



**Online Graduate Education**  
Affordable • Accredited

**csc.edu/online**  
**1-800-CHADRON**

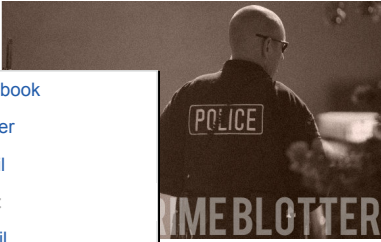
# YourHub



[Adams County](#) [Arapahoe County](#) [Aurora](#) [Denver](#) [Douglas County](#) [Jefferson County](#)  

67 Crime Blotter Roundup

Like



Facebook  
Twitter  
Email  
Print  
Gmail  
Favorites  
More... (293)

Powered by [AddThis](#)  
[Load more »](#)

## Is Jeffco Superintendent Cindy Stevenson a martyr or a failed CEO?

Posted by tcoyne on February 17, 2014 in Jefferson County, Jefferson County Education | 2261 Views | 9 Responses

Or is she something much more mundane, just another CEO who resigned after her poor track record caused stakeholders to lose confidence in her leadership? While the martyr story strikes an emotional chord, the near riot in the Board Room at the Jeffco Ed Center on Feb. 8 after Dr. Stevenson announced her resignation demands that we confront this question.

In today's intensely competitive, complex and fast-changing economy, failed CEOs are unfortunately all too common, particularly when they have held power for a long time. In a recent article in the Strategic Management Journal ("How Does CEO Tenure Matter?" by Luo, Kanuri, and Andrews), the authors describe the path to resignation taken by too many long-serving CEOs. After an initial period of energy and change, they settle into established routines and organizational innovation slows. Over time, these CEOs also narrow their sources of information and become increasingly reliant on internal colleagues, which causes them to lose touch with the changing views and needs of their outside stakeholders.

This loss of perspective is further reinforced by the tendency of a CEO's popularity with employees to increase over time, regardless of their company's performance record. Based on my experience, I also note the tendency of long-serving CEOs to surround themselves with colleagues who are too often promoted for loyalty rather than merit. Such people

### YOURHUB STAFF STORIES

[Twigs Consignment & Boutique, Evergreen](#)  
July 22, 2015  
Interview with Christine Gaber, owner

[Skin Essentials Medical Skin Care & Day Spa, Littleton](#)  
July 22, 2015  
Interview with Beth Pestotnik, owner

[Celestial Hair Designs, Lakewood](#)  
July 21, 2015  
Interview with Celeste Lucero, owner

[Angela M. Osborn, DDS, PC, Lone Tree](#)  
July 21, 2015  
Interview with Dr. Angela Osborn

[Park Hill Hub, Denver](#)  
July 21, 2015  
Interview with Victoria Williams, owner

[The Barber Shop, Aurora](#)  
July 21, 2015  
Interview with Jose Ramos, owner

[Felicia & Monica's Hairstop, Wheat Ridge](#)  
July 21, 2015  
Interview with Felicia Gallegos and Monica Lopez, owners

[Advanced Urgent Care & Occupational Medicine, Brighton](#)  
July 21, 2015  
Interview with Dr. Anthony Euser

[Angels With Paws Thrift Store,](#)

Comments Popular Tags



Barbara Stein on [Local Teachers Tackle Trust and Children's Fears...](#)

*Congratulations to you, your mom...*



Scott on [Your Voice: An open letter to the...](#)

*Very well written. I look...*



Toni Budoff on [Your Voice: An open letter to the...](#)

*So well stated Tammie! Thank...*

Colleen woods on [Veteran](#)

are usually very reluctant to bring bad news to a CEO, or to challenge his or her views. In theory, governance processes should act against these tendencies, but long-serving CEOs usually have very loyal board majorities who are also reluctant to challenge them, until rising stakeholder dissatisfaction forces the board's hand (e.g., due to a sharp fall in the company's stock price).

Ultimately, the question of whether Dr. Stevenson was a martyr must turn on the change in Jeffco's academic achievement over her 12 years as superintendent. If her track record in this area shows dramatic gains, then the martyr story rings true; if it does not, we are left with the much more common situation of poor performance leading to the resignation of a long-serving CEO. To examine this question, I have analyzed the last eight years of publicly available CSAP/TCAP data, and the 2013 results of the Grade 11 ACT test, which is the last test every Colorado student takes before graduation. All of this data are publicly available on the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) website.

The Colorado Growth Model uses TCAP scores to measure academic performance from third through 10th grade. TCAP uses a 150 to 950 or 999 scoring scale to measure students' progress up the learning curve from third to 10th grade. Each year, the minimum score for proficiency increases. Over the past eight years, Jeffco's grade-to-grade increases in average TCAP scale scores in math, writing and reading have often been less than the corresponding increase in the minimum score for proficiency. As a result, over the past eight years, Jeffco's percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced in math, writing and reading has often significantly declined from third to 10th grade. For example, in 2013, 57 percent of Jeffco 10th graders were not proficient in math. Over the past eight years, 30,155 10th-grade students have scored below proficient in math – about equal to the population of Wheat Ridge. This pattern appears in the TCAP results for every student group, including special education and gifted students (the full data set is available on [k12accountability.org](#)).

It is also critical to note that this pattern of grade-to-grade proficiency decline is not due to poverty. In 2013, 48 percent of 10th graders who were not eligible for free and reduced lunch (F&R) were not proficient in math. For Jeffco's F&R students, performance was much worse. In 2013, a stunning 80 percent of 10th-graders were not proficient. (In Massachusetts, where the state tests are much

[Lakewood](#)  
July 15, 2015  
Interview with Jean Ausenbaugh, board president

[K2 Signs and Graphics, Evergreen](#)  
July 15, 2015  
Interview with Chris Klaschik, owner

[Golf Zone Adventure, Parker](#)  
July 15, 2015  
Interview with Karen Stackpole, owner

[Brik on York, Denver](#)  
July 15, 2015  
Interview with Travis Gee, president and executive sommelier

[Havana Street Station, Aurora](#)  
July 15, 2015  
Interview with Tracy Clemons, day manager

[Gently Used 2, Wheat Ridge](#)  
July 15, 2015  
Interview with Mark A. Williams, owner

[ASAP Asphalt & Concrete, Commerce City](#)  
July 15, 2015  
Interview with Grant Simmons, president

[Willow & An Artisan's Market, Littleton](#)  
July 15, 2015  
Interview with Helen Rice, owner

[Pam's Hair & Nail Designs, Lakewood](#)  
July 8, 2015  
Interview with Pam Cain, owner

[Gold Mine Cupcakes, Golden](#)  
July 8, 2015  
Interview with Sara Rutter, owner/baker

[Golden Flame Hot Wings, Castle Pines](#)  
July 8, 2015  
Interview with Scott Ulrich, owner/manager

[Three Tomatoes Catering, Denver](#)  
July 8, 2015  
Interview with Donnah Phipps, business development manager



program brings mom and daughter out...  
*I can't thank Sarah enough...*



Ann Rose Madison on **Residents organize to name new recreation center...**  
*I support the effort to...*



Andrea Weyand on **To Nepal, with Love 5K Walk/Run**  
*Register here!*  
<http://walkfornepal.org/event-detail/denver-5k.html>

## Denver Medical Assistant

[heritage-education.com/Medical](http://heritage-education.com/Medical)

Flex Schedules for Adult Students. Denver, CO  
Request Info Now.

[K12 Online Public School](#) ▾

[Tutor Doctor Boulder](#) ▾

YourHub on Twitter

tougher than Colorado's, only 37 percent of F&R 10th-graders were not proficient in math).

Moreover, it does not appear that a lack of money is the root cause of this broad pattern of grade-to-grade decline in proficiency. It was there before Jeffco's budget cuts started in 2009, and it has not worsened since.


A reasonable question to ask is whether academic achievement substantially improves between 10th and 11th grade. Based on Jeffco's 2013 ACT results, it does not. In 2013, 55 percent of all Jeffco 11th-graders were below the minimum math and reading scores for "college and career readiness." For science, 61 percent fell below this mark. This is consistent with research findings by both CDE and the ACT organization. Because of the cumulative nature of learning, students who are significantly below the minimum proficient cut score in grades six through eight will likely never reach college and career readiness, despite the Herculean efforts of their high school teachers.

But what about the frequently made claim that Jeffco's academic achievement performance is excellent because the district routinely outperforms the state on TCAP Median Growth Percentiles (MGP)? The key point here is that growth percentiles measure only the relative year-to-year scale score increase for students who all started out with the same previous year TCAP score. A good analogy is to a running race in which 100 students start on the same line, and your child finishes 24th – that is, in the 75th percentile (assuming a 0 to 99 scale). While this tells you how well your child performed compared to others who started in the same place, that 75th percentile score says nothing at all about whether your daughter's performance is good enough to earn her a college track scholarship. For that, you need to know her actual time, or, in the case of TCAP, her scale score.


Consider this example: On the TCAP math tests in 2013, Jeffco had MGPs above the 50th percentile in every grade from third to 10th. However, the cumulative increase of 152 scale score points between third and 10th grade was much less than the 208 point increase in the minimum score for proficiency. As a result, the percent of Jeffco students who were not proficient in math more than doubled, from only 26 percent in third grade to 57 percent by 10th grade. In short, at the district-level Median Growth Percentile is a very misleading measure of real achievement performance.

**Tweets** Follow

**YourHub.com** @YourHub 41m  
 Old explosives still being found at Lakewood's Green Mountain park [dpo.st/1JvYD4e](http://dpo.st/1JvYD4e) by @abriggs [pic.twitter.com/ocSfXhg3UK](http://pic.twitter.com/ocSfXhg3UK)



**YourHub.com** @YourHub 1h  
 Echo Mountain ski area reopening to the public Dec. 10 [dpo.st/1Jw3Vwy](http://dpo.st/1Jw3Vwy) by @JosieKlemaier [pic.twitter.com/li1VH0ne4d](http://pic.twitter.com/li1VH0ne4d)




Tweet to @YourHub

YourHub on Facebook

**YourHub.com** 3,931 likes


Like Page Share

Be the first of your friends to like this



**YourHub.com** February 23

While we're touting the accomplishments of former YourHub staffers, we might as well do the same for the current crew here by announcing our very own Colorado Press Association first-place finish for Best Website Daily Community! Hooray us!



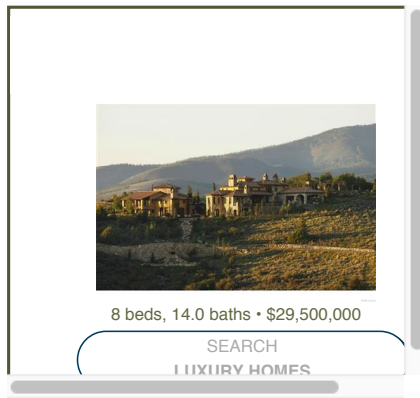
Dr. Stevenson also likes to point out that Jeffco's high school graduation rate is close to the top among the nation's 50 largest school districts. Again, given the dynamics at work, this is exactly what we would expect to find. Across the top 50 districts, there is a very strong negative correlation between the percentage of F&R students and the high school graduation rate, and Jeffco has the third-lowest F&R percentage. However, 29 percent of Jeffco's graduates who attend a public college or university in Colorado have to pay for remedial (non-credit) courses, which suggests that the district has been pushing too many kids out the door who aren't college- and career-ready.

For me, the most frustrating aspect of Jeffco's dismal track record over the past eight years is that there are many examples of individual schools in the district that have delivered significant improvements in academic achievement. We have some outstanding teachers and building teams whose accomplishments should be recognized and rewarded. However, despite spending almost a billion dollars per year over the past eight years, the district's leaders, Board of Education majorities and Accountability Committee have not been able to identify, and/or understand, and/or scale up the innovations at these schools to improve Jeffco's overall academic achievement. Our kids have paid a heavy price for this failure.

After weighing the evidence, it seems clear that those people who fervently believe Dr. Stevenson is a martyr are quite wrong. Instead, the data point to a different conclusion: She is simply the latest name on the long list of CEOs whose poor performance cost them the confidence of their stakeholders and led to their departure.

Before moving to Colorado, I experienced two very different K-12 performance improvement processes. In Alberta, Canada, a long-term, data-driven collaboration between K-12 professionals, the business community and politicians resulted in substantial academic performance gains, which led to higher funding for K-12 and significant increases in teacher compensation. Everyone ended up a winner. In Rhode Island, intensifying conflict between education, business and political groups blocked many performance improvement initiatives and eventually led to the most heavily Democratic state in the nation voting to significantly reduce teacher pensions. Everyone ended up a loser.

The stakes are indeed high, and the path that Jeffco



takes from here is up to all of us.

*Tom Coyne chairs the Wheat Ridge High School Accountability Committee. He has worked on corporate performance improvement issues for more than 30 years.*

Posted in Jefferson County, Jefferson County Education

## About the Author



**tcoyne**

Chair, Wheat Ridge High School  
Accountability Committee

## 9 Responses



**Dean** February 19, 2014 at 10:23 pm | [Permalink](#)

Thank you for your analysis and write up.

This is the kind of analysis and writing that we should get from the Denver Post. I hope the reporters and editors of the DP read this and learn from it. It's far better than what they produce. Our local media outlets need to elevate their work to this level.

Wheat Ridge is fortunate to have you on their accountability committee.

[Reply](#)



**David Johnson** February 20, 2014 at 1:46 pm | [Permalink](#)

Often times a highly popular school superintendent is doing a good job of maintaining the status quo. Unions love that. Dr. Stevenson showed that she was unable or unwilling to adapt to the changes that the Jeffco voters wanted. She disgraced herself by quitting mid-stream. Did Dr. Stevenson feel she was inexplicable? No school administrator is indispensable. Dr. Stevenson appears to be playing games in public by pretending to be the 'whipped dog' in front of her supporters. I never figured her to be so shallow and transparent.

[Reply](#)



**Robert** February 27, 2014 at 9:46 am | [Permalink](#)

I don't think people understand that Stevenson was not pro teacher union. She actually cut teacher pay and compensation for 5 consecutive years. Criticize Stevenson



all you want but she was not a friend of the teacher association.

Reply



**Sunny Flynn** February 20, 2014 at 2:49 pm | [Permalink](#)

Thank you for this rational, fact based look at Dr. Stevenson's record in JeffCo. So much of what we see portrayed through the left leaning media, JeffCo PTA, Transparency Jeffco, her friends in the administration and other organizations is emotional at best and factually incorrect at worst.

I became involved with the previous JeffCo School Board and Dr. Stevenson as I was researching inBloom last fall. I was very concerned with her ideology, management style and connection to special interests. Based on my experience your article hits the nail on the head. I believe it is time for change in JeffCo! The voters agree.

Please continue to write more articles. Parents, teachers, principals and taxpayers need to understand the truth.

Reply



**CindyR** February 20, 2014 at 4:23 pm | [Permalink](#)

Tom, I loved your article. I have had dealings with Cindy Stevenson and I didn't need to read all the facts to come to your conclusion. Dr. Stevenson is politically charged and pursues only her agenda. She basically stated she would not work with the new board when she resigned a day after they were elected. She orchestrated the mob scene on February 8th just as she has orchestrated all the media to not publish/pursue articles of her deceitfulness. We are entering a new era and I do hope this new board can hire a leader that knows how to run a company as if it were private and not take advantage of the Jeffco taxpayers any longer.

Reply



**Loren Sheets** February 21, 2014 at 9:08 am | [Permalink](#)

Thanks for looking at the real issue – students and student performance. Many rallying around Dr. Stevenson at the “near riot” on February 8 have lost that perspective. To them, this is about Dr. Stevenson and the cult of personality that surrounds her.

While I do not question Dr. Stevenson's best intentions, her policies have failed and JeffCo students are paying the price. I know change can be scary – especially if you're a friend of Dr. Stevenson, but we can't continue wandering down the path we're on simply because Dr. Stevenson is a good person. We need to see results.

Reply



**Trudi** February 21, 2014 at 6:32 pm | [Permalink](#)

Great article. It would great if it received widespread exposure! I've had three children in the Jeffco school system with Ms. Stevenson in charge. I was not at all pleased with their education, to say the least. I am exceedingly glad that we have a new board, and I hope the changes they make will improve the results of future students. I would like to see them follow the lead of Dougco.

Reply



**gary fisk** February 22, 2014 at 9:12 am | [Permalink](#)

The recently elected reform board ran on a platform of school choice and teacher accountability. All students are different and school choice offers the variety parents want. Witness the long waiting lists at most charters. Study after study shows that excellent teachers are the main factor in a child's learning and goal-setting. Allowing the annual Dance of the Lemons where low-performing teachers are fobbed off onto other schools (and students!) is a long-standing practice that has to be abolished. Unions resist these changes so progress is very slow in coming. The children graduating from JeffCo schools this year started 1st grade when Dr. Stevenson became the Supt. 29% of these grads need remedial help to start college, showing the urgency of charters and more teacher accountability. Board: Pick a supt who supports these issues. It will be a long fight. The Board now needs the vocal support of the voters who put them in office if these changes are going to come to JeffCo.

Reply



**Carol** February 27, 2014 at 12:04 pm | [Permalink](#)

Mr. Coyne, thank you for contributing such a clear, fact-based message on what is really going on in Jeffco Public Schools! I am so tired of the emotional writings that have been published since the abrupt departure of Ms. Stevenson. Please contribute more of your ideas to a more widely read publication (The Hub is wonderful for that specific area, but readers from the wider Denver area need to hear this). Again, we need more people to speak up, armed with facts, as you did.

Reply

### Leave a Reply

Name \*

Email \*

Website

Comment

# YourHub



YourHub is The Denver Post's online local news source and weekly print section. This website is for community contributions. For YourHub staff content, go to our Denver Post website at [denverpost.com/yourhub](http://denverpost.com/yourhub).

101 W. Colfax Ave.  
Denver, CO 80202  
303-954-1010  
[newsroom@denverpost.com](mailto:newsroom@denverpost.com)