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## Jeffco Board Should Reject Proposed Uniform Improvement Plan

Posted by tc415 on March 31, 2015 in Arvada, Arvada Education, Arvada Front, Aurora Opinion, Conifer, Conifer Education, Conifer Opinion, Edgewater, Edgewater Education, Edgewater Opinion, Evergreen, Evergreen Education, Evergreen Opinion, Featured, Golden, Golden Education, Golden Front, Golden Opinion, Jefferson County, Jefferson County Education, Jefferson County Front, Jefferson County Opinion, Lakewood, Lakewood Education, Lakewood Front, Lakewood Opinion, Morrison, Morrison Education, Morrison Opinion, South Jeffco, South Jeffco Education, South Jeffco Front, South Jeffco Opinion, Wheat Ridge, Wheat Ridge Education, Wheat Ridge Opinion | Views | Leave a response

Back in August, I posted a column on ["Why Jeffco Schools Must Separate the Strategic Planning and Advisory Council \(SPAC\) from the District Accountability Committee \(DAC\)."](#) In the months since then, my worst fears have been confirmed. As a result, I have sent the following letter to the members of the Board of Education in advance of their meeting on April 2nd:

*Dear Ms. Dahlkemper, Ms. Fellman, Mr. Newkirk, Ms. Williams, and Mr. Witt,*

As you know, I am a member of the District Accountability Committee, and the Chair of the School Accountability Committee at Wheat Ridge High School. I am writing to you regarding the Draft District UIP, which is included in the Consent Agenda for the April 2, 2015 Board of Education Meeting.

I do not think you should approve this agenda item, nor send this UIP to the Colorado Department of Education, as I do not

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believe that the District Accountability Committee has complied with state law, and I am concerned that there are major flaws in this UIP as it stands.

On January 17th, I wrote the following email to all members of the SPAC/DAC, which I copied to each of you:

**Quote**

*"Dear Fellow Members of the Jeffco SPAC/DAC:*

*I am writing to you regarding the first item on the agenda for our meeting that is scheduled to take place on January 20th. I see that our co-chairs have allocated 30 minutes for "a review of the root causes and major improvement strategies...as part of the 2015-2016 Jeffco UIP", which is to be submitted to the Board for approval before being sent to CDE.*

*I note that, under Colorado law (CRS 22-11-302(1)(b)), one of the duties of a District Accountability Committee is to: "To advise its local school board concerning preparation of, and annually submit to the local school board recommendations regarding the contents of, a district performance, improvement, priority improvement, or turnaround plan, whichever is required based on the school district's accreditation category. In advising and preparing the recommendations, the school district accountability committee shall make reasonable efforts to consult in a substantive manner with the school accountability committees of the school district and shall compile and submit to the local school board the school performance, improvement, priority improvement, and turnaround plans submitted by the school accountability committees pursuant to sections 22-11-403 to 22-11-406."*

*I am also sure that you are aware of Jeffco's most recent student achievement results, which have not significantly improved in ten years, despite the billions of taxpayer dollars the district has spent.*

*To refresh your memories, Colorado is one of eighteen states that use the national ACT test to measure the college and career readiness of every 11th grade student. This serves two purposes: It expands access to college for students who might otherwise not take the test, and it provides policymakers, parents, and taxpayers with a measure of the cumulative achievement results produced by the billions of dollars we spend each year on our public schools. The results on the ACT are not only very important for college admissions, but are also highly correlated with scores on the ASVAB test that students who want to serve in the military must take, as well as pre-employment screening tests (e.g., Work*

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Interview with Gail C. Howell, owner

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Interview with Amanda Dauzat, owner

[So Much 'Mores Campfire Desserts , Jefferson County](#)

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Interview with Janice Holmes, owner

[Pho Real, Littleton](#)

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Interview with Johnna Holcomb, manager/bookkeeper

[Jus Grill Restaurant, Aurora](#)

March 11, 2015  
Interview with Carlos Morales, co-owner

[Alpine Dental Center, Thornton](#)

March 11, 2015  
Interview with Alan Gurman, doctor of dental surgery

[A Culture of Speed, Evergreen](#)

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Keys) that are taken by many students going straight to work after high school.

In 2014, only 46% of Jeffco students met the “college and career ready” (C&C) standard in reading, only 47% in math, and only 45% in science. Since 2008, over 24,000 Jeffco 11th graders have failed to meet the C&C standard in reading, over 25,000 have failed to meet the math standard, and over 30,000 have failed to meet the science standard.

Among Jeffco students eligible for free and reduced lunch (FRL), just 26% met the C&C reading standard, 23% met the math standard, and 23% met the science standard. Among Jeffco’s Hispanic students, just 27% met the C&C standard in reading, 25% met it in math, and 25% met it in science.

Jeffco’s achievement problems cannot all be blamed on poverty. In 2014, only 52% of non-FRL eligible students met the C&C reading standard, 55% met the math standard, 52% met the science standard.

Even in our most affluent articulation areas (Chatfield, Columbine, Conifer, Dakota Ridge, Evergreen, and Ralston Valley), only 58% of non-FRL eligible 11th graders met the C&C reading standard in 2014, 64% met the math standard, and 59% met the science standard.

Equally frustrating results appear in Jeffco’s CSAP and TCAP scores for the past ten years. Clearly, Jeffco is a very long way from achieving our twin goals of every student meeting Colorado grade level standards every year, and then graduating college and career ready.

Each year, every school and district in our state is required to submit a Uniform Improvement Plan (“UIP”) to the Colorado Department of Education that includes a self-assessment of the major root causes that are responsible for their achievement shortfalls. These UIPs must be approved by both the Superintendent and the Board of Education. Here are the root causes that Dr. Stevenson, with the approval of previous Boards of Education, submitted to the CDE over the past four years:

**2010/11 UIP**

- “Schools lack district-wide formative and benchmark progress monitoring tools in writing to calibrate the fidelity of implementation of the district writing curriculum.”
- “Students needing to catch-up do not receive quality and/or adequate time for universal/core instruction in addition to effective, aligned targeted/intensive interventions.”
- “Many secondary schools do not have a systematic, tiered

owners

[Bristlecone Shooting, Training & Retail, Lakewood](#)

March 11, 2015  
Interview with Bryan and Jacquelyn Clark, owners

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18h

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*system of support to respond to the needs of catch-up students.”*  
*· “The district has not strategically resource mapped and allocated resources differently among schools to better meet the needs of catch-up students.”*

**2011/12 UIP**

- “Schools lack district-wide formative and benchmark progress monitoring tools in writing to calibrate the fidelity of implementation of the district writing curriculum.”*
- “Teaching and learning have not consistently demanded high expectations in every classroom due to superficial coverage of a large number of standards, lack of understanding of grade level mastery, lack of relevance for students, and lack of systemic progress monitoring.”*
- “Educators lack consistently rigorous, growth-producing feedback through the evaluation process.”*
- “The district is not meeting the state expectation of 100% highly qualified teachers...because an effective monitoring system is not in place for existing staff especially for secondary schools.”*

**2012/13 UIP**

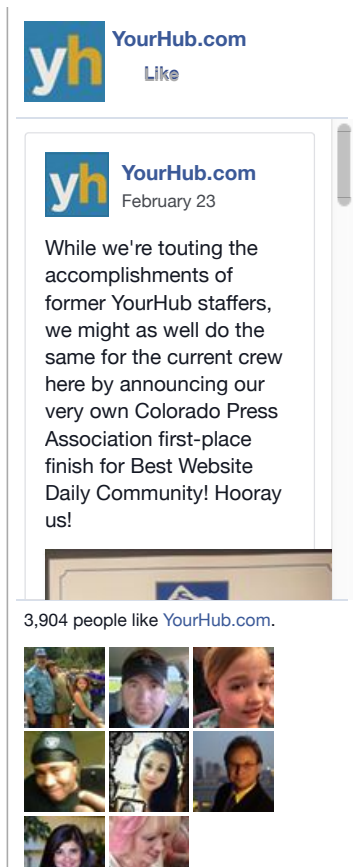
- “The district lacks systemic practices in writing instruction and effective feedback in every classroom.”*
- “The district lacks structures to ensure consistent quality of professional development is provided to all instructional staff.”*
- “District and school leadership lack systemic understanding around multiple pathways for students to stay on track to graduate.”*

**2013/14 UIP**

- “Systemic implementation of intentional lesson design to engage students’ conceptual understanding of their learning and increase student cognitive load is not evident in all classrooms.”*
- “Educators have received inconsistent training on effective literacy instruction and the use of research-based resources”*
- “Math instruction tends not to be differentiated, lacking a variety of structures to meet students’ needs”*

*In light of the very serious shortfalls in student achievement results in Jeffco, before reviewing the root causes that the district proposes to include in this year’s UIP, should we not first analyze and understand what happened with regard to the root causes listed in previous UIPs? Were they successfully addressed? If so, how? What lessons were learned, and were they fully leveraged across the district, to address similar root causes that appear in many schools’ UIPs?*

*If these district root causes were not successfully addressed, why were they removed from subsequent UIPs (or was the district*



*essentially just using different words to describe the same fundamental problems)? And if they were not successfully addressed, what were the deeper obstacles that stood in the way, and why have they so far proven to be insurmountable?*

*How can we consider this year's proposed root causes and major improvement initiatives if we do not first dig deeply into these questions?*

*Finally, in advising on the district UIP, how have we discharged the DAC's legal duty to "make reasonable efforts to consult in a substantive manner with the school accountability committees of the school district"? As a SAC chair, I have received no communications from the DAC on this issue, and I strongly suspect I am not alone.*

*In light of the very serious student achievement problems facing Jeffco, as well as the legal duties of the DAC and our ethical obligations to Jeffco's students, parents, and taxpayers, I hope you will agree with me that the 30 minutes allocated to our discussion of root causes and major improvement initiatives is vastly insufficient given the challenges we face.*

*Very truly yours,*

*Tom Coyne*

**Unquote**

Unfortunately, Shawna Fitzler, the SPAC/DAC chair, refused to change the agenda and devote more time to developing a deeper understanding of the root causes Jeffco's repeated achievement shortfalls. This did not come as a surprise, as every previous request I have made to her for changes to the SPAC/DAC agenda to expand the discussion of Jeffco's achievement shortfalls have also been declined.

To put this into perspective, I have attached a **detailed summary** of the amount of time the SPAC/DAC has spent since last September on all aspects of the UIP process. As you can see, about 35% (250 minutes) of the SPAC/DAC's total meeting time since September has been spent on the UIP process and achievement related issues. Moreover, of that 35%, about half was spent on listening to district presentations or district led discussions. Group work by SPAC/DAC members on achievement related issues has amounted to a very slim 17% of the total amount of time the combined SPAC/DAC has spent meeting this year. I have attached the SPAC/DAC's **summaries of this small group work** which show the shallow level of insight produced by these

short and superficial discussions.

I cannot see how you can honestly say this complies with the state District Accountability Law. Given the absurdly short amount of time devoted to analyzing the root causes of Jeffco's poor achievement performance (e.g., the DAC's total time spent on this critical issue was a fraction of the time we have spent on root cause analysis on our SAC at Wheat Ridge High School), it is, as a practical matter, impossible for the DAC to have provided the Board with well-reasoned, sound advice as to the reasonableness of the major improvement initiatives proposed by the district, and their implications for budget priorities. At a time of tremendous and accelerating change in education (e.g., see [the attached article](#) by a teacher looking at how technology is disrupting K12), the poor quality of the DAC's work this year is, to be blunt, unconscionable.

I also believe that this year's experience further reinforces a critical point I have raised before about the inefficiency and ineffectiveness, not to mention the questionable legality, of a previous Board's decision to combine the SPAC (a legal creation of the District) with the DAC (a legal creation of the state) to create an unwieldy combined committee of fifty seven members (a significant number of whom have not bothered to show up to this year's meetings). For more on this, please see [the attached Denver Post column that I wrote back in August 2014](#).

With respect to the Draft UIP before you, I hope you are as stunned as I am that the root causes referred to in the 2014/15 document are exactly the same as the ones listed in 2013/14:

- "Systemic implementation of intentional lesson design to engage students' conceptual understanding of their learning and increase student cognitive load is not evident in all classrooms"
- "Educators have received inconsistent training on effective literacy instruction and the use of research-based resources"
- "Math instruction tends not to be differentiated, lacking a variety of structures to meet students' needs"

Apparently, the SPAC/DAC, or perhaps more accurately, Ms. Fritzler (since the full DAC never discussed these root causes) believes that no progress at all has been made over the past year – or more — towards addressing them. Given that we are spending nearly a billion dollars per year in taxpayer money on our schools, this also evinces an alarming lack of curiosity as to why this is the case — the lack of progress clearly

suggests that deeper root causes are at work, which could be, for example, in areas such as structure, processes, systems, staffing, contracts, and/or culture.

Moreover, the draft UIP also fails to adequately address — or even raise — some blindingly obvious questions, such as the alignment of the proposed Major Improvement Strategies with the purported major root causes of the district's achievement problems; why some major improvement strategies have failed to have their expected effects; and just how it is possible for Jeffco to have almost all of its teachers rated "highly effective" and "effective" when one of the major root causes of our achievement problems is that "Systemic implementation of intentional lesson design to engage students' conceptual understanding of their learning and increase student cognitive load is not evident in all classrooms."

To repeat: Based on the evidence, I do not believe that the District Accountability Committee has complied with state law with respect to carrying out its duties, and as a result a grave disservice has been done to the students, parents, and taxpayers of Jefferson County. I further believe that the Draft UIP before you is deeply flawed, and you should not approve its transmission to the Colorado Department of Education. Instead of approving it, I recommend you hold a study session to discuss the Draft UIP in more depth with district management and with the ten members of the District Accountability Committee who, under state law, have been legally appointed by your Board.

To the new district leadership's great credit, and to the equally great credit of the many parents and other citizens who have volunteered their time, this year's accountability process at the school level has worked much better than it ever has in the past. It is long past time for the district level accountability process to do the same.

Very truly yours,

Tom Coyne

*Tom Coyne is a political Independent. He chairs the Wheat Ridge High School Accountability Committee, is a member of Jeffco's District Accountability Committee, and has worked on corporate performance improvement issues for more than 30 years.*

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## About the Author



tc415

Chair, School Accountability Committee, Wheat Ridge High School; business executive for 30 years

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