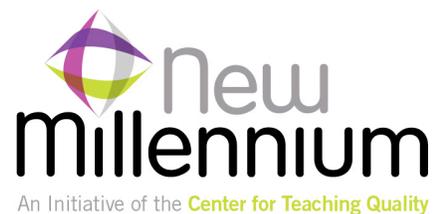

Making Teacher Evaluation Work for Students:

Voices from the Classroom

An Introduction to the Perspectives
of the Teachers of the Denver New Millennium Initiative



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Who We Are

We are a group of 21 diverse, nonpartisan, public school, professional educators committed to elevating our voice beyond the classroom for the benefit of the highest quality education for all students. We teach in 11 districts in the Denver Metro area and have been working together for over a year and a half, focused on learning to connect what we do each day in our classrooms to the policies that govern our work. The length of our classroom experience ranges from three to eight years, at all grade levels and in a variety of content areas. We teach across a variety of demographics—from affluent to low-income, large to small, suburban to urban— and bring to the Center for Teaching Quality’s [New Millennium Initiative](#) (NMI) a variety of perspectives and experiences.

Our teacher preparation experiences are quite diverse, ranging from traditional undergraduate and graduate preparation pathways to several different alternative certification programs, including Teach for America and the local Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) alternative licensure program. Eighteen of us are pursuing or have earned advanced degrees, and two of us are doctoral students. Since the start of this initiative, two team members left the classroom to advance the teaching profession through teacher education and policy work (one with the [Denver Teacher Residency](#) program and the other at [The New Teacher Project](#)).

Together, we are committed to developing effective TeacherSolutions for policy and decision making in public education. We share a promising vision of the future of teaching and how *all* teachers—novices and veterans alike—must continually hone their practice in order to improve student learning. Our collective pedagogical expertise guides our thinking about how to advance tools for measuring teacher effectiveness.

We do not stand on just our experience alone, however. We have also studied research reports, talked with the researchers who authored them and engaged more than a dozen of the nation's foremost education reformers in conversations about effective teaching policies and practices, including Linda Darling-Hammond, Jennifer Jennings, Tom Kane, Rob Meyer, Diane Robinson and Joan Snowden. We examined the highly publicized 2009 report on teacher evaluation, [*The Widget Effect*](#),¹ and looked at more scholarly treatments of teacher evaluation reforms and new tools under development through initiatives such as the [*Measures of Effective Teaching Project*](#), commissioned by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. We shared our ideas with and received feedback from a number of local stakeholders and policymakers. And finally, we spent time—in our virtual community with NMI colleagues in California, Illinois, and Washington—connecting the wide range of empirical evidence with our classroom experiences.

Some policy pundits argue that teachers are the root problem in public education. However, research suggests that effective teachers are actually part of the *solution*, given that teachers are the most important school-based factor in students' learning. The Denver New Millennium Initiative team aims to find solutions beyond the classroom, including policy-focused TeacherSolutions for transforming teaching into the results-oriented profession that students deserve. This report is the first of several papers and other products that will elevate our voices from the classroom in an effort to ensure that education policy matches the realities of how those policies are implemented in our classrooms, today and tomorrow.

We are eager to be part of the leadership that puts this vision into action.

We encourage you to join the movement with us to ensure every child in Colorado—and across our nation—receives the high-quality education they deserve.

Introduction

The spotlight on teachers and teaching effectiveness has never been brighter. Researchers have consistently shown that the quality of the teacher is the single most important in-school factor having an impact on student learning.² However, in most schools and districts, teacher evaluation has changed little over the past 30 years and remains an unstable tool for identifying and supporting effective teaching and teachers.³ The good news is that increasingly sophisticated statistical tools are becoming available, which can link student outcomes to teachers who address those outcomes with students. And we are hopeful that far more robust student assessments, as well as hand-held technologies, will soon empower teachers to gather data and report on students' academic progress to policymakers and the public alike.

EQUTEE Act (formerly titled SB 191) Key Provisions from Section 5*

“Every teacher is evaluated using multiple, fair, transparent, timely, rigorous, and valid methods.”

- At least 50% of the evaluation must be based upon student growth.
- Teachers will have an opportunity to improve their effectiveness through a growth plan that links their evaluation and level of effectiveness to professional development.
- Multiple measures for effectiveness will include:
 - (1) “measures of student longitudinal academic growth” and
 - (2) “achievement levels on any statewide assessments in the relevant subject and grade level or any locally adopted interim assessments approved by the state board.”

Beginning in 2011–12, teachers will earn non-probationary status after three consecutive years of demonstrated effectiveness; that status will be lost after two consecutive years of ineffectiveness.

*Colo. Rev. Stat. ch. 430 § 22–9–105.5

Colorado’s landmark law, *Ensuring Quality Instruction Through Educator Effectiveness* (or EQUTEE, formerly titled SB 191),⁴ has the potential to move our profession forward. As a small (but growing) group of young teachers who believe teaching must be treated as a real profession, we are hopeful. As the Act rightfully demands, student learning measures—such as the Colorado Growth Model—should be used in assessing teaching performance. While this focus on effectiveness could have a positive impact on our profession, the policy’s impact hinges on fair and effective implementation. We developed a set of TeacherSolutions to counteract potential obstacles and help ensure the EQUTEE Act will be implemented in an effective manner at the state and local levels.

Four issues deserve the most immediate attention:

1. Developing meaningful measures of student growth (including in nontested areas) to comprise 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation, as required by state law
2. Defining qualifications and training for evaluators
3. Determining how to account for school conditions and student factors in a teacher's evaluation
4. Designing an evaluation system that informs both employment decisions and professional growth and learning

An effective teacher can break down the learning processes to their most basic level and organize the learning in a logical, progressive manner to anticipate and eliminate possible learning gaps while adjusting his/her instructional delivery to meet the needs of the individual learner.

—Zachary Rupp, Denver NMI Team (Denver Public Schools)

Our review of the research helped to inform our decisions about implementation priorities. Researchers have pointed clearly as to why teacher evaluation failed to elevate our profession and highlight the great work of teacher leaders across the country. In the early 1980s, scholars at the Rand Corporation revealed that, “principals lacked sufficient resolve and competence to evaluate

accurately.”⁵ A few years later, another researcher found that “evaluators are mistaken if they assume they are observing the typical behavior of a teacher with the usual evaluation procedure.”⁶ In 1990, studies concluded that because of dysfunctional school district operations, teachers tended to “regard (evaluation) as an institutional obligation to be endured rather than an opportunity to be seized.”⁷

We have looked at the recent research on value-added models (VAM) and engaged in extensive conversations with teaching evaluation experts, including Jennifer Jennings and Tom Kane. While such methods have promise in identifying effective teachers, we are concerned about how well they represent teacher effectiveness as a whole. Measurement experts recently found that the typical VAM misidentified over 25 percent of teachers as effective or ineffective.⁸ This research finding creates cause for concern; however, we feel confident that—with the input of excellent teacher leaders—we can figure out how to use these outcome data in ways that make sense for improving teaching and learning as well as advancing our profession.

These lessons from research suggest that much needs to be done to change the focus of teacher evaluation, including looking closely at the measures of student outcomes, who completes the evaluations, how they interpret the evidence and the time and training needed for evaluators to provide a fair, effective and consistent evaluation. Today, teacher evaluations are typically conducted inconsistently (sometimes teachers are never even observed) and often by a single evaluator who is not distinguished as an effective educator.

Our current system of evaluation is broken. Our focus should be to first correctly identify, support and develop teachers who are labeled as ‘ineffective,’ and then if they do not improve over time, they should no longer be in the profession. We need to do a better job of supporting and developing teachers so they can grow, rather than just jumping quickly to get rid of them.

—Sean Woytek, Denver NMI Team (Denver Public Schools)

We want to help ensure that the EQuITEE Act, with many of its components relying on the current Colorado Growth Model,⁹ will assist teachers in improving their teaching and correctly identify those who are effective or ineffective. One important starting point is improving the assessments upon which the Colorado Growth Model is built. Efforts to do so in Colorado are already underway with the federally-funded SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC). This consortium will draw upon teacher leaders to help create performance-based tasks administered throughout the year, while also using computer-adaptive technology to customize test questions relative to a student's responses.¹⁰ These new assessments will better accommodate different student learning and testing styles as well—beyond just linguistic and logical intelligences, which are most often targeted in traditional tests. In terms of more accurately assessing the performance of students and teachers, this effort is a step in the right direction.

Our Recommendations

As the state of Colorado and local districts work to implement the EQuITEE Act, we strongly encourage them to consider the set of TeacherSolutions developed by the Denver New Millennium Initiative team. Below we address each of the four critical implementation issues.

Developing meaningful measures of student growth (including in nontested areas) to comprise 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation, as required by state law

As teachers, we want to see our students achieve at high levels. Yet—despite a narrow emphasis on standardized tests in current accountability systems—we view evidence of learning as being much broader than paper-and-pencil assessments. In our 21st-century world, students who are going to be fully ready for college and careers must go beyond just solving a simple algebraic equation or finding answers to a comprehension question in a narrative text. They must also be able to gather and synthesize online resources, assess their utility and apply the knowledge gained to real-life problems.

We are encouraged by efforts—such as the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium—to develop more robust assessments, which address these critical thinking skills and more accurately measure students' growth over time. We want to be trusted as professional experts to help in their design and to create student learning metrics of our own that align with broader district, state and national goals and standards for learning. As a result, we propose the following TeacherSolutions for implementation to ensure that our impact on our students' learning can be measured effectively.



Listen as **Katie Micek** from Jefferson County explains how the goal attainment process could work in her elementary art classroom.

- Student growth measures for teachers in tested subject areas and grade levels should include (but not be limited to) the following:
 - Student growth at the teacher level, using the Colorado Growth Model
 - Student growth at the schoolwide level, using the Colorado Growth Model
 - Goal attainment process, using locally developed assessments. In such a process, teachers will develop at least *two growth* goals—which connect to their schools’ improvement plans—in collaboration with their evaluators and then select appropriate assessments to measure their students’ progress. They will also develop proficiency indicators tied to their growth goals and use these metrics to demonstrate student learning growth with whole-class trends, subgroups and/or growth at the individual student level.
- To improve the Colorado Growth Model, pre- and post-tests should be developed so that growth may be measured based upon students’ performance during one school year—as opposed to comparing the previous year’s scores to the current year’s.
- Student growth measures for teachers in nontested subject areas and grade levels should include (but not be limited to) student growth at the schoolwide level and a goal attainment process, using locally developed assessments (as described above).
- The Colorado Department of Education should expand its efforts to share resources by creating a statewide assessment database from which teachers may select assessments to measure their students’ growth—particularly in the arts and other courses without standardized tests. Practicing teachers should submit authentic assessments (either established national assessments or local teacher-developed ones) that have proven to be valid and reliable in their classrooms, along with the lesson plans that prepared students to take them. A panel of teachers should vet the submitted assessments for approval and identify the related curricular goals to cross-reference within the database. If assessments are accepted, teachers should be rewarded for sharing their expertise and resources.



Defining qualifications and training for evaluators

The long history of evaluation failure has been partially attributed to a lack of effective evaluators.¹¹ We believe that an evaluation system is only as strong as its evaluators; therefore, a rigorous selection process must be in place to ensure high-quality educators—who have proven their own effectiveness—are selected to serve in these leadership roles. We desire high-quality feedback, which will require evaluators to hone their knowledge and skills in working with adult learners and understanding the evaluation process. Time during the school day to complete this important work should be a protected commodity; consequently, we propose innovative ways to re-organize school schedules and teacher roles in the TeacherSolutions listed below.



Listen as **Allison Sampish** from St. Vrain describes the ideal evaluation training process.

- Peer evaluators should be selected from practicing classroom teachers and rotate through a two to three year teacher/evaluator cycle, either full time or in a hybrid role (i.e., maintaining a half-time teaching load).
- Evaluator training should be structured as a summer program, followed by a yearlong apprenticeship in which evaluators are partnered with experienced peers to evaluate as a team. All evaluators within a district should work collaboratively in a professional learning community to continue their growth and development via ongoing training. The training curriculum should be developed by the state, with opportunities for local schools and districts to customize to their unique needs.
- To ensure inter-rater reliability, observers should be required to pass assessments of their observation skills. A panel of experienced observers should regularly monitor and audit observations to ensure consistency across schools.

All evaluators should be normed to agree on what good instruction looks like. It is not okay for three evaluators to walk into a room and one sees a phenomenal lesson, another sees a mediocre lesson, and the last sees utter garbage. Part of evaluator training should always be norming practices about what effective instruction looks like. I think a holistic rubric is a good place to start. Outlining what makes effective instruction on paper first and training evaluators about what to look for is the key to high-quality evaluation.

—Victoria Okell, Denver NMI Team (Brighton 27J)

Victoria, I would take that idea a step further and suggest that evaluators review videos of classroom teaching and go through the rubric process together in order to practice and develop strong inter-rater reliability.

—Jessica Lyons, Denver NMI Team (formerly Denver Public Schools)

Determining how to account for school conditions and student factors in a teacher's evaluation

Today's students face many challenges outside of the school building. Many are learning English as a second language, while others may come from families that are struggling during these difficult economic times. We do not present these ideas as excuses; rather, we understand the impact that these out-of-school factors may play in our students' learning. As teachers, we work diligently to meet their academic, social, and emotional needs, but many of our schools are strapped financially as well, which limits the resources and support personnel available. The TeacherSolutions below acknowledge these challenges, yet maintain a high sense of teacher accountability for student success and offer better tools for assessment and evaluation that make teaching more effective in every classroom context, for every student.

- Evaluation rubrics should be developed at the state level, with standard domains that all evaluations must include as well as a menu of options from which districts and schools may choose, based on their contextual differences and school improvement goals. Examples of menu options include focus on content mastery, pedagogy/instructional strategies, professional growth and learning contributions, use of technology, understanding of special populations [e.g., English language learners (ELL), special education students, free-reduced lunch, gifted and talented] and program-specific knowledge (e.g., International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement). These rubrics should contain at least four rating levels for teaching effectiveness, so that teachers' performance—like students'—can be assessed using methods with sufficient stretch. This approach allows schools to distinguish the struggling teacher from the actively growing one, and the proficient from the genuinely masterful.
- Growth data should be analyzed in relevant and related subgroups (i.e., ELLs should be compared to other ELLs, rather than to the general population).
- Growth scores of students with significant absences should not be included in a teacher's evaluation.



Listen as **Anna Martin** from Littleton shares her experience in evaluating her special education students' engagement—and how that knowledge should be considered in an improved teacher evaluation system.

Designing an evaluation system that informs both employment decisions and professional growth and learning

Our team, like many teachers, appreciates the opportunity for professional growth and learning. All too often, however, evaluation models are designed simply as diagnostics for “good” or “bad” teachers, rather than as tools to help understand why teachers are struggling or succeeding and how every teacher (including the best in our profession) can improve. We feel strongly that all teachers—regardless of their years of experience or effectiveness—deserve excellent feedback as well as a support system to continue their development. One-size-fits-all workshops and brief classroom observations with no follow-up are not effective. Teachers should be provided the opportunity to reflect on their feedback, participate in high-quality professional development and apply their new knowledge in their classrooms, as we outline in the TeacherSolutions below.

- Teachers should meet with their observer before formal observations to determine specific goals and discuss lesson plans. Teachers should receive notes (either written or oral) from the observation within two days in order to give them time to reflect and then participate in a post-conference with their observer within five days.
- Professional guilds of teachers should take responsibility for reviewing teacher evaluations at an aggregate level and designing differentiated, relevant professional growth and learning activities for teachers at all levels of effectiveness. Master teachers from these guilds should co-teach and/or provide model lessons in order to demonstrate best practices.
- Teachers should be provided opportunities to develop action research plans based on their students’ needs and their projected growth measures, and then share implications for their instruction through professional learning communities—created within their schools or across schools and/or districts.



Listen as **Stephanie Van Horn** from Boulder Valley explains why teachers—regardless of their years of experience or effectiveness—need continued learning opportunities in a collaborative school environment.

A self-organized, self-regulated guild of novice, journeyman and master teachers will aggressively assess, audit, intervene and develop its own [teachers]—across buildings and, ideally, across districts. If this was done aggressively and thoroughly, the guild could completely recapture evaluation into the hands of its own teachers.

—Vinnie Basile, Denver NMI Team (Adams 50)

Conclusion

In this first policy brief, we outlined our TeacherSolutions for student success by examining four areas for reform: (1) meaningful measures of student growth, (2) evaluator qualifications and training, (3) school conditions and student factors, and (4) professional growth and learning. We recognize that many of our recommendations require a cultural shift in the current thinking around teaching and learning, but we are optimistic that this transition is possible.

Research has shown that the quality of the teacher is the single most important in-school factor influencing student learning. The Ensuring Quality Instruction Through Educator Effectiveness Act presents a prime opportunity for teachers, administrators, and policymakers to engage in a productive dialogue about how to ensure a well-prepared, well-supported and effective teacher for every student. We believe firmly that the act can advance the teaching profession in Colorado far beyond where it is today, and we feel certain that if the 50 percent measurement of student growth incorporates multiple, valid forms of student assessment, half the battle will be won. A number of these assessments already exist and could easily be shared across the profession—if the expertise of our best teachers could be spread through assessment design, professional development and peer-evaluator roles.

The Denver New Millennium Team

Karen Babcock

Karen Babcock is a seventh grade science and AVID elective teacher at Adams City Middle School in Adams 14. She completed her bachelor's in biology at Kansas State University and her master's in curriculum and instruction from the University of Colorado at Denver. Karen is recognized as a teacher leader through her efforts to work on district curricula, her participation in her school's AVID National Demonstration Site leadership team, her service as a model classroom teacher for best practice videos and walkthroughs, and her work as a mentor for district science teachers. Karen's work in all aspects of education is driven by her desire to retain effective teachers in high-needs schools.

Stephanie Basile

Stephanie Basile is a fifth grade teacher and grade level chair at Meridian Elementary in Adams 12. Prior to teaching, Stephanie worked in the non-profit sector. Her role in gift processing both at the University of Colorado Foundation and the Children's Hospital Foundation in Denver inspired her to pursue teaching. She earned her master's and teaching certification at the University of Colorado at Denver. In addition to her school level leadership, Stephanie sits on her district's energy conservation committee, which meets to discuss economical and energy-efficient solutions for the school district.

Vinnie Basile

Vinnie Basile is completing his sixth year as a ninth grade science teacher, head cross country coach and assistant track coach at Westminster High School in Adams 50. He earned his teaching license and master's degree at the University of Colorado at Denver, where he was awarded "Outstanding Graduate" of his cohort. Since graduating, Vinnie continues to be honored by his alma mater; he was the keynote speaker for the 2008 pre-service teacher gathering as well as a featured alumnus in their 2009 magazine. His leadership transcends the local level through his involvement with the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA), presenting at their annual conference for the past four years. Vinnie is also an active member of the Colorado Education Association at the state and national levels.

Alicia Butcher

Alicia Butcher is currently working as an English language learners (ELL) coach at Clayton Partnership School in Mapleton. After returning from her service as a Peace Corps volunteer in Honduras, she began pursuing a career in education through a teaching certificate in language arts and a master's degree in curriculum and instruction for the linguistically diverse from the University of Colorado at Denver. In 2006, she began working at the Mapleton Expeditionary School of the Arts and developed their ELL program. In her current position, Alicia facilitates professional development and teacher mentoring at the elementary level, with a focus on meeting the needs of ELL students.

Justin Davis

Justin Davis is a middle school language arts and reading teacher in Adams 14. He entered the teaching profession through an alternative licensure program offered by the Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES). Justin is a district mentor for new teachers, serving as a coach for effective lesson planning. He also hosts a series of professional development videos and is a Global Learner teacher, supporting the use of technology in the classroom. In addition to teaching, Justin has experience in business management, professional entertainment, radio broadcasting and voice production. He is currently working on his doctorate in educational leadership and instruction.

Teresa Dwire-Elliott

Teresa Dwire-Elliott is a teacher, coach and agent of change. She completed a traditional teacher preparation program at the University of Northern Colorado in 1999, before teaching social studies in Mapleton for two years and German in Longmont for two more years. During a brief stint away from the classroom, she spent a year traveling in New Zealand. Upon returning to the U.S., Teresa earned her master's in organizational performance and change and served as a liaison for the Western Colorado Math and Science Center—an educational non-profit closely aligned with regional leadership and state political organizations. In 2009, Teresa returned to the classroom once again, this time as a reading interventionist in the school district where her teaching career began.

Stephanie Gronholz

Stephanie Gronholz is a language arts teacher at Westminster High School, an urban school in Adams 50. She received a bachelor's in English and a master's in teaching from Whitworth University, a private liberal arts school in Spokane, Washington. After moving to Boulder, she began her teaching career at Ranum High School and served as department chair in her second year. Stephanie then transferred to Westminster High School in 2008 to coordinate the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme. In addition to teaching, Stephanie coaches varsity cheerleading and serves as the senior class sponsor. During the 2010–2011 school year, she completed the National Board Certification process.

Adria Moersen Hohman

Adria Moersen Hohman is a teacher on special assignment (TOSA) for Jefferson County (Jeffco) Public Schools. She spent the first five years of her teaching career in Aurora, as a high school English teacher and speech/debate coach. She later moved to Arvada West High School in Jeffco, where she taught language arts in grades 9–11. Adria has served as a mentor teacher, a clinical teacher through UCD, a professional learning community leader, and a language arts instructional leader. In her current role as a TOSA, she provides professional development on literacy instruction to administrators and teachers, coordinates district-wide literacy work and supports school-based initiatives focused on developing teacher leadership. Adria is presently working on her EdS in leadership and policy studies.

Ben Jackson

Ben Jackson taught for three years at Bruce Randolph School in Denver. He assisted in the drafting and negotiation of the first professional autonomy agreement in Colorado, freeing Bruce Randolph from the constraints of district policies and the union contract. In 2008, he co-created Denver Teachers for Change, a reform-minded organization for educators in Denver, which pushed for a more forward thinking teacher contract. Prior to teaching, Ben earned a bachelor's in English and certification to teach secondary English from the University of Colorado at Boulder. In summer 2010, Ben began a new career in the field of education policy as a project director for The New Teacher Project. There, Ben is using his knowledge from the classroom to assist districts and states in developing strategies to dramatically increase teacher effectiveness and student achievement.

Christina Jean

Christina Jean served for six years as a middle and high school social studies teacher in Boulder Valley before joining the staff at the Denver Teacher Residency program at the beginning of the 2010-11 school year. She has been identified as a strong teacher leader in her district and community, earning several state level leadership positions. For example, she served on the subcommittee to revise the Colorado Model Content Standards for Civics and participated in the Colorado Race to the Top planning process as a teacher representative. Christina also participated in numerous district committees, informing school board policy around assessment and student Internet usage. She also has served as association representative for her local union for five years. Christina recently began a doctoral program at the University of Colorado at Denver in instructional leadership for educational equity.

Jessica Lyons

Jessica Lyons entered the teaching profession through Teach for America in 2007. She taught fifth grade for three years at Knapp Elementary in Denver, following her graduation from the University of Delaware with a bachelor's in international relations, specializing in development and Africa, with minors in history, economics and French. After experiencing a number of troubling working conditions, she decided to resign from her teaching post and [blogged about her experience](#) for Advancing the Teaching Profession, Barnett Berry's blog on the CTQ and TLN websites. Jessica spent her summer volunteering with the international group Mercy Corps in Portland, Oregon, and hopes to participate in a teaching fellowship with Orbis Institute in India later in 2011.

Anna B. Martin

Anna B. Martin is a special education teacher and department chair at Runyon Elementary School in Littleton. She began her teaching career at Madison West High School in Wisconsin, working with young adults diagnosed with severe disabilities. In Madison, Anna co-wrote a grant with the University of Wisconsin for the peer partner program, which is still flourishing today. She then relocated to Colorado and became a teacher leader in her school and district. Anna serves on her school's student intervention team, designed to support students who are struggling academically, emotionally, or physically. At the district level, she is a member of the special education team and the student support team, working with various professionals to support high-needs students. These leadership roles, along with the Denver New Millennium Initiative, have inspired Anna to take action and elevate her voice in the world of education, which drives her toward positive change.

Katie Micek

Katie Micek is in her fifth year as an art teacher at Powderhorn Elementary in Jefferson County. In addition to her classroom duties, Katie joined her school's cabinet, which focuses on school climate, professional development and culture. Katie is also a member of the Jefferson County Strategic Compensation Steering Committee, a cross-section of stakeholders who are examining teacher pay reform for the district. At the state level, she is currently participating in the Leadership Academy for CEA and looks forward to learning more about their initiatives. Katie recently finished her master of education degree at the University of Colorado at Denver with an emphasis in linguistically diverse education.

Dana Nardello

Dana Nardello is a ninth grade literacy teacher, department chair and instructional coach at Aurora Central High School in Aurora. She leads a study group focusing on equity in all classrooms by way of standards-based grading and vertical and horizontal alignment within urban schools. Dana received her teaching license and master's degree through an alternative program at the University of Colorado, followed by her principal license from the University of Denver. Dana is actively involved with the Colorado Language Arts Society, the Denver Writing Project and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). She was one of 50 teachers nationwide to receive NCTE's leadership development award, which recognizes dynamic secondary teachers who have a positive impact on student achievement and a continuous commitment to professional development and collaboration with colleagues.

Victoria Okell

Victoria Okell has taught middle school language arts for five years in Brighton. She is a member of her school's leadership team and facilitates professional development for new teachers in her district, including curriculum planning and district standards writing. Victoria also works with The Center, a non-profit educational reform group that dedicates Title I grant dollars to improving school conditions. She received an award from her district's Hispanic Advisory Council for her dedication to supporting diversity and recently returned from teaching English in Mexico. Victoria earned her teaching license at the University of Colorado at Boulder and is continuing there for her master's studies in English as a second language (ESL) education, the area of interest about which she is most passionate.

Zachary Rupp

Zachary "Zach" Rupp is currently in his fourth year as a music teacher for Denver Public Schools. A graduate of the University of South Alabama, Zach splits his time between working at Columbian Elementary and the Mathematics and Science Leadership Academy (MSLA), a teacher-led school. He completed his *Take One!* entry for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards as a schoolwide professional development initiative last year. An accomplished musician, Zach is actively involved on the board of directors for the Denver Classroom Teachers Association and as a workshop leader for the Colorado Education Association's Leadership Academy. He is currently pursuing his master's of music education at the University of Colorado at Boulder, with a focus on the psychology of music learning and ethnomusicology.

Allison Sampish

Allison Sampish is a kindergarten teacher at Fall River Elementary in St. Vrain Valley. She completed her teaching license and master's in curriculum and instruction, with a focus on humanities, from the University of Colorado in December 2008. In addition to kindergarten, Allison has experience teaching first and fourth grade. She is involved in planning and conducting professional development classes for her colleagues within and outside of her school. She serves on various local committees, including her district's social studies standards alignment committee, where she is a true leader with an active voice. Allison recently co-wrote an article for the journal *Social Studies and the Young Learner*.

Nicolette Vander Velde

Nicolette Vander Velde is a fifth grade teacher at East Elementary School in Littleton, where she facilitated the development of a student-created technology leadership team and sits on the building leadership team. Nicolette completed her bachelor's in interdisciplinary studies with an emphasis on English as a second language from the University of Northern Colorado, followed by a master's degree in curriculum and instruction and an administrative degree from the University of Phoenix. At the district level, Nicolette has presented at the Littleton Public Schools new teacher orientation, focusing on technology implementation and the writer's workshop. She also co-presented at the Technology in Education Conference at Copper Mountain and was a finalist for the Colorado Technology Association's Technology Teacher of the Year Award.

Stephanie Van Horn

Stephanie Van Horn is a third grade teacher in Boulder Valley. She received her master's from Teachers College, Columbia University, and subsequently began her teaching career in Denver. Stephanie is active in the Boulder Valley Education Association and has served as her school's association representative. She is also a leader on the Teachers' Advisory Council, which meets monthly with the district superintendent to discuss and offer advice on issues affecting the district. Stephanie is able to bring these conversations to local and state legislators as well, through the council's political action committee, the Boulder Fund for Children and Public Education. Above all, she enjoys teaching and advocating for fellow educators.

Isabel Campos Woytek

Isabel Campos Woytek, a Texas native, moved to Colorado as part of the 2007 Denver charter corps with Teach for America. She is a 2007 graduate of DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana, where she majored in mathematics with minors in Spanish and studio art. During the first two years of her career as an English language acquisition resource teacher at Bruce Randolph School in Denver, Isabel earned her master's in curriculum and instruction with an emphasis in urban leadership from the University of Colorado at Denver. Her strong leadership skills offered her the opportunity to serve as a teacher representative on a panel for the Measures of Effective Teaching project with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. She currently teaches at the Cole Arts & Sciences Academy.

Sean Woytek

During the 2010–2011 school year, Sean Woytek is serving as a social studies teacher at Colorado High School, educating sophomores, juniors and seniors. After completing his undergraduate work at Mesa State College of Colorado, Sean earned his master's degree in integrating technology into the curriculum from Walden University. Sean taught at Bruce Randolph for three years in Denver Public Schools, where he also helped to pass his school's autonomy agreement and chaired the collaborative committee. He recently joined the district's professional development design team.

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