

Testimony of Elaine Menardi on Behalf of Herself
IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 17-1201
SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY ENGINEERING MATH DIPLOMA ENDORSEMENT
Before the State House of Senators, Education Committee
April 5, 2017

Mr. Chair Hill and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

I am Elaine Menardi and I would like to testify in favor of HB 1201.

After I graduated from Colorado School of Mines in Electrical Engineering, I worked in Research and Development for many years before turning to education. I have been an educator for 25 years teaching at all levels from kindergarten to college graduate school in local, national and international settings. For 20 of those 25 years, I have lived and taught in rural communities. Currently, I am the Education Program Coordinator at Wings Over The Rockies Air and Space Museum, the building leader for Wings Aerospace Academy for middle school and high school students.

I know the reality of rural life. And I know education.

Jess Buller and I are the original co-brains of this project and we have been acutely focused on creating an endorsement that will benefit all students regardless of where they live or the resource challenges they face. We have intentionally set the bar high for this STEM diploma endorsement for two reasons: To give all students a real chance to compete on an equal level; and to give districts and educators a stretch goal to reach higher in providing quality STEM education.

An unspoken bias in the education world can be labeled the "rural factor," the mindset that rural students are less capable than those who possess the resource, access and funding that larger school districts enjoy. The rural factor implies that even though students may graduate at the top of their class of 50 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. Even though no college admissions officer would acknowledge it, the rural factor is real and often results in rural students being overlooked for prestigious scholarships and entrance into top-tier higher education institutions. This is simply a fact.

This endorsement is the equalizer because it will demonstrate that all students can achieve at the same high level. Earning the endorsement is very possible in almost all districts throughout the state. I have provided a map for you to review. I would ask you to consider a few key statistics.

- 167 of 178 Colorado school districts offer concurrent enrollment or college class options.
- Of the remaining 11 districts, 4 offer AP classes to students.
- The 7 districts that do not offer college or AP classes serve approximately 820 students. This equates to 0.09% of all Colorado students.
- 99.91% do have access to college and/or AP classes.

The basic process a district would go through to outline the requirements for the endorsement is:

1. Identify a sequence of at least 4 courses that define the STEM pathway.
2. Work with administrators, instructional teachers and local STEM-related business leaders to identify the STEM competency framework and measures of mastery.
3. Create a rubric to assess student capstone projects.
4. Mentor students in designing and implementing their capstone projects to demonstrate STEM learning.

There is great postsecondary value for a student who receives this award of excellence not only for college admissions but also for career pathways that lead straight to the workforce. All of Colorado will benefit from students who give the effort to earn this endorsement... school districts, students, families, colleges and employers.

This bill will stretch districts and educators to find creative ways to offer high level STEM education in rural areas. Colorado is a technology-driven economy and students need the very best we can offer to help them succeed in this rapidly changing, high-powered world.

I have firsthand experience both in the business world and in the education world. This future is possible and achievable. Jess and I intentionally wrote the bill with these challenges in mind, giving local education providers the flexibility they need to work within their unique constraints with the hope they will raise the bar and offer students ever increasing opportunity to compete in the global economy.

I ask you to pass HB 1201 because it will be a shining example to other states that our Colorado students excel at a level above and beyond the norm. This endorsement will show all our constituents and stakeholders that we value the education of our young people to the highest degree.

Thank you Mr. Chair and Members of the Senate Education Committee for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Elaine Menardi