

Democracy for \$ale

Buying School Board Elections

*Will what happened in Denver in 2011
happen in Indianapolis in 2012?*

© 2012 Education-Community Action Team

Indianapolis

REVIEW OF FINANCES IN DPS 2011 SCHOOL BOARD RACE

Last November, the Denver Public Schools (DPS) had a school board election. Much national attention was paid to the race because the campaign contributions were said to be some of the most significant in the history of the district.

Three seats were up for grabs. An ad hoc group composed of “Happy” Hayes (District-wide), Anne Rowe (District 1), and Draper Carson (District 5) became an unofficial “pro-reform” slate backing privatization.

Many of the campaign contributions to “pro-reform” candidates came from the oil and gas industries and investment bankers, which caused speculation that Denver's “high rollers” were trying to weigh in with their ideological bent towards a more conservative direction for DPS.

Let’s look at the numbers and see what all the fuss was about:

Haynes, raised \$230,037 over the course of the race. \$31,000 was from Stand for Children. Haynes' 4 opponents *combined* raised a mere \$27,532:

John Daniels \$244

Roger Kilgore \$8,464

Frank Deserino \$16,790 (\$15,500 of his own)

Jacqui Shumway \$2,034

Dist. 1 winner Anne Rowe raised \$196,845 (\$15,477 in-kind from Stand for Children). David Sirota raised less than half of Rowe’s campaign with \$87,293. Dist. 5 loser Draper Carson raised a total of \$177,440. In contrast, incumbent Arturo Jimenez raised \$68,073.

Jimenez faced an ad by **Latinos For Education Reform** accusing him and fellow board member Andrea Merida **of being against reform**. Jimenez, the only one who won against the so-called pro-reform slate noted: **"It's just an attack by folks who aren't in this district and can't vote here and are trying to influence the vote in northwest Denver."** He also said, "This election was a close, hard-fought race **against big money from out-of-district and out-of-state interest groups**, with your help we overcame."

Jimenez was referring mostly to the involvement of **Stand For Children**, a Portland, Ore.-based education reform organization **that helped the “pro-reform slate” candidates with thousands of dollars for canvassing operations.**

The above paragraphs were a compilation of ideas and direct quotes from:

www.coloradostatesman.com/content/993089-denver-school-board-race-steeped-politics

www.coloradostatesman.com/content/993125-school-board-election-yields-happy-results

Big Money, Bad Media, Secret Agendas: Welcome to America's Wildest School Board Race

John Nichols October 21, 2011 *The Nation*

<http://www.thenation.com/blog/164122/big-money-bad-media-secret-agendas-welcome-americas-wildest-school-board-race>

“Tens of thousands of additional dollars have come to the aid of Sirota’s opponent via the deceptively dubbed *Stand for Children* group, which campaigns for charter schools. Stand for Children Colorado's spokeswoman says the group works ‘100% on behalf of public education,’ but the group **Parents United**

for Responsible Education has described *Stand for Children* as having been ‘hijacked by the corporate school reformers.’“

Nonpartisan school board races are supposed to be about grassroots politics and human-level connections made at the doors between candidates and voters. The pattern that is developing in Denver—and that can be found on display in too many other communities across the country—threatens to collapse that connection, under the weight of big-money, consultant-driven campaigning and media that confuse skepticism with stenography.

*But what happens when **all the pathologies of national politics**—over-the-top spending by wealthy elites and corporate interests, partisan consultants jetting in to shape big-lie messaging, media outlets that cover spin rather than substance—are visited on a local school board contest?*

Stand for Children-Colorado has formally endorsed Rowe, as has the group “Democrats for Education Reform” (DFER). (<http://www.dfer.org/branches/in/>) “DFER’s endgame has little to do with learning and everything to do with marginalizing public-sector unionized workers and bringing down the cost of taxes for social programs,” notes the [United Federation of Teachers](#).

**Where did the “big money” idea that influenced Denver school board races originate:
Who’s behind Stand for Children?**

Rich Miller *Illinois Times* October 21, 2010

www.illinoistimes.com/Springfield/article-7903-whorss-behind-stand-for-children.html

It’s not every day that a group almost nobody in Illinois has ever heard of gives \$175,000 to a single state legislative candidate. But that’s just what happened on Oct. 7 2010 when *Stand for Children Illinois PAC* handed over that gigantic check to Republican Ryan Higgins, who is vying to replace retiring state Rep. Paul Froehlich (D-Schaumburg). **It’s probably a good bet that the group’s contribution to Higgins is the single largest “outside” legislative campaign check in modern Illinois history.**

Yet Stand for Children has received almost zero press coverage. Fox Chicago followed up on a story Miller wrote earlier, but that’s it, even though the group has contributed \$650,000 to rank and file legislative candidates since Oct. 4, 2010.

Republicans had hoped to receive nearly all of the group’s prodigious contributions this fall, **but the majority of its money went to six Democrats.** Rep. Jehan Gordon (D-Peoria) received a \$100,000 check. State Reps. Bob Flider, Mark Walker and Keith Farnham and Sen. Toi Hutchinson have all received \$50,000 contributions, as well as House Democratic candidate Daniel Biss. Three Republicans received money from the group.

In an January 22, 2011 *Substance News* article, Stand for Children, was then the best funded political action committee (PAC) in Illinois, having gone from zero to more than \$3 million in its coffers thanks to a handful of Chicago area millionaires and billionaires who donated as much as a half million dollars to Stand for Children just before Illinois law changed putting a cap on the donations. The same billionaires and millionaires bankrolled the Rahm Emanuel campaign for mayor of Chicago. ["Emanuel's billionaire donors also bankrolling 'Stand for Children', pushing union-busting organizations in Illinois"](#).

**Denver School Board Election Heats Up:
National Spotlight and Outside Cash Become Focal Points**
Ryan Grenoble *Huffington Post Denver* October 25, 2011

School board elections rarely garner significant attention -- these are not the typical high-profile races that bring in big money, U.S. Senate seats, and shady organizations known as Super PACs. This year has been different.

WATCH District 1 candidate Emily Sirota discuss the impact of money in the Denver Public Schools race on MSNBC:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/25/denver-school-board-election_n_1030906.html

Perhaps big donors have become so accustomed to writing big checks for political causes that, in an off-year election, they embrace an inner compulsion to finance *somebody, anybody*.

So far this year, the Denver Public Schools board race has seen more than \$600,000 in campaign funding--and that's just for three of the seven candidates (there are seven candidates in total). [Fox 31 reports](#) \$261,000 of the trio's war chest can be tied back to deep pocketed CEOs and industry executives. The 3 candidates are endorsed by Denver Mayor Hancock and *The Denver Post*.

Education and the Wall Street Connection: The Denver School Board Race

Angela Engel October 18, 2011 www.angelaengel.com

<http://defensedenver.com/2011/10/education-and-the-wall-street-connection/>

National level organizations involved in local school policy via school board elections

This election year, Denver voters will have an opportunity to demonstrate the power of citizen engagement and the importance of direct control of our neighborhood schools. National interests are investing heavily in Denver's school board race. The players are many, the politics ugly, and the possibilities well...promising.

The Players

Stand for Children started a Colorado Chapter in 2010 in order to push legislation tying teacher evaluations to test scores. Their investors include:

- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- Walton Family Foundation
- New Profit Inc., a "national venture philanthropy fund."
- Democrats for Education Reform (DFER)
 - a newer organization promoting charter schools, alternative certification training, and performance pay, and in addition promote mayoral control.
- ACE originated in Colorado in 2000.
 - ACE members made significant campaign contributions to the Douglas County School Board responsible for directing private dollars away from some of the most high-performing public schools in the state.
- Several other funders have also joined the ranks, and the one thing they all have in common
 - trustees and board members with corporate connections and with very deep pockets.

Business and education: The politics of educational profits

So why are corporate executives and wealthy entrepreneurs suddenly interested in public education? Because they like to make money and recent education reforms along with "new tax credits" and Education Management Organizations, EMO's, have provided ample opportunity to make a dollar.

Private charters and online schools

Under the guise of failing test scores, Education Management Organizations co-opt community schools or aggressively market online. COVA, Colorado Virtual Academy managed by the Virginia based company K12 projected growth in excess of 100 million dollars last year. It's fair to note that many charter schools are district managed and publicly controlled. Still, Colorado policy makers have created a double standard favoring charter schools. Ed News Colorado reported that nearly half of online student enrollments leave before finishing the year. The majority of programs are low performing and operating outside of the accountability mandates required of public schools. Online and charter schools can hire non-licensed and non-certified employees.

Alternative Licensing Programs have become big business

Teach for America (TFA), reported earnings in 2009 of over \$269 million. Tax documents list their net assets at \$261.5 million. This past July the Walton Family Foundation committed \$49.5 million to double the number of Teach For America candidates throughout the United States; \$3.1 million was designated for Colorado.

Senator Michael Bennet, DfER "Reformer of the Month" and recipient of nearly \$500,000 in DFER campaign contributions, is sponsoring the GREAT Act, which calls for taxpayer dollars to fund private revenue generating alternative certification models. In a "Statement of Principles to fix the Elementary Secondary Education Act," the Senator stated, "We also must support programs like Teach for America..." TFA prepares college graduates in a five-week summer training program. While their results are mediocre at best, TFA candidates are attractive to budget strapped districts. The majority of candidates don't last and the two year revolving door of cheap labor keeps costs associated with salaries and benefits low. The two year contracts and building transfers allow TFA candidates to maneuver around teacher effectiveness mandates and the accountability required of real teachers.

Tests, text books, and more tests

While education experts and innovators call for personalized learning and differentiated models of schooling, groups like Stand for Children and DfER, support national standards (Common Core is also funded by Gates), and punishments and sanctions tied to test scores. The McGraw Hill (publishers of CSAP—Indiana has ISTEP+ and is graded by McGraw Hill site at 7000 Michigan Road) financial fact book mirrors the national education platform. It's no wonder, with contracts in 26 states (including Indiana), this publishing company holds a monopoly over all curriculum and assessments. The failed NCLB Act based on standardization and high-stake testing has cost taxpayers billions and delivered zero in terms of return on investment. Unless of course you are a publishing company - McGraw Hill listed revenues at \$2.3 billion in 2009. (FYI: **WTHR Ch 6 is owned by McGraw-Hill.**)

Stand for Children and their investors will be directing millions of dollars at these targeted school board races. The question is will the money go to our children or will the children go to the money. Cast your vote for kids, not corporations.