

Testimony of Jess Buller on Behalf of Himself
IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 17-1201
SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY ENGINEERING MATH DIPLOMA ENDORSEMENT
Before the State Senate Education Committee
April 5, 2017

Dear Chairman Hill and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

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 House Bill 1201, creating a STEM High School Diploma Endorsement.

Colorado students deserve House Bill 1201. For too long educational reform has been filled with quick fixes and short-term solutions. What we've seen as a result is an increase in remediation rates for high school graduates and more and more employers who are begging for qualified candidates. Our students deserve better.

Two concerns I have heard regarding 1201 are the level of rigor in the requirements and the equitability of the bill. First off, the term 'rigor' is often misused. It is misinterpreted as quantity of work instead of quality of work. The requirements outlined in 1201 clearly define a rigorous pathway to 21st century readiness that is of the highest quality when it comes to performance-based assessment of student skill. It is ultimately capped off by the student receiving a high mark of distinction as well as a plethora of post-secondary opportunities. Honestly, to someone like me the STEM diploma endorsement is intimidating. But to 7th grader Jesus at West Grand Middle School, it is a goal that far supersedes high school graduation. To Karsten, my third grade son, it is a bright future. As one of our Colorado representatives stated, "This will make the high school diploma relevant again."

The other argument expressed is whether or not the bill is equitable. Will 1201 be equitable for rural schools like West Grand, a school district of 416 students in K-12? How can schools provide adequate programming for students to meet the requirements of 1201 when their district is limited on financial resource? In short, it will and they can. In fact, statistics show us that they already are. 99.91% of districts in Colorado have concurrent enrollment or AP offerings. And 100% of schools are capable of offering coursework in the fields of science, technology, engineering (aka physics) and math. I am constantly reminding my staff in Kremmling that lack of resource doesn't mean lack of opportunity. It simply means we get more creative in how we provide it.

To be truthful, I am concerned with the state of funding in Colorado and I am even more concerned with the funding crisis facing rural and small rural districts in the state. I keep myself educated and advocate for more funding when there is opportunity. Ultimately, however, I don't know how much power I possess to change state funding; therefore, my efforts are better spent on that which I can change--providing better opportunities for kids.

As Jesus's principal (and Karsten's principal-dad), I owe it to them 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. It's not that they can't; it's simply that they haven't. 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 guarantee to colleges that students who have earned this high mark of distinction are capable of competing with anyone.

Our students deserve the very best we can offer. This is a real opportunity for Colorado to give kids what they deserve, so that they can best serve the future they will control.

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

Sincerely,

Jess Buller