

MEMBERS OF THE GREAT FUTURES COALITION

Associated Students of Colorado, Boulder Valley Gifted and Talented, Colorado Association for Gifted and Talented, Colorado Council of Churches, Colorado School Foundations Association, Colorado PTA, Colorado Rural Schools Caucus, Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition, Every Child Matters, Great Education Colorado, Impact on Education, Justice and Peace Ministry Team – Rocky Mountain Conference United Church of Christ, Kyffin Elementary PTA, Padres Unidos, Partnership for Families and Children, Wickerdale Walkers, and Women Informed Network.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – DECIDE (HCR 1002 / SCR 002)

Left with no other options, the legislature is now considering a budget that will cut **hundreds of millions of dollars from** K-12 education – about \$400-500 per pupil. Colorado already funds its schools \$1,900 below the national average. Without action at the ballot, the 2011-12 budget will bring even deeper cuts to every public school in Colorado.

Higher education is also in trouble. Colorado ranks 48th in the country in state funding for higher education. The **higher education funding cliff** threatens the sustainability, quality, and affordability of colleges and universities in Colorado.

Is that what Colorado voters want?

What is DECIDE?

DECIDE stands for “Decide: Education Cuts OR Invest in our Democracy and Economy.”

DECIDE is a proposed referred measure that would give voters the chance to DECIDE whether they want an alternative to balancing our state budget by making deep and irreparable cuts to Colorado’s public schools, colleges and universities.

What would DECIDE do?

DECIDE would allow voters to grant authority to the legislature to increase revenues in order to prevent more cuts to education and invest in K-12 and higher education. New revenues could be used for accountable education reform, class size reduction, school safety, technology, effective teaching, early childhood education and full-day kindergarten, career technical education, higher education and more.

Why now?

Across Colorado, public schools are enduring deep, crippling cuts that are virtually irreversible. You’ve heard about Pueblo going to a four-day school week. Adams 12 Five Star just announced 180 job cuts. Class sizes are growing in just about every district – and every community college – in the state.

Without action, school districts, colleges and universities will be forced to make even more painful cuts – cuts that could only be reversed through years of steadily improving funding, and only after a heavy price has been paid by Colorado’s students and our local economy:

- Class sizes – already among the highest in the nation – will grow to unmanageable levels.
- Colleges may close or lose their accreditation.

- Highly qualified and effective teachers and professors will leave the state and/or profession – and few will enter the teaching profession.
- Programs critical to educational achievement, economic opportunity and competitiveness, and life-long learning will be lost, perhaps forever. Already deep cuts are being made to music, the arts, foreign languages, International Baccalaureate, Career Technical Education, and specialized programs for diverse learners, such as children with disabilities and those who are academically advanced and/or highly creative. The loss in potential resulting from these cuts is incalculable.
- Students who cannot afford rising tuition will end their advanced education; more high school students will fall through the cracks and drop out – creating permanent obstacles to economic opportunities.
- Colorado will lag in its economic recovery, as businesses seek out locations with strong a strong commitment to public schools and colleges and universities, and a well-prepared workforce.

Perhaps most important: **our children don't get do-overs, nor can they wait to get their education until Colorado sorts out its fiscal mess.** For our kids, educational opportunities delayed are opportunities lost. Inaction is no longer an option.

Who supports DECIDE?

DECIDE is being proposed by a broad coalition of organizations called the “Great Futures Colorado Campaign.” The coalition supports increased investment in preschool, K-12 and higher education in Colorado. Visit www.greatfuturescolorado.org for more information.

Why should others support DECIDE?

DECIDE would **give voters the opportunity to step in to protect Colorado's kids** from more irreversible and crippling education cuts

DECIDE would **give the legislature the ability to avoid the looming education funding cliff** in 2011, when the federal stimulus dollars end.

DECIDE would **allow the legislature to create a more fair and equitable tax structure** and to act upon the analysis that will soon be provided by the first study of Colorado's tax system in over 50 years, which was requested by the legislature (in Senate Joint Resolution 10-002).

DECIDE would **protect Colorado from extra years of rebuilding** while our fellow states and nations outperform us educationally and economically.

DECIDE would **restore balance to two voting traditions in Colorado: limiting the size of government and supporting education.** Without it, the voters' clear intent to protect education from cuts will be violated, without their consent.

MEDIA COVERAGE

Media Stories about DECIDE: *9News, KDVR Fox 31 News, KKTV Colorado Springs, KOAA Colorado Springs, KMGH Channel 7, The Denver Post, Colorado Independent, The Denver Daily News, Education News Colorado, Colorado Statesman, KUNC (NPR), The Pueblo Chieftain, Associated Press* (Over 50 hits including *Business Week, Forbes, The Vail Daily News, The Aspen Daily News, Sterling Journal-Advocate, The Fort Collins Coloradoan*)

Denver Post Editorial: *End run is the wrong way to take on TABOR: Rather than trying to skirt the Taxpayer's Bill of Right to raise education taxes, it would be better to take on broader reforms.*

The [Denver Post](#) editorialized today about [DECIDE](#), the [Great Futures Colorado coalition's](#) proposal to prevent and reverse cuts to education.

Democratic lawmakers and public education supporters should earn extra credit for hatching an idea to get around TABOR restraints to raise more money for education. . .

The Great Futures plan comes after the legislature has been forced to cut funding for higher education and is set to slice \$260 million from public schools. The funding reductions represent serious challenges for educators. And it's only expected to get worse next year when the stimulus money from the federal government dries up.

It's highly unlikely that the coalition will be able to convince the required two-thirds of lawmakers to send the measure to voters. However, this is a good chance for Great Futures to force the issue into the public eye and possibly pave the way for a citizen-issued ballot measure.

We may be inclined in the future to support the coalition if they take on the broader problems of TABOR, and not just carve out an exception for education.

The Post is reporting the conventional wisdom that it is "unlikely" that we'll be able to gain the 2/3 vote necessary to place the referendum on the ballot.

But here's what the conventional wisdom doesn't take into account: public education supporters (preschool, K-12 and higher ed) haven't yet let their legislators know just how devastating the upcoming cuts are going to be, and how dedicated they are to preventing deeper cuts.

Greeley Tribune Editorial: *Lifting tax limit not the answer*

Like the Denver Post, the Greeley Tribune editorial board has weighed in on DECIDE, saying that the Great Futures Colorado coalition's proposal has identified a critical problem, but is "too narrow in scope."

The Tribune takes the opportunity of the DECIDE measure to opine:

However, we do think it's time for the citizens of Colorado to wake up and embrace the fact that somehow, someday, we are all going to have to make a commitment to financially support education in this state.

And, after citing statistic after statistic about Colorado's failure to keep up with the rest of the nation in K-12 investment, the Tribune concludes:

So many people use the cliché "you can't just throw money at the problem." But here's another cliché, one that is quickly becoming our reality: You get what you pay for. Or maybe more true in Colorado: You get what you won't pay for, which is a steady decrease in the quality of public education. . . .

We call on all residents, all lawmakers, to open up their minds and find a way to solve the continuing funding crisis for education. And that most certainly will include a change in mindset about our tax structure in Colorado, and a realization of what it will cost to adequately fund a good and essential public education system.

Though we disagree with its conclusion about DECIDE, we applaud the Tribune's recognition that the question is no longer *whether* we should do something about Colorado's education funding crisis, but *what* we should do about it.

Our children can't wait - the time for action is *now*.