

## Ritter hopes laws will be gateway to better state education

Rep. Karen Middleton's HB 08-1370, creating the school counselor corps and grant fund was signed into law in Aurora on Tuesday, May 27, 2008. Read on to learn more...

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Governor returns to alma mater to sign school bills into law

May 27, 2008

By Boyd Fletcher

The Aurora Sentinel

AURORA | Gov. Bill Ritter went back to high school at his alma mater in Aurora on Tuesday, May 27. Ritter, a graduate of Gateway High School, was joined by fellow Democratic lawmakers as he signed into law five education bills, including one that increases teacher training for support programs helping dyslexic students.

"Of all of the things we do," he said, "(Education legislation) is the most important thing we do." Ritter acknowledged the teachers in the audience and praised them for their hard work. He said several of the bills will give them more support in areas they often struggle with. "We take into consideration how we can give you the right kinds of tools to be able to instruct the students who are valuable to us," he said. "We expect a great deal of your profession but oftentimes do too little to reward you, given the kind of value that we place on the things you do for our students."

Also on hand were Aurora legislators, including state Sen. Suzanne Williams and state Reps. Karen Middleton and Nancy Todd, all Democrats.

Ritter praised the group for their continuing leadership in education reform. "The policies we are putting into place in education are about allowing students to reach their full potential," he said. "And I am fortunate to be joined by a group of people who think about this every day. The bills we are signing today are, in fact, student centered," he said.

After a brief ceremony in the school auditorium, Ritter signed five bills into law:

- Ritter said House Bill 1370 would give more support to school counselors, allowing them to spend more time working with students to get to college starting their freshman year. He said Colorado has some of the worst student/counselor ratios in the nation, often doubling the recommended figures.

- HB 1384 will direct the state to study how teacher working conditions affect recruiting and retention. The bill also creates a pilot program to offer higher pay scales for teachers willing to accept positions in struggling schools, Ritter said.

- House Bill 1386 creates a statewide school leadership development program for principals and building administrators to come together and collaborate on new and existing ways of improving a school's learning culture.

• HB 1204 helps clarify a continual system by which children in foster care, hospitals and detention centers can get an education by creating the Colorado Facilities School Board. "Children should not come into this world unwanted, but some do. Children should not be abandoned, abused or neglected. But some are," said Rep. Cherylin Peniston, D-Westminster. She said there are more than 22,000 students in Colorado who receive their education through more than 70 special daycare, hospital or foster settings. "This bill gives new hope to these students that what they have accomplished will add up to a high school diploma," she said.

• HB 1223 allows for the Department of Education and the Department of Higher Education to establish technical assistance programs to help teachers better educate students with dyslexia and other challenges. "Intervening early is really critical for dyslexic children," Ritter said. Williams, who taught students with dyslexia for 20 years before joining the Legislature, said she was impressed by the community support for the bill - from the groups that helped craft the language to the students showing their support in the audience. "These bills don't just happen because of us," she said.

Renee Wisner, mother of three children with dyslexia was overjoyed to see the bill pass.

"To have something like this pass means my children are finally going to get the help they need," she said. "It can be so frustrating, but for teachers to finally be able to recognize it will be great. To have the governor recognize it means that people are finally starting to pay attention."