

Petition Comments and Stories: April 16, 2015

B.C., Eagle: Pay freezes for teachers have led to teacher retention issues. Low starting salary has impacted our ability to recruit. Large class sizes impact student achievement.

L.M., Eagle: I have been working 10 years in Colorado, and my salary is \$43,000. If I were to cross "the border" to Wyoming. I would make \$10,000 more dollars. When I started teaching 10 years ago, I had an average of 18 kids per class. Last year, I had 30 third graders in my class, and this year it is 24 students. Meeting the needs of this many students at a Title 1 school is impossible. I have to perform "triage" and only focus on the students that are almost proficient. The students that are proficient, do not receive any additional help, and are left to learn independently. The students who are several grade levels behind continue to be left behind because I do not have the time or resources to support them. We need our money back to give teachers the resources they need to be able to meet the needs of America's future citizens!

T.S., Colorado Springs: Some results of funding cuts: loss of programs (Latin, German), outrageous class sizes, network always down so kids can't access technology because we can't afford to upgrade, students having to purchase their textbooks. I have to buy my own supplies with my frozen, furloughed, lowest paying district's salary in the one of the lowest funded states for education. Schools have been closed to save money, leading to overcrowding in the remaining schools. There is extreme turnover due to the horrendous teaching conditions of constant testing, no respect, and no funding.

K.F., Loveland: Students at Truscott Elementary are unable to log in or to stay logged in on computer programs that are used for interventions, teaching typing, and taking state-mandated tests, because of the limited bandwidth for internet use at the school. Gifted and Talented students need more services than they are receiving at all of the schools. Lack of funding limits the amount of resources and the number of specialized Gifted and Talented teachers that are available.

H.B.M., Fort Collins: I work in a Title 1 school with 70% of our students qualifying for Free and Reduced lunch. Since the Great Recession, we have seen more and more families unable to keep up with housing and food. Parents are working more hours and not even able to make ends meet. The children in Colorado are in crisis. Classroom teachers see the effect of the economy every day on their students. Teachers have had fewer resources (personnel) to help students when they need it the most. Teachers are working tirelessly day and night and weekends to do their best, but the demands are great. Unless you work in the schools, you do not see how badly our schools need money to hire more people. We can only do so much. I am pleading with you to make the good, honest, and right decision to allow the tax refund to stay for our schools. If everyone shares a little, it will have a great and positive impact on our schools.

L.S., Loveland: I am the principal of a K-8 charter school. For the past two years, my staff has donated up to 14% of their salaries to our general fund to be sure our students received the very best learning opportunity possible. Our salaries are far below any school that I know of - almost to the level of pay that I began with 28 years ago. We put our students first, why can't our government vote to do the same?

B.E., Loveland: In response to budget cuts, my district had to change its ratio of certified employees to students. I am responsible for meeting the needs of 34 fifth graders including one student with Autism, one with a significant emotional disability, two with identified learning disabilities, and three who read and write at least three grade levels higher than fifth grade. All of these kids are in one room with 27 grade-level peers. And I am responsible for trying to meet their daily intellectual, social, and emotional needs!

D.H., Elizabeth: Our school is cutting three elementary teachers because of budget cuts. Our kids will not be able to have shop, the school may be falling apart, and the track needs repair. Testing requires technology which many schools struggle to supply. And tests require that students are computer knowledgeable and have typing skills in third grade. This means starting out young students with as much technology time and

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interaction as possible. We're going to see more students home schooled. Between testing and budget cuts, more parents will choose keep their students at home.

W.P., Gunnison: Gunnison schools have been cut \$8 million over the past four years. We have reduced classroom teachers, librarians, guidance counselors, administrators, classified staff. Our parents, students and community members have much higher expectations of our local public schools than that. Use excess funds as an investment in the future of our children. A \$20 rebate is not that much of a rebate, but it will make a difference in the future of a child if the funds are used to keep the public schools operating at a higher level. Our children are worthy of the best. Thank you, a senior citizen from Gunnison.

S.A., Indian Hills: Our children in Colorado are being poorly served in educational support. I am embarrassed and have admitted to relatives that our system is inadequate compared to other states; I've discouraged two of my own children from educational careers. One of my schools has science texts published in 1995. We have to spend time writing grants for classroom materials and instructional support so that our teachers can stay current in the profession; the district cannot afford these basic elements of a system. Special education (SPED) staffing is still being cut and those students are having to depend on general education teachers, who are not trained in SPED, for academic support. This negatively impacts SPED students, the general education teachers who are overwhelmed by expectations they do not have training for, and the other students who find themselves in a classroom that has one overwhelmed adult and inadequate resources for their learning. The level of efficacy expected in relation to the amount of essential resources to do our work well is beyond belief. Teachers are working at substantially more than 100% effort. Students are shaking out into economic segregation dependent on local sites' ability to find outside funds for learning materials, technology, staff training, transportation, and fine arts, to name a few. We would appreciate retaining the small amount of funding this TABOR refund would provide. Quality public education is a basic infrastructure of a democracy.

D.N., Durango: Cuts in funding for K-12 education resulted in much larger class sizes, the discontinuation of advanced math classes, and several people losing their jobs. There is no librarian or media specialist to work with kids and teachers to learn through books and media resources. There is no more gifted and talented programming or specialist to advocate for the needs of gifted and high potential learners. And this is just one middle school's story.

V.B., Glenwood Springs: Our class sizes have gone from approximately 20 to 30 and our school was designed and built for 22 students in a classroom. Some of the rooms are so crowded that students can't get to the restroom and teachers have bruises on their legs from bumping into desks. Three teachers have had to sell their homes and move into rented trailers, apartments, or back with their parents. Our salaries are the same as they were in 2008. That's seven years of stagnation in income compared with an average of 2% increase in costs. How can we attract and keep excellent teachers? How can I recommend becoming a teacher to a young student? Our school used to have two buses, now we have one and we expanded the boundary for bus riding. It was one mile, now it's one-and-a-half miles. We have two bus routes, but only one bus so the bus takes a group of kids home, then returns for a second run. Meanwhile, kids are waiting in line for the second bus.

J.J., Saguache: I teach middle school Health, Social Studies and PE. The textbooks in my 8th grade class are 16 years old and I use duct tape to keep them together. Our school can't afford to buy the textbooks that accompany the internet curriculum for 6th and 7th grade Social Studies.

B.B., Alamosa: I teach English and Spanish at a small, rural school in Moffat, CO. Each staff member here has to take on the work of two or three employees because we simply can't afford to hire the employees necessary to run the school effectively. Our school nurse is only in on Wednesdays. Authentic experiences, field trips, and even classroom supplies are often left out of the equation due to insufficient funding. And none of the teachers or staff are paid according to their workload.

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H.S., Monte Vista: In the last nine years, our first grade team has gone from four classroom teachers and four paraprofessionals teaching 80-90 six year-old students to read every day for two hours to four classroom teachers and one paraprofessional (who can only support kids for an hour) teaching 80-90 six year-old students to read. We are being asked to do the same thing with less support. This translates into more kids who aren't supported well enough to become adept at reading. It also translates into low teacher morale, more sick leave being used and higher rates of burnout.

S.H., Woodrow: Colorado needs to return the negative factor to schools. The base pay makes it hard to recruit quality teachers. Costs are increasing, yet the state wants to cut schools even more. Our music program was eliminated and physical education was cut from full-time to 3/4 time. Increases in food costs are making it difficult to support the National School Lunch Program with general fund dollars.

S.S., Kiowa: I am the mom of three who are all now in college. I am a conservative Republican who believes in smaller government and feels our tax money should be spent more wisely. The small amount of money that TABOR will refund back to us, will be much better used in our schools. The Starbucks coffee I might buy with that refund will be much better utilized in the classroom. Let's place the importance on education where it belongs.

C.D., Highlands Ranch: With classes so large and elementary assistants cut, it is impossible for teachers to provide individual attention. I had to get outside tutoring for my child. We've lost Spanish, keyboarding, library, activity bus, free busing, band in elementary. PTO fundraisers no longer pay for fun extras like field trips and assemblies, but for necessities like curriculum and copy paper.

N.K., Boulder: I am a special education and literacy teacher at an elementary school. Over the past several years, we have seen significant cuts in special education para-educator support for students, and our literacy specialist/teacher FTE (full time equivalent) has been cut in half. It is very difficult to meet the needs of struggling students with such limited services available.

L.C., Westminster: In 2015-16, we will have fifth-grade students who have never known their school life without larger class sizes and less resources. My older daughter is one of those fifth grade students. Her younger sister will start kindergarten in a class potentially as large as 29 children. I know there's talk of potential cuts by 2017, and yet we have not restored the cuts that were made for the 2010-11 year. The idea that my children could begin school with less than what previous students received and then face cuts of even that meager amount so people can have an extra \$20 this year is pennywise and pound foolish. These students are our future economy, our future health care workers, policymakers, and engineers--provided we restore funding and stop this unnecessary downward spiral.

D.P., Golden: I am a retired vocational/industrial arts teacher from the Boulder Valley School District. My construction trades program was cut in 2010. There is a construction boom in Denver and a current shortage of skilled trades workers in Colorado. This doesn't make sense. I would like to see more state money go to support skilled trades training at the high school and post-secondary levels.

L.H., Broomfield: The STEM Magnet Lab school is in a building that was built back in 1969. In the last eight months, we have experienced the same main water pipe break twice, flooding a common area of the school and causing the school to close early once and be canceled altogether the second time. We have had coolant leak out of the old air conditioning unit into the cafeteria. An old boiler, which was identified as cracked, leaked and flooded another part of the school. This all happened in the last eight months! Our roof is over 20 yrs old and, needless to say, it needs to be replaced, but at \$2M our district just doesn't have the funding. A mill levy

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and bond were rejected by the voters by a 4% margin, 52% - 48%. Please, please, allocate the excess to schools and keep my \$20 refund!!!

J.S., Brighton: My preschool classroom is full of high needs, at-risk students. Budget cuts mean we are chronically understaffed, and lack the resources to fully meet the needs of these kids. Early childhood education can improve a child's chances of success in the classroom and in life, but only if that education is high-quality. We cannot provide the needed quality without adequate resources. Please fund our schools at the level our kids deserve.

T.E., Centennial: I am an educator. Every year we make cuts because we haven't received an increase in funding while the cost of employees (and benefits) rises. This has drastically impacted our schools, especially at the elementary level. We will have 27 first graders in each class next year which is a challenge. (It won't be surprising to see scores drop due to larger class sizes.) Currently, each 5th grade teacher in my building has 33 students. That is not fair to students; teachers are spread so thin and cannot possibly give each student the individual time and attention they deserve. Large class sizes also impacts student behavior; we have seen an increase in problem behavior which is directly attributed to large class sizes. Thank you for putting the education of our students -- tomorrow's leaders! -- first.

P.C., Centennial: My position in the library after 30+ years has been eliminated along with numerous others. Class sizes are increasing which decreases time with students. We continue to see cuts even though other areas of the economy are booming.

W.O., Commerce City: We are considering moving due to the cuts to schooling. Our schools are overcrowded and underfunded! We used to take care of our children in Colorado.

S.G., Westminster: Both of my children attend Adams 50 Mesa Elementary in Westminster. Most of the children that attend are on free or reduced lunch. What the teachers are doing with limited resources is amazing. I want the district to keep those amazing educators and continue to allow our children to soar. This is going to take resources our community just doesn't have. With additional funds, the state can show that it believes in quality education for everyone and it believes in our children.

K.O., Longmont: My son experienced the impact of cuts firsthand when his Intervention teacher no longer taught the reading intervention class for 4th grade students in elementary school. This class was cut for all 4th and 5th grade students. He had been receiving reading intervention since Kindergarten and he definitely experienced a loss in intervention aid. In addition, class sizes have been increasing through the years affecting the teacher's overall ability to reach every student successfully.

J.M., Denver: This senior citizen fully supports public education in Colorado. Don't shortchange our children by cutting any surplus spending that is needed to enhance their learning possibilities.

K.R., Denver: I have been an educator for 20 years, 18 of them in Colorado. We are at a time when we need these resources more than ever. Colorado has implemented so many reforms without the resources needed to enact them in the classroom. At my school of diverse learners, over 50% of whom qualify for free or reduced lunch, we lack funds to expand our programming; to retain quality teachers; to hire needed interventionists; and to obtain the technology needed for the new standardized assessments. We can really do great things in education. Colorado has willing, hard-working educators. But it's time to give education the funding it deserves. Thank you.

L.L.R., Denver: I am a teacher and have just been informed that my pre/K class will increase to 30 students...imagine that.

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L.H., Denver: I am a school leader in Denver working to ensure my students have what they need to be successful. The cuts have been tremendous particularly in the areas of wrap-around services since we have prioritized funding teachers in the classroom. My students would greatly benefit from increased mental health support and academic counseling.

E.H., Denver: I teach in a school in north Aurora. Most years, over 90% of our students are qualified for free- or reduced-price lunch because of family poverty. Many have no internet at home, or even computers, so this spring when we're doing all this new computerized testing, they're missing a lot. We tried to prepare them but we had only four chrome-books in our classroom for all to share -- until testing season started, when the administration took those back to be used for testing elsewhere. My classroom has a pretty good library, mostly books belonging to me personally, but the school library is understocked. The school library books are about 30-years-old and are inadequate for writing reports about our state. We need field trips, since our kids' parents can't afford take them to museums or state parks or other places to have learning experiences, but our district can only pay for one field trip bus per class per year. Are we on a level playing field with the school where YOUR children go to? I doubt it! Please don't refund taxpayers like me a trivial amount of money. Instead, keep it and use it to carry out voters' intentions when they passed the amendment to improve school funding.