

Education Presentation

Rep. Kevin Priola

HB 1172 does not aim to change the current SPF model. Nor does it alter any accountability mechanisms set in place by the Education Accountability Act of 2009 (SB 09-163). The Colorado Department of Education has proven itself to be a reliable agency. It would simply change the accreditation categories for school districts and the institute from “accredited with distinction”, “accredited”, “accredited with improvement plan,” “accredited with priority improvement plan” and “accredited with turnaround plan” to “A”, “B”, “C”, “D”, and “F”

This bill also introduces a parent trigger law. Parents of students enrolled in a public school that has a “D” or “F” accreditation for two consecutive years may petition the school board to reorganize the school through one of several options.

It is important that, all students, regardless of background, have access to high quality education. We remain concerned, however, that the families that make up the largest proportion of Denver’s student population, low-income Latinos, may not engage with the school choice process in the same way as other segments of the population.

The Piton Foundation, Stand for Children Colorado, and Together Colorado are committed to ensuring that all parents, regardless of background, have adequate and actionable information about school quality when exercising choice. To that end, they commissioned a study to explore how to further that goal.

Several themes emerged about families’ current experience with Denver public school choice:

Parents are often unaware of information on schools’ academic performance, largely find the School Performance Framework difficult to follow (when they are aware of its existence), and do not typically incorporate academic performance from the Framework into their choices.

Information about school academic performance needs to be made more accessible and presented more clearly to parents in order for it to be included as a component of parents’ multifaceted decision making processes

Complex jargon and terminology interfere with the incorporation of school performance data into parents’ choices and their willingness to consider the broad array of school choices available. Information on school performance and school descriptions must be presented much more clearly.

School choice policies are designed to allow parents to take full advantage of the education options open to them. It follows that more transparent information would lead parents to both organize to improve their schools and/or choose a different school for their children to attend.

At a macro level, the results of these choices should create system-wide pressure for poorly performing schools to improve or districts and the state to make changes at those schools.

Other supporters of a Parent-Trigger bill include Democrats for Education Reform (DFER)

A-F Framework:

Provides Transparency and Accountability: identifies struggling schools

Parent Trigger:

Provides Community involvement

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Maine Introduces Parent Empowerment Legislation

April 25, 2011

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Maine is the latest to join at least 15 state legislatures considering a bill to establish a Parent Trigger law, empowering parents of children at failing public schools to

petition for reforms.

State Rep. Amy Volk (R-Scarborough) is the author of the Maine House bill, designated LD 1417, "An Act to Enhance Parental Roles in Education Choice."

Flexibility Is a Goal

Volk's bill, modeled after California's 2010 Parent Empowerment Act, would require implementation of school-level reforms if half of the eligible parents at a school designated "program improvement" for three years under No Child Left Behind "petition for the restructuring of a school that is not making adequate yearly progress."

Restructuring may include transferring students to another school, reopening the institution as a charter school, replacing school leadership and granting greater flexibility in choosing teachers and curriculum, or implementing a "turnaround strategy" with greater state oversight.

Cosponsors of the bill include Senator Garrett Mason (R-Lisbon Falls) and Reps. Heather Sirocki (R-Scarborough), Beth O'Connor (R-Berwick), Melvin Newendyke (R-Litchfield), and Deborah Sanderson (R-Chelsea).

"The bill was intentionally drafted in short form," explained Volk. If passed, LD 1417 would allow "the Commissioner of Education great flexibility in developing rules to apply the core concept to Maine-specific circumstances," she said.

Parents 'Back in the Equation'

Ken Capron, chairman of the Maine Center for Constitutional Studies (MCCS), says Volk's bill "is all about choice, and parental choice of the education path of their children."

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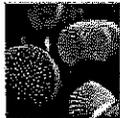
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"The trigger puts parents back in the equation," Capron said.

Although the political climate in Maine is volatile after a recent Republican takeover of both houses of the state legislature, Capron says the Parent Trigger is essentially nonpartisan. As in many other states, fiscal issues are front and center. Capron says he is hopeful this year will yield real and substantial progress in educational reform.

Capron says advancing parent choice should be a legislative priority. "The government would like you to believe they know better what's best for your kids," he said. "We need to put education back in the hands of parents."

Bipartisan Origins

Although Volk's bill currently has no Democratic cosponsors, a prominent Democrat wrote the California law upon which her

legislation is based.

"I'm as Democrat as you can get," said Gloria Romero, the former chairwoman of the California State Senate's education committee.

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"Feudalism ended a long time ago, but we are bound still by the land when it comes to education," explained Romero, who now directs the California chapter of Democrats for Education Reform. "Schools don't have to respond to their customer base, because in K-12 you're stuck based on your ZIP code."

"The system isn't built to change, the force to change has to come from the outside from those who want change—and that is parents," Romero said. "We're going beyond involvement. Parents should be the CEOs and architects of their children's future."

Ashley Trim (*ashley.trim@gmail.com*) writes from Los Angeles, California.



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Animal Rights Wrongs

Ten years ago the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) sued Ringling Bros.—Barnum & Bailey circus for alleged mistreatment of its elephants. Now the litigation is...

Somewhat Reasonable

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School choice, let your taxes dollars follow your child

by Kevin S. Thomas
Chairman Fairfield County Republican Party
Vice Chairman Fifth Congressional District
08.14.12 - 12:01 am

As I continue my look at ways to improve education in Fairfield County, let's look at the idea of school choice.

As I walk around town I often get asked about things in the political world, but mostly I get asked out my involvement in the charter school and the idea of school choice.

The question I often hear is what is school choice?

School choice is the practice of allowing the tax dollars you pay each year to follow the child as the parent sees fit.

Your child may learn best in a religious school, a free public charter school, a private school, a free public virtual school or a traditional public school.

The beauty of school choice is you, the parents, decide what is best for your child, not the government or the zip code you live in.

As I talk to parents who are struggling to work two jobs to put their children in Richard Winn, they don't know what they are going to do when their second or third child starts kindergarten and their tuition bill goes from last years' total of \$5,232 to \$10,464 to \$15,696 each year.

With the average household income in Fairfield County of \$32,022, that is impossible. Imagine being able to use the taxes you already pay and apply them to Cardinal Newman, Richard Winn, or the new charter school.

If you think one of your children is better fit for the local public school, you can keep him or her there.

If another one of your children would learn better at Richard Winn you can send her there.

If your third child would excel in a charter school environment you can send him there.

The bottom line is, you, the parent, know what is best for your children, not the federal, state or local government.

(I love when politicians say we cannot afford school choice. Wake up! It is our money, the taxpayers, who send it to you.) Private school should not just be for the elite.

Our own State Senator Creighton Coleman talks about sending one of his children



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Parents Choose Charter School after successful execution of parent trigger



By Amelia Hamilton on October 25, 2012

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After successfully executing the parent trigger option at Desert Trails Elementary school in Adelanto, California, and the protracted [legal battle](#) which followed, parents have selected a charter school to take over the failing public school. "I'm excited and happy that we're finally able to move forward and provide a better education for students," [said](#) Doreen Diaz, a parent who led the pro-charter campaign.

Parents [chose](#) to transform Desert Trails Elementary into a LaVerne Elementary Preparatory Academy, which operates a charter school in Hesperia over the other option, the Lewis Center for Educational Research in Apple Valley. LaVerne founder Debra Tarver [said](#) "Well, we're ecstatic about this.". "My team and I, we've all spoken quite intensely about this and we're ready to go in there and bring that community and school together, roll up our sleeves and get those kids where they need to be."

The Adelanto Teachers' Union, as expected, is not happy about the changes taking place at the school. 180 parents signed the parent trigger petition last year, meaning that those 180 parents were eligible to vote. LaVerne won by garnering 53 votes. "Fifty-three votes cast the direction of the school," [said](#) LaNita M. Dominique, president of the Adelanto teachers' union. "That's a little disheartening." Adelanto school board president Carlos Mendoza, believes this is indicative of low support for the trigger option. He also stated, however, that the school board would comply with the law.

Parents disagree. "I'm doing it for our kids," [said](#) Kathy Duncan, the mother of two students at the school. "It's a long time coming. They have sabotaged our kids." That sentiment is understandable, as 75% of the 670 students at Desert Trails are unable to read and write. Doreen Diaz, the parent who led the campaign for reform, accused Principal David Mobley of discouraging parents from voting. He chose to hold a school board election skating party at the same time as the charter school selection vote.

This was a true test of the mettle of empowered parents. They fought for better education of their children, and got it. By the time the new school year begins in August, the charter school will have taken over and, hopefully, students will be on the road to success.

Tags: [School Choice](#), [adelanto](#), [charter school](#), [desert trails](#), [parent trigger](#), [School Choice](#)

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Bush and Rhee Show Bipartisan Support for Parent Trigger Laws



By Amelia Hamilton on August 31, 2012

Next month, the [film](#) *Won't Back Down* will hit theaters around America. It is the [story](#) of a mother who will not accept that her child will be subjected to an unsatisfactory education simply because she comes from a financially disadvantaged background. It is a look at school reform in America, and will put Parent Trigger Laws front and center ahead of the upcoming election season.

This week, Florida Governor Jeb Bush and Former D.C. Schools Chairman Michelle [Rhee](#) (who many may remember from [Waiting for Superman](#)) attending a screening of the film at the Republican National Convention. They [spoke](#) at a panel after the film, giving the movie their bipartisan seal of approval.

Bush praised the film for humanizing the issue, saying that "We need to take [education reform] out of a political context and take it to something where it's a top priority of parents." Randi Weingarten, president of teachers' union American Federation of Teachers, was less than pleased with the portrayal of teachers and students in the film. Weingarten said "Instead of focusing on real parent empowerment and how communities can come together to help all children succeed, 'Won't Back Down' offers parents a false choice—you're either for students or for teachers, you can either live with a low-performing school or take dramatic, disruptive action to shut a school down."

Bush and Rhee, however, see Parent Trigger as a nonpartisan issue. In fact, the film will be shown at the Democratic National Convention next week. Bush said "We're in this climate of negativity, and there may be more agreement here than people want to admit." It is imperative that we put education before partisanship. As Rhee [said](#) "We have to fight really hard against that polarization."

On the issue of school choice, Americans are much more unified than on many others. If we agree to work together, we can make the future better for American children. That's something for which we can all agree to work.

Tags:

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[EDITORIAL]

Parental Role in 'F' Schools: Polk's Finger On Trigger

Published: Sunday, February 24, 2013 at 12:01 a.m.

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Polk County will play a prominent role in the state Senate's Parent Trigger bill for the second straight legislative session. The 60-day session begins March 5.



[Enlarge 1](#)

State Sen. Kelli Stargel, R-Lakeland, filed the Parent Trigger bill Feb. 13.

PIERRE DuCHARME | THE LEDGER (AUGUST)

The bill was filed Feb. 13 by Sen. Kelli Stargel, R-Lakeland.

In the case of a public school that receives a state grade of "F" twice in a row, SB 862, formally titled the Parent Empowerment in Education bill, would allow parents to file a petition with the county school board for one of the school-turnaround options that state law requires.

As the law stands, the turnaround choice is the school board's. If Stargel's bill becomes law, the school board would have to choose between its option and any options for which parents have petitioned. The State Board of Education could override the school board.

The choices are:

- Convert to a school district-managed turnaround school.
- Move students to another school and monitor the progress of each student.
- Reconstitute the school as one or more charter schools. Each would require a governing board with a record of effectiveness.
- Contract with an outside entity. A record of effectiveness in school operation would be required of the company or group.
- A combination of the choices above, or some other approach with a record of effectiveness.

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In addition to giving parents standing in turnaround procedures, the Parent Trigger bill calls for school districts to provide parents with performance evaluations for their children's teachers upon request, and to notify parents when their children are taught by teachers working out-of-field or with poor performance ratings.

[Parental Role in 'F' Schools: Polk's Finger On Trigger](#)

What is plain language?

According to the Center for Plain Language, something is in plain language if it considers who will use it, why they will use it, and what they will do with it. The language used minimizes jargon and uses sentence structure, strong verbs, word choice, and other similar techniques to make sure that the audience can read, understand, and use the information. For more information about plain language, see centerforplainlanguage.org.

Plain Language Ballots

http://www.upassoc.org/upa_publications/jus/2010may/redish1.html

Practitioner's Take Away

The following are key points from this study:

- Language matters. Study participants voted more accurately on the ballot with plain language than on the ballot with traditional language.
- Education matters. Level of education correlated with accuracy. Voters with less education made more errors.
- Location, gender, age, and voting experience do not matter. None of those factors was a statistically significant correlate of accuracy.
- People recognize plain language. After they voted both ballots, participants were shown pairs of pages (the A and B versions of the same ballot page) and were told, "Notice that the instructions on these pages are different. Please compare them and comment on them." Participants commented that certain words were "simpler," "more common," and "easier to understand."
- People prefer plain language. Asked for an overall preference between the two ballots, 82% (37 of 45) chose Ballot B, the plain language ballot.
- Straight-party voting confuses many people. Even on the plain language ballot, participants made errors related to straight-party voting.
- Some voters do not have a good grasp of levels of government. Many of the errors on both ballots related to confusing U.S. Senate with State Senator and County Commission with City Council.
- Usability professionals can help make ballots and other voting materials more usable through research and consulting.
- Even in a summative test, usability specialists often see ways to improve the product for its next release. In the study reported here, the plain language ballot did significantly better than the ballot with traditional language. Nonetheless, after watching participants work with the ballot, we realized we could make the language even clearer. We include recommendations for an even better plain language ballot.

Plain Language Association InterNational



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Samples of Plain Language Rewrites and Organizational Change

Examples:

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Business

From a life insurance application form (submitted by Ron Scheer, www.saywhatyoumean.com):

Before:

If you fail to comply with your duty of disclosure and we would not have entered into the contract on any terms if the failure had not occurred, we may void the contract within three years of entering into it. If your non-disclosure is fraudulent, we may void the contract at any time. Where we are entitled to void a contract of life insurance we may, within three years of entering into it, elect not to void it but to reduce the sum that you have been insured for in accordance with a formula that takes into account the premium that would have been payable if you had disclosed all relevant matters to us.

After:

If you fail to disclose any relevant matter and we would not offer you insurance if this matter were known, we may within three years (1) void the contract or (2) reduce the sum for which you have been insured. If your nondisclosure is fraudulent, we may void the contract at any time.

From an insurance company form letter:

We have recently implemented an enhancement to our computer system that will enable us to provide better service to our valued customers. This has resulted in a slight delay in the processing of your renewal. The difference you will notice is in the payment schedule. Your annual policy premium has been divided over 11 (eleven) months, and as a result your monthly payment will have increased due to the reduced number of monthly installments.

Rewritten in plainer language:

We are a little late in sending your renewal documents because we have made a change in our computer system in order to provide better service. Your annual premium will now be divided over 11 months instead of 12 so the monthly payment will increase slightly.

From a travel agent:

METHOD OF PAYMENT: All quotes are for cash or certified cheque only. A personal or company cheque will take 10 working days to clear. Documents cannot be released until we are in receipt of cleared funds. Payment within 7 days of departure may incur courier charges.

Rewritten in plainer language:

We have indicated a price based on your paying us by cash or certified cheque or credit card. If you pay by a personal or company cheque, we will want 10 working days for your cheque to clear your bank. We will not provide your tickets or other travel documents until then. If we receive

your payment by personal or corporate cheque less than 7 days before your scheduled departure, we will charge you the cost of sending your documents by courier.

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Science

British plain-language expert Martin Cutts commented on one scientific writing habit, refusing to use personal pronouns:

... the statement "it is considered that fluoridation of drinking water is beneficial to health" leaves readers wondering who considers this -- the writer, wider scientific opinion, or both. Usually readers can make an intelligent guess from the context, but this means extra work for them and they will sometimes guess wrongly. No scientists worth their salt want their readers to engage in guess-work... The prohibition (against personal pronouns) can lead to woolliness, as in this example:

During the inspection, load checking of several tendons in the upper stressing gallery of G4 was witnessed. Several points were raised with the company about this procedure. These were: the numbering of the tendon anchorages, the numbering of strands for load checking and the calibration of the feeler gauge used to determine when tendon lift-off occurred. The company reported that all the load-checking procedures were under review. The latter point was accepted and would also be incorporated into the procedure. These changes will be reviewed by the author during the next site visit.

and the rewrite

During the inspection, I watched load checking of several tendons in the upper stressing gallery of G4 and raised the following points with the company about this procedure: the numbering of the tendon anchorages, the numbering of strands for load checking, and the calibration of the feeler gauge used to determine when tendon lift-off occurred. The company reported that all the load-checking procedures were under review but accepted the last of these points and said they would incorporate it into their procedures. I will review these changes during my next site visit.

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Journalism

From newspapers on Clinton's speech explaining why the U.S. attacked Sudan and Afghanistan with cruise missiles:

They are seeking to acquire chemical weapons and other dangerous weapons.

The evidence was apparently lacking for a more convincing and much stronger statement *rewritten* without the words "seeking to":

They are acquiring chemical weapons and other dangerous weapons.

From a newspaper article about the NCAA's concern about aluminum baseball bats:

In response to the concerns, the NCAA announced that the baseball rules committee will recommend a maximum batted-ball exit velocity of 93 mph and a change in the size and weight specs of non-wooden bats beginning with the 1999 season.

This rewrite is much better with a list than a rambling sentence:

Responding to the concerns, the NCAA announced new recommendations from the baseball rules committee, to begin with the 1999 season:

- Batted-ball exit speed maximum of 93 mph
- Change in size and weight specifications for non-wooden bats

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Law

From a brief of a few years ago. Widgets inserted to protect the guilty (submitted by Judge Mark P. Painter,

Cincinnati, Ohio, www.judgepainter.org):

Due to the fact that the plaintiff-appellant had up to this point in time supplied an insufficient number of widgets, defendant-appellee specified that, in the event that an insufficient number was supplied in the future, the contract would be held to be terminated, and deemed to be null and void and of no further effect. (55 words)

Translation:

Because Smith Co. had not supplied enough widgets, Jones Co. said that, if this happened again, Jones would terminate the contract. (21 words)

From *A Civil Action* by Jonathan Harr, a close call...

He said he wanted a settlement that would provide for the economic security of the families, and for their medical bills in the future.

Perhaps clearer:

He said he wanted a settlement that would make the families financially secure as well as pay their future medical bills.

And a recent headline from a Virginia case:

"It's a \$25 fine for driving while applying mascara."

This reverses the onus on the wrong behavior and makes it sound like:

- It is the applying of mascara that is unlawful, instead of the driving under sub-optimum conditions; or
- The primary activity was applying mascara which was interrupted by driving.

Rewritten, the headline should properly read:

"It's a \$25 fine to apply mascara while driving."

From a Clarity Award Winner from the State Bar of Michigan's Plain English Committee:

"[Name] informed you of the procedures for calculating interest for insufficient estimates. If the enclosed invoice(s) include charges for insufficient estimates, a detailed insufficient estimated [sic] used to calculate these charges is also enclosed."

Changed to:

"How to pay your bill: To avoid penalties as well as further interest, you must pay this bill by its due date."

And another Michigan Award Winner:

Before:

I give my Agent the power to exercise or perform any act, power, duty, right, or obligation whatsoever that I have or may hereafter acquire, relating to any person, matter, transaction, or property, real or personal, tangible or intangible, now owned or hereafter acquired by me, including, without limitation, the following specifically enumerated powers. I grant to my Agent full power and authority to do everything necessary in exercising any of the powers herein granted as fully as I might or could do if personally present, with full power of substitution or revocation, hereby ratifying and confirming all that my Agent shall lawfully do or cause to be done by virtue of this Power of Attorney and the powers herein granted.

After:

I give my agent the power to do anything that I have a right or duty to do, now or in the future.

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Technical Writing

Here's a dialogue box I encountered when setting up my e-mail (submitted by Sally McBeth, Toronto, Ontario, [Clear Language and Design](#)):

Before:

Check for messages every 30 minutes. If my computer is not connected at this time, connect only when not working offline..

After:

Check for messages every 30 minutes when I am working online.



Here's an original, written about an electronic toll system by a trained engineer, as they like to call themselves (submitted by [Mona Albano](#), Toronto, Ontario):

Before:

Make sure that the account holder's name on the account is the same as the name of the customer to whose account the transaction should be attributed.

After:

Make sure that this account is for the right customer.

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