



The
Bell
Policy
Center

STATE and LOCAL OPPORTUNITY NOTE

Revised, replaces *Opportunity Note* of Jan. 22, 2009



As amended

POSITIVE

Drafting Number: LLS 09-0306.01

Date: March 12, 2009

Prime Sponsors: Sen. Bob Bacon, D-Fort Collins
Rep. Andy Kerr, D-Lakewood

Bill Status: Senate Education

Policy Analyst: Frank Waterous, (303) 297-0456

Title: Concerning parental involvement in kindergarten through 12th grade education

This bill represents a net opportunity gain for Colorado. Parental involvement is one of the most important elements in children's academic success. By making it possible for more parents to attend parent-teacher conferences and other specified academic activities, the bill takes an important step toward closing the state's achievement gaps, reducing the dropout rate and increasing the number of students who successfully transition to post-secondary educational opportunities.

Colorado Department of Education data show that in 2006-07, 18,027 students dropped out of school statewide.¹ By allowing more parents – particularly those from low-income and minority families – to become more active partners in their children's academic success, the number of dropouts would likely decrease. Over time, hundreds more students could graduate from high school and earn post-secondary certificates or degrees, giving them better opportunity for good jobs, higher wages and economic self-sufficiency.

Summary of Legislation

As amended, the bill allows parents who work for an employer, as defined in the federal Family and Medical Leave Act, to take unpaid leave to attend parent-teacher conferences or other specified academic activities related to their children's educational advancement. It limits such leave to six hours in any month and 18 hours in any academic year. The leave would be pro-rated for employees who work less than full time.

The bill permits the employer to require employees to take the leave in increments of no more

than three hours and to provide written verification of the academic activity for which the leave is requested. It requires employees to give at least one week's notice of the leave except in emergencies and directs them to make reasonable attempts to schedule leave time outside of regular work hours.

The bill allows employees to substitute vacation, personal or other leave for unpaid leave. Employers providing comparable leave are in compliance and are not required to provide additional leave.

Background

Persistent achievement gaps exist for Colorado's low-income and minority students, and research shows that these students drop out at significantly higher rates than students from higher-income and non-minority families.² Parental involvement in children's education is consistently cited as one of the key elements associated with lower dropout rates and increased student achievement. Significantly, given the changing demographics of Colorado's school population, recent findings suggest that parental involvement is the single strongest predictor of Latino academic performance.³

Yet low-income and minority parents are especially likely to work in jobs that do not provide the time off and flexible schedules needed to meet personal and family needs. Researchers have found that about 38 percent of jobs held by low-wage and low-income employees are low-flexibility jobs.⁴ Further, only 51 percent of low-wage jobs provide paid vacation time, compared to almost 90 percent of higher-paying jobs.⁵ Minorities and women are more likely to be found in low-wage, low-flexibility jobs.⁶

The Bell Policy Center believes a top priority of the General Assembly should be to expand opportunities for Coloradans to achieve the American Dream. In that spirit, we offer Opportunity Notes on selected bills. Similar to Fiscal Notes, Opportunity Notes reflect our best analysis of whether a bill, if implemented, will expand opportunities for Coloradans.

A POSITIVE analysis means our research suggests a bill will expand opportunity in a cost effective manner.

A NEGATIVE analysis means our research suggests the measure will restrict opportunities or will not cost-effectively achieve its goals.

To address this situation, and to allow more parents to participate in school-based activities, several states (for example, Illinois, Minnesota, North Carolina and Vermont) and the District of Columbia have enacted parental-leave laws.⁷

Research/Evidence of Effectiveness

The evidence clearly indicates that supporting parents' involvement in school-based activities is a key strategy for closing achievement gaps, cutting dropout rates and increasing post-secondary participation. A research review by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory found that students with involved parents were more likely to:

- Earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs.
- Be promoted, pass their classes and earn credits.
- Attend school regularly.
- Have better social skills, show improved behavior and adapt well to school.
- Graduate and go on to post-secondary education.⁸

Other research concludes that the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement is not income or social status but the extent to which the student's family is able to:

- Create a home environment that encourages learning.
- Communicate high yet reasonable expectations.
- Become involved in their children's education at school and in the community.⁹

Several studies have found that while families of all incomes, educational levels and ethnic/racial backgrounds are engaged in supporting their children's learning at home, white, middle-class families tend to be more involved at school.¹⁰

Given the evidence, providing more opportunity for parents – particularly those from low-income and minority families – to engage in school-based activities is a prudent public policy decision.

Estimate of Impact and Benefits

Students whose parents are involved in their educational success both at home and at school are more likely to graduate and go on to earn post-secondary credentials. As a result, HB 09-1057 carries both individual and societal benefits. Earnings dramatically increase and unemployment

rates decrease with each higher level of education attained.¹¹ On the societal level, the foundation of a strong and competitive state economy is a well-educated citizenry and workforce.

End notes

- ¹ Colorado Department of Education, *2007 Colorado Education Facts*.
- ² Rich Jones, *Understanding and Closing Colorado's Achievement Gap*, The Bell Policy Center Policy Brief, Vol. 1, No.2, March 21, 2006, *Colorado Education Statistics: 2006-2007 Dropout Data*, Colorado Department of Education, and *Event Dropout Rates By Family Income, 1972-2001*, National Center for Education Statistics.
- ³ See for example Andrew Behnke and Sue Rosman, *Latino Family Engagement: How to Effectively Engage and Connect with Latino Parents and Youth* and Axel Lluch, *The New Latino South: Latinos in North Carolina*, Governor's Office of Hispanic/Latino Affairs.
- ⁴ The Families and Work Institute defines workplace flexibility to include "policies and practices that give employees greater control over their work schedules, work locations, and the ability to take time off to meet personal and family needs." It defines low-wage jobs as those paying less than \$9.73 per hour in 2005. See Heather Boushey, et.al., *Understanding Low-Wage Work in the United States*, The Mobility Agenda and the Center for Economic Policy and Research, March 2007.
- ⁵ Boushey, et.al., *Understanding Low-Wage Work in the United States*.
- ⁶ *Fact Sheets*, Fairness Initiative on Low-Wage Work.
- ⁷ *State Laws Regarding Leave for Parental Involvement in Children's Education*, National Partnership for Women and Families, provided electronically via personal communication with Lorena Garcia, 9to5, National Association of Working Women, Denver, CO, and *Leave for Parental Involvement in School Activities*, National Partnership for Women & Families, Updated September 2008.
- ⁸ Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2002.
- ⁹ *Effective Strategies: Family Engagement*, National Dropout Prevention Center/Network.
- ¹⁰ Henderson and Mapp, *A New Wave of Evidence*.
- ¹¹ For data on the differences in earning-potential and unemployment based on educational attainment see *Education and Training Pay*, Postsecondary Education Opportunity, Oskaloosa, Iowa, and Dr. Tucker Hart Adams, *The Impact of Public Higher Education on the State of Colorado*, Dec. 2007.