

# Centennial Institute

# POLICY BRIEF

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## **Much Better Schools on Much Lower Budgets**

### **A Primer for Colorado Policymakers**

Centennial Institute Policy Brief No. 2010-2

By William J. Moloney

**Editor:** Colorado public education is the most important communal undertaking for our state's future. It is also the most expensive obligation for taxpayers. But as we enter 2011, education faces both a budget crisis and an identity crisis.

Legislators will take up another round of unwelcome spending reductions come January. At the same time, school districts from the gritty urban neighborhoods of Montbello to the affluent greenbelts of Douglas County are mired in controversy over the very meaning of education.

Centennial Institute asked former Education Commissioner William Moloney, who was Colorado's chief state school officer under Democratic and Republican administrations from 1997 to 2007 and has worked on education policy in a number of other states and nations, to think outside the box about realistic solutions. Here are his analysis and recommendations.

### **Three Ways the Conventional Wisdom is Wrong**

The grim fiscal situation now confronting Colorado legislators, along with their counterparts in nearly every other state, has no precedent since the Great Depression.

What is to be done about the projected deficit of \$1.1 billion in our state's budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2011? And where will an additional quarter-billion dollars of spending cuts be found for the current fiscal year, ending June 30?

Reducing the level of state aid to K-12 education has to be part of the answer. With a painful bipartisan effort, budget-writers held K-12 spending \$260 million under its earlier projected level for this fiscal year. Further cuts are acknowledged on all sides as unavoidable when the legis-

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Published as a public service by the Centennial Institute at Colorado Christian University  
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lature reconvenes in January. How much to cut is not agreed, but given that K-12 consumes nearly half the state's General Fund, reductions will be large.

Policymakers at the State Capitol and across Colorado's 178 school districts can only find their way forward if they see through the conventional wisdom about K-12 budgets and results. It is badly mistaken in three ways.

*Myth 1: Conventional wisdom holds that K-12 education in Colorado today is both cost-effective and educationally effective. That is wrong.*

*Myth 2: Conventional wisdom holds that deep reductions in spending will doom education reform. That too is wrong.*

*Myth 3: Conventional wisdom holds that there are no models of schools or systems doing much better with much less. Wrong yet again.*

Fortunately for Colorado, its schoolchildren and families, its taxpayers and governments, its economic vitality and quality of life, these three myths are demonstrably false.

The facts, backed with strong evidence which we'll examine in this policy brief, are these:

*Fact 1: There are massive cost inefficiencies and educational deficiencies within the structure of K-12 education, built up over decades and crying out for correction.*

*Fact 2: For that reason, the deep spending reductions now forced upon us can actually set the stage for the most dramatic improvements in learning performance we have seen in decades.*

*Fact 3: There are countless examples of schools, systems, states, and countries doing much better with much less.*

These propositions will be hard for many people to accept. They contradict so much of the widely and sincerely held perception about what our schools have been doing over the last half-century.

However, given the awesome scale of the fiscal emergency facing our state and nation, policymakers across the spectrum cannot honestly excuse themselves from setting aside all preconceptions and thinking hard, thinking anew, about how to do education right and how much it needs to cost.

What's involved in thinking anew? This policy brief spells it out in a question-and-answer format. We argue that American public education went badly astray in the last half-century. We show where and how that happened. We point out the road to recovery. Finally, we offer an agenda for taking that road.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The facts and assertions made in this paper are fully documented and widely available from public sources. For a single-volume compendium including most of them, we highly recommend the recently published *Stretching the School Dollar* (Harvard University Press, 2010) which includes contributions by nationally recognized authorities from across the country. We acknowledge the invaluable contribution by the authors and editors of this seminal

## Twenty Ways to Think Anew

To set Colorado on a new path toward much better schools on much lower budgets, the first step is realizing that things don't *have* to be the way they are now.

The status quo of expensive mediocrity was not forced on us by fate. It resulted from certain assumptions and decisions over the course of several decades, back to a time in living memory when American education was the world's best.

Better decisions based on truer assumptions, starting now, can begin to improve the picture dramatically. It is in our power to fix what is broken. All that's needed is the political will – and the grim fiscal situation should supply that. Indeed it leaves us little choice. There will never be a more opportune moment to break out of the old paradigm.

The following sections use Q&A to provide a reality check on discredited educational notions, one at a time, and then to give policymakers a ready reference of what works – along with an action menu for what can be done. At a glance, the 20 ways to think anew will include:

1. Admit: The US trails woefully in global rankings.
2. Own up: The US spends high but achieves low.
3. Face it: No performance gains since 1971.
4. Understand our worst errors of 1960-2010.
5. Recognize the limits of accountability tests.
6. Recognize the limits of NAEP.
7. Recognize the limits of CSAP.
8. See why class organization works poorly.
9. See why the teaching profession has faltered.
10. See through class size reduction, the CSR fetish.
11. Understand why CSR is harmful and needless.
12. Realize school funding is bloated, not starved.
13. Know what makes education budgets recession-proof.
14. Dispel the illusion of under-funded schools.
15. Realize that Utah puts Colorado to shame.
16. Analyze Utah's superiority in CSR and teachers.
17. Learn from Colorado's Catholic schools.
18. Emulate success models from America.
19. Emulate success models from abroad.
20. Legislate boldly in 2011.

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work. In addition, since a picture is worth a thousand words, we encourage readers to see the new documentary film *Waiting for Superman*, directed by Davis Guggenheim. Reviewers have been unanimous in their praise, saying: “the most compelling film ever made about American Education”... “will evoke emotions of shame and heartbreak even among persistent defenders of the status quo”... “devastating expose of teacher union culpability in this American Tragedy”... “celebrates dozens of American schools doing more for children while spending less.” We submit that all who read this book and see this film will have an essential grasp of what's wrong and how to fix it.

## Spending High, Achieving Low

### *Q1: Where does the United States rank in international comparisons of academic achievement?*

**A1:** We rank embarrassingly low: all the way down at No. 18 in reading, No. 29 in science, and No. 35 in math. Here are the details:

- a. The study on Progress in International Reading Literacy (PIRLS), coordinated by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, assesses reading achievement and reading behaviors and attitudes of fourth grade students. The most recent results (2006) ranked the United States at 18<sup>th</sup> among 45 education systems including Canadian provinces. Russia was 1<sup>st</sup>, followed by Hong Kong, Alberta, British Columbia, Singapore, Luxemburg, Ontario, Hungary, and Italy, with Sweden at No. 10.
- b. The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests 15-year-olds from around the world every three years under the auspices of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The most recent results for combined science literacy (2006) showed the United States at 29<sup>th</sup> out of the 57 nations represented. Finland was 1st, followed by Hong Kong, Canada, Taiwan, Estonia, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, the Netherlands, and in 10<sup>th</sup> place, South Korea.
- c. In mathematics literacy, the PISA rankings for 2006 put the USA at 35<sup>th</sup>. Standing 1<sup>st</sup> was Taiwan, followed by Finland, Hong Kong, South Korea, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Canada, Macao, and Liechtenstein, with Japan ranked 10th.

### *Q2: How do per pupil costs in the United States compare with other industrial nations?*

**A2:** These comparisons are very difficult owing to disparate funding mechanisms, and also currency fluctuations. However reasonable comparisons can be made. The following are recent secondary education figures from OECD countries most comparable to the USA.

Finland	\$7,829	United Kingdom	\$8,892
Germany	\$7,841	Ireland	\$9,375
South Korea	\$7,860	France	\$9,532
Italy	\$8,004	Netherlands	\$10,248
Canada	\$8,045	UNITED STATES	\$11,301
Spain	\$8,730	Norway	\$11,997
Japan	\$8,760	Switzerland	\$13,982

### *Q3: What has been the progress of 17-year-olds in the United States in reading and mathematics achievement over the past four decades, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)?*

**A3:** No significant progress whatsoever. On NAEP's 0-500 scale, this age groups scored 285 on the first NAEP Reading Test in 1971. In 2008 they scored 286. On the first NAEP Math Test in 1973, 17-year-olds scored 304. Thirty-five years later (2008) they scored 306.

## Omissions and Misconceptions

***Q4: What are the greatest errors of American K-12 educational practice since 1960?***

**A4:** The principal ones in ascending order of negative impact are:

- a. Lack of credible systems for testing and accountability.
- b. Lack of rational systems for how students are organized into classes for purposes of instruction.
- c. Lack of quality control for the teaching profession, including recruitment, training, compensation, assessment, and retention.
- d. A national obsession with class size reduction, an expensive and counterproductive policy that has never been shown to improve learning performance.

***Q5: How can accountability tests be lacking? Doesn't every state have them?***

**A5:** Yes, but in name only. Unlike tests in other industrial nations, every one of our state tests is routinely “gamed,” precisely to *avoid* accountability and any attendant embarrassment. The very best of them (the MCAS in Massachusetts, soon to be sacrificed to toothless national standards) has had only the most tenuous connection to advancing individual student progress.

***Q6: Then perhaps the National Assessment of Educational Progress, NAEP, makes up for what is lacking in state accountability?***

**A6:** Unfortunately not. NAEP is an excellent test, America’s best. But aside from periodic “temperature taking,” it is rendered useless by the infrequency of its use in any subject area (being given in five-year cycles) and by the prohibition in federal law for any use of NAEP at the local level.

***Q7: Wasn't Colorado's CSAP a well-regarded accountability test?***

**A7:** Only when compared to inadequate competition in most other states. The long delay in reporting CSAP results, and the failure to include them on report cards or transcripts, rendered them irrelevant to parents, teachers, students, and policymakers.

***Q8: What is wrong with how Colorado organizes students for instruction?***

**A8:** Unlike some U.S. and most foreign schools, we traditionally use irrational criteria – age, grade, or alphabetical order – that have almost nothing to do with where individual students are in their ability or capacity to advance.

Ability grouping, once the norm in US schools, has decisively fallen into disfavor save in isolated curricular areas such as advanced placement. It has been replaced by “individualization,” which places unrealistic burdens on teachers.

They are commonly driven to instruct at the lowest common denominator, creating a classroom social dynamic ranging from boredom to resentment. Instruction proceeds at a snail’s pace – sometimes, as in many of our inner-city schools, not at all.

There is no better illustration of the resulting consequence than the wide prevalence of remedial reading at high school and college level.

***Q9: What is wrong with the way America recruits, trains, compensates, assesses, and retains teachers ?***

***A9:*** Nearly everything, sad to say.

- a. *Recruitment:* Other nations only admit the “best and the brightest” into teacher preparation programs, accepting only a small minority of candidates based on rigorous objective criteria. In this country, candidates are self-selected based on paying tuition, piling up irrelevant credits, listening to the least esteemed professors on the campus, taking no tests in their intended subject areas, receiving inflated grades, and serving no real apprenticeship – after they are hired by people who have no objective criteria to judge them in the first place, and who therefore utilized such extraneous criteria as “Are you certified?” or “Can you coach?”
- b. *Compensation:* In the USA, unlike other nations, teacher pay is based on a lock-step “unitary salary scale” that values only seniority and the random acquisition of credits – making no distinction for the importance of subject or successful performance. Merit pay is therefore almost unheard of.
- c. *Training:* In the USA, unlike other nations, teacher training is falsely assumed by employers to have occurred in the Ed Schools from whence candidates came.
- d. *Assessment:* As is well known, rigorous evaluation and the removal of bad teachers simply doesn’t happen.
- e. *Retention:* Public schools have no capacity to make a counter-offer to a highly successful physics teacher tempted by private industry. Said teacher must be paid the same salary as an elementary P.E. teacher with the same seniority and credit totals.

***Q10: Why isn’t class-size reduction a good idea?***

***A10:*** CSR is the most costly and damaging “reform” in the last half century. Elementary class-size caps in California, mandated by referendum, starved all other education initiatives and ultimately bankrupted the system. Florida is currently ignoring and in the process of repealing a similar referendum mandate.

Years of research consistently demonstrate that class-size reduction doesn't improve educational outcomes. Even if it did the immense cost would be an unacceptable trade-off.

Other industrial nations routinely operate with class sizes that are twice America's 15-1 student-staff ratio and still consistently outperform the US in educational outcomes. They use money saved to recruit and retain high-quality teachers who can then deliver high-quality instruction.

***Q11: Then why do people like and often vote for class-size reduction?***

***A11:*** CSR has an intuitive appeal, and seems logical. People have been told by educators that it really works. People have not been told about the research, the enormous costs, or the more valuable things they lose because of the costs.

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## **Funding and Fallacies**

***Q12: Is education under-funded, as we are often told? Or is there runaway cost escalation in our schools? What do the data show?***

***A12:*** The data show runaway cost escalation. There is no other way to interpret them.

- a. Education spending per pupil in this country, adjusted for inflation, has increased more than 100% since 1983.
- b. Between 1955 and 2007 student-staff ratios fell from 27-1 to 15-1.
- c. The number of American teachers jumped 61% between 1970 and 2008, even though student population increased by only 8%.
- d. Teacher salaries, adjusted for inflation, have increased 42% since 1960.
- e. In the same period, teachers' health and pension benefits have risen to a level approximately double that of the average American.

Productivity is said to increase when more output is achieved for each person employed and each dollar invested. When there is less output per person and per dollar, productivity has worsened.

It is clear that the latter description fits, given the persistently mediocre learning performance in US classrooms over several decades, despite ever-greater applications of human and financial resources. (See details under Q2 and Q3 above.)

By no stretch of the imagination is American public education, or Colorado public education, under-funded. They are under-delivering on reasonable expectations, under-performing on minimal standards and, worst, under-serving the children placed in their care.

***Q13: While other sectors of the economy, private enterprise certainly, but also many governmental agencies, adjust their spending according to economic cycles and revenue patterns, why has school spending been virtually recession-proof?***

**A13:** There are at least five reasons:

- a. Education holds a privileged legal status within most state constitutions, often with guarantees like Colorado's Amendment 23.
- b. Education has a uniquely decentralized operating arrangement, accompanied by a diffuse revenue-generation structure.
- c. Local political dynamics and institutions generally foster a favorable fiscal environment for public schools.
- d. Most states, Colorado included, assign a multi-tiered responsibility for funding schools and offer complicated intergovernmental funding incentives
- e. Schools tend to rely on inelastic tax sources, such as the property tax, at the local level.

***Q14: Then if school funding has been so stable, why is there this lingering impression that it has "fallen behind" and needs to "catch up," reflected in voter-approved mandates such Amendment 23?***

**A14:** That mistaken perception is driven by the unwholesome interplay of media dynamics and protectionist personnel provisions. For contractual reasons, if there is even a possibility of staff reductions owing to budget cuts, districts must send layoff warnings as early as April to any personnel who might be affected, even if the probability of such is slight. These letters and the Sunshine-Law-mandated announcements of other budget-cutting contingencies (e.g. school closings, program eliminations) create a media frenzy, alarm employee and parent advocates, and add to a general perception that schools are being hammered again.

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## **Looking at What Works**

***Q15: What is the best model of another state doing better with less?***

**A15:** There are several, but clearly the best model would be Utah, our neighboring state and one that is similar to Colorado in many ways.

- a. The National Assessment of Educational Progress has shown Utah to have been a national leader in achievement over time, significantly outperforming Colorado.
- b. Yet Utah's per-pupil expenditure is only \$5,734 compared to Colorado's \$9,335, according to the most recent figures available (Education Commission of the States, 2009).

***Q16: How does Utah outperform Colorado while spending only 61% as much?***

**A16:** While these comparisons are complex and multi-factored, two variables stand out:

- a. On the cost front, average class sizes are significantly higher, more resembling top-performing foreign nations than other US states. Utah's pupil-teacher ratio is 23.7-1. Colorado's is 16.8-1.
- b. As for achievement, Utah reveals a pattern of stressing quality over quantity, particularly teacher quality.
- c. What is beyond any doubt is that Utah is worth a closer look.

***Q17: What can Colorado policymakers learn from looking at the state's Catholic schools?***

**A17:** For 2008-2009 the average per-pupil cost for the Archdiocese of Denver Catholic Schools was \$5,148. This is just 55% of Colorado's public school per-pupil cost for the same year.

While Catholic schools offer a significantly narrower range of academic programs compared to public schools, they bring an impressive clarity of focus and intensity to their programs, notably in the area of basic skills.

Catholic schools are popular with parents. And they have a particularly admirable record in achieving success with minority students who previously struggled in public schools.

***Q18: What are some examples from around the state and nation of schools doing more with less?***

**A18:** Here are two dozen examples. We could cite many more if space permitted.

- a. Aurora, Colorado, is currently increasing secondary teaching responsibilities from five classes daily to six.
- b. Jefferson County, Colorado, has begun training teachers to handle bigger classes.
- c. Harrison District 2 in Colorado Springs has eliminated entirely the district's promotion of teachers based on seniority and college credits, replacing it with a system of performance-based compensation.
- d. Colorado Springs District 11 anticipates saving \$4 million by closing nine schools. This tracks with estimates by the Colorado School Finance Project, which reports that districts can save as much \$400,000 a year by closing an elementary school with fewer than 300 students, and as much \$600,000 annually by closing a middle school.
- e. Teach for America, which recruits and intensively trains outstanding graduates of top colleges for challenging urban assignments, has operated in Colorado under a state waiver since 2007.

- f. Douglas County, Colorado, agreed in 2007 to support a promising online education program for poor children. They are currently examining a voucher program that would expand parental choice and reduce per-pupil costs by 25%.
- g. New Orleans, Louisiana, had all of its schools reconstituted after Hurricane Katrina as an “independent recovery district” based on parental choice. Seventy percent of the schools in this formerly very low-performing district are now public charter schools exhibiting significantly improved educational, managerial, and fiscal efficiency.
- h. Springfield, Massachusetts, enrolls 1,574 low-income students at its SABIS International Charter School. The K-12 school is organized not by grades but by skills. Class size routinely exceeds 30, yet the minority achievement gap has been completely eliminated as measured by the state’s highly regarded MCAS test. The waiting list is 2,700, and *Newsweek* rated the school one of the best in the country.
- i. Clark County, Nevada, saved \$11 million by eliminating costly and ineffective “block scheduling.”
- j. Hillsborough County, Florida, estimates it will save \$38 million by having high school instructors teach six classes instead of the customary five.
- k. Fairfax County, Virginia, has saved \$9 million a year by increasing class size by just half a student.
- l. Kansas City, Missouri, this year closed nearly half of its 61 schools, sold the downtown central office, eliminated 700 of its 3,000 positions, and required teachers at six low-performing schools to reapply for their jobs.
- m. Grand Rapids, Michigan, outsourced substitute teachers to a private company.
- n. Scottsdale, Arizona, requires all administrators to substitute-teach five days a year.
- o. Seattle, Washington, is saving \$600,000 per year by centralizing its elementary-school food services. The district expects another \$2.2 million in savings by centralizing school start times so it can use buses more efficiently; 49 buses were eliminated in 2009-2010.
- p. Washington, DC, where a third of all students attend public charter schools, closed 23 of its schools in 2008.
- q. Putnam and Westchester Counties, New York, increased teaching loads by hiring technicians to run science labs, paying department heads a stipend instead of two periods of release time, and scheduling larger physical education, art and music classes.
- r. Milwaukee, Wisconsin, saved seven jobs by putting its purchasing system online. Action is pending on a massive external management study completed last year, which identified \$103 million in potential savings within the district’s nonacademic operations.
- s. Arlington, Virginia, has begun hiring teachers on “terminating contracts” that expire annually, thus allowing the district to set salaries and eliminate positions much as it does with substitute teachers. They report 23 applicants for every available position.

- t. California allows open-ended stretching out of textbook adoption cycles and lets districts transfer that money to operating budgets. Many districts are replacing highly expensive textbooks with instructional materials available online.
- u. Charter schools operated by the highly-praised Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) are delivering impressive results in many states. KIPP emphasizes highly trained teachers delivering rigorous curriculum with class sizes ranging from 30 to 45. “Class size is not an issue if teachers know how to manage kids,” asserts cofounder David Levin. KIPP’s LA Prep is featured in the new movie *Waiting for Superman*. KIPP’s presence in Colorado includes Denver Collegiate, a high school, and Sunshine Peak Academy, a middle school.

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## Lessons from Around the World

### *Q19: What is different about school systems in other countries that enables them to do more with less?*

**A19:** Nearly everything that matters. But nothing that is beyond our reach, if we care enough.

- a. Three of the five highest-performing countries in the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 1994-95 – Singapore, South Korea, and Japan – had average class sizes greater than 30 students. Korea’s averaged over 50.
- b. The highest-performing countries in TIMSS and PISA (the Program for International Student Assessment; see Q1 above) draw their teachers from the top 5 to 30 percent of high school classes – unlike the United States which draws its teachers on average from the bottom third of their high school classes.
- c. Continuing with the same top-performing group: The average starting teacher salary in South Korea, as a percent of GDP per capita, is 74% higher than in the United States. Hong Kong’s is 20% higher, and Finland’s and Singapore are both 17% higher.
- d. European and Asian teacher unions are as powerful or more so than their US counterparts. But unlike the unions here, they zealously guard high standards of educational performance. Unions in those OECD nations, tracing their origins to the guild-apprentice system, recognize that quality control is the best guarantee of continuing public support for good salaries and benefits. American unions, by contrast, arose out of the industrial manufacturing model that regards quality control (or in educational terms, student performance) as a management responsibility.
- e. European and Asian nations generate a powerhouse student work ethic through carefully calibrated testing and accountability at every level that clearly communicates to students and parents that success and advancement is a matter of hard work and clear focus, not of time served and entitlement. How different this is from our US system – long undermined by grade inflation, social promotion, diploma by attendance, and open college admission by purchase.
- f. Unlike the US, where students are generally assigned to schools based on the location of their house, European and Asian parents commonly have a high degree of choice, are thoughtful consumers, and strong supporters of their schools.

- g. Unlike the US, a high proportion of school administrators in Europe also have teaching responsibilities, leading to lower costs and better insight into classroom realities.
- h. Most European and Asian Schools utilize differential pay scales. So, for example, they do not pay an elementary physical education teacher as much as a high school physics teacher. In fact physical education (often called “Games and Exercise” in those countries) is a supplementary activity commonly supervised by regular teachers and/or volunteers.
- i. In most all other industrial nations, “Schools of Education” as we understand them don’t exist. Academic teachers attend academic universities and pursue academic programs.
- j. Minority students in the European Union have educational outcomes significantly better than their US counterparts.
- k. A number of European Union countries, as well as Japan, achieve significantly greater success rates with special education students than does the US. Here a student identified as needing special education in 3rd grade almost always remains such through the 12th grade, whereas other countries bring significant numbers up to grade level in reading and out of special education. A nationally acclaimed program in Arlington, Massachusetts, beginning in 2006 pursued similar methods that resulted in striking achievement gains and also saved \$5 million over time.

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## **An Agenda for Getting Serious**

***Q20: In light of the above realities far and near, what policy actions should be taken by the Colorado General Assembly during its 2011 session to put our state on the road to much better schools with much lower budgets?***

***A20:*** Centennial Institute submitted a draft of this paper to senior political leaders for comment. Their thoughts were summed up by a legislator who said this: “Up to now, despite all the spending and all the legislation, education reform simply has not happened. So let’s stop debating whether to fully fund a failing system. The imperative of diminished funding from the state to local districts, now unavoidable, can provide a shock to the system resulting in better public policy *and* reduced school costs. The time has come.” We accordingly recommend:

- a. The legislature should again in 2011, as was done in 2010, assert its constitutionally coequal prerogative to reinterpret Amendment 23’s “factor formulas” so as to avoid automatic spending increases we cannot possibly afford. Pending judicial clarification or voter-approved revision of those factors, the state should cease being the enabler for discredited practices in Colorado schools.
- b. The legislature should suspend the State School Code (with a few reasonable exceptions such as the provisions for safety or special education), thus freeing local districts from a host of costly but minimally beneficial mandates.
- c. The legislature should act in concert with the State Board of Education to suspend the rules for accreditation of local districts, thus freeing school boards from another set of costly mandates (what must be taught, who can teach it, etc.).

- d. The legislature should suspend statewide testing, thus saving time and money for local districts and the state itself – while sacrificing very little, given the general ineffectiveness of the current system. Precedent exists for suspension without loss of federal funding.
- e. The legislature should pass the necessary bills to facilitate every kind of outsourcing or privatization that local school districts may choose to undertake.
- f. The legislature should eliminate all barriers to the formation of public charter schools, which have fully proven themselves in Colorado since 1993. Charters are much less costly than traditional public schools, popular with parents, and have a record of student achievement at least as good as non-charter schools.
- g. The legislature should enact an Arizona-style tuition tax credit for individuals or corporations that subsidize students attending non-public schools, or a school voucher plan as proposed in last year's unsuccessful House Bill 1295. Such a measure would be a triple win for Colorado in terms of dollar savings, learning opportunities, and liberty itself – establishing our state as a national leader in genuine education reform.
- h. The legislature should build on last year's modest steps toward reforming the PERA retirement system, in order to achieve immediate further economies as well as long-term actuarial soundness in this hugely expensive program. PERA in its current form is ultimately unsustainable. The General Assembly will have failed in its trust if it does not do everything necessary to defuse Colorado's exposure to the pension time bomb that now endangers so many governments here and abroad. Elements of last year's unsuccessful House Bill 1207 should be reintroduced and passed this year.

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### **Conclusion: Bankruptcy of the Status Quo**

**Editor: “We know what’s wrong. We know what works. The only question is whether we have the will to do what works to fix what’s wrong.” So said William J. Bennett during his tenure as US Secretary of Education, 1985-1989. His blunt diagnosis is even truer now.**

**But tragically, during the intervening quarter-century, thousands of Colorado children and millions of American children have come through our nation’s schools and been cheated of the quality education promised them by us adults. Can we now, at last, under the pressure of fiscal extremity, muster the will to do what works?**

**This issue brief offers all the data, analysis, and recommendations needed for Colorado policymakers to make a good start. William Moloney’s approach has been factual and respectful throughout, as was his approach in a Denver Post commentary sketching the same concerns and published on October 3, 2010.**

**In that article, Moloney simply asked: “Can a different way of thinking identify a model of public education that is effective, cost-effective, and sustainable?”**

**But in the Denver Post on October 14, when five defenders of Colorado’s educational status quo wrote a rebuttal article, they conspicuously sidestepped his challenge for a different way of thinking.**

The defenders' article mentioned "an environment of higher expectations," but it didn't claim the expectations are being met. *Because they are not.*

It complained that Moloney had said our public schools are "ineffective and inefficient," but it didn't deny those words are accurate. *Because they are.*

It expressed indignation about education being called "a metastasizing entitlement," but it didn't deny such is the case. *Because it is.*

Instead, the apologists simply dismissed Moloney's entire argument as "offensive to educators" – case closed. It was a classic example of when-you-don't-have-the-facts-pound-the-table.

In similar fashion, the teacher unions and the education lobby – Colorado's most powerful – will probably also dismiss the present paper. It is easier to reply with emotionalism when proof is wanting.

Legislators and school boards cannot indulge the luxury of such evasion, however. Their obligation to voters, taxpayers, and above all, to our schoolchildren, won't allow it.

To these public servants, at a time of severe trial, we submit this Primer for Colorado Policymakers. We wish them well in their challenging and crucial task.

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**Author:** William Moloney is a former Colorado Education Commissioner (1997-2007). He holds a doctorate in education management from Harvard University.

In a rich and varied professional life spanning 35 years, he has served as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, headmaster, assistant superintendent, and superintendent in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, Pennsylvania, and Maryland.

Dr. Moloney's career includes several years overseas, four of them as a director of the American School in London. He served three terms on the National Assessment Governing Board, which sets policy for the National Assessment of Educational Progress, more commonly known as "The Nation's Report Card".

He is also co-author of *The Content of America's Character and Education Innovation: An Agenda to Frame the Future*. His columns have appeared in the Wall Street Journal, USA Today, Washington Post, Philadelphia Inquirer, Baltimore Sun, Rocky Mountain News, and Denver Post. He is a Centennial Institute Fellow. Email: MoloneyVision@aol.com

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**Date:** December 1, 2010

