

COLUMNS

Keep focus on student achievement

By Susan Miller*Guest Commentary*

The Denver Post

Posted: Sat Feb 20 17:00:00 MST 2016

State Senate Bill 105, which was introduced in January and assigned to the Education Committee, would drastically reduce Colorado's focus on student achievement growth. If passed, it would send exactly the wrong message to employers, taxpayers and parents.

While measurement methodologies like value added and the Colorado Growth Model are relatively new, employers and parents have for years been concerned with student achievement growth.

When companies are making location decisions, the quality of a state's school system is always a consideration. When they open up their new operation, their employees compare school district performance when deciding where to live.

Once they are in a district, those employees compare schools before deciding where to send their children. And once their children are in a school, parents fight to get them into the classrooms of the best teachers.

Employers and parents are acutely aware of the importance of student achievement growth. And today, that growth is more important than ever before.

As Erik Hanushek writes in "The Knowledge Capital of Nations," in today's digital economy, "long-run economic growth is overwhelmingly a function of the cognitive skills of the population."

John F. Kennedy said, "Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education. The human mind is our fundamental resource."

When our children graduate from high school, they will face a global economy in which they will have to compete not only against other students from around the world, but also against rapidly improving technologies that can increasingly perform sophisticated activities that once required human beings.

It is clear that the bar for college and career readiness is rapidly rising, even though our teachers and schools still have just 13 years — from kindergarten to 12th grade — to meet it.

If we don't focus on improving student achievement growth, too many of our kids will never get there, and will struggle all their lives.

It is more important than ever to have an effective teacher in every classroom. That requires metrics that identify and reward effective teachers and schools.

Across multiple disciplines, the accuracy of assessments is increased when you combine a variety of different metrics to reach a conclusion, rather than relying on just one.

That is why the performance of other professionals like lawyers, doctors, and engineers is evaluated using a mix of objective and subjective measures, such as revenue-generated, risk factor-adjusted patient outcomes, and 360-degree feedback from managers, subordinates and clients.

As professionals whose performance is critically important to our children's and our state's economic future, teachers must be evaluated using the same approach.

While socio-economic factors will often affect the college and career readiness results for students born in Evergreen and Edgewater, they do not affect their year-to-year achievement growth from their respective starting points. In fact, there are schools in Edgewater that have better student achievement growth than schools in Evergreen.

But if we sharply reduce the weight of student achievement growth in teacher performance evaluations, those high performing teachers and schools in Edgewater will never get the credit and rewards they deserve, and we will allow those in Evergreen to confuse being born on third base with hitting a triple.

If SB 105 passes and we cease to hold teachers accountable for measurable growth in student achievement, Colorado will never see the improvements in K-12 performance we so desperately need.

Susan Miller is a co-founder of www.k12accountability.com.

To send a letter to the editor about this article, submit [online](#) or check out our [guidelines](#) for how to submit by e-mail or mail.

Close Window

Send To Printer