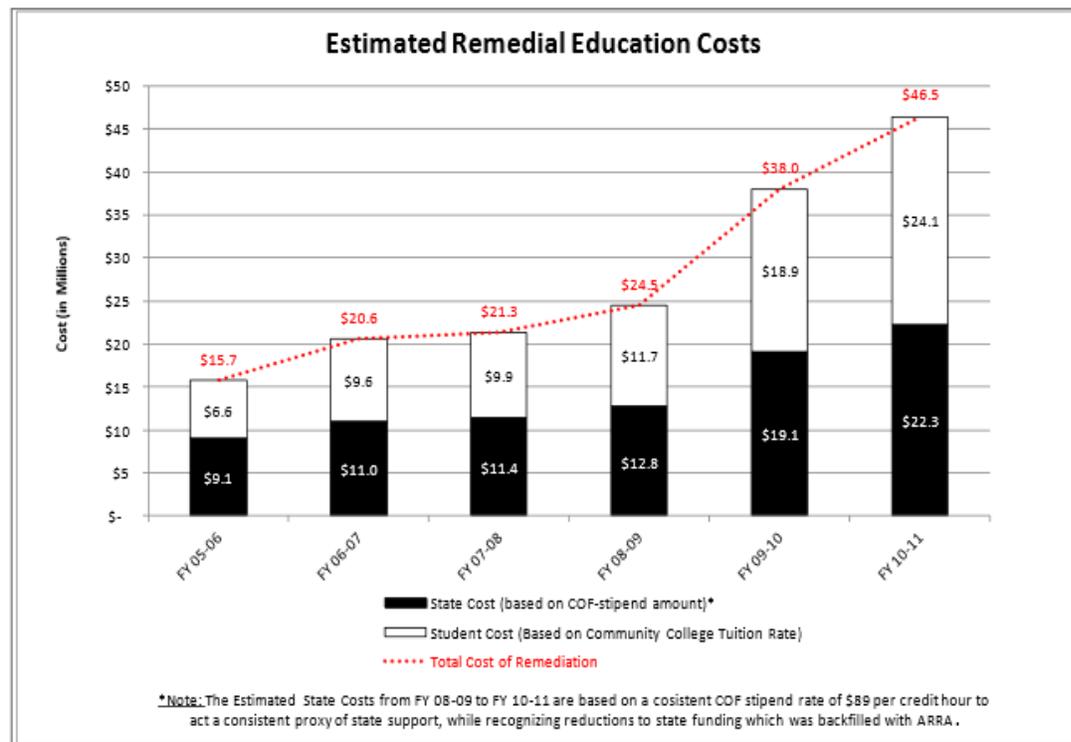
**Shading bubbles—Poor Preparation for College, Career, and Citizenry**

The classes of 2011 were third graders when NCLB was implemented .They are the first graduating class to have been completely educated under a model of standardization and high-stakes testing. These students are less prepared for college than any generation before them:

In 2000, 28 % of entering freshmen enrolled in at least one remedial reading, writing, or mathematics course.

In 2011 the percentage of freshmen placed into a college remediation course increased by 11 % from the previous year. According to the Colorado Commission on Higher Education, Nearly 60 percent of all adult students require remediation in at least one subject.

**Figure 9.**  
**Cost of Remediation (State, Student, and Total)**



### More children living in poverty

While measuring growth according to CSAP scores remains widely stagnant, other measures indicate Colorado's children are in crisis:

According to the [Kids Count Report](#), Colorado has the fastest growing poverty rate in the nation. Since 2000 the number of Colorado children in poverty has more than doubled and the number of children living in extreme poverty has increased by 150%. **Since No Child Left Behind was first enacted, twice as many children as before are now living in poverty.**

In the original Elementary Secondary Education Act (1969), Federal funds were directed towards resources and expanding services for at-risk students. The passage of No Child Left Behind, (NCLB) demanded equality in student outcomes without any commitment to equality in opportunity. Since high-stakes testing was institutionalized in Colorado and throughout the nation, we have learned exactly what we knew before: students with opportunity and resources, score better on standardized tests. Counting kids is not the same as helping kids. The increases in at-risk students and the number of children living in poverty are a direct result of misguided policies that promote sanctions and punishments and bad funding decisions that direct scarce dollars to private interests who monitor and measure. Standardization and high-stakes testing reforms have cost billions to taxpayers but the real costs in terms of loss of opportunity for children and teachers have gone uncounted.

### Challenging Corporate Reform

From the beginning there has been opposition to standardization, high-stakes testing and the privatization and profitization of our public schools. In 2000 as the legislature was passing SB186, The **Citizens for Quality Public Education**, comprised mostly of educators and led by [Marie Wirsing](#),

published Senate Bill 186 and The Truth About Colorado Educational “REFORM”. Below are excerpts from that publication:

What should be of concern here is the integrity of knowledge, instead of its commercialization. What should be of greater concern is the totalitarian nature of all social engineering schemes, including those that regard children as “human capital” for the workforce and learning in terms of “profit and loss” statements.

Senate Bill 186 is the latest piece of a long-range attack on publicly-controlled, equitable and adequate public education in Colorado. It is part of a national and coordinated political effort, [starting with the “1983 Nations at Risk Report”] to privatize, atop the public tax base, the management of public education throughout the U.S.

There is absolutely no basis to the claim that state-high stakes testing, state commandeering of public education, state engineering of charter-based schools, and state promotion of on-line instruction will be in the best interest of our children; absolutely nothing--except political ambitions and insatiable greed.

The fundamental challenge posed by the “hidden agenda” is that collectively, all these outside forces are systematically moving American education in a uniform ideological direction controlled, increasingly, by private interests. In this process classroom teachers are being reshaped as passive transmitters in a predetermined “delivery system of educating. And American Youth are being trained within increasingly narrow, if commercially profitable, intellectual confines.

The condition of American education today is in stark contrast with the vision held by Thomas Jefferson and successive generations of public school advocates. It is also in contrast with U.S. Supreme Court decisions, eloquently articulated just a generation ago, that linked First Amendment guarantees with academic freedom. The following memorable passage is from the 1967 Keyishian decision, which reaffirmed academic freedom at the level of higher education:

The classroom is peculiarly the “marketplace of ideas.” The Nation’s future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure to that robust exchange of ideas which dis-covers truth “out of a multitude of tongues, [rather] than through any kind of authoritative selection.”

In 1972, the U.S. Supreme Court let stand a federal appeals court ruling in the New York case of *James v. Board of Education*. Considering the Constitutional rights of classroom teachers in the public schools, the U.S. Court of Appeals had noted:

If anything is clear from the tortuous development of the first amendment right, freedom of expression demands breathing room. To preserve the “marketplace of ideas” so essential to our system of a democracy, we must be willing to assume the risk of argument and lawful disagreement.

In the 1977 case of *Aboud v. Detroit Board of Education*, the U.S. Supreme Court, again speaking to the Constitutional rights of American classroom teachers, declared that

At the heart of the First Amendment is the notion that an individual should be free to believe as he will, and that in a free society one’s belief should be shaped by his mind and conscience rather than coerced by the state.

...a government may not require an individual to relinquish rights guaranteed him by the First Amendment as a condition for public employment.

### **A Call To Action**

Business interests have played an influential role in standardization and testing reforms. While their economic interests have been well served, public schools, students learning and the teaching profession have been corrupted. Playgrounds and classrooms have been transformed into the standardized testing “For-profit-pipeline” without any consideration for children; who they are or how they learn. Academic freedom for both teachers and students has been forfeited and the essential tools for democracy surrendered. Coloring bubbles is no measure of leadership or civic engagement. Our disadvantaged children are even more at risk—labeled and catalogued but with fewer opportunities and less resources since the Civil Rights movement. Despite the promise of “college readiness,” students are less prepared for the rigors of critical thinking and self-directed learning. There is no career in which “test taking” is a required skill.

The achievement gap has widened, not narrowed. Not only has poverty persisted but it has been perpetuated by an accountability system fraught with discrimination and injustice.

We have wasted billions on a model of education (testing/standardization) that had no scientific basis or supporting evidence. In every instance, these reforms have failed. Yet even today, the claims of a “failing pipeline” persist. [Colorado Succeeds](#) issued a report in 2012 demanding MORE standards and testing.

Below are excerpts from the report:

“Any increase in funding must be integrally linked to specific targeted outcomes, and concrete signs of improvement on specific timelines.”

“The Pipeline Performance Indicators show over the last five year, Colorado’s educational performance has not gotten much better....Continuing to do the same thing will only exacerbate the ongoing shortage of educated workers needed to fill our increasingly high-skills jobs.”

“In the interest of all Coloradoans, college and career readiness must be the standard by which our education system is measured. Assessing and monitoring progress is the first step toward reaching this goal.”

Instead of listening to the bogus claims and false promises of political lobbyists and corporate interests, the public needs to restore trust in professional educators, students, and parents. The relationship between a student and their education is personal and sacred; it needs to be protected. REAL Accountability provides for the institutions that promulgate a critically thinking and engaged democratic citizenry. Our economic priorities and public tax dollars must serve the public good, not just the wealthy, but particularly those children who begin life at a disadvantage. The purpose of public education has been hijacked by those who wish to gain profit or privatize our public schools. From instruction to assessment, “Reformers” have over-imposed on what is an individual right to learn and express ones learning in multiple ways reflective of a student’s unique experiences, interests, and talents. The time has come for Colorado and the nation, to reclaim our schools, equal opportunity for all, and the academic freedoms that once characterized these publicly funded and locally monitored institutions.

Learn more at [AngelaEngel.com](http://AngelaEngel.com)

### **Appendix**

**JBC Staff Budget Briefing: FY 2014-15**  
**Staff Working Document – Does Not Represent Committee Decision**

For example, the FY 2013-14 appropriation includes the following increases building on previous appropriations associated with legislative reforms:

- \$15.2 million cash funds from the Early Literacy Fund (funds originally from either Tobacco Settlement moneys or the State Education Fund) for implementation of H.B. 12-1238.
- \$4.2 million cash funds (from the State Education Fund) for additional development and administration expenses associated with new assessments adopted pursuant to S.B. 08-212.
- \$0.6 million General Fund and 3.2 FTE (annualizing to \$1.0 million General Fund and 3.5 FTE in FY 2014-15) to support accountability and improvement planning activities pursuant to S.B. 09-163.

For FY 2014-15, the Governor’s request includes a total increase of \$6.9 million in additional funding directly associated with the implementation of recent bills, including:

- \$3.8 million total funds (including \$75,600 General Fund and \$3.8 million cash funds from the State Education Fund) to address additional costs associated with administering the new statewide assessments adopted pursuant to S.B. 08-212.
- \$2.8 million cash funds from the State Education Fund and 1.0 FTE to provide ongoing funding for the early literacy assessment tool (ELAT) originally approved through H.B. 12-1345 (FY 2012-13 School Finance Bill) and associated with H.B. 12-1238 (READ Act).
- \$234,606 General Fund and 1.8 FTE (annualizing to \$245,290 and 2.0 FTE) to provide additional technical support to school districts regarding recent college and career readiness education reforms.

|  | FY 2011-12<br>Actual | FY 2012-13<br>Actual | FY 2013-14<br>Appropriation | FY 2014-15<br>Request | Request vs.<br>Appropriation |
|--|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>SUBTOTAL - (B) Information Technology</b> | 3,191,517            | 3,743,657            | 3,741,413                   | 7,006,662             | 87.3%                        |
| <i>FTE</i>                                   | 18.8                 | 16.7                 | 23.0                        | 27.6                  | 20.0%                        |
| General Fund                                 | 2,567,467            | 2,994,776            | 2,979,845                   | 6,244,754             | 109.6%                       |
| Cash Funds                                   | 0                    | 89,496               | 89,496                      | 89,496                | 0.0%                         |
| Reappropriated Funds                         | 624,050              | 659,385              | 672,072                     | 672,412               | 0.1%                         |
| Federal Funds                                | 0                    | 0                    | 0                           | 0                     | 0.0%                         |

**(C) Assessments and Data Analyses**

|  |            |            |            |              |
|--|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| Colorado Student Assessment Program  | 21,947,677 | 26,587,994 | 34,044,390 | 35,940,656 * |
| <i>FTE</i>   | 14.5       | 16.5       | 11.8       | 11.8         |
| General Fund   | 0          | 0          | 0          | 75,600       |
| Cash Funds   | 15,879,370 | 22,243,106 | 26,448,378 | 28,232,143   |
| Reappropriated Funds   | 0          | 0          | 0          | 0            |
| Federal Funds  | 6,068,307  | 4,344,888  | 7,596,012  | 7,632,913    |
| Development of New Science and Social Studies<br>Assessments and Updating Existing Assessments | 0          | 0          | 0          | 0            |
| Cash Funds   | 0          | 0          | 0          | 0            |
| Federal Grant for State Assessments and Related<br>Activities                                  | 2,247,224  | 2,247,224  | 2,247,224  | 2,247,224    |
| <i>FTE</i>   | 5.7        | 5.7        | 5.7        | 5.7          |
| Federal Funds  | 2,247,224  | 2,247,224  | 2,247,224  | 2,247,224    |
| Longitudinal Analyses of Student Assessment Results  | 7,693,157  | 8,018,084  | 5,186,311  | 291,820      |
| <i>FTE</i>   | 2.8        | 2.3        | 3.0        | 3.0          |
| General Fund   | 276,057    | 259,884    | 286,311    | 291,820      |
| Federal Funds  | 7,417,100  | 7,758,200  | 4,900,000  | 0            |

|  | FY 2011-12<br>Actual | FY 2012-13<br>Actual | FY 2013-14<br>Appropriation | FY 2014-15<br>Request | Request vs.<br>Appropriation |
|--|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| Early Literacy Assessment Tool                 | 0                    | 0                    | 0                           | 0                     |                              |
| Cash Funds                                     | 0                    | 0                    | 0                           | 0                     |                              |
| Basic Skills Placement or Assessment Tests     | 0                    | 35,943               | 320,917                     | 320,917               |                              |
| Cash Funds                                     | 0                    | 35,943               | 320,917                     | 320,917               |                              |
| Preschool to Postsecondary Education Alignment | 456,289              | 510,755              | 567,685                     | 579,323               |                              |
| FTE  | 3.4                  | 3.6                  | 3.5                         | 3.5                   |                              |
| Cash Funds                                     | 456,289              | 510,755              | 567,685                     | 579,323               |                              |
| Educator Effectiveness Unit Administration     | 0                    | 424,390              | 544,483                     | 548,108               |                              |
| FTE  | 0.0                  | 2.9                  | 4.0                         | 4.0                   |                              |
| General Fund                                   | 0                    | 0                    | 424,390                     | 432,718               |                              |
| Cash Funds                                     | 0                    | 424,390              | 120,093                     | 115,390               |                              |
| Transfer to Great Teachers and Leaders Fund    | 0                    | 0                    | 0                           | 0                     |                              |
| FTE  | 0.0                  | 0.0                  | 0.0                         | 0.0                   |                              |
| General Fund                                   | 0                    | 0                    | 0                           | 0                     |                              |
| Educator Effectiveness Implementation          | 0                    | 2,512,153            | 1,905,312                   | 1,740,981             |                              |
| FTE  | 0.0                  | 2.7                  | 14.5                        | 14.5                  |                              |
| Cash Funds                                     | 0                    | 680,002              | 200,000                     | 0                     |                              |
| Federal Funds                                  | 0                    | 1,832,151            | 1,705,312                   | 1,740,981             |                              |
| Accountability and Improvement Planning        | 0                    | 0                    | 1,284,733                   | 1,678,364             |                              |
| FTE  | 0.0                  | 0.0                  | 11.2                        | 11.4                  |                              |
| General Fund                                   | 0                    | 0                    | 734,401                     | 1,128,032             |                              |
| Federal Funds                                  | 0                    | 0                    | 550,332                     | 550,332               |                              |

Source: Colorado General Assembly, Joint Budget Committee: FY 2014-2014 Staff Budget Briefing  
Department of Education