


# Primary COL R'S



ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALEX NABAUM

**From language immersion in Mandarin to crime scene investigation classes, Denver's top elementary schools have it all.**

**BY LUC HATLESTAD**

IMPROVING THE WAY we educate our children has become an epic, and seemingly eternal, struggle throughout the country. In Colorado, however, it looks as if administrators, educators, and elected officials are actually making progress. Schools here are embracing technology and using it to create innovative ways to evaluate students, teachers, and schools. Politicians from both parties are spearheading state and national legislation to support the cause. And parents are more involved than ever in their kids' education. ● Even with the myriad efforts at improvement, there's still plenty of work to be done, so this year we've turned our lens on where it all begins: elementary education. We've used some of this emerging technology to evaluate the area's top public schools, and we've used good old-fashioned reporting to determine Denver's best private options. We've explained how the new tools work, and how the new laws might begin to make a difference. And we've highlighted the efforts of two moms who've begun doing due diligence on schools on behalf of parents everywhere. As September dawns, school is once again in session, and we've got a head start on the impending deluge of homework. Have a read.



# TOP PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

**METHODOLOGY**

Schools were evaluated in a one-county radius around Denver, including Boulder, and were selected using the Colorado Growth Model ([https://cdeapps.cde.state.co.us/growth\\_model\\_public](https://cdeapps.cde.state.co.us/growth_model_public)), which assesses schools according to levels of academic proficiency—in math, reading, and writing—and “growth.” The term growth refers to the extent to which schools are helping their students catch up with, keep up with, or surpass their expected grade levels. (See “Growth Spurt,” page 74, for a more complete explanation of the growth model.) Schools were chosen based on high scores in both categories across all three subject areas. Special consideration was given to schools with higher Free-and-Reduced Lunch (FRL) numbers.

Format: proficiency/growth (on a scale of 1-100) for MATH, READING, and WRITING in 2009

## Aurora Quest AURORA K-8

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
100/76	99/72	96/51	21.38%

A John C. Irwin School of Excellence, Aurora Quest has had students win awards in everything from poetry to science and technology. The bilingual school emphasizes good citizenship and community involvement and has a well-established gifted-and-talented program. [quest.aurorak12.org](http://quest.aurorak12.org)

## Beach Court DENVER PRE-K-5

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
76/80	75/75	68/87	95.74%

With virtually all of its students receiving some kind of FRL assistance, this bilingual school boasts extraordinary growth numbers across the board. Led by principal Frank Roti, Beach Court features programs for special needs and gifted-and-talented students and has received national recognition for the reading achievements of its Hispanic students. [beachcourt.dpsk12.org](http://beachcourt.dpsk12.org)

## Boulder Community School of Integrated Studies BOULDER K-5

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
85/63	90/65	84/79	14.79%

BCSIS features a Waldorf-influenced curriculum, which places a heavy focus on using artistic expression as an avenue to learning. Beginning in kindergarten, students participate in PassageWorks, “activities that encourage social/emotional growth and positive classroom cultures” that conclude in the fifth grade with exercises that help children transition to middle school. [schools.bvsd.org/bcsis/index.asp](http://schools.bvsd.org/bcsis/index.asp)

## Bradford Intermediate LITTLETON K-6

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
96/72	97/68	94/76	1.88%

Bradford sits on two sites: One houses grades K–three; the other is home to grades four–six. The school stresses accountability from students, teachers, and staff, and publishes notes on its website from faculty and PTA meetings. In addition, the school places an unusually strong emphasis on attendance and conduct and offers programs in art, music, and physical education, the latter of which has an outdoor research lab component for sixth-graders. [sc.jeffco.k12.co.us/education/school/school.php?sectionid=182](http://sc.jeffco.k12.co.us/education/school/school.php?sectionid=182)

## Bromwell DENVER K-5

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
90/69.5	90/61	86/71.5	10.09%

Bromwell pays special attention to promoting a caring, supportive environment between students.

The school publishes a student newspaper and an annual volume of verse that contains one poem from each student. It also convenes a committee of parents, teachers, the principal, and a community representative to regularly address all aspects of running the school. [bromwell.dpsk12.org](http://bromwell.dpsk12.org)

## Canyon Creek AURORA K-5

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
81/72.5	77/69	71/70.5	18.83%

Canyon Creek features a year-round calendar, with longer breaks around Christmas and in late June/early July. The Parent Teacher Organization eschews most fund-raisers and instead requests small donations (\$30 per student) from all parents and instructs them how to redeem grocery purchases, such as cereal and soup, for points that go toward funding the school. [canyoncreek.ccsd.k12.co.us](http://canyoncreek.ccsd.k12.co.us)

## Challenge School DENVER K-8

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
99/63.5	99/60	95/59.5	3.53%

This magnet school was the first in the Denver area to be authorized as an International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program, which provides a more globally focused and rigorous approach to education. It also offers programs that integrate the arts and technology into traditional subject areas and provides smaller and multiage groupings outside the classroom based on students’ developmental needs. [challengeschool.info](http://challengeschool.info)

## Cherry Hills Village CHERRY HILLS VILLAGE K-5

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
92/75	90/64	84/79	4.04%

Marking its 125th year in 2011, Cherry Hills offers differentiated and accelerated learning, along with a range of activities, including a financial management class for fifth-graders; programs that teach environmental awareness and problem-solving; and classes in art, chess, and languages. [chv.ccsd.k12.co.us](http://chv.ccsd.k12.co.us)



## Douglass Elementary BOULDER K-5

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
98/68.5	97/68	87/66.5	3.31%

An award-winning arts program highlights this school’s broad class offerings. Douglass stages an annual science fair, a weeklong celebration of Earth Day that showcases environmentally themed projects and initiatives, and publishes the student-created *Waves* magazine, which this past year featured essays about ways Douglass students could help Haitian earthquake victims. [bvsd.org/schools/douglass/Pages/home.aspx](http://bvsd.org/schools/douglass/Pages/home.aspx)

## Dry Creek CENTENNIAL K-5

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
86/64	88/61	82/70	16.51%

Dry Creek uses a collegiate prep curriculum from day one. It assigns homework to all grades and incorporates technology into the classroom where appropriate. It also offers weekly “specials” classes in art, music, physical education, and provides help for teachers in the form of paraprofessionals and parental volunteers. [dry.ccsd.k12.co.us](http://dry.ccsd.k12.co.us)

## Eisenhower BOULDER K-5

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
91/64	83/67	76/64.5	17.98%

Eisenhower offers extensive (and free) after-school activities, and the PTA stages numerous fund-raising events throughout the year. Eisenhower has a Design Advisory Team of parents and staff to oversee new construction projects enabled by a bond granted to the entire Boulder Valley School District. [bvsd.org/schools/Eisenhower/Pages/default.aspx](http://bvsd.org/schools/Eisenhower/Pages/default.aspx)

## Flagstone CASTLE ROCK PRE-K-6

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
84/74	83/64	69/68	10.07%

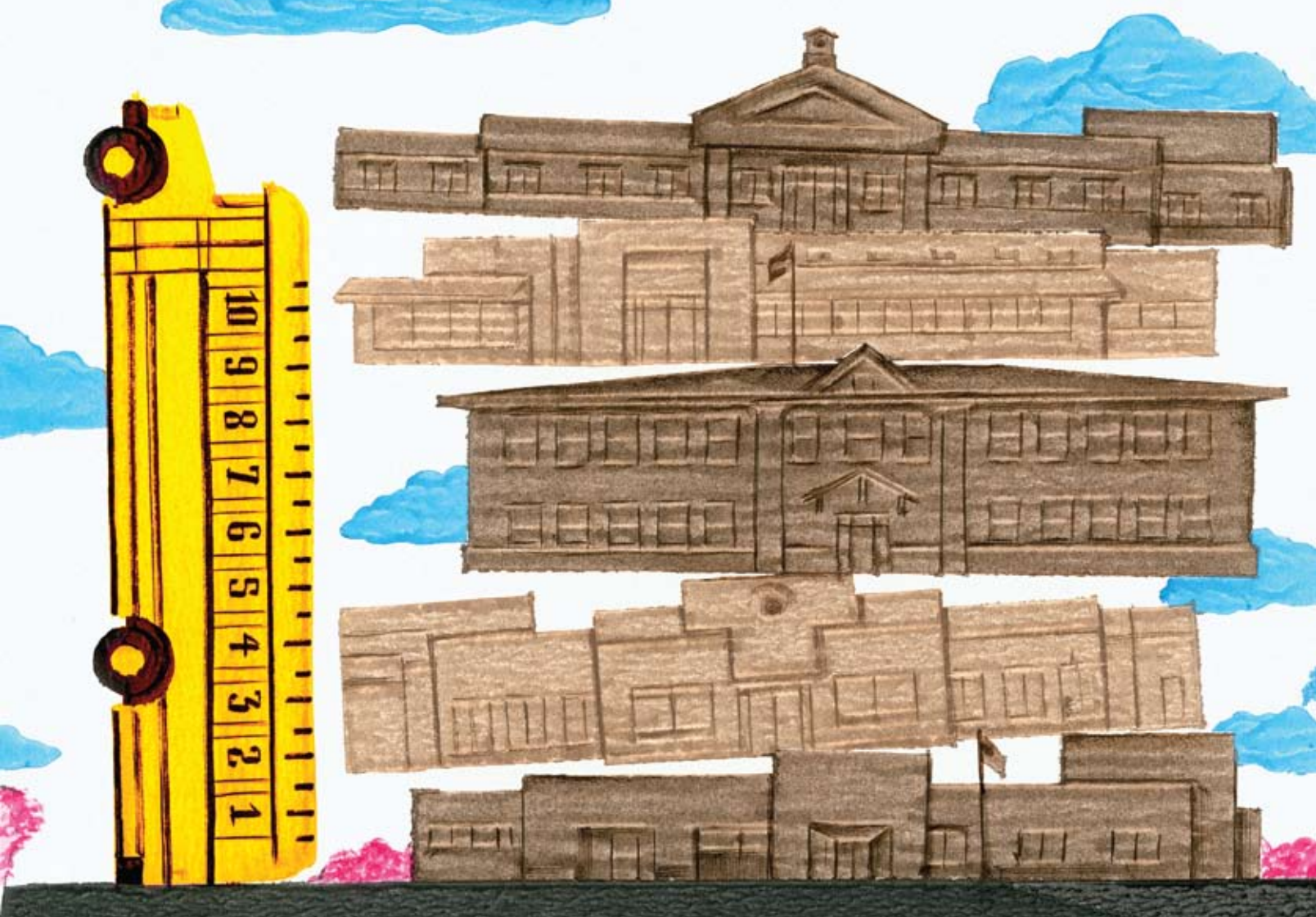
Flagstone’s library collection holds more than 10,000 books and boasts extensive computer facilities. The school offers Accelerated Reader, an assessment tool that helps teachers more closely monitor a child’s progress. Students from grades one–six contribute to the school’s *Tie-Dye Scribes Times* online newspaper. [schools.dcsdk12.org/education/school/school.php?sectionid=23](http://schools.dcsdk12.org/education/school/school.php?sectionid=23)

## High Peaks BOULDER K-5

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
99/77	94/68.5	92/68	7.19%

This consistently high-performing school uses a Core Knowledge curriculum (an increasingly popular approach that teaches students a specific set of new skills at each grade level) and provides

CONTINUED ON PAGE 74



# Building a Better Teacher

**SB 191 promises to rid the educational system of subpar instructors, but it could be years before anyone notices the difference.**

Although the law went into effect on July 1, no one expects to see a significant impact from it in 2010–11. (Even so, the passage of the

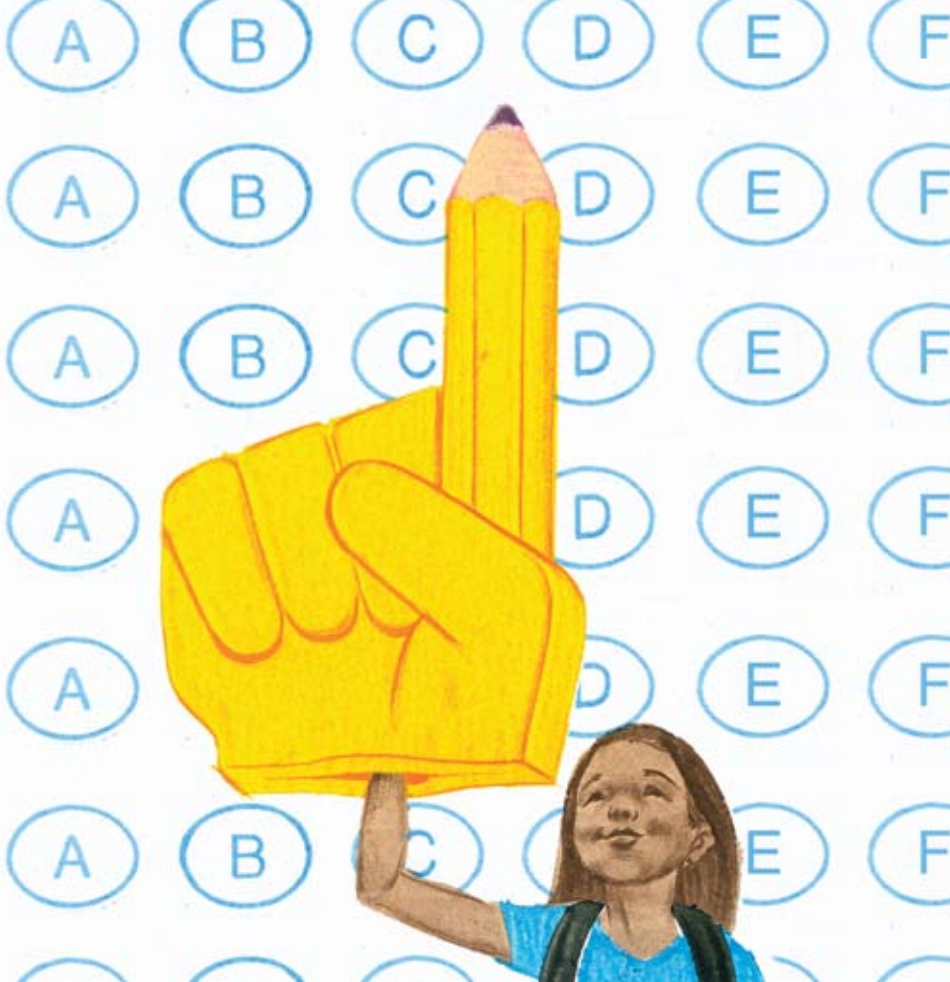
bill is a key reason Colorado recently was named a finalist in the Race to the Top competition for federal education grants. Winners will be announced in September.) “We probably won’t see much this year other than the media attention paid to it, and you might notice teachers being more feisty about their jobs,” says Sean Vanberschot, executive director of Teach For America (TFA) Colorado. This is because SB 191 eliminates direct placement, the requirement that school districts find a school for all teachers under contract before hiring any new ones. SB 191 should make it easier for TFA to get its instructors hired, and Vanberschot says he expects the teachers union to “push back” on the new rule.

WHEN THE COLORADO legislature passed Senate Bill 191 this spring, after a last-minute flurry of tacked-on amendments, supporters lauded it as a giant step toward making teachers more accountable for their students’ performance. This may well prove true, but we also may have to wait a while before we notice concrete results.

The new law, authored by state Senator and longtime education advocate Michael Johnston, won’t be fully phased in until the 2014–15 school year, and the time between now and then will be packed with debates and wrangling between the state Council for Educator Effectiveness (CEE) and the Colorado Education Association (CEA)—our division of the National Education Association—over exactly how SB 191 will be put into practice. Spokeswoman Deborah Fallin of the CEA says her organization opposed SB 191, although its official position now that it passed is “to do everything we can to make it work.” Even so, she says those 11th-hour amendments have inserted some flaws into the legislation that need to be ironed out. “It’s not a very well-written bill,” she says. “A lot of things happened to it in the six weeks it was working its way through the legislature,” including a few instances in which ratified passages may contradict each other.

While there are promising new models for evaluating teachers, it’s still an imperfect science, one that SB 191 should partially decode. “[The bill] isn’t a model for the rest of the country, but it’s an effort that will be watched by other states,” Fallin says. “If there were a foolproof evaluation system, everyone would be adopting it.”

 [COLORADO EDUCATION ASSOCIATION'S SB 191 PAGE](http://www.coloradoea.org/atthecapitol/SB191.cfm)  
<http://www.coloradoea.org/atthecapitol/SB191.cfm>



# Growth Spurt

Inside the never-ending search for a better way to evaluate schools, teachers, and students.

THE TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY has always made promises about how its wares will improve lives, yet it's been mostly unable to concoct tools to assess our children's schools. That may be changing: This year the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) has introduced an improved method for examining how well public schools do their job.

The Colorado Growth Model (available at [SchoolView.org](http://SchoolView.org)) provides access to data about how public schools perform and where they need to improve. It shows schools' proficiency and growth in reading, writing, and math, presented as an X-Y graph divided into quadrants. "Growth" refers to keeping kids in sync with their grade level, so a school in the 50th percentile on the growth axis is helping its students improve one grade level each school year—i.e., it's doing exactly what it's supposed to be doing. Schools above 50 percent are helping their kids learn faster, while schools below that level have some catching up to do. Although schools in upper-middle-class areas typically score high on both axes, putting them in the upper-right quadrant, schools in poorer neighborhoods can distinguish themselves by staying above 50 percent on the growth scale. "If your school is in the bottom-right quadrant, that's OK, too," says CDE associate commissioner Rich Wenning. "If you have a lot of kids with learning deficits or coming from free-and-reduced-lunch (FRL) backgrounds and you're in the bottom right, that means you're catching kids up."

Though the growth model still lacks metrics for factors such as teacher engagement, it's a more sophisticated method for rating a school's performance. "The growth model is the most interesting thing to happen in Colorado schools in the past five years," says Alexander Ooms, a founding board member at West Denver Prep and a contributor to [EdNewsColorado.com](http://EdNewsColorado.com). "Up to now, schools with high FRL numbers suffered. But some of these schools are doing great growth numbers, and some schools coasting with high-income kids aren't doing as well as their reputations would have you believe."

 **COLORADO GROWTH MODEL** [https://cdeapps.cde.state.co.us/growth\\_model\\_public](https://cdeapps.cde.state.co.us/growth_model_public)

## PUBLIC SCHOOLS CONTINUED

summer reading exercises to all its students. It has full-day kindergarten options, plus Talented-and-Gifted (TAG) and special-needs programs. [schools.bvscd.org/hp](http://schools.bvscd.org/hp)

### Highline Academy DENVER K-8

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
73/74	82/68	61/65	33.19%

With about one-third of its students qualifying for FRL assistance and hailing from 55 countries, this charter school has produced strong growth numbers. It owes this achievement to small class sizes and a liberal arts curriculum that emphasizes character and groups students according to performance levels. [highlineacademy.org](http://highlineacademy.org)

### Hulstrom Options NORTHGLENN K-8

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
97/76	96/69	89/70	6.97%

This magnet school offers a before- and after-school summer enrichment (BASE) program that combines child care with exercises that enhance the students' existing schoolwork. Hulstrom's Connections and Advanced Academic programs, and overall curriculum, are designed for children who thrive in a more structured learning environment. [hulstrom.adams12.org](http://hulstrom.adams12.org)

### Lafayette LAFAYETTE K-5

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
79/72	80/61.5	64/61	23.50%

Lafayette has unusually high FRL participation for the northern suburbs. It recently began a TAG program, and launched Literacy Assessment Days that take place before the school year begins in August. It also features smaller class sizes at the lower grade levels and stresses character-building throughout the school. [bvscd.org/schools/lafayette](http://bvscd.org/schools/lafayette)

### Monarch K-8 LOUISVILLE

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
86/72	87/63	82/69	7.49%

Small class sizes that feed into Monarch's larger middle school mean extra attention for primary-level students. The school's PTA provides a robust fundraising apparatus, and Monarch also has a variety of special-needs offerings, including a program for deaf children. [bvscd.org/schools/monarchk8](http://bvscd.org/schools/monarchk8)

### Peabody CENTENNIAL K-5

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
84/72.5	80/67.5	73/67.5	22.09%

Will celebrate its 50-year anniversary in 2011. Faculty and staff meet regularly to update each other on performance trends and analyze student data to see where improvements can be made. The school's extracurricular Enrichment program features classes in music, art, and Spanish. [peabody.littletonpublicschools.net](http://peabody.littletonpublicschools.net)

### Polaris at Ebert DENVER K-5

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
97/61.5	98/72.5	91/58	11.34%

This highly gifted-and-talented program accepts students through a nomination and testing process, but its IQ requirements have a "soft" cutoff, so students may gain admission by, for example, having exceptional ability in a specific subject area. Alternative instruction includes such offerings as beginning Italian language for second-graders and crime scene investigation for fourth-graders. [polarisprogram.dpsk12.org](http://polarisprogram.dpsk12.org)

**Side Creek** AURORA PRE-K-5

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
82/81	70/70	61/80	39.82%

Led by principal Suzanne Morris-Sherer, Side Creek aims to instill a distinct culture of high expectations into its curriculum and extracurricular activities. It offers media classes at all levels to help children keep pace with new technology, and it has instituted a School Improvement Plan for 2010–11 that involves students, faculty, and parents working together toward further academic development. *sidecreek.aurorak12.org/*

**Slavens** DENVER K-8

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
97/74	86/54	73/57	9.02%

A strong PTA and fund-raising organization keep the regular classes and extracurriculars flowing. Among the class projects are slide shows about wildlife presented by third-graders (and showcased on the school's website), and "wikispaces," which are informational Web pages that are updated by fourth-graders. *slavens.dpsk12.org*

**Steck** DENVER K-5

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
93/76	95/65	89/75	9.39%

Steck offers Kaleidoscope Corner, a before- and after-school extended-learning program. The school also has staged mock congressional hearings at the higher grade levels. The PTA holds fund-raising events throughout the year to raise money for classroom materials, paraprofessional assistance, and facility upgrades. *steck.dpsk12.org*

**Stone Mountain**

HIGHLANDS RANCH PRE-K-6

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
92/75	92/65	87/68	1.17%

Stone Mountain's curriculum is highlighted by a strong focus on character development. The school's website includes pages for each classroom, a principal's blog and school newsletter, and a portal through which parents can monitor their child's activities and progress. *schools.dcsdk12.org/education/school/school.php?sectionid=6857*

**Timber Trail** CASTLE ROCK K-5

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
92/71.5	89/70.5	84/67.5	1.68%

Timber Trail participates in the national Watch D.O.G.S. program, in which fathers donate time to the school with the aim of providing positive male role models. A three-time John Irwin award winner, Timber Trail's curriculum includes classes in arts, music, and PE, and gifted-and-talented programs. *schools.dcsdk12.org/education/school/school.php?sectiondetailid=164600*

**University Park** DENVER K-5

MATH	READING	WRITING	FRL
78/67.5	83/71.5	63/58	27.32%

Students at UPark represent roughly 15 different languages, and the school stresses cooperation among students, parents, and the surrounding community by recruiting adult volunteers for such tasks as technology support and grant writing. The active PTA has raised funds through everything from carnivals to book fairs, and UPark's students and teachers have won more achievement awards than most other DPS elementary schools. *upark.dpsk12.org*

# Test Cases

**Dr. Mary Monroe, a clinical psychologist and adjunct professor at the University of Denver, explains the ins and outs of gifted-and-talented programs.**

**Q: How does a child get admitted to the typical gifted-and-talented program?**

**A:** These programs generally are looking at the child's IQ and learning style. But certain private schools that do require testing tend to have a soft cutoff because, for some, admissions have gone way down. It's a business decision. They're officially looking for an IQ of 130 and up, but they also look at kids from a more holistic perspective, so parents who can't get their kids to test at those exact scores might still be able to get them in.

**Q: Is there a trick to passing the test?**

**A:** The tests are controversial because they give an unfair advantage to families who know what schools test for and can train their kids. Families with a gifted kid who don't know about the test might not be able to get their kid into the program, but if you ask a school what's on its test, they'll probably make it available to you. It's human nature to want the info ahead of time for your child, but it's also problematic. If you just train them to pass the test, they'll be going into a school that might not be designed for them and run the risk of failing out. I try to help parents with the perspective of it all and try to show them that there is a whole range of schools available.

**Q: Do private gifted-and-talented programs offer more than public ones?**

**A:** In most ways, parents are getting their money's worth and have more say in their child's education. But there are bad teachers everywhere, and private schools are no different, although they're sometimes easier to get rid of than at public schools.

**Q: What if you have a gifted child but can't afford private school tuition?**

**A:** The point is to get those kids more challenging work so they won't be bored. Families scramble for alternatives to DPS because they've heard such bad things, but it's still very possible to get a good public education here.

**Q: How have you addressed gifted programs with your own children?**

**A:** I'm not sure I'd want my kids going to a school with gifted in the title. Truly being gifted is a good thing, but it can also be a burden. I'd like my kids to feel like they fit into a range of environments, and some highly gifted kids can have problems with that. IQ scores themselves are not nearly as valid, reliable, or useful as a lot of people in our field like to say they are, so I don't have a lot of faith in the test, the process, or the pressure it puts on kids. What matters most to me as a parent is that my kids go someplace where they feel comfortable.

WWW.DRMARYMONROE.COM  
WWW.ISER.COM  
Assessment Services, IQ and special needs testing



**THE PROFESSOR**  
Dr. Monroe helps parents pick what's best for their kids.

# TOP PRIVATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

**METHODOLOGY**

For our private schools list, we focused on a tighter geographic radius around Denver. Unlike their public counterparts, private schools typically don't share their academic achievement data with the public or the media. As a result, our assessment of Denver's top private elementary schools is based on interviews with expert sources in and around Denver's education community, and research including Web resources such as GreatSchools.org. We've chosen the schools based on academic reputation, expert opinion, and overall buzz.

Tuition is for the 2010-11 school year and is subject to change

## Aspen Academy

GREENWOOD VILLAGE PRE-K-8

TUITION: \$5,590-\$11,280

The school's only stated rule is "Be kind." The curriculum revolves around holistic education in core subjects with a bent toward character and leadership development. Teachers use the Socratic Method and tailor lessons according to ability, interest, and learning styles. Aspen also offers a unique entrepreneurial program, including instruction about finance for students at all but the lowest grade levels. [aspenacademy.org](http://aspenacademy.org)

## Colorado Academy

DENVER PRE-K-12

TUITION: \$15,350-\$20,230

Led by head of school Michael Davis, CA celebrated its centennial in 2006 and offers strong artistic and athletic programs, all part of the school's broad liberal arts and sciences curriculum that is led by 107 instructors, almost three-fourths of whom have advanced degrees. Instruction at the lower levels includes extensive focus on developing students' character. [coloradoacademy.org](http://coloradoacademy.org)

## Denver Academy

DENVER 1-12

TUITION: \$21,450

In recent years, this school has been lauded for its outstanding ability to establish relationships with parents and kids that help turn indifferent students—some of them special-needs students—

into productive scholars who find they like school for the first time. The school's sometimes-chaotic feel is actually more energetic than disorderly, and teachers often adapt their styles to the students rather than the other way around. [denveracademy.org](http://denveracademy.org)

## Denver Jewish Day School

DENVER K-12

TUITION: \$12,425

The former Herzl/RMHA features a college prep curriculum that integrates general and Judaic studies. Grade-school students participate in "specials" instruction in the arts, PE, athletics, and information technology, and the school's library boasts more than 16,000 volumes. Beginning in third grade, students enjoy overnight on-site "experiential learning" exercises in such settings as the Plains Conservation Center and the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. [dcje.org](http://dcje.org)

## Denver Montclair International

DENVER PRE-K-5

TUITION: \$11,490 (full time)

Offering full-immersion education in French, Spanish, and Mandarin Chinese to students as young as three years old, the curriculum is built around training students to thrive in a broad global environment. Early-childhood instruction involves a mix of structure and freedom of exploration for the students. [dmischool.com](http://dmischool.com)

## Denver Waldorf

DENVER PRE-K-12

TUITION: \$4,440-\$10,750

Based on the nearly century-old teachings of German philosopher Rudolf Steiner, this computer-free environment encourages students to develop a sense of wonder and curiosity via creative exercises such as drawing and journal-keeping. Throughout the year, students write and illustrate their own lesson books in each course as they learn new information, and Waldorf students tend to emerge with a strong sense of personal and intellectual independence. [denverwaldorf.org](http://denverwaldorf.org)

## Foothills Academy

WHEAT RIDGE PRE-K-12

TUITION: \$13,100

Foothills makes a special effort to reach out to parents who have either home-schooled their children or considered it. The school's philosophy centers on the constructivist notion of "layering new discoveries upon the foundation of what [students] already know," so early-childhood instruction involves helping children thrive socially before deepening subject-specific teaching at higher grade levels. [foothills-academy.org](http://foothills-academy.org)

## Graland Country Day

DENVER K-8

TUITION: \$17,200

Long known in Denver for its luxurious facilities and stellar academic reputation, Graland's curriculum is designed to develop multitalented students. It conducts about 40 community service-oriented projects throughout the year, and teams older and younger children in a mentoring Buddy Program that realizes benefits in both directions. [www.graland.org](http://www.graland.org)

## Havern School

LITTLETON K-8

TUITION: \$17,250

This nonprofit school caters to children with learning disabilities through its core curriculum of reading, writing, spelling, and math, and its student-teacher ratio of 4:1 means the classes stay small. The school has on-site therapists for speech and language training and offers elective instruction in such subjects as drama and social skills development. [haverncenter.org](http://haverncenter.org)

## Logan School for Creative Learning

DENVER K-8

TUITION: \$14,780

Logan has siphoned off students from competing private schools in recent years because of its track record of helping improve academic performance and promoting growth through classroom exercises



**THE THREE'S**  
Students at Colorado Academy buckle down.

COURTESY OF COLORADO ACADEMY

PRIVATE SCHOOLS CONTINUED

such as problem-solving and conflict resolution. It develops individualized learning plans for each student while also stressing experiential learning through frequent field trips and extended excursions to such destinations as South Dakota and southeastern Colorado. [thelogschool.org](http://thelogschool.org)

### Montessori School of Denver

DENVER TODDLER-6

**TUITION: \$6,500-\$12,230**

Its curriculum echoes traditional Montessori tenets of learning and empowerment through creativity and independence. Instructors teach lessons from a multicultural perspective and foster a sense of community service and team-oriented tasks that stress participation and engagement. [montessoridenver.org](http://montessoridenver.org)

### Ricks Center

DENVER PRE-K-8

**TUITION: \$7,365-\$16,690**

Despite occasional (and conflicting) rumors of a chaotically run administration, this University of Denver-based school has consistently garnered national recognition for its gifted programs. Teachers tailor lesson plans to each student's needs and abilities, all built around tying real-world examples to central themes that promote experimentation and problem-solving. Students also take frequent field trips to a variety of businesses, organizations, and environments. [du.edu/ricks](http://du.edu/ricks)

### St. Anne's Episcopal

DENVER PRE-K-8

**TUITION: \$8,140-\$15,532**

St. Anne's curriculum centers on helping students develop curiosity, self-esteem, and sensitivity to others. Despite its church-based roots, the school's teachers are known for their progressive teaching methods and adoption of emerging educational trends. Students also get two "specials" per day in subjects including the arts, PE, and science, and students at all levels are given exercises designed to improve their public-speaking abilities. [st-annes.org](http://st-annes.org)

### St. Elizabeth's Episcopal

DENVER K-2

**TUITION: Varies according to income and need**

This unique school in Denver's Skyland neighborhood employs an innovative tuition reform model that makes it more affordable to more families, resulting in a level of diversity not commonly seen at private schools. Curriculum is faith-based but includes instruction about multiple religions, and the school stresses a devotion to community service. [stelizabethsdenver.org](http://stelizabethsdenver.org)

### Stanley British Primary

DENVER K-8

**TUITION: \$12,784-\$14,535**

The curriculum here is derived from the philosophies of Friedrich Froebel, creator of the kindergarten concept. Students are grouped in small, multiage arrangements, and special attention is paid to social and emotional development in K-2 before kids move on to the more traditional subjects and the arts in subsequent grades. Children learn to think independently and in collaboration with each other, and project-oriented creativity is stressed as a valuable means of absorbing knowledge. [stanleybps.org](http://stanleybps.org)



**MOMMY POWER**  
ScoopToo does the legwork for parents.

# Getting the Scoop

How two Denver mothers are helping local families make sense of school choice.

IF YOU'RE LUCKY ENOUGH to live in an area with a solid public school, your children's educational options probably are fairly clear. But in Denver, like virtually every other American city, there are complications. The closest public school may not be to your liking, or your child may be gifted and talented or have special needs. Parents these days are savvier about starting their school planning early, often in pre-kindergarten, but the information they need, while more available than you might think, also can be confusing and hard to locate.

Enter ScoopToo, a blog started by Denver moms Jenn Massie, an executive recruiter, and Kerri Barclay, a former elementary-level teacher. When their own children approached preschool age—Massie has two kids under six and Barclay has three under eight—they realized that useful information about local schools, if available at

[WWW.SCOOPTOO.COM](http://WWW.SCOOPTOO.COM)

all, is often buried on various websites. "Everyone's buzzing about where to send their kids, but if you don't have a decent DPS school in your neighborhood, it takes a lot of research to figure out where to go," Massie says.

The two moms teamed up to tour schools and talk to local educators, administrators, and assorted experts about the scholastic issues Denver parents face, and ScoopToo.com is the result. The regularly updated site features individual school profiles (16 as of this writing), interviews with the experts and other parents, event listings, and articles and discussions about buzzy trends such as teacher reform and school choice.

The profiles go deeper than mere demographic and logistical information to include the moms' personal take on a school's look and feel. "GreatSchools.org and sites like that give you very basic data, but they just don't give you the heart and soul of a school," Massie says. "We think it's important that our information comes from parents and gives people an emotional sense about a school."

By approaching school evaluation with the engaged and invested parental mind, the ScoopToo tandem hopes to add a meaningful layer to the data-driven analysis found elsewhere. "School choice has been an option in Denver for almost 10 years, but it's always changing, so it confuses parents," Barclay says. "It's about looking for what's important, such as test scores and leadership, but you also need to get the vibe from a school, because even if you really like a school, it may not be such a good fit for your child's needs." ▲