



# **The Colorado Youth Advisory Council**

## **3rd Annual Legislative Report**

May 2011



A report from the Colorado Youth Advisory Council (COYAC) to the Colorado General Assembly concerning the progress of the Council from February 1, 2010 – May 31, 2011

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Staffing for the Colorado Youth Advisory Council provided by the Civic Canopy. For more information, contact Bill Fulton at 303-292-3144 or [bill@civiccanopy.org](mailto:bill@civiccanopy.org)

The Colorado Youth Advisory Council (COYAC) was established on May 29, 2008 “to examine, evaluate, and discuss the issues, interests, and needs facing Colorado Youth and to formally advise and make recommendations to elected officials regarding those issues” (HB 08-1157). COYAC is a vehicle, created by the Colorado State Legislature, to give young people an opportunity to offer first-hand information to our legislators about issues affecting Colorado's teens. The first class of Council members was appointed in the summer of 2008. Thirty five were appointed by state senators (one per district) and five by the Speaker of the House at the time, Andrew Romanoff, as at-large members to better represent the diversity of Colorado’s youth—in particular, rural youth. Subsequent classes of COYAC members have been selected through an application process, with each member serving a two year term. Members serve staggered terms, so half of the seats are open each year. The Council also includes four non-voting legislative members: Senator Ellen Roberts (R-Durango), Representative Andy Kerr (D-Lakewood), Senator Michael Johnston (D-Denver), and Representative Tom Massey (R-Poncha Springs).

Having spent its first two years primarily building the infrastructure of a new Council, COYAC members were able to dive more deeply into policy discussions and consider how reach out to bring more voices of Colorado youth into the policy making process.

## Key Accomplishments during 2010-2011

### Getting actively involved with the legislative process during the 2011 session



Brenna Christenson and Jimmy Graham testify at a House Ed Committee meeting on HB 1270

- The Council tracked over 20 bills over the legislative session, a 200% increase from last year. This was due to the increased experience of COYAC members themselves, but also to having an improved bill tracking system and more contact with experts in the field.
- The Council tripled the number of bills they took positions on in committee from 5 in 2010 to 16 in 2011, and more than doubled the number they presented to the entire membership for a vote. Bills presented by committees ranged from lowering the age for youth to have a driver’s permit to operate machinery, improving parent involvement in schools by creating an action plan, to the issue of civil unions and the ASSET bill.

### Gathering youth opinions from across the state and sharing their views

- COYAC conducted a survey of nearly 750 youth from across the state to learn about what issues youth feel most strongly about and to aid policy-makers in creating legislation to help solve those problems.
- COYAC hosted a “meet and greet” with legislators at the beginning of the 2010 Session for COYAC members to get to know their individual representatives.
- The Council met with several organizations to give feedback from a youth perspective
  - College in Colorado (how to improve postsecondary and workforce readiness)
  - Colorado Expanded Learning Opportunities Commission (best practices and programs that effectively use the school day)
  - Project VOYCE (discussing student perception data surveys as part of the Governor’s Council on Educator Effectiveness)
- Three publications ran stories about youth voice and COYAC:
  - The Durango Herald, March 17, 2011 (<http://www.durangoherald.com>)
  - Colorado Municipal League (February 2011)
  - The North Denver Tribune, October 6, 2010 (<http://www.northdenvertribune.com/index.php?s=coyac>)

### **Creating recruitment, application, and enrollment procedures**

- COYAC distributed the application process to replace vacancies.
- The Council successfully recruited and selected new members to fill the open spots on the Council (each term is two years, with half of the first round of Council members serving one year terms to stagger the rotation of members). However, there were some vacancies in the at-large positions. Recruitment is a focus of the Council and the goal is to have full membership by the fall 2011 meeting.
- Procedural committees developed bylaws and meeting procedures, and brought them to the full COYAC body for approval.
- Establishing internal leadership roles and committee structures
- The Council elected its third round of officers at the October meeting. The officers serve one year terms and comprise the Executive Committee for the Council:
  - Youth Co-Chair: Mandy Cramer, Colorado Springs
  - Youth Vice Chair: Alison Fox, Grand Junction
  - Secretary: Irma Aganovic, Denver
  - Treasurer: Janet Chen, Treasurer, Broomfield
- At its October kick off meeting, the Council welcomed its new members, reviewed its policies and procedures, worked to hone communication skills of Council members to communicate with legislators, set goals and objectives, and reviewed the structure of committees and changed them to the following committees
  - Policy Committees
    - Statewide Issues
    - Education
    - Social and Physical Health

- Equal Opportunities
- Procedural Committees
  - Communication
  - Finance
  - Membership and Recruitment
  - Public Outreach
  - Youth Input

### **Developing greater knowledge of policy issues and the policy making process**

- At the January 2011 meeting, Fuffy Mendez from Mendez and Associates presented on how to best communicate with legislators.
- The Council worked with staff from many organizations to learn about issues they were interested in as well as to glean information on how to have the greatest impact on the legislative process. Resources included:
  - Kirchhof Group, Inc.
  - Crime Prevention and Control Commission (City of Denver)
  - Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment
  - House Education Committee
- COYAC called on legislative sponsors Representative Andy Kerr and Senator Ellen Roberts to share their expertise at quarterly meetings and with both youth and parents at evening gatherings.
- At the March 2011 meeting, COYAC members met with Lieutenant Governor Joe Garcia to discuss current policy issues, especially around education, and his experience as a leader.

### **Looking Ahead**

COYAC is wrapping up it's third year and there has been tremendous growth. COYAC is at a point in the cycle of group formation where individuals are learning to work together and need to evaluate process, internal structure and vision.

## Appendix A: Colorado Youth Advisory Council Members 2010-11

### Members in Alphabetical Order

**Irma Aganovic—Secretary**

Denver

Senate District 33

**Mitchell Alton**

Colorado Springs

Senate District 12

**Daniel Arsenault**

Centennial

Senate District 26

**Teagan Boda**

Pueblo West

Senate District 3

**Annsley Brophy**

Yuma

Senate District 1

**Janet Chen—Treasurer**

Broomfield

Senate District 23

**Brenna Christenson**

Durango

Senate District 6 (AL)

**Mandy Cramer—Youth Co-Chair**

Colorado Springs

Senate District 9

**Daniel Fallon-Cyr**

Durango

Senate District 6 (AL)

**Sam Field**

Ft. Collins

Senate District 14

**Allison Fox**

Grand Junction

Senate District 7

**Talia Goldberg**

Louisville

Senate District 17

**Jimmy Graham**

Aurora

Senate District 28

**Alex Knuckey**

Boulder

Senate District 18

**Alec Lask**

Greeley

Senate District 13

**Elizabeth (Ki) Lynn**

Cheraw

Senate District 2

**Alejandro Maldonado**

Denver

Senate District 35

**Nik Malinin**

Arvada

Senate District 19

**Cheyenne McCoy**

Dolores

Senate District 6 (AL)

**Leslie Meraz**

Denver

Senate District 24

**Angie Neslin**

Denver

Senate District 32

**Amanda Patarino**

Lakewood

Senate District 21

**Grant Peterson**

Littleton

Senate District 22

**Rebekah Romberg**

Evergreen

Senate District 16

**Pranaya Sathe**  
 Ft. Collins  
 Senate District 14 (AL)  
**Maria Scheffel**  
 Parker  
 Senate District 4  
**Joseph Soto**  
 Aurora  
 Senate District 29  
**Hannah Stokes**  
 Ft. Collins  
 Senate District 15

**Thomas Tarler**  
 Denver  
 Senate District 35  
**Glorianna Tillerman-Dick**  
 Denver  
 Senate District 34  
**Reh Vanatta**  
 Poncha Springs  
 Senate District 5  
**Gabe Webb**  
 Aurora  
 Senate District

**Members by District\***

District	COYAC Member
1	Annsley Brophy
2	Elizabeth (Ki) Lynn
3	Teagan Boda
4	Maria Scheffel
5	Reh Vanatta
6	Cheyenne McCoy
6	(AL) Brenna Christensen
6	(AL) Daniel Fallon-Cyr
7	Alison Fox
9	Mandy Cramer
12	Mitchell Alton
13	Alec Lask
14	Samuel Field
14	(AL) Pranaya Sathe
15	Hannah Stokes
16	Rebekah Romberg
17	Talia Goldberg

District	COYAC Member
18	Alex Knuckey
19	Nik Malinin
21	Amanda Patarino
22	Grant Peterson
23	Janet Chen
24	Leslie Meraz
26	Daniel Arsenault
27	Gabe Webb
28	Jimmy Graham
29	Joseph Sots
32	Angie Neslin
33	Irma Aganovic
34	Glorianna Tillemann-Dick
35	Thomas Tarler
35	(AL) Alejandro Maldonado



## Appendix B: Annual Colorado Youth Survey

# The Colorado Youth Advisory Council

## Annual Colorado Youth Survey

### Executive Summary

Thomas Tarler, Alex Knuckey, Daniel Fallon-Cyr, Maria Scheffel, Nik Malinin, Pranaya Sathe, and Talia Goldberg

### Introduction

In the last two years, the Colorado Youth Advisory Council (COYAC) has worked hard to ensure that Colorado's youth have a voice at the state legislature. While youth input is sometimes gathered in isolated pockets or on specific issues, COYAC has tried to reach across the state to ensure that the views of youth on a broad range of issues are included in the legislative session of 2011. Therefore, the Colorado Youth Advisory Council (COYAC) has conducted a survey of nearly 750 youth from across the state to find out what youth feel most strongly about and aid policy-makers in creating legislation to help solve those problems.

### Methodology

The survey was distributed through paper and electronic mediums and garnered 712 responses. The online survey was distributed through email lists and advertised on social networking sites; the paper survey was distributed where youth had limited access to the internet. The responding group was very diverse, providing roughly equal representation of urban, rural, and suburban youth (36%, 32%, and 33% respectively) and slightly more females than males (56% and 44%). We took efforts to reach out to youth in schools as well as those in dropout and GED programs to get a range of views. While the survey was not randomized, the overall number of responses was high enough to give us a 4% margin of error and a 95% confidence level, leading us to feel that we have accurately captured the perspectives of Colorado's youth.

### Questions, Results and Findings

We asked youth about their thoughts on a wide range of issues, including education, social health, environment, and human rights. Analysis of the survey allows COYAC to make 4 findings.

1. Youth support the idea of creating a scholarship for at risk teens that draws from money taken from the State Corrections Budget (83.4% agreement).
2. Teenagers are very concerned about the issues of teenage suicide (70.6% agreement).
3. Teenagers are very concerned about domestic abuse (67.3% agreement).
4. Teenagers want the opportunity to make more input to the state legislature (65.5% agreement).

We stress that these results require further research into the best solutions for these issues. However they do pinpoint four very specific policy areas that are top priorities for youth and which need to be addressed soon. COYAC is eager to help legislators do further research and develop policies that address these issues.

To view the full report, please go to [www.coyac.org](http://www.coyac.org) or contact us at [info.coyac@gmail.com](mailto:info.coyac@gmail.com)



## Appendix C: COYAC in the News

### **THE DURANGO HERALD**

#### **Youth council brings fresh ideas to Colorado Legislature The**

**By Joe Hanel**

**March 17, 2011**

DENVER – All the usual suspects were at the Capitol this week to testify on a bill that would let parents close their low-performing public schools – lobbyists for school boards, superintendents, the teacher’s union, the charter schools’ association.

But lawmakers also heard from a voice that rarely is heard at the Capitol – actual students.

Durango High School sophomore Brenna Christensen provided the perspective of teenage Coloradans on behalf of the Colorado Youth Advisory Council, a 3-year-old group created in part by Sen. Ellen Roberts, R-Durango.

The youth council officially takes a neutral position on House Bill 1270, a bill that is opposed by public school leaders and teachers and supported by charter-school advocates, because it would allow parents to vote to convert a school to a charter without the blessings of the school board.

But Christensen raised concerns in her testimony that the bill did not ask for student involvement.

“Change can be stressful on kids,” Christensen said. “Kids don’t like change if they’re not involved.”

The House Education Committee voted 8-5 to kill HB 1270.

Legislators in the committee’s stuffy basement room perked up when they heard Christensen’s testimony. It was the kind of input Roberts had in mind in 2008, when she sponsored the bill that created the Youth Advisory Council.

The council has 40 students from around the state who meet in person four times a year, in addition to working together online. They study bills before the Legislature and pick out which ones affect youths, then craft positions and talk to legislators.

Christensen was the first council member this year to offer formal testimony in a committee.

“That’s really what COYAC is about, is bringing that perspective, which has gotten overlooked because we can’t vote,” said Christensen, daughter of Katherine and Steve Christensen.

She serves as vice president of DHS’s sophomore class, but she has never testified publicly before. She did not read from a script.

Cheyenne McCoy of Dolores had never been to the state Capitol before she joined the advisory council two years ago.

“I’ve learned more from this than any government class,” said McCoy, daughter of Patrick and Vangi McCoy. “On the news, it just says a bill passed. But there’s so much that goes into it.”

The council met Sunday afternoon and Monday, and the members agreed to draft letters of support to Gov. John Hickenlooper for two bills that appear to be on their way to his desk. The bills would allow students to take their own prescription medication at school and require youth sports coaches to pull kids out of games if they suspect a concussion.

McCoy, who plays volleyball and basketball, supports the concussion bill and said she has a friend who has suffered five concussions – too many, in her opinion.

Roberts recruited Animas High School sophomore Daniel Fallon-Cyr to be on the council because she thought a charter school student would offer a valuable perspective.

Fallon-Cyr said he probably would have supported HB 1270, but he agreed with Christensen’s testimony that the bill failed to get student input.

“She definitely hit all the points that hadn’t been hit. It got the committee thinking that youth should be involved,” said Fallon-Cyr, son of Mark and Maureen Fallon-Cyr.

He is on his first year on the council, and he’s impressed by how much self-directed work the students do, without marching orders from The Civic Canopy, a nonprofit group that provides logistical and financial support to the youth advisory council.

“It’s just kind of amazing what we can get done without being guided,” Fallon-Cyr said.

Some of the council’s most pressing needs are recruiting members and keeping them participating. Members serve two-year terms, so each year, 20 seats are open. There is one person from each of the state’s 35 Senate districts, plus five at-large members.

Participation is a constant challenge. By the end of Monday’s meeting, 22 of the 40 members were present to vote.

The members also are hoping to increase their visibility and influence at the Capitol, McCoy said.

They’re starting with the little things.

Their chairwoman led Monday’s meeting by banging a paper cup on the table. The last vote was to spend no more than \$30 to buy her a proper gavel.

## Colorado youth gather to inform legislators about issues and solutions



October 6, 2010 North Denver Tribune  
by **Glorianna Tillemann-Dick** |

Last weekend, I traveled to the Snow Mountain Ranch YMCA. Planes, trains, and cars were required to transport 28 other teenagers from disparate corners of Colorado to our destination in Winter Park. We had been summoned onto the mountain by the Colorado State Legislature to discover which are the most critical issues to youth in the state of Colorado.

In 2008, the Colorado State Legislature established the Colorado Youth Advisory Council, (COYAC). The council gives a political voice to non-voting teenagers around the state. This mountain gathering was the first of four COYAC meetings scheduled throughout this legislative session.

At its first meeting, COYAC members determine which statewide issues most acutely effect Colorado youth. These often are problems which COYAC reps witness personally among their friends, at their schools, or in their towns. Many members are distressed by pervasive drug use in schools, so a number of remedies were discussed, including: more serious volunteer activity by youth in their communities, more education on the effects of soft and hard drugs, and less tolerant responses when kids are discovered using drugs on school premises.

The regulation of medical marijuana and marijuana dispensaries was a topic of extensive conversation. The general sentiment reflected incredulity at the process for distribution currently in place, and there was consensus that it needs revision. We discussed programs that could support teenage mothers in continuing their educations, and ways to make college more affordable for middle-class families. We also spoke about issues that have a larger spectrum of impact, like transitioning Colorado to sustainable energy sources and the responsible management of water across the state. In the coming months, members of COYAC will research legislation making its way through the Capitol. When someone discovers a piece of legislation that pertains to the youth of Colorado, we take a vote on whether or not to support it. We then share our decision with state senators and representatives, and they take it into account when deciding how to vote on the issue.

This year, COYAC is organizing a survey for Colorado youth. We want know what teenagers' opinions are on topics from cultural awareness to childhood obesity. The survey will include questions concerning immigration, body image, the environment and a myriad of other subjects. Hopefully, some of the people reading this article – or at least the children of some of the people reading this article – will be willing to take the survey. It hasn't yet been completed, but if you want to be sent the link when it's released, send me an email at [nonitd@gmail.com](mailto:nonitd@gmail.com).

COYAC is young, both age-wise and organization-wise. We're trying to figure out what is the best way to serve Colorado's youth. The most effective way for us to do our job is by communicating meaningfully with our fellow teenagers in the state. By listening to their experiences and concerns, we will be better able to make informed decisions. To share your opinions, find out who your youth representative is, or learn more about COYAC, go to [coyac.org](http://coyac.org) or email me at [nonitd@gmail.com](mailto:nonitd@gmail.com).

## Appendix D: Sponsors

COYAC is extremely grateful to the sponsors who have supported our work to date. We would especially like to thank the El Pomar Foundation, which stepped forward to support the vision of youth involvement in government with a grant covering half of our estimated first annual budget. Their commitment to youth engagement is valued and appreciated.

### Founding Supporter

#### The El Pomar Foundation

### Lead Sponsors

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Foundation



Children's Hospital

### Sponsors

College in Colorado - \$500

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Rocky Mountain Health Plans

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### Staff

Bill Fulton, Co-Director

Drew O'Connor, Co-Director

Sarra LeMoss, Coordinator

Ana Soler, Director of Youth Programs