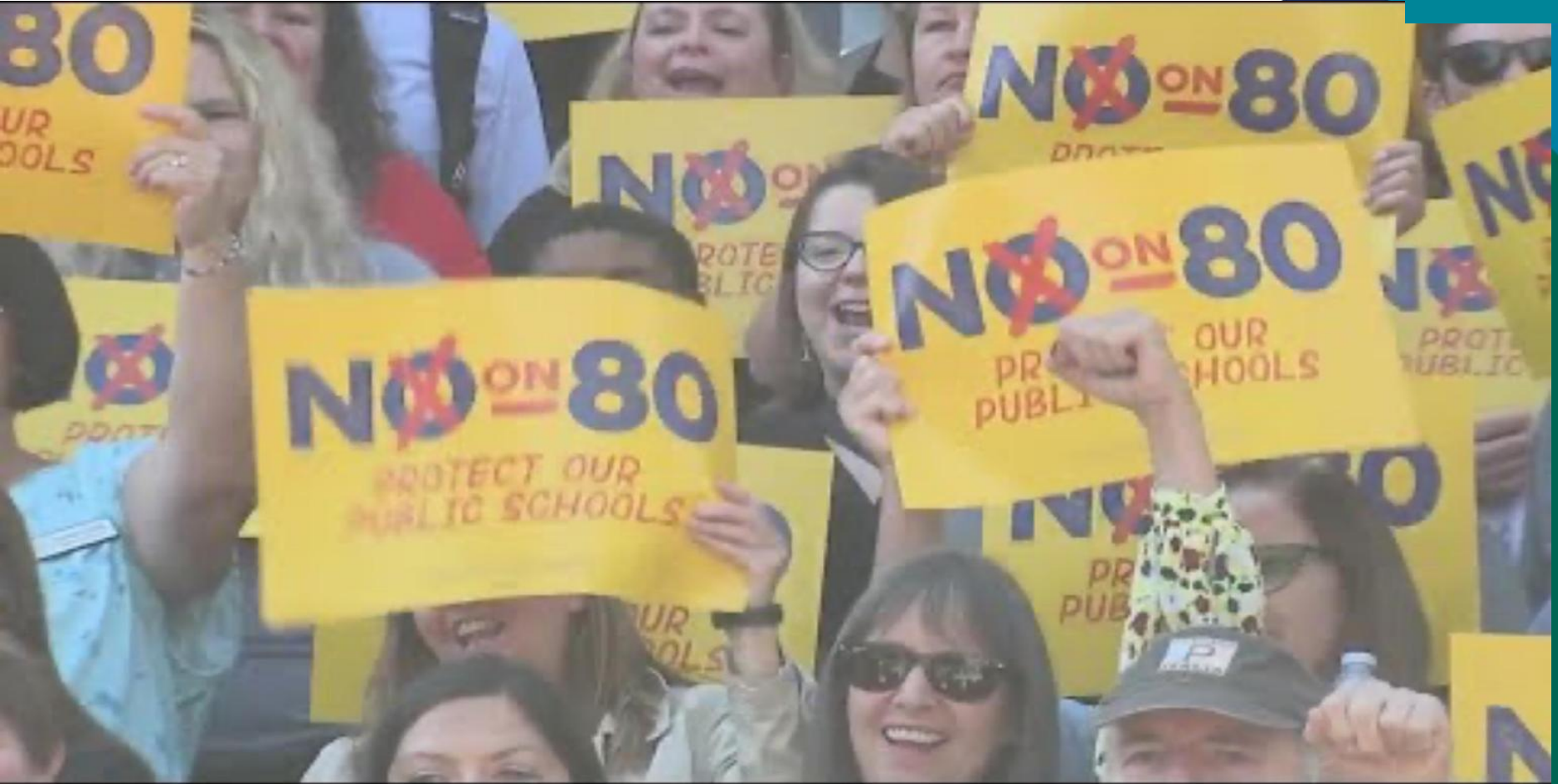


# How Colorado Voters Turned Down a School Choice “Voucher” Amendment

Presented by:

- Mike DeGuire, Advocates for Public Education Policy
- Lisa Escárcega, CO State Board of Education
- Phil Sorensen, Colorado Education Association, affiliate staff
- Evie Hudak, PTA leader, former CO State Senator, A4PEP
- Paula Noonan, Colorado Capitol Watch

# Overview of Amendment 80 Fight



# Background for Public Education In Colorado

“School Choice thrives while funding gaps persist”

- Conservative history opposed to taxation
- Charter school prominence
- Training centers for privatizing schools
- Union legislation
- Politically: Democrats PLUS Conservatives
- Significant Billionaire influence

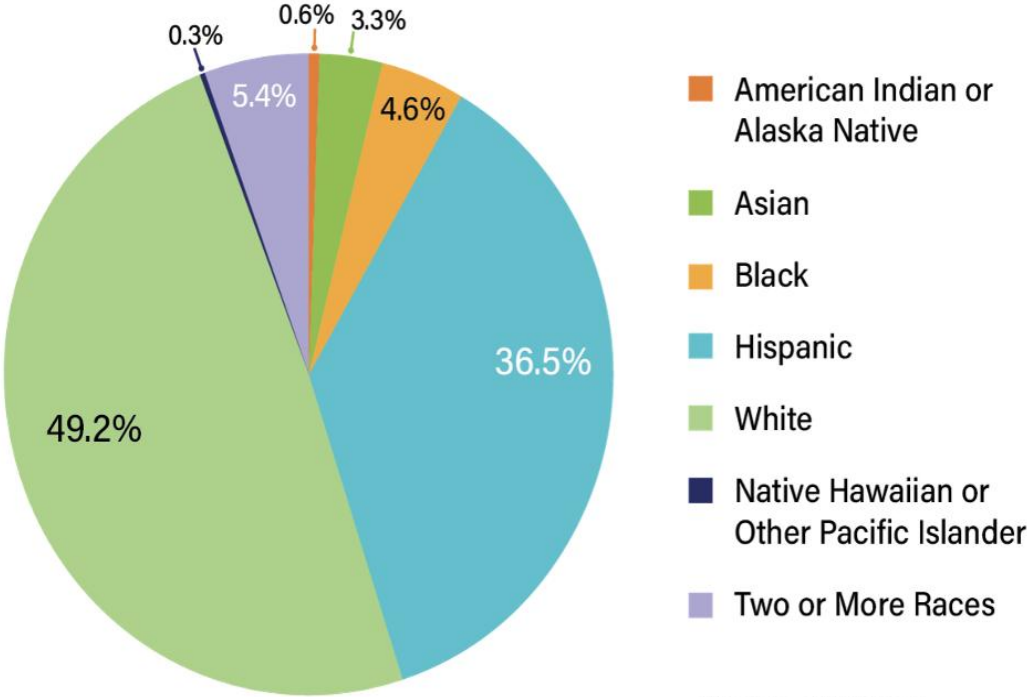
# Colorado Public Schools 2024-25

178  
SCHOOL  
DISTRICTS

1,927  
SCHOOLS

881,065  
PUBLIC  
SCHOOL  
STUDENTS

Student Demographics\*



\*October 2024 Data

Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch:

394,765 (~44%)

Students with Individualized Education Programs:

117,616 (~13%)

Multilingual Learners:

105,362 (~12%)

McKinney Vento:

14,498 (~2%)

262 Charter Schools

136,000 Charter School Students

# Colorado Voucher History

## Ballot Initiatives

- 1992 - Amendment 7 to pass vouchers - Failed, with only 33% of the vote
- 1996 - Amendment 17 on "parental rights" which might have enabled vouchers - Failed with only 42% of the vote
- 1998 - Amendment 17 providing a tax credit to parents for education - Failed with only 39% of the vote
- In 2003, a school voucher program passed for 11 school districts by a Republican legislature. In 2004, the state Supreme Court ruled the program unconstitutional.
- 2011 – Douglas County SD institutes vouchers for private schools – 2017 the district school board repealed the program
- 2024 – Amendment 80 on school choice that includes private and homeschooling – Failed

## Pro-voucher bills failed since 2016

- Tax Credits for Nonpublic Education
- Parent Choice In Low-performing School Districts
- Education Income Tax Credits For Nonpublic School
- Education Income Tax Credits For Nonpublic School
- Income Tax Deduction For 529 Account K-12
- Child Safety Accounts
- Special Education Opportunity Scholarships
- Support For Literacy Enrichment For Young Students
- Income Tax Deduction For 529 Account K-12 Expenses
- No 529 Account Income Tax Deduction for K-12 Expenses
- Income Tax Deduction For 529 Account K-12 -12
- Create School Safety Account And Related Tax Credits
- Student Equity Education Funding Programs
- Choice In Low-performing School Districts
- Income Tax Credits for Nonpublic Education
- Funding For Educational Opportunities

# Why in 2024?

## **HB24-1363: Charter School Accountability**

- Governing board composition
- Waivers and contract changes
- Facilities and property use
- Transparency and public reporting
- Application and renewal requirements
- Appeals and moratoriums
- Enrollment and funding provisions
- Conflict of interest and personnel evaluations
- Annual reporting requirements



# Advance Colorado on Amendment 80



[Michael Fields: Advance Colorado](#)

# Amendment 80: What did it say?

Amendment 80 proposed amending the Colorado Constitution to create the **right to school choice** for children in kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) and create the **right for parents** to direct the education of their children; and **define school choice** to include public neighborhood and charter schools, **private schools**, **home schools**, **open enrollment options**, and **future innovations in education**.



# Amendment 80 Fails

NEWS: ELECTION 2024

## Amendment 80 fails: Right to school choice won't be added to Colorado's constitution

The ballot measure wanted to cement the right to school choice, including the right to private schools, in the state constitution



Erica Breunlin

10:32 AM MST on Nov 7, 2024

POLITICS > ELECTION • News

### Colorado didn't follow the big national rightward swing toward Donald Trump. Here's why.

Pollsters say higher education rates, Latinos not breaking toward Trump helped keep state reliably blue



# The Pro Side and Positions

## **The Colorado Business Community and Conservatives**

- Colorado Concern (business)
- Advance Colorado (business)
- Ready Colorado (conservatives)
- The Colorado Catholic Conference
- Colorado Association of Private Schools

## **Pro 80 Arguments**

- A change in state government administration could mean a change in choice
- A backstop if legislature limits choice
- HB24-1363 was an anti-charter bill that could end charter schools in Colorado
- If school choice is embedded in the constitution, it guarantees choice for parents
- It is NOT a prelude to vouchers

# The Con Side and Positions

## Public Education Community

- Colorado Education Association
- American Federation of Teachers
- Colorado Fiscal Policy Institute
- PTA
- Advocates for Public Education Policy
- Colorado Democrats (not DFER)
- Stand for Children
- Christian Home Educators of Colorado
- Colorado Association of School Executives
- ACLU
- Great Education Colorado & Public School Strong
- *(and many more)*

## Anti 80 Arguments

- A quick slide to school vouchers
- Puts public tax dollars into any school option including home schools and private schools
- Undermines traditional public schools, especially financing
- School choice is already embedded in Colorado statute
- School choice over 30 years sets choice in Colorado policy
- Vague wording ensures numerous lawsuits

# When neutral isn't neutral

Colorado League of Charter Schools

Colorado Association of Charter School Authorizers

National Alliance for Public Charter Schools: Colorado Chapter

Colorado Republican Party

Governor Jared Polis

# SILVER LININGS in CO

## Amendment 80 went down!!

*We needed it to be below 55%! It got 49%*

**Colorado Voter Turnout:**  
**78.31%**

**CEA MEMBER TURNOUT:**  
**95%**



# Election 2024 Union/Educator Engagement

**Union members voted at a higher rate than all Colorado voters: 95% vs 78%**



## Member engagement in election activities:

- Activists identified:
  - **222 members**
- **92,576 calls made w 1,110 voter conversations**
  - Focus on No on 80 and local bond/mills
- **44,516 Member Hustles** sent
  - 4,058 convos sharing recommendations and supporting member GOTV.
- Data for No on 80:
  - **15,679 doors knocked**
  - **3,151 conversations** (21% contact rate)
  - NOTE: This does not include No on 80 data for either candidate canvasses or coalition partner canvasses.



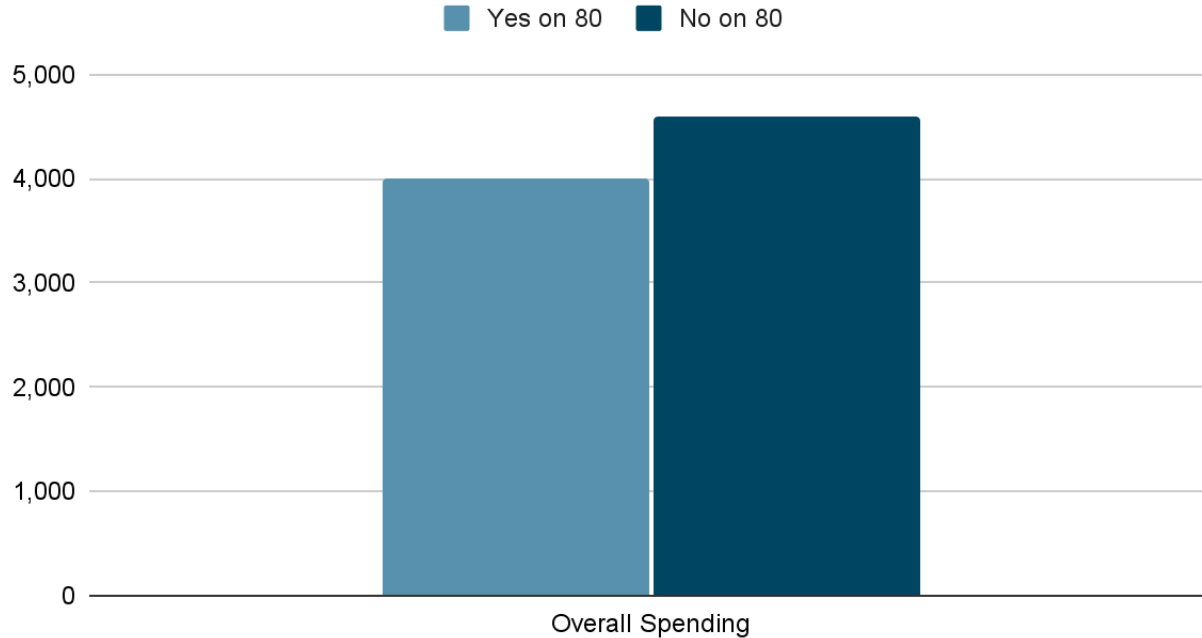
## Highlights:

- **Over 50 union members** and community allies in Ft. Collins for No on 80 walk on 10/19!
- **Union members partnered with the Yes on 2U campaign in Denver** for several joint canvasses and they carried No on 80 literature during their paid canvasses.

**Need to match up union activists with anti-voucher supporters.**

# Why 80 went down- The impact of money

## Spending on 80

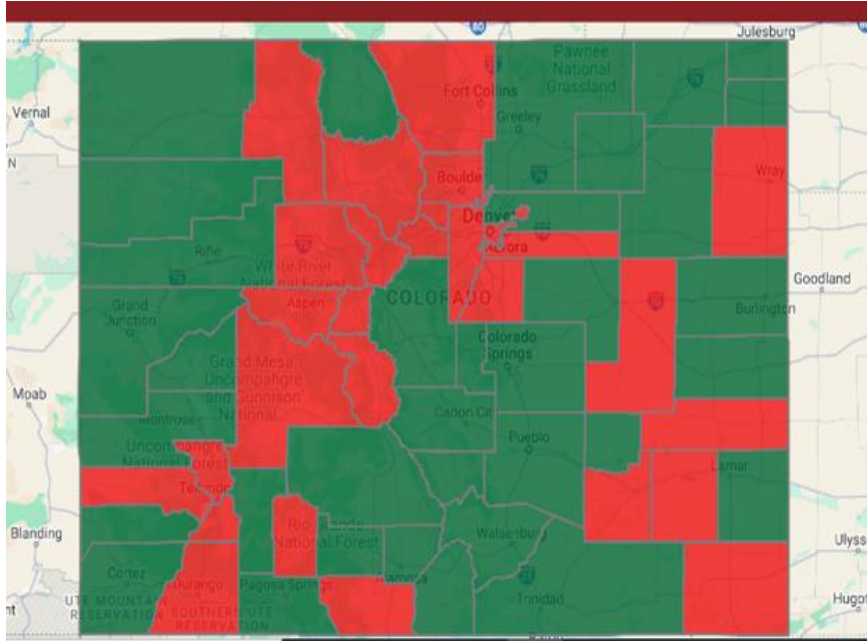


**Public Schools Strong**  
*(anti 80 campaign)*

Raised **\$4.9 million**.  
NEA gave over **\$4 million**.  
Spent **\$4.6 million**.



# Why 80 went down-Urban, rural, and suburban results



1. **Rural counties** turned against it.
2. Areas where **school choice** has been prevalent (as charters), e.g. Denver and Doug Co., voted against it.
3. Built a **broad coalition** of opposition and worked together with campaigns on other ballot issues.

# The Con Side and Positions

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# Lessons Learned

Networking

Messaging

Resources

Timing

Politics

# They'll be back! Initiative 22

Shall there be an amendment to the Colorado Constitution establishing a fundamental right to school choice for students in kindergarten through 12th grade, and, in connection therewith, declaring that school choice includes neighborhood schools, charter schools, private schools, home schools, open enrollment options, and future innovations in education?

**Approved March 5:** The Title Board determined that the proposed initiative requires the addition of language to the Colorado Constitution. The requirement for approval by **55 percent** of the votes cast applies to this initiative.