<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Level of instruction</th>
<th>Understands the meaning of numerals</th>
<th>Knows and uses number facts</th>
<th>Solves problems by reasoning</th>
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<td>SOCIAL STUDIES</td>
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<td>PHYSICAL EDUCATION</td>
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<td>ARITHMETIC</td>
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**LANGUAGE**

- Level of instruction
- Expresses himself orally
- Expresses himself in written work

**SPELLING**

- Level of instruction
- Learns words from spelling list
- Uses good spelling in daily work

**WRITING**

- Forms letters well
- Uses good writing in daily work

**READING**

- Level in basal program
- Level of instruction is:
The Institute for a Competitive Workforce (ICW) is the nonprofit, nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. ICW promotes the rigorous educational standards and effective job training systems needed to preserve the strength of America’s greatest economic resource, its workforce.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is the world’s largest business federation representing the interests of more than three million businesses of all sizes, sectors, and regions, as well as state and local chambers and industry associations.

The National Chamber Foundation, a nonprofit affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, is dedicated to identifying and fostering public debate on emerging critical issues. We provide business and government leaders with insight and resources to address tomorrow’s challenges.
The Denver school system has propelled the Mile High City into the forefront of school reform efforts. The seven-member Denver school board is currently split ideologically.

The seven members of the nonpartisan elected school board have backed a series of progressive superintendents in implementing groundbreaking reforms over the past six years. In 2005, former superintendent (now senator) Michael Bennet introduced The Denver Plan, a comprehensive initiative focused on student achievement. A hallmark of that plan was the Denver School Performance Framework, which uses multiple measures to track and evaluate schools’ academic progress. Simple, red, yellow, and green traffic signal-style ratings make school performance transparent to educators, parents, and the public and inform district policy—including closure of low-performing schools. The system has since been adapted for use statewide.

The Denver Plan also took a Portfolio of Schools approach, fostering the development of new and nontraditional school structures to expand educational options and address previously unmet needs while closing underperforming and underenrolled schools. Denver has embraced charter schools, authorizing some 30 charters since 1994. The district has also pushed to create other types of alternately governed schools, including 19 innovation schools which have more charter-like autonomy around personnel, schedules, and education programs but remain part of the school district, and performance schools, new district schools created through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process to better address student learning needs.

The Denver Plan has attracted financial support from national foundations and political backing from powerful community groups and business leaders including the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce, raising Denver’s national profile as a model for education reform. It was revised in 2010, under Bennet’s successor, Tom Boasberg. The revised Denver Plan emphasizes strategies to reward outstanding teachers, make families an integral part of schools, and give school leaders authority over how to spend money. Key goals include preparing every Denver student for college or a career, increasing the number of high-performing schools, offering universal full-day kindergarten, and boosting public school enrollment.

Relations between the Denver school district and its teachers union, the Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA) have historically been good, resulting in the union’s collaboration with the district on a new initiative to compensate teachers based in part on performance. In 2004, DCTA broke with national union leadership to strike a collective bargaining agreement that replaced traditional seniority pay schedules with a new formula that rewards teachers for working in more challenging schools and offers performance bonuses. This ProComp plan, implemented district wide over the last seven years, has been widely praised, most notably in the 2008 presidential election.

But more recently, relations between the union and district were strained, with the continued expansion of charter and innovation schools a particular source of contention. Reflecting this more contentious relationship, DCTA filed suit
against the district and school board in June 2011, arguing that the board signed off on new innovation schools without the required approval of a majority of the school staff. The school district countered that all job applicants at the new schools, which were not yet staffed, were given the required notifications. The suit’s future remains unclear.

After years of swift and sweeping change, including school closures, Denver’s reform agenda is encountering increasing pushback, from both the teachers union and local citizens opposed to the closure of traditional “neighborhood” schools and the growth of charter schools run by outside organizations. Critics have also challenged the influence of national foundations and reform groups in Denver, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Stand for Children.

This pushback came to a head in the 2009 school board election, when candidates skeptical of the Denver agenda captured two seats that had been vacated due to term limits. As a result, board dynamics were altered, and collaboration among the school board, district, and teachers union was weakened.

School board members with a pro-union, pro-neighborhood schools stance have combined with the growing influence of education reform groups to amplify ideological differences among a historically moderate board. A schism has grown between those who support the Denver Plan and board members who favor the preservation of neighborhood schools and oppose the creation of new charters.

Since the 2009 election, the board has been roiled by upheaval. Recall attempts of some board members have been made; however, they ultimately failed. Nate Easley Jr. was targeted for recall by union, community, and political groups frustrated with his voting record, including his support for a controversial plan to split a chronically low-performing high school into three smaller schools. Andrea Merida was targeted for recall when she failed to disclose political affiliations and employment by a candidate for the U.S. Senate.

“You need people on the board who can work together, because working in a 4-3 environment has tarnished the reputation of the Denver school board,” Peña says. “That’s harmful, because if this district wants to go for a bond or mill levy in a few years [to raise money for schools], you don’t want the district [board] to be a distraction. For me, a 4-3 vote is untenable.” The board did come together in the summer of 2011 to unanimously approve eight new schools, but that vote underscores the extent to which such agreement has become the exception.

The 4-3 split was maintained following the November 2011 election. Two seats were being vacated by term-limited members. Two of the three candidates labeled as “reform” and supportive of the direction of the district and leadership of the superintendent, captured the two vacant seats.

The race generated unprecedented campaign funding from both the business community and local teachers union. During the 2009 race, local business leaders gave more than $237,000 to three candidates, according to EdNewsColorado, while five local unions—three teachers
unions and two others—donated a combined total of more than $103,000 to the three-member slate that received their backing. Because Denver’s school board elections occur in off cycle years and generally have low voter turnout and Denver allows unlimited individual political contributions, single donors and relatively modest donations and organizing can significantly sway elections. The three 2011 races raised in excess of $750,000 according to reports, with larger contributions coming both from the business community and the teachers union.

For years, Denver has enacted groundbreaking school reforms that bridged union and district interests while skirting political infighting. Currently, previous alliances have fragmented, and new advocates have emerged on both sides to influence the shape of education reform in Denver. The public is now savvier about education reform. The future of Denver’s schoolchildren could ultimately be shaped by moneyed interests and political factions that loom large in urban school districts nationwide.