

Testimony of Jess Buller on Behalf of Himself
IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 17-1201
SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY ENGINEERING MATH DIPLOMA ENDORSEMENT
Before the State House of Representatives, Education Committee
March 15, 2017

Dear Madame Chair Petterson and Members of the House Education Committee:

Thank you for allowing me a few moments to speak today about the importance of House Bill 17-1201. I apologize for not being there in person but my duties at 7,300 feet have prevented me from being able to attend.

My name is Jess Buller. I am a veteran educator of 17 years, the last six of which I have had the privilege of serving as a building leader. My current position is K-8 principal for West Grand Elementary & Middle School in Kremmling. I am writing to urge you to pass HB 1201, creating a STEM High School Diploma Endorsement.

I am a rural educator. I was a rural student who received a quality education in a rural school, and I have chosen to maintain a life and a career raising my family in rural America. It is no secret that rural schools are often strapped by lack of resource, access and funding. The mindset that often accompanies these issues is that rural students are less capable than those who possess the resource, access and adequate funding. This mindset is wrong. This mindset has produced the 'rural factor.'

The rural factor implies that even though students like Alex and Jesus may graduate at the top of their class of 32 students with a perfect 4.0 GPA, they will not be able to compete for top slots at Colorado universities. A college looking at their credentials alongside someone with the same credentials from a graduating class of 800 in a larger district will not compare these students in the same light.

Alex and Jesus have come to tell you their stories and share their dreams for getting into a top-tier STEM program in college. They both understand how hard they will have to work to overcome the perceptions of attending a rural high school. They are both adamant in their efforts to debunk the 'rural factor.'

In my years as an educator, one fundamental element has always held true: if sustainable change is to take place—be it in the classroom, in the school, in the district, or in the state—it must happen from the inside out and not from the outside in. It is a matter of a long term vision versus a short term fix, a matter of *reform* versus *repair*. This is why I believe in 1201. It signifies that Colorado is truly vested in the future of its students.

This bill moves us past the proverbial water cooler chat about how to make education better and it positions us to blaze trails in defining true 21st century college and career readiness. I co-wrote HB 1201 because I feel passionately about what it can mean and what it can do for Colorado students.

The current rate of remediation for incoming college freshmen is increasing; the number of employable Colorado graduates for STEM-related jobs in Colorado is in jeopardy as well. HB 1201 will prompt schools to take a critical look at their current level of programming and to ante up where it might be under-preparing students.

As their principal, I owe it to Alex and Jesus to make sure my school creates a pathway for them to earn this high level of distinction. The fact of the matter is that advanced placement courses have been around for 40 years yet some districts still do not make them available to their students. I promise to do

better. The STEM diploma endorsement will be the game changer. The STEM diploma endorsement will cause local education providers to create better quality programming, and will take the 'rural factor' out of the equation which will guarantee to colleges that these students are capable of competing with anyone.

Our students deserve the very best we can offer. This is a real opportunity for Colorado to become a national leader—perhaps even an international leader—when it comes to educating kids for a complex technological future.

Thank you Madame Chair and Members of the House Education Committee for your time and for the opportunity today to outline the importance of House Bill 17-1201.

Sincerely,

Jess Buller